

MAJOR LEAGUE DRONES

Written by

Selvir Katich

OVER BLACK:

Echoes of applause. The sound of roaring Formula One engines.

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

MONTAGE - VARIOUS FORMULA ONE RACES AND COUNTRY ROAD

A. A dozen present-day Formula One cars speed by.

JD (V.O.)
For my family? It means to race in
a 1500 pound heavy death trap.

B. A present-day F1 with red and yellow colors takes lead. It shoots ahead like a bolt of fire.

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

C. An 80s Formula One race at full speed. Again a red and yellow car taking the lead.

JD (V.O.)
Every Dante in the past 100 years
was a race driver.

D. A 60s Formula One race. Again a red and yellow car.

JD (V.O.)
Ever since the first car was bought
by a Dante in Italy...

E. Old vintage photo of **PAPA DANTE** in front of a Stefanini-Martina from 1896.

JD (V.O.)
...and subsequently crashed.

F. Stefanini-Martina up in flames. Papa Dante pouring water.

JD (V.O.)
Into the only other car in Italy.

G. We zoom out on the photo to show a lonely road. Papa Dante crashed into the only other car on the road.

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

H. F1 supercut through the years. From 1960s through 2010s.

JD (V.O.)
To be a Dante means to race or die.
That is our fate.

I. Different podiums over the decades. A Dante on each.
J. Different Formula Ones up in flames: 70s, 80s, 90s, 2000s.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. CAR - DAY

Eyes of focus. Staring. Concentrating. Clinteastwooding.

JD (V.O.)
And me? I'm no different!

A gentle and soft hand moves the gearshift from 1 to 2.

EXT/INT. CAR - ROAD - CONTINUOUS

An 80s BMW E30 sputters to a halt in heavy traffic. CLACK.
Clutch rattles for its life. CLACK. CLACK. Engine roars back
to life. Another jolt. Dead again.

Everyone around honks like mad maniacs.

JD (V.O.)
Maybe I'm a little different.

On the wheel is 15-year-old **JAKE DANTE** or JD, youngest family
member and out of his depth. He fumbles with the gearshift.

Next to JD is **JOE DANTE**, 60s, 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 embarrassing yourself and
your family!

Behind JD is **SILVIA DANTE**, mid-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 means she has
to be twice as mean...

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

A **KID JD** finishes a car Lego set. He looks at it with pride.

KID SILVIA storms into the room and kicks the car away. It bursts into pieces as it hits the wall.

EXT/INT. NASCAR - RACE TRACK - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A massive pile-up of several cars flies through the air spraying debris.

JD (V.O.)
...and insane.

One lone car swirls past with elegance. Silvia looks in the rearview mirror. Laughing, her blue eyes glisten with joy.

EXT/INT. CAR - ROAD - CONTINUOUS

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

RICKY
You need to be gentle, the clutch
will tell you everything.

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

EXT. F1 CAR - RACE TRACK - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A red and yellow F1 takes over multiple cars. Takes corners with speed and elegance. The cold blue shine from the visor radiates pure coolness.

EXT. F1 PODIUM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Ricky is swarmed by journos.

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

RICKY
(puts on sunglasses)
I only break a sweat for the
ladies.

Ricky pops the champagne.

EXT/INT. CAR - ROAD - CONTINUOUS

JD still struggles with getting the car going again.

Everyone chimes in: "Stay in 1st", "Push the clutch all the way down", "Don't fidget with the gearshift". It all morphs into one monstrosity making JD nauseous.

JD
STOP IT! EVERYONE!

A long and unpleasant beat.

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

An **ANGRY DRIVER** in an e-car stops before Joe's window. The person is augmented with brain-to-computer (BCI) implants and artificial eyes. 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 and not a battery like some goddamn toy!!!

JD (V.O.)
That's my dad for ya. Still angry that he didn't win 100 Grand Prix... ending it with 99 wins.

Angry Driver flips off Joe with a cybernetic finger.

JOE
(flips off too)
I got a real one for ya! Who mutilates their body like that?

RICKY
Everyone's got augs, dad. It's the 2030s.

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

JOE
 How ugly are these cars going to get? No edge or trim. This is what you get when women buy cars.

SILVIA
 DAD!

JOE
 What? Would you buy any of these?

Silvia tilts her head in reluctant agreement.

JOE (CONT'D)
 JD, the traffic is piling up!

JD
 I'm trying... I'm just...

JOE
 What?

JD
 (gestures to windshield)
 This view is making me nauseous.

JOE
 What the hell are you talking about? 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 in a German! That's all the compromise you need!

JD
 Everyone is driving automatic... if they drive at all.

Joe stares at JD. A dishonorable sacrilege was committed.

JOE
There's a 10th circle in hell--

SILVIA AND RICKY
(like a mantra)
--For people who drive automatic.

JOE
(sotto)
And don't get me started on "self-driving" cars.

JD sighs, leans back in surrender.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DANTE ESTATE - DAY

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

IRENE
(into phone)
No, we're not doing a reality TV show. I don't want a film crew in my house 24/7. But that museum sounds interesting.

Irene reacts to screeching tires around the corner.

IRENE (CONT'D)
(into phone)
I'll call you later.

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

IRENE (CONT'D)
How did it go?

JD
(storms past her)
Don't ask.

IRENE
(to Joe)
That bad?

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

IRENE
We're rich schmucks.

IRENE
 (heads inside house)
 They're both professional drivers.

JOE
 They're Dantes!

Joe stands alone in the circular driveway. He scratches the burned skin on his arm.

JOE (CONT'D)
 (sotto with shaking hands)
 Dantes...

INT. DANTE ESTATE - DAY

The massive estate is suspiciously empty. No cook or any service staff whatsoever.

INT. HALL OF FAME - DANTE ESTATE - DAY

JD walks past an array of glass cabinets filled to the brim with Dante exploits.

Trophies, old cut-out newspapers, honor certificates, racing paraphernalia, burned up F1 pieces of each Dante before Joe. He pays no attention to any of it. Instead bursts into--

INT. JD'S ROOM - DANTE ESTATE - DAY

Brimming with Funko Pops and figurines. 65 inch TV on the wall. Cables lead to an array of gaming consoles.

JD drops into a recliner chair and grabs a game controller inside a side pouch on the chair. He loads a first-person shooter. Drops into an online game.

ON SCREEN: JD navigates with precision, dropping bodies.

GAME VOICE ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
 Double Kill! Triple Kill! Overkill!

JD is unfazed by this. The spree goes on.

But a slight sadness forms on his face. He takes a deep breath, he's starting to break a sweat.

ON TV: JD misses and his game character is killed by grenade.

He drops the game controller in his lap. Sighs.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - DANTE ESTATE - DAY

Irene removes her earrings, places them inside a decorative and expensive-looking box.

IRENE

They want to film a reality show. I already said no. But it's right in time for a new documentary. You know? Ricky's new season.

Joe comes out of the shower. His burns cover more than half of his upper body. Sits down on the bed. Puts his socks on.

JOE

Sure.

IRENE

You actually this gloomy now?

JOE

I knew it! There were signs!

Joe looks at the massive drawer with family photos on top.

INSERT - DRAWER PHOTOS

Each Dante kid through the years. First on Joe's lap behind a wheel as toddlers. In a F1 car in the crew pit. Then as kids seated by Joe into a go-kart. JD is crying in all of these.

BACK TO SCENE

Irene wraps her arms around Joe.

IRENE

JD is different. Every other kid wanted to hang out with Ricky... Every other kid wanted to hide from Silvi. And JD, he just wanted to play his video games.

INT. DINING ROOM - DANTE ESTATE - EVENING

Joe unpacks takeout. Simple burgers and fried chicken look oddly out of place in the huge and ornate dining room.

JOE

Where is he?

IRENE

Probably playing with that thing again.

EXT. ROOF - DANTE ESTATE - SAME

JD sits on the edge of the roof. He flies a drone. It spins and barrel rolls gracefully. Next to him is a propped-up cellphone livestreaming a Major League Drones (MLD) race.

ON PHONE: All MLD races are themed. This one shows the infamous 9 Circles of Hell. 23 drones kick off the race.

EXT. 9 CIRCLES - MLD STADIUM - SAME

A massive swirling tube with nine ever-deepening levels and transparent inner sides. The bleachers are on top.

Drones race across the 2nd circle HERESY, a shifting track with death traps. The drones are bulky with a slick design using very nimble plasma jet engines. Most are 4 by 4 feet.

One drone with blue thunder decals takes lead passing several with ease while dodging any incoming shifts in the track.

MLD ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Serpent-One takes the lead as
usual. This pilot is unstoppable!

EXT. PILOT ROW - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

At the top, across the media booth is the pilot row. 23 pilots occupy a race chair each. They wear a VR headset with a 360-view from their drone.

The pilots look exhausted with sweat running down from the First-Person-View (FPV) goggles. But one pilot is unaffected. Calm and precise: **LUCY**, 15, with artificial snake-eyes, petite but in total control as--

EXT. 9 CIRCLES - MLD STADIUM - CONTINUOUS

One drone tries to creep up on Serpent-One but to no avail. Serpent slows down for a moment. Nose-to-nose with the enemy.

Serpent smashes against the other drone forcing it to grind against the tube wall. A barrage protrudes from the wall, smashing the competitor to bits. Serpent-One barrel rolls to safety under great applause.

MLD ANNOUNCER
An incredible display by JD! JD!

IRENE (O.S.)
JD!

EXT. ROOF - DANTE ESTATE - CONTINUOUS

Irene looks at JD from a window. He snaps back from his daydream. His miniature drone crashes somewhere behind him.

JD

What?

IRENE

You want food? Get your ass down here!

JD sighs, picks up his drone.

INT. DINING ROOM - DANTE ESTATE - EVENING

The table for a family of six is now occupied by three with JD in the middle. He continues watching the drone race.

The constant drone sounds start to drive Joe insane.

JOE

Can you not during dinner?

JD

(puts phone away)

It's hardly a dinner... Why don't we have a cook like everyone else in the neighborhood?

JOE

When you have your own house you can have a cook.

JD

Not even a cooking-droid?

JOE

I don't need a Terminator for pasta.

JD

It's not a Terminator. It's just a droid.

JOE

Just a droid. That's how it starts!

JD shakes his head. But Joe can't stop.

JOE (CONT'D)

You know what the problem with everyone is these days?

IRENE

Come on, Joe. Not now.

JOE

Everyone is too reliant on their little gadgets. It takes the edge off people. Makes you weak!

Both JD and Irene just wait for Joe to stop.

JOE (CONT'D)

That's why Silvi can't find a man who knows how to do an oil change.

IRENE

Silvi is gay, Joe.

JOE

A woman, whatever. You know what I mean. Imagine if there was a month-long blackout. We'd be doomed with every moron trying to look up how to fix anything.

IRENE

(a beat)

You done?

JOE

Yeah, I'm done... What about you? Have you decided on a car?

JD

Actually... I was...

JOE

What? Spit it out!

JD

I was planning on doing a try-out for the Minor League Drones.

If "oh boy" was a dictionary entry, Irene's face would make an appearance now.

JOE

What's... Minor League Drones?

JD

It's, you know. A racing league... with drones.

Joe takes a beat. Not believing what he just heard.

JOE
And who's doing the racing?

JD
Well, there's pilots controlling
the drones.

JOE
With what? A joystick?

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

JOE
So a joystick. What the hell are
FPV goggles?

JD
Forget it.

JOE
No, what else do they do? Do they
collect golden rings to level up?

IRENE
Joe?

JOE
Do they power up the drones with
"speed boosters"?

JD stands up and leaves.

JOE (CONT'D)
What? I'm just trying to understand
how it works.

IRENE
You know it's a real sport?

JOE
Sure it is.

IRENE
No, I mean that. Some of the pilots
make millions.

JOE
So do politicians and other
grifters.

Irene sighs, no way of getting through that bullhead.

INT. JD'S ROOM - DANTE ESTATE - NIGHT

JD's back in the recliner and on the video game again. Mindlessly running around the game map. Just a distraction.

His phone buzzes.

OMAR (TEXT)
You joining?

JD thinks for a moment and replies.

JD (TEXT)
Nah.

He leaves the phone aside but a moment later it buzzes again.

OMAR (TEXT)
Come on! School's out!

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - DANTE ESTATE - SAME

Joe's in the bed watching an 80s movie. He chuckles as the musclebound hero shows no mercy to his enemies. Irene gets ready for bed.

IRENE
I think you should apologize.

JOE
That's how it starts. One apology and they run the house.

IRENE
Then talk to him. You don't even know what he wants to do.

JOE
Play video games all day.

IRENE
And you didn't waste time his age?

JOE
Excuse me? I was already a kart champion his age.

IRENE
Your father dragged you to every race because all you wanted to do was spend time with the girls.

Joe can't argue with that.

IRENE (CONT'D)

And the only reason you picked up anything resembling discipline is because you realized racing to the top will get you girls.

JOE

That's not--

IRENE

--Don't! Your mother told me everything.

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

JOE

Fine. I'll talk to him.

INT. JD'S ROOM - DANTE ESTATE - CONTINUOUS

The phone buzzes again.

OMAR (TEXT)

I know a way to get in!

JD's chance for a reply is interrupted by a knock.

JD

Yeah?

JOE

It's me!

JD

What do you want?

Joe rolls his eyes, opens the door.

JOE

I just want to talk.

JD continues with the online game.

JD

There's nothing to talk about.

JOE

What are you playing there?

ON TV: JD delivers a clean headshot.

JOE (CONT'D)

Nice!

He chuckles but JD ignores him.

JOE (CONT'D)
Look... I--

JD
--It's all a joke to you.

Joe can't help himself.

JOE
I mean it's a toy for crying out
loud. You can't race with toys!

JD shuts down the game, throws the controller into his chair.

JD
I'm off to bed.

JOE
Where's the danger in that?

JD falls into his bed. Ignores him.

JOE (CONT'D)
You know why it's a joke? Where's
the edge? Where's the madness? To
find the best in something you
always walk the line between life
and death. A goddam chess player
burns 6000 calories in a tournament
per day. You think that's healthy?

Still no response. Joe leaves the room after a beat. JD
ponders for a moment. His phone buzzes again.

OMAR (TEXT)
Dude, it took me way too long to
find a way. Come on!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

ON PHONE: A gif of various cartoons and movie characters
appears. The caption reads "Do it!".

JD ponders for a moment. Starts typing.

JD (TEXT)
I'm in!

EXT. SAMU INDUSTRIAL PARK - NIGHT

A sprawling but lifeless zone with countless factories and
warehouses. Lone security drones sweep the perimeter as self-
driving trucks pass the gates.

JD (O.S.)
You sure about this?

JD and **OMAR**, his lively 15-year-old buddy, hide in the bushes. Omar shows a grid layout of the area on his tablet.

OMAR
I ran a bunch of simulations.
Managed to map every pathway and
angle of all drones and CCTVs.

JD
And?

OMAR
Nothing. It's airtight. No way in.

JD
So what the hell do we do?

Omar pulls some shiny and silvery cloth from his backpack.

OMAR
Stealth hijabs! I took them from my
sister. She's back from deployment.
These will confuse any industrial
drone with ease.

JD
So crossdressing will confuse the
drones?

OMAR
(pulls up two lasers)
And lasers! Trust me it'll work.

They put the hijabs on. JD struggles with it.

JD
How the hell do you put it on so
easily?

OMAR
I used to hide in one to scare my
sister. Didn't help, got a beating
instead... You ready? Let's go!

Omar moves across the street, JD in tow.

SECURITY DRONE POV: They run into view but only as a slim shimmer, almost blending with the environment.

They stop at the chain-link fence. Omar hands JD both lasers.

OMAR (CONT'D)
Focus them on any drone. With our
appearance, it'll trigger a
maintenance request.

JD
Alright.

Omar takes out shears and starts cutting a hole in the fence.

JD (CONT'D)
You do gardening now?

OMAR
It's my grandma's. She spends all
day with her garden.

JD
I have a feeling you're making the
women in your life angry on
purpose.

OMAR
Ha! That's what my mom says too.

