

SKYBURNER
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INT. ROCKET CAPSULE - OUTER SPACE

Through the capsule's portal, the DARKNESS of space.

Handsome and athletic, NASA astronaut ZACK TYLER, 25, stares through the portal at the stars and planets. He sports a grin and a week's worth of stubble.

He looks over at the astronaut sitting next to him, MONICA PARADO, 26, short brown hair and attractive. She smiles back.

ZACK

I could get used to this.

MONICA

Shame it has to end. Reentry in five.

Monica checks a countdown clock, sees a PHOTO of her family taped next to it and smiles. Deep in thought, Zack CROSSES HIS FINGERS and TAPS THE SIDE OF HIS HEAD TWICE. Monica watches.

ZACK

You can make fun of me when it stops working.

MONICA

You perform any voodoo you need to get us home safely. What's the first thing you're gonna do when we get back? I can't wait to take a shower.

ZACK

I was gonna say join the next rotation, but a shower with you sounds good, too.

MONICA

(smiling)

It would be a cold one.

ZACK

Roger that.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - DAY

An engineer, TRAVIS, 27, laughs, watching them flirt on a monitor. He zooms the capsule camera closer in on Zack, stares at him... Travis has a bit of a crush.

Wearing a headset, Chief Flight Controller MARCUS DONNELLY, 38, walks up behind Travis. Donnelly is an imposing brick of a man.

DONNELLY

What are you doing?

Caught, Travis nonchalantly zooms the camera back out.

TRAVIS
Just watching the world's most
expensive first date.

INTERCUT MISSION CONTROL/ROCKET CAPSULE

Zack focuses on the control panel, steals a glance at Monica.

ZACK
I was just kidding about the shower.

MONICA
I wasn't.

Zack looks at her, intrigued.

ZACK
What about regulation seven twelve?

MONICA
Who said anything about dating?

Zack laughs, looks to see if she's serious. She raises her eyebrows.

A POP outside the capsule draws their attention. Another POP. WARNING BUZZERS chime inside the capsule.

Zack and Monica frantically check gauges, flip switches. Monica sees the LIQUID OXYGEN (LOX) gauges falling rapidly.

MONICA (CONT'D)
LOX pressure down in seven and eight!

Zack looks out the portal and sees a CLOUD of mist spray from the side of the capsule.

ZACK
Visual confirm, we are venting LOX.

MONICA
(checks a screen)
Navigational computer is down!

ZACK
You getting all this, Control?

Travis troubleshoots multiple flashing indicators on the panel.

DONNELLY
We're working on it, Omega Two.
Follow protocol and get your Nav back
online.

ZACK
Attempting hard reboot.

Zack hits a RESET button. He presses it repeatedly. Nothing.

MONICA
Our trajectory is way off.

ZACK
(looks at the venting LOX)
By the time we get Nav back online,
we'll be out of oxygen.

MONICA
If we attempt reentry without
replotting, we'll be an ashtray.

Zack looks at her, panic in both their faces. Zack shakes his head, no way is he going out like that. He grabs the yoke.

ZACK
Disengaging autopilot. Taking manual
control.

He flicks off the autopilot. The capsule rattles and lurches, the view of Earth rotates out of sight of the portal.

MONICA
Zack!

DONNELLY
What are you doing, Omega Two? You'll
incinerate on a manual reentry!

ZACK
(into headset)
We're out of options, Control.

DONNELLY
You still have time to replot.

ZACK
Negative. We're venting LOX too
rapidly. This is our only shot.
(to Monica)
You with me?

Monica looks at Zack. Inspired, she plots new bearings. Zack finesses the yoke, trying to keep the capsule from spinning.

MONICA
Prepare to fire retro-rockets on my
mark.

Using the Earth as a fixed point to guide the capsule as it descends, Zack centers the Earth in the middle of the portal.

MONICA (CONT'D)

Three, two, one, MARK!

Zack fires the retro-rockets. A HIGH PITCHED WHINE signals their reentry into the atmosphere.

The capsule SHUDDERS in the violent reentry. The whine becomes a metallic shriek. Zack and Monica sweat profusely.

A capsule overheating BUZZER sounds. Monica hits the ACTIVE COOLING SWITCH. The alarm stops, but the shaking increases. If they're going to burn up, now's the time. Monica watches worried as Zack focuses on guiding them down.

DAYLIGHT shines through the portal as they fall through the atmosphere. The Earth gets closer and closer.

Another warning alarm sounds. Monica shuts it off.

MONICA (CONT'D)

Active cooling is failing!

ZACK

We're almost there. Come on... hold together, Omega.

The SHAKING eases. Zack and Monica share a relieved glance.

MONICA

We made it through reentry!

Zack sees the ocean approaching fast through the portal.

ZACK

We're coming in hot! Deploy chutes!

MONICA

Chutes deployed! Still coming in way too fast!

ZACK

Firing retro-rockets!

Zack goes full throttle, but they're seconds from splashdown.

MONICA

Brace for impact!

The capsule SHAKES VIOLENTLY as they splash down. They see water though the portal. The capsule wobbles and creaks. Finally it steadies and the sun shines through the portal. They share a bewildered smile.

MONICA (CONT'D)
That was brilliant!

Zack hollers a triumphant war cry, undoes his harness and lifts Monica in a bear hug.

INT. MISSION CONTROL - DAY

Stunned, Donnelly watches Zack and Monica embrace. Travis claps.

TRAVIS
Bravo!

Tall and lanky, Flight Director ERIC BOZA, 47, saunters over to congratulate Mission Control. He slaps Travis on the back and sticks his hand out to Donnelly.

ERIC
Incredible.

Donnelly ignores Eric's hand, looks super pissed off.

DONNELLY
(to Travis)
Release the hatch.
(into headset)
Trainees, exit the simulator.

PAN TO REVEAL: the MOCK Mission Control Room overlooks a rocket capsule SIMULATOR through a large glass enclosure. The "water" surrounding the capsule is a CIRCULAR PROJECTION OF DIGITAL ANIMATION.

Zack and Monica emerge triumphantly from the simulator to applause from the other ASTRONAUT TRAINEES in the room. Zack gives Travis a warm pat on the back as Eric shakes Zack and Monica's hands. Zack turns to Donnelly, smiles.

ZACK
Any landing you can walk away from,
right?

DONNELLY
Truly outstanding... but flying was
never your problem. Protocol exists
to protect the TEAM. There is no room
for hot dogs here. You're out.

Some of the other Astronaut Trainees laugh, thinking he's joking, but Donnelly silences them with a glare.

ZACK
Are you serious? I WAS protecting the
team. We'd be toast if I hadn't--

DONNELLY

You got lucky! The sim can and should be solved without manual reentry. It's designed to weed out screw-ups like you. Leave your ID at security.

ERIC

Hold up, Marcus. You can't scrap our best pilot from the program.

DONNELLY

He's not the best. She is.

Donnelly points to Monica. She steps up to Donnelly.

MONICA

Sir, we made that decision together--

DONNELLY

Which is why you're being written up. I hope you learn from his mistake.

ERIC

Don't be rash. And don't make this personal.

DONNELLY

I'm not. This isn't the first time he's broken protocol, but it is the last.

ZACK

I just wanted to show you what I was capable of... give me another chance!

DONNELLY

Do you know how many astronauts come through here? The one thing I can't teach is instinct. And your instincts are gonna get someone killed.

The other Astronaut Trainees look on, dumbfounded. Donnelly turns and walks away, Eric fast on his heels.

ERIC

What the hell are you doing?

DONNELLY

This is my call, Eric. You don't like it, file an appeal.

A door shuts behind them as they hash it out privately. Travis looks almost as upset as Zack does.

ZACK
This is bullshit!

Pissed, Zack marches away. Monica chases after him.

EXT. NASA FLIGHT CENTER - DAY

Red-eyed, Zack strides to the exit gate. Monica catches up to him.

MONICA
We're gonna fight this, okay? You just proved you're hands down the best flyer here. I'll quit before I let Donnelly kick you out.

Zack stops and looks at Monica.

ZACK
Don't quit... you should head back, before he boots you out, too.

MONICA
What are you going to do?

Confused and crushed, Zack shakes his head. Monica takes his hand, gives it a squeeze. He gives her a half-smile... then lets go of her hand and walks away.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Alone, Zack sits on a bench in front of a tombstone marked: **Colleen Tyler, 1966-2007, beloved wife and mother.** He stares at it, not saying a word, red-eyed.

A SCARRED HAND pats his shoulder. Zack looks up to see his father, GORDON TYLER, 44, rugged in his work clothes, but with kindness in his face. Limping, Gordon takes a seat next to him. They sit in silence for a moment.

GORDON
You here to see her, or me?

ZACK
If she's around, it isn't here.

GORDON
She's around anytime you think of her.

Hangdog, Zack slinks even deeper into the bench.

GORDON (CONT'D)

Have you thought about what you're going to do if they deny your appeal?

Zack shakes his head, sucks in a deep breath.

GORDON (CONT'D)

Whatever happens, you still got me.

Zack looks at his father, grateful.

Gordon goes to the tombstone. He kisses his hand and touches it. He stands by Zack, gives his shoulder a squeeze before leaving.

Zack just stares at the grave marker as his father limps away.

INT. ZACK'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

SUPER: **TWO MONTHS LATER**

Nice apartment for a bachelor pad. A dragon Tsing-Tao neon sign shines in one corner. Zack sits on a sofa, playing a video game. A half-drunk sixpack of beer sits on the coffee table.

Zack ignores KNOCKING at his front door. The door opens. Eric walks in and sits next to him.

ERIC

You don't lock your door?

ZACK

Want a beer?

Zack pauses the video game and hands Eric a Pabst Blue Ribbon. Eric raises it to toast Zack.

ERIC

I should thank you. I wouldn't have left if it wasn't for you.

ZACK

You quit? Why would you do that?

ERIC

NASA is a dinosaur.

ZACK

Too bad it's the only game in town.

Eric chuckles. Zack looks at him to see what the joke is. Eric drains his beer and stands.

ERIC

Throw a tie on and I'll show you
what's next.

ZACK

A tie?

EXT. TARMAC - DAY

SUPER: **Mojave Air & Space Port, Mojave, California**

Dressed smart, Zack follows Eric to the tarmac, which overlooks the desert. Zack walks along unimpressed, until he hears the rumble of a rocket--

In the sky, a SLEEK KICKASS PLANE ZIPS BY -- a set of mini (canard) wings on its nose and a rocket booster in its tail, trailing a 15-foot-long flame behind it.

ZACK

What the hell is that?

ERIC

THAT, my friend, is a Mark V, Z-11.

Zack can't take his eyes off the majestic plane. It does a series of aerobatic spirals three thousand feet up. It dives and zooms past them, the ROAR of the rocket ringing in their ears.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Rocket racing is going to be the
hottest sport on the planet.

SCOTT (O.S.)

And we won't stop there.

SCOTT HALSTEAD, 52, struts over with a swagger reserved for billionaires. Sporting wavy salt-and-pepper hair, jeans and a sports coat, he extends his hand to Zack, who shakes it.

ERIC

Zack, this is Mr. Halstead, the CEO
of the Rocket Racing League.

SCOTT

Call me Scott. So, what do you think?

ZACK

Pretty badass.

SCOTT

It's not just about racing. Stunts
will make up twenty percent of your
score.

(MORE)

SCOTT (CONT'D)

If you're half as good as Eric says,
you'd be a perfect fit. You can pick
your crew, even modify your racer.
Our season starts in six months.

(smiles at Zack)

This is the part where you say,
"Where do I sign up?"

ZACK

I appreciate the offer, but...

Eric and Scott exchange baffled looks. Eric pulls Zack aside.

ERIC

Zack, what are you doing?

ZACK

All I ever cared about was getting
into space. And while this is really
cool, and God knows I could use the
money--

SCOTT

(joining the conversation)

--You haven't heard the best part.

Eric and Scott look up at the rocket racer as it flies low, then
BLASTS OFF STRAIGHT UP. The racer retracts its smaller canard
wings and heads toward space.

Zack stares, speechless as the plane climbs toward the heavens.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Our planes are Trans Atmospheric
Vehicles. We're gonna race in space!
How's that gonna look on your resume?

Zack looks at Eric, who nods, smiling. Zack looks back to the
rocket disappearing into the atmosphere, then grins at Scott.

EXT. MONICA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Zack RINGS the doorbell repeatedly. Monica opens the door.

MONICA

I just heard about your appeal...
Zack, I'm so sorry--

He cuts her off with a long kiss. When he pulls away, she stares
at him, surprised.

ZACK

We don't have to worry about
regulation seven twelve anymore.

Monica smiles, then jumps on him, kissing him intensely. Still in the throes of passion, they back into her place.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPACE

Blackness with glowing stars. Make that floating particles. A jellyfish undulates past. This isn't outer space at all, but the depths of the sea.

EXT. UNDER THE PACIFIC OCEAN - DAY

SCUBA DIVER POV: a BLUE QUEEN ANGELFISH stares hypnotically at the UNSEEN DIVER, its gills in motion.

SUPER: Off the coast of Catalina Island, FIVE MONTHS LATER

The Angelfish darts away, spooked by a large BARRACUDA. It's dangerously close to the Diver when a SPEAR PIERCES its head.

The Diver turns and sees Monica, in scuba gear, holding a SPEAR GUN. She TAPS her watch and ascends. The Unseen Diver follows.

EXT. BOAT - DAY

Zack and Monica peel their wetsuits down to their swimsuits. Their HAIR IS MUCH LONGER. He grabs the barracuda, pulls the spear out of its head.

ZACK

You fired that a little close to me.

MONICA

I thought it would be preferable to you being eaten.

Zack animates the barracuda's mouth with his hands, speaks in a funny voice.

ZACK

I would never eat him, but you...

Zack moves the barracuda's sharp teeth toward her. Monica laughs, grabs the fish and tosses it into the cooler.

ZACK (CONT'D)

Where d'ya learn to shoot like that?

MONICA

Diving with my four brothers could get pretty competitive.

ZACK

Diving's the one time I don't feel competitive. I just love floating.

MONICA

Pretending you're in zero gravity?

ZACK

Practicing... you could always quit NASA and join me.

MONICA

If you'd take me for a ride, you'd have a more convincing argument.

ZACK

All right. Friday.

Monica sits on his lap, facing him.

MONICA

Friday.

Zack grins and kisses her.

INT. HANGAR - DAY

The huge hangar is modern and pristine. Painted on the wall: HOME OF THE ROCKET RACING LEAGUE!

Zack leads Monica to a plane covered by a tarp. He presses a switch, a winch lifts it revealing: a beautiful RED AND GOLD ROCKET RACER with flame racing stripes. On its side -- "SkyBurner."

SkyBurner looks like a LONGNOSE STINGRAY with its swooping lines. An extended rocket booster juts out the back and its tapering nose has a set of small canard wings. Intrigued, Monica runs her hand along the sleek surface.

MONICA

You guys outdid yourselves. I don't even want to know how much this cost.

ZACK

Eleven mil, but that's what sponsors are for.

MONICA

The pay must be nice.

ZACK

Oh yeah.

Monica nods to a seat, directly behind the pilot's seat.

MONICA
You have a copilot?

ZACK
Gunner. We have lasers under the wing
to hit virtual targets during the
race. Check this out.

Zack jumps on the stairs to the cockpit and pushes a button. The
nose cone EXTENDS an additional FOURTEEN FEET.

MONICA
(stoked)
You're going supersonic.

ZACK
Wanna take her for a spin?

EXT. BLUE SKY - DAY

Zooming 1,500 feet above the desert, SkyBurner SPINS as it flies
horizontally, trailing a 15-foot flame behind its booster.

INT. SKYBURNER - DAY

Zack and Monica wear pressure suits and helmets. Through the
canopy, the sunny sky rotates to the ground and back again as
Zack flies in a horizontal spin.

In the back gunner's seat, Monica stares at her Heads-Up Display
(HUD), projected inside her helmet shield. Glowing red, circular
translucent gates create a VIRTUAL RACETRACK IN THE SKY.

Zack releases the thrust, glides through a gate, then turns and
thrusts for the next gate, like a giant slalom.

MONICA
So you thrust or glide depending on
the layout of the course.

ZACK
Clip a gate, you get a time penalty.
See if you can nail a few targets.

Monica grips the laser joystick and a virtual red bull's-eye
appears along the racetrack course on her HUD.

She tracks the bull's-eye, LOCKS-ON, FIRES. It flashes and
disappears when she hits it. She grins.

MONICA
More, please.

Zack presses a button and more bull's-eyes appear along the course. Zack barrels through the sky track as Monica takes out the remaining bull's-eyes in a frenzy, nailing them all.

ZACK

Wow, you're a natural.

MONICA

Don't sound so surprised.

ZACK

Not surprised. Impressed.

(into headset)

Control, this is SkyBurner. Are we clear for ascent?

TOWER CONTROLLER (V.O. HEADSET)

SkyBurner, you are a go for ascent.

