

AETHER TORRENT #1  
"TORI'S TREASURES"

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. MEDDON - NIGHT

A well-to-do city of stone and brick and pillars settles down a minute before sunset. Modern-looking wind turbines poke up behind the skyline. A YOUNG WOMAN's voice remarks on it all:

TORI (V.O.)  
Everything's just so common. So  
dull and cheap.

INT. MEDDON STREETS - NIGHT

Emission-free horseless carriages drive down a flagstone road lit by electric streetlamps. Sidewalk traffic moves in the opposite direction.

TORI (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Like humans. The radio guy said  
there's a billion of us now. A  
one followed by nine zeroes is a  
pretty accurate description of  
us.

EXT. MEDDON HISTORICAL SOCIETY - ROOF - NIGHT

Small, feathery dragons roost on the point of a roof like pigeons. Another one FLAPS in, nudging itself into place.

TORI (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
But as with anything, the "ones"  
are what make life worthwhile.  
Treasures. Even intangible  
treasures like the sight of  
roosting city-dragons.

BACK YARD

TORI'S P.O.V.:

The dragons, made small by distance, roost on a small yet stately pointed-roof building. Our narrator looks to the West and the sun finally sets behind the skyline.

TORI (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Or a nice sunset.

The young woman's view looks down at the back door of the building. A POLICEMAN stands there, leveling a pistol at her.

TORI (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Or even -- damn it.

POLICEMAN  
Hold it right there!

We finally see TORI, a thief in a dark blue and black leather jacket, from behind. Her orange ponytail hangs down her back.

TORI  
Okay. I'm held.

Above the neck, Tori wears a solid black baseball cap, mirrored sunglasses and a gray ninja-style mask.

TORI (CONT'D)  
Now leave for your own good. I  
didn't come here to hurt you.

Tori pulls a deadly-curved knife with a navy blue handle from inside her jacket. She holds it defensively.

POLICEMAN  
(chuckle)  
Uh, Miss? Gun versus knife?

Dew rapidly condenses on Tori's knife.

The grass around her feet withers.

The cop begins sweating.

Tiny droplets COLLIDE and merge in the air before SPLASHING as drops of water onto Tori's knife.

The cop wobbles on his feet, sweating profusely.

Tori SWINGS her knife. A MASS OF RAINDROPS flies out of the cop, instantly drying his sweat-stained clothes.

Tori TWISTS her knife in the air --

The water from her knife and the water from the cop MERGES in an elegant midair stream --

Which snakes down, PLOWS into the cop and knocks him down.

Tori walks past the cop to the back door. She wears gray pants. The cop WHEEZES dryly on the ground.

EXT. GRAMPUS RELICS - NIGHT

Tori, no longer in her thieving disguise, carries her jacket like a satchel down a sidewalk. She's an athletic 22 years old, now wearing a blue shirt and light blue vest.

TORI (V.O.)

Intangible treasures are nice,  
but material ones are nicer.  
This would be the best job in  
the world if only my boss wasn't  
such a shark.

She nears a window-fronted antique store with a streetlamp out front. A sign above an awning reads: "GRAMPUS RELICS." The awning itself reads: "FINE MATERIALS FOR REFINED TASTES."

INT. GRAMPUS RELICS - NIGHT

A pair of gray-on-white hands with short black claws grip a broom handle and SWEEP the floor. A doorbell CHIMES.

GRAMPUS looks up. He's a shark-man, a *raiza*, 6'-plus. He has holes for ears, gill slits on his neck and a fat brass ring pierced through a small fin-nub at the back of his head.

GRAMPUS

(baritone voice)

Damn it, Tori, I told you to  
start *after* nineteen.

Tori slings her jacket on the countertop and opens it. The spacious store around her is filled with antiques ranging from furniture to fine art.

TORI

Sorry, I couldn't wait.

She takes out a silvery, milk-jug-sized statue of a stout flightless bird from among her cap, shades, knife, and mask.

TORI (CONT'D)

They only had one cop guarding the place. No respect for treasure, I tell ya.

Grampus is even more conspicuous in his conservative button-up shirt. He snatches up the statue and TAPS it with a claw.

GRAMPUS

Magnificent. Solid aluminum.

