

ANTHROPOSCENE
PILOT

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July 2024

TEASER

COLORFUL SMOKE ON A BLACK BACKGROUND

A refined woman's voice comes from the darkness.

MALOVAR (V.O.)

Fear was once an abundant resource.

A brown jaguar chases off two orange cavemen. WHITE STEAM, fear itself, rises off the men into a cloud.

MALOVAR (V.O.)

Abundant and delicious, it became
the sole sustenance of the vicious,
ancient demon, Alu.

The cloud of white steam reforms into two large, sinister EYES. They blink and disappear back into the darkness.

MALOVAR (V.O.)

But as humankind evolved, so did
their means of keeping fear at bay.

Cavemen wielding yellow torches chase off the jaguar. The sinister white eyes open and glare off at the cavemen.

MALOVAR (V.O.)

Alu grew hungry, so he dispatched
his minions to stoke fear.

The eyes transform into two horrifying white demons. A green human cowers beneath them; white steam rises off his back.

MALOVAR (V.O.)

But Alu wasn't satisfied. This fear
was only temporary. He needed more
fear. Constant fear.

The white demons take the shape of two humans. One whispers to a red human and the other whispers to a blue human.

MALOVAR (V.O.)

Then, an idea: What if humans could
scare themselves?

Red and blue humans draw swords on each other.

MALOVAR (V.O.)

That's how Alu discovered something
more delicious than fear: hatred.

Armies of red and blue humans advance behind their leader. The armies attack. The smoke mixes on the battlefield: DARK PURPLE steam rises beside white steam above them to form a sinister purple smile with SHARP WHITE TEETH.

MALOVAR (V.O.)
As society advanced, where fear
would lead, hatred would follow.

Purple and white steam fall from the mouth to take human forms. White beckons purple to follow him off.

MALOVAR (V.O.)
Fear became more nuanced, so hatred
became more broad. Fear then grew
broad, and hatred then grew
nuanced. They blossomed in each
other's shadows.

The demonic humans dance through a line of many red, blue, green, and orange humans. YELLOW symbols float above each human head: bread, a house, money, a heart, a crown.

As the demons pass each human, their yellow symbol falls apart and dissolves into white steam. In place of each yellow symbol, a DARK PURPLE symbol of a man.

The humans attack one another.

MALOVAR (V.O.)
The cycle of fear and hatred became
self-perpetuating.

A red human grows twice as large and squashes blue into oblivion. Green grows thrice as large and squashes red. Orange grows four times as large and squashes green, and so on, until all but one giant blue human remains.

MALOVAR
Humanity allowed itself to be
tricked into a constant battle.

With a loud CLAP OF THUNDER, two LARGE HANDS, one purple and one white, clap the blue human into a puff of blue smoke.

In his place, held between the hands of hatred and fear, is a gently spinning blue and green planet Earth.

MALOVAR (V.O.)
And now, millennia later, fear is
abundant once more.

All smoke dissolves into the darkness.

ACT ONE**1 INT. ISLA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT**

1

A well-kept bedroom of a wealthy teenage girl. Large bed, lilac linens, modern furniture, high ceiling, gold awards for debate, chess, and FENCING. SOUND of a PARTY in another room.

The door flies open and hits the wall with a SLAM. PARTY NOISE rushes in at full volume. ISLA (15), dark-skinned, in a beautiful yet juvenile party dress, HYPERVENTILATES and hastens across the room to a large window.

As she desperately tries and fails to get the window latch unlocked, the party noise grows increasingly intense around her until it's impossibly, SUFFOCATINGLY LOUD. Her face twinges with physical pain.

She starts back toward the door. She stumbles in her high heels. She SLAMS the door shut and the PARTY NOISE SETTLES.

With her back to the door, she slowly EXHALES, kicks off her heels, and goes back to the window. This time, she quickly undoes the latch and the window opens. She draws in a sharp breath of NAIROBI night air.

2 EXT. SHAM SHUI PO DISTRICT, HONG KONG - NIGHT

2

A different window, smaller and dirtier, opens high above a narrow street in Sham Shui Po, the poorest district in Hong Kong. Laundry and power lines weave between old buildings like spiderwebs. TRAFFIC and SIRENS echo through the alley.

3 INT. YEU'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

3

YEU (17) walks away from the small open window and returns to chopping cabbage at the counter next to the stove. The steam from one of the pans on the stove wafts out the window.

The kitchen is small and cramped. Kitschy knick-knacks, scattered papers, kitchen equipment on industrial shelves, and worn, eclectic furniture fill the warmly lit room.

Yeu slides the cabbage off the block into the pan, it SIZZLES on contact and steam rises to slightly obscure his face. Behind him, an old woman wrapped in a blanket, his GRANDMOTHER, shuffles to the window and closes it, SLAM.

As she shuffles back down the narrow hall, she shouts:

GRANDMOTHER (O.S.)
 (In Cantonese)
 Yeu! Good food smell, inside. Bad
 city noise, outside! Leave it shut!

A door creaks shut down the hall. Yeu shakes his head, amused. He tosses red pepper flakes into the pan and stirs.

The front door slowly opens behind him. BOU-YI (22) tries to sneak past him down the hall. The floor CREAKS, Yeu turns. Bou-Yi freezes and stands upright.

