

AETHER TORRENT #20
"RIN'S AGENTS"

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. ALMAHOOK CITY - DOWNTOWN BRIDGE - NIGHT

Wide twin stone-arch bridges span the river in Almahook City's 1920s-era downtown. A thick wooden section fills a ten-foot gap between the bridges for PEDESTRIAN traffic.

The stolen 100-foot yacht hides almost fully under the twin bridges with its mast lowered. KLAUSER curiously glances up at the soft THUMPING of footsteps on the high wooden span.

INT. STOLEN YACHT - NAUR'S CABIN - NIGHT

NAUR lies on a bed with his robe pulled down to his waist. The slash wound on his back is a hard, shiny red line with the puffiness of a huge infection at the edges.

TORI (O.S.)
Sepsis. It's a blood infection.

TORI wraps the shallow infected cut on AVANI's arm. The cabin is small. Tori's tone is very controlled.

TORI (CONT'D)
Mom once told me that the most detailed elementalists can do crazy stuff. When Rin cut you guys, she most likely used Flora magic to make bacteria bloom.

CIRRUS paces back and forth outside the door. Each time she passes, she looks more worried. Tori finishes wrapping.

AVANI
What will happen to us?

TORI
If we do nothing? Slow death.

CIRRUS
So let's go get some medicine or something!

Tori anxiously tucks some of her hair behind her ear and looks at Naur. His hands tremble occasionally.

TORI

There's none strong enough. The infection's infused with Flora magic, so we need Flora magic to fight it. And fast.

Naur cringes and SUCKS AIR through his teeth.

Avani holds her wrapped arm. Her worry is plain on her face.

AVANI

Can we really undo such a curse?
Where would we even find the vessel for Flora?

TORI

First, don't call it a curse.
Second, of course we can do it.
With me keeping you hydrated you had enough depth and detail for Rannom's fields, remember?

QUICK FLASHBACK:

Back in episode 7, Avani presses the lithodendros slab and a wave of green corn-stalks sprouts up from tilled ground.

Avani looks hopeful yet quickly deflates.

AVANI

That's right! Oh. But by the time Cirrus could fly there...

TORI

Don't worry, we won't need that big slab. I know where to find the perfect vessel and straight edge for Flora magic.

NAUR

Do you? Where?

INT. HUB AIRPORT - LOUNGE - NIGHT

RIN's multi-ringed hand rubs the polished, petrified wood octopus that serves as her cane-sword's handle.

RIN

Don't worry. My unit is more than able to handle them.

KARRUN rubs her thumb over a knuckle. She and Rin sit in a darkened corner booth of a lounge decorated with paintings of airships. Some LOUNGE MUSIC plays off-screen.

KARRUN

I'm not worried, I'm interested. We'll see who handles whom, Rin.

Superimposed images of RANDALL, RANDALL'S MOTHER, TARASSAS and GREEN appear by Rin as she names them.

RIN

My agents can handle anyone. Randall and his mother are experienced hunters. Tarassas fought hundreds of monsters when he studied ancient ruins. And Green was a knight for some kingdom, I forget where.

ADDANC, with a curved cavalry saber at his belt, guards the booth from intrusion. A few random BUSINESSMEN get drunk at the bar, behind which a cathedral-front radio plays music.

ADDANC

Bah. None of 'em have the same experience I do. Why not send me out, miss Karen?

KARRUN

You are far more useful as a page boy of Karrun Mariana than as an agent of Cirein Cròin.

ADDANC

(turns head)

Come on, I know how Torrent works. Trust me, I can get her.

Karrun lifts a glass of dark liquid.

KARRUN

No. The situation has changed.
Presented with the inescapable
truth about her companions, Tori
decided to flee with them again.
And thus I have also decided.

(sips drink)

I no longer wish to capture her.

Rin and Addanc stare at Karrun.

INT. STOLEN YACHT - TORI'S CABIN - NIGHT

Avani frowns at us in a different cabin.

AVANI

I insist on helping you.

Tori sits on the edge of a bed and ties a pair of tennis shoes. Her leg blocks where her knife is strapped.

