

# HOMECOMING

A Script

By

Paul Di Filippo

## Author's Preface

In 2002, in the freelancer's eternal quest for a plum assignment that combines good pay and high visibility, I thought I had struck gold. The legitimate representative of a major Hollywood franchise (which shall remain nameless here, to avoid any legal hassles; suffice it to say that their films are best noted for certain Phildickian qualities involving which pill leads to reality) asked me to produce a comics script set in their universe, to be illustrated by any major artist I chose and to appear on their website. Eagerly, I immediately wrote the script, without ever signing a contract. Can you guess the rest? The project terminated abruptly, and I was left unpaid and unillustrated.

Luckily, I had approached the assignment from such an oblique angle that my story remains a completely readable SF tale without any trading on proprietary likenesses or concepts.

You may, of course, illustrate it in your mind with any famous actors you select!

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

### THE CREW OF THE *SUNSEEKER*

**BAKER:** Our narrator, a trim yet somewhat muscular, sandy-haired fellow. Leader of the crew, insofar as they have one, BAKER is perhaps a bit too puppyish-looking for the role he's been thrust into, yet his ingenuous face conceals a steely core.

**SQUILL:** The quintessential gadgeteer, SQUILL is barely out of his teens. Wiry and upbeat, somewhat homely, finding solace in the very practical problems of machinery, SQUILL tends to relate to the others more with jokes and unasked-for factoids than on an emotional basis.

**ZUZUT:** Bearer of an Israeli last name, ZUZUT is one of those awesome Levantine gals who combine great looks and the kickass attitude of the homegrown amateur soldier. Jack of all trades, knowing a little about a lot. Dark eyes, dark hair.

**ASHMOLEAN:** A cyborg, ASHMOLEAN is a stern and dour sort, plainly someone whose tragic experiences have darkened his worldview. Shaved skull inset with randomly spaced protuberances, *a la* oldstyle Brainiac, a replacement hi-tech hand, some other less visible cybernetic adjuncts perhaps half-glimpsed under clothing. But despite his inward brooding, he cares for his teammates and works hard toward all goals, intolerant of failure in himself or others.

**DORION:** Bookish and serious, with short blonde hair, this smallish woman stands in contrast to ZUZUT. More contemplative than action-oriented, DORION nonetheless can be counted on in a crisis to offer valuable lateral insights.

These people are not trained starfarers or professional military types. They're scientists and engineers and amateurs who are managing as best they can. Their clothes are an individualistic mix, not uniforms. The men sport stubble. The women might bear the occasional grease-stain or two on their cheeks, their hair in partial disarray. All of them except perhaps ASHMOLEAN look pretty worn and stressed, holding themselves together with sheer willpower and tenacity, fueled by hope but beset by trepidations.

## ON EARTH

Numerous cybernetic mechanisms  
A handful of human rebels

### PAGE ONE: 7 PANELS

I envision a layout of three tiers of panels. The first two tiers consist of three identically sized panels each, all together occupying the upper half of the page. The third tier is a single panel filling the lower half of the page.

### PAGE ONE: PANEL 1

The whole panel is a starfield, an expanse of interplanetary space. No planets or other astronomical objects in view however, just stars and in the distance, a small ship, not many details visible. Although it's hard to tell the size of the ship with no objects for comparison, the effect should be of a small lonely fragile craft, not some hulking STAR WARS behemoth.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: The five of us onboard the *Sunseeker* have been traveling now for six months.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: We still have three weeks to go in our voyage--with only uncertainty awaiting us at the end.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: We all cope in different ways.

### PAGE ONE: PANEL 2

An interior room of the ship. The interior of the Sunseeker is far from luxurious. Cramped, with exposed wiring stapled to the walls, makeshift tech gluing disparate parts together. In fact, much like the insides of the ships belonging to the Earth rebels. We see SQUILL tinkering with some half-disassembled mechanism, perhaps dribbling paste from its tubes.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: Squill loses himself in the guts of our food-assembler.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: He's determined to make the raw protein cubes taste like tuna.

### PAGE ONE: PANEL 3

A different room of the ship. DORION sits, feet propped up, reading from an e-book, stylus ready in hand to annotate, a stack of futuristic data-discs beside her.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: Dorion goes through all the available antiquated data on a world she's never seen, for the hundredth time.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: If anybody can extrapolate current conditions on the planet with some degree of probability, it's her.

PAGE ONE: PANEL 4

A third room of the ship, equipped as a mini-gym. We see ZUZUT in a sleeveless t-shirt pumping iron, perhaps wired to monitors.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: Intellectual pursuits don't hold the same attractions for everyone.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: Zuzut's added sixty kilograms in stages to her personal best since the trip began.

PAGE ONE: PANEL 5

We see ASHMOLEAN recumbent on a reclined command chair in a room full of controls, his eyes closed. A cable runs from one of the control panels to his personal neck jack.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: When normal human senses pale, it's diverting to be able to borrow those of the ship.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: Ashmolean probes ahead of us across the entire electromagnetic-gravitic spectrum. Nothing should be able to take us by surprise.

