

The Long Road Home

EXT. SPACE

An old frigate lumbers through the vast and empty void of space like a wounded animal. A streak of smoke trails from one of the main engines and the ship drifts with a slight list toward the starboard.

Thick plates of titanium armor cover the ship from stem to stern. Each piece of armor is riddled with blackened craters and scorch marks. This is the Hannible.

CUT TO:

INT. HANNIBLE CRYOBAY

Lights flicker to life revealing a massive room. A frozen mist lingers just above the steel floor. The hum of several computers booting up can be heard.

The room is packed with over fifty cryogenic pods, most of which are empty. One pod holds a striking young woman wearing military fatigues.

Her pale skin makes her look like a ghost. This is NATASHA BURNS, but you can call her Reaver.

A computer hanging over her cryopod chirps then beeps and after a few moments, the cover of her tube slowly opens.

Suddenly a soothing yet artificial female voice fills the cavernous room.

COMPUTER

Lieutenant Burns. As the highest ranking officer still active, procedure requires you to complete wake-up protocols.

Reaver raises an arm and shields her eyes.

REAVER

(annoyed)

Confirmed, now dim the lights by twelve percent.

The computer complies and the room grows darker. Reaver lowers her arm and peers out, examining the room. In front of her stand three occupied cryopods.

The nearest pod holds a young soldier, who looks like he's not even old enough to buy a beer let alone kill people. This is HARVEY WILLIS but his talent with a rifle has earned him the moniker 'Scope'.

The next pod holds a beast of a man. This is THEODORE MCLENDON, but most just call him Tex. When you hear him speak you'll know why. A sort of scowl has been frozen on his face.

Next to Tex sleeps JIM WEST, the squads last medic. His uniform is covered with blood and he seems paler than the others.

Reaver looks past the wounded medic to all of the empty cryopods. Her eyes reveal a deep sadness. She silently but purposefully salutes. After a heavy sigh, Reaver climbs out of her pod and walks over to a nearby computer console.

REAYER

Computer, activate cryo units two and three. Keep unit four in standby mode.

COMPUTER

Order confirmed.

Two pods rumble to life and the covers open. Despite their losses, Reaver attempts to sound cheerful.

REAYER

Rise and shine, troopers.

Scope tumbles out of his pod and hits the deck. The young soldier starts to vomit uncontrollably. Tex casually climbs out of his own pod. He stretches and yawns before glancing down at Scope.

TEX

(disgusted)

Do you really have to spray the deck every time you crawl out of that freezer?

Scope looks up at Tex with an apologetic look and then wipes bile away from the corner of his mouth.

SCOPE

I get claustrophobic.

Reaver offers him a hand up, but he waves it away.

TEX

Mention that to your recruiter?

SCOPE

I wasn't recruited... I was drafted.

With his hands clenched into fists, Tex glares at the young soldier who quickly looks away.

REAVER

Scope, get below and prep the medical pod. I want Doc ready to move as soon as we land.

Scope nods and climbs out a nearby hatch. As soon as he's gone, Reaver spins around and jams Tex against his pod with her elbow rammed into his throat. He manages to chuckle, clearly surprised by her strength.

TEX

(coughing)

Is there a problem, Lieutenant?

REAVER

You're the problem. That kid has been through enoug--

Tex easily pushes her off.

TEX

He's been through enough? And what the fuck have I been doing for the past two years? Tiptoeing through a field of daisies?

She doesn't say anything.

TEX (CONT'D)

Do I have to remind you that these god-forsaken freezers used to be full of people? My friends!

REAVER

(whispering)

I know. They were my friends too.

TEX

Then don't tell me what other people have been through, cause I don't need a fucking reminder.

SCOPE (O.S.)

Um, sorry to interrupt.

Scope stands outside the hatch, looking apprehensive.

SCOPE (CONT'D)

I think something's wrong. You should take a look out the windows.

