

AETHER TORRENT #25
"DJITTOR'S SECRETS"

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. OCEAN - RAFT - DAY

A raft with a sail, tiny in the distance, moves over the lonely sea at late afternoon.

AVANI, clad only in Tat's lab coat, shoots a glare at us.

AVANI

No. We *have* to pursue it.

CIRRUS flies behind the raft, air-pushing it along with NAUR on her back. She blinks heavily and decreases altitude.

NAUR

But if there remains a chance
that Tori is alive --

CIRRUS (V.O.)

--And there *is* a chance, for the
fifth time --

NAUR

--Ought we not focus on finding
her instead of that treasure?

Avani and TAT lean against still-sleeping KLAUSER and the mast of the raft, respectively. Avani hugs her bag containing, cramped, her weapons and Tori's violin case.

AVANI

How clearer can I state this?
Tori is alive because she has
holy protection, but scrounging
for signs of her would doubt
that defense. And weaken it.
(clutches coat collar)
I will not allow faith in her to
fade. I mustn't. She set us on
the path to that treasure, and
we *will* see it through.

Tat, still shirtless and shoeless, turns his face completely away from Avani and smiles thinly, clearly hiding something.

TAT

"A treasure beyond all desire."
You all desire to see her again,
don't you?

Avani's expression is enough of a confirmation.

So are Cirrus and Naur's.

TAT (CONT'D)

What if I told you exactly where
the treasure lies?

Avani, Cirrus, and Naur each quickly react in turn.

Avani crawls around Klauser, who stirs and GWARKS softly. The raft rocks slightly and Tat shrinks away from the edge.

AVANI

Are you... *serious*, mister Tat?

TAT

Just "Tat" is fine.

AVANI

Fine! Tat! Are you joking?

TAT

No. I discovered its location,
but it...

(shudder)

I needed help. Surely you
wondered why a stranger took you
aboard his boat!

AVANI

I thought it was kindness.

TAT

Not quite. Not quite.

Cirrus looks perturbed.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Why didn't you tell us earlier?!

TAT

It isn't the easiest thing to believe until you're there.

NAUR

Fine. Then let me accelerate us.

The two long palm tree logs on which the large raft floats sink low.

Naur dismounts Cirrus. There's just barely enough surface area to fit everyone.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Are you sure about this?

Naur clenches the edge of the raft with his toes and bends his knees and cups his hands outward. Water splashes up and his feet SIZZLE.

NAUR

(cringing)

I am not completely powerless at sea. Hold on.

A JET OF FLAME shoots from his hands not unlike rocket exhaust, BOILING the water it touches.

The raft JOLTS forward, jostling Avani and Tat and fully awakening Klauser, who lifts his head wide-eyed.

Seen from afar, the raft shoots forward with what looks for all the world to be a flaming rocket boost.

EXT. NASHTE - BACK ALLEY - DAY

Tori's antique book lies in the dust of the alley. TORI's dirty bare feet walk into frame and her hand picks it up.

Tori walks back the way she came and opens the book.

TORI (V.O.)

Good, still intact...

Tori turns to a full-page illustration of a bearded old sage speaking to a crowd as a young man stands behind him.

Tori cracks a smile that is not at all joyful.

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

"We are all we have." And the sage wept. "Our only lasting treasures are each other."

EXT. NASHTE - STREET - DAY

Tori exits the alley into busy PEDESTRIAN traffic all moving in the same direction. She moves against it.

PEDESTRIAN 1

I heard it was a dragon!

PEDESTRIAN 2

This far north? Are you mad?

Tori's gray eyes blink sadly, unaffected by the bustle.

FLASHBACK

INT. CARAVAN HIDEOUT - LOOKOUT - DAY

Back in episode 2, up in the cramped lookout, Avani seizes Tori's hand in both of hers. Tori looks uncomfortable.

AVANI

That's why I believe our meeting was no accident, Tori. If you left with me--

END FLASHBACK

EXT. NASHTE - STREET - DAY

Tori clamps her eyes shut, interrupting her own recollection. A couple tears leak out.

A pedestrian COLLIDES into her, stumbling her and knocking her book down, but he doesn't slow as he apologizes.

PEDESTRIAN 3

Oh, sorry!

Tori SNIFFLES hard, once, then crouches to retrieve her book and more pedestrians flow around her.

