

MAJOR LEAGUE DRONES

Written by

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OVER BLACK:

Echoes of applause are drowned out by roaring F1 engines.

JD (V.O.)
What does it mean to carry a
legacy?

MONTAGE - VARIOUS FORMULA ONE RACES

A. Present-day Formula One cars speed by.

JD (V.O.)
For my family? It means racing in a
2000-pound heavy deathtrap.

B. A 2010s F1 car with red and yellow colors takes the lead:
the Inferno. It shoots ahead like an angry fire bolt.

FORMULA 1 ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Another flawless display by Joe
Dante in his Inferno.

C. Rapid shots of various F1 Infernos over the decades.

JD (V.O.)
Every Dante in the past 100 years
was a racer. Ever since the first
car was bought by a Dante in the
old country...

D. Old vintage photo of PAPA DANTE in front of a Stefanini-
Martina from 1896 in Italy.

JD (V.O.)
And crashed... into the only other
car in Italy.

E. Papa Dante pours water over a burning Stefanini-Martina.

JD (V.O.)
They were waving at each other.

F. Full vintage photo: Papa Dante crashed into the only other
car on a small lonely road.

G. F1 Infernos from 1970s through 2010s are checkered first.

H. Snapshots of F1 Infernos up in flames over the decades.

JD (V.O.)
To be a Dante means to race or die.
And me? I'm no different!

I. A gray consumer drone flies through a dense skyline,
overtaking a couple other drones.

JD (V.O.)
I just need to carve out a path of
my own! To win the infamous 9
Circles of Hell!

J. Outside a skyscraper, the gray consumer drone leads as they fly by, startling a bunch of office workers.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. BMW E30 - DAY

Eyes of focus. Staring. Concentrating. Clinteastwooding. A soft hand moves the gearshift from 1 to 2.

EXT/INT. BUSY ROAD - BMW E30 - CONTINUOUS

The 80s BMW E30 sputters, rattles, and dies in traffic. JD fumbles as mad honks pass all around the BMW.

Engine roars back to life. Another jolt and it dies again.

JD (V.O.)
Well, maybe I'm a little different.

The driver is JAKE DANTE or JD, 17, and out of his depth. He fumbles with the gearshift. The Dantes are Italian-American.

Next to JD is JOE DANTE, 50s, family patriarch, tough and rugged like an old, oil-soaked rag in an auto shop. His neck and face burned like Niki Lauda's.

JOE
You're not just grinding gears,
you're grinding my patience!

Behind JD is SILVIA DANTE, early 20s, a sharp-eyed blonde.

SILVIA
You don't start with the 2nd,
moron.

JD (V.O.)
This is my sister, Silvia. A girl
in the Dante family has to be twice
as mean.

INT. JD'S CHILDHOOD ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

5-year-old KID JD looks at a finished car Lego set with pride. KID SILVIA storms into the room and kicks the car away. It hits a wall and bursts into pieces.

EXT/INT. NASCAR RACETRACK - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A massive pile-up. Cars fly through the air spraying debris.

JD (V.O.)
And insane.

A red and yellow Nascar zips past it all. Silvia looks in the rearview mirror, laughing with joy.

INT. BUSY ROAD - BMW E30 - CONTINUOUS (BACK TO PRESENT)

Behind Joe is RICKY DANTE, mid 20s, doe-eyed and relaxed.

RICKY
You need to be gentle. Do not ease
off the clutch too quick.

JD (V.O.)
Ricky, my older brother. He's
taking up dad's mantle.

EXT. F1 RACETRACK - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A red and yellow F1 takes over multiple F1s. Takes corners with speed and elegance. The blue shine from Ricky's visor radiates pure coolness and relaxation.

--PODIUM: Ricky is in 1st place and swarmed by journos.

REPORTER
Ricky! You look like you didn't
even break a sweat.

RICKY
I only break a sweat for the
ladies.

Ricky puts on sunglasses and pops the champagne.

INT. BUSY ROAD - BMW E30 - CONTINUOUS (BACK TO PRESENT)

JD still struggles to get the car going. Everyone chimes in: "Stay in 1st," "push the clutch all the way down," "don't fidget with the gearshift." An endless tiresome cacophony.

JD
SHUT UP! EVERYONE!

A long and unpleasant beat.

JOE
Jesus, no need to get this angry.
It's just driving.

An ANGRY DRIVER in an electric car stops before Joe's window. The person is augmented with artificial eyes and hands. He stops the honking for a second.

ANGRY DRIVER
What the hell are you doing?

Joe rolls the window down with a crank handle. Old-school.

JOE
Hey, listen Tin Man. How about you go fuck yourself and talk to me again when you drive something with an engine not a battery!

JD (V.O.)
That's my dad for ya. Still angry that he didn't win one hundred Grand Prix... ending it at ninety-nine wins.

Angry Driver flips off Joe with a cybernetic hand. Joe returns the favor.

JOE
I got a real one for ya!

Joe looks around. People more machine than human. Cars are smooth and without edge. Functional but soulless.

JOE (CONT'D)
How ugly are these cars going to get? This is what you get when cowards buy cars. Come on, the traffic is piling up!

JD
I'm trying!

JOE
Are you? Because this should be the easiest thing for a Dante!

JD
Really? Whose idea was it to do this on the busiest road?

JOE
You don't learn to drive on a damn parking lot!

More honks pass by.

JD
But maybe, I could do this in a more beginner-friendly car?!

JOE
We're already inside a German! I
could drive this car blindfolded.

JD
Yeah well, I'm not you.

Joe throws a glance at JD, shakes his head.

JOE
Then stop proving it every damn
second!

JD sighs and leans back in surrender.

EXT. DANTE ESTATE - DRIVEWAY - DAY

IRENE DANTE, 60s, leaves her car, on a call with a stylish in-
ear headset. She grabs her laptop bag.

IRENE
We're not doing reality TV again. I
don't want a film crew in the
house. But a documentary about
Ricky sounds good. Right in time...

Incoming screeching tires distract Irene.

IRENE (CONT'D)
...for the new F1 season.
Something's coming. Call you later.

The BMW E30 comes to an abrupt halt. The Dantes pour out.

IRENE (CONT'D)
How did it go?

JD storms past his mother without saying a word.

IRENE (CONT'D)
That bad? Where are you going?

JD
Meeting up with Omar!

IRENE
What about dinner?

JD
I'll eat in town!

IRENE
I know school's out but I still
want you back by ten!

JD is gone. Joe walks up to Irene.

JOE
Does no one know how to use a stick
these days? Everyone is being
chauffeured like some rich schmuck!

IRENE
We're rich schmucks.

JOE
You know what I mean!

IRENE
I told you to take it slow. Start
on a parking lot.

Joe has a minor meltdown.

JOE
Parking lot, parking lot?

RICKY
...I think we're gonna head out.

IRENE
You too? I ordered so much food.

SILVIA
Mom, no one wants to be at that
dinner table tonight.

Silvia and Ricky kiss their mom goodbye.

IRENE
Ricky, when will I see some
grandchildren?

RICKY
Mom! Not now!

Ricky and Silvia get in their high-end sports cars.

IRENE
Or a wife?

The sports cars spin around with speed and grace.

IRENE (CONT'D)
Or at least a girlfriend and NOT
ANOTHER WHORE OF THE WEEK?!

The cars drive off with Mach speed. A beat.

JOE
See how easy it is to use stick?

Irene heads inside the house.

IRENE
They're both professional drivers.

JOE
They're Dantes...! Dantes...

A worried Joe rubs the burned skin on his forearm.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - ROOF OF ABANDONED BUILDING - EVENING

AI drones perform maintenance and repairs. JD and OMAR JOHNSON (17, African-American, always with a backpack) set up gear. There are two medium Pelican cases nearby.

JD preps the gray consumer drone from before.

JD
What about cops?

OMAR
Got a little surprise for them,
especially if they launch drones...
But, uhm, did you talk to your dad?

JD
Not yet.

OMAR
Dude, you gotta. What if this
doesn't work? You still need a
sponsor!

JD
I know. But I also know he won't
care. Not unless it's about cars.
(tightens goggles)
And you heard the rumors. The
Freeman sponsors good pilots.

Omar stops setting up a monitoring station.

OMAR
The Freeman sponsors the best
pilots. Or craziest.

JD
Let's hope I'm crazy enough.

OMAR
Talking about crazy, you watched
the last 9 Circles race, right? You
saw what she can do?

Echoes of thunderous applause accompany JD's tentative nod.

EXT. 9 CIRCLES OF HELL STADIUM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Thousands cheer inside a spiraling Major League Drones (MLD) arena OF NINE SWIRLING TUBES -- the 9 Circles of Hell.

23 futuristic drones tear through a deadly course. MLD drones are roughly the size of a go-kart with slick designs using very nimble plasma jet engines.

A DRONE with blue thunder decals takes the lead with ease while dodging any incoming shifts in the track.

MLD ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Serpent-One takes the lead again.
Lucy is unstoppable!

--PILOT ROW: The pilots sweat in cockpit chairs under their bulky First-Person-View (FPV) goggles, like VR headsets. All MLD pilots have a neural link implanted in their nape. One racer remains calm: LUCY SAMU (17, Asian).

OMAR (O.S.)
You'll need money for a top-tier
neural link and a coach to prepare
you for racing with one.

--9 CIRCLES TRACK: A drone tries to sneak up on Serpent-One. Serpent-One doesn't flinch. She brakes just enough, smashing the rival drone into the wall. A retractable rod juts out. IMPACT! Serpent-One rolls to safety under great applause.

--PILOT ROW: The rival PILOT seizes up, pressing against his implant as a high-pitched noise drills into his brain stem.

OMAR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Otherwise you're toast, man. Our
nervous system can't handle that
feedback loop.

The pilot spasms with a frothing mouth as paramedics rush.

EXT. ROOF OF ABANDONED BUILDING - EVENING (BACK TO PRESENT)

JD
The Freeman knows how to prepare
for neural link racing.

JD brings the gray drone to the edge of the roof.

OMAR
I don't get you, man. Your dad is a
racing legend! Don't you think he
might have valuable insight?

JD
You don't know him like I do!

OMAR
What about your... you know,
performance issues?

JD ignores the question, hiding his annoyance as he puts on his FPV goggles (smaller compared to MLD goggles).

JD
Where to?

Omar glances at his tablet. A livestream countdown ticks down next to a cutesy anime avatar of The Freeman: a man in a gold and black jacket with an LED head like some Daft Punk member.

OMAR
Sending coordinates to your HUD.
Track's two miles northwest. You've
got sixty seconds before he taps
into everyone's feeds.

JD tilts the joysticks on the controller and the gray drone lifts with a WHIRR and zips off like a raging bee.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - DINING DISTRICT - CONTINUOUS

The gray drone takes a tight corner, zips between alleys and past fire escapes with ease.

INTERCUT WITH ROOF OF ABANDONED BUILDING

OMAR
Sending Freeman's track data.

JD'S POV: HUD flashes traffic signs, indicating a virtual racetrack with TWELVE consumer drones ahead.

JD
I see them!

JD accelerates. Patrons SCREAM and duck as the drones blitz through. Waiters jump for cover, PLATES HIT THE GROUND. Four drones down. JD pushes forward.

INT/EXT. DOWNTOWN - POLICE CRUISER - SAME (MOVING)

DISPATCH (VIA RADIO)
Units in the vicinity, respond Code
3 to reports of multiple drones
racing on Main Street. Requesting
UAV support for containment.

Patrol Officer #2 riding shotgun answers the radio.

PATROL OFFICER #2
7-Adam-13, copy dispatch,
responding Code 3 from Grand
Avenue. Launching UAVs. ETA two
minutes.

PATROL OFFICER #1
Goddamn kids...

Patrol Officer #2 flips two switches. THE CRUISER lights up,
its trunk pops and two slick AI police drones fly out.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - DINING DISTRICT - CONTINUOUS

The drones are nearing the end of the district. The gray
drone is in second place.

INTERCUT WITH ROOF OF ABANDONED BUILDING

OMAR
Freeman's taking it indoors.
Sending track update now.

The race pushes into a RESTAURANT. Two drones smash at entry.

--RESTAURANT: JD's drone slips inside clean, moves into
first. In the KITCHEN: three more drones are downed by pots
and pans. Four drones escape out the back.

--ALLEYWAYS: The two police drones follow in pursuit.

OMAR (CONT'D)
Don't get caught, they'll track it
back to us.

The police drones fire bolts of electricity, take out two
drones. Second in place tries to creep up on the gray drone
BUT JD MIMICS LUCY'S MOVE FROM THE 9 CIRCLES.

Second in place evades but scrapes a police drone and both
hit a fire escape. Police drone blows up like a fireball.

JD'S POV: Holographic finish line approaches fast. JD gets
checkered as holographic fireworks fill the display.

OMAR (CONT'D)
One more tailing you!

JD
I got a plan.

JD's drone zips into TRAFFIC. In the chaos of honking and
swerving cars the Police UAV follows -- until A SELF-DRIVING
TRUCK slams into it. The gray drone flies away unimpeded.

EXT. ROOF OF ABANDONED BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

OMAR
Whoa! Leaving livestream.

JD
Put it in autopilot.

Omar taps a few commands on the tablet. JD takes off the goggles, he looks dizzy and sweaty.

OMAR
You alright?

JD
Yeah... I hope this was crazy
enough for the Freeman. Any news?

OMAR
He's not just gonna message--

Omar's phone buzzes. He takes a look at it.

OMAR (CONT'D)
It's a locker code and location.
Number thirteen... signed The
Freeman.

JD
(lights up)
Yes! Told ya!

The gray drone flies in, it VTOLs down gently.

JD (CONT'D)
Come on, let's pack up!

EXT. DOWNTOWN - SMART LOCKERS - NIGHT

Omar and JD look for locker number 13.

JD
Here!

Omar enters the access code. CLICK and JD swings the locker door open. SOMETHING INSIDE THE LOCKER HAS HIM VERY CONFUSED.

OMAR
What is it?

JD takes out a cassette tape and holds it up like some never before seen technology.

JD
What the hell is this?

OMAR
It's a tape.

JD gives Omar the blankest of blank looks.

OMAR (CONT'D)
A vintage storage device. People used them to listen to music. But the Freeman uses them to send messages. They're fully analog. No remote scan or access is possible.

JD
So how do we read it?

Omar swings his backpack around, rummages through.

OMAR
On the off chance this would actually work, I came prepared.

He presents an old cassette player with a data cable and small electronic device attached. He connects the USB end of it to his tablet.

OMAR (CONT'D)
This is an analog-to-digital converter. Hand me the tape.

JD hands the tape over and Omar loads it into the player. He presses play and as the cassette winds, basic text is auto-filled on the tablet, also low-res images of JD and Omar.

OMAR (CONT'D)
Wow... this guys knows everything about us. It's an invite. To one of his underground races.

JD
Yes! I knew it! If we do well in the race he'll sponsor us.

OMAR
(re: locker)
It also says to leave our drone and gear here. I don't like this, man.

JD is already throwing the Pelican cases into the locker.

JD
(pure excitement)
Come on! It's gonna be great. His races are legendary. Crashing theme parks! Water parks! Prisons! He picks the best places for a race!

EXT. SAMU INDUSTRIAL PARK - NIGHT

JD and Omar stare like two kids who just got socks for Christmas. A self-driving cab drives away. Before them is a sprawling but lifeless industrial zone.

Omar spots a massive warehouse structure. Self-driving trucks with *SAMU INDUSTRIES* logos comes in and out.

OMAR
That's part of Samu Industries.
They make cars here. It's a lights-
out factory.

JD
Victor Samu owns the 9 Circles.
This can't be a coincidence.

JD spots CCTV and patrol drones securing the perimeter.

JD (CONT'D)
How do we get in?

Omar is reluctant to provide a solution. The boys hide behind an outdoor electric box.

OMAR
Remember when I said, I got a
surprise for the cops?

Omar presents some shiny, silvery cloth from his backpack.

OMAR (CONT'D)
*Adaptive recon cloaks with anti-
neural evasion.* I like to call them
stealth hijabs! Took them from my
sister. She's back from deployment.
These will confuse any recon drone.

JD
So crossdressing will confuse the
drone?

OMAR
No, it's-- ugh, just put it on.

They put on the "stealth hijabs." JD struggles with his.

OMAR (CONT'D)
You ready?

JD nods. Omar takes the lead on this.

EXT. AUTOMATED WAREHOUSE - ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

JD and Omar watch as one Samu Industries truck drives through the gate. JD and Omar peak into the security booth: empty.

OMAR
Weird... there should be at least
security here.

They move to a swing gate. JD keeps watch and Omar hooks up to a keypad with his tablet, starts hacking it. WHIRR! Both freeze like deer caught in headlights: it's a patrol drone.

PATROL DRONE POV: They're in view but only as a slim shimmer, almost blending perfectly with the environment.

The patrol drone moves on.

JD
Damn! It worked...

BUZZZ! The swing gate unlocks.

OMAR
I'm in!

INT. AUTOMATED WAREHOUSE - LOADING BAY - NIGHT

A SECURITY GUARD watches as the same Samu Industries truck from before pulls into the loading bay swiftly.

SECURITY GUARD
Hello?

Truck's backdoors open and six black-clad crew grips come out, wearing ski masks and goggles. They carry flight cases and parts of drone racing chairs. Before the Security Guard can ask a question, four costumed women exit the truck.

One dressed as MARILYN MONROE in her classic white dress. A SEXY NUN, SCHOOLGIRL, and a MAID.

THE FREEMAN (30s) steps out with flair, wearing black gloves and a gold and black jacket. His head is augmented into a LED helmet. No visible skin but pure showmanship.

The Freeman raises a hand and he's handed a tracker. His LED head displays crude emojis based on his mood and gesturing.

THE FREEMAN
Take this and bring those two
idiots inside.

SECURITY GUARD
(looking at GPS tracker)
Who is this...?

THE FREEMAN
 My new playthings. Well...
 technically, their phones. Now
 move! I'm not paying you to dawdle.

Not understanding a bit of what's going on, the Security Guard is escorted away by two tall grips.

EXT. AUTOMATED WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Omar peeks around the corner at an adjacent building: nothing, no soul in sight.