TORI

Look, I don't want to worry
about your infection getting
worse. Cirrus and I'll be fine.
I've stolen rarer things from
more dangerous places than this.

AVANI

Like what.

TORI

Like you, for one.

Avani shuts her mouth. She reopens it after a second.

AVANI

I'm not a thing, Tori. I'm a
person.

Tori takes her dark blue and black leather jacket (which we haven't seen in a very long time) off a bedpost, puts it on and ZIPS it up. Avani watches her sternly.

TORI

Rare things can be people.

AVANI

I prefer the word "friend."

TORI

Okay, rare friend. All of you guys are rare friends, so I don't want to lose any of you. You'll be safer if you just stay here and keep Naur company.

AVANI

This curse threatens his life, a life the gods blessed at birth. I *will* help save him.

Tori pulls her ponytail tight and deftly re-ties it with a blue elastic. She speaks partway into the tying after a moment's contemplation.

TORI

Fine. But if you end up dying I'll kick your ass.

NAUR'S CABIN

Naur's breathing is shaky. Cirrus clenches his hand.

CIRRUS

We'll be back before you know it, kiddo. I promise.

NAUR

I know. No one else would.

EXT. ALMAHOOK CITY - DOWNTOWN BRIDGE - NIGHT

Tori, Avani and Cirrus hop off the tip of the yacht to a narrow sidewalk under the bridge. Klauser GWARKS at them.

TORI, AVANI, CIRRUS

Shhh!

Seen from the water level some distance away, a STRONG WIND blows out of the bridge. Cirrus (wind tiger) flies out a moment later, skimming the water with the girls on her back.

By the base of an arch on the far end of the bridge, YOUDAI (dragon) lifts the top of his head above water like a crocodile.

YOUDAI (V.O.)

All three, just like she said.
But I'd better give the wind
cougar some distance first.

EXT. BLUE RING HOTEL - ROOFTOP GREENHOUSE - NIGHT

A light fixture is on inside the greenhouse. A figure wearing Rin's black suit-dress hunches over some flowers.

Cirrus lands quietly on the edge of the roof. Tori hops off first. Avani drops Cirrus's clothes from under her arm.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Stay back. I'll break the glass.

AVANI

No! That could kill her.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

So?

TORI

(unzips coat, draws knife)
So, Rin might've hidden her cane
somewhere else. Stay put.

The greenhouse has one door. The figure inside faces away from it. Tori grips the knob.

Tori throws open the door and steps in, knife out.

TORI (CONT'D)

Rin!

The figure is RANDALL'S MOTHER wearing a copy of Rin's suit-dress. Her braid is stuck down the back of her coat.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

Sorry, dear. She's in Suite #4.
But I'll be glad to occupy you.

Tori notices a conspicuous number of metal watering cans lining the floor.

Randall's Mother STRIKES out her arm and a diamond-tipped weighted end of her chain SHOOTS out of her sleeve.

Avani and Cirrus (human) rush toward the greenhouse. In the span of two seconds, the open door fills with a wall of spiky ice and all the glass FROSTS OVER.

Inside, Tori stares down Randall's Mother and shouts:

TORI

Cirrus! I'm fine! I know you
heard her, so go get Rin!

Cirrus's ear tendrils twitch. She looks at Avani.

INT. BLUE RING HOTEL - UPPER HALLWAY - NIGHT

A carved-wood door has a brass knocker. The number 4 is printed large below a peephole.

The hallway is wide and empty, save for Avani and Cirrus. Suite #3, with a similar door, is across the hall from #4.

CIRRUS

Probably a trap. Stand back.

Cirrus backs up to the #3 door and levels her arms at #4. Avani stands clear.

CIRRUS (CONT'D)

One.

The #3 door suddenly swings open and RANDALL jumps out, snagging Cirrus around the neck with his one arm and YANKING her in. Cirrus REACTS ad-lib.

Avani lunges for the #3 door. Randall KICKS it closed and a BURST OF FIRE in front of it stops Avani in her tracks.