A folded paper sticks out of the pages in back. She pauses as she notices it.

Tori's hand plucks the paper out. It's a pamphlet which reads "ANCIENT SITES OF DJITTOR."

Tori scrunches her face.

TORI
Well played, Mom.

EXT. ASPH HOTEL - PRIVATE BEACH - DAY

The Greek-column-adorned Asph Hotel overlooks a peaceful yet dull gray-sand beach at the edge of town.

Human HOTEL PATRONS wander the sand. Further back, an imposing barbed-wire fence bears a sign reading, in italics, "*Asph Hotel Guests ONLY.*"

INT. ASPH HOTEL - KARRUN'S SUITE - DAY

KARRUN lies on her couch, apparently asleep. Her tail dangles off the end. A sliding door to an outdoor balcony stands open in the background.

ADDANC sneaks toward the front door, saber at his side.

Karrun's yellow eyes open, stern and non-dilated as usual.

KARRUN
Going for a stroll, Addanc?

ADDANC
(frightened jolt)
I, uh, thought I'd, take some
initiative. Find Torrent, like.

Karrun STRETCHES luxuriously. She may be seven feet tall, but her total length, fingertips to tail-tip, is over ten.

KARRUN
Use that initiative like a good
servant and cook me something.

ADDANC

But I can find her! I can!

Karrun stands up, straightens her suit and folds her hands behind her back.

KARRUN

Let me tell you, Addanc. The alias of every member of the Nexus is, in some way, accurate.

Karrun slowly walks over to Addanc. Her tail sways.

KARRUN (CONT'D)

Take me for instance. I have eaten a whale.

Addanc backs up to a wall as Karrun gets far too close.

KARRUN (CONT'D)

Of course, I was so *small* back then, it took weeks to finish.
 (nose to nose)
 You would take half a day, were I so inclined.
 (tooth-clenched smile)
 Do not. Make me. Inclined.

ADDANC

I'll... be in the kitchen. Ma'am.

EXT. TAUNTING WALL RUINS - DAY

A white wall displays repeating lines of black glyphs, each placed next to one of nine black cylindrical etchings arranged in a ring. Two "columns" of gray fractal swirls mark the edges of the wall.

In a ruin of broken tower stumps, Tori, alone, admires the wall. It's 9' tall, 4' long and 1' wide. Grass and soil overtake broken slabs of stone around it.

Tori flips through her book.

Seen further back, the hollow stumps of variously-sized stone towers stand among the fallen rubble of their former glory.

STORYBOOK SPACE

The view switches to a sparsely-animated storybook style. Tori narrates as the bearded SAGE walks through the ruins.

TORI (V.O.)

Said the sage: "My eyes, now dimmed, once beheld an antique land. Upon the last standing wall appeared a poem known well to the shark-men:

The Sage stares contemplatively at the wall.

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

"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*."

TAUNTING WALL RUINS

Tori reads an illegible page illustrated by the Sage looking at the wall as a strange tentacled shadow hovers behind him.

TORI (CONT'D)

"Go there," he said, "and your tears will rise. No true tower stands. *Abaoaqu* is not a monster but ruin itself, for it shadows our glory and turns us mad."

Tori furrows her brows at her book, thinking deep. She SLAPS her book shut at the end of an interruption:

RANDALL'S MOTHER (O.S.)

So, no real treasure or monster. Kinda depressing, huh, Randall?

RANDALL'S MOTHER and RANDALL himself stand a few yards behind Tori, she in a long white Greek tunic and he still in buckskin, yet with a touristy straw hat and sunglasses.

RANDALL

Yes, Mother. Let us find joy.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

Lucky for us that the tourists
ran off to gawk at a dragon
attack.

Tori keeps her gaze on the wall.

TORI

Lucky. Right. I know Karrun set
this trap in case she lost me,
which she did.

GREEN walks around a tower stump in hoodless steel chainmail
and carrying a mythril sledgehammer -- much simpler than his
old one, nothing but a pale green brick on a long handle.

GREEN

How odd that you would come
regardless, then.

TORI

Treasure hunting's all I have
now. I'm fine with the risk.

TARASSAS walks around a stone slab, wearing a new fedora.

TARASSAS

A human after my own heart-art.

Randall, his Mother, Green, Tarassas, and the wall surround
Tori. The back of the wall is bare white.

