

AETHER TORRENT #16  
"RILO'S WEAPON"

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. DEPTH NOTE - ROOF - NIGHT

A nightclub, "Depth Note" by its sign, stands in a town we've never seen before. CLUB PATRONS enter and exit, wafting out ACOUSTIC GUITAR MUSIC from within. There are no bouncers.

CIRRUS (wind tiger) rests on the roof with her head up, not unlike an actual tiger. Her clothes are underneath her and she wears Levanter's bracelets on her front ankles.

The lights of a big city shine far in the distance behind her. A low-built suburb spreads in front of her. Water towers are the tallest structures. She stares at the dusk horizon.

CIRRUS (V.O.)  
Just *try* to follow us, Levanter.

INT. DEPTH NOTE - STAGE - NIGHT

A scruffy BEATNIK plays a guitar on a smallish stage in the dimly-lit club. He's pretty good at it.

TORI and NAUR (cloakless) sit at a small table among the AUDIENCE. The stage takes up most of a side of the building.

Tori drinks something with ice in it. Naur stares raptly off-screen. The music ends and Naur APPLAUDS with the audience. Tori claps politely, sucking on an ice cube in her mouth.

TORI  
Sounded a little dull.

NAUR  
But the energy he had!

TORI  
I mean the instrument. It's a piece of junk, no depth to it.

The beatnik bows and walks off-stage.

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

Not like Von Luthier's work. His instruments have *incredible* sound quality, like the violin Avani and Cirrus got me.

Naur shrugs.

NAUR

Music is music. A pity Avani chose not to listen with us.

Tori CRUNCHES her ice cube.

TORI

She had her chance. I swear, everything fun's a sin with her.

EXT. STREET ISLAND - NIGHT

Avani walks alone in a tree-lined island between two parallel streets. Occasional cars pass on either side of her.

AVANI (V.O.)

Here I am again, Great Teizen, walking the path you lay for me. It has been... crooked, recently.

Avani passes a tree. She stares ahead at nothing, trancelike.

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

I still do not understand why you crossed my path with Tori's. All you do in my life has a reason, so what is hers? O Lord Below, give me a sign!

A car RUSHES past, and in the wake of its whoosh a MAN'S VOICE floats in. Avani pauses to listen.

DURANTE (O.S.)

...for Teizen is the common ground of all life.

EXT. BAKERY - NIGHT

A few TOWNSPEOPLE listen to FATHER DURANTE, a mid-30s priest in a dark green robe with a gold collar and buttons, as he preaches on a bread statue outside a closed bakery. He has gold-rimmed glasses and a faint Italian accent.

DURANTE (CONT'D)

Young and old, good and evil,  
all life returns to his embrace.  
Go now in peace, ever mindful  
that he will support whichever  
path your life takes.

Avani crosses the street to the impromptu pulpit. Some of the townspeople pass her.

Durante hops off the bread statue and stretches his arms. A steel square with a gold dot in the middle hangs from his neck where one might otherwise expect to see a crucifix.

AVANI

Hello, sir! I haven't heard a  
Northern-root preacher in years.

DURANTE

Your colors... I suppose you're of  
the Tergaian root?

Avani glances down at her gold-trimmed green shirt and khaki skirt. She bows with her hands folded in a *Namaste* greeting.

AVANI

I am. My name is Avani Lahar.  
Might we talk a while?

DURANTE

(adjusts glasses)  
Ordinarily I have nothing to say  
to a filthy polytheist who sees  
our Lord and Supporter Teizen as  
merely the first among equals.

(sigh)

But we all need distractions,  
lest we go mad with focus. I'm  
known as Father Durante.

Avani frowns, suddenly less enthused about meeting him.

INT. DEPTH NOTE - BAR - NIGHT

Tori speaks with a balding middle-aged BARTENDER, who mixes two drinks. SAXOPHONE MUSIC plays in the background.

BARTENDER

So what brings you folks to Quarterhill?

TORI

We're just taking some down time on our way North. I can't tell you how much I needed some R&R. Stuff's been crazy lately.

