

## SLIDERS REBORN

### "Reminiscence" (2)

An EarthPrime.com exclusive.

**Writer's Note:** *This was a first draft of the "Reminiscence" novella. After remarks from Matt Hutaff, "Reminiscence" was rewritten significantly. This flawed first draft is shared in the spirit of showing how constructive criticism and feedback can radically reshape a story. Please see the final versions of Sliders Reborn on [www.earthprime.com/reborn](http://www.earthprime.com/reborn)*

This novella is Part Two of SLIDERS REBORN and takes place after the events of "The Seer" and "Reprise" (1).

By Ibrahim Ng with special thanks to Matt Hutaff

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You are in a bakery, one you've been in before across a hundred different Earths. The tables and chairs are always warmed by the heat from the ovens, the coffee has a hint of cinnamon, and on every Earth where you stepped through the doors -- whether it was an Earth that outlawed gluten or used resequenced human excrement raw foodstuffs -- the lemon-raspberry squares were always perfect.

You buy the last four of those squares on sale for the day. You spot the lady behind you just as her face falls. You cast her a glance; she's middle-aged with copper hair that's graying and lines on her face that have deepened with laughter; now they faintly tighten with disappointment. You know these squares are her favourite.

She looks at you; she doesn't know you at all. She only sees an unfamiliar boy -- mid-twenties, but still a boy to her.

You tell her she can have three of the four squares in exchange for half an hour of her time in this bakery. Confusion flashes across her face, but she sizes you up and decides a polite young man in his mid-twenties poses no threat in a busy shop. You ask her if she'll sit down with you at an empty table.

She settles herself into the chair primly, shifts away table's sugar and stir-sticks and dusts away at the table with a napkin while you seat yourself. You hand her the bag of squares. She reaches into her purse, slides some money across the table. You shake your head no; you want her attention, not her money.

She asks you who you are -- you look familiar, but you've never met. You tell her your name is Quinn and that this is your story.

You tell her of your scientist father and the research he left behind when he died, your dream of using his work as a starting point in creating a flying car -- and how you discovered something else instead. You tell her how your adventures all began in a San Francisco basement. The first vortex you opened. The smarter (yes, you admit it) version of yourself who gave you the secrets of travelling between dimensions. The day you invited your brilliant professor and your best friend to see what you'd discovered. The moment you stepped into a doorway into other worlds and accidentally took a soul singer along your journey. And how on this first adventure, you lost the way back home.

You tell her of the earliest adventures, those first slides where the four of you quickly experienced the danger and wonder of sliding. Worlds where the Colonies were on the losing side of the Revolutionary War or where a viral outbreak had devastated every critical establishment in the United States. Worlds that were forever changed by the sliders passing through, carrying nothing but the clothes on your backs and the ideas in your heads.

The lady sits and listens to you, eyes widening with alarm, then filling with pity -- the pity the sane have for the delusional. But she sits and lets you speak and you continue with your story.

You tell her how all four of you longed for home. The timer -- the device that you built that opens gateways between dimensions -- you'd never had the chance to perfect its function before this initial, disastrous test. And then it had been damaged. The timer would now open gateways to random dimensions at random times. After landing on each world, it would offer a timed countdown to the next window of opportunity. If you missed that window, you would be stranded. As a result, you and your friends were now condemned to wander the interdimension until you found the technology or knowledge to take yourselves back home.

You tell her of the hatred and anger your three friends had for you, and how it faded in the face of adversity, replaced by certainty and confidence in each other. Across hundreds of slides to hundreds of worlds, Wade's compassion held you all together, Rembrandt's good heart won the trust and confidence of the strangers you met, the Professor's wisdom and experience kept you all alive -- and as for you yourself, you occasionally had a bright idea or two to offer in a crisis.

You tell her how, upon failing to repair the timer within the first week of your adventures, you'd expected the group to eventually fall apart. The Professor might have chosen to stay on a world where he could have been an icon of gender equality, Rembrandt might have chosen to stay on an Earth where he was a cultural icon, Wade might have chosen the Earth of psychics and telepaths. But in the end, none of these worlds could match the lure of infinite worlds and the knowledge that the vortex would always lead them to something they'd never seen before.