TORI

What can I say? It's my path.
Avani would've wanted me to
follow it. Funny thing about her
religion, by the way. It allows
for killing in self-defense.

Tori spins 180 degrees and WHIPS OUT her knife.

TORI (CONT'D)

So come on. Who's first.

Randall's Mother placidly holds up her hands.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

Nobody. We just want to talk.

Tori carefully puts her book down.

TORI

Y'know, I am goddamn sick of
people lying to me.

Tori LEAPS forward from her crouch --

Randall's Mother hikes up her tunic far enough to unsheathe
the two daggers strapped to her thighs --

Dodges Tori's THRUST, dodges a SLASH, BLOCKS a second and
third SLASH with her daggers and DUCKS another THRUST.

Tori SLASHES downward and Randall's Mother CLASHES her
daggers scissor-like against it. A shaking water sphere the
size of a golf ball forms at the point of contact.

The grass and soil underfoot withers and CRACKS, drying fast.

The water ball expands and moves from the three-blade
junction to fully engulf Tori's knife.

Tori and Randall's Mother sweat visibly, knife-grappling as
the water ball grows.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

Where's that skill you showed
me? Your mind's somewhere else.

TORI

Is not.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

Liar.

Randall's Mother SLASHES her daggers and the ball SHOOTs into
Tori's chest with a heavy SPLASH-THUMP, knocking her back.

Tori regains her footing, rotates her knife underhand and
SLASHES out the water on her as a pointed projectile --

Which Randall's Mother, at the end of her sentence, SPLASHES
into oblivion in midair with a flick of her wrist.

RANDALL'S MOTHER (CONT'D)

Will you *cool it?!?*

TORI

Make me.

The ground under Tori's legs sinks and SNAPS SHUT over her calves faster than we've ever seen the trap move before.

Green rests his hands on his hammer handle, cane-like.

GREEN

A lady asks, and I cannot refuse.

Tori struggles and gets nowhere.

TORI

Let-- *nnh*-- fight me like a man!

Green scowls. Randall's Mother steps up quickly.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

Don't encourage him. We need your help to arrest your mother!

The tension in Tori's face shifts to shock.

TORI

Arrest... wait, she told you?

Randall's Mother points a dagger at Tori. Green maintains his stolid grip on his hammer.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

She *told* us you were brainwashed by the Nexus. She wanted you back to avoid the scandal of a Federal vessel contractor's daughter working for criminals.

GREEN

Our Lady Rin believed her tale, but she is weak to woeful stories. We are not.

Randall's Mother smiles down the length of her arm at us. The dagger has a squid etched into the blade.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

Tell me. What's the *likeliest* way for a girl like you, with a mother like yours, to join an elementalists mafia? Brainwashing or family connection?

Tori lowers her knife, albeit cautiously. She's still stuck.

TORI

What do you want from me?

Randall's Mother re-sheathes her daggers on her thigh straps.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

Talk. That is, if you don't mind incriminating your mother.

Tori thinks about that for a moment.

TORI

Where should I start?

EXT. ASPH HOTEL - PRIVATE BEACH - NIGHT

The raft WHUMPS hard against the gray sand. Avani, Cirrus, Naur, Klauser, and Tat disembark. It's just dark enough to technically be night.

AVANI

(kneeling on sand)
Praise below, praise everywhere,
we've been delivered safely!

Naur leans on Cirrus. He looks exhausted.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

That was amazing, Naur.

NAUR

It was nothing. I am just...
famished.

Klauser starts clawing the sand and sticking his beak in.

AVANI

You aren't alone. Where exactly
did you navigate us, Tat?

The hotel lights are all on, but no one except the party is
on the beach.

TAT

Seems I miscalculated. This is
the Asph Hotel's private beach.
No matter, we can jump the fence
and head to the treasure.

AVANI

Not before dinner. Food is holy.

TAT

But the treasure--

AVANI

--Will still be there if we
pause to find food. We'll need
to get something for Tori too.
Maybe some granola.

Tat claws at his short beard in frustration. Avani shoots him
a particularly dangerous glare as he speaks, which pauses him
long enough to divert his sentence.

TAT

Granola. As if she's... uh,
incapable of feeding herself.

Naur watches Klauser pull a small crab from the sand, SNAP it
in his beak and juggle it down to his mouth.