OMAR
 I think it's safe.

He turns. JD is already surrounded by the Security Guard and two grips. Omar pulls down the cloak, surrenders with a sheepish smile.

INT. SAMU PRODUCTION LINE - SUPERVISOR OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Omar and JD are led into the office. They spot The Freeman looking outside the windows, down to the work floor.

THE FREEMAN
 This room fascinates me. It used to
 be the office of the supervisor
 before it was turned into a lights-
 out facility. I wonder what purpose
 it serves now...

Omar and JD don't understand a word. The Freeman turns around. Clips of the downtown race play across his LED head.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
 Adaptation. Without it there is no
 survival. Something you have
 demonstrated quite well today.

The POV recording from JD's FPV goggles grows full-screen, showing JD's reckless maneuvers.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
 All this without a neural link...

JD
 Even without it, I can beat anyone.

THE FREEMAN
 (with Canadian accent)
 Old-school, eh?

OMAR
 Wait... you from Canada?

THE FREEMAN
Nonsense! The Freeman is home
wherever he shelters from taxation.

JD
Sponsor me and I'll take down the 9
Circles champion. I can do it!

THE FREEMAN
Is that so...? Mhm, I might have
the right drone for you then!

The Freeman grabs JD's hand and shakes it wildly. Squeezes
JD's hand painfully tight though JD keeps smiling.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
Deal! Grand Prix it is! Nothing
more, nothing less!

OMAR
Wait, that's it?

Omar is utterly confused, this was way too easy. The Freeman
beckons the boys to follow.

JD
Don't worry. It's gonna be fine!

INT. SAMU PRODUCTION LINE - MAIN FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER

The place is a mechanical jungle as conveyor belts move a
stream of bodyworks. The Freeman leads JD and Omar to the
pilot's corner where grips are still assembling the chairs.

JD ogles the grid girls and walks straight into a pillar.

THE FREEMAN
Eyes here!

Freeman points to a sleek red MLD drone and cockpit chair.

Omar looks over the intricate joysticks and switches build
into the chair. It looks like the seat of a Predator drone.

OMAR
That's a Hayabusa-Roku! You sure
you can pilot that thing?

JD
Sure, I can. Just handle the
equipment.

THE FREEMAN
I'll leave you to it then. Race
starts soon.

JD inspects the pilots: four men and three women. All with a neural lace in their napes with various designs ranging from rugged jacks to slick metal plates.

JD looks at a gnarly pilot with an augmented skull -- the FPV goggles are embedded in his face as artificial eyes.

OMAR
How is that allowed?

JD
Street rules, I guess.

Omar spots Lucy, hooded and unrecognizable, prepping nearby.

OMAR
Who's she?

JD shrugs and puts the MLD goggles on. He straps them tight and falls into the chair. Feels the controls. A beat.

JD
Uhm... how do I turn it on?

Omar sighs, rolls his eyes. He flips a red switch on the seat and the Hayabusa whirs to life.

JD'S POV: A 360 degree panorama first-person view lights up.

Omar watches the feed on a monitor. Holographic traffic signs mark the racetrack. A second monitor tracks telemetrics.

Freeman steps center stage as a camera-drone buzzes around him. The grid girls strike a pose.

THE FREEMAN
Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, and everything beyond! To another episode of Speed Junkies! Super Chats are open and I, as always, accept only crypto.
(LEDs turn black and gold)
Remember kids, sound money matters!

CAMERA-DRONE POV: Comment donations pour into the livestream. Chat lights up with emojis and comments.

Sexy Nun leans on Freeman's shoulder, waves for the camera with a handkerchief. The other grid girls disperse.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
Our wildcard tonight is going old-school. No neural link, no implants. We shall see if he becomes a legend or a mere lolcow! Let me know what you think. Press one for legend or two for lolcow!

CAMERA-DRONE POV: Chat floods with 2s over JD's blurred face.
 JD forces a smile. He spots Lucy's drone move past his.

JD
 Is it just me or does her drone
 look familiar?

OMAR
 It looks a bit like Serpent-One.

Lucy's Serpent-Two fires up its engines.

THE FREEMAN
 Pilots! Ready your engines!

All drones hover to the start line.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
 You too, rook.

CAMERA-DRONE POV: Feeds toggle through. Each camera shows a grid girl waiting at a different vantage point.

Sex Nun plays the flag girl, raises the handkerchief. A bead of sweat runs down JD's cheek. THE HANDKERCHIEF DROPS. Each pilot reacts differently but Lucy remains calm.

Handkerchief hits the ground. Everyone slams the controls down. Serpent-Two leads, JD is dead last. As the powerful drones zip by, the draft blows up Sexy Nun's dress.

--CONVEYER BELTS: Lucy still leads, dodging every incoming bodywork with ease. JD's Hayabusa scrapes past another drone, it's messy and very reckless.

INTERCUT WITH MAIN FLOOR

Omar cringes a bit, spots how sweaty JD already is.

OMAR
 How are you this sweaty without a
 neural link?

JD shakes his head. No idea. 2nd tries to snag past Serpent-Two but she keeps her flanks tight. They fly into--

--VENTILATION: Tight spaces. JD slows but Serpent-Two loses no speed. Same as 2nd. Light at the end of the tunnel.

JD reacts to the incoming bright light.

--ASSEMBLY LINE: Serpent-Two leads the charge past the Schoolgirl. Hayabusa is 4th in place. They descend onto a long line of welding robots, sparks fly everywhere.

Serpent-Two and 2nd dash and roll, dodging welding robots. JD takes his chances and the Hayabusa moves into 3rd but clips two robot arms.

Omar cringes a lot as parts of the screen GO BLACK.

2nd closes in on Serpent-Two, she breaks -- 2nd crashes into a welding robot. 2nd's pilot is about to smash his goggles in anger when he seizes up. Grips rush to him.

JD and his Hayabusa are now behind Serpent-Two. The remaining drones zip past the Maid and exit through an open window.

EXT. SAMU INDUSTRIAL PARK - CONTINUOUS

Drones fly through a shipment container field. Serpent-Two weaves through tight corridors with surgical precision. 3rd drone overtakes the Hayabusa, guns for Serpent-Two.

INTERCUT WITH MAIN FLOOR AND SAMU INDUSTRIAL PARK

OMAR
You're losing them! JD?

This part takes everything from JD. He's dripping with sweat and can barely sit straight in the chair.

JD'S POV: It's one twist and turn after the other.

3rd leaps past Serpent-Two but misjudges a turn -- CRASH!

INT. SAMU PRODUCTION LINE - ELECTRIC MONORAIL - CONTINUOUS

Serpent-Two bolts through a roof window past Marilyn Monroe doing her signature pose as her skirt blows up. The rest follows suit, past car bodies on a monorail system.

INTERCUT WITH MAIN FLOOR AND ELECTRIC MONORAIL

Omar watches the feed closely.

OMAR
Don't rush it!

JD
I can win!

JD guns the engines, grits his teeth. Hayabusa lunges forward, closing the gap on Serpent-Two. This is it! UP UNTIL DOZENS OF DANGLING CAR BODIES SWOOP IN.

Oh, boy.	OMAR	Shit.	JD (CONT'D)
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Serpent-Two weaves through easily. JD hits body after body. He's dead last. Sexy Nun gets ready to checker Serpent-Two.

The Hayabusa gets battered from all sides. Omar cringes at the massacre, sees JD choking on sweat and stress. It's full-blown motion sickness. JD pukes.

THE FREEMAN
And we got a technicolor yawn!
That's it for the rook.

Serpent-Two finishes and the chat erupts. The Hayabusa spirals toward the ground -- AND SEXY NUN. The Freeman tackles her to safety.

The Hayabusa smashes against the ground, flipping like a stunt car. It stops unceremoniously before a conveyor belt. The Freeman is still on top of Sexy Nun.

SEXY NUN
For someone so skinny, you're way
too heavy. Get off me!

Freeman jumps up quickly and addresses his camera drone.

THE FREEMAN
So lolcow it is!

CAMERA-DRONE POV: Chat lights up with '2s' and FAIL gifs.

BAM! Police burst in. SWAT and robo-dogs sweep the space.

SWAT POLICE #1
EVERYONE ON THE GROUND!

THE FREEMAN
EVERYONE RUN!

The crowd disperses. Robo-dogs zap racers out cold. JD slumps in his chair like a drunkard. Omar yanks him up.

OMAR
JD, we gotta run!

--HALLWAY: The Freeman runs like hell with his buzzing camera drone in front of him and the robo-dog in tow.

THE FREEMAN
(into camera drone)
Gotta go fast! And don't forget to
like and subscribe!

He rushes through a fire door and his grips close it quickly before the robo-dog bashes against it.

--MAIN FLOOR: Omar helps JD get up, he spots Lucy nearby. Serpent-Two hovers above her. Lucy grabs a handle on the drone and takes off Mary Poppins-style.

OMAR
(looking up)
You got to be kidding me?!

Three SWAT officers swarm around Omar and JD.

SWAT POLICE #2
HANDS IN THE AIR!

Omar raises his hands. JD tries as well. But he stumbles forward and falls to the ground with a thud.

OMAR
We need help--

A bolt of electricity takes out Omar.

INT. POLICE STATION - BOOKING AREA - NIGHT

JD and Omar get booked and their mugshots taken. JD looks like he just got busted for drunk driving.

INT. POLICE STATION - JAIL CELLS - SHORT TIME LATER

Omar and JD rest on a bench. Omar sees JD is pouting.

OMAR
It's not that bad.

JD looks at Omar.

OMAR (CONT'D)
I mean, look. You almost had her.
That was her, right?

JD
It's this damn motion sickness. I
don't know where it's coming from.
I can... suppress it for a while...

Omar leans in, gets serious.

OMAR
Part of qualifying for the 9
Circles is an endurance rally. How
are you gonna win that one?

JD has no answer. The hallway door unlocks, both turn to see the Freeman and two of his grips enter. They also wear cloaking devices like the "stealth hijabs."

The Freeman snaps his fingers and the cell doors open up.

THE FREEMAN
This district really needs some
security upgrades.

JD
What are you doing here?

THE FREEMAN
To demonstrate a few things.

One of the grips sets up a folding chair before Omar and JD.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
(sits down)
To demonstrate a few things. For
example, what incredible creatures
of habit humans are. It is
fascinating how these cops get
their coffee at exactly the same
hour, every night. Also, how much
you can achieve with a little bit
of bribery. And finally to
demonstrate that you can't hide
anywhere from me. Not even in jail.

Both JD and Omar tense up.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
You see, I gave you a drone. And my
drone got totaled. That's why I'm
here. You two... owe me a drone.

JD
I-I don't have that kinda money.

THE FREEMAN
I know that. But your family does.

JD
I'm confused... are you the mafia?

THE FREEMAN
The mafia?! The only mafia left is
the government, kiddo. We had a
handshake deal, remember?

OMAR
We were not looking for trouble!

THE FREEMAN
And yet you still found it. And
don't even think about involving
the police. Because right now, most
of what happened at the industrial
zone will be blamed on me.

(MORE)

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
But the downtown cops are still
looking for the pilot who wrecked
two of their drones. And I as a
concerned citizen just so happened
to come across the pilot's drone
and gear.

Both JD and Omar realize what game The Freeman is playing.

OMAR
You set us up!

THE FREEMAN
No, I created the right incentives.
Get me my drone back or the
equivalent in crypto. And I do not
accept fiat.

JD
(confused)
What's fiat?!

THE FREEMAN
And you agreed to take down the 9
Circles champion.

JD
You need to coach me!

The Freeman gets up, a grip folds the chair back up.

THE FREEMAN
I will do no such thing. My role in
this is purely executive. Be sure
to hide this on your way out.

The Freeman tosses a cassette tape to Omar.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
Your new coach. Finding him is the
easy part. Convincing him to help?
That is your problem to solve.

JD
What happens if we don't?

THE FREEMAN
For starters, I'll implant chips in
your brains. Let you see the kinds
of horrors that keep God in
heaven... away from us... You got
one week! This is life or death
now. Something your new coach knows
all too well.

The Freeman and his grips leave as casually as they entered.
JD and Omar look at each other in disbelief (and worry).

INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING AREA - MORNING

The usual frenzy of a hospital. Younger patients are glued to their phones, older patients to the TV. News blares from every screen: drone wreckage and mugshots of JD and Omar.

ALEX NAKAMURA (Japanese-American, 30s and wheelchair-bound) watches the TV as well.

ON TV: VICTOR SAMU talks to reporters (40s, Chinese-Canadian, Lucy's adoptive father. Think if Tony Stark and Gordon Gekko had a baby). He has a long scar running down his forehead.

A chyron reads: *Victor Samu, CEO of Samu Industries CEO*

VICTOR (ON SCREEN)
We will cooperate with all
authorities. If the Freeman wants
to challenge my champion, he's free
to do so in the 9 Circles. But he
must stop his reckless stunts
before he kills someone.

NURSE (O.S.)
Alex Nakamura?

Alex turns his attention to the nurse.

INT. HOSPITAL - EXAMINATION ROOM - SHORT TIME LATER

Alex sits on the examination chair. His legs are atrophied. A gritty neural lace rests on his nape. It looks fried. A DOCTOR runs her thumb down Alex's spine.

DOCTOR
Anything?

Alex shakes his head. The doctor sighs, gives up.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
I don't know why we still do this
every month. Miracles like this
don't happen.

ALEX
They do. For the worthy.

DOCTOR
I think it's time to get an
exoskeleton.

Alex lifts himself into his wheelchair.

ALEX
Can't do, doc.

DOCTOR
Then let us at least remove that
ghastly thing from your neck.

ALEX
I'll think about it.

Alex leaves the room.

EXT. POLICE STATION - MORNING

Irene exits the station with Omar and JD in tow.

OMAR
Mrs. Dante, thank you for posting
bail! I'm--

IRENE
You shut your mouth! Your father
and sister are on the way. Get
ready for it.

Omar looks more worried than during his arrest.

EXT/INT. DANTE ESTATE - MORNING

The massive estate feels eerily empty. No staff in sight.

Near the main entrance is a Hall of Fame packed with
showcases of Dante family glory: trophies, newspapers
clippings, scorched F1 parts.

JOE (O.S.)
You got anything to say?

JD (O.S.)
What's there to say...

JOE (O.S.)
I don't know. How about we start
with you almost killing a nun?

INT. DANTE ESTATE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

JD and Omar sit on the couch. Joe towers over the two.

JD
It wasn't a real nun.

OMAR
Yeah, I-I... I can confirm that.

JOE
 You're not helping. Real nun or
 not, you almost killed somebody
 with a toy. I can't believe it.
 What happened to this world?

JD
 Nothing. The world left you behind.

IRENE
 JD!

Joe's face darkens. An old wound creeps to the top.

JOE
 Oh, is that so?

JD
 Yeah! You keep going on about the
 old days. But how are oil changes
 gonna help me? There is nothing
 that needs an oil change these
 days. Or drives with a stick?!

JOE
 It's not about the oil change. It's
 about the discipline and routine
 that comes with it. That's why
 Ricky and Silvi went ahead.

JD
 The world has changed.

JOE
 But the people have not! The faster
 things change, the more they stay
 the same!

JD shakes his head, not a word of Joe's is coming through.

OMAR
 If I may--

DING DONG. Irene heads for the main door.

JOE
 You may not.

--MAIN DOOR: Irene welcomes DUKE (late 60s) and VANESSA
 JOHNSON (20s, off-duty soldier, still dressed from a night
 out). They greet each other like good family friends.

VANESSA
 I am so sorry, Mrs. Dante. We will
 pay everything back in full--

IRENE

Oh, don't you worry about that.

--LIVING ROOM: Irene and the Johnsons have a nice chat until they enter the living room. Then the mood turns to doom.

VANESSA

Is this how I have to spend my free time now?!

OMAR

It's all his fault!

JD

What? No, it isn't!

OMAR

You crashed the drone!

JD

Because you wouldn't shut up!

OMAR

Because someone has to think!

JD

Oh, thinking? You mean hide behind a tablet and then blame me when it all goes to hell?

VANESSA

SHUT UP! Both of you!

Vanessa grabs Omar by the ear and drags him away. She stops right before leaving the living room.

VANESSA (CONT'D)

Oh, and nice to see you again, JD.
Mrs. Dante. Mr. Dante.

Vanessa drags Omar outside. Duke follows, waves goodbye.

DUKE

I'll be at the garage.

JOE

See ya in a bit.

Duke and Joe share a nod like decade-old friends. Joe sighs, sits down across from JD.

JOE (CONT'D)

What is it you want? You don't care about school. You don't care about driving. What do you want?

JD looks for words.

JOE (CONT'D)
What? Spit it out!

JD
I want to race in the drone league!
Irene's face says it all: this will escalate.

JOE
Drone racing? And who's doing the racing?

JD
Pilots.

JOE
With what? A joystick?

JD
Not a joystick. A very precise controller. They use FPV goggles.

JOE
So a joystick. And what the hell are FPV goggles now?!

JD
Forget it.

JOE
No, what else do they do? Do you *collect coins*? Gain an *extra life*?

JD
(getting up)
That's what you always do! You have to make fun of everything.

Joe stops JD in his tracks.

JOE
Who told you, you can leave? I'm just trying to understand how it works.

JD
It's a real sport! Some of the pilots make millions.

JOE
So do politicians and other grifters. That doesn't make it a sport. You race inside something with an engine!

JD
You're-- it's all a joke to you.

JOE

You know why? Where's the edge? To find the best in something you walk the line between life and death. A goddam chess player burns 6000 calories in a tournament per day just... thinking! You think that's healthy? Racing in a car means--

JD

I DON'T CARE ABOUT CARS!

Joe is taken aback. This hurt. A beat. JD storms off.

JOE

You're grounded! I don't want to see your face till tomorrow! And no more allowance!

--HALL OF FAME: JD walks past the showcases, paying no attention to his family's legacy.

--LIVING ROOM: Joe looks like he's annoyed at the world. He sighs, turns to a massive drawer with family photos on top.

The drawer photos show each Dante kid through the years. As toddlers on Joe's lap behind the wheel. In an F1 car in the crew pit. Then as kids in a go-kart with Joe next to them.

