

AETHER TORRENT #13  
"NAUR'S GRATITUDE"

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. THE BRIDGE - SLOPE - DAY

It's morning. Soil has piled into a slope at the edge of the mile-wide bridge, overtopping the 20-foot side wall and extending 50 feet out.

TORI stirs in the sunlight underneath a blanket at the border of bridge and slope. She slept in her clothes. She sits up.

CIRRUS (wind tiger) sleeps stretched out on another blanket. Cirrus's left front leg is still wrapped. The collarbone wing and pair of tendrils that Karrun severed haven't grown back.

AVANI plucks a thin blue carrot from the slope and adds it to a few gathered in her arm. She notices Tori. KLAUSER looks at the carrots. A blanket is rolled up on his saddle.

AVANI

Oh, good morning. I found some carrot weeds. They should last us 'til the other side.

Tori rubs her eyes. Cirrus rolls over on her back.

TORI

I really, really doubt that.

Avani transfers the carrots to her many pockets. Klauser snaps one up, juggles it in his beak and drops it.

AVANI

Why? Even with Cirrus's injuries, how long could it take to cross a bridge?

Tori still looks sleepy. Cirrus FLOMPS on her side and keeps snoozing.

TORI

You're not familiar with this continent at all, are you.

INT. CITADEL - THRONE ROOM - DAY

KARRUN, in a new suit-dress, sits on her throne.

KARRUN

They have one hundred forty-four  
kem to travel -- on foot, thanks  
to my fight with the wind tiger.  
Assuming Tori doesn't leave her  
behind, it will take them three  
or four days to cross.

SOMER and ROFUN kneel before her. The high-backed chairs that  
were once in the throne room are missing.

ROFUN

Then why can we not pursue them?

SOMER

Yeah, that's plenty of time!

Karrun SIGHS through her nose.

KARRUN

Plenty of time to fail. The two  
of you caused all manner of  
collateral damage yesterday as  
you failed *three different times*  
to kill Tori's companions.

She crosses her arms. Somer and Rofun bow their heads.

KARRUN (CONT'D)

I sent an official request to an  
ally of mine. *He* will kill them.

(quick build to anger)

Those damn strangers. I gave  
Tori so much, yet she chose *them*  
over *me?!*

Karrun SLAMS her fist on her throne. Something CRACKS.

Somer and Rofun bow their heads lower.

Karrun CLENCHES her jaw.

KARRUN (CONT'D)

No matter how many monsters I must call upon, they *will* die, and I *will* have Torrent back. She still has great usefulness to the world... and to me.

(stands, cracks knuckles)

Now, which of you failures wants to be punished first?

Somer raises his hand. Rofun points to him at the same time.

EXT. THE BRIDGE - DAY

Tori, Avani, Cirrus and Klauser walk along the edge of the soil slope. Klauser carries Tori's bag. Avani's pockets are full of blue carrots.

Cirrus suddenly stops and looks up, SNIFFING at something.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Hey. I smell a fire up ahead.

(sniff)

A little one. Maybe a campfire.

TORI

Of course! Mom used to complain about hobos on the bridge -- maybe he has some food!

Avani gestures to the slope. Little sprigs of carrot weeds are everywhere. Tori runs off in the middle of her second sentence and Cirrus hobbles after her.

AVANI

But Teizen already gave us all the carrot weeds we could eat. Why bother someone else--*hey!*

NAUR'S TENT

A simple wedge tent stands at the base of the southern soil slope. A tiny red spark of campfire sends up a thin plume of white smoke.

Piles of fruits and vegetables are laid out on a large blanket. Some of the piles are uneven.

TORI (O.S.)  
You're a life-saver, pal.

Tori has piled up some of the food on her blanket. Cirrus sniffs at it. Avani seems reluctant to take any.

TORI (CONT'D)  
My friend here would've had us eating weeds all the way across.

AVANI  
Food is food. Do all of these grow on the bridge, sir?

NAUR (as we'll know him) sits between the tent and the food, fully concealed in a long black cloak. He gestures at the food with a bandage-wrapped hand and enunciates too clearly to be speaking a native language.

