

AETHER TORRENT #23
"KARRUN'S DEPTH, PART 1"

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. LONELY BEACH - DAY

Ocean waves splash onto a quiet strip of grass-framed sand. A subtitle reads: "2/9/77."

TORI lies face-up on the sand, unconscious as if she just washed up there. She's barefoot and her pants are rolled up to her knees. The waves hit her legs.

A tiny CRAB skitters over her hand.

Tori suddenly BOLTS UPRIGHT and PANTS for breath.

Tori catches her breath. SLAPS her cheek. Nothing changes.

Her hand flies to her chest and THUMPS over her heart. She looks relieved, and we see why: she grips her knife hilt under her vest.

Tori stands up and COUGHS once. She surveys the beach.

TORI (V.O.)

Okay, Tori. Take it slow. What happened? I was on a boat. Now I'm on a beach. Shipwreck? I guess that's... wait, where's--

Tori's calm assessing expression turns wild and panicky.

TORI (CONT'D)

Naur! Klauser! Cirrus!
(choked gulp)
Avani!

KARRUN (O.S.)

You will not find them. I couldn't.

Tori looks toward us.

KARRUN stands at the grassy edge of the beach. The coat of her ivory pantsuit is unbuttoned.

KARRUN (CONT'D)

Welcome to Djittor, Tori dear.
All your friends are dead.

Tori steps back and a wave hits her ankles.

TORI

(small voice)

What.

(large voice)

You're lying.

(holds forehead)

You're lying!

Tori stares down and aside at her own memory.

EXT. OUTDOORS - DAY

Seen from atop a hill, the sun shines from the east onto the distant Rockies-esque mountains. A subtitle reads: "1/9/77."

CIRRUS (wind tiger) suddenly SOARS up and over the hill, carrying Tori and AVANI over our heads. NAUR rides KLAUSER over the hill and straight at us.

Klauser, laden with luggage, runs at about 35 MPH which Cirrus matches easily a few yards above and ahead.

The horizon glitters. It's the ocean, very distant.

EXT. SANDWARD - DAY

The busy half-circle harbor city of Sandward has an abundance of sandy beaches and sandier islands with boats of all sizes moving in between. There are no bridges in sight.

EXT. EAST BEACH - DAY

A beach crawls with PEOPLE doing beach activities.

Tori smiles out at them from a sidewalk overlooking the beach. Avani walks up and tugs her away by the arm.

AVANI

No more "down time," Tori.

TORI

Oh, come on, just a few hours?

Avani leads Tori back toward Cirrus and Naur, both cloaked and standing by Klauser on the sidewalk. The party moves on.

AVANI

No. Now, I *like* beaches. The border of earth and water is a great visual aid for spreading word of the gods' love. But our path ought not divert there.

(gestures toward beach)

Just look at them.

A top-heavy BLONDE in a tiny red bikini bounces down the sand and into the water. A muscle-bound MAN in unsettlingly tight trunks walks along the sand with two bikini-clad GIRLS.

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

The body is a holy gift, yet those people parade theirs to be gawked at for unholy reasons.

Avani makes a prudishly offended HMPH sound.

AVANI (CONT'D)

And if there's one thing I hate, it's mocking the gods' gifts and taking *pride* of it.

Tori stops. The others stop after a couple more steps.

TORI

Y'know Avani, and I'm serious, it's unhealthy to be so uptight. You're saying they should be ashamed of their bodies?

Avani squints. Cirrus SIGHS aloud.

AVANI

No. Modesty is not shame.

TORI

I don't see the difference.

Most of the beach-goers do not have perfect figures.

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

Everyone owns a body that no one else does. Those people are having fun *stating* their rarity, not flaunting it. Contentment with yourself isn't pride.

Avani's squint is gone, but she looks unconvinced. Cirrus and Naur exchange glances in the background.

AVANI

I don't see the difference.

TORI

Well there's a big one, okay?

CIRRUS

Can you discuss this later?

NAUR

We stand out too much here.

AVANI

Yes, let's be visibly modest.

Avani walks out of frame. Tori scowls slightly at her.

