

IT'S ALL JUST SHOWBIZ

Texas State Fairgrounds

As they pull into the fairgrounds, preparations for opening day swirl around them. Nitro parks the truck and trailer by the grandstands. The fair starts in four days and lasts over two weeks; it's going to be a busy time for the Bikesters. Besides putting on flying shows every day, there will be a large booth set up near the Bikester trailer for the "D.A.R.E. To Keep Kids off Drugs" program, which they will run along with help from several local groups. The fair runs twelve hours a day, so there's not going to be much time for anything else.

As soon as they get the Tracker unloaded, Celeste and Electra are gone. There are a ton of details to take care of and they'll be on the run until the fair starts.

A Pretty "Fair" Week

TK and Nitro are quite occupied getting everything set up and tearing RocketBike down to make sure everything is O.K. after the unscheduled flight in Portland. Celeste and Electra, who's giving her a lot of help and whom Celeste is finding to be indispensable, are going non-stop putting together radio and television spots etc. for both the D.A.R.E. booth and the flying show.

Terry arrives on Friday to figure out the exact pattern he wants to fly and then practice in front of the grandstands. Friday is a special free day for senior citizens and inner-city kids, and Terry's practice will be a fantastic free show for all of them. After Friday, Terry is scheduled to fly twice a day on weekends and once a day during the week for the duration of the fair.

The practice flights go flawlessly and the seniors and kids get a great show on Friday. Everything is ready for Saturday, the first official day of the fair. Elaborate opening day ceremonies are planned, including an antique aircraft fly-by, parachute jumpers, and of course RocketBike.

Showtime Saturday

It's a typical Texas spring day; the sky is bright blue and cloudless, perfect for an air show. The antique aircraft have just finished their part of the show and it's time for the big finale, which consists of the Texas Precision Parachute Team free-falling in formation and holding a giant state flag while Terry swoops around them on RocketBike--skywriting an outline of a Texas Star. Then, as they break formation and open their chutes, Terry will do some passes down by the grandstands. At least, that's the way it all worked out when they practiced on Friday.

The performance is timed to the second. Terry is on RocketBike on top of the trailer, wearing his silver flight suit. After waving to the crowd, he launches, full tilt, with the bright white flame of the rocket burst activated! Almost two miles above him, the skydivers have already jumped out of their plane and are forming up in free-fall with the flag.

Terry skyrockets straight up to rendezvous with the jump team--just as they get the Texas flag all spread out--and proceeds to make a large star around them with the skywriting smoke system that Nitro has installed on the bike especially for the fair. Then, for good measure, he puts a big Texas-sized smoke circle around that.

Finished, Terry heads back down towards the grandstands as the parachutists break their formation and prepare to pull their rip cords to open their chutes. They will float down and land on the target in front of the grandstands.

Terry spirals down and does a low pass in front of the grandstands, performing a victory roll for the cheering fans. At the same moment, high above him, the skydivers' chutes are blossoming open. "Everything smooth as silk," thinks Terry, "just like rehearsal yesterday!"

Something Unplanned

However, far above him things aren't quite smooth as silk. Eleven chutes have opened or are opening, but jumper number twelve is having problems: his chute didn't open! He goes for his reserve chute and it also fails in a tangled mess! He spreads his arms and legs as far as possible to slow down and gain more control of his free fall. He has one chance: to link up with the jumper closest to him, whose chute is just opening, so they can both come down on the other jumper's chute. But they miss by inches!

Now he's on his own. The rest of the team's chutes have opened and he's already leaving them far behind as he plummets towards the ground at nearly two hundred feet per second, his tangled reserve chute streaming behind him.

Down below, Terry completes his low rolling pass for the spectators and continues his aerobatics, pulling up into the beginning of a loop. Celeste, who is on top of the trailer, sees some of the crowd pointing straight up and immediately trains her binoculars in the direction they are pointing and sees the hapless skydiver. "Man, this could ruin opening day, especially for that jumper!" she thinks.

She quickly points out what's happening to Nitro, standing beside her with a headset on. Through the headset, he's in constant contact with Terry, and also with TK, who's in the doorway of the trailer with Electra, in front of the computer which monitors RocketBike's systems.

Teamwork

Nitro instantly alerts Terry who breaks off his loop and heads straight up as the helpless skydiver plummets earthward. As soon as he hears the transmission from Nitro to Terry on his headset, TK is calculating altitude, speed and angles of interception on the computer, once again, the Bikesters are all on the same wavelength!

Luckily, the entire performance was carefully choreographed with a very precise timeline, so TK knows when the jumpers opened their chutes to the precise second. He can quickly calculate the position and rate of descent of the unlucky parachutist, still in free-fall. With this information (and the exact altitude and speed of RocketBike, which is always displayed on the monitor in real time) TK is able to calculate the point where Terry must end his climb and angle back down to rendezvous with the skydiver--at an exact spot and matching rate of descent.

There's not much time to do all this; the ground is coming up fast. In the air, Terry is thinking with lightning speed. TK can give him the information on the altitude, speed and angle needed to pull this off. But, because they have no radar, among other things, Terry has to do his best to keep the falling parachutist in sight. He has to know his own exact position at all times to be able to intersect with him at exactly the right moment to pluck him out of the sky.

Finding a Spot in the Sky

Terry has discovered that when flying something with as much power as RocketBike, it's

sometimes very hard to keep a point in sight. Especially if it's moving, like this skydiver.