NAUR  
Ah, no, no. Only weeds grow in this soil. These come from West Granbridge, from the bridge-walker camp.

Klauser roots around in the dirt with his beak. Tori looks up from her open duffel bag, temporarily holding her violin case by the neck. Her black metal box is already unpacked.

TORI  
Really? You don't look like a bridge-walker. You're wearing way too much.

Naur's hood tilts down and he holds his cloak closed.

NAUR  
I am just a merchant. And, ah, I have a skin problem.

Avani examines a potato.

AVANI  
So do you live out here, mister merchant? It seems lonely.

NAUR

I live where I like, and I like the bridge. I hear so many stories here. Did you know that Archon Karrun once made a deal with the Imperial Dragons?

Avani drops the potato. Cirrus looks up from some apples.

AVANI

You mean the storm-bringers?

CIRRUS (V.O.)

I thought they hated raiza.

Tori PUNCHES the clothes in her duffel bag to pack them in tighter. She vents frustration with each punch.

NAUR (O.S.)

They do. But Archon Karrun lets nothing and no one stop what she chooses to do.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. RYŪGŪ-JŌ - DAY

A massive castle complex sits on the sea floor. It resembles Himeji Castle in Japan, with giant red and white corals instead of trees and a bridgeless trench instead of a moat.

IMPERIAL DRAGONS, shape-shifting serpentine sea-dragons, go about their imperial business in both dragon and humanoid forms. Their dress styles are solidly Japanese.

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

When she came to power, she went to the palace of the Great Ocean King *Ryujin* and asked him to calm the hurricanes that once made this area... undesirable.

INT. RYUJIN'S THRONE ROOM - DAY

Karrun kneels at the bottom of a few stairs in an enormous underwater throne room. The walls are decorated floor to ceiling with gems and vibrantly-colored corals.

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

She offered one hundred consorts as payment. Ryujin agreed, but only if Karrun kept the bridge free of elementalists.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. THE BRIDGE - NAUR'S TENT - DAY

Tori has freed up about half of the space in her bag. She begins packing in some of Naur's vegetables.

NAUR (CONT'D)

It is holy to dragons, you see. They would kill any non-dragon who uses magic while on it.

(quick dismissive wave)

Oh, but the bridge is too holy for any but Ryujin or his children to come near and check. None of you need worry.

AVANI

How did you know we--

NAUR

(holds cloak closed)

--Ah, um, do you have something to trade for the food?

EXT. THE BRIDGE - AIR SPACE - DAY

A CARRIER DRAGON, a foot-long Archaeopteryx, flies in from the East. A rolled-up message is tied to its leg.

EXT. THE BRIDGE - NAUR'S TENT - DAY

Tori keeps loading her bag with veggies. Naur holds up and examines the blanket that Cirrus had slept on. The bottom of his gray cloak touches the ground.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Come on, I liked that blanket!

TORI

Oh, hush, you can sleep on mine.

Cirrus sulks. Avani pats her on the shoulder.

Klauser finally pulls his beak out of the dirt, yanking up a foot-long centipede. He juggle-bites it in his beak. An off-screen avian SCREECH catches his attention.

Naur's hood tilts up. Tori freezes as she drops a yam into her bag.

TORI (CONT'D)  
That's one of the citadel's  
carrier dragons!

Naur drops the blanket and lifts his arm. The carrier dragon alights on it. Naur unties the message one-handed.

Avani and Cirrus cautiously move away from Naur.

AVANI  
You're in contact with the  
archon?

NAUR  
(unfolds paper, reads it)  
I am now. Oh, what an honor!  
It's from the archon herself.  
Let's see, an official request...

Tori stands up and draws her knife from the holster under her denim vest.

Naur's hood tilts up from the unfolded message and turns sideways to look at us.

A WATER BALL strikes Naur in the unseen face, throwing back his hood. He CRIES OUT in pain disproportionate to the hit and the carrier dragon SHRIEKS and FLIES AWAY.

The remaining vegetables on Naur's blanket are shriveled.

Avani and Cirrus stay close to Tori. Tori's line trails off and her eyes widen.

TORI  
Gotta hand it to Mom, she...  
really...