NAUR

Klauser seems capable.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Think we can leave him here? I
don't smell anyone nearby.

TAT

The guests will be at dinner or
in the city. Even *with* a beach,
Asph Hotel is torturously dull.

INT. KARRUN'S SUITE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Addanc pours a glass of wine. He wears a white apron with a blue shark on it.

Karrun politely CRUNCHES a tasty-looking pork rib at a dining table. Beside her plate (with more ribs on it) sits a half-eaten loaf of bread and Naur's spiral disc, now a coaster.

KARRUN

This is... admittedly good. It
seems you are useful after all.

Karrun takes a long sip of her wine with a pinky extended.

ADDANC

Used to cook for Grampus, I did.
But begging your pardon, Ma'am,
what if the L-M unit can't find
Torrent? Can I hunt her then?

KARRUN

If they cannot, they will be
useless, as will you be if you
stop cooking.
(grin)
Now, bring me a pineapple or
I'll eat your legs.

EXT. NASHTE - HILLSIDE - NIGHT

Randall's Mother clenches her fist over Youdai's ring.

She, Randall and Green rapidly descend the ruin-capped hill and enter the edge of Nashte. Randall's Mother's graying braid flaps behind her. Randall has shed his hat and shades.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

It's Karrun's shade of carapite.
And all the gawkers said a tall
girl cut off the dragon's ear.

(MORE)

RANDALL'S MOTHER (CONT'D)

Even if we can't prove the rest,
we can nail Karrun for giving
aid and comfort to an enemy.

GREEN

Still, parts of the account felt
skimmed, I say. Perhaps young
Tori hid a fact or two.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

Tarassas can talk it out of her.

EXT. TAUNTING WALL RUINS - NIGHT

Tori and Tarassas sit on earthen cubes around an earthen fire
pit a few yards from the wall. A fire CRACKLES warmly.

TARASSAS

You know... for what it's worth,
I'm sorry about your friends.

Tori stares at the fire, silent. Her denim vest lies over her
book, which lies on another cube-seat. Her knife and holster
remain over her shirt.

TARASSAS (CONT'D)

So. Um. Fond of archaeology?

TORI

Yeah. Old stuff is rare.

TARASSAS

I'm ninety-six. Does that count?

TORI

Not for lurutt. Your limited
accent is rarer.

TARASSAS

Thanks! It took me decade-ades
to lose -- ah, spit.

Tori CHUCKLES a little. She looks up at the wall.

TORI

So, what do you make of that?

Tarassas hops off his cube, walks to the wall and takes a shiny red-orange orichalcum rock hammer from his jacket.

TARASSAS

Ah, the Taunting Wall, my old nem-esis. It's the most despised object in archaeology.

TORI

How come?

A long jet of flame BURSTS from the tip of Tarassas's hammer. He waves it at the wall in a circle, indicating it all.

TARASSAS

The wall is made of monumentium. Ever hear of it?

TORI

I grew up in a city full of it. It's totally indestructible, not even elementalism... can... damage...

Tarassas, smirking, points at a line of glyphs in a paragraph near a black cylinder.

TARASSAS

Ah-ha, you getting it? How do you explain a three-thousand-year-old language etched in a nine-thousand-year-old material?

Tori stands up, suddenly very interested.

TORI

The ancient raiza must have discovered some way to carve it.

TARASSAS

(sour expression)
Yes, those *clever* raiza. Look.
(MORE)

TARASSAS (CONT'D)
 (points flame at writing)
 These are all the tower poem.
 Each rewriting has at least one
 incorrect-rect glyph.

Tarassas points out two lines by two different cylinders.
 They both have one glyph that the other doesn't.

TORI
 Huh. Hey, maybe they could--

TARASSAS
 --Spell a mess-essage? They do.

TORI
 What does it say?

Tarassas frowns as deeply as his beak allows.

TARASSAS
 It says, *and I quote:*

EXT. NASHTE - NARROW STREET - NIGHT

Tat leads the party down a narrow street between buildings
 budding with balconies. Clotheslines full of laundry bridge
 the gap, but Cirrus alone looks up at them.

TAT
 "These are not towers. There is
 no treasure. You are a fool."
 Now a message like that would
 discourage anyone, but not me.