In fact, at times, when doing aerobatics, it's hard to tell up from down or know where the ground is. He's sure that jet fighter pilots run into the same problems. With all this power, you never feel the normal pull of gravity towards the ground, just various G-forces pulling in different directions. "Cool, but confusing".

Terry has found the best way to deal with this problem is to consider the bottom to be wherever his feet are, then, whether he's right-side up or upside-down he always has something to relate to. "Kinda cuts the confusion down." Someday he'd like to talk to a jet pilot and see what they do, maybe it's the same thing.

Hitchhiker

As he comes over the top of his arc and begins to angle back down, he has to lose sight of the skydiver for a few seconds. But "Good old TK" has once again put him in the exact right spot at the exact right time. The jumper comes quickly into his sight-- almost beside him! Terry sees the strangest look in the man's eyes, like he'd pretty much given up and now, out of nowhere, he has a chance.

Terry very carefully matches his speed to the skydiver's free fall, edges over right beside him and reaches out his hand, they grasp hands and Terry pulls him over to the bike.

"Man, this is weird" thinks Terry, "It's like being in outer space, there's no sensation of speed or falling, just two people floating in the middle of nowhere. I'm going to have to try skydiving," Then he looks at the tattered reserve chute streaming behind the jumper. "But I'll make sure my parachute works!"

The skydiver pulls himself onto RocketBike behind Terry and grabs on tight as Terry pulls back hard on the controls! By now they're only a few hundred feet off the ground! As they pull up, they're just thirty or forty feet off the ground, right in front of the main grandstand! As he gains a little altitude and roars around to land, Terry thinks, "How's that for a show!" The crowd is going wild! They actually think it is all part of the show!

"I don't think I want to try to pull this off twice a day," Terry says to himself as the bike settles down on the trailer top. He feels the skydiver sitting behind him holding on so tightly he can hardly breathe. As his fingers gradually loosen their petrified grip, Terry can feel them retract from the wrinkles of his suit. "And I know he doesn't."

Safe and Sound

Terry settles RocketBike on top of the trailer in front of a standing, cheering crowd who still seem to think the rescue was part of the act. However, there's one person in the crowd who knows it wasn't. Austin Lewis understands that, beyond the sheer bravery of it, it required an unbelievable amount of teamwork, mathematical calculations, intensity and instant decision-making to put Terry in the right spot at exactly the right time to save the skydiver – not by just one person but by the entire Bikester team.

Austin is now even more impressed with the Bikesters -- if that's possible after meeting TK in Chicago and then seeing their rescue of the crane operator in Portland on the news. Nobody at Atlas, including his mother, knows that he's here. All they know is that he's taken a few days of vacation. So he has a chance to do what he wants to do, which is to - "Meet the Bikesters".

After the excitement of the grandstand show has calmed down, Austin heads down to the booth that's set up by the Bikester trailer. He catches TK's eye, their friendship instantly renewed with a few quick looks of recognition and appreciation. TK wastes no time in introducing him to Celeste

and they soon find themselves having lunch together at one of the many restaurants on the fairgrounds.

Austin and Celeste soon find they have some things in common, especially their feelings of social responsibility and an interest in helping those in need. She tells him about the Can-Am Harvest show and how well it's doing. The concept of high-visibility promotions and displays for charity interests him, and he sees how this would work especially well for causes like the Food Bank or D.A.R.E. that thrive on public awareness. He finds the idea very attractive – especially the fact that it's self-supporting after the initial funding and, with good management, will continue accomplishing its goals for an infinite amount of time. And it gets him thinking.

Atlas has a foundation that was established many years ago by his father, funded by the continual royalties from several of his inventions to aid charitable causes. When his mother took over running the company, she also took over control of the foundation. Since then, she has done her best to see to it that the foundation only gives funds to what she approves, which means causes that provide her with more social importance.

Austin has managed to extract some funding for projects aiding the hungry and the homeless, but he's had a hard fight for it. Austin has always felt that if there are people who don't have food or a place to live, they should have a higher priority than a new opera house, statue or reflecting pool. Now he's finding that Celeste and the Bikesters feel the same way about our responsibilities to each other as human beings. In fact, the Bikesters, as a business, is based on supporting programs like the food banks.

The Fair Must Go On

The daily flying shows are smooth and relatively uneventful after the excitement of opening day. The booth is extremely successful, selling thousands of Bikester "D.A.R.E. to Keep Kids Off Drugs" tee shirts and, at the same time, generating massive visibility for the whole D.A.R.E. program.

Austin Lewis stays for most of the first week of the fair, and has a good time, he helps out at the booth every day and learns a great deal about the Bikester charity promotions. By the time he has to leave to go back to work he's starting to put a plan together on how to help them with their program. Celeste and TK take Austin to the airport and see him off, with the feeling that they've made a good friend. And they're right, they've made a *very* good friend!

Electra ends up staying for almost the entire fair. She's busy full-time in the D.A.R.E. booth and is also writing computer programs with TK. He doesn't know a lot about programming, but he's learning fast. They're creating a "Flying Bikester" game, complete with rescues, and at the same time putting together a "bikesters.com" website. As TK says, it's going to be "Much cool!" Electra leaves for home a few days before the fair ends (got to get back to school), but TK will see her in a few weeks.

They are going to drop TK off in California on their way home. He's going to the engineering institute for a few weeks of concentrated classes and lectures. Then he is off to Chicago for several weeks of full-tilt physics with Professor Lucas, who is also taking an interest in TK's education.

Chapter 19

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