JOE (CONT'D)

I knew there were signs.

JD is crying in all of his photos with Joe.

IRENE

JD is different. Ricky and Silvi wanted to fill your shoes.

JOE

It's not just that. He has no discipline.

IRENE

And you had discipline at his age?

JOE

Excuse me, I was already a kart champion at fifteen.

IRENE

Your father dragged you to every race because all you wanted to do was chase after girls. And the only reason you picked up discipline is because you realized being a racer gets you girls.

JOE
That's not--

IRENE
--don't! Your mother told me
everything.

Joe looks at his wife. He can't win this.

IRENE (CONT'D)
You might have to come to terms
with no Dante breaking the 100.

JOE
(re: burned skin)
Hard to come to terms with this.

IRENE
It's not JD's fault.

JOE
(a beat)
I know.

IRENE
I think you should talk to him.

JOE
Maybe later, Duke is waiting for
me. Need help with the beamer. I
noticed some gear resistance when I
drove it back home.

IRENE
Beginner's car is hard to drive?

Joe realizes what Irene is hinting at.

JOE
I'll talk to him.

IRENE
Joe. The world out there is nothing
like it was when Ricky and Silvi
were kids. Let alone when we were
kids. Maybe you need to adapt some
of your lessons.

Joe wants to say something but Irene continues quickly.

IRENE (CONT'D)
--I don't mean change what you
believe. Change your delivery. It's
not 1995 anymore. Have you tried
explaining a cassette tape to JD?

Irene kisses Joe and leaves. Joe thinks about Irene's words.

EXT. OCEAN - AUG CITY - DAY

The cybernetic Monaco of the world where robots do the heavy lifting. It's a small island that has been extended through a grid of floating islands build out of ocean plastic.

Home to the MLD and 9 Circles stadium. At the center is a citadel: *Samu Industries HQ*. A Samu Industries VTOL passenger aircraft touches down on a helipad.

EXT. SAMU INDUSTRIES HQ - HELIPAD - MOMENTS LATER

Two Samu technicians unload Serpent-Two from the VTOL.

LUCY

Send me all flight data when you're done!

INT. SAMU INDUSTRIES HQ - LUCY'S FACILITY - DAY

Lucy analyzes the flight data. Victor enters (he owns Aug City and the 9 Circles stadium).

VICTOR

I don't mind you taking the VTOL for a joy ride but you need to tell me if you plan to meet the Freeman.

LUCY

You worried for my safety now?

VICTOR

You should be worried. The man is dangerous... if he even is a man.

LUCY

You think he's a robot? I think he spreads those rumors about himself.

VICTOR

You know what is not a rumor? Him lobotomizing multiple agents that were investigating him. Associating with the Freeman attracts attention. To me and the city!

LUCY

So, that's what this is about?

VICTOR

Yes, but... I'm also happy you're safe and back. What were you even doing there?

LUCY
Just testing the competition. His
champions are a joke.

VICTOR
I pay for research. You don't need
to take that kind of risk.

LUCY
It's more fun than reading.

Victor used to have a neural link in his nape, now there is
just scar tissue left. He sighs, changes tactics.

VICTOR
Those neural links? We don't know
who created the first blueprints.
They represent decades of research
and breakthroughs. And no one is
taking credit for them? You don't
find that odd?

LUCY
You approved them for the league.

VICTOR
The league accelerated the research
and integration. But... Just
promise me to be careful. We have
the best firewalls. Use them!

LUCY
I will. I do.

Victor nods, not quite convinced.

VICTOR
I have to take care of business.
The Freeman's *champions* caused
quite a mess.

Victor leaves. With worry, Lucy touches her neural link.

INT. DANTE ESTATE - JD'S ROOM - DAY

Brimming with figurines and gaming consoles. A defeated JD is
at his computer, watching news reports about his carnage. His
phone rings, it's Omar. JD picks up.

JD
Please tell me you got good news.

INT. SUBURBAN HOME - OMAR'S ROOM - SAME

Jam-packed with stacked computer parts and electronics everywhere. Omar's reads out the tape with a cassette player.

INTERCUT BETWEEN JD'S AND OMAR'S ROOMS

OMAR

It's Alex Nakamura! The first 9 Circles champion.

JD

What? For real?

OMAR

Yeah, everything's here. Where he lives, his shop, medical history.

JD

Damn, that's creepy.

OMAR

It's almost like we should've never done this in the first place!

JD

We need to talk to him. Can you sneak out?

OMAR

I can but... can you?

EXT. DANTE ESTATE - GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Duke checks the BMW's underbody. A cigar always in his mouth.

DUKE

Looks like the clutch is not fully disengaging. Clutch disc is worn down too. This ain't a quick job, Joe. No wonder JD had problems.

JOE

It's not just the car. The kid wants a quick fix for everything.

DUKE

Ah... so like you!

In the background, JD sneaks out of his window.

JOE

Maybe but I never give up. Everyone wants a shortcut. People are soft. That's why Silvi can't find a man who knows how to change oil.

DUKE
Joe, Silvi's been changing oil
since she was ten.

JOE
You know what I mean.

Duke takes a beat, long enough for JD to fall behind a bush.

DUKE
You let me know if I'm overstepping
my bounds here but... what happened
to the staff?

JOE
I fired them. I was hoping it would
teach the kid some valuable
lessons. Learn some skills like
cooking. Only thing he learned was
how to find offers for a goddamn
kitchen Terminator.

DUKE
You mean a cooking-droid?

JOE
I don't need a Terminator to cook
pasta for me.

DUKE
Never change, Joe.

Duke chuckles, and the two continue working on the BMW E30.
JD exits the grounds without being noticed.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - DAY

JD and Omar stand across the street of a classic-looking auto
repair shop named *Echo Nine Robotics*.

They approach the shop, it's been repurposed for drone
repairs and other autonomous equipment. A MECHANIC (40s) who
never said no to a donut works on a delivery drone.

JD
We're here to see Mr. Nakamura.

MECHANIC
(keeps working)
You got something in the shop?

OMAR
We're just fans.

The Mechanic looks at the boys.

MECHANIC
(crosses himself)
I've seen you two. You're the kid
who tried to kill a nun.

JD
It wa-- I didn't try to kill a nun!

MECHANIC
Looked like attempted murder to me.

OMAR
Please, we'd like to speak to Mr.
Nakamura. We need his help.

INT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - DAY

The shop looks like a Transformer's guts. Industrial parts everywhere. The Mechanic leads the boys into the drone bay. Alex looks up from a soldering station. Eyes them, cold.

ALEX
No. Leave.

JD
Wait, we didn't even chat?!

ALEX
No. The answer is still no! Tell
the Freeman, it's not my job to
train his lackeys.

JD
Is that because of what happened to
you?

Omar cringes, knowing they screwed up already. Alex wheels himself closer, sizing up JD.

ALEX
No. It's because you're reckless,
soft, undisciplined and full of
teenage angst. Get off my property!

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - MOMENTS LATER

The Mechanic throws out the boys. Shuts the gate behind them.

OMAR
What now?

JD paces about, thinks.

JD
I'll call you later.

OMAR
We can try someone else.

JD
No! I'll talk to him again.

OMAR
Fine... Let me know how it goes.

EXT. BUILDING ACROSS ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - 7TH FLOOR - SAME

The Freeman, perched on a windowsill, watches Omar enter cab. He shifts his focus on JD. Grips set up shop behind the Freeman, moving crates and weapons.

INT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - LATER THAT DAY

Alex works on a different drone. He sees JD hanging out with some homeless people outside. The Mechanic walks by.

MECHANIC
Want me to call the cops?

ALEX
Nah, he'll give up.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Dusk. Alex ignores JD while closing shop.

Dinner at the Dantes. JD, Irene, and Joe eat in silence.

Morning. Alex opens shop, pretends to not have seen JD already waiting for him.

Rainy morning. Alex works on a drone, sees JD under an umbrella. A car drives past, splashing JD.

At home, dinners are silent. JD stinks of wet clothes.

Next morning, JD opens the gate for Alex.

Alex sees JD sharing his food with the homeless.

Night. The Mechanic closes the shops gate. Still ignored.

BACK TO SCENE

INT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - NIGHT

Alex stares at a tarp covering a racing drone. Sounds of a crash and a screaming woman torture his mind.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - MOMENTS LATER

JD, same hoodie and exhaustion, gets up. Ready to leave.

ALEX (O.S.)
Want dinner?

He turns to see Alex. JD nods happily.

INT. DOWNTOWN - ANIME-THEMED RESTAURANT - NIGHT

High-tech running sushi. Droids deliver food besides the classic conveyor belts. JD grabs some sushi, Alex blocks him with his chopsticks before he has a chance to eat with hands.

JD
(grabs chopsticks)
Sorry.

ALEX
So... What do I have to do to get rid of you?

JD
I was disrespectful, I know that.
And I'm sorry but I need your help.

JD fumbles around picking up a piece of sushi.

ALEX
You're not getting rid of the Freeman. He does this all the time. He's obsessed with the 9 Circles.

The piece of sushi falls back on the platter.

ALEX (CONT'D)
J-Just stab it!

JD
Sorry, my dad is not much for sushi.

ALEX
Has he stopped you from learning how to use chopsticks?

JD shakes his head.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Then why are you blaming him?

JD has no answer.

ALEX (CONT'D)
What I don't understand is this?
Why come to me? Why not go to your
family or the authorities?

JD
I can't.

Alex looks at JD questioningly.

JD (CONT'D)
Remember that downtown race a
couple days ago? I was involved.

ALEX
Ah, the old switcheroo. All this
sophisticated technology and the
Freeman's biggest asset are still
useful idiots. Why did you do it?

JD
The downtown race? It's my family.
Everyone's following my dad's
footsteps. I only feel uneasy
around him and nauseous inside a
car. This is the closest thing to a
race I know.

ALEX
Do you read biographies?

JD
Uhm... Nooooo.

ALEX
Thirteen of the top twenty-three
pilots are orphans. This is not a
race but a battle royal. Cutthroat
kids from a dog-eat-dog world. No
one does this for family. They will
grind you up and spit you out.

JD's heart sinks in. This was harder than anything from Joe.

ON WALL-MOUNTED TV: 9 Circles ad showing the best. Lucy is on
top, looking like a valiant soldier from a propaganda poster.

ALEX (CONT'D)
She was an orphan too. Came from
nothing. And now top of the world.

JD looks utterly defeated. Alex breaks the silence.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Let's try something.

EXT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - JUNKYARD - SHORT TIME LATER

Two consumer drones wait for Alex and JD. Alex hands JD goggles, controller, and a wristband.

ALEX
This will measure your heart rate.
I want you to follow my lead. If I
bank, you bank. If I barrel roll,
you barrel roll, capisce?

JD
No one says that anymore.

Alex boots his drone to life. JD puts on his goggles but--

JD (CONT'D)
You're not using goggles?

ALEX
No need.

Alex's drone zips ahead, weaves past wrecked cars, into barrel rolls and tight turns. All smooth. JD follows, not so smooth. Alex's drone graces the yard like a ballerina.

JD's drone flies like a drunk sailor. He taps out, nauseous.

ALEX (CONT'D)
It is ridiculous how easily you get
motion sickness. Are you just
sitting around all day?

JD
(heavy breathing)
No...

Alex checks his phone. Reads the wristband data.

ALEX
195 beats per minute. After this?!
You're not out of shape. You're
scared for your life.

JD
I get this sometimes. No idea why.

ALEX
What do you think will happen to
you with a neural link? A crash
feels like a root canal treatment
without anesthesia. That's the best-
case scenario...

Alex touches his fried neural lace. A beat.

ALEX (CONT'D)
You want to win the 9 Circles?
Start with the minor league. You
already got a taste of major league
drones. They're a different beast.
To handle them, you'll need gear.
And training. Just like I did.
Training starts tomorrow. Six AM.
Don't be late.

JD
What? Why so early?

ALEX
I have only one rule. Don't
question my methods!

INT. DANTE ESTATE - NIGHT

JD sneaks into the house but Irene and Joe were already
waiting for him.

IRENE
You really thought we won't notice?

JD
(caught off guard)
It's for a... job.

Irene and Joe look surprised and confused.

JD (CONT'D)
I have no allowance left. What else
was I supposed to do?

JOE
And what kinda job did you get?

JD
Uhm... auto shop, actually.

JOE
Auto shop? What's it called?

JD
Echo Nine... Repairs.

JOE
Echo Nine Repairs?

JD
I gotta go. Early start tomorrow!

JD rushes past them. Joe and Irene look at each other.

INT. DANTE ESTATE - JD'S ROOM - NIGHT

JD falls into bed. He calls Omar.

OMAR (ON PHONE)
And?

JD
We got a coach.

OMAR (ON PHONE)
Alright man, don't screw this up.

JD
I won't! I'll keep you posted.

JD hangs up, exhausted and tired, but also happy.

INT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - MORNING

A very tired JD walks into the shop. Alex rolls by and throws a blue overall and a pair of work gloves at JD.

ALEX
Do as he says.

Alex wheels away. The Mechanic grins.

INT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - DAY

JD wears the blue overall, stacks old spare parts -- scrubs floors. He takes off a tire from a small car, looking utterly inept. The Mechanic watches with second-hand embarrassment.

EXT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - JUNKYARD - DAY

JD holds an electric metal cutter.

JD
I do what?

MECHANIC
Remove any excess metal. Anything
sticking out from a body.

JD looks at the wall of metal. The tool whirs to life and JD tries his luck. He flinches as the first sparks fly.

JD
Can I get a helmet or something?

The Mechanic is gone already.

EXT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - JUNKYARD - LATER

JD saws off a piece, drenched in sweat, red like a lobster.

ALEX
I'm surprised you're still here.

JD
Let me guess, this is all part of
some unorthodox training method?

ALEX
No, I just needed free labor.

JD and Alex enter a staring contest. Alex smiles.

ALEX (CONT'D)
But it will help you get used to a
neural lace. Your body will
experience the same heat as your
drone. Time for your next exercise.

INT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - EVENING

Alex takes out three tennis balls. Starts juggling them.

JD
Juggling?

Alex throws two tennis balls at JD. He only catches one.

ALEX
Your hand-eye coordination is still
horrendous. Start with dribbling.
First one, then two. Do the
juggling at home.

JD starts dribbling one ball. Slowly.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Faster!

JD dribbles faster.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Now two!

JD starts dribbling two balls. He's slower again.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Crisscross between palms!

He crisscrosses the balls between his palms.

ALEX (CONT'D)
HIGHER!

JD bounces the balls hard, shoots them upwards. His gaze follows them up -- ALEX TOSSES A THIRD tennis ball at JD's stomach. He goes down with a groan.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Your reaction time is horrendous
too. Tomorrow we'll continue.

INT. DANTE ESTATE - HALL OF FAME - NIGHT

Joe stares at an old balaclava mounted on a mannequin's head. He sees JD entering his room. Joe wants to say something but he takes a beat and goes the other way.

INT. DANTE ESTATE - JD'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

JD spreads a cream on his burned skin. He spots his backpack, takes out three tennis balls. Tries juggling them. They drop and scatter. JD's had enough, but he tries again. And again.

INT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - MORNING

JD struts in. A bag of carrots flies his way, he catches it.

ALEX
Snack on those from now. Improves
eyesight. No more junk food!

JD
We use goggles.

ALEX
Which are a screen. An inch away
from your eyes. Eat the carrots!

JD puts one reluctantly in his mouth.

ALEX (CONT'D)
And get back to work.

Alex wheels away. JD sees the Mechanic smiling at him.

EXT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - JUNKYARD - DAY

Sweaty and tired, JD cuts metal with the cutter again.

INT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - SHORT TIME LATER

The Mechanic moves a cart with a screen and a high-powered battery. The battery cables lead to a pair of gloves. Alex hands the gloves to JD.

ALEX
Put these on.

JD
What the hell is that?

ALEX
It's not in use anymore. Been
deemed a... torture device.

JD
What?

ALEX
You can sit down for this.

JD
(putting on gloves)
These are quite small.

ALEX
Yeah. My mom started me early.

JD looks at him, not understanding what Alex meant. Alex
turns on the screen.

ON SCREEN: 1+5 pops up in white numbers.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Tiger mom. Anyway. Each finger is
represented by a number. One
through five are the thumb to
little finger on your right hand
and six to ten on your left hand.
Once your thumb taps the little
finger, it's cleared.

JD touches his right little finger with his right thumb.

ON SCREEN: 1+5 turns green. 3+1 pops up next.

ALEX (CONT'D)
It will alternate but it's the same
principle every time.

JD hits 3+1. Next is 1+2 and 6+8. He matches the right hand
but screws up the left. 6+8 turns red. The gloves zap him.

JD
Aaaah! Shit.

ALEX
Messing up will hurt. The equations
will get faster as well.

JD looks at Alex, can't believe he's doing this.

ON SCREEN: 1+4, green. 6+10, green. 2+5, red.

ZAP. JD shakes his head but he doesn't give up. 7+6, green. 9+6, green. 1+5, green. JD smiles.

INT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - LATER

Back to dribbling. This time JD bounces three tennis balls while crisscrossing palms. Alex comes in, sees the progress.

ALEX

I want to show you something.

He leads JD to the tarp-covered drone. He pulls it down to reveal two older but very slick drones.

JD

No way!? That's the...

ALEX

Hayabusa-San. The first model with a brain-to-computer interface.

JD

That's the one that...

Alex touches his fried neural link. Inspects the drone.

ALEX

Yeah. Neural implants were primitive back then. They had external batteries. You had to jack in. Internal batteries would cause a heat stroke. These days your body heat powers the chip. Anyway, I was reckless. Ignored the heat, it fried the chip and the drone locked up... killing a bystander.

JD tries to find the right words.

ALEX (CONT'D)

But... That won't be your worry when you fly it.

JD

Wait...

ALEX

I made some modifications. It's compatible with modern neural chips now.

JD

I don't have a neural link.

ALEX
We'll get there. For now, you'll
try out for the minor league with
the little one. The Sparrow. My
personal design. Very nimble.

JD looks at Sparrow. It looks like a cybernetic stealth bird.

ALEX (CONT'D)
We got two weeks to get you ready
for the qualifications. And I want
you to practice this move.

