

HELLEBORE

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INT. DESERT - DAY

A seemingly abandoned wasteland with no one to see, save for A SMALL HILL. Oddly formed. Something METALLIC sticking in the sand. The wind INTENSIFIES, slowly baring the object. We get a better look at it as more and more details are revealed.

Off-Screen, STEPS draw closer.

VOICE (V.O.)

My father always used to say: That's the day everything started...

A SHADOW falls onto the object. Human-shaped. We now get to see that object up close. Old metal. Dented. Broken.

With an unseen FAN, the silhouette blows some grain off the metallic surface. It's A GOLDEN VINYL DISC, labeled "The Sound of Earth".

VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

... The day, this thing crash-landed here.

The silhouette inspects the disc. Arms akimbo. Suddenly, its silhouette transforms. A third arm grows from its body. Scratching its head in confusion.

BLACK.

MUSIC plays. "Voyager's Golden Record: Melancholy Blues".

A SERIES OF IMAGES flash before our eyes: Everything that was recorded on that golden vinyl. Historical pictures, scientific calculations, pieces of art, photos of life on Earth, of traffic, scientists, outer space. An image of planet Earth, its galaxy.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. GRIT - DAWN

The Milky Way grows smaller. Creaking sounds fade in. The camera pulls back, out of a CHILD'S EYE. With thoughtful eyes, it looks up to A YOUNG BOY carrying it. Its skin freckled in white dots.

This is VARR (18), unkempt hair, frightened look in his eyes. Trembling. Like he is carrying some sort of bomb, when in fact it's an infant.

He wears a huge backpack, like he was on his way to someplace else. He takes a look around. Wide-eyed. Hectic. Searching for help.

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VARR stands at the center of a village. Surrounded by GRIT INHABITANTS. Some curious, some bothered by his presence. We stay close to Varr.

VARR looks up into the sky above. Unsure what to do next.

Off-Screen, we hear the crowd chatter. Talking behind his back. Spoken in ALIEN TONGUE. Subtitled below.

VOICES (OFF)

Who is this child? Does it have a name?

Varr's eyes run down the baby, while he tries to come up with a name. Then his eyes stop at a logo sewn to the baby's gown. "RICHARD STATION". With a finger, he covers the word "STATION". Only RICHARD remains.

A brief smile flashes across his face. Then his eyes go back up. Off-Screen, we hear spaceships take off.

POV (point-of-view): VARR

We see, what he sees. And what he sees, is A SPACESHIP leaving this planet's atmosphere.

AN ANNOUNCEMENT is broadcasted off-screen.

VOICE (OFF)

Due to security concerns, the planet Earth has decided to cancel the treaty and leave the Galactic Union, consequently limiting off-world immigration.

VARR watches the final spaceship leave. There is a sadness to his eyes. As if deep inside him, a dream shattered.

POV: VARR

The spaceship above shrinks smaller and smaller. Until it vanishes into the depths of space.

TIME CUT:

EXT. WOODS - DAWN

Same sky. All ships have left. Camera PANS DOWN to the ground. A lush meadow extends before us. We notice a series of yellowish hills. This landscape is anything but earthly.

Strange PLANT-ANIMAL-HYBRIDS browse. It's quiet. Almost silent. The sun is setting.

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EXT. OUTSIDE A CABIN - CONTINUED

BANG! Suddenly, the door to a circular housing flies open. A young man, RICK, storms outside. He is in a rush. Sprinting across the field. Only silhouettes can be seen.

EXT. WOODS - DAWN

In a montage we follow the young man running. He speeds across the field. Abandoned spaceships tower in the background. Piles of garbage rise to the sky. Leftovers. Quite earthly.

Next, the young man runs through a forest. Plants rise like birds.

EXT. WOODS - SEVERAL MINUTES LATER

A watch around A YOUNG MAN'S WRIST. It counts 38 hours instead of 24. We pan up into the face of TRICKICHIL (19). A strong and sturdy youngster. He frowns. He's waiting. His rendez-vous is late.

On cue, we see the young runner approaching. White freckles on his face. This is RICK (18). The baby has grown up. Out of breath, he runs his fingers through his unkempt hair.

Rick's fashion is quite earthly. As opposed to Trickichil. Yet it seems fetched from a second hand shop.

TRICKICHIL

(annoyed)

Look who ARE almost an hour late.

RICK

(pants)

Who IS late. -- Sorry. I Couldn't find my communicator. Probably lost it. Did you bring the flashlights?

TRICKICHIL produces a strange flashlight from his bag.

