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Nitroduction



SUPERBIKE AND THE CHASE AT CHINA LAKE

Baker, California

Leather-clad motorcyclists swarm through a small high desert town like wasps over a picnic spread. They're Grungers, a defiant, independent breed of biker - racers who stage impromptu match races throughout the Southwest, and Baker California is crawling with them. They circle lazily around the sun-baked gas stations and parking lots. They cruise the main street in formation and lounge around the streets and storefronts, cleaning and polishing their bikes and swapping stories, from the city square all the way out to the old landing strip on the outskirts of town.

For the residents of Baker this is great news -- an extremely welcome flood of friends and money that creates a circus-style holiday for all ages and walks of life. Whenever the Grungers are within striking distance, the local merchants hire extra help to handle the huge increase in customers. This is the biggest boon to the local economy since the last bike race. In fact, racers *are* the economy here: they spend a lot of money.

But the Grungers and spectators are here today for one thing: the word has gone out that the Bikesters and their awesome V-8 powered SuperBike will compete against any and all takers in a "Run what Ya Brung" midnight match race. In town, everyone--young, old, Townie and Grunger--stops what they're doing and stares as the Bikesters' truck and trailer pulls onto the main drag and cruises through town toward Baker's "Famous Truck Stop Cafe". They know SuperBike has arrived.

The Famous Truck Stop Cafe

This truck stop hasn't seen a truck since Johnson was president. Still, it's the dive of choice for the Grungers. They spin in and out of the gravel front lot as if they own the place. Inside, Celeste, an

attractive and street-smart twenty, pirouettes among the reveling Grungers in an impressive demonstration of balance and finesse. The Grungers may act like they own the place, but Celeste runs the show. She takes orders, serves food, cleans tables, and keeps everybody in line with efficiency and grace. Despite their rough edges, the Grungers are a decent bunch—and they know better than to challenge Celeste’s clear authority.

At the video games, Nail, a punkish twenty-year-old, hammers and pounds the controls as he struggles to displace Celeste’s high scores. Something tells you he’d rather break the machine than lose—especially to a girl.

In the back, TK, a small black kid in a wheelchair, passes his tattered blue sticker book among the racers, collecting new stickers and autographs. TK may be small in size (he prefers to call himself “compact and efficient”), but he’s big on brains. He knows what he wants. He even picked out his own name: just the letters T and K. No first name, no last name, just “TK.” No periods or initials, just letters. Like he says, it’s easy to spell and easy to remember.

And he has lots of interests; not only is he a computer prodigy - a fledgling hacker who attends college by computer modem - but also a fanatic drag racing fan. Elated with his new autographs and souvenirs, he introduces Celeste to Big Daddy Corliss, once the undefeated champion - until the Bikesters and SuperBike appeared on the scene. Big Daddy, or “Big D,” is still the informal King of the Grungers, he’s just not the fastest on the drag strip anymore.

Celeste and TK have a special relationship. Raised in foster homes, they’ve long considered themselves brother and sister. On her eighteenth birthday, Celeste moved out on her own and began to work as a waitress so that she could obtain legal guardianship of the young genius. It was difficult, but through a lot of discipline and persistence, both she and TK were able to make it work. Since then, she’s worked an endless succession of minimum wage jobs to pay their rent, putting her own dreams on hold so that TK’s schooling and internet access bills are always paid. It’s hard sometimes, but it’s worth it.

At last, Nail gets exasperated with the video game and gives up. He just can’t seem to do better than number ten on the list! He challenges Celeste to prove herself on the video game: if someone as good as Nail can only work his way up to the tenth highest score, there’s no way a girl can hold numbers one through nine. He bets two passes to the evening’s midnight match race that the ‘CEL’, which fills the rest of the top ten, is somebody else. She’s busy, but she always has a minute to teach someone a lesson. Celeste easily replaces the number two score, bumping Nail from the list. As he hands her the passes, the whole place erupts in catcalls and hollering.