BARTENDER

Seriously. I even heard on the radio that a wind tiger attacked Reltawist yesterday.

(makes strangling motions)

I'd like to get my hands on it.

Tori CHUCKLES NERVOUSLY.

EXT. QUARTERHILL PARK - PICNIC AREA - NIGHT

Durante withdraws from us in disgust.

DURANTE

An *atheist*?

Avani sits with Durante at a stone table in an open-wall picnic building of a public park. A few light bulbs shine.

AVANI

Yes. But she rescued me *twice*, so clearly Teizen crossed our paths. What am I to make of it?

DURANTE

Simple. Teizen is testing to see whether you have the faith to know evil when you see it.

Avani CHUCKLES in cautious denial.

AVANI

(chuckling)

Evil? Tori? Vulgar, maybe, but...

DURANTE

Evil is clear to those who *truly* serve the Great One. I see evil as I see the brightest jewel, for I traveled here to strike down a *most* unholy man.

Avani frowns at Durante's back, her words carrying a sting.

AVANI

And who do you hunt that makes you such a great holy servant?

Durante tilts his head down in such a way that his glasses shine over, obscuring his eyes.

DURANTE

One who carries a weapon made by the powerful elementalists syndicate, *the Nexus*.

Avani's brown eyes flash open. She tightens her lips and runs her hand over the smooth stone of the table.

AVANI

The... "Nexus," you say. Never heard of it.

DURANTE

Few have. My quarry's weapon is an axe shaped like a star.

METAPHORICAL SPACE

A thin, shadow-obscured VILLAIN lurches toward us, wielding a star-shaped battle axe. A wall of fire RAGES behind him.

Durante narrates a SERIES OF SHOTS:

1). The villain SWINGS his axe laterally and a LOW-PITCH BLAST of sound tears a GIANT TRENCH in a city street.

2). The villain SWINGS again at an angle. The SOUND BLAST changes in pitch and an ARC OF FIRE ignites a building.

3). The villain swings, the pitch changes, and a FLOOD OF WATER surges down a street, PLOWING into many unlucky people.

4). A vertical swing changes the pitch once more and a TORNADO strikes a building, BLASTING OUT its glass windows.

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

With that axe, one can summon  
the basic elements with enormous  
depth, using nothing but sound.  
It defies all the rules of the  
gods' power. Praise below that  
the man wielding it has not yet  
used it to its full potential.

PICNIC AREA

Avani leans forward, fingers laced and elbows on the table.

AVANI

Praise below. Such a weapon  
could make thousands suffer.

Durante smiles suspiciously.

DURANTE

It could. And I shall prove my  
worth to the Great One by  
capturing it.

AVANI

(stands up)

Father Durante. If I knew as  
much about this man you hunt as  
you do, would Teizen not prove  
which of us is more worthy by  
guiding us to find him?

Durante looks at her in surprise. Then smiles.

DURANTE

Too true. Listen well to my  
description, and pray that what  
I say will be useful.

EXT. DEPTH NOTE - ROOF - NIGHT

Cirrus has laid her head down on her paws. Her eyes look as though she hasn't blinked recently. It's quiet.

A shadow moves on the faint fading horizon.

Cirrus BOLTS to her feet.

The shadow is just a bird. It flaps.

Cirrus lowers her head.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Screw it, I need a break. No way they'll confuse me with him.

Wind starts WHIPPING around her.

INT. DEPTH NOTE - STAGE - NIGHT

A casually-dressed human EMCEE addresses the audience.

EMCEE

All right, folks, you're in for something rare tonight!

Tori rejoins Naur at their table, carrying two full glasses. She offers one to Naur, who simply stares at her. Tori withdraws the drink with some embarrassment.

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

A real artist who's performing tonight for free! Give it up for Rilo, M., Sawyer!

The audience APPLAUDS.

RILO, a lanky guitarist seen from behind, walks out on stage. Over his back is slung a pearly white electric guitar shaped like a five-pointed shooting star.