Bou-Yi has a BLACK EYE AND BLOODIED KNUCKLES. A drop of blood drips from his jaw. He puts on a nervous smile and gives Yeu an overcompensating thumbs up. Yeu is not amused.

BOU-YI
 Please don't tell mom.

Yeu rolls his eyes as Bou-Yi rushes down the hall. Yeu aggressively CHOPS scallions on the block.

4

INT. CHARLIE'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

4

In a dirty bathroom mirror, CHARLIE (16), frantically chops off her long blonde hair with a rusty old HUNTING KNIFE. Tears stream down her face. Her hair piles up in the sink.

Her breath is uneven, she jerks every few moments to wipe a tear away. Yet, her eyes are focused, her hands are sure.

She chucks the knife in the sink, CLATTER. She leans in to the mirror to examine her haphazard handy-work. Her hair sits in jagged lines along her chin- a bastardized 'bisexual bob.'

She smiles at herself in the mirror. She shakes it out and walks out the door, leaving a mess of hair behind her. Someone SHRIEKS in another room.

CAROL (O.S.)
 Your hair!?

The SLAM of an old screen door echoes through the house.

5

EXT. REDFIELD, KANSAS - NIGHT

5

Charlie walks among a group of punk teenagers down the middle of a rural street. Some ride bikes, some walk. Charlie walks a step away from the curb, plastic drugstore bag in hand.

LEILA (16), a lithe girl with an 'e-girl'-meets-MCR punk aesthetic and jet black hair, walks next to her.

LEILA

Your hair is probably light enough
you can skip the first step. But
for real, use gloves. Remember that
time I dyed my hands blue? Gloves.

Charlie looks in the bag.

CHARLIE

Ain't this that cheap brand that
stained your whole bathtub?

LEILA

You only gave me ten bucks. Do you
care if you stain Carol's bathtub?

Charlie shrugs, 'fair enough.' A THUD comes from ahead.

A punk on a bike flies off a ramshackle plywood jump and
lands with a THUD in the grass. Teens CHEER. Beyond them, in
a field of long grass, the uneven dirt ring of a bike track.

As the teens fan out into the moonlit park, Charlie and Leila
slowly make their way to a decrepit picnic table across the
track, casually dodging kids on bikes as they cross.

CHARLIE

Don't we have anything else to do?

LEILA

(Sarcastically)
And miss out on all this?

CHARLIE

(Sarcastically)
How could I ever hope for more than
watching *Senior Boys* screw up the
same tricks every weekend of my
youth. Could something more
fulfilling even exist?

LEILA

What'd you have in mind?

They take a seat at the picnic table facing the track.

CHARLIE

One of these numbskulls has to get
a car sooner or later, then we
could at least drive to Oak Ridge.

LEILA

And what're you gonna do in Oak
Ridge after 8pm?

CHARLIE
I don't know, *be* in Oak Ridge?
Watch *their* seniors screw up
different tricks?

Charlie stands on the picnic table and looks away from the track, into the field of long grass that meets the tree-line in the middle distance. She gestures to the trees.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Anywhere, Leila. Anywhere else. Oak
Ridge is fine, New York would be
better, Rome would be ideal.

Leila scrolls through her phone.

LEILA
And the moon would be absolutely
pinnacle?

Charlie SIGHS, exasperated, and drops back down to her seat. She looks up at the clear night sky. A gentle breeze brushes her face. She looks back toward the field.

Little lights pulse and fade across the grass.

CHARLIE
Fireflies.

Charlie looks to her, but Leila keeps scrolling.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Well, I'm gonna go chase bugs.
Join me if you want.

Charlie hops off the table and starts into the grass.

She runs at a firefly, catches it out of the air, waits for it to glow between her fingers, then gently opens her hands and watches it fly away. She repeats her process, then she stops mid-step, frozen in awe.

Ten feet from her nose, a BUTTERFLY GLOWS like a firefly; from its little body to its gently fluttering wings- it glows, unblinking.

Eyes locked on the butterfly, Charlie slowly extends her finger to it, willing it to land on her.

She stands alone in the moonlit field: a girl reaching out to a glowing butterfly.

WATER RUSHES from the faucet. In a brightly lit bathroom, dense bubbles fill the tub. Isla's hand turns the faucet off.

An Ankara-print BATHROBE falls to the bathroom floor.

Isla slides into the mountain of bubbles and takes a deep, meditative breath. She closes her eyes, her head falls back.

Her phone buzzes on the edge of the tub.

She picks it up and opens her social media app. 10 notifications. She opens the most recent one, from "Ada [nails emoji, sparkle emoji]," who tagged her in a post:

A filtered photo of a girl Isla's age in a revealing dress, posing with an older boy at an opulent party. The location tag reads 'Nairobi, Kenya.' The overlaid text reads, "@Isla_Wendo Thanks for the invite! It was lit!"

She rolls her eyes and starts to scroll through her feed:

Picture after picture of rich kids being rich: on yachts, with nice cars, advertising cosmetics, modeling nice clothes, meeting influential people, traveling abroad.

She tilts her head back and scrunches her nose. She drops her phone onto her robe next to the tub.