TARASSAS stands in the open #4 door with a sharp-pointed orichalcum rock hammer in his stubby hand.

TARASSAS
Orders changed. For what it's
worth-orth, I'm sorry.

Avani turns and bolts down the hall.

Tarassas leisurely walks out.

TARASSAS (CONT'D)
Everyone thinks they can outrun
a lurutt...

Avani keeps running. An AIRY ROAR sound approaches.

A TWISTING FIREBALL shoots down the hall.

Avani GASPS through her teeth.

EXT. BLUE RING HOTEL - NIGHT

A window one floor down from the roof SHATTERS from a short, FIREY BURST which balloons out before vanishing.

INT. BLUE RING HOTEL - SUITE #3 - NIGHT

Randall, amazingly, is able to keep a hold of Cirrus despite both her hands clutching at his one arm around her neck.

RANDALL
Nothing personal.

Cirrus BASHES a fist into Randall's face a few times.

Randall's nose bleeds. His arm tightens its grip.

Cirrus jams a fist between their bodies, opens her hand --

And the blast of an AIR BOMB separates them.

Randall HITS a wall. Cirrus grabs his throat and his wrist and HITS him against it again.

Randall KNEES Cirrus in the solar plexus.

Cirrus bends, jaw mutely agape.

Randall HEADBUTTS her and pulls his arm from her grip.

Cirrus staggers backwards, grits her teeth --

And UPPERCUTS Randall right in the chin.

Wind follows her punch to BLAST Randall up at an angle. His head and shoulder HIT the ceiling yet he twists to land on his feet, bunching up a rug with his skid.

Randall shakes his head to clear it and tenses his fist.

Cirrus's expression screams "You gotta be kidding."

INT. ROOFTOP GREENHOUSE - NIGHT

Randall's Mother twirls her weighted chain. Tori points her knife at her.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

You know, even when Rin told us,
most of us still weren't sure
you kids were in that Nexus.

TORI

We aren't.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

And then you up and ran away
like your lives depended on it.

TORI

We're not with them, damn it!

RANDALL'S MOTHER

Tell it to a judge!

AETHER VIEW

Randall's Mother STRIKES her chain out. A rapid stream of pale blue swirls shoots out of the chain and collides with Tori's silhouette.

NORMAL VIEW

Tori GASPS shudderingly as sparkling frost forms on the front of her jacket.

Randall's Mother yanks her chain back, STRIKES it out --

Tori SLASHES her knife --

Two watering cans BURST --

And a jagged mass of ice spontaneously forms in the air and CRASHES to the ground.

Randall's Mother takes a step back.

Tori points her knife at the ice mass. Under her directing knife movements it melts, forms into a tight floating water ball and SHOOTS a powerful high-pressure stream.

Randall's Mother SWINGS her chain at the stream --

FREEZE FRAME:

Instantly FREEZING IT SOLID.

Time resumes and the stream BREAKS on the floor. A chunk of the end of the stream remains as a mace ball at the end of Randall's Mother's chain.

Tori runs down the broken line of ice.

Randall's Mother SWINGS her ice-mace out --

Tori tosses her knife from her right hand to her left --

DUCKS the mace and lays into Randall's Mother with a PUNCH to the face.

Randall's Mother stumbles back and CRASHES into a row of red poppies, spilling a few on the floor.

Tori doesn't move.

TORI

Are you done?

Randall's Mother SWINGS out her chain --

Tori blocks with her knife and the end of the chain wraps around the blade. Tori pulls it back and grabs the chain. Randall's Mother keeps hold of the opposite end.

The tug-of-war doesn't last long. Ice rapidly encases Tori's hands, her knife, her half of the chain and her arms up to the elbows.

The ice around Tori's knife melts and immediately RE-FREEZES thicker, then melts and RE-FREEZES again. The ice thickens and advances to her shoulders.

Randall's Mother smiles coldly.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

Almost.

INT. BLUE RING HOTEL - HALLWAY 1 - NIGHT

The hallway is charred, right up to the broken window.

There is a hole in the floor.

