

AETHER TORRENT #18
"THE PARTY'S PATH"

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. RIVERSIDE - SHORELINE - NIGHT

A wide, gentle river is bordered on both sides by dense woods. The horizon glows with the last of nightfall.

CAMPSITE

A bright hexagonal oil lamp shines on a flat earthen surface. NAUR's hands turn his white spiral disc over in the light. The black pictographs stamped in it shine faintly.

Naur sits on a dirt cube at a wide cylinder of packed earth. AVANI hangs her ruined skirt from the previous episode over a clothesline. The skirt she wears now is an un-ruined copy.

NAUR

Say. What do you suppose the
treasure mentioned on the disc
really is?

AVANI

Are you asking me?

NAUR

Either of you.

CIRRUS (human) lies on her back, ankle hoisted on her knee, making one-handed waving motions at the clothesline. Some of the party's recognizable clothes sway there, damp.

CIRRUS

Well it's pretty vague. "The
greatest treasure beyond all
desire." If it's really so
great, and if the poem about it
is so old, what are the chances
it's still going to be there?

The campsite is a large flat circle limited to the cylinder table, the cube seats, the clothesline and a hollowed-out mound of earth large enough to comfortably hold four people.

AVANI

(goes to table, sits)

Chance is an illusion, Cirrus.
Whatever that treasure is, we
are meant to find it.

NAUR

Meant?

AVANI

(serious face)

Meant. I've devoted a lot of
thought to this. The way we all
met and the way we learned of an
ancient poem were *most* unlikely.
Without Tori they would not have
happened. The gods must be using
her to reveal our path. A path
which now leads to a treasure.

SHORELINE

TORI'S bare arms wring out her hair, dripping water which
SPLASHES gently off-screen. Her knife is in her teeth.

Tori's hand dips her knife in the river and slowly pulls out
a basketball-sized water blob. The ball quivers and SPLASHES
back in the water.

Seen from behind, Tori stands nude in the river up to the
thighs. She improvises an ANGRY NOISE and SLASHES the river.

KLAUSER looks up from digging at the shoreline. He tilts his
head back and GWARKS.

The sound only twists Tori's frustrated expression further.

Klauser GWARKS again. Tori turns around.

TORI

Shut up! I can't concentrate!

Klauser looks not at Tori but past her. Tori understands and
looks in the same direction.

A side-wheeled riverboat with a design out of the 1860s moves
downriver. It looks as innocent as a steamboat gets.

Tori juts out her chin, thinking.

Her arm grabs her shirt from a pile of her clothes --

And she WAVES it around in circles over her head, cupping her other hand around her mouth.

TORI (CONT'D)

Hey! Haaaaay!

CAMPSITE

Avani and Naur look in the same direction. Cirrus sits up.

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

Over here! Hey!

RIVERBOAT

Tori's waving and distant ad-lib YELLING reaches the boat.

A muscular blue-on-white raiza we'll know as GREEN looks over the banister of the second of the riverboat's two levels. He wears a tight medieval tunic, green with gold trim.

GREEN

Who on Ahret is that person?

TARASSAS, a 4'-tall lurutt in a fedora, neck bandanna and leather jacket, looks through a pair of binoculars next to Green. His voice isn't as nasal as other lurutts we've heard.

TARASSAS

It's a human.

(adjusts binoculars)

Female. Maybe a survivor?

Green leans over the banister and shouts upward at the helm. A human HELMSMAN in a navy blue uniform takes notice.

GREEN

Helmsman!

SHORELINE

Avani carries the lamp out of the woods.

AVANI
 What's wrong, Tori--
 (quickly averts gaze)
 --Oh!

Tori pumps a fist. The riverboat slowly veers toward her.

TORI
 All right!
 (turns, points at boat)
 You see that?

Avani looks 90 degrees away from Tori and covers her peripheral vision with the lamp.

AVANI
 Yes! Yes I do!

Tori, suddenly dressed, sits on a rock and ties her hiking boot. Avani, Cirrus, Naur and Klauser make a circle around her. Cirrus and Naur, cloaked, hurriedly wrap their hands.

CIRRUS
 I thought we were trying to
avoid attention.

NAUR
 And to flag a boat without
 consulting us...

AVANI
 And to do it naked!

The riverboat nears the shore. Tori ties her other boot.