Out of Isla's view, behind the bubbles, a STONEFLY that GLOWS just like Charlie's butterfly crawls out of the water, flaps itself dry, and flits to the tip of the faucet.

An irate woman's voice calls from another room:

ISLA'S MOM (O.S.)
Isla! You did not say goodbye to
our guests! Get out of the bath, we
want a word with you!

A door outside SLAMS shut. Isla relaxes her neck and closes her eyes with a stressed exhale.

ISLA
(Softly)
Haven't I suffered enough words
this evening?

The water begins to drain away. Confused and covered in bubbles, she sits up to investigate. Through the bubbles, a faint glow comes from the faucet. She pushes some foam away to reveal the stonefly. She SCREAMS.

7 **EXT. SHAM SHUI PO DISTRICT, HONG KONG - NIGHT**

7

A tea kettle WHISTLES inside Yeu's slightly ajar window.

A GLOWING COCKROACH crawls up the building to the window.

8 **INT. YEU'S KITCHEN - NIGHT**

8

The kettle WHISTLES on the stove. Dirty dinner dishes are piled next to it on the counter. Yeu switches the kettle off and places a green tea bag into a small teacup.

 BOU-YI (O.S.)
 So I'm still on the ground, right?
 Cops shouting, people screaming-

Yeu pours steaming water over the tea bag, then, careful not to spill his tea as he walks, he takes a seat at the table across from Bou-Yi, now slightly cleaner, who ravenously eats his dinner. He speaks through bites.

 BOU-YI (CONT'D)
 - when I hear the HRIIIP of nylon
 next to me. This girl's umbrella
 shield is gonna go down, so I do
 what anyone would and I jump back
 there with her. What I didn't see
 was the cop on her other side with
 mace. I had my mask up, so I was
 fine, and I led her to safety
 around the corner and we found a
 medic for her eyes.

Yeu calmly, gently, blows on his tea.

 YEU
 You're lucky. You got lucky. Again.

 BOU-YI
 Maybe it's not luck.

 YEU
 Skill then?

Bou-Yi snorts, amused.

 BOU-YI
 Yeah, skill! Something like that.
 Practice, Practice.

 YEU
 Mm. You used to tell me all the
 time how skilled Kai-Han was.

Yeu blows on his tea again and cautiously takes a sip.

BOU-YI
He knew the risks.

YEU
Do you?

BOU-YI
(In Cantonese)
Shut up!

Bou-Yi throws his fork down onto his plate.

BOU-YI (CONT'D)
Of course I know. I watched the van
take Kai-Han in spite of everything
we did. If they take me too, fine.
This isn't about me, it's about all
of us, even you.

YEU
I only want you to be safe.

BOU-YI
I don't need your safety lecture!
Watching injustice from the
sidelines doesn't make anyone
safer, Yeu!

He gets up from the table and takes his plate with him.

BOU-YI (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Thanks for saving me a plate.

A door SHUTS down the hall. Yeu sits alone in the kitchen.

YEU
Sorry for my concern.

The glowing cockroach crawls in the window behind Yeu.

Charlie follows the glowing butterfly down the sidewalk.
Every time she almost gently catches it, it flits away. She
watches it at slight distance with wide eyes and half smile.

The butterfly lands on a storm drain. She slowly approaches.

Just as she gets within arms reach, the butterfly flies down
the drain. Her face turns to panic.

She gets on her hands and knees in front of the drain. A FLASH OF FIREFLY LIGHT surrounds her. She disappears.

10

INT. ISLA'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

10

Isla attempts to leap from the tub, but she SLIPS, YELPS, and rapidly slides toward the drain.

She scrambles for her phone, but can only grab her bathrobe.

With a FLASH OF FIREFLY LIGHT, she disappears down the drain.

11

INT. YEU'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

11

Alone at the table, Yeu serenely sketches in a tattered notebook: A photorealistic scene of a peaceful garden.

He absent-mindedly takes a sip of cold tea and recoils. He gets up and walks to the sink.

Just as he pours the tea down the drain, the glowing cockroach crawls to the edge of the sink and looks up at him.

When he sees it, Yeu jolts back. Cautiously, he leans over the sink to get a closer look at the glow.

It jumps at his face. He instinctively tries to swat it away.

As his arm extends over the drain, a FLASH OF FIREFLY LIGHT shoots upward; he's sucked down the drain with the cockroach.

ACT TWO

12 **INT. ANTHROPOD TRANSPORT SYSTEM - ATEMPORAL** 12

They fly through the air SCREAMING; they fall like Alice down the Rabbit Hole. Jewel tones of purples, reds, and greens swirl. Electric yellows and blues BUZZ and flash like sparks.

The Butterfly remains on Charlie's finger as she reaches out.

The Stonefly clings to Isla's toe as she curls into a ball.

The Cockroach sits on Yeu's head as he flails.

The Butterfly leads them sharply left. SCREAMING intensifies.

13 **INT. COUNCIL ROOM - DAY** 13

The teens fall from the ceiling in a beam of light and land with a THUD and some GRUNTS in a pile on the stone floor.

Charlie, prone, opens her eyes. She sees a large chamber made of stone and wood. She rolls her face to one side.