A drone comes closer and JD focuses both lasers on its "eye".

SECURITY DRONE POV: The aperture shifts but the image stays
distorted. A message pops up: *Initialize Maintenance Routine*

JD
Damn! It worked. So... how long is
your sister visiting?

OMAR
No.

JD
No what?

Omar cuts the last piece. They sneak through the fence.

OMAR
You're not seeing my sister.

JD
Why?

OMAR
You're just gonna stare at her like
a creep.

The boys move past an array of container trailers. They stop
behind the last container to let a drone pass by.

JD
I don't stare!

Omar pulls down his veil and delivers the most intense - at least for a human - "Oh really"-look. A beat.

JD (CONT'D)
Okay, maybe a little.

Omar points at a massive warehouse structure. There's a consistent flow of self-driving trucks coming in and out. SAMU INDUSTRIES logo everywhere.

JD (CONT'D)
That's Samu Industries. Dude, they're making cars here.

OMAR
I know! Gonna be awesome!

INT. LOADING BAY - AUTOMATED WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

A lone **SECURITY GUARD** watches as a self-driving truck pulls into the loading bay. The truck stops with pinpoint accuracy.

SECURITY GUARD
Hello?

A rumble and the backdoors of the truck swing open with black-clad grips bursting out. They wear ski masks with goggles and carry flight cases.

Once a dozen leave the truck, **THE FREEMAN** jumps out. Dressed in punk attire with black gloves and a black and yellow jacket. His head is augmented with a LED-Helmet. He looks more android than human. No visible skin.

The helmet displays different emojis based on his mood. Three small camera drones buzz around him capturing every angle.

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

MAIN CAMERA-DRONE POV: This is a livestream where Super Chats (comment donations) run down the screen. The Freeman swings an arm around the Security Guard like they're old buddies.

SECURITY GUARD

I... I don't want to be on camera.

THE FREEMAN

Don't worry. Your face is blurred.
But you know whose isn't? My
favorite Grid Girls!

Four costumed women exit the truck. One dressed as **MARILYN MONROE** in her classic white dress. A **SEXY NUN, SCHOOLGIRL,** and a **MAID**. Each rocking a shorter and shorter skirt.

Two of the camera drones buzz past them causing a small draft that lifts the skirts a little.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)

Let's bring this house under
control. Time to set up the race!

EXT. AUTOMATED WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

JD and Omar stop at the adjacent building at a corner. They can see a crowd waiting to enter the automated warehouse.

JD

How are there so many people?

OMAR

(rifles through backpack)
The Freeman invited them... Here!

He pulls out two old cassette tapes.

JD

What are those?

OMAR

Tapes!

JD gives Omar the blankest of blank looks.

OMAR (CONT'D)

They're vintage storage devices.
People used them to listen to
music. The Freeman sends them out
with his signature stored. They're
analog. No remote scan possible.

JD

How did you get them?

OMAR

I stole them from some dudes.

JD

What? Who?

OMAR

Ehm... Andrew Ryan and John Galt. I think. Come on, let's go!

They make a run for it and slip into the crowd.

INT. ENTRANCE - AUTOMATED WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

A **TALL GRIP** scans each visitor's tape. He puts them into an old cassette player which connects to a tablet via an analog to digital converter cable.

One person hands over their tape. He presses play and as the cassette winds, basic text is auto-filled on the tablet.

ON TABLET: Richard Torres, 24, Regular, followed by a low-resolution photo.

The Tall Grip confirms the photo and lets the visitor inside.

OMAR

Ours are VIP, btw.

The two are waved in by the Tall Grip and they're already suspiciously popping because of how young they are.

Omar's tape goes in first. Identity confirmed. JD's next. Confirmed again. Omar moves ahead but he's stopped by the Tall Grip. He motions another grip for help.

TALL GRIP

VIP.

The **NEW GRIP** nods, gestures the two boys to follow him. Omar follows and winks at JD who shakes his head in disbelief.

INT. SUPERVISOR OFFICE - AUTOMATED WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Omar and JD are led into the office by the New Grip. They plop into two very out-of-place VIP chairs overlooking the ground floor below. Omar looks around.

OMAR

Where's the snacks?

JD

Maybe they'll bring it in--

--Multiple grips enter the office followed by Freeman.

THE FREEMAN
These must be my VIPs?

Omar stands back up.

OMAR
Mr. Freeman. We're massive--

THE FREEMAN
--fans. Right. I figured much. And yet... you steal from me.

JD and Omar try to find an excuse when--

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
Two teenagers with military-grade stealth gear and two of my stolen tapes tend to stand out.

JD
I told you. Told you!

OMAR
(points at JD)
He's a racer! And a good one at that.

THE FREEMAN
He doesn't even have a BCI let alone a proper neural lace.

OMAR
Even without a neural lace, he can outmaneuver any one of yours.

JD looks at Omar like "WTF are you doing?".

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

OMAR
Are you... Canadian? I did not expect that.

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

OMAR
Look. With the right sponsor, he would win the 9 Circles!

THE FREEMAN

Oh really?

The Freeman walks up to JD. Hand-shake ready.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)

I might have the right drone and sponsorship for you! If you think you're up for the task?

JD looks at Omar then back to Freeman.

OMAR

We are!

The Freeman grabs JD's hand, starts shaking it wildly.

THE FREEMAN

Then we have a deal! Grand Prix it is! Nothing more, nothing less!

JD

Wait, what?

The Freeman beckons the boys to follow.

OMAR

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

INT. MAIN FLOOR - AUTOMATED WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

A crowd has formed cheering The Freeman and his Grid Girls on. Omar and JD approach their seat in the pilot corner.

JD

That was way too easy!

OMAR

Dude, you worry too much.

JD gets distracted by the sight of the Grid Girls and bumps into a metal pole.

OMAR (CONT'D)

You alright?

JD

(facepalms)

Oh, oh. I know those controls.

JD looks around, spots the one drone still on the ground. It's a stylish red with sharp contours.

JD (CONT'D)
That's a Hayabusa-Roku. I'm gonna vomit.

OMAR
No, you won't. Just chillax.

JD inspects the pilots. Seven of them, four men and three women. All have the neural lace on the back of their neck with various designs from rugged jacks to slick metal plates.

One pilot has an augmented skull with embedded FPV goggles instead of eyes.

JD
How is that allowed?

OMAR
Street rules! Am I the only one who believes in the Dante name here?

JD
(a beat)
Yes!

OMAR
Put the damn goggles on.

JD is about to when he spots the last pilot coming in. She looks familiar but he can't make her face out under the hoodie and goggles (it's Lucy).

JD
Who's she?

Omar shrugs. Gestures JD to put the goggles on. He straps them tight and falls into the chair. Feel's the controls.

JD (CONT'D)
(sotto)
I forgot they're joysticks.

JD flips a red switch and his Hayabusa roars to life as do his FPV goggles.

JD'S POV: A VR screen projects a 180° panorama first-person view from the drone. Hologram signs indicate the race track.

Omar watches the feed, a monitor attached to the chair.

OMAR
Don't screw this up. You know how long I have to mine to get this much crypto?

JD
Yeah, yeah.

The Freeman enters center stage with his camera drones.

THE FREEMAN
ARE WE READY FOR A SHOW OR ARE WE
NOT?!

The crowd cheers.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
Tonight we have a special guest. A
rookie newcomer going old school.
No BCI or any implants whatsoever.

The crowd goes bonkers.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
We shall see if he goes down as a
legend or a mere lolcow! Press 1
for legend or 2 for lolcow.

MAIN CAMERA-DRONE POV: The chat blows up with a wave of 2s.

JD forces a smile. He spots Lucy watching him, her drone
focused on him as well. Once they lock eyes she looks away.

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

Omar takes a look at the drone too.

OMAR
It looks a bit like Serpent-One.

Lucy's Serpent-Two roars to life.

THE FREEMAN
Pilots! Ready your machines!

All drones move to the start line.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
You too rook.

The Hayabusa-Roku gets in place.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
Are my Grid Girls ready?

MAIN CAMERA-DRONE POV: The feeds toggle through. Each camera
showing a different Grid Girl ready at a vantage point.

Sexy Nun leans on Freeman, waves into the camera. She takes center stage on the start line acting as a flag girl with a handkerchief in hand.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
Start the race track!

A **SWIFT GRIP** dislodges a red STOP button causing the whole warehouse to move again.

Every nook and cranny shifts as the conveyor belts move. Endless stream of PVC boxes leave the storage units. They move into Pick It stations where robotic arms pick ordered products for delivery. The once silent warehouse is alive.

JD
Eh, didn't expect that.

The air fills with tension as the Sexy Nun raises her arm.

OMAR
Don't fly the drone into a pole as well!

JD focuses for a long beat. She drops the handkerchief. As in slow-motion, it falls towards the ground.

Each pilot reacts differently. Some jittery or grinning with anticipation. JD's already sweating. Lucy is calm and steady.

The handkerchief hits the ground. Everyone pushes their controls down with force. Serpent-Two dashes ahead. Everyone else follows suit with JD trailing dead last.

As they pass, the draft blows Sexy Nuns dress up.

INT. CONVEYER BELTS - AUTOMATED WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Serpent-Two leads the charge across the conveyor belt system. The drone dodges every incoming box with ease. It spins and takes a turn into--

INT. STORAGE UNIT - AUTOMATED WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Small shuttles on railings move inside with products in a PVC box on top. The drones slow down to maneuver through.

JD'S POV: We see the ever-shifting rack. It's like a 4th-dimensional labyrinth in there.

JD's Hayabusa catches up. Passes the first drone but the move was reckless and he grinds against the railing as he passes.

OMAR

Careful.

JD

I know!

Omar sees JD's sweating already.

2nd tries to snag past Serpent-Two but no chance. Serpent-Two keeps her flanks tight. They reach the end of the storage unit and fly into--

INT. VENTILATION - AUTOMATED WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The drones navigate through tight shafts. Serpent-Two loses no speed. Same as 2nd. But the Hayabusa slows down a bit. Light at the end of the tunnel and--

INT. AUTOMATED WAREHOUSE - SAME

--JD reacts to the incoming bright light.

JD

What's on the other side?

OMAR

Just the factory.

INT. ASSEMBLY LINE - SAMU INDUSTRIES - CONTINUOUS

Serpent-Two and 2nd burst from the shaft and past Schoolgirl. The draft blows her skirt up as well. She pushes it down.

More Drones fly by. Hayabusa is now 4th in place. The drones descent onto a long line of welding robots. Sparks flying everywhere as they weld together car bodies.

Serpent-Two and 2nd dash and roll as they move past the welding robots. JD takes his chance and the Hayabusa moves into 3rd but in doing so he scrapes against a few robot arms.

INT. AUTOMATED WAREHOUSE - SAME

JD cringes a bit.

JD'S POV: Parts of the image go black.

JD

Oh, oh.

OMAR

Oh, oh.

2nd closes in on Serpent-Two again. She takes no chances, falls behind only to force 2nd into a corner: a robot arm. 2nd smashes against it. It flies off and hits the ground.

2nd's pilot smashes his goggles against the ground in anger.

JD and his Hayabusa are now behind Serpent-Two. The two and the remaining drones leave the welding field and pass the Maid this time. Again blowing up the skirt.

They exit through an open window.

EXT. INDUSTRIAL PARK - CONTINUOUS

The drones make their way through a field of shipment containers taking tight corners and into an--

INT. ABANDONED WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The place is jam-packed with junk and old 20th-century work tools from bobcats to a picked-clean industrial press.

Serpent-Two takes these corners and hoops with grace and precision. 3rd drone in line takes over the Hayabusa and guns for Serpent-Two.

OMAR

JD you're losing them.

(a beat)

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 and roll after the other. A centrifuge would be a walk in a park by comparison.

The 3rd drone leaps past Serpent-Two but with too much speed it's unable to bank in time and hits a brick wall.

Serpent-Two flies through the window outside. After what feels like an eternity, the Hayabusa follows suit with the remaining drones tailgating.

INT. CEILING GRID - SAMU INDUSTRIES - CONTINUOUS

Serpent-Two comes in fast through a roof window and past--

--Marylin Monroe whose skirt blows up doing the classic pose.

Here car bodies are moved around the facility via a monorail gondola system once they're welded together.

Hayabusa and the rest of the drones follow suit.

INTERCUT WITH AUTOMATED WAREHOUSE AND SAMU INDUSTRIES

Omar watches closely on the screen.

OMAR

This is it, take your chance!

JD

I'm trying!

The Hayabusa extends its engines to the maximum. It bursts forward closing the gap on Serpent-Two.

JD grins his teeth. This is it--

--until both see the incoming hundreds of moving gondolas all carrying a welded car body.

OMAR

Oh, boy.

JD (CONT'D)

Shit.

Serpent-Two slips through car body windows, missing doors, above as below without even the slightest slowdown.

JD slows down and even then he's scraping and hitting bodies left and right. The first drone passes him.

Serpent-Two leaves the ceiling system and heads for the finish line at the bottom.

The Sexy Nun gets ready to checker the winner.

Hayabusa flips and rolls. With each move, it takes more damage. Omar cringes at the massacre. Last drone passes JD.

OMAR (CONT'D)

Oh man, come on! This is--

Omar sees JD jittery and sweaty. JD stifles a retch. It's full-blown motion sickness. Another retch and he vomits.

THE FREEMAN

And we got a technicolor yawn!

That's it for the rook.

Serpent-Two passes the finish and with applause blows the Sexy Nun's skirt. The other two drones finish too.

The Hayabusa crashes through the last car body and descends towards the ground finish and Sexy Nun.

Within a hair's breadth, The Freeman tackles her and out of harm's way as the Hayabusa smashes against the ground and into a thousand pieces. A beat.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
You alright?

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

Freeman stands up quickly and addresses his camera drones.

THE FREEMAN
I guess it's lolcow then!

MAIN CAMERA-DRONE POV: The meme comes to life as a fast-paced wave of Fs comes in. People commenting failure gifs as well.

Everyone around him applauds. Freeman turns to face the crowd when the doors burst open with a BANG. It's the police!

SWAT POLICE #1
EVERYONE ON THE GROUND!

THE FREEMAN
(to everyone)
COMMIE--

The Freeman turns to one of his grips.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
Are these state or private?

GRIP
Private working for the district.

THE FREEMAN
FASCISTS! EVERYONE RUN!

The crowd disperses. SWATS deploy non-lethal countermeasures like tasers and a robo-dog that's zapping people out cold.

OMAR
JD, we gotta run!

Omar helps JD out of the pilot chair. But JD is fumbling around like a drunkard.

MAIN CAMERA-DRONE POV: The Freeman runs like hell through a hallway with a robo-dog chasing him.

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

Serpent-Two hovers above Lucy. She grabs a handle and takes off Mary Poppins-style.

OMAR
 (looking up)
 You got to be kidding me.

Three SWATs 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 didn't do nothin!

SWAT POLICE #2 lowers his rifle with disbelief.

OMAR (CONT'D)
 Sooo... we're free to go?

SWAT POLICE #2
 Zap him!

A bolt of electricity takes out Omar. The police disperse across the warehouse arresting anyone on sight.

INT. WAITING ROOM - HOSPITAL - NIGHT

The usual frenzy of a hospital. Young patients are glued to their phones and tablets.

Some older patients watch the TV mounted on the wall.

ALL SCREENS: JD and Omar's mug shots overlaid on all the property damage they caused. The Sexy Nun almost dying is shown several times.

INT. DOCTOR'S ROOM - HOSPITAL - NIGHT

ALEX CHEN, 30s, sits on the examination chair. His legs are atrophied. A gritty neural lace rests on his neck. It looks fried. He stares at a TV showing the disaster drone race.

The doctor runs his thumb down Alex's spine.

DOCTOR
Anything?

ALEX
No.

After a deep sigh, the doctor gives up.

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

ALEX
They do. For the worthy.

DOCTOR
Look, it's about time to get an implant or an exoskeleton.

Alex lifts himself into his wheelchair.

ALEX
Can't do doc.

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

Alex sees the repeat of Sexy Nun almost dying.

ALEX
(eyes on TV)
Not yet.