EXT. WATERFRONT - DAY

Dozens of boats from sailboat small to cruise-ship huge are docked along the waterfront.

The *End of the World*, An aerodynamic 175' black yacht, rests at a dock. A massive yellow and black salamander is emblazoned on the ship's foresail.

TAT, a thin man with long brown hair and a short beard, sits alone in the aft deck and clutches his head with both hands. He's in his thirties and sounds very distraught.

TAT

Gone. They're really gone. All of them. The cold, the deep...

(shudder)

We're done for. We're done for. How many days? How many hours?

TORI (O.S.)

You okay, pal?

Tat looks up at Tori on the dock. He wears a white lab coat over a long-sleeve, burnt-orange shirt and black slacks.

TAT

Um, y-yes... sorry, I, I'm an actor. Practicing lines, you know. Can I help you?

TORI

I think so.

(waves off-screen)

Hey guys, check this one out!

Avani, Cirrus, Naur and Klauser walk down the dock. Avani looks up at the boat's sail.

AVANI

I don't know.

TORI

What, too shameless for you? It looks pretty fast.

NAUR

And large enough for Klauser. Is your boat for rent, sir?

Tat's astonished eyes dart back and forth.

TAT'S P.O.V.:

Our view darts from Naur to Cirrus and back again, lingering only once on the others. The cloaks' hoods leave just enough unconcealed face area to show Cirrus and Naur's colors.

TAT (V.O.)

Monsters. Doubtless. Already?
No. Impossible. Tourists? Is
that possible? Maybe if I...

NAUR

Is something the matter, sir?

Tat shakes his head. His smile is a nervous one.

TAT

N-no, no. You're wise to wear cloaks. Dornans are terribly prejudiced toward monsters.

Naur tugs his hood down.

CIRRUS

We know. If you are too, then forget it. C'mon Naur.

TAT

(reaches out suddenly)
Wait! I love them-- er, you. Come aboard, help me with the sails and I can take you anywhere you like. Payment on arrival, whatever you feel the ride was worth. How's that?

Tori, Avani, Cirrus and Naur look understandably surprised.

TAT (CONT'D)

Oh, and my name's Tat. Well, come on, we're wasting time!

Tat literally runs into the ship. The party looks at each other. Tori shrugs.

EXT. END OF THE WORLD - DAY

The ship is alone at sea, close to evening. "*End of the World*" is clear on the bow if we haven't noticed it before.

Avani sits with Klauser on the aft deck and scratches his neck while Cirrus (wind tiger) summons WIND into the sails.

AVANI

Tori? About earlier...

Tori sits at the edge of the yacht, dangling her legs overboard. Her pant legs are rolled up.

TORI

Just forget it.

AVANI

I can't. It's confusing. You don't seem prideful, so how can you defend pride in others?

TORI

(annoyed sigh)

One, you're confusing pride with hubris, and two, being content with your body is *neither*. I thought Elementism *wasn't* a skin-hating original-sin thing.

AVANI

It isn't, but even a little pride can lead to evil. I was only concerned in view of your past with Karrun, that's all.

Tori, instantly offended, turns her head in time to miss a serpentine shape snaking underwater past her feet.

TORI

Oh, so you think I'll turn into Mom just because I'm comfortable in my own skin? Y'know, *this* is part of why I'm an atheist. Religious types are so damn judgmental.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Tori...

AVANI

(hurt)

I didn't mean any disrespect.

TORI

Then why be concerned at all? I thought you said you knew me.

A sudden HEAVY THUMP from underneath JOSTLES the entire boat, knocking Tori from sitting to laying.

The boat tilts dangerously. Cirrus stops summoning wind into the sails and BLASTS it at the rising side --

Just in time to keep Avani and Klauser from sliding off.

AVANI

What's going on?!

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Two guesses.

Cirrus crouches to launch off, but YODAI (dragon) emerges behind her and CHOMPS onto her rear left leg. Cirrus has just enough time to YELP airily --

Before Youdai FLINGS her overboard. A patch of the sea rises up and over her, encasing her in a hovering water sphere.

Tori whips out her knife. Klauser looks around for an escape but finds none. Avani ducks into the boat.