Among Friends

In a back booth, Terry and Nitro hold court; talking and joking with the racers and fans that come by to visit or just say “Hi.” Since the end of their daredevil and boat racing days, Terry and Nitro have gotten back into Drag Racing. First, it was with dragsters and funny cars, which were fast, but weren’t exciting enough for Terry, then with bikes, which were exciting, but weren’t fast enough. Now they have Nitro’s latest creation, ‘SuperBike’, a motorcycle powered by an AA/Fuel Dragster engine.

This seems to be both exciting and fast enough for Terry. In fact, it’s just plain “scary”! It’s so scary that it isn’t allowed to race at sanctioned events that count toward the national championship, however there’s lots of very lucrative match racing, against everything from AA/Fuel Dragsters, funny cars and the occasional jet car on down. But it’s always the most fun at an all-bike race, like the races the Grungers put on. Terry and Nitro crisscross the country, going wherever there’s a race for them.

Bo!

Terry looks up and growls at the face of Bo Barns, the famous (“Just ask Bo”) international dragster driver, as it appears on the TV screen behind the counter. Barns likes to brag he’s the best in the world. The only problem is that he is. For the third year in a row he is likely to amass enough points to win the season championship. For Terry, beating Bo Barns is what SuperBike is for; the rest is just practice. They may not let SuperBike run at their races, but Terry knows he can beat their champion--“Especially that loudmouth!”

Instant Race Track

Hours later, Celeste and TK push through the crowd at what’s normally an abandoned landing strip. Yesterday this place was tumbleweeds, tonight it’s a bustling racetrack: a makeshift village of trucks, trailers and tents clustered in the area of the starting line and extending most of the way down the old strip. There are grandstands and timing lights. Huge portable floodlights illuminate the entire scene. Vendors hawk pop and hot dogs, and fans buy tee-shirts and trade bike stories with the racers in the pits while proud parents take pictures of their kids sitting on Grunger bikes. It just goes to show you: the Grungers aren’t really so bad once you get to know them.

SuperBike

To great fanfare, Terry appears at the starting line with the unreal SuperBike. This thing isn’t a bike! It’s a two wheeled dragster, powered by a turbo-charged, fuel burning hemi head Chrysler V-8 that puts out over 3,000 horsepower. It takes a rear tire nearly 20 inches wide to get the power to the ground. The crowd goes wild and begins to chant “Bikester! Bikester!” Nitro, always unflappable, stares at Terry with an amused expression on his face.

As long as he’s known him, Terry has always put on a show for the crowd. Terry does a very smoky burnout, heating up the huge racing slick with an earth-shaking display of brute horsepower. The crowd goes wild! Then after carefully staging at the starting line, he leaves under full power, doing a two foot high wheelstand as the light turns green.

He holds the wheelie for the full quarter mile, and easily sets a new track record. He pops his parachute with its large Bikester logo as he crosses the finish line, definitely letting everyone know who’s “King of the Hill”!

Quick

The races begin. Racers compete with each other to see who will have the opportunity to race against SuperBike in the big final. After several hours of eliminations and another smoky exhibition run by Terry, a very large crowd watches as the two bikes that have won all their elimination rounds run against each other.

The winner will face Terry and SuperBike in the grand finale. Tonight it’s Nail on his supercharged Harley drag bike against Big Daddy Corliss on his big twin-engined Kawasaki. Nail’s unbelievably quick reflexes give him a full bike length lead at the start, and even though Corliss’s bike has more power and speed he can’t make up the difference. It will be Nail against Terry in the final. Celeste smiles, Nail’s video game loss has been vindicated.

King of the Hill

Thirty minutes later, Nail is back at the starting line, ready to race Terry. As the engines are fired up on the two bikes, Celeste and TK push their way to the front of the huge crowd around the starting line, or as TK says, “A good thing about this wheelchair is that it always gets you a front row seat.”

