

AETHER TORRENT #10
"KARRUN'S GIFTS, PART 1"

Written by

Jack Duffe

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FADE IN:

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY

A pristine white building stands somewhere in the Water District of East Granbridge. A blocky white car idles by the front.

INT. HOSPITAL - LOBBY - DAY

AVANI and CIRRUS (human) walk through a sterile hospital lobby. Avani's left arm is wrapped where the lion-wolf bit her in the previous episode. Cirrus carries a glass of water.

CIRRUS

You thanked her for getting the
blood stains out, right?

Avani holds her injured arm and clenches and unclenches her fist. Cirrus chugs her water and places the glass on a reception desk, to the confusion of a RECEPTIONIST.

AVANI

Sorry, it slipped my mind in my
thanking her for saving my life.
(sigh)
That's twice that Tori has
rescued me. Yet what have I done
in return? What *can* I do? I
barely even understand her...

Cirrus's ear-tendrils vibrate. ADDANC's voice comes through to her.

ADDANC (V.O.)

They didn't print a word about
me, like? What the hell, man!

Cirrus turns her head. Avani looks confused.

AVANI

What is it?

CIRRUS

I could've sworn I heard... hang
on a sec.

Cirrus snatches up her glass and heads back the way she came.

AVANI

Oh, what, don't run off
distracted like Tori did!

INT. AIRSHIP - COCKPIT - DAY

TORI clasps her hands together in the cockpit of the airship.

TORI

This, is, so, awesome!

Tori repeatedly reaches out to touch or grip something on the control panel, but draws back each time.

TORI (CONT'D)

I haven't been in a cockpit in
years! Airships are too rare in
this region, y'know? Oh hey do
you have a radio receiver?

PILOT HINDENNEN and CO-PILOT AKRONNON, a pair of lurutts wearing old-timey aviator scarves, helmets, and jackets, fidget nervously behind Tori.

PILOT HINDENNEN

Well yes, but we don't -- um,
please-please don't touch!

CO-PILOT AKRONNON

That's very-very sensitive!

TORI

Don't worry, I'll be fine.

Tori flips a switch.

INT. HANGAR 1 - DAY

The turtle-shaped airship rests in one of the hangars. A few crate-toting forklifts go to and from it.

A small feathery DRAGON roosts between the propeller blades of one of the airship engines.

The engine makes a CLICK and the dragon quickly flies away an instant before the propeller SPINS to killing speed.

INT. POWER PLANT - DAY

A turbine SPINS, surrounded by water.

WORKMEN, standing on and around a tight steel grate above the turbine, point blue-handled curved blades down at it. They're all operating a manual hydroelectric generator.

The immediate area holds six such generators with workers on each. Thick electrical cables snake out of the base of each generator and through a door into another part of the plant.

EXT. SWITCHING STATION - DAY

An electrical switching station HUMS softly.

INT. ADDANC'S HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Air blows softly out of a large vent into a hospital room.

Addanc, dressed in a hospital gown, reads a newspaper in bed. A curtain divides him from the silhouette of someone else in a neighboring bed.

Addanc's wrists and ankles are handcuffed to the corners of the inclined bed on long enough chains that he's comfortable.

AVANI (O.S.)

It's so cool in here.

CIRRUS (O.S.)

Air conditioning. Still not sure
if I like it.

Addanc lowers the paper. Turns his head.

Avani looks surprised to see him. Cirrus fills her glass at a sink.

ADDANC

You again.

AVANI

Addanc?

CIRRUS

I heard you complaining. Be thankful you're still alive.

ADDANC

What's this, you came just to heckle me?

CIRRUS

No. I thought you could tell Avani something about Tori. You've known her for longer than we have.

(to Avani)

You want to understand her, right? Here's your chance.

ADDANC

Hah! You might not like what I have to say.

Addanc folds up his paper as Avani speaks to him. Cirrus gulps down some water in the background.

AVANI

I don't care. I do want to understand her. I believe now more than ever that Tori was sent to defend me, but she and I often... clash. Please, what is she really like?

Addanc smirks thinly.

He sits up in bed and his handcuffs clink. We can subtly see the shadow of someone in the bed behind the curtain.