AVANI

My weapon. I'll be right back!

Youdai stretches to his full length inside a water column. His head sticks out.

TORI

Get lost, lizard. I'm off my cycle, I can fight you for real.

YODAI (V.O.)

Oh, can you? Don't flatter yourself, honey.

A thick, dark blue ring hangs from his right ear. Both his ears are unmarred. His draconic face looks deadly serious.

YODAI (V.O.)

Your mommy got mad and dropped her deal with me. Nothing's protecting you now.

A SWIRLING water column rises under the boat. Tori points her knife at Youdai and SLASHES it back and forth to no effect.

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

I like Levanter better anyway.

Cirrus struggles fiercely in the water ball, also to no effect. Her leg bleeds.

Tori frantically thrusts her knife in Youdai's direction. Nothing happens. Klauser looks over the edge and GWARKS.

The column under the boat SWIRLS VIOLENTLY as it rises one hundred, two hundred, three hundred feet and more.

Cirrus's spherical prison rolls toward and up the column, picking up size and speed as it goes.

Youdai smiles toothily.

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

Sayonara.

Tori looks down.

Cirrus's ball SMASHES into the boat, BREAKING it in two.

Tori tumbles overboard, plummeting to the sea.

EXT. LONELY BEACH - DAY

Tori lowers her hand from her forehead.

TORI

That's right... I didn't see them.
How long was I out?

Karrun checks her nails. They're thick, black and sharp.

KARRUN

Today is the second, and that's
a morning sun.

TORI

Not even a day, then. I made it,
so maybe they did too!

Karrun takes a khaki scrap of cloth from her coat.

KARRUN

I told you. I didn't find them.

Tori strides up to Karrun and snatches the scrap from her. It's part of one of Avani's skirts.

KARRUN (CONT'D)

Your friends were still useful to me, so I tried to intercept Youdai myself. I was too late.

Tori's grip on the scrap trembles.

She glares up at us.

TORI

You're lying. This, this is all some evil plan of yours. Why are you even here?

KARRUN

I deduced that you'd come. Since I regarded your whole party as useful, I came to explain fully and calmly about myself and the Nexus. But then Youdai --

TORI

-- You're *lying!* You lied about who you were and you're lying about them! They can't be dead!

Karrun allows a touch of genuine sadness in her yellow eyes.

KARRUN

Tori dear. Please look past your recent hatred for me. I am who I am. I am still your mother, and I still love you. Your suffering is in no way useful to me. I'm sorry, but they are gone.

We can practically hear Tori's last restraints break one by one. At last she loses it and starts POUNDING ineffectual fists into Karrun's abdomen, SOBBING between anguished WAILS.

Karrun absorbs the half-attack. Tori leans on her last blows, shuddering with sobs, and Karrun hugs her softly.

TORI

I, I never told them... and Avani,
she... the, the last thing I did
was insult her, Mom!

KARRUN

Take heart. Considering her
faith, she likely died forgiving
you.

Tori WAILS again. We've never heard her so emotional.

Karrun's smile is a little too sinister for this situation.

EXT. JRANKRN - SHORE - DAY

A volcano looms over an island forest, which looms in turn over a wide shoreline.

Klauser's legs SPLASH from the sea to the shore.

Klauser, saddle-free and dripping gallons of water, carries an unconscious Avani on his back for a few wobbly steps.

He COLLAPSES onto the sand. Avani rolls off him. Her clothes are horribly tattered, but that's her only damage.

EXT. WRECKAGE - DAY

Naur stares at the sky from the deck of the *End of the World*.

The deck is all that remains, floating miraculously. He and Tat sit on it as other ship bits float around.

TAT

We're done for. We're done for.

NAUR

Yes, if we abandon hope.

TAT

You don't know what I mean. You can't. I'm not even sure I do.

NAUR

She will come for us. I know it.

EXT. SEAWEED PATCH - DAY

Cirrus (wind tiger) floats on her back in a giant patch of seaweed.

A SEAGULL lands on her chest. Walks up to her neck.

The seagull pecks at Cirrus's face. Cirrus's face twitches and she rolls over, immediately rolling back and SPUTTERING EXPLOSIVELY. The gull flies away.