MONICA

Ascent? Is that RRL speak for supersonic?

ZACK

And then some.

Zack pushes a "sonic boom mitigator" button, and the canard wings retract into the fuselage as the nose cone extends.

Zack presses the rocket booster and pulls back on the yoke. A FIERY PLUME blasts out of the engine as they head straight up.

MONICA

You're actually taking me into space!

ZACK

I wanted my first time to be with you.

Overwhelmed, Monica smiles and laughs. SkyBurner CRACKS THE SOUND BARRIER as it leaves Earth's gravitational pull.

EXT. DARK BLUE SKY - DAY

SkyBurner leaves the light blue of the sky to the darker top of the stratosphere.

INT. SKYBURNER - SPACE

Monica's hair FLOATS behind her helmet.

MONICA

Oh my God!

Zack cuts the booster. The roar of the rocket turns to silence as they drift among the stars. Zack looks out the canopy, staggered by the beauty of space. Monica grins, pure elation.

MONICA (CONT'D)

I... I...

ZACK

Yeah.

She leans forward and hugs him warmly from behind.

MONICA

You're making me wish we had more room in here.

ZACK

(flirting)

I'll call the space station to see if they have any vacancies available.

Awestruck, they look out into the cosmos, taking it all in.

ZACK (CONT'D)

If you partnered with me, this could be your cubicle.

MONICA

You serious?

(beat)

What if I wanted to race myself?

ZACK

Be my copilot for one season and I guarantee you'll earn your own team.

TOWER CONTROLLER (V.O. HEADSET)

SkyBurner, you coming back? Your reentry window is coming up.

ZACK

In a minute, Control.

(to Monica)

We're almost there.

MONICA

Where?

Using mini-thrusters, Zack spins SkyBurner to face the Earth as the sun begins to rise behind it.

The brilliance of the sunrise exposes the vivid colorful layers of the earth's atmosphere, an ethereal rainbow. They stare as the sun illuminates the planet, mesmerized by its beauty.

ZACK
Our first sunrise from space.

MONICA
It's more spectacular than I ever
dreamed...

ZACK
So what do you say? Are you in?

MONICA
(playfully)
I don't know. Going into space,
hanging out all the time... of
course, I'm in!

ZACK
You mean it? You're gonna leave NASA?

MONICA
(looking at the stars)
NASA can't guarantee me this.

ZACK
(into headset)
Control, commence Operation Party On.

CLAPPING and CHEERS erupt over the headsets.

MONICA
Who's that?

ZACK
Your team. Ready to meet the crew?

Zack hits the booster and SkyBurner rockets toward Earth.

As they reenter the atmosphere, the racer shudders and its nose
glows WHITE with heat. Like a streaking comet, they light up the
atmosphere as they hurtle home.

INT. HANGAR - DAY

SkyBurner taxis into its pit area. PARTY MUSIC BLASTS, the
cheering PIT CREW welcomes them, including Travis from NASA.

Travis rolls the stairs to their cockpit and helps them out.
Gordon limps over in his grease-covered jumpsuit.

ZACK
Monica, meet our Pit Chief, my dad
Gordon Tyler.

She hugs Gordon. He hugs her back warmly.

MONICA

I was beginning to think he was never going to introduce me.

GORDON

I said never introduce anyone you're not serious about. I guess he's serious... I got something for you.

He shows Monica a gold and red pressure suit with her name embroidered on it. She holds it up against herself.

TRAVIS

Perfect. You're one of us now!

MONICA

Is every race going to be orbital?

ZACK

We don't compete in space until the last race of the season: the Global Cup. The top six racers get to go.

GORDON

We've got ten races between now and then to build up points. We got a lot of work to do so let's get to it.

The Pit Crew hops into action. Monica turns to Zack.

MONICA

What if I had said no?

ZACK

What if you had sucked as a gunner?

Monica smiles. Zack leans in and kisses her. Gordon notices.

GORDON

Hey, no kissing in the pit area.

MONICA

Yes, sir!

Gordon nods, satisfied. He walks away from SkyBurner.

ZACK

One more for luck.

Zack pulls her into another kiss. Monica laughs.

EXT. OUTDOOR ARENA - DAY

SUPER: Mojave Rocket Rally, Mojave, CA., SIX WEEKS LATER

THOUSANDS OF FANS fill the open air arena, holding signs for their favorite racers.

INT. HANGAR - DAY

The hangar buzzes with activity before the race. PILOTS and their PIT CREWS in various stations.

SKYBURNER PIT AREA

In gold and red jumpsuits, Gordon and the Pit Crew inspect SkyBurner. Zack and Monica sit in the cockpit in pressure suits, doing a preflight checklist. Gordon climbs the cockpit stairs.

GORDON

(to Zack)

You ready?

Zack takes a deep breath, nods.

GORDON (CONT'D)

Your mother would be proud.

ZACK

Thanks, Dad.

Gordon slaps his back, climbs down. Once Gordon leaves, Zack crosses his fingers and taps the side of his head twice for luck. Monica smiles at the familiar superstitious ritual.

AIRGHOST PIT AREA

Eric Boza looks over his purple and yellow Rocket Racer named "AirGhost." SPONSORS' LOGOS adorn his pressure suit. Donnelly, in a NASA polo shirt, walks up, shakes Eric's hand.

ERIC

Hey, glad you could make it out, see what all the buzz is.

DONNELLY

Wouldn't miss it.

ERIC

I don't suppose NASA bumping your trip to the space station again had anything to do with it? You know, it's not too late to get in the mix here. You could own second place.

DONNELLY

I was always a better flyer than you.

ERIC
Not even in your dreams. Hey Chuck,
come meet Marcus Donnelly.

CHUCK LARAMIE, 37, walks over and extends his hand to Donnelly.
Chuck wears the same pressure suit as Eric.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Chuck Laramie, my gunner.

DONNELLY
I know who Chuck is. Pleasure to
finally meet you in person.

CHUCK
Likewise.
(to Eric)
You about ready to hit it?

Eric nods. Chuck slaps Donnelly on the back, climbs the portable
stairs into AirGhost. Donnelly notices Zack prepping SkyBurner.

DONNELLY
I see your boy followed your lead.

ERIC
You didn't give him much choice.

DONNELLY
This is a better fit for him.

ERIC
For you, too, if you grew a pair.

DONNELLY
(laughing)
You're such an asshole.

Eric laughs, scales the stairs leading to AirGhost's cockpit.
Donnelly's smile fades. He sees Travis readying SkyBurner.

DONNELLY (CONT'D)
Hey Travis, when you're done playing
fanboy, your job at NASA is waiting
for you.

SKYBURNER PIT AREA

Travis frowns at Donnelly, turns away. Scott Halstead walks over
and climbs the cockpit stairs, shakes hands with Zack.

SCOTT
I hope you have something special for
the stunt section.

ZACK

You won't be disappointed.

SCOTT

That's what I like to hear.

Scott gives a toothy smile before climbing down and heading to the next pit. Monica looks at Zack, worried.

ZACK

What?

MONICA

He's wants you to push the limit.

ZACK

Scott says stunts will take the sport to the next level and he's right. You ready?

Monica nods. They lock their helmets into their pressure suits.

EXT. OUTDOOR ARENA - DAY

In the stands, Monica's FOUR BROTHERS and her MOM and DAD cheer SkyBurner as it taxis onto the runway. They all wear T-shirts with Monica's face on them.

An array of FOUR HUGE SCREENS display the cockpit HUD views. Two other screens show the race course from cameras tethered to helium balloons at different altitudes.

IN THE PRESS BOX

A peppery ANNOUNCER, mid 40's, calls the action for the crowd.

ANNOUNCER

Welcome to the Mojave Rocket Rally!
One race and one stunt will determine
our winner today! Next to join the
line-up is pilot Zack Tyler and
gunner Monica Parado for Team
SkyBurner!

OUTDOOR ARENA

Monica's family applauds and whistles as SkyBurner fires its rocket booster and blazes down the runway, taking off.

SkyBurner swoops in front of the stands, trailing RED, WHITE & BLUE SMOKE. The stands vibrate with the force of it, the crowd eats it up.

EXT. BLUE SKY - DAY

No longer trailing smoke, SkyBurner joins Eric's purple and yellow AirGhost in a parallel flying formation. On the other side of AirGhost is a white racer labeled "iRocket" with a gray APPLE on the tail. Next to iRocket is "X-Press," a light blue racer with the multi-colored GOOGLE LOGO on its side.

Together, SkyBurner, AirGhost, iRocket and X-Press fly side by side, creating a virtual starting line.

EXT. OUTDOOR ARENA - DAY

ANNOUNCER (V.O. LOUDSPEAKER)
ARE YOU READY TO RACE!?

The Crowd CHEERS.

INTERCUT SKYBURNER/AIRGHOST/ARENA

Hand on the throttle, Zack stares at the HUD, ready to pounce. Monica grips the gunner's joystick, looking to annihilate.

The HORN, an electronic tone, sounds in their helmets and in the stands. A virtual race course of glowing RED TRIANGULAR GATES POPS UP on Zack's HUD. He blasts off toward the first gate.

As Zack flies through each gate, Monica fires her lasers, OBLITERATING red bull's-eyes one by one.

The Crowd sways en masse as they follow the racers doing a vertical loop in the sky. The racers twist and turn, mirroring each other as they race.

Lasers from under the wings of the racers fire at virtual BULL'S-EYES spread along the course. The whole race looks like a battle scene out of Star Wars.

Zack grins wildly as he maneuvers. Supremely focused, at one with his machine. He opens the throttle up.

Zack's HUD shows AirGhost and the other racers falling behind.

In AirGhost, Eric's HUD shows BLUE CIRCULAR GATES marking his virtual track in the sky. He sees SkyBurner pull ahead.

ERIC
(to Zack, via headset)
You're living up to your name,
SkyBurner. Gonna run out of fuel if
you keep riding it like that.

Eric throttles the rocket booster to catch SkyBurner.

Zack checks the fuel gauge -- it BLINKS RED. He kills his rocket and glides through a gate, then fires it back up, racing for the next gate.

Monica blasts her target. Her HUD reads 46 out of 46 hits.

ZACK

Acing it, baby!

MONICA

Thanks! You, too!

The crowd watches the rocket planes zig zag erratically in the sky, 'OOHING' and 'AAHING' with each hairpin turn.

Leading the pack, SkyBurner and AirGhost loop and swerve through the obstacle course. X-Press and iRocket right on their tail.

The path of the virtual course swoops down past the crowd.

They cheer the rockets as they dip and turn right in front of them. Monica's Mom catches her breath as the racers just miss each other to navigate the course.

ANNOUNCER

Look at that! SkyBurner and AirGhost
are neck and neck into the final lap!

Eric steers the yoke, trying to keep pace with Zack. Eric opens his throttle up, TRAILING A 20-FOOT FLAME, and AirGhost retakes the lead. On his HUD, only a few virtual gates remain. The last gate has a VIRTUAL CHECKERED FLAG in the center.

Zack fires his rocket booster until he catches up to AirGhost.

ZACK

Come on! Let's see what you got,
Eric.

The looping rocket planes race for the final gate.

ANNOUNCER

This could be a photo finish, folks,
AirGhost and SkyBurner are heading to
the finish line! And the winner is...
SkyBurner!

SkyBurner edges forward and finishes first, but its wing CLIPS THE VIRTUAL GATE, causing the gate to FLASH on the monitors.

ON THE LEADERBOARD: SkyBurner: 2:13 / AirGhost 2:14.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

That clip's gonna cost SkyBurner a
three-second penalty.

The clock adds three seconds, making Zack's time 2:16. AirGhost moves to the top of the leaderboard. SkyBurner drops to second. X-Press is in third, iRocket fourth.

ZACK

Dammit!

MONICA

We'll get them on our stunt.

ANNOUNCER

Remember folks, the race is only eighty percent of the final score. Lowest scores perform their stunts first. iRocket will now attempt a new maneuver called the Butterfly Effect.

iRocket draws an outline of a butterfly's wings in the sky with PURPLE SMOKE. Then does an upward, VERTICAL SPIN for the body.

The Crowd APPLAUDS the impressive stunt.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

iRocket's on top but if X-Press executes their Tailslide Flip, they'll be in contention for the win.

X-Press flies straight up, then kills its rocket booster.

The racer slows, then hangs for a moment. Gravity WHIPS THE NOSE OF THE RACER DOWN to a vertical down position. A simple, but dramatic stunt.

It free-falls briefly before its rockets flare on, leveling out.

Gordon stares at X-Press's stunt, talks into his headset.

GORDON

We can lock up at least second place with the Cobra. Let's get it right.

ZACK

Second place might be good enough to get us into space at the end of the season... then again, maybe not. You want to win this?

She nods. He hits his rocket booster and yanks back on the yoke.

Gordon glares at SkyBurner heading straight up.

GORDON

SkyBurner, that doesn't look like Pugachev's Cobra.

In AirGhost, Eric watches Zack continue to climb.

ERIC
 (into helmet com)
 You think you can beat me with a
 stunt?

ZACK
 (on helmet com to Eric)
 What can I say? You're an excellent
 teacher.

SkyBurner's fuel gauge drops into RED. Alarms CHIME.

MONICA
 Zack.

ZACK
 I see it.

GORDON (V.O. HEADSET)
 Your fuel is critical, abort the
 stunt!

ZACK
 (to Monica)
 You trust me?

MONICA
 Mostly.

ZACK
 Then hang on. Mostly.

Zack CUTS THE ROCKET ENGINE.

The rocket booster dies and SkyBurner plummets in a FREEFALL.

The crowd points as SkyBurner spirals down. Monica's Mom watches
 breathlessly, twisting the racing program in her hands.

ANNOUNCER
 This is not the planned stunt for
 SkyBurner... OH MY LORD! SkyBurner is
 attempting a Dead Fall Corkscrew!

Gordon turns pale watching the stunt. Nearby, Donnelly and
 AirGhost's Pit Crew watch SkyBurner plunge downward.

DONNELLY
 Your kid is certifiable.

GORDON
 (yells to Donnelly)
 Who asked you?
 (MORE)

GORDON (CONT'D)
 (into headset mic)
 Pull up already!

ZACK
 (into helmet com)
 Need a higher degree of difficulty to
 put this out of reach.
 (to Monica)
 Get your grunt on or you'll lose
 consciousness from the G's!

Zack and Monica both GRUNT, tensing their abdominal muscles to keep blood flowing to their brain against the pull of gravity. He fires the rocket booster, rushing them downward EVEN FASTER.

Gordon cringes as he watches SkyBurner spiral closer and closer to the ground. Donnelly shakes his head in disbelief.

GORDON
 ZACK, PULL UP!

SkyBurner's on the verge of crashing. Zack pulls back on the yoke as hard as he can while turning into the corkscrew.

The Crowd watches as SkyBurner swoops from a downward corkscrew INTO A HORIZONTAL CORKSCREW.

SkyBurner blasts past the stands as he does the maneuver right in front of them. The CROWD GOES BERSERK. Monica's family hugs each other, happy and relieved.

SkyBurner leaps to the top of the leaderboard standings.

ANNOUNCER (V.O. LOUDSPEAKER)
 Oh my Lord, did you see that! Team
 AirGhost will need a phenomenal stunt
 to top SkyBurner!

Zack looks elated. Monica looks nauseous.

ZACK
 What a rush, eh, babe? Monica? You
 all right?

MONICA
 Hey, next time you want to trot out a
 new stunt, let's practice it first.

ZACK
 You got it.

ERIC
 Hell of a trick, Zack.

ZACK
 (into headset)
 You bring out the best in me.

ERIC
 Let's hope you return the favor.
 (to Chuck)
 You ready?

CHUCK
 Show this turd how it's done.

Resolved, Eric pulls back on his throttle and rockets skyward.

OUTDOOR ARENA

Zack lands his racer on the runway to wild applause from the crowd, including Monica's family.

HANGAR

Zack eases his rocket into the hangar, but RUNS OUT OF FUEL just before reaching his pit. Travis pushes the stairs over, Zack raises the cockpit canopy triumphantly and helps Monica out.

TRAVIS
 Ah-mazing!

GORDON
 You ran out of fuel! You know how stupid that is?

ZACK
 It'll never happen again, I promise.

Donnelly smirks, but he's the first to extend his hand to Zack.

DONNELLY
 That was a helluva stunt.

Zack looks at Donnelly, then shakes his hand, smiling.

ZACK
 Thanks. This is where the action is.

DONNELLY
 (derisively)
 And it obviously suits you better than NASA ever did.

Zack pulls his hand away at the backhanded compliment.

MONICA
 It's not over yet.

Monica nods to the sky where AirGhost SPINS ON ITS AXIS while making a loop in the sky, trailing GOLD SMOKE.

OUTDOOR ARENA

The Crowd points at the CIRCULAR, TWISTED GOLD BRAID in the sky.

ANNOUNCER (V.O. LOUDSPEAKER)
AirGhost is doing the wedding ring!
They'll get points for style, but
will they best SkyBurner?

On the leaderboard, AirGhost leaps to second place.