Naur clutches his face. It STEAMS and SIZZLES. He's a raiza, but with scaly dark-red-on-red skin. Green eyes peer out between his wrapped fingers.

NAUR

Why you...!

A long, membrane-free tailfin like a thresher shark's lifts up his cloak in back.

Tori, Avani and Cirrus stare at him.

AVANI

His skin! He's a Fire monster!

CIRRUS (V.O.)

I smelled heat on him, but I thought he was just roasting under that cloak!

Naur THROWS OFF his cloak. A long dark-purple robe underneath is short-sleeved. He tenses his hands and his arms BURST INTO FLAME, blasting the wrappings clear off.

NAUR

None will strike me unanswered.  
Not anymore! *Prepare yourself!*

Naur's flaming arms throw two FIREBALLS, left-right.

Cirrus STARTS FORWARD, not moving her feet.

A BLAST OF WIND follows her quick motion and WHIFFS the fireballs out of existence.

Naur draws back in surprise. A heat shimmer surrounds him, which Cirrus's wind blows away harmlessly. He's barefoot, for the record.

Tori's knife is dripping wet. She orbits Naur to her right and SLASHES OUT a water projectile.

Naur JERKS his head towards Tori and lifts his arm.

AETHER VIEW

Naur's silhouette swarms with tightly-packed red swirls. Streams of red swirls shoot from his short, pointed claws -- And bombard the blue-swirled water projectile.

NORMAL VIEW

The projectile EXPLODES into steam.

Tori SLASHES OUT smaller projectiles as she RUNS up the slope. Naur EXPLODES them all as he gives chase.

Avani frantically throws carrot-weeds out of her many pants pockets as if searching for something.

The unfolded message flutters across the soil. Cirrus's left front paw steps on it to hold it down before we can read it.

Cirrus reads the off-screen message. She looks surprised.

Naur repeatedly SWIPES his claws at Tori, dangerously close to the edge of the bridge. Tori ducks and weaves around each swipe. We can see all the way down to the ocean.

TORI

Cirrus! Knock him off! Quick!

Cirrus looks up the slope at Tori.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Tori! He's not with your mom!

Tori looks down the slope.

TORI

*What?!*

Naur's tail SLAMS into her chest, knocking her towards the edge --

And into a quick-rising WALL OF EARTH.

The soil RUMBLES and shifts under Naur, sinking him down and closing tight around him. He's quickly buried up to the neck.

Avani holds her mythrill ingot to the slope. All her pants pockets are turned outward except for one.

Klauser keeps rooting in the dirt, his back turned to the area around the tent, oblivious to what just happened.

INT. OCEAN - DAY

A CARRIER SQUID, a 4'-long white squid, jets through the water at high speed via two powerful external siphons.

It carries a rectangular metal plate in its tentacles. The plate is etched with Japanese writing too obscured to read.

EXT. THE BRIDGE - SLOPE PEAK - DAY

Tori's hand holds the creased message from the carrier dragon. It reads as she reads it.

TORI (CONT'D)

"Official request, re: petition  
for cessation of soil removal  
near East Granbridge: 'Get a  
job.' Karrun Mariana, Archon."

Tori lowers the message. She stands with Avani and Cirrus around Naur's unburied head.

NAUR

The bridge is part of nature.  
Two days ago I went to ask the  
archon to stop cleaning it, but  
for some reason the gates were  
shut. So I left a message for  
her.

TORI

(kneels)

I'm sorry I attacked you. I  
really am. We're running from  
the archon, and she has a lot of  
strong henchmen, so I thought...

NAUR

I *can* respect her power without  
being her servant.

NAUR'S TENT

Naur, freed of the soil, puts his cloak back on in front of his tent. He doesn't bother with the hood.

NAUR (CONT'D)

I am sorry I misunderstood. Most people fear my appearance, or hate my power, and attack me. That is why I hid my skin. That is why I am here alone.

Tori and Avani stand near Naur. Cirrus sniffs at the desiccated food on Naur's blanket. Klauser keeps rooting in the dirt in the background.

AVANI

(looks down, folds hands)  
How sad... do you not even know you are blessed.