Tori lowers her eyebrows and sips one of her drinks.

Rilo shifts his guitar to his hands. He wears ragged jeans and a red tank-top under an olive-drab coat with the sleeves ripped off.

His right wrist, heavy with tight bracelets, plucks a string with a silvery coin. An ELECTRIC GUITAR TWANG fills the room.

Everyone in sight pays full attention.

Rilo grins. A five-o'clock shadow spreads from his soulpatch. His neck-length black hair, dyed red at half of the tips, raggedly frames his blue eyes.

One of his worn hiking boots TAPS the stage four times.

Rilo launches into an ELECTRIC GUITAR JAM, plugged into nothing. The speed of his playing is mind-boggling, like something from the real-life group Dragonforce.

Tori and Naur gape.

Most of the audience is stunned until someone CHEERS like at a rock concert. The audience follows and CHEERS Rilo on.

Rilo ROCKS OUT. His guitar pick is a quarter-sized coin.

AETHER VIEW

White swirls leave the strings like ripples from every pluck by Rilo's silhouette-fingers.

NORMAL VIEW

Naur has his eyes closed.

NAUR

Air magic...

(opens eyes)

He's an elemental! Tori?

Naur turns his head to Tori. Tori is still awestruck, hypnotized by the sound. The way his head is now turned, he can also see the bartender.

Cirrus enters, hands stuffed in the pockets of her gray sweat-shorts. She stops and listens to the hard rock music.

The bartender sees Cirrus standing at the door. She directs her full and baffled attention to Rilo.

The bartender scowls angrily, takes a double-barreled shotgun out from under the bar and levels it at Cirrus.

Naur sees the gun-grab. He turns to see where it's pointed. Tori is too entranced to notice.

The bartender PUMPS the shotgun and takes final aim as the music builds to a crescendo.

EXT. DEPTH NOTE - NIGHT

A small EXPLOSION is heard.

INT. DEPTH NOTE - STAGE - NIGHT

Rilo has stopped playing. He and his audience look toward us.

The bartender leans against the back of the bar, hands bleeding.

Seen from ground level, half of the shotgun rests in front of Cirrus. One end of the barrel is melted and glowing red-hot.

Naur points his clawed hand at the bar. His nails steam. He glances back and forth in the silence.

Tori, looking toward where Naur's arm points, downs the rest of her second drink in one shot.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

*Monsters!*

The audience and all other club patrons PANIC and rush to the nearest non-main exits.

Cirrus runs a hand down her face. Her aluminum bracelets are loose in human form.

Rilo swings his guitar to his back and runs backstage.

Naur trembles, hunching over reflexively.

NAUR

I, I, he was going to...

TORI

Naur, go hide with Cirrus.

NAUR

But where?

TORI

That park we passed on the way here looked safe enough. I'll catch up later, go before someone else starts shooting.

Tori joins the mob rushing the stage exit. Naur slinks away.

EXT. DEPTH NOTE - BACK EXIT - NIGHT

The club patrons flood out of the back door. Tori is among them. She frantically looks left and right.

Rilo turns a corner, carrying a guitar case and an olive-drab duffel bag in his hands. He still wears his guitar.

Tori pursues him.

EXT. QUARTERHILL PARK - PICNIC AREA - NIGHT

Durante and Avani share an adversarial stare outside the picnic building.

AVANI

All right, then. I represent the Tergaian root, and you the Northern. The first one to find the Nexus agent and reclaim his weapon clearly belongs to the denomination that Teizen favors.

DURANTE

Clearly. But the favored one must submit *both* the man and the axe to the unfavored's judgment.

AVANI

Don't worry. I will.

They continue their stare for a second or two, then RUN away in different directions.

EXT. QUARTERHILL STREETS - NIGHT

Rilo exits an alley into a part of town full of low buildings and spaced-apart trees. Road and sidewalk traffic is nil. He puts down his luggage and takes a moment to breathe.

RILO

*Still?*

TORI (O.S.)

Hey! Guitar guy!

Rilo's hand flies to the stock of his guitar and he faces us.

Tori emerges from the alley, clearly not winded.

TORI (CONT'D)

You're pretty fast.

RILO

I've had to be. I saw you sit by that monster, you with him?

TORI

He's just awkward in public. And I just want to talk.

Rilo lets go of his guitar.

RILO

Sorry, I'm a little gun-shy. Or monster-shy, I guess. My name's Rilo. What's yours, Red?

TORI

Tori Mar... no, just Tori. I really liked your sound.

Rilo runs a thumb under his guitar strap.

RILO

Thanks. I like to think it's mostly me performing, but my axe is the real star.

(grin)

So to speak.

TORI

(returns smile)

Heh. Can I take a look at it?

Rilo suddenly looks suspicious. He draws back from Tori.

RILO

Why?

TORI

Oh, I dunno, you only *blew my mind* with it. C'mon, let me see.

Rilo's tucks his hair behind his ear, still cautious.

RILO

Well Tori, I'm glad you liked it, but this is a rare treasure.

TORI

I know. You use Air magic through the strings, right?

Rilo blinks. Tori steps closer to him. He doesn't withdraw.

RILO

Maybe.

TORI

That's incredible enough, but it only augmented the underlying sound quality. There's only one craftsman in the world who can make an instrument like yours. String-master Nicodemus Polfus von Luthier.

INT. CONCERT HALL - NIGHT

VON LUTHIER, a dark blonde, sharp-featured, well-dressed man in his late forties, PLAYS a glass violin on a concert stage. He expertly performs part of the first movement of "Winter" from Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*.

Seen from the height of the balcony, hundreds pack the indoor concert hall to hear his recital. The sound flows everywhere.

YOUNG TORI, age 10 or so, sits enthralled with KARRUN in a private box. Both are in formal wear. A pair of GUARDS can just barely be seen flanking the door.

EXT. QUARTERHILL STREETS - NIGHT

Rilo is only slightly taller than Tori. He grins at her, drops his bag and shifts his guitar to his hands.

RILO

That changes everything! Anybody who appreciates the world's greatest instrument-maker is okay by me. But you gotta be careful. It's one of a kind.

Tori slowly and deliberately brushes her fingers over Rilo's as she takes hold of the guitar.

TORI

I could tell at a glance.

Rilo's eyes flick upward from the guitar to Tori.

Tori looks him right in the eye. Smiles.

EXT. QUARTERHILL PARK - PLAYGROUND - NIGHT

Cirrus peeks out from behind a tree.

CIRRUS

Nobody following yet. Wonder where Avani is. I would've thought she'd hang out here, wouldn't you?

(pause, looks back)

Naur?

Naur sits hugging his knees at the top of a steel slide which has a ladder separate from the support bars. Kid-sized play equipment stands in a sea of small rocks around him.

Cirrus walks over to him. Her FOOTSTEPS in the rocks make soft grind-scratching sounds.

CIRRUS

Come on, don't sulk, those people were just startled.

NAUR

At me. I tried to focus like you said, but it happened anyway. Even after ten years of it, it still hurts.

CIRRUS

(blink)

Wait. You're ten?

NAUR

I do not know exactly. Maybe twelve. I only counted years for ten, and I began as soon as I thought to.

Durante walks around a building bordering the playground. He sees Cirrus and Naur facing away from him.

CIRRUS

(distant)

I knew that raiza grow fast, but wow.

NAUR

(distant)

Yes. Were I human, I would be long dead.

Durante SMILES toothily.

He opens his robe. Six steel-handled, mythril-headed, two-foot-long hammers hang within.

Cirrus's yellow eyes dart to her left --

Naur's green eyes dart to his right --

Durante STRIKES two hammers to the ground and the playground RUMBLES, rocks and all.

Cirrus LEAPS straight up to evade the COLLISION of two lightning-fast ridges of earth. The rocks SCATTER everywhere.

Durante SWINGS his left-hand hammer through the rocks, quickly building a ball of them at the tip --

Lifts the ball up and SMASHES it with his right-hand hammer, splitting it into stony shrapnel.

Naur jumps down just quick enough to avoid the bombardment of rocks PLINKING off the slide.

Cirrus alights on a steel geodesic dome.

Durante dramatically CROSSES his hammers in the shape of a capital T with a CLANG of metal on metal.

DURANTE

Glory to the Terranian Father!  
In the name of Teizen, the Great  
Foundation, no monsters of the  
Nexus shall block my holy path!

Cirrus and Naur glance at each other, equally confused.

EXT. QUARTERHILL STREETS - NIGHT

Tori carefully holds Rilo's guitar. She looks at it with an appraiser's eye.

TORI

So, you live around here?

Rilo walks a half-circle around Tori until he's behind her, then snakes his arms under hers to help support the instrument in her hands. Tori allows it.

RILO

Nope. I've been on and off the  
road for a while. Way too long  
of a story. I came here to play  
a little and relax for once.

Tori PLUCKS a G-chord and it comes out acoustic. She turns her head slightly and smiles conspiratorially at Rilo.

TORI

That a fact? So did I.

Avani stealthily turns a corner, ingot in hand. She spends a second surveying the far street before she turns toward us.

Tori arches her head back to rest on Rilo's shoulder.

TORI (CONT'D)  
Mmm, but I prefer to play  
somewhere a lot less public...

The ground RUMBLES and an angled pillar of concrete and earth BASHES into Rilo's side, knocking him away from Tori. Tori herself staggers, as Rilo's arms were still around her.

TORI (CONT'D)  
Agh! What the--?!

Avani holds her ingot to the ground down the street behind where Tori and Rilo stood.

AVANI  
Tori! Be careful! That man is a  
Nexus agent!

EXT. QUARTERHILL PARK - PLAYGROUND - NIGHT

Cirrus addresses Durante from atop the play-dome. Durante stands just outside the playground borders.

CIRRUS  
Explain yourself!

DURANTE  
(points hammer at her)  
Rilo M. Sawyer has brought Von  
Luthier's weapon to this place.  
I don't know how the Sunthief  
and the Lifeflame found out, but  
I'll break even *their* agents in  
the service of Teizen -- by  
order of the Beast of Earth!

Durante SLAMS his hammers to the ground.

A spike of earth RISES through the rocks under the dome --

Cirrus LEAPS off an instant before it PIERCES the steel bars.

She perches on the top of the slide.

CIRRUS

Damn it, he's Nexus! *Naur!*

Naur scoops up two handfuls of rocks. They GLOW red-hot and MELT together before he HURLS them at Durante.

Durante rises fast enough to BAT the molten projectiles down.

The melted rock coats the mythrill hammerheads. Durante scowls at them.

Cirrus dives at him, heel-first --

Durante HURLS his hammers spinning at her.

One misses to her right and the other HITS her square in the forehead, knocking her head back.

Durante evades and lets Cirrus LAND and SKID heavily on her butt, SCATTERING rocks everywhere.

Naur glares at him.

Durante RIPS open his robe, revealing six more hammers hanging inside, hitherto unseen.

EXT. QUARTERHILL STREETS - NIGHT

Tori puts the guitar down by its case and cautiously watches Rilo get to his feet. Avani approaches.

TORI

A Nexus agent?

AVANI

I met a devotee of Teizen who told me all about you, Rilo M. Sawyer. Now where is the axe that can make thousands suffer?

Rilo edges carefully toward his guitar.

AVANI (CONT'D)

(realizing)

"Axe"... Tori! Stop him!

Tori and Rilo dive for the guitar.

Rilo reaches it first and STRUMS the strings with a frantic swipe --

A DEEP THRUM of a SONIC BLAST knocks Tori backwards into Avani and SHATTERS any nearby windows. Both girls fall.

Rilo grabs his bag and guitar case and DASHES across the street.

Tori and Avani get up.

TORI

Thanks, Avani. You helped me  
dodge a bullet there.

AVANI

Beg pardon?

TORI

Nevermind. Are we going to stop  
him or what? Come on!