ADDANC

That girl has a fixation on rarity. I asked her why, once.

INT. UPSCALE BAR - NIGHT

Tori and Addanc sit at the same table in a reasonably classy bar, presumably back in Meddon. Tori's hair is neck-length and she wears the dark blue and black jacket from episode 1.

TORI

You wanna know? It's 'cause of my mom.

ADDANC

Your mum? What's she got to do with it?

Tori gestures with an empty shot glass. A couple BAR PATRONS pass by her and Addanc.

TORI

She was the first rare thing I knew. Smart as hell, strong as an orca, always made time to show me she loved me. Started me appreciating greatness, y'know?
(sniffles)

Why'd I leave in the first place? You gave me so much, Mom.

Addanc takes a drink of something with ice in it.

TORI (CONT'D)

I mean grabbing treasures with you people is fun, but... gimme that.

Tori snatches the drink out of Addanc's hand.

INT. ADDANC'S HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Back in the present, Addanc adjusts a handcuff. Avani listens. Cirrus holds a loose fist to her bottom lip in a thinking pose.

ADDANC

She whined about missing her mum so much, I never forgot it.

(MORE)

ADDANC (CONT'D)

That's why I tried to kill miss Karen. I knew it'd make that upstaging bitch suffer.

CIRRUS

You couldn't seriously have expected to kill a raiza of Karrun's size.

ADDANC

Sure I could. Torrent never mentioned she was adopted.

AVANI

(to herself)

Why not?

ADDANC

Beats me. But if she had, I never woulda thought *she* killed Grampus.

Avani's expression hardens.

ADDANC (CONT'D)

She'd never kill a raiza, what with being raised by one. That narrows the possibilities, then, doesn't it? I wonder what that god of yours thinks of murder.

Avani stares at Addanc and speaks very solemnly.

AVANI

For self-preservation I returned a soul to the cycle of life. He would understand.

Addanc lies back down and re-opens his newspaper.

ADDANC

You go on believing that, Skirt.

AVANI

My name is Avani Lahar. Thank
you for the information.

Avani exits quickly yet politely. Cirrus lingers a moment to
look at Addanc before following.

Addanc's silhouette, visible on the other side of the
curtain, goes back to reading.

The blue-on-white raiza MESSENGER -- Klauser's original owner
from back in episode 5 -- lies wide-eyed in the other bed.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. LAKESIDE VILLAGE - DAY

Back in episode 5, the Messenger rides KLAUSER through the
lakeside village.

MESSENGER

Ma'am Kurnung! Terrible news!

KURNUNG turns her head. Her skin is wet.

KURNUNG

Oh, it's you. How are things
with the division head?

The Messenger is shorter than her and less thickly built.

MESSENGER

It's not that, it's about your
brother! It's... he's... dead!

EXT. KURNUNG'S HUT - DAY

Kurnung and the Messenger rush out of the former's hut.

Addanc rides the hijacked Klauser away.

EXT. PRAIRIE - NIGHT

The Messenger RUNS across our field of view. Three fast LION-
WOLVES follow him a second later.

EXT. EAST GRANBRIDGE - DAY

The Messenger SWAYS, clothes ruined and bloody, a few dozen meters from a great blue arch in the outer wall of East Granbridge. He collapses.

END FLASHBACK

INT. ADDANC'S HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

The Messenger's breathing has quickened.

MESSENGER (V.O.)
 Avani Lahar... killed Grampus?
 (sits up, winces)
 I have to -- have to tell the
 division head!

The Messenger THROWS off the top sheet of his bed.

INT. AIRSHIP - CARGO HOLD - DAY

Some strong human and raiza LOADERS haul crates and other containers onto luggage carts and wheel them away.

Stacks of containers fill most of the walkable space in the airship. Two raiza could hypothetically piggyback and still not reach the ceiling.

Tori squeezes through a narrow alley between two as-yet-unmoved stacks of boxes. Shipping restraints latched to the floor slow her progress.

TORI (V.O.)
 Bet the rarest stuff's way in
 back, like Solstice presents in
 the closet. Mom won't mind.