A few yards from where they landed, Madam MALOVAR, an anthropomorphized praying mantis, scolds the bugs that brought them here. Malovar's lithe, old body is dressed in academic-looking finery. She carries a thick, worn BOOK.

MALOVAR

I've told you a hundred and seventy-
three times, do not interrupt me
during council meetings!

Isla pulls her face off the ground and pulls her robe defensively around her. She looks the opposite direction.

Seven well-dressed anthropomorphized insects, ANTHROPODS, engage in a heated debate. They sit around a horseshoe-shaped bench, each with a small microphone and nameplate.

A grasshopper man, HARROLD, shouts at a bee woman, PAULINE.

HARROLD

It's just not in the budget,
Pauline!

PAULINE

If the security of our nation is
not 'in the budget,' then what is
the budget even for!?

A regal-looking, androgynous moth person, ATLAS, interjects.

ATLAS

We will certainly put what we have toward security, but do we have the resources needed to attain the security we seek?

HARROLD

This is not our only concern!

Yeu, wide-eyed, looks between Malovar and the council.

Malovar shoos her assistants out of the council room. She hastens toward the pile of children.

MALOVAR

Up! Up! Look alive!

Yeu, terrified, scrambles to his feet and backs away. Isla stays down, petrified. Charlie jumps up in a fighter stance.

CHARLIE

Don't come closer!

The council suddenly turns and takes notice.

ATLAS

Madam Malovar? An audience?

Malovar turns on her heel to face the council with a smile.

MALOVAR

No, not today. Terribly sorry, my guests are simply lost.

HARROLD

Fine, resolve the issue outside.

Malovar bows her head, turns back to the children, and tries to usher them out; she leads, but they don't follow.

MALOVAR

(Hushed)

I imagine you'd like some explanation of where you are, and you won't be getting that here. Now please, come along.

As she stalks away from them, the humans exchange alarmed looks. Malovar opens the door and beckons them to follow.

Charlie helps Isla up. The three humans stick close together as they walk; Charlie leads. They follow Malovar out.

14

INT. ANTHROPOSCENE CITY HALL HALLWAY - DAY

14

Madam Malovar leads the teens down an earthy but well-lit corridor. They pass hallway intersections and their heads swivel: worms in ties chat at a water cooler, roaches laugh with coworkers, and a moth reprimands a hornet in a cubicle.

MALOVAR

Allow me to introduce myself, I'm
Madam Cecilia Malovar, Secretary to
the Anthropod High Council. You are-

She opens her book and drags her bony finger down the page.

MALOVAR (CONT'D)

Charlotte Miller, Isla Wendo, Yeu
Leung, and-

She glances back at them.

MALOVAR (CONT'D)

No, that does seem to be all of
you. Very well.

They emerge into a bustling, brightly lit stone atrium. To one side, a stick-bug man holds open a LARGE DOOR for a fly woman to exit, and DAYLIGHT pours in from the outside.

Charlie sees the door and stops. She throws out her arms to halt Yeu and Isla. Malovar continues to walk.

Charlie beckons them to follow her and starts quickly toward the door. Yeu follows, Isla shakes her head.

Isla continues toward Malovar. Yeu grabs Isla's wrist; Isla YELPS in surprise as he pulls her into a sprint to the door.

Malovar whips around in time to see them escape.

Malovar GASPS. She pulls out a narrow WHISTLE and blows. Her three insect assistants rush to her. She points to the door.

MALOVAR (CONT'D)

Bring them back here!

The Butterfly, Stonefly, and Cockroach zip out the door.

15

EXT. ANTHROPOSCENE TOWN SQUARE - DAY

15

In the blue-grey sky, a locust and a ladybug fly by and tip their hats. Below, the dome of a large stone building reads "CITY HALL." Below, the humans run through the doors.

They sprint across the dirt town square littered with anthropod pedestrians, who dodge them with surprised MURMURS.

VOICE IN THE CROWD
(Softly)
Humans? That's never good.

The humans run down an alleyway between clay buildings.

The Stonefly, Butterfly, and Cockroach zip into the square and fan out. The Stonefly enters the alleyway.

EXT. ANTHROPOSCENE MARKETPLACE - DAY

The teens emerge from the narrow alleyway in a bustling market place. Isla rips her wrist from Yeu's grip.

ISLA
Why did you do that!?

YEU
I couldn't just leave you behind!

Behind Isla, the Stonefly SKITTERS ferociously toward them.

CHARLIE
Incoming!

Charlie pulls them both into the DENSE CROWD, where they disappear into the crowd of anthropods.

They scurry past brightly colored stalls hosted by anthropods selling all manner of things: bees sell flowers, worms sell books, dung beetles sell pottery, and June bugs sell jewelry.

They dive behind a stall. They peek out from behind a large quilt as the Stonefly SKITTERS past them. They all EXHALE.

THISTLEBUD (O.S.)
That's a lovely quilt there.

At the register, THISTLEBUD (12), a small, adorable, androgynous moth child smiles at them. Quilts and fabrics surround them. Some of the cloth has tiny bites missing.

THISTLEBUD (CONT'D)
10% off, today only!

Yeu steps back, Isla freezes, Charlie steps forward.

CHARLIE
Aww! What's your name?