You find yourself summing up a good four years' worth of nomadic travels inside seven minutes. The Earth that seemed just like home and where two Professor Arturos fought over who would be the one to slide. You tell the lady about a parallel justice system operating on game-show logic. The water-depleted California that you and your friends barely survived until your engineering skill and ingenuity brought a storm to the desert. The America that enslaved its workforce until you and your friends inspired a fire within the oppressed. The paradise lost where death had been conquered and birth was now considered an obscenity. The mass exodus on a world where you all found a way to use sliding to evacuate an entire planet's population from a solar system about to be destroyed by a rogue pulsar. The Earth where the impoverished and desperate were forced into unwilling organ harvesting and considered little more than breeders for spare parts.

And you tell her about Kromaggs -- the end result of an alternate evolutionary path, culminating in a conquering empire seeking to enslave or destroy the predominantly human populations across the multiverse. The mysterious, distant creatures who used human agents as their pawns and manipulated their victims at a distance. How your first encounter got you all captured with a new friend sacrificing herself for your escape. How your timer was drawn to worlds with high levels of sliding activity, and how by your fourth year of sliding, the four of you were running into the Kromaggs with alarming regularity.

You saw them on the Earth used as a weapons-testing site where Wade saved the life of a human collaborator working for the Kromaggs and whose gratitude saved you all. And again in the collapsed universe that had become a cage of sliding Kromaggs and doubles, and become the eye of the storm in a widening Kromagg campaign to conquer all human-dominated Earths. Then there were the dying fields in which Kromagg-human hybrids were created as infiltrators to be dispatched to previously stable human societies and foment conflict and chaos so that the Kromaggs could invade with ease. And the terrible revelation that your first escape from the Kromaggs had been a cunning ruse to send you on your way with a tracking device lodged in your brain that would bring the Kromaggs to your home Earth should you ever be able to return to it.

Once again, you and your friends escaped, knowing now that you no longer dared go home.

And at the start of your fifth year of adventures, something even worse happened.

Three years previous, on the world of psychics and mind-readers, the secrets of the sliding technology had been copied from your mind. A scientist named Dr. Oberon Geiger had sought to create your invention, but with your grasp of sliding being incomplete and with Geiger working from a fractured version of that knowledge passed on secondhand from telepaths, Geiger's first test produced a terrible accident. Dr. Geiger erased himself from the multiverse, leaving behind only a ghostly phantom of himself that passed from world to world until he found one with a peculiar electromagnetic pattern that could tether him but still leave him without form or substance.

Dr. Geiger manipulated various scientists on this world to craft a containment field for him to at least hold him to one room, while preparing further experiments to anchor himself permanently. The solution, Geiger believed, would be to combine all universes into a single reality. With no other universes in existence, Geiger would be able to adhere to the remaining reality. The catalyst for Geiger's experiment in creating a multiversal collapse would be the opening of a slide window -- and during his time wandering the multiverse as an insubstantial ghost, Geiger had learned a little more about sliding -- enough to create a specific EM field that would eventually draw a group of sliders to him. His intention: to test his Combine process on the Quinn-double of this current Earth, to combine this Quinn-double's history, physical form and memories into a single being, which would be the first experiment towards combining universes.

You tell the lady how Dr. Geiger's experiment was another haphazard disaster. He had no knowledge of the interdimensional transmitter lodged in your brain, how it subtly warped your presence in space-time, made you enough of an anomaly to throw off Geiger's calculations and intentions. To illustrate, you hold up one of the lemon-raspberry squares. Imagine, you say, trying to add another flavour into the square after it's baked and cooled; imagine trying to inject a syringe of banana purée into the square. You press your thumb through the square and show the lady the result: a lemon-raspberry square with a hole through it. There would also, you say, be a few traces of banana inside the square and purée splattered all over the table. This, you tell her, is what happened to you.

