

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 so common.

INT. MEDDON STREETS - NIGHT

Emissionless, horseless carriages drive down a flagstone road lit by electric streetlamps. Sidewalk traffic moves in the opposite direction.

TORI (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Especially people. There's a billion now. A one followed by nine zeroes sure seems like an 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)
The "ones" in the world are all I care about. Rare treasures like interesting people...

BACK YARD

TORI'S P.O.V.:

The dragons are made small by distance. They roost on a small yet stately pointed-roof building.

TORI (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The sight of roosting dragons...

Our narrator looks to the West. The sun finally sets behind the skyline.

TORI (V.O.) (CONT'D)
A nice sunset.

She looks down at the back door of the building. A POLICEMAN stands there, leveling a pistol at her.

TORI (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Then there are more material
treasures like -- oh hell.

POLICEMAN
Hold it right there!

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

TORI
Okay. I'm held.

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

TORI (CONT'D)
Now leave for your own good.

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

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

Dew condenses on her knife.

The grass around her feet withers.

The cop sweats heavily, unnaturally. He begins PANTING.

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

The cop GASPS for air, raises his arm to fire --

Tori SWINGS her knife first. A MASS OF RAINDROPS flies out of the cop, drying his clothes and stiffening his skin.

Tori TWISTS her knife in the air. The water from her knife and the water from the cop MERGES in an elegant 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 ANTIQUES - NIGHT

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

TORI (V.O.)

Treasures make life worth living. I guess that's why I tolerate this job. If only my boss wasn't such a shark.

She nears a humble antique shop. A hanging wooden sign reads: "GRAMPUS ANTIQUES -- FINE, LEGITIMATE RELICS!"

INT. GRAMPUS ANTIQUES - NIGHT

A pair of gray-skinned and black-clawed hands grip a broom handle and SWEEP the floor. A door-bell CHIMES off-screen.

GRAMPUS looks up. He's a shark-man, a *raiza*, 6'-plus. He's even more conspicuous in his conservative button-up shirt.

GRAMPUS

(baritone voice)

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

Tori slings her jacket on the countertop and opens it. She takes out a silvery, milk-jug-sized statue of a flightless bird from among her cap, shades, knife and mask.

TORI

I couldn't wait. Take a look.

GRAMPUS
(snatches it, taps on it)
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 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. Aluminum's at two hundred
per ounce.

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, who's the best
elementalist you've got?

Grampus glowers at her over his prominent sharkish nose. He has holes for ears, thin gill slits on his neck and a fat brass ring pierced through a fin at the back of his head.

GRAMPUS
You are simply an employee, and
a disobedient one at that. I
will not negotiate. Wait
downstairs for more work.

TORI

(sigh)
Yes sir.

INT. MEDDON STREETS - NIGHT

A brown pair of 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.

INT. SIDE-STREET - NIGHT

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

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

AVANI

(smiles, waves)
Excuse me! Could you direct me
to your religious center?

BOY 1

What's in the pack, hot stuff?

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 (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Have you ever lost sleep over
all the suffering in your life?
Can you honestly say to
yourself, "I am a happy person?"

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.
The gods *want* you to be happy.
The elemental magic which only
the faithful can summon is--

The boys stare fixated at her hand.

BOY 2

--Is that mythrill?

AVANI

Well, yes, every elemental
tool needs a vessel material,
and mythrill... is...

They approach her with clear intent.

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

A MINIATURE EARTHQUAKE hits the side-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.

AVANI (CONT'D)

If you're going to be rude about
it, you can learn Elementalism
from someone else.

BOY 2

Hey, don't leave us here!

Avani sighs to herself.

AVANI (V.O.)

Maybe I shouldn't come on so
strong...

(stern face)

No. This polis needs me. It
needs to know the right path.

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. Look, 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 us.

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

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

"We mortals know the Aether only
by its elemental manifestations,
the thing we have long called
'magic.'

(MORE)

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

That alone is the identity of magic, not a supernatural communion between gods and the faithful. Faith in gods is neither required nor logical to manifest the Aether in its elements."

Tori rests her face on her fist.

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

(smiling)

"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 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

I saw it just last week when
Yenech donated it.

ADDANC

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

Grampus arrives down the stairs at one end of the room.

GRAMPUS

For the profit of 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

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 like you do. 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, an 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.

Kreutzet waits around the corner of a building not far ahead. In his hands are *tonfa*, side-handle police nightsticks.

Yenech steps out of his car, a villainous Santa Claus.

YENECH (CONT'D)

Good evening, young lady.

AVANI

Good evening. I'm afraid I'm a bit 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've come to spread the holy word of Elementalism.