Tori takes off after Rilo. Avani follows, somewhat hesitant as she thinks.

AVANI (V.O.)

Is that it, O Lord? Did you  
cross our paths so that I would  
help her? But *she* saved *me*...

Avani shakes her head and goes from a jog to a sprint.

AVANI (CONT'D)

Wait up!

EXT. QUARTERHILL PARK - NIGHT

In very smooth succession, Durante SLAMS a hammer into the rocks, a ball of earth and stone SHOOTs up from the ground, and as he BATS it off-screen it takes on a conical shape.

Naur DUCKS the cone and takes refuge behind the slide.

Cirrus gets to her feet only to SINK into an opening rift. She LEAPS up but the rift SNAPS SHUT, imprisoning her at chest level and pinning her arms underground.

Durante arms himself with a second hammer from his coat and menacingly stomps toward Cirrus.

Naur's hands MELT a section of the slide's steel ladder.

Cirrus STRUGGLES and fails to free herself. Durante grips his hammers and circles around to her back.

DURANTE

Even the highest flyer must  
return to Teizen's embrace.

(raises hammer)

Feel the crush of his love!

Naur's feet DASH across the rocks --

SLOW-MOTION:

Durante's final blow is interrupted by Naur BLUDGEONING him in the head with most of the length of the steel ladder.

REGULAR SPEED:

Naur holds the ladder. It RINGS faintly from the impact.

Durante drops his right-hand hammer, staggers several steps away and holds his head where Naur struck.

Cirrus pauses struggling long enough to crane her head around to look at Durante.

Durante's glasses are knocked off, otherwise he looks fine. He smiles yet again.

DURANTE

You mean to attack a priest of  
Teizen with blunt force?

Naur blinks hard in utter bafflement.

EXT. QUARTERHILL STREETS - INTERSECTION - NIGHT

Rilo runs. He SHOVES past a pedestrian or two.

He nears a fire hydrant. It suddenly BURSTS, its water snakes around in a midair stream --

And PLOWS into him before he can cross a somewhat busy street.

Tori has her knife out. She and Avani are about twenty feet behind the drenched Rilo. The fire hydrant continues flowing.

TORI

We're *trying* to be subtle here!  
Don't make us fight across town!

RILO

You know you want to! Nexus cronies don't care where they fight!

TORI

(twists knife)  
Don't you *dare* call me that!

A ball forms from the hydrant water and SLAMS into Rilo's face, staggering him dangerously close to the street. A car passes within inches and HONKS.

RILO

(coughing)  
What else could you be?! Durante and the others have followed me for *months*. They're not above lying or getting sweet on me to steal this beauty back.

AVANI

Steal it *back*...?  
(pause, glance at Tori)  
Wait, what does he mean sweet--

TORI

(to Rilo)  
--So you're saying you really aren't with the Nexus?

RILO

Of course I'm not!  
(jostles guitar)  
They say the Orfeo is theirs, but I'm not. Are you?

Tori angrily scratches the base of her ponytail. Avani grips her forehead in what can only be an "I'm so stupid" pose.

TORI

He sounds sincere and he's not fighting back. This Durante guy must've suckered you, Avani. Where is he now?

AVANI

He... I don't know, we split up near the park about half an hour ago. Maybe less.

TORI

Oh no...

EXT. QUARTERHILL PARK - PLAYGROUND - NIGHT

Cirrus grits her teeth.

CIRRUS

His body. It's like Avani's!

Durante grips his hammer and smiles at Naur, who drops the ladder.

DURANTE

A body is only as strong as its faith. You cannot break me so easily. I, however--!

Durante advances on Naur and SWINGS his hammer.

Naur CATCHES the mythril hammerhead with ease --

And his forearm SNAPS.

Naur YELLS OUT in pain, BREATHING FIRE with the yell --

Durante pulls out his fifth hammer and SMASHES Naur on the chin, SNAPPING his mouth shut --

And BOOTS him high in the chest, knocking Naur to the rocks.

Cirrus sees it happen. Her eyes GLOW and high-speed wind ENCIRCLES her, picking up rocks.

Naur looks up from the rocks, as surprised as anyone that a human knocked him down.

Durante finally turns back to Cirrus. He looks concerned.

The rocks caught in the WHIRLWIND around Cirrus erode a trench around her. Her arms BURST free, she SLAPS the ground and a BURST of dust and rocks obscures her.

Durante shields his eyes and backs away.

Naur blinks in the wind, still holding his arm.

Cirrus (wind tiger) hovers above a shallow crater, rocks SPINNING around her in rapid orbits.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Earth can't hold the sky, you  
Nexus rat. Now get the hell out  
of my sight before I let the  
whole town know I'm here.

Durante smiles. Tilts up his chin.

DURANTE

Very well. I've spent too much  
time on you animals.

Cirrus FLAPS her collarbone wings and sends air-streams full of tiny rocks and dust at us.

Durante HAMMERS the ground and ducks behind two curved, strategically-placed rising earth walls which absorb the rock impacts. The ground RUMBLES and he begins sinking.

DURANTE (CONT'D)

This won't delay the Beast of  
Earth. Pray we never meet again,  
monster.

Cirrus LAUNCHES herself at him.

Too late. Another two curving walls bend over him, enclosing him in an earthen dome. Cirrus TACKLES one of the walls, to no effect.

The dome sinks. Naur watches a descending mound of a line upset the playground rocks before disappearing further underground. A soft RUMBLE fades into the distance.

## PICNIC AREA

Tori, Avani, Cirrus (human) and Naur sit around one of the stone tables in a picnic building. Naur rubs his previously-broken arm.

CIRRUS

And he didn't resurface. At least not anywhere nearby.

Rilo leans against one of the building's brick corner pillars. The Orfeo (in its case) and Rilo's bag are propped against the pillar too.

RILO

The Nexus attracts all kinds of freaks. I hear that's why Von Luthier wanted to keep the Orfeo away from them.

AVANI

You hear?

RILO

I still don't know much about it myself. Like the whole *all-magic-with-nothing-but-sound* thing? That's new to me. But I think I'll keep using it for music.

Tori traces out invisible notes on the table surface with a fingertip.

TORI

Fair enough. So is there some internal drama in the Nexus, Cirrus? I mean if one guy under one executive attacked 'cause he thought you and Naur were under two others...

CIRRUS

Don't ask me, I was never in charge of anything.

AVANI  
(under breath)  
Another mystery, O Lord...

NAUR  
Pardon?

AVANI  
Nothing.

Tori glances nonchalantly at Rilo and scratches her temple.

TORI  
So Rilo, where will you go now?

RILO  
No offense, Red, but it's safer  
for everybody if I don't say. I  
get the feeling you have people  
after you guys too. Wouldn't  
want any spillover, y'know.

Tori stares at the table.

TORI  
Yeah. Mom'd break you in half.

RILO  
Pardon?

TORI  
Nothing.

RILO  
So where are you headed?

TORI  
Actually, some place up--

INT. DEPTH NOTE - BAR - NIGHT

The bartender's hand is wrapped. He speaks to a POLICEMAN, of whom we can see only an arm and shoulder badge. The policeman sounds familiar.

BARTENDER

North. That's what she said,  
officer, I'm sure of it.

LEVANTER

And nothing else?

BARTENDER

Said she wanted a break or  
something? I dunno. I just know  
that's the redhead what sat with  
the red raiza.

The policeman is in fact LEVANTER, identity obscured by  
gloves, a hat, and big reflective sunglasses.

LEVANTER

Thank you, sir, you've been  
quite helpful.

EXT. DEPTH NOTE - NIGHT

Yellow crime scene tape is stretched around the premises. A  
police car idles out front.

Three OFFICERS inside the car are dead, slumped over, chests  
collapsed. One is stripped to his boxers.

Levanter walks out the front door and removes his glasses.

LEVANTER (CONT'D)

North... from here... we'll see,  
Cirrus. We'll see.

FADE OUT