Alex pulls out a coin, balances it across his knuckles. FLIP.
He tosses the coin at JD who doesn't look so sure about it.

INT. DANTE ESTATE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The entire Dante family is here. Homecooked meals. JD eats
his carrots while balancing the coin.

IRENE
First time I'm seeing you eating
those.

JOE
When's your court date?

JD
In a month.

JOE
Let's just hope you get off with
community service.

JD nods nervously.

RICKY
Dad told us you got a *job* now? What
are you doing?

JD
Most of the time... I'm just
cutting metal.

SILVIA
We all had those jobs at one point.

Ricky and Silvia laugh. JD forces a smile. But notices that
Joe doesn't believe him. It's painful he can't be truthful.

INT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - MORNING

Omar and JD enter the building. Alex awaits them.

JD
This is Omar, my best friend. He
can help with training and,
honestly, anything tech-related.

ALEX
Aspiring engineer?

OMAR
Yes, sir.

ALEX
What fields?

OMAR
Information technology, telematics
and automation.

ALEX
I'll show you the drones. You can
start to familiarize yourself. And
you? Familiarize yourself with some
cardio.

Alex leads Omar to the drones.

ALEX (CONT'D)
You're still out of shape.

EXT. PARK - DAY

JD jogs, Omar rides along on a mountain bike. JD stops,
grabbing his sides. Omar circles around him.

OMAR (O.S.)
You ever worry that our list of
crimes just keeps growing?

JD (O.S.)
Technically, we have done worse.

INT. OMAR'S ROOM - DAY

Omar preps a robot arm. JD presents a folder to Omar.

OMAR
That doesn't make it better.

JD
This is the school paper. And these
are the league forms.

Omar grabs both. Scans Joe's signature. The robot arm moves
in position. Omar secures the league papers. Once done, the
robot arm forges Joe's signature.

Omar takes it and compares the two signatures: identical.

OMAR
Voila! You now have parental
approval to enter the drone league!

JD smiles.

EXT. DANTE ESTATE - DAY

Joe mows the grass, old-school with a diesel lawnmower. He's drenched in sweat. JD leaves the house. Joe watches him enter a self-driving cab. Irene looks out the window.

JOE
You know, I don't believe for a
second he's doing something
productive!

IRENE
Speaking of productive, you sure
you don't want to buy a robot
mower?

JOE
That's how it starts. First, they
mow grass, then people!

IRENE
You're getting too old for this.

JOE
My father squandered everything my
great-grandfather built. We were
out on the street. Can't let that
happen again.

IRENE
By mowing the lawn?

JOE
You know what I mean. Wooden shoes
go up, silken slippers go down.

IRENE
You'll not convince JD to-- Fine.
Just take a shower before you sit
down anywhere in the house!

Joe waves Irene off, starts the lawnmower back on.

EXT. ABANDONED APARTMENT COMPLEX - SIGN UP BOOTH - DAY

Alex, JD, and Omar wait in line. Without looking up a bored
MLD ADMIN checks off names on a tablet. It's JD's turn.

MLD ADMIN
Name and age, please?

JD
Jake Dante, seventeen.

MLD ADMIN
(looking up)
Oh, it's you... Drone?

JD
Sparrow.

He types the data in.

MLD ADMIN
Alright, you're all set. Based on
your lap clearance you're starting
third. Here's your pilot RFID.

JD takes the chip the size of a thumb drive.

MLD ADMIN (CONT'D)
Please don't kill anyone.

JD rolls his eyes and walks off the booth.

ALEX
This one should be easy. Don't gun
for first place. Just make sure you
end up in the top five to qualify
for the next race.

JD nods, looking a bit worried.

ALEX (CONT'D)
You'll make it!

Everyone reacts to Lucy arriving to watch the race. She poses
for photos but her bodyguards quickly disperse any media.

JD
I'll be back in a minute.

Alex and Omar watch JD approach Lucy.

ALEX
(to Omar)
She gonna be a distraction?

Omar can't say yet, sees JD approach Lucy -- a bodyguard
blocks JD from taking any steps further.

JD
(looking past bodyguard)
Hey, remember me?

A short beat later, Lucy walks away with a contemptuous "hm." Omar and Alex react as JD is left standing there.

OMAR
If it wasn't before... it is now.

EXT. ABANDONED APARTMENT COMPLEX - START LINE - DAY

13 drones are lined up. All roughly the size of Sparrow. JD takes a seat in the pilot area. An ORGANIZER walks the area.

ORGANIZER
ALL PILOTS. CONTROLS CHECK.

Omar runs a software on his tablet.

ON TABLET: *Pairing: Active*

OMAR
It's paired up.

JD feels out the controls in his seat. Sparrow shifts and moves ever so slightly. Adjusting wings and rotors.

ORGANIZER
GOGGLES ON!

All pilots put on their FPV goggles. A wave of THUMBS-UP!

ORGANIZER (CONT'D)
THREE LAPS! I REPEAT. THREE LAPS!
READY?

JD grips the controls tight. Start light countdown begins.

RED. RED. RED... ALL GREEN!

The drones shoot ahead like a swarm of wasps.

INT/EXT. ABANDONED APARTMENT COMPLEX - CONTINUOUS

The nimble drones fly through hallways and apartments.

INTERCUT WITH START LINE AND ABANDONED APARTMENT COMPLEX

Sparrow holds 3rd but 4th and 5th are gaining. They slalom out windows and back inside. JD lets 4th pass. They shoot through another hallway and cross the start line.

OMAR
He's fourth.

ALEX
He only has to hold his position.

5th closes in on Sparrow. JD accelerates -- nearly clips a doorway but banks just in time.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Don't rush it.

JD gives a small nod. As they hit Lap 2, 5th overtakes. 6th moves in but JD cuts through a kitchen. Sparrow scrapes a cabinet, regains control.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Reckless.

1st through 4th cross the finish. Sparrow holds off 6th and finishes by a hair. Omar and Alex cheer. JD exhales, pulls off his goggles.

He scans for Lucy but she's already leaving the bleachers. JD sways, lightheaded.

JD
I think I'm gonna pass out.

ALEX
We really need to do something
about your motion sickness.

JD
More unorthodox training?

ALEX
Not really, just a centrifuge. But
getting access isn't easy or cheap.

Omar looks like he just had the best idea ever.

OMAR
Centrifuge you say?

EXT. PARK - PLAYGROUND - DAY

A few kids have gathered. JD sits in the center of a merry-go-round, wearing a motorcycle helmet. Omar lines up a motorcycle wheel at the edge.

JD
Are we sure about this?

OMAR
Of course. It's just physics.

ALEX
Ready?

JD flips his visor down. Thumbs-up, Omar revs. The merry-go starts slow but it's building up fast.

Parents gawk, kids laugh. JD launches off like a missile. Omar and Alex exchange a look. JD groans, raises a hand.

JD
I'm alive... just in pain.

MINOR LEAGUE MONTAGE - VARIOUS LOCATIONS

A. The Freeman watches from the 7th floor as JD and Omar load up a van at Echo Nine Robotics.

B. Sparrow moves into position inside an abandoned high-rise.

C. JD, Joe, and Irene in court. The judge brings down the hammer. Both Joe and Irene look relieved.

D. The swarm of drones flies in and out of the high-rise. With each lap, they get higher. Sparrow in the lead.

E. JD and Omar at an underpass. Collecting trash with other convicts. Two cops and their robo-dog stand guard.

F. Sparrow banks, tilts, flips, barrel rolls. Unstoppable.

G. First. First. And again first. Sparrow reaches the finish on the high-rise's roof.

H. JD's 1st on the podium holding his trophy. He's showered with photography.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - DAY

JD places the minor league trophy on a desk.

ALEX
We're in the majors now. You know what that means!

JD
I can't tell my parents.

ALEX
I thought you already did? We need cash for the neural link.

JD tilts his head, too ashamed to tell the truth.

ALEX (CONT'D)
(realizing)
You forged the signature... Forget attracting a sponsor, it's your head on the chopping block if the league finds out and--

THE FREEMAN (O.S.)
--they won't...

Four grips accompany the Freeman. The Mechanic catches up.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
Unless you tell them of course.

MECHANIC
Sorry, boss.

ALEX
What do you want?

THE FREEMAN
(tosses thumb drive to JD)
Take this. It's a crypto wallet.

JD looks at it, it comes with build-in fingerprint scanner.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
Registered on your fingerprints.
Enough money to buy the newest
model. Go get your personal Vergil.

JD
I thought you're not getting
involved?

The Freeman and his grips are already leaving.

THE FREEMAN
This falls under the purview of the
executive.

They're gone. Alex and JD look at each other.

INT. UNDERGROUND AUG SURGERY - DAY

Room is crammed with prosthetics and robotics. An unsettling collection of pneumatic arms and legs, cybernetic hearts.

A rugged SPLICER preps JD, facedown on a surgery bed, head through a padded hole. A drape covers his back, exposing only the neck. The Splicer wipes it clean.

JD
Does it have to be local?

SPLICER
If you don't mind accidentally
becoming a quadriplegic, then sure.

JD
Wait, what?!

SPLICER
I need to talk to you while we do
this. Monitor your whole body. As
long as you feel your toes and
fingers, it'll be fine.

The Splicer types, hits ENTER. Two surgical arms whir to
life, hovering over JD's neck.

SPLICER (CONT'D)
All set. You ready, kid?

JD hesitates.

ALEX
We can still delay this.

JD
No. Let's do it!

Alex nods. The Splicer hits ENTER again. The arms begin,
slicing into JD's nape with mechanical precision.

Two smaller arms widen the cut. Tiny blades expose nerve
tissue and thread in carbon nanotubes, jellyfish-like
tendrils fusing with flesh.

SPLICER
As ordered. It's a Mark VII Vergil.

A silver module the size of a Zippo descends. The carbon
tendrils feed into it.

SPLICER (CONT'D)
Samu's latest tech. Carbon
nanotubes will make you feel
everything the drone registers.

Vergil sinks into JD's nape. Connection complete. The Splicer
runs diagnostics, then pricks JD's fingers with a needle.

JD flinches.

SPLICER (CONT'D)
That's a good sign.

He continues down JD's legs, ending on his toes.

SPLICER (CONT'D)
Feel this?

JD
Yes.

SPLICER
Done. Let's give it a try!

INT. UNDERGROUND AUG SURGERY - SHORT TIME LATER

JD sits in front of a mirror, holding a hand mirror, trying to get a look at Vergil. The skin around it is red and swollen. Omar stands behind him.

OMAR
Gnarly! But cool.

SPLICER
Diagnostics should be working.

The Splicer holds up a circuit board with synthetic skin and an antenna. He runs a finger across the skin.

JD
(shudders)
Ooof. Goosebumps... And...

JD crosses his legs, hiding something.

SPLICER
Sensory overload. An erection will be the least of your worries.

OMAR
For your sake, I hope this doesn't happen mid-race.

SPLICER
First few nights, your body'll think you're falling out of the sky. Just ride it out. The carbon tubes will do the most to prevent rejection but take these for two weeks in the morning and evening.
(throws two pill bottles)
Side effects include dry mouth, hormonal imbalance, increased appetite, and mood swings. Let your body figure it out. Chances of rejection are low.

JD nods, a bit overwhelmed by the information.

ALEX
And do not turn off your firewall! Ever! There is a failsafe but some pilots got hijacked. Briefly. Like puppets.

JD nods, now overwhelmed and worried.

INT. DANTE ESTATE - DINING ROOM - EVENING

Joe and Irene stare at JD, who's wearing the most ridiculous black turtleneck he could find. He pretends nothing's wrong.

JOE
What the hell are you wearing?

JD
I got a minor cold.

JOE
In the summer?

JD shrugs. Joe and Irene exchange looks.

JOE (CONT'D)
Is there anything you want to tell us?

JD shakes his head. Joe doesn't buy it.

IRENE
Your dad could come visit you. Why don't you show him your workplace?

JD
Not a good time. We're very busy.

JOE
Is that so?

JD nods nervously.

EXT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - JUNKYARD - DAY

Alex preps a mobile pilot seat. The Hayabusa-San is out on a cart. JD walks up to him like a kid about to confess.

ALEX
You can't hide from your parents forever.

JD understands, nods.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Omar, pair it. Let's see if our boy can handle this.

Omar taps his tablet. Alex spots the turtleneck.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Is it not hot in that thing?

JD shakes his head like "I know." Takes off the turtleneck.

ALEX (CONT'D)
(re: pilot seat)
She's yours.

JD
No goggles?

ALEX
Not for now. Let's just see if you
don't pass out.

OMAR
Ready.

JD takes a seat, grips the controls -- Hayabusa VTOLs up. A cold shudder runs down JD's spine. He shivers, drone sways.

JD
Whoa. It's cold up there.

ALEX
Let's hope cold is the only thing
you feel for now.

JD kicks out his feet due to a hypnic jerk. In sync with him, the Hayabusa sways hard.

JD
Whooooooooah!

ALEX
Careful! The ground is still under
you. Touch the ground!

JD touches the ground carefully with his feet. Steadies himself. The drone catches its balance.

JD
This feels weird.

ALEX
You'll get used to it.

JD
I was wondering why don't we pilot
with our thoughts?

ALEX
Try it.

JD focuses on the drone. Mind-bending like a Jedi but nothing happens. The drone swings a bit like a crib.

OMAR
Synchronicity level is too low. We
could use a brain cap but the input
delay is impractical for a race.

JD
Synchronicity?

Omar flips the table: *82.3% Synchronicity*

OMAR
How well you align with the drone.

JD
It's not at a hundred percent?

ALEX
No, this is average. You don't want
a hundred percent.

JD
Why?

ALEX
Neural chips are a two-way street.
Go past ninety percent-- risk brain
damage. You'll be one with the
drone. Sharper senses, better
instincts. But crash the drone?
It'll fry your nervous system.
We've got a kill switch if it goes
too far.

JD nods, realizing the severity of it all.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Don't worry. Focus on the haptics.
Simple, safe and reliable. You use
Vergil to feel the situation. It's
gonna feel like you're flying.

JD
Like a driver's butt!

Both Omar and Alex look confused.

JD (CONT'D)
My dad explained it. A race driver
uses his butt cheeks to judge the
state of the car.

ALEX
(re: Hayabusa)
Well, take your butt for a spin
then!

JD
Here?

ALEX
(hands him FPV goggles)
Don't get caught by a police drone.

JD smiles, puts on the goggles, flips a switch. Hayabusa's engines roar. He pushes the controls -- drone blasts skyward.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - SKYLINE - CONTINUOUS

The Hayabusa rises through the dense skyline, skimming rooftops and AC vents until a blast of white smoke hits it.

INTERCUT BETWEEN SKYLINE AND ECHO NINE ROBOTICS JUNKYARD

JD twitches. His hands slide off the controls.

JD'S POV: it fogs up like it's hit by a fire extinguisher.

JD panics. The drone banks hard, swaying toward the ground. He clutches his chest.

ALEX
AUTOPILOT!

Omar taps the tablet. The drone recovers -- pulling up just above pedestrians.

JD collapses from the chair, yanks off the goggles.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Your heart rate's a mess. That
motion sickness has a grip on you.

The Hayabusa, still on autopilot, VTOLs down like a delivery drone. Alex watches JD, thinking.

ALEX (CONT'D)
We'll start with Tai Chi. And
meditation.

EXT. PARK - DAY

The Freeman watches from afar. His LED lenses shift, zooming on JD who mimics Alex's Tai Chi, step for step. Applause echoes nearby.

EXT. DENSE FOREST - PILOT AREA - DAY

Lucy and Serpent-One arrive to great applause. JD and Alex observe as Omar and the Mechanic set up JD's racing chair.

ALEX
Ignore her. Just qualify for the 9
Circles.

JD glances at the other pilots -- more than enough to worry about. He nods.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Got something for you.

Alex hands JD a small box. Inside are two sleek bracelets.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Acustimulation bracelets.

JD just looks at Alex like a confused puppy.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Anti-nausea bracelets. They'll help
with your motion sickness. Try em!

JD puts both bracelets on.

JD
Thank you...! But I gotta do
something first.

Alex watches as JD approaches Lucy, who's checking Serpent-One's engines.

JD (CONT'D)
Looks like you're not getting rid
of me that easy.

Lucy scoffs, not looking up.

LUCY
I don't have to. Your type never
sticks around.

JD
My type? What's my type?

LUCY
The rich and pampered.

JD
Your sponsor is a trillionaire.
What are you then?

She looks up. Her face stone-cold.

LUCY
Get out of my sight, you spoiled
brat.

JD freezes first but his face hardens. This is personal now.
He turns and rushes back to his racing chair.

EXT. FOREST MLD TRACK - DAY

The Hayabusa-San takes over multiple competitors through a
dense forest. But loses to Serpent-One at finish.

EXT. MOUNTAIN MLD TRACK - DAY

Hayabusa-San banks, flips, and barrel rolls past several competitors. Still behind Serpent-One, checkered second.

EXT. MOUNTAIN MLD TRACK - PILOT AREA - SAME

JD takes off his FPV goggles, looks at Lucy. He's fuming, seems like he can't defeat her. Alex notices this.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - DAY

Omar, JD, and the Mechanic unload the Hayabusa and gear from a van onto a cart. They roll it all inside.

Across the street, Joe watches from his BMW E30, more confused than angry. For now.

INT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - CONTINUOUS

Omar leaves the cart, goes for the restroom. Alex comes up to JD who looks a bit defeated.

ALEX
Remember! Focus on getting in the 9
Circles. We'll deal with Lucy when
we cross that bridge!

JD nods but he doesn't look convinced.

JOE (O.S.)
What the hell is that?

Alex and JD turn to see Joe.

JD
What are you doing here?

JOE
Your mother insisted I talk to you.
Since you're never home, I figured
I'd check in. Silvi found this
place online.

JD keeps his distance and Joe chases him around a desk.

JOE (CONT'D)
Come here, you little-- What have
you done with your neck?

Omar walks in, humming a tune -- spots Joe confronting JD. He casually turns and locks himself in the bathroom.

JD
I-I can explain everything.

JOE
What the hell are you doing here?

JD tries to find the right words.