You were without shape or substance, adrift through the multiverse. You fought your way back to your friends only to find that something had changed. Wade and the Professor had vanished, replaced by a red-haired fighter pilot named Maggie Beckett and while Rembrandt remained, the joyful performer who thrived on sliding had become a haunted figure scarred by imprisonment and trauma. You struggled into your own body to find it had also changed. A different man's face was in the mirror. And then you were adrift again, wrenched from this body not your own and into the winds of the multiverse.

You found yourself back in your familiar old basement, only now you were nothing but a ghostly wraith, unseen and unheard. You watched yourself encounter your smarter double and receive the secret of sliding and begin your travels with your friends. But in this second viewing, something was wrong -- one of your earliest adventures should have been in a San Francisco where the Summer of Love never ended; instead, that early experience was now on the world overrun by a viral epidemic. One adventure was now earlier, the other later. And other things were strange: you saw you and your friends escaping a flooded America, but a little while after escaping, you saw your friends caught in the same flood for the first time despite having previously escaped it. Events were taking place in the wrong order.

Confused and afraid, you attempted to return to the present day and to the body you'd briefly inhabited. The strange man whose body you shared declared that he was Quinn; Rembrandt and Maggie theorized that he might be a double with a different mother or father. This Quinn-alternate, whom your friends dubbed "Mallory," was an uneducated petty-thief and small-time criminal who'd found work as a laboratory subject. And to him, your mind was a vague shadow on his own, something to be cast aside and dismissed.

And you understood; this was his body and you were an unwelcome visitor. You attempted to stay within this alternate's consciousness without intruding, seeking only to understand the situation. This Maggie Beckett attempted to reawaken your memories in this alternate Quinn with a holographic interface that would create simulations of the past.

You allowed your mind to come to the forefront of your alternate, hoping these memories would reveal what had happened to Wade and the Professor and who this Maggie person even was.

And what you saw was horror. You saw the Professor attacked by a psychopath in a military uniform, a needle slammed into his head, his brain irreversibly damaged. You saw that same assailant proceed to shoot the Professor to death and then you were forced to abandon his corpse on a doomed Earth. You saw vampires with electric guitars attacking you on motorcycles. You saw giant, flesh-hungry slugs and hordes of zombies and typhoons and underground cities of monsters. You saw your home Earth a devastated battlefield, overrun with Kromaggs and your mother dragged away. You saw Rembrandt telling you Wade was now a prisoner. You saw yourself discovering that your home wasn't your home, that you had a brother named Colin. And you saw your four years of adventures in a corrupted, altered state, with joyful exploration and delight that eventually became infested with monstrosity and madness and death.

You found yourself dragged out of this body again -- observing your second year of adventures but with odd changes. On three adventures, you and the sliders had made new friends who joined you for a time; in this new version of reality, the new sliders disappeared the moment they leapt into the vortex and were forgotten. Then you were pulled to the present again, observing poor Rembrandt struggling onward as the last remaining slider with a home Earth that had been conquered. And you observed strange things: how Rembrandt's adventures now seemed constantly situated around the same streets and the one hotel, the Chandler, as though reality were shrinking. You observed the timer -- now a strange, scarab-decorated device rather than your familiar modified cell phone -- would constantly break down when, in the altered memories you'd seen, it seemed reliable enough.

And you saw how Rembrandt would often seek out your doubles, on each Earth he visited, only to find that on all of these Earths, you had never been born.

And you began to understand. When Dr. Geiger attempted his Combine experiment with you and a double, he ripped you out of existence along with every other Quinn-double in the multiverse. Reality coped in places by using this secondary Quinn-double as a patch. But nevertheless, you were a slider and you and your doubles had interacted with other dimensions extensively.

You show the lady the hollowed out lemon-raspberry square that you stuck a hole in. You explain that doubles interacting with doubles creates divergences in the paths of decision. What would happen, you ask, if those paths of decision were suddenly cut out of all realities? You place the hollowed-out square on the table, the hole facing you. You pick up the porcelain sugar-stick holder and place it on top of the hollowed-out lemon-raspberry square and then you begin to press downward. The lemon-raspberry square is flattened. This, you say, is what happened to the multiverse.