Behind Avani, Naur rips a chunk off a loaf of bread and it
 browns into toast, which he hungrily EATS.

AVANI
 And certainly not Tori, if I
 know her.

Cirrus (human), wearing loose, dark red, draw-string shorts
 and a white T-shirt two sizes too big for even her, LANDS
 behind Naur with some dangling clotheslines in her arms.

CIRRUS

Hey guys, look what I found.

NAUR

How fortunate!

Avani turns, indignant.

AVANI

Cirrus! That's theft!

CIRRUS

Sure is. You getting drafty
under that coat yet, Avani?

Avani blushes and grabs her fully-buttoned button row.

AVANI

Well... maybe there's something in
Tori's size. Let me see.

Avani walks out of frame. Tat impatiently runs a hand through
his hair.

EXT. ASPH HOTEL - PRIVATE BEACH - NIGHT

Klauser digs in the sand and plucks out another crab, this
one notably larger than before.

The crab flails wildly as Klauser peck-bites it.

It JABS a claw into a nostril at the end of Klauser's beak.

Klauser's pupil shrinks.

INT. KARRUN'S SUITE - KITCHEN/DINING AREA - NIGHT

Karrun, her plate clean and glass empty, CRUNCHES a bite out
of a whole pineapple. Juice dribbles down her chin. A long,
loud, distant, familiar GWARD wafts in and her CHEWING stops.

EXT. ASPH HOTEL - PRIVATE BEACH - NIGHT

The crab hangs onto Klauser's nostril for dear life as
Klauser FLAILS his head around.

At last the crab loses its grip and flies out at a high arc, landing in the sea with a PLOP.

Klauser breathes rapidly for a moment, calms down, and goes right back to digging.

Karrun and Addanc (in apron) stare out from the balcony.

Karrun smiles. Turns to Addanc.

KARRUN

Fetch my sword.

EXT. TAUNTING WALL RUINS - NIGHT

Tori grits her teeth.

Tori examines the wall very close, scraping at bits with her finger. She's 5' 9" and Tarassas is 4' even.

TORI

"Go there," he said, "and your tears will rise. No true tower stands..."

TARASSAS

Chronicle of the Wandering Sage, right? No clue there, trust me.

Tori stares hard and clutches her face.

TORI

No tower. Worth crying over, I guess. But then why are there towers on this thing?

TORI'S P.O.V.:

Tori's gaze darts over the wall. The nine cylinders are all identical, and on closer inspection they each seem to have a halo. Her gaze lingers on the gray fractal designs.

TARASSAS (O.S.)

The poem and the graffiti both say they *aren't* towers, and I believe-leave it. They don't look much like towers anyway.

Tori lowers her hand and GASPS. Her eyes look fit to pop out.

She points out the gray fractal "columns" framing all the black etchings. Tarassas moves his flame to illuminate them.

TORI

Point your fire there. No -- no, *there*. Look. The swirly bits.

TARASSAS

What about them? All monumentium has those patter-atterns.

TORI

But they're *standing*, and only tower-*shaped*. As for rising tears... well, water is water.

Tori WHIPS OUT her knife. Tarassas draws back.

TARASSAS

What are you doing?

Tori summons a slow-growing water ball around her knife.

TORI

Digging for treasure.

EXT. NASHTE - DERELICT STREET - NIGHT

Tat leads Avani, Cirrus and Naur past some tight-packed houses in grave disrepair. Tat has his lab coat back on and Avani wears a dark green, one-shoulder, knee-length dress over a sunny yellow t-shirt.

AVANI

I don't understand. Tori -- I mean, the poem specifically said a tower was involved.

TAT

What *is* a tower, *really*? Just an elongated vertical structure. A well fits that definition.

EXT. ASPH HOTEL - PRIVATE BEACH - NIGHT

Klauser looks up. Tilts his head. His beak is sandy.

Karrun, wearing a Japanese *katana* sword on a gray waist sash over her suit, descends from the hotel grounds to the beach with Addanc at her side. She points her sword toward us.

KARRUN

I knew it. Look there, Addanc.

Klauser walks backwards toward the beached raft. Not all of the party's footprints have been washed away.

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

You dai whisked her here so fast,
he didn't ensure they were dead.

Karrun kneels, examining the footprints.

KARRUN (CONT'D)

So tenacious. They must have
been desperate to press on. But
surely they know there is no
treasure, so why did they come?