The noise is deafening as the two bikes do their burnouts, then they slowly pull up to the starting line. The yellow lights come on in both lanes, they both bring their revs up, then the lights turn green and they're gone.

Nail, once again getting a quick start, leads by almost a bike length. But by the 1/8-mile marker Terry has passed him and is pulling away. Terry wins easily, breaking his own track record in the process.

Winner's Circle

Celeste decides to wait around the starting line to congratulate Nail on a good race as soon as he gets back for the trophy presentation. Meanwhile TK wheels off to investigate the equipment and machines that seem to be overflowing from the various rigs in the pits -- and to see if he can score just a few more autographs

Once he gets out in the pits, he spots the Bikester's trailer and heads straight for it. Back at the starting line, the presentation of trophies for the various classes of competition and the ultimate honors as “King of the Hill” is over. Terry congratulates Nail on his great start and fast reflexes. Standing nearby, Celeste gives Nail the thumbs-up sign, and Nail beckons her over to meet Terry.

Cool Stuff

TK can't believe his eyes. This rig is totally high-tech! It's fully loaded with state-of-the-art equipment - a complete rolling race shop.

Looking in the open side door, TK spots a crate under a workbench with the words “SUN TOOL, Inc. H²O-S”. What a find! He forgets about everything else. He has to check this out.

He rolls up the side ramp into the trailer and over to the open Sun Tool crate. TK looks inside and immediately recognizes the contents. He is happily digging through it when he gets the feeling he's being watched, and looks up to find Nitro blocking the door—and he looks rather formidable!

All's well that ends well, though: just a half an hour later, Terry, Nail and Celeste arrive to find TK and Nitro removing various strange looking parts from the crate and discussing them in technical terms which the three of them can't understand at all.

What sounds to them like a foreign language of initials, numbers and mechanical terms, makes a lot of sense, though. TK is explaining to the astonished Nitro that the parts are prototypes from an experimental project in using water for fuel.

TK is amazed because these parts were thought to have disappeared almost 50 years ago when the U.S. Government abandoned its top secret attempt to develop a readily available, high horsepower-producing, fuel for, among other things, the P-51 Mustang Fighter Plane. When Nitro bought a P-51 engine for a future project at the Sun Tool surplus yard in El Segundo, the crate of strange parts came with it.

Nitro, a true junkyard rat, can't go past a surplus yard without going in to dig around and he likes Sun Tool the best because they have been in business since the 1930's doing mostly government projects, so they have a lot of what Nitro calls “neat stuff.” The place is even worth a trip to El Segundo --- occasionally.

Sun Tool and the H²O-S System

Nitro wonders where TK learned so much about all these parts and their history and TK's more than happy to fill him in.

While cruising the information superhighway on his computer, TK had come across several scientists and engineers trading information about a project known as the Sun Tool H²O-S. Its purpose was to separate the hydrogen out of water and process it into a usable fuel (the 'S' stands for separator). Scientifically inquisitive, TK was interested in this concept and had several conversations with them at a science site on the internet.

They were quite impressed by TK and soon asked him to join their group. Something good about doing things by computer is that it doesn't show how old you are—just how smart you are. And TK is plenty smart.

After eight months of sending information and ideas back and forth by computer, TK and the three other members of the group (their computer address was 'nopoll'— for "no pollution") had almost worked out the system. Except that they didn't have the prototype parts that had been built in the Sun Tool laboratories -- absolutely necessary for them to complete the project. The cost of the research and development to design and build those parts again would be out of the question, and according to all the information they could find, the original parts and the engineering drawings for them had been destroyed many years ago. Still, they were close; real close

But that's the closest they ever got. It was shortly after that, the other members of 'nopoll' signed off the internet without a word and all 'nopoll' information was suddenly deleted. TK tried every way he knew, but couldn't make contact with them.