Tori snags her foot on one of the shipping restraints and she topples forward.

Her fingertips SCRAPE against the sides of the box stacks.

Tori holds her position. Her grip on the boxes is the only thing keeping her from falling face-first.

Tori lifts the foot she snagged --

And climbs the narrow space vertically, a hand and a shoe on either side.

She reaches the top of the stacks, carefully squeezes between a stack and the ceiling and begins crawling towards the back. Co-Pilot Akronnon's voice reaches her.

CO-PILOT AKRONNON (O.S.)

Hey-hey, you loaders! Unload
this part next, we need the rear
space for the orichalcum!

Tori stops.

The lurutts argue on one side of the container stacks. Hindennen pokes Akronnon in the chest with a stubby finger.

PILOT HINDENNEN

Quit boss-bossing these poor
softskins, Co-Pilot Akronnon!
That Beau human hasn't come with
the orichalcum yet.

Tori's fingernails scratch into the tops of the boxes under her as they CLENCH into fists.

CO-PILOT AKRONNON (O.S.)

That's why we need to prepare,
Pilot Hindennen! Archon Karrun
gets mad other-otherwise!

Tori bites her lower lip. Her jaw shakes.

INT. TORI'S ROOM - DAY

Avani and Cirrus carefully sift through the clutter of Tori's room, clearly looking for something.

Avani checks a bookshelf. Some of the titles are references to Kurt Vonnegut books: "Abattoir Five," "String Bridge," "Dinner of Champions," etc. Some other titles are in raizan.

SOMER sulks past the open door, wearing something business-casual with the shirt unbuttoned. He stops to look in.

SOMER

What are you doing in there?

Avani nearly jumps in surprise.

AVANI

We're -- we're just looking for,
um, rare things.

Somer furrows his hairless brow.

Cirrus thumbs backwards at Avani.

CIRRUS

Avani wants to figure out what
makes Tori tick, so we're
digging for clues. Do you know
anything about her?

AVANI

Did she have any particular
interests? Anything she enjoyed
doing with her mother?

Somer scratches his chin. His claws are very well-manicured.
Suddenly his eyes FLASH open and a plan shines in them.

SOMER

She played the violin.

Avani and Cirrus blink simultaneously.

Cirrus's hand GRIPS a bunch of clothes and FLINGS them off of
a once-well-hidden violin case.

Seen from below, she and Avani hover above it, amazed. Somer
pokes his head in between them.

CIRRUS

Well I'll be damned.

AVANI

I never would have guessed Tori
to be the musical type.

Somer clears the nearest table and sets the case on it.

SOMER

Oh, Tori can surprise you.
(MORE)

SOMER (CONT'D)

The archon trained her body *and* mind. And music was also useful to guide elementalism training.

CIRRUS

Really? I get using an instrument to learn Air magic, but how does it work for Water?

Somer makes wavy gestures to illustrate his point.

SOMER

String instruments help teach every element. See, the simplest forms of elementalism are vibration: waves, wind, heat, tremors. Sound is vibration too.

He unlatches and opens the case as he speaks.

SOMER (CONT'D)

If you're not careful, you can forget the basics. Playing with sound is a great reminder. Even the archon plays cello sometimes.

The violin is surprisingly common-looking for Tori's tastes.

AVANI

It's... ordinary. Strange.

Somer SMILES. In most contexts it would be a dangerous smile.

SOMER

If you wanted to get Tori a present for, you know, saving your lives, I know a place that sells rare instruments.

AVANI

Say, that's a good idea. I can say thank you *and* show her how well I understand her!

CIRRUS

But do you have any money?

AVANI

Oh... no, none local.

Somer thrusts a hand in a pocket and withdraws a fat wallet.

SOMER

It's on me. Take it.

EXT. CITADEL - DAY

Cirrus (wind tiger) alights on the edge of one of the citadel walls and FLIES off with Avani on her back. Avani sits on Cirrus's robe like a saddle.

Down below, Somer SPRINTS along the top of one of the walls.

Further below still, a taxi pulls up to the front gate. Tori disembarks and runs inside.

INT. CITADEL - INNER HALL - DAY

KARRUN, wearing a business-formal suit dress, strides down a hall. Several AIDES follow behind and beside her.