Tex and Reaver walk over to the nearest viewport and look out into space. Their reactions are identical. Confusion.

TEX
Shouldn't we be able to see it?

REAVER
This doesn't make any sense.

Tex looks over his shoulder towards the computer console.

TEX
Computer confirm location.

COMPUTER
Sector five-nine-four at grid eight. The Sol System.

TEX
What the fuck are we doing out here? Computer, what was original destination point?

COMPUTER
High orbit over Earth.

REAVER
Computer, why wasn't our original destination point reached?

COMPUTER
A critical engine malfunction occurred during transit.

REAVER
Current state of main engines?

The hum of the computers grows louder.

COMPUTER
Inoperable.

TEX
Mother fucking piece of shit!

Tex slams his fist into the bulkhead beside him, denting the thick metal plating.

REAVER
Stow that right now, trooper!

He shakes his hand and mumbles something under his breath.

REAVER (CONT'D)

Computer, link-up with SATCOM and get me a priority channel with Fleet Command.

COMPUTER

Unable to complete request. The comm-system is currently off line.

TEX

(panicked)

Why in the fuck would the comm-system be off line?

COMPUTER

The comm-relay received critical damage during transit.

TEX

(speaking to Reaver)

How is this even possible?

REAVER

I don't know. The combat zone was still hot when we bugged out. Maybe some rounds caught up with us after we went into cryo.

SCOPE

(to himself)

What are we gonna do?

TEX

Well, we can't just stay here. Storage is completely empty. We were supposed to be smoking cigars planet-side tonight.

REAVER

There has to be something left.

TEX

Combat rations. We each have a days worth not including the Doc.

SCOPE

And the o2 scrubbers might run out before then anyway.

TEX

Ain't that a bitch? We ain't just out of food, we're out of air.

SCOPE

(speaking to Reaver)

He's right Lieutenant, we weren't supposed to be on the ship this long.

REAVER

Alright then, we activate our emergency beacon and go back into stasis.

Scope shakes his head.

SCOPE

No point. We've already been in six months. If we go back in, the freeze would tear apart our nervous systems.

TEX

Well, that's it then. Game over.

REAVER

You need to get a grip. We just need to work the situation.

SCOPE

I think I have an idea. Computer, are maneuvering thrusters online?

COMPUTER

Affirmative.

Reaver raises an eyebrow.

SCOPE

And computer find the nearest manned outpost.

COMPUTER

The Eris Observatory. Currently 984,400 kilometers away.

SCOPE

Computer calculate a transit time to the observatory using our maneuvering thrusters.

A moment passes as the computer calculates.

COMPUTER

Fifteen days. Twelve hours and twenty-nine minutes.

TEX
Fifteen days? It might as well be a
year. We can't make that.

REAVER
Then maybe you should shut up and
start saving air. It's better than
noth--

A klaxon alarm suddenly blares throughout the room.

TEX
What the fuck is that?

REAVER
Oh God, it's Doc. I forgot to take
his pod out of standby.

Scope rushes over and examines the computer hanging above
the medic's pod.

SCOPE
Christ, he's flatlining. We've got
to get him out of there. Someone go
below and finish prepping the
medical pod!

Tex doesn't move, he glances at Reaver and gives her the
slightest nod. To say she looks conflicted would be a
colossal understatement.

SCOPE
What the hell are you waiting for?
He's going to die in there!

Reaver closes her eyes and shakes her head.

REAVER
No, leave him in.

It takes a moment for her words to register with Scope.

SCOPE
You can't be serious. He's going to
die. We need to get him out! Now!

As the alarm continues to blare, Scope desperately tries to
pry the cover open. From behind, Tex wraps his massive arms
around Scope and drags him out of the room.

TEX
It's over for Doc, we don't have
the means. We have to let him go.

Reaver opens her mouth but has trouble speaking. Doc has woken up. He struggles to breathe and coughs up blood. His widened eyes lock with hers.

REAVER
Computer, turn off the medical alarm and set a course for the Eris Observatory at best speed.

FADE TO: AGAINST BLACK, TITLE CARD:

SIX DAYS LATER

INT. HANNIBLE/ENGINE ROOM

Metal scaffolding surrounds a large spherical reactor, which dominates much of the room. Below the reactor, Reaver leans against the main engineering terminal.

Across the room, Tex sits alone, in a dark corner. He clings to two small ration packs as they might disappear if he doesn't hold on tight enough.

REAVER
(speaking to Tex)
Is that the last of it?

TEX
Last two. Twelve-hundred calories and a single water pack.

REAVER
We'll wait until tomorrow to spl--

TEX
It's not going to be enough.

REAVER
We don't know that yet.

TEX
Sure we do, you just don't want to accept it.

REAVER
Don't talk like that. That's an order.

TEX
Let's face the facts. We're not going to make it as we are, but there is a way to, um, improve our odds.

Their eyes meet. Reaver knows what he means but doesn't want to hear him say it.

TEX (CONT'D)

It'll be easy, you've already done it onc--

SCOPE (O.S.)

Lieutenant, I checked out the main engines.

Reaver spins around, Scope stands on the scaffolding above.

REAVER

What'd you find out?

SCOPE

It looks like we've been hemorrhaging reactor coolant. The tanks are bone dry.

TEX

(annoyed)

For fuck sake! Eris is less than an hour away at normal speed. Just turn the damn things on.

SCOPE

That's not an option. The heat would be enough to ignite flesh and the radiation would liquefy our internal organs.

TEX

Really? And how could you possibly know that?

SCOPE

School. I studied superluminal travel before the war broke out.

Tex flips him the bird.

TEX

Study this, college boy.

REAVER

Shut up Tex. That's an order.

A brief moment of awkward silence.

TEX
 (whispering)
 Don't tell me what to do, you
 fucking bitch.

REAVER
 What did you say to me?

Tex stands up, a look of rage washes over him.

TEX
 I've had enough of you and your
 little friend running around the
 ship, trying to repair things that
 can't be repaired.

SCOPE
 We're trying to save your miserable
 life. Our lives!

TEX
 Isn't that the problem? There's too
 many lives to save. There's not
 enough food. We know what needs to
 happen...

FADE TO: AGAINST BLACK, TITLE CARD:

FOUR DAYS LATER

INT. HANNIBLE/ BRIDGE

Every terminal on the bridge has been powered down, leaving Scope alone in the dark. He stares out the main viewport, admiring a brilliant field of stars. The hatch behind him opens and Reaver climbs in.

REAVER
 Private. How you holding up?

SCOPE
 Not bad, in fact I don't really
 feel hungry anymore.

REAVER
 That's the atrophy. It weakens your
 perception of hunger.

SCOPE
 (sarcastically)
 That's a comforting thought.

REAVER
Have you seen Tex lately?

SCOPE
Thankfully, no. He's been spending most of his time in the engine room.

REAVER
It's warmer down there. I think it reminds him of home.

There's a brief moment of awkward silence between the two.

SCOPE
Um, I don't like saying this but I think he might be right. Only two of us are going to make it back and that's only if--

REAVER
I don't want to die.

SCOPE
Neither do I.

REAVER
And I doubt that Tex wants to be the one, so that sort of leaves us in a predicament.

SCOPE
You could order one of us...

REAVER
Would you follow that order?

SCOPE
You're right. What has to happen next can't be an order, but then what are our options?

REAVER
I've only been able to come up with one.

CUT TO:

INT. HANNIBLE/ENGINE ROOM

Tex stands alone, wrapped in a thermo-blanket.

TEX
Computer, how much breathable air
does the Hannible have left?

COMPUTER
Fourteen pounds of oxygen remain.

TEX
Now translate that into time.

COMPUTER
Three days, four hours and sixteen
minutes of oxygen remain for three
squad members.

TEX
Subtract one squad member and
recalculate.

A brief pause.

COMPUTER
Four days, twenty-one hours and two
minutes.

TEX
(to himself)
Not enough.

REAYER (O.S.)
Everything alright?

Tex spins around.

REAYER (CONT'D)
You seem jumpy.

TEX
I thought I locked that hatch.

REAYER
And I unlocked it. We need to talk.

Reaver raises her hand. Three pieces of cord stick out of
her clinched fist.

TEX
Detonator cords?

SCOPE

One cord, cut into three different lengths.

REAYER

We all pick. Whoever gets the shortest takes this pistol into the airlock and does what has to be done.

TEX

You think after all the shit I've been through that I'm gonna leave my life up to chance? Fuck you people.

Reaver points the gun at him.

REAYER

Maybe you can be persuaded.

Scope draws first. The piece is long. He sighs with relief. With two left, Tex quickly snatches out a piece of cord.

He holds it up for everyone to see. It's short.

Tex shakes his head and drops the piece of cord.

TEX

Okay. That's fine. Let's get this over with. I bet you guys are dying to dig into that last pack.

He motions towards the main engineering terminal. The last ration pack rests on top of it.

Reaver offers him the pistol. He looks at it for a few moments before grabbing it. He pulls back the slide and makes sure there's a round in the chamber.

TEX (CONT'D)

Before I do this, I just want to say I'm sorry for being such a dick lately. We've all been through a lot and you guys didn't deserve it.

REAYER

Don't worry about. We understand.

TEX

Good. It's important that you understand.

Tex raises the gun, points it at Reaver and fires. He puts a round cleanly through her chest. She falls backward, hitting the deck hard.

Then he turns the gun towards Scope and pulls the trigger again. But nothing happens. Just a muted click. Unfazed, Tex leaps onto Scope and pins him to the deck.

With an insane amount of force and power, the large Texan smashes the pistol against the young soldier's skull. Bones break. Blood pours.

Scope suddenly stops struggling.

Tex doesn't stop, seemingly lost in a fit of rage. He smashes away until there's nothing left but a bloody pile of flesh and bone.

Now covered in blood and bits of brain matter, Tex slowly stands and strolls over to the engineering terminal.

He grabs the last ration pack and takes a deep breath. Tex seems relieved as he starts to shove food into his mouth.

TEX
(breathing heavily)
Computer, calculate when breathable
air will run out.

COMPUTER
Four days, twenty-one hours and two
minutes.

TEX
Clarify. Computer calculate when
breathable air will run out for
remaining squad member.

COMPUTER
I detect two vital signs on board.

Tex drops the ration pack and turns around. He walks over and kneels beside Reaver. He puts his ear to her mouth and hears breathing. He unsheathes his combat knife and raises it above her heart.

Just as he begins to bring the knife down, an alarm goes off. The bloody Texan freezes.

COMPUTER
Alert. Incoming friendly contact.

TEX
(nearly screaming)
Wh-what? Computer, identify!

COMPUTER
UED verification codes confirmed.
Two Jupiter-Class search and rescue
vessels.

Reaver suddenly opens her eyes.

REAVER
(whispering)
Please, you don't have to. Let them
save us.

TEX
They can't save us.

Tex sits there for a moment, lost in thought.

COMPUTER
Attention. Docking systems have
been remotely activated.

The distant sound metal grinding against metal can be heard. Reaver slowly reaches for the knife, but Tex pins her down and looks at her.

For the first time he smiles and then plunges the knife downward, into her heart.

TEX
Computer, start the main reactor.

COMPUTER
Warning. Insufficient levels of
coolant to run reactor at
recommended safety levels.

TEX
Just do it.

The large spherical reactor begins to glow. The glare is so intense, Tex has to cover his eyes. The air around begins to shimmer and ripple.

Tex bursts into flames. A few moments later, the reactor goes critical and erupts. It tears through the ship like a wave of fire and burning plasma.

THE END