DOCTOR
Those two are in the hospital here. Reckless morons.

Alex takes this in.

INT. PATIENT ROOM - HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Two cops talk to Joe and Irene at the door.

JD's handcuffed to a bed. He sees the disaster he caused on a TV as well. Omar's handcuffed to the bed next to him.

OMAR
It's not that bad.

JD looks at Omar.

OMAR (CONT'D)

I mean look. You almost had her.
You lost your Dante chillax.

JD

That's not a thing.

Outside, Joe runs his hand across his face.

JOE

Ok, let me see if I got this right.
It's an illegal... underground
drone racing ring?

COP #1

Yeah, it's all over the brainnet.

JOE

Oh yes, the brainnet. I too am
lobotomized like everyone else.

IRENE

You have to excuse him. W-What
happens now?

COP #2

Pay bail and he's good to go
otherwise we'll put him back in
jail until his trial.

JOE

Great. Leave him in jail.

IRENE

Stop it. We'll be there.

The cops nod and walk away. Joe storms into the room.

OMAR

Mr. Dante, it was all my--

JOE

You shut your mouth! Your sister is
on her way. Get ready for it.

Omar tries to escape but he's pulled back by the handcuffs.

JOE (CONT'D)

When I said "walk the line between
life and death", I didn't mean
this!

JD stays silent.

JOE (CONT'D)
You got anything to say?

JD
What's there to say?

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

JD
It wasn't a real nun.

OMAR
Yeah, I-I... I can confirm that. It
was a stripper in a nun costume.

JOE
You're not helping with that.

Omar zips it.

JOE (CONT'D)
Drone racing. I can't believe it.
What happened to this world?

JD
Nothing. The world left you behind.

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

IRENE
JD!

JOE
Oh, is that so?

JD
Yeah! You keep going on about the
old days. How is that helping me
today? How is doing an oil change
gonna help me? There's nothing that
needs an oil change these days. Or
a driving stick?!

JOE
It's not about the oil change or
the stick. 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 people have not! The faster things change, the more they stay the same! You too might learn that one day. But for now, you're just grounded! And no allowance!

JD

(sotto)

I barely get any to begin with.

Joe leaves.

IRENE

He means well.

Irene puts her hand on JD's shoulder.

IRENE (CONT'D)

And my god, I haven't seen you vomit since your bed-wetting days.

JD

Mom!

Omar chuckles.

IRENE

Alright, I'm just joking. All will be well!

Irene heads for the door too.

IRENE (CONT'D)

Remember that!

She's gone. Omar can't hold it back.

OMAR

You did pee your bed, didn't you?

MIRIAM (O.S.)

OMAR!!!

JD

I think the only one who will have peed his bed is you.

MIRIAM, 20s, bursts into the room. The fearless soldier wears a tight braless red dress and makeup for a date. A loose-hanging scarf completes the mix of modern and tradition.

Cop 1# stands behind Miriam.

MIRIAM

Is this how I have to spend my nights now?

OMAR

It was all his fault!

JD

What? No, it wasn't!

OMAR

Well, who crashed the drone?

JD

And who got us fake invites?

MIRIAM

Shut up! Both of you! Please uncuff him!

On command Cop #1 uncuffs Omar.

OMAR

I think I have to stay in the hospital as well. It was quite traumatizing seeing that much destruction.

JD rolls his eyes. She grabs Omar by his ear.

MIRIAM

Stop it! Let's go!

She drags him out but stops right before leaving.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

Oh, and nice to see you again, JD.

JD waves goodbye. Miriam drags Omar outside. Both JD and Cop #1 spot the shape of a thong under the dress. JD looks at the cop. Sees him staring too. They lock eyes.

COP #1

Ahem, grow up!

The cop leaves. JD slumps back into his pillow. Sighs.

ALEX (O.S.)

Long night, huh?

JD looks at the door. Alex is in the room.

JD

You might say that.

ALEX

Could be worse. You could've killed that nun.

JD

She wasn't a real... yeah. What about you? Waiting on a new implant?

ALEX

(comes closer to JD)
Something like that. What made you do it?

JD

Do what?

ALEX

Race the drone.

JD

Nothing. It was stupid.

ALEX

Obviously not stupid enough to ignore it. Maybe next time you should. It's not worth the trouble.

A beat. Alex turns around and rolls out.

JD

Alex Chen? You won the 9 Circles like 10 times!

ALEX

Then you should listen to me.

Alex is gone. JD falls into the pillow again. All alone.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DANTE ESTATE - DAWN

Joe parks the car gently. Irene's in the passenger seat. JD in the backseat. The silence is crushing but Joe just leaves.

IRENE

You should get some rest.

JD nods.

INT. JD'S ROOM - DANTE ESTATE - DAWN

JD walks into his room. Tired he drags himself to his bed and falls on top of it. A beat.

THE FREEMAN (O.S.)
I can't believe you didn't see me.

JD's jump-scared out of his bed. The Freeman sits across from him in the recliner chair.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
Look, I even positioned myself like
in the movies.

Nothing. JD just looks in confusion.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
Movies? You have seen one... once?

JD
How the hell did you get in here?

THE FREEMAN
Yeah, that was surprisingly easy.
No security drones or dogs. Just
plain CCTV and those...
(knocks on LED head)
...well.

JD
W-What... What do you want?

THE FREEMAN
Ah, yes. You see, I gave you a
drone. And I only got bits of my
drone back. Sooo... I want my drone
back. And a win in the Grand Prix.

JD
That was a Hayabusa. It's worth a
small fortune. I-I don't have that
kinda money.

THE FREEMAN
Ah, now you see. I know that. But
your family does... Mr. Dante.

JD
Are you... the mafia?

THE FREEMAN

The only mafia left is the government kiddo. We have a handshake deal. Old school, eh?

The Freeman stands up, comes a bit closer.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)

Get me my drone back or the equivalent in crypto. And win the damn 9 Circles. And since it's technically a loan I want it back with interest. 24% APR. And I do not accept fiat.

JD

What's fiat...? How am I supposed to do that? You set us up!

The Freeman perches on the window sill, ready to jump.

THE FREEMAN

Setup? I nudged you in the right direction. I'm sure you'll figure it out. I'll be in touch.

Freeman is about to jump but pulls himself back inside.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)

Woo boy, that... that didn't look that high from the outside. I'll just take the door. Don't forget my drone!

He shuts the door. A beat. The Freeman peaks back inside.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)

And 24% APR!

BANG. Door's shut again. JD falls back. He's asleep.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - DANTE ESTATE - DAWN

Joe's in the bed like a mopy child. Stares into space.

IRENE

You want to talk?

JOE

No.

IRENE

You might have to come to terms
that no Dante will break 100.

Joe gets up. Points at his burned body.

JOE

Hard to come to terms with this.

IRENE

It's not JD's fault.

That hit home. Joe slumps back into his pillow.

JOE

I know.

Irene turns off the light on the bedside table.

IRENE

Get some rest.

Joe stares at the ceiling.

INT. JD'S ROOM - DANTE ESTATE - DAY

A drooling JD zaps back to life. He jolts up and looks around his room. Nothing.

JD

What a dream...

He grabs his phone and drags himself to his gaming desk and turns his computer on. While doing so he calls for Omar.

OMAR (THROUGH PHONE)

Whatup? You alright man?

JD

I had the weirdest dream.

OMAR (THROUGH PHONE)

Was it wet and moist?

JD

No, it was the Free-

JD's face lights up from the brightness of the monitor.

ON MONITOR: A custom wallpaper with The Freeman pointing like Uncle Sam. A caption reads: I want my drone!

OMAR (THROUGH PHONE)
The what?

JD
We gotta meet! Like now!

OMAR (THROUGH PHONE)
I'm what they call under house
arrest.

JD
The cops grounded you?

OMAR (THROUGH PHONE)
Heck no, my damn sister did. You
have to come over.

EXT/INT. SUBURBS - OMAR'S HOUSE - DAY

A self-driving cab drops off JD. As he exits--

SELF-DRIVING TAXI
Have a nice day Jake!

The tiny car drives off. JD rings the bell. Miriam opens.

MIRIAM
5 minutes!

JD just nods. She waves him inside. He follows her through the kitchen and living room where Omar's mother, grandmother, aunt, second aunt, and three older sisters prepare dinner.

JD
Eh, hi?

OMAR'S MOTHER
Astaghfirullah! A woman of God?

JD
It wasn't... I'm sorry.

He gives up. Follows Miriam into a hallway. His eyes glued to her silky hair. As they reach Omar's room she stops and he bumps into her awkwardly.

JD (CONT'D)
Sorry.

A Tactical Drone guards Omar's door. Ready to zap anyone unwelcome. Drone scans Miriam's eyes. She holds up a chip.

MIRIAM
Adding IFF tag.

The drone beeps in confirmation.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)
Here. Keep this tag on you.

JD takes the tag, smiling awkwardly. He moves past the drone. It scans him but lets him pass.

INT. OMAR'S ROOM - DAY

Jam-packed with stacked computer parts and electronics everywhere. Omar's on the computer typing basic machine code.

OMAR
Welcome to my prison.

JD
That bad?

OMAR
She's using a military drone. I'm still trying to override it.

JD spots a 3D printer in the room. It's working tirelessly to finish an anime figurine with ridiculously-sized breasts.

JD
How the hell is she not falling over?

OMAR
That's why God gave us math to find the right center of mass.

JD
I'm kinda scared of what happens when you decide to do something useful with your skills.

Omar finishes the last line of code. Presses enter and a simulation starts running numbers across the screen.

OMAR
(turns to JD)
The world ain't ready for that...
How about you?

JD drops on the couch.

OMAR (CONT'D)

That bad?

JD

He set us up! 24% APR? What the hell is that even? Where did you steal those invites from?

OMAR

Well, they kinda... sorta... found their way to me... via mail.

JD

And you didn't find that odd?

OMAR

(shrugs)

We better ask Alex for help then. Also, what are the odds of you meeting him in the hospital?

Both are lost in thought. BEEP. Omar turns to the screen.

OMAR (CONT'D)

I'm in. Can you order a cab?

EXT. DOWNTOWN - CHEN'S LAB - DAY

JD and Omar exit the self-driving cab. They see an auto repair shop. Logo reads: *Chen's Lab*

The boys cross the street towards the classic-looking auto repair shop repurposed for drones and other various autonomous equipment like lawnmowers.

A **MECHANIC** works on a delivery drone.

JD

We're here to see Mr. Chen.

MECHANIC

(continues working)

You got something in the shop?

JD

No. We're... we're--

OMAR

Fans.

The Mechanic looks at the boys.

MECHANIC
(crosses himself)
I've seen you two. You're the kid
who almost killed that nun.

JD
It... it wasn't a real nun.

MECHANIC
Looked real to me.

JD
What nun shows that much leg?!

OMAR
We got a proposal to make.

INT. CHEN'S LAB - DAY

The shop looks like the guts of a Transformer. Industrial parts everywhere. The Mechanic leads the boys to the drone section. Hundreds of spare parts hang from the ceiling.

Alex solders an exposed computer board on a delivery drone.

MECHANIC
Boss, you got visitors. It's that
kid that almost killed a nun.

JD rolls his eyes. Alex stops, looks JD and Omar up and down.

ALEX
So you wanna try again?

JD
Try what?

ALEX
Seeing you here after what
happened. There's only one reason.
And no, I'm not doing it.

JD
You don't know what we wanna ask.

ALEX
I'm not training you. You're
reckless and even more recklessly
out of shape. No discipline and too
much teenage angst for a pilot.

JD
Is this because of what happened?

The room becomes dead silent. Tension cuts through the air. Alex wheels himself towards JD. Stops right in front of him.

ALEX

No. Now get off my property!

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - CHEN'S LAB - DAY

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

OMAR

What now?

JD

I'll meet you later.

OMAR

You sure. I can--

JD

Go!

Omar pulls out his phone to order a cab.

INT. 7TH FLOOR - BUILDING ACROSS FROM CHEN'S LAB - SAME

The Freeman, perched on a windowsill, watches Omar leave in a self-driving cab. He focuses on JD, alone in the street. Grips set up shop behind him. They move crates and weapons.

INT. CHEN'S LAB - LATER THAT DAY

Chen's working on a different drone. He sees JD hang out with some homeless outside. The Mechanic walks by.

MECHANIC

Want me to call the cops?

ALEX

No, he'll give up.

INT. ALEX'S ROOM - CHEN'S LAB - NIGHT

Alex twists and turns in his bed. He's woken up by the screams of a woman and the sounds of a crashing race drone.

He gets up. Looks outside towards the homeless camp and JD.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - NIGHT

JD watches as the lights go out in Chen's Lab. The Mechanic leaves and locks the gate. A **BUM** offers JD a bottle of booze.

JD
I'm fifteen.

BUM
Didn't stop me.

JD
Right. I think I gotta go.

BUM
Aye, was a productive day!

JD forces a smile.

ALEX (O.S.)
Want dinner?

JD
Yes! Of course.

BUM
Can I come too?

ALEX
Sure. If they let you in.

INT. OTAKU DEN - NIGHT

A high-tech running sushi with barely any staff. Little droids deliver the food besides the classic conveyor belts.

Anime women grace the walls. Every table has a small screen with a cutesy Virtual Assistant dancing around.

BUM
This place gives me the creeps.

ALEX
It was the only place that would let us in... with you.

The Bum starts grabbing sushi from the conveyor.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Suit yourself, I guess.

Alex moves his chopsticks before the Bum has a chance to eat with his fingers. The Bum rolls his eyes, grabs a pair.

ALEX (CONT'D)

So. What do I have to do to get you off my ass.

JD

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

ALEX

Let me guess, The Freeman?

JD's like "how did you know?!".

ALEX (CONT'D)

He does that all the time. To what end though. I don't know.

JD

Is he dangerous?

ALEX

As long as you pay your dues... No.

JD

And if I don't? Does he--

BUM

--break his legs or something?

ALEX

He's on the most wanted list of every alphabet soup agency out there. You think they want him because he just breaks a few legs?

JD swallows. He's in bigger danger than he thought.

ALEX (CONT'D)

But why do this? Just ask your dad for help or go to the authorities.

JD

I don't know... It's my family. Everyone's out there doing something great. Following my dad's footsteps. I only feel uneasy around him and nauseous inside a car. This was the closest thing to a race I know.

ALEX

Do you read biographies?

JD
Ehm... Nooooo.

ALEX
13 of the top 23 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. Alex points at a wall-mounted TV.

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's an orphan too. Grew up a slave in some factory. And now top of the world.

JD looks utterly defeated. Alex breaks the silence.

ALEX (CONT'D)
And that's why you need training. Like I did. Let's try something.

EXT. CHEN'S LAB JUNKYARD - NIGHT

The Bum eats sushi to go. Alex hands JD a controller and a wristband.

ALEX
This will measure your heart rate.

JD takes the controller and puts the wristband on.

ALEX (CONT'D)
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 gonna use goggles?

ALEX
No need.

JD puts his on. He jumpstarts his drone. These are two mid-tier drones. Smaller but more nimble. Alex's drone flies ahead. JD trails behind. First slow and easy.

Alex leads JD around the yard. Once they make a full round he increases the difficulty. Banking through cars followed by speedy barrel rolls.

Until Alex barrel rolls into a series of intricate aerobatics like he's spray-painting the sky. Alex's drone looks like a sky ballerina while JD's prances around like a drunk sailor.

Both JD and his drone crash. He falls on his knees, lays down on his back. Alex's lands his drone carefully.

ALEX (CONT'D)

It is ridiculous how out of shape you are. Are you just sitting around all day?

JD

(with heavy breathing)

No...

Alex pulls up an app on his phone. Reads the data.

ALEX

195 beats per minute. For this little exercise. You're not out of shape. You're scared for your life.

JD

I don't know why. Nothing else causes this.

ALEX

If you want to win the 9 Circles. Without a sponsor. Without telling your family!

Alex touches his fried neural lace. A beat.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Tomorrow's training starts at 7 am. So be here in time.

JD

What? Why so early?

ALEX

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

JD looks at Alex. Unsure what he got himself into.