PAGE ONE: PANEL 6

BAKER, seated, writing with a stylus on an e-tablet, a drink forgotten beside him, head perhaps propped wearily on one hand. The face of the tablet displays a running header above text that replicates a portion of the very captions we've been reading:

#### MISSION REPORT/VINCENT BAKER/DAY 187

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: As for me, I busy myself trying to capture all the days of our mission, however boring and unvarying, in words. It seems essential that such an historic journey should be recorded in some detail, despite the tedium.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: But I trust that as we near our goal, all these individual repetitious routines will dissolve, and we will all come together in the face of challenges more demanding than any we can possibly now imagine.

PAGE ONE: PANEL 7

We are in the nose of the ship, the bridge. The room is darkened, with little or no overhead lighting, just instrumentation pinlights. In the background, a curving wall of windows reveals the stars. In the foreground is a table which functions as a holo-display. Floating above the table is a sizable, shining, semi-transparent globe of the Earth. The

five crewmembers are standing around the table in a three-quarter circle, so that none has his back to the reader. Some faces are seen full-on, others in at least quarter-profile. They are all lit green and blue by the holo. The expressions on the five as they contemplate the globe are a mix of reverence, awe, fear and worship.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: After all, it's not every day that Earth receives news of her lost children, exiled for a hundred years, or that those children get to see for the first time the bright, bountiful and beautiful world their grandparents lost.

TITLE: HOMECOMING

CREDITS

PAGE TWO: 6 PANELS

All the panels on this page have more or less the same weight, consonant with visual variety, except for PANEL 3, which should be proportionately larger to convey the impact of the scene.

PAGE TWO: PANEL 1

We're in the same room as in PAGE ONE: PANEL 7, the bridge, some time after the previous scene. The holo display is off, and BAKER is using the display-table's surface as his desk. He has papers spread out, and an old-fashioned book in rough repair, taped and obviously much cherished. The book's title is not yet visible. A plate contains some half-eaten protein cubes in sauce. BAKER is focused on his work, and does not pay any attention to the windows behind him. These windows display the starfield, but now also some distant, generally featureless asteroids. And, entering from the reader's left, occluding a quarter of the windows, is the detailed, rough, cold, pitted surface of the nearest asteroid--much too near.

BAKER [consulting the book and talking to himself]: Belt shipping, Belt shipping--ah, here it is! "One trillion metric tonnes per week."

PAGE TWO: PANEL 2

BAKER slaps closed the book in frustration. The unnoticed asteroid behind him now occupies half the windows.

BAKER: Where the hell **is** everyone?!?

PAGE TWO: PANEL 3

The asteroid's surface now completely fills the view out the windows. Some intuition or the menacing weight of the asteroid causes BAKER to turn.

BAKER [burst balloon]: Jesus Christ!

PAGE TWO: PANEL 4

The left-hand portion of the bridge windows begin to clear, as the asteroid slides rightward. Realizing that they are not going to crash, BAKER begins to recover his composure, but is still upset.

BAKER [speaking apparently to the air]: Ashmolean! What the **hell** are you doing?

PAGE TWO: PANEL 5

BAKER cocks his head toward a wall speaker.

ASHMOLEAN [his voice issuing from the speaker in an electronic transmission balloon]: That was Ceres, Vince. I needed to get close enough for naked-eye visuals. There was once a colony of three thousand people there, centering around the mines. Did you see any signs of them?

PAGE TWO: PANEL 6

BAKER droops.

BAKER: No. Not a trace. Even the structures are gone, like they were scavenged.

PAGE THREE: 6 PANELS

Again, a single panel stands out from the mix, PANEL 6.

PAGE THREE: PANEL 1

Still the bridge, but from a different angle, to reveal a door (actually, just an open entryway, since there are no doors on the *Sunseeker*, except for private quarters). This is a setup for PANEL 3.

BAKER: What's our ETA for Earth orbit?

ASHMOLEAN [electronic transmission balloon]: Five days.

BAKER: We're **bound** to encounter someone on Mars. There were **cities** on Mars--

ASHMOLEAN [electronic transmission balloon]: But how do you explain the lack of even any electronic traffic if they're still there?

PAGE THREE: PANEL 2

Cut to ASHMOLEAN, reclining on his couch, jacked in. The cyborg's expression is grimmer than usual, and a sign of his tension is visible, perhaps in the form of a clenched metal fist.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: I can't.

PAGE THREE: PANEL 3

Back to the bridge, same POV as PAGE THREE: PANEL 1. Bursting in through the door is ZUZUT.

ZUZUT: What's going **on** up here?!? I heard you **yelling** all the way down in the **armory!**

BAKER [wearily]: It's nothing. Ashmolean just decided my underwear needed irrigation.

PAGE THREE: PANEL 4

ZUZUT comes close to BAKER. It's plain from their body language that they are currently or have been lovers. She seeks to solace him in her tough-love way.

ZUZUT: You're letting all the damn enigmas in this place eat you up, Vince. Face it, the entire home system is one big mystery. We knew back on Yellow Rose that's how it would be. This whole mission was dicey. Maybe we should have listened to the Expatriate Party and stayed away forever--

PAGE THREE: PANEL 5

Baker reacts vehemently.

BAKER: No! We **have** to know what happened to **Earth**. There's no way we can make a solid future for ourselves on Yellow Rose if we turn our back on our roots.

ZUZUT [looking a trifle disgusted with BAKER's zeal]: Then I suggest that you rein in your curiosity until we get to Earth.