THISTLEBUD
Thistlebud! What's yours?

YEU
What are you doing!? They could
kill us at any moment!

Thistlebud opens their snowy white wings, alarmed.

THISTLEBUD
Kill us!?

CHARLIE
C'mon, is that the face of a
killer?

Thistlebud looks at Yeu with the biggest puppy-dog eyes. Isla
clears her throat.

ISLA
Um, would you be able to tell us
where we are?

THISTLEBUD
Arachnina's Textiles on Market
Street!

CHARLIE
Awesome, and where is that relative
to say, Wichita, Kansas, USA?

THISTLEBUD
Um. South, I think?

ISLA
"South." We're not even on Earth!

THISTLEBUD
Sure you are!

ISLA
No! Earth has humans, and animals,
and bugs that don't talk!

THISTLEBUD
Humans? Ohmigosh you are humans! I
was going to ask, but I didn't want
to be rude. What brings you here?

YEU
That's what we want to know!

ISLA

(Irate)

I was just having a bath and suddenly there was a bug and a flash of light, and I was-

Charlie nods along.

CHARLIE

Falling through a portal to a different dimension or something?

ISLA

Yes, or something.

THISTLEBUD

Portal? Oh! You took the ATS! I can take you there, if you want.

CHARLIE

If that's your local inter-dimensional portal, then let's go!

Charlie takes a confident step out from the booth.

ISLA

Do you ever look before you leap, Miss America? What is an ATS?

THISTLEBUD

The Anthropod Transport System. It takes us everywhere an Anthropod could want to go!

ISLA

What's an anthropod?

THISTLEBUD

Me! And all those people! Basically everyone here that isn't a human.

CHARLIE

Bug people, anthropods. Satisfied, Princess? C'mon, let's go home. This was maybe more adventure than I wanted tonight.

ISLA

How do you know this moth can really take us home?

CHARLIE

I don't! But unless you have a plan, I'm following the moth!

Yeu joins Charlie. Isla looks helplessly between them.

ISLA

Fine. I hope you're right.

Isla joins them. Thistlebud pulls a cord to release a big curtain that reads CLOSED around the stall.

THISTLEBUD

Follow me!

Thistlebud leads them into the bustling market street crowd.

From the top of a nearby clay building, the Stonefly, Butterfly, and Cockroach survey the streets.

A metropolis of clay, stone, and tree roots sprawls to the horizon. Dotted the panorama, thick, dark tree roots twist up into the blue-grey sky before disappearing into thin air.

INT. ATS STATION - DAY

Inside a bustling transit station, anthropods queue at ticket booths, maneuver through turnstiles, and filter in and out of the large open-air doorway carved out of thick, dark, twisted tree root walls. RINGING, DINGING, and CHATTER fill the air.

Thistlebud leads the teens through the doorway.

At the front of the ticket line, a June bug steps aside.

THISTLEBUD

One ticket for three, please!

The praying mantis TICKET AGENT rises in his seat to see Thistlebud over the counter's edge. Thistlebud pleasantly waves up at him.

TICKET AGENT

Destination?

THISTLEBUD

The exterior, please!

The bustle screeches to a halt; SILENCE. Everyone stops and stares. The flat-faced Ticket Agent slowly raises an eyebrow.

TICKET AGENT

Do you have Form E67 completed?

THISTLEBUD

Um. No?

TICKET AGENT
Clearance designation RC5?

THISTLEBUD
What?

TICKET AGENT
External travel can not be booked
without either the proper forms or
clearance designation. Please step
aside now.

The Ticket Agent reaches a long front leg out of the booth
and scooches Thistlebud to the side. BUSTLING sound resumes.

CHARLIE
Exterior?

THISTLEBUD
Where the humans are. I'm sorry,
I've never been outside of the city
before, I didn't know.

ISLA
It's just paperwork? I'm standing
on an alien planet, and to get
home, I just need paperwork? Ha!

CHARLIE
Yeah, what an anti-climactic
adventure.

ISLA
No, my dad's a diplomat! I've done
travel paperwork in 32 different
countries and 5 different
languages: I was *Born* for this.

Isla points to another desk down the concourse.

ISLA (CONT'D)
That's an information desk, yes?
I'll get the papers, we'll fill
them out, and go home.

Isla strides away to the information desk.

YEU
How do we know they'll let us leave
even if we sign some papers? They
brought us here for some reason.

CHARLIE
They're clearly not a hive mind.
Just look around, this place is
just like Earth, but like, buggier.

THISTLEBUD
It's still Earth.

CHARLIE
I really don't think it is.

THISTLEBUD
Sure it is! It's the interior!

She cocks her head at Thistlebud. Then, her eyes widen, GASP.

CHARLIE
We're underground! Isla!

Charlie sprints toward Isla.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Isla! The Exterior is the surface
of the Earth! We are *inside* Earth!

As Charlie reaches halfway between Isla and Yeu, the
Butterfly, Stonefly, and Cockroach BUZZ through the doorway.

YEU
Run!

They all run deeper into the station. UPBEAT MUSIC PLAYS.

Isla bobs and weaves through an exiting crowd until she spots
a security booth staffed by wasps. She sprints towards it.