INT. HALL OF FAME - DANTE ESTATE - NIGHT

Joe stops at the mid-cabinet. He stares at an old and dirty balaclava mounted on a mannequin's head.

He sees JD on the other end walking into his room. He wants to say something but takes a long beat and--

--goes in the other direction of JD's room.

INT. JD'S ROOM - DANTE ESTATE - NIGHT

JD falls into bed. Exhausted, tired, but with a happy grin.

INT. CHEN'S LAB - 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/EXT. CHEN'S LAB - DAY

JD, now wearing the blue overall, stacks old spare parts.

--The Mechanic eats an apple and watches JD scrub floors. JD looks up at him annoyed. Some more stacking.

--He takes off a tire from a small car and looks rather inept doing so. Yet again, more stacking.

--IN JUNKYARD. JD holds an electric metal cutter.

JD

I do what?

THE MECHANIC

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

JD looks up and down the wall of metal before him.

JD

Okay... no problem.

The tool whirs to life and JD tries his luck. He flinches as the first sparks fly his way.

JD (CONT'D)
Can I get a helmet or something?

The Mechanic leaves him alone. JD sighs.

EXT. CHEN'S LAB - EVENING

JD saws off a piece of metal. It falls to the ground with a bang. He's showered in sweat. Red like a lobster. A few burn marks grace his overall.

ALEX
Congrats. I'm surprised you're still here.

JD
Let me guess, this is already part of the training?

ALEX
No, I just needed free labor.

JD just stares at Alex for an eternity. Alex smiles.

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

INT. CHEN'S LAB - 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. We'll start with simple bouncing.

JD looks at Alex in confusion. Alex raises his hands. JD throws him a ball. Alex starts dribbling the tennis ball with his palm. Throws it back at JD.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Start with one. Then two. You can do the juggling at home for now.

JD starts bouncing off one ball. Slowly.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Faster!

He increases the speed.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Now two!

JD starts bouncing two balls. Now slow again.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Faster!

He goes fast again.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Crisscross between palms!

He crisscrosses the balls between palms.

ALEX (CONT'D)
HIGHER!

JD bounces the balls hard against the ground, shooting them up in the air. His gaze follows them up when--

--the third tennis ball smacks him into his stomach. He coughs to the ground in pain.

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

INT. DANTE ESTATE - NIGHT

JD sneaks into the house.

JOE (O.S.)
Where the hell have you been?

Both Joe and Irene are already waiting for JD.

IRENE
What the hell happened to you?

JD
(caught off guard)
I got a job.

Irene and Joe look in disbelief.

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

JOE
And what kinda job did you get?

JD's unsure if he should tell the truth.

JD
I'm helping in an auto shop.

Both Irene and Joe don't buy it.

JOE
Oh really. What's it called?

JD
Chen's... Shop...

JOE
Chen's Shop?

JD
I gotta go. Early start tomorrow!

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

IRENE
Drugs?

JOE
Drugs!

INT. JD'S ROOM - DANTE ESTATE - NIGHT

JD's in his recliner, he launches the video game. A beat. He looks at his backpack. Turns off the game and TV.

He takes the three tennis balls and tries juggling them. Fumbling around like a toddler. The balls scatter. JD looks like he's had enough of this already. But the boy picks them balls up and tries again. And again. And again.

EXT/INT. CHEN'S LAB - MORNING

JD struts in. A plastic bag filled with carrots flies his way. He catches them right in time.

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

JD
Carrots?

ALEX
Improves eyesight.

JD
We use goggles.

ALEX
Which are a screen. Literally an
inch away from your eyes. Eat them
carrots!

JD puts one reluctantly in his mouth.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Get back to work.

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

EXT. CHEN'S LAB - DAY

JD moves equipment, cargo boxes, spare parts. Sweaty and tired. He's grinding metal with the electric cutter again.

ALEX (O.S.)
HEY!

He stops and turns to Alex who waves him inside.

INT. CHEN'S LAB - DAY

The Mechanic moves a cart with an old tube TV on top. Below the TV is a high-powered battery with cables leading 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 common use anymore.
Been deemed a... torture device.

JD
What?

ALEX
You can sit down for this.

JD takes a seat, puts on the gloves but they're quite small.

JD
These are quite small.

ALEX
Yeah. My mom started me early.

JD looks at him, not understanding what Alex meant.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Tiger mom. Anyway. Each finger is represented by a number. From a 1 for the thumb to a 5 for the little finger on your right hand and 6 to 10 on your left hand.

Alex turns on the TV.

ON TUBE: In black numbers. $1+5$

ALEX (CONT'D)
Once your thumb taps the little finger you can move on.

JD touches his right little finger with his right thumb.

ON TUBE: $1+5$ turns green. Then $3+1$, again in black.

ALEX (CONT'D)
It will alternate but the equation works the same.

JD matches the $3+1$.

ON TUBE: $6+8$ $1+2$

JD matches the right hand but screws up the left.

ON TUBE: The numbers turn 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 TUBE: $1+4$ $6+10$ $2+5$

Right. Right. WRONG. ZAP. JD shakes his head but no retreat!

ON TUBE: 7+6 9+6 1+5

He gets them all right this time. JD smiles.

INT. CHEN'S LAB - LATER

Dribbling again. This time JD is bouncing three tennis balls and alternating again. Alex comes in. Sees the progress.

ALEX

I want to show you something.

He leads JD to an abandoned part in the lab.

Something's on a desk, covered with a tarp. He pulls it down to reveal two vintage but slick drones.

JD

No way!? That's the...

ALEX

Hayabusa-San. The first BCI model.

Something dawns on JD.

JD

That's the one that--

ALEX

--Yeah. Back then the neural lace was... primitive to say the least.

Alex touches his fried neural lace.

ALEX (CONT'D)

It was powered via a battery. You had to jack in. I used too many speed boosters which caused a positive feedback loop. Fried the chip and the drone locked up. That's what I get for being cocky.

Alex comes closer to the drone.

ALEX (CONT'D)

It killed an innocent 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 BCIs now.

JD
 I don't have a BCI.

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

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

ALEX (CONT'D)
 We got two weeks to get you ready
 for the qualifications. So get your
 ass back to training. Also this!

Alex pulls out a coin and a ring. He balances the coin across
 his knuckles on one hand and the ring across his fingers on
 the other. FLIP. He throws both at JD. The kid catches them.

INT. DINING ROOM - DANTE ESTATE - NIGHT

The entire Dante family is here. Homecooked meal for once. JD
 eats his carrots while playing with the coin and ring.

IRENE
 First time I'm seeing you eat
 those.

JD forces a smile.

JOE
 When's your court date?

JD
 In a month.

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

SILVIA
Why is a nun at a drone race?

JD
It wasn't a nun! When was the last
time you saw a real nun?

Everyone's silent. A beat.

RICKY
I would've stayed in Sunday school
with a nun like that.

They laugh but JD drops his cutlery and leaves the table.

INT. CHEN'S LAB - MORNING

Omar and JD enter the building. Alex comes towards them.

JD
This is Omar, a friend of mine. He
can help with training and,
honestly, anything tech-related.

ALEX
Aspiring engineer?

OMAR
Yes, sir.

ALEX
What field?

OMAR
Telematics and automation.

ALEX
I'll show you the drones. You can
start to familiarize. And you? Back
to stacking.

Alex leads Omar to the drones.

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

The Mechanic points at a stack of new deliveries.

INT/EXT. CHEN'S LAB - DAY

--JD stacks the new deliveries into storage. Omar's looking
over a disassembled Hayabusa-San.

--Cutting metal again. Now he doesn't flinch at all.

--JD flies Sparrow. Pulling off complex aerobatics with ease.

INT. CHEN'S LAB - DAY

JD's bouncing three tennis balls with ease. Alternating as well. Omar throws a fourth tennis ball into the mix.

As it joins the juggling whirlwind JD throws one back to Omar. This happens every three seconds like clockwork. Alex is watching and timing it with a stopwatch.

EXT. PARK - DAY

JD jogs through the park. Omar's on a mountain bike next to him. Casually riding along. But JD stops, grabs his sides.

OMAR
You alright?

JD
Yeah, no retreat, no surrender.

JD runs off.

OMAR
That's so corny.

EXT. DANTE ESTATE - DAY

Joe mows the grass, old school with a classic diesel lawnmower. He's drenched in sweat from pushing the machine.

JD leaves the house, rushes for a self-driving taxi. Coin riding across his knuckles.

JOE
Where are you going?

JD
Work.

JOE
It's a Sunday.

JD
Good overtime.

JD's off. Irene looks out the window.

JOE
You think he's dating someone?

IRENE
Are you sure you don't wanna buy a lawn droid?

JOE
I'm not letting a Terminator mow my lawn. That's how it starts. First they mow grass, then people!

IRENE
You're getting too old for this!

JOE
You know why we had to start from scratch? How my father squandered everything my great-grandfather earned. I was living 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
Alright... Take a shower before you sit down anywhere in the house!

She's gone. Joe shakes his head. Turns the lawnmower back on.

EXT. SIGN UP BOOTH - ABANDONED APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

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

MLD ADMIN
Name, please?

JD
Jake Dante, 15.

MLD ADMIN
Oh, it's you... Drone?

JD
Sparrow.

He types the data in.

MLD ADMIN

Alright. All set. Based on your lap clearance you're starting... 3rd. 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

Alright. This one should be easy. Don't even gun for 1st. Just make sure you end up in the top 5 to qualify for the next round.

JD nods. Looks a bit worried.

ALEX (CONT'D)

You'll make it!

EXT. STARTLINE - ABANDONED APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

23 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: SYNC-Status: Active

OMAR

It's synced up.

JD checks the controls in the seat. Sparrow shifts and moves ever so slightly. Adjusting wings and rotors. Every pilot gives a thumbs up to the Organizer. JD thumbs up too.

ORGANIZER

Goggles on!

Everyone puts their FPV goggles on.

ORGANIZER (CONT'D)

3 laps! I repeat. 3 laps! READY?

JD grips the controls tight. A Traffic Signal Drone flies in.

RED. RED. RED. HOLDING AMBER... ALL GREEN!!!

The drones burst ahead like a swarm of bullets and right into-

INT. ABANDONED APARTMENT COMPLEX - CONTINUOUS

The nimble drones fly through the hallway and apartments. There's plenty of holes in the walls to get through.

Sparrow is still 3rd. JD plays it safe. But 4th and 5th are closing in. They all bank outside and--

EXT. ABANDONED WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

--and fly past multiple windows before banking back inside--

INT. ABANDONED APARTMENT COMPLEX - CONTINUOUS

JD let's 4th pass. They rush through a hallway and out again.

INTERCUT BETWEEN EXT/INT ABANDONED APARTMENT COMPLEX

The drones pass the start line. Omar watches the livestream on a tablet.

OMAR

He's fourth.

ALEX

He only has to hold his position.
No point in rushing this.

5th is getting close to Sparrow. JD accelerates but comes in a hairbreadth of a door frame. He banks right in time.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Don't rush it.

JD confirms with a slight nod. The drones pass the 2nd lap and 5th takes over.

ALEX (CONT'D)

One more!

6th tries to take over Sparrow but JD takes a shortcut through a kitchen and its cabins. Sparrow scrapes across the wood but catches its drift again.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Reckless.

OMAR

It's the Dante chillax!

ALEX

What the hell is chillax?!

1st through 4th pass the finish line. With 6th in tow and a nick of time between the two, Sparrow crosses the finish.

Both Omar and Alex cheer. JD lets a big sigh of relief go.

JD

I think I'm gonna pass out.

Omar and Alex steady him.

ALEX

We really need to do something about your motion sickness.

JD takes the goggles off.

JD

Another crazy training method.

ALEX

Not really, just a pilot centrifuge. But getting access isn't easy and cheap.

OMAR

Centrifuge you say?

EXT. PLAYGROUND - PARK - DAY

A few kids have gathered, watching the potential spectacle.

JD

Are we sure about this?

JD sits in the middle of a merry-go-round. He wears a motorcycle helmet. Omar places the wheel of a bike on the edge of the merry-go-round.

OMAR

Of course. It's just physics.

ALEX

Ready?

JD flips the visor down. Gives his thumbs up. Omar revs the bike. The merry-go runs quite slow at first but as Omar increases the speed so does the merry-go-round.

Parents turn to the insanity, not believing their eyes. A few rounds and JD goes flying like a missile. The kids laugh.

Omar and Alex look at each other. A beat. JD writhes and turns on the ground.

JD
 (raises hand)
 I'm alive... just in pain.

The kids laugh and cheer.

MONTAGE - VARIOUS LOCATIONS

A. The Freeman watches from the 7th floor as JD and Omar load up a van at Chen's Lab.

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

C. JD, Joe, and Irene in court. Judge slams 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 criminals. A cop and his robo-dog watch.

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. CHEN'S LAB - DAY

JD places the trophy on a desk.

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

JD
 I can't tell them. We'll just do it.

ALEX
 Your call. I'll send you the bill later anyway.

INT. UNDERGROUND AUG SURGERY - DAY

Jampacked with all sorts of prosthetics and augmentations. From pneumatic arms to cybernetic hearts. A ruffled **SPLICER** attends to JD on a surgery bed.

JD's on his belly, face through a padded hole. His back is covered with a surgical drape, only part open: the neck.

JD

Does it have to be local?

The Splicer wipes the neck area clean.

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, everything should be alright.

Splicer turns to a computer screen. Types a bit and ENTER!

Two surgical robotic arms whir to life and position themselves above JD's neck.

SPLICER (CONT'D)

All set. You ready, kid?

JD ponders.

ALEX

We can still delay this.

JD

No. Let's do it!

Alex nods at the Splicer. He hits ENTER again and the two arms go to work with inhuman precision as they cut open a slice of JD's neck.

Two smaller arms come in and spread the open cut.

The machines cut through nerve tissue and connect the loose end with cybernetic carbon nanotubes. It looks like the tendrils of a jellyfish are connecting with JD.

SPLICER

As ordered. It's a Mark VII Vergil.

The machines lower a small silver shield the size of a Zippo lighter. That's where the carbon tendrils are coming from.

SPLICER (CONT'D)

Pagan Tech's latest masterpiece.
Carbon nanotubes will make you feel
everything the drone feels.

As Vergil comes closer to JD's neck it absorbs the tendrils connected to his nerve tissue. Vergil sinks into JD's neck. The connection is complete.

The Splicer runs diagnostics. He then goes around the table pricking JD with a needle. Fingers first.

JD

Ouch.

SPLICER

That's a good sign.

He continues down his legs, ending with toes.

SPLICER (CONT'D)

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. Small mirror in hand. He tries to get a good look at Virgil. The tissue around is still red and swollen. Omar peaks behind JD.

OMAR

Gnarly! But cool. First thing you
should do is Haptic VR porn!

ALEX

First thing he should do is heal!

SPLICER

Diagnostics should be working.

The Splicer holds up a small piece of artificial skin. It's embedded in a small circuit board with a WiFi antenna. He runs a finger across the skin.

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

JD crosses his leg to hide something.

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

OMAR
Let's hope it doesn't happen during a race.

SPLICER
There will be a few nights where you think you're falling out of the sky. Certainly after initial test flights. But they'll fade once your body can tell the difference. The carbon tubes will do the most to prevent organ rejection but take these for the next two weeks.
(throws two pill bottles)
Both morning and evening. Side effects can be dry mouth, hormonal imbalance, increased appetite, mood swings. Just let your body figure it out. Once it accepts Vergil. It's done.

JD nods, a bit overwhelmed with the info.

INT. DINING ROOM - DANTE ESTATE - EVENING

Both Joe and Irene are staring at JD who wears the most ridiculous black turtleneck sweater he could find.

He pretends like nothing's out of the ordinary. Continues to play with the ring this time.

JD
So how was everyone's day?

Joe and Irene look at each other.

JOE
What the hell are you wearing?

JD
I got a minor cold.

JOE
In the summer?

JD
Happens...

Joe looks back at Irene.

IRENE
You seeing someone?

JD
No.

JOE
Is there anything you want to tell us?

JD shakes his head. Continues with eating and balancing.

