

AETHER TORRENT #14
"AVANI'S SUBTLETY"

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. WEST GRANBRIDGE - DAY

A city at the West end of the titanic bridge is buried under a rolling layer of earth, grass and clusters of trees. The tops of buried buildings hint at the city's former glory.

Large thatch-roofed houses border a mostly-buried copy of the East Granbridge Citadel like coral on a shipwreck.

EXT. WALLACE'S GARDEN - DAY

A pair of male hands hold a curve-edged hand shovel which has a dark blue ring attaching the blade to the handle. Water condenses on the shovel blade.

WALLACE, a middle-aged man in a dirty yellow and gray poncho, SPLASHES the water over tomato plants in a sizeable outdoor garden. He is a "bridge-walker," a hippie in all but name.

Wallace smiles over the plants. He turns his head when Naur's voice calls him.

NAUR (O.S.)

Wallace!

TORI, AVANI (riding KLAUSER), CIRRUS (wind tiger), and NAUR approach the garden. Naur waves, cloakless.

INT. WALLACE'S HOUSE - DAY

The walls of Wallace's spacious, rustic home are full of racks of useless objects and mechanical junk. Colored Christmas lights, permanently off, hang from the ceiling.

WALLACE (O.S.)

So the archon denied the
request, huh? That figures.

Tori, Avani, Cirrus and Naur sit on a big woven rug. There's no furniture in sight, just the junk shelves and a long, tie-dyed cloth screen blocking the rear half of the house.

NAUR

It was not a total loss. If
Karrun's reply did not come when
it did, I might not have met
these women.

AVANI

And if not for him, Cirrus and I
might have moved to our next
lives prematurely.

(folds hands)

May Teizen always support you
for choosing Naur as your
messenger.

TORI

(muttered)

Fishing for converts, Avani?

AVANI

Shush.

EVELYN, a blue-eyed, black-haired pregnant woman in a white
shift, walks out from behind the screen carrying a steaming
teapot and a pair of earthenware cups.

EVELYN

Naur just came along at the
right time for me to ask him. If
I let *this* dummy go to the East,
he'd have come back with even
more junk.

Wallace takes the teapot and cups and pours the former into
the latter. Evelyn carefully sits down and playfully punches
Wallace in the shoulder after he speaks.

WALLACE

Aw, Evelyn, not in front of the
guests.

EVELYN

Anyway, what can we do for ya?

Wallace passes the cups to Tori and Avani once he finishes
filling them.

NAUR

It's about the packages I left.

WALLACE

Oh, right, right. I didn't want your stuff to get lost in mine, so I put it in the castle.

NAUR

Where in the castle, exactly?

WALLACE

(long contemplative pause)
I forget.

EVELYN

(sighed out)
Wall-ace...

EXT. WEST GRANBRIDGE - DROP-OFF - DAY

The sheer rock sea-cliff is as steep here as it was in East Granbridge.

The surf CRASHES into the base of the cliff and flows into a tall tunnel. The retreating wave shows the tunnel's base to be at the current tide level.

The sea SWELLS in a suspicious lump in front of the tunnel, overtaking the opening in height.

PRINCE YODAI (human) steps out of the swell and into the tunnel. The swell COLLAPSES into a wave --

Which ROARS deep into the tunnel.

You dai clenches a well-manicured fist. His ears have healed, but they're still jagged where Naur ripped the earrings off.

YODAI

I knew it. The East and West are twins, and the East had to have sea access to send that message.

The wave faintly ECHOES in the far reaches of the tunnel.

You dai rubs his hands together.

YOUDAI (CONT'D)

Those elementalists should reach
the polis soon. They'll never
suspect me from below.

(smiles, bites lip)

Ooh, Youdai, you clever minx. I
can almost taste that reward.

EXT. WEST GRANBRIDGE - DAY

Avani and Wallace speak through the following shots.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

- 1). A BRIDGE-WALKER MAN touches the pale-green face of a hoe
to the ground. The ground RUMBLES into rows of tilled earth.
- 2). Inside a house, a BRIDGE-WALKER WOMAN takes a shiny-
orange flower pin from her hair and touches it to the bottom
of a kettle. Steam SHOOTs OUT of the kettle.
- 3). A small group of BRIDGE-WALKERS skinny-dip in a rain-fed
lake. They have a playful WATER FIGHT with hand shovels.