Cirrus FLAILS in the seaweed for a moment before fully awakening. She looks around, tangled in the weeds.

Tori's duffel bag floats on the edge of the patch.

EXT. NASHTE - MAIN STREET - DAY

Djittor is rocky and green like a Grecian island. Nashte, a grid town of two-to-four-story buildings, keeps its distance from a hill covered in broken and/or fallen gray towers.

KARRUN (V.O.)

"South in Chutor, a tower climbs
to a view of unmatched beauty.
The greatest treasure, beyond
all desire, rests at the top,
shadowed by Abaoaqu."

Karrun and Tori walk down a very straight main street. Tori looks depressed. Judging by the PASSERS-BY, the population is 50/50 human and raiza.

KARRUN (CONT'D)

Imagine my surprise when I saw
that old raizan poem on the
plate Rin's unit brought back.

TORI

Avani said she came here once.
Tried to convert people, didn't
work. I never thought it was
real 'til she said that.

KARRUN

The island is real, but the poem
is creative balderdash.

Karrun reaches into her coat and takes Tori's antique book,
not seen since episode 17, from under her arm.

TORI

That's...

KARRUN

The Chronicle of the Wandering Sage. You left it in Almahook City. How odd that you would have a raizan translation like the one I read to you. Do you even remember those days?

Tori takes the book. Karrun lets her. Tori flips some pages.

FLASHBACK

INT. TORI'S ROOM - NIGHT

CHILD TORI, seven or eight, lies in bed and clutches her sheets excitedly. Her hair is short.

CHILD TORI

Treasure? Ooh, what is it, what is it? And what's a boa-ku?

Karrun, looking no younger, sits at Tori's bedside and holds the book open. The room is a mess.

KARRUN

The treasure is what you want it to be. Abaoaqu is a metaphorical representation of the desire of others impeding your willingness to seize any greatness, represented here by treasure.

CHILD TORI

But what if others are helping me? If the treasure's what I want it to be, there's enough to... de-le-gate it.

KARRUN

Distribute, Tori dear, not delegate. But you should not do either. Are you not entitled to the sweat of your brow?

CHILD TORI

What if I wanna sweat with my friends? They should get some.

Karrun smiles and gently ruffles Child Tori's hair.

KARRUN

No they shouldn't. You are better than them, Tori dear. That is a fact. My love for you proves it, does it not?

Child Tori smiles. She's missing a tooth.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. NASHTE - MAIN STREET - DAY

Tori closes the antique book.

TORI

Mom?

KARRUN

Yes, dear?

TORI

I think I still hate you.

KARRUN

You think, eh? Well, that's an improvement. Come, let me buy you something. What can you go without longer, breakfast or shoes?

TORI

Shoes.

EXT. JRANKRN - SHORE - DAY

Avani stirs. The deep, vibrato RAIZAN LANGUAGE buzzes around

her without subtitles.

AVANI

What...?

Two naked gray-on-white raiza islanders poke and prod a groggy yet alive Klauser. Their names are GRA and SULV.

GRA

(subtitled)

Oh look, sister, it's awake.

(English)

Hello there. You are not dead.

AVANI

So I see. Where...

(averts eyes)

Oh my.

The raiza leave Klauser alone. Gra has an ocean wave pattern tattooed up his arms and Sulv wears bone and leather bracelets on her wrists, ankles and tail. Their only apparent gender mark is Sulv's greater height and muscle tone.

SULV

You are on *Jrankrn*. Many broken humans wash here.

GRA

"Wrecked," not broken. What is your name?

Avani has her head turned 90 degrees to the islanders.

AVANI

A-Avani... yours?

GRA

For human tongue, Gra will do, and she is Sulv. Come, take your bird and follow us.

SULV

We will hospital you.

GRA
(side whisper)
"Hospitality."

SULV
Hospitality you.

AVANI
Do you have... I mean, could I
borrow some clothes?

SULV
Close what?

Sulv looks at Gra, who shrugs.

Avani turns a little red.

EXT. WRECKAGE - DAY

Tat holds his head again.

TAT
It's all my fault. All my fault.