Tarassas looks over the edge of the hole. Jumps down.

HALLWAY 2

Tarassas LANDS on his feet. No holes here.

A door at the end of the hall is open.

STAIRWELL

Tarassas enters a stairwell, looks down and stops.

Long twisted spikes line every step of the sturdy metal stairs. Only the immediate floor is safe.

Tarassas looks over the railing.

The stairwell descends many floors.

Avani is three floors down and descending rapidly, clutching her wrapped cut.

Tarassas scowls as best as his turtle beak can manage. He pulls a second rock hammer from his leather jacket and takes a DEEP BREATH.

Avani looks up at the sound of ROARING AIR.

A TWISTING FIREBALL shoots down the middle of the stairwell.

Avani tightens her lips and VAULTS over the railing.

Avani plummets down the shaft headfirst. Tarassas's fireball shoots down after her.

Avani holds her ingot ahead of her with both hands.

The fireball catches up fast.

INT. SUITE #3 - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cirrus PUNCHES Randall in the chest, AIR-BLASTING him against another wall which CRACKS from the force. Randall's face is bruised and his buckskin shirt is ripped at every seam.

Cirrus has several bruises and a black eye, and a strap of her tank-top is torn. An EARTHQUAKE suddenly hits the room.

Randall stumbles, leans on a bed for support --

Cirrus SLUGS him in the stomach --

AIR-BLASTING him up and back to CRASH above the headboard and FLOP forward, BOUNCING softly on the mattress.

INT. ROOFTOP GREENHOUSE - NIGHT

The quake RATTLES the greenhouse as Tori tries to pull away from Randall's Mother. The ice is over her shoulders now.

Tori's shoes bump into the line of broken ice, which begins creeping up her legs.

The upper ice closes around Tori's chest and creeps inexorably toward her neck. Tori's eyes dart, shivering.

TORI (V.O.)

Think. Think! Can't melt it,
it'll freeze thicker.

Seen through the ice, the chain wraps Tori's knife blade.

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

Damn it, damn it, her Ice
magic's just too... wait!

Tori closes her eyes. The ice still thickens.

RANDALL'S MOTHER
Giving up already? Good girl.

AETHER VIEW

Randall's Mother pumps cascades of pale blue swirls into and around Tori through the diamond ends of the chain.

Blue swirls flow from Tori's left hand, hit her knife hilt and flood from the blade curve. A thin layer of swirls forms around only the blade and the chain, leaving the ice intact.

NORMAL VIEW

Randall's Mother lowers her eyebrows, mildly concerned.

AETHER VIEW

The thin layer of swirls creeps down the chain where it meets Tori's right hand, frozen to the chain itself, and creeps over her hands and arms.

Randall's Mother tightly grips her end of the chain. Blue and white swirls in her body mingle in the diamond weight and surge out as pale blue.

Tori's blue swirls split the pale blue into blue and white.

NORMAL VIEW

The ice around Tori's arms and the chain between them
SHATTERS OUTWARD like shrapnel --

Striking Randall's Mother primarily about the face and neck.
She SCREAMS OUT and lets go of the chain.

Tori CHIPS the ice on her chest with her knife. All the ice
above her knees melts and SPLASHES to the floor.

Randall's Mother blinks and rubs her eyes furiously.

RANDALL'S MOTHER (CONT'D)
*How?! For the love of gods how
did you do that?!*

Tori bends down and melts the ice on her legs with stabs of
her knife. She stuffs the chain in her jacket.

TORI

Apparently I'm better with Water magic than you. I split your combined element with focus on my single one. My friends told me how to do it. Now if you'll excuse me, I'll go help them.

Randall's Mother rubs her eyes and leans on the table where she knocked off the poppies.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

Rin's in the airport with the other contractor. You can try but you'll never get to her.

Tori sticks her knife in the ice wall blocking the door.

TORI

Don't doubt my friends. They're living treasures.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

(smirks, eye-rubbing)
Not for much longer.

Tori picks up a watering can and HURLS it. It CLANGS hollowly against Randall's Mother's head.