INT. JD'S ROOM - DANTE ESTATE - NIGHT

JD sits on his bed. Runs his hand across Vergil. He's still too scared to tell. He calls up Omar on his phone.

JD
Yo!

OMAR (THROUGH PHONE)
How did it go?

JD
Ehm... didn't tell.

OMAR (THROUGH PHONE)
Alex gonna be mad.

JD
Yeah, I know... See you tomorrow!

JD hangs up. Thinks. This won't end well.

EXT. DANTE ESTATE - MORNING

Joe digs around the garden. Replaces a plant. JD catches his attention as the kid leaves again with the silly turtleneck on. He balances both the coin and the ring.

Joe stares with suspicion.

EXT. CHEN'S LAB - DAY

Alex preps a mobile pilot seat. The Hayabusa-San is out on a cart. JD walks up to him all timid.

ALEX
Don't even bother.
(looks at JD)
You can't hide it forever though.

JD nods.

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

Omar runs a software from his tablet.

ALEX (CONT'D)
(pointing at pilot seat)
She's yours.

JD
(sits down)
No goggles?

ALEX
For now, let's just see if you
don't pass out.

OMAR
Ready.

JD sits down and grips the controls. The Hayabusa VTOLs up.

JD
Ready.

Omar taps his tablet. A cold shudder runs down JD's spine. He shivers. Hairs up on both his arms. The drone sways a little.

JD (CONT'D)
Whoa. Cold up there.

ALEX
Wait till you scrape against a
railing while another drone's jet
engine is blasting around you.
Ain't gonna stay cold for long.

JD kicks out his feet like he's about to fall a flight of stairs. In tandem with him, the Hayabusa sways some more.

JD
Whooooooooah--

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

JD touches the ground slowly. He steadies his feet. The drone catches its balance.

JD
This feels weird.

ALEX
You'll get used to it.

OMAR
You know, I always wonder why they
never control the drones with their
minds.

ALEX
Try it.

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

ALEX (CONT'D)
Not precise enough. The drone, not
the neural lace. It's overwhelmed
by all the input from your mind.
Unable to process the data. Haptic
controls are easy to use. Fail-safe
and reliable. You use the drone to
feel out the situation.

JD
Like a driver's ass!

Both Omar and Alex look confused.

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

ALEX
Take your ass for a spin then!

JD
Here?

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

JD smiles. He puts on the goggles and flips a switch.

Hayabusa's engines roar to life. JD pushes down both joysticks and the drone shoots up like a rocket and into--

EXT. SKYLINE - DOWNTOWN - CONTINUOUS

The Hayabusa rises and passes through the dense skyline. Closes in on rooftops and air vents. The drone moves above several AC vents until a burst of smoke hits the drone.

INTERCUT BETWEEN SKYLINE AND CHEN'S LAB

JD twitches. His hands slide off the controls.

JD'S POV: The drone's view fogs up from the smoke. It looks like the drone is being dosed with a fire extinguisher.

JD has a panic attack. The drone banks wildly. It sways to the side and towards the ground. JD grabs his heart.

ALEX
 AUTOPILOT!

Omar taps the tablet. Activates autopilot and the drone catches its flight last minute above some pedestrians.

JD falls out of the chair. He pulls down the goggles.

ALEX (CONT'D)
 Your heart rate is not normal.
 Whatever this motion sickness is,
 it has a grasp on you.

The Hayabusa flies in. Still on autopilot. VTOL's down like a delivery drone.

ALEX (CONT'D)
 This will sound corny. But... I'll
 teach you Tai chi and some
 meditation techniques. Tomorrow. 6
 am. Park!

INT. DINING ROOM - DANTE ESTATE - DAWN

Joe sips coffee and reads his news on a tablet. Irene reads hers across from him. He has problems navigating the page.

JOE
 Can't they just bring back paper?
 I'll chop the damn tree myself.

JD rushes past the door.

JD
 Off to work! See ya in the evening!

BANG. JD's out the door. A beat.

JOE
 He's probably selling drugs.

EXT. PARK - MORNING

JD stands next to Alex following his every hand-move as Alex demonstrates various Tai chi techniques.

The Freeman watches them from across the park. Lenses change apertures inside his helmet.

EXT. PILOT AREA - THICK FOREST - DAY

The Major League Drones pilots look like the real deal. JD spots Lucy and her Serpent-One arriving to great applause by the media and fans.

ALEX
 Ignore her. Just qualify for the 9
 Circles. You don't have the
 experience to beat her...

Not much consolation for JD.

ALEX (CONT'D)
 ...yet!

EXT. FOREST MAJOR LEAGUE DRONES TRACK - DAY

The Hayabusa-San takes over multiple competitors through a thick forest. But it can't keep up with Serpent-One.

It gets checkered by passing through a holographic finish.

EXT. DANTE ESTATE - MORNING

Joe in the garden again. Watches JD leave (with the silly turtleneck on) and enter a self-driving cab.

EXT. MOUNTAIN MAJOR LEAGUE DRONES TRACK - DAY

Haybusa-San banks, flips, and barrel rolls like it's nothing. Past several competitors. Still behind Serpent-One.

It flashes through the holographic finish. Checkered again.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Scorching sun. Omar and JD pick trash with other convicts.

EXT. DANTE ESTATE - MORNING

JD enters a self-driving cab as Joe watches. From inside the BMW E30. He follows the self-driving cab.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - DAY

JD exits the cab and runs for Chen's Lab. Joe watches in his BMW E30 across the street.

INT. CHEN'S LAB - DAY

JD enters. Drops his duffel bag.

ALEX

I got something for you!

Alex hands him a small box. JD opens it to reveal two high-tech bracelets.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Acustimulation bracelets.

JD just looks at him like a confused puppy.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Anti-nausea bracelets. They'll help with your motion sickness.

He puts both bracelets on.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Electrical pulses stimulate the median nerve. Disrupting nausea signals. We need to get your motion sickness under control.

JOE (O.S.)

What the hell is that!

Alex and JD turn to the commotion. Joe walks up to JD who keeps his distance. Joe's chasing the kid around the desk. The Mechanic joins, a bit out of breath.

THE MECHANIC
(to Alex)
Sorry boss.

JOE
What have you done with your neck!

Omar walks casually into the shop, humming a tune. Sees Joe confronting JD. He casually turns around and walks out again.

JD
I can explain!

JOE
What the hell are you doing here?

JD tries to find the right words when--

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

JOE
And who are you?

ALEX
(extends handshake)
Alex Chen. 9-time Grand Prix champion in the MLD. I'm his coach.

JOE
(ignores handshake)
And I'm Joe Dante. 99-time champion in a real Grand Prix. And I'm his father.

The pissing match is full-on.

JOE (CONT'D)
You're going home! Now!

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

JOE
Shine? By playing around with toys?

JD

It's not a toy. I've trained way
too much for this to give up now.

JOE

Trained? For this? Can't you just
sell drugs or be gay? Like a normal
kid! Like your siblings!

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

JOE (CONT'D)

You lied to me and your mother.
(moves in closer)
Listen to me. I know you ain't a
kid anymore. So I can't drag you
out of here. But if you don't come
home now, don't bother coming home
at all.

That stung. JD looks eyes with his dad. It's a No.

JOE (CONT'D)

Fine. When I was your age I was
already out of a home. So be my
guest.

Joe shakes his head and leaves.

EXT. CHEN'S LAB - CONTINUOUS

Omar's hiding behind a corner. Watches Joe storm out and
reach a safe distance. Omar heads back inside.

INT. CHEN'S LAB - CONTINUOUS

OMAR

Hey, what did I...

Everyone's pulling a long face.

OMAR (CONT'D)

...miss.

ALEX

You can... We can pack for the
qualifying race. Best not to waste
any time.

JD gives a defeated 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. PADDOCKS - RACE TRACK - AUTONOMOUS FARM - DAY

23 pilots and their crews have gathered around their allocated pilot seats. Everyone's getting ready for the race.

JD and his team are in the middle. He sees Lucy just waiting. Everyone else is getting ready but she's calm as a clock.

ALEX

This is an endurance rally. The heat, the dust, the moisture. Your drone will feel it and so will you. 30 laps across the longest track. And you have to make the podium. Otherwise, we have to try again.

JD nods. He looks worried as the wind whips.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I hope our drone doesn't clog up from the dust.
(to Omar)
Sync it up!

JD puts his goggles on. Omar gives his thumbs up. The Hayabusa-San rises above ground. Dust flies everywhere as all drones rise. This environment is unlike anything before.

Omar looks worried too, the high-tech seems quite feeble now.

Drones move into their assigned positions. Hayabusa-San in 2nd, Serpent-One on pole position. A traffic drone flies in.

RED. RED. RED. HOLDING AMBER. GREEN!!!

The drones explode ahead and into--

EXT. RACE TRACK - AUTONOMOUS FARM - CONTINUOUS

Serpent-One is still in the lead. The drones fly across the cornfield and down into a tight--

--maze cleared of cornstalks. Drones form into single-file. Too tight to overtake, the foliage could tangle up a drone.

EXT. PADDOCKS - RACE TRACK - AUTONOMOUS FARM - SAME

JD's already sweating and struggling.

JD
Why the hell do I smell dung?

ALEX
It's your mind and Vergil. All other senses picture dung so phantom smells form in unison. Ignore it.

JD
Easier said than done.

INTERCUT WITH PADDOCKS AND RACE TRACK

Hayabusa takes tight turns in the maze. Banks dangerously close towards the foliage, so much it cuts 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. MASTER BEDROOM - DANTE ESTATE - DAY

Joe fumbles with his phone on the bed. Irene towers over him.

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 remotely 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 of what to say.

JOE
 (brings up phone)
 It's stuck. I don't know what to do
 with it.

IRENE
 Bring back our son. Or there will
 be more broken than your phone.

Irene storms out and slams the door behind her. Joe looks at his frozen phone. The dashboard on it starts moving again.

ON PHONE: Remote access activated

The TV turns on before Joe. A compilation starts to play, streaming from the phone.

ON TV: Various drone racing highlights and crashes.

Joe takes it all in.

EXT. PADDOCKS - RACE TRACK - AUTONOMOUS FARM - DAY

Alex looks at the digital leaderboard: Lap 23.

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

EXT. RACE TRACK - AUTONOMOUS FARM - SAME

Back in the labyrinth. Number 3 gets cocky and tries overtaking the Hayabusa in a risky move.

It doesn't work as JD holds his ground but the Hayabusa gets tangled up with more foliage. The jets run hot as they burn up the foliage. So much that a coolant hose bursts.

JD'S POV: The liquid foams up like the spray of a fire extinguisher. Engulfing the view like a dark specter.

INTERCUT WITH PADDOCKS AND RACE TRACK

JD starts to hyperventilate. He's losing it.

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

JD
 No, it's not.

ALEX
What's not?

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

The Hayabusa sways full-on into the cornstalks. Burning up foliage until the jets stop rotating. It crashes into the ground and across the cornfield. Lucy doesn't even react.

Everyone overtakes the Hayabusa. It's over. Rescue and salvage teams head for the burning Hayabusa-San. 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. VAN - COUNTRY ROADS - DUSK (MOVING)

Omar drives the van. Alex rides shotgun.

JD is in the back staring at the burned-up and mangled Hayabusa-San. The silence is painful.

EXT. CHEN'S LAB - NIGHT

The van stops in front of the shop. Omar notices the lights inside are still on.

OMAR
Nobody should be inside, right?

Alex frowns. What is it now!

INT. CHEN'S LAB - NIGHT

Alex and Omar enter and are approached by the Mechanic.

THE MECHANIC
I tried. They won't leave.

ALEX
Who?

JD drags himself inside, shoulders down. Tired. Surrendered.
The Mechanic looks at JD. Alex realizes. Oh!

THE MECHANIC
There's some other old guy with
him. Says it's his mechanic?!

ALEX
Did you call the cops?

THE MECHANIC
I did. They came here and took a
fan photo and autograph with them.

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

INT. ALEX'S ROOM - CHEN'S LAB - SHORT TIME LATER

JD walks in, he spots his dad and **DUKE JOHNSON**, late 60s,
rugged and tough like Joe. Cigar in mouth. The muscled hunk
of a man smiles at JD.

DUKE
Been a long time, kid.

JD
Duke? What are you doing here?

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

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

JD
She?

DUKE
(smiles at Joe)
This kid needs to learn a lot. I'll
leave you two to it.
(to JD)
This jackass has something to say.

Duke leaves. Joe's fumbling for words. The painful silence
could kill a titan.

JD

Look--

JOE

--I tried your stupid drone.

JD's face says it all: What?!

JOE (CONT'D)

Your... mother insisted I at least try your drone once before I kick you out of the house.

JD

You piloted my drone?

JOE

Eh, pilot... not so much.

EXT. DANTE ESTATE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Joe's in the garden. FPV goggles on. Controller in hand. He stumbles and fumbles. Overtaken by nausea like a drunkard.

WHOOOSH. The small drone comes in like a missile and hits him square in the goggles. Smacking him to the ground.

INT. ALEX'S ROOM - CHEN'S LAB - CONTINUOUS

JOE

I thought it's just a toy.

JD

Well, that one is. The Hayabusa is a different monster.

JOE

Hayabusa... Is there one called Samurai?

JD

(a beat)

Yeah.

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

JOE

I was wrong. I'm sorry. And I'm here to help.

JD

Too late now.

JOE
You can still try again. Why not--

JD
How about I don't want your help!
You just show up now? I realized
something today. You know what my
only childhood memory is of you?

Joe stays silent.

JD (CONT'D)
You dying!

JOE
What? I didn't--

INT. VIP BOOTH - F1 RACE TRACK - RAINY DAY (FLASHBACK)

A younger Irene holds a late **TODDLER JD** in her lap. **KID RICKY**
and **SILVIA** play around.

Both Irene and Toddler JD are glued to a TV.

ON TV: Joe's helmet camera during a race. THE race, Joe's
100th Grand Prix.

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

Joe loses control. A massive crash and pileup.

Irene gets up, JD in arm. Kid Ricky and Silvia stop playing.
They all watch as flames engulf the view. Joe tries to get
the safety belt off but to no avail. He's trapped inside.

Foam extinguishers capture the view. Same as it did for JD's
FP-view. The birth of the specter. It all comes home.

INT. DANTE ESTATE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Joe, fresh off the ICU, watches his messed-up race on TV. His
face looks ghastly and ghoulish.

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

Toddler JD peeks through the door. He looks at the mad ghoul
before him. Until Joe turns, giving him a deadly look. The
boy runs away.

INT. ALEX'S ROOM - CHEN'S LAB - CONTINUOUS

Joe's lost for words.

JOE
Almost had it. The 100. It
should've been a Dante doing it!

JD
There's still Ricky. He'll take it
home.

JOE
Ricky... will mostly like get bored
or get busted for drugs... It
should've been you. I named you
Jakob for a reason.

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

JD
Well too late now.

JOE
Why?

JD
It's not easy to explain. Omar and
I are... in a bit of trouble.

JD and Joe notice The Freeman and his grips enter. The black-clad grips are armed this time.

JD (CONT'D)
Actually, trouble is already here.

INT. CHEN'S LAB - SAME

The grips carry an array of 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)
Ah, there he is. What an impeccable
display of failure.

JD
We'll get you your drone.

THE FREEMAN

There's just one little problem. I
didn't invest in a drone. I
invested in a Grand Prix champion.

The Freeman grabs a Kalashnikov from one of the grips.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)

You see this?

(holds up the Kalashnikov)

It was such a marvelous product
they went out of business. No one
bought a second one. Under the
right conditions and incentives,
human ingenuity knows no bounds.

(points rifle at JD)

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

Joe steps in front of JD to shield him.

JOE

Careful pal. 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 ass into The
Crucible.

JOE

The Crucible?

ALEX

No chance! That's too dangerous for
an underdeveloped brain. No one
under 25 needs to go there!

JOE

What in god's name is The Crucible?

ALEX

The ghost towns of Ikeshima Island.
And its reactor.

DUKE

The nuclear plant?

ALEX

Yes. Anyone can join. But it's more
battle royal than a rally.

(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)

Win it and you get an invitation to the Grand Prix. The spectacle is used to fund the cleaning effort.

JOE

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

THE FREEMAN

The BCI implants verge on the quantum level. Even within the maximum possible distance for remote control, there's still 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 maniacs and convicts with nothing to lose go there.

THE FREEMAN

The next Crucible is in two weeks. So make the right choice or you'll regret it.

JOE

We ain't afraid of you and your muscle.

THE FREEMAN

And you shouldn't be. What you should be afraid of is the financial institution of your choosing.

Joe tightens.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)

I know you think it's safe because you've been dealing with the same clerk for decades but your fortune is nothing other than a long string of ones and zeros. And that just happens to be my native tongue.

The Freeman beckons his grips. They leave.

JOE

What was he talking about?

OMAR

He can make you poor. He once hacked into the Pentagon and changed everyone's food items to their allergies. Even for those who didn't even know they had allergies. Usually, he only screws with government employees.

JOE

Wait, that's why the government shut down? Did he hack my phone?

DUKE

That's why I buy gold!

ALEX

(to JD)

You're not going!

Alex wheels away but JD stops him in his tracks.

JD

Wait! I can do this.

ALEX

You physically can't with this one! It overwhelms well-adjusted adults. What do you think it'll do you?

JOE (O.S.)

He can do it!

Joe joins his son.

JOE (CONT'D)

We Dantes are tough and stubborn.

Alex sees the determination in both Joe and JD.

ALEX

I'm not letting another person--

JD kneels before Alex.

JD

It wasn't your fault. And I would've never come this far without you. We need you. I need you!

Bullseye. Alex realizes he changed the boy.

ALEX
We'll need all the help we can get.

JOE
Oh, you got it!

Joe looks at Duke who takes a big pull from his cigarette.

INT. CHEN'S LAB - DAY

Everyone has gathered around a projector. Alex beams photos of The Crucible via his Bluetooth tablet.

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

ALEX
The problem is twofold. First the radiation. The shortest way to get checkered is also the most radiated. Sensory overload, connection loss, etc. Which leads us to problem #2. Everyone else.

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

JOE
(Arnie impression)
Aaah, lawl, I'm a cybernetic organism. Living tissue over...

No one finds it funny. Alex takes a beat.

ALEX
There are 50 drones. Each pilot will try to knock off everyone else. The less there are towards the end, the easier the win.

Collage changes again. This time to marked radiation zones and optimal routes.

ALEX (CONT'D)
Our biggest problem will be to shield the drone from radiation and to keep JD safe.

DUKE
I know what can help. We need to 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

With digital, the measurement is only as precise as the amount 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 with both joysticks.

JOE

(to JD)

Ha! So they are joysticks!

ALEX

They also cost more. And it's very time-consuming to integrate them with digital systems. Think you can get it done in two weeks?

DUKE

(points at Omar)

With his help? Sure.

Omar smiles. Proud of himself.

ALEX

That leaves JD.

Everyone looks at JD. The pressure is mounting.

ALEX (CONT'D)

We'll have to amp up everything. Are you ready for it?

JD wants to say something when--

JOE

He was born ready!

80IEST OF 80S MONTAGES - VARIOUS LOCATIONS

A. Dawn. JD jogs in the park.

B. Chen's Lab. JD dribbles 4 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 and alternate faster than usual. He's zapped in the end.

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

E. Chen's Lab. Omar and Duke have gutted the Hayabusa-San. The parts are all laid out on the table.

F. Ricky, Silvia, and Irene bring in food for everyone at Chen's Lab. The garbage piles up.

G. JD juggles 5 tennis balls but loses it when a 6th is thrown in by Alex.

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

I. JD and Alex do more elaborate Tai chi exercises. JD follows Alex's lead.

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

K. Chen's Lab. JD dribbles 4 tennis balls while swiveling and alternating. Joe and Alex throw fastballs at him but he swaps them like a baseball pitching machine.

L. Back in the torture chair. Numbers Pong is going crazy. But JD hits every single one. A fraction of a second between fingertip touches.

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

N. JD juggles 6 tennis balls with mastery.

O. A big feast with everyone including Miriam. More garbage piles up.

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. Chen's Lab. 4 alternating dribbles as usual. JD swivels as Joe, Ricky and Silvia throw in a fastball. They also move in circles. He catches them all and throws them back. Alex watches proudly.

S. Merry-go-round tornado. But JD holds on. 7000rpm on the bike. The metal in the bike wheel glows. Omar stops. The merry-go-round comes to a halt. JD steps down tumbling like a drunk with both thumbs up. He gets up but tumbles again.

T. Chen's Lab. Omar and Duke put the last pieces back together. The Hayabusa-San has morphed.

Nothing left of the old machine. It looks tighter and sharper. Stripped of useless weight.

U. Merry-go-round. Everyone surrounds JD and lifts him up and on their shoulders. The kids cheer and applaud. Parents applaud with hesitation at the successful Jackass stunt.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. CHEN'S LAB - DAY

Everyone has gathered looking at the morphed Hayabusa-San.

ALEX

That's not a Hayabusa anymore.

JOE

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

They all turn to Joe with great anticipation.

ALEX

What's the theme?

JOE

Inferno. Dante's Inferno.

DUKE

We can do it. If the kid wants it?

JD looks at his dad.

JD

(with a smile)
Absolutely.

They get back to work.

INT. JD'S ROOM - DANTE ESTATE - DAY

JD packs up a few things. He puts his anti-nausea bracelets into his luggage. Joe knocks on the open door and comes in.

JOE

I got you something.

Joe hands him a pair of sealed fingerless gloves.

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

JD
 You did your research?

JOE
 Yeah. I thought it's best to make
 myself useful.

JD smiles.

JOE (CONT'D)
 Where does the race actually start?
 The whole coast there is radiated.

JD
 Oh it's off a carrier.

JOE
 Carrier?

EXT. COAST - JAPAN - DAY

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

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 the expert too.

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

EXT. USS RONALD REAGAN - JAPAN - DAY

50 pilots get ready on the main deck. The cybernetic monsters look more insane and ridiculous than on the collage.

MLD Technicians move the drones into place.

A **BEEFCAKE** and his crew look more like prison inmates than athletes. The Beefcake beckons one of his crewmembers who starts slapping the shit out of the pilot like he's about to arm-wrestle Stallone in 'Over the Top'.

After a barrage of slaps, the Beefcake lets out a war cry.

JD

Well, that can't be healthy.

ALEX

Don't mind them. Everyone deals with The Crucible differently. You though. Focus on the goal. We have no idea what will happen to your mind. So nothing's real outside the goal. You got me?

JD nods. Omar hands him his FPV goggles.

OMAR

I made some upgrades. The drone has a built-in Geiger counter. Radiation will appear as green splotches.

JD

Green? Really?

OMAR

What? You played enough video games.

JD spots Lucy. She studies all the potential competitors. Someone else is beside her talking with MLD Officials and Navy personnel. The person wears a slick and very expensive-looking business suit. This is **JONATHAN SAMUKANGE**, late 40s.

JOE

Who's that guy?

JD

That's Jonathan Samukange! He owns Samu Industries.

Joe looks like he heard that name for the first time.

OMAR

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

This doesn't mean anything to Joe.

OMAR (CONT'D)

He makes fast computers.

JOE

Oh. Nice... You should talk to the girl. She looks cute.

Jonathan says something to Lucy. She nods and stays as he leaves with the others. JD sees his chance and walks up to her. Mesmerized by her augmented cybernetic snake eyes.

JD

Hi.

With a contemptuous "hm" she walks away. Omar walks up.

OMAR

You know. There's this thing called "friend zone". Most men end up eventually there. But you? You reached a higher plane of friend zone. You're at least in the 9th dimension now.

JD rolls his eyes and walks back to his seat. Ricky and Silvia watch on a tablet the livestream of the event.

INT. MEDIA BOOTH - USS RONALD REAGAN - SAME

A viewing deck repurposed as a media booth. The **CRUCIBLE ANNOUNCER** watches multiple screens covering all angles and ghost towns in Ikeshima.

CRUCIBLE ANNOUNCER

Welcome to The Crucible. The most ruthless among us have gathered yet again for a deadly battle and a ticket to the 9 Circles. The pilots face off with each other against the radiated ghost towns of Ikeshima. Notable newcomers include Jakob Dante, a young and scrupulous pilot who was in the clink for the attempted murder of a nun. Unbelievable. But it's all for a good cause!

EXT. USS RONALD REAGAN - CONTINUOUS

Everyone looks at JD.

JD

Is research even a thing these days?

A **CRUCIBLE ORGANIZER** walks the deck with a megaphone.

CRUCIBLE ORGANIZER

Pilots! Ready your seats!

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

JD

Seatbelts?

ALEX

There've been people freaking out and running off the deck. Better safe than sorry.

JD straps in. It looks like he's in some high-tech racing chair. Puts on the goggles.

INT. VIP BOOTH - USS RONALD REAGAN - SAME

Another repurposed room. This one with fancy snacks and drinks. Jonathan and Lucy take seats in designer armchairs. An **ASSISTANT** always on standby.

JONATHAN

What are the odds?

ASSISTANT

The usual. Most bids on the convicts.

JONATHAN

What about the kid?

ASSISTANT

One anonymous bidder with multiple crypto credits.

JONATHAN

What are you up to Freeman?

EXT. USS RONALD REAGAN - CONTINUOUS

CRUCIBLE ORGANIZER
Start your engines!

50 drones roar to life. The deck erupts like it's swallowed by a swarm of angry wasps as the drones move into place. A giant Traffic Drone moves in above them.

RED. RED. RED. RED. RED. RED.

The pilots shift and adjust. Grinding molars to a pulp.

HOLDING AMBER.

JD grips the joysticks. The rubber in his gloves squeaks.

GREE. GREEN. GREEN. GREEN. GREEN. GREEN!!!

The swarm of wasps erupts into motion and onto--

EXT. OCEAN - IKESHIMA - CONTINUOUS

Like the Ride of the Valkyries the drones descent onto the shining and clear blue ocean. JD's Inferno is in the middle playing it safe.

Water and vapors gush over them. Everyone goes full speed as they approach--

EXT. THE CRUCIBLE - IKESHIMA - CONTINUOUS

A narrow street. The drones merge into double file. Inferno still in middle as multiple drones hit the nearby buildings.

Inferno banks and sways as debris flies across the street. It narrowly avoids being hit by the flying metal parts.

The drones continue their way through the ghost town. Swarming out as everyone takes different routes avoiding radiation and obstacles.

Not long though until JD learns this ain't a simple rally. Three drones swarm Inferno trying to push it against a building. Inferno escapes through a window and into--

--an apartment as one drone crashes against the window. Two follow inside the apartment.

EXT. USS RONALD REAGAN - SAME

JD jerks the controls.

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

Everyone else watches the POV livestream intently.

INTERCUT WITH THE CRUCIBLE AND USS RONALD REAGAN

Inferno leaves the apartment complex through a collapsed wall. The two drones still in tow coming in closer when--

--the Inferno takes a sharp dive in between a monorail system. The two drones crash against the rails.

ALEX
How do you feel?

JD
Hot.

Alex looks at Omar.

OMAR
(whispers to Alex)
Drone's running smooth.

Alex, clearly worried, looks at JD.

JD
What?

ALEX
Huh?

JD
What did you say?

ALEX
I didn't say anything.

JD
Oh. Thought I'd heard something.

Alex looks at Omar prompting him to show JD's vitals: Elevated heart rate and brain activity.

Inferno leaves the monorail, flies through narrow streets.

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

JD twitches. So does Inferno. Things seem to slow down. For both Inferno and JD.

DEMONIC WHISPER (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 trouble brewing.

ALEX
 What's wrong?

JD'S POV: A series of flashes and shots of burned-up and ghoulish Joe.

DEMONIC WHISPER (O.S.)
 They're better off without you!

JD
 SHUT UP!

Inferno starts swaying dangerously. Narrowly avoiding a hit.

ALEX
 Omar. What's wrong with the drone?

OMAR
 Nothing. He's in sync with the drone.

DEMONIC WHISPER (O.S.)
 You should just kill yours--

Joe's rests his hand on JD's shoulder.

JOE
 I know that feeling. Happens to me in the Nordschleife. At the Mutkurve. A deadly corner when approached with 250km/h. You know why the Germans named it Mutkurve?

JD
 Why?

JOE
 It means courage curve. But I like to call it Gut Corner. You either take it with guts or you lose your guts. Literally.

JD snaps out of it. This is the boost he needed but it's too late when--

--A big drone flies past Inferno smacking it to the side. Inferno scrapes a wall and skids across the ground. The FPV feed goes blank.

JD

Damn it!

The Beefcake's crewmembers laugh and cheer. It's his drone.

ALEX

Reboot! Now!

Omar smacks the keyboard as fast as he can.

JD

(with confidence)

What's the shortest route!

ALEX

Nobody uses the shortest--

JD

What's. The. Shortest. Route!

Alex pulls up a route on his table.

ALEX

Sending now.

JD'S POV: A shortcut appears marked on a map. It leads through a highrise not far from Inferno's position and a massive drop into underground sewage.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Problem is there's a blind spot for the jump. You need to get to the 13th floor and jump 117 feet to fall into the manhole. No signal, no feed, no cameras. It's a blind jump.

JD

Omar?

OMAR

Done!

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

JD jerks the controls and Inferno jumps back to life. Inferno flies towards the highrise. Ignores all other drones.

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. HIGHRISE - THE CRUCIBLE - CONTINUOUS

--the massive lobby. Through elevator doors and--

--with an insane half inside loop it shoots upwards the elevator shaft.

EXT. USS RONALD REAGAN - SAME

Alex and Omar watch the stream.

ALEX

That... That one... Only AIs...

Joe watches his son.

INT. HIGHRISE - THE CRUCIBLE - CONTINUOUS

Inferno approaches the 13th floor and does another half inside loop to leave the shaft. It's not stopping. Approaching a window with maximum speed.

EXT. USS RONALD REAGAN - SAME

Alex watches the screen. The window coming in closer.

ALEX

Slow down! We need to plan the--

INT./EXT. HIGHRISE - THE CRUCIBLE - CONTINUOUS

Inferno bursts through the window.

EXT. USS RONALD REAGAN - CONTINUOUS

JD cuts the power. Flips off jet engine switches.

JD'S POV: The manhole is marked below. The view looks like the first seconds before the descend on a rollercoaster.

INTERCUT WITH USS RONALD REAGAN AND THE CRUCIBLE

Inferno feels the wind slipstream across its shell.

So does JD as his hackles raise. He gently moves both joysticks. Adjusting to the winds and slipstream.

Inferno is in full descend. Approaching the ground fast. JD's calm. Alex breaks a sweat in anticipation. Joe smiles when--

--Inferno falls through the manhole with inhuman 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. SEWAGE - THE CRUCIBLE - CONTINUOUS

--Inferno's engines roar back to life. Hairbreadth 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.

ALEX

My god.

Omar high fives everyone but Alex doesn't reciprocate.

ALEX (CONT'D)

It ain't over yet.

JD

It is!

INT. SEWAGE - THE CRUCIBLE - CONTINUOUS

Inferno clears the sewage at full speed. Any gates, crates, pipes, bars, and railings are dodged with ease.

EXT. FINISH - THE CRUCIBLE - SAME

12 drones remain. Lead by the Beefcake. They approach the finish line fast. The ground below them ends with a crater revealing the sewage system.

INTERCUT WITH FINISH AND USS RONALD REAGAN

Beefcake smiles. Sure of his win when Inferno spawns from the crater below and right in front of everyone.

Everyone behind Inferno pushes to the limit. Some drones are faster but they can't overtake Inferno.

Too nimble. Too fast. Too precise. JD keeps his corners closed and gets checkered at full speed. A beat later and everyone else follows. Everyone cheers around JD.

Beefcake screams his heart out as he gets off his seat, ripping the controls out. He smashes controls and goggles in Hulk-like mania against the ground. JD takes a deep breath.

JOE

I know that feeling all too well.

Both laugh.