TRICKICHIL

(smiles)

Reliability got a name. And it spells TRICKICHIL.

They put down their bags and start fetching warm clothes. Rick shoots a look at the field. One side of the meadow DARKENS.

The planet Grit is divided into a bright and dark side. Rick

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and Trickichil live on the illuminated side. But today, they have an exploration planned to the dark side.

Fully dressed, they switch on their flashlights and head for the dark.

EXT. RICK'S CABIN - CONTINUED

AN ELDERLY FIGURE steps outside the housing. In haste. Quickly, it shoots a look left and right. Searching for someone. This is VARR (40). He has grown into a sturdy, world-weary MAN.

VARR
(shouts)
Richard?

No response.

VARR (CONT'D)
(louder)
RICHARD??

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Rick and Trickichil wander about an obscure area. Their flashlights are illuminating their way.

They pass by AN ABANDONED SETTLEMENT. Like a decommissioned colony. It's really hard to make out. Darkness obscures our view.

Mounted to a pole sits A SENSOR, scanning the surrounding. With a RED DIODE blinking. We push in closer.

Off-Screen, we hear sand crunching underneath boots.

RICK and TRICKICHIL step into frame.

TRICKICHIL
(sighs)
Are you sure about this? If we don't turn it off, we'll alert everyone and everything close-by.

RICK
(smiles)
Leave it to me.

He produces A DEVICE from his jacket. With a cable, he connects it to the sensor. Its DISPLAY reads "ANALYSIS". Then: "DEACTIVATE". The red diode TURNS OFF.

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RICK (CONT'D)
 (with a grin)
 Ladies first.

Trickichil rolls his eyes.

TRICKICHIL
 How long do we got?

RICK
 Do we HAVE.

TRICKICHIL
 (smacks)
 How long do we HAVE

RICK
 Twenty minutes. Give or take.

Trickichil presses some buttons on his watch. We don't really move into it. From its look, he activates a countdown.

TRICKICHIL
 Alright, genius. Let's move.

EXT. HILL - MINUTES LATER

Rick and Trickichil climb a rise. Bathed in silvery moonlight. There is no need for flashlights. So they save their batteries and turn them off. Atop, they take a seat and gaze at the star-lit nighttime sky.

Rick in particular looks at it, DREAMY.

TRICKICHIL
 Holy shit. Whaaat. It's looks real.
 Are you saying it's just a night reflector?

RICK
 (giggles)
 Night reflector? Is that even a word?

TRICKICHIL
 Shut up, Mr. Dictionary.

RICK
 (sighs)
 Isn't she beautiful? In reality, she is way bigger. Can you imagine, what it'd be like to live up there?

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TRICKICHIL

(beat)

Madness. I heard, the planet rotates around a yellow sun. All the time. The light's always changing. Day, night. Day, night. I'd turn crazy within a week.

They laugh.

There isn't much to see. Except for a familiar blue marble:
EARTH.

TRICKICHIL (CONT'D)

And don't get me started on the temperatures. I mean... How do they even know what to wear?

More chuckle.

EXT. FIELD - DAWN - MEANWHILE

VARR runs as fast as his feet carry him. His heart is beating quickly. His breath goes rapid. We can hear it prominently. Faster and faster. Fearful--

MATCH CUT:

YOUNG VARR is running scared. In the distance, an unseen creature GROWLS. Followed by A CHILD crying.

MATCH CUT:

OLD VARR stops. He arrived at an abandoned village. His eyes go wide in fear. He recognizes this place. Off-Screen, the sounds of the past slowly FADE AWAY, like an ECHO.

VARR tries to get his senses back together. Not this again, not this place. He clenches to A RIFLE in his hands. This is serious.

EXT. HILL - MINUTES LATER

Back to Rick and Trickichil...

Their laughter fills the night. Relaxed, they sit atop their lookout hill. Staring at Earth's reflection. Literally starstruck.

RICK

(smiles)

Ah come on. They probably think the
(MORE)

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RICK (CONT'D)
same about us.

TRICKICHIL
I guess, that's why they left.

RICK
Perhaps one day, we'll make it there.

TRICKICHIL
(ironic)
Perhaps one day, I'll marry our queen.

Rick gives him a dig with his elbow. More laughter.

Suddenly, Trickichil's face freezes. Deadpan. The laughter wiped away. His facial traits harden. He narrows his eyes. Concentrating.

RICK
C'mon, Trick. It's not that bad...

TRICKICHIL
(interrupts)
Shh!

He puts a finger on his lips. Rick falls silent instantly. Slowly, the camera starts circling around the friends. Off-Screen, we hear leaves and branches RUSTLING.