YENECH

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

Kreutzet 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

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 bars of the fence. She gets stuck and JERKS free.

Tori stares at the fence, arms akimbo. She pulls down her gray ninja mask and SPITS twice at a bar, high and low.

Tori WHIPS OUT her knife, holds it parallel to the bar --
And the spit-marks SIZZLE, eating away at the metal.

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 money can bend even nature
to his will.

AVANI

Nature is not to be bent.

YENECH

(withdraws)
Odd talk, from a foreigner.
Don't you all do that?

FRONT YARD

The car passes identical, equidistant trees on the path to the mansion. It reaches the front after Yenech speaks.

AVANI (O.S.)

Elementalism respects nature.

(MORE)

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

The gods see that respect for their creation and offer its power to the faithful. It saddens me that so many people can be so misinformed about it.

YENECH (O.S.)

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. There are so many, some bow on the stairs.

MAIDS

(simultaneous)

Good evening, Mister Yenech.

Avani and Yenech stand on a decorative rug. Avani still 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 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 shades in awe.

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 he picked her up. He
likes 'em stupid.

Tori peeks out. Her eyebrows suggest indecision.

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. Mister 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.

Kreutzet 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.

Kreutzet casually walks forward.

KREUTZET (CONT'D)

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

Kreutzet 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

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

All right. You are?

AVANI

(suspiciously)
What about you? You're not with him, are you?

TORI

Hell no. Who is he?

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

AVANI (O.S.)

No idea. He could be with anyone. I'm not a very popular Elementalist.

TORI

(jerks head to her)
Elementalist? Where's your tool?

AVANI

Blown away.

TORI

Mine too. Let's fetch them.

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 her thigh. The hilt is navy blue.

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

TORI (CONT'D)

(pulls down ninja mask)

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.

Avani fishes around in her backpack and withdraws her mitten.

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

Kreutzet CRACKS a shard of glass underfoot on the patio.

Avani turns to him.

AVANI

Please, whoever you are. Tell me how I offended you.

KREUTZET

Your polytheism, your Earth magic, your appearance -- all affronts to my nation.

(grips nightsticks)

I am Kreutzet Tiercel, soldier of the East Ragloan Air Force!

AVANI

(sigh)

East Ragloa? *Again?* Why do you
people hate me so much?

Kreutzet grips his nightsticks.

KREUTZET

You exist.

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 runs away.

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 looks aside at Kreutzet. Her back is to the pool.

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! What can I do?
(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 on your side and
I can stop him!

Avani blinks. Her expression turns serious again.

She ducks and SLAPS the ground with her mitten.

The pool HEAVES and RISES on Avani's side, cracking into a tall and narrow mound.

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

Kreutzet 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 at the head of the pool, holding her knife behind her. The water in the pool SWIRLS in on itself.

TORI (CONT'D)

Avani, was it?

AVANI

Yes?

TORI

My name is Tori, and this is a stupidly dangerous thing I'm doing. You might want to hide.

AVANI

No thank you. The gods clearly sent you to deliver me. It is safer here.

Kreutzet glares at Tori and SWEEPS his nightsticks to point at her.

The glass-filled air stream snakes down.

TORI

Well aren't you a rare sort. A little unorthodox for a treasure, but I'll take it.

Avani blinks.

The air stream nears.

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

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

Kreutzet points his nightsticks at Tori.

KREUTZET (V.O.)

What? Water magic alone can't make it flow that fast! Is she using my own low air pressure?

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

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

(panicking)

No... she's doing it in the opposite direction! She has *that* much control over the water's motion? Just who am I dealing with?!

Tori glares down her arms at Kreutzet.

Kreutzet panics and THROWS his nightsticks aside.

The air stream dissipates at once --

But the water stream keeps going.

Kreutzet clenches his narrow jaw.

The stream SMASHES into him.

INT. YENECH'S MANSION - REAR FOYER - NIGHT

Kreutzet 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. How did you piss *him* off?

AVANI

Religion.

TORI

That'll do it.

AVANI

Uh, your arm--!

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

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 a thief by trade. And of course you're coming with me, like it or not. Boss Grampus always needs more help.

Tori heads for the mansion. Avani lingers.

AVANI

I'll, um... I'll wait out here.

TORI

Fine. Just don't go running off. Treasures are rare enough when they don't have legs.

Tori exits.

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 an avenger on your behalf...

(opens eyes)

But did you have to pick one so vulgar?

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.

YENECH

Ladies, ladies, ladies! I
trusted you with the--
(sees the water)
--Oh my! What in the world?

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.)

You fool! Those paintings are
worth five or six lives! The
world just doesn't have many
treasures like those! ...

FADE OUT