INT. VIP BOOTH - USS RONALD REAGAN - SAME

Both Jonathan and Lucy watch as JD gets checkered.

JONATHAN

Will this boy be a problem?

Lucy watches the repeat of JD's win.

LUCY

No.

JONATHAN

(to Assistant)

How much did The Freeman make?

The Assistant looks at her tablet. Numbers still coming in.

ASSISTANT

Not final yet. But it's a record.

JONATHAN

Let's increase the security for the next 9 Circles. I want every pilot and their drones monitored.

ASSISTANT

Understood.

EXT. USS RONALD REAGAN - SHORT TIME LATER

Inferno VTOL's down before JD. He gets out of the chair and hugs his dad. MLD Officials already lined up. Garland and trophy in hand.

JD walks with the MLD entourage towards a podium. A beat.

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.

INT. FOYER - DANTE ESTATE - NIGHT

The Dantes are greeted by Irene. Hugs and kisses. JD looks tired. She kisses him last.

IRENE
That was insane!

JD
Thanks, mom. It was nothing really.

IRENE
Oh, you already humblebragging like your father now?

He forces a smile. The recognition is almost as tough to handle as the lack of it. JD wants to carry his luggage when--

JOE
--No, no. The champ does not carry his own luggage.

Joe beckons Ricky and Silvia.

JD
I ain't the champ yet. There's still Lucy.

JOE
The cute one?

JD
She's more than just cute. She's the current champion and she has Samu Industries behind her.

JOE
You know what she can't buy with money? A Dante!

INT. TRAINING FACILITY - AUG CITY - NIGHT

A holographic display of JD (bought with money) in his pilot chair is analyzed and dissected by Lucy.

She watches in a pilot chair. The facility is filled with training equipment.

Every twitching muscle identified. Exerted force measured. No detail left out. Jonathan appears behind her.

JONATHAN

And?

LUCY

Nothing. No additional augs besides the Vergil. No hacks or jacks.

The hologram shows the insane half inversed loop.

LUCY (CONT'D)

No AI assistance.

JONATHAN

That Dante family. I looked them up. They've been racing for over 100 years. And his father is the first to not die in a race. It's like they live for this.

LUCY

For what?

JONATHAN

Competition.

Both look at the inversed loop on repeat.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Security is increased nonetheless. You wanted to show me something?

LUCY

Yes. I can do 20 now.

--Lucy stands in the middle of the gym. Jonathan watches across from her.

Above Lucy, a small opening in the ceiling slides open. A beat and 20 juggling balls fall towards her.

She toss juggles all of them back up and into the opening until the last one is inside and the opening locks again. Took less than 2 seconds. Jonathan applauds with a smile.

INT. HALL OF FAME - DANTE ESTATE - NIGHT

Joe stands in front of the balaclava again. He sees JD on his way to his room.

JOE

Jake. I got something for you.

JD joins. Joe opens it and takes the old balaclava.

JOE (CONT'D)

I know we'll head out for Aug City soon. So I thought to give you my old balaclava. It saved my life. It belongs to you now.

JD

We don't really use those.

JOE

I know. I know. It's still yours. Try it!

He puts the balaclava on. Nods proudly.

JD

(a beat)

It does smell a little.

JOE

Yeah well, a few races will do that.

JD

Actually, I think I'm about to pass out.

Joe props up JD. Helps him take off the balaclava. JD looks at it with tearful eyes.

JD (CONT'D)

Thanks.

JOE

By the way. How do we get to Aug City? Alex said someone is picking us up?

JD

Yes. About that.

EXT. PRIVATE AIRPORT - DAY

Joe stares at a high-tech self-flying VTOL with no windows but an array of solar panels and sensory modules.

Airport crew loads the VTOL with luggage and flight cases.

JOE

No. No. No. I'm not getting into that death trap.

Everyone's here. Dante family, Omar, Alex, Duke, and Miriam.

ALEX

It's our only way to Aug City.

Joe takes a moment and--

JOE

Any booze in there?

ALEX

Probably.

INT/EXT. VTOL - OCEAN - DAY

Joe pours himself a whiskey on the rocks and shakily moves the glass to his lips. He's holding onto his life in the chair. Irene tries to comfort him.

The inside walls of the VTOL are screen panels displaying the outside view around the aircraft.

Omar and JD play around trying to get all the panels on. They turn on the ground panels revealing the ocean beneath them.

JOE

Could you maybe not do that.

OMAR

This is awesome! You can get to Beijing with this in 3 hours!!!

JOE

Great. I'll bury you in Beijing then.

Omar realizes Joe's dead serious.

EXT. AUG CITY - OCEAN - DAY

The cybernetic Monaco of the world. A chain of floating islands made out of the ocean's plastic.

The entire city is automated. Robots clean the sides of skyscrapers. There's a Fifth Element-style air traffic but for drones and cargo.

The VTOL approaches Aug City.

INT. VTOL - AUG CITY - DAY

Everyone's watching out the screen windows. Even Joe is looking around.

JD spots the massive 9 Circles stadium on the ground.

EXT. HELIPAD - AUG CITY - DAY

VTOL touches down. First to exit is Joe and quite happy about it. Everyone else follows.

An entourage of Aug City technicians approaches them.

AUG TECHNICIAN

Welcome to Aug City. My name is Bailey. I'm with Pagan Tech. We got the bid for the municipality last year.

JOE

I don't follow...

AUG TECHNICIAN

Oh. We're the company responsible for administrative tasks and governance.

JOE

Wait. No government? Who pays for this?

JONATHAN (O.S.)

I do.

Jonathan chimes in. He shakes hands with Joe. Waves to everyone else.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Most of it at least. We don't levy taxes here.

JOE

Oh really? Well, count me in then.

JONATHAN

Sure, if you got the time and money. When's the next available lot, Bailey?

Bailey looks at another technician who pulls up data from a tablet. Whispers something to Bailey.

BAILEY

23 years, sir.

JOE

And I thought my go-to Italian restaurant had a long waiting list.

JONATHAN

It will change as we expand.

ALEX

Excuse me. But do you always greet the arrivals?

JONATHAN

Sometimes. When I have a gift for them. Or on behalf of someone else.

Jonathan pulls out three fancy envelopes. Half paper, half circuit board. Hands them to Joe and Alex.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

VIP passes. You can see the pilots from this spot.

JD

Who bought those?

JONATHAN

No idea. Anonymous. Someone's got a big fan already.

JD locks eyes with Omar.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Anyway. I have business to attend.

Jonathan bows ever so slightly and slips away.

JOE

I don't trust that guy. No one gets that far without screwing someone over.

OMAR
Actually, no one knows much about
him. Grew up an orphan on an
electronics dump.

Everyone gives Omar the odd looks.

OMAR (CONT'D)
Supposedly.

JOE
Well. I'm starving. Time to eat.

They follow Joe's lead but JD watches Jonathan in the
distance. Omar comes up to JD.

OMAR
The Freeman?

JD
Him? No idea.

OMAR
You do realize where our hotel is
now with the VIP passes?

JD looks back at Omar. Oh shit.

INT. HIGHRISE HOTEL - AUG CITY - EVENING

JD falls into a massive bed. Omar's looking around like a kid
on a sugar rush. The room is a penthouse.

JD
Do you think she's his daughter?

OMAR
Who's what now?

JD
Lucy. Is she Jonathan's daughter or
something?

OMAR
Nah man, he bought her.

JD rises up. What did he just say?

OMAR (CONT'D)
Well, by accident. He bought the
factory where she worked. Hence the
cybernetic eyes. She was blind.

JD takes this in.

OMAR (CONT'D)

One thing I know for sure. She'll fight to the bitter end. So get a good night's sleep.

Omar grabs his tablet and leaves for the door.

JD

Where are you going?

OMAR

There's a huge casino in here. I'm gonna try and hack it.

JD

They won't let you...

But Omar's gone already.

JD (CONT'D)

...in.

He sighs for a beat and falls into bed.

INT. DRONE GARAGE - 9 CIRCLES - AUG CITY - DAY

A holographic display of the 9 Circles. Intricate details and measurements pop out.

Alex gives instructions as JD, Omar, Joe, and Duke watch.

The Inferno is on display behind them. 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. Since you're starting dead last I would recommend playing it safe until you reach Treachery.

ON HOLOGRAM: The bottom ring or rather well lights up.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Most pilots will try to take out Serpent-One. Let them. Once the competition is thinned out focus on Serpent-One. You should know her moves by now.

JOE
 What about those shortcuts I'm
 seeing there?

Alex taps his tablet.

ON HOLOGRAM: The shortcuts pop out and change colors.

ALEX
 Shortcut to Paradise. No point in
 even trying. So far only an AI-
 controlled drone has managed to
 navigate through the shortcuts. The
 speed boosters will propel you past
 max speed. It's possible. Just not
 for a human.

JOE
 Ha! So they are called speed
 boosters!

ALEX
 What else would we call them?

Joe throws an I-knew-it-look at JD.

ALEX (CONT'D)
 I think you should spend the rest
 of the time relaxing. If you can.

JD nods. Joe gets up.

JOE
 I should get dressed. VIP pass and
 all.

They wave goodbye. Joe gives his son a tight hug and leaves.
 For a moment there's a calming silence until--

SCOTTISH VOICE (O.S.)
 Thare yer laddie!

JD, Omar, and Alex turn to see **JOHN ANDREW RYAN GALT**, a goofy
 MLD technician with thick welding goggles and a dust neck
 gaiter. Gaiter covers his head too. It's The Freeman.

A small entourage of three MLD technicians is behind him.

JOHN ANDREW RYAN GALT
 I wis lookin for ye an yer peculiar
 drone. Tis nae up tae specs 'n'
 regs. A'm needin' tae approve it
 foremaist fur th' race.

JD
Who are you?

JOHN ANDREW RYAN GALT
Me John.

JD wants to say something but--

JOHN ANDREW RYAN GALT (CONT'D)
--Andrew Ryan--

--He wants to chime in again but--

JOHN ANDREW RYAN GALT (CONT'D)
Galt.

JD sees his chance and--

JOHN ANDREW RYAN GALT (CONT'D)
(raises index finger)
--the third!

JD
Are you done?

JOHN ANDREW RYAN GALT
(a beat)
Aye.

ALEX
What's this about? We submitted a
full inventory for the drone.

JOHN ANDREW RYAN GALT
Aye. But thae custom bits have tae
be approved afore th' race. Juist
making sure thir's na AI a hawn.

JD looks at Alex. Why this now?

ALEX
How long?

JOHN ANDREW RYAN GALT
A wee hour or so.

ALEX
Fine. But if something happens to
the drone during the race. We'll
sue you! And only you!

John Andrew Ryan Galt, the Third snaps his fingers, and the
technicians cart Inferno away.

JOHN ANDREW RYAN GALT
 Dinnae worry! Thare's nothin tae
 sue about. Guid luck!

John joins the technicians. JD and Alex don't look convinced.

ALEX
 (to Omar)
 Run diagnostics when the drone
 returns.

Omar nods.

INT. MEDIA BOOTH - 9 CIRCLES - DAY

A large booth with a dozen announcers. Each one for a different language.

There are two English speakers. **MLD ANNOUNCER** and **CHAD HAMILTON**, late 30s, record holder for Grand Prix wins.

MLD ANNOUNCER
 Welcome, everyone! To the 9
 Circles. We have an incredible
 lineup this time around and joining
 us today is Chad Hamilton. Former
 Grand Prix champion and with 22
 wins, also record holder.

CHAD HAMILTON
 Happy to be here but I might not be
 the record holder for long. Lucy
 with her Serpent-One is the current
 champion and if she takes it home
 tonight. She'll surpass my record.

INT. VIP BOOTH - 9 CIRCLES - SAME

Joe enters. He spots the Dantes and Miriam in the far corner. They can look down at the Pilots Row.

As Joe walks over he sees Jonathan and other business associates. They lock eyes and both nod with respect.

INT. MEDIA BOOTH - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

MLD ANNOUNCER
 There are also fascinating
 newcomers like Jake Dante who
 trained under no other than Alex
 Chen. *The* Alex Chen.

CHAD HAMILTON

Yes, this is his first time inside an MLD stadium since the accident. He certainly whipped the young Dante into shape judging by his incredible performance in The Crucible.

INT. CREW PITS - 9 CIRCLES - SAME

Circular pits with countless screens and telemetric monitors.

Omar runs diagnostics with Duke.

Alex hears Chad's words on a livestream. He turns it off.

ALEX

How's the drone?

OMAR

All good so far.

EXT. PILOT ROW - 9 CIRCLES - DAY

23 pilots from all over the world take seat and get comfortable. These look much more sophisticated than what JD encountered in The Crucible.

JD looks around. Spots Lucy on the other far end above him. She doesn't pay attention to him.

He sits down. His chair is the only one with seatbelts.

He straps in.

INT. MEDIA BOOTH - 9 CIRCLES - DAY

Everyone comments on the unique chair in their language.

MLD ANNOUNCER

Ah yes. Young Dante is the youngest son of the infamous F1 racer legend, Joe Dante. A fitting homage one can say.

EXT. START AREA - 9 CIRCLES - DAY

23 drones are brought into position by small self-driving carts. As each drone is moved into place their names and positions are added to a massive screen:

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/Stormvigor 16th/Dragunov
 18th/Hawkblood 19th/Snakefang 20th/Doomstriker 21st/Raiden
 22nd/Fireheart and 23rd/Inferno

INT. VIP BOOTH - 9 CIRCLES - DAY

Joe makes himself comfortable next to Irene. He spots JD from his vantage point.

INT. MEDIA BOOTH - 9 CIRCLES - DAY

MLD ANNOUNCER

We're about to start and I must admit the first circle is always the nastiest to look at.

EXT. LIMBO - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

This circle is filled with countless destroyed drones.

CHAD HAMILTON (O.S.)

Ah yes. Destroyed drones are forever stuck in Limbo.

Some are dangling from the ceiling.

EXT. PILOT ROW - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

Two **ORGANIZERS** appear. But because of the tumult and applause in the stadium, they use green glowsticks to indicate readiness. All pilots put on their goggles.

FLIP. FLIP. FLIP. As countless engine switches turn on.

INT. START AREA - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

The drones roar to life. They hover a few feet above the ground. The mechanics tilt and adjust like muscle. Above is a build-in Traffic System. An array of lamps.

RED. RED.

Inferno roars. The drone sticks out from the rest.

INT. VIP BOOTH - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

Joe watches intently. His hackles are raising.

INT. PILOT ROW - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

JD grips the joysticks tight. He cracks his neck.

Every pilot is silent and frozen. Nothing but concentration.

INTERCUT WITH START AREA AND PILOT ROW

HOLDING AMBER

The drones shift ever so slightly. After an eternal beat--

GREEN. GREEN. GREEN. GREEN. GREEN. GREEN. GREEN. GREEN.

--EVERY PILOT jerks the controls as if to rip them off and--

--EVERY DRONE bolts like a bullet and into--

INT. LIMBO - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

The Serpent holds the lead. The drones fan out. This ride is just the warm-up.

Inferno banks 180 to fly between two dangling drone corpses.

The Serpent builds up distance between everyone else. Flies through with top speed and into--

INT. LUST - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

--where the scenery changes drastically as holographic men and women shift and contort erotically under neon-red lights. 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.)

Yes. Each pilot is faced with the same problem.

(MORE)

CHAD HAMILTON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 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 getting totaled like
 Greenwing just did.

MLD ANNOUNCER
 Correct. Some of these holograms
 are masked animatronics.

The hologram flickers revealing an animatronic body. A few flickers later and 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 below a holowoman's crotch.

INT. MEDIA BOOTH - 9 CIRCLES - SAME

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!

INT. LUST - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

Serpent approaches the end of Lust when--

A MASSIVE animatronic creature rumbles to life. It's **MINOS** in his snake form. As he turns to face the incoming swarm of drones so do countless snakes on the back of his snake body.

Each snake takes a different angle as his body rises. Towering over the drones. The eyes flash red and a--

--LASER beam worthy of Iron Man erupts from each snake. As they shift their heads so do the lasers. Creating a deadly laser show.

CHAD HAMILTON (O.S.)
 Now the only way out of this mess
 is through his mouth!