TORI
 Just listen. That treasure's on
 an island, so we have to get a
 boat eventually. We can ride to
 Talus, get a boat *there* and sail
 North instead of hiking.

Cirrus and Naur look at Avani. Avani SIGHS.

AVANI

I suppose water is a path...

RIVERBOAT

Green waves from the first level of the riverboat. There with him are Tarassas; RANDALL, a gruff Sasquatch of a man wearing all buckskin; and RANDALL'S MOTHER, a thin, mid-50s woman with a long pleated dress and a longer graying braid.

TARASSAS

A group of four, *here* of all places? Aren't we lucky-lucky.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

This'll be fun. I haven't been on a joint operation in ages.

The boat has reached the shore. Tori leads the rest of the party up a wide plank-ramp onto it, Klauser carrying the luggage. Green speaks in iambic pentameter.

GREEN

(graceful bow)

Well met. To think we could have passed you by!

NAUR

Er, thank you. How much for the ride?

GREEN

Do you speak truly, friend? It's free of charge.

TORI

Great! You going to Talus?

GREEN

We are. And we're quite thrilled to have you all to help us bring the Airmen to their knees.

Tori, Avani, Cirrus and Naur look at Green with the same dumbstruck expression.

CIRRUS

Wait, what?

Randall YANKS the entire landing plank back into the boat with a single movement.

It CLATTERS noisily and heavily. The suddenness of the sound makes Avani and Naur START.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

Boy, your unit's out of touch.
East Ragloa hit Talus yesterday.

RANDALL

Air Force assisted by Imperial
Dragon. Many thousands dead.
Naval yard destroyed.

TARASSAS

Hope you're all up for a fight.

Avani, Cirrus and Naur stare at Tori. Tori slowly lifts a hand and rubs her forehead.

The riverboat veers away from the shore.

EXT. TALUS - DAY

A major metropolitan port has been destroyed. High floodwaters have made islands of crumbled buildings. Fallen trees, smashed automobiles and other debris line the sunken roads.

Only one part of the city is above water: a big hill littered with fallen buildings. A single ten-story one made all of rectangles capped with a shallow dome is all that stands.

Levanter's thirteen airships rest on the hill ruins in very close proximity. The morning sun gives them long shadows.

INT. CITY HALL - HALLWAY - DAY

One of Levanter's AIRMEN walks down a hall, idly twirling an aluminum nightstick.

YOUDAI, wearing a crumpled Airman's uniform, peeks out of an adjoining hall and quietly stalks the Airman from behind.

You dai bites his lower lip and gets within grabbing distance.

LEVANTER (O.S.)

You dai!

You dai FLINCHES. The Airman turns and REACTS surprised.

LEVANTER, forever wearing his flight jacket, strides toward the dragon from further down the hall.

LEVANTER (CONT'D)

Would you mind explaining why
there's an unconscious naked
Airman in my new office?!

You dai faces Levanter and lolls his head, grinning. The Airman discretely backs out of frame.

YOU DAI

You want a detailed account?

LEVANTER

Listen, reptile. It may have
been sheer dumb luck that we
met, but you are a major asset
to my plans. I *will* not have you
exhausting yourself.

You dai saunters up to Levanter and runs a claw down the front of Levanter's jacket.

YOU DAI

Oh, lighten up. It takes *much*
more than them to exhaust me.
Care to find out *how* much?

Levanter stares, unamused. He makes a fist and You dai BURSTS OUT COUGHING.

You dai staggers over to a wall and leans on it, COUGHING.

LEVANTER

Next time I'll explode your
sinus cavity. Now make yourself
useful and patrol the river.

EXT. RIVERBOAT - DAY

The riverboat paddles along at a quick pace. Steam billows out of its two smokestacks.

Klauser stands at the edge of the first level and drinks from the river like a "drinking bird" toy.

AVANI (V.O.)

But we really aren't with the
military, we're just travelers!

INT. RIVERBOAT - WAR ROOM - DAY

Green, Tarassas, Randall, Avani, Cirrus, and Naur sit at a round table in a windowless room full of maps.

GREEN

Alas, we Elemental Ops units
must hold to lies that we're but
trav'ling friends.

RANDALL

Official policy ridiculous. No
disguises or lies needed here.

Cirrus pulls back her hood, quickly unwraps her hands and pulls her aluminum bracelets from her upper arms down to her wrists. Naur pulls down his hood with his wrapped hand.