Yeu scrambles toward a bathroom. Tries the handle: locked. He
looks down the hall: dead-end. He BANGS on the door.

Charlie jumps over the turnstile and races onto the platform.

Isla hails a guard wasp and points at the incoming Stonefly.

Yeu BANGS on the bathroom door. The Cockroach approaches.

Thistlebud tries to jump over the turnstile, but isn't tall
enough. The Butterfly flies over him.

The ATS platform seems to spin around Charlie as she sprints
across it. The roots in the wall seem to OPEN and CLOSE
randomly, letting anthropods in and out.

Isla jumps behind the wasp guard. The Stonefly flashes a
badge. The wasp steps aside. Isla looks incredulous.

The Cockroach chases Yeu into the dead-end. Yeu turns, back against the wall, and puts his arms defensively over his face. Behind the Cockroach, a centipede emerges from the bathroom, drying his many hands on many tiny paper towels.

Thistlebud stops, stares at the turnstile, then happily flaps his wings and scurries under the turnstile.

The Butterfly gains on Charlie. She looks ahead at the end of the platform: a solid wall of roots. She lowers her head, grits her teeth, shuts her eyes, and sprints toward it.

At the moment of impact, WHOOSH. FIREFLY LIGHT. MUSIC STOPS.

INT. ANTHROPOD TRANSPORT SYSTEM - ATEMPORAL

Charlie opens her eyes. She floats in a space both familiar and alien: jewel tones of purples, reds, and greens gently swirl around her. Electric yellows and blues pulsate slowly.

COMPUTER VOICE

Ticket not read. Please exit and
see attendant for assistance.

She tries to swim through space, but she can't move forward.

COMPUTER VOICE (CONT'D)

Ticket not read. Please exit and
see attendant for assistance.

Tears start to well in Charlie's eyes.

CHARLIE

Please just take me home!

A small black butterfly arm reaches into the ATS behind her, grabs her by the shirt collar, and sharply pulls her back.

INT. ATS STATION - DAY

Charlie lands hard on her butt, THUD. She falls prone.

Upside down in Charlie's vision, the Butterfly stands over her. A few feet away, Isla stands with her arms crossed defensively, the Stonefly over her shoulder. The Cockroach holds Yeu up by one ankle, he dangles sadly. They're caught.

Charlie shuts her eyes. Defeated. Game over.

16

INT. MALOVAR'S OFFICE - DAY

16

Thousands of books line the tree bark walls. At the center of the room, Malovar sits and reads behind a stately dark wood desk with four chairs waiting in front of it.

A large globe spins gently in the corner beside a wooden door. It CREAKS open. The Butterfly ushers the teens inside.

Malovar lays her papers on the desk and rises from her seat.

MALOVAR

Welcome back. I apologize for sending my staff after you, but I can't have you frittering about the city when there are urgent matters at hand.

The teens stand stiffly in front of the door. Malovar clears her throat. She motions them toward the seats.

MALOVAR (CONT'D)

Don't be shy, come, come, sit, sit!
I won't bite.

The teens, led by Charlie, reluctantly each take a seat.

MALOVAR (CONT'D)

I know you've taken your own little, ahem, self-guided tour, nevertheless, I promised you an explanation: Welcome to the Anthroposcene.

She points to the globe. The globe floats into the air.

MALOVAR (CONT'D)

Think of the Anthroposcene like your very quiet downstairs neighbor. Humans inhabit the planet's exterior, we anthropods reside below you in the interior.

As she explains, the equator GLOWS, then CRACKS, and the halves FLOAT APART, revealing a smaller planet's map inside.

MALOVAR (CONT'D)

The interior houses a great diversity of races across several distinct regions.

With a flick of her wrist, the globe splits again and again, like a nesting doll, into NINE LAYERS. Charlie softly GASPS.

MALOVAR (CONT'D)

Our downstairs neighbors are the Rabbitfolk. They're strong allies so we tolerate their exceedingly loud outbur- er, customs.

ISLA

Tolerance is a virtue for accomplished statesmen. Does the Anthroposcene tolerate humans in the same way?

Charlie and Yeu look at Isla with surprise. Malovar laughs.

MALOVAR

We have no quarrel with humans, if that's what you're asking.

ISLA

Then perhaps you could illuminate-

CHARLIE

If you don't want to murder, imprison, or eat us, why did you bring us here?

Isla glares at Charlie.

MALOVAR

I'm the Anthroposcene's premier scholar of historical magics and sciences, and I have been working to fulfill a long-forgotten prophecy that has the potential to save not only our nation, but your human nation as well.

Charlie leans in.

CHARLIE

Save our human nation from what?

MALOVAR

An exceedingly powerful demon: Alu.

ISLA

What does this prophecy have to do with us three in particular?

YEU

Demon!?

Malovar slowly rises from her seat.

MALOVAR

The prophecy, handed down through
generations of scholars, states
that as Alu nears his highest power-

As she narrates, she gesticulates to conjure COLORFUL SMOKE
over her head to ILLUSTRATE the tale.

COLORFUL SMOKE: ALU appears as a fiery hurricane with a
familiar sinister grin.