KARRUN

That meeting took forever. Give me *news*, people.

HUMAN AIDE

The bridge-walkers want us to stop cleaning the bridge near the city walls.

KARRUN

Official reply: get a job. Next.

Somer continues SPRINTING indoors, PLODDING and GASPING to a stop in front of Karrun. She and the aides stop.

LURUTT AIDE

There's a... um.

SOMER

Ma'am. Something urgent. Need to. Talk.

KARRUN

Wait your turn, Somer. And button your shirt.
(turns head slightly)
You were saying?

Tori emerges from an adjoining hall behind the crowd, unseen.

LURUTT AIDE (O.S.)

A messenger wait-waits outside the throne room.

Somer busily buttons his shirt.

KARRUN

Very well. Anything else?

Tori alters her voice to something low and professional.

TORI

The orichalcum hasn't arrived.

KARRUN

Tsk. What's keeping him?

TORI

(normal voice)
What's keeping *who*, Mom?!

Karrun FLINCHES. Turns around completely.

Tori stares through her.

TORI (CONT'D)

My friends tried to tell me you were connected to that crook. And you just proved it!

Karrun stares back, looking helpless for the first time. She gets a grip on herself and her expression hardens.

KARRUN

Excuse me, everyone. My daughter
and I need to discuss something.

INT. CITADEL - THRONE ROOM LOBBY - DAY

Somer and the Messenger sit and wait outside an opulent pair
of double-doors in a round lobby. The Messenger leans
forward, fingers interlaced, and bounces his leg anxiously.

SOMER

So. Urgent message, huh.

MESSENGER

Yes. Highly urgent.

SOMER

You know, my twin brother is the
police chief. If they aren't
done in there soon, I'll wire
him something. Maybe I could
pass your message to him.

The Messenger stops bouncing his leg. Looks around.

A pair of raiza-height human GUARDS stand by the exit.

The Messenger speaks quietly in **subtitled** raizan.

MESSENGER

**One of the archon's business
partners is dead. Earlier today
I learned who killed him.**

SOMER

**Ooh, dramatic. What's the
killer's name?**

MESSENGER

Her name is Avani Lahar.

Somer's eyes widen. The toothiest grin in the world spreads
out on his face.

EXT. AIR DISTRICT - DAY

Cirrus flies above the businessy Air District between the citadel and the colossal bridge. It's late afternoon.

KARRUN (V.O.)

Rannom always traded orichalcum
for luxury finished products.

INT. CITADEL - THRONE ROOM - DAY

Tori leans forward in one of the high-backed chairs. Karrun takes up the couch-throne and never once in this scene deviates from a calm and collected tone.

KARRUN (CONT'D)

Cars. Clothes. What have you. I knew they would trade more of the Fire vessel if it was for something vital, but their crop fields were as vibrant as fire itself. So I sent Sir Beau to handle it. You know the rest.

TORI

I can't believe you, Mom. You starve and manipulate an entire city like a common crime boss -- for *profit*? How could you *do* it?

KARRUN

I just told you the how. And the "how" is immaterial so long as the end result is useful.

Tori HITS her fists on her arm-rests and stands up.

TORI

Useful?! Like a, like a common business manager now?! You were making people suffer! What happened to you, Mom?!

Karrun narrows her eyes at her daughter.

INT. ROFUN'S OFFICE - DAY

The brown-on-white raiza SERGEANT barges into an office worthy of a police chief, carrying a folded piece of paper.

SOMER (V.O.)

Say, friend, how long have you worked for the archon?

Gray-on-white ROFUN looks up from reading a file. A desk plaque bears a long illegible name. The Sergeant hurriedly passes him the paper and he reads it.

MESSENGER (V.O.)

Only a year.

Rofun holds the telegram in such a way as to block his face below his eyes. His eyes look up from it.

SOMER (V.O.)

Did you know that this polis was a hermitage for Air Elementist zealots before Karrun arrived forty years ago?

EXT. AIR DISTRICT - ANCIENTS' BLOCK - DAY

A city block in the Air District has no modern construction at all. Everything, even the street, remains in the white-and-gray adobe-like style built upon elsewhere.