ALEX
We're training for the drone racing
Grand Prix.

JOE
And who are you?

ALEX
(goes for a handshake)
Alex Nakamura. Nine-time Grand Prix
champion. I'm his coach.

JOE
(ignores handshake)
And I'm Joe Dante. Ninety-nine-time
champion in a real Grand Prix. I'm
his father.

JD
Dad--

JOE
You're coming home! Now!

JD plants his feet, he's not budging.

JD
No. This is my chance to prove
myself as well for once.

JOE
Prove yourself? With what? Toys?!

JD
I've not trained this much to be
playing with toys!

Joe realizes his son has changed. Fitter, sharper, even his
gaze is more focused.

JOE
You're not a kid anymore, so I
can't drag you out. But you lied to
me and your mother. If you're not
coming home now, don't bother
coming home at all.

That stung. JD locks eyes with his dad. It's a no.

JOE (CONT'D)
Fine. When I was your age I was
already out of a home. Be my guest.

Joe leaves unceremoniously. Omar peeks around the corner,
sees Joe storm out.

OMAR
He didn't bring my sister with him,
right?

Omar sees how defeated JD looks. Alex sees it too.

ALEX
You should... We should prepare for
the rally. Best not to waste any
time. It's gonna be a tough race.

JD gives a lukeworm nod.

EXT. AUTONOMOUS FARM - DAY

A scorching sun burns down on us. Endless cornfields. Drones
fly by dusting them. Self-driving tractors graze the fields.

On the other end, cattle are herded by navigation drones.
Applause echoes from the distance. A long row of bleachers.

EXT. AUTONOMOUS FARM - RACETRACK - DAY

--PADDOCKS: 23 pilots and their crews crowd around their
seats. Everyone's prepping.

JD stands with his team. He spots Lucy -- still, composed.
The others stretch or fidget. She's rock-solid.

ALEX
This is an endurance rally. Heat,
dust, moisture. Your drone feels
it, so do you. Thirty laps across a
long track. Make the podium, or we
have to try again.

JD nods. Wind whips. Omar and JD exchange a worried look. JD
puts on his goggles. Omar gives a thumbs-up.

Hayabusa-San lifts. Dust blasts as all drones rise. The harsh
terrain makes high-tech seem fragile.

--RACETRACK: Drones align. Hayabusa in 2nd. Serpent-One on
pole position. Traffic lights begin the countdown.

RED. RED. RED. RED. RED... ALL GREEN!

The drones launch forward. Serpent-One leads through a cornfield, diving into a cornstalk-cleared maze. Single-file. Too tight to overtake, the foliage could eat up a drone.

--PADDOCKS: JD's already sweating and struggling.

JD
I smell... dung.

ALEX
It's your mind and Vergil forming
phantom smells. Ignore it.

JD
Easier said than done.

INTERCUT WITH PADDOCKS AND RACETRACK

Hayabusa takes tight turns in the maze. Banks dangerously close to the foliage, cutting off a few leaves.

ALEX
Careful.

JD adjusts. Hayabusa steadies and exits the labyrinth into a dust bowl. Wide swarms of dust hit the FPV camera. Alex and Omar watch the live feed with worry.

IRENE (O.S.)
You did WHAT?

INT. DANTE ESTATE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Irene drops a Pelican case -- she's still holding a package. Joe fumbles with his phone, it refuses to turn on.

IRENE
You kicked him out of the house?!

JOE
He'll come back. Can you help me
with this? It's stuck.

IRENE
Joe, listen to me. If he's anything
like you, he ain't coming back.

JOE
Of course, he is. Kids these days--

IRENE
--the faster things change, the
more they stay the same!

A beat. Joe looks at his wife. Unsure what to say.

JOE
 (re: phone)
 It's stuck. What do I do?

IRENE
 Bring back our son. Or more will
 break than your phone. Here! This
 came in for you.

Irene shoves the package into Joe's arms.

DOOR SLAMS SHUT. Irene's gone. Joe opens the package -- finds
 JD's gray drone controller. A post-it reads: *Try it*

He opens a Pelican case. It's the same gear the Freeman had.
 Inside: the gray consumer drone. Joe's phone powers on.

Volume rises automatically. A Freeman avatar points at a
 loading bar and the official MLD livestream begins. For the
 first time, Joe sees the real sport of drone racing.

ON JOE'S PHONE: The paddocks, it zooms in on JD and his crew.

EXT. AUTONOMOUS FARM - RACETRACK - PADDOCKS - DAY

Alex looks up at the digital leaderboard: *Lap 23*

He turns to JD drenched in sweat. Alex focuses on JD's hands.
 Sweaty as well. Not good.

INTERCUT WITH PADDOCKS AND RACETRACK

Back in the labyrinth. Number 3 gets cocky, tries to overtake
 Hayabusa with a risky move. JD holds his ground, but Hayabusa
 gets tangled in foliage. The engines burn hot, scorching the
 leaves -- A COOLANT HOSE BURSTS.

JD'S POV: The liquid foams up the view, engulfing it like
 some dark specter.

JD starts to hyperventilate. He's losing it. Omar sees the
 Synchronicity level go down: 80%... 76%... 68%...

ALEX
 Slow and deep breaths. It's just
 motion sickness. You're with us.

JD
 No, it's not.

ALEX
 What's not?

JD
 (tearing up)
 It's not just motion sickness.

The Hayabusa banks hard into cornstalks, burning up foliage until the jets stop rotating. It crashes across the cornfield. Everyone overtakes JD. Lucy doesn't even react.

It's over. Rescue and salvage teams head for the burning Hayabusa. Drones swirl around and spray fire extinguishers. JD falls to his knees, crying. Throws the goggles away.

ALEX

We can try again. This is not the
end of the world.

But he keeps crying. JD dabs his eyes and runs away.

OMAR

Is that because of Vergil? I read
it can mess with your mind.

ALEX

I have no idea what that is.

INT. COUNTRY ROADS - VAN - DUSK (MOVING)

Omar drives the van. Alex rides shotgun. JD is in the back --
stares at his mangled Hayabusa. The silence is painful.

EXT/INT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - NIGHT

The van stops in front of the shop. Lights still on.

OMAR

Nobody should be here, right?

--WORK SPACE: Alex and Omar enter. The Mechanic rushes over.

MECHANIC

They refuse to leave, boss.

ALEX

Who?

JD drags himself inside, shoulders down. Tired. Surrendered.
The Mechanic looks at JD.

MECHANIC

His people!

Alex turns to JD. This is JD's fight.

INT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

JD walks in, he spots Joe and Duke (cigar in mouth) waiting
for him. Duke smiles.

JD
Duke? What are you doing here?

A puff of smoke hits JD. He waves it off with his hand.

DUKE
We saw your drone race. I'm here to
help fix your drone. She'll get all
the love she needs.

JD
She?

DUKE
This kid got a lot to learn. I'll
leave you two to it.

Duke leaves. Joe looks for words. A long painful beat.

JD
Look--

JOE
--I tried your stupid drone.

JD's face says it all: What?!

JD
What drone?

JOE
The gray one. I guess you sent it.

JD
I didn't...

JD realizes it must have been the Freeman.

JD (CONT'D)
How did it go?

Joe tilts his head: it didn't go all to well.

EXT. DANTE ESTATE - GARDEN - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Joe with FPV goggles, controller in hand. He stumbles and fumbles. Overtaken by nausea like a drunkard. WHOOOSH. The small drone comes in like a missile, flies in his face.

INT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - CONTINUOUS (BACK TO PRESENT)

JOE
I thought it was just a toy. I
mean, that one looks like a toy.

JD
That one is. The Hayabusa is a
different beast.

JOE
Hayabusa... Is there one called
Samurai?

JD
What do you want?

No point in delaying it. Joe swallows. This ain't easy.

JOE
To say I'm sorry. I'm here to help.

JD
I don't want your help! You can't
just show up and all is forgotten.
You only care when it's too late.

JOE
I always cared! You think I'm
pushing you for fun?! I don't want
you to end up like me. I just don't
know how to teach you.

JD
Oh, you taught me plenty. You know
what I learned today?
(re: Vergil)
This chip helps me remember. It's
unwinding the past. It's scary when
I think about it. You know what my
only childhood memory of you is?

Joe regrets what's coming.

JD (CONT'D)
You being a... ghoul!

INT. F1 RACETRACK - VIP BOOTH - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A younger Irene holds a late PRESCHOOLER JD in her lap. TWO
KIDS (Ricky and Silvia) play around.

SUPER: *13 years ago.*

ON TV: Joe's POV. It's THE RACE, Joe's 100th Grand Prix.

JD (O.S.)
It's the only thing I remember.

Joe loses control. A massive crash and pileup. Irene rises
with JD in her arms. Ricky and Silvia stop playing. They
watch as flames consume the view.

ON TV: Joe struggles with his seatbelt. He's stuck. Foam extinguishers flood the frame -- just like JD's POV during the rally. The birth of the specter. It all clicks now.

INT. DANTE ESTATE - LIVING ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Preschooler JD peeks through the door. He spots Joe (a few weeks after ICU), watching his failed race. Joe's gauze-wrapped head looks ghastly and ghoulish.

JD (O.S.)
And we all had to pretend it never
happened. Which only made it the
centerpiece of everything.

ON TV: Joe's F1 spins out of control.

He jolts up, hurls his whiskey glass at the screen, startling JD. Joe whips around with bloodshot, raging eyes.

--HALLWAY: Preschooler JD stumbles as he runs away.

JOE (O.S.)
OUT!

Picks himself up quickly, runs as if his life depends on it.

INT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - CONTINUOUS (BACK TO PRESENT)

JD
And then you expect us to simply
pick up where you left off.

Joe looks at his son, seeing an equal for the first time.

JOE
Almost had it. The one hundred. It
should've been a Dante!

JD
There is Ricky. He'll take it home.

JOE
Ricky will get bored or get busted
for drugs. And Silvi prefers
NASCAR. It should've been you.

JD looks away. He looks down at the ground floor.

JD
Too late now.

JOE
Why?

JD

Omar and I are in a bit of trouble.

JD and Joe notice the Freeman and his grips enter. A van blocks the garage entrance and the grips are heavily armed.

JD (CONT'D)

Actually, trouble is already here. Remember the drone I crashed in the factory? It belonged to the most notorious cyber criminal in the world.

INT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - CONTINUOUS

The grips are strapped with ARs and Kalashnikovs. Some old-school, some modern high-tech rifles.

THE FREEMAN

Where's my champion?

Everyone gathers before The Freeman and his entourage. JD and Joe move in. The Freeman starts applauding.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)

There he is. What an impressive display of failure.

JOE

I'll pay for your drone.

THE FREEMAN

Ah, the father. It's a pleasure to meet you, sir. One little problem. I didn't invest in just a drone. I invested in a champion. We had a handshake deal.

The Freeman grabs a Kalashnikov from one of the grips.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)

(re: Kalashnikov)

You see this? It was such a marvelous product of engineering they went out of business. Nobody bought a second one. Under the right conditions and incentives, human ingenuity knows no bounds.

(aims Kalashnikov at JD)

And I think you're just missing the right incentives.

Joe steps in front of JD.

JOE

Nobody needs to get hurt here.

The Freeman throws the Kalashnikov back at the grip.

THE FREEMAN
Nobody's getting hurt as long as
the kid gets his butt into the
Crucible.

JOE
What's the Crucible?

ALEX
Not a chance! That's too dangerous
for an underdeveloped brain.

JOE
What in God's name is the Crucible?

ALEX
The ghost towns of Ikeshima Island.

DUKE
The nuclear plant?

ALEX
What's left of it. Anyone can join.
Win it and you get a ticket to the
9 Circles. But it's more battle
royal than a rally.

DUKE
And what's so dangerous about it?
You're not in the radiation zone.

THE FREEMAN
The neural chips verge on the
quantum level. Even with remote
control, there is elevated
radiation. It can mess a little
with the neural lace.

ALEX
Mess a little is an understatement.
Adults have gone mad piloting a
drone through the Crucible. Only
lunatics and convicts go there.

THE FREEMAN
Then prepare accordingly.

ALEX
Our drone is totaled. I doubt I can
source all spare parts in just two
weeks.

The Freeman snaps his fingers and two grips unload a busted
MLD drone from the van. It's dropped unceremoniously: it's
the Hayabusa-Roku from the factory race that JD crashed.

THE FREEMAN

You remember this one? I'm sure
you'll find what you need in
there... Capisce?

JOE

We'll get the title. Us Dantes
never go back on our word. Even if
it's a handshake deal made by our
idiot members.

JD cringes. The Freeman double finger guns at Joe.

THE FREEMAN

That's what I like to hear. You got
two weeks!

He beckons his grips. They hop into the van and leave as
quickly as they came in. A beat.

ALEX

I can't let you do this!

Alex wheels away but JD stops him.

JD

Wait! I can do it.

ALEX

You physically can't! It overwhelms
adults. What do you think it'll do
to you?

JOE

He can do it!

Joe joins his son.

JOE (CONT'D)

He must do it. We're all here to
assist.

Duke takes a big pull from his cigarette, stands next to
Omar. Alex sees the determination in everyone.

ALEX

I can't let another person--

JD kneels before Alex.

JD

I would have never come this far
without you. We need you. I need
you!

A beat. Bullseye. Alex realizes he changed the kid.

INT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - DAY

Everyone gathered around a projector. Alex beams photos of the Crucible from his tablet.

ON SCREEN: A collage of the massive island. Burned out and crashed reactor cores. Ghost towns.

ALEX

Two problem. First radiation. The shortest way to the finish is also the most radio-active. Connection loss, sensory overload. You name it. This leads us to problem number two. Everyone else.

The collage changes, showing a collection of mugshots. Dangerously augmented men and women. Cybernetic monsters.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Fifty pilots. It's a free-for-all battle royal.

ON SCREEN: Marked radiation zones and optimal routes.

ALEX (CONT'D)

We need to shield the drone from radiation and keep JD safe.

DUKE

I know what can help. Gut the Hayabusa and replace key circuits with analogs.

OMAR

That makes sense. They're much sturdier and technically they have infinite precision.

JD

I don't get it.

DUKE

Digital measurements are only as precise as the number of ones and zeroes you process. With analog? You can measure any point on the spectrum. It'll give you much more precise and robust controls and I think it's gonna feel like you're actually there.

ALEX

They also cost more. And it's very time-consuming to integrate them with digital systems.

DUKE
 (re: Omar)
 With his help? Not a problem.

Omar smiles. Proud of himself. Alex sighs, not convinced.

ALEX
 We also have to keep close watch on
 the Synchronicity level. There are
 more pitfalls with analog.
 (looking at JD)
 It's going to mess with you,
 challenge you in ways we can't
 predict or prepare for.

Everyone looks at JD. The pressure is mounting.

JOE
 He can do it!

A beat. JD nods confidently.

THE MOTHER OF ALL 80S MONTAGES - VARIOUS LOCATIONS

A. Dawn. JD jogs in the park.

B. Echo Nine Robotics -- JD dribbles four tennis balls.
 Alternating with both Joe and Alex throwing in a ball.

C. JD in the torture chair. This time the numbers move like
 Pong, changing faster than usual. He's zapped in the end.

D. Park. Merry-go-round madness. JD flies off-screen again.

E. Echo Nine Robotics. Omar and Duke have gutted the Hayabusa-
 San. The parts are all laid out on the table.

F. Ricky, Silvia, Vanessa, and Irene bring in food for
 everyone at Echo Nine Robotics. The garbage piles up.

G. JD juggles five tennis balls but loses them when a sixth
 is thrown in by Alex.

H. Park -- JD runs fast with Omar on a bike alongside him.

I. Park -- JD and Alex do more elaborate Tai Chi exercises.

J. Merry-go-round. JD flies off again. Again. And again.

K. Echo Nine Robotics. JD dribbles four tennis balls. Joe and
 Alex throw in fastballs -- JD catches them.

L. Back in the torture chair. Numbers Pong is going crazy. JD
 hits every single note.

M. The Hayabusa-San is half-gutted and still without its
 shell as Omar and Duke install the new analog parts.

N. JD juggles six tennis balls skillfully.

O. A big feast for a big family at Echo Nine Robotics. Everyone's gathered.

P. Park. More Tai Chi. This time JD is in sync with Alex.

Q. JD outruns Omar on the bike. He can barely keep up.

R. Echo Nine -- JD dribbles and swivels in circles as Joe, Ricky, and Silvia throw in balls. He catches them all and throws them back. Alex watches, impressed.

S. Echo Nine Robotics. Omar and Duke put the last pieces back together. Hayabusa-San has morphed. It looks tighter and sharper. Stripped of useless weight.

T. Merry-go-round tornado at 7000 RPM. JD holds on. The wheel starts glowing. Omar stops. JD stumbles off like a drunk, gives his thumbs-up as Omar, Joe, Ricky, and Silvia lift him up. Kids cheer. Parents clap cautiously, still impressed by the Jackass stunt.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - DAY

Everyone has gathered looking at the hybrid Hayabusa-San. It's an analog Frankenstein's monster.

ALEX

That's not a Hayabusa anymore.

JOE

I know what it is. Do we have time for a paint job?

ALEX

What's the theme?

JOE

Family colors. Dante's Inferno.

DUKE

We can do it. If the kid wants it?

Everyone looks at JD.

JD

Absolutely.

INT. DANTE ESTATE - JD'S ROOM - DAY

JD packs up a few things. He puts his anti-nausea bracelets into his luggage. Joe comes in knocking.

JOE
I got you something.

Joe hands him a pair of sealed fingerless gloves.

JOE (CONT'D)
Rubber grips. I read they absorb
sweat and keep your hands cool.
Used by a lot of the pro pilots.

JD takes them happily with a big smile.

JD
This means a lot! I see you did
your research...

JOE
Yeah, I wanted to be more useful.
By the way I was wondering where
does the race actually start? The
whole coast there is radiated.

JD
Oh, it's off a carrier.

JOE
Carrier?

EXT. JAPANESE COAST - PORT - DAY

JD and his entourage watch as the USS Ronald Reagan moves
into view. Joe, Duke, Ricky, and Silvia can't believe it.

ALEX
I guess our ride is here.

Alex points at a smaller ship in tandem with the Reagan.