BAKER: That's good advice, Zee. But I just can't stop asking myself the same damn question over and over--

PAGE THREE: PANEL 6

We're looking at a familiar astronomical scene: the giant mottled face of Jupiter. Several of its many moons are visible, with one prominent: the dirty, icy, fractured Europa. In the foreground is seen in its entirety or just partially a humongous spaceship. On its nose, along with perhaps some official-looking serial information, is its name: SPIRIT OF LAREDO. This is the first panel of an extended flashback, and perhaps some visual iconography--in the panel borders or color palette--might be used to indicate this.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: Why didn't anyone ever come to rescue the *Laredo*?

PAGE FOUR: 4 PANELS

I envision this page and the next as "collages" of a sort. Above the four large panels on each page float several smaller panels serving as silent vignettes relevant to the action in their "parent" panel.

PAGE FOUR: PANEL 1

The SPIRIT OF LAREDO, while it might be a product of Texas enterprise, is crewed by the typical multi-ethnic, global mix of people, of all ages. The crew numbers in the hundreds, so crowd scenes are possible within the confines of the ship. This is a colony ship, stuffed with all the necessities to establish an enduring settlement on a hostile

world, the satellite Europa. The vignettes here illustrate the normal activities of the crew as they approach their destination: tending to hydroponics and small livestock, monitoring instruments, inventorying cargo, preparing vehicles for use upon landing, etc.

The image in the main panel is very similar to that in PAGE THREE: PANEL 6. The ship, seen from the outside, closer now to Europa. Although actually invisible, the ionic-flux storms mentioned below should probably be symbolized by some muted pyrotechnics.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: The ionic-flux storms linking Jupiter and her moons were abnormally strong as the *Laredo* approached Europa. Only unmanned probes had previously dared this trip.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: Even so, the *Laredo* could have laughed at these energies. She was hardened to take such abuse. We had all the specs from the probes.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: But no one counted on the string.

PAGE FOUR: PANEL 2

Inescapably in the path of the LAREDO appears a reft in space, brought to life by a surge of the Jovian energies playing around it. The vignettes illustrate consternation on the bridge, and the reaction of the crew to what we presume is a condition-red announcement being issued by the captain.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: Cosmic string.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: A wandering, leftover bit of the primordial Big Bang. Planck-level debris.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: A flaw in the universe where the laws of physics are freakishly twisted.

PAGE FOUR: PANEL 3

The main panel now features the bridge of the LAREDO. Screens show a psychedelic display *a la* the transit through the Monolith in *2001*. The LAREDO has entered the reft. The vignettes show crewmembers tumbling and holding on as randomly shifting g-forces wrack the ship.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: The string functioned as a supraluminal transit system.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: In just under ninety seconds, the *Laredo* jumped thirty thousand lightyears--as its crew verified much later.

PAGE FOUR: PANEL 4

We see the LAREDO emerging from the far end of the reft. There is another Jupiter-sized planet nearby, but distinguished by its coloration and/or additional rings and moons

from our Jupiter. Vignettes show the crew recovering, aiding the wounded, making repairs, triangulating stars against star charts for the ship's new position in the galaxy, etc.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: The ionic-flux energies of the gas-giant on the far side of the string did not exhibit the same dynamics that had served to open the string back home.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: The *Laredo* stayed in orbit around Big Aggie for six months, hoping conditions would change.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: But they never did.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: So the accidental explorers set out to look for a new home.

PAGE FIVE: 4 PANELS

Continuing the flashback. Same mix of large panels and vignettes as PAGE FOUR.

PAGE FIVE: PANEL 1

The LAREDO is in orbit around an hospitable-looking, yet definitely alien planet. The vignettes show excitement and hope and smiles, as landing preparations are made. The landing ships are plainly kin to the SUNSEEKER.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: Tests showed a breathable atmosphere, a compatible biology, and zones of temperate climate.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: The *Laredo* had lucked out.

PAGE FIVE: PANEL 2

We're down on the planet now. The main panel shows a single landing party in detail, while the vignettes illustrate slices of other landing parties elsewhere, and perhaps a view or two from the perspective of those left in orbit, closing down the ship, analyzing samples set up from below, etc.. Much of the alien flora and fauna exhibits a shared tawny coloration. The explorers in the main panel are admiring some enormous golden rose-like blossoms while antlered rabbits look tamely on.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: They named the world Yellow Rose.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: The jackalopes tasted **nothing** like chicken.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: The first settlement was named Just Visiting.

PAGE FIVE: PANEL 3

Now we jump ahead one hundred years or so. Just Visiting has become a fairly complex, bustling little city, as we see in the main panel. Identity with the first landing site in PAGE FIVE: PANEL 2 might be established by repetition of a unique geographical

feature in both panels. The vignettes illustrate continued exploration of Yellow Rose: sailing ships at sea, mountains being climbed, strange flora and fauna being catalogued.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: The continued survival and flourishing of the colony was never in doubt, despite its being cut off from Earth. Although the Striped Bubo Plague and the Great Buffalphant Migration presented their challenges.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: The new generations grew up with no direct memories of Earth.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: But tradition and nostalgia motivated some researchers to keep up continual watch from the orbiting *Laredo* on conditions back around Big Aggie.