Then one day, TK came home to find that he had a message in his email asking him to contact a law firm that represented the Sun Tool Company. They said they had a "very lucrative offer for him."

TK did some checking, a computer can turn up just about any information, and discovered that Atlas Petroleum Unlimited had bought the Sun Tool Company. Atlas was known to be a very powerful and somewhat ruthless company.

TK got scared and signed off the internet before they could trace him. Some of the members of the 'nopoll' group had thought someone might be monitoring them, and it looked like maybe they were right.

Now here he is, looking at the very pieces that are the key to a secret that could allow every vehicle in the world to run on water, helping put an end to air pollution. Or as TK put's it "The Ultimate Anti-Smog Device."

Brains in Gear

After listening to TK's story, Nitro's brain is working overtime. While putting an end to world air pollution is certainly a most worthy goal and of the highest priority, Nitro is a racer, and can't help but think of the power you could get out of an engine running on the oxygenated hydrogen fuel that this system would produce. At last, all the horsepower you could imagine, "A racers dream!" TK is thinking too: "What a way to test this system—on SuperBike!"

Omeletes and Ideas

Celeste invites Terry, Nail, Nitro and, of course, TK to a late night, after-the-races breakfast at the closed truck stop. TK and Nitro take a booth and are mulling over the technical information that TK has gathered. A few of the mechanical parts from the crate are partially disassembled and scattered across the top of the papers. It looks like total confusion. TK and Nitro have slipped off

into their own world and are speaking in that strange language again (engineering), and Terry doesn't want to have anything to do with it.

Terry and Nail grab another booth and sit talking racing while Celeste makes Denver omelets for everyone except TK - he has a hamburger. Celeste sits down with Terry and Nail to eat, after reminding TK and Nitro that their food is getting cold, as they are too engrossed in their project to notice. She explains that she and TK have been stuck in this town for seven months now. Their station wagon broke down when they got here so they just stayed. They live on the tips from her job, and meals and a mobile home come free with the deal, but things are still tough. There isn't any business to speak of except when there's a race. There won't be any more races here this year so she and TK are hoping to move to a bigger town where there might be better job opportunities.

Luckily, TK can continue his education anywhere, assisted by the modem on his computer. In fact, Celeste has been taking a few classes, too. Terry and Nail listen sympathetically as she explains their situation.

Oblivious to all this, TK and Nitro are matching parts to plans and drawing diagrams and think they have come up with a plan that will make this system work. When Nitro half-jokingly asks to, "Rent the kid - or at least his brain - for a few days," Terry offers to give them a hand moving to the next town.

TK is in seventh heaven; there's no way Celeste can say no. "Besides," says TK, "once we get the H²O-S system working, nobody, not even Bo Barns, will be able to run with SuperBike." Terry grins; he likes that kind of talk.

Hittin' the Road

Celeste cleans the last of their stuff out of the dilapidated mobile home that's been their home for over half a year, while Nitro hefts the final piece of TK's computer equipment into the side door of the Bikester trailer.

All that's left is Celeste's dirt bike, which Nail helps her roll into the trailer and tie down. Nail is heading for a bike race in Texas, so they all say their good-byes and make plans to cross paths again. Nail heads east, while the rest of them head west across the high desert.

Nitro and TK feel that if they had a few days to work on it, they could have the H²O-S system ready to test, and Terry knows just the place where they can put it together and test it without being bothered. They're heading for a place near China Lake, an abandoned military landing strip in the middle of nowhere.

China Lake International

Terry and Nitro like to call it China Lake International Airport because nothing's there, just a very long landing strip and a lot of sagebrush. The nearest town in one direction is over 35 miles away, and it's only a gas station and store. In the other direction is the Military Testing Center, hundreds of square miles of restricted area where nobody goes.