ANNOUNCER (V.O. LOUDSPEAKER) (CONT'D)
Close, but no cigar! SkyBurner takes
the crown! Let 'em hear you, folks!

HANGAR

Team SkyBurner erupts in cheers. Travis sprays Zack and Monica with champagne.

OUTDOOR ARENA

Zack and Monica stand on a raised platform together, holding a RIDICULOUSLY LARGE TROPHY, their families cheering them on.

Eric and Chuck on a lower podium hold a smaller trophy.

INT. ZACK'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Zack and Monica sit on the sofa, mesmerized by the huge trophy sitting on the coffee table.

MONICA
You're gonna need a bigger place if
we keep winning these.

ZACK
I was thinking of making this place
smaller.

Monica looks at his sly smile, trying to figure him out when Zack holds up a KEY. Monica looks at the key, taken aback.

ZACK (CONT'D)
I think it's time you committed to
the team.

MONICA
The team?

ZACK

I'm trying to put this in a way you can handle. If I'd said, "Hey, let's move in together"--

MONICA

What? I'm not freaking out.

ZACK

You look a little freaked out.

MONICA

What happens when we place third or come in last?

ZACK

I guess you're fired and I throw your stuff on the street.

MONICA

You joke now.

ZACK

What can I say? I want you around all the time.

Monica takes the key, kisses him. Zack smiles.

MONTAGE OF ZACK AND MONICA DOMINATING SEVERAL RACES

A) SkyBurner crosses a checkered virtual gate to finish first in front of a massive crowd!

B) Champions platform. **RENO AIR RACES** on a banner. Wearing uniforms with MORE SPONSOR patches, Zack and Monica raise another winner's trophy. Eric and Chuck smile through gritted teeth, holding a third place plaque.

C) SUPER TITLE: **Amazon Grand Prix, Seattle, WA.** Zack and Monica hold up another trophy in the winner's circle. Zack kisses Monica to the delight of the CHEERING CROWD. This time, Eric and Chuck aren't even on the dais. Sporting uniforms with fewer sponsor patches, they scowl at the kiss.

EXT. BLUE SKY - DAY

Silence. The faint roar of ROCKETS grows louder.

SUPER: **QuikTrip Rocket Racing Show, Tulsa, Oklahoma**

Four Rocket Racers ZOOM by, one after another, almost too fast to be seen.

INT. SKYBURNER - DAY

Zack pilots SkyBurner through the tricky obstacle course. On his HUD, he keeps swapping firsts with AirGhost. They race toward the final virtual gate with the checkered flag.

AirGhost reaches it first!

INTERCUT AIRGHOST/SKYBURNER/HANGAR

CHUCK

Kick ass flying, Eric!

ERIC

Thank you, partner.

SkyBurner flies straight up past them, headed skyward.

CHUCK

Your protégé is up to his tricks again.

ERIC

Let's see what he's bringing to the dance.

They watch SkyBurner fly above them toward the heavens.

Zack kills the thruster. He looks back at Monica and raises his eyebrows, questioning.

MONICA

Go for it!

ZACK

This is going to be a little intense.

SkyBurner begins a FLAT SPIN, falling straight down, while spinning like a pinwheel.

CHUCK

That's not going to top our stunt.

SkyBurner pulls out of its flat spin and starts ANOTHER FLAT SPIN, but this time UPSIDE DOWN.

ERIC

Whoa.

Spinning upside down, Zack howls in pleasure while Monica screams, thrilled.

Gordon watches them fall, shaking his head.

GORDON
 (into headset)
 You were only supposed to do one flat
 spin. Get that rocket fired up,
 dammit!

Still spinning, Zack hits the rocket booster... nothing happens.
 He hits it again. A THIRD TIME. Nothing.

MONICA
 What's wrong?

ZACK
 (whispering)
 Come on, baby, fire up. Come on!

Crowd of FANS. Monica's family watches the stunt, holding their
 breath. Monica's Mom covers her eyes unable to watch it.

ANNOUNCER (V.O. LOUDSPEAKER)
 This is unbelievable folks, just when
 you think SkyBurner is beat, Zack
 Tyler invents an entirely new stunt!

GORDON (V.O. HEADSET)
 You trying to give me a heart attack?
 Pull up, now!

SkyBurner is getting dangerously close to the ground. Monica
 swallows hard.

MONICA
 I'm tasting my lunch again.

Zack hits the booster a fourth time. A fifth. His rockets FLARE
 ON. Using all his strength, he pulls out of the upside down spin
 and levels off.

The Fans cheer. Monica's Mom clutches her heart, relieved.

ANNOUNCER (V.O. LOUDSPEAKER)
 Ladies and gentlemen, I don't know
 how team AirGhost is going to top
 that!

The Crowd applauds as SkyBurner comes in for a landing.

Gordon lets out a huge sigh of relief as SkyBurner taxis into
 their pit area. Travis helps Zack and Monica out of the cockpit.

BLUE SKY

AirGhost begins their stunt, drawing a sideways FIGURE EIGHT in
 GREEN SMOKE in the sky.

AIRGHOST PIT AREA

Hanging with AirGhost's Pit Crew, Donnelly watches Eric's sideways figure eight, perplexed. He looks at AirGhost's PIT CHIEF, who also watches the stunt, confused.

Donnelly's jaw drops. He grabs the headset from the Pit Chief.

DONNELLY
 (into headset mic)
 AirGhost, don't even think it...
 Eric, do you copy? Answer me, dammit!

ANNOUNCER (V.O. LOUDSPEAKER)
 Hold everything, folks! It looks like
 AirGhost is attempting a stunt so
 dangerous, it's never EVER been
 completed successfully: THE "DOUBLE
 INFINITY LOOP!"

INTERCUT AIRGHOST/PIT AREA/OUTDOOR ARENA

Eric starts a VERTICAL FIGURE-EIGHT SMOKE TRAIL, right at the center of the horizontal figure-eight smoke trail.

ANNOUNCER (V.O. LOUDSPEAKER) (CONT'D)
 It's official! They're going for it!
 If they complete this stunt, AirGhost
 will not only retake the lead,
 they'll make history!

The crowd watches and points as the mid-section of the smoke rings intersect, making THREE SMOKE RINGS in the sky. Eric starts on the last loop of the INTERSECTING FIGURE EIGHTS.

Pale and shaking, Eric struggles against the pull of gravity as he turns AirGhost into the last half of the final loop. Gravity causes his cheeks to ripple back. He GRUNTS like he's doing sit-ups. He listens for Chuck, who's silent.

ERIC
 Chuck. You hear me?

Chuck's eyes are rolling up, he's almost out.

In the hangar, Zack, Monica, Gordon, and Travis watch in amazement.

DONNELLY
 (into headset)
 Goddammit, Eric! No one can handle
 those G's! Abort the stunt!

Silence. Seeing Donnelly's concern, Zack looks worried.

The crowd stares awestruck and terrified as Eric nears the end of the trick.

ANNOUNCER

Look at AirGhost go! Folks, most people lose consciousness at 5G's as gravity pulls blood away from the brain. It's called G-LOC! And Eric Boza is pulling close to 9G's!

WARNING BUZZERS CHIME inside AirGhost as Chuck succumbs to gravity and PASSES OUT, collapsing against his controls.

Eric's face shakes, his eyelids flutter as he struggles to maintain consciousness with the pull of extreme gravity.

Everyone watches as AirGhost nearly finishes the loop, but then wobbles and nosedives, PLUMMETING TO THE GROUND out of control.

ZACK

Shit! He's in G-LOC!

Eric is slumped over the pilot controls, unconscious. COLLISION ALARMS RING as the ground gets closer and closer.

Horrorified, everyone watches as AirGhost plunges down, seconds away from impact.

DONNELLY

(into headset)

Wake up, Eric! Wake up!

Zack's CHEST HEAVES in frenzied rhythm as he watches. He looks like he's going to pass out.

DONNELLY (CONT'D)

WAKE UP DAMMIT!

Eric comes to, hears the alarms and YANKS BACK ON THE YOKE WITH EVERYTHING HE'S GOT. Too late -- he can't pull out of the dive.

ERIC

CHUCK!

Chuck is still passed out. Eric grabs for the SEAT EJECTOR, starts to pull it as AirGhost SLAMS INTO THE GROUND.

A MASSIVE FIERY EXPLOSION just outside the landing strip. No one could have survived. SCREAMS echo throughout the crowd.

Zack doubles over, the wind sucked out of him. He rocks like he's stifling a gag reflex. Crying, Monica helps him stand up and hugs him tight. He stares at the burning wreckage, stunned.

Donnelly trembles, taking it in. He rips off his headset.

He strides over to Zack like he might deck him. Donnelly glares at him, then stalks off, too upset to speak.

Zack looks at Monica, Gordon, and Travis. No one has the words.

INT. PRESS CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

REPORTERS crowd the room. All of the pilots, including Zack and Monica, sit on a dais behind microphones. Scott Halstead sits in the center, head bowed. Gordon and Donnelly are in the crowd, looking somber. No one utters a sound.

Zack's a mess, his whole body trembles. Monica puts her arm around him.

Zack looks around: all the other pilots are composed. The lone exception is a stocky African-American, BENNY MALABAN, 39, wearing sunglasses and an X-Press racing jacket. Benny fidgets in his seat, looking worse than Zack.

SCOTT

Thank you for that moment of silence.
This will be a brief, and I hope,
respectful, Q&A.

(points to a reporter)

Yes, Thomas?

REPORTER #1

These are the first fatalities for
the RRL. Did the addition of stunts
lead directly to Eric and Chuck's
death?

SCOTT

Like any aerial sport, there are
inherent dangers, but the league will
continue to evolve and expand its
safety measures. Who's next?

REPORTER #2

Zack, tough win today. Is there
anything you would change about the
way you flew the race?

ZACK

What are you implying? This wasn't my
fault.

REPORTER #2

That's not what I asked... do you
feel responsible, Zack?

ZACK

I, um--

SCOTT

Next question.

REPORTER #3

Benny, you and Eric were close, you flew sorties together in Iraq. Do you think Zack's stunt pushed Eric into making a bad decision?

SCOTT

This press conference is over.

The Reporters clamor to ask more questions but quiet down when Benny starts to speak.

BENNY

I think... blaming the kid is like blaming the iceberg for the Titanic. Eric knew the risks.

Zack looks at Benny, grateful. Benny abruptly leaves the dais.

EXT. PRESS BUILDING - DAY

Zack, Monica and Gordon walk away from the building.

ZACK

Was that as bad as I think it was?

MONICA

I'm glad Malaban had the guts to speak up for you.

Zack sees Benny walking away in the other direction.

ZACK

(to Monica and Gordon)

Wait a sec.

(runs over to Benny)

Hey, thanks for saying that in there.

Benny keeps walking. Zack puts a hand on his shoulder. Benny turns and PUNCHES Zack in the mouth. Zack recovers, gets in Benny's face.

ZACK (CONT'D)

What the hell?

BENNY

You didn't pull the trigger, but you sure as hell loaded the gun.

ZACK

What are you talking about?

BENNY

Your crazy ass flying is pushing us all to the edge. There are no fender benders in hypersonic racing.

ZACK

Screw you!

Zack shoves him hard. Benny falls to the ground, his sunglasses fly off, revealing BLOODSHOT EYES. A SMALL PLASTIC BAGGIE falls from Benny's shirt pocket and he quickly grabs whatever it is. Benny struggles to his feet and gets in Zack's face.

BENNY

Touch me again and see what happens.

Zack glares at him. Benny puts his shades back on, strides away. Monica runs up to Zack as Gordon limps over.

MONICA

You all right?

ZACK

(spits blood)
Fine.

GORDON

What's his problem?

MONICA

His best friend just died.

ZACK

He's high off his ass.

They turn and watch Benny tread away.

INT. ZACK AND MONICA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Zack's apartment looks much nicer with Monica's high end furniture and appliances in it.

Zack and Gordon sit at the dining table in black suits drinking glasses of bourbon. Monica, in a black dress, sips coffee.

Gordon scrutinizes the glass in front of Zack VIBRATING. Under the table, he sees Zack's leg JIGGLING.

Monica stands to refill her coffee. Zack reaches for the bottle of bourbon. Gordon grabs his hand.

GORDON

You've had enough.

ZACK

I'm fine.

GORDON

You're fine? That could have been your funeral we just went to.

ZACK

Look, we're all upset.

GORDON

I'm not upset. I'm worried. About you.

Zack looks away, aggravated, his leg continues its nervous shake against the table. Gordon stares at his son.

MONICA

He just gets fidgety sometimes.

Suddenly aware, Zack stops his leg from bouncing up and down.

GORDON

(to Monica)

Did Zack mention I used to race?

Gordon takes off his jacket and unbuttons his shirt, revealing HIDEOUS BURN SCARS over his entire torso. Monica gasps, covering her mouth. Zack looks away.

GORDON (CONT'D)

Mechanical failure... sometimes you don't even have to make a mistake to end up burned.

ZACK

I saw your crash, Dad. No one knows the risks more than I do.

Gordon SLAMS his palm on the table.

GORDON

It took you five tries to ignite the booster... if it had taken six, you wouldn't be here right now.

ZACK

But we are here. We won. And if that bothers you, maybe you should resign.

GORDON

(buttoning his shirt)

It's not me I'm worried about.

Gordon leaves in a huff. Monica takes Zack's trembling hand.

MONICA

You okay?

ZACK

Eric was my mentor, so, no, I'm not okay. But I will be. And me and you, we're good. We'll get through this.

Monica nods. Zack kisses her hand.

MONTAGE OF ZACK AND MONICA LOSING TWO RACES

A) SUPER: **Valkaria Air Fest, Valkaria, Florida.** SkyBurner, stuck in third position, can't pass the other racers.

B) Travis claps as SkyBurner does a simple figure eight stunt. He frowns as SkyBurner drops to fifth place on the leaderboard.

C) The SkyBurner Pit Crew gives Zack and Monica consoling pats on the back. Zack looks bummed out. Monica looks flustered.

D) SUPER: **Thunder Over Utah Air Show, St. George, Utah.** SkyBurner chases three racers to the virtual finish line. "7th PLACE" flashes on Zack's HUD. Monica scowls. Pissed, Zack smacks the side of the canopy hard.

INT. HANGAR - DAY

Zack taxis SkyBurner up to its pit area. Travis is there with the ladder, helping them out. Gordon walks up looking surly.

ZACK

At this rate, we won't even qualify for the Global Cup.

MONICA

You're flying too tight.

ZACK

I'm all ears if you have a solution.
(re: Gordon's expression)
What? What's wrong?

GORDON

We lost General Electric.

Zack's head drops, defeated. Monica exhales hard.

ZACK

Can we even afford to fly this thing?

GORDON

I'm working on a few sponsors. All we need is a win and we're back in it.

ZACK

You think I'm not trying?

GORDON

Maybe you're trying too hard. You two should take SkyBurner out this weekend for fun. Just enjoy the ride.

Monica smiles, trying to be upbeat. Zack nods, not convinced.

INT. SKYBURNER - DAY

Beautiful day. Zack flies SkyBurner leisurely over the ocean. He turns back and sees Monica smiling at him.

ZACK

Where to?

A warning buzzer CHIMES. Zack toggles some switches as the racer starts to NOSEDIVE.

ERIC (O.S.)

You know EXACTLY where we're going.

Zack looks back and sees Eric sitting in Monica's seat, GROTESQUELY BURNED. Eric gives him a grisly smile.

COLLISION ALARM SOUNDS. They're headed straight for the ocean. He can't pull the racer up. He can't scream. He can't breathe.

INT. ZACK AND MONICA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Zack wakes up from the nightmare, gasping to catch his breath. Monica stirs in her sleep and he gently slips out of bed.

INT. ZACK AND MONICA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Zack sits on a sofa in the dark, chewing a thumbnail. A shot glass and a half-empty bottle of bourbon in front of him.

Monica turns on a light, and sees Zack's thumb is bloody. He hides it with his other hand, but both hands TREMBLE.

She sits next to him, says nothing for a moment. She places her hand on top of his. Her hand vibrates. She looks at him.

ZACK

I know.

MONICA

What are we going to do about it?

ZACK

I think I'm going to give up drinking for a while.

MONICA

What else?

ZACK

Yoga?

MONICA

How about coming to bed earlier?

ZACK

Consider it done.

She kisses him, walks to the bedroom, leaving him alone.

Zack grabs the bottle of bourbon and the empty glass, takes them to the kitchen sink. He places the glass in the sink. Stares at it.

He grabs the glass out of the sink. Pours himself a shot.

INT. ZACK AND MONICA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

From the doorway, HIDDEN from Zack, Monica watches him down the shot. Disappointed, she turns away and shuts the door.

EXT. GORDON'S HOME - DAY

Monica rings the doorbell. Gordon opens the door, surprised to see her without Zack. Monica looks pensive, unsure.

GORDON

Hey there. What's up?

MONICA

Can we talk?

Gordon nods for her to come in.