Tori marvels at the statue with professional interest.

TORI

And over two hundred years old. The local species went extinct before photography existed, so this is a really rare image.

Grampus puts the statue on the counter and resumes sweeping. His thick tail arcs to keep from touching the floor.

GRAMPUS

More importantly, it should sell high. The archon could always use more aluminum flatware.

Tori steps back, dumbstruck.

TORI

You're... you're not going to melt it down, are you? I'll buy it right now, you can dock my pay!

GRAMPUS

(concentrates on sweeping)  
Like I did for that ancient book you couldn't live without?

TORI

Come on, Boss Grampus, who's the best elementalist you've got?

Grampus glowers at her over his prominent sharkish nose.

GRAMPUS

You are simply an employee,  
Tori, useful though you are. I  
will not negotiate. Now wait  
downstairs for more work.

TORI

(sigh)  
Yes sir.

EXT. MEDDON STREETS - NIGHT

A pair of brown legs in the pedestrian mass wears a long,  
dark green and gold skirt. The feet connected to them wear  
sandals.

The legs' owner is AVANI, a 19-year-old Indian girl who lugs  
a giant overstuffed backpack without a trace of fatigue. She  
has shoulder-length black hair.

EXT. SIDE-STREET - NIGHT

Avani turns a corner. A thin green sweatshirt with a diamond  
of gold dots on the chest completes her outfit.

A pair of BOYS, no older than 14, immediately point and LAUGH  
from across the street.

AVANI

(smiles, waves)  
Excuse me! I'm a bit lost. Could  
you boys direct me to your local  
religious center?

BOY 1

Maybe. What's in the pack?

AVANI

I'm glad you asked!

Avani shrugs the pack off. It lands with a HEAVY THUD and she  
rummages through it. The boys make mocking gestures at her to  
each other.

AVANI (CONT'D)

Have you ever lost sleep  
contemplating the evils of this  
world? Have you ever asked  
yourself, "How can I be happy  
when so much suffering exists?"

Avani slips a mitten on her right hand. The palm is a flat  
piece of light green metal.

AVANI (CONT'D)

Well, boys, I have good news.  
You need only accept the gods  
into your heart and they will  
reward your faith with the  
happiness and elemental power  
that only their love can--

The boys stare fixated at her hand.

BOY 2

--Is that mythril?

AVANI

Well, yes, every elemental  
tool needs a vessel material,  
and mythril is--

The boys approach her with clear intent.

BOY 1

--It's worth a ton, that's what.

Avani's expression turns serious. She DUCKS down and SLAPS  
the ground with the metal part of her mitten.

A small EARTHQUAKE hits the street, SHAKING some windows.

The flagstones under the boys' feet LURCH and PILE UP tightly  
around their ankles.

The boys struggle in vain to escape. Avani coolly puts her  
mitten away, hefts her backpack and walks away.

BOY 2

Hey, don't leave us here!

AVANI

You can dig yourselves free. I  
have nothing to say to thieves.

Avani keeps walking. She SIGHS to herself.

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

Maybe I shouldn't come on so  
strong.

(stern face)

No. This polis clearly needs me.  
It needs to know the love of the  
gods.

Avani turns another corner.

A TALL, SHADOWY MAN runs into view at the far end of the  
side-street. His absurdly long blonde hair flows behind him  
as he stops short.

The trapped boys STRUGGLE hard enough to free their feet.

The man cracks a crescent smile between a hooked nose and  
pointed chin. His name is KREUTZET.

KREUTZET

Unmistakable. That heathen girl  
*is* here.

INT. CARAVAN HIDEOUT - LOUNGE - NIGHT

Tori sits alone at a table in a well-kept lounge containing a  
few CARAVAN MEMBERS, her illicit co-workers. They're all  
armed with curved blades of different kinds.

Tori reads from an ancient leather-bound book on the table,  
dreamily content. Two CARAVAN GUYS notice her as they exit.

CARAVAN GUY 1

Heh. Check it out, Tori's still  
lost in that old book.

CARAVAN GUY 2

Nerd.

TORI (V.O.)

(oblivious)

"The source of all magic is the invisible and inanimate Aether," the sage said to the vast crowd before us.