NAUR
Do not blame yourself.

QUICK FLASHBACK:

Back on the ship, in the cockpit, Avani and Naur shout
silently at Tat, who visibly suffers a nervous breakdown at
the wheel.

NAUR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Anyone would be frightened of a
dragon attack.

Tat clenches his hair.

TAT
I didn't think it was a dragon...

CIRRUS (V.O.) (O.S.)
Naur!

Cirrus (wind tiger) flies in with Tori's bag around her neck.

Naur and Tat look up. Naur stands and waves ecstatically and the deck tilts slightly below the surface.

NAUR

Cirrus! Cirr--agh!

The seawater reaches Naur's ankles and SIZZLES. The deck begins submerging.

Cirrus speeds down --

And hovers an inch above the deck.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Get on, get on! Both of you!

They do.

Cirrus FLIES OFF and the deck finally goes under.

Naur and Tat hold on tight.

NAUR

I lost my backpack. Our funds were in there.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

We'll get more later. I'm so glad you're okay.

NAUR

As am I. But what happened to the others?

CIRRUS (V.O.)

I don't know. Let's find out.

Cirrus flies away.

INT. SEAFOOD RESTAURANT - DAY

Tori joylessly cuts into an omelet. There are shrimp in it.

She and Karrun have a whole section of a restaurant to themselves. Fish skeletons and fishing equipment decorate the walls. Every RESTAURANT PATRON except for Tori is a raiza.

KARRUN

How long has it been since we were together like this?

TORI

Not long enough.

KARRUN

Hah.

Karrun has a plate of whole shrimp. A couple still TWITCH. She picks up a twitching one and eats it whole, CRUNCHING politely.

KARRUN (CONT'D)

The other Executives don't have half the leisure time I do. Division One is more efficiently organized than most governments, even my own. I could spend a few more days away and they could both manage themselves.

Tori focuses on her food, if her blank stare and mechanical movements could be called focus. Karrun's velvet rumble is almost hypnotic in its cadence.

KARRUN (CONT'D)

Djittor is a fine place for a holiday, isn't it? Good food. Rare sights. Quiet beaches. Warm water off the gyre. You could swim like you like away from prying eyes, utterly relaxed. Then we could talk about anything. It would be as though you had never left.

(deliberate pause)

Would you like that, Tori dear?

Tori SLAMS her utensils down and STANDS up in the same motion. Everything on the table CLATTERS loudly.

Some of the other restaurant patrons watch as Tori storms out of the restaurant.

Karrun waits a beat, grabs a handful of shrimp and follows her, shooting a false smile at the onlookers.

KARRUN (CONT'D)

Adopted daughter. You know how humans are.

EXT. LAGOON VILLAGE - DAY

More ISLANDER RAIZA populate a large village built in a scattered assembly of lagoons. Houses made of huge sewn hides stretched over whole whale ribs stand above the water on wooden pilings.

Gra and Sulv lead Avani out of a low forest. Avani leads Klauser.

GRA

I will find an unbusy friend to send for a boat for you. Comfort yourself until then.

Gra dives into a lagoon about five feet deep and swiftly swims away with his dorsal fin sticking above the water.

Avani watches him go. Something she sees makes her GASP.

On the big sandbar dividing the lagoons from the sea, four islanders (three gray, one blue) cut apart a *Dunkleosteus*, an extinct (for us) armor-headed fish the size of a school bus.

Sulv smiles at Avani's mouth-covering reaction.

SULV

Big, yes? I helped kill it.

Avani keeps her hand over her mouth. She starts crying.

SULV (CONT'D)

What is problem? You eat plants?

Avani wipes her eyes and SNIFFLES. Klauser lowers his head and nuzzles her shoulder. Avani pets him.

AVANI

Did you find any other castaways
on the beach?

SULV

No.

Avani SNIFFLES again and vigorously rubs her face.

AVANI

Then there is no problem.

(V.O.)

I know you found them safe
ground too, Great Teizen. You
need not test my faith.

(aloud)

Aahh. All right. I would like to
help you however I may.

SULV

Good. Remove your skin.

AVANI

Pardon?