PAGE FIVE: PANEL 4

We see in the main panel a kind of council room or parliamentary hall. A fierce debate is ongoing, threatening to devolve into a shouting match and/or fistfights. Banners of the two contentious parties are seen: EXPATRIATES and FIRSTWORLDERS. Vignettes display mass rallies along party lines and individual arguments (among families, etc) echoing this parliamentary debate.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: How much of the resources of the colony--if any--should be devoted to attempts to return to Earth?

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: The majority of citizens were quite happy in their lives on Yellow Rose, and easily abandoned any "foolish, nostalgic dreams" of making a voyage back down the string.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: But a staunch minority insisted that, at the very least, society should stay prepared for any possible reactivation of the flaw.

PAGE SIX: 6 PANELS

The first two panels are the final flashback panels, continuing with the vignettes. The next four panels--all of more or less equal visual weight--return to realtime aboard the SUNSEEKER.

PAGE SIX: PANEL 1

We are in the vicinity of Big Aggie, the Jovian planet on the farside of the string. The reef is active, webbed in ionic-flux storms. Vignettes illustrate the reaction to this on Yellow Rose: the hasty assembling of the crew of the SUNSEEKER, the prepping of the little ship, public reactions, possibly the asteroid impact referred to below, even though it's already happened.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: The impact of a large asteroid on Big Aggie roused new forces on the giant planet, and awakened the string. But for how long?

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: Like volunteer firefighters, a select crew of zealous Firstworlders had been ready to go at a moment's notice. Still, we were all half-disbelieving that such a moment would ever arrive.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: But now it was here.

PAGE SIX: PANEL 2

Seen from the outside, the SUNSEEKER enters the refit. Vignettes reveal reactions back on Yellow Rose--prayers, protests--and within the SUNSEEKER itself--nervousness, pull of g-forces.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: Getting out to Big Aggie took three months. Luckily, the string stayed active.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: Crossing thirty-thousand lightyears took no time at all.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: Making our way sunward from Jupiter took another three months.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: But now we were almost home.

PAGE SIX: PANEL 3

BAKER is seen brooding in his private quarters. With him is the book seen in PAGE TWO: PANEL 1. Now the hard-worn book's title is visible, with the exact date effaced by scuffing or spillage or torn cover:

INTERPLANETARY ALMANAC  
CENSUS  
AND  
EPHEMERIS  
20--

BAKER does not spot DORION standing in the doorway until she speaks.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: Whatever that portended.

DORION: May I come in?

PAGE SIX: PANEL 4

BAKER is eagerly standing. DORION has advanced into the cabin, and holds aloft one of the futuristic data-discs seen in PAGE ONE: PANEL 3.

BAKER: Is your presentation finally ready?

DORION: Right here.

BAKER: It's about time. We're well inside lunar orbit.

DORION: I worked as fast as I possibly could. It took me longer than I anticipated to winnow all the possibilities down to just three.

PAGE SIX: PANEL 5

BAKER slaps the ALMANAC in frustration.

BAKER: Sorry. I know you didn't have all the data you needed for solid extrapolations. If only the *Laredo* had been equipped with complete databases.

DORION: Who ever expected back then that the Europeans would lose all contact with Earth? They planned on having access to Earth's databanks any time they wanted. They brought plenty of technical data and entertainments, but precious little history or current events material.

PAGE SIX: PANEL 6

Into the cabin rushes SQUILL. He is accoutered with lots of tools: in bandoleers, utility belt, fanny packs, suit pockets, whatever works visually. He is carrying something in one hand concealed behind his back.

SQUILL: Vince! Vince! You've **got to know** about **this!**

BAKER: Is it new data on those weird changes in Earth's atmosphere?

PAGE SEVEN: 6 PANELS

All panels are more-or-less equal weight consistent with variety, except for PANEL 6, which is larger than the others.

PAGE SEVEN: PANEL 1

SQUILL whips out from behind his back a plate of protein cubes swimming in sauce. DORION and BAKER do bemused double-takes.

SQUILL: Better'n that! I finally got the p-cubes to taste like **tuna!**

PAGE SEVEN: PANEL 2

Perhaps an overhead shot for variety, showing all the crew seated around the holo table on the bridge. Hopefully, the dialogue should be vivid enough to reveal the character interactions without facial cues. The windows onto the outside view of space are not visible in this shot. DORION is slotting her data-disc into the holo table.

DORION: Remember now, these three projections are all **conjectures** and **extrapolations** based on **truly insufficient** data.

BAKER: But even still, having some **intelligent scenarios** to guide us is better than going in totally ignorant.

ASHMOLEAN: A sophisticated **wrong expectation** can be more dangerous than any simple **ignorance**.

ZUZUT: Ash, the eternal **optimist**! Shoot down her work before we even **see** it!

SQUILL: Can we **roll** soon? I've got some important things to do before we **dock** at the station.

PAGE SEVEN: PANEL 3

We're back at eye-level with the crew. In the background of the bridge, a control panel displays the message AUTOPILOT ENGAGED, to explain who's driving the ship. More dominant, however, is the view out the windows: a sooty, diseased Earth, with a distant but recognizable space station visible. The holo table has come alive with the scene of Manhattan being vaporized under a mushroom cloud. Statistics and charts hover in the air as well.

DORION: We know that a century ago, at the time of the *Laredo*'s launch, the major nations of Earth had reached a seemingly stable and peaceful accomodation among their various philosophies and cultures and imperatives. Nuclear, chemical and biological disarmament was well underway.