Tori CRINGES. Naur turns to look straight at Avani.

NAUR

*Blessed?*

Avani walks up to Naur, unafraid. He's 6' tall and she's about 5' 3".

AVANI

The elements of magic are sacred extensions of the gods' power. The Fire magic in your body is proof that you are blessed!

In the background, Tori moves her mouth, then looks surprised that she says nothing. She grabs her throat and silently yells at Cirrus, who innocently looks away.

NAUR

*Blessed!* What sort of blessing makes skin burn at the touch of water?

AVANI

That is not my place to guess.  
(MORE)

AVANI (CONT'D)

The gods have plans for every  
life, so your power must somehow  
fit into their plan for you.

Tori has Cirrus in a headlock. Neither of them makes a sound.

Naur turns away and walks a few paces up the slope. Little  
plants grow randomly on it.

NAUR

If they plan my life, I have  
*only* one reason to thank them.  
When my family threw me away,  
when I had to trade to survive,  
when I wandered in search of  
people who did not hate me at  
sight... I came here.

We take another look at the enormity of the bridge. Both ends  
curve over the horizon.

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

Granbridge is old, yet it never  
weathers, and no one knows who  
made it or how it was made. It  
is proof that the world holds  
and hides things much... *greater*  
than the misery my life has  
seen. It is... how to say it?

Tori elbows Cirrus. Cirrus tilts her head and a quiet, airy  
WHUMP is heard.

TORI

The word is "rare."

Naur turns back around and blinks his emerald green eyes.

TORI (CONT'D)

It's something immense and  
special that just *is*, without  
known reason. It's an example of  
greatness in a world full of  
mean, common stuff. It's *rare*.

(MORE)

TORI (CONT'D)

(motions to Naur)

Rare like a raiza full of Fire  
magic, for instance.

Naur exhales a single CHUCKLE. Steam comes out with it.

NAUR

Blessed. Rare. Ridiculous words  
to say about a monster.

(faint smile)

You may call me "Naur." Please,  
tell me more ridiculous things.

EXT. RYŪGŪ-JŌ - NIGHT

The sea has darkened, but the castle GLOWS with bio-  
luminescent coral. The white carrier squid JETS toward it,  
still carrying the message plate.

EXT. CASTLE ACCESS RAMP - NIGHT

Two figures stand in a secluded, high-walled ramp to the  
castle keep.

PRINCE YODAI (human), an impossibly good-looking Imperial  
Dragon with jade-on-beige skin, pins us to the wall. Forking  
dragon horns emerge from his silky black hair.

YODAI

Trust me, no one ever uses this  
path. We can play here for hours  
without being disturbed.

You dai holds a male dragon CIVILIAN (human) against a wall.  
You dai wears a black and white kimono decorated with white  
chrysanthemums -- only the pants and halfcoat, no shirt.

CIVILIAN DRAGON

(subtitled Japanese)

**B-but, my prince, we shouldn't!**

YODAI

(touches civilian's lips)

You can speak casually to me.

(MORE)

YOUDAI (CONT'D)

The human tongue is beautiful,  
too, in its way.

(leans in seductively)

Now, call my name in it...

A WATCHMAN (human) swims up the path with furious sweeps of his human-form tail. He clutches the squid's message plate and speaks **Japanese**, subtitled, like the civilian.

WATCHMAN

**Move aside! Make way!**

You dai frowns. He has four dark blue carapite earrings in each ear. He releases his captive and raises an arm at the Watchman.

A SWIRL of water SLAMS against the Watchman, halting him.

YOUDAI

*Oh*, do you *mind*? I'm trying to  
have some *me* time out here!

WATCHMAN

**Please, Prince Youdai, I have an  
urgent message for your father  
the king!**

The civilian discretely swims away.

YOUDAI

If it's good enough for him,  
Watchman, it's good enough for  
me. Give it.

You dai beckons. A SWIRL of water yanks the message plate from the Watchman's hand and Youdai snatches it.

Youdai dangles the plate between his thumb and middle finger, extending his pinky. His claws are white and curved.

YOUDAI (CONT'D)

Hail King Ryujin, blah blah... oh,  
it's from that ugly shark-woman.