INT. BLUE RING HOTEL - STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Tarassas frowns down the stairwell.

Far, far below, there's a gaping hole in the floor.

Tarassas HARRUMPHS, sticks his hammers in his jacket and turns around. He bumps into Cirrus's waist and looks up.

BASEMENT

A giant hole in the wall is hard to see in the dark. A muffled, distant RUMBLE comes from behind it.

EXT. BLUE RING HOTEL - ROOFTOP GREENHOUSE - NIGHT

The spiky wall of ice crumbles wetly down and Tori emerges.

Cirrus walks out from the stairwell, visibly thrashed yet with a healthy posture.

CIRRUS

Hey Tori. It was a trap.

TORI

I know. Rin's in the airport.
Where's Avani?

CIRRUS

Underground. Or so I was told.

INT. BLUE RING HOTEL - STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Tarassas ROLLS and BOUNCES down the stairs, apparently unable to stop.

EXT. BLUE RING HOTEL - ROOFTOP GREENHOUSE - NIGHT

TORI

(rubs hair)

Glorious. Let's--

A distant GWARK reaches the roof. Tori and Cirrus hear it.

They hurry to the edge of the roof and look down. Klauser swims in the river by the hotel docks and GWARKS loudly.

TORI (CONT'D)

Klauser? Why would he be...

Tori and Cirrus look at each other.

INT. STOLEN YACHT - NAUR'S CABIN - NIGHT

Naur continues his shaky breathing. He still lies on his stomach, but his head lies on its side.

NAUR'S P.O.V.:

The world is sideways and blurry between long, slow blinks. A humanoid shape appears and sits on the bed between blinks.

NAUR

Cirrus...?

You dai's human-form hand pats Naur's. Naur's eyes widen.

You dai, wrapped loosely in a white and green silk kimono embroidered with dragons, leans seductively toward Naur.

YOU DAI

Hey.

Naur's expression is appropriate for this situation.

EXT. HUB AIRPORT - TARMAC - NIGHT

The airport is shaped something like an octopus, with long concourses and hangars extending into thick tarmac tentacles dotted with airships.

Cirrus (wind tiger) lands with Tori at the tip of a tentacle. Cirrus's clothes are in her mouth.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Good luck 'til I get back.

Cirrus BLASTS OFF, violently FLAPPING Tori's hair.

EXT. DOWNTOWN RIVER - NIGHT

Klauser sees Cirrus fly to the river and bank to follow it upstream. He GWARKS and swims upstream.

EXT. HUB AIRPORT - TARMAC - NIGHT

Tori tucks some hair behind her ear. The ground RUMBLES.

Tori LEAPS away just in time to avoid the CRUNCH of a stony pair of jaws rising from the ground.

TORI

Avani?

The tarmac opens up with another RUMBLE and Avani is THROWN UP in a hail of gravel, SHRIEKING.

GREEN's mythrill sledgehammer lifts off the ground.

Avani stands up and rubs her thigh, on which she apparently landed. Tori rushes over to her.

AVANI

The hotel was a trap. I thought
Rin would be here instead.

Green himself, decked out in plate armor all the way to his tailfin, steps out from behind an airship a hundred feet away. Mythril sections are bolted to the steel.

GREEN

Your brave advance will stop
here, crim'nal scum!

Some BAGGAGE HANDLERS watch him at a safe distance, as do specks of CIVILIANS from the concourse windows. A roll-away covered ramp leads from a closed door to the tarmac.

GREEN (CONT'D)

I will defend these people to
the last!

Avani holds her wrapped cut. Her injured arm holds her ingot.

AVANI

Tori. I'll handle him. Go on.

TORI

The hell I will! You can't--

AVANI

--Do it! Naur doesn't have time!

Green raises his hammer.

Tori grits her teeth and RUNS.

TORI

Don't die!

Tori SPRINTS and LEAPS out of the way of four STONE JAWS snapping up from the ground, each telegraphed by a RUMBLE.

She heads straight for the ramp.

Green readies his hammer for one-on-one combat --

And an angled pillar of stone COLLIDES with him, knocking him out of Tori's way.