AVANI (V.O.)

So, mister Wallace, is everyone
here an elementalist?

WALLACE (V.O.)

Yep, every one. It used to be
that the archon shipped stuff
back and forth over the bridge.
We got some nice vessels before
she switched to all-airship.

EXT. BURIED CITADEL - DAY

Wallace leads Tori, Avani, Cirrus, and Naur around the
citadel.

AVANI

You know, if your settlement had
a place of worship, your
elemental skill would improve.

WALLACE

Sorry, we're not into religion.
Not looking to change, either.

AVANI
(deflated)

Oh.

ENTRY PORTAL

The party and Wallace stand by a large rounded window-hole in the citadel. It's now at ground level.

WALLACE
Here's the best way in. I'll be
in the orchard if you need
anything. Take care, man.

Wallace leaves. Tori looks reluctantly at the window.

TORI
Now that we're here, I dunno if
we should bother. If Mom sent
anyone else after us, they could
catch up while we're wandering
down there.

AVANI
(to Naur)
Tori does have a point. What did
you leave behind, anyway?

Tori takes immediate interest at the word "treasures."

NAUR
My money. Oh, and some things
given as payment -- treasures,
probably. I could never
accurately appraise them.

TORI
(rubs hands together)
Why didn't you say so? Let's go!

Cirrus SHUDDERS and turns away from the entrance. Avani pats her on the shoulder.

CIRRUS (V.O.)
No thanks. I hate caving.

AVANI

That's all right. You can stay and help me evangelize. These people need Elementism to guide their elementalism!

Tori follows Naur into the buried citadel. She waves over her shoulder.

TORI

Suit yourself. Careful you don't make another angry mob.

AVANI

That incident in Rannom happened under entirely different circumstances! There won't be any violence this time!

EXT. AIR SPACE - DAY

A rigid oval airship painted brown and white like a hawk flies in silence above some clouds over the sea. It's smaller and narrower than the turtle-shaped airship we've seen.

Two AIRMEN, soldiers in blue and white uniforms, stand on the top of the airship at the front and rear, twirling aluminum *nunchakus* skyward in absolute silence.

As we close in on them, we pass an invisible barrier and all the PROPELLER SOUNDS of the airship flood to our ears. The airmen are encasing the ship in an air bubble.

INT. RARÓG'S AIRSHIP - GONDOLA - DAY

Eight more airmen sit in the airship's gondola, each carrying an aluminum *nunchaku*. The gondola is a 13-seater, minus the single-pilot cockpit. Four seats are empty.

RARÓG, a skinny 4'-tall man in a white, brown and blue military uniform, gazes out of one of the many windows. His dwarfism is pituitary, so his body proportions are normal.

The lone PILOT wears a helmet with a tinted visor. His only exposed skin, suspiciously pale white, is his mouth and chin.

PILOT

Lieutenant Tiercel, was it
really wise to leave so early?
Won't we need the others?

Raróg sneers. (His name is Polish, ['raruk], so it sounds more like Rarook. The second r is trilled.)

RARÓG

Our target is an agricultural
ruin, pilot. Colonel Levanter is
mistaken if he thinks we need a
fleet to conquer it. Before this
day is done, all of West
Granbridge will kneel before
Raróg Tiercel!

Two of the airmen SNICKER. Raróg turns to look at them and they shut up at once.

INT. CATACOMBS - DEEP TUNNEL - DAY

You dai stumbles around in the darkness.

YOU DAI

No trace of elements... what's
this stupid tunnel made of?!

You dai waves his arm and water SPLASHES the walls and floor.

YOU DAI'S P.O.V., AETHER VIEW:

A thin layer of blue swirls shows the outline of a wide tunnel. A hole is visible in the ceiling.

YOU DAI (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Ah, here we go...

The blue in the walls melts into a soft yellow glow.

INT. BURIED CITADEL - INNER HALL - DAY

Tori and Naur walk down an immaculately clean hallway. Naur leads the way, floating a fireball in his hand. The fire makes his scaly dark-red-on-red skin look scarier than usual.

TORI

It's uncanny. The floor plan is exactly like back home... wait.