The damage done by Dr. Geiger had resulted in crushing it, shrinking it, compressing it. Logic, sense, cause and effect had been cracked open by Dr. Geiger's experiments, resulting in the existence of the supernatural, mystical and paranormal monsters that now infected your third year of adventures, the peculiar version of your fourth your of sliding and the increasingly illogical adventures that Rembrandt had to contend with.

You found yourself continuing to be catapulted back and forth between an altered past and a horrific present, going from observing a ghastly encounters with dinosaurs and animal-human hybrids to a present-day slide where Rembrandt discovered that Wade, a Kromagg prisoner, had been subjected to grotesque experiments with her brain. And you were forced to watch as Wade's fate was revealed. Her body was a hollowed-out husk in a vat of green liquid. Her only means of communicating now was as a disembodied voice. She had been surgically dissected and reassembled into a Kromagg computer.

You screamed screams that no one heard; you sought to cry but you had no tear ducts and no body and it was simply too much to bear. You let your shapeless, massless existence fall away into this dying multiverse and you wanted to see nothing else again.

But the next thing you saw was cold, marble tile and your own hand resting on the floor. You rose from to discover you were once again in your body. Clad in flannel and jeans. You could feel your mopy hair on your forehead, you touched your mouth and felt the familiar scar. And then someone rushed towards you, someone short enough that you couldn't make out her face before she wrapped her arms around you. And at a slight distance, you saw Professor Arturo smiling broadly as he approached you and Wade Welles, who was holding you tight. And you felt yourself go limp in her arms, letting your head rest on her shoulder, scarcely daring to believe that you had been reunited with your teacher and your very best friend.

Eventually, Wade released you and the Professor warmly shook your hand. You wiped the tears from your eyes and looked around you and you knew where you were: you were in the sliding exhibit on that Earth where you'd mistakenly thought you were home, where the Professor had received an entire museum wing for the sliding technology and where two Professors had battled for the right to leave this Earth with you, Rembrandt and Wade. It had been unclear of whether the victorious Professor had been the original or the double. It was the original who now guided you through this museum, empty of all patrons and staff save you, Wade and the Professor. He took you to the front hall of the museum, and he told you to be ready for what you might see outside the glass doors.

You peered out to see a devastated world. The buildings of San Francisco had been reduced to bombed-out, hollowed-out wrecks. The sky was choked and polluted greenish-gray. Half the city looked like it

had been set aflame and the other like it was ash to be blown away in the wind. Kromagg manta ships drifted above the buildings, occasionally firing beams of red energy and creating clouds of dust and death. You could see metallic machines the size of tanks crawling over the wreckage. And the Golden Gate Bridge -- blue in this world -- no longer stood. The Professor spoke gently in your ear, giving you a horrific fact for every sight. The human population had been reduced to a quarter and enslaved by the Kromaggs. The mineral and biological elements of this Earth were slowly being strip-mined away by their machines. Within weeks, every aspect of this planet would be repurposed for the Kromagg war machine.

Enraged, you threw open the doors, intent on destroying every Kromagg out there. But the doors opened to reveal shifting energies of purple, violent, green and red -- the walls of the interdimensional tunnel between universes. The Professor shut the doors, Wade took your hand and they began to tell you their story. The Professor shared how, when left behind on this Earth, he sought to rebuild sliding technology. After four years, he was near a working model, but then the Kromaggs came. The Professor proceeded to use what little equipment he had working to shift the museum out of sync with this universe; the Kromaggs never found him. The Professor rescued who he could and used the instability of this museum as a sliding platform to find safe Earths on which refugees could be deposited. But the Professor didn't understand the Kromagg's plans: they were not simply draining the mineral and biological wealth of this Earth; they were using it to make a machine -- a machine to collapse universes. A machine that had been designed in its original form by someone named Dr. Oberon Geiger.

And then, within the interdimension, the Professor was approached by Wade -- a disembodied Wade whom the Professor was able to resynchronize with the sliding platform's place in spacetime, restoring Wade to what she was before Dr. Geiger's experiment. Together, the Professor and Wade tracked this Dr. Geiger to the Earth with the Combine experiment and realized what had happened to you. And together, they pieced together enough of the Combine experiment to restore you and your body to the sliding platform.