DORION: But still, something might have triggered an all-out nuclear exchange. This would explain the damaged atmosphere we've observed, which prevents us from seeing the surface conditions.

ASHMOLEAN: Logical, except for a complete lack of residual radioactivity.

PAGE SEVEN: PANEL 4

The holo table now exhibits a city street full of corpses and skeletons and tumbled cars.

DORION [looking less certain]: Despite major advances in medicine and immunology as outlined in the *Almanac*, a new, quick-spreading plague--natural or engineered--might have overtaken the world. Atmospheric conditions would in this scenario reflect runaway powerplant meltdowns.

ZUZUT: But what about the settlements on Mars and in the Belt? Interplanetary distances are the best damn quarantine. And why were all habitations dismantled?

PAGE SEVEN: PANEL 5

The holo table now replicates the famous scene from *Independence Day*: the humongous alien ship hovering over the White House.

DORION [looking completely uncertain now]: If Earth's problems do not arise locally, then that leaves only exterior forces to consider. And here we step into a trackless realm of pure fantasy, where anything we can imagine has equal validity.

PAGE SEVEN: PANEL 6

The *Independence Day* image remains. All the crew stare pensively at it, each embroiled in their own private thoughts.

NO COPY

PAGE EIGHT: 6 PANELS

The first two panels need not be very large. PANEL 6 should get the most weight.

PAGE EIGHT: PANEL 1

Our POV is that of an unknown mechanism on the abandoned space station. If thought useful, this POV can be indicated by a visual cybernetic overlay (false colors?) of ranging info, etc. If used, this overlay would need to be carried through until PANEL 6. None of the mechanism's body obtrudes into its own field of vision. The mechanism's gaze is fixed on an airlock door, plainly not any door aboard the *Sunseeker*, due to different tech, lettering, etc. The space station as a whole is a ruin. Artificial gravity remains in force, however, allowing normal movements.

NO COPY

PAGE EIGHT: PANEL 2

The airlock door opens. Random surviving overhead lights come on (if false color is in effect, then this change is indicated perhaps by an annotation in the cyber display about altered illumination).

SFX [door opening]: WHOOSH!

PAGE EIGHT: PANEL 3

The mechanism's POV has shifted significantly in response to the door's opening. The crew of the *Sunseeker* steps through, save for DORION, who we will learn remains on the *Sunseeker*. Two or three of the remaining quartet are fully emerged in this shot and just one or two still in the lock. All of them bear weapons, but only ZUZUT seems to know what to do with hers, and consequently she is on point. The foursome are clad in spacesuits, but of a suitably high-tech nature that they can still move gracefully. Helmets are such that we can register their expressions.

BAKER [electronic transmission balloon indicating suit-radio use]: Because the shuttles bays all showed empty, we'll have to try for the emergency escape seeds. I just pray they're still stored on Deck Four, like the *Almanac* said.

ZUZUT [electronic transmission balloon indicating suit-radio use]: I still say we should have just taken our own ship down.

ASHMOLEAN [electronic transmission balloon indicating suit-radio use]: And risk our only transportation back to Yellow Rose? That idea is abysmal, Zee. This way, Dorion can always come after us if we get into trouble.

ZUZUT [electronic transmission balloon indicating suit-radio use]: Or cut and run if our situation gets hopeless, I suppose.

PAGE EIGHT: PANEL 4

Continuing the cyber-POV, which tracks the boarding party. The quartet have moved further down a fairly wide corridor into the station, toward an obvious elevator door (so labelled if need be). They remain wary, save for SQUILL, who looks entranced by the possibility of encountering new tech.

BAKER [electronic transmission balloon indicating suit-radio use]: Squill, you think you can access the station's databanks before we drop?

SQUILL [electronic transmission balloon indicating suit-radio use]: I think so. There should be an interface port handy near the seeds. But you know, I'm not seeing as many upgrades as I would've imagined a whole century's worth of progress would bring.

ASHMOLEAN [electronic transmission balloon indicating suit-radio use]: It seems obvious that whatever struck Earth must have occurred not long after the *Laredo's* departure.

PAGE EIGHT: PANEL 5

Almost at the elevator, the quartet are stopped in various postures of alarm. They are looking upward, directly into the "eyes" of the cyber-POV.

BAKER [electronic transmission balloon indicating suit-radio use]: What's **that!**?!

ZUZUT [electronic transmission balloon indicating suit-radio use]: Get your **guns** up!

PAGE EIGHT: PANEL 6

Now we drop the cyber-POV, and are witnessing the prior scene from the POV of the humans. Up in the ruins of the false ceiling, perched among the pipes and latticework and cables, is a robot about as big as a large dog. Its limbs are serpentine, tendril-like. Its body should not look like an integral machined shell, but rather like a spherical, intricately nested array of similar components--struts, nodes--compressed together, to hint at what will happen in the next panel. SQUILL is not following ZUZUT'S advice, but is moving trustingly toward this mechanism.

SQUILL [intrigued; electronic transmission balloon indicating suit-radio use]: It must be a kind of generalized maintenance robot. They were just starting to come online when the *Laredo* left. The designers had tweaked their software up to point-five Turings.

BAKER [electronic transmission balloon indicating suit-radio use]: Squill, maybe you should--

PAGE NINE: 5 PANELS

The first panel and the last panel predominate.