Light glows from a room ahead and to the left.

NAUR

Someone lives here?

Tori draws her knife.

TORI'S ROOM REVISITED

Tori peeks around the edge of the doorway. SWEEPING is heard.

A bright lantern stands on the floor of a large, clean, bare-walled room.

CLEANER MOTILLIL, a naked lurutt with a white bandanna around his neck, furiously SWEEPS dirt back into a tunnel entrance that was once a huge window.

CLEANER MOTILLIL

Dirty foreign contamin-aminants.

Tori drops her tension and enters the room, looking around curiously. Naur follows, his fireball adding more light.

CLEANER MOTILLIL (CONT'D)

(turns, points broom)

Was it you make-making trouble for Cleaner Motillil? You put that box here?

NAUR

Uh, yes. Yes I did. Where is it?

Motillil thumbs over his shoulder into the earthen tunnel.

CLEANER MOTILLIL

Cleaner Motillil put the dirt-dirty box in this empty supply tunnel.

Naur scratches his head and turns to Tori.

NAUR

Please forgive the extra delay.

TORI

Huh? Oh, it's no problem. I've gone on treasure runs with bigger setbacks than this.

(pats Naur's shoulder)

Let's go, Naur.

Naur heads to the tunnel. Tori lingers, looking around.

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

This place...

Motillil SWATS Tori's boots with his broom, ruining the mood.

CLEANER MOTILLIL

Move it move it!

Tori KICKS Motillil onto his shell and enters the tunnel. Motillil rolls back and forth and rights himself.

CLEANER MOTILLIL (CONT'D)

Agh! Medic! Medic! Oh wait.

EXT. CITADEL SQUARE - CENTRAL WATCHTOWER - DAY

Avani and Cirrus approach the squared central watchtower of the buried citadel on what was once its roof. They already stand a couple stories above the thatch-roofed houses.

AVANI

That will make a superb pulpit.
Are you healed enough to give my voice some assistance?

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Yeah... but I have a question.

AVANI

What is it?

INT. CITADEL SQUARE - CENTRAL WATCHTOWER - DAY

Avani and Cirrus enter the tower and climb the stairs. The width of the staircase is just enough for Cirrus.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Tori quit her thieving job. I
quit my hunting-you-down job.
But if you're still
evangelizing, how exactly have
you quit your evangelizing job?

Avani slows her ascent. She stops just short of the exit.

AVANI

My temple sent me to make people
receptive to it. It would then
move in and try to control the
local government, using any of
my converts as a power base. I'm
not helping them do that
anymore. Not at all.

EXT. CITADEL SQUARE - CENTRAL WATCHTOWER - DAY

Avani and Cirrus exit to the roof of the watchtower. They're at the highest point in sight.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Aren't you? Your temple could
still exploit what you do.

Avani walks to the edge. A dozen bridge-walkers are assembled below outside a cluster of houses, practicing yoga. A couple of the people are nude.

AVANI

Are you suggesting I just stop?

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Maybe you could tone it down.
Show, not tell. I mean, I like
hearing you talk about your
religion, but you *can* be a
little... pushy.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. THE BRIDGE - DAY

Out on the bridge, Avani stands and preaches to Cirrus (wind tiger), seated.

AVANI

And Teizen said unto Atmas, "You torment humans with their own helplessness! I shall give them tools, that they may defend and empower themselves." And the Goddess of Air shouted angrily...
(looks off-screen)
hey, you two, are you listening?

Tori sits with Naur and Klauser, none of whom are interested, and holds her Carmine Special violin under her chin.

TORI

Nope.

Tori picks up the violin bow and plays a quick few notes. She lowers the violin and twists its lowermost peg.

TORI (CONT'D)

The G sounds a little off...

Avani scowls at them.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. CITADEL SQUARE - CENTRAL WATCHTOWER - DAY

Cirrus nudges Avani's hand. Avani scratches Cirrus's head.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

People might pay more attention if you were subtle. Plus, your temple couldn't easily exploit people if you didn't leave piles of dogma everywhere you go.

AVANI

I know. I know I should lead by example, especially around Tori, but how can I be *subtle* about the greatest things in creation?

Avani spreads her arms out to the view.

AVANI (CONT'D)

I want to flood the world with
holiness! To take the gods'
power and let it be known!

