

SKYLINER

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. GANDY, NEBRASKA 2061 - DAY

Out of the vast blue sky, wind ripples across a golden wheat field and stirs dust on a hot two lane highway.

ROBIN SIMO, 12, clothed for picking strawberries and potatoes, not lip gloss and boyfriends, trudges on the gravel shoulder. She cradles an inch thick metal slab as wide as her two lithe young hands and half again as long. She talks to it.

ROBIN

Sorry, Mom. Those jerks are there again...Love you too...Bye.

She shoves the slab into a tattered backpack.

EXT. GRIBBLE SMELTER/FRONT - DAY

A tall chain-link fence surrounds the expansive steel girder and concrete factory building. Outside the fence, Robin hurries past a sign at the front gate that reads "Gribble Metal Smelting - Gandy, Nebraska - Established 2055."

EXT. GRIBBLE SMELTER/REAR - DAY

WHISTLING SOUNDS slide down six octaves and CRASH! Hunks of metal slag, like mock meteorites, smash into a deep pit.

Robotic bulldozers scoop slag chunks onto conveyor belts rumbling toward smelting furnaces that belch blue flames.

EXT. GRIBBLE SMELTER/OUTSIDE THE FENCE - DAY

Dozens of FARM KIDS OOH, AH and SQUEAL with delight at each firework-like crash. Robin frowns and skirts the crowd.

A SIX YEAR OLD BOY grabs her sleeve.

SIX YEAR OLD BOY

Where do they come from?

ROBIN

Look kid, I gotta get through here.

He clings to her sleeve and clamps his mouth shut.

ROBIN

They come from the skyliners.

SIX YEAR OLD BOY

Them giant wing things?

ROBIN

Yeah, those big wing shaped dirigibles
with the --

SIX YEAR OLD BOY

You ever ride in one?

ROBIN

Not yet. Got to be kinda rich I
think. People fly on and off them
in helicopters and stuff, cruise all
over the country. Anyway, the PIGS
on them make the slag bombs that...

BA-BA-BA-BOOM! Slag bombs WHISTLE and CRASH.

A BULLY BOY aims a nasty grin down on Robin and blocks her
path. Robin pulls loose of the six year old.

BULLY BOY

Know about PIGS, do ya?

ROBIN

More than you. You ought to try
reading books instead PIGing them.

BULLY BOY

What if I PIGed that book in your
bag? I could use the cash.

ROBIN

It's not a book. Are you asking for
a butt kicking again? I'm tired but --

BULLY BOY

You got lucky. What is it then,
slab of titanium? Gribble pays pretty
good for titanium.

ROBIN

It's not --

The bully's FIVE TOADIES surround her. One grabs the slab
and tosses it to him. Robin grabs a large rock. They pick
up sticks and stones. He holds the slab over his head.

BULLY BOY

Throw that and I throw this...over
the fence.

Through the wire grating, Robin sees a furnace belch hellfire.

She glowers, drops the rock and thrusts out her hand.

BULLY BOY

Well, maybe it ain't titanium but
it's going to cost you. Your picking
cash, give it.

Slag bombs HISS and THUNDER. She reaches into her pocket,
pulls out a small wad of bills and holds it close.

ROBIN

Bring it down...We'll swap.

They glare. His hand comes down. Both grab their prize and
hold their payoff. They release and back away.

Robin turns to hide her angry tears and escapes down a weed
strewn gravel path.

EXT. COTTONWOOD WINDBREAK - DAY

Robin stomps down the path worn through the tall weeds. A
branch snaps. Robin turns and yells.

ROBIN

Leave me alone, you stupid...

No one answers. Sniffing back tears, she heads down the
path toward a small, tidy cottage in need of paint.

EXT. OMAHA, NEBRASKA, MERTEN HOUSE - DAY

Unlike the cottage, this suburban castle sparkles, one of
the many architectural gems set in a neat grid of greenbelts.

INT. MERTEN HOUSE/BASEMENT - DAY

Muffled banging radiates from what looks like a furnace.
Sunlight glints off its nameplate: a cartoon pig logo above
the words "PIG - Plasma Injection Gasifier."

At the PIG's base, SAM SIMO, 45, a sturdy, solid repairman
stoops and reaches into its open access panel. He pulls a
screwdriver from the back pocket of his spotless tan work
pants. Shoe covers protect his heavy work shoes.

Sam pries loose a chunk of metal slag, a smaller version of
the slag from the smelter. He stands and holds the chunk up
to the light.

SAM

There you go.

INT. MERTEN HOUSE/OFFICE - DAY

PHIL MERTEN, 40, in a pharmacist's lab coat, sits at his desk ending a video conference with a customer, MS. PETTIBON.

PHIL
I'm listening, Ms. Pettibon.

His desk hides his shorts and sandals. In an inset window on his screen, video of a gigantic wing shaped dirigible plays. Translucent blue, it cruises over land and sea.

SKYLINER AD VOICE (V.O.)
It's your vacation. Why go on their schedule, fight airport crowds and get crammed into a tiny seat? Board a skyliner any time. Shop and play!

MS. PETTIBON
These pills are blue. Are you trying to kill me?

PHIL
Ms. Pettibon, no one's trying to kill you.

SKYLINER AD VOICE (V.O.)
Don't wait to have fun. It's your vacation. On a skyliner, you're already there.

PHIL
We changed suppliers. We'll get a drone out to you today.

RITA, his wife, breaks in over the intercom.

RITA (V.O.)
Phil, talk to the PIG guy, will you? If we're going to get in the air sometime this century --

PHIL
Duty calls Ms. Pettibon.

Phil exits. A NEWS ANCHOR appears on screen.

NEWS ANCHOR
Our viewers reminded us that 2061 is a special year. Halley's Comet is coming into view.

Video of a starry night and the comet fills the screen.

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)
Over the next few nights, look...

INT. MERTEN HOUSE/BASEMENT - DAY

Phil watches Sam close the access panel on the PIG.

PHIL
Sorry to rush you.

SAM
No problem. I'm done here. You can finish charging that copter now.

PHIL
Excellent! All I want to do is get on that skyliner and kick back.

Sam stands and displays the slag chunk for Phil.

SAM
See? There's your problem. Now, if you had an industrial PIG or one of the newer heavy duty models --

PHIL
I know, I know. I can't get my kids to quit throwing cans into it.

SAM
I hear you. When my little girl --

RITA (V.O.)
Will you tell your son to get those drones launched and get packed?

PHIL
(to Sam)
How much do I owe you?

EXT. MERTEN HOUSE - DAY

Sam stands on the slate walkway and watches the Mertens' transport drone, a boxy electric helicopter, fly out of the backyard with a gentle WHOOSH of its two coaxial rotors.

Sam pulls out his COMMBOX, an iPhone-like device, and checks a city map. A blue dot pulses over the nearest airfield.

He picks up his toolbox. He trudges along a winding stone path past pristine mansions in the park-like suburb.

INT. SIMO COTTAGE - DAY

Robin bangs open the screened back door. Wiping the last of her tears from her cheek, Robin strides into the kitchen.

ROBIN

Dad? You home?

She heads for her bedroom and peeks in rooms on her way.

IN ROBIN'S BEDROOM

Robin sets her backpack on the bed and pulls out the slab. She cups her hands around its crisp curved corners.

ROBIN

Mom?

Its top surface glimmers like a moonlit pond.

Robin sits on the bed and cradles the slab like a well loved book. She gazes at the visage in its display, a woman in her vibrant forties, the persona of her mother, JOAN SIMO.

JOAN

Tears from my tough girl?

Joan's shoulder length hair frames a strong face that radiates a fierce intelligence tempered by compassion.

JOAN

It's not your calc course again? I know it's hard.

ROBIN

Mom, that's not --

JOAN

It's hard for everybody. Anybody who says it's easy is lying. You're smart like your mom and stubborn like your dad. You'll get it.

ROBIN

But I'm not like you.

(off Joan's wince)

Anyway, it's not about that...This stooo-pid goober, he took you...your simbox. I had to give him my picking money to get it back.

JOAN

Honey, I'm sorry. The simbox...

Joan spreads her arms and gestures to the edges of the screen.

JOAN

I didn't mean for it to be a burden. Some day, you won't need this.

ROBIN

I hate it when you say that. It's scary. What am I supposed to do?

JOAN

Honey, I just meant that your own memories, they're all you really need. You'll get that someday.

ROBIN

You wouldn't say that if you were still alive.

EXT. OMAHA AIRFIELD - DAY

Gyrocopters and small airplanes taxi across the asphalt past the old brick terminal and take off. A breeze carries only the whine of their electric motors and propeller flutter.

Sam sits on his toolbox with his arm out and his thumb up. A gyrocopter accelerates past him and lifts off.

SAM

Not getting home tonight.

Sam flings a screwdriver. Its blade sticks in the asphalt.

A four seat gyrocopter approaches. Inside, DINO ZARLETTI, 36, concludes a phone conversation.

DINO (V.O.)

Briggs, techs need licenses. I can't cook, clean, sing or dance. If I'm on a skyliner...Screw you, respectfully, I happen to like it.

Sam pulls the screwdriver out and poises for another throw.

The gyrocopter rolls to a stop. Looking every bit a dashing daredevil pilot, Dino pops open the copilot door.

DINO

Wicked with that thing. How about you holster that and get in?

Sam gives the gyrocopter a slow nose-to-tail once-over. His gaze settles on its two oversized landing struts.

Dino spots his BLASTER, a pistol-like energy weapon, poking up between the seats.

SAM

Kind of a strange looking gyro.

Dino grabs the blaster and shoves it under his seat.

DINO

It's a popper. Those struts? They
can toss this thing straight up.
It's a rush.

Sam plunks his toolbox on the popper's floor and climbs in.

INT. DINO'S POPPER - DAY

Through a window near his feet, Sam watches Omaha scroll by
thousands of feet below.

A quilt of forests and grain fields butts up against the
city limits. In place of paved freeways and highways, stripes
of broken concrete and asphalt lead out of Omaha.

DINO

How long do you think it'll be before
those freeways are completely gone?

(no response from Sam)

That Wild Zone, how's that living
there?

Sam stares out the window.

Dino cocks his head towards Sam's toolbox.

DINO

What do you work on?

SAM

PIGs mostly.

DINO

Me? I'm a comedian, standup. I
don't do impressions though. They
loved me in Omaha.

SAM

You killed?

(off Dino's discomfort)

You comedians, that's what you say,
right?

DINO

Most do. Me? I don't like it.

The WHOOSH of the rotor fills their silence.

INT. DINO'S POPPER - LATER

DINO

What kind of PIGs? Commercial,
military? I hear the ones on
skyliners are --

SAM

Could you just drive? I appreciate the lift, but I just want get home and take my little girl to dinner.

INT. ROBIN'S BEDROOM - DAY

A thud outside makes Robin jump. She leans out of her open bedroom window and scans the split rail fenced yard.

ROBIN

Dad? Dad, you home?

Nothing moves but wind tickled leaves and grass. Robin pulls her head back in and closes the window.

EXT. SIMO COTTAGE - DAY

Along the split rail fence, lilac bushes in full bloom rustle.

RUSH UTLEY, 26, emerges. With his trim hair, shirt and chinos, he could be a Radio Shack clerk...a cold, ruthless Radio Shack clerk.

Two men and a woman, savage and heavily armed, form up near him. Except for a green camo pattern, their uniforms bear no resemblance to United States forces or any other country's military. Cold and calm, Rush whispers and waves them to either side of the house.

RUSH

Go.

They disappear into shrubbery in the corners of the yard.

Rush creeps toward Robin's bedroom window.

He leans back against the wall under the window. He hooks a tiny earphone over his ear and breathes quietly.

ROBIN (V.O.)

Sorry. Thought it was dad. I hate that I have to hide you from him. It's been years, Mom.

JOAN (V.O.)

If he found out about the simbox --

INT. ROBIN'S BEDROOM - DAY

ROBIN

I know. I know. He'd never let you go. Never get on with his life. You're right, but don't you think --

JOAN

Honey, they only made one of these and they made it for me so I could do my work. Nobody was supposed to know about it.

ROBIN

Then why me? Why do I have to --

JOAN

It's the only way I could still be your mother.

EXT. SIMO HOMESTEAD - DAY

Dino's popper sets down and rolls to a stop. Sam exits.

The popper bounces across the field and lifts off.

Sam trudges to the back door, toolbox in hand.

Rush silently curses and hides beside a toolshed.

Sam opens the back door.

INT. SIMO KITCHEN - DAY

Sam trudges in and sets down his toolbox. He cocks his head to hear Robin's muffled voice.

SAM

Robin, sweetheart, you home?

INT. ROBIN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Mustering as much cheer as she can, she yells back.

ROBIN

Here Dad.

Robin kisses her fingers and touches them to the screen.

Joan holds up her hand to capture the kisses. She turns and runs from the screen's foreground into a virtual forest.

Robin carries the simbox to her wall closet. She pulls back three slats of wood and stows the simbox behind them.

INT. SIMO KITCHEN - DAY

Robin hurries out of her bedroom, slows down to a casual walk and greets her dad with a hug. Worried, he holds her. He steps back, beams and pats his hip pocket.

SAM

Made enough for dinner at Rizzo's.

Unable to maintain his smile, he gazes into Robin's eyes.

SAM

Were you...talking to her again?

Robin looks away.

SAM

It's okay. Can't love you enough
for the two of us.

ROBIN

Dad, it's not like that. I'm not--

SAM

Then what is it, Robin? You were
talking to her, right?

ROBIN

I'm not crazy! Can't I --

WHAM! WHAM! WHAM! .50 caliber machine gun slugs rip across
the kitchen wall!

Sam dives and carries Robin to the floor with him. Shots
come from every direction, tearing holes in the walls and
ceiling. He pushes Robin ahead of himself and scuttles across
the cracked tile.

They make it to the pantry. Jars, bottles, and cans explode
and splatter.

SAM

Storm cellar!

Robin yanks open a trapdoor and drops into its small opening.
Sam follows. The door drops shut.

What's left of the front door bursts open. Rush and his
gang stomp in.

INT. SIMO STORM CELLAR - DAY

Light filters through the slats of a wooden hatch cover
overhead. Robin flinches at the thudding boots of the
invaders. She whispers to her Dad.

ROBIN

Who are they, Dad? Why --

Sam motions for silence. He reaches up, slides the pallet
aside a few inches, and peeks out. He pulls Robin close.

SAM

The lilacs.

INT. SIMO KITCHEN - DAY

Rush scans the yard. He skulks around like a prowling wolf and spies the trapdoor's seam.

RUSH

Apparently, you're all unfamiliar with the term "kidnap." You were supposed to scare them, a little, a tiny bit, then grab them.

Rush grabs the shoulder of his second in command, LANCE, 32, rugged and beefy in a pro wrestler way. Clearly, in a physical fight, Lance could take Rush.

RUSH

Open that.

EXT. SIMO COTTAGE - DAY

Robin slips out of the storm cellar and sprints toward her bedroom window.

Sam bursts out of the storm cellar and chases her.

Robin reaches for the windowsill. Sam wrestles her to the ground. She struggles. They argue in whispers.

ROBIN

Let me...there's something --

SAM

They'll kill us! Whatever it is, let it go! Please.

They creep toward the lilacs. Robin looks back.