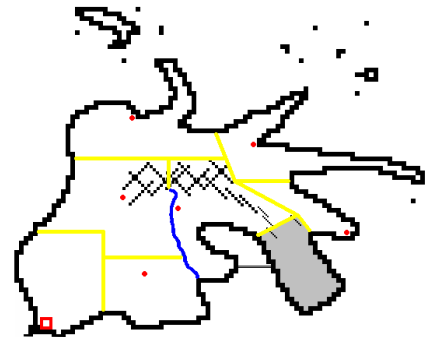
CIRRUS

Thank you. C'mon, Naur, do it.

NAUR

Perhaps later.

Tarassas WHAPS a long pointer stick on the South end of a blue line of a map of Dorn, one shaped like this but in greater detail:



TARASSAS

(clears throat)

Now. Our biggest problem is that
we'll be so close to the ocean.

(MORE)

TARASSAS (CONT'D)

The Airmen claim to have the Imperial Dragon prince on their side, so the navy won't dare approach-oach.

Tarassas closes his eyes and SMACKS himself across the beak.

TARASSAS (CONT'D)

Sorry, Digger Tarassas--
(smacks self again)
I can't quite kill my accent.

AVANI

So you intend to fight them without support?

NAUR

It seems we are their support.

GREEN

Indeed. I doubt that other units have the spine for swift autonomous attack. I only hope our numbers are enough.

RANDALL

Plenty already. Tarassas. Green. Randall. Randall's mother. New people. Even incapacitated girl.

GUEST BEDROOM

Tori, dressed yet barefoot, lies in a twin bed in a fetal position and clutches her abdomen with at least one arm.

Randall's Mother sits on another twin bed and sets a full tea tray on the nightstand. She wears a long double-looped chain necklace, most of which hides down her dress.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

Here, hon, this'll help.

TORI

You can help by going away.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

You talking to me or her?

Tori rolls over on her back and covers her eyes with her elbow, GROANING.

TORI

This is ridiculous. One *stupid* egg and my concentration for Water magic is shot.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

Then you won't be needing this.

Randall's Mother reaches under Tori's vest, yanks out her knife and flips it into stabbing position with the speed and dexterity of a much younger woman.

TORI

Hey!

Randall's Mother directs a stream of tea from the pot to a cup with Tori's knife. She flips the knife around in her hand and runs a fingernail along its deadly curve.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

Oh my, this is a very good tool.
You must have a great supplier.

Randall's Mother hooks the knife through the teacup handle and passes both to Tori.

Tori cautiously takes the cup in one hand and her knife in the other.

TORI

Thanks. My mom got it for me.

Tori moves to take a sip. A sudden RUMBLE hits the room and everything in it JOLTS sideways. Tori spills the tea before she can drink it.

Randall's Mother stands up and purposefully grasps her chain necklace.

INT. RIVER - DAY

You dai (dragon) SLAMS the underside of the boat's bow with his tail.

EXT. RIVERBOAT - DAY

The boat tilts back from a swell of water under the bow.

Klauser GWARKS and tumbles down.

The boat dips back down and water SPLASHES over the front of the first level, drenching Klauser. He rights himself and SHAKES OFF, making his feathers FLUFF out.

Tori and Randall's Mother exit a room on the port side of the second level. A thick stream of water DRILLS into the paddlewheel on that side, BREAKING it into splinters.

The six from the war room exit on the second level, opposite side. Another stream SMASHES into that side's paddlewheel.

You dai swims out from under the boat and follows his tail in a circle. The water above him UNDULATES exactly like a voice pattern. His voice BOOMS.

YOU DAI (V.O.)

Listen up! I am Prince You dai of
Ryūgū-jō! Toss *only* your
prettiest passengers overboard
and I *might* not sink you!

Two CREWMEN on the first level glance at each other.

The Helmsman blinks.

The eight elementalists have gathered at the front of the second level and show varying degrees of disbelief.

Randall's Mother WHIPS her necklace out to full length. It's a single 5'-long *manriki*, a chain weighted on both ends.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

You heard him, Randall!

RANDALL

(cracks knuckles)

Yes, Mother.

Tori, Avani, Cirrus and Naur are the only ones surprised.

AVANI

But he has no weapon...

RANDALL'S MOTHER

His *weapon* is ten years' of
catching Tergaian alligator gars
barehanded. That's all he'll
need for this.