SULV

My human tongue is sick. The...

(snaps fingers)

Skin on your skin. *Garments.*

Avani reddens again. Her clothes are still tattered.

AVANI

Uhm, I'd rather not?

SULV

You floated from unknown water.

Your skin may crawl with them.

(looks up, taps foot)

Them, them... *parasites*, yes. Very
dangerous for humans. Remove for
your safety, please.

Avani cringes. Klauser lifts a big clawed foot and SCRATCHES
his neck like a dog with fleas.

AVANI

Humans have this thing called modesty. We don't like baring our skin with someone watching.

SULV

Oh, I think. I will leave you unwatched to remove.

Sulv dives into the lagoon.

Avani and Klauser are left alone. Klauser scratches again.

AVANI

(to Klauser)

It's fine for my safety, right? They wouldn't care, right? Like I don't care about *your* nudity, right?

Klauser GWARKS fussily and keeps scratching.

Avani gulps.

She shakily unfastens the three buttons of her shirt with the hesitancy of a child in her first locker room.

Seen from behind, she lifts off her shirt. It's a slow reveal of an inch-wide scar on the full length of her spine, which branches left and right at her shoulders. The scar is a capital T, a few shades lighter than the rest of her skin.

EXT. DJITTOR - WATERFRONT - DAY

Djittor's waterfront is less busy than Sandward's.

Tori walks down it, still barefoot.

Karrun's long stride catches up.

KARRUN

Anger is useless, Torrent. What did I teach you about accepting and moving on?

Tori keeps her voice down. It's clearly an effort for her.

TORI

Do you want to know what I'd
like, Mom? Do you really?

KARRUN

What you want is impossible.
They are dead. I was there.

Tori stops on a dime, spins around and SHOUTS, livid:

TORI

It's not just them! I want my
proof back!

KARRUN

Your what?

SERIES OF FLASHBACKS:

[Cued roughly to Tori's sentences]

- 1). Four quick flashes: Tori and Avani outside Yenech's mansion in episode 1, Cirrus in episode 3, Avani and Klauser in episode 5, and Naur in episode 13.
- 2). Tori fights two GUYS in the spiral staircase of Castle Shiitake in episode 6.
- 3). Tori and Avani push Avani's charm back and forth to each other in episode 7.
- 4). Avani pets Cirrus (wind tiger) in the back of Karrun's limo in episode 12.
- 5). Naur speaks at the campsite in episode 22.

TORI (V.O.)

I found all my friends against
all likelihood in the *universe*.
After we set out together there
was never a dull moment. Sure we
argued sometimes, but even *that*
was fun. And the best thing was,
we didn't ask a lot of questions
about each other. We opened up
only when we wanted to, and only
to the extent we wanted.

EXT. DJITTOR - WATERFRONT - DAY

Tori starts tearing up again, not looking directly at Karrun.

TORI (CONT'D)

We didn't need to gush about ourselves. Our group -- we just were. We just went. We just did. One thing just led to another and we picked up reasons along the way. It was how life is.

(rubs eye with wrist)

It was so rare.

KARRUN

And this "proof?"

TORI

D'you remember --

(shuddering snuffle)

I was like twelve, and I told you I wanted to make a museum? To show proof that life was special? Worth the trouble? They were it. Like you used to be.

Karrun sweeps Tori close in her arms. It's a soft hug. Tori SNIFFLES against her.

KARRUN

Why speak in past tense? Am I not rare? Singular? Peerless?

(whisper)

I could be your proof again, Tori dear. You need only let me.

Tori hesitates.

She hugs back.

Karrun's smiles triumphantly down at Tori's head buried in her chest. Her eyes flick up at a faint sound.

ADDANC (O.S.)

(faintly distant)

Bugger off, will you?!

Far down the waterfront, Youdai (human) says something inaudible to Addanc. Only Addanc is loud enough to be heard.

ADDANC (CONT'D)

(distant)

I don't care what she promised
you! I'd sooner cut 'em off!

Karrun's smile clenches into the grin of Death.

She hugs Tori tighter. Evidently Tori can't hear Addanc.

TORI

Mom... Mom...

FADE OUT