

HIGH STEEL

Heading South

Nitro has returned from taking Dr. Lucas to the airport and they finish getting the trailer loaded up and ready to go. Nitro, Celeste, TK and Electra will leave first thing in the morning. Terry will fly down in a week, when the fair starts.

By 8 a.m., they are already well past Seattle, traveling south on I-5. To the east, Mount Rainier dominates the view in the crystal clear morning. “Nothing like the Northwest” thinks Nitro. He’s been all over the country, but he always comes back here. Two hours later, they are crossing the Columbia River into Portland, Oregon, a beautiful city that stretches along two rivers.

Celeste marvels at all the new construction that’s going on; it seems like the steel skeletons of new buildings dominate the skyline. As they are traveling south on the elevated freeway that cuts across the city, they are suddenly caught in a huge traffic jam. One so bad, in fact, that people are all getting out of their cars – and seem to be looking in the direction of one of the skyscrapers under construction near the freeway. Looking out of the cab of the truck, over the tops of the cars, they soon see what everyone is looking at.

Top Floor Terror

One of the giant construction cranes, perched on top of the steel framework of a future office tower, has evidently collapsed and is hanging at a crazy angle, swaying back and forth over the side of the building, hundreds of feet above the ground!

“I hope nobody’s down below. It doesn’t look like it’s going to stay up there for long,” says Nitro.

TK turns on the radio to the emergency band to see if there’s any information. At the same time moment, Celeste says, “I think I can see someone up there.” She gets the binoculars to take a better look. “Yes, there he is. The operator is still in the cab, hanging out over the edge!”

They all look at the crane, dangling out over the edge of the building. It looks like it will fall at any second. Just then TK starts picking up information on the radio. The nearest helicopter that’s set up for this type of rescue has been dispatched from Astoria -- and it’s just getting ready to take off! They say it will take at least 20 minutes to get it here!

“Poor guy,” says Nitro, “It looks like he’s a goner.”

“Maybe not,” says Celeste, looking back through the passageway into the trailer at RocketBike. “I can fly that thing,” she says with confidence. “Besides, it’s his only chance!”

“You can land right by him on the crane with the Magnebrakes,” adds Electra. Before Nitro can say yes or no, Celeste is on her way to the back of the trailer where RocketBike is sitting on the elevator, ready to be raised to the roof. Nitro is right behind her.

Going for It

Celeste is buckling Terry’s helmet on as she climbs on the bike and Nitro gives her a quick run down on the controls and operation of the Magnebrakes: “There’s no time to waste!”

Luckily, Celeste has always watched closely whenever they ran RocketBike, and already has a

good idea of how everything works. She starts up the H²O-S and Magnebrake systems, locking RocketBike magnetically down on the elevator platform. She shakes Nitro's hand for good luck and he pushes the button to raise the bike to the roof.

As the elevator comes up to roof level, Celeste looks over the tops of cars and commuters-turned-spectators and sees that the collapsing crane has slipped even further. It's now hanging very precariously, almost entirely over the edge -- and it's over thirty floors to the ground.

Celeste vs. Gravity

Celeste starts up the rocket, bringing it immediately up to full thrust and releasing the Magnebrakes as she hits the "Rocketburst" button. The acceleration is phenomenal! She now understands why Terry gets such a rush out of riding this bike. "Especially the launches!" she thinks. "If you could call anything 'unreal', this is definitely it!"

On the ground, the crowd of people looking toward the skeletal skyscraper and its crippled crane hear a huge roar behind them and turn to see Celeste on RocketBike, blasting off the top of the trailer with a long tail of white flame!

On with the Job at Hand

After the initial excitement of the launch, it takes Celeste a few seconds to get organized. She then puts the bike into a hard right turn while gaining altitude. After getting her bearings she heads straight for the crumpled crane; there's not a second to lose!

TK's very excited voice is filling her earphones, but he isn't making much sense. Then Nitro's calm voice takes over and she sees why Terry counts on Nitro when he's in the air. Nitro goes back over the functions of the controls and how to adjust the pull of the Magnebrakes.

"They're kind of quirky," he reminds her. By the time Nitro's done talking, she's all calmed down and totally back down to business. "Thanks, Nitro," she says to herself.

She has to land and pick this guy up on the first time around. The crane is hanging over the edge by just what remains of one leg and some cable, and is just about ready to drop. There's no time for practicing with the Magnebrakes or anything else. This will be the first time they've tried using the Magnebrake system to land on anything besides the trailer.

As she throttles down to stall speed, Celeste looks at the mass of twisted metal that used to be one of the largest pieces of construction equipment in the world. It's going to be hard to find a spot intact enough to land on, leave alone one close enough to the operator's cab to pick him up.

Air Idiots

To top it all off, there are two news helicopters swirling about the toppling crane like blindfolded flies. Even though neither one of them has the capability to rescue the crane operator, they're hovering dangerously close, trying to ace each other out for the best videotape footage.

At stall speed, the bike can be very sensitive to the wind and air currents, and their rotor wash is blowing RocketBike all over the place. They just about blow RocketBike and Celeste into the tangled jumble of steel! "I'm going to have something to say to them back on the ground!" thinks Celeste with a growl.

She maneuvers into a spot about ten feet from the cab, and as she manipulates the Magnebrakes to pull down on the steel, she sees the crane operator looking out of the door, eyes bulging with fear.

He doesn't even question the fact that what appears to be a motorcycle is trying to land up here - he's out the door immediately, crawling towards her across the mangled metal as she touches down

and locks the Magnebrakes onto the remains of the crane's main spar.

Narrow Escape

Celeste feels what's left of the huge crane start to drop out from under them, even as the operator half-climbs and half-drags himself onto the bike behind her. She barely has time to yell at him to hang on tight as she releases the Magnebrakes, simultaneously hitting the "Full Thrust" and "Rocketburst" buttons.

Suddenly they're launching almost straight up from the twisted metal as the crane plummets to the ground beneath them, falling earthward in a grinding, tortured scream of aluminum and steel. As the thrust lifts them higher, the crane and most of the top two floors crash into the ground.

Celeste skyrockets clear of the wreckage in a single powerful arc, looping back down by the trailer to the cheers of the crowd of motorists standing on the freeway. Over the din of honking horns and cheering motorists, Nitro is already giving her directions to the nearest airport, as they've decided not to land back on the trailer. As Nitro puts it, "No sense pushing our luck too far."

Ground Sweet Ground

By the time Celeste lands, the news helicopters are already there, their camera men filming her landing. As she gets off the bike, the reporters are right there to interview her, but she ignores them and goes right after the two helicopter pilots. In no uncertain terms, Celeste lets them know just what she thinks about them coming in that close during a rescue as tricky and dangerous as that! They very nearly caused her to crash into that mess. She and the crane operator both could have crashed down to the street, along with the crumpled mass of metal that had been the crane and the top of the building. Celeste makes very sure they know it!

Over the roar of the slowing rotors, the entire press learns that Celeste is not only brave, but also that she has a bit of a temper, especially when someone does something as stupid as those pilots did.

After her outburst, Celeste soon calms down and gives a very professional, Bikester-type interview. Nitro arrives with the truck and trailer and they manage to get RocketBike loaded up and get out of there to continue their trip south before too many more of the news and media people arrive. After they're safely on the road again, Celeste exclaims, "Terry's right! Flying on a bike is as good as it gets! Especially a really fast one!"

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