INT. RIVER - DAY

Two bodies SPLASH into the river.

You dai straightens out his swimming with an eager expression which turns immediately to disgust. His Airman pants float by close enough to be recognized.

Randall and his Mother land on the bottom. The river is only twelve to fourteen feet deep at most.

Randall's Mother PULLS her chain taut in her hands. Diamonds the size of marbles are set in the weighted ends.

You dai lifts an eyebrow.

Randall's Mother SWEEPS OUT her chain. A thick, curved, jagged ICE BLADE forms in the water and flies at You dai.

You dai's eyes FLASH open and he JETS out of the way --

Randall's Mother YANKS back her chain --

And the ice blade BURSTS into a dozen smaller shards.

A couple of them STICK into You dai, drawing faint blood.

EXT. RIVERBOAT - DAY

A couple other shards SHOOT out of the water.

You dai snakes around the boat. Tori, Avani, Cirrus and Naur rush around to the side of the boat, following him.

Green and Tarassas smile, not concerned at all.

INT. RIVER - DAY

You dai circles around and swims straight at us.

Randall stands his ground. His Mother swims behind him.

You dai bares his teeth and STRIKES at us --

Randall amazingly GRABS You dai's jaws and holds them apart.

Another ice blade grows around one end of Randall's Mother's chain.

Randall keeps You dai in place. You dai's eyes dart around in panic before he focuses on Randall and lowers his eyebrows.

Water SURGES into Randall's mouth and bubbles EXPLODE out.

You dai wrenches himself out of Randall's grip and SNAPS his jaws on his right arm, instantly drawing copious blood.

Randall's Mother SWINGS the ice blade.

You dai's human-form hand grabs the ice blade and CRUSHES it.

Randall's Mother releases bubbles from her clenched teeth.

EXT. RIVERBOAT - DAY

Randall and his Mother FLY high out of the water in two swirling jets.

Green and Tarassas see them and are instantly horrified.

Randall LANDS HARD on the top level by the helm. His right arm has been torn off at the shoulder. His Mother LANDS on top of him. He bleeds.

Green and Tarassas rush off-screen. Tori, Avani, Cirrus and Naur look either up above or down below.

You dai (human) rises from the river in a column of swirling, blurring water up to his waist. His pants are on. He holds Randall's severed arm, SHAKES it at us and hurls it aside.

YOU DAI

I said *prettiest!* That was a
sick joke!

The party looks at You dai at about the same height as him.

YOUDAI (CONT'D)

I should've *expected* you hussies
were behind it. Now for *payback!*

Cirrus balls her fists. Her aluminum bracelets shine.

CIRRUS

I can take him. I think.

TORI

(draws knife)

No. I will.

Green, Tarassas and the Helmsman reach Randall and his Mother. The Helmsman helps Randall's Mother off her son.

AVANI (O.S.)

Are you insane?! You're no match
for him right now!

Tarassas pulls a sharp-pointed, red-orange rock hammer out of his jacket and touches it to Randall's bloody shoulder socket. A FLASH OF FIRE instantly cauterizes it.

YOUDAI (O.S.)

Oh this is rich! Really truly!

You dai makes a rising gesture with a clawed hand. The water around the boat RISES into sheer walls.

YOUDAI (CONT'D)

Come on, then. I'll keep you a
little bit alive for my reward.

Tori's knife-gripping hand brings her weapon to her neck. The rest of the party watches her, stunned silent.

You dai's expression loses all its mirth.

TORI

I'll tell you what you'll do.
You'll quit attacking right now
and move this boat to Talus as
fast as possible if you ever
want what Mom promised you.

YOUDAI

You don't have the balls, honey.

Tori nicks her neck, just enough to bleed. Avani GASPS.

Youdai narrows one eye.

The water walls lower past the top level. Green helps Randall sit up. The Helmsman helps Randall's Mother to her feet. Tarassas worriedly bites a knuckle.

Youdai's swirling water column lowers him to the river and takes him under. He GRUMBLES ad-lib.

The river around the boat suddenly SPEEDS UP, propelling it along so fast the bow tips up like a speedboat.

Klauser attempts to maintain balance. The two Crewmen help keep him upright.

Blood trickles from Tori's shallow cut. Tori points her knife at it and it dries. She moves to touch it, but Avani's hand wipes it off with a swipe of her thumb. Tori looks aside.