Nitro pulls the truck up to the spot where they always camp along the edge of the runway. It's a nice day. It's always a nice day here. They crank out the big awning on the side of the trailer for shade. Celeste has already set up housekeeping in the hospitality suite in the front of the trailer while the guys are bunking in the large living quarters area behind the cab of the trunk. They've hardly even set up camp and Nitro and TK are already back in the trailer, building and fitting pieces of the H²O-S system to SuperBike.

For the next few days, the four of them work on putting together the new setup on the race bike, taking time to explore the area around them, have a few barbecues, and watch the sun set over the

high desert. TK has his computer set up, and with the modem hooked into the small satellite dish on the roof of the truck he is once again totally in contact with the world and all that information.

“You can’t get enough information,” says TK.

Nitro just snorts, “Computer kids.”

Let’s Try it Out

Less than a week has gone by since they arrived before SuperBike, with the H²O-S system installed, is ready for a test. Nitro is nervously checking fittings and lines to make sure that nothing’s loose: “Can’t be too careful.” TK is fiddling with the small onboard computer that monitors the bike’s mechanical functions and watches over the H²O-S system. All they have to do when the engine is running (or after a race) is plug the bike’s data accumulator into TK’s computer and they will have a complete read-out. This tells them how everything is working and detects any flaws or adjustments that are needed.

Near the cab of the truck, Celeste leans against her dirt bike and absent-mindedly sips from a water bottle. There’s not much for her to do at the moment and she’s feeling a little left out. For the better part of a year she’s known that TK would benefit from male companionship and role models, but now that she sees him totally caught up in this project with Nitro and Terry she wonders what her role in his life should be right now. However, she knows she couldn’t find better guys for him to hang out with.

Man from Mars

Just then, Terry comes out of the side door of the trailer. He looks over, sees Celeste looking a little blue, and smiles and waves to her. Celeste has to laugh: Terry has his silver driving suit on and is holding his helmet, standing on the edge of the runway with nothing but the endless desert behind him. He looks like an astronaut—on Mars!

As Terry prepares to get on SuperBike, and Nitro and TK continue with their last minute checking over of everything, Celeste sees a lone dirt biker race out of a gully and onto the flat about a half mile away towards the far end of the landing strip. Her binoculars are still sitting on the seat of her dirt bike, where she put them after watching birds soaring on the thermals over the desert. She picks them up and takes a look just in time to see the dirt biker staring back at her through his own binoculars. The biker stares at her for a moment, then pans across the rest of the scene around her: the truck and trailer with its colorful Bikester logo, the guys around the race bike, even the barbecue and lawn chairs.

He ignites a green smoke flare and tosses it out onto the landing strip. Suddenly, a low flying Lear Jet appears from nowhere and makes a pass over the truck and trailer causing everyone to look up before it disappears over the surrounding hills. The guys look at each other, shrug and go back to the last second preparations to start up SuperBike. However, it certainly has caught Celeste’s interest, and she looks back at the dirt biker and thinks, “There’s something strange going on here.”

Fire it Up!

Terry climbs on SuperBike and Nitro pushes the button engaging the portable starter that is plugged into the side of the engine. The starter spins and the engine roars to life. It’s unbelievably loud!

“This fuel system must be doing something,” thinks Nitro, “because I’ve never heard an engine this loud!” TK is off to the side sitting in front of his computer that is plugged into the bike. The

loudness of the exhaust surprises him, but he gets on with his job of monitoring all the mechanical functions to watch for any problems.

Terry hops off the bike, which is now idling, and stands with Nitro staring in amazement at the exhaust, which is steam, no fuel or oil smoke or smell, just pure steam. TK looks over from the computer screen and sees them standing in a cloud of steam, shaking their heads, and gives them two thumbs up, letting them know that everything is fine. Steam is what you get for exhaust when you are running on water.

TK looks over towards Celeste, to let her know everything is working like it should, but she's looking out at the landing strip and thinking, "Something very fishy is going on out there."