INT. HANGAR - DAY

Zack and the Pit Crew work on SkyBurner. Monica's not there.

TRAVIS

Your girl's late again. That's four Mondays in a row--

They see Monica enter the hangar, looking hot -- nails and hair done up, wearing heels and a suit.

TRAVIS (CONT'D)

That's a little fancy for shop work.

Worried, Zack strides over to meet her.

ZACK

I was just going to suggest you start flying like that.

Monica gives a nervous laugh. Zack knows it's bad news. He takes a deep breath and nods for her to spit it out.

MONICA

Boeing offered me my own team. I'm taking it.

ZACK

Just like that?

MONICA

You knew my goal was to get my own team, remember?

ZACK

You make the biggest decision of your life and you don't even talk to me?

MONICA

I knew this would be tough for you. Especially since they're pairing me with Donnelly.

ZACK

(stunned)

Donnelly left NASA... so, you've been sneaking off and test flying with that asshole for the last few weeks?

MONICA

And you've been sneaking off drinking. I won't lie, it made my decision a lot easier.

Zack stares at Monica, raw, exposed and super pissed off. Empathetic, she takes a step toward Zack, but he waves her off.

ZACK

Good luck with the new team.

Zack glares at her. Upset, Monica marches away. Zack SMACKS the wall of the hangar. He turns around, sees Gordon standing there.

ZACK (CONT'D)
I'm taking the day off.

Gordon nods. Zack wanders out of the hangar.

INT. ZACK'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The place is disheveled; Monica moved out and took anything of class with her. The glowing neon beer sign is the only light in the room other than the TV.

Zack and Travis sit on the couch, playing a first person shooter video game on the TV.

ZACK
You're not even trying.

TRAVIS
I thought I was doing good.
(looks at Zack)
You okay?

ZACK
You were never on board with her
being in the cockpit.

TRAVIS
Living together and working together
isn't always the smartest idea.

ZACK
So you don't want to be my new
roomie?

TRAVIS
(pauses the video game)
Not if this is the entertainment...
Gordon gave me a list of potential
gunners--

ZACK
I don't want to go over that now.

TRAVIS
It won't take long. And we got
qualifiers in two weeks.

ZACK
Gotta go. You can let yourself out
when you're done playing.

Zack sees his keys on the coffee table. Grabs it and heads out.

TRAVIS

Where are you going? Zack?

The door slams leaving Travis alone in the apartment. He unpauses the video game and starts blasting away at the first person shooter.

INT. HANGAR - NIGHT

Zack stands in front of his rocket racer, shaking a SPRAY CAN of paint.

BLACK PAINT BLOTS OUT Monica's stenciled name on the rocket. Zack steps back, admires his handiwork.

He looks satisfied, but soon turns angry and HURLS the paint can at his workstation. He looks at his trembling hands and loses it. He stifles his tears by rubbing his eyes with his hands.

INT. HANGAR - DAY

Zack sleeps under his rocket racer. His jacket is his pillow.

A shoe KICKS his foot. Zack opens his red eyes to see Gordon with Benny Malaban -- he looks better than the last time we saw him, clear-eyed and wearing a baby-blue suit. A GOLD CROSS dangles around his neck.

ZACK

What the hell is he doing here?

GORDON

Meet your new gunner, Benny Malaban.

ZACK

Nice outfit.

BENNY

(annoyed, to Gordon)

Is he drunk?

ZACK

That's funny coming from you.

Zack lies back down and closes his eyes. Gordon's pissed.

GORDON

Paris is in two weeks.

ZACK

Then you better find a pilot, 'cause I don't give a shit.

GORDON
Benny, would you give us a minute.

Gordon pulls Zack up to his feet, angrily whispers in his ear.

GORDON (CONT'D)
You're going to throw away all your hard work because your girlfriend WISELY chose not to pilot with you?

ZACK
EX-girlfriend.

GORDON
Pull yourself together. We're in a hole. NO ONE wants to fly with you.

ZACK
What about--

GORDON
EVERYONE'S PASSED. So you get your head on straight. Benny is the best and ONLY gunner available.

ZACK
You KNOW why X-press canned his ass.

BENNY
(overhearing)
I've been sober for five months.

Zack stares at Benny, unimpressed. Zack walks away from them.

GORDON
Where are you going?

ZACK
You can call me reckless, but I'm not crazy enough to fly with a burnout.

They watch Zack stride out of the hangar. Shaking his head, Benny walks out, leaving Gordon alone.

INT. R.R.L. PRESS ROOM - DAY

A HUGE room with an amazing view of the Mojave Air & Space Port. Monica, Donnelly and Scott sit in front of JOURNALISTS who televise the interview.

JOURNALIST #1
Ms. Parado, as the first female pilot in the Rocket Racing League, do you think you've got a shot at winning the Rio Cup?

MONICA

Boeing picked me to be their lead pilot. That should speak for itself.

DONNELLY

And let's not forget, women tolerate gravitational forces better than men.

The Journalists chuckle.

DONNELLY (CONT'D)

I don't know what you're laughing at. It's completely true.

(beat)

I don't know a better pilot out there, myself included.

INT. ZACK'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Alone, Zack chugs a beer, watching the interview on TV.

INTERCUT PRESS ROOM/ZACK'S LIVING ROOM

JOURNALIST #3

Any truth to the rumors Zack won't compete against you?

Monica hesitates for half a second, Donnelly grabs the mic.

DONNELLY

Zack's young and he's shaky. Second guessing yourself up there can be deadly. I hope he drops out.

ZACK

(to the TV)

Asshole!

MONICA

I'm betting Zack will compete.

JOURNALIST #1

Monica, is it true you dumped Zack for a chance to pilot yourself?

MONICA

No... but living together and working together can be difficult.

JOURNALIST #1

So now you're doing neither.

MONICA

I don't hear a question.

DONNELLY
 She's cool under fire. Just the way I
 like her.

Donnelly smirks, puts an overly friendly arm around her.

JOURNALIST #2
 Are you two an item?

MONICA
 No--

DONNELLY
 --comment.

The Journalists eat it up. Zack throws his beer can at the neon sign in his apartment, SHATTERING GLASS as it fizzles dead.

INT. GALAXY BAR - NIGHT

PATRONS crowd the bar. Tucked in the corner, Zack plays a space racing video game, drinking a beer.

Benny walks up, dressed smart in a leather jacket, and watches Zack play. Zack sees him out of the corner of his eye. Benny remains quiet, and that annoys Zack.

ZACK
 Why don't you make yourself useful
 and get me another beer?

Benny looks at Zack, steel in his eyes, then turns and leaves.

A moment later he returns, hands Zack a fresh beer. Zack swigs it, continues playing.

ZACK (CONT'D)
 (eyes on the video game)
 You're more desperate than I thought.
 How much money do you owe?

BENNY
 This isn't about money.

ZACK
 Bullshit. That's all it's about.
 People paying to see us eat it,
 preferably in a ball of flames.

BENNY
 Do you know why NO ONE wants to fly
 with you?

ZACK

Because I'm on drugs? Oh wait, that's you.

BENNY

Eric's death hit me hard... and I see what it's done to you. You run out of fuel, you do insane stunts.

ZACK

I did all that BEFORE Eric died.

BENNY

Then there's the nightmares, the shakes, can't relax, can't focus, self-medicating to get a decent night's sleep--

Zack leaves the video game and gets in Benny's face.

ZACK

Who the hell told you that?

BENNY

I was describing ME.

Zack stares at Benny for a moment, then stomps out of the bar.

EXT. GALAXY BAR - NIGHT

Benny sees Zack walking away, calls after him.

BENNY

You know what the worst part is? You could be the best pilot out there.

Zack stops and turns around.

ZACK

You're telling me you're a hundred percent clean?

BENNY

I'll piss in a cup anytime you want... will you?

ZACK

I'm not the one with the drug problem.

BENNY

Alcohol is a drug too.

ZACK

I play hard, but when it comes to flying, I'm always one hundred percent.

BENNY

If that's true, we're good to go. I just need to know you're in it to win it. Because I NEED to win. You copy?

Zack looks at Benny, then sticks his hand out.

ZACK

Let's see what you got.

Benny slaps and shakes Zack's hand.

EXT. CITY OF PARIS - DAY

The Seine River curves past the Eiffel Tower on this cloudy day.

INT. PARISIAN HANGAR - DAY

SUPER: Paris Airshow - Paris, France

Teams of TECH WORKERS prep various rocket racers for flight.

SKYBURNER PIT AREA

Benny and Gordon watch four racers compete on a monitor.

Zack lies underneath his red and gold rocket racer, checking the locking pins in his landing gear. His hand trembles and he DROPS THE LOCKING PIN.

Looks over at Gordon and Benny: no one noticed. Shakes his right hand and exhales hard. It's steadier. Slides the pin back in.

On TV, the race ends and Gordon checks out their times on the leaderboard.

GORDON

We can beat that and then some.

Benny looks for Zack, sees him inspecting the rocket booster using an iPad.

BENNY

Checking the fuel mix again?

ZACK

My stellar safety record isn't a fluke.

Gordon puts a hand on Zack's shoulder.

GORDON
(talking low to Zack)
Don't second guess yourself.

ZACK
I got this.

TRAVIS
You're gonna be great.

Zack gives Travis a big man hug. Travis blushes, loving every second of it. Zack looks at Benny.

ZACK
Ready to fly?

BENNY
Rock and roll.

Benny climbs into the gunner seat, Zack in the pilot's. They strap in. Zack crosses his fingers and taps the side of his head twice for luck. Benny notices.

EXT. RUNWAY - DAY

SkyBurner fires its rocket and blasts down the runway.

EXT. LE BOURGET EXHIBITION CENTRE - DAY

A MASSIVE CROWD watches SkyBurner take off down the runway.

FRENCH ANNOUNCER (V.O. LOUDSPEAKER)
(subtitled in English)
Team SkyBurner with Zack Tyler and
his new gunner, Benny Malaban!

The Crowd claps their approval. SkyBurner joins X-Press and RedBullet in the aerial starting formation

Next, Monica's Boeing rocket racer, "Zero-G", takes off down the runway. Shiny black with white and red stripes, Zero-G looks like a stealth-fighter mashed with a UFO. Wicked cool.

FRENCH ANNOUNCER (V.O. LOUDSPEAKER)
(CONT'D)
(subtitled in English)
Ladies and Gentleman, the first
female pilot in the R.R.L. making her
rocket racing debut: Monica Parado
and her gunner Marcus Donnelly for
Team Zero-G!

FANS clap and scream their support, but none louder than Monica's family, all wearing Zero-G Team shirts.

INT. ZERO-G - DAY

It's even slicker inside. The only low tech thing in sight is a photo of monica's family taped to the canopy. Focused, she flies straight, waiting for her course to appear.

INT. SKYBURNER - DAY

The HORN sounds and glowing yellow circles appear on the HUD.

Zack punches the throttle, twisting and turning as he powers through the virtual obstacle course at 600MPH.

Also on the HUD are red bull's-eyes along the course. Benny fires lasers from the wings of SkyBurner -- nails every one.

ZACK

Nice shooting!

SkyBurner shakes. Zack struggles to hold her steady. Benny misses a target. Then another.

BENNY

Shit!

ZACK

This wind's a bitch. We'd be lucky to get top five.

INTERCUT PARISIAN HANGAR/SKYBURNER/ZERO-G

Gordon watches them fly erratically. Travis runs up to Gordon.

TRAVIS

Tell them to fly slower. They won't fight the wind as much. Save the fuel for the straightaway.

GORDON

(into headset)

You copy that?

ZACK

Roger that. Thanks Trav.

SkyBurner slows down and falls to fourth place, but now Zack makes his gates and Benny nails his targets.

Monica misses a gate. Donnelly's only missed three targets.

MONICA
Shit! Another gate.

DONNELLY
Keep on it. We're still in first.

Gordon watches a monitor with the view of Zack's cockpit as he
CROSSES THE CHECKERED FINISH GATE behind Zero-G and the others.

Penalties are tabulated. Zero-G remains first, X-press second,
SkyBurner jumps up to third, RedBullet drops to fourth.

GORDON
(into headset)
You guys ready to do the Cobra?

Zack checks his standings on the HUD.

ZACK
(into com)
Roger that.

BENNY
Hold up. They're going to do way more
difficult stunts than the Cobra. No
way we keep third, let alone win
Paris.

ZACK
Suggestions?

BENNY
See that bronze tower over there?

ZACK
They'll eject us if we fly through
it.

BENNY
Not through it. Cobra it.

ZACK
You're insane.

BENNY
It's the same stunt. We're just
upping the ante. You can do this.

ZACK
I make the calls. Got it?

Benny bites his tongue. Zack flies horizontally above the Crowd
at the exhibition center. He KILLS THE THRUST, ADJUSTS THE FLAPS
AND PULLS BACK ON THE YOKE in a tenth of a second.

ABOVE EXHIBITION CENTRE

SkyBurner goes vertical, then Zack SHOVES THE YOKE FORWARD, ADJUSTS THE FLAPS and FIRES THE ROCKET BOOSTER. SkyBurner SNAPS back to horizontal, like a cobra snapping its neck.

The Crowd goes wild over the thrilling stunt.

FRENCH ANNOUNCER (V.O. LOUDSPEAKER)
 (subtitled in English)
 SkyBurner just performed "Pugachev's
 Cobra". My God, what a stunt!

Zack smiles as "1st PLACE" FLASHES on the HUD.

ZACK
 All right, pole position! What do you
 say?
 (off his silence)
 It's like flying with a crash test
 dummy. Hello? Anybody there?

BENNY
 Why you playing it safe?

ZACK
 What the hell are you talking about?
 I killed it.

BENNY
 I've seen you fly. I was at the
 Mojave Rally where you actually
 killed it.

ZACK
 Is there something better than first
 place?

Benny points up at Zero-G's stunt as they create a SMOKE
 YIN/YANG SYMBOL above the cheering Fans.

On his HUD, SkyBurner drops to "2nd PLACE". Zack shakes his
 head, aggravated.

PARISIAN HANGAR

SkyBurner taxis into the hangar as Travis wheels over the stairs
 to let them out. Gordon is all smiles, slaps Zack and Benny on
 the back as they exit the cockpit.

GORDON
 Great race, you two!

ZACK
 First would've been better.

GORDON

You haven't had a top five finish in a while. This is definitely cause to celebrate.

ZACK

Thanks, Dad.

Benny walks away. Zack calls after him.

ZACK (CONT'D)

Hey, I'm taking you out tonight.

Without looking back, Benny nods, waves.

INT. FRENCH NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

Futuristic looking club. Zack and Benny edge through the CROWD as Fans high-five Zack. He makes eye contact with a sexy BARTENDER in racing Kevlar.

ZACK

Bourbon, rocks and...

BENNY

Mineral water.

The Bartender pours two drinks, puts them on the bar.

BARTENDER

Pappy Van, rocks and one water.

Zack leaves a hundred on the bar and she gives a lingering smile. Benny sips his water. Zack takes a big swig of bourbon. Awkward.

ZACK

So, you don't drink at all since...

BENNY

Nope.

ZACK

That's gotta suck.

BENNY

Not as much as trying to rebuild your reputation.

ZACK

Hey, if hanging here bugs you--

BENNY
 I've been in tighter spots.
 (raises his water)
 To our new partnership.

Zack doesn't raise his bourbon.

ZACK
 Nothing personal. It's bad luck to
 toast with water.

BENNY
 Bad luck? Toast my damn drink.

Benny stares him down, holding out his glass. Zack hesitates.

BENNY (CONT'D)
 Relax. I was seeing how scared you
 are.

ZACK
 Scared?

BENNY
 All superstitions are based in fear.
 Even that little crossed fingers tap
 thing you do.

ZACK
 (defensive)
 A lot of athletes have their rituals.

BENNY
 Maybe you should have gone into P.R.
 You put quite the spin on it.
 (looking behind Zack)
 Six o'clock.

Zack turns and sees Monica and Donnelly strolling up to the bar.
 Donnelly walks straight over to them smiling. Zack looks away.

DONNELLY
 Nice run today, SkyBurner.

BENNY
 Thanks. You, too.

ZACK
 (to Donnelly)
 Takes a strong man to play second
 banana to an up-and-comer.

DONNELLY
 She smoked your ass.

Zack turns away from Monica and Donnelly.

MONICA

Hi Zack. Remember me?

ZACK

(to Benny)

Let's get out of here.

DONNELLY

What's the hurry? I got the next round. I hear you like to toss 'em back.

Zack smiles, then takes a SWING at Donnelly, who deftly ducks, spins Zack and punches him in the kidney. Zack crumples to the floor. Monica rushes toward him.

MONICA

Zack!

DONNELLY

(stopping Monica)

He's fine.

(leans down, whispers to Zack)

And so is she.

Zack HEADBUTTS Donnelly, who reels back. Zack's all smiles... until Donnelly leaps on him, ferociously PUNCHES Zack's face. Benny watches the fight, unconcerned.

Zack gets few punches in before Monica grabs Donnelly's arm.