JOE
How much money is there in drone
racing?

ALEX, JD, AND OMAR
A lot!

DUKE
Lots of gambling because of the
random nature of the sport.

JOE
Oh, you're now an expert too?

Duke blows smoke into Joe's face and smiles. They head for
the ship. Ricky and Silvia move stacked Pelican cases.

EXT. OCEAN - USS RONALD REAGAN - DAY

MLD techs position drones at the edge of the flight deck as 50 pilots prep in a makeshift paddock. The cybernetic monsters look even more ridiculous than in the collage.

JD looks intimidated, spots a BEEFCAKE and his crew who resemble prison inmates. The Beefcake nods to a crewmember, who slaps him repeatedly like he's prepping for *Over the Top*.

After a flurry of slaps, the Beefcake lets out a war cry. JD and his crew watch with a mix of astonishment and confusion.

ALEX

Ignore them. Everyone deals with the Crucible differently. Focus on the goal! Nothing outside of it is real. We don't know what'll happen to your mind. So lock in! Capisce?

JD nods with a smile. Omar hands him his FPV goggles.

OMAR

I made upgrades. Drone's got a built-in Geiger counter. Radiation will show as green splotches.

JD

Green? Really?

OMAR

You played enough video games.

JD spots Lucy. She studies the competition. Victor stands close to her, chatting it up with MLD and Navy personnel.

JOE

Who's that guy?

JD

That's Victor Samu! He owns Samu Industries and the 9 Circles.

Joe hears the name for the first time.

OMAR

The first trillionaire. His memristor tech is everywhere and he built Aug City with ocean plastic.

Joe didn't understand a word.

OMAR (CONT'D)

He makes fast computers go faster.

JOE

Oh. Nice...

(to JD re: Lucy)

You should talk to the girl after
you win this. She looks cute.

JD

Dad, she's the current 9 Circles
champion. We already talked... it
wasn't pleasant.

JOE

She's the one you've been trying to
overtake all this time?

JD nods.

JOE (CONT'D)

After you win this. Talk to her
like you're equals.

JD

I was not disrespectful--

JOE

No, no, I mean, talk to her like
someone who has caught up. Not
someone playing catch up. After
this she can't ignore you, which
means you need to understanding
her. Who she is. How and why she
races. You need to know that about
all your rivals. We're on the hunt.

Joe pats his son on the shoulder. JD looks confident.

--VIEWING DECK: repurposed as a media booth. The CRUCIBLE
ANNOUNCER watches multiple screens covering the race.

CRUCIBLE ANNOUNCER

Welcome to The Crucible where the
ruthless battle for a shot at the 9
Circles. Set against the
radioactive ruins of Ikeshima,
today's contenders include newcomer
Jake Dante. A young and scrupulous
ex-con who allegedly tried to kill
a nun. Unbelievable. But it's all
in support of the cleanup effort!

--PADDOCKS: Everyone looks at JD. He rolls his eyes.

JD

They don't fact-check here?!

A CRUCIBLE ORGANIZER walks the deck with a megaphone.

CRUCIBLE ORGANIZER
PILOTS! TAKE YOUR SEATS!

All 50 pilots take their seats. Put on goggles. JD sits down and realizes there are racing seatbelts now in his seat.

JD
Seatbelts?

ALEX
People have freaked out before,
some ran off the deck. Better safe
than sorry.

JD straps in. Puts on the goggles.

INT. USS RONALD REAGAN - VIP BOOTH - SAME

Victor and Lucy take seats in designer armchairs. An ASSISTANT always on standby.

VICTOR
What are the odds?

ASSISTANT
Most bids are on the convicts.

VICTOR
What about that Dante kid?

ASSISTANT
Only one anonymous bidder.

VICTOR
(to himself)
Mhmm. What are you up to Freeman?

EXT. OCEAN - USS RONALD REAGAN - DAY

CRUCIBLE ORGANIZER
START YOUR ENGINES!

Fifty drones roar to life. The deck erupts as a swarm of angry wasps take flight. Drones snap into position. The Crucible Organizer raises a starting pistol.

Pilots shift, grind their molars. JD grips the controls, his gloves squeak.

Omar checks telemetry data: *85.7% Synchronicity*

The tension is unbearable. BANG! The swarm dashes forward.

EXT. OCEAN - IKESHIMA COAST - CONTINUOUS

Like *Ride of the Valkyries*, the drones descend over the gleaming blue ocean. JD's Inferno holds steady in the middle, playing it safe.

Water and vapor surge around them as they speed toward--

EXT. IKESHIMA COAST - THE CRUCIBLE - CONTINUOUS

A narrow street. Drones move into double file. Inferno stays mid-pack as others slam into nearby buildings. Inferno banks, dodging debris and flying metal.

The swarm spreads into the ghost town. Each drone taking its own route, avoiding radiation and wreckage.

But this isn't just a rally. Three drones close in, trying to pin Inferno to a wall. JD dives through a window -- one drone crashes into the frame, the other two follow him inside.

EXT. USS RONALD REAGAN - SAME

Joe watches multiple pilots collapse from their chairs. Paramedics got their hands full. JD jerks the controls.

JD'S POV: Inferno banks and flips through apartments.

Everyone else watches the POV livestream closely.

INTERCUT WITH THE CRUCIBLE AND USS RONALD REAGAN

Inferno leaves the apartment complex through a collapsed wall. The two drones come in closer -- Inferno dives in between a monorail. The two drones crash against the rails.

ALEX
How do you feel?

JD
Hot.

Omar shows the Synchronicity level to Alex: still 85.7%. A worried Alex looks at JD who seems to have heard something.

JD (CONT'D)
What? What did you say?

ALEX
I didn't say anything.

JD
Oh. Thought I heard something.

Two seats away from JD, a SCARED PILOT starts to freak out.

SCARED PILOT'S POV: Spiders emerge from a darkness all around him, they crawl over his body.

The Scared Pilot runs away. Medics chase after him. Alex looks at Omar prompting him to show JD's vitals: elevated heart rate and brain activity.

Inferno leaves the monorail and flies through narrow streets.

DEMONIC JOE (O.S.)
You're a failure.

JD twitches. So does Inferno. Things seem to slow down.

DEMONIC JOE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
You're a failure and a disgrace.
Everyone knows.

JD jerks. So does Inferno. He's losing control. Alex sees the Synchronicity go down again: 82%... 79%...

ALEX
What's wrong?

JD'S POV: Flashes of a burned-up and ghoulish Joe. The same darkness spreads around JD like it did for the Scared Pilot.

DEMONIC JOE (O.S.)
I'm better off without you!

Inferno starts swaying dangerously. Narrowly avoiding a hit.

ALEX
Omar. What's wrong with the drone?

OMAR
Nothing. He's still in sync.

DEMONIC JOE kneels next to JD's left, inches away from his face like some burned up spawn of hell wrapped in gauze.

DEMONIC JOE
You should just kill yours--

Joe rests a hand on JD's shoulder. The demon is gone. JD snaps out of it but it's too late. A BIGGER DRONE slams past Inferno, bumping it aside. Inferno scrapes a wall and skids outs. The FPV feed goes blank.

The Beefcake's crew laugh and cheer. It was their drone.

ALEX
Reboot! Now!

Omar smacks the keyboard as fast as he can. Joe moves in closer to JD.

JOE

I know what you're feeling. Happens to me every time in the north loop at Nürburgring. A deadly corner. The Germans call it Mutkurve. You know what that means?

JD

What?

JOE

It means courage curve. But I like to call it the gut corner. You either take it with guts or you lose your guts. Literally.

A beat. JD thinks for a moment.

ALEX

We're back online!

JD

What's the shortest route!

ALEX

Nobody uses the shortest--

JD

(lifts googles)

What's. The. Shortest. Route?

Alex locks eyes with JD. A beat later he checks his tablet.

ALEX

Sending now.

JD'S POV: A pathway in heavy green areas appears on a map. It leads through a highrise with a massive drop into sewage.

ALEX (CONT'D)

You need to get to the thirteenth floor and jump one hundred and seventeen feet. You must fall into a manhole. No signal, no feed, no cameras. It's a blind jump.

JD

Omar?

Omar stares at the tablet. Synchronicity is at 92.3%, dangerous (possible brain damage) territory.

JD (CONT'D)

OMAR!

OMAR

Done!

JD pulls down his goggles, jerks the controls and Inferno zips to life. Inferno flies towards the highrise, ignoring the race. Omar hides the tablet's screen from Alex, looking worried. Unsure if this was the right call.

ALEX
JD, listen. No one has done this.

JD
No Dante.

It's pointless. The Dante bullhead is too thick. Inferno gains speed and flies into--

INT. THE CRUCIBLE - HIGHRISE - CONTINUOUS

--the massive lobby. Through elevator doors -- with an insane half inside loop it shoots upwards the elevator shaft.

INTERCUT WITH USS RONALD REAGAN AND HIGHRISE

Alex and Omar watch the stream.

ALEX
That... That one... Only AIs can...

Joe watches his son, then the livestream.

Inferno approaches the 13th floor and does another half inside loop to leave the shaft. It's not slowing down.

Alex watches the LIVESTREAM: the windows come in closer.

Inferno bursts through a window. JD flips off engine switches on his chair. Inferno's engines power down.

JD'S POV: The view looks like the moments before the first descend on a rollercoaster -- feed cuts out.

A slipstream glides across Inferno's shell. JD feels it, his hackles raise. He gently moves the controls, adjusting to the slipstream. Inferno free falls, approaching the ground fast.

JD's calm. Alex breaks a sweat in anticipation. Joe smiles. Inferno falls through the manhole with surgical precision.

JD'S POV: The FPV feed fades in again.

JD had his fingers on the switches all this time. He flips them back on right in time for--

INT. THE CRUCIBLE - SEWAGE - CONTINUOUS

--Inferno's engines to roar back to life. Inches above ground. But it's done. Inferno is safe and resumes the race.

EXT. USS RONALD REAGAN - SAME

Everyone sees the insane jump from the sewage cameras. Omar high-fives everyone but Alex doesn't reciprocate.

ALEX
It ain't over yet.

JD locks in.

JD
It is!

INT. THE CRUCIBLE - SEWAGE - CONTINUOUS

Inferno clears the sewage at full speed. Gates, bars, crates, pipes, all dodged with ease.

EXT. THE CRUCIBLE - FINISH - SAME

12 drones remain, lead by the Beefcake. They approach the finish line. The ground below leads to a crater and sewage.

INTERCUT WITH FINISH AND USS RONALD REAGAN

Beefcake grins. Sure of his win -- Inferno spawns from the crater below, right in front of everyone. Some drones give chase but they can't overtake Inferno. Too nimble. Too fast.

Too precise. JD keeps his corners tight, gets checkered at full speed. A beat later and everyone else follows. Cheers erupt around JD.

Beefcake screams, rips out his controls, and smashes them and his goggles to the ground in full Hulk-rage. JD relaxes.

JOE
I know that feeling all too well.

Both laugh.

INT. USS RONALD REAGAN - VIP BOOTH - SAME

Victor and Lucy watch as JD gets checkered on repeat. Victor looks over at a NAVY CAPTAIN who seems genuinely impressed, and even awestruck.

NAVY CAPTAIN
Holy mother of God. That kid could take down our AI drones.

The Navy Captain realizes everyone in the room just heard that, awaiting an additional comment from the captain.

NAVY CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
(nervously)
Well, almost.

Victor thinks, something feels off about everything so far.

VICTOR
Will this boy be a problem?

Lucy is gone. Victor turns to his assistant.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Let's increase security for the 9
Circles. I want more eyes on every
pilot and their drones.

The Assistant nods but Victor looks troubled.

EXT. USS RONALD REAGAN - SHORT TIME LATER

Inferno VTOLs down before JD. He leaves the chair, hugs his dad. MLD officials wait patiently with garland and trophy.

JD walks with the MLD entourage toward a celebration stage. Alex takes a deep breath, and looks up to Joe.

ALEX
How did you know?

JOE
Know what?

ALEX
The small touch on the shoulder.

JOE
That's what my dad used to do.

Alex chuckles at the simple but effective method.

JOE (CONT'D)
By the way, I wanted to thank you
for sending that drone. The one I
tried out.

Alex looks lost.

ALEX
I never sent any drone. I don't
even know where you people live.

Joe looks equally confused now.

--CELEBRATION AREA: JD is celebrated, there is no second or third place as only the winning pilot gets a ticket to the 9 Circles. Lucy has joined and watches the crowd.

As it gets quieter JD spots Lucy. He walks up to her all proudly, like an equal.

JD
Well, well, well. I guess this
spoiled brat just caught up.

LUCY
Yeah, I've seen. Daddy issues can
be quite the motivator but they'll
get you only so far.

JD chuckles.

JD
You really think that's all there
is to me?

LUCY
(walks away)
Yes.

This annoys and enrages JD. He steps up and calls her out.

JD
I race for the same reasons you do!

That hit home. Lucy stops, walks up to JD. They face off.

LUCY
You don't know why you race. You
don't even know who you are or
where you come from. Because if you
did, you'd know there is only one
thing worth racing for.

Lucy walks away, JD takes another step.

JD
What is it you're racing for?

Lucy stops again, locks eyes with JD.

LUCY
Freedom.

JD is surprised by the answer. He's left standing there,
understanding less than he did before.

INT. ECHO NINE ROBOTICS - DAY

Alex does routine checks on the Inferno as JD storms in. He's
carrying a tablet, tosses it to Alex across the work desk.

ALEX
What's this?

JD

You asked me if I read biographies.
I do now.

Alex checks the tablet: reports about Victor's indentured servitude program to fast track Aug City. Thousands died.

The last headline shows a photo of Lucy reading: *The Last Serf of Aug City*

JD (CONT'D)

Did you know? That she's a slave.

ALEX

She's not a slave. She's an indentured servant.

JD

That makes it better?

ALEX

It does... see, I didn't tell you because I knew you'd overreact.

JD

How am I supposed not to? How is this even allowed? Why is no one talking about this?

ALEX

They did. About ten years ago. Victor had an accident. He survived but the man was never the same. Liquidated hundreds of billions to build a city in international waters. No one knows why, but he thought it was worth everything. The backlash almost killed Samu Industries.

Alex leans back in his chair.

ALEX (CONT'D)

The ocean cleanup program sparked endless moral debate. A brilliant distraction. He guaranteed a lot for every worker that would complete the terms of the contract. Once Aug City was finished they got their freedoms back. Many took the deal. Like Lucy's parents. But conditions were horrible. Her father died in a crane collapse and her mother died shortly after from lead poisoning.

JD
 (getting angry)
 You should've told me. How am I
 supposed to race against her when
 I'm the one standing between her
 and freedom. She was a child slave.

ALEX
 Oh, I see. So now you care about
 child slavery?

JD
 You don't?

ALEX
 Okay, let me ask you this.
 (re: Inferno)
 What about the child slaves who
 mined the lithium for that drone?
 Or the child slaves who made the
 clothes you're wearing?

JD
 These ain't cheap clothes.

Alex laughs at the naiveté.

ALEX
 I'm going to be real honest with
 you and you're not gonna like it.
 Your father failed you when it
 mattered the most.

JD's lost for words.

ALEX (CONT'D)
 He was too busy licking his wounds
 when you needed to learn about
 life. You grew up sheltered. You
 missed the most important lesson.

JD
 Like what? That life isn't fair?
 You think I don't know that?

ALEX
 Oh no, that one kindergartners
 figure out. I'm talking about how
 there are no solutions. Only trade-
offs. You know what happened when
 they outlawed child labor? I found
 out. When I was a champion I
 lobbied against it. Lobbied for
 ways to improve the sport. It's
 easy to get celebrities and the
 media on your side with a righteous
 cause. But after the ban, a lot of
 kids starved or got trafficked.

(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)

There was nothing else for them.
And when I tried to raise the alarm
again, no one cared. Because who
wants to report on the fact that
you made it worse... and trade-offs
lack the glamour to attract
celebrities.

Alex comes closer to JD.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Everything improves in small
increments that compound over time.
Including you. The whole world,
actually. That's what everyone
learns the hard way. It's slow. Not
revolutionary, doesn't animate the
youth... but it's the truth. So, I
don't recommend throwing everything
away for an indentured servant
living in a penthouse in the
world's richest city.

JD

If she loses, she's left with
nothing. Victor owns everything.
Even her flight data.

ALEX

And you think no one's gonna sign
her? She's the most sought after
racer in the league's history!
Jake! No solutions. I traded my
legs for being stupid and reckless.
Lucy's parents traded their lives
for her. And your trade-off is you
deciding if you can live with that
or deal with the Freeman. We all
have to sacrifice something.

Alex leaves. JD stands there alone, unsure what to do.

INT. SAMU INDUSTRIES HQ - LUCY'S FACILITY - NIGHT

A holographic display of JD in his pilot chair is analyzed
and dissected by Lucy. She watches carefully as every
twitching muscle is identified and exerted force measured.

VICTOR

And?

LUCY

Nothing. No additional augs besides
the Vergil. No hacks or jacks. No
AI support.

The hologram shows the insane half inversed loop.

VICTOR
How did the Freeman find this kid?
That Dante family. I looked them
up. They've been racing for over a
hundred and thirty years. And his
father is one of the few to not die
in a race. They live for this...

LUCY
Competition.

Both look at the inversed loop on repeat.

VICTOR
I've increased security. Stay away
from the Freeman.

LUCY
Understood.

Victor looks worried, he leaves. Lucy resumes analyzing JD's
race performance at the Crucible.

INT. DANTE ESTATE - HALL OF FAME - NIGHT

Joe stands in front of the balaclava again. He sees JD on his
way to his room, slouched and defeated again.

JOE
Jake, come here. You alright?

JD
Yeah, just tired.

Joe opens the showcase, takes the old balaclava.

JOE
I know we'll head out for Aug City
soon. So, I thought to give you my
old balaclava. It saved my life.

JD
We don't really use those.

JOE
I know. I know. But it still
belongs to you now. Try it!

JD
(puts it on)
It does smell terribly.

JOE
A few races will do that.

JD take off the balaclava, looks at it with tearful eyes.

JD
Thanks, dad.