Something moves through the nearby woods.

TRICKICHIL (CONT'D)
(dead serious; in alien language)
Time to leave.

RICK
(gulps; in alien language)
How long till' the sensors turn back
on?

Trickichil checks his watch.

TRICKICHIL
(in alien language)
Five minutes.

More RUSTLING. Calmly, they get back up. Trickichil keeps his cool. Highly concentrated, he mimics Rick to leave. Rick's eyes widen in fear. Following his friend willingly.

Trickichil climbs down the rise. Stern. Rick in hot pursuit. The RUSTLING gets louder. They freeze.

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TRICKICHIL (CONT'D)
 (mumbles; in alien language)
 To the bright side. Quick!

They start RUNNING for their lives. Into the woods. Off-Screen, twigs and branches break under the weight of an unseen CREATURE. Resounding in rapid fashion. We speed across the ground (Shakycam). Rick and Trickichil locked in our sights. Like prey. Silence. NOTHING.

POV: TRICKICHIL
 While running, they come by a big dark cave. Trickichil shoots a look inside. Something is moving there.

TRICKICHIL (ON)
 (in alien language)
 Quick! Run towards light!

The SENSOR on its pole comes into frame. Still deactivated.

Trickichil runs past it. Ignoring it. But not Rick. He stops in a hockey skid. Grass spraying. Quickly, he fumbles his device from his jacket and connects it to the sensor.

TRICKICHIL
 (panics)
 What are you doin'? Forget about it!
 Let's move!!

Rick ignores him. His eyes locked on the display. His hands tremble. Display reads "ANALYSIS".

POV: UNKNOWN CREATURE
 We keep running for Rick and Trickichil. They stopped running, making them easy prey...

Trickichil won't leave his friend behind. Quickly, he tosses his backpack to the ground and fetches A SPEAR from his back. Ready to defend them.

POV: UNKNOWN CREATURE
 We're getting closer and closer...

CLOSE-UP: TRICKICHIL

TRICKICHIL (CONT'D)
 (shouts)
 Rick! It's getting closer!!

RICK's self-preservation instincts kick in. He leaves the device dangling and makes a run for it. So does Trickichil.

Suddenly -- Rick STUMBLES. He loses balance - and falls. Shit! Reflexively, he covers his head with his hands. Eyes closed. Waiting for impending death...

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QUICK ZOOM at the device. Its display switches to "ACTIVATE". The RED DIODE flashes on. The sensor is back ONLINE.

BLACK.

We don't get to see what happens next. But we hear every detail. A cacophony of CREAKING, UNEARTHLY SCREAMING, A SHOT FIRED, KA-BLAM! Then DEAD SILENCE.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUED

On GROUND LEVEL, Rick slowly opens his eyes. He is seemingly unharmed. Wondering, why the heck he is still alive.

Same goes for TRICKICHIL. He's got his eyes sealed tight. One POPS OPEN. Then both. Why am I still breathing?

In confusion, he turns around. Their reason for survival kneels behind them. Rifle locked. Bead drawn on the creature in front. Unkempt hair. Eyes filled with sorrow: VARR.

RICK gets back up. He sees him, too. Then he follows Varr's eyes - and JUMPS. He SHRIEKS.

A HAIRLESS BODY lies on the ground. Impaled. Motionless. Mere meters away from the sensor. That was close.

VARR gets back up. The rifle dangling by his side. He doesn't even try to conceal his disapproval. Varr lets out a deep sigh of disappointment.

TRICKICHIL hangs his head in shame. Feeling rebuked.

RICK doesn't. He looks Varr straight into his old sad eyes. Unwilling to give in. He takes a deep breath. Puffing up his pride. What he did may have been wrong in Varr's eyes. But Rick did it with CONVICTION.

Eventually, Varr shoulders his rifle and turns to leave. Wordless. Walking back to their cabin.

Rick looks back to their lookout hill. There, in the sky, barely visible, rests PLANET EARTH.

RICK (V.O.)

Well, that was not probably the best decision I made in my life. It was hard to explain. As if I knew, I had to see her, had to be there. Close to everything connected to this world.

MATCH CUT TO:

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INT. CLASSROOM (EARTH), NORTHERN ALLIANCE - YEAR 2055 - DAY

A HOLOGRAPHIC GLOBE is projected onto a white board. Surrounded by MORE PLANETS. Arranged like satellites. The hologram is replaced by ANOTHER. A BLUE FLAG.

We pull back and see A TEACHER standing next to the board. Big eyes behind thick glasses. Her outfit is rather old-fashioned.

She is lecturing a CLASS OF STUDENTS.

TEACHER

According to that, the satellite completely changed the way energy works today.

The school bell RINGS. On cue, her students start rummaging. Packing their stuff into bags, moving chairs, pushing for the door.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

Don't you think, you'll be leaving without homework, everybody. Prepping for our next class, I want you to read about the political formation of Southern and Northern Alliance. Alright?

STUDENTS leave. One GIRL is still busy stuffing electronic books into her sling bag. She wears a strange wristband. Its display reads "5000 Credits". A FRIEND OF HERS leans towards her and mumbles.

FRIEND

Tay, are you okay?

TAY

(turns around)

Sure. Why not?

Her friend grabs a strand of hair and shows it to Tay. Its tips turned BRIGHT BLUE. Brighter than they are supposed to be. It's something that turns Tay's face chalk-white. Her eyes widen in shock.

TAY (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Shit!

Her wristband starts to glitch.

FRIEND

We better leave.

They pack their stuff and go.

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EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY

A single flower grows inside the flowerbed. Gentle. Peaceful
Off-Screen, we hear KIDS playing and laughing. Suddenly, wind starts blowing. Strong. Noisy. Like the bluster of a storm, or the landing of a troop carrier.

INT. "NEW CITY SCHOOL", CORRIDOR - CONTINUED

TAY and her friend rush down the hallway. Tay fumbles a HANDHELD MIRROR from her bag. Likes going through her hands. She takes a quick look inside. However, somebody else is staring back at her. THE FACE OF A BOY.

TAY (OFF)
No no no no no. Please don't.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - CONTINUED

TOP SHOT:
Awestruck, the KIDS stare into the sky. Wind blowing in their faces. Hard. They shield their eyes for a better view.

The gentle flower is ripped from the flowerbed by a GUST.

We PAN DOWN to the schoolyard. A GROUP OF FIVE lines up in front of the school building. Equal uniforms. These are RANGERS.

We catch a glimpse at their LOGO. "E.T.L.D."
(Extraterrestrial Legal Department). Slowly, the group marches for the school.

INT. "NEW CITY SCHOOL", CORRIDOR - CONTINUED

A SCHOOL BOY comes running down the hallway. He wears the same wristband. We DOLLY AT him. Fast. He puts his hands around his mouth.

SCHOOL BOY
(whispering)
Rangers are coming! Rangers are coming!!

He runs past us, but we keep dollying for the end of the corridor. Seconds later, THREE RANGERS turn around the corner and hit the hallway.

TAY's heart pounds loud. She is visibly stressed out. She

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knows, if the Rangers find her, she's in trouble. Thus, she tries to hide her bracelet under her sleeve. She hides her blue-tipped mane underneath her hoodie.

Her friend knows her condition, knows her dilemma. She tries to help Tay, hiding from the Rangers. She urges her into a nearby restroom.

On her way, Tay briefly disappears behind a column. When she steps back into view, she has MORPHED into an ADULT WOMAN. However, unfortunately her clothes didn't grow with her. They look way too small on her.

Hectically, she tries to ADJUST her short sleeves. It doesn't really work. Thus, she covers her wristband with her hand -- and SNEAKS quickly into the ladies' room.

Meanwhile the Rangers round up students in the foyer.

RANGER #1

Every Hellebore-wearer please step
forward so we can check in on them.
Remember, resistance is an offense.

This little announcement proves effective. Some STUDENTS step forward and show their Hellebore-bracelet. While his TWO COLLEAGUES take care of the Hellebore-wearers, RANGER #3 notices the bathroom close-by. Resistance is an offense. And so is evasion.

Cautiously, he pushes down the handle. Squeakingly, the rest room door opens. RANGER #3 enters.

INT. "NEW CITY SCHOOL", RESTROOM - CONTINUED

Slowly, the Ranger walks past the bathroom stalls. Pushing open closed doors. One after another. Each appears empty. But we know, somebody is hiding in here.

The Ranger pushes against the next door. It won't open. It's shut. Someone's occupying the stall. He knocks against the door.

RANGER #3

E.T.L.D. - Open the stall. This is a
Hellebore inspection.

TAY (OFF)

I'm not wearing a Hellebore.

RANGER #3

(knocks again)
Open the damn door!

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Click. The door is being unlocked. The Ranger pushes it open only to see -- A STURDY MAN sitting on the loo seat. Inside the ladies' room. Answering with a female voice...

STURDY MAN (TAY'S VOICE)
(awkward)
Shit...