AIR DRILLS shoot down from a cloud in tight formation --

CITADEL SQUARE

And SLAM into the ground around the yoga session. The bridge-walkers YELL OUT in surprise and fear.

CENTRAL WATCHTOWER

Avani looks at Cirrus.

AVANI (CONT'D)

That's the right idea, but don't
be so violent.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

That wasn't me!

Airmen drop from the cloud, one after another. PROPELLER SOUNDS become audible as if turned on by a switch.

INT. RARÓG'S AIRSHIP - GONDOLA - DAY

The last few airmen JUMP out of the open door of the gondola. Raróg wields a nunchaku in each hand. The handles are as long as his forearms. Raróg shouts over his shoulder.

RARÓG

Keep her in a holding pattern,
pilot!

EXT. CITADEL SQUARE - DAY

The airmen WHIRL their nunchakus, summoning SWIRLING AIR COLUMNS that slow their descent enough for them to land gracefully around the assembly.

The bridge-walkers instinctively huddle closer together, COMMENTING ad-lib in confusion. "Who are they?", etc.

Up on the watchtower, Avani and Cirrus are tense.

A tight TORNADO descends, blowing a STIFF WIND over the bridge-walkers.

Raróg descends inside it, spinning his nunchakus at his sides. He lands and the wind dies down.

The ten airmen form a circle around Raróg and spin their weapons. Raróg's voice BOOMS THUNDEROUSLY.

RARÓG (CONT'D)
Attention, West Granbridge! I am
Lieutenant Raróg Tiercel of the
East Ragloan Air Force!

Avani looks even more tense.

QUICK FLASHBACK:

Way back in episode 1, Kreuzet grips his nightsticks on the back patio of Drach Yenech's mansion.

Back in the present, more bridge-walkers step outside their homes to see Raróg pontificating.

RARÓG (CONT'D)
Improper use of elementalism
afflicts humanity with the slow
cancer of de-industrialization!

Evelyn exits her house. Klauser, pecking around outside, pays attention too.

RARÓG (O.S.) (CONT'D)
East Ragloa will suffer this
creeping primitivism no longer!

Raróg dramatically points a nunchaku handle.

RARÓG (CONT'D)
You elementalists will submit to
our rule or be blown away by our
peerless command of Air magic!

Avani and Cirrus exchange a determined glance.

INT. CATACOMBS - EARTHEN TUNNEL - DAY

Tori and Naur walk down an incline in the tunnel. One of Naur's footsteps makes an off-tune CLANK and he looks down.

Naur pulls his foot back from a manhole cover.

A path of white makes up the base of the tunnel from here on.

TORI
Looks like we hit the street.

NAUR
Look, over there!

Naur's fireball expands with a FWOOMP, casting more light --

Some of which falls on a low, rectangular treasure chest.

Tori SPRINTS the twenty or so feet to the chest and embraces as much of it as she can wrap her arms around.

TORI
Finally! Oh, if only everything
came in a treasure coffer.

Tori pulls back and opens the flat lid of the coffer. Naur comes closer with the light.

Smallish tied bags and wooden boxes line the bottom. They aren't stacked, so most of the coffer is empty. Tori floats her hand over them, unsure of which to pick first.

TORI (CONT'D)
Now which ones are the potential
treasures?

A distant RUSHING sound comes from the manhole.

NAUR (O.S.)
Check there, under that bag.

EXT. CITADEL SQUARE - DAY

Cirrus LANDS with a GUST behind the bridge-walkers, wracking them with wind again. Avani clings to her back.

They have Raróg's attention.

Avani dismounts. Cirrus stretches her not-yet-regrown wing.

AVANI

East Ragloans! I am Avani Lahar,
vanguard of the Sacred Ground
Temple! Ignore these innocent
people and come catch me!

The airmen look a little confused. Raróg doesn't.

RARÓG

You. I knew my cousin Kreutzet
couldn't handle your kind.
(thrusts staff)
Airmen! She's one of the fiends
who tried to overthrow the
Imperator! Kill her!

The airmen turn toward Avani.

INT. CATACOMBS - EARTHEN TUNNEL - DAY

Tori holds a white earthenware plate, six inches across, with black pictographs stamped in a spiral on both sides. The design is very much like the real-world Phaistos Disc.

Tori turns it over in her hands and scrunches her face.

NAUR

A man gave me that dish for a
bag of Ragloan pepper. The
language is strange to me.

TORI

(eyes widen)
Wait, this is ancient raizan!
Mom had a vase somewhere with
pictographs like these on it!

NAUR

Can you read it?

TORI

Not here. I'll need to do some
research. Maybe we can find a--

You dai BURSTS UP from the manhole in a SURGE of water. He comes out facing the incline, not Tori and Naur.

YOU DAI

Ahhh! Finally! Natural ground!

(pause)

It's so dark. How long was I down there?

You dai notices the light and turns around. Tori and Naur look back at him, momentarily stunned. Tori quickly puts the disc back in the coffer and closes the lid, eyes on You dai.

You dai blinks. He gets over his surprise and GRINS toothily.

YOU DAI (CONT'D)

Oh, hi.

He THRUSTS out his claws and a WATER BLAST follows them.

EXT. CITADEL SQUARE - DAY

Avani reaches in her pocket --

And STRIKES the ground with the flat side of her ingot.

Tall, thin columns of earth SHOOT UP underneath the ten airmen and Raróg, more or less simultaneously. Each man is struck and/or toppled.

Avani stands up. Cirrus watches her.

AVANI

Everyone, *scatter!* Warn your neighbors to stay indoors!

The bridge-walkers SCATTER. The airmen right themselves and CHARGE through them, WHIPPING wind behind.

Cirrus moves in front of Avani and stiffly FLAPS her collarbone wings.

Two WHIRLING AIR-STREAMS hit the nearest two airmen, LIFT them up and SLAM them into the next-nearest two.

The remaining six keep running --

Four of them comically SMASH into RISING earthen walls.

The remaining two JUMP over the walls --

Are BLASTED up and backwards by two more AIR-STREAMS --

And LAND to Raróg's right and left. Raróg angrily TWIRLS his nunchakus and a WHIRLWIND lifts him skyward.

RARÓG

Pathetic. After them, airmen!

Avani rides Cirrus, who SPRINTS away.

INT. CATACOMBS - EARTHEN TUNNEL - DAY

Naur and Tori RUN. Tori clutches her knife in her right hand. Naur keeps lighting the way with his fireball.

Youdai quickly closes the distance, propelled by a small WAVE under his feet.

YOUDAI

And just *where* do you plan on running, *hmmm?*

Tori turns around and SLASHES her knife --

The wave under Youdai diverts and SLAMS him into the wall.

Tori and Naur keep running.

Youdai frantically brushes off his halfcoat. He lifts his hands and a dome of water covers him to the chest. Both it and he SURGE down the tunnel toward us.

EXT. ORCHARD - DAY

Cirrus DASHES through an unarranged orchard of apple trees. The only sound she makes is a quick WHOOSH.

The airmen follow with wind-assisted speed, RUSTLING the trees loudly. A few apples fall.

Cirrus, with Avani still on her back, runs and weaves around the trees. Raróg flies above them, spinning his nunchakus like airplane propellers.

Avani looks up and back at Raróg.

AVANI
He's -- he's flying?

CIRRUS (V.O.)
Scrawny showoff. I can't fly
'til my stupid wing grows back
all the way!

AVANI
(leans close)
Then make *me* fly.

Wallace plucks an apple from a tree and drops it in one of two wooden buckets. His hand-shovel hangs from his belt.

Avani dismounts Cirrus, runs up to Wallace, grabs the empty bucket and stands in it.

AVANI (CONT'D)
I need to borrow this!

WALLACE
No prob.

Cirrus summons a small TORNADO under the bucket. Avani rises.

INT. CATACOMBS - DEEP TUNNEL - DAY

Tori and Naur stand with their backs to a dead end. Youdai walks toward them.

YOUDAI
Tch. Now I'm going to have to
drag you *all* the way back
through that ugly tunnel *and* the
bridge to give you to Karrun. I
hate having to work this hard.

The fireball in Naur's hand FLICKERS.

NAUR
Tori is my friend. I will not
let you take her.

YOUDAI

Not your decision to make, hon.

You dai SLASHES his claws, hurling an airborne water stream.

The stream hits Naur and his fire goes out, plunging us into COMPLETE DARKNESS. His skin SIZZLES audibly.

All the sounds of a FIGHT are heard, but we see nothing until Naur HURLS a fireball at You dai. It WHIFFS against the wall and we go back to pure darkness.

More FIGHTING SOUNDS. Naur's fist IGNITES and misses a punch past You dai's head. Water DOUSES the fist and SIZZLES us into darkness again.

More SPLASHING and SIZZLING. Naur GRUNTS in pain.

Brief FLASHES of off-screen fire illuminate Tori. Her expression is something rare -- she's terrified.

TORI (V.O.)

Wake up, Tori! Now's not the
time to choke!

Naur and You dai continue fighting. Brief flashes of fire are all that let us see. It's a scary sight that reaches its peak when Naur BREATHES FIRE at us.

EXT. ORCHARD - DAY

Raróg continues "flying."

Avani, crouching in the apple bucket, SHOOTS towards Raróg --

COLLIDES with him and GRABS him around the waist. She and he spin out of control in midair.

The airmen DASH around the trees toward Cirrus.

Cirrus FLAPS her good and bad wings. A strong wind BLOWS the surrounding trees and FLAPS Wallace's poncho.

Wallace's hand-shovel falls out of his belt.

The airmen draw near --

And a straight-line wind PUMMELS all ten with apples and leaves, BASHES them into trees, or both.

Wallace's hand-shovel STICKS into a tree.

Raróg takes a sharp upward turn, "flying" with one nunchaku and BEATING Avani's back to no effect with the other. Avani repeatedly grabs at his flight-nunchaku hand and misses.

Raróg SPINS like a top, finally throwing Avani off.

Cirrus sees it happen.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Avani!

Two airmen LEAP at Cirrus.

INT. CATACOMBS - DEEP TUNNEL - DAY

A THUMP is heard in the dark. Naur's hands IGNITE, revealing Youdai pinning him to the wall of the tunnel by his wrists.

YOUDAI

This *has* been fun, but you're too much of a distraction. Say goodbye, handsome.

Tori rushes out of the darkness --

TORI

Thanks for holding *still!*

And SLASHES her knife through Youdai's upper arm, cutting deep and ruining the sleeve of his coat.

Youdai SHRIEKS and releases Naur. Youdai grabs his bleeding upper arm.

YOUDAI

My *haori!* How dare you!

Naur GRABS Youdai by the upper arms, setting Youdai's halfcoat on fire --

And HURLS him into the dead-end of the tunnel.

EXT. ORCHARD - DAY

Avani, plummeting, reaches into one of her pockets --

AVANI

Great Teizen, catch me!

And lands, ingot-first, with an EARTHQUAKE that SHATTERS the ground into a large, soft bowl of mulch and sand.

INT. CATACOMBS - DEEP TUNNEL - DAY

The tunnel RUMBLES. Dirt falls from the ceiling.

Tori and Naur turn and run. Naur's hands light the way.

Youdai rights himself in the waning light. He looks up at the ceiling and makes a plaintive SQUEAK. The tunnel COLLAPSES.

Tori and Naur outrun the COLLAPSING tunnel behind them.

TORI

Avani must have pissed off the hippies up top!

NAUR

Gods bless her lack of subtlety!

EXT. ORCHARD - DAY

Avani shakily stands in the dust cloud her crater kicked up. A few trees lean toward the crater.

AVANI

(coughing)

Thanks be to your power... now how I may fight this enemy?

Raróg hovers overhead, spinning his weapons.

RARÓG

Damned foreigner! Die!

Raróg crouches in midair, points one nunchaku up and points the other down. Both spin.

Cirrus fights a few remaining airmen. Sheared-off leaves flow in the air around her and follow her BLASTS of wind.

Raróg's spinning summons a thin, high-speed ROARING TORNADO.

The tornado inches toward Avani, ripping up the ground.

Avani turns to run, but notices the hand-shovel sticking out of one of the trees. She smiles, unspeakably calm despite the approaching tornado.

AVANI (V.O.)

"I shall give them tools, that
they may defend and empower
themselves..."

Avani YANKS the shovel out and HURLS it into the tornado.

The shovel travels up with the ripped-up soil --

And STICKS in Raróg's downward-pointing hand. The nunchaku chain TANGLES around the shovel's handle instantly.

Raróg YELLS in pain and releases both nunchakus. He falls.

Cirrus SLAMS a final airman against a tree in a barrage of wind and leaves and DASHES away.

Raróg HITS the soft ground of Avani's crater with a GRUNT.

Cirrus arrives at Avani's side.

AVANI (CONT'D)

You are beaten. I suggest you
leave, little bird.

Raróg struggles to his feet in obvious pain. His hand bleeds.

RARÓG

Airmen! *Airmen!*

All ten bruised and beaten airmen limp toward the crater. They surround Raróg as he speaks.

RARÓG (CONT'D)

We will return for you, girl!
Tiercels never lose their prey!

The airmen SPIN their nunchakus downward. Tight WIND BLASTS send them and Raróg skyward.

Avani and Cirrus watch them go. Wallace walks into frame, scratching his head in confusion.

EXT. WALLACE'S HOUSE - DAY

Tori, Avani, Cirrus and Naur are gathered outside Wallace's house with Klauser, Wallace, and Evelyn. Naur transfers the last of the treasure coffer contents to his pack.

AVANI

Those men know me. If we keep moving, they are sure to follow us away from your settlement.

WALLACE

That's real nice of you. Good luck with your gods, Miss.

AVANI

If you'd like to learn more, I...
(pause, smile)
Nevermind. Thank you.

Naur hefts his pack. Avani hops into Klauser's saddle and secures Tori's bag to it.

TORI

One more thing. I've got some treasure to research. You happen to know where the nearest library is?

EVELYN

Leave on the West road. There's a college in Reltawist -- should be a library there.

Cleaner Motillil leans out of an upper-story window in the citadel, shaking his broom angrily.

CLEANER MOTILLIL

And don't come back, foreign contamin-aminators!

EXT. RARÓG'S AIRSHIP - DAY

The hawk-shaped airship flies over the sea, fully audible now that no airmen ride the superstructure.

INT. RARÓG'S AIRSHIP - GONDOLA - DAY

The injured airmen sit uncomfortably.

The pale-faced pilot keeps piloting. Raróg moodily rubs his bandage-wrapped hand in a seat behind the cockpit. His nunchakus rest on another seat.

PILOT

Avani Lahar, huh? And she had a wind tiger? Sounds like you really screwed up, Lieutenant.

RARÓG

Shut up. I need to think of an excuse to satisfy the Colonel.

PILOT

Tall order.

Every airman pays attention. Several of them SNICKER as Raróg angrily faces the cockpit.

RARÓG

How dare you talk down to me?!

A few more airmen try to stifle more SNICKERING. The pilot flicks a switch and stands up out of his chair.

PILOT

And how dare *you* fail me twice?

The pilot takes off his flight helmet. He's a wind tiger with very sharp-edged eyes and pointed, knifelike hair-tendrils.

The airmen immediately STAND at attention. Raróg panics and STUMBLES backwards into his seat.

RARÓG

C-Colonel Levanter--*uwah!*

LEVANTER, until now the pilot, stands up very straight and crosses his arms behind his back. His age is hard to determine -- he sounds more mature than the 30 he looks.

LEVANTER/PILOT

You defied my order to stay with
the fleet at the atolls.

Raróg stands up and at attention, TREMBLING. Levanter's height over him makes the berating all the sadder.

LEVANTER (CONT'D)

And when I let you defy it, two
enemies beat you and ten airmen.
You're useless, Raróg. I won't
be needing you any further.

RARÓG

What?

EXT. RARÓG'S AIRSHIP - DAY

The gondola door is BLOWN OPEN with a GUST, blasting Raróg backwards out into the air, weaponless. Raróg YELLS IN PANIC. Levanter stands close to the doorway, hand extended.

LEVANTER

Those who are useless do not
deserve to live.

Levanter twists his hand and the door SLAMS SHUT.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Tori, Avani, Cirrus, Naur and Klauser walk down a dirt road. Tori is entranced by the spiral disc in her hands.

Cirrus suddenly slows and looks off into the distance.

Nothing but sea horizon can be seen where Cirrus looks. Cirrus turns forward again and moves on.

FADE OUT