JOE
It was nothing. By the way. How do we get to that island? Alex said someone is picking us up.

JD
Yes. About that.

EXT. PRIVATE AIRPORT TARMAC - DAY

Joe stares at a high-tech autonomous Aug City VTOL. An array of solar panels and sensory modules replaced all windows. Airport crew loads the VTOL with luggage and MLD gear.

JOE
No. No. No. I'm not getting into that death trap. A self-driving car is bad enough but this?! God, no!

All Dantes and Johnsons are here.

JD
It's our only way to Aug City.

JOE
(a beat)
Any booze in there?

JD
I'm seventeen.

JOE
Didn't stop me.

Irene pats her son on the back.

IRENE
I'm so proud of you!

JD
It's nothing, mom.

IRENE
Oh, he's humblebragging like his father now.
(checks out neural link)
But I still can't get used to that thing on your neck. Does it hurt?

JD
Not anymore. It's okay.

OMAR
Looks like it's time to board.

The group heads for the VTOL. Alex arrives next to JD.

ALEX
I guess you made a choice?

JD
Not yet.

Alex looks for the right words.

ALEX
Whatever you decide, I'm proud of you and I'll help you deal with the Freeman. And in any case we get a luxury vacation out of it.

Both chuckle, though JD look like he forced himself.

ALEX (CONT'D)
But... I recommend you talk to your dad about this one. The man seems confident in any situation.

INT. OCEAN - VTOL - DAY (FLYING)

Joe pours himself a whiskey on the rocks and shakily moves the glass to his lips. Irene tries comforting him.

Some wall panels are screens showing the outside view. Omar and JD play around trying to get all the screens on -- the ground panels turn on.

JOE
Could you maybe not do that?

OMAR
This is awesome! You can get to Beijing with this in three hours!

JOE
I'll bury you in Beijing then.

Omar zips it.

EXT/INT. OCEAN - AUG CITY - VTOL - DAY (FLYING)

The VTOL approaches Aug City. The artificial parts of the island consists of hexagon shapes that are expanding outward from what's left of the original island.

Everyone watches through the screen windows. Even Joe is looking around. JD spots the massive 9 Circles stadium.

EXT. AUG CITY - RUNWAY - DAY

The VTOL touches down. First to exit is Joe, he's quite happy about it. Three Aug City employees approach, lead by an uptight, stiff looking bureaucrat named BAILEY.

BAILEY
Welcome to Aug City. My name is
Bailey. I'm with Ventralis. We got
the bid for the council last year.

Joe doesn't quite follow.

BAILEY (CONT'D)
We're the company responsible for
administrative tasks and
governance.

JOE
Wait, no government? Who pays for
this?

BAILEY
Samu Industries for the most part.
We don't levy taxes here.

JOE
Oh really? Well, count me in then.

BAILEY
Sure, our next lot will be
available in about thirteen years.

JOE
(to Duke)
And I thought Vito's had a long
waiting list.

ALEX
You guys go ahead but Omar, you
should come with me to the docks.
They'll have questions about
Inferno's custom parts.

Omar nods and they split up.

EXT. AUG CITY - ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT - DAY

This district feels like a theme park with countless arcade halls and restaurants. There are some human workers but robots do all the heavily lifting.

JD
I have to go back to my room. Study
the competition.

JOE

Don't forget to rest too!

JD nods. The Dantes and the Johnsons spread out. JD doesn't look like he's going to have any fun.

INT. AUG CITY - DOCKS - CARGO HANGAR - DAY

MLD containers arrive via monorail. Above, three shadowy figures parkour across the rafters, they drop into the storage bay. It's the Freeman and two grips.

They move like special ops, armed and in exo-suits. They also wear "stealth hijabs." The grips crack open a container: it's Inferno and JD's gear. Freeman pulls a plug from his nape and jacks himself into the drone.

GRIP #1

This is not worth the risk of being here.

THE FREEMAN

It's a simple bug for the neural comms. And a little backup in case he fails. This flight data will be crucial in finding a better candidate.

GRIP #2

You think he'll die?

THE FREEMAN

He might die. Her too. Odds are the same. I can't see how it will play out. This is insurance.

The upload finishes. Freeman unplugs himself, exits the container. He spots Alex and Omar with TWO MLD OFFICIALS. Freeman signals the grips to close the doors, and they vanish into the shadows -- just as the group arrives.

INT. AUG CITY - HOTEL - JD & OMAR'S ROOM - EVENING

JD is at a desk reading details about his rivals. Omar enters all giddy like a kid in a theme park.

OMAR

This city is incredible.

Omar spots JD, realizes he hasn't left the room.

OMAR (CONT'D)

You still haven't made a choice?

JD shakes his head.

OMAR (CONT'D)
I think you should talk to your
dad. I mean, the guy's ancient. I'm
sure he has some advice.

JD chuckles, he knows Omar is right.

INT. AUG CITY - HOTEL - SHORT TIME LATER

JD knocks on his parents' door. Joe opens up all happy.

JD
Can we talk?

Joe's smile fades, he realizes this is serious.

--RESTAURANT: Joe has listened to JD's summary of the
situation. Joe breathes out as he massages his neck.

JOE
I don't think I have had any rivals
under those circumstances ever.

JD
I know but what would you do? What
would you have done if this was in
an F1 championship?

Joe locks eyes with his son. A beat.

JOE
Son, you know what I would do. I
would have raced even if it was a
death match. But this ain't about
me. Not the race, the Freeman, Lucy
or this city. This is about you.
Can you live without your dream?
Can you do something else?

JD doesn't know. Joe gets a little teary-eyed.

JOE (CONT'D)
It took me thirteen years to
overcome mine. And I mellowed out
by the time it happened. What's it
gonna do to you? You're not even in
your prime. We're not the kind of
people who just give up.

JD
But it's not the same as racing for
your freedom.

JOE
I wouldn't say that.

JD perks up, he doesn't understand quite what Joe means.

JOE (CONT'D)
 You know it's been a while but on the centenary of the first Dante champion, I tried to learn who we were. Before motorsport. I expected knights. Songs about heroes.

JD leans in to listen closely.

JOE (CONT'D)
 Turns out, we were nothing. Just serfs for centuries. To useless to ride a horse, useful enough to die in war. Canon fodder before canons even existed. And if we didn't die for some suzerain, we toiled for one. Then some German sticks a combustion engine in a car and everything changes. The engine set us free. It was like God put us here too early. And when I look at this city, this drone league, the technology-- I don't understand any of it but I can see it's the same thing. And if you're worried I'll be mad? Mad you're the first Dante to walk away from a race? No! I learned to live without it, our family will be fine. My question is... will you? Can you live without this? Can you be free without this?

A beat. JD has no answer. Echoes of thunderous applause rise.

INT. 9 CIRCLES OF HELL STADIUM - DAY

The fans have taken their seats in the bleachers. People cheer as a jumbotron shows highlights of previous races.

--MEDIA BOOTH: A large booth with dozens of announcers. There are two English speakers. MLD ANNOUNCER and CHAD HAMILTON, late 30s, record holder for Grand Prix wins.

MLD ANNOUNCER
 Welcome to the 9 Circles! Joining us today is Chad Hamilton. With twelve wins, he remains undisputed.

CHAD HAMILTON
 Happy to be here John, but that might change today. Lucy with her Serpent-One is the current champion and if she takes it home tonight, she'll break my record.

INT. 9 CIRCLES OF HELL STADIUM - DRONE GARAGE - DAY

A holographic display of the 9 Circles. Alex gives instructions as JD, Omar, Joe, and Duke watch. The Inferno is on a self-driving cart.

The garage is huge. All other pilots and their crews are occupied with discussion and maintenance as well.

ALEX
Everything in the 9 Circles will
try to stop you. You're starting
dead last. I recommend playing it
safe until you reach Treachery.

ON HOLOGRAM: The bottom ring or rather well lights up.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Most pilots try to take out Serpent-
One. Let them. Once the competition
is thinned out, focus on Serpent-
One. You know her moves now.

JOE
What about those passages all over?

Alex taps his tablet.

ON HOLOGRAM: The shortcuts pop out and change colors.

ALEX
Shortcuts to paradise. No point in
even trying. So far only AI-
controlled drones have managed to
navigate through them. The speed
boosters will propel you past max
speed. It's possible. Just not for
a human. And for the love of God,
go into the pit stop. We'll patch
the drone up. No one reaches
Treachery without taking some hits.

JD
Capisco!

Alex nods with a smile. The garage lights up as warning lights flash and sirens call.

ALEX
That's it! JD you're with the drone
for the parade.

JD nods, fist bumps Duke and Omar. JD gives his dad a quick hug but Joe holds him tight. A beat.

The self-driving cart with Inferno starts to move. JD takes his gloves and follows it.

All drone carts line up, matching the positions on the starting line. JD is last, he looks past everyone to the pole position where gates begin to open.

INT. 9 CIRCLES OF HELL STADIUM - CONTINUOUS

23 pilots walk along their drones as they parade toward the starting line. As each drone is moved into place, the pilot's name, position and drone name are added to the jumbotron:

1st/Serpent-01 2nd/Wukong 3rd/Suleiman-I 4th/Babaroga
 5th/Blitzkrieg 6th/Tempest 7th/Greenwing 8th/Scimitar
 9th/Wyvernstrike 10th/Hornet 11th/Ryu 12th/Steelcrusher
 13th/Oni 14th/Flamecutter 15th/Samurai 16th/Drangunov
 18th/Hawkblood 19th/Snakefang 20th/Doomstriker 21st/Raiden
 22nd/Fireheart and 23rd/Inferno

MLD ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
 This season we have an incredible
 line up!

--MEDIA BOOTH: Both announcers look very hyped.

MLD ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
 There are strong newcomers like
 Jake Dante who trained under no
 other than Alex Nakamura.

CHAD HAMILTON
 Yes, first time Alex is back at the
 9 Circles since his accident.
 Judging by the incredible
 performance in the Crucible, he
 certainly whipped the Dante boy
 into shape.

--PIT STOP: Circular pits with countless screens and
 telemetric monitors. Omar runs diagnostics with Duke. Alex
 listens to Chad's words on a livestream. He turns it off.

ALEX
 We good?

Both Omar and Duke nod confidently.

--VIP BOTH: Joe enters. He spots the Dantes and Vanessa in
 the far corner. They can see the pilot row below.

Joe walks by Victor and his business associates. Joe and
 Victor lock eyes and they exchange a respectful nod.

Joe makes himself comfortable next to Irene. He spots JD from his vantage point.

INT. 9 CIRCLES OF HELL RACE TRACK - CONTINUOUS

--STARTING LINE: JD scans the competition. The spectacle weighs on him. Other pilots wave for the cameras.

Lucy waits in pole position. To JD's right are 23 pilot chairs. Above them, VIP booths.

Two ORGANIZERS appear. Amidst the tumult and applause, they use green glowsticks for signals. Organizer #1 raises his -- all pilots face the row, drop into sprint stance.

Organizer #2 lifts a starting pistol. The tension tightens.

--VIP BOOTH: Everyone holds their breath. Joe watches closely. His hackles raise. This is a race.

--PIT STOP: Alex, Omar and Duke watch closely on livestreams. Alex looks stressed.

--STARTING LINE: A LONG BEAT. GUNSHOT! The whole stadium erupts. All 23 pilots dash forward.

--PILOT ROW: Pilots sprint to their chairs. Some dive in. Others get comfortable first. FLIP, FLIP, FLIP -- switches on, goggles down. These FPV goggles come with headsets.

JD grips the joysticks, cracks his neck.

--STARTING LINE: Drones roar to life, hover, tilt like flexing muscles. Inferno stands out -- fierce. The drones bolt ahead and into--

--LIMBO: Filled with countless totaled drones. Some are dangling from the ceiling.

MLD ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
I must admit the first circle is
always the nastiest to look at.

CHAD HAMILTON (O.S.)
Forever stuck in Limbo!

Serpent-One leads, rest fans out. This ride is just a warm-up. Inferno banks 180 between two dangling drone corpses. The Serpent builds up distance. Flies with top speed into--

--LUST: The scenery changes drastically as large holographic men and women shift and contort erotically under neon-red lights like a holographic red-light district.

Serpent maneuvers with ease. Flies through a few holograms.

MLD ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Incredible instinct combined with
plenty of experience.

CHAD HAMILTON (O.S.)
Each pilot is faced with the same
problem. Play it safe and lose time
or risk flying through one of these
and--

Greenwing smashes into something solid as it tries to fly
through a hologram.

CHAD HAMILTON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
And risk a crash.

MLD ANNOUNCER
Correct. Some of these holograms
are masked animatronics.

The hologram flickers revealing a robotic body. A few
flickers later it blends back into form. The rest sways to
the sides dodging Greenwing debris.

Inferno plays it safe and stays away from the holograms. It
flies between a holo-woman's thighs.

--MEDIA BOTH: Both MLD Announcer and Chad chuckle at the
sight of Inferno passing under the hologram.

CHAD HAMILTON
I guess nothing is tempting enough
for the Inferno.

MLD ANNOUNCER
Get ready for Minos!

--LUST: Serpent nears the end of Lust. A MASSIVE animatronic
creature rumbles to life -- As he turns to face the incoming
swarm, dozens of snakes on his back rise, each takes aim.

Minos towers over the drones. His eyes flash red and laser
beams erupt from every snake, Iron Man-style. As the heads
shift, so do the lasers. A deadly, sweeping light show.

Serpent-One dodges with ease. Heads through Minos' mouth
without slowing down.

MLD ANNOUNCER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Incredible!

Oni and Steelcrusher don't bank in time. Both drones are
sliced up like butter.

Everyone else sways around the lasers and flying debris and
into the mouth of Minos. Inferno is still dead last.

--VIP BOOTH: Joe sees the drones getting sliced up. Irene can't bear to look.

JOE

Damn.

RICKY

This is a race?

Silvia has the time of her life. Vanessa watches closely.

VANESSA

Looks more like a battlefield!

--GLUTTONY: Serpent, Wukong, and Suleiman reach the icy cold of Gluttony. As they pass a sensor grid, multiple holes split open in the ceiling.

CHAD HAMILTON (O.S.)

This part's my favorite. Icy cold rain of hell.

Cylindrical canisters eject from the holes.

MLD ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

That's one way to put it. For those unaware, those are filled with liquid nitrogen!

The canisters explode in a barrage of anti-aircraft fire (or ice in this case). Drones bank and dodge away from the icy puffs of smoke. Inferno flies low, using others as shields.

CHAD HAMILTON (O.S.)

Looks like Inferno found a great strategy.

Inferno dives under Hawkblood. BANG! A canister hits Hawkblood. Both engines freeze. Stiff as a corpse, it plummets. Inferno veers clear just in time as Hawkblood shatters like the T-1000.

--PILOT ROW: Hawkblood's pilot seizes up. Medics rush to him.

--GLUTTONY: JD has a chance to catch Serpent, but lets Wukong pass -- Only for Wukong to be blocked by a robotic Cerberus. Three heads rise. Three flamethrowers blast from each mouth.

Drones dodge the incoming flames. Serpent escapes into the next circle.

--PILOT ROW: Lucy reacts.

LUCY

(to herself)

Are you mocking me, Dante...

--GREED: Boulders are pushed down by tortured animatronic souls. Drones fan out but Tempest is crushed by a boulder.

Compared to previous circles this one is great for overtaking and so multiple pilots try. Wukong closes in on Serpent. Hornet on Wyvernstrike and Blitzkrieg on Babaroga.

--MEDIA BOOTH: Both announcers perk up.

MLD ANNOUNCER
Here we go! My personal favorite.

--ANGER: A monorail system goes through all of Anger. It starts at a vault where SOMETHING shoots out from it. Dashing along the monorail. A beast is on the hunt for the drones.

CHAD HAMILTON (O.S.)
It's Medusa! Watch out for her EMP!

ROBO-MEDUSA locks eyes. They glow, firing a beam. It hits Wyvernstrike. Lights out. Powerless, it drops to the ground.

CHAD HAMILTON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
To dodge the EMP one has to get
close to the river Styx.

The snakes on Medusa's head fire off lasers like Minos. Everyone is forced down by Medusa.

MLD ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
I do not recommend staying there
for too long!

A ROBOTIC ARM springs from the river and drags Fireheart down. Frying the drone. Inferno flies past the spot and dodges two additional arms.

Countless arms spring to life trying to catch a drone.

--VIP BOOTH: Joe jumps from his chair.

JOE
COME ON! DON'T LET THAT SNAKE BITCH
GET YOU!

IRENE
(embarrassed)
Joe!

Joe realizes everyone's watching him. He adjusts his suit and sits down a bit ashamed.

--HERESY: Blitzkrieg overtakes Barbaroga. This circle is littered with tombs exploding like a Jacks in the box. Acid, fire, ice, dirt. Everything's thrown at the drones.

With no casualties, they reach--

--VIOLENCE: Inferno arrives last. Still playing it safe until a ROBO MINOTAUR emerges from a river of boiling blood.

It charges. Inferno flips into a reverse loop, the beast passes below it.

--PILOT ROW: JD is yanking the controls HARD!

--VIOLENCE: Inferno catches up with Robo Minotaur, falling into its slipstream as it plows through the blood river.

--MEDIA BOOTH: Chad looks impressed.

CHAD HAMILTON
Brilliant strategy by the Dante
kid!

--VIOLENCE: The other drones part like an ambulance is coming. Inferno rides safely behind the Robo Minotaur. A fire arrow pierces through Samurai, taking it out.

Centaurs darken the sky with volleys -- drones dodge the flaming barrage. Still shielded, Inferno overtakes Raiden, Doomstriker, Snakefang, Dragunov, Flamecutter, and Ryu.

Ahead, Serpent, Wukong, and Suleiman near the exit -- dodging GERYON'S stinger before vanishing into the maze on his back.

--FRAUD: A river of boiling tar. Winged demons reach for passing drones. Inferno sees an opening and overtakes Hornet and Scimitar. Blitzkrieg gets cocky, drifts to close to Suleiman. GETS SPEARED! FLUNG into the tar by JASON OF ARGO.

Jason readies another throw. Inferno sees an opening and overtakes Babaroga, Suleiman and Wukong.