In response, you shared your memories of the past five years. You described the Professor being murdered, home being invaded, your true parentage exposed, Wade being captured, finding your brother Colin, Maggie Beckett -- but then you stopped, describing how these darker memories seemed to exist in opposition to your brighter ones and how you now had both sets inside your head. You described what you'd seen of Rembrandt's adventures and how logic, sense and reason seemed to have disappeared.

And the Professor told you that this explained everything. The Kromaggs saw Dr. Geiger's experiment, saw how it collapsed the multiverses that Quinn had visited, corrupted his past adventures. And now they sought to recreate the experiment on an even larger scale, transforming Earth upon Earth into parts of a reality warping engine that would destroy the multiverse aside from the one Earth the Kromaggs deemed fit to exist -- the Kromagg Earth.

You asked the Professor what could be done to stop it; the Professor replied that even the three of them reunited were no match for the Kromagg war machine. Instead, he and Wade hoped to allow the Kromaggs to complete their reality warping engine and then repurpose it. The Professor led you to a room with fifteen blackboards filled with mathematical equations. The Professor explained that all those numbers represented Wade -- as converted to numerical eigenvalues within vector space that were used to bring Wade back. Her quantum history in written form. He said that in this space between worlds, you were equations in the end and it was through that process that you were also restored.

What worked on a person could, perhaps, work on the multiverse -- the Professor and Wade hoped that your quantum history as a slider of four years could contain the necessary spectral functions for a Kromagg reality warping weapon to rebuild the multiverse instead of destroying it.

But it wasn't to be. After a series of tests, you and the Professor found your history too badly warped, too fragmented, with two sets of data conflicting with each other, also resulting in you struggling to reconcile two different versions of your adventures. It was the same for Wade. The plan that Wade and the Professor conceived had failed. But one more chance remained: Rembrandt, you pointed out, had continued sliding. The Professor and Wade protested that Rembrandt's slides were random and could not be tracked, but you pointed out that the new timer -- a device stolen from another Earth and then with parts of the original timer installed -- would have a uniquely traceable sliding signature that could be followed. But as you would be operating on memory, there would be a degree of error as the Professor shifted the sliding platform's location in the multiverse to follow the signature.

Over the course of five months, you, Wade and the Professor opened the museum doors time and time again to unfamiliar worlds and worlds without Rembrandt. Eventually, you finally opened your doors to an Earth where the sliding concept was a basis for a television series. But then the Professor's equipment showed another vortex opening and you all realized that Rembrandt had left again. You tracked the vortex to its destination.

The three of you ran out of the museum to find your loyal friend and comrade collapsed in an alley. He recovered consciousness briefly and declared his friends were gone and dead and couldn't be here with him. And the Professor reminded him that you were all sliders and nothing was impossible. When Rembrandt was back on his feet and inside the museum, he again declared his suspicions that this was a virtual reality simulation or a Kromagg mind game.

And in response, you asked him: hadn't he found it strange that ever since the Combine experiment, the majority of his adventures had taken place on the same city streets and been constantly confined to the Chandler Hotel? Didn't he wonder why, after four years of regularly encountering Quinn-doubles, no more were to be found? Didn't he find it curious the timer kept breaking down after a year and a half of reliable function? He stared at you in astonishment as you told him that these were all the death-knells of a dying multiverse with the timer struggling to function normally in states of reality that no longer functioned at all.

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You order tea for yourself and coffee for the lady. It arrives promptly and you stir milk and a touch of salt into the lady's mug before sliding it across the table. She accepts it with the same nonplussed reaction she's had for your story so far. Automatically takes a sip, then realizes the coffee's exactly the way she likes it. Before she can ask how you knew, you ask her to consider the liquid in her mug. How it takes the shape of the container. Pour it into a cube, a triangle, a cylinder, a sphere, and that's the shape the liquid takes. Chip away at the container, and the liquid will lose shape. Break the container and the liquid will drain.