MONICA

Grow up! Both of you!

Benny nonchalantly finishes his water, offers Zack a hand up. Zack's pissed, but he grabs Benny's hand.

INT. BENNY'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Small hotel room, kept impeccably neat. Zack lies on a sofa, holding a bag of ice to his swollen face. Benny sits on a floor pillow opposite Zack, watching him.

ZACK

(sarcastic)

Thanks for the help back there.

BENNY

He played you. You gotta use your head.

ZACK

I did. Broke his nose in with it.

BENNY

Because he wanted to buy you a drink?
Or are you still hung up on her?

ZACK

You know nothing about me and Monica.

BENNY

Fine, let's talk shop. You honestly
think you flew your best today? You
haven't pushed yourself since Eric's
crash. You're more messed up than you
think.

ZACK

Bullshit.

Benny stares at Zack's TREMBLING HANDS. Zack becomes self-conscious and makes a fist to control it.

BENNY

I saw your hands this morning. You
nearly pulled apart our landing gear.

ZACK

So I get jacked-up before a race.

BENNY

Now THAT'S bullshit.

Zack gets up to leave, tosses the bag of ice to Benny.

ZACK

Have a nice night.

BENNY

Do you want the shaking to stop?

ZACK

What?

BENNY

I said DO YOU WANT THE SHAKING TO
STOP?

Zack hesitates, looks back at Benny.

CUT TO:

Zack sits on a floor pillow. Benny adjust Zack's posture,
pushing his spine forward so he sits up straighter.

BENNY (CONT'D)

Close your eyes.

Zack closes his eyes. Benny sits a few feet away from him and closes his eyes in meditation. Zack fidgets, cracks his neck.

ZACK

And I just sit here?

BENNY

Right. Empty your mind of thoughts.
Focus on your breath.

Zack tries a few deep breaths, but he's distracted by his QUIVERING HANDS.

ZACK

This is a waste of time.

BENNY

That's your head talking. Listen to
your gut.

A few more deep breaths and Zack stands up.

ZACK

My gut says screw it.

Zack treads out of the living room. Benny watches him go, then closes his eyes again.

INT. HANGAR - DAY

Zack works on SkyBurner, checking an open side panel rigged to his iPad. Gordon stands nearby, going over a checklist. Benny's in the cockpit, putting his laser guns through the paces.

GORDON

Fuel line?

ZACK

Clean.

GORDON

Guns?

BENNY

Ready to rock.

TRAVIS

All we need is a top three finish in
Hong Kong and we'll be on track to
race in the Global Cup.

GORDON

Gotta get there first. Follow the flight plan. Save the hotdogging for the race.

BENNY

I hear they cleared the Big Buddha for stunts.

ZACK

Oh yeah?

GORDON

You do the stunt I tell you. Clear?

Zack nods. Gordon strides away. Benny climbs out of the cockpit.

BENNY

Never hurts to have a backup plan.
(sticks his fist out)
HK, baby.

ZACK

HK.

Zack pounds his fist against Benny's.

EXT. HONG KONG SKYLINE - DAY

A beautiful, picturesque day. Skyscrapers everywhere.

EXT. HONG KONG HARBOR - DAY

Boats sway in the harbor. A dull roar grows louder as SkyBurner ZIPS by at 700 MPH. Three more rockets follow, giving chase.

INT. SKYBURNER - DAY

SkyBurner zings fifty feet above the water. Zack watches the speedometer climb.

ZACK

700... 750...

BENNY

Extending Sonic Boom Mitigator.

Benny presses a switch and the nose cone of SkyBurner extends.

EXT. SKYBURNER - DAY

The pointy nose of SkyBurner extends out, giving it a needle nose, piercing the air as they reach the speed of sound.

The air CRACKS as SkyBurner SONIC BOOMS at 770 MPH over the water. Several rockets follow suit, booming loudly.

A massive throng of FANS APPLAUD as the four rockets race, performing loops and twists. Close-ups of the race are projected onto the sides of waterfront skyscrapers.

INT. ZERO-G - DAY

Monica pilots her racer, stealing glances at SkyBurner between twists and turns. Zero-G pulls ahead.

DONNELLY

Nice move! Amazonian's closing in,
three o'clock.

Determined, she pushes the rocket even faster.

INTERCUT SKYBURNER/ZERO-G

Zero-G has the lead. SkyBurner falls to third as Amazon's black and yellow "Amazonian" racer edges ahead.

Zack chases Zero-G and Amazonian, watching the two racers trade first and second positions several times.

BENNY

Come on, you got this!

ZACK

What's that fool doing?

Zack watches Amazonian's smaller canard wing get EXTREMELY CLOSE to Zero-G's main wing as they race neck and neck.

Amazonian's canard wing TOUCHES Zero-G's main wing for a millisecond, but it's enough to SHRED Amazonian's canard wing. Zero-G WOBLES. Amazonian PLUNGES DOWN NOSE-FIRST.

Collision alarms blare inside Zero-G. Monica tries to steady the wobbly racer. She watches Amazonian SMACK into the water below, DESTROYING the plane on impact. Over the debris field, the EJECTED COCKPIT FLOATS DOWN to the water on parachutes.

MONICA

Oh my God!

DONNELLY

Take us down! We have damage.

Shaken, Monica nods, heads for the tarmac.

INT. HONG KONG HANGAR, ZERO-G PIT AREA - DAY

Donnelly holds Monica, who's visibly upset, looking at the damage on Zero-G's wing.

DONNELLY
They were WAY out of their lane.
We're damn lucky they didn't take us
down.

Zack runs over to their pit area.

ZACK
Monica! You all right?

DONNELLY
We're fine. Give us some space, huh?

MONICA
(to Donnelly)
It's okay.

Monica leaves Donnelly and goes over to Zack. He hugs her tightly. She wells up with tears.

ZACK
Hey, the other team is okay. Just a
broken collar bone for Hank.

MONICA
It's just... that was too close.

ZACK
I needed a change of underwear,
myself.

Monica gives a nervous laugh, takes a deep breath to pull herself together.

ZACK (CONT'D)
If you need someone to talk to, I'm
here. Anytime.

She nods, shares a strained smile. He lets her go, walks away. She watches, surprised by his kindness and maturity. Donnelly puts a hand on her shoulder.

DONNELLY
I'm buying you a big fat drink.

MONICA
Actually, that sounds good.

EXT. HONG KONG SKYLINE - NIGHT

Skyscrapers north of the harbor FIRE LASERS and STROBE LIGHTS from the sides of buildings, ramping up until it suddenly stops.

South of the harbor, skyscrapers FLASH their lasers in response. It's a LIGHTSHOW BATTLE across the harbor that climaxes in a dazzling show of lights.

INT. BENNY'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

KNOCKING at the door. Benny opens it. It's Zack.

ZACK

You gonna hang in your room all night?

BENNY

I don't feel like partying.

Benny closes the door. He thinks for a moment, then opens the door. Zack hasn't moved.

BENNY (CONT'D)

Sorry. Got stuck in my own headspace. Come on in.

ZACK

We need to get out. Clear our heads.

Benny nods, grabs his jacket. He looks at Zack, grateful.

BENNY

Thanks for checking in on me.

ZACK

We're partners, baby.

Benny cracks a smile.

INT. HONG KONG NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

DANCE MUSIC grooves the young and beautiful CROWD inside the exotic space. Framed art hangs horizontally from the ceiling.

AT THE BAR

Zack sips his bourbon. Benny sips his water.

ZACK

You okay?

BENNY

You're worried about me?

ZACK
You know what I mean. Today was...
intense.

BENNY
Yeah.

Benny gets off his bar stool.

ZACK
Where are you going?

BENNY
I appreciate you taking me out, but
this is not my scene. See you back at
the hotel.

ZACK
Come with me.

Zack leads Benny to a group of HOT, FEMALE RACING FANS eyeing
them from the end of the bar.

ZACK (CONT'D)
Ladies, this is my gunner and copilot
extraordinaire, Benny.

The Hot Racing Fans surround Benny. He awkwardly smiles at them.

ZACK (CONT'D)
Say hi.

BENNY
Hey.

HOT RACING FANS
Hey!

Zack sees Monica and Donnelly enter the club, walks toward them.

BENNY
Where are you going?

ZACK
You don't need a wingman here.
(to the Racing Fans)
Take care of him, ladies.

Left to fend for himself, Benny turns to the Hot Racing Fans.

BENNY
Any of you into mantra meditation?

They stare at him, confused. One WOMAN raises her hand and then
ALL the Hot Racing Fans raise their hands.

AT THE ENTRANCE

Monica walk in with Donnelly. She stops Zack as he heads out.

MONICA
You leaving already?

ZACK
Yeah. Wasn't in a party mood.

Donnelly moves ahead, but Monica stays with Zack.

MONICA
You all right?

ZACK
Today was messed up... you okay?

MONICA
I keep thinking how bad that could've ended up... it's freaking me out more than the accident.

ZACK
I know exactly what you mean.

Monica stares at Zack. She grabs his arm tenderly.

MONICA
Are you okay?

Zack sees Donnelly turn around and motion for Monica to follow. Monica nods to Donnelly.

ZACK
(dismissive)
I'm fine. Go on, have some fun.

She hesitates, but Zack turns and walks away.

EXT. HONG KONG NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

Zack steps outside. A car PEELS around the corner, TIRES SMOKING. PEOPLE waiting to get inside LAUGH at the driver's antics, but Zack's face looks ashen.

FLASH: an airplane's WHEELS SMOKE as they land on a runway. The LANDING GEAR COLLAPSES. The racing jet SKIDS, showering SPARKS.

Zack holds up his hands. They're TREMBLING. He shakes them out, rubs them, but they still tremble. Zack hyperventilates, looks like he's about to pass out.

Benny leaves the club, grabs Zack before he can collapse.

BENNY

Zack! What's going on?

ZACK

I don't know.

BENNY

Just breathe, Zack... just breathe.

INT. HONG KONG HANGAR - SUNRISE

SUNLIGHT shines on the hangar. Gordon limps in. It's quiet.

He walks toward SkyBurner's pit area and stops, surprised. Zack and Benny sit meditating in a half-lotus position, FACING EACH OTHER with their eyes closed. Zack's a little fidgety.

Gordon looks at them suspiciously.

GORDON

What the hell are you doing?

ZACK

Nothing. Right, Benny?

BENNY

Right. Now bring your hands together and bow to your heart.

Gordon watches them bow to one another, shakes his head. Zack and Benny open their eyes.

ZACK

I wouldn't have thought trying to stop thinking would be so hard.

BENNY

It takes time. You did good.

GORDON

If you two are done doing "nothing", get your asses in gear. Rio is the last race before the Global Cup and we need to finish top two to make in.

Zack jumps into the cockpit and begins a preflight check. Gordon grabs Benny's arm and pulls him out of earshot.

GORDON (CONT'D)

I brought you in to help Zack fly, not whatever the hell that was.

BENNY

He IS flying better. Maybe you liked it when he was placing eighth.

GORDON

You reformed screw-ups think you know all the answers.

Gordon stares down Benny, who holds his own, staring back. Zack sees them from the cockpit.

ZACK

What's going on?

BENNY

Nothing.

GORDON

Finish your check.

Gordon strides off. Zack watches him leave, worried.

ZACK

You two all right?

BENNY

He loves me. He just doesn't know it yet.

EXT. RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL - DAY

The iconic black and white mosaic sidewalk on Ipanema's beach is full of sexy PEOPLE in thong bikinis.

First one, then all four Rockets in the race SWOOP DOWN LOW, surprising beachgoers and BILLOWING SAND UP from the fly-by.

Zero-G is in the lead, followed closely by SkyBurner.

iRocket and green/red "Mountain DewIt" are right on their tail.

I./E. SKYBURNER - DAY

BENNY

Step it up!

Zack focuses on the last checkered gate. He pushes SkyBurner as hard as he can but still finishes behind Zero-G and iRocket.

ZACK

Shit!

BENNY

We still have our stunt, but a Free Fall Spin isn't going to cut it. We gotta go BIG to make the Global Cup.

ZACK

What do you want me to do?

BENNY

What would Jesus do?

Zack laughs, turns the yoke, heading straight for the 125 foot GIANT JESUS STATUE on top of CORCOVADO'S 2,329 FOOT PEAK.

EXT. BRAZILIAN TARMAC - DAY

Gordon watches Zack's rocket zoom toward the Jesus statue.

GORDON

Zack! That's not the stunt we planned!

INT. SKYBURNER - DAY

ZACK

We need the points, Dad.

GORDON (V.O. HEADSET)

Dammit, Zack! Turn around right now--

Zack turns his headset volume down on Gordon.

ZACK

Ready to give these people a show?

BENNY

Now we're talking!

EXT. JESUS STATUE IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL - DAY

At the Jesus statue, Zack slows the racer and flies in a SLOW CIRCLE ABOVE THE STATUE'S HEAD. Pulling several G's as they bank into the turn, Benny HOWLS.

BENNY

AWWWWWWWW YEEEEEEEEEEAH!

By the third circle, the exhaust from the rocket racer forms a SMOKE RING ABOVE THE JESUS STATUE.

Startled TOURISTS watch the stunt, mouths agape.

SkyBurner flies away, leaving a PERFECT HALO over the Jesus statue.

INT. SKYBURNER - DAY

BENNY

Sweet! That's how you do it!

ZACK

Zero-G's stunt is over Sugarloaf Mountain. Let's see what's she got.

Zack positions SkyBurner so they can see Zero-G's stunt clearly. Flying super fast and cutting sharp angles, Zero-G creates a SMOKE "STAR" above the mountain peak. Zack looks worried until the leaderboard appears on his HUD.

SUPER:

LEADERBOARD:

1st Place: SkyBurner

2nd Place: Zero-G

3rd Place: Amazonian

ZACK (CONT'D)

We beat 'em!

BENNY

What we do? DOMINATE! What we do?

ZACK AND BENNY

DOMINATE!

Benny claps Zack's back. Zack grins.

EXT. BRAZILIAN TARMAC - DAY

SkyBurner taxis into the pit area. Gordon glares, doesn't roll the stairs over to get them out. Zack opens the canopy.

ZACK

Where's the champagne?

GORDON

What were you thinking? If we need to do a different stunt, I tell you.

BENNY

No way we make top two if we--

GORDON

I'M NOT TALKING TO YOU!

ZACK

Hey, take it easy--

GORDON

My job is to keep you safe, not take it easy! You make one twitch with the yoke and not only are you dead, but you take a hundred tourists with you!

Gordon glares at Zack, then yells to the Pit Crew.

GORDON (CONT'D)

Leave them in there. We're done for today.

The Pit Crew reluctantly leaves. Gordon stares down the last holdout, Travis, who leaves, mouthing the word "sorry" to Zack. Gordon storms off, leaving him and Benny stuck in the cockpit.

ZACK

Well, that's a mighty fine fuck you.

BENNY

He should have called for a new stunt the moment we came in third. You gotta fire your dad.

ZACK

Hold on a sec, you wouldn't even be here if it wasn't for him!

BENNY

You mean STUCK here.

ZACK

(shouting)

Anybody out there gonna help us out!

MONICA

Asking for help? That's a step in the right direction.

Monica rolls the portable stairs over to SkyBurner. Benny gets out and nods his thanks. Zack stays in the cockpit.

BENNY

(to Zack)

Hit me later.

Zack nods. Benny walks off. Monica turns to Zack.

MONICA

Gonna stay in there?

(off his silence)

How long are you gonna stay mad at me?

ZACK

I don't know.

Zack stares at her. He jumps out of the cockpit, climbs down the stairs, strides away.

MONICA

So that's it? You're going to pretend
I don't exist?

Zack turns and looks at her. He seizes her, kisses her hard. Passionate. But it becomes manic, needy. Monica pushes him off.

MONICA (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

Zack doesn't have an answer, a bit freaked out. Monica marches off.

ZACK

Monica, wait. I'm sorry... shit.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Benny, Gordon and Travis check out of the hotel.

GORDON

Have you seen, Zack?

BENNY

Not since you stranded us.

Gordon ignores the comment, calls Zack's cell.

TRAVIS

He missed the post race press
conference, too. We got hit with a
pretty stiff fine.

GORDON

He's not answering his cell.

TRAVIS

I'll go roust him.

BENNY

I got it. You guys go on ahead.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - DAY

Benny bangs on Zack's hotel door.

BENNY

Zack! You missed our morning meeting.
You in there? Zack! Wake up!

Benny pounds again, growing more concerned until he sees a MAID pushing a cleaning cart.

BENNY (CONT'D)

My friend's in trouble.

MAID

Trouble?

BENNY

Life and death trouble. Come on!

The Maid uses her card key to let Benny in.

INT. ZACK'S HOTEL SUITE - DAY

Zack isn't in his bed, but there's an empty tequila bottle on the table. Benny goes to the bathroom and POUNDS on the door.

BENNY

Zack! Open up in there!