An illustration of an old man speaking to a crowd takes up a full page. A younger man stands behind him. The script on the other page is illegible to us.

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

"We know the Aether only by its elemental manifestations," said he. "That alone is the identity of magic. It is not, as the Elementists say, a proof of supernatural communion. Faith in gods is neither required nor logical to manifest the Aether in its elements."

Tori rests her face on her fist. She smiles.

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

"For if there be gods, they do not care for the goings-on of this world. We are all we have."

CARAVAN GUY 2 (O.S.)

Hey guys! Addanc's back and he's got the painting!

Tori turns around, scowls and closes her book.

HUB ROOM

A MURMURING crowd of a dozen or more Caravan members gathers around a support column in a wide, sparse room with many exits. A couple of the assembled are raiza like Grampus.

ADDANC, a smug black-haired man in his 20s, hangs a 3'-square oil painting on the column. In it, a bearded military man signs a treaty with a humanoid feathery-winged serpent.

ADDANC

(slight Welsh accent)

I know, I know. Look closer, not a scratch on it, like. It's not easy being so perfect.

Tori nudges a path through the crowd to get a better look. She's about 5' 9".

ADDANC (CONT'D)

(smirk)

Torrent.

TORI

Addanc.

ADDANC

Like my new catch?

TORI

Yeah. I saw it just last week when Yenech donated it.

ADDANC

Yes, the museum was kind enough to hold it for me.

Grampus descends the stairs at one end of the room.

GRAMPUS

For the Caravan, you mean.

ADDANC

Boss Grampus! You're just in time. Come look at my--

TORI

--Fake.

A few of the onlookers CHUCKLE knowingly at the rivalry.

ADDANC

Oh? And I suppose you can prove that?

Tori takes the painting down and turns it towards Grampus. Anyone blocking the view moves aside.

TORI

Boss, take a look. You see Lerman's watch here? It's bulletproof. Pretty famous.

Tori indicates the bearded military man's belt. A pocket-watch, clearly gold, hangs from it.

ADDANC

Not everyone cares about history. Get to the point.

TORI

You stole this from the museum? You didn't forge it yourself?

ADDANC

Why, I'm insulted! Of course I stole it. Why do you ask?

TORI

His watch was made of steel. The last time I saw this painting it was *colored* like steel too. So, somewhere out there is an art forger who never went to school. Somewhere closer there's a thief who steals without looking.

The small crowd REACTS in Tori's favor. Addanc seethes.

GRAMPUS

Good eye, Tori. But if this is a forgery, where is the real one?

TORI

(drops the painting)  
If I had to guess, I'd say that it still lives with the man who donated it.

INT. MEDDON STREETS - YENECH'S CAR - NIGHT

DRACH YENECH, a balding egg-shaped robber baron, sits heavily in the back of his automobile. He sees something out his window.

Avani still carries her heavy backpack. The car passes her.

Yenech jostles his DRIVER by the shoulder.

YENECH

Stop! Stop the car, man!

STREETSIDE

The car rapidly slows from its speed of roughly 25 mph. Avani stops walking.

Kreuzet waits around the corner of a building not far ahead. He wears a white and brown military uniform. In his hands are *tonfa*, side-handle police nightsticks.

Yenech steps out of his car, a Santa Claus in a tan suit.

YENECH (CONT'D)

Good evening, young lady.

AVANI

Good evening, sir. I'm afraid I'm lost. Where might I find this city's religious center?

Yenech beckons at his driver and approaches Avani. The car follows him in reverse.

YENECH

Why ever do you search for such a thing in Meddon, Miss...?

AVANI

Avani Lahar. I'm an Elementist, come to spread word of the holy love of the gods.

YENECH

Really? My name is Drach Yenech, and as it happens, I'm in the midst of a spiritual crisis.

Kreuzet GRUMBLES, holsters his weapons and slips away.  
Yenech escorts Avani to his car in the background.

AVANI

No one deserves to suffer like  
that. I can help, sir.

YENECH

Yes, I'm sure you can.

EXT. YENECH'S MANSION - BACK YARD - NIGHT

A tall iron fence blocks off a huge lawn around a mansion  
worthy of Yenech's wealth. Manicured trees line a long and  
narrow swimming pool.