Youdai keeps reading. The Watchman approaches and reaches out to the plate, but Youdai raises his arm and BLASTS him out of frame with another SWIRL of water.

KARRUN (V.O.)

Despite my strongest efforts,  
elementalists walk your bridge.  
One of them is a human female  
with orange hair. Bring her to  
me alive. Kill the others. Do  
this, and the Nexus will give...

YOUDAI

(grinning)  
*One hundred* new consorts. I *have*  
been getting bored of mine.

The Watchman keeps his distance this time.

WATCHMAN

**Prince Youdai. Your father will  
not look kindly on you if you  
delay this message.**

Youdai holds the plate in his palm. The Watchman approaches.

Youdai TENSES his hand. A swirl of water COMPRESSES the plate into a jagged ball in front of the Watchman's face.

Youdai smiles down his extended arm and tilts his chin up at the Watchman, SMIRKING.

YOUDAI

**I am Prince of the Eastern Sea.  
I will do as I please.**

EXT. THE BRIDGE - MIDPOINT - DAY

It's morning. At this point on the bridge, the soil slopes into a very gentle valley which covers 99% of the roadbed. The party is camped in the soil-free middle.

Klauser unearths, and begins eating, a massive worm.

NAUR (O.S.)

I thought on what you said.

Naur, cloakless, cups his hands over a potato. It bakes in no time at all and he splits it, releasing gentle steam.

NAUR (CONT'D)

Evading Karrun *and* searching for three different things means all of you have a long road ahead. Are you sure you want that?

He passes the potato to Tori, who blows on it. Avani is already eating one. Cirrus rests on her favored blanket. Her severed wing and tendrils have already begun growing back.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

If the alternative is dying and never seeing my kids again, then I'll make do.

AVANI

A long road means I can tell more people about the gods. I want nothing more than that.

TORI

(eats potato)

I've got nowhere else to go. And a real museum has treasures from everywhere.

Naur thoughtfully bakes another potato in his hands.

NAUR

I am used to long roads. But on all of them I never met people so fast accepting and, and... *open* as you. Wherever it is your party goes, may I come?

Tori, Avani and Cirrus pause to think. Tori and Avani look at each other. Cirrus SNIFFS, occupied with something distant.

AVANI

The gods must have ordained that he cross our path, like Teizen crossed my path with yours.

TORI

It's more accidental than that,  
but it doesn't matter. Cirrus,  
what do you think?

(pause)

Cirrus?

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Something's coming... and it  
smells like salt.

EXT. OCEAN - DAY

Rain rises vertically from the ocean.

It merges into a patch of dark, fast-moving clouds --

The edge of which hovers half-on and half-off the bridge. The tall clouds do *not* block the morning sun, so the scene remains bright. The clouds cover a square mile at very most.

INT. RAINCLOUDS - DAY

Up in the clouds, Youdai (dragon) is encased in a SWIRLING STREAM of water. His constant fast motion and tight control of the stream overcomes gravity. He's about eleven feet long.

YOUDAI

Nothing like rain to announce a  
royal presence!

EXT. THE BRIDGE - MIDPOINT - DAY

RAIN starts falling. Wisps of STEAM rise from Naur's unprotected skin.

Naur disappears into his tent and Tori and Avani follow. Cirrus can't fit, so she only sticks her head in after them.

Klauser SHAKES his body in vain to dry himself.

INT. NAUR'S TENT - DAY

Naur puts on his cloak and pulls his hood over his head. Tori's duffel bag and a big yet empty dull-green camping backpack are in here too.

NAUR

It must be a dragon!

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Then why didn't you sense it?  
You're a monster too! And move  
over, my ass is getting soaked.

Cirrus nudges in. It's far too crowded to fit more than her head and shoulders.

NAUR

I am a *Fire* monster. I can only  
feel magic close to me, like the  
distance of heat.

AVANI

Naur, I thought you said dragons  
wouldn't come near the bridge.

NAUR

This one must be royalty, or  
under orders from them.

Tori sets her teeth on edge.

TORI

Damn it, Mom. Naur, stay out of  
the rain, we'll handle this.