You tell her how you explained to Rembrandt that reality would need a new container -- a container to be built by breaking into 17 Kromagg installations on 12 different Earths, with Rembrandt needed to be on site for each effort to reprogram the machines. Within Rembrandt's body, actions, thoughts and movements in spacetime were the full quantum history of both the post and pre-Geiger versions of history.

And there began a mission that spanned eight months and 30 different Earths in the quest to gather the components needed to enter and exit each Kromagg facility. You relate some of the adventures you had during this time. An encounter with the Confederate States of America. An Earth where the Cuban Missile Crisis had erupted into full-scale nuclear war. An America that was an extension of an undefeated Roman Empire. An Earth where energy was the primary currency of trade and you could make your own money by running on treadmills. And the confrontations with a deranged Colin Mallory whose mental programming by the Kromaggs had been corrupted.

The search for a double of The Seer to aid in the mission and the successful infiltration of 15 Kromagg facilities where you and your friends successfully turned the engines of destruction into machines that might rebuild.

You tell the lady how it was with the sixteenth facility that everything went wrong. The reprogramming was successful. But the Professor was captured and this time the Kromaggs had no patience for their usual mind games; they wanted to know his intentions and proceeded to perform a twisted form of neuro surgery that siphoned the contents of his brain into a computer and left the Professor's body and empty shell without life. Rembrandt attempted to charge the facility and found what was left of the Professor, then he, too was captured. The Kromaggs, curious about your efforts to reprogram their engines, proceeded to subject Rembrandt to translocation experiments -- they put him in a looped vortex, condemning him to slide forever between dimensions. And by the time you and Wade got to the Professor and Rembrandt, there was nothing left to save.

You and Wade escaped back to the museum, stricken with grief and horror. You'd lost Rembrandt and the Professor before, but now there would be no retrieval, no second chances. All that remained, you tell the lady, was the final Kromagg facility -- the control centre for the other reality warping engines in the chain.

It was on the fourth floor of the facility that you watched Wade Welles die for the second time, shot through the head by a Kromagg energy beam aimed for you. Her sacrifice permitted you to make it to the control center, in which you finally set about the endgame of your long and terrible journey. You activated the secondary programming you and your dead friends had covertly installed into the other 16 Kromagg reality engines. You slaved this seventeenth and final engine to the other 16 and triggered the recall for Rembrandt Brown's quantum history -- beginning the process of restoring the multiverse to what it was before Dr. Geiger's experiment.

But before the program had run a single cycle, the barricades you'd erected to the control room doors fell. The Kromaggs burst in, their weapons trained on you. And rather than die at their hands, you threw yourself into the heart of the reality engine.

The next thing you saw was white. Empty, white, blank space. You couldn't even see yourself. But as the light faded, you could make out sights in the distance. An uncharacteristically sunny day in San Francisco in the park where you broke Brady Oaks' leg. A glimpse of a swinging gate at the front of a lawn, always squeaking. A passing sight of a phone booth, then vanished into white fog. A momentary vision of the coils and power converters of your basement sliding apparatus, then nothing at all.

Until a portion of the white space darkened and Colin Mallory emerged. This phantom of a false sibling told you that the Kromaggs had succeeded and all realities aside from their own were gone. Dr. Diana Davis stepped out from behind Colin to inform you that this space was the emptiness where infinite

numbers of parallel Earths once existed. But then the alternate-Quinn whose body you'd visited -- the man your friends now called Mallory -- also appeared. Mallory's eyes glinted with guile and he possessed a will that you yourself no longer felt. He greeted you like a brother and told you that you weren't out of tricks just yet. And then came Maggie Beckett, telling you that you couldn't give up now.

You asked them if they were really here as echoes of a dying multiverse or if they were merely fragments of your mind in a near-death state. Mallory dismissed your question, instead telling you to look around you at the vast whiteness and see it not as realities destroyed but realities waiting to be reborn. The 17 Kromagg reality engines were reprogrammed; the mission succeeded and while the Kromaggs might try to reverse your interference from within their Earth, you now existed outside and could counteract their influence. He urged you to see where you were as infinite, conceptual space unbound by the restrictions of any physical reality and a space where you might finally complete your mission.

And you allowed yourself to imagine. You imagined a machine of your own making integrating the universal constants mastered by the Kromaggs. A machine that might copy Rembrandt's quantum history and restore the pre-Geiger version. And suddenly, a portion of the machine sprang into existence; coils and parts repurposed from what you might have cannibalized from abandoned cars and castaway computers and discount products from Doppler Computers. Mallory grinned and urged you forward, Maggie told you that you would succeed, and as the machine came fully into being, you put your hands to the controls and felt hope stir inside once more.

You soon determined that the rebuild triggered by your reprogrammed Kromagg engines had only completed half the job: the multiverse was ready to be rebuilt, but a new core Earth had to be chosen. A single Earth with a single point in time that would serve as the originating point for all future diversions that would result in parallel realities. The specific Earth would need to be one visited by Rembrandt at the specific time of his visit. You weighed your options for which Earth could be the core --

And then came a slow, sardonic clap from an enemy. You turned to see that you, Maggie, Diana, Colin and your alternate had now been joined by Kromaggs you recognized. Kromanus, Kolitar, Starke, Kryoptus, Kronus, Kreesha and more. Kolitar laughed at the sight of you, declared that even this valiant effort was doomed to failure. The Kromaggs were masters of all realities including the space left behind after wiping the inferior universes away.

Mallory strode forward, told you to keep working. He spat defiant words at the Kromaggs, declaring that he'd faced batalions of Kromaggs on Purgatory. They came at him in hundreds there and Mallory had reduced them all to dust. Mallory declared that not a single Kromagg would get past him to you. You grinned at his bravado. Then Kolitar snapped Mallory's neck and cast his corpse aside before unsheathing a knife and turning on your friends. Within moments, Colin, Diana and Maggie lay dead next to Mallory.

Kolitar strode towards you, declaring that there would be a core Earth chosen -- his own. He batted you from the controls with a single blow, drove a foot to your chest to immobilize you, raised his knife -- and then suddenly, a figure burst into the scene and knocked Kolitar away. You sat up and saw, in amazement, that it was Professor Arturo. A Professor in casual clothes with long hair. Forcing the Kromagg to the ground. The other Kromaggs charged forward, the Professor shouted for you to activate the machine, you dived for the controls with your choice in mind and everything was gone.

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You tell the lady how you found yourself lying face-first in the grass of a cool and bright morning. Stood up to find yourself in front of the statue of Abraham Lincoln in Golden Gate Park. You rushed to a nearby pretzel vendor and demanded the date. He told you it was 2001. You started running towards your house, but passed by the Doppler Computers where you and Wade worked in repairs and sales -- and then you spotted Rembrandt Brown walking into the shop.

Barely daring to believe, you charged after him, racing into the store. But you were stopped by another shocking sight: Wade Welles, alive and well, standing in the middle of the store. Being harranged by Michael Hurley for failing to close a sale. As you listened to Hurley declare that Wade's six-year disappearance had done nothing for her sales-skills, you felt your heart lift. You stepped towards her -- only to be stopped by Hurley, asking you if he might help you find anything.

You addressed him by his name with your usual familiarity. But he responded with nothing but the opening salvos of a salesman towards a customer; your old manager, the man who hired you, had no idea who you were. You cast a glance in Rembrandt's direction; Rembrandt was speaking to another salesperson, asking if he might bring Rembrandt up to speed on MP3s as Rembrandt had missed out on a few things.

Confused, you sneaked into the Doppler Computers repair bay and picked up the phone. Dialed the home phone number of Professor Arturo. And received a gruff reply from an impatient Professor declaring that unless Quinn were one of his tutoring students, the Professor had no time for him as his six-year disappearance had cost him his tenure and now he was struggling to make ends meet.

Dismayed and alarmed, you left the store. And finally made your way to your house. Noted the squeak of the gate as you made it to the front door. But no one answered the doorbell and your housekeys were lost. Following Wade's lessons, you went to the back door, out of sight from anyone passing by and promptly picked the lock. You entered the kitchen and examined the photograph of yourself, your dead father and your mother. But only your mother and father were in the photo.

You threw open the door to the basement and leapt down the stairs. Your lab was gone, your equipment absent and all that was there were gardener's tools and unopened boxes. And then you realized what you had done. Your repurposed Kromagg reality warping engines and the conceptual machine rebuilt reality as you could from the fragments of the post-Geiger multiverse. The Kromagg Earth had been erased. But in doing so, you had also erased yourself. Wade, Rembrandt and Arturo would have been reinstated to reality, but with a six-year absence.

You sank to the floor in this basement not your own and buried your head in your hands. You had given your friends everything but taken everything from yourself. But then you looked up and saw, for a moment, your chalkboard. Your chalkboard which hadn't been there before.

You reached out tentatively, felt your fingers brush against the chalkmarks of the board, let your fingers touch your calculations, your equations, your mathematical sequences and all the work that had brought you to this point. You hesitantly reached for an eraser and cleared a third of the board, and then began to lay out the equations you and the Professor had studied so urgently in your bid to reset the multiverse.

And then you realized what remained to you. You remained erased from reality. But you had been reinstated as a fragment, and as a fragment, you carried your history with you. With reality having been

rebuilt, you were the tiniest of drops in a vast ocean with only the smallest of ripples. But you would have the briefest of opportunities to choose what that ripple might reach before being dispersed. Space and time had found their fixed states everywhere but where you happened to be -- around you, reality was still settling, adjusting to your proximity. And you would have perhaps an hour, no more than that, to choose one element of this new reality -- one aspect of your life -- to restore through your presence.

You knew your mother loved this bakery, this coffee shop, this place where she first met your father. You sprinted to the bakery, racing the clock to get there before she would arrive as she did every Saturday. You got there just before she did. You stepped in line just before she did. You bought the last of the lemon-raspberry squares. You offered to share them with her, sat down at a table with her. And then you told your story.

This woman stares at you as if you are a stranger and you desperately tell her that you have memories enough for both of you. You tell her that she named you Quinn for her favourite aunt. Michael for your father. You tell her that you are her son, that you love her dearly, that you have fought your way across a thousand worlds to find your way back to her. And you plead for her to remember who you are.

She gazes at you with infinite sadness -- and then suddenly there is a flash of recognition. She stares at the coffee that you adjusted precisely to her taste, the lemon-raspberry squares you know she loves and suddenly she rises from the table and embraces you in her arms.

And from across the street, I sit on a bench and observe. I watch you as you whisper apologies, as you tell her how sorry you are, as you promise you will never leave again. And I grit my teeth and seethe with rage. I rise from my seat with fury. I tear my gaze from you with contempt and disgust and march away from your pitiful reunion.

My hands form fists that shake as I proceed down the street, past two intersections and through a tunnel and arrive in the parking lot of Doppler Computers.

I step into the shop to see Rembrandt Brown and Wade Welles rushing towards each other like long-lost friends. I observe unseen and unnoticed as they declare they will contact the Professor.

And I turn away once more, striding towards the door, catching the briefest glimpses of my own reflection in the mirror, and I find myself looking away from my own face because it is also the face of the man I despise.

When I first met you in your basement, you were lost, Quinn Mallory. You had no idea what you'd stumbled into, no idea what doors you'd opened or what lay beyond them. And I gave you the secret of sliding. I completed your work, gifted you with my knowledge, granted you my experience -- and you erased my life from existence.

My wife doesn't know who I am. My father is dead. I'm a stranger to my mother. Othes live in my house. My equipment is gone. My legacy is destroyed. I gave you everything you were and you tore it all down and left me with nothing.

Rebuild your life, Quinn. Take your time. Restore your connections in this Earth where no one knows you, reinstate everything that you've lost -- and it'll be all the better when I bring it crashing down around you.

You destroyed my world, Quinn -- and now I'll do the same to you if it's the last thing that I do.

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NEXT: SLIDERS REBORN continues with "Reunion" (3), only on [EarthPrime.com](http://EarthPrime.com).