The beach suddenly RUMBLES --

A sandy earthen wall RISES UP on the beach, blocking the tide and tipping the raft out of sight.

Klauser GWARKS wildly and runs away as sand POURS down the steep slope.

Karrun scowls toothily. Addanc turns to look off-screen.

Randall's Mother, Randall, and Green (lifting his hammer) approach from where the hotel grounds meet the beach. All of them look ready for a fight.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

Karrun Mariana! We know all
about the dragon *and* the Nexus!
I never thought I'd say this to
a Federal vessel contractor, but
you're under arrest!

Karrun stands and turns. The last of the falling sand falls behind her. She looks deadly serious.

Addanc's hand floats to his saber.

KARRUN (O.S.)

No, Addanc.

Karrun grips her katana. Its guard, pommel, and wrapped handle are the same dark blue. She UNSHEATHES it in a blur.

EXT. TAUNTING WALL RUINS - NIGHT

Tarassas kills his flame with a wave of his hammer. The fire pit still provides enough light to see well.

TARASSAS

Fringe nonsense. There's nothing below-low but more monumentium.

Tori's water ball engulfs her blade and keeps growing slowly as tiny water drops form out of the air and strike it.

TORI

(distant smile)
Keep an open mind, old guy.
Stuff can surprise you.

Tori makes a short SLASH in the air and her water ball flies out, divided neatly in two.

The halves strike the bottoms of the "towers" and SPLASH --

Tori holds her knife steady --

The splash-back halts in midair and rejoins the rest.

Water slowly and evenly trickles up both of the fractal towers, flowing into and out of every tiny crevasse.

Tarassas looks on in skeptical interest.

AETHER VIEW

Tori's silhouette fires streams of blue swirls from her knife to the water on the wall.

The swirls churn in the deliberately-slow-moving water --
 And begin to sink into the gray fractals.

EXT. ASPH HOTEL - PRIVATE BEACH - NIGHT

Randall's Mother, Randall, and Green spread out.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

Drop your weapon. Now.

Karrun holds her sword one-handed and limp. Water drops rise from the sand and meld smoothly over her blade edge.

KARRUN (CONT'D)

Your alias is Randall's Mother,
 isn't it? You are no longer
 useful. I am Nexus Division One
 Executive, the Beast of Water,
 Cirein Cròin the Whale-Eater.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

Good, you're confessing.

KARRUN

You misunderstand.

Karrun DASHES straight at Green.

Green, ready, thrusts his hammer down --

Karrun LEAPS up to avoid the THUMP-HISS of a very fast, very sandy earth-jaws trap --

Green lifts his hammer for a strike --

GREEN

For Lady Rin!

SLOW MOTION:

Green swings his hammer sideways in an arc timed to hit Karrun's torso as she descends, but Karrun SLASHES her sword in a water-trailed arc which passes cleanly through his neck.

REGULAR SPEED:

Green's hammer spins in the air and HITS the sand.

Randall's Mother, horrified, lifts her daggers. Hundreds of clear water drops rise out of the sand.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

Green!!

Karrun holds her nose, her ivory suit coat speckled with red. Something off-screen makes a sandy THUMP sound.

KARRUN

Blood is thicker.

Karrun lifts her sword and a large red blood glob rises from an unseen yet obvious source.

Randall's Mother SLASHES her daggers in an "X" form.

Karrun turns clockwise and SWINGS her sword.

SLOW MOTION:

Randall's Mother's clear drops gather and fly out as a sharp-looking water spear.

Continuing slow motion, Karrun's blood glob does the same.

The spears meet, the red effortlessly plunges into the clear and carries it forward, not stopped at all --

Randall's Mother stares wide-eyed, arms out at her sides where the down-slash of the X naturally puts them --

RANDALL'S MOTHER (V.O.)

Randall....

REGULAR SPEED:

The combined water spear SMASHES into her face, SNAPPING her head back 90 degrees with a sickening SPLASH-CRACK.

Karrun faces left. Her eyes flick toward us just as Randall's fist SMASHES against her face, tossing her head back.

Karrun stumbles, releases her nose, and Randall UPPERCUTS her in the jaw, followed by a KICK in the stomach and a PUNCH in the collar, all landing with devastatingly heavy IMPACTS.

Karