

INT. ISC JOHNNY APPLESEED

A CREEPY, INHUMAN SOUND echoes through the UNNERVING QUIET. If anyone recognizes it (and good on them!), it's the sound of Jupiter's Magnetosphere, but it's almost like the VOICES OF THE DEAD ARE SPEAKING.

Then, over the top of it...

MALE VOICE

(with tour guide aplomb)

...and that, ladies and and gentlemen, was the voice of Jupiter, now passing by the Starboard portholes. If you look closely, you'll be able to see the bright blue auroras around the northern hemisphere. A few hundred thousand miles south is the great red spot, swirling, as it has since the beginning of recorded history, at a speed of 400 miles per hour: a hurricane twice the size of the planet Ear...

He stops. Clearly, something's wrong.

MALE VOICE

(far gone inside his own head)

Huh. Guess I'm, uh, going to choose a different point of reference.

He can't stay with the thought more than a moment. The sounds of space CLICK OFF, replaced by the STEADY HUM OF 02 generators.

MALE VOICE

(improbably cheerful)

But never mind the sound of radio waves produced by an unimaginably large celestial body of gas and liquid hydrogen! That's not what you're here for, folks! Nope: this is Radio Free Space, broadcasting live from the ISC Johnny Appleseed -- in transit from, 'so long and thanks for all the fish' to 'the restaurant at the end of the universe!' I'm your host, Commander Adam Ainsley, AKA Lonestar McStarWolf, AKA Hanikan Starwalker, AKA... um, whatever I called myself before that.

(awkward pause)

So! As the only ambulatory crew member aboard this tin can, I'm lucky enough to be in possession of this little million-dollar radio kit, along with virtually unlimited free time!

(beat)

I am, of course, also unlucky enough to have both, and since the ship is currently corkscrewing its way towards interstellar space, there isn't much for me to do. Thankfully for both of us, this colony craft comes equipped not only with the complete genetic material of all creatures great and small, but with the single most comprehensive database of literature, art, and music ever assembled! So, just kick back, relax, and enjoy the twenty year ride to Barnard's Star, as we take it back a notch with -- and I know I'm going to butcher this pronunciation -- 'Salut d'amour, Opus 12' by Edward Elgar. This is Radio Free Space, transmitting in the blind.

The commander's voice clicks off, and a BEAUTIFUL DUET FOR PIANO AND STRINGS begins to play. As the movement swells, it mixes and mingles with the SOUNDS OF SPACE -- as though the music of man is mingling with the music of the spheres.

The opus COMES TO AN END. The sounds of space FADE AWAY. And there is SILENCE AND THE HUM OF GENERATORS once more. A long silence. Too long. Then, a SIGH.

ADAM AINSLEY

(clearly disturbed by having to be with alone his own thoughts, but determined to put a good face on)

...and we're back! Ladies, gentlemen, and any otherworldly entities listening in on this broadcast: that was 'Salut d'amour, Opus 12' by Edward Elgar, on Radio Free Space. I...

(long pause. unsure what to say now that formalities are done)

I... I just, um...

(bam. he gets it. his voice takes on its old flippant tone -- a mask for the broken person beneath)

I want to take this moment to give a

shout-out to a very special listener. Okay, I know they're not technically listening -- at least, not in any way that's empirically confirmable -- but it's their birthday, and I know they hate it when I forget, so... happy birthday Ren. That last song? That was for you.

(suddenly deadly serious)  
'Salut, mon amour.' Until we meet again.

CLICK. The radio switches off. And yet it doesn't. The SOUNDS OF SPACE rise in the background, and we can hear the INTERIOR OF THE SPACESHIP again. Adam is CRYING. Softly, as though afraid to wake someone up, but unable to stop.

ADAM AINSLEY  
(to himself, whispered through tears)  
Come on Ainsley. Knock it off.  
(drill sergeant impression)  
Pull yourself together Commander, or by gum I'll toss you out that airlock myself!  
(back to himself, whispering, pathetic)  
Maybe you should just get it over with.  
(shifts into David Bowie impression)  
"Ground Control to Major Tom..."  
(SIGH, just as sudden shift to Elton John)  
"And I think it's going to be a long long..."

STATIC SPIKE. THE SOUNDS OF SPACE ARE IN THE CAPSULE. THE VOID IS SCREAMING...

AND SO IS COMMANDER AINSLEY. CHAOS FOR A LONG MOMENT. The noise is nearly unbearable... but it doesn't last for long. Silence, and the STEADY HUM OF 02 GENERATORS return, along with HEAVY BREATHING.

ADAM AINSLEY  
(recovering whisper)  
Okay. That was -- awful.

MYSTERIOUS VOICE  
 (through radio)  
 Thank You.

Adam freezes. The voice is flat, but not mechanical --  
 synthetic, but not artificial.

ADAM AINSLEY  
 (terrified whisper)  
 H-- hello?

MYSTERIOUS VOICE  
 (flat, but not self-serious)  
 Hello, Lonestar McStarWolf. Pleasure  
 to meet you.

Silence -- then Adam starts laughing

ADAM AINSLEY  
 (humor keeping terror at bay)  
 Oh, that's it then. I've finally  
 cracked. Finally gone off the deep  
 end. One's flown over the coo-coo's  
 nest, and guess who?  
 (jack torrence impression)  
 Here's Adam!

MYSTERIOUS VOICE  
 (unimpressed)  
 You are not crazy.

ADAM AINSLEY  
 (worried)  
 I'm not?

MYSTERIOUS VOICE  
 (as though explaining to a five  
 year old)  
 You have not cracked up -- yet. This  
 is not an illusion, Hanikin.

ADAM AINSLEY  
 (he would be annoyed, if he wasn't  
 terrified)  
 That's not my na... who are you? Where  
 are you?

MYSTERIOUS VOICE  
 Be with you in a moment.

An ELECTRIC CRACKLE fills the air. Adam SCREAMS AGAIN a it

builds to a crescendo that settles into a steady, STATIC HUM with occasional SPARKS.

ENTITY

(fuller, but still sounding almost like its coming from a radio)  
Here are we, come as we are, as we were...

ADAM AINSLEY

(breathless, but still doing his best kurt cobain)  
...as I want you to be.

ENTITY

"Otherworldly Entities."

ADAM AINSLEY

(confused)  
Excuse me?

ENTITY

Is this what you pictured when you said "Otherworldly Entities?"

ADAM AINSLEY

(dazed, but trying really hard to be polite in front of something that can clearly destroy him with a thought)  
Not -- not exactly. No. I... I didn't picture -- anything.

ENTITY

(a tone that could be confused, annoyed, or neither)  
Why then did you contact us?

ADAM AINSLEY

(now just genuinely lost)  
What do you mean, contact you?

The Entity makes an electric sound almost like a tape rewinding

ENTITY

(imperfect impression of Adam's voice)  
"This is Radio Free Space, broadcasting live from the ISC Johnny Appleseed..."

ADAM AINSLEY

(starting to get it)

Hold on, hold on -- you were listening to that?

ENTITY

(returning to its own flat voice)

They are always listening. Always hearing.

ADAM AINSLEY

No no, Someone was actually listening to my show? That's awesome! I can't believe after all this time I have a... wait. They? Who's they?

There's a CRACKLE, indicating the Entity has moved

ADAM AINSLEY

Jupiter?

ENTITY

(flat, almost talking over Adam)

You are noisy. Your Earth. Calling out into the airless. "Transmitting in the blind." They and we are always hearing.

ADAM AINSLEY

(awestruck and finally starting to believe)

You've -- been listening to our radio signals?

ENTITY

(still far removed)

So many voices. So much song. Countless the things we have no name for -- what you brought out into the blind with you. Tell me...

Adam suddenly CRIES OUT IN PAIN.

ENTITY

(unaffected)

...what is that called?

ADAM AINSLEY

(desperate)

Pain! Pain! Stop! Stop it!

A faint STATIC SOUND, and Adam GASPS IN RELIEF.

ENTITY  
(curious)  
What is it?

ADAM AINSLEY  
(angry)  
What is what?

ENTITY  
Pain. What is it?

Adam pauses.

ADAM AINSLEY  
(anger and fear disappear behind  
genuine fascination)  
You... don't know what pain is?

ENTITY  
(patronizing)  
We and they are sound and light and  
thought. Your physical existences are  
a novelty to us. Explain.

ADAM AINSLEY  
(struggling)  
Well, it's kind of hard to -- I mean,  
there's a lot of different theories,  
like, evolutionary utility, social  
function...

STATIC CRACKLE. ADAM CRIES OUT AGAIN.

ENTITY  
(flat)  
Explain.

ADAM AINSLEY  
(half-screaming)  
Bad! Very bad! Very very -- not good  
feeling!

The static FADES. Adam COLLAPSES.

ENTITY  
(flat)  
Feeling.

ADAM AINSLEY  
 (gasping)  
 Yeah, feeling. It doesn't *feel* good.

ENTITY  
 Explain.

ADAM AINSLEY  
 (catching his breath)  
 Explain what?

ENTITY  
 Feeling.

ADAM AINSLEY  
 (now plainly irritated)  
 Explain feel -- look, buddy, Mr. Jupiter Man... Thing... it's not the sort of thing you can explain to someone who -- who can't...

ENTITY  
 What is the function of feeling?

ADAM AINSLEY  
 (almost yelling now)  
 Function! Hell if I know! Sorry Dr. Manhattan, but I never did get the user manual on this thing! Nobody did!

ENTITY  
 Why do you feel pain?

ADAM AINSLEY  
 (serious running out of patience)  
 Because you hurt me!

ENTITY  
 (sudden flat, terrible johnny cash impression)  
 "I hurt myself today -- to see if I still (feel)..."

ADAM AINSLEY  
 (no longer amused)  
 Oh give me a break...

ENTITY  
 (flat again)  
 Radio Free Space, transmission 026.  
 What do these words mean?

ADAM AINSLEY  
 (a little less pissed)  
 I don't know. Ask Johnny Cash.

ENTITY  
 Whom?

ADAM AINSLEY  
 (trying to keep his voice level)  
 Johnny. Cash.

ENTITY  
 Who is this monetary entity of whom  
 you speak?

ADAM AINSLEY  
 (running short on patience)  
 No, not money -- Cash.

ENTITY  
 Synonym detected. Equivocation.  
 Distinction irrelevant.

ADAM AINSLEY  
 No, that's -- that's his name.

ENTITY  
 Name?

ADAM AINSLEY  
 (there went the last of his veneer)  
 Oh, for the love of... you don't know  
 what names are?

ENTITY  
 Arbitrary linguistic markers used for  
 identification by non-telepathic  
 organisms. Irrelevant. What is love?

ADAM AINSLEY  
 (reflexively)  
 "Baby don't hurt me..."

ENTITY  
 (analytical)  
 Hurt. Song by Jonathan Mon -- Johnny  
 Cash. Previously referenced. Describes  
 sensory experience known as pain. Is  
 this relevant to current query?

ADAM AINSLEY

(done. just done.)

Is it... look, buddy, it's been a very long -- well, a long couple of years, and I really don't have time to...

Suddenly, he SCREAMS AGAIN. STATIC CRACKLE.

ENTITY

(would sound sadistic, if they weren't so disinterested)

You do not enjoy the experience you call pain, correct?

ADAM AINSLEY

(desperate)

No! No! Definitely not!

Static changes tone, become SLOWER, SOFTER -- almost turning to VOICES SINGING. Adam STOPS SCREAMING.

ENTITY

(still as academic)

And what about this? Do you enjoy this?

ADAM AINSLEY

(as though seeing the most beautiful stars shining in a clear night sky)

What... what are you doing? What is this?

ENTITY

(as if describing a blank wall)

We may be incorrect, but they believe we are generating the feeling you call "love."

ADAM AINSLEY

(softly, with tears in his voice)

How -- how did you...

ENTITY

(unable or unwilling to acknowledge the transcendent experience they're creating)

We intercepted your words across the lightless for years uncounted, translating and understanding. Your "feelings," you bring with you. To

reproduce them is no difficulty.

The sound of voices FADES AWAY, replaced by the low level STATIC of the Entity's presence. Adam BREATHES SLOW, RAPTUROUS BREATHES.

ENTITY  
(disinterested)  
Who is Ren?

ADAM AINSLEY  
(stunned)  
What?

The entity doesn't answer, but the STATIC CRACKLES as they move. A button on the console CLICKS, and SALUT D'AMOUR begins to play again.

Adam listens a moment, and he begins BREATHING THROUGH HIS NOSE in anger.

ADAM AINSLEY  
(through gritted teeth)  
How. Did you...

ENTITY  
(blithely)  
Electro-chemical response was tied to the neural impulses connected to that name. Simple enough to trigger...

ADAM AINSLEY  
(screaming)  
GET OUT OF MY HEAD!

ENTITY  
(finally surprised)  
What?

ADAM AINSLEY  
(starts slow, then builds, like a collapsing building)  
Get. Out. Of. My! HEAD!!

ENTITY  
(off-balance)  
Commander Starwalker, we...

ADAM AINSLEY  
(howling now)  
You have no right! No right to come

into my ship and start poking your fingers in my brain...

ENTITY

(trying to get their feet -- their whatever, under them)  
Allusion irrelevant, we do not have fingers...

ADAM AINSLEY

(too late, he's over the edge)  
Shut up! Just -- Shut! UP! You want to know what love is? You want to know? "Baby don't hurt me!" God, for an Jovian you really are dumb as a pile of rocks!

ENTITY

(sputtering through the static)  
Commander, please don't...

ADAM AINSLEY

(suddenly slowing, laughing deliriously)  
No, no no no, don't worry, I won't. I won't! I'll just explain to you, very precisely and calmly, why it's not okay for you to go shoving emotions around in people's brains!

ENTITY

(the cool, calm, detached alien is gone)  
The emotion was positively charged -- associated with strong neural pathways that suggest the entity called Ren was...

ADAM AINSLEY

(a wild animal -- undone)  
...was brilliant! Was incredible! Was the most beautiful person I've ever known or ever will! And he's...

That's it. That's all he can take. Ainsley begins CRYING. Silence but for the STATIC HUM of the Entity.

ENTITY

(more cautious, less capricious now)  
Is this -- is this pain? Did we cause

you...

ADAM AINSLEY

(through tears, but trying to pull himself together)

No. No. You didn't cause -- this. It's not your fault.

ENTITY

(curiosity returning)

Whose is the fault?

ADAM AINSLEY

(scoffs)

Not yours. Not his, either. Probably mine.

ENTITY

How are you to blame?

ADAM AINSLEY

(you can hear the shrug)

You'd be surprised. Besides, I'm probably just being a big baby about it. It's not like he's the only one who's gone. Not by a long shot.

ENTITY

The reaction was involuntary.

ADAM AINSLEY

I'm just making mountains out of -- smaller mountains. That's all.

(laughs)

I'm lucky, you know. At least I'm still alive. Most people can't say that.

ENTITY

(confusion growing)

How are those factors relevant?

ADAM AINSLEY

(suddenly growing angry)

God, you're full of questions today, aren't you? I think I preferred talking to the endless void, to be honest. Look, why don't you go back to your ginormous gasbag in the sky and keep listening? I'm pretty sure I was planning a lecture series on human

emotions for all the aliens in the audience.

(beat)

Probably.

ENTITY

(flat threat)

We couldn't wait for that.

ADAM AINSLEY

(mocking)

We couldn't...

(long pause, as he realizes what they're saying)

What do you mean, you couldn't wait?

The Entity doesn't answer.

ADAM AINSLEY

(masking worry)

Hellllllo? Casper the friendly disembodied space monster? Anything you'd like to tell the class?

ENTITY

(distant as the planet they come from)

You came too far.

ADAM AINSLEY

What?

ENTITY

(as though someone else is speaking through them)

They let your probes and satellites pass into the lightless. We let you peer into the beyond and wonder. So long as your minds and -- bodies, you kept away. You crawled out of your holes to walk upon the moon a handful of times, then crawled back again, and all the while your signals screamed into the stars. They clawed at our ears, but still we listened. We heard. We learned. And now -- quiet at last. Only one voice in the soundless. One mind, one body, coming to cross the line which they have drawn.

ADAM AINSLEY  
(starting to understand, and panic)  
What -- line?

ENTITY  
(pauses, then finally addresses  
Adam)  
The last threshold. The doorway to the  
stars. Where we must decide.

ADAM AINSLEY  
(understanding, but not wanting to)  
Decide -- what?

ENTITY  
(flat threat)  
If human beings were doomed from the  
day they crawled out of their holes.  
And if they carry that doom with them.

A long pause between the two of them. In the background,  
SALUT D'AMOUR ENDS. The console CLICKS.

ADAM AINSLEY  
(hissing through his teeth)  
And how exactly are you supposed to  
decide that?

ENTITY  
By a determination of which drives  
your actions.

ADAM AINSLEY  
Which? Which what? I...

ENTITY  
Love.

ADAM AINSLEY  
Excuse me?

ENTITY  
Pain.

ADAM AINSLEY  
(gruffly)  
Oh no, I'm good on both, thanks.

ENTITY  
We understand neither...

ADAM AINSLEY  
(scoffs)  
No shit...

ENTITY  
(ignoring the human)  
...but we determine that one of the  
two controls human action. We cannot  
decide which.

ADAM AINSLEY  
(rapidly losing his cool)  
Why does that matter!?

ENTITY  
Because one we can create easily, to  
keep in check the danger. The other  
humans must create between themselves.

ADAM AINSLEY  
(muttering)  
You created the other easy enough...

ENTITY  
We created nothing. We activated  
existent neurological machinery. The  
connection to Ren created it.

ADAM AINSLEY  
(not quite believing what he's  
hearing)  
You're talking about it like it was  
real...

ENTITY  
(flat, analytical)  
It was real. Is real.

ADAM AINSLEY  
It's just love. Just -- feelings.

ENTITY  
It is more than a feeling.

ADAM AINSLEY  
(sarcastically singing)  
"More than a feeling..."

ENTITY  
The mental architecture is strong and  
stable, even with the passage of

time...

ADAM AINSLEY  
 (mostly to himself)  
 Five years...

ENTITY  
 Time elapsed noted. It is real. Adam.  
 (long pause, as though trying to  
 express emotions they don't  
 understand)  
 It began as feeling, but we see now  
 objective reality. We can see nothing  
 else.

ADAM AINSLEY  
 (not sure what to make of it)  
 Thanks for the diagnosis, Doc.

ENTITY  
 (confused)  
 Who is this Doc?

ADAM AINSLEY  
 (frustrated)  
 Oh, for crying out loud -- look, if I  
 knew my show was such a hit on Jupiter  
 FM, I would've started with the  
 encyclopedia Britannica! I'm sure we  
 have it in the data files. Somewhere.

Suddenly, STATIC CRACKLES on the radio, and the SOUNDS OF  
 SPACE are heard again -- louder and more dangerous.

ENTITY  
 (after an awkward pause)  
 They need your answer now.

ADAM AINSLEY  
 What answer?

ENTITY  
 Which will control your species'  
 actions when they awaken among the  
 stars.

ADAM AINSLEY  
 You want me to answer *that*?

ENTITY

(an undertone of worry appears in their voice)

The line approaches. You have five minutes to determine...

ADAM AINSLEY

(you can hear him shaking his head)

No, no, no Doc, you're not hearing the question. Why do you want *ME* to answer that question?

A long, pregnant silence. The SOUND OF STATIC GROWS LOUDER, as though the Entity is growing stronger as the ship approach the line.

Finally, the Entity SIGHS -- a crackling sound like a faulty transformer.

ENTITY

(resigned)

Because we cannot.

There's another long, loaded silence. At last, Adam SIGHS.

ADAM AINSLEY

(just as resigned)

Yeah, me neither. Jeez. I mean, The whole future of the human race is riding shotgun with me, and I can't even pretend to have an answer to that.

(slips into a simpering politician's tone)

Well of course, sir, humankind is only motivated by the most noble of emotions! We've never done anything because we're afraid! Because we fear pain! Or even because we're afraid of love! It's all just love! The all love, all the time show! "Love is all you need..."

(gives up on the impression)

Yeah. I don't think even you'd buy that. You saw what love did to me. It made me angry. It hurt me.

(scoffs)

"I will let you down. I will make you hurt."

(pause)

I didn't just leave him to die with

the rest of the planet, you know. I left him *before* that. Everybody knew what this mission would take -- the politicians, the crew, everybody. We all knew we weren't coming back. But I was the only one who had any attachments on Earth. ISFA didn't know -- no one knew. We hadn't told anyone -- I mean, his family just wouldn't have understood. But he told me I couldn't turn down this chance. I had to survive, and hey! He knew I always wanted to go to space. I tried to fight him. I told him I was going to turn it down, stay with him no matter what. So the next morning he told me he was leaving. But we both knew the score. I was the one leaving, not him.

(pause)

And you know what? Maybe if I'd been more afraid of losing him, I'd have fought harder to hold on. Maybe if it hurt more to say goodbye, I wouldn't have. Maybe if he hadn't loved me enough to let me go, we would've been together at the end. Maybe the last thing I said to him could've been 'I love you,' not 'You're an asshole.' And now all I have is pain. Pain to keep me moving forward. To force me to keep going, to stay distracted, to try and do right. To do right by him.

(long pause, then a SIGH)

Maybe I don't deserve a second chance out there. But if -- if just, maybe, there's one person in those gene banks just a little bit like Ren -- then they deserve a chance. They deserve a chance to love -- even if it hurts.

Adam BREATHS.

ADAM AINSLEY

You know, Doc... Doc?

SILENCE, AND THE HUM OF THE 02 GENERATORS. In the midst of his speech, he didn't notice the hum of the Entity had FADED AWAY.

ADAM AINSLEY

Where did they...

Suddenly, there's a SPIKE OF STATIC on the radio.

ADAM AINSLEY  
Oh shit, the line!

Adam SCRAMBLES for the controls.

ADAM AINSLEY  
(mind running at warp factor 12)  
Telemetry, telemetry, telemet...  
there! Okay, okay, looks fine. Well,  
not fine, but not in the red. Yet.  
Okay. 02 holding. Good. Now if the  
ship would just stop shaking, and --  
okay, now telemetry's in the red. Doc,  
if you're listening, I'm going off the  
rails of this crazy train! Need a  
little help from my friends! I'm --  
AHHH!

The console SPARKS, throwing Adam across the cockpit with a  
CRASH.

ADAM AINSLEY  
Ow.

All at once, the static STOPS. So does the SHAKING. Quiet at  
last.

ADAM AINSLEY  
(whispering, as though his voice  
will set the ship off again)  
D -- Doc? Are you there?

Something in the console CLICKS by itself. BRIGHT, BOMBASTIC  
CLASSICAL MUSIC starts playing.

ADAM AINSLEY  
You clever sonofa...

Adam GRUNTS, PICKS HIMSELF UP, AND WALKS BACK to the console  
mic as the music plays. CLICK.

ADAM AINSLEY  
(improbably cheerful)  
Welcome back to Radio Free Space!  
Sorry for the short lapse in  
transmission, but you know, sometimes  
things just happen. That's life, isn't  
it? Even life in a tin can, floating  
far above the world. Seems we've had a

listener's request while I was off  
mic, so, for your listening pleasure:  
Gustav Holst's "The Planets, Opus 32 --  
Jupiter."  
(pause)  
Happy birthday, Ren.

The movement SWELLS, MINGLING ONCE MORE WITH THE SOUNDS OF  
SPACE. The future of humanity plays us out to the tune of  
stings and stars.