MALOVAR (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Three humans will be gifted with
the glow of Coleoptera- one of our
ancient, nigh-mythological heroes-

COLORFUL SMOKE: Below Alu, three humanoid shapes appear and
glow FIREFLY YELLOW, one by one. Below them, a faceless
FIREFLY goddess raises a hand in blessing.

MALOVAR (O.S.) (CONT'D)

And these humans, perfect and
chosen, will travel to the center
of the interior, slay the demon
Alu, and save all nations from sure
destruction.

COLORFUL SMOKE: The humans LUNGE at Alu. Alu explodes. The
humans stand victorious, under rainbow-confetti-like bursts.

The SMOKE DISSIPATES and Malovar sits.

Isla and Yeu look terrified. Charlie bounces in her seat,
eyes wide with a grin from ear to ear.

YEU

Slay the Demon?

MALOVAR

Yes. Slay the demon. And soon too,
I've been tracking Alu's activity
within the three innermost regions
of the interior, and everyday he
seems to inch closer to freedom.

Isla fixes her eyes on the smallest globe, faintly glowing
red, floating in the center of the model.

ISLA

So he's trapped there?

MALOVAR

Imprisoned, yes.

CHARLIE

Cool, should be easy enough then.

YEU

Easy!?

ISLA

You're not seriously entertaining this, are you?

CHARLIE

Of course! Talk about a once in a lifetime adventure! "Perfect and chosen"? Yes, ma'am! I'm ready right now, let's go.

ISLA

I thought you wanted to go home!?

CHARLIE

That was before I knew we were literally the chosen ones! C'mon!

MALOVAR

Slow down. He'll eat you alive right now. But we'll fix that. You'll come back in 24 hours to begin training.

YEU

That's what you think!

Yeu stands up as if to leave. Malovar stands, he sits.

MALOVAR

Yes. You must. You're not fools. I'm sure you're all perfectly aware of the turmoil your world is already facing at the hands of Alu. Oceans rising, fires, plagues, man at the throat of fellow man-

Yeu squirms in his seat. Malovar bends to meet his eyes.

MALOVAR (CONT'D)

You've seen it in your city, on your very own street, Yeu- just a taste of what Alu is capable of unleashing. Alu can and will bring about the end of the exterior as you know it.

ISLA

And only we can stop it?

MALOVAR

You have the *chance* to stop it. You and only you. You can try to run- or hide- and certainly die. Or. You can fight, and potentially save yourselves and all you hold dear.

They each stare at her: Isla pensively nods, Charlie is on the edge of her seat, and Yeu draws in a deep breath.

YEU

We go, we do it, we kill this, this *Demon*- and the fighting stops? No more riots in the streets?

MALOVAR

That is the idea, yes.

Yeu solemnly stands. His voice shakes.

YEU

Then I will do it. If that's what it takes. To make it stop.

Charlie jumps up with a fist pump.

CHARLIE

Yeah! Let's go!

Isla looks tragically between Charlie and Yeu, who bites his lip. Malovar lowers her eyes to her.

MALOVAR

It is an honor to be chosen, Isla. A sacred duty, really. Would you deny such a responsibility?

Isla draws in a breath and slowly stands, posture perfect. Her voice is brave, but her eyes are scared.

ISLA

If I must, then I must.

Charlie CHEERS. Yeu and Isla exchange a solemn glance. Malovar smiles knowingly.

MALOVAR

Marvelous. Training begins tomorrow.

DISSOLVE TO:

ACT 3

18

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

18

Behind the counter, Yeu stares straight ahead. Frozen, tense.

A poster on the opposite wall: A brightly colored ad for an energy drink features warriors fighting a dragon.

He rapidly TAPS his fingers on the counter. SHALLOW BREATHS.

His vision tunnels into the poster: the colors swell, he can almost HEAR the BATTLE, it comes at him. He HYPERVENTILATES.

TING-A-LING chimes the bell over the door. Yeu snaps out of his panic as a gaggle of chatty teenage girls enter.

He sharply looks down. He draws in a deep breath, puts on a fake smile, then stands and looks up- too abruptly.

A pretty girl, WAI-SI (16), jumps back from the counter, startled. Yeu jolts, startled by her.

YEU

Sorry! I didn't see- Hi! Wai-Si!
How are you?

Wai-Si smiles and places her sandwich on the counter.

WAI-SI

Fine, how are you? I wasn't sure it
was you, your hair is much longer.

YEU

Oh, yeah, ha. My mom is on my case
to cut it.

As he rings up her sandwich, her friends all walk between them and buy their lunches. He rings them all up without a second thought, barely looking down, extremely practiced.

WAI-SI

How is your mom?

YEU

Good. She's good. She's uh. Good.

WAI-SI

And your brother?

YEU

Good. You know, like. Good.

The other girls GIGGLE to themselves by the door. He blushes.

WAI-SI

That's good. We miss you all. You should come by sometime!

YEU

I uhhh. I'll ask my mom.

Wai-Si smiles and grabs her sandwich. She turns to leave.

WAI-SI

Great. See ya later!

The bell TINGS as the girls all exit. Wai-si waves pleasantly over her shoulder.

Yeu blushes and waves back until they're out of sight. His smile drops. He mocks his own voice.

YEU

'I'll ask my mom.' Ugh.

He plops back in his seat and THUNKS his head on the counter.

17

INT. ISLA'S REC ROOM - DAY

17

The wild grin of PIERRE LaFigue, flamboyant frenchman.

PIERRE

Again! *Allez!*

He pulls down a fencer's face guard and jumps at Isla, foil first. Isla, in full fencing costume, parries and thrusts until Pierre lands a hit. They raise their face guards.

PIERRE (CONT'D)

Hit! Isla, *ma belle*, you've gotten rusty since our last bout!

ISLA

I'm sorry.

PIERRE

Non, sorry, *non*! Your *counter-ripostes* is sloppy, fix it. *Allez!*

They lower their face guards. They attack, Pierre parries, Isla *ripostes*, Pierre *counter-ripostes*, Isla steps back and prepares to attack. As she lunges into an attack:

ISLA'S DAD (O.S.)

Unbelievable!

Isla's attack goes wide as she spins around to see her enraged father in the doorway. Pierre gently lands hit.

PIERRE
(Whispered)
Hit.

Isla swats his ankle with her foil.

ISLA'S DAD
Monsieur LaFigue, I'm unsure why you've returned, but I insist you take your leave. This lesson is over, and as I said before, your services are no longer needed here.

PIERRE
Mes excuses. I simply come when I'm called. When Isla called-

ISLA'S DAD
Isla is a child, she has no right to decide such things alone.

ISLA
A child!

ISLA'S DAD
A child. How else would you explain your behavior last night? You were irresponsible, impolite, short-sighted, foolish, and childish!

ISLA
I only went to my room!

ISLA'S DAD
You neglected your duties as a hostess to say good night to our party guests. How do you think that reflects on your mother and I?

ISLA
I think it-

ISLA'S DAD
Get out of your sweaty clothes, wildly unbecoming of a young lady. You have a busy day ahead of you.

ISLA
This is ridic-

ISLA'S DAD

You'll be writing personalized letters to all of our party guests to apologize for your rudeness and explain you suffered a terrible headache and needed to step away.

ISLA

They were *your* friends!

ISLA'S DAD

Not friends, colleagues. Foreign officials, influential businessmen- and they will be *your* colleagues soon. This is basic diplomacy. Letters, in your best penmanship, in my hand, at noon.

As Dad stalks away, Isla glares at the doorway, seething with rage. She lowers her face guard and spins to face Pierre.

ISLA

Allez.

Pierre smiles and lowers his face guard. They attack, Isla fights harder. Faster. Vicious-er! With a perfect *compound-riposte* and an animalistic YELL, Isla hits between Pierre's ribs. She rips off her face guard, crazed look in her eye.

ISLA (CONT'D)

Hit.

19

EXT. CHARLIE'S BACKYARD - NIGHT

19

In true rural fashion, Charlie's "backyard" melds into the expansive, scrubby field beyond; long grass and sparse trees frame a HUNTER'S TARGET on a hay bale. An arrow flies by, several feet above its mark.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

Ugh!

Charlie lowers her bow, frustrated. The bow is far too big.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

"Again, c'mon Charmander, let's go." Fine, fine, shut up.

She draws another arrow from a rusty metal ground quiver. She names each step, then acts on it.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
 Stance, nock, draw, anchor.
 Breathe, TV eyes, feel the wind,
 aim. Release!

The arrow sails through the air! And hits the ground!

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
 C'mon! I used to be good at this!

She examines the bow in front of her. Faint, golden dawn sunlight glints off of it. Carved into it: "JASON MILLER."

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
 Curse you and your big, dumb hands.

Behind her at a sizable distance, her house's lights come on. She nocks another arrow, draws, deep breath, focus. Behind her, the small silhouette of her mom, CAROL, steps outside.

CAROL
 Charlotte Elizabeth Miller!

Charlie jumps and releases the arrow. She spins around. The arrow hits the edge of the target, unnoticed.

CHARLIE
 What!?

CAROL
 What? What!? You disappear all night, no call, no text-

CHARLIE
 How'd you know I disappeared?

CAROL
 You slammed the door on your way out! And you left a mess in the bathroom, and we still need to talk about what you did to your hair-

CHARLIE
 I'm fine, thanks for asking!

CAROL
 Get in the house!

CHARLIE
 (Whispered, hostile)
 Love you too.

She tosses her bow gently to the grass and stomps up to the house, past Carol, who follows her in. Door SLAMS behind her.

20

INT. MANUEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

20

A truck gate SLAMS outside; People SHOUT in Portuguese. A dimly lit, small, cluttered bedroom. MANUEL (18), large, muscular, sits with his head down at his desk, focused. He gently rolls a soccer ball back and forth under the desk.

Patchy facial hair surrounds his pensive frown.

He SCRATCHES numbers and dollar signs across a budget sheet. He circles '-\$2,865,' then abruptly leans back, dissatisfied.

He stares at the ceiling, irate, when a GLOWING BEETLE flies into his cheek. He GRUNTS and swats it into the desk.

The beetle flickers and tries to stand as Manuel's fist, BANG, crushes the beetle, snuffing out its light.

Manuel picks up the exoskeleton and drops it in the glass tube of an old prayer candle on the edge of his desk.

It's full of beetle skeletons.