MESSENGER (V.O.)

Why, no, I didn't.

Avani's hair and skirt WHIP WILDLY in summoned wind and Cirrus walks up behind her, robed and human-form. They enter a building labeled "STRETTO-VARIOUS."

SOMER (V.O.)

Funny thing about those zealots. Only the youngest ones chose to work for her.

Several subtle RUNNING FOOTSTEPS can be heard approaching.

A soundless BREEZE blows dust through the area. The footsteps STOP. All ambient sounds STOP too.

INT. CITADEL - THRONE ROOM - DAY

Karrun crosses her legs and rests her interlaced fingers on her knee. Tori scratches a fingernail on one of her chair's armrests, avoiding eye contact with her mother.

KARRUN

Ask yourself this before you get angry at me, Tori dear. If you had the means, would you want to show people that life is not always terrible? That it holds some special meaning?

Tori's scratching fingernail develops into a thoughtful drumming of fingers.

FLASHBACK:

INT. CARAVAN HIDEOUT - LOOKOUT - DAY

Back in episode 2, Tori speaks to Avani in the lookout room.

TORI

I want a place to show off *truly* rare treasures from all over the world. I want to show people that life has some scraps of greatness in it. That life doesn't suck.

END FLASHBACK

INT. CITADEL - THRONE ROOM - DAY

Tori one-handedly rubs her thumb in her fingers and keeps avoiding eye contact. The voice-overs continue the flashback.

AVANI (V.O.)

I see... but you'd be displaying stolen goods.

TORI (V.O.)

What museum doesn't?

Tori makes a fist with her thumb-rubbing hand.

TORI (CONT'D)

Yeah, Mom, I think I would.

KARRUN

Elementalism has given *your* life special meaning, has it not?

Tori pulls her knife out from under her shirt and looks it over. It has a navy blue handle and a deadly curve.

TORI

If you want me to forget modesty for a sec, then yeah it has. I love doing something that not everybody can. It... I dunno, whenever I pull water out of something and make it dance for me, it makes *all* life seem worth it, not just mine.

Karrun slowly rises from her throne.

KARRUN

That is exactly what we do, Tori dear. We give the whole world the elemental power to make life more than a parade of mediocrity. And gathering vast amounts of vessels is necessary for that. Do you really begrudge us making a few lives suffer for the benefit of all?

Tori blinks her gray eyes. Karrun looms over her.

TORI

"We?" "Us?"

KARRUN

Yes, dear. We of the Nexus.

EXT. AIR DISTRICT - ANCIENTS' BLOCK - DAY

Avani and Cirrus exit the "Stretto-Various" store and walk some distance down the street.

Avani very carefully carries a violin case, visibly pleased with herself. After a moment she notices Cirrus isn't following her.

Avani turns her head. Cirrus is tense.

AVANI

What's wrong? Did you leave something behind?

CIRRUS

Don't you hear that?

The block is quiet. There's nothing to be heard. Literally.

AVANI

No, it's so quiet...

Cirrus's hair tendrils lift slightly.

CIRRUS

Exactly. This is bad, we're in an air bubble. Somebody's controlling the air for...

(tilts head)

feels like a thirty rem radius, maybe more. I'll pop it.

Cirrus lifts her arms. Wind flaps her robe and Avani's skirt.

A tightly-whirling spear of air suddenly STRIKES the ground behind Avani in COMPLETE SILENCE and unwinds into an equally silent AIR BLAST.

The force of the blow knocks her forward regardless and she COLLIDES into Cirrus. Both of them REACT to the impact.

The violin case HITS the ground without a sound.

AVANI

I, I'm sorry, something hit me.

CIRRUS

Damn it, they're--

Cirrus's mouth continues "muting us," but her voice doesn't.

Avani mouths "They're what?" silently and holds her throat, surprised by her own silence. The voice of an older man, the leading SKYSWIMMER, comes from everywhere.

SKYSWIMMER (V.O.)

Avani Lahar and wind tiger
Cirrus, I presume?