EXT. THE BRIDGE - MIDPOINT - DAY

Tori, Avani and Cirrus exit the tent, quickly soaked. Tori  
draws her knife.

You dai descends in his swirl of water. His clothes follow  
further behind in the swirl. The clouds keep RAINING HEAVILY.

You dai's water-swirl EXPLODES outward --

DRENCHING Tori, Avani and Cirrus even more.

Klauser takes that as a cue and bravely RUNS AWAY, Westward.

You dai (human) is dressed. He bows in the most flamboyant way  
possible.

YOUDAI

Many wonderful greetings to each of you. I have come to find elementalists, and I see very plainly that you are they.

TORI

I know Karrun sent you. Whatever she promised you is a lie.

YOUDAI

I have reason to *doubt* that.

AETHER VIEW

Youdai's silhouette is packed solid with blue swirls. He flicks his wrist and the swirls fly from his curved claws into the rain.

NORMAL VIEW

Youdai points his finger.

A WATER SPHERE forms out of rain around Avani's head. The water flows into her mouth and nose and she CONVULSES.

Tori SLASHES through the sphere --

The sphere SPLASHES away. Avani falls out of frame and makes COUGHING and RETCHING NOISES.

Tori circles wide around Youdai. Cirrus INHALES and spits out an AIR DRILL at him.

The air drill SPLASHES through the rain at high velocity.

Youdai TWIRLS and dodges it, very light on his feet. He dodges another one in the same way and uses the dancelike flow of his arms to summon a HUGE WATER STREAM.

Cirrus can't evade it fast enough. The stream PLOWS into her, sweeping her up and away.

Youdai directs Cirrus and the stream through the air.

Tori runs up behind him, SPLASHING loudly --

She holds her knife as if to stab him, but the water stream SLAMS Cirrus into Tori and takes her along for the ride too.

Youdai raises his arms --

YOUDAI (CONT'D)

What *am* I thinking?

Points one arm aside --

And the stream forks, directing Tori away from Cirrus and dropping her to the rapidly-muddying ground.

YOUDAI (CONT'D)

Can't have the orange-haired one drowning on me.

Youdai directs the stream to SLAM Cirrus hard into the ground. The stream lifts her up and SLAMS her down again.

Tori's hand TREMBLES as it clutches her knife.

TORI (V.O.)

How is he holding her like that?  
She's not that weakened! Unless  
this guy's really *that* strong...

TENT

Naur clutches at his cloak. Rain POUNDS the tent walls.

NAUR

They can handle it. They fought  
Karrun and lived, they can  
handle it.

Cirrus, trapped in the stream, SMASHES through the tent.

MIDPOINT

Cirrus fights to free herself from the stream, but amazingly, she can't.

The soggy earth under Youdai RUMBLES, SINKS and SNAPS SHUT over his legs and tail, dirtying his pants.

YOUDAI  
 (shrieking)  
 My *hakama!* How dare you!

Avani looks off-screen. She holds her ingot to the ground.

AVANI  
 (coughing)  
 T-tori! Now!

Tori runs at Youdai's unprotected back.

Youdai pulls his tail from the mud and SWINGS it at her --

KNOCKING Tori backwards with an ARC OF WATER.

Youdai angrily SLAMS Cirrus into Avani --

TWISTS his hands --

And entraps them in two LARGE WATER SPHERES.

Naur stands up from under his ruined tent. STEAM rises from him as the rain soaks his cloak.

Youdai steps out of the mud, equal parts angry and offended.

YOUDAI  
 You know how *hard* it is to get  
 dirt out of sea-silk?!

Tori levels her knife at her friends --

Youdai's eyes dart to the side --

A water stream STRIKES Tori in the upper back and HAMMERS her into the mud, burying her.

Naur's body STEAMS.

NAUR  
 Stop it...

Cirrus and Avani SMASH into each other under Youdai's direction. Youdai turns his head, giving us another view of his earrings, and the women pause in midair.

YOUDAI

Eh? Another one?

Naur THROWS OFF his cloak, exposing his un-robed skin directly to the rain. Steam POURS from him.

NAUR

(wincing)

*Ssstop* it!