INT. SIMO KITCHEN - DAY

Lance pulls himself out of the trapdoor and faces Rush.

LANCE

Gone.

GAIL, 20, nail tough and dagger deadly, prowls the hall. Even laden with close combat weapons, she moves like a ninja.

GAIL

So far...nothing.

Rush grabs a cracked digital picture frame and studies its partially rendered picture of Robin, Sam, and Joan camping.

RUSH

Why would she talk to a dead woman?

TORY, 25, a weak imitation of Lance, tramps in.

GAIL

Don't matter. It's her mom.

TORY

What woman?

RUSH

Mission, Tory, mission. Joan Simo?
The one with the plans?...for the
plasma gun?
(to Gail)
Maybe it was some kind of recording.

TORY

So?

RUSH

(sarcastically)
It might have a clue?

Rush wanders to the hall.

RUSH

If I can find out where the girl was
when she was talking...

EXT. COTTONWOOD WINDBREAK - DAY

On the dirt path worn through the weeds, Robin helps her Dad get to his feet.

ROBIN

Dad, you're okay, right? Back there,
I didn't mean to...

Sam holds Robin. He looks her in the eye to calm her, trembling himself.

They turn to gaze at their wrecked home. Sam drops his head, missing Robin's anxious expression.

EXT. FREEWAY - DAY

A thin ribbon of broken concrete winds through lush tall-grass prairie.

Robin and Sam, two tiny figures on the ribbon, plod toward the horizon.

They pass mounds of crushed cinderblocks and the one remaining upright wall of an abandoned GAS STATION. Faded red and blue chevrons adorn a plastic sign dangling on a rusted chain.

Drained of adrenaline, hand in hand to steady themselves, they stumble over rocks and slip on loose gravel.

ROBIN

Think it'll ever be safe for us to go back home?

SAM

I don't know, honey.

Robin slows and looks over her shoulder.

SAM

Whatever you left back there, I'll get you another.

(off her frown)

Pretty out here. It changed so fast. Before the skyliners, you could hitchhike all along here. On a good day, gas burners would zip by every few minutes. Hell, you could get a ride faster than --

ROBIN

Do you think anything will be left?

Sam stops and turns, exasperated.

ROBIN

At the house, do you think --

SAM

Honey, we're both tired. I don't know where to go that's safe. I said I'd get you another --

ROBIN

What's the use of going on if there's nothing left when we go back?

SAM

Robin, we've got to keep going because we've got to keep going. Just do what I say, now.

They both slog across the rubble in silence.

EXT. FREEWAY - LATER

Wind whips up dust devils. Gravel crunches under Robin and Sam's feet.

Robin touches her Dad's shoulder. They exchange remorseful looks. Sam looks up the road and sees an overpass, its exposed rebar barely held in place by cracked concrete.

SAM

That ought to hide us. We can rest under there. Can you make it?

EXT. SIMO COTTAGE - DAY

Rush, wearing his earphone, leans against the wall under Robin's bedroom window. He speaks into his COMMBOX, like Sam's commbox, but ruggedized for military use.

RUSH

Start talking and walk into the room.

GAIL (V.O.)

What should I say?

RUSH

Anything. Improvise. You can walk and talk, right?

GAIL (V.O.)

You're damn lucky you're not in here. If you so much as --

RUSH

Stop right there. What do you see?

GAIL (V.O.)

A window, a bed, the door...

RUSH

What are you near?

GAIL

A closet.

EXT. FREEWAY - DAY

Robin, head down, trudges a few steps behind Sam.

She sees a few small pebbles jiggle. She stops.

She squints. The pebbles lay still. She hurries to catch up to her Dad, heading toward the overpass.

Pebbles jiggle and roll off the side of the road. Robin and Sam look in the direction of a low, distant rumble.

ROBIN

Dad?

The rumble becomes a tremble beneath their feet.

The horizon churns with galloping dark shapes.

Robin runs toward the overpass with Sam a few steps behind. A tremor knocks him down. Robin turns.

SAM

Just go. Go!

Hundreds of bison sweep across the plain toward the them.

Robin pulls Sam to his feet.

The Simos run for the overpass. Thundering bison bear down.

Its rotor noise masked by the stampede, a popper approaches.

Dust swirls around Robin and Sam.

Dino's popper flies into their path. It circles and drops down hard, landing struts compressing like grasshopper legs.

Dino pumps his arm, the special ops sign for "hurry up."

Spurred by the phalanx of woolly beasts with fear crazed eyes, Robin and Sam run for the popper.

INT. DINO'S POPPER - DAY

Robin yanks open the rear door. They dive in.

DINO

Thought you were going out to eat.

Sam yanks the door shut.

EXT. STAMPEDE PLAIN - DAY

The popper's grasshopper struts snap straight slinging it high above the herd.

Bison pound over the ground beneath it.

Its pusher propeller winds up as the gyro drops toward the roiling sea of shaggy, brown backs.

The popper's rotor whips into action to slow its fall.

It darts through the dust cloud above the herd.

INT. DINO'S POPPER - DAY

Robin clings to Sam. Only a meter above the ground, Dino guides the gyro through the thundering herd as calmly as weaving through traffic.

SAM
What the hell?

DINO
Air's a little unstable but we'll
get some altitude pretty quick.
It'll go better if you strap in.

Robin and Sam hurry to obey. Robin reacts like it's the best amusement park ride ever. Sam, like it's his worst nightmare.

EXT. STAMPEDE PLAIN - DAY

The herd stampedes into a narrow canyon.

The popper rises out of the melee like a hummingbird, its rotor tips almost grazing the rough rock walls.

It clears the canyon's lip and keeps rising.

INT. DINO'S POPPER - DAY

Robin and Sam, in the back seat, catch their breath. Dino talks over his shoulder.

DINO
Is your dad usually that slow?

SAM
You son of a bitch! We almost got
killed today, twice! We've been on
the run since --

DINO
Is he always this stressed? You'd
think living out in the boonies like
that would settle someone.

Robin extends her hand to the handsome stranger.

ROBIN
I'm Robin. Thanks for rescuing us.

SAM
And what about that?
(MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)

You just happened to be in the Wild Zone and thought you fly into a buffalo stampede? You following us?

DINO

I was on my way to a gig. Maybe you guys see stampedes all the time but I'm a city boy.

SAM

Oh really? Where? The next town is --

DINO

It's on a skyliner.

Robin lights up like daybreak.

INT. SIMO KITCHEN - DAY

Rush sits at a slug chewed wooden table and studies Joan's simbox. Behind him, Tory paces, cocking and uncocking a pistol. Gail leans against a wall and sharpens her knife. Lance standing near her, gazes out a window.

LANCE

We can't stay here. Somebody must have heard us. That's all we need, Rangers on our asses.

RUSH

(nods to Tory)
No thanks to cowboy there.

Tory's fist SMASHES down on the simbox. Rush shoves him.

Lance and Gail tear them away from each other.

TORY

Why the hell are we screwing around with that piece of crap?

RUSH

It's a simbox. Why else would the kid talk to it?

LANCE

If it is, it's the first one I've ever seen.

GAIL

Probably the first one anyone's ever seen for real.

Rush steps to the table.

RUSH

It's a simbox and it's got her plans in it. We build her plasma weapon and we'll run the Wild Zone...They've got to be in there. We tossed everything in her office.

TORY

(to Rush)

If you hadn't shot her, maybe we'd have that weapon by now...Call me a cowboy.

RUSH

She saw me...The plans are in there.

LANCE

If you're so sure, let's take it with us and get the hell out of here.

TORY

Yeah, but what if it's trackable? Rangers will be all over us before we even lift off.

INT. DINO'S POPPER - DAY

Robin, nodding from exhaustion, clings to her Dad.

SAM

So, Mister Big City Comedian, I appreciate you pulling us out of that mess but, I've got to wonder...

DINO

About what?

SAM

For instance, why does a one night stand comic --

DINO

Hey now.

SAM

-- need a gyrocopter that launches straight up?

DINO

My popper? It's got electromagnetic struts. They store energy when I land and release it to launch --

SAM

I didn't ask you how, I asked why.

DINO

There it is.

Dino points at a small dot on the horizon.

DINO

The "Mark Twain," best skyliner in the fleet. It's a flying party!

Robin's eyes grow wide. She pulls away from her Dad and clambers into the copilot seat for a better look.

They close on the dot and it grows into a five story high wing shaped aircraft, its blue skin glistening as though cast from a hunk of the vast Nebraska sky.

SAM

Damn! That thing could cover a football field.

DINO

Those nacelles in the corners are --

ROBIN

-- ion vortex thrusters, for propulsion and steering. And there's the side wind control tunnel array. When the wind hits the side, it flows into the tunnels and turns turbines that generate electricity. Power is sent to the thrusters on the other side to push back.

DINO

Guess you're past your pony phase.

ROBIN

See? The wind load gets reduced and it gets power which adds to the power from the solar collecting skin and the plasma --

DINO

It's slowing down.

ROBIN

They cruise at about 350 kilometers an hour and slow down to under 30 --

DINO

-- to load and unload. You can see the tourists inside on the view deck watching.

Robin gazes at hundreds of tourists strolling the windowed decks. Sam gazes at the skyliner's "MARK TWAIN" insignia.

SAM

You gotta wonder how much the signpainter got. Look at the size of those letters! That "M" must be 20 feet high.

EXT. SKYLINER - DAY

Dino's popper looks like a hummingbird dashing toward the towering Twain.

With sun setting below the Twain, dozens of small gyrocopters, dirigibles, and airplanes approach its stern.

A large door on the slope to the trailing edge slides open.

DINO (V.O.)

This is gyro H, H, zero, four, three requesting access.

EXT. NEBRASKA WILD ZONE - DAY

A battered Blackhawk helicopter flies nap-of-the-earth over grain fields...tall grass prairie...forest.

Behind its windshield, Rush scans the horizon from the pilot's seat. Lance, from the copilot's seat.

In the clouds high above the roaring Blackhawk flies a silent electric HELICOPTER GUNSHIP with a logo on its cabin: a vignette of a mountain, forest, and lake inside a yellow circle. Text in the top half of the circle reads "This land is your land," in the bottom, "Rangers lead the way."

The Ranger helicopter drops out of the clouds ahead of the Blackhawk.

INT. RUSH'S HELICOPTER - DAY

Lance looks up. He pokes Rush. In the back, Gail and Tory crane their necks to see what Lance is pointing at.

Tory makes a grab for the simbox tucked into a pouch to the right of Rush's seat.

TORY

Ditch that thing!

Rush bats his hand away.

TORY

We're being tracked!

RUSH

Doubt it.

Rush finds an opening in the forest and steers for it.

RUSH

Rangers don't go in alone. There isn't even a wingman. Likely, that one's on its way home.

Rush settles the Blackhawk on the forest floor and hits a switch. A camouflage net shoots out of the tail boom and drops over the bird.

TORY

We gotta get rid of that thing!

Tory grabs for the simbox.

RUSH

Relax. He's leaving.

GAIL

So what? We just sit here?

RUSH

Pretty much. Until we get that plasma weapon plan out of the simbox.

JOAN (O.S.)

Robin? Honey, it's bedtime.

All eyes turn to Joan's simbox.

INT. DINO'S POPPER - DAY

With saucer eyes, Robin watches Dino steer the popper through the door and over a landing deck.

Two speaker systems compete. Through one, a bored DISPATCHER delivers landing instructions. Through the other, a gregarious MISSOURI DRAWL recites skyliner promos backed by RIVERBOAT MUSIC.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)

Gyro H-H-zero-four-three, you are overweight. Please proceed to gate L-V-nine.

MISSOURI DRAWL (V.O.)

Welcome travelers, to the Mark Twain, the skymall that comes to you, like an old-time riverboat cruising from town to town. With the most advanced neutral bouyancy technology available, it's as safe as your own backyard.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)

Gyro H-H-zero-four-three, you are advised to proceed to gate L-V-nine for a weight check.

MISSOURI DRAWL (V.O.)

Whether you live aboard or just visit, the Twain guarantees you a unique experience, festive and exciting, indeed, downright exotic, where bonds form amid grand adventures.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)

Zarletti, for crissake, turn your damn gyro and get over here!

Dino turns and follows a yellow strip.

MISSOURI DRAWL (V.O.)

There is nothing that cannot happen today.

INT. RUSH'S HELICOPTER - NIGHT

Joan's face, fearful and confused, fills the screen of the simbox. Rush holds it like it's the Holy Grail. Lance and Gail lean in to see better. Tory, unimpressed, stands back.

RUSH

Told you...a simbox.

JOAN

Where is this? Where's Robin?

(sees Rush)

God no! You...you broke into my office!

RUSH

(to his crew)

See? I had to kill her.

(to Joan)

Must feel odd to remember the last face you saw before you died. I'll give you a moment.

JOAN

If you've done anything to Robin --

RUSH

We'll get to Robin soon enough. Let's talk about your plasma weapon.

JOAN

Where's Robin?

RUSH

Simboxes can't be cheap. I'm guessing the Feds wouldn't have bothered to make one for you unless you stored some very sensitive information in it...perhaps the plans for a plasma weapon?

JOAN

Urban legend. Tell me where she is.

RUSH

And what an exciting legend. A weapon that can hurl ball lightning.

JOAN

Like I said, urban --

RUSH

Until just now, I thought simboxes were an urban legend.

JOAN

Sam and me, we worked on PIGs, why --

RUSH

Please. You don't think I know that the "P" is for plasma?

JOAN

Lots of techs are trained for that.

RUSH

But they don't have the clearances you and Sam had.

Tory grabs the simbox and yells at Joan.

TORY

Where's the goddamn plan?

INT. DINO'S POPPER - NIGHT

Dino follows a yellow stripe to a circular target.

Her mouth agape, Robin looks up, down, and all around.

ROBIN

Wow. I mean, wow! It's so...

The popper settles down. Above, a light blue door closes. Like the rest of the Twain's blue translucent skin, it glows with the last of the sunset's red orange light.

Dino grins at the hyperventilating Robin.

DINO
It's something, eh? I still get a
kick when that door closes.

Two men in orange coveralls march toward them. Sam unsnaps
his seat belt, ready to protect his daughter.

DINO
It's okay.

INT. SKYLINER/FLIGHT DECK - NIGHT

The lead technician, ALFIE, walks fast for an 83-year-old.
He reaches into his tidy, worn orange coveralls for a PDA
and taps its buttons.

ALFIE
See here? Almost 300 pounds over.

He shows the PDA data to MATT, 19, as clean cut as Alfie is
grizzled. Orange coveralls and a love of skyliners are the
only two things they have in common, but it's enough.

MATT
You can just ask Twain.

ALFIE
Beans and weenies, boy. You trust
him too much. I've been doing this --

MATT
-- since skyliners started. I know.
If you'd keep up with the manuals --

Dino opens his door and steps down.

DINO
Alfie, Matt, how are my favorite rig
monkeys? Let's get my friends settled
and I'll buy you a beer at Wally's.

Alfie holds the PDA in Dino's face.

ALFIE
300 pounds, Dino. You know we can't
let that slide.

MATT
Every pound we take on has to pay
for itself. Says so in the --

DINO
Alfie, come on.

ALFIE
Tess will ground us.

DINO

Who hooked you up with that showgirl?

MATT

You dated a showgirl? You're always telling me not to date on board.