CHAD HAMILTON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Dante and his Inferno are now in
second place. Unbelievable for a
newcomer!

--PILOT ROW: JD looks tense as he just got into second place. A beat and he relaxes, like he's letting go of something.

--FRAUD: Inferno stops short of overtaking Serpent-One. It banks away dangerously and is overtaken by Wukong again.

--PILOT ROW: Lucy twitches, her lips tighten. She looks mad, something just dawned on her.

--FRAUD: All drones flock past Jason and into--

--PIT STOP: First Serpent-One, then Wukong, followed by Inferno and the rest. Crews rush to them.

ALEX
GO! GO! GO!

Omar and Duke start the patch work, replace damaged shell parts. Sparks fly as they weld them shut. Alex glances at the Synchronicity levels. He's worried: *89.8% Synchronicity*

--PILOT ROW: Lucy takes off her goggles, leaves her chair.

MLD ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Something's happening in the pilot
row. LUCY HAS LEFT HER CHAIR!

Lucy rushes down all the way to JD's chair.

CHAD HAMILTON (O.S.)
This has never happened before!

LUCY
HOW DARE YOU!

JD gets startled, takes off the goggles. He gets up too.

JD
What do you mean?

LUCY
I know what you're doing! I don't
need your pity!

--VIP BOOTH: Everyone watches on the jumbotron as Lucy and JD argue. Victor is confused but so is everyone else. Whispers ripple through the crowd.

IRENE
What's that about?

Joe bites his lip.

--PILOT ROW: Lucy faces off with JD.

JD
I don't know what you're talking
about.

LUCY
You're throwing the race! I don't
need you to let me win.

JD looks away, he's caught.

LUCY (CONT'D)
Listen to me! If you don't give it
everything, I'll tell the league
you threw the race for me! They'll
disqualify us both! I either win
this fair or we're both out. If you
want to forfeit here, fine! But
don't drag me into it!

Lucy storms off, leaving JD standing. A beat later and Alex's audio comes through JD's FPV goggles.

ALEX (VIA FPV GOGGLES)
*JD, we're almost ready...! JD? You
 hear me?*

JD grabs the goggles, brings the mic close.

JD
 Copy that.

JD hangs the goggles on his chair. He's not moving.

--PIT STOP: Omar and Duke finish the job. Thumbs up to Alex.

ALEX
 (into headset)
 We're good to go!

A beat. Nothing. Inferno is not moving.

ALEX (CONT'D)
 (into headset)
 JD? JD, you hear me?

Serpent-One and Wukong fly away.

--RAFTERS: Above the jumbotron are the Freeman and his grips. Freeman's LED head zooms on the pilot row.

THE FREEMAN'S POV: JD standing there alone before his chair.

THE FREEMAN
 No, no, now is not the time for
 cold feet.

--TREACHERY: Serpent-One leads as all drones enter an icy bottom well filled with liquid nitrogen.

MLD ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
 The safest way out is past the
 three giants!

CHAD HAMILTON (O.S.)
 But it ain't easy. If Nimrod,
 Ephialtes, or Antaeus catch you,
 they'll chew you up like gum!

Serpent and Wukong head for the three ROBOT GIANTS. On the other side of the well is Robo-Satan.

MLD ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
 The only other way out is through
 Satan but we all know how that ends
 for a human pilot!

--MEDIA BOOTH: Both the MLD Announcer and Chad chuckle. Chad realizes that JD has not joined the rest.

CHAD HAMILTON
It looks like we got an update. We can't tell yet what went wrong. But something's up with Inferno. It has not left the pit stop yet.

Uproar spreads at the never-before-seen situation.

--PILOT ROW: Lucy shakes her head before pushing her controls down and speeding ahead.

--VIP BOOTH: Victor and his business entourage watch closely. Everyone looks surprised.

MLD ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
The Inferno is a custom hybrid design. Looks like it didn't make it through the race unscathed.

Joe walks up to the window overlooking the pilot row below. He spots a worried and anxious JD.

THE FREEMAN'S POV: Both Joe and JD are in focus.

THE FREEMAN (O.S.)
If you forfeit this, it'll bug you for the rest of your life.

--PILOT ROW: JD stands before his chair. Frozen. Unsure what to do when it matters the most.

ALEX (VIA FPV GOGGLES)
JD? Answer me? What's wrong?

JD sees MLD officials closing in. He walks toward them, ready to forfeit. BZZZZZZ. Sounds of a mosquito bug irritate JD. ZAP! He slaps his nape, wincing like he's been stung.

JD
Damn phantom...

He pauses, sensing eyes on him. JD looks up -- locks eyes with his dad. A long beat. Joe nods. Simple, silent, powerful. It says it all: *"I'm proud no matter what!"*

JD's face hardens. Softness gives way to grit. Jaw clenched, eyes sharp. Determination manifest. The officials reach him.

ALEX (VIA FPV GOGGLES)
JD? You gotta talk to me!

JD rips off the bracelets and gloves. Tosses them at the officials. Sprints to his chair, **THROWS HIMSELF INTO IT.** STRAPS IN. Goggles come down.

JD
 (into headset)
 Alex, I need you to do one thing
 for me!

--PIT STOP: Omar and Duke watch Alex closely.

ALEX
 (into headset)
 Yes! Whatever you need!

JD (VIA HEADSET)
Do not! Under any circumstances!
Flip the switch!

Alex looks at Omar and Duke for a long beat and answers. Omar and Duke can't make this decision for Alex.

--PILOT ROW: JD takes a beat.

JD (CONT'D)
 (into headset)
 Do not flip the kill switch! Do you
understand me?

ALEX (VIA FPV GOGGLES)
Understood.

--PIT STOP: Omar, Duke and Alex watch the parked Inferno.
 VVRRRRROOOOM -- it zips away with lightning speed.

--MEDIA BOOTH: Everyone reacts to JD being back in the race.

MLD ANNOUNCER
 Honor is honor. Looks like JD will
 at least finish the--

CHAD HAMILTON
 --I don't think that's his plan!

MLD ANNOUNCER
 What is he doing?!

--PIT STOP: Alex wants to say something but Omar stops him.
 Points at the monitor. Alex, Omar and Duke stare at it as
 Inferno's and JD's vitals align perfectly: *100% Synchronicity*

ALEX
 My God, he's gonna do it!

--TREACHERY: Banked 180, Inferno shoots skyward. With each
 orbit, it goes higher and higher.

CHAD HAMILTON (O.S.)
 Is he doing what I think he's
 doing?

Right at the zenith of the well -- Inferno loops down and towards -- SATAN. It bursts through Satan's head like the Kool-Aid Man through a wall. THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE ERUPTS.

A chain of fireworks explodes down Satan's body.

INT. 9 CIRCLES - SHORTCUT TO PARADISE - CONTINUOUS

Inferno races through Satan's robo-intestines, only to burst out from Satan's animatronic rear into the track's basement. Inferno hits a Maglev rail and is sucked into it, blasting through a cloud of Argon gas.

PLASMA JET ENGINES ENTER OVERDRIVE. EMIT BLUE EXHAUST.

INT. 9 CIRCLES OF HELL STADIUM - SAME

The crowds erupt in cheers and applause as they see the insanity unfold on the jumbotron.

INTERCUT WITH EVERYTHING IN THE DAMNED 9 CIRCLES

CHAD HAMILTON
He's daring the impossible!

MLD ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
No human has ever successfully
piloted a drone through this!

Not a bead of sweat on JD. Just focus. Inferno hits 300km/h, 380km/h, 450km/h. 500KM/H. It slingshots up on the Maglev and INTO OPEN AIR. UPSIDE-DOWN.

JD kills the engines, rides the slipstream. Feels it out and adjusts by instinct. THE ENTIRE STADIUM HOLDS ITS BREATH. INFERNO approaches a small opening in Violence.

With inches to spare, Inferno needles through. JD reignites the engines. THE STADIUM ERUPTS.

CHAD HAMILTON
I have never seen anything like
this!

MLD ANNOUNCER
He's back in it!

Inferno skids across the walls only to fall into--

ANOTHER SHORTCUT. MORE ARGON GAS sprays on Inferno. With insane speed and flaming BLUE ENGINES, the INFERNO moves past a series of tight obstacles with barely any wiggle room.

Leaving burn marks like a Delorean who's about to go back in time. Inferno slingshots yet again. Into Greed right behind--

--RAIDEN. JD hasn't even blinked once so far.

Joe has a massive grin on his face. He remembers something. Joe sees the drawer photos, they come to life as scenes.

INT. CAR - DAY (FLASHBACK)

First drawer photo of JD and Joe. Joe has Toddler JD on his lap. He's first crying like before in the photo, looking out the windshield. Toddler JD turns, faces his dad.

Then both erupt in cheers and laughter.

BACK TO PRESENT

Inferno flashes past Raiden and into another shortcut. Back on the Maglev, it passes Doomstriker. JUST UNSTOPPABLE.

Omar has a tight grip on Duke's shoulder. Not believing his eyes. Alex is sweating intensely.

CHAD HAMILTON (O.S.)
He's not just in control. He is the
drone!

Victor is on his feet. STARING AT THE JUMBOTRON. He's finally realizing what this is all about.

Inferno catches up with Snakefang and Dragunov. Each time using the Maglev shortcuts to propel itself past any limits. Overtakes both with ease, moving into GLUTTONY.

Nothing is stopping Inferno now. It overtakes Ryu, Scimitar and Hornet.

INT. RACETRACK - GO-KART - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Another photo alive. This time a crying Young JD in a go-kart but only until -- Joe joins. He sits down behind the kid. It's cramped and silly but both are having a blast.

BACK TO PRESENT

IN LUST Inferno takes over Babaroga and Suleiman. Passes through every safe hologram and into IN LIMBO, right on Wukong and Serpent.

FOR THE FIRST TIME LUCY SHOWS EMOTION. With rage, she gives her all. She flips a switch on her seat and parts of Serpent-One's shell blow away.

MLD ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
I can't believe it! Serpent-One is
dropping weight!

Serpent-One flies into a Maglev shortcut. Its engines light up blue as well. The snake gains speed but times slows for JD. Something creeps up next to Inferno.

JD turns to see -- a 60s F1. The driver salutes JD. It's overtaken by an 70s F1. Then 80s. 90s. 00s. 10s. 20s. 100 years of Dante history. Inferno overtakes them all.

It blasts past Wukong. Guns for Serpent-One. Lucy looks back. Inferno fills her view as they exit Limbo and into--

EXT. 9 CIRCLES OF HELL - PARADISE - CONTINUOUS

The Freeman and his grips watch as Inferno shoots skyward past the jumbotron. Followed by the Serpent and Wukong.

INTERCUT WITH PILOT ROW AND PARADISE

Serpent hones in on Inferno like a heat-seeking missile. But to no avail. She can't catch up. She can barely keep up.

They're approaching the finish. The holographic, checkered zenith. Just moments away. One last push. Both Lucy and JD push the joysticks to their limits.

LUCY
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHH!

Lucy jumps from her seat screaming as INFERNO GETS CHECKERED!

Just inches behind is Serpent-One. Fireworks erupt across the stadium. She takes off her goggles. Her eyes staring down JD.

SERPENT CREW (VIA FPV GOGGLES)
Lucy? Lucy? Want us to take over???

A long beat. She calms herself, flips on autopilot. JD does the same. Takes off his goggles as cameras swarm around him.

He can barely see from all the light.

INT. 9 CIRCLES OF HELL STADIUM - CEILING - CONTINUOUS

The Freeman takes a good look down at the pilot row. He fires double finger guns at JD as he leaves with his grips.

INT. 9 CIRCLES OF HELL STADIUM - VIP BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

The Dantes and Vanessa cheer. Joe looks to Victor but the man and his assistant are gone.

INT. 9 CIRCLES OF HELL STADIUM - HALLWAY - SAME

Victor looks worried as he rushes through with his Assistant.

VICTOR
We need to lock down all travel!

ASSISTANT
But--

VICTOR
NOW!

The Assistant is startled but nods timidly.

INT. 9 CIRCLES OF HELL STADIUM - PIT STOP - CONTINUOUS

JD runs towards Alex, Omar, and Duke.

JD
OUT! NOW!

Omar and Duke lift Alex from his wheelchair and onto their shoulders. JD joins in as journos and cameras follow. Hip hip hooray as they further lift Alex.

Journos and camera crews circle around them.

INT. AUG CITY - DOCKS - CARGO HANGAR - DAY

The Freeman and his two grips exit a lift just as the hangar goes into lockdown. They run for a speed boat that's been waiting for them with two more grips on it.

They don't make it in time -- hangar doors shut.

THE FREEMAN
I'm working on it.

VICTOR (O.S.)
NOT THIS TIME!

Freeman and his grips turn to see Victor with a small army of Aug City Police. Armed to the teeth with guns and exo-suits.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
You're not going anywhere.

THE FREEMAN
Victor, my old friend!

VICTOR
You're under arrest. You will be extradited to the United States government.

THE FREEMAN
I don't think so. Uncle Sam and I
are not on the best terms.

VICTOR
I have finally figured you out. And
I won't allow it.

THE FREEMAN
Won't allow what?

VICTOR
You're looking for a new body! You
augmented freak destroyed your own
and now you're hoping to take over
a pilot's body with the neural
link. That was the plan all along.

The Freeman looks at Victor, starts applauding.

THE FREEMAN
My dear Victor. For someone so
brilliant you have quite the banal
ideas sometimes.

The Freeman snaps his fingers and ALL AUG CITY POLICE
OFFICERS FREEZE. Trapped in their exo-suits. Every officer
reacts with a mix of worry and terror.

AUG CITY POLICE #1
Sir! It's moving on its own...

The Freeman snaps again and all the guards aim at Victor.

THE FREEMAN
You can use this as an incentive to
upgrade your security protocols.

The Freeman walks up to Victor.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
There are only three things certain
in life. Do you know what they are?

VICTOR
It's two things. Two things are
certain. Death and taxes. It's a
Ben Franklin quote.

THE FREEMAN
Ah, right. Death and taxes. You
sacrificed everything to escape
both. But old Benjamin forgot
something. The third thing is...
war. War is certain.

The Freeman snaps his fingers again, the hangar gates open.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
In the last century the nuclear arms race prevented all out war. Today, it's the race for artificial general intelligence. A fragile peace. Not from lack of warmongers. But because war games end in a stalemate. The singularity of tomorrow was supposed to end it. End the question of machine vs human. Unfortunately, that research is a dead end. You people have no idea what consciousness is.

The speed boat enters the hangar.

INT. 9 CIRCLES OF HELL STADIUM - PODIUM - SAME

THE FREEMAN (O.S.)
But what happened today... in your city. In your stadium... ended that stalemate. Machine vs human?

JD, Lucy, and Wukong's pilot occupy the podium. Their drones are on a platform behind them. They're showered with photography and applause. They smile and wave at the cameras.

THE FREEMAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Turns out man combined with machine... win out.

INT. AUG CITY - DOCKS - CARGO HANGAR - CONTINUOUS

Victor realizes what the real goal was all along. Freeman's grips jump into the speed boat.

THE FREEMAN
Have you ever wondered, Victor, why the 9 Circles feel like a combat zone? Because we both know it wasn't you who designed them.

VICTOR
Who are you?

The Freeman ignores him, approaches the edge of the dock.

THE FREEMAN
Here's what's gonna happen next. Every warmonger on this planet will come knocking on your door. Because for the first time in human history someone holds the key to global hegemony. To total war and peace.

VICTOR
Quit stalling. Who are you!

THE FREEMAN
Just a diligent little employee.

Something dawns on Victor, like he heard that phrase before.
He touches his scar tissue on the back of his neck.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
I will be in touch.

The Freeman jumps on the boat. The boat accelerates. Victor runs up to the edge of the dock.

VICTOR
WHAT ARE YOU?

THE FREEMAN
A FREE MAN!

The Freeman and his grips vanish. A beat later and all the Aug City police officers gain back control over their exoskeletons. Victor looks utterly dumbfounded.

EXT. DANTE ESTATE - GARDEN - DAY

The Dantes, Johnsons and Alex have gathered in celebration. Joe pops open beers, hands them out like candy.

RICKY
So the drone is really yours now?

JD
Looks like it. It's been a couple days. The Freeman is ignoring us.

DUKE
I think that ain't the last of him.

ALEX
I think so too.

JD
You ready for the next season?

Alex just looks at his protégé. Smiles.

ALEX
I am but... there's something I have to do first.

INT. UNDERGROUND AUG LAB - DAY

Alex is on the surgery bed. Face down, through the same padded hole. His ghastly old neural lace exposed.

SPLICER

You sure you want it just removed?
I have some new tech just waiting
for you.

ALEX

Small steps. For now.

The Splicer nods and goes to work.

INT/EXT. SAMU INDUSTRIES HQ - LUCY'S FACILITY - DAY

Lucy watches the 9 Circles showdown. Victor enters the facility with a file. Lucy kills all video feeds.

TOSS. The file lands in front of Lucy on her desk.

LUCY

What is that?

VICTOR

Your release papers. I know how
much this league means to you so
it's up to you if you want to sign
them or not.

Lucy flips through the file documents.

LUCY

Why?

Victor looks out the large open doors, past the helipad. He spots an American military VTOL land in Aug City. Multiple generals exit the VTOL.

VICTOR

I made a promise to your parents
which I can't keep. My city will
change. This league will change.
And I don't like what's coming...
As I said. It's your choice.

Victor leaves. Lucy takes the papers, finds the release document. She takes it, walks out onto the helipad.

Lucy sees another military VTOL land. A Chinese one. In another helipad a British one lands. Then a German. Israeli. Russian. Brazilian. Indian. Japanese. They keep coming.

She takes one last look at her release papers and rips them. Scatters them to the four winds and heads back inside.

INT/EXT. PARKING LOT - BMW E30 - DAY

JD is behind the wheel again. Joe in the passenger's seat.

JOE
We couldn't find a smaller lot?

JD
Dad.

JOE
Alright... Put in first.

JD puts the shift in first and slowly rolls on.

JOE (CONT'D)
Now second.

JD shifts into second. The engine doesn't sputter. As we move out the BMW E30 drives around the parking lot.

FADE OUT.

THE END.