You dai blinks his ruby-red eyes.

YOUDAI'S P.O.V.:

Red swirls radiate from Naur's body. Blue swirls radiate from the falling and fallen rain. The Aether-view is an overlap.

You dai GRINS.

You dai keeps a hand raised and saunters toward Naur. He wiggles his hand as if rolling meditation balls. Cirrus and Avani's spherical prisons orbit each other above him.

YOUDAI

*Who* are you? I've never seen a magic-empowered raiza before.

Tori digs herself out of the mud. She's covered in it.

Naur approaches You dai with zero romantic intent.

NAUR

I am *Nhrh1hrnuvgr*. Or Naur. You?

You dai licks his teeth and comes closer.

YOUDAI

*Mmmm*, you can call me You dai.

Naur closes his eyes.

NAUR'S P.O.V., AETHER VIEW:

The world is a blurry mess of blue swirls. You dai's blue-packed silhouette walks into focus. Additional blue swirls flood from his ears to the rest of his body.

YOUDAI (CONT'D)  
Checking me out, huh? You like  
what your senses show about me?

Youdai's silhouette strokes its chest with its free hand.

NORMAL VIEW

Naur GRABS Youdai's ears where his earrings hang.

Tori sees it happen. Her face is clean but she's still muddy.

YOUDAI (CONT'D)  
(breathy)  
Ooh, yeah, forceful--

Naur's hands IGNITE and RIP Youdai's ears, taking the earrings with them.

Youdai SHRIEKS, backs away and holds his ears. They're instantly cauterized, so they don't bleed.

Avani and Cirrus's water spheres COLLAPSE and drop them --

They LAND with little harm in the mud and GASP for breath.

The rain keeps falling, but it slows dramatically.

Naur throws the be-ringed scraps of ears off-screen.

Youdai's ears are mangled. His jaw QUIVERS.

YOUDAI (CONT'D)  
You bitch! You *bitch!*

Youdai RAKES his claws at Naur, SLASHING out a basketball-sized water projectile --

Tori twists her knife up --

The projectile follows her motion, missing Naur --

And SMACKING Youdai in the face with the force of a punch. Youdai SHRIEKS again.

Tori stares him down.

TORI

Carapite earrings. I should've guessed. Monsters don't need vessel materials, but contact *with* them jacks up their power. I wonder how much more you can take as an ordinary dragon.

Avani and Cirrus have recovered and are on their feet.

You dai is surrounded on four sides by Tori, Avani, Cirrus and Naur, clockwise. Their positioning is important.

You dai holds his abused cheek. His eyes dart back and forth.

YOU DAI

This isn't over, human. I *will* have those consorts. I *always* get what I want!

The water on the ground flies toward him.

The water merges with the waning rain into a WATERSPOUT which surrounds You dai and rises into the shrinking clouds.

You dai (dragon) swims up the waterspout and into the clouds, his clothes following behind him.

The clouds move off the bridge and continue Southward.

The four-member party watches the clouds leave.

NAUR

I do not understand. Consorts?

TORI

(sotto)

Apparently Mom is a madam.

Far away and yet visible, Klauser GWARKS at the party. Tori cups her hands over her mouth.

TORI (CONT'D)

He's gone, you big coward! Come on, we got a long way to go!

(pause)

Wherever we want to go...

Naur's broken tent rests on the damp ground.

EXT. THE BRIDGE - FURTHER MIDPOINT - DAY

The party walks in a very loose line. Tori leads the way, Cirrus follows with a lesser limp than before, and Avani rides Klauser and carries Tori's bag.

AVANI

It's a long way to "wherever,"  
but we surely go with the gods'  
favor. Just look at us! Water,  
Air, Earth...

Naur keeps pace a little behind and to the side of Cirrus, wearing his giant backpack. It looks suspiciously light.

AVANI (CONT'D)

And Fire.

NAUR

I would not want to travel with  
anyone else. Thank you... thank  
you all.

Naur closes his eyes. A blood-red tear leaks from one.

The teardrop falls and solidifies.

It hits the ground as a tiny red stone, unnoticed, as the party moves on.

FADE OUT