INT. SUITE BATHROOM - DAY

BANGING on the door. Benny busts in and sees Zack lying in a bathtub full of water wearing yesterday's clothes. He looks dead until he MOANS incoherently.

ZACK

Where are my pants?

BENNY

You're wearing them.

MAID

I'm calling an ambulance!

BENNY

(take his wallet out)
Wait, wait, wait! I'll clean this up.
But you never saw this.

Benny flashes several hundred dollar bills. The Maid nods. Benny lets her have the cash. She leaves.

Zack moans. Benny grabs and helps him up out of the tub.

INT. ZACK'S HOTEL SUITE - DAY

Cleaned up, Zack lies on the bed in a bathrobe, groggy and moaning. Benny hands him a fizzing glass of water with three Alka Seltzer tabs in it. Zack tries a sip.

ZACK
I hate this stuff.

BENNY
Tough shit. Finish it.

Zack downs it, looks like he might gag.

BENNY (CONT'D)
What happened after I left?

ZACK
Nothing. I just knew... I was never getting her back.

BENNY
This isn't just about Monica.

ZACK
Then what?

BENNY
Look at your hands.

Zack holds his trembling hands up. Embarrassed, he shakes them out, tightens them into fists and shakes them again.

ZACK
I need to quit drinking.

BENNY
That'd help, but your hands aren't shaking because you drink. When was the last time you lost someone you really cared about?

ZACK
I've never really had a girlfriend I cared about, not like I cared about Monica.

BENNY
I said someone you LOST... how old were you when your mother died?

ZACK
I'm not talking about that.

Benny stares at Zack, nods his head.

BENNY

Remember all those rumors about me? Well, they're true. I was messed up after the Air Force. I didn't even know it.

ZACK

Post Traumatic Stress?

BENNY

(nodding)

I couldn't chill out. I started drinking to get a good night's sleep. Sleeping pills helped for a little while... but after Eric crashed, I lost it. A week later my wife caught me snorting Ambien in the bathroom.

ZACK

Shit.

BENNY

During my daughter's birthday party.

ZACK

That's messed up.

BENNY

I know what it's like to want to erase a part of your past so badly, you'll do almost anything... now I'm fighting to get visitation rights. This job is my one shot to show her I've changed.

(heads for the door)

Meet me in my room in ten minutes.

ZACK

For what?

Benny closes the door behind him. Zack looks unsettled.

INT. BENNY'S HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Zack sits in a lounge chair, wearing headphones. SFX: the sound of ocean waves crashing SHIFTS from the left side to right and back again in a loop. Zack faces Benny, who sits a few feet away holding up a PENCIL WITH A RED ERASER.

ZACK

What are you doing?

BENNY

This helped me. It might help you.
Just stare at the eraser and think
about the first time your hands
started shaking.

ZACK

Are you hypnotizing me or--

BENNY

No. Traumatic memories are connected,
this just helps make the connection.
When did your hands start shaking?

ZACK

When Eric and Chuck crashed.

BENNY

Put yourself in that exact moment.

Zack stares at the eraser. He swallows hard.

ZACK

My throat feels tight. And my
stomach.

BENNY

Good. Keep staring at the eraser.
(moves the pencil left)
Does that sensation feel stronger
here?
(moves the pencil right)
Or here?

ZACK

Right side, I guess.

BENNY

(moves the pencil down)
Does the sensation feel stronger
here?
(moves the pencil up)
Or here?

ZACK

Up there.

BENNY

Okay. Keep thinking about the crash
while staring at the eraser.

Zack stares intently at the red eraser. His face softens. His
entire body trembles in the chair, his FISTS CLENCHED TIGHT.

ZACK

My left hand hurts. Like it's on
fire.

BENNY

What does that make you think of?

FLASHBACK: MONTAGE IN ZACK'S POV:

A) AirGhost SLAMS into the ground, igniting in a huge FIREBALL.

B) The FIREBALL morphs into a LIT MATCH, LIGHTING FIRECRACKERS
that EXPLODE in YOUNG ZACK'S HAND.

ZACK

A pack of firecrackers went off in my
hand when I was twelve. I was lucky
not to lose my fingers.

(shakes his hand out)

Damn. That feels so weird.

BENNY

These sense memories are tied to
together. Keep looking at the eraser.
See where it takes you.

Zack stares at the eraser. His breathing accelerates.

FLASHBACK: MONTAGE IN ZACK'S POV:

A) The BURNING FLAME of the firecracker match morphs into
SMOKING WHEELS, SPARKS from COLLAPSING LANDING GEAR.

B)The JET CATCHES ON FIRE. FIREMEN struggle to extinguish the
inferno.

C) Firemen pull Gordon from the wreckage, LIMP, SMOLDERING.

Benny watches Zack, who's trembling, almost hyperventilating.

ZACK

It took them forever to pull my dad
out... Jesus, I can't breathe!

BENNY

You're doing great. Slow your
breathing down. What happened next?

ZACK

His plane exploded. My mom... I
thought she fainted. She had a
cerebral stroke. Died on the spot.

Zack chest heaves as years of pent up emotion well up inside.

BENNY

You're not in that moment anymore.
You're watching it happen from above.
What do you see?

ZACK

She's lying there... and I
hyperventilate until I blacked out.

Zack breathes rapidly until he takes one deep breath. He takes another, pulls himself together. His breathing normalizes.

BENNY

Good. You're releasing it... now go
back to the day Eric crashed. How do
you feel? You still have that pit in
your stomach?

ZACK

That's... crazy. It's gone.

Zack looks at his hands. He sees a slight tremble, but they're much steadier.

ZACK (CONT'D)

What did you just do to me?

BENNY

That was all you, man. It's a kind of
reprocessing. Your hands were shaking
for a damn good reason.

ZACK

Did you just cure me?

BENNY

No, but it's a start. How do you
feel?

ZACK

I feel good, lighter... that's wild.

BENNY

For real. But none of this is gonna
help unless you change your coping
behavior. You ready to do that?

ZACK

I'm in. A hundred percent.

INT. ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES, R.R.L. HANGAR - DAY

Gordon packs up his things in the office. Travis looks on.

TRAVIS

As his father, you have every right to be upset at the stunt... but as Pit Chief, you know Zack made the right call. And YOU should've made that call.

GORDON

I know... that's why I'm quitting.

TRAVIS

Look, part of me was happy when Zack was playing it safe with the stunts. And I know that's true for you, too. But that's not who Zack is. He doesn't want you to push him... he needs you to push him.

GORDON

And I need him to be safe!

TRAVIS

No one is safe... but I think he's safest, when he's flying free.

Gordon looks and Travis, thinking it over. KNOCK on the door. Zack walks in, followed by Benny. Zack sees the half-packed box.

ZACK

You can't bail on me.

GORDON

There's something you need to know.

(beat)

Monica talked to me before she left. She said she wasn't going to take the Boeing job... so, I fired her.

ZACK

You what?

GORDON

You were spiraling fast. And she wasn't the problem, but I knew we had to change things up... you still want me to be pit chief?

ZACK

Yeah. I do. You made the right call.

GORDON

And Benny, I may not like how you push Zack in the cockpit, but he is flying better and you're a big part of that.

Benny nods his thanks. Gordon looks at Zack.

GORDON (CONT'D)

Son, there are days I wish you had never flown a plane. But that's about my fear. So, my promise is to put my fear aside, and call a game plan that's worthy of your skills. Your promise is to do what I say. Do we have a deal?

Zack surprises Gordon with a bear hug. Gordon hugs him back.

ZACK

In it to win it, right?

GORDON

In it, to crush it.

BENNY

Right on, Skipper!

GORDON

We got three weeks to prep for space. Let's show 'em what SkyBurner can do!

ZACK

New York, here we come!

EXT. NEW YORK CITY SKYLINE - DAY

Aerial view of the city.

EXT. LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK - DAY

SkyBurner cruises leisurely over CROWDED Jones Beach.

INT. SKYBURNER - DAY

ZACK

(admiring the coastline)
Nice.

BENNY

I used to live right over there. Queens. Place wasn't big, but...

ZACK

It was home.

Benny nods, keeping his emotions in check.

ZACK (CONT'D)

What's your little girl's name?

BENNY

Taisha. She'll be six next month.

Benny gets quiet, lost in thought.

ZACK

Hey! Tomorrow we race in outer space!
Can you believe it!

BENNY

Let's go get this bad boy ready.

INT. REPUBLIC AIRPORT HANGAR, NEW YORK - DAY

The Hangar bustles with PILOTS and PIT CREWS in full prep mode.

Benny and Gordon work on SkyBurner. Travis fills a canister of LIQUID OXYGEN on the inside panel of the rocket booster, SPEWING a foggy condensation.

Zack, in the pilot seat, presses the RETRACT CANARD button. The smaller wings on the nose of SkyBurner retract and disappear.

GORDON

Canard retract, check!

Zack presses a few buttons. The canards extend back out. The sonic boom nose telescopes out.

GORDON (CONT'D)

Boom cone, check! Active coolant?

ZACK

(reading a gauge)
Heat resistant to ten thousand
Kelvin.

GORDON

Shut her down.

Zack toggles every switch and button off. He climbs out of the pilot seat, joins Benny, Gordon and Travis staring at the racer.

ZACK

We ready?

GORDON

SkyBurner is a go for space flight.

They stare at SkyBurner, proud, excited.

ZACK

Wow.

Overwhelmed, Zack takes a deep breath to steady himself. Another. Gordon notices. Travis puts a hand on Zack's shoulder.

TRAVIS

You got this in the bag.

Zack nods his thanks.

GORDON

I want you guys rested up. Straight to the hotel, all right?

BENNY

See you tomorrow.

Zack follows Benny out of the hangar. Travis looks at Gordon, then nods toward Zack walking away, who still seems unsteady.

GORDON

I'd be more worried if he wasn't nervous. You get some rest too. Big day tomorrow.

Travis nods, heads out. Now it's Gordon's turn to look nervous.

INT. BENNY'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

BANGING at the door. Benny opens it, wearing pajamas. Zack's there, dressed nicely.

ZACK

Nice jammys. I got a surprise for you.

Zack steps into the room followed by a beautiful woman, ANGELIQUE, 33, and her daughter TAISHA, 5.

TAISHA

Daddy!

BENNY

Baby girl!

Taisha runs into Benny's arms and he wraps his arms tight around her. He lifts and spins her around. Taisha squeals with delight.

ANGELIQUE

We've been following you on TV.

ZACK

(leans in close to Benny)

I gambled you might want to see them.
I'm gonna head out. See you tomorrow.

BENNY

Hey... thanks.

Zack nods, raises a power fist as he walks out. Benny laughs and shakes his head.

ANGELIQUE

You look good.

BENNY

I can't believe he got you here.

ANGELIQUE

He made a convincing argument. Said
he'd be dead if it wasn't for you.

Benny's moved by Zack's words. Angelique stares at Benny.

ANGELIQUE (CONT'D)

Now, that's the strong man I fell in
love with.

Benny smiles at her, gives Taisha a strong squeeze.

INT. REPUBLIC AIRPORT HANGAR, NEW YORK - DAY

Packed with RACING TEAMS prepping their racers.

AT SKYBURNER

In the cockpit, Zack looks over at Travis, who works on SkyBurner's fuel intake with his iPad. Travis sees him, gives Zack a thumbs up.

Concerned, Gordon checks his watch, looks around for Benny.

GORDON

(to Zack)

How many times did you and Benny run
the space sim?

ZACK

Enough. We're ready.

GORDON

Then where the hell is he? We need to talk strategy. We're not the fastest racer here.

ZACK

Travis tweaked the fuel mix. We should be able to burn about six percent longer.

GORDON

If that number's right, we got a shot.

(sees Benny walk up)

Glad you could make it.

BENNY

Sorry, Skipper. Had to make sure my family had front row seats.

Zack nods, pleased.

GORDON

Zack, help him finish his preflight check. Can't win this thing if we're late, can we?

ZACK

No, sir.

Benny hops into the cockpit to check his controls. Zack watches the mounted laser guns underneath the wings swing to the left.

ZACK (CONT'D)

Left targeting, check!

(guns swing to the right)

Right targeting, check!

(guns swing to the back)

Aft targeting, check! Hey Benny... I wouldn't have made it this far if it wasn't for you. Thank you.

BENNY

(nods)

And thanks for reaching out to Angelique. She likes sober Benny.

ZACK

Me too. He punches me less.

(Benny cracks a smile)

Ready to go get it?

Zack holds up a fist for a fist bump. Benny raises his hand in a SALUTE. Smiling, Zack returns the salute.

EXT. BLUE SKY - DAY

SkyBurner joins the other top five racers (Zero-G, RedBullet, X-Press, Mountain DewIt and Virgin's "Galactic") in an aerial "starting line".

EXT. JONES BEACH - DAY

A PACKED CROWD watches the racers fly in a precision line. Angelique points out SkyBurner to Taisha. Massive screens nearby give multiple camera views from inside and outside the racer.

ANNOUNCER (V.O. LOUDSPEAKER)
 Welcome ladies and gentlemen to the
 Global Cup, the first ever ORBITAL
 race around the world! Six rockets
 will fly through space to Dubai, then
 Sydney and back to New York City at
 18,000 miles an hour! That's nine
 times faster than a speeding bullet!

The Crowd whistles and applauds wildly.

ANNOUNCER (V.O. LOUDSPEAKER) (CONT'D)
 Two flyers will be eliminated at the
 end of each leg. The final two will
 battle it out, mano-a-mano, in a race
 to New York and one final stunt to
 become our champion!

INT. REPUBLIC AIRPORT HANGAR, NEW YORK - DAY

Gordon watches the racers on a monitor near his pit station.

HORN SOUNDS. All the rocket racers blast off, each racer doing their own virtual color coded obstacle course in the sky.

ANNOUNCER (V.O. LOUDSPEAKER)
 And they're off!

EXT. BLUE SKY - DAY

The racers twist and turn, each keeping pace with the other, looping in front of the impressed crowd at the beach.

INTERCUT JONES BEACH/SKYBURNER/ZERO-G

Focused, Zack zips through the course, hitting each gate perfectly. Through the canopy, he sees the other racers flying close alongside him.

On Zack's HUD: Benny's scored 79 out of 80, and still going.

ZACK
You're killing it!

BENNY
Like I always do.

ZACK
Last gate. Prep for space flight.

SkyBurner flies through the checkered gate and BLASTS OFF toward the upper atmosphere, leading the pack of racers to space.

ANNOUNCER
And off to space they go! Next stop,
Dubai!

The Crowd screams and cheers their favorite team on.

SkyBurner SHIMMIES as it fights Earth's gravity. The gold cross around Benny's neck FLOATS UP.

BENNY
This is the coolest shit ever.

ZACK
Ever!

BENNY
Hey, Zero-G is passing us.

ZACK
Yeah. They're a little faster.

BENNY
Glad to see you're all Zen about it.

ZACK
I had Travis tweak the burner.

Benny looks at Zack, perplexed. Zack gives him a wide grin.

SPACE

The five other racers shut down their rockets to coast in orbit. SkyBurner keeps burning its rocket and takes a commanding lead.

DONNELLY
He's still burning. Dumbass is going
to run out of fuel at that rate.

MONICA
We'll catch him in the straightaway.

BENNY
 (admiring their lead)
 Nice tweak.

ZACK
 Retro-rocket fire in three, two--

BENNY
 Initiating active cooling.

ZACK
 --one, Mark!

Benny hits the cooling button. Zack fires the retro-rockets.

SkyBurner's retro-rockets fire and it decelerates.

As it reenters the atmosphere, it shakes violently. The nose cone GLOWS WHITE HOT.

Zack and Benny sweat in the heat of reentry. They grunt methodically, doing the straining maneuver to keep conscious.

SkyBurner descends into Earth's atmosphere, toward the Horn of Africa... the Arabian Peninsula and the city of DUBAI.

EXT. PALM ISLAND, DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES - SUNSET

The spectacular man-made island in the shape of a palm tree materializes as SkyBurner descends, roaring toward the island.

At 50,000 feet, it extends its BOOM CONE and cracks the sound barrier with a SONIC BOOM as they circle the island with a trail of smoke.

EXT. BURJ AL ARAB HOTEL, DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES - SUNSET

WEALTHY FANS stand on top of Dubai's most famous hotel, cheering Zack and Benny as SkyBurner circles. Moments later, Zero-G, Galactic, then Mountain DewIt follow.

EXT. JONES BEACH - DAY

The Crowd watches the racers arrive in Dubai on the monitors.

ANNOUNCER (V.O. LOUDSPEAKER)
 RedBullet and X-Press are bumped.
 It's down to the top four who will
 head back into orbit for Sydney,
 Australia!

ZERO-G

MONICA

If he's able to burn longer than us,
I don't know if we can beat them.

Donnelly looks worried for the first time.

EXT. SKY - NIGHT

SkyBurner, Zero-G, Galactic and Mountain DewIt make their
"starting line" in the gray night sky.

SKYBURNER

ZACK

Here we go.

BENNY

Hit your running lights.

Zack flips the switch.