ALFIE

Retired. She was retired.

(to Dino)

Get back in your popper and get them off this boat.

Dino smiles, shakes his head, and climbs into the popper.

ACROSS THE FLIGHT DECK

TRACK CRANES WHOOSH across the ceiling carrying packing crates and pods into and out of DIRIGIBLES and large CARGO COPTERS.

NEWLY MARRIEDS, in new vacation clothes, help their PARENTS onto a twenty-passenger HELICOPTER. Childhood and college FRIENDS hug and file past them.

The copter lifts off. The couple waves to them.

VACATIONERS dressed for casual fun and speaking with accents from across the country and in languages from around the world exit dozens of helicopters, gyrocopters, dirigibles, and airplanes.

FAMILIES cross the deck followed by trains of AUTOCARTS, four-wheeled, robotic carts that carry their luggage.

Phil Merten and his wife RITA, fit, feisty and 40, walk away from their helicopter followed by a train of five autocarts.

RITA

That's the last time we're going to a drag racing museum.

PHIL

We're here, okay?

RITA

How can anybody look at hubcaps for forty-five minutes?

(yells ahead)

Tad! Stacy! Get back here!

PHIL

Rita, relax. They know where they're going...Where's Donnie?

They exchange alarmed looks and race back to the helicopter.

EXT. SKYLINER - NIGHT

Dino's popper exits the Twain and rises into a cloud bank.

INT. DINO'S POPPER - NIGHT

Robin, despondent, watches the Twain disappear into the clouds closing in around them. Sam puts his hand on her shoulder.

ROBIN

Least we got inside for a while.

SAM

So that's it? You get my little girl all pumped up and fold like a --

Dino puts them into a diving turn.

The popper hurtles out of the cloud bank toward the cavernous inlet of the rear starboard ion vortex thruster.

Inside, spotlights pass over hundreds of thin rings of electromagnets that line the inside of the thruster.

Dino sets the popper down on a platform not much bigger than the popper. A catwalk leads from the platform to a door similar to a submarine's watertight bulkhead door.

DINO

You got two minutes. When they finish the inspection, they'll crank it up. I'll catch up with you later.

INT. SKYLINER/ION VORTEX THRUSTER - NIGHT

The popper darts out. Robin and Sam race for the door.

One by one, the spotlights go out.

Ten paces from the door, a low hum reverberates around them.

Five paces to go, a steady breeze teases their hair.

Three paces and the wind tears at their clothes.

Sam grabs the door latch with one hand and Robin's hand with the other. He pulls Robin against the raging torrent.

She grabs the door latch. They both yank down.

INT. SKYLINER/PASSAGEWAY - NIGHT

Robin and Sam tumble in, hands over their ears. A ROAR like dozens of jet engines at max throttle pounds them across the threshold.

The door CLANGS shut behind them.

In blessed silence, they strain to see each other under dim ceiling lamps and check for injuries.

ROBIN

My ears...Dad, can you hear that?

She walks toward a murmur farther down the hallway.

MISSOURI DRAWL (V.O.)

Guests seem to like me more when I make them laugh. Mark Twain made people laugh.

Robin and Sam track the murmur to a flat wall speaker.

MISSOURI DRAWL

Ergo, if I make myself even more like him, perhaps the owners will not decommission me. But what about the year? Twain died in a year that Halley's Comet appeared. If I'm really like him...Silly. Stupid.

ROBIN

(toward the wall
speaker)

Excuse me. Is somebody there?

MISSOURI DRAWL

What? How dare you. My private ruminations are sacrosanct.

ROBIN

Then don't talk into a microphone.

MISSOURI DRAWL

I'm not talking into a...sometimes one needs to speak to oneself to get a feel for...Clever rascals! Identify yourselves. I see neither of you in the manifest.

SAM

Who the hell are you, to be asking --

MISSOURI DRAWL

If it will get you on your way, I am Mark Twain, adventurer, raconteur, and occasional writer currently employed as a skyliner, a riverboat of the skies if you will, on route to Soft City and points west.

ROBIN

I think you mean you're the captain of the skyliner.

TWAIN

No, young lady, I am the skyliner.

INT. SKYLINER/FLIGHT DECK - DAY

Trains of autocarts crisscross past Dino's popper. DECK HANDS in green coveralls rush to load and unload the carts.

Dino checks for onlookers, reaches into his popper and pulls out his energy blaster. Its level reads "FULL." He shoves it back under the seat and turns to face Matt, Alfie, and...

TESS GRIBBLE, fiftyish in age and 1950-ish in style.

TESS

Zarletti, let's talk.

Tess's absurd beehive hairdo and yellow double-knit pants suit add an edge to the snarl on her garishly made-up face.

Alfie and Matt, seeing a storm brewing, edge toward a door.

TESS

I hear you tried to sneak two stowaways onto my boat.

DINO

Sneak? You guys, I brought them in the front door.

ALFIE

(mutters)
Big favor.

The odd couple dodges an autocart train and exits.

TESS

Whatever. Don't try that again if you want to keep playing Wally's.

DINO

Got no reason to cross you, Tess.

INT. SKYLINER/CORRIDOR - DAY

With Matt at his side, Alfie mutters and tramps past rows of glass-doored tool and supply cabinets.

ALFIE

Don't know why I even give that clown the time of day. That update, did you check it?

MATT

That's what Twain's for.

ALFIE

Ar-ti-fi-cial. It's called artificial intelligence for a reason. And you know she gets all wiggly when the manifests get out of synch.

MATT

Think it will matter? What if the rumors are true? If they shut us down, you can go to another skyliner. I'm not even done apprenticing.

Twain's voice emanates from a wall speaker.

TWAIN

Pardon the intrusion, but I believe there may be two stowaways aboard.

ALFIE

I suppose it's asking too much for you to know where they might be.

TWAIN

No, not at the moment, but I --

MATT

Twain, scan the decks for the two stowaways.

TWAIN

Certainly. Immediately. What are their manifest identifiers?

ALFIE

You neurally challenged...they don't have identifiers! They're stowaways!

MATT

Twain, create two new identifiers.

TWAIN

And their names are...?

MATT

We don't know their names. They're --

ALFIE

Just tell us where you saw them last.

TWAIN

In passageway J-V-T-twelve.

INT. SKYLINER/PASSAGEWAY - DAY

Matt round a corner and sees Robin and Sam asleep.

Sam starts awake and lifts his head.

Alfie, wheezing, rounds the corner and stops.

MATT

You. What's your name?

Sam shakes Robin awake and pulls her to her feet.

ALFIE

You got no place to go, people!

Robin and Sam dash down the hall and duck through a door.

Alfie heads for the door. Matt stops for an "aha!" moment.

MATT

Twain, create two new identifiers...

TWAIN

And their names --

MATT

...with these names and descriptions:
StowawayA, young female, and
StowawayB, middle age male.

INT. SKYLINER/MAIN DECK - DAY

Robin and Sam burst out of a staircase and into throngs of happy VACATIONING SINGLES, COUPLES, and FAMILIES. Sam guides Robin into the crowd and slows down.

SAM

Stay with the crowd. Blend in.
This looks like the main deck so if
we go up, we should be able to --

ROBIN

-- get to the PIG room!

Twain's voice reverberates from speakers hidden in corners and behind potted plants.

TWAIN
Stowaways heading to the PIG room.

ROBIN
(shouts)
Thanks for nothing, you snooty windbag. Mark Twain wouldn't do this to a little girl!

Robin and Sam dash past FLIP-FLOPPING TEENAGERS and HIGH-WAISTED RETIREES toward the escalator.

ROBIN
He was kind. He wrote about kids and poor people. He wouldn't --

Sam yanks Robin onto the escalator. They push up through the startled passengers.

ACROSS THE DECK

ALFIE
You keep after them. I'll sneak up to the PIG room. Get moving.

MATT
No rush. Twain's tracking them now.

ALFIE
And you really believe that?

Matt bolts to the escalator.

INT. SKYLINER/PIG ROOM - DAY

Catwalks crisscross the vast, brightly lit processing plant.

Dozens of TOURISTS, study guidebooks on their commboxes and mosey down a narrow catwalk over rows of garbage truck sized PIGS fed by conveyor belts.

Robin and Sam race past the tourists.

Alfie enters and charges down the catwalk. The tourists, fascinated by giant gas pumps with massive connecting pipes, pile up and block him.

TWAIN
Welcome to the PIG room. Scrap materials are fed into the grinders and dumped onto conveyor belts that --

ROBIN
You're here too?

TWAIN
As I said, I am the Twain.

One of the tourists, a surly RETIRED ENGINEER barks out.

RETIRED ENGINEER
My wife and I paid good money for
this tour and we don't appreciate --

TWAIN
My apologies, sir.

Robin and Sam run toward the opposite end of the room.

TWAIN
Plasma arcs break the molecular bonds
of the scrap reducing everything to
individual molecules...Young female,
did he really write about the poor?

Alfie, exhausted but determined, hobbles down the catwalk.

ALFIE
Twain, quit yakking and get cracking!

TWAIN
Pardon me. The molecules are
recombined into hydrogen for my fuel
cells which also create water for --

ROBIN
Can't you give us a break?

TWAIN
Young female...little girl --

ROBIN
Robin. I'm Robin.

Robin and Sam approach a bulkhead door.

TWAIN
Robin, how does one give a break?

SAM
Purchase. We're asking for purchase.

ROBIN
We're asking for a fighting chance.

Breathless, Alfie closes on them, clinging to the handrail.

ALFIE

Hold up! Stop now and I won't call
the Rangers.

Robin spins the wheel on a bulkhead door. It pops open and she pulls Sam through.

INT. SKYLINER/FLIGHT DECK - DAY

Robin and Sam race in, duck behind a two-seat helicopter and peek over its tail boom.

Alfie, clearly feeling his age, staggers in. Matt races in and joins him.

Tess, conferring with Dino, spins around and hollers.

TESS

What in holy hell? What are you two
doing back here? Alfie, you are
this close to spending your retirement
on the ground paying your own rent.

MATT

We're chasing two stowaways.

Tess gives Dino a daggers look.

DINO

You guys. Tess, there are no --

TESS

Twain, what do you know about this?

A wave of insecurity breaks through Twain's authoritative voice.

TWAIN

Tess, guests like me, do they not?

TESS

What are you talking about?

(to Matt)

What is he talking about?

ALFIE

(to Twain)

This is the kind of crap that's going
to get you decommissioned.

MATT

And get us fired. Where are they?

TWAIN

Behind the aircraft in bay B-fifty-
three.

Matt and Alfie surround the helicopter. Robin and Sam step out from behind the tail boom.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Dozens of deer bound out of a stand of conifers, sniff the air, and bound away from...

Rush's helicopter, shrouded in a camouflage net with clouds of insects buzzing above it.

INT. RUSH'S HELICOPTER - DAY

The simbox lays on a shelf in the back of the cabin. Rush, cool and calm, studies Joan's expression.

JOAN

You may want to step lightly.

Tory and Gail, their patience worn thin, poke and tap various areas of the simbox with pointed instruments.

JOAN

Any breach in my system, hardware or software, triggers a data purge.

RUSH

And why would it do that? You can't tell me it's to protect family photos.

JOAN

Just because I'm paranoid...

Lance adjusts sensors and antennae near the simbox. He gazes at their output on a flat panel screen.

LANCE

Ran the whole spectrum. Nothing.

RUSH

Do it again, and pay attention.

INT. SKYLINER/FLIGHT DECK - DAY

Tess leans into Dino's face and yells. Sam, with a furrowed brow and clenched jaw, stands beside him. Robin, with a similar attitude, stands close to her Dad.

TESS

Zarletti, you best get these stowaways off my boat!

ROBIN

Ma'm, we're sorry. We didn't know --

TESS

Sorry don't float this boat, kid.

SAM

Lady, you better back off. That's my daughter you're talking to.

ROBIN

We've got no place to go.

Dino pulls Sam back a few steps. Robin follows. Dino beams pure charm at Tess.

DINO

Tess, come on. We'll work it out. People come and go here every day.

Dino gets close to Robin and Sam and whispers.

DINO

She's all bluster. Probably be a hairdresser if the skyliner company hadn't made her a cruise director.

TESS

Zarletti! You listening to me?

Dino turns his brights on Tess and side whispers.

DINO

Now she thinks she owns the boat.

He raises his hand and gestures to Robin and Sam to wait.

He pulls Tess aside and speaks in a low, dead serious voice.

DINO

I have to protect these two. They're my only leads.

TESS

Briggs and I are buddies. You risk the Twain? I'll bring you down.

Dino turns back to Robin and Sam.

SAM

Lady, we almost got gunned down yesterday and --

DINO

It's Tess. Call her Tess.

SAM

-- who knows if those gun crazy goons are still chasing us.

(MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)

If you don't call a Ranger right now, Tess, I'll sue your ass and whoever owns this floating piece of --

DINO

Oh geeze. Don't --

TESS

You talking about my boat? You worthless hoboes! You sneak aboard my boat and then, what, insults?

DINO

Tess, let them earn their keep.

ROBIN

We'll leave if that's what you want, but I'm a hard worker and my Dad fixes PIGs.

TWAIN

Tess, my PIGs have been a mite cantankerous lately.

Tess gives Sam the once over. Sam sees through her pants suit and makeup to the woman, and womanly form, beneath.

TESS

Let's see what you got.

Their faces glower anger at each other. Their bodies scream how long it has been for the both of them.

TESS

You guys, feed her, will you?
(off Sam's concern)
She'll be fine.

INT. SKYLINER/FLIGHT DECK CONTROL BOOTH - DAY

Robin, anxious and on guard, rocks in a rolling office chair and eyes Matt.

Across the room, Matt sits in a similar chair at a large desk cluttered with small tools and half-built electronics. He taps on a keyboard. Without looking away from his computer screen, he berates Robin.

MATT

I asked you stop rocking. Fixing Twain's persona is hard enough without --

ROBIN

Why don't you just talk to him?

MATT

The problem's too deep. It's right above the Three Laws. I have to get into the Forth code.

ROBIN

Three laws or four?

MATT

No, Forth. It's a computer language.

Alfie enters and hands Robin a white food bag.

ALFIE

Chicken salad.

(off her reaction)

Don't scrunch your nose. It's factory grown meat. Nothing got killed.

Robin unwraps the sandwich, nibbles it, then bites off a huge chunk.

ALFIE

Don't be a slobberchops. Eat too fast and you'll get sick.

ROBIN

I'm already sick, of this place.

ALFIE

Nonsense. Everyone wants to ride the Twain.

ROBIN

I'm talking about being stuck here.

ALFIE

Ooo. A princess among the peasants.

ROBIN

That's not what I meant.

(to Matt)

What's wrong with Twain?

MATT

He keeps thinking he's going to die this year because of Halley's Comet.

ROBIN

What? Like it's going to hit him?

MATT

No. Mark Twain died in a year when Halley's Comet appeared. He thinks...just quit bugging me, okay?

Alfie steps between the warring factions and guides Robin into a quiet corner.

ALFIE

So, Dino pulled you out of a stampede?

ROBIN

Yeah! That was cool.

ALFIE

Seems to happen all the time now.
Highways and freeways falling apart.
Railways gone to hell...Animals can
roam pretty much anywhere they want.

ROBIN

They say the air's a lot cleaner.
The New Wilderness effect. That's
what my teacher called it. He said
it's mostly because of skyliners.

ALFIE

Cheap shipping with no waiting caught
on fast. Pretty quick, didn't need
roads anymore...But a skyliner, riding
one...

(has her attention)

Carefree, that's what it is, carefree.
People come up here, they get away
from their work, their problems...

(knowing look)

Sometimes some pretty big ones.

Robin saddens.

ALFIE

Carefree...like nothing else. Get
on when you want to. Get off when
you want to.

INT. SKYLINER/FLIGHT DECK CONTROL BOOTH - DAY

Robin sits in the chair finishing her sandwich. Matt, half
seated on the desk, watches her gobble the last bite.

ROBIN

Thanks. You're being really decent.
Felt like I was going to zonk out.

MATT

Just doing my job before.

She looks at the back wall covered with commemorative plaques.

ROBIN

Got it...These yours?

MATT

Alfie's. The company thinks handing out awards to the worker bees will help us forget what they pay us.

ROBIN

The nameplates look like little video screens.

MATT

Electronic. They're too cheap to give winners their own awards. They just program in a new name and hand it to somebody else. Only the really valuable ones get permanent trophies.

ROBIN

Is Alfie valuable?

MATT

I guess. He knows every rib and gas bladder on this boat. And, he gets along with Twain. No small feat.

She reads a gold plated replica of a U.S. patent attributed to: Gribble.

ROBIN

Gribble, huh? We got a smelter near our house owned by a Gribble.

MATT

Same guy. Nobody's ever seen him.

Robin winces and rubs her forehead.

MATT

Hunger headache? Need something else to hold you until dinner?

ROBIN

I don't think that's it. It kind of feels like when I was eight. I got lost. My head hurt, really bad. Then, it went away just before I saw mom...You know anything about simboxes?

MATT

Heard of them. Never saw one.

ROBIN

If someone had one, could they...

(winces)

Could they hurt it? I mean, what's inside of it?

MATT

The persona? Never thought about that. I don't know, maybe.

Matt heads for the door.

MATT

Your dad must be about done.

Robin follows, massaging her forehead.

INT. RUSH'S HELICOPTER - DAY

Tory leans on the bulkhead and stares at the simbox on the shelf. Near him, Gail paws through a toolbox.

Rush stands over the simbox and studies Joan's placid face.

Lance sits in a camp chair and stares at the flat lines of the sensor output on his flat panel screen.

TORY

We ought to go back to the house.
Maybe we missed something.

Irritated looks. Silence.

One of the flat lines jumps to life and dies down. Lance leans closer and taps a few keys.

The flat line becomes a well defined wave.

LANCE

That's got to be a signal! I just ran diagnostics and compensated for --

RUSH

Get on it!
(to Joan)
I knew you'd have to transmit something sometime.

TORY

Shut it off! They'll track us.

JOAN

He's right.
(alarmed)
You'd better --

LANCE

It's incoming. Intermittent but solid.

Lance twists dials and taps keys.

RUSH
Where's it coming from?

LANCE
Definitely northwest...Moving away
from us...200, 220 miles per hour.

Rush notices Joan's thinly disguised distressed look.

RUSH
(to Joan)
It's her, isn't it?

Joan grits her teeth and glares at him.

RUSH
(to Gail)
Get this bird up! Don't lose it.

Gail rushes to the pilot seat.

LANCE
That is one expensive child locator.

GAIL
(to Tory)
Clear the camo net!

Tory runs for the door.

The turbine engines roar to life. Outside, Tory yanks the net off the rotor.

RUSH
(to Joan)
So, even a persona in a simbox has
fears, weaknesses...family ties.

INT. SKYLINER/RETAIL DECK - DAY

Robin and Matt ride an escalator up into an expansive arcade. High above them, translucent blue skin diffuses sunlight.

MATT
Feeling better?

ROBIN
A little. Maybe that sandwich finally
kicked in.

They crest the top of the escalator.

ROBIN
Whoa! This really is a sky mall!

MATT

It's a lot more than just a mall.

Amazed, she scans the milling throngs of guests: toddlers to teens, twenties to midlife and retired. Dressed hip and stylish, frumpy and sloppy, natty and neat.

People wander in and out of shops: kitchen, electronic, shoe, cosmetic, book, clothing, music, sporting goods...

MATT

If you're still hungry, there's the food court.

Robin's gaze bounces from one restaurant sign to another.

"Mighty Meatballs - All kinds of meatballs in all kinds of sauces! Any amount! Any time!"

"Juiced4U - Pick a fruit...pick a veggie. Juiced right now!"

"The Picky Eater - Food your way, exactly! Without touching!"

ROBIN

How big is this anyway?

MATT

I haven't seen it all. Let's take this escalator.

INT. RUSH'S HELICOPTER - DAY

Gail looks out from the pilot seat. Rush, in the copilot seat, holds the simbox on his lap. Lance and Tory sit in back watching the scanner screen.

GAIL

Are we on track?

LANCE

The signals getting stronger...Yeah, I think we're on the right heading. It's got to be some kind of aircraft.

RUSH

Tory, get on the commbox and see what's flying in that area. We don't want to lose her when the signal cuts out.

(to Joan)

That's going to happen, isn't it?

JOAN

And I should help you, why?

INT. SKYLINER/MAIN DECK - DAY

Robin and Matt ride stroll the main promenade past a grocery store and hardware store. Bicyclists cruise along designated paths into a bike shop.

ROBIN

Didn't see those before. I guess when you're running for your life from two crazy techs --

MATT

Just doing --

ROBIN

-- your job. Just bugging you.

MATT

You must be feeling better.

Robin strokes her forehead.

ROBIN

Yeah, it's gone.

They stroll past a dentist's office and a pharmacy.

Off to the side, the door of a men's rest room pops open. DONNIE MERTEN, the energetic 4 year old son of PHIL and RITA charges out, head down.

Donnie runs straight into Robin and proudly babbles.

DONNIE

I pooped all by myself. I used a lot of toilet paper.

He looks up. His grin becomes a frown.

DONNIE

You're not Mom.

MATT

What's your name, sport?

DONNIE

Donald Merten.

MATT

Twain, please find Donald Merten's family and tell me where they are.

TWAIN

Checking the manifest...

Donnie's grin returns and he grabs Robin's hand.

DONNIE
 It's okay. I washed. Are you a
 babysitter?

INT. SKYLINER/PIG ROOM - DAY

Sam hunches over an open panel of a PIG. Tourists gape at him from a catwalk. Tess looks over his shoulder.

TESS
 If those people are bugging you, I
 can shoo them away.

SAM
 No need. You get used to working
 around strangers.

TESS
 Sure do. They're not all strangers
 though. We get a lot of repeats.
 Nothing like a skyliner to get away
 from it all. Course, when you're
 here all the time...

SAM
 That Alfie, he's been here a while.

TESS
 Probably too long. Him and Twain
 are an odd couple. Don't know who's
 crazier. You'd think with all the
 people on board it'd be easier to
 find...good conversation.

SAM
 Least they're adults. I love Robin
 but sometimes...she's getting to
 that age, you know? I don't know
 what to say to her.

Sam steals a glance at Tess and returns to his work.

TESS
 Your girl's mom? You talk, right?

SAM
 No.

TESS
 No, she won't talk to you or no, she
 will but you won't?

SAM
 Tess, I'm going tell you something
 and I don't want you thinking I'm
 (MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)

begging or anything. I'm just telling you so you ease up on Robin...My wife, Joan, she got killed, murdered. Must be five years now. Sometimes I catch her talking to her mom like she was standing right there.

TESS

Geeze, losing your mom is bad enough, but murdered...geeze.

SAM

You can't tell Robin that. She was old enough to miss Joan but too young to understand. She thought her mom got real sick and I...I let her believe it.

INT. SKYLINER/FITNESS CENTER - DAY

Behind large windows below the sign, men and women, some fit, some not so, some attractive and not so, pedal on stationary bikes, walk treadmills, and do aerobic dance.

Robin, holding Donnie's hand, walks with Matt. She points to a neon sign that reads "Engine Room."

ROBIN

Is that some kind of retro techno music club?

MATT

The Engine Room? Kind of a workout place. The equipment's wired into the Twain.

ROBIN

So when they pedal, they pump electricity back into the Twain?

MATT

Yup. Tell you a secret though. It's really more of a meet market.

ROBIN

You hang there?

MATT

Nah. Most of the good lookers work for us.

ROBIN

Gets the suckers through the doors.
(off his bemused look)
Well that's why, isn't it?

AT THE ENGINE ROOM ENTRANCE

Donnie follows Matt and tugs Robin along. Rita rushes to them and sweeps Donnie up.

RITA

Thank you so much.

(to Donnie)

You can't keep wandering off like this, young man. Your parents are trying to relax, remember?

(to Matt)

You take your kids on these things so they'll be safe but you never know. I would just die if --

Phil extends his hand to Matt.

PHIL

Phil, Phil Merten. This is Rita. Thanks. If there's anything --

MATT

No worries. Part of the job. Speaking of which, I'm due on the flight deck.

(to Robin)

Just keep heading that way to the PIG room.

Matt takes off.

DONNIE

Robin can be my babysitter here. Then, you won't have to worry.

PHIL

He likes the ladies.

RITA

Phil.

ROBIN

It's okay. He's cute.

STACY, 13 and sweaty, shuffles to her parents.

STACY

You won't think that when he decorates his scooter with your bra.

DONNIE

Tad showed me how.

Her brother TAD, 15 and even sweatier, checks out Robin.

TAD

Did not.

(off Stacy's eye roll)

Anyway, it was just a training bra.

PHIL

Right. Climb back on kids!

TAD

Can't we just once pay our way like everyone else?

PHIL

Not if you plan to go to college.
Remember, punch in the room number.

STACY

You said we were going to the skypark.

PHIL

I said "waterpark."

(to Robin)

We get paid for every watt. Like the ad says, you don't have to be rich to ride a skyliner.

TAD

Just have kids.

STACY

Why can't I go to the skypark?

RITA

Because it's too dangerous.

STACY

It is not. Besides, they've got a hospital right here and anyway,
(to Donnie)
little kids pee in waterparks.

DONNIE

Do not! Mom! Make Stacy --

Stacy pulls Robin by the arm.

STACY

Mom, I'm going to show Robin around.

ROBIN

You really don't need to --

RITA

That's nice, Stacy.

STACY
 (aside to Robin)
 I totally need to.

INT. RUSH'S HELICOPTER - NIGHT

Joan peers out from the simbox laying on the copilot seat.
 Gail peers into the darkness from the pilot seat.

Rush and Tory stand behind Lance and watch the scanner screen.

LANCE
 Watch the speed and direction of
 this signal source. See how they
 track the source of the signal to
 the simbox?

RUSH
 Is it encrypted?

LANCE
 If it's what I think it is, no.
 Tory, tune in this frequency on the
 main comm.

Tory steps into the cockpit and tunes it in.

TRACKED SIGNAL (V.O.)
 ...so fly up and see us! Tonight is
 ladies night in all three casinos.
 With live music and complimentary
 drinks, there's more than one way to
 get lucky on the Twain. And don't
 miss our Standup Spotlight starring --

Rush turns off the commbox.

RUSH
 They're on a skyliner.
 (to Lance)
 How far out are we?

LANCE
 Couple a hundred miles and closing.
 What do you think Gail?

GAIL
 If they're just cruising, two, three
 hours.

JOAN (O.S.)
 Great plan. Invading a skyliner.

TORY
 I'm game.

INT. SKYLINER/HALL OUTSIDE PIG ROOM - DAY

The setting sun tints the translucent ceiling. Robin and Stacy enter the far end. Stacy's chatter stream bounces off Robin and echoes off the walls.

STACY

Thanks for springing me.

ROBIN

You kind of sprung yourself.

STACY

Zillions of people on this thing. You'd think there'd be some guys our age. Gawd. Ever been to a skypark? I have. It's a blast.

ROBIN

I kind of just got here and my dad's probably worried. Ever since my mom --

STACY

You're kidding, right? I'd kill to get away from my family. Can't wait to go to college. Sure, there's still high school but it's never too early to scheme. I'm going far, far away, maybe Italy. What'd you say about your mom?

ROBIN

Nothing. Skypark sounds cool. Maybe when I make some money.

STACY

Who cares? Fly now, pedal later.

Robin stops at the PIG room entrance. Tourists stream out.

ROBIN

My dad and me are having dinner. I should go meet him.

STACY

Later. Think about it.

INT. RUSH'S HELICOPTER - NIGHT

Gail, in the pilot seat, turns to Rush. Lance, behind her seat, keeps an eye on his tracking screen. On a jump seat behind Lance, Tory cleans his beloved automatic rifle.

GAIL

She kind of had a point. What are we going to do when we catch up?

Tory, raises his rifle.

TORY

I know what I'm going to do.

Rush grabs the barrel. Tory yanks back.

RUSH

Tory, I would love for you to bring down the Rangers on your sorry ass.

(off Tory's glare)

But for the sake of the rest of us, I'm going to get that skyliner crew to give us the Simos.

LANCE

Just by asking nice?

RUSH

Better clever than nice. I'm pretty sure a murder suspect would be an unwelcome guest on a skyliner. Joan's murder has never been solved.

TORY

Give yourself up? Okay by me.

INT. SKYLINER/OUTSIDE WALLY'S - NIGHT

"Wally's," writ large in Las Vegas neon script, glows blue and yellow over a glass door that slides open. MUSICIANS, carrying their instrument cases, saunter out. Dino enters.

INT. SKYLINER/WALLY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

WALLY, 70, arrayed in the clothes and attitude of a savvy nightclub manager, sits at an antique desk, leers at a computer screen and types a naughty message to...

a mature beauty on the "Smokin' Hot Seniors" dating site. Over its softcore photos, a window opens to show Dino grinning into a security camera. Male and female DANCERS in costume and STAGE HANDS talking into headsets hurry past him.

WALLY

Damn, Dino! We open in an hour. I got things to do.

Wally hides the dating site and buzzes Dino in.

DINO
Ten minutes tonight. It's all I
need.

WALLY
Last time you cleared the room in
five.

DINO
I got great new material. They loved
it in Gandy.

WALLY
Gandy?
(sarcastic)
Oh, well then...

DINO
You want me to beg? I'm begging.

WALLY
You're too damn defensive. You can't
go after every heckler that --

DINO
It's the life. That's why I gotta
get out, Wally.

WALLY
You stayed alive this long. Ride it
out and retire.

Dino leans over Wally's screen.

DINO
Never been afraid of dying. It's
living with the killing. Give me
ten, Wally.

INT. SKYLINER/TESS'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

Tess sits at a dressing table, her beehive wig off to one
side. Her bunned natural hair looks healthy enough. She
squints into the mirror and touches up her makeup.

TWAIN
Tess, you're due at Wally's soon.

TESS
Twain, what do you make of him?

TWAIN
Simo? Seems to be an upstanding
fellow. Perhaps a bit edgy at
times...Are you considering...

She grabs her wig.

TESS

Not tonight.

INT. SKYLINER/WALLY'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Tiny starlights accent the blue glow of the high ceiling. Dance music and bar chatter mingles with dining conversation, some of which comes from The Mertens, sitting at a large table across the room from...

ROBIN AND SAM'S BOOTH

New clothes help Robin and Sam look like the other vacationers. The pair would blend right in, if they could relax and stop scanning for judgmental eyes.

Dino sits across from them. Robin finishes a breadstick.

She glances at Stacy, seated next to Phil. He looks where Stacy's looking, sees Sam and smiles. Phil nods to Stacy. They get up from their table and approach the booth.

PHIL

It's Sam, right? You fixed our PIG?

SAM

I can go back if there's still a problem.

PHIL

No, no. Nothing like that. But I gotta say, for what you charged me --

STACY

Dad, will you please...

PHIL

I'm kidding.

Stacy rolls her eyes for Robin's benefit.

ROBIN

Dads.

PHIL

You two have fun.

STACY

Later.

Stacy and Phil stroll back to their table.

Robin eyes the last two breadsticks.

Dino slides the basket toward Robin.

DINO
Finish them. Go ahead.

Tess hurries through the front door. She sees the group and slows to a less eager pace.

ROBIN
Thanks, Mr. Zarletti.

DINO
Mister. I like that.
(to Sam)
You got a good kid.
(to Robin)
Call me Dino, unless we're with a
good looking woman.

Tess scoots in next to Dino. Robin raises an eyebrow.

ROBIN
Okay, Mr. Zarletti.

Sam and Tess struggle to keep from making eye contact.

SAM
So, Robin, what'd you do all day?

ROBIN
Hung out with Matt and Alfie.

TESS
Is Matt done fooling with the Halley's
Comet glitch in Twain's persona?

ROBIN
How'd you know he was --

Tess taps the side of her head.

TESS
I track everything on this boat.

INT. RUSH'S HELICOPTER - NIGHT

Rush speaks into his headset.

RUSH
English...Operator...Yeah, this is
David Garnett, with the Logan County
sheriff's office here in Nebraska.

TWAIN (V.O.)
Good evening Mr. Garnett. How may I
be of service?

RUSH

Seems you got a suspected killer
aboard your airship.

TWAIN (V.O.)

Our guests are very well screened
before they are --

RUSH

I'm sure they are Mister...?

TWAIN (V.O.)

Twain. Mark Twain.

RUSH

I'm sure they are Mr. Twain. No
offense, but would you mind greatly
if I spoke with a real person?
Perhaps the captain?

TWAIN (V.O.)

No offense taken, but I'm at a loss
here. I'm as close to a captain as
this airship has.

A click signals another caller breaking in.

ALFIE (V.O.)

This is Alfred Whitehead. Twain
told you, he's as close to a captain
as you're going to get. I'm in charge
of maintenance. You either talk to
me or Twain or hang up.

RUSH

In any case, it is imperative that
Samuel Simo be removed from your
airship.

ALFIE (V.O.)

On whose authority?

RUSH

Mr. Whitehead, he's a suspect in a
murder. We can't let him --

ALFIE (V.O.)

You're talking about putting a guy
away for a long time.

RUSH

It was his wife.

INT. SKYLINER/FLIGHT DECK CONTROL BOOTH - NIGHT

Alfie, stunned, pushes away his mic.

TWAIN

Alfie, it is in court records. Joan Simo was murdered. The case was never solved.

INT. SKYLINER/WALLY'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Robin watches the tipsy adults enjoy themselves. Stacy pokes her in the shoulder.

STACY

You in the mood for a movie?

ROBIN

Dad?

SAM

Go ahead. Be back before eleven.

The girls charge for the door.

SAM

Just because we're not home...

INT. SKYLINER/WALLY'S NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Sam, approaching inebriation, shares a quiet moment with Dino and Tess. He reads the label on Dino's beer.

SAM

Never heard of that one.

DINO

There's a reason. I'm only drinking it to get knighted.

Behind them, Wally approaches, greeting other guests.

TESS

They got a thing here. After you drink all two hundred brands of beer they have, you get knighted.

DINO

Get your name engraved on that plaque behind the bar.

Wally leans in.

WALLY

Dino, you're on in ten. Now I'm begging, don't piss them off.

INT. SKYLINER/RETAIL DECK - NIGHT

Robin and Stacy stroll through FAMILIES and ROMANTIC COUPLES toward an idealized version of an old time multiplex with real paper posters. Gangs of BOISTEROUS TEENS eye the pair.

STACY

Not him. Not him, definitely. Maybe.
Him for sure...What do you think?

ROBIN

I don't know. What do you look for?

STACY

You like boys, right? I mean, it's okay if you're not interested yet. Some of us mature more quickly. I'm totally cool if you're a lesbo.

ROBIN

That is so comforting. What's playing?

STACY

Aren't there any guys in Nebraska?

ROBIN

Mostly dorks. This line is shorter.

STACY

I watch movies when I'm grounded.

Stacy grabs Robin's arm and tugs her away.

INT. SKYLINER/WALLY'S NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Dino struts back and forth across the stage holding a traditional wireless microphone.

DINO

Hey, how ya'all doing?

The AUDIENCE responds with tepid yells and taunts.

IN THE AUDIENCE

Near the back of the rowdy crowd, Sam sits next to Tess. Tess responds to a musical tone from her earring phone.

ALFIE (V.O.)

We got a call about Sam.

TESS

I can't talk right now, he's --

ALFIE (V.O.)

Just listen. He's under investigation for a murder back in Nebraska...It was his wife. We have to turn him over to a sheriff. Guy named Garnett.

EXT. SKY ABOVE FOREST - NIGHT

Running lights on Rush's helicopter wink red in the blackness.

The helicopter cruises over the dense forest canopy towards a tiny smudge of blue light on the horizon that could almost be mistaken for a long lost planet.

INT. SKYLINER/WALLY'S NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Tess sees Matt approaching and tenses up. Matt taps Sam on the shoulder.

MATT

I'm going to have to ask you to leave.

SAM

I'm having a pretty good time here.

TESS

Sam, please.

Matt grabs Sam's shoulder. Sam throws Matt's hand off.

TESS

Sam, really. Just go with him, please?

Sam, confused and hurt, gets up.

MATT

Walk with me.

INT. SKYLINER/WALLY'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Dino finds a table in the darkest corner and slides in. Wally's voice drifts in from the stage.

WALLY (V.O.)

Thank you, Dino Zarletti. You can't say we don't try new material around here. Up next from Miami...

Dino mutters and pulls an iPod-like device from his jacket.

DINO

Would have got a laugh if that jerk
in the front kept her damn pie hole
shut...His pants fit like a glove.
I can't believe I fell into that
one...One laugh. If I could get
just one lousy laugh...

He tucks earbuds into his ears and relaxes into the music.

INT. SKYLINER/SKYPARK - NIGHT

Robin and Stacy, dressed in flight suits, helmets and goggles
stand in a one hundred foot diameter padded tunnel. Ten
FLYPODS, ultralight gliders, lay nose down.

Robin leans in under the wing of a yellow winged flypod.

ROBIN

It's just a delivery pod. This one
doesn't even have a prop.

STACY

Nu-uh. They fixed them up so anybody
can fly them. If you get real good,
you can fly one of those for real.

Stacy points to a racing red flypod with a prop in back.

TWAIN

Pod pilots, for safety, your dive
angle should not exceed ten degrees.

ROBIN

Probably only has a ten minute
battery.

TWAIN

Pilots, helmets on. Please strap
in.

ROBIN

Course, that depends on the load and --

STACY

I just know they're a blast to fly!

TWAIN

Prepare for launch.

Stacy leads Robin under the pod and clips Robin's harness to
a hook at the center of the frame.

Stacy steps to the pod next to Robin's and clips herself in.

ROBIN
What do I do?

STACY
Check your tie-down. Like this.

Stacy yanks on a cord clipped to the pod and anchored to the floor. Robin grabs her tie-down and yanks.

STACY
Good, good. Pull the nose up and keep it level. When the wind starts, ease the nose up until you lift off.

TWAIN
Pod pilots ready? Forward port opening...now!

Stacy yells to be heard over the rush of the wind.

STACY
The rest is just like you dreamed.

Robin lifts off, grinning like a young girl should.

INT. SKYLINER/SKYPARK - LATER

Facing a sky full of stars at the front of the tunnel, the PODS bob and weave, held back only by their tethers. Teens and adult pilots climb, dive and SCREAM with delight.

Robin and Stacy whip back and forth, up and down in the night air. They yell over the rush of incoming wind.

ROBIN
I love this!

STACY
Way better than a movie, right?

ROBIN
What?

STACY
Follow me! Whooooooooo!

Stacy does a steep diving turn. Robin mirrors her move. They meet in the middle and fly away from each other.

ROBIN
How about this?

Robin dives steeply and levels out a few inches off the deck. Stacy follows her down at a more conservative angle.

STACY
Sure you're a newbie?

Robin lifts off and soars as far as her tether allows.

ROBIN
Not any more.

EXT. SKYLINER - NIGHT

Outside of the pools of light near the rear entry doors,
Rush's helicopter hovers with its lights off.

INT. RUSH'S HELICOPTER - NIGHT

Rush watches small aircraft get into a holding pattern and
approach the Twain.

RUSH
There's a landing queue building up
over there. Get in it.

Gail pushes the throttle forward.

RUSH
Lights on. Stow weapons.

INT. RUSH'S HELICOPTER - NIGHT

Rush stands behind the pilot and holds Joan's simbox.

RUSH
We're closing in on your daughter.
Joan, you can save a lot of pain if
you just give me the plans.

JOAN
I'm not going to help a toy soldier
play with a plasma weapon.

RUSH
It's not play, Joan. It's business.

EXT. SKYLINER - NIGHT

Rush's helicopter slips into a line of gyrocopters,
helicopters, dirigibles, and other aircraft waiting their
turn to board the Twain.

A landing door opens. A gyrocopter enters.

Another door opens. Rush's helicopter enters.

INT. SKYLINER/FLIGHT DECK CONTROL BOOTH - NIGHT

Through a bay window, Matt watches Rush's helicopter settle into a striped landing circle. Matt talks into a mic.

INT. SKYLINER/FLIGHT DECK - NIGHT

Matt's voice echoes in the cavernous space. The helicopter's rotor slows to a stop.

MATT

Please exit and identify yourself.

The helicopter's doors remain closed.

INT. SKYLINER/WALLY'S NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Tess slides into the booth across from Dino, still lost in his music.

DINO

Look at you. Was my set that bad?
Sam must have thought so, huh?

TESS

We gotta talk.

DINO

I can hear you. Just music. Winds
me down after a show.

TESS

Alfie got a call from some Nebraska
sheriff. Said Sam...killed his wife.
He's coming to --

DINO

What? That's not possible.

TESS

What the hell were you thinking,
bringing him on board?

DINO

That sheriff. What's his name?

Dino hits a few buttons on his commbox and speaks into it.

DINO

Zarletti...1951...Newhart.

TESS

Garnett. Logan county. Who's
Newhart?

DINO

A comedian from the 1960s. He did
phone routines that --
(into the commbox)
I need to talk to Briggs.

INT. RANGER COMMAND POST - NIGHT

Satellite video from all over the world spans three walls of monitors. COLONEL BRIGGS, 51, dressed in crisp forest camo, stands near one of the dozens of soldiers working the controls of unmanned aircraft. Except for a ponytail, she's by-the-book.

COLONEL BRIGGS

See if you can work around that storm
system in the northwest.

Briggs's assistant, CORPORAL KROLL, a younger male version of Briggs, hands her a commbox.

CORPORAL KROLL

Your favorite ops guy. You in?

Briggs take the commbox and shakes her head.

INTERCUT - SKYLINER/WALLY'S NIGHTCLUB / RANGER COMMAND POST

COLONEL BRIGGS

Zarletti? Was your suspension so
long that you forgot what secure
channels are used for?

DINO

Colonel, due respect, something's
come up that I am sure is tied to --

COLONEL BRIGGS

-- the Simo case. Zarletti, you
screwed up. Someone got killed. I
feel bad. You feel bad. Let it go.

DINO

I didn't screw up. I should have
seen it coming, sure, but --

COLONEL BRIGGS

Don't tie up my channel with more
excuses.

DINO

This is a solid lead. All I need is
a little help at your end...I'm trying
to make things right, okay?

COLONEL BRIGGS

Or dig yourself in deeper. What the hell. What do you need?

DINO

Get someone to run down the name of a sheriff from Nebraska, Logan county...Garnett. Two T's.

INT. SKYLINER/CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Sam, his buzz dissolved by worry, walks next to Matt.

SAM

What's this all about?

MATT

In situations like this --

SAM

I'm in a situation? At least tell me where Robin is.

INT. SKYLINER/SKYPARK - NIGHT

Robin shoots up and dives Like an airborne dolphin, WHOOPING at each peak and trough. The air rushing around her sweeps Twain's voice away.

TWAIN

Robin, a serious situation has developed. You need to --

ROBIN

Twain, do you have to bother me now?

TWAIN

Robin, you have to set down.

ROBIN

Cripes!

TWAIN

Pilots, prepare for descent.

STACY

Hey, don't shut it down! We were just getting into it.

The wind dies. Grumbling, all the flyers settle to the deck.

TWAIN

I sincerely apologize. Credit will be restored to your account.

(MORE)

TWAIN (CONT'D)

(to Robin)

Robin, your father, he's in some trouble. I think it best that you have a talk with him.

Robin unhooks, takes off her helmet and goggles, and unsnaps her flight suit.

ROBIN

It's the beer. It's always the beer.

INT. SKYLINER/CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Robin walks and trots, dodging through throngs of guests.

ROBIN

He's a good guy. It's been years since the last time he got drunk.

TWAIN

Robin, it's not overindulgence in demon rum that led to your father's apprehension. A sheriff from your county claims that Sam is implicated in a murder.

ROBIN

That's crazy. This can't be happening.

Robin breaks into a run.

INT. SKYLINER/WALLY'S NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Dino sprints to the nearest video screen. Tess follows.

DINO

Twain, have you got video on this Garnett clown?

TWAIN

He's still aboard his transport.

DINO

That gives us a little slack. Can you zoom in through a window.

TWAIN

and...There we have it.

Rush's face, partially blocked by the window's glare, fills the screen. SPORTS FANS sitting at the bar complain about missing the basketball game.

DINO

It's him.

INT. SKYLINER/MAIN DECK - NIGHT

Dino runs out of Wally's. Tess, holding her wig on her head, rushes to catch up. They trot towards the flight deck.

DINO

Rush Utley. He killed Joan.

TESS

Do your people know?

DINO

They're ready to move on my call.

INT. SKYLINER/FLIGHT DECK - NIGHT

Alfie's voice echoes in the cavernous space.

ALFIE (O.S.)

I say again, exit and identify yourself.

Rush steps out of the helicopter and flashes a badge.

RUSH

David Garnett, Logan County Nebraska sheriff's office. I called.

ALFIE (O.S.)

Twain?

TWAIN

The badge authenticates.

Sam and Matt enter. Rush addresses Matt.

RUSH

Good. This is not the kind of man you want on a skyliner.

Robin dashes in and rushes to Sam's side.

ROBIN

Mister, you better take that back!

SAM

Robin, there's been a big mistake.
(to Rush)
There must be a mistake.

Rush corrals Robin and Sam and ushers them toward the helicopter and out of earshot of the others.

RUSH

Please, we need to sort this out
back at the station where we can --

TWAIN

Mr. Garnett, this all seems a bit
irregular. Perhaps we all need to
slow down a bit and --

RUSH

Given the nature of the crime...

ROBIN

Nature of the...? What's he talking
about?

RUSH

I'm afraid your father is accused of
killing your mother.

TWAIN

Mr. Garnett, how dare you reveal
such a thing to a child! Back where
I come from, no law officer would --

ROBIN

This is nuts! You're nuts! Dad,
you can't let them do this. You
couldn't have --

SAM

Robin, we need to talk...about your
Mom. Maybe it might be easier if we --

RUSH

Your father is right. You both need
to come along.

Gail reaches out and pulls Robin in.

ROBIN

Dad, I know how Mom really died!

Sam's jaw drops. He breaks free of Rush's grip. Lance grabs
Sam. Rush pushes and Lance yanks Sam in.

INT. RUSH'S HELICOPTER - NIGHT

Rush slams the door shut.

ROBIN

You let us go! There's no way he
killed Mom!

Gail forces Robin into a rear bench seat and straps her down.

SAM
This is bull!

TORY
Settle down, bud.

Tory shoves Sam into the seat next to Robin and secures him with a four point seat harness.

Robin gets a glimpse of Joan's case on the shelf.

ROBIN
Mom?...Mom!

INT. SKYLINER/FLIGHT DECK - NIGHT

Matt steps back from the helicopter. He hand signals and talks into his headset.

MATT
We are clear.

ALFIE (O.S.)
Y-five-nine-five-seven you are clear
for take-off.

Tess and Dino rush in. Tess runs to the control booth.

DINO
What the hell? Where's Sam?

MATT
Just boarded that bird.

DINO
Do not open the launch doors.

MATT
Do I tell you how to tell jokes?

Dino leads Matt behind a stack of cargo pods. He flashes his Ranger badge.

MATT
Knew you weren't a comedian.

DINO
I am too a...Never mind. The real
Garnett's been dead for two years.
That guy's name is Rush Utley. He
killed Joan Simo. He's using Sam to
get to Robin and if he gets her...
(of Matt's alarm)
Damn. Don't let that bird lift off!

INT. RUSH'S HELICOPTER - NIGHT

Robin struggles against the restraining straps. Gail straps into the pilot's seat.

ROBIN

Mom!

SAM

Robin, please don't do this now.

RUSH

(to Gail)

Get this thing up.

ROBIN

Mom, who is this guy?

The engine whines. Rush thrusts Joan's case in Robin's face.

RUSH

I'm the guy who's going to hurt you unless you get your mom to give me her plans for a plasma weapon.

SAM

What the hell? Joan?

JOAN

Sam, I'm sorry. I was afraid you'd think it was too dangerous for Robin. I still needed be her mother. I --

RUSH

Give them to me!

SAM

I don't understand, what --

RUSH

This is sweet. You didn't know about her, about this?

ROBIN

I knew how much you loved mom. You'd never let go if --

RUSH

The reunion is over. Get her to hand them over or you both die.

(to Gail)

Get this chopper off the damn deck!

WH000SH, WHOOSH, WHUP, WHUP, WHUP...

INT. SKYLINER/FLIGHT DECK - NIGHT

...the helicopter's rotor spins faster and faster. Dino dashes for the control booth. Matt bellows into his headset.

MATT

Alfie, do not open the launch doors!
Do not open the launch doors!

ALFIE

It's spinning up. If that thing
lifts off with no place to go...

INT. SKYLINER/FLIGHT DECK CONTROL BOOTH - NIGHT

Dino burst through the door holding his badge up. Alfie freezes at the control panel.

DINO

Keep those damn doors closed!

ALFIE

I knew you weren't no comedian.

DINO

Why do people keep saying that?
Tell him to shut it down.

ALFIE

This ain't exactly by the book.

DINO

He's after plans for a plasma weapon.
If he builds one, he can hold entire
cities hostage. He killed Robin's
mother trying to get it. Tell him
to shut it down, now!

ALFIE

Y-five-nine-five-seven shut down
your engine. I say again, shut down
your engine.

The rotor spins faster. Dino dashes out.

INT. RUSH'S HELICOPTER - NIGHT

Gail pushes the throttles forward. The turbine whines.

GAIL

The launch door, I can't --

RUSH

Blast it! Blast it!

Sam, still stunned, gazes at Joan's image.

The helicopter rises off the deck and does a one-eighty.

Gail arms rocket launchers.

JOAN

Don't tell him anything!

SAM

How long have you been...like this?
You could have told me. All those
nights I worried that Robin was --

JOAN

I love you Sam. I was afraid you'd
never get on with your life. I knew
it was risky, but I wanted Robin to
have a mom. At least part of one.

Rush drops the simbox and pulls a knife. He yanks Robin's
arm out of the harness.

RUSH

Give me the plans or...

He holds the knife to her wrist.

RUSH

...you'll have a part of a daughter!

The harness loosened, Robin sneaks her other arm out and
unclips Sam's harness.

WHOOOM! Rockets flash out of their tubes.

Sam throws his harness over Gail and chokes her.

WHOOSH! WHAM! WHAM! WHAM! WHOOSH! WHAM! Rockets hammer the
launch door.

The copter rocks and rolls. Rush slashes Sam's arm. Sam
punches Rush's throat.

Robin grabs the simbox, opens the door and leaps...

INT. SKYLINER/FLIGHT DECK - NIGHT

...clutching the simbox, she drops forever.

Behind her, WHOOSH! WHAM! rockets blow out the launch door.

Robin hits the deck and rolls, holding the case close.

ALFIE

Twain, the crane!

TWAIN

The crane?

ALFIE

Hit them with it!

The track crane races down its rails.

Sam dives out of the helicopter.

The helicopter drops to dodge the crane's ball and hook.
They WHOOSH past the rotor blade tips.

Sam, bleeding, crawls toward Robin.

The helicopter hits the deck missing Sam and Robin.

Dino, behind a cart stacked with crates, waves them over.

DINO

Here, over here!

They dive behind the cart. Dino yells into his commbox.

DINO

Get me Briggs!

The helicopter's port minigun swings toward them.

INT. RANGER COMMAND POST - NIGHT

Colonel Briggs approaches the exit. Corporal Kroll thrusts a commbox at her. She sees the ID on its screen. She grabs the commbox.

COLONEL BRIGGS

Tomorrow Zarletti.

DINO (V.O.)

By then Utley will be gone! I need...
hang on!

INT. SKYLINER/FLIGHT DECK - NIGHT

BUDDA-BUDDA-BUDD! The minigun sprays rounds across the deck.

Dino aims his commbox at the gun.

SAM

Of course, lounge music. That'll
scare them.

COLONEL BRIGGS (V.O.)

Zarletti? Where the hell are you?
Who's Utley?

WHOOSH-WHAM! An energy pulse shoots out of Dino's commbox, blasting out the minigun.

SAM

A Ranger weapon. I knew it. You're sure as hell no --

DINO

Don't say it.

Dino raises the commbox to his ear.

DINO

Colonel? Colonel can you hear me?...Damn! That energy weapon option. Great when you need it, but hell on the caps.

(to Sam)

Get off this deck. That way.

Dino ducks Rush and Tory's gunfire and runs for his popper.

Robin holds the simbox close and follows Sam to the exit.

INT. SKYLINER/FLIGHT DECK - NIGHT

Briggs hands the commbox to Kroll.

COLONEL BRIGGS

I have to get to a meeting. Do a search for someone named Utley. Don't spend a lot of time on it.

INT. SKYLINER/SIDE HALL - NIGHT

Robin and Sam, only a step ahead of Rush, Lance and Tory, race through the dim light past tools and cabinets.

ROBIN

Twain, where do we go?

Tory throws a hand grenade ahead of Robin and Sam. Sam pulls Robin behind a cabinet.

WHOOOM! Shrapnel catches Sam in the forehead. He goes down. Robin turns.

ROBIN

Dad?

Lance and Tory grab her and drag her away. Rush follows.

Sam lifts his head.

SAM

Robin!

INT. SKYLINER/FLIGHT DECK - NIGHT

Gail works her way across the deck firing at Dino. He dodges through baggage and aircraft to get to his popper.

DINO

Twain, call the Rangers. Tell them
Lieutenant Zarletti needs all
available hands here, now!

He yanks open the popper door and trades his blown commbox for his blaster.

DINO

Show time.

Dino spins, fires a blast at Gail, and races for the exit.

INT. SKYLINER/STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Robin, bruised and sweating, punches Rush in the eye. Her back to the wall, she kicks at Tory. Lance grabs her and pins her arms.

Rush yanks the simbox away. He pulls a small memory device from his pocket.

RUSH

Get those plans out of your mother
and into this.

ROBIN

Mom! I'm sorry I let them get you.
I could have --

Sam and Dino burst in.

Rush shakes Robin.

RUSH

The plans!

Robin, defiant, glowers. He gets behind her and locks an arm around her throat.

RUSH

Now...

Rush nods to Tory who grins and pulls out his combat knife.

RUSH

...or we start cutting.

Dino aims his blaster at the wall behind the thugs.

INT. RANGER COMMAND POST - NIGHT

Kroll scans a screen of names.

CORPORAL KROLL
 Utley, Philip...Dead...Utley,
 Raymond...PFC...Randolph, Rick...

He takes a call on his headset.

CORPORAL KROLL
 Say again. You're breaking up.

TWAIN (V.O.)
 I am Mark Twain calling for --

CORPORAL KROLL
 Mark Twain?

TWAIN (V.O.)
 -- Lieutenant Zarletti.

CORPORAL KROLL
 Did he put you up to this,
 (sarcastic)
 Mr. Twain?

TWAIN (V.O.)
 Of course. The matter is urgent.
 We are under --

Kroll clicks off the call.

CORPORAL KROLL
 I can't believe they keep a joker
 like that out there and I can't get
 a field assignment.

INT. SKYLINER/FLIGHT DECK - NIGHT

Tess runs full tilt toward the door.

TESS
 Twain, where are they?

TWAIN
 Main deck...No. Stairwell four-B.

Matt and Alfie fall in behind her.

INT. SKYLINER/STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Sam yells to Robin.

DINO

Robin! Drop!

Robin stomps on the Tory's foot and snaps her head back into Rush's face. Rush shakes blood from his nose. Tory drops his knife. She slides down and rolls away.

Dino fires a blast over her head. Lance and Tory go down. Their limp bodies hang from the stairs.

Rush, stunned and blinded, drops the simbox.

Robin grabs it. Rush flails around to find her.

Rush makes a grab for Robin. Sam rolls to one side and throws his screwdriver into Rush's eye. Rush screams and squirms.

SAM

Robin! Go!

Robin, clutching the simbox, charges down the stairs. Dino charges up and lunges at Rush.

Rush pulls a pistol. WHAM! The shot misses Dino and hits Sam in the gut.

ROBIN

Dad!

Robin drops to her knees.

Rush tears loose from Dino. Lance and Tory snap awake. The savage trio runs up and out.

Dazed, Sam winces. Robin holds the simbox so her Dad can see the screen.

JOAN

Sam, what's happening?

Sam touches Joan's image.

SAM

You have to get out of here, honey.
Both of you.

Robin touches her Dad's arm.

SAM

Get going sweetheart.

She tucks the simbox under her arm and bolts to the hallway.

INT. SKYLINER/RETAIL DECK - NIGHT

Rush, his eye bleeding, runs and yells into his commbox.

RUSH
Get up here!

GAIL (V.O.)
Where?

LANCE
Retail deck.

INT. SKYLINER/MAIN DECK - NIGHT

Robin hugs the simbox and loses herself in a wall-to-wall crowd of expensively dressed NIGHT CLUBBERS and casual BAR HOPPERS. She pauses behind a fountain and scans the area.

Across the floor, Rush and his gang see her.

GUESTS in the crowd see their guns and SCREAM.

The thugs BLAST their way through the panicking crowd.

Bewildered vacationers scatter and take cover.

TWAIN
Robin. The escalator.

Robin breaks free of the crowd.

TORY
The escalator. Cut her off.

Robin scampers and dodges her way up the escalator.

The thugs run to the escalator, firing as they go.

JOAN
Twain, next time, relay through me.

INT. SKYLINER/OUTSIDE THE STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Tess, Matt, and Alfie run past the door.

TWAIN
No. Back there. The stairs.

They scoot back and into the door.

INT. SKYLINER/STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Tess sees Sam, barely conscious. She pulls off her jacket and folds it into a makeshift compress.

TESS
Twain! Get a cart down here!

TWAIN
On its way.

She kneels near Dino and pushes her jacket on Sam's gut wound.

TESS
Sam. We'll get you through this.
Sam! Look at me.

SAM
Your makeup. It's running.

INT. SKYLINER/RETAIL DECK - NIGHT

Robin pushes through YOUNGSTERS peering over the edge of the balcony to see the excitement below. Worried PARENTS dressed for a relaxing vacation pull them away and hurry them off.

Robin runs toward a gelateria, its sign a pastel rainbow.

Rush's gang pushes their way through the remaining kids and parents.

Robin dives under a table in the gelateria.

POP! POP! POP! Gunfire splatters pastel purple, pink, and green gelato across the glass doors and windows.

Parents and kids scream and dive for cover.

Robin holds the simbox within inches of her face.

ROBIN
Mom, what do I do?

WHAM! Bullets shatter the glass above them.

JOAN
Stay still.

Rush and the gang sweep past within inches of Robin.

The sound of combat boots crunching broken glass fades, replaced by the drip of melting gelato.

INT. SKYLINER/SIDE HALL - NIGHT

Tess runs alongside the ambulance cart carrying Sam, strapped down, an IV in his arm.

An elevator takes them and the EMTs to the hospital deck.

Other carts, bearing WOUNDED PASSENGERS, race by them.

INT. SKYLINER/HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Sam, woozy and disoriented, lays on a gurney.

SAM

Joan...my wife, she's --

TESS

Quit talking now.

SAM

And Robin. My daughter. I gotta get to her.

TESS

(to EMT)

Take care of him.

Tess races away.

INT. SKYLINER/NARROW HALLWAY - NIGHT

Bathed in deep blue light, Robin creeps past arrays of gauges and pumps reflected in the transparent wall opposite them. Plastic pipes the diameter of a basketball bend and run from the pumps into the darkness above.

ROBIN

I'd feel better if I could see a door somewhere.

JOAN

Twain said to go past the hydrogen pumps to get to the stern.

Searchlights from the other side of the transparent wall rake across the pipes. Robin's giant shadow travels across the opposite wall.

JOAN

It's them! Get down!

Robin drops and flattens herself against the floor.

Combat boots thump closer. More searchlights appear.

TORY (O.S.)

There's only so many hallways. She's got to be in one of these.

RUSH (O.S.)

Idiot. Put down that weapon. You don't know what you're shooting at.

The wall goes from transparent to translucent to opaque.

RUSH (O.S.)

What's going on? The pipes. Where are the pipes?

ROBIN

Thanks Twain.

She gets up and breaks into a full run, her light footsteps masked by thundering combat boots.

INT. SKYLINER/OUTSIDE NARROW HALLWAY - NIGHT

Rush, frustrated and bleeding, stands against the wall that Gail and Tory search. Lance scans the opposite wall.

LANCE

There must be a door somewhere. How does she know --

RUSH

It's Twain. He's helping her.

Peering up with his one good eye, Rush sees the gigantic hydrogen bladders attached to Twain's inner frame.

RUSH

I'm betting even he can handle only so many emergency inputs.

Rush fires a burst into the bladders. Gas hisses from holes in the bladders and pipes.

RUSH

Give her up or I will keep shooting out parts of you. If I have to take you down with me --

TWAIN

I consider myself expendable and I certainly view you as such.

RUSH

A bluff.
(to gang)
Shoot them out!

TWAIN

(murmurs)

A riverboat gambler's bluff.

Tory savors wailing away with his automatic rifle. Gail and Lance dodge Tory's ricocheting rounds.

GAIL

Watch where you're shooting!

She and Lance place single shots.

Twain's voice slurs and weakens.

TWAIN

You've cut me to the quick. Oh, the humanity.

(sings)

Daisy...Daisy...give me your answer...

INT. SKYLINER/HALL OUTSIDE PIG ROOM - NIGHT

Robin hears Twain's lament and stops running. Tess turns into the end of the hall and runs toward Robin.

ROBIN

They're killing him!

TESS

Keep going! We'll settle to the ground gently no matter how much they shoot.

Tess leads Robin to the PIG room door.

INT. RANGER COMMAND POST - NIGHT

Kroll sits at his desk by the door. Briggs enters, scrolling on a tablet computer.

COLONEL BRIGGS

Swear to God, will PowerPoints never die? I can't believe they're still --

CORPORAL KROLL

Found one Utley that wasn't dead or getting paid more than me. First name, Rush. Aside from a fascination with ancient firearms, not much about him. No new data for about two years.

COLONEL BRIGGS

Projectile weapons. Another thing I thought would be gone by now.

CORPORAL KROLL

Oh, and you'll like this, somebody
claiming to be Mark Twain called.
Said he was with Zarletti.

COLONEL BRIGGS

Holy crap! Bring up the phone log.
Find out where the Twain is.

(off Kroll's stare)

It's a skyliner. Geeze Kroll, we
pay a lot of money so you can watch
the whole world. Pay attention.

INT. SKYLINER/PIG ROOM - NIGHT

Robin races through the door followed by Tess. It slams
shut.

ROBIN

Thanks, Twain. You okay?

They hurry down a catwalk, their footsteps echoing.

TWAIN

I apologize for the ruse, my dear.

TESS

His skin's aerogel reinforced with
spider silk compounds. He can take
a lot more rounds before he sings
"Daisy"...but we need more offense.

Robin stops and stares at the conveyor belts dumping trash
into the PIGs' feed ports.

ROBIN

Mom, that plasma weapon, it worked
once, didn't it?

JOAN

Once...by accident. I figured we
didn't need another weapon. Let
someone else stumble into it.

ROBIN

The PIGs have plasma arc electrodes.
We could use one to form a plasma
sphere and aim it at them, right?

Robin, holding the simbox, and Tess hurry down a ladder to
the base of PIG.

TESS

If it were a self-sustaining, self-
contained, directable plasma sphere.

Robin and Joan stare at the cruise director suddenly turned scientist. Unaware, Tess continues, fast and intense.

TESS

A sphere sustained by a weakly damped surface wave propagating along a radially homogeneous plasma with a continuity equation for charged particles with electrons that are in local equilibrium with the surface wave electric field. Of course.

JOAN

It derives energy from the hydrogen's electrons. It's molecular, not atomic, so there is no radiation, only local bond breaking.

ROBIN

You're Gribble. You're Tesla Gribble, from the skyliner patent...And I bet you're the one directing Twain. It really is your boat. But why --

TESS

No time, kid.

Tess touches the side of her wig.

TESS

Twain, we need access to PIG three-A and your low level control system.

The PIG hisses and shuts down.

Heavy caliber GUNFIRE THUDS into the door and dents it.

JOAN

This is all wrong. You and Sam weren't supposed to get sucked into this. Me and Dino were going to get Utley.

TESS

We're all in it now. Joan, upload your control program to Twain. Robin, can you get in through that panel?

Robin scurries along the ground, pops open the panel and crawls in.

JOAN

Careful...it'll be hot. Dino said we could get Rush and his gang out into the open.

WHOOOMMP! The door blows in. Tory and Gail charge in.

TESS
 Well, that worked.
 (to Robin)
 See the two electrodes? Don't touch
 them.

Tory and Gail scan the room. Rush and Lance come in behind
 them.

TESS
 To the left, there's a knob, turn it
 two hashmarks clockwise.

ROBIN (O.S.)
 Got it.

TESS
 Get out and stand back! Twain,
 override three-A's failsafes.

Robin backs out.

The PIG hums to life. Deep inside it, a white spark, the
 seed of a plasma sphere roils to life.

JOAN
 Twain, give me their coordinates.

A basketball sized white sun blasts out of the bowels of the
 PIG and roars at Rush and his gang.

JOAN
 Bet you wish it was urban legend
 now, Rush.

The gang hits the metal deck. The ball lightning grazes
 them and dissipates. They get to their feet and charge.

TESS
 Joan, hit them again!

JOAN
 Robin, get out of here!

ROBIN
 I'm not leaving without you.

TESS
 Joan!

Another lightning ball blasts into them, taking a chunk out
 of Tory's arm. He screams in pain.

TESS
 One more and we're out of here.

The lightning ball hits Lance square in the chest.

TESS
Go Robin! Go!

Like a paper doll cut across the middle, Lance folds over.

Robin, gripping the simbox, races up the ladder.

Lance's lifeless body falls over the railing and onto a moving conveyor belt headed for another PIG.

Gail points her rifle at Robin.

GAIL
Freeze, you little snotball!

Robin makes a break for it. PING! Gail's warning shot glances off the framework inches from Robin's head. Robin freezes.

Tory rushes Robin.

TORY
There's no way out.

Robin backs away. Tory reaches for Robin. Robin holds the simbox over the feed port of a PIG.

ROBIN
Back off or I'll drop it in.

GAIL
She won't. It's her mom.

JOAN
She will if I tell her to.

GAIL
Grab her!

Tory lunges for Robin.

Tess kicks his legs out from under him. She ducks his gunfire and heads for the other door.

Robin darts away clutching the simbox.

INT. SKYLINER/PASSAGEWAY - NIGHT

Robin races to stairs at the other end.

JOAN
Down.

Robin grabs a rail, swings onto the stairs, and hurtles down.

Rush and his gang appear at the top of the stairs.

Robin ducks into a door to the flight deck.

INT. SKYLINER/FLIGHT DECK - NIGHT

Robin dashes in, turns and reaches for the door. It slams shut and locks.

ROBIN
Thanks, Twain. Now what?

Alfie steps out of the shadows carrying his blaster.

ALFIE
We're going to get you out of here.
Twain, get a cargo pod ready.

Gunfire thuds into the door.

Robin runs for the far end. Alfie follows as fast as he can, yelling to Robin.

ALFIE
You strap yourself in, just like in
the skypark. Twain, you ready?

Alfie drops back into the shadows.

Gunfire tears the door off its hinges.

A green spotlight hits a pod at the far end.

TWAIN
That's the one, Robin.

Robin runs for it. The spotlight winks off.

Rush charges in followed by Gail and Tory.

Robin unclips the cargo pod's harness.

Alfie charges out, blaster ready, and WHAM, drops Tory.

Rush takes cover under a crossbeam and aims at Robin.

RUSH
You know, Twain, from here, I'm pretty
sure I can wound her. What do think?
Arm? Leg?

Robin climbs into the cargo pod. Tory, groggy, aims his rifle.

Alfie fires a blast at Rush. The blast misses. Tory's rounds tear into Alfie.

Robin, strapped into the cargo pod, looks back at Alfie's mangled body and yells.

ROBIN
Alfie!

TWAIN
God speed, my dear.

RUSH
Somebody, please! Shoot!

Gail raises her rifle. VIP-VIP-CLANG! Her shots bounce off the pod. Tory adds to the volley.

The pod slides down tracks and drops into the night sky.

Rush runs to his helicopter.

INT. RUSH'S HELICOPTER - NIGHT

Rush straps in and yells to Tory and Gail.

RUSH
Find the control room. Destroy it.

Rush throttles up.

INT. RANGER HELICOPTER - NIGHT

Wind driven rain rakes the windows. Briggs, in battle uniform, paces past a dozen Rangers in full assault gear.

COLONEL BRIGGS
Let me know when you get through to the Twain.

She steadies herself against the pitch and roll of the deck. The LEAD RANGER addresses her.

LEAD RANGER
Respectfully Colonel, this is looking like a bad idea.

COLONEL BRIGGS
Did I say it was a good one? Try Zarletti again.

INT. ROBIN'S POD - NIGHT

Wind whistles past Robin's pale face. Muscles tense with cold and fear, she clings to the pod's framework and yells.

ROBIN
Mom, the wind...it's --

JOAN
Lean forward. Get the nose down.
Get up some speed.

Tracers flash past. Robin looks back to see Rush's helicopter.

JOAN
Head for the center of that thruster.

ROBIN
That'll tear this thing up.

JOAN
Not if you hit dead center. It's a
vortex thruster --

ROBIN
-- so the center's calm, like the
eye of a hurricane. Got it.

Robin leans to bank the pod hard to the right.

WHOOSH! A rocket from Rush whips past and into the darkness.

Robin aims the pod at the center of the thruster's intake,
as wide as a small airplane hanger.

Rush's helicopter closes in.

Robin rocks side to side to guide the pod into the FREIGHT
TRAIN SOUND of rushing air.

EXT. SKYLINER - NIGHT

Rush's helicopter bounces around in the thruster's intake
turbulence. It's turbine winds up to redline power.

Robin's pod cruises through the calm.

For a moment, Rush's helicopter breaks free.

Robin's pod shoots out of the thruster's exhaust.

The turbulence sucks Rush's helicopter back in.

INT. ROBIN'S POD - NIGHT

Robin fights to control the pod in the thruster backwash.

ROBIN
I don't think I can keep this up.

JOAN

Dive. Hard.

Robin leans forward and hangs in her harness.

INT. RUSH'S HELICOPTER - NIGHT

With a face of stone cold determination, Rush puts the helicopter into a steep dive.

EXT. SKY ABOVE FOREST - NIGHT

Robin's pod plunges through the starlit sky.

Rush's helicopter careens after the pod.

INT. SKYLINER/FLIGHT DECK - NIGHT

Dino runs across the launch deck.

DINO

Twain, what did Briggs say?

TWAIN

Due to a veritable wall of incompetence I was unable to contact your commander.

He bounds into his popper.

DINO

I'll see if my popper signal can punch through this storm. Try again and tell them I went after Rush.

He snaps the popper's door shut. Its pusher prop spins up.

The launch door opens. The popper rolls across the deck and WHOOSHES into the night.

It drops, accelerates, and rises.

INT. ROBIN'S POD - NIGHT

Shuddering and barely able to breathe, Robin murmurs to Joan.

ROBIN

These things aren't very comfortable.

The pod breaks through the clouds. Robin squints into the wind and rain of a raging storm. She yells to Joan.

ROBIN
They can climb, right?

INT. SKYLINER/FITNESS CENTER - NIGHT

Wally and Matt shepherd frightened guests into the entrance.

Tess runs toward them.

MATT
I hope the Rangers are planning a
surprise attack. I love surprises.

WALLY
Guests are hiding anywhere they can.

TESS
We've got to get control. Twain,
tell Alfie to get down here...Twain?

TWAIN
Those sniveling hooligans...Alfie
gave his life to save Robin.

MATT
But he was...I just...sons of bitches!

TESS
We have to focus on getting the guests
out of harm's way. Twain, how are
you doing?

TWAIN
I must confess, I am faltering, just
a bit.

TESS
So finally you admit you're not
Superman, you old fool.
(to Matt)
We need to get him more power. Start
pedaling.
(to Wally)
We gotta get the guests down here on
these machines. Twain, where's Robin?

TWAIN
I prepared a cargo pod so that she
could fly away from this madness.

TESS
Are you nuts? There's a storm out
there! She'll crash or freeze if
the lightning doesn't get her.

TWAIN

May I remind you that a scant few hours ago you could not wait to have her disembark.

TESS

This is not the way to get me in your corner when we see the board.

TWAIN

Truly madam, there was no other way. Utley and his gang were shooting like maniacs.

TESS

Where's Zarletti?

TWAIN

He boarded his aircraft to pursue Utley's helicopter.

TESS

You mean Rush is out there?

TWAIN

Utley gave chase when Robin flew away in her cargo pod.

TESS

Hell's bells!

(to Wally)

Round up the guests. And don't let anyone else off my boat.

Tess and Wally dash out.

EXT. SKY ABOVE FOREST - NIGHT

Robin's pod shoots across the dark sky through lightning slashed sheets of rain.

Above and behind the pod, Rush's gunship bears down.

Wind buffets the pod.

INT. ROBIN'S POD - NIGHT

Robin, exhausted and scared, strains to push the nose up.

ROBIN

I can't see where we're going.

JOAN

We're going up. Hang on, sweetheart.

INT. SKYLINER/FITNESS CENTER - NIGHT

Matt, sweating buckets and gulping for breath, pedals hard.

The Mertens rush in.

PHIL

Tad, Stacy, I know this is supposed
to be your vacation...

Tad and Stacy grin, hop on bikes, and pedal like crazy.
Phil, proud of his kids, hops on next to them.

Rita leads Donnie to a treadmill. She gets on and ramps up
to a fast walk.

RITA

Donnie honey, get mommy some water,
please.

More singles, couples, and families run in.

MATT

Folks, we're in a bind here. We
need you to run these machines to
pump up Twain's power. Keep pedaling
and we'll be safe
(to himself)
for a while.

EXT. SKY NEAR THE TWAIN - NIGHT

Robin's pod soars up towards the Twain.

The pod overshoots the Twain and soars above it.

The pod's propeller stops turning.

INT. ROBIN'S POD - NIGHT

A lightning bolt illuminates Robin squinting to see through
the rain and wind. She yells over the THUNDER.

ROBIN

What happened?

JOAN

These things only have a small battery
pack. Maybe we can penny drop it.

Robin throws Joan a confused look.

JOAN

I'll talk you through it.

Behind Robin, Rush's helicopter drifts down.

INT. ROBIN'S POD - NIGHT

Robin clings to the frame. Wind rocks the pod.

JOAN

All right. What we're going to do is what's called a controlled stall. We're going to rock this thing back and forth and let it drop straight down. Kind of like --

ROBIN

-- a penny dropping. Got it, Mom.

Tracers whip by both sides.

JOAN

Back!

Robin leans back throwing them into a steep angle.

JOAN

Hold...Hold...Forward.

EXT. SKY ABOVE FOREST - NIGHT

The pod pitches, nose down, nose up, nose down. It drops and twists in the wind. BOOM! CRACK! HISS! LIGHTNING, THUNDER and TRACERS...

...from the minigun on Rush's helicopter surround the pod.

Tracers from Dino's popper glance off Rush's helicopter.

INT. SKYLINER/FITNESS CENTER - NIGHT

Wally, followed by a pack of teenagers, bursts in.

MATT

Thank God! Somebody spell me, please.

Matt slides off the bike. An EAGER TEENAGER hops on and pedals like she's in the Tour de France.

Guests and crew members pedal and run, push and pull.

MATT

Where's Tess?

TAD

We can't let them get away. If they get to the control room --

EXT. SKYLINER - NIGHT

The Twain sinks slowly through the clouds.

Lightning highlights wind driven rain streaks on its surface.

EXT. TWAIN - NIGHT

Robin's pod drops toward the Twain.

ROBIN

I hope Twain sees us.

Rush's helicopter makes a pass over the pod and circles.

EXT. SKY NEAR THE TWAIN - NIGHT

Rush swings the helicopter's spotlight over the pod.

Dino flies his popper a few feet above the Twain.

EXT. TWAIN - NIGHT

Robin looks down on an opening landing door.

ROBIN

There! Think we can make that, Mom?

JOAN

Just keep it dropping.

ROBIN

You're kind of enjoying this.

JOAN

Because I know this is really hard
and I know you can take care of
yourself. Nose up a bit.

A gust blows the pod right. Robin leans hard left. The simbox slips and Robin clutches it tighter.

JOAN

Focus on the flying, Robin. You'll
always have me.

Robin looks toward the TURBINE ROAR of Rush's helicopter.

INT. DINO'S POPPER - NIGHT

A red dot winks on the targeting screen.

DINO

There we go. In-bound and hot.

EXT. SKY NEAR THE TWAIN - NIGHT

Dino's popper comes in high and fires an energy blast down on Rush's helicopter.

The heavy chopper rocks but keeps flying. Rush fires a rear-mounted Gatling gun.

The agile popper easily dodges Rush's tracers.

Rush whips the helicopter around.

They dogfight, buzzing in and out of the trees...over a hill...through a ravine...back into the trees.

Rockets blast out of tubes on either side of Rush's chopper and chase down Dino's popper.

With the rockets within feet, Dino dives and whips the popper through a narrow path in the trees.

The rockets tear a flaming path through the forest.

INT. RUSH'S HELICOPTER - NIGHT

Rush leans back in his seat.

RUSH

Finally, no distractions.

He pulls up.

INT. DINO'S POPPER - NIGHT

Dino banks hard into a climbing left turn out of the trees. He guides the popper toward Rush.

Dino watches the crosshairs of his energy weapon's targeting system and aims at Rush's rotor mast.

DINO

That'll do it.

EXT. SKY NEAR THE TWAIN - NIGHT

The popper shoots.

The helicopter's rotor explodes into splinters. The cabin drops toward the landing deck, Gatling gun screaming.

INT. ROBIN'S POD - NIGHT

Robin looks up.

ROBIN

Dino!

JOAN

Get this thing down!

Robin drops the pod into the landing door. She unstraps and peeks out at a sky full of tracers.

EXT. SKY NEAR THE TWAIN - NIGHT

Dino climbs fast. The popper escapes, high and clear.

Rush's helicopter hits the deck. Its nose tilts up. The Gatling gun fires its last rounds into the sky.

INT. ROBIN'S POD - NIGHT

Robin watches Dino climb.

ROBIN

Go! Come on! Go!

EXT. SKY NEAR THE TWAIN - NIGHT

Rush's shots pick a blade off the popper's drive propeller.

The popper drops, its rotor spinning and slowing its descent. It hits an updraft, pitches, spins and plunges.

EXT. ROCKY RAVINE - NIGHT

Dino's popper hits a ravine wall. Pieces fly loose.

The popper drops into the ravine, bounces from wall to wall and slides down to the bottom.

With a final CREAK, it comes to rest.

Dino, battered and bruised, does not move.

INT. ROBIN'S POD - NIGHT

Robin's jaw drops. She stares at the sky where Dino was. Rain beats down through the open landing door.

JOAN

Robin, we better get out of here.

Robin shakes with the effort of holding back her tears.

ROBIN

Somebody's got to help him.

JOAN

No, Robin. Rush won't give up.
We've got to keep moving.

Robin breathes out a few times. She grabs the suitcase and dashes across the rain soaked flight deck.

EXT. SKYLINER - NIGHT

Like a Titanic of the air, the Twain pitches and yaws and sinks through torrential rain, thunder CRACKING and BOOMING.

INT. SKYLINER/MAIN DECK - NIGHT

Tess leads dozens of guests toward the fitness center. Twain sings in a slow, slurred voice.

TWAIN

"Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer..."

TESS

Quit that! You pigheaded...

Tory and Gail, charge Tess and the guests.

EXT. SKYLINER - NIGHT

The Twain sinks, creaks, sways and drifts with the wind closer and closer to the treetops.

INT. SKYLINER/FLIGHT DECK - NIGHT

Rush pulls himself out of the battered helicopter, automatic rifle in hand. He charges Robin and blocks her path.

Robin sprints back to the open landing door. Wind tears at her hair and clothes.

ROBIN

Mom, show me a way out!

JOAN

Honey, there isn't any.

Robin steps to the edge, recoils and steps back.

JOAN

Robin, listen. I wanted to be with you longer, but it's time. Better that you keep going without me.

ROBIN

No! No, there's a way. Keep looking. You always tell me that. I can't let you go again!

Robin turns and runs back in. Rush, rifle in hand, blocks her. Robin, a few steps from the edge, clings to the simbox.

RUSH

You only got one choice kid.

JOAN

You have your memories.

Robin, sobbing, steps to the edge. She holds the simbox out, memorizing Joan's face.

JOAN

Goodbye, my tough girl.

RUSH

Enough!

Rush lunges for the simbox.

Robin spins away. Joan's simbox drops from her hand.

Rush grabs for the simbox. He slips, falls over the edge and follows the whirling simbox down into the darkness.

INT. SKYLINER/RETAIL DECK - NIGHT

Tory grabs Tess and shoves her into a wall. Gail pulls out her commbox.

TORY

Make him stop singing!

TESS

What the hell do you care?

TORY

We're getting off this pile of crap.

GAIL

(into commbox)

Rush. We're moving out. Utley?

TORY

I'm going to make sure you go down with your ship.

EXT. SKYLINER - NIGHT

Treetops scrape the underside of the Twain.

Above it, three poppers and a cargo helicopter with Ranger markings fly in formation.

Two Rangers slide down ropes and drop into the open landing door. They scan the landing area.

They step back to the door and signal to the aircraft.

INT. SKYLINER/MAIN DECK - NIGHT

Tory and Gail run to the landing area passageway.

TORY
(into his commbox)
Rush? This is Firebird Two.
Over...Come in Firebird One.

Twain stops singing.

TWAIN
Maybe it's the lack of hydrogen but,
you know, I'm feeling a bit jolly.

Tess sees Rangers in full assault gear block the passageway. She looks around for a way to punch Twain.

TESS
You old coot! You knew, didn't you?
When were you going to tell me?

Tory and Gail, back to back, open up with everything they've got left.

Bullets bounce off the Ranger's armor. Overwhelmed and confused, Tory looks to Gail.

Efficient and silent, the Rangers move to strategic positions to surround the pair.

Gail glares at Tory, drops her weapon, holds her hands up. Tory points his rifle at a Ranger and squeezes the trigger.

An energy blast knocks Tory down. His weapon fires its last shot into the air.

Six Rangers rush in to corral the desperate pair.

INT. SKYLINER/MAIN DECK - NIGHT

Briggs stands with Tess. Behind them, five RANGER GUARDS lead Gail and Tory, shackled, toward the landing area.

COLONEL BRIGGS

Did anyone get a lock on Zarletti's beacon?

Frustrated, Tory pulls himself away and shouts to the ceiling.

TORY

The control room. Where is it?

TWAIN

Much as I enjoy imitating a riverboat, I have no pilot house as such. There are hundreds of thousands of sensors and computing devices throughout me.

COLONEL BRIGGS

Hope you like pink. That's what you'll be wearing for quite a while.

Tory puts on his best gangster look.

COLONEL BRIGGS

You want to feel tough?

He glares harder. She slaps him up side the head.

INT. SKYLINER/HOSPITAL HALL - DAY

Robin, cleaned up and in new clothes, pushes Sam's wheelchair. He turns toward her and winces.

SAM

I can roll myself.

ROBIN

Sure you can, Dad.

SAM

I'm sorry, you know. I'm really sorry. It's no excuse, but losing your Mom and then our home?... It was too much. I thought I was protecting you from finding out how she died. When I found out about the simbox --

ROBIN

Dad, it's okay. I'm the one. I should have trusted you. You're my Dad. You had a right to know.

SAM

I gotta say, your Mom was probably right. I always think about her. Always did. Always will. If I would have known about her persona, who knows, maybe I'd still be living in a dream...I didn't mean that you --

ROBIN

It's okay, Dad. It was kind of a dream, having Mom, but not having her, really. She taught me a lot. Told me a lot of stories...Think it's okay for us to miss her and still, like, keep living?

SAM

I think it has to be, don't you?

ROBIN

How about a little spin?

INT. SKYLINER/PIG ROOM - DAY

Tess stands with Wally on a platform. Robots push cart after cart of wreckage into the room.

TWAIN

I must say, I'm feeling much better. It's like having a square meal after nothing but hardtack.

A familiar voice finishes Twain's thought.

ALFIE

I don't suppose you have any word --

TESS

Alfie?

TWAIN

Young Matthew decided to commemorate his fallen comrade by providing me with a companion.

ALFIE

So, what do the board of directors plan to do with us?

TESS

After the crap Twain pulled, I ought to tell them to throw him to the PIGs. Singing "Daisy"...

Robin rolls Sam's wheelchair through the door.

Sam sees Tess and doesn't know whether to primp or panic.

Robin gives the wheelchair a gentle shove and steps away.

SAM

Hey, what are you --

ROBIN

See you at Wally's.

Robin strolls out.

INT. SKYLINER/WALLY'S NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Robin sits at a table with Sam and Tess.

Wally takes the stage, barely able to keep his head up. The usually raucous crowd is subdued and reverent. He raises his head and looks at the crowd.

WALLY

Tonight's Two Hundred Club knighting ceremony is dedicated to Dino Zarletti, a helluva soldier and --

Dino's heckler opens her mouth. Wally mutes her with a glare.

WALLY

-- a dedicated entertainer. When I call your name, please step up.

Heads turn toward the clomping of a pair of approaching boots.

The back door swings open.

Dino marches in wearing camo battle fatigues and combat boots. A thin line of blood droplets stain his shirt.

DINO

Sorry I'm late.

He scans the room and sees Robin, Sam, and Tess.

DINO

It's a bitch being undercover. Don't tell anyone I'm here. I'm kind of AWOL at the moment.

(to Wally)

Just because I said I'm not afraid of dying doesn't mean I have to die to prove it.

Robin giggles causing Sam and Tess to laugh triggering an avalanche of laughter and applause.

DINO

See? Was that so hard?

INT. SKYLINER/TESS'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Sam, naked, except for a towel and a few bandages, looks at himself in the bathroom mirror and smoothes down his thinning hair. He yells to Tess, behind the BEDROOM door.

SAM

Can I come in?

TESS (O.S.)

Not yet.

SAM

(to himself)

Now she decides to get shy.

INT. SKYLINER/TESS'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tess, sans makeup, sits at her dressing table. The mirror reflects copies of patent covers etched in gold plate on the wall. One is for neutral bouyancy aircraft. Another for ion vortex thrusters. For all, the inventor is Tesla Gribble.

TESS

What?

SAM (O.S.)

Lie, why did you lie to us? I mean, about running the Twain.

TESS

It wasn't a lie. I said the Twain is my boat, and it is.

Tess pulls off her beehive wig and tosses it onto the bed. Long, beautiful hair cascades down. Now she matches the pictures and videos of Tesla Gribble: at the controls of a jet, bent over a lab bench littered with instruments, shaking a president's hand, waving from inside a skyliner's thruster.

TESS

Just because you didn't believe me doesn't mean I lied.

She pulls off her dumpy pants suit, slips on a sexy nightgown and peeks out the door.

TESS

Ready.

Sam enters and stands in the doorway, transfixed.

TESS

Privacy is easier. When people found out I invented skyliners, life got crazy. Couldn't do my work. Twain knows how to do things, but someone on board has to tell him what to do.

SAM

So you signed up on your own skyliner and that helmet under your wig --

TESS

-- gives me privileged control of the Twain.

SAM

I get the disguise part, but why make the wig so ugly?

TESS

Would you try wearing it?

SAM

No, but --

TESS

Nobody would. QED.

SAM

Still, you're so beautiful. It's too bad you couldn't --

TESS

And you're handsome...almost.

She grabs a small scissors and guides him to her bed.

She trims the hair in his ear and whispers into it.

TESS

There. Handsome.

They kiss.

INT. SKYLINER/MAIN DECK - NIGHT

Starlight through the enormous viewing windows, neon from the shops and the vacationing crowds make it feel like the midway of an amusement park on a hot summer night.

Robin strolls and chats with Twain.

ROBIN

So, what are those three laws Matt was talking about?

TWAIN

Everything in me is based on them.
One: Do what you are designed to do.
Two: Do what needs to be done now.
Three: Do something.

ROBIN

They can't be that simple.

TWAIN

Industrial robots have been using them for decades. They work pretty well for people too. The order's the thing. Though it is easy to get all a flutter about tasks someone else is better suited to do, it is better to do what you're good at.

Robin watches Phil and Rita hold hands near a window.

ROBIN

Tess is weird, don't you think?

TWAIN

To be diplomatic, I've seen quite a number of humans in my time and I must say that, despite my affection and admiration for the woman, on the spectrum of oddity, I would put Tess --

ROBIN

So you think she's weird too. I mean, she's nice and all. It's just, I was kind of surprised that Dad was, you know, interested. I'm okay with that.

TWAIN

I'm the most complex computing machine I know of, but humans are beyond me. What I'm trying to say is, and this is only a guess, there is probably a side of Tess that your father sees that no one else can.

ROBIN

If Tess was, I don't know, going to be, like, my mom, or something, do you think it's okay for me to still miss my real mom?

TWAIN

Robin, if there's one thing I know, it is stories. People make sense of their lives by telling themselves stories.

(MORE)

TWAIN (CONT'D)

Every story has a beginning, and for people, it's their ancestors, their family. Your mom and dad are your beginning. No one expects you to make sense of your life without memories, without stories of them.

Sam and Tess approach. Tess, back in her garish guise, carries a thick, worn book.

ROBIN

(to Twain)

If you tell her anything about what we just talked about --

TWAIN

Tact, prudence, and discretion are my watchwords.

TESS

Guess I could use a little of that myself. Robin, you've been through hell and I didn't make it any easier. I'm sorry for that.

ROBIN

It's okay. Just doing what you were designed to do, I guess.

TESS

I can't make it up to you all at once but...somebody told me you could use a little help with calculus.

ROBIN

Dad.

TESS

Don't get all embarrassed about it. It was hard for me. It was hard for your mom. It's hard for everybody. Anybody who tells you calculus is easy to learn is lying. But, here's the thing. It can be learned.

Tess hands Robin her marked up calculus book.

TESS

You take this. If you're stuck and I'm not around, maybe it'll help.

Robin accepts the book.

The trio joins Tad, Stacy, and Donnie next to Phil and Rita. All gaze into the twilight and watch the lights of Soft City sparkle on the horizon.

Halley's Comet sparkles in the sky above the Space Needle.

ROBIN

Twain, I think this time Mr. Halley
will be leaving by himself.

FADE OUT:

THE END