Tori, back in her thieving outfit, tries to squeeze through  
the narrowly-spaced bars of the fence. She can't fit.

Tori takes a step back and stares at the fence, arms akimbo.

A plump city-dragon alights on the top horizontal bar of the  
fence, some eight feet off the ground. It nestles between the  
spiked tips of two vertical bars.

Tori sees it. Her tilting eyebrows suggest an idea.

The dragon keeps roosting. The sound of RAPID FOOTSTEPS  
approaches, followed by a GRUNT OF EXERTION. Tori SLAMS  
against the fence with both hands gripping the upper bar.

The city-dragon flies away as Tori HAULS herself over the top  
of the fence --

Jumps off and ROLLS once to a semi-graceful landing.

FRONT YARD

The front yard is a mirror image of the back with the  
exception of a long stone path in place of the pool.

The driver walks from the open gate and returns to the car.

YENECH'S CAR

The car moves again. Avani looks out the window, unimpressed.  
Yenech leers at her.

YENECH

Do you like what you see? A man with great wealth can bend even nature to his will.

AVANI

Nature is not to be bent.

YENECH

(withdraws)

Odd talk, from an Elementist. Don't you command nature as a matter of faith?

FRONT YARD

The car passes identical, equidistant trees on the path to the mansion. Avani and Yenech are visible inside. The car reaches the front after Yenech speaks.

AVANI

I don't command anything. When I summon an element of magic, I am a temporary vessel for the power and love of my patron god. For Elementists, elementalism is communion, not commandment. It saddens me that so many people can be so misinformed about it.

YENECH

You can tell me all about it inside, my dear.

Kreuzet watches the car, perched atop the iron fence like a bird of prey. His long hair dangles below him.

INT. YENECH'S MANSION - FRONT FOYER - NIGHT

A gaggle of MAIDS respectfully BOWS in an expensively-furnished foyer. So many are present that some bow on the stairs.

MAIDS

(simultaneous)

Good evening, Archon Yenech.

Avani and Yenech stand on a decorative rug. Avani carries her backpack and looks shocked at all the maids.

YENECH

Evening, ladies! Show my guest  
to a South room, would you? I'll  
be in the bath.

Yenech departs. The maid-mass absorbs Avani.

AVANI

But sir, what about -- hey!

GALLERY HALL

The painting that Addanc supposedly stole hangs on the wall.  
The soldier's pocket watch is gray, not gold.

Tori sneaks in from a perpendicular hall right next to it.

Paintings hang every few feet on both walls.

Tori removes her mirrored shades in awe.

TORI

Man... wonder if I can sneak a  
couple extra back just for me.

AVANI (O.S.)

He said he was in a spiritual  
crisis!

MAID 1 (O.S.)

And you believed him?!

Tori hides behind the junction.

The maid mob passes the other end of the hall, hustling Avani  
along. Three maids lag behind, all carrying Avani's backpack.

MAID 2

No wonder Yenech picked her up.  
He likes 'em stupid.

Tori peeks out. She has gray eyes, if we haven't noticed yet.

AVANI (O.S.)  
 I trust in people's good nature.  
 If I'm mistaken, I'd like to  
 leave -- stop pushing me!

Tori puts on her shades.

REAR FOYER

The maids bring Avani to a rear foyer full of tall windows,  
 essentially glass walls, overlooking the back yard.

TORI (O.S.)  
*Hey.*

Tori stands dramatically, knife in hand.

TORI (CONT'D)  
 Yenech has enough girls to screw  
 already. Let that one go.

AVANI (V.O.)  
 (eyes widen)  
 Another one after me? Here?

The maids assemble defensively around Avani.

MAID 1  
 Not a chance. Archon Yenech  
 wants her.

Far in the background behind Tori, the faint image of  
 Kreutzet enters the hall.

TORI  
 That's a sick sense of loyalty  
 you have. Am I going to have to  
 knock you all down to get her?

MAID 1  
 Yes.

Kreutzet braces his stance.

KREUTZET

*Fine by me!*

Tori turns around.

Kreuzet WHEELS a nightstick forward. A ROARING GALE blows down the hall, WHIPPING his hair madly.

The wind SLAMS into the group and KNOCKS DOWN a number of maids.

Tori's cap, shades and knife fly away before she herself TUMBLES into Avani.

Kreuzet casually walks forward.

KREUTZET (CONT'D)

Now no one of importance blocks  
my prey. *Begone!*

Kreuzet raises a nightstick.

EXT. YENECH'S MANSION - BACK YARD - NIGHT

A window-wall SHATTERS OUTWARDS with a ROARING WIND, blowing an unlucky maid out with it.

INT. YENECH'S MANSION - BATHROOM - NIGHT

In an opulent bathroom, Yenech soaks in a bathtub the size of a suburban driveway. A SMALL SHOCKWAVE ripples the water.

YENECH

Hmm? Earthquake?  
(stretches)  
Ah well, the girls will clean  
things up.

INT. YENECH'S MANSION - REAR FOYER - NIGHT

Maids scatter the floor. They GROAN and get up.

Tori and Avani brace against a door frame, the only remaining part of the glass wall. They BREATHE HEAVILY.

TORI  
Just my freakin' luck.

AVANI  
(suspiciously)  
Who are you? You're not with  
him, are you?

TORI  
Hell no. Who is he?

Kreutzet keeps walking, slowly, deliberately. The maids  
SHRIEK and run upstairs.

AVANI (O.S.)  
I don't know. He could be with  
anyone. I'm not a very popular  
Elementist.

Tori jerks her head aside at Avani.

TORI  
Elementist? Where's your tool?

AVANI  
Blown away.

TORI  
Mine too.

Tori and Avani abandon the door frame and run outside.

EXT. YENECH'S MANSION - BACK YARD - NIGHT

A WOUNDED MAID lies on the ground amid shards of glass. She's  
cut all over.

Tori's knife sticks out of the maid's thigh. The hilt is navy  
blue.

Tori slows from a jog and kneels down to her. The maid makes  
a PLAINTIVE WHINE and Tori pulls off her ninja mask.

TORI (CONT'D)  
You'll be fine. Close your eyes.

The maid does -- and FLINCHES, teeth on edge.

Tori wipes her knife on her jacket sleeve and holds its edge at the maid.

Tori concentrates on the maid. The maid's bleeding stops and dries up, not just on her thigh but all over. Dew forms on Tori's knife.

WOUNDED MAID

What are you doing? Shouldn't  
you escape? The rear gate--  
(winces)

TORI

Nah. Running away is way too  
common for me.

Avani fishes around in her backpack and withdraws her mitten.

Kreutzet CRACKS a shard of glass underfoot on the patio.

Avani turns to him.

AVANI

I see now. That uniform. I never  
guessed that you people would  
pursue me here.

KREUTZET

"You *people*?" Don't flatter  
yourself. I alone have come. I  
alone can deal with you.

(grips nightsticks)

I am Kreutzet Tiercel of the  
East Ragloan Air Force! For  
defiling my nation with your  
unholy Earth magic, I shall  
shred you in my claws!

He WHIRLS his weapons up and crosses them over his head.

Tori finishes with the maid and stands up. A GUST OF WIND  
blows Tori's ponytail and the maid hobbles away from the  
mansion as fast as she can.

The glass shards blow away too. Tori notices.

TORI

The glass... hey, Skirt! Get down!

Avani turns her head.

AVANI

Skirt?

A piece of glass CUTS Avani's cheek and draws blood.

Kreutzet performs a TWIRLING, FLOWING DANCE with his weapons.

The wind picks up glass shards in a vortex.

Tori and Avani hide behind two of the trees flanking the swimming pool. Glass shards THUMP into their narrow shelters.

Tori peeks around the tree at Kreutzet.

The shards reveal the way the wind blows: in a tornado directly in front of Kreutzet.

TORI (V.O.)

Okay. If I send a stream on the outside I can maybe fork it and hit him. Okay.

Tori grips her knife and points it at the pool. A glass shard SLASHES her arm and she pulls it back with a CRY OF PAIN.

TORI (CONT'D)

Damn it! Think!  
(realizes, turns head)  
Hey, Skirt!