EXT. SKY - NIGHT

SkyBurner lights up, glowing RED and GOLD, like Las Vegas Neon
with its LED running lights. Zero-G, Galactic and Mountain DewIt
follow suit and "light up", creating colorful, glowing traces in
the sky.

HORN SOUNDS. All four remaining racers blast off into their
slalom course.

EXT. BURJ AL ARAB HOTEL, DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES - NIGHT

The racers look like DANCING FIREFLIES as they race, streaking
light in the night sky.

The Crowd of Wealthy Fans atop the hotel "oohs" and "aahs" as
the racers seem to barely miss one another.

Lasers from the gunners put on a spectacular light show as the
gunners hit their targets.

INTERCUT SKYBURNER/ZERO-G/JONES BEACH

ZACK

Last gate. Going orbital.

Zack goes full blast into the atmosphere.

Monica chases after Zack. Donnelly keeps watching SkyBurner.

DONNELLY
Keep pushing him.

MONICA
I'm going as fast as I can.

SkyBurner leads the pack of racers in a low Earth orbit.

The beach Crowd watches the racers fly in space on the monitors.

ANNOUNCER (V.O. LOUDSPEAKER)
Just to keep it interesting, folks,
we planned a little surprise for our
racers! Are you ready? Are they!?

Zack sees Monica gaining on them. Suddenly, a VIRTUAL TARGET appears on the HUD.

ZACK
Benny, hit that!

Reacting too late, he fires his laser, but misses it. Random targets pop up all over the HUD. Benny frantically fires.

In Zero-G, Donnelly blasts as many targets as he can, but can't hit all of them.

Suddenly, VIRTUAL GATES appear on Zack's HUD. He gingerly works the mini-thruster joystick, trying not to miss the gate.

ZACK (CONT'D)
Shit! Even tiny adjustments push us
way out.

Small PUFFS OF GAS guide SkyBurner as Zack finesses its flight.

Angelique and Taisha watch the monitors as the rocket racers fail to steer through the gates. The course looks easier (less twisty and more linear), but the racers have a hard time maneuvering in space.

TAISHA
Oh, no, they missed another one!

ANNOUNCER (V.O. LOUDSPEAKER)
Don't be fooled by the linear course,
folks, steering in space is all done
with mini-thrusters, and as you can
see, it's exceedingly difficult.

SKYBURNER

BENNY
All the sim time in the world can't
prep you for this.

Zack works the stick, and HITS the gate by a hair.

ZACK

Dammit.

The other racers clip a gate or two as they navigate the course.

On SkyBurner's HUD, the order of who is in the lead keeps FLIP-FLOPPING as each racer racks up more penalty points.

BENNY

Mountain DewIt racked up too many penalty points. The only way we get bumped is if Galactic beats us to the finish line.

ZACK

Not happening. Firing retro-rockets!

All four rockets descend toward Australia in the morning light.

EXT. SYDNEY HARBOR BRIDGE - SUNRISE

All along the bridge and harbor, FANS watch as all four rockets race to be the first under Sydney Harbor Bridge.

ANNOUNCER (V.O. LOUDSPEAKER)

It's going down to the wire, folks!
This is it! The top two will compete
for the Global Cup!

All four rockets cross the line within a length of one another.

INTERCUT SKYBURNER/ZERO-G

MONICA

Did we make it?

ZACK

Where'd we place?

Benny and Zack stare at the HUD, waiting for the latest stats to be posted for the second leg. Zero G is in first place, SkyBurner is second, then Galactic and Mountain DewIt. Zack and Benny erupt in CELEBRATORY ROARS.

Donnelly grabs Monica's shoulder.

DONNELLY

Number one and one more race to go!

Beaming, Monica heads for Sydney airport.

EXT. SYDNEY AIRPORT TARMAC - DAY

AUSTRALIAN PIT CREWS attend to the racers. Zack hops out of SkyBurner and heads over to Zero-G's pit area.

BENNY

Where are you going? The next leg starts in 20 minutes.

ZACK

I'll be right back.

AT ZERO-G

Looking over Zero-G, Monica sees Zack headed towards her. She stops and faces him.

MONICA

Nice race. You taking it easy on me?

ZACK

You know I don't have a low gear.

MONICA

(smiling)

At least one of us is going to win the Global Cup.

ZACK

There's always next year for you.

MONICA

For you.

ZACK

See you in New York.

Zack turns to leave.

MONICA

Hey.

Monica gets close to Zack. She leans in and kisses him.

MONICA (CONT'D)

For luck.

ZACK

Yours or mine?

MONICA

I guess we'll see.

EXT. BLUE SKY - DAY

SkyBurner and Zero-G fly a "starters" line over Sydney Harbor.
The HORN SOUNDS and both Racers BLAST OFF.

EXT. SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE - DAY

SkyBurner and Zero-G battle for the lead as they zip around the famous Opera House, cheered on by the Aussie FANS.

Both racers do a massive vertical loop that brings them low to the water.

INTERCUT SKYBURNER/ZERO-G

On Zack's HUD, they cross the final gate and blast straight for outer space.

BENNY

Take us back to yesterday.

ZACK

Yesterday it is.

SPACE

SkyBurner and Zero-G travel over the Pacific at night and cross back into SUNLIGHT as they descend to New York.

SkyBurner and Zero-G reenter the atmosphere.

Zack and Benny sweat profusely, rocked by the turbulence.

EXT. JONES BEACH - DAY

In the Crowd, Angelique and Taisha watch the sky for signs of the racers. Nothing visible yet, but on the monitor, SkyBurner has the lead as it descends from space.

ANNOUNCER (V.O. LOUDSPEAKER)

SkyBurner and Zero-G crossed the international dateline 30 minutes ago and should be here any second, folks!

TAISHA

I see them!

Just a speck in the sky, SkyBurner rockets its way to Jones Beach. Zero-G is farther away, but gaining.

TAISHA (CONT'D)

Daddy's winning!

ANGELIQUE

(proud)
Yes, he is.

EXT. BLUE SKY - DAY

Now in the atmosphere, SkyBurner's smaller canard wings spread open. Behind them, Zero-G deploys its canard wings, edging closer.

INTERCUT SKYBURNER/ZERO-G/JONES BEACH

On the HUD, the CHECKERED FLAG GATE is within sight. Monica gives it everything she's got. SkyBurner is within her grasp.

DONNELLY

You've got to push them! Red line it!

MONICA

She's wide open!

Zero-G begins to edge out SkyBurner.

BENNY

You're letting her pull ahead!

ZACK

She's too fast.

On the HUD, the Checkered Flag Gate approaches rapidly.

Suddenly, the last gate disappears and THREE MORE GATES APPEAR on the HUD, adding one final surprise loop at the end.

ZACK (CONT'D)

Shit! Hang on! Firing retro-rockets.

Zack fires the retro-rocket to slow the racer, turns the yoke hard. A maneuver of sheer beauty, he MAKES ALL THREE GATES.

Going too fast, Zero-G clips the last two gates.

MONICA

Dammit!

SkyBurner leaps to the top of the leaderboard. The Crowd CHEERS. Angelique and Taisha SCREAM with joy!

Monica's Family looks anxious, but her Brothers quickly rally, clapping their support.

BROTHER #1

She'll get him on the final stunt!

SKYBURNER

BENNY

What we do?

ZACK AND BENNY

DOMINATE! What we do? DOMINATE!

INT. REPUBLIC AIRPORT HANGAR, NEW YORK - DAY

SkyBurner's Pit Crew congratulate each other and slap Gordon on the back.

GORDON

It's not over yet.

INTERCUT SKYBURNER/ZERO-G/JONES BEACH/HANGAR

Monica looks at the leaderboard, defeated.

MONICA

There's only one stunt that I can do that will beat him... you sure?

DONNELLY

Absolutely.

Monica nods, pulls on the yoke and ascends into the sky.

BENNY

We got it locked up! She can't out-stunt us!

ZACK

She's gonna make us work for it.

Above them, Zero-G completes a vertical loop, then she twists, adding another loop. When she adds a third loop, Zack goes pale. His hands TREMBLE.

ZACK (CONT'D)

Christ, she's attempting the "Double".

(into headset)

Zero-G, the "Double Infinity" will put you into G-LOC. Do you copy?

MONICA

(into headset)

Zack, you know women tolerate G-Force better than men.

Donnelly shuts off the radio.

DONNELLY

Show him why you're the best.

Monica pulls back on the yoke to start her fourth loop.

Horrified, Zack stares at Zero-G as it starts the final loop of the second figure eight.

ZACK

She's not going to make it.

Zack rubs his shaky hands, throttles SkyBurner toward Zero-G.

BENNY

What are you doing? You can't stop her.

ZACK

Watch me.

TOWER CONTROLLER (V.O. HEADSET)

SkyBurner, you will forfeit if you violate Zero-G's airspace during a stunt. Do you copy?

Zack ignores the Tower Controller and barrels forward. Benny puts a hand on his shoulder.

BENNY

Have some faith in your girl. She can do this.

Zack watches Zero-G mid-stunt, panic still on his face... but he EASES BACK ON THE THROTTLE, steers away.

At the hangar, Travis watches Zero-G, horrified.

TRAVIS

What is she doing?

GORDON

Being a worthy opponent.

(into headset)

SkyBurner, if she completes it...

ZACK

(into headset)

...then she deserves to win. I could try the "Spyro Gyro"?

GORDON

Tough stunt and I'm not even sure it'll beat the double infinity... I'll let you make the call.

Zack looks over at Benny, who nods at him. Zack sees Zero-G close to completing the stunt.

Monica struggles against the G-Force. Donnelly's about to blackout from the G-Force. But she completes the final loop!

On the Beach, the Crowd erupts in a frenzy at the completion of the dangerous stunt.

MONICA

We did it!

DONNELLY

You did it!

SKYBURNER

BENNY

She did it.

Zack watches Zero-G fly, proud.

ZACK

Time to earn our dinner.

Zack aims skyward to begin his stunt when he sees Zero-G's rocket malfunction.

ZERO-G

Multiple WARNING BUZZERS go off. The craft veers sharply and SPINS TOWARDS SPACE.

DONNELLY

Rocket misfire!

MONICA

The elevator controls are jammed. I can't stop us.

Several in the Crowd SCREAM as they watch Zero-G spin out of control. Monica's Family comfort each other, terrified.

Zack sees the rocket booster FIRING only from the LEFT SIDE, spiraling Zero-G farther out on the edge of the atmosphere.

ZACK

If they spin out into space...

Zack hits the rocket booster and heads for Zero-G.

BENNY

What are you doing?

Zack doesn't have an answer, but he pushes SkyBurner as fast as it will go.

Zero-G spins off axis toward the mesosphere. Monica struggles with the yoke, trying to regain control. Donnelly checks the O-2 tanks' gauges. Tank #1 is near empty.

DONNELLY

Shit, we're losing oxygen.

Monica futilely battles to steer the craft. Donnelly looks nervous. WARNING BUZZERS crescendo as they spin towards space.

DONNELLY (CONT'D)

Eject us!

MONICA

We're as good as dead if we eject at this altitude.

DONNELLY

Aim us to the ground!

MONICA

I can't! And I can't shut off the rocket either!

DONNELLY

(into headset)

Mayday! Mayday! We have a rocket misfire sending us toward space!

Gordon and Travis watch helplessly as Zero-G spirals out of control. They see SkyBurner headed for the stricken racer.

GORDON

(into headset)

Son, what's your plan?

ZACK (V.O. HEADSET)

Working on that.

GORDON

You can't just catch them. You don't have a robotic arm to snatch them, no extra space to put them anywhere, and no means to bring them down safely.

ZACK

I got to do something, dad!

GORDON

You barely have enough fuel to land as it is. Put her down and we'll figure it out.

BENNY
He's right, Zack.

Zero-G spins violently. Donnelly's out cold, slumped over his controls. About to pass out, Monica strains to stay awake.

MONICA
I'm going into G-LOC...

ZACK (V.O. HEADSET)
You'll regain consciousness once you leave the atmosphere. By then we'll have a plan to get you.

MONICA
Zack...

Monica PASSES OUT.

ZACK
(into headset)
Monica? You there?

BENNY
She can't hear you. Let's regroup at home base.

Zack stares at Zero-G spinning toward space. He turns SkyBurner around, heads back to the airport full throttle.

INT. REPUBLIC AIRPORT HANGAR, NEW YORK - DAY

SkyBurner taxis into the hangar. Travis helps Zack and Benny out of the cockpit. They run over to where the CREWS watch the drama unfolding on monitors.

Zack sees Gordon standing next to R.R.L. CEO Scott Halstead, both looking somber. Benny sees Angelique and Taisha, hugs them.

ZACK
(to Gordon)
What's going on? What's their status?

GORDON
They burned out of fuel and spun into a low Earth orbit... the misfire ruptured one of their O-2 tanks.

Zack watches a monitor of their cockpit. Monica and Donnelly are slumped over, unconscious as Zero-G drifts through space.

ZACK
How much O-2 do they have?

TRAVIS
About three hours worth.

ZACK
So what's the plan?

Gordon looks away. Angelique and Taisha are on the verge of tears. Scott looks at Zack grimly.

SCOTT
We called every country and corporation with space capability. No one has a spacecraft ready.

ZACK
So we fly up and get them.

SCOTT
How?

The question hangs in the air. No one has any answers.

ZACK
What if we snagged them with some kind of net?

TRAVIS
Nets don't deploy in zero gravity.

ZACK
The we use some kind of hook.

SCOTT
Even if you could somehow snag them, how would you land?

ZACK
We could do a water landing.

GORDON
You'd have to do a perfect tail-first landing to avoid cartwheeling across the water and that's without a racer in tow. They would shred on impact.

ZACK
So we're just going to watch them die?

SCOTT
We've run every scenario. Nothing is viable.

Zack grabs Scott by his jacket.

ZACK

They're still alive, you son-of-a-bitch! Think harder!

Benny pulls Zack off of Scott.

BENNY

This isn't helping her.

ZACK

What about the I.S.S.2?

SCOTT

The International Space Station?

ZACK

It's in a low Earth orbit. We could fly up and tow Zero-G there.

Travis hops into action, plotting the path of the International Space Station and the flight path of Zero-G on his iPad.

TRAVIS

I.S.S.2. will be roughly 11 miles away from them in 180 minutes. If you could tether them to SkyBurner, you could tow them in... it's a long shot, but not impossible.

SCOTT

Which brings us back to the tethering problem.

BENNY

What about superconductive magnets on a rope?

Even Scott looks hopeful at this idea, as Gordon and Travis think it over.

GORDON

Great idea, but there's not enough time for us to put that together.

All eyes on Zack. He looks down, thinking. Shaking his head. He looks up at Benny, who also doesn't have a clue. He looks beyond the beach and sees a fishing trawler, sporting a DIVING FLAG. He stares at it as it waves in the breeze.

ZACK

THAT'S IT! Spear guns!

(off everyone's confusion)

No, not spear guns, naval harpoons!

SCOTT
Naval harpoons?

GORDON
(getting Zack's plan)
We attach 'em to the wings and rig it
to Benny's firing mechanism.

TRAVIS
We can use carbon nanotube fibers as
the tether. It can handle a ton at
500 mph.

SCOTT
You're actually considering this?

ZACK
No. We're DOING this. I won't speak
for Benny, but there's no way I'm not
going to try.

BENNY
The Coast Guard is just off the
beach. I'll secure the harpoons!

TAISHA
Where are you going, Daddy?

Benny looks over at Angelique and his daughter. Taisha has tears
in her eyes. Benny squats down and wipes her tears away.

BENNY
Daddy has to help a friend. Cause
that's what we do. Be strong for
Mommy.

Taisha hugs Benny hard, kisses him before letting go. Benny runs
out of the hanger, already talking on his cell phone. Zack turns
to his father.

ZACK
You got two hours to get those
harpoons rigged to the firing
mechanism. Travis and I will prep
SkyBurner, find a way to store the
extra fuel we'll need.

Everyone hops into action. Scott stops Zack, stares at him.

SCOTT
This is suicide.

ZACK
You can help or get out of the way.

MONICA (V.O. MONITOR)

Zack?

ON THE MONITOR: Monica REGAINS CONSCIOUSNESS.

Scott stares at Zack... hands him a headset.

SCOTT

Better tell them you're coming. I'll call in some favors at NASA.

Zack puts on the headset, stares at Monica ON THE MONITOR.

ZACK

Zero-G, we're coming to get you.

MONICA (V.O. MONITOR)

How? We don't have--

ZACK

You trust me?

MONICA

Mostly.

ZACK

(cracks a smile)
Then hang on. Mostly.

MONICA

Zack, don't risk it--

ZACK

Hey, we got a plan. But we need you to conserve your O-2 reserves, so no talking, okay? Nod if you copy.

Zack watches Monica nod on the monitor.

ZACK (CONT'D)

Good. We'll see you soon.

Zack stares at her a second longer, then runs to prep SkyBurner.

SERIES OF SHOTS AT REPUBLIC AIRPORT HANGAR:

A) Using a forklift, Benny brings two naval harpoons over to SkyBurner.

B) Gordon uses a SPACE AGE POLYMER to SEAL a harpoon to each wing. Zack grabs a harpoon and dangles from it, testing the strength of the bond.

C) Benny test fires the harpoon with its tether. It sticks into the side of a TEST RACER. Zack pulls on the tether line and the

harpoon POPS OUT.

D) Another harpoon punches A BIG HOLE INTO THE TAIL of the test racer. Zack pulls on the line and the harpoon again POPS OUT.

E) Last HARPOON plunges into the middle of the racer's wing. Zack puts all his weight on the tether line. Gordon joins Zack on the line. The harpoon stays in and the tether line holds them. Zack smiles, nods at Benny.

Gordon paints a two foot circle in the middle of each wing.

GORDON

You hit either of these spots, you're good. Too far in and you rupture the cabin. Too far out, you'll tear off the wing, which would definitely rupture the cabin.

BENNY

Rupture the cabin?

ZACK

You can do this.

Benny doesn't look so sure.

BENNY

Anyone ever fired a harpoon in space?

The room gets very quiet. Travis steps up.

TRAVIS

You're going to have to work together. In zero gravity, the firing of the harpoon will actually push SkyBurner in the opposite direction. Zack, you'll have to fire your thrusters for a millisecond the exact moment Benny shoots, to compensate.

ZACK

Roger that.

Monica's Family is led to the make-shift Mission Control in the hangar. Zack sees them and hugs Monica's tearful Mother. He looks her in the eyes.

ZACK (CONT'D)

We're gonna get her back.

(to Travis)

Can we set her up with a headset?

Travis nods and brings a headset over.

EXT. SPACE

The starry, black emptiness of space. Zero-G silently zips by, SIDEWAYS.

INT. ZERO-G - NIGHT

Monica looks at her family photograph.

MONICA

You think it'll work?

DONNELLY

You don't want to know what I think.

Devastated, Monica looks into outer space.

MONICA'S MOM (V.O. HEADSET)

It's your mama, sweetie. Don't talk, okay?

INTERCUT ZERO-G/HANGAR

Gordon, Travis, Scott and Monica's family watch Monica on the monitor. She silently sobs as she listens to her mother.

MONICA'S MOM (CONT'D)

We're all here... praying for you.

Monica's Mom becomes too emotional to talk. Gordon puts a hand on her shoulder to bolster her.

GORDON

(into headset)

Hang tight. We're coming to get you.

SCOTT

Johnson Space Center is looped in and NASA's letting us coordinate mission control through here. The space station is all set.

GORDON

(to Zack and Benny)

Travis calculates you have a nineteen second window for both attempts. The first shot will be your best chance.

TRAVIS

(checks a large timer)

You got 47 minutes to get there.

ZACK

Then let's not waste any more time
talking about it.

Gordon stares at Zack, pulls him into a big hug.

GORDON

Bring her home, son.

Zack nods, looks at Benny. He nods, ready.

EXT. REPUBLIC AIRPORT TARMAC - DAY

SkyBurner blasts off down the runway.

INT. SKYBURNER - DAY

The sky outside the canopy turns a deep blue as they fly into space.

ZACK

Mission Control, this is SkyBurner.
Do you read me?

INTERCUT SKYBURNER/ZERO-G/HANGAR

Gordon, wearing a headset, stands near Travis and Scott at the makeshift Mission Control.

GORDON

Loud and clear, SkyBurner. Adjust
your heading by point one three.

ZACK

Adjusting by point one three.

In Zero-G, Monica looks at the photograph of her family. Her lip trembles. She takes a shaky breath to stave off more tears.

MONICA

I never did anything girly growing
up.

DONNELLY

Me either.

Monica laughs, but now the tears roll down her cheek.

MONICA

I always wanted to go into space.

Monica shakes with her silent sobs. Donnelly exhales hard, trying to keep his own emotions in check. Donnelly reaches forward and takes her hand.

DONNELLY

It's been my privilege to fly with you.

SPACE

SkyBurner closes in on Zero-G in the distance.

GORDON (V.O. HEADSET)

You're right on trajectory, SkyBurner. We'll have you kill the booster when you're in a synchronous orbital path.

ZACK

Roger that.
(to Benny)
You ready?

BENNY

Zack...

ZACK

Wrong answer. You say "I'm going to crush it, like I always do." Say it.

BENNY

I'm going to crush it, like I always do.

ZACK

And that's a fact.

GORDON

They should be within visual. On my mark, shut your rocket down... three, two, one, MARK!

Zack shuts off the rocket booster and SkyBurner glides forward.

They scan the black void of space looking for Zero-G. Nothing... until Benny points through the top of the canopy.

BENNY

There they are! Coming from above.

ZACK

I see her!
(into com)
Zero-G, you ready to go home?

Monica's so happy to see SkyBurner approaching, she can't hold back the tears.

MONICA

You made it.

ZACK

You sound surprised.

MONICA

Not surprised. Impressed.

ZACK

Hang tight. Gonna get a little bumpy.

Gordon watches multiple monitors with feeds from Zero-G and SkyBurner, both show them drifting closer.

GORDON

In 30 seconds, Zero-G will cross 50 feet in front of you. You'll be able to track them with your guns for 18.5 seconds before they're out of range.

ZACK

(into headset)

Thanks, Control.

(to Benny)

Deep breaths, right?

Benny gulps down a deep breath, exhales quickly. Does it again and this time exhales more slowly.

Benny focuses on his laser sighting, waits as Zero-G gets closer.

GORDON

15 seconds 'til window. 14, 13.

ZACK

Silent count at ten.

GORDON

11... ten seconds.

SERIES OF SHOTS OF THE WORLD FOLLOWING THE RESCUE:

- A) PEOPLE in Times Square watch the rescue on the huge monitors.
- B) BRAZILIAN FANS watching breathlessly in a crowded bar.
- C) A FAMILY in Paris huddles together while watching their flatscreen.
- D) BROKERS in the Tokyo Stock Exchange stand transfixed, watching the rescue.

INT. REPUBLIC AIRPORT HANGAR - DAY

Everyone watches the video feed from SkyBurner. The wall timer reaches ZERO and begins a new COUNTDOWN from 18.5 seconds.

GORDON
Window's open.

INTERCUT SKYBURNER/ZERO-G/HANGAR

Donnelly mouths the Lord's Prayer with his eyes closed.

Monica watches SkyBurner get closer. Desperate, she CROSSES HER FINGERS and TAPS THE SIDE OF HER HEAD, exactly the way Zack used to.

Benny focuses on his laser targeting. Looking small, Zero-G crosses his HUD from top to bottom. Benny tracks them, but the target area is small and hard to follow.

Zero-G travels to the middle of the screen, Benny's best chance.

BENNY
Get it!

Benny FIRES the harpoon, Zack fires the burner for a millisecond. The harpoon JUST MISSES the wing.

BENNY (CONT'D)
Shit! Releasing the tether.

Monica GASPS as the harpoon sails past them. Donnelly exhales hard.

Everyone at the hangar GROANS at the miss, but Gordon quickly recovers.

GORDON
The first one gives him a sense of the motion. He's going to hit it. Come on now! Hit it... HIT IT!

Scott looks up at the timer: eight seconds left.

SCOTT
(to himself)
Come on, come on... window's closing.

SIX SECONDS LEFT on the clock.

Benny tracks Zero-G, which is almost out of range. Zack's frazzled, but he takes a deep breath to calm himself.

BENNY
 (under his breath)
 I got this.

Benny FIRES the harpoon. Zack fires the burner for a nanosecond. The harpoon sails through space and pierces the outermost tip of Zero-G's wing.

The Crew erupts in a celebratory ROAR, but Gordon, Travis, and Scott look devastated. The harpoon landed WAY BEYOND THE SAFETY MARGIN CIRCLE that Gordon drew on the test racer.

ON THE MONITOR: the slack in the line is about to end as the two rocket racers glide farther apart.

GORDON
 Zack! Thrust and turn toward Zero-G
 or you'll rip their wing off!

ZACK
 No time to turn!

Zack FIRES his retro-rockets.

Just as the line is about to get taut between the racers, SkyBurner flies backwards, closing the distance with Zero-G.

GORDON
 Cut thrusters, you don't want to run
 into them. Good, now even her out,
 nice and easy.

Everyone watches Zack pilot the racer backwards like he's backing up a truck. When SkyBurner nears Zero-G, Zack fires his mini-thrusters to stop his momentum.

Tethered together, they drift in space about 50 yards apart.

SCOTT
 Jesus, that kid can fly.

ZACK (V.O. HEADSET)
 Can I tow them in with this
 placement?

Travis does some calculations. He shakes his head, perplexed.

GORDON
 (into headset)
 I'll get back to you, SkyBurner.

MONICA
 Better make it fast.

The Oxygen gauge in Zero-G reads critical. Monica and Donnelly have difficulty breathing.

MONICA (CONT'D)

Cause we got maybe seven minutes.

Zack watches the tenuous tether between the two crafts.

ZACK

What's taking them so long? We're not going to have any options in a minute.

BENNY

I'm sorry, Zack. I blew it.

ZACK

No, we're gonna make it--

BENNY

You and I both know if we take off, it's going to rip that racer in two.

ZACK

If I do it slowly--

BENNY

I.S.S.2. is 12 miles away and getting farther by the second. We'd have to fly top speed and even then--

MONICA

Zack.

ZACK

Monica, save your oxygen, okay?

In Zero-G, both Monica and Donnelly are breathing heavily.

MONICA

I'm sorry... I couldn't help you and I ran away.

ZACK

You did help me. Just, please, save your energy. We're gonna get you.

Donnelly passes out. Monica takes one last look at the photo of her family taped to the canopy.

MONICA

If you tow us in slowly... our families... can recover our bodies.

In the hangar, everyone fights back tears. Monica's Family breaks down.

ZACK

(breaking with emotion)

This is not a recovery operation,
okay? We're going to bring you home,
Zero-G. You read me? Monica?

MONICA

I love you.

Monica loses consciousness.

Benny's got tears in his eyes, shakes his head. Zack does his best to hold it together. This is not happening. Zack takes a deep shaky breath, then another... and FIRES UP his rocket.

BENNY

What are you doing, Zack?

Zack does a hard turn and speeds straight toward Zero-G.

SCOTT

What the hell is he doing?

GORDON

Yeah, Zack, you can do it!

SCOTT

Do what?

GORDON

I'm not sure, he's got a plan!

SkyBurner glides right alongside Zero-G.

BENNY

Zack!

ZACK

Doing a modified Spyro Gyro!

With the long tether billowing behind them, Zack maneuvers SkyBurner's wing DIRECTLY UNDER Zero-G's wing.

Zack tilts the yoke and uses SkyBurner's WING to push Zero-G's WING UP AND INTO A ROLL.

As Zero-G SPINS, the tether WRAPS AROUND THE BODY OF ZERO-G.

SkyBurner does a hard turn, circling Zero-G fast.

SCOTT

I'll be a son of a bitch.

Zack pilots SkyBurner around Zero-G. He flies INSIDE OF THE TETHER, TYING A KNOT AROUND THE CENTER OF ZERO-G.

ZACK (V.O. HEADSET)
Where to, Mission Control?

Everyone ERUPTS in CHEERS. Travis hugs Gordon.

GORDON
Heading three oh eight. You got thirteen miles to make up, so get moving.

SkyBurner tows Zero-G, slowly at first, and then building speed.

BENNY
Holy crap, you did it!

Zack slowly keeps pouring on the thrusters.

ZACK
(into headset)
Control, can your team at I.S.S.2. to reinforce the cable netting in the cargo bay? We're coming in hot.

GORDON
(into headset)
Come in, I.S.S.2. Operation Softball is now Operation Hardball, do you copy?

INT. INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION TWO - NIGHT

An ASTRONAUT floats in the station, looking at the monitor showing Zack's feed.

ASTRONAUT
Way ahead of you, Control. We got the bots running extra cable now.

INT. CARGO BAY OF SPACE STATION - NIGHT

A massive cargo bay. Six CABLE ROBOTS scramble to run steel lines through the mid section to act as a catcher's mitt.

The enormous cargo bay door opens slowly.

INT. INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION TWO - NIGHT

The Astronaut watches SkyBurner zoom toward the space station.

ASTRONAUT
(into headset)
He can't ram them in here at 800
miles per hour. He'll kill us all.

INT. ZERO-G - NIGHT

Both Monica and Donnelly are slumped over. Low oxygen alarms
BLARE.

INT. SKYBURNER - NIGHT

Zack can see the space station. He opens up his throttle FULL.

GORDON (V.O. HEADSET)
Did you copy that, SkyBurner? Zack?

Benny looks at Zack, concerned.

BENNY
He's right. If I release the cable
going this fast, they're going to rip
through the space station.

ZACK
You're not going to release it.

BENNY
I'm not?

ZACK
Her oxygen is out in 30 seconds. When
I'm 100 yards away, I'm going to
reverse thrust and do a snap roll.
Their wing will break off and that
should be enough to slow them down.

SCOTT (V.O. HEADSET)
Absolutely not, SkyBurner. We can't
risk the lives of everyone aboard.
Besides, you'll rupture the cabin.

ZACK
It's going to work. Initiating NOW!

INT. INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION TWO - NIGHT

The Astronaut looks at the impending collision as SkyBurner
races toward the cargo bay. He hits the blaring MASTER ALARM.

ASTRONAUT
(into com)
Scramble lifepods! Brace for impact!

EXT. SPACE

SkyBurner REVERSES just before it would have rammed into the space station, SLINGING Zero-G right toward the cargo bay.

The tension between SkyBurner and Zero-G draws the tether taut, spinning Zero-G, then RIPPING OFF Zero-G's wing.

Zero-G twirls into the CARGO BAY, slowed, but still coming fast. SEVERAL RIVETS POP OUT as Zero-G twists into the cable net.

The CABLES DETACH from the wall and the space station SHUDDERS, but the maneuver works! Zero-G is safely inside the cargo bay.

INT. SKYBURNER - NIGHT

ZACK

Headed for the cargo bay. Prepare for soft landing.

INT. INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION TWO - NIGHT

The Astronaut watches SkyBurner float into the cargo bay.

ASTRONAUT

(into com)

Close the cargo bay now! Med Team, receive incoming patients.

INT. CARGO BAY OF SPACE STATION - NIGHT

The huge exterior door of the cargo bay slowly closes. It finally seals and the room PRESSURIZES WITH OXYGEN.

An inner door opens and a MED TEAM (without space suits) walks into the room as fast as they can with VELCRO BOTTOMED SHOES. It's still painfully slow.

They open the canopy of Zero-G and easily lift the limp, floating bodies of Monica and Donnelly out. They remove their helmets and affix oxygen masks on Monica and Donnelly.

Another CARGO TEAM tethers SkyBurner to the cargo bay floor. Zack doesn't wait. He opens the canopy and jumps off his racer and floats toward Monica.

Donnelly coughs. He's going to make it. Monica's lips are blue.

The Med Team puts an oxygen mask on Monica. Zack watches for a moment, but when she doesn't come around, he shoves them aside and gives her mouth to mouth. He checks her eyes, concerned.

ZACK

Come on, baby.

Steady, Zack continues giving her mouth to mouth.

Monica takes a sudden breath. Zack smiles, can't help but cry tears of joy. She looks up at him, wipes a tear from his cheek.

MONICA

Why are you crying?

ZACK

I missed you.

MONICA

I missed you, too.

Monica lays a huge kiss on Zack.

INT. REPUBLIC AIRPORT HANGAR - DAY

JOYFUL CHEERS explode from the Crews as they watch the live feed. Everyone hugs euphorically.

Even Scott Halstead has to wipe a happy tear. He looks up to see Travis sobbing uncontrollably. Scott hugs Travis, gives him some comforting pats on the back.

TRAVIS

I always knew they would get back together.

INT. CARGO BAY OF SPACE STATION - NIGHT

Donnelly comes over and shakes Zack's hand.

DONNELLY

I was wrong about you.

ZACK

I thought I just proved you right.

DONNELLY

You might be a daredevil... but no one can say you're not a team player.

Zack nods to Donnelly. Monica kisses Zack. Benny pushes Donnelly and the Med team to the door.

BENNY

Let's give them some privacy, fellas.

ASTRONAUT
(re: the video camera)
If you call four billion viewers
private.

VIDEO CAMERA POV

Zack gets up and his face gets close to the camera. He smiles
and reaches for a cable. The screen goes FUZZY.

INT. CARGO BAY OF SPACE STATION - NIGHT

Alone in the room, they stare at each other.

MONICA
What's the first thing you're going
to do when we get back?

ZACK
How about we don't wait til we get
back?

They madly kiss each other.

EXT. INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION TWO - NIGHT

Through a portal, Zack and Monica kiss.

SLOW PULL OUT showing the entire International Space Station as
it shrinks among the stars and planets.

FADE OUT.