Three more WIND SPEARS fly in from above and strike the ground around Avani and Cirrus with silent AIR BLASTS. The wind violently and silently flaps their clothes and hair.

Avani and Cirrus stand back-to-back. Avani pulls her mythrill ingot from a skirt pocket.

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

You are marked for death and
will not live past the next few
minutes. Make a note of it.

INT. CITADEL - THRONE ROOM - DAY

Tori looks confused. Karrun sits back down and folds her hands in her lap, radiating power.

TORI

The Nexus?

KARRUN

An international organization
dedicated to advancing the use
of magic. We train elementalists
the world over, making lives
special in a world of common,
vulgar things. I've been a
member for twice your age.

Tori's expression is difficult to describe. She shows equal parts sadness and annoyance.

TORI

Then why didn't you ever tell
me, Mom?

Karrun smiles. We take a dramatic angle on her. ("Cirein Cròin" is Scottish Gaelic, pronounced *Ki-ray-een Crow-een*.)

KARRUN

Until a few moments ago, I thought you were not ready. But now, let me introduce myself. I am called Cirein Cròin the Whale-Eater, Beast of Water, one of the Four Executives of the Nexus and head of Division One. My division supplies the others.

EXT. AIR DISTRICT - ANCIENTS' BLOCK - DAY

The SKYSWIMMERS, two humans and four raiza in billowing white and gray clothes, stand on different rooftops out of Cirrus and Avani's sight. They each hold an aluminum staff overhead.

The speaking Skyswimmer is a smooth-featured man with brown hair graying at the temples. He also holds up a staff.

SKYSWIMMER

Don't bother speaking. You can only make a noise if we allow it.

Avani puts on her serious face and STRIKES the ground with her ingot.

Nothing happens.

Avani picks up her ingot and looks at it. Cirrus looks too.

AVANI

The... the ground isn't earth or stone, or even metal!

Cirrus mouths "What is it?" as the Skyswimmer speaks again. Avani presses down hard on her ingot.

SKYSWIMMER (V.O.)

It is the ancient indestructible foundation of East Granbridge. Whatever the foundation material is, it contains no minerals, so Earth magic cannot control it.

Cirrus's eyes dart around, trying to pinpoint the voice.

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

We Skyswimmers own the air in
this bubble. Good luck wresting
it from the six of us.

Avani resumes standing back-to-back with Cirrus. Cirrus continues searching for the voice's owner. Tension builds.

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

Now, stay where you are and you
will suffocate painlessly. If
you resist, you will not hear
the wind spear that kills you.

INT. CITADEL - THRONE ROOM - DAY

Tori holds her forehead and leans her elbow on an arm rest.

TORI

This is too much, Mom. I can see
your argument, and logically it
makes sense, but... you're still
responsible for starving a city,
no matter what secret clubs
you're in. I just... I just don't
know if I can let it go.

KARRUN

What if I offered you a job?

Tori releases her forehead and looks at her mother.

Karrun rises again. She walks to Tori and places an encouraging hand on her shoulder.

KARRUN (CONT'D)

The Nexus could always use more
members. You would teach others
the skills you learned under me
and practiced over your absence.
Not only would you give me a
great gift of happiness, but you
would give many ignorant
wastrels a reason to live.

TORI
(looks away)
I dunno, Mom...

Karrun walks a slow orbit around Tori's high-backed chair.

KARRUN
You would advance your skills,
travel the world, never want for
money again...
(smiles, tilts chin down)
And since you are *my* daughter,
you could take whatever lower-
rank members you want as your
personal consorts.

Tori clearly thinks about that. Blushes a little.

Karrun keeps smiling. She tilts her head at Tori expectantly.

TORI
If I did agree, where would I
teach, exactly? Here?

KARRUN
No, we have enough here already.
(pause for thought)
You mentioned you worked in
Meddon before. How about there?
My regional coordinator Grampus
could use the help.

Judging from Tori's expression, Karrun's words have dropped a hundred steel girders on her. The most she vocalizes is an ad-lib CONFUSED SOUND.

Karrun frowns, half disappointed and half darkly annoyed at her daughter's reaction to her kindness.

KARRUN (CONT'D)
Something wrong, Tori dear?

FADE OUT