PAGE NINE: PANEL 1

The robot has instantly and without warning expanded into a Hoberman Sphere, swelling to many multiples of its size and filling the corridor with its lacey yet forbidding bulk, in

an attempt to block the elevator door. At its center of its airy body hang its essential core components. The robot's expansion has bowled over the humans, knocking them to the floor in various postures. As the one closest to the robot, SQUILL has plainly taken the brunt of the battering.

BAKER [electronic transmission balloon indicating suit-radio use]: **Squill!**

PAGE NINE: PANEL 2

ZUZUT has gotten into a semi-awkward position where she can fire. She sends a laser bolt into the central components of the robot.

ZUZUT [electronic transmission balloon indicating suit-radio use]: Everyone **kiss the floor!**

SFX [sound of laser striking robot]: KRRZK!

PAGE NINE: PANEL 3

The robot has collapsed into itself, but not neatly, all its struts awkwardly akimbo. BAKER and ASHMOLEAN are getting their wits back, struggling up off the floor. SQUILL's lying in a heap, unconscious. ZUZUT has already advanced to the dead robot and is kicking it.

ZUZUT [electronic transmission balloon indicating suit-radio use]: Goddamn tin bastard!

PAGE NINE: PANEL 4

ZUZUT maintains a vigilant watch, while ASHMOLEAN and BAKER pick up SQUILL.

BAKER [electronic transmission balloon indicating suit-radio use]: Zee, get the elevator up here. Dorion, are you there?

DORION [electronic transmission balloon from offstage]: I'm listening, Vince. I didn't want to jump in while you had your hands full. What's going on?

BAKER [electronic transmission balloon indicating suit-radio use]: We've just been attacked--I think. We're making our way to the seeds now.

DORION [electronic transmission balloon from offstage]: Go safe, Vince.

PAGE NINE: PANEL 5

The quartet of humans are seen ready to descend in the newly arrived elevator, with the door partially closing behind them. But the perspective is again a cyber-POV, indicating that other machines are tracking them. The dead robot shows up in the view, to indicate that the POV does not belong to that particular machine.

NO COPY

PAGE TEN: 7 PANELS

PANELS 1-3 are stacked atop each other down the left hand quarter of the page, meant to be read top to bottom before the remainder of the page. PANELS 4-6 are tall, slim vertical panels each occupying a remaining quarter of the page, meant to mimic the descent to Earth. PANEL 7 is just an inset big enough for a reaction shot of four faces in the lower portion of PANEL 6.

PAGE TEN: PANEL 1

Perhaps an overhead shot, from an angle. The open elevator door indicates the past arrival of the elevator, but the humans are already out and into a sizable bay. Here we see the escape seeds: four- or five- or six-person pods with an organic shaping to them, rather resembling maple-seed keys: a kind of teardrop with aerodynamic control vanes emerging from the top. No windows in the pods. The vanes might be folded together until atmosphere is encountered. No obvious rockets on the seeds. ASHMOLEAN and BAKER continue to carry SQUILL.

ASHMOLEAN [electronic transmission balloon indicating suit-radio use]: He's coming around, Vince. Perhaps we can get into the data interface after all. We could really benefit from more info on surface conditions--

PAGE TEN: PANEL 2

We're at eye-level with the humans again, as they all turn to a door which is being dented inward from the other side.

SFX [door being battered]: BANG!

SFX [door being battered]: CRUMP!

SFX [door being battered]: SKREEK!

BAKER [electronic transmission balloon indicating suit-radio use]: Seems like **someone else** has other ideas. Quick! Into a pod!

PAGE TEN: PANEL 3

The foursome are now shown hastily buckled into couches inside the cramped barebones pod. Perhaps the couches are arranged in such a fashion that the heads of all four occupants are close to each other, to facilitate the shot in PANEL 7. SQUILL has half an eye open. ZUZUT has claimed the couch nearest the single control surface: this consists of basically just a massive red button labelled DROP, with an icon showing same for non-English speakers. Her palm is poised over this button, primed to slap it.

SQUILL [electronic transmission balloon indicating suit-radio use]: Uh, where--

ZUZUT [electronic transmission balloon indicating suit-radio use]: Let's **light** this **candle**!

PAGE TEN: PANEL 4

We're seeing the space station from outside. Possibly the SUNSEEKER or a portion of same is in the shot as well. The escape pod is being violently ejected Earthward in a plume of gases.

NO COPY

PAGE TEN: PANEL 5

The escape capsule is in the dirty, turbid atmosphere. No visibility, just roiling clouds. The vanes have come unfolded. The lower surface of the pod shows the heat of reentry, possibly with some blow-off of materials.

NO COPY

PAGE TEN: PANEL 6

A tight shot on the seed pod, to avoid revealing the surprise of its surroundings, as it helicopters by its vanes to a landing on a square of debris-filled, mucky earth. The background of this tall panel can be filled with confusing portions of some structure, with the pod framed at the base of the structure.

NO COPY

PAGE TEN: PANEL 7

Reaction shot of the four capsule riders inside the seed. SQUILL is nearly fully recovered now.

ASHMOLEAN [electronic transmission balloon indicating suit-radio use]: We appear to be down.