Avani gives Tori a hard yet concerned stare.

AVANI

The gods are helping us through
you, Tori. Your life is holy.
Please don't gamble with it.

Tori holds the stare a second and looks forward again.

The boat speeds downriver.

EXT. CITY HALL HILL - DAY

Levanter stands on the dome cap of the City Hall building, staring inland. It's some time in the afternoon.

LEVANTER

Not long now. They will embrace
the magic that threatens them,
warring element to element, ever
so slowly turning the valve...

Levanter holds his arms open to the sky.

LEVANTER (CONT'D)

And who will be responsible? Who will be recognized? Who will be the next Beast of Air?! *Levanter the Bladewind!*

Levanter lets out a string of LAUGHING, using up the full contents of his lungs. He inhales after it, but suddenly stops mid-breath. He SNIFFS twice. His face goes serious.

EXT. FLOODED BLOCK - DAY

You dai (dragon) escorts the riverboat into the city at a more casual speed, despite Tori's ultimatum.

Tori, Avani, Cirrus, Naur, Green, and Tarassas take in the flooded city from the top level. Green carries an elegantly-crafted mythrill sledgehammer.

They're in a former commercial district. The boat passes a few bodies among the debris in the water. A dead shirtless man's chest is conspicuously caved in.

The five elementalists see it.

AVANI

What horror. Not all of these people drowned. The Airmen will pay for this.

CIRRUS

You guys have fun with them. Levanter is mine.

GREEN

But what of our escorting dragon, then?

INT. RIVERBOAT - INFIRMARY - DAY

A Crewman tends to Randall in a one-bed infirmary. Randall's Mother clenches her son's big hand.

TORI (V.O.)

I'll keep him down. It's a long story, but he can't afford to have me die.

EXT. FLOODED BLOCK - DAY

Levanter's mouth YELLS at us.

LEVANTER

Youdai! What are you doing?!

Youdai lifts his head out of the water. The boat stops.

Levanter, if visible at all, is a tiny speck on the distant City Hall. He projects his voice clearly.

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

Sink that boat this instant!

Cirrus LEAPS out of frame.

The water around Youdai undulates in a voice pattern again.

YUDDAI (V.O.)

But I could lose those consorts
I was promised!

CIRRUS'S P.O.V.:

Levanter grows more distinct as we fly top-speed at him.

LEVANTER

*Idiot! Kill them and I'll give
you all the Airmen you want!*

Levanter LEAPS out of frame to avoid colliding with us.

QUICK SERIES OF SHOTS:

All around the city, wading through less-flooded streets, looting stores and relaxing inside airships, uniformed AIRMEN suddenly stop what they're doing and quizzically look up.

Youdai's draconic face twists into a smile.

Tarassas holds his hat to his head and runs as fast as he can to the side of the boat.

TARASSAS

Off the boat, off the boat!

The boat suddenly LURCHES upwards. Tori, Avani, Naur, Green and Tarassas REACT ad-lib.

The floodwaters rapidly gather into a column under the boat.

On the first level, Klauser abandons ship and SPLASHES down.

You dai's heavily-blurred human-form shape rises inside the rising column --

The five elementalists run to the sides of the boat --

You dai UPPERCUTS and the column SHOOTs up fifty vertical feet, hurling the entire riverboat up and away much higher.

Avani SPLASHES into the flooded street.

Tori lands on a rooftop with a somersault.

Naur LANDS on a different rooftop in a crouch, his cloak billowing out like Batman's cape. Tarassas lands off-center near him and ROLLS comically.

The boat capsizes as it descends --

Green clings to the boat's upper railing, hammer in hand --

The riverboat CRASHES upside-down on a building which IMPLODES on impact, softening the potential damage as a crumple zone.

EXT. CITY HALL HILL - CITY HALL - DAY

Levanter (human) flies backwards and lands on the dome-cap just long enough to JUMP back again. Cirrus (human) lands on it and JUMPS off to pursue.

AIRSHIPS

Levanter lands near one of the thirteen closely-parked airships between the fallen buildings. Some confused Airmen stand around.

AIRMAN

Colonel, what's going on?

LEVANTER

Kill anything not in uniform.

Cirrus flies at us and SWINGS an arm.

Levanter JUMPS away. A pocket of air distorts and EXPLODES, knocking the airmen down.