Serpent-One dodges with ease. Heads through Minos' mouth without slowing down.

MLD ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Incredible!

Oni and Steelcrusher don't bank in time. Both drones are sliced up like butter. The parts fly off crashing.

Everyone else sways around the lasers and flying debris and into the mouth of Minos. Inferno is still dead last.

INT. VIP BOOTH - 9 CIRCLES - SAME

Joe sees the drones cut apart.

JOE
Damn. Didn't know it's this wild.

RICKY
This is a race?!

SILVIA
I wanna try this!

INT. GLUTTONY - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

Serpent, Wukong, and Suleiman reach the icy cold of Gluttony.

As they pass a sensor grid multiple little holes split open in the ceiling and--

--cylindrical canisters are ejected like cannonballs.

INT. MEDIA BOOTH - 9 CIRCLES - SAME

Everyone reacts to a close-up of the canisters on screen.

CHAD HAMILTON
This part's my favorite. Icy cold rain of hell.

MLD ANNOUNCER
That's one way to put it. For those unaware, these are filled with liquid nitrogen!

INT. GLUTTONY - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

The canisters explode creating a barrage of anti-aircraft fire (or ice in this case). The drones bank and dodge away from the icy puffs of smoke.

Inferno flies real low with only a few inches above ground.

CHAD HAMILTON (O.S.)
Looks like Inferno found a great strategy.

Inferno flies below Hawkblood when--

--BANG. A canister takes down Hawkblood. Both jet engines freeze. Stiff like a corpse the drone heads for the ground.

Inferno moves out of the way in the nick of time only for Hawkblood to burst into frozen pieces like the T-1000.

Wukong tries to take over Serpent but the attempt is cut short when an animatronic **CERBERUS** raises his three ugly heads and--

--three flamethrowers erupt. One from each mouth.

Everyone dodges the flames in time and Serpent reaches--

INT. GREED - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

Where boulders are pushed down by tortured animatronic souls.

The 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.

But to no avail, as they enter--

INT. ANGER - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

--and a robotic **MEDUSA** focuses her gaze on them. The animatronic beast runs on rails.

INT. MEDIA BOOTH - 9 CIRCLES - SAME

MLD ANNOUNCER
Here we go! My personal favorite.

CHAD HAMILTON
Watch out for her EMP!

INT. ANGER - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

Medusa's eyes light up and the beam catches--

--Wyvernstrike. The drone's lights go out. It powers down. Descends lifelessly towards the ground.

Everyone is forced down by Medusa.

CHAD HAMILTON (O.S.)
To dodge the EMP one has to get
close to the river Styx.

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.

INT. VIP BOOTH - 9 CIRCLES - SAME

Joe jumps from his chair.

JOE
COME ON! DON'T LET THAT SNAKE BITCH
FOOL YOU!

Irene looks around embarrassed.

IRENE
Joe!

Joe realizes everyone's watching him. He adjusts his suit and sits down in shame.

INT. HERESY - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

Blitzkrieg overtakes Barbaroga. This circle is littered with tombs exploding like a Jack in the box.

Acid, fire, ice, dirt. Everything's thrown at the drones.

But no casualties as they reach--

INT. VIOLENCE - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

Inferno comes in last. Still playing it safe until--

--an animatronic **MINOTAUR** emerges from the river of boiling blood. The beast goes after Inferno but--

--the drone does an inversed loop. The beast passes below it.

INT. PILOT ROW - 9 CIRCLES - SAME

JD yanks the controls. HARD!

INT. VIOLENCE - 9 CIRCLES - SAME

Inferno catches up with Minotaur. Falls into the slipstream of the creature as it drudges through the blood river.

INT. MEDIA BOOTH - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

CHAD HAMILTON
Brilliant strategy by the Dante
kid!

INT. VIOLENCE - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

The other drones part as if an ambulance is taking over. Inferno safely in tow.

A fire arrow pierces through Stormvigor, takes out the drone.

Everyone dodges incoming fire arrows as animatronic **CENTAURS** darken the skies.

Inferno, still safe behind the Minotaur, takes over Raiden, Doomstriker, Snakefang, Dragunov, Flamecutter, and Ryu.

Serpent, Wukong, and Suleiman approach the end: **GERYON**

They dodge Geryon's stinger and escape through the maze on his back and into--

INT. FRAUD - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

Boiling tar covers this circle as winged animatronic demons grip for incoming drones.

Inferno sees an opening and overtakes Hornet and Scimitar.

Blitzkrieg gets cocky and gets close to Suleiman only to--
 --be pierced by a spear and flung into the boiling tar.

It's **JASON OF ARGO**. The menacing hero targets a drone and
 throws a massive spear after it.

Inferno sees an opening and overtakes Babaroga and Suleiman.

CHAD HAMILTON

Dante and his Inferno are now in
 fourth place. Unbelievable for a
 newcomer!

They all flock past Jason and into--

INT. TREACHERY - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

The icy bottom well is 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!

INT. MEDIA BOOTH - 9 CIRCLES - SAME

MLD ANNOUNCER

The only other way out is through
 Satan but we know how that ends for
 a human pilot!

Both the MLD Announcer and Chad chuckle.

INT. CREW PITS - 9 CIRCLES - SAME

Alex, Omar, and Duke watch closely.

ALEX

Come on, kid! This is your chance!

INT. TREACHERY - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

Serpent and Wukong head for the three giants.

Inferno crosses into Treachery when--

INT. PILOT ROW - 9 CIRCLES - SAME

JD'S POV: The FPV stream cuts to black. He's offline!

JD
What the--

INT. TREACHERY - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

Inferno just shuts... down. The drone descends. Crashes lifelessly into a snowy mountain.

INTERCUT WITH PILOT ROW, CREW PITS, AND TREACHERY

JD
(into radio)
What's going on?

IN PITS Omar and Duke scramble, run diagnostics.

ALEX
(into radio)
No idea. It just shut down!

OMAR
Restarting!

JD takes off the seatbelts and goggles. Heads for the edge to see Inferno at the bottom--

IN TREACHERY. The drone loses grip and slides further down towards the well of liquid nitrogen. All drones pass Inferno.

JD
Omar! I don't have much time left!

OMAR
It's back... oh.

ALEX
What? What's going on?

OMAR
There's a counter. There's a fucking counter! 30 seconds until it's back online.

ALEX
What?!

DUKE
Not possible!?

OMAR
See for yourself.

Alex and Duke see ON SCREEN as each system comes back online after a countdown.

Lucy gives a short-while smile.

INT. MEDIA BOOTH - 9 CIRCLES

Uproar at the never-before-seen crash.

MLD ANNOUNCER

He was so close! We can't tell yet what went wrong. But something's up with Inferno for sure. His drone is a custom hybrid design.

CHAD HAMILTON

Looks like it didn't make it through the circles unscathed.

INT. VIP BOOTH - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

Jonathan and his business entourage watch closely. Everyone looks surprised.

Joe walks up to the window overlooking the pilot row below. He spots a worried and anxious JD.

JOE

(sotto)

Come on! Just turn around!

INTERCUT WITH VIP BOOTH AND PILOT ROW

ALEX (O.S.)

15 seconds. I'm sorry, kid. I really am.

JD looks up to see his dad. They lock eyes. What feels like an eternal beat. Joe just nods.

A subtle and simple but powerful nod that says one thing and only one thing: "I'm proud no matter what!"

In this moment JD's face changes. The juvenile softness gives way to sharp eyes and an edged jaw. His molars grinding away. Determination manifest.

ALEX (O.S.) (CONT'D)

5 seconds!

JD sprints to his chair and throws himself into it with force. He straps the seatbelts tighter than ever before.

ALEX (O.S.) (CONT'D)
It's back!

Goggles on! Game on!

INT. TREACHERY - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

As Inferno roars back to life it slides for the liquid nitrogen only to--

--lift off last second.

INT. MEDIA BOOTH - 9 CIRCLES - SAME

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?!

INT. TREACHERY - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

Banked 180, Inferno flies in circles. 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. Right through his maw, down the intestines and into--

INT. SHORTCUT TO PARADISO - CONTINUOUS

Inferno bursts out of Satan's animatronic butt and onto a Maglev rail system. It's sucked into it and propelled past its limits.

INT. 9 CIRCLES - SAME

The crowd erupts in cheers and applause.

INT. MEDIA BOOTH - 9 CIRCLES - SAME

CHAD HAMILTON
He's daring the impossible!

MLD ANNOUNCER
No human has ever successfully
piloted a drone through this!

INTERCUT WITH EVERYTHING IN THE DAMNED 9 CIRCLES

There's not a bead of sweat on JD. Nothing but focus.

Inferno hits past 250km/h, 300km/h, 350km/h. FOUR FUCKING HUNDRED and slingshots upwards on the Maglev and into--

--AIR, across the inner open space.

JD flips off the engines. Takes the slipstream in. Feels it out and adjust ever so slightly.

THE ENTIRE STADIUM HOLDS ITS BREATH.

INFERNO approaches a small tight opening in Violence.

With millimeter-sized spacing left Inferno falls through the gap and JD jumpstarts the engines back to life.

The stadium erupts in turmoil and applause.

CHAD HAMILTON
I have never seen anything like
this!

MLD ANNOUNCER
He's back in it!

ALEX
(sotto)
He's gonna do it!

Joe smiles at Jonathan.

Inferno skids across the walls only to fall into--

ANOTHER SHORTCUT. With insane speed, Inferno moves past a series of tight obstacles with barely any wiggle room.

Inferno slingshots yet again and into Greed right behind--

RAIDEN. JD hasn't even blinked once so far.

Joe has a massive grin. He remembers something.

INT. CAR - DAY (FLASHBACK)

It's the first photo of JD in Joe and Irene's bedroom but come to life.

Joe holds Toddler Jake on his lap. The kid's first crying like before in the photo. Looking out the windshield until--

--Toddler Jake faces his dad. Then both erupt in smiles and laughter.

BACK TO SCENE

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 smiles.

CHAD HAMILTON (O.S.)
He's not just in control. He is the
drone!

Inferno catches up with Snakefang and Dragunov. Each time using the Maglev shortcuts to propel itself past any limits. Overtakes both with ease and into--

GLUTTONY. No obstacle could stop Inferno now.

The drone takes over Ryu, Hornet and Scimitar.

INT. GO-KART - RACE TRACK - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Another photo come to life. This time a crying Young Jake in a go-kart but only until--

--Joe joins him. He sits down behind the kid. It's cramped and silly but both are having a blast.

BACK TO SCENE

IN LUST Inferno takes over Babaroga and Suleiman.

Passes through every safe hologram and into--

LIMBO. Right on Wukong and Serpent.

FOR THE FIRST LUCY SHOWS EMOTION. With grinning teeth, she gives her all.

Images flash before JD. With each inch that he closes in another image of a former Dante in an F1 car flashes by.

100 years of Dante history catches up with him.

HE overtakes Wukong. Close behind Serpent-One when--

--a 60s F1 appears. Overtaken by a 70s F1. Then an 80s. 90s. 00s. 10s. 20s. Until finally Inferno catches up. Bigger than all of them and right behind Lucy.

She looks back. See's not just JD but Dante's Inferno.

Inferno overtakes as they exit Limbo and into--

EXT. PARADISO - 9 CIRCLES - CONTINUOUS

Inferno shoots upwards. Followed by the Serpent.

INTERCUT WITH PILOT ROW AND PARADISO

Lucy tries every trick in the book.

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 and checkered zenith. Just moments away. One last push. Both Lucy and JD hold the joysticks at their limits.

LUCY

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!

Lucy jumps from her seat screaming as INFERNO GETS CHECKERED!

Just inches behind is Serpent-One. Fireworks erupt from the zenith and down the stadium.

She takes off her goggles. The snake eyes wide like never before. Staring at JD.

SERPENT CREW (O.S.)

(through radio)

Lucy? Lucy? Want us to take over???

A long beat. She calms herself. Flips on autopilot from the seat. JD does the same. Takes off his goggles as an army of camera drones swarm around him.

The lights are so bright he can barely see anything.

INT. VIP BOOTH - 9 CIRCLES - DAY

The Dantes and Miriam cheer and hug. Jonathan looks defeated but impressed.

JONATHAN
 (to Assistant)
 How much did I lose?

ASSISTANT
 The numbers are still coming in.
 But--

He waves her off. Knowing exactly it's too much.

INT. CREW PITS - 9 CIRCLES - DAY

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.

ALEX
 We really need to analyze the
 drone.

JD
 No rush now!

Journos circle around them.

INT. PODIUM - 9 CIRCLES - LATER

JD, Lucy, and Wukong's pilot occupy the podium.

Their drones are on a platform behind them. They're showered with photography and applause. Lucy looks up at JD.

LUCY
 You did well.

JD
 Thank you.

She waves at the cameras.

LUCY
 But now everyone will try to take
 you down.

She smiles.

LUCY (CONT'D)
Including me.

JD forces a smile too.

INT. GARAGE - 9 CIRCLES - DAY

MLD Organizers and Technicians analyze Inferno. Or at least they try to connect with the custom drone.

ALEX
I'm telling you someone messed with
the drone.

MLD ORGANIZER
Do you have any proof?

ALEX
(a beat)
No, but we know who would've
benefitted the most.

JONATHAN (O.S.)
I'll stop you right there.

Jonathan joins with an army of lawyers.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)
I know everyone likes to blame the
trillionaire for their problems.
But I had nothing to do with your
little accident.

JD
An MLD technician and his crew took
the drone. Name's John Andrew...

ALEX
...Ryan Galt.

OMAR
--the Third!

JONATHAN
Check if anyone is employed here
with that name.

Jonathan walks up to Inferno.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)
But I can guarantee you no one
meddled with this weird drone.

MLD ORGANIZER

There's nobody here working under that name. Never was either.

JONATHAN

See. This drone is... old. We don't even have the tech to read it out let alone write on it. There isn't a single piece of pure analog equipment on the island. Who the hell uses analog anyway?

JD and Omar realize something. They look at each other. The damn name sounds familiar now.

EXT. PRIVATE AIRPORT - DAY

The Freeman waits in front of a high-tech private jet. His usual Grid Girls are dressed as flight attendants.

JD, Alex, Omar, Joe, and Duke approach the plane.

THE FREEMAN

My champion!

No one looks amused.

JD

We got your drone.

THE FREEMAN

No need for that. I made a fortune betting on you.

He mimics throwing cash.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)

Well. Hard to show off with crypto.

JD

You used us!

THE FREEMAN

Used, exploited. Tomayto, tomahto. What matters is that we're all richer now.

ALEX

How? You sabotaged our drone. But we still won.

THE FREEMAN

I know. I placed a bet on you.

Everyone realizes what happened.

THE FREEMAN (CONT'D)
Also, the only one to bet a small
fortune on you clearing the
Shortcut to Paradise.

OMAR
How did you know he'll make it?

JD looks at Omar like "where's the trust". Omar shrugs.

THE FREEMAN
It's all about the right
incentives. The first lesson I
learned from my father after he
gave me 20 bucks to mow the lawn. I
took 15 and gave 5 to another kid
who mowed the lawn... Although I'm
not sure that was the intended
lesson.

JOE
(to JD)
You're mowing the damn lawn
tomorrow!

JD
Wait, what? Why?

THE FREEMAN
(heads for the plane)
Well, time for me to leave.

JD
Where are you going now?

THE FREEMAN
To the last tax-free frontier...
Space! Goodbye, Au Revoir, Auf
Widersehen, Sayōnara!

The door closes behind The Freeman and the jet rolls away.

DUKE
I feel like that ain't the last of
him.

OMAR
What's next?

ALEX
Relax. But not for long. Everyone's
gonna gun for the champion now.

JD
What about you?

Alex just looks at his protégé. Smiles.

ALEX
Time to move on!

INT. UNDERGROUND AUG LAB - DAY

Alex is on the surgery bed. Facedown, through the same whole JD was in. 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 goes to work.

INT./EXT. BMW E30 - HUGE PARKING LOT - 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. And only
use it to start moving.

JD puts the shift in first. Starts the car and it 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.

THE END