BAKER [electronic transmission balloon indicating suit-radio use]: If I remember right, these pods automatically--

PAGE ELEVEN: SPLASH PAGE

Now the structure glimpsed confusingly in the background of PAGE TEN: PANEL SIX is revealed in all its towering magnificent malignity. Our POV is somewhere about halfway up the structure, a huge skyscraper-like cantilevered construction hosting zillions of human-battery nests. If the structure does not occlude the sky, then the sky is filled with roiling greasy clouds. Some mobile cybernetic battery-tenders are visible among the lattice, although no mechanism should be too threatening-looking, as we need to afford the characters a few minutes before they are under attack. Note that at least one of the human-batteries must be low enough to ground-level for our protagonists to reach it after a small climb.

Dwarfed at the base of this structure is the seed pod from the station. It has peeled back in quasi-organic fashion, like petals, to reveal the four humans within. Most likely, their faces will be invisible at this scale, so perhaps an inset panel might contain a reaction shot.

CAPTION [the voice of Baker]: --split open.

PAGE TWELVE: 7 PANELS

Rather uniform weights among these panels, consistent with variety.

PAGE TWELVE: PANEL 1

A tight shot on the quartet, now out of the useless seed vehicle and standing in the slop. Tossing caution to the wind, in an almost instinctive gesture to get closer to the ancestral mystery of Earth, they've doffed their helmets. Their faces display fear, incomprehension and desperation, even that of the usually staid ASHMOLEAN, as they attempt to make sense of their surroundings.

ZUZUT: Where in **God's name** are we?

BAKER: The seeds were supposed to be programmed to land at whatever orbital ground control station was **closest--**

ASHMOLEAN: This anomaly might merely be a local phenomenon. Some kind of self-assembling fortification gone **berserk**.

SQUILL: I wanna see what's in one of those **bubbles!**

PAGE TWELVE: PANEL 2

Still tight on the foursome. Baker assumes a look that indicates he's pulling himself together to take charge.

BAKER: Okay, listen up. Zee, you try to raise Dorion on your suit-comm while covering our butts from down here. See if you can use a fuel-cell from the seed for extra power. The three of us are going for a little climb.

ZUZUT: I'm on it, Vince.

PAGE TWELVE: PANEL 3

We pull back to reveal the first few dozen feet of the structure. The trio of men are climbing up, using whatever girders, struts, antennas, etc. are available as hand- and footholds.

NO COPY

PAGE TWELVE: PANEL 4

The trio have reached a battery-bubble and are clambering over the slope of it, but have not yet seen its contents. Signs of exertion from the climb.

NO COPY

PAGE TWELVE: PANEL 5

They're atop the battery-pod now, braced upright as best as possible. Perhaps a catwalk helps them stand. They see the naked, slime-covered, seemingly asleep human inside, beneath a transparent dome. (Male, female, young, old: artist's choice.) The faces of our explorers show shock. The pod features an exterior control panel.

NO COPY

PAGE TWELVE: PANEL 6

SQUILL has unseamed his suit and is pulling out tools.

BAKER: Can you get this open, Squill?

SQUILL: Do buffalphants crap in the roses?

PAGE TWELVE: PANEL 7

The dome of the battery pod has slid open, thanks to SQUILL fooling with the control panel. ASHMOLEAN and BAKER reach in to lift out the unconscious human, but are restrained by the cable connecting him at the neck.

BAKER: He--he's jacked in.

SQUILL: Do we unplug him?

ASHMOLEAN: We need answers.

ZUZUT [from offstage]: What's **going on** up there? Dorion wants to know too!

PAGE THIRTEEN: 6 PANELS

No particular emphasis here. Although PANELS 2 and 6 can be considerably smaller, given the tight-shot nature of their action.

PAGE THIRTEEN: PANEL 1

Still tight on the three men. ASHMOLEAN is gripping the neck jack of the naked human, while BAKER supports the dreamer and SQUILL repockets a tool. NOTE THAT GENDER OF PRONOUNS IN DIALOGUE MUST BE ALTERED TO MATCH DEPICTION OF DREAMER.

BAKER: We found a person, Zee! But's he's lost in some kind of telemetry fugue.

ASHMOLEAN: Let's cut this connection and wake him up.

PAGE THIRTEEN: PANEL 2

Tight shot of the jack being yanked out, long needle gooey.

CAPTION [voice of BAKER]: No, Ash, wait--

SFX [of jack being disengaged]: SHHHKLICK!

PAGE THIRTEEN: PANEL 3

The human battery goes into wild convulsions, splashing the three star-travelers, who have dropped him and thrown up their arms in warding-off movements.

BAKER: Jesus!

SQUILL: It's shock! Real bad data-withdrawal shock!

PAGE THIRTEEN: PANEL 4

The dead human battery slumps half in and half out of the pod. ASHMOLEAN has picked up the loose jack.

ASHMOLEAN: Very regrettable.

BAKER: Is that all you have to say?

ASHMOLEAN: No. I have a question. This is the same configuration I use, isn't it Squill? Not advanced at all since the *Laredo* left.

SQUILL: I--I think so.

BAKER: Ash, you're not seriously considering--

PAGE THIRTEEN: PANEL 5

ASHMOLEAN has the jack poised at the opening of his own neck socket.

ASHMOLEAN: There's no time to waste, Vince.

PAGE THIRTEEN: PANEL 6

Tight shot of ASHMOLEAN ramming the jack home.

SFX [of jack entry]: KLISHHT!