Cirrus lands on the airship and JUMPS off after Levanter.

CIRRUS
Fight me, you bastard!

RUINS

Levanter perches on a fallen building.

LEVANTER (V.O.)
As long as she has *those*
augmenting her power, I can't...

Levanter JUMPS away again and a much larger air bomb EXPLODES, throwing chunks of building debris everywhere.

Levanter looks down and back at the building in mid-flight.

LEVANTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But if I can keep her pouring
out so much magic at once...

Cirrus suddenly appears above him and raises a fist.

A SHOCKWAVE bursts out from the IMPACT of her fist against his upper back.

Levanter sails down and SLAMS into a debris-cluttered street hard enough to bounce.

He grabs the road and HURLS himself away an instant before Cirrus lands hard enough to CRACK the pavement.

EXT. FLOODED BLOCK - DAY

The water column lowers just enough to keep Youdai's shame covered. In the blur of the column we can see his Airman pants slide back on.

Youdai watches Avani rise out of the water on a RUMBLING column of earth and pavement. She hops off onto Naur and Tarassas's roof.

YOUDAI

Hmm, three at once...

Tori holds her knife defensively on her rooftop across the flooded street.

You dai lifts his claws at Tori. Suddenly his water column BOILS, aborting his line with his reaction.

YOUDAI (CONT'D)

One at a time sounds easier.
I'll just tell Karrun it was an
accideeeeeaaaow ow ow!

You dai LEAPS out of the water column and it SPLASHES back down, BOILING hot.

Naur points his claws at the floodwaters. Avani and Tarassas gape as STEAM rises all around.

NAUR

(to Avani)
I'll stay and assist. Go, help
Cirrus.

You dai LANDS on Tori's square rooftop. Tori backs up to the edge, knife out.

EXT. CITY HALL HILL - RUINS - DAY

Levanter holds his chest at the edge of the floodwaters.

LEVANTER

You want to kill me. I can
understand that.

Cirrus rolls one of the bracelets around her wrist as she stalks toward Levanter.

Levanter smirks.

LEVANTER (CONT'D)

But if you do, you'll just make
orphans out of Auster and Marin.

Cirrus stops.

LEVANTER (CONT'D)

Oh, didn't I tell you? After I brought our talented cubs to the Nexus, I told them you were shot by a hunter. They cried so hard.

Cirrus tenses her hands.

Levanter's backwards jump is assisted as he gets violently BLOWN BACKWARDS by a VERY LOUD AIR BOMB.

EXT. FLOODED BLOCK - DAY

Tori and Youdai face each other and orbit an air conditioning unit on the roof. Steam rises from the boiling floodwaters.

Youdai SWIPES his claws --

A stream of BOILING WATER shoots over the edge --

And EXPLODES into steam.

Naur keeps his claws pointed forward. His bandages IGNITE at the fingertips.

YOUDAI

Looks like I'll have to fight with a handicap. Come on, Ponytail, show me why Karrun wanted you alive.

Tori squeezes her knife hilt.

TORI

Knowing her, she'd hate to waste the effort she spent raising me.

Youdai's eyes widen.

Tori DASHES ahead, uses the air conditioner as a step --

And misses Youdai with a powerful SLASH. Undaunted, Tori advances on Youdai and takes several quick cuts at him, all slash and no stab, as her knife is better for slashing.

You dai dodges them all until he sees an opening. He slashes his right claws downward and Tori evades. He slashes them upward, Tori grabs his wrist, turns a 360 and twists his arm down. Holding his arm in place, Tori SLASHES at his neck --

You dai tilts his head back fast enough to dodge it and grabs her wrist with his left hand. They grapple for a moment, glaring at each other.

You dai simultaneously releases Tori and wrenches his twisted arm free. He swiftly KICKS her in the lower abdomen.

Tori stumbles backward to the edge of the roof, clutching her abdomen with her whole left arm. Her face contorts in pain. Steam rises behind her.

TORI (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Goddamnstupidfreakin' *cramps*...

Naur relaxes his arms but the water still BOILS.

NAUR (V.O.)
Oh no. Naur you fool, you can
only *add* heat!

You dai stays where he is, half angry and half curious.

YOU DAI
Raising you. Explain that.

TORI
Karrun's my adopted mom.

You dai narrows his eyes. A sudden BURST OF FIRE flashes very near his head, catching his hair on fire. You dai SHRIEKS, furiously PATS it out and glares off-screen.