Avani's hiding position faces the reflecting pool.

AVANI

It's Avani!

TORI

Whatever! That guy said you know Earth magic!

AVANI

So?

TORI

So make a wall and I can stop  
him!

Avani blinks. Her expression turns serious again.

She ducks and SLAPS the ground with her mitten.

The near end of the pool HEAVES and RISES, cracking into a tall and narrow mound.

The mound blocks enough of the deadly wind for Tori to safely leave her cover.

Kreuzet sees what's going on. He SPINS in his dance and SWINGS his nightsticks up.

The glass tornado rises, twinkling in the night sky.

Tori stands behind the wall, holding her knife behind her at the rest of the pool. The water in the pool SWIRLS in on itself.

TORI (CONT'D)

Hey, Skirt. This is a stupidly dangerous thing I'm doing. I'm pretty sure you can escape out the rear gate.

Avani stays put.

AVANI

No. How could I run away from someone whom the gods sent to rescue me? And my name is Avani.

Kreuzet SWEEPS his nightsticks to point at Tori's cover.

The glass-filled air stream snakes down.

TORI

My name's Tori. You're a little unorthodox for a treasure, but I think I'll keep you anyway.

Avani blinks.

The air stream nears.

Tori SWINGS her knife upwards and the water leaves the pool as an UNDULATING DRILL.

The streams COLLIDE HEAD-ON and SPLASH water and glass.

Bits of both pelt Avani's tree and Tori's wall.

Kreutzet keeps pointing his nightsticks.

KREUTZET (V.O.)

That girl's an elemental? But  
the stream is moving so fast!

The water stream narrows and begins to penetrate the air stream, taking glass shards along with it.

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

(panicking)  
Just who am I dealing with?! If  
this keeps up...!

Tori steps out from her cover and glares down her arms at Kreutzet.

Kreutzet panics and THROWS his nightsticks aside.

The air stream dissipates at once --

But the water stream arcs down and heads for Kreutzet.

Kreutzet clenches his narrow jaw. He turns to run --

Part of the patio surface RUMBLES and PILES UP around his ankles, halting him.

Avani holds her mitten to the ground.

Kreutzet looks up helplessly --

And the stream SMASHES into him.

INT. YENECH'S MANSION - REAR FOYER - NIGHT

Kreuzet tumbles in the flow with a thousand shards of glass.

FRONT FOYER

Water flows gently into the front foyer. Blood flows with it, along with a few fine shards.

EXT. YENECH'S MANSION - BACK YARD - NIGHT

The pool is bone-dry.

Tori limply drops her arms.

TORI

Man. Haven't needed to do *that* in a while.

AVANI

Uh, your arm!

The gash on Tori's right arm still bleeds. The blood exits her sleeve and drips down her hand.

TORI

Oops.

Tori swaps the knife to her left hand and holds it to her cut. The blood stops and dries up immediately.

TORI (CONT'D)

There we go. Now if you'll excuse me, I've got a painting to steal. Hope it's not wet.

AVANI

Wait, let me come -- steal?

TORI

I'm kind of a thief by trade. Wait here a few minutes and I can take you somewhere safe. You'll fit right in with the other rare things.

Tori heads for the mansion. Avani lingers.

Avani falls to her knees, whips off her mitten and plants both hands on the ground.

She bows her head.

AVANI

Great one below, sustainer of  
life, I thank you for sending a  
savior on your behalf...

(opens eyes)

But did you have to send a thief?

INT. YENECH'S MANSION - REAR FOYER - NIGHT

Tori HUMS pleasantly to herself and carries the all-important painting away.

FRONT FOYER

Yenech descends the stairs in a robe, surrounded by maids.

MAID 1

It was terrible! A tall man--

Some long blonde hairs mingle with the blood at the edge of the water-spill.

YENECH (O.S.)

--Did you check the art in the  
hall? Is it undamaged?

A trail of blood, blonde hairs and wet footprints on the rug leads away from the water towards the front door.

MAID 1 (O.S.)

Well, *no*, sir, we were a little  
busy running for our lives.

YENECH (O.S.)

Those paintings are worth five  
or six lives! The world doesn't  
*have* many treasures like those!

FADE OUT