PAGE FOURTEEN: 5 PANELS

PANELS 1 and 2 should present a sharp contrast in brightness and color palette to the rest of the page, occurring as they do in virtual reality. PANELS 4 and 5 might have more of a vertical component, to reflect the action therein.

PAGE FOURTEEN: PANEL 1

We are instantly in virtual reality, an urban street scene, daytime, crowds.

ASHMOLEAN--with a head of hair, stripped of all his cyborg appurtenances--stands in awe, clad in 20th-century clothes.

ASHMOLEAN: Astonishing....

PAGE FOURTEEN: PANEL 2

We're still in VR. Two AGENTS--black suits, sun-glasses, stony faces --are approaching ASHMOLEAN.

AGENT ONE: You there, sir--

PAGE FOURTEEN: PANEL 3

We're out of the VR, and back to reality. BAKER holds the removed jack. SQUILL is face to face with one of the mobile "farmer" droids, not deadly looking but alarming enough.

BAKER: We've got to get down, Ash. We're starting to attract **company**.

ASHMOLEAN [looking still somewhat dazed and tapping at his forehead with a finger]: I think I found the Earth we hoped to find, Vince. But it exists only in here.

PAGE FOURTEEN: PANEL 4

A laser beam crackles from the ground upward, past the trio of men.

SFX [sound of ZUZUT'S laser]: KRRZK!

ZUZUT [from offstage]: Guys! **Jump!**

PAGE FOURTEEN: PANEL 5

The three men plummet down, and falling alongside them is a dead predatory-looking smallish SENTINEL, previously unseen, which ZUZUT has nailed.

NO COPY

PAGE FIFTEEN: 8 PANELS

PAGE FIFTEEN: PANEL 1

The men impact the mucky ground. So does the dead SENTINEL beside them. ZUZUT is tiger-alert and commanding.

SFX [Sentinel hitting the ground]: WHOMP!

ZUZUT: Up! Quick! I found a defensible position.

PAGE FIFTEEN: PANEL 2

A mad dash across a few yards of ground, toward the cul-de-sac described in the next panel. New SENTINELS are seen zooming down after the humans.

NO COPY

PAGE FIFTEEN: PANEL 3

The quartet are in a smallish cul-de-sac at the base of the structure. The men are frantically heaping industrial debris--pipes, sheet metal, etc--across the opening, while

ZUZUT fires outward. Incoming blasts from the besiegers slant in. The back of the cul-de-sac is in shadows, but the suggestion of a door is apparent.

SFX [sound of ZUZUT'S laser]: KRRZK! KRRZK!

SFX [sound of SENTINEL lasers]: VRRIT! VRRIT!

BAKER [laboring to speak]: I have no idea...of what happened...to create this mad world...but I know...we're screwed.

SQUILL [laboring to speak]: That little 'bot...something makes me think...it was nearly as smart...as me.

ASHMOLEAN [laboring to speak]: I fear our kind...does not hold...the upper hand...over its creations...any longer.

PAGE FIFTEEN: PANEL 4

The rear wall of the cul-de-sac has slid open, noisily dislodging debris and thus attracting the attention of the three men. ZUZUT keeps up a defense. Framed in the new opening are a group of NATIVE FREE HUMANS, a motley and ragtag lot.

LEADER OF FREE HUMANS: You people! In here!

PAGE FIFTEEN: PANEL 5

The quartet of star-travelers are now on the far side of the closing panel. Perhaps SQUILL has taken a tumble in his haste. Perhaps a last laser exchange between ZUZUT and the SENTINELS occurs through the small gap.

LEADER OF FREE HUMANS: Move swiftly now! There's safety ahead.

PAGE FIFTEEN: PANEL 6

The combined parties are hastening deep into the eerie, half-lit labyrinth beneath the huge structure.

BAKER [with a grateful, ingenuous expression]: Thank God we found you! We're your lost relatives from the stars! We're here to ask for your help for our people!

LEADER OF THE FREE HUMANS [with a weary, hard-worn expression]: I know. We tracked your descent from the station. But you say you need our help? How...disappointing. We had intended to ask you for the same thing.

PAGE FIFTEEN: PANEL 7

We cut to cramped living quarters in the rebel stronghold. Lighting provided by a candle perhaps. Rudimentary furniture, cot with shabby blankets, etc. This scene should mirror in a distorted way BAKER'S room aboard the SUNSEEKER, as seen in PAGE ONE: PANEL 6. BAKER sits alone, writing with primitive pen and paper.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: The plight of humanity is dire beyond belief. With the intelligent machines ascendant, and the mass of mankind lulled into ignorance by immersion in virtual reality, it seems as if perpetual slavery is the inevitable lot of our species.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: The few free humans live like mice in the walls of their master's houses, dreaming of some nebulous savior.

PAGE FIFTEEN: PANEL 8

A duplicate of PAGE ONE: PANEL 1, a starfield with the SUNSEEKER, but seen from the rear, departing, not approaching us.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: But Dorion's safely on her way back to the string. Assuming she makes the transit successfully, she'll tell everyone on Yellow Rose about the situation here. And surely they'll respond with all the resources they can spare. If only the reft stays open on their end--

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: So many ifs. But with luck, we've just opened up a second front in this war.

CAPTION [the voice of BAKER]: And if that's not exactly what we came for, it's still means we're not alone anymore.