For a brief moment, nobody moves. Silence. Then - the Ranger narrows his eyes. His hand reaches for his belt. Suddenly, the STRURDY MAN comes at him like a bulldozer.

WHAK! He bodychecks him. Hard. Pushing him out of his way. Running for the exit. Followed by Tay's friend, who has been hiding next door.

The Ranger slides across the tiles. He activates a communicator within his glove. Alerting his colleagues.

RANGER #3
We got a Morph! I repeat: We got a Morph!!

INT. "NEW CITY SCHOOL", CORRIDOR - CONTINUED

The STURDY MAN hurries down the stairs. There is a rear exit. The ticket to liberty. But before he can reach the door - it opens as if by magic.

A FOURTH RANGER stands in the door frame. Straddle-legged. Blocking the exit.

The STURDY MAN stops dead in her tracks. Unsure what to do next. Their eyes meet. RANGER #4 smirks. Gotcha!

Off-Screen, we hear A TRANSFORMATION SOUND. The Ranger's eyes widen in surprise.

There is A LITTLE GIRL standing before him. In clothes way too big for her. She turns on her heel and rushes back upstairs.

RANGER #4
(into comm)
She's headed your way, Sarge

"Sarge" refers to RANGER #1.

RANGER #1
(into comm)
Understood.

The LITTLE GIRL shoots around the corner. Right into RANGER #1.

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RANGER #1 (CONT'D)

Resistance is an offense. You're under arrest, sweetheart. You have to leave the planet

On cue, the remaining TWO RANGERS show up behind him. TWO grab Tay and bend her arms on her back. The other ones are on CROWD CONTROL.

One of the Rangers scans her Hellebore. GLITCH. BROKEN.

On the other end of the corridor, someone watches all this. ARETA LELANTOS (50). A no-nonsense, by-the-book ranger. Some even call her a sociopath. For her lack of empathy and emotions.

A SCHOOL GIRL looks at Lelantos with a question. She simply smiles back. But this smile disappears automatically. She fetches her blaster from her holster, she's all locked and loaded. One bullet after another.

LITTLE GIRL

(struggling, in Tay's voice)

I've complied with every regulation!

She SCREAMS in agony. Trying to wrestle free. The Rangers have a hard time keeping her under control -- until they don't.

CLOSE-UP: RANGER #3

his eyes widen in terror as he realizes --

-- TAY turned into A BIG 'N' BUFF MUSCLE MAN again. Easily, he pushes those two Rangers aside. Almost casually. Then he sets his sights on Lelantos. He realizes, that the Hellebore doesn't control him anymore.

Huffing and puffing like a locomotive, the MUSCLE MAN CHARGES at the Captain. Prepared to fight her way out of school. He runs at her.

Lelantos doesn't move an inch. Almost like she was waiting for that. Suddenly, the muscle man stops.

In A LOW ANGLE SHOT, Areta Lelantos raises her blaster and aims it at him. Unimpressed by her newfound physical strength.

TAY (V.O.)

Some things cannot be controlled.

(beat)

-- Dreams.

Same angle: Lelantos pulls the trigger. BLAM! Off-Screen, we hear the man COLLAPSE.

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CONTINUED: (3)

FADE TO BLACK

INT. E.T.L.D. CENTER - DAY

TAY wakes up. She is her old self. She has been taking a nap. Leaning against the broad shoulders of another unlucky FELLA sitting next to her.

He GRUNTS unhappy and turns his back on her.

Tay is all dizzy. Her head feels twice the size. The bright lights blind her. By blinking, she tries to accustom her eyes. She shakes her head in confusion. Trying to think straight. Where is she? What is she doing here?

The penny drops. Instantly, her hands go for her face. It feels -- normal. She checks her Hellebore. Still 5000 Credits, no glitches. She checks her tips. Colored, but not blue. She checks her face in a mirror. No changes.

Tay sighs in relief and sinks back into her seat.

ANCHORMAN (OFF)

(on TV)

Today, another Morph has been arrested. Rangers could restrain the individual at New City School. This is the fifth Turnian arrested in the Northern Alliance this week.

Tay isn't really bugged by the news. She tries to remain cool even though they talk about Morph aliens like her. Her focus turns to the ticket on her lap. A paper strip with a waiting number. 100500. She shoots a look at the wall.

TAY (V.O.)

So stupid. I've been living here for three years and I'm still having those bloody dreams.

The display switches from 100499 to 100500.

It's her turn. She gulps. She has a frog in her throat. Nervously, she fumbles around her Hellebore. Then she finds the courage to stand up and face what's coming.

MAIN TITLE

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it deciphers to --

H E L L E B O R E