

CLOUD RACER

POC

12/29/20

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OVER BLACK

ONAH (V.O.)

It wasn't always like this. The rich living their safe, convenient lives out in the fortress cities while the rest of us struggle on the outside. Cities like this... they used to be for all of us.

EXT. BANC OF CALIFORNIA STADIUM - DAY

JOREN SAKAMO (26) stands in awe up at the huge stadium, overgrowth covering it.

Reveal his father ONAH (62) standing next to him.

ONAH

Wish you could've seen what it used to be.

(then)

C'mon, we're running late.

Joren hastily grabs his bags, as does his father, with some shoulder/knee trouble, and the two proceed ahead into the stadium.

INT. STADIUM TUNNELS - DAY

Walk-and-talk following Joren and Onah as they walk down the long and winding stadium tunnel.

JOREN

(re: bags)

Need some help?

ONAH

I got it! Damn shoulder won't stop dislocating since the accident at the fulfillment center.

JOREN

You mean the *latest* accident at the fulfillment center. Amazon not covering the medical bills again?

Onah just gives his son a look.

JOREN

We gotta install something in you? Saw some fixed bearings in the hangar that might fit.

They pass through RACING TEAMS unloading equipment, speaking with OFFICIALS, prepping, etc. *Hints of what's going down...*

RACERS who are Joren's age, decked in SPONSOR KITS look over as the motley duo pass them.

ONAH

No time to stop and say hi.

JOREN

(low)

These guys definitely do not want to chat me up, not after last night.

ONAH

Something go down at the SpaceX mixer you want to tell me about?

JOREN

Not really.

ONAH

That's my boy, making enemies wherever he goes.

JOREN

(waves to pilot, polite)

Hi! Good morning!

(then)

Rich douche numero uno-- Hey!

(smiles to another pilot)

And numero dos.

They hurry through the tunnels toward a HANGAR... Passing working-class members of society in similar clothing to them who are lugging heavy equipment to and fro.

JOREN

I swear, anyone even touched the Nightjar while it's been in here, I'mma make it personal.

About to enter the hangar, they are stopped by an OFFICIAL.

OFFICIAL

Whoa whoa, pilots and mechanics only.

JOREN

I am a pilot, he's my mechanic.

OFFICIAL

Which... team are you?

JOREN

I'm unsponsored, independent, Joren
Sakamo--

OFFICIAL

Look kid, I'm not letting any
workers through. There's very
expensive equipment in there, ships
that cost more than your life
earnings.

Onah pulls out a badge from under his grime-covered overalls,
holds it up for the official to see.

ONAH

On any other day I'd say *yes sir*
and go about whatever menial job I
was assigned, but not today... not
on the day my son flies in the
SpaceX World Prix qualifier.
(nudges Joren)
Show him.

Joren pulls his badge and displays with a goofy smile next to
his goofy smile headshot. A nearby WORKING CLASS MAN stops
what he's doing and watches this interaction.

OFFICIAL

(swallows, beat)
I apologize. Go on ahead.

They move past him into the huge HANGAR as the working class
smiles for them.

Onah and Joren continue in past loud noises and mechanics at
work on giant engines.

ONAH

I'm reporting that prick.

JOREN

We've got *bigger* things to worry
about.

He's looking up at something looming over them as they come
to a stop.

REVEAL: THE NIGHTJAR MONO RACER. A one-seater high altitude
racecraft capable of speeds of over 1,000 mph.

But the Nightjar isn't all gleaming and streamlined-- it's
been cobbled together over many years, repainted, damaged in
places, though looking as solid as she can today. Large
CHARGING CABLES are hooked up to the ship's engine.

They toss down their bags and get to work checking her.

ONAH
(unplugs cables, reads)
Batteries are fully charged.

The two move about the nimble ship like a rehearsed dance--

JOREN
Check the compressor next--

ONAH
Oh now you want to start giving me
the orders? Nah ah, this is my
office, yours is--
(motions vaguely to sky)
Up there somewhere. Fire up the
systems and call em out!

JOREN
Aye aye, Jefe!

EXT. STADIUM / STARTING GRID - DAY

SIX RACING CRAFT have lined up on the open field, which has been marked up amongst the decay for this event... less of a verdant field and more of a weed filled dirt lot now.

We notice scattered HARDCORE FANS in the stands, spectators brave enough to venture back into the city for this event. They SCREAM and WHISTLE as the racers take their positions.

We HARD TILT UP from the stadium to see LARGE FUTURISTIC BLIMPS with *SPACE-X* emblazoned on their sides floating three thousand feet above the starting line.

The only ones down on the grid are the pilots in their ships, cockpit canopies open as we find the Nightjar lining up at the back of the pack, Joren eyeing the other male and female racers and their much larger teams.

Their ships are all new models, well-built, state of the art and shiny, making the Nightjar look like a Pinto amongst Ferraris.

CAMERA DRONES cover the stadium from multiple perspectives, broadcasting the race across the world with their tall antennae. We HEAR excited announcers speaking in foreign languages over this visual.

ONAH (RADIO)
(reading Joren's mind)
They might have style... Substance
is what matters today.

JOREN (RADIO)
Fortress city yups.

The pilot to his right, JEN (with a Red Bull logo across her ship), takes in the Nightjar, shouts from her starting position:

JEN
You're out of your depth here,
scrapper!

JOREN
(not giving an inch)
You ever seen a vapor cone form
from behind? It's just so
beautiful.

JEN
(mimes dive, explosion)
See you on the way down, cheapseat.

The pilots close their canopies. Joren flips switches and reads gauges, fires up engines-

JOREN (RADIO)
Turbofans at 4000 RPMs, reverse
thrusters-- check.

Engine and startup noises from all the race-craft drown out other sounds as pilots test flaps and thrusters.

ONAH (RADIO)
You keep her under 1200. Low
visibility through downtown. Full
thrust over the flooded sector.
Careful at the Century City
corridor.

JOREN (RADIO)
I got it!

ONAH (RADIO)
Just how you flew her in our desert
training runs, alright?!

Joren looks around at the other expensive aircraft and rich-blood racers surrounding him.

JOREN (RADIO)
Think we're a long way from Barstow
now, dad.

ONAH
We play the cards we were dealt.
Extreme ownership. You deserve to
be here.

Ahead of Joren a young pilot for Honda, VERNON gazes up at the tumultuous clouds from his cockpit, gauging wind and weather conditions.

Joren clocks this as Vernon looks back to him. Eye contact. A subtle, friendly nod.

LOUD SCREAM OF JET THRUSTERS FIRING UP, BELCHING BLUE FLAME.

CRIMSON LIGHT FLASHES WITH A *BOMP!* *This is it.*

JOREN (RADIO)

For mom.

ONAH (RADIO)

For mom. You fly safe up there.

DEAD QUIET in Joren's cockpit. Just his breathing under the helmet, eyes aligned on that starting light, hands grasping and ungrasping the steering column as he preemptively pulls the stick back, tilting the Nightjar's long nose slightly upward.

A colorful beetle buzzes onto his windshield and lands...

LIGHTS FLASH GREEN WITH A LOUD *BOMP!* and **BOOM!!**

The racecraft launch forward, up and out of the stadium with insane thrust, gone in the blink of an eye--

They take off into the sky but remain under 1500 feet, a race rule that is kept in check by floating magenta buoys that mark the 'ceiling,' making for low-to-ground action.

From South LA they head through and over the tall buildings and hills of **old-Hollywood**, 'H-LL-WO-D' SIGN receding behind them.

It's a slow start for Joren from the back of the pack as ships try to take lead positions out of the gate, resulting in a bit of a clusterfuck.

We can see in his eyes the intimidation of this all (we're *inside* his helmet *Iron Man* style) as racers zip past because this is his first professional race. As our main ANNOUNCER crashes in:

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

And the racers are off as we begin the SpaceX Grand Prix qualifying race here in the ghost city of Los Angeles! The top three American finishers today will go on to compete in the 2055 international circuit against the best pilots in the world--

The front runners AMAZON and UBER SCREAM past us at Mach1-- heading over winding Sunset Blvd and its huge broken e-billboards, passing through large floating rings--

ZOOM-- ZOOM ZOOM! The ships rush past what used to be a luxurious high rise apartment-- now a decrepit building, overgrown foliage creeping up its walls.

REVEAL A GROUP OF SQUATTERS on the roof where the pool used to be, laying back on lounge chairs, warming themselves next to a bonfire, loving this once-a-year action, CHEERING.

Racers banking south as they head toward the tall towers of **Century City**-- two of the towers crashed into each other--

AMAZON passes dangerously under the two collided towers to hit the ring-- We glimpse his cocky cockpit snicker--

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*And Sebastian Denzo racing for
 Amazon is out front in this first
 lap of two! Heading now through
 Century City towers followed by
 Kimbal Dallas racing in the Uber--
 the two pilots hailing from the
 fortress cities of...*

JOREN
 Gotta give Honda a spankin-

THRUSTERS ENGAGE-- THE NIGHTJAR pulls ahead of Vernon's Honda through the Sunset Corridor as it barely misses an e-billboard on a hard bank-- narrowly makes it through the rapidly approaching ring--

VERNON
 Bastard!

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*And we have newcomer rookie pilot
 Joren Sakamo pulling ahead in P5--
 ooof-- almost didn't make it
 through that target ring-- miss one
 of those and you'll incur a harsh
 five-second penalty--*

Joren pulls his airbrake and HARD DECELERATES as he banks at extreme G's going into Century City--

ON ONAH in the mechanics' tent, biting his nail, headset radio over his thinning hair--

ONAH (RADIO)
*Ease her down, Joren-- Corner 15
 coming up fast after you pass under-*

Joren KNIFES IT to make it through and under the towers-- comes out the other side and un-knives.

JOREN (RADIO)
Got some shaking in the throttle--

ONAH (RADIO)
(watching monitors)
*Levels look fine. You're three
seconds back from Red Bull.*

Joren is out and trailing the four lead racers as they break the speed of sound over a **serpentine intersection of freeways--**

UBER AND REDBULL NIPPING AT EACH OTHER-- dog fighting at close range as one tries to overtake and the other straddles the air-path leading to the next ring--

ONE CLIPS THE OTHER-- both are destabilized for a brief moment-- Red Bull LOSES CONTROL and crashes into the intersecting freeways in a ball of fire--

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*Oh dear... Ladies and gentlemen we
have a crash at section 4, this
looks serious. Red Bull is down and
I am not sure if Jen Nagato ejected--*

CAMERA DRONES cover the crash from closer as now JOREN in his Nightjar blazes past, followed by Honda. No time to rubberneck the wreckage-- cost of doing business.

As he passes west of the intersection at supersonic speed, he flies over **A CITY COMPLETELY UNDER WATER...** nothing but the tops of taller buildings are visible poking out from below.

Joren glimpses the engulfing ocean ahead and below-- it's covered the entire western part of the city and Santa Monica.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*The leaders now making their way
over Santa Monica, which has been
completely submerged since '32,
driving many out of this once
thriving city--*

The sight of it all is as sad as it is awe inspiring. The briefest beat as Joren takes it in.

ONAH (RADIO)
Coming up on the straight-away.

JOREN (RADIO)
How far behind leader am I?

ONAH (RADIO)
7.2 seconds.

Joren laser focused as he throttles up, coming into a straight shot above the underwater portion of Santa Monica-- the old pier ferris wheel barely sticking out of the water.

He catches up behind the third racer-- we go into that racer's COCKPIT POV--

BROOKLYN (RADIO)
Scrapper's on me--

He nudges his control stick and accelerates, doing his best to keep Joren from overtaking.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*We've got Brooklyn Thomas in third
trying to keep Sakamo in his rear
view--
(they clip each other)
Oh we have contact!*

Joren's gauges are shaking-- warnings go off-- he's pushing the engine as fast as it can go--

JOREN
(sotto)
Stay together you piece of shit--!

ONAH (RADIO)
*Back off and cool down Joren.
Engine temps are peaking.*

JOREN (RADIO)
Have to overtake him before the mountains!

He throttles up, pulling a daring sidewind maneuver around a beautiful piece of architecture as they approach the ring, barely big enough for both of them to fit through at once.

REVEAL AN OLDER WOMAN'S EYES WIDENING as she watches them jockey for the ring on TV. This is ADLEY (55) in a designer jump suit, standing among wealthy spectators and team owners.

REVEAL they're in the VIP box inside a floating blimp far above the city. ON SCREEN: Joren shoots out the other side of the gate in one piece and ahead of Brooklyn/Apple!

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*Oh and what a maneuver by Sakamo on
gate thirteen, that's put him in
third up from P6! An unbelievable
first lap for the newcomer-- let's
see if he can keep this pace up--*

Adley keeps her eyes glued on Joren's ship via the monitor, carefully tracking his progress as--

AMAZON AND UBER vie for first position as they head into the peaks and valleys of the **Santa Monica Mountains**.

And this is relentless, dangerous, one-wrong-move-and-your-dead territory. A race of life or death.

Uber tries to overtake but can't thread the needle.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*My God this is close in quite
 possibly the most dangerous segment-*

As Joren drops down into the valley to hit the ring, flying now through the canyons-- wants to gain elevation but those magenta BUOYS are constantly giving him a ceiling.

JOREN
 (sotto)
 Dammit--

He barrel rolls, NIPPING his ship on the side of a cliff, losing a turbine guard. Flies upside-down for a moment--

JOREN (RADIO)
 Did I lose something?!

ONAH (RADIO)
*Looks like you clipped the left
 turbine.*

JOREN (RADIO)
 (rights himself)
 Need to box?

ONAH (RADIO)
 (analyzing screen)
*Negative, do not box, keep on, you
 are P3. Push Joren, push.*

The leaders plummet across the canyons, dogfighting as they make it out through the mountains, zipping right over the rusted Griffith Observatory.

Joren squeezes through the final canyon and comes out into clear territory again in one piece, glancing to the left (North) over what has become an extremely dense forest of overgrown wildlife. *A milli-second of him taking it in.*

Approaching quickly on the horizon is **Downtown**, the final leg. It's MASSIVE CLUSTER OF SKYSCRAPERS like a cyberpunk megalopolis where the lights have all gone out. What used to be a glowing neon Oz has gone dark...

ANNOUNCER
*The leaders now approaching
 downtown-- looks like Vernon Linski
 in the Honda is catching up quickly-*

Vernon (the friendly rival from the grid) emerges out of the canyons in tact in his heavily-advertised-on Honda.

As Joren approaches downtown, he sees for himself what everyone talks about...

THE HILLS BEYOND IT ARE BURNING. Everything glowing red/orange like something out of *Blade Runner 2049*. Embers and ash fall amongst the tall buildings.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*Now approaching the thick, smoky
 air of downtown. Non-stop raging
 fires in the nearby mountains yet
 another reason the city was
 evacuated--*

Joren hits a ring, following the leaders as they bend toward the center of the downtown skyline, navigating THROUGH and OVER and ALONGSIDE the defunct skyscrapers, old company logos etched into their penthouses.

The air is thick, hard to see through as Joren decelerates--

ONAH (RADIO)
Building, building--!

A REFLECTIVE BLACK SKYSCRAPER EMERGES just ahead of Nolan through the smoke! Joren SCREAMS--

Yanks back the stick and climbs FAST at an impossible angle, up through the fire storm, losing valuable seconds as he goes up and over the building, trying to regain his bearings.

JOREN (RADIO)
 Did I miss-- where's--

ONAH (RADIO)
*Pitch down, next ring 3 o'clock 600
 meters.*

JOREN (RADIO)
 I can't see--

He spies the tail lights of Vernon and follows them down back into the red haze, hitting the next ring just after him.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*Linski has overtaken Sakamo for
 third! Oh that must hurt--*

They decelerate over the LA river and quick-drop under a bridge to hit a ring-- Joren right on Vernon's tail. *Know's he's vying him for the last qualifying position.*

JOREN
 C'mon c'mon!

As they loop back around southern downtown, coming around the skyline from the other direction--

Uber pulls a daring move THROUGH a hole in a vacant building-- we follow him at dizzying speed through what once was the impressive lobby of an office-- comes out the other side of the shortcut AHEAD OF AMAZON.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Look at this--! Uber has taken pole position through downtown as the racers head back toward the old stadium for the second lap!

The Nightjar following the three leaders back toward the South LA STADIUM we started at--

UP IN THE VIP BOX, Adley watches Joren pass into lap two as CHEERING and CLINKING GLASSES permeate the blimp. She moves away from the monitors, through the hobnobbing crowd, passing forced smiles to team owners and glitterati.

LAP TWO as the racers zip through the MULTICOLORROED COLORED EXTRA LARGE RING above the stadium. We linger a moment on the large lap-ring to see Uber and Amazon blast through... beat... beat... followed by the rest of the pack just five seconds later.

We go into Kimbal/Uber's cockpit as he deftly maneuvers his overpowered craft along the winding turns of Sunset blvd.

UBER ENGINEER (RADIO)
Brilliant job, Kimbal. Sebastian two seconds behind.

Gravity and perspective warping as he banks at extreme G's.

KIMBAL (RADIO)
 (focused on flying)
 Having trouble-- keeping space between us--

UBER ENGINEER (RADIO)
Do what you have to.

Kimbal threads through two crumbling pillars-- the fossilized remains of a freeway overpass--

Sebastian follows the dangerous route but not as smoothly-- his wing clips a pillar coming out of the junction and it begins to crumble and fall, the freeway it was holding up giving way.

Vernon quickly approaching, sees the route becoming blocked--

VERNON
 Shit!

HARD DECELERATION, banking, but not fast enough to avoid it-- he clips the crumbling structure, sending his craft spinning out of control--

Joren is right upon him-- makes a tough decision, crying out as he does-- pulls hard on his airbrake/reverse thruster--

Slows to almost a complete stop to stay clear of the out of control craft without hitting it--

Vernon EJECTS at a bad angle-- shoots sideways as he falls to earth-- The Nightjar cruises slowly alongside the pilot, Joren watching to make sure Vernon is okay--

Vernon pulls his parachute-- this rights him again and he drifts safely down toward Earth--

Joren sees he's going to make it and as soon as he registers that-- FULL THRUSTERS--! He rockets out of the section like a bat out of hell.

Trying to regain these crucial lost seconds that have put space between him and the leaders, allowing Apple to nearly catch up-- Joren caught between the two groups--

ONAH (RADIO)
What are you doing?!

JOREN (RADIO)
Shut up!

ONAH (RADIO)
*That launch burned through fuel--
you have to slow your pace--*

Joren GROWLS, seeing in his aft camera Apple gaining quickly on him. He PUNCHES IT against his dad's orders--

Grey plumes of smoke cough out of his exhausts as he makes it through Century City and toward the flooded city.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*Looks like Sakamo is having some
trouble-- possible engine issues--*

Using his launch to gain speed and close the gap over the coastal straight away--

CONTRAILS and WAKES shooting up from the water as he flies right over it. This, coupled with the smoke from his exhaust makes it hard for Apple to see ahead, backing him off--

Joren coming up on Amazon as they drop into the treacherous canyons again. Uber knifes it through and over a ridge--

SUDDENLY AMAZON'S ENGINE BLOWS! SMOKE BILLOWS OUT THE BACK--

Blinding Joren's vision. He's forced to pull up-- goes above a Magenta buoy as we hear a shrill VIOLATION NOISE--

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*No but it's Sebastian Denzo who has
 blown an engine!*

The Amazon sputters out of the canyon, slowing to a stop over a hilltop to land-- WOOSH! Joren blows past him into second place, but--

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*That may be a five second violation
 for Joren Sakamo. Officials are
 reviewing this mess--*

Joren pulls the Nightjar back on track as he deftly maneuvers between the canyons and out the other side over the veritable jungle of the San Fernando Valley.

But Uber is far ahead, perhaps too far to catch up to at this leg of the race.

ONAH (O.S.)
Push, Joren, P2-- hold onto it--

Joren shakes out his wrist and re-grabs the wheel, sweat pouring down his nose inside the helmet.

JOREN
 Trying--

He rockets toward the fire storms of downtown into the final stretch, attempting to close the gap.

Steers the Nightjar as tightly as he can from ring to ring (our sound drops out here in his desperate plea to catch up before it's over).

ONAH (RADIO)
*Just get back in one piece, son.
 Maintain this position. Repeat--*

JOREN
 ... agh.

Joren seethes under the helmet... but relents. Onah is right. He makes his way through downtown, powering (slo-mo?) through tall buildings of yester-year amongst glowing ash... Checking his engine systems, fuel, flicking switches.

He shoots out of Downtown and banks around back toward the large CHECKERED RING over the stadium.

JOREN (RADIO)
How's the Honda pilot?

ONAH (RADIO)
*Looks like he's going to be
 alright.*

Joren blasts through the finish ring behind Uber in second place, but Apple crosses the line just five seconds later.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*Kimbal Dallas takes first for Uber!
 Followed by rookie Joren Sakamo in
 his own ship, a virtual unknown
 before his brilliant performance in
 this qualifying race! We are yet to
 confirm his placement as we await
 the results of that violation...*

Over this VO, Kimbal loops around slowly, safely landing his craft back in the center of the stadium (hovering down to land VTOL style). He jumps out, removes his helmet, and waves happily to the drone cameras and cheering fans around the stadium as his team rushes out to him.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
*Only the top three finishers here
 today will enter the Grand Prix...
 Sebastian had an unfortunate mishap
 along with Red Bull and Honda...*

Joren comes around and lands inside the stadium similarly, taking a beat to compose himself before opening the cockpit and hopping out.

He removes his helmet as his father walks up to him, removing his headset, patting him on the back and hugging him.

JOREN
 I screwed up, I'm sorry--

ONAH
 You flew fast. Mom would be proud.

A long beat... then we notice Adley approaching them, the landed blimp visible just outside the stadium. Joren and Onah turn.

ADLEY
 Nearly lost it in the canyons.
 (then)
 You got lucky this time. New York
 won't be any easier.

JOREN
 (flippant)
 Started in P6 with a relatively...
 underfunded racecraft. And who the
 hell are you?

ONAH
(embarrassed)
Joren, that's-

ADLEY
Adley... Harken.

JOREN
(realizes)
... You won the first Grand Prix...
that was twenty years ago...

ADLEY
Do you have some time to chat?

But they all look over as they're interrupted by--

ANNOUNCER (OVER LOUD SPEAKER)
*Ladies and gentlemen, viewers
around the world, we have the
official standings now! Having
tallied all violations...*

Onah squeezes his son's shoulder - *stay strong, keep a smile
on no matter what.*

ANNOUNCER (LOUD SPEAKER)
Our American qualifiers for the
Space-X World Grand Prix are Kimbal
Dallas for Uber, Olly Summers
racing for Apple...

Oof, he didn't get second. Joren and Onah exchange a look of
anticipation... Adley smiles knowingly as a gust of wind
blows...

ANNOUNCER (LOUD SPEAKER)
And in third...

CUT TO BLACK.