

Nightspeeder

FADE IN:

EXT. QUITO, ECUADOR - DAY

Quito at the end of the twenty-first century is a glistening jewel set in a clear blue sky. With its green parks and glass towers, it appears to be paradise on Earth.

SUPERIMPOSE: *QUITO, ECUADOR, 2092 A.D.*

The skyscrapers reach toward Heaven, but one structure touches it. The STARBRIDGE, a slender tower reaching into space, is an elevator system that connects the Earth to an orbiting space station.

SUPERIMPOSE: *SITE OF STARBRIDGE 2.*

Flying cars and scooters whiz through the city. Below are pedestrian malls, greenways, commuter stations and parks. The buildings are laced together with public transportation: four-passenger capsules on monorails, and sliding pedestrian walkways running through clear tubes high above the ground.

INT. CITY SLIDEWAYS - DAY

FINN, an attractive young woman with short red hair, strides along the slideway toward the Starbridge. She wears the uniform of a starship pilot, simple, practical and close-fitting. She carries a small shoulder bag.

Her fellow COMMUTERS wear bright, strange clothes. Some are dressed in kimonos, dashikis, suits. Others wear clothes that change color or move like living things. They are Latinos, Asian, African, Caucasian: every nation has representatives here.

A slideway RIDER, seeing FINN's uniform, points and whispers excitedly to his companions. ANOTHER RIDER smiles and nods at her. FINN smiles back.

Three TEENAGERS, two boys and a girl, dart through the crowd, kicking and passing a small, vigorously rebounding ball.

A middle-aged BUSINESSMAN with a backpack finds himself in the middle of the game and scolds furiously. The teenagers race past FINN, and she laughs.

FINN steps off the slidewalk at "Starbridge Station."

INT. STARBRIDGE LOBBY - DAY

FINN crosses a bustling lobby where TRAVELERS carry briefcases, backpacks and suitcases that float in the air.

Security GUARDS stand before a row of huge elevator doors, checking tickets of travelers bound for the Starbridge.

FINN walks past the line of people waiting to board the elevators. A GUARD waves her past his checkpoint.

GUARD

Morning, Nightspeeder. Have a safe jump.

FINN

That's the plan. Thanks.

INT. STARBRIDGE ELEVATOR - DAY

FINN boards a windowed elevator capsule with rows of seats. Nineteen people board with her: young FAMILIES, COUPLES and a MAN and a WOMAN in technician's overalls.

Quito rapidly dwindles below them. A few people read. Most gawk, clearly making their first trip up the Starbridge.

A FATHER (an Asian man), a MOTHER (a brown-skinned woman) and TADAO, their 14-year-old son, sit near FINN.

KAZ spots FINN, and his eyes widen.

KAZ

Hey! You're a Nightspeeder!

His parents look away from the windows.

FATHER

Kaz. Your manners.

KAZ

(to Finn)

My name's Kaz. I'm going to be a Nightspeeder, too.

FINN

It's a good job.

FATHER

But a dangerous one.

FINN

Not really. We've only lost one ship in six years.

KAZ

The *Cairo*, carrying one thousand passengers.

FINN

You've been doing your research.

KAZ nods, grinning.

MOTHER

You should see his room. Full of books and disks and posters about ships and probe pilots.

FINN

It's tough to qualify. Better bust your butt at school.

KAZ

What's hyperspace really like?

FINN

(grinning)

Want me to show you?

KAZ

You can do that?

FINN pulls what looks like sunglasses with attached headphones out of her bag. There's a dial on one earpiece.

MOTHER

What's that?

FINN

The simulator pilots use before a flight. To make sure we haven't lost our edge.

KAZ

(putting on the goggles)

Zow!

EXT. HYPERSPACE SIMULATION

KAZ is floating in something like an infinite space of television static.

FINN (V.O.)

Imagine something. A bird.

KAZ

OK.

KAZ concentrates. A cartoon bird takes shape before him.

KAZ

All right!

The bird disintegrates back into the static.

KAZ

I had it!

FINN (V.O.)

You learn to maintain the concentration that keeps it there. Now, imagine a tunnel through the stuff around you.

A long tunnel forms, parting the static.

INT. STARBRIDGE ELEVATOR - DAY

FINN

Got it?

KAZ

Yeah. This is all there is to being a Nightspeeder?

FINN

Yep. You manipulate hyperspace with your mind. But you're in beginner mode now. This is the standard test setting.

FINN cranks up the dial over KAZ's ear.

EXT. HYPERSPACE SIMULATION

The static-like environment begins to churn madly.

KAZ

Whoa!

KAZ's tunnel swirls out of control. Vaguely human shapes form within it. KAZ spins wildly, buffeted by the chaos.

INT. STARBRIDGE ELEVATOR - DAY

FINN lifts the glasses off KAZ's head and puts them back in her bag. KAZ gasps, dazed and relieved.

FINN

That's why Nightspeeder training takes five years.

KAZ

Gotcha.

His mother and father smile at each other.

MOTHER

We're going to Deneb Three. Where're you heading?

FINN

I'm your pilot.

KAZ

Nightspeeder Finn? From the *Brazilia*? It's the biggest!

FINN

She's the queen of hyperspace. Four thousand passengers.

FATHER

Are you ever afraid?

FINN

Of what?

FATHER

Of going mad. I thought that's why passengers travel in suspended animation.

FINN

I've made sixty-three flights, no problems. Don't worry, I'll take care of you.

Starbridge Station looms above them. The elevator slows; its occupants feel the effects of weightlessness.

EXT. STARBRIDGE STATION

Starbridge Station consists of four enormous metal rings connected to the tower like wheels on an axle. The lower three rings spin to provide artificial gravity.

The fourth, furthest and largest ring doesn't rotate. Eighteen ships connect to it by long, flexible tubes large enough for people and cargo to pass through. Three ships are huge hyperspace transports.

The *Brazilia* is the largest and newest of all. It's beautiful, but not aerodynamic—it looks a piece of jewelry or sculpture made of polished silver.

INT. STARBRIDGE ELEVATOR

At Level Three, the doors open to reveal a uniformed STEWARD.

STEWARD

Welcome to Starbridge Two! Hyperspace passengers, this is your stop. Suspended animation services are to your left at the end of the corridor.

Everyone but FINN and the technicians leaves the elevator, moving awkwardly without gravity. KAZ turns to FINN.

KAZ

Bye, Nightspeeder.

FINN

Bye, Kaz. I hope you like life on Deneb Three.

FATHER

It's nice knowing we're in good hands.

INT. STARBRIDGE STATION - ELEVATOR STOP

FINN and the technicians float out of the elevator near a sign reading, "LEVEL 4." FINN grabs a moving cable set into the wall. It pulls her through the tube to the outer ring.

INT. STARBRIDGE STATION - OUTER RING

FINN arrives at the junction of several corridors. They're busy with people doing their jobs. FLIGHT PERSONNEL and small vehicles maneuver gracefully in weightlessness.

EDUARDO VEGA, a dark, handsome young man in a flight controller's uniform, appears around the curve of the hallway, riding the moving cable on the other side of the hall. He has a bag hanging, holster-style, from his belt.

EDUARDO

Finn!

FINN smiles. EDUARDO lets go of the cable, pushes off from the wall and floats across the corridor. He grabs the cable beside her. They hug awkwardly, one-handed.

FINN

Eduardo. You didn't have to see me off. We'll talk before the jump.

EDUARDO

Sure. But I wanted to tell you—

He shrugs, then takes a red rose out of his bag and offers it to her. She looks at it, but doesn't reach for it.

FINN

The last two weeks were a lot of fun. But it's time to move on.

EDUARDO

Moving on doesn't mean you can't come back.

FINN

It's simpler if we don't expect anything.

EDUARDO

What's simplest isn't always what's best. Matters of the heart are never simple.

FINN

Co-workers shouldn't get involved.

EDUARDO

Why not?

FINN

It's awkward when it doesn't work out.

EDUARDO

Everything's awkward when it doesn't work out.

FINN

I've got to go.

EDUARDO

I know. Please. Take it.

(offering the rose, smiling)

It's the fastest way to get rid of me.

FINN

(embarrassed)

I don't want to get rid-

EDUARDO

And it'll let you take a tiny piece of Earth with you.

FINN

Well.

(accepting the rose)

We'll talk at preflight.

EDUARDO

About that. We're showing fluctuations in the ion levels at the hyperspace gates.

FINN

They always fluctuate.

EDUARDO

Not like this. You may have to scrap the run.

FINN

What, and lose my bonus for a perfect flight record?