Surprise Visitor

The Lear Jet has returned and is landing, coming in past the trailer towards the far end of the strip. It rolls to a stop as it turns to point back down the runway towards them. Celeste watches through her binoculars as the side door opens and two men jump out, one of them holding a backpack.

The dirt biker skids up alongside and the men get the backpack buckled on him and jump back into the jet, which is already rolling.

The biker takes off full tilt across the desert, heading for the nearby hills just as a formation of black and white and undercover police cars storm out of a distant ravine. They race onto the flat at the far end of the runway behind the plane. Celeste finally figures it out: it's a drug bust!

The Chase

Without hesitation, Celeste jumps on her dirt bike, buckling her helmet strap as she races off in pursuit of the biker!

The Lear Jet is starting to build up speed as it accelerates down the strip in the direction of the truck and trailer. Arriving at the base of the hills, Celeste spies the biker heading upward into a canyon and accelerates straight up the rocky slope to cut him off. As the biker reaches a narrow path at the top of the canyon he looks up to see Celeste blocking his way. Desperately, he turns and tries to cut straight back down the steep side hill. He dumps, sliding down the slope and to a stop at the foot of two D.E.A. agents.

As they handcuff him, Celeste takes off her helmet and raises a clenched fist in a power salute. The D.E.A. agents applaud and Celeste gives a little bow.

Meanwhile, at the trailer Terry looks down the runway and sees the Lear Jet accelerating towards him with a pack of police cars in hot pursuit. He instinctively springs into action.

Yelling at Nitro to remove the starter and unplug the computer, Terry vaults on the still idling SuperBike. By now the jet is even with the trailer, picking up speed very fast, leaving the police cars in the dust. Terry engages the clutch and is in the chase, accelerating away with a roar of exhaust and cloud of tire smoke.

SuperBike takes off like nothing Terry's ever felt before, and in less than five seconds he's going well over 200 miles an hour and catching the jet, which is reaching take-off speed. Terry thunders past the Lear as its front wheel begins to lift off the ground. Pulling in front of the jet, he pushes the button releasing the parachute.

In a split second, all the pilot sees out of his windshield is parachute--and the Bikester logo that's on it. He suddenly has zero visibility. Not knowing what is happening, he skids to a halt, blinded by the chute and a growing cloud of desert dust.

In front, Terry is already stopped and off the bike wondering what to do if a bunch of very

uptight bad guys jump out of the plane. When the police finally catch up, the men in the plane are so shaken up they just hold up their hands and surrender.

Mission Control

The D.E.A. Command van has pulled alongside the Bikester encampment. Terry and Celeste watch the finish of the D.E.A.'s telephoto videotape of the drug bust. As the chute opens in front of the fleeing Lear Jet, TK, watching through the open side door of the van, cheers and the tape comes to an end.

Not only did Terry prevent the jet's certain escape, says the Agent in charge, but also, Celeste's fearless pursuit of the dirt biker resulted in the quick capture of a major drug dealer. The Agent asks if it would be OK if they release the video of the bust to the press. The D.E.A. can always use some help in their ongoing fight against drug dealers and smugglers, and good press never hurts. So Terry and Celeste tell him "Sure, anything to help you guys out."

River Campground...and Beyond

Stopping for a couple days of "R and R" (rest and relaxation), gives TK a chance to touch base with a few of his computer pen pals -- or as he calls them, "Mouse Pals".

He finds out that someone has been beating the email bushes looking for him. Worse, it appears that two "well dressed men in an expensive car" showed up in Baker looking for him just a few days after they left.

Nobody told them anything, and the only information they had was his email address, 't-kid'. Just to be on the safe side, TK decides to immediately change it to 'rollertk' and make sure that only a few very good friends know how to get hold of him.

It sounds like the men trying to find him were the lawyers from Atlas. TK is more than a little worried.

Just then, Terry comes back from doing a little fishing. "Well, I've done that. Fishing gets old. Let's get going." And once again, Terry has a destination in mind.

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