Tori passes Green and enters the ramp as he rights himself.

GREEN

You lowly, dev'ious--

Green HITS the ground with an armored fist.

A spiked pillar IMPALES the ramp an instant behind Tori.

Avani runs straight at Green.

AVANI

--Gods-blessed life, she is!

INT. STOLEN YACHT - NAUR'S CABIN - NIGHT

You dai deliberately lets part of his kimono slip off his shoulder and leans on Naur's hand.

YOU DAI

Karrun's in town, you know. I told her about *all* the fun we had, but she told me to kill you anyway. Can you *believe* that?

NAUR

(cringing)
You will not. I... nnggh...

YOU DAI

I'm *sure* you feel it. It's clear as day to me.

YOU DAI'S P.O.V.:

Naur's body is superimposed with red swirls -- all gathered around his slash wound.

YOU DAI (CONT'D)

Your body's magic is too busy fighting that *nasty* infection. If you throw *any* at me, you'll just kill yourself faster.

Naur struggles to pull away from Youdai. Impossible. Youdai leans down, eye-to-eye with him.

YOUDAI (CONT'D)

And I prefer the *little death*.

NAUR

S-stop...

Youdai seizes Naur's chin and moves in, closing his eyes.

YOUDAI

Make me.

Naur jerks his head free and CHOMPS DOWN HARD on Youdai's hand. Youdai's skin SIZZLES and he JUMPS up to his knees, SCREAMING high-pitched.

HALLWAY

Cirrus (human) enters and dashes down the short hall.

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

Aa-haaow! Stop! Leggo! No teeth!

NAUR'S CABIN

Cirrus comes to a stop in the doorway.

Youdai's kimono has fallen down past his waist. His back is to us, and his kneeling position on the bed blocking Naur's face can be easily misconstrued. He turns his head.

EXT. STOLEN YACHT - NIGHT

The yacht ROCKS from the force of a great struggle within.

INT. HUB AIRPORT - CONCOURSE - NIGHT

A few late-departure civilians make way for Tori as she SPRINTS down the long hall. She stops just long enough to accosts one of the businessmen from earlier.

TORI

You! Have you seen a short dye-blonde woman with a cane around?

LOUNGE

Tori jogs to a stop outside the open wall of the lounge. The MUSIC keeps playing.

The lounge is all but empty. The corner booth is visible from the entrance. Karrun and Addanc flank Rin in the deepest part of the booth. Karrun smiles.

KARRUN

Good evening, Tori dear.

Tori stares. Her fists can't be clenched any tighter.

TORI

Mom. What are you doing here.

Karrun gestures at Addanc at the word "servant."

KARRUN

Oh, various things. Checking in on an important Division One base. Having a holiday with my new indentured servant. Gauging the strength of Rin's unit.

EXT. HUB AIRPORT - TARMAC - NIGHT

Green's armored feet TROMP across the tarmac.

With each step, a spike of stone BURSTS up under Avani, who barely outruns the rise of each one.

Seen from above, Avani seems to be leading him away from the concourse. She makes a left turn around a dome-shaped rigid airship out of Green's line of sight.

Green brings his hammer down. An EARTHQUAKE strikes.

Avani hits the ground with her ingot that instant --

RISING up on a pillar of stone while the tarmac around her RUMBLES into a field of spikes.

Avani's pillar keeps rising, up and up, until she overtakes the height of the airship and JUMPS off onto it.

Green lifts his hammer and looks up.

Avani runs over the airship and JUMPS off toward Green --

Green STOMPS his steel-bottomed foot --

A huge STONE SPIKE rises up at Avani --

And she meets it with her ingot, PULVERIZING it all the way down into a huge cloud of dust.

INT. HUB AIRPORT - LOUNGE - NIGHT

TORI

(slow march forward)

How did you know I'd be here.

KARRUN

A little fairy told me you were headed upriver with some conspicuous individuals.

EXT. DOWNTOWN INTERSECTION - NIGHT

Nighttime car traffic crosses an intersection. Youdai's extended off-screen YELL grows louder as he gets nearer, until at last he SLAMS into the middle of the road and BOUNCES twice. Cars stop and HONK. None hit him.

Youdai remains where he landed, splayed out, cheek to the pavement, kimono dirtied and ripped and bunched up.

YUDAI

Aaaow. Dirty stinking mammal.
Didn't even touch him.

INT. HUB AIRPORT - LOUNGE - NIGHT

Tori stops about ten feet from the table. Addanc's eyes are fixed on her.

KARRUN

You want Rin's cane, correct?

TORI

If I have to fight you I will.

Karrun LAUGHS UPROARIOUSLY.

KARRUN

Tori dear, if *I* took a fight seriously *here*, I'd be on the newsreels overnight. The gauntlet I've put you through doesn't end with me -- tonight, anyway. Addanc?

Addanc grabs his sword hilt.

ADDANC

Yes'm.

Addanc slides out of the booth and draws his saber in the same motion.

Tori's face is all business.

Addanc runs his thumb over the back of his saber.

ADDANC (CONT'D)

Take a gander at this, Torrent. Exquisite curve. Finest quality carapite from Kurnung's lake. Now I *finally* outclass you!

Tori whips out her knife.

Addanc attacks her. The saber and knife CLASH twice. On a third CLASH Addanc bears down on the knife just long enough for Tori to swiftly KICK him in the groin.

Addanc makes a CHOKED SOUND and appropriate facial twinge.

Karrun holds her forehead.

EXT. HUB AIRPORT - TARMAC - NIGHT

The huge dust cloud lingers. Green grips his sledgehammer.

GREEN

Deceptive girl. What can you hope to do?

Avani JUMPS out of the dust, but with unnatural speed Green THRUSTS his hammer, hits her in the chest and KNOCKS her flat on her back.

Avani looks up.

Green raises his hammer.

Avani SPRINGS forward, SLAPS her ingot on his armored knee --

AETHER VIEW

A tide of green swirls enters Green's armor, reacts with the mythril plating, and STRETCHES and BENDS the steel over itself, locking every one of the articulated joints --

NORMAL VIEW

And SNAPPING off the bolts of the mythril plates, which CLATTER to the ground.

Green struggles, locked in his armor.

Avani uses the confusion to reach up with her ingot, touch Green's hammer handle and SNAP it off.

Green makes various FURIOUS STRUGGLING GRUNTS. Avani sweats, breathing a little unsteadily. She stuffs her ingot in her pocket, picks up the remainder of Green's hammer --

And BASHES him upside the helmet.

Green topples over. His tail is stuck in such a way that he resembles a fallen tripod, one leg sticking up.

Avani, sweating and clearly exhausted, strikes the ground and a chair-shaped lump of earth RUMBLES up. She sits in it and splays her fingers on the "armrests."

GREEN (CONT'D)

You vile and vi'lent wench!
Release me now!

AVANI (V.O.)

Great Teizen forgive my opponent
who draws your element from you.
He knows not what he does. And
please, sustain my body. Lest
Tori be upset with me.

INT. HUB AIRPORT - LOUNGE - NIGHT

Addanc cringes on the floor. Tori glares at Karrun.

TORI

Where is it.

KARRUN

Rin, hand me your cane.

Rin brings her cane up from under the table and hugs it.

RIN

What?! But she's right there,
you said you wanted her dead!

Tori's glare switches to disbelieving horror. Karrun keeps their eyes locked like lasers.

KARRUN

I did not say that. I said that
I no longer wanted her captured.

RIN

Well what else could you mean,
just let her go?

A sudden THUMP comes from under the table and Rin FLINCHES.

KARRUN

Yes. Now give me your cane.

Tori's eyes have too many conflicting emotions to count.

TORI

What's your game? Why let me
save my friends when you--

KARRUN

--So they *aren't* dead! I knew
it, pure Nexus skill. My "game,"
Tori dear, is to let your
friends continue serving me.
Today, Rin.

Rin reluctantly passes Karrun her cane-sword.

TORI

Serving you. *You*. How.

KARRUN

Their actions harmed not one but *two* Nexus divisions with insider precision. By using *you*, the one person I can always find, they revealed a conspiracy I can exploit. The longer they use *you*, the more they will reveal.

Karrun hands the cane to Tori. She doesn't take it yet.

TORI

They're not using me, Mom.

KARRUN

Odd to hear *you* rely on faith.

Tori angrily snatches the cane from her.

KARRUN (CONT'D)

Hah. Go, enjoy your freedom. It has given me more leverage than you can imagine. You've been very useful. Very useful indeed.

Tori clenches her jaw. The beginnings of tears form in her eyes, but she turns away before they can grow.

EXT. HUB AIRPORT - TARMAC - NIGHT

Avani unsheathes Rin's cane-sword and holds the edge to her clearly infected cut.

Tori holds her knife. The baggage handlers and ramp-piercing spike have vanished, but a few civilians at the windows remain, as does Green, stuck in his armor.

TORI

Hurry. Tuna-can there might break out.

GREEN

(ineffectual jostling)

You racist strumpet! I demand a
duel!

Tori brandishes her knife at Green with uncalled-for fury. Something's wrong with her. (The term is buck-passing.)

TORI

You're lucky I don't scale you
right *here*, soupfin!

AVANI

Tori! Calm down.

Tori takes a moment to breathe. A low GRUMBLING comes from Green's armor.

AVANI (CONT'D)

I don't know if I can narrow my
scope to the unseen. I've never
had need to.

TORI

I know you can do it. You...
(swallows)
Your skill's rare enough. Trust
me.

Avani smiles a little. She closes her eyes to focus.

AETHER VIEW

Green swirls in Avani's multicolor (yet mostly green) silhouette sink into the brown cane-head. Brown swirls flow down the straight blade as Avani's blue swirls are forcefully sucked into the cane.

Tori's silhouette points her knife at Avani's. Blue swirls waft from the former to the latter.

The brown swirls enter Avani's cut.

MICROSCOPIC AETHER VIEW

Thousands of bacteria, each with a tiny brown swirl or two, multiply like mad in what looks like a cell culture.

A wave of brown swirls washes over them, and for a second they multiply even faster. The wave then recedes, removing the swirls and SHRIVELING the bacteria to nothing.

Elsewhere, bacteria multiply in what can only be a blood stream. A tide of brown swirls rolls in and out, extinguishing the pathogens.

INT. STOLEN YACHT - NAUR'S CABIN - NIGHT

Avani lifts the blade off the edge of Naur's gash. All puffiness to it is gone.

AVANI

How does that feel, Naur?

Naur tries to turn over, but his hard red scab SNAPS and leaks as he speaks.

NAUR

Amazing. Simply--*aah!*

Tori touches her knife to the scab and it dries instantly.

TORI

Take it easy. You'll need to lie still 'til your mega-scab gets more flexible.

Tori, Avani and Cirrus are present with Naur. Cirrus kneels by his bed and holds his hand.

CIRRUS

It won't be too long. Us monsters heal fast, right Naur?

Red tears drop from Naur's eyes and instantly harden.

NAUR

Thank you. So much. To meet strangers and have them care so much, after my own family did not... I do not know what I did to deserve friends like you.

Cirrus tightens her grip on his hand. Avani SNIFFLES.

CIRRUS

Oh, quit, if I hug you you'll
bleed again. Let's move, Tori.
How far does the river go?

(looks up)

Tori?

Tori has her back turned to the bed. She makes little shaking motions of heavily-restrained sobs.

AVANI

Tori?

Tori holds her elbow. The half of her face not clutched by her other hand would be bawling if she were pushed another inch.

TORI (V.O.)

Damn it, Mom... goddamn it, Mom...

Avani touches Tori on the shoulder.

Tori turns around and HUGS Avani tight, choking back sobs.

TORI (CONT'D)

You guys... all you guys...

Tori can't seem to bring herself to say anything else.

Avani hugs back. She seems to understand.

FADE OUT