Across the flooded street, Naur levels an arm at us.

You dai slowly backs up to the opposite edge of the roof and takes a dark, very sinister tone. The boiling tapers off.

YOU DAI
I see. But if I were you, I
wouldn't escape her this way.
(MORE)

YOUDAI (CONT'D)

The port leads directly to the waters around Ryūgū-jō. We treat any elementalists we find as open game. Literally. And we can see magic through a ship's hull.

Tori clenches her jaw.

Youdai smiles and wiggles his fingers goodbye, instantly back to his flamboyant self.

YOUDAI (CONT'D)

Well, *do* take care. *Both* of you. For *your* sake I hope we don't meet again very soon. *Ja ne!*

Youdai blows a kiss and backflips off the roof. A SPLASH is heard afterward.

Far off to the side, a metallic CRUNCHING sound comes from the overturned riverboat on the collapsed building.

Tori and Naur look toward it.

EXT. CITY HALL HILL - RUINS - DAY

Levanter flies to a broken rooftop just long enough to LEAP to another one.

Cirrus flies after him and makes SLASHING motions, summoning curved air distortions which SLASH through water and buildings with equal ease.

AETHER VIEW

Cirrus's silhouette hurls out white crescents. The number of white swirls in her body drops precipitously, but the solid white bracelets keep her hands full of them.

SUPERIMPOSE:

A semi-X-ray view shows very few swirls passing through her heart. The ones that do are slower than her blood.

NORMAL VIEW

Cirrus, flying, rears back her hand again. We hear a sudden HEART-THROB and her eyes go wide.

Cirrus (wind tiger) plummets. She lands like a rag doll.

Levanter perches on a bent streetlamp. Smiling. Something suddenly EXPLODES off-screen behind him and his smile dies.

AIRSHIPS

Levanter's flagship has exploded. Several of the others have caught fire.

Avani STRIKES an unlucky Airman in the temple with a swing of her elbow.

The Airman falls and the ground RUMBLES and encloses him up to the neck, along with at least twenty others already thus entombed.

Tarassas holds an orichalcum rock hammer in each hand. He SWINGS one --

And a LONG ARC OF FIRE strikes one of the four non-rigid airships painted like hawks. The airship EXPLODES --

Sending flaming scraps onto whichever airships aren't already on fire. All thirteen of them burn. The eight rigid airships quickly become blazing skeletal frameworks.

Levanter watches them burn from high in the air. They make a huge smoke column.

His arms are crossed. He has his bracelets back on.

LEVANTER

Useless Airmen. Useless dragon.
Still, plenty of damage done...

Levanter flies away with a SONIC BOOM.

Avani and Tarassas look up past the smoke at the sound.

RUINS

Avani and Tarassas pass the bent streetlamp. Avani GASPS and covers her mouth.

Cirrus (wind tiger), very much alive, GROANS weakly and shakily tries to stand up. Avani rushes over to her and hugs her around the neck.

AVANI

Cirrus! Are you all right?

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Well my heart stopped for a bit,
but other than that...

EXT. FLOODED BLOCK - DAY

An enormous pillar of smoke is visible from the distant City Hall hill. Klauser swims through a flooded street in the foreground, GWARKING softly and happily.

Green, Tarassas, Randall and his Mother sit or stand on a rooftop across from their ruined boat.

RANDALL

Green only soften crash. Trap us
inside for while. If dragon not
defeated we keep crewmen company
right now. Appreciate greatly.

Tori, Avani, Cirrus (wind tiger) and Naur stand behind them.
Tori rubs her forehead.

TORI

Sure. No problem. Minus the fact
that we're further from our goal
now than we were before...

AVANI

At least you crossed our path
with some interesting people.
Don't be upset. Or are you
still... you know?

TORI

It's not that.

Klauser swims past the combined wreckage of the riverboat and the imploded building.

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

Our luggage is still in the boat.

EXT. OCEAN - NIGHT

Ocean waves break under the stars and moon.

Youdai (dragon) torpedoed through the waves.

YOUDAI (V.O.)

(giggling)

If Ponytail was worth a hundred
consorts as a random fugitive, I
bet she's worth ten thousand as
an archon's daughter! Time for
me to work some diplomacy.

The long span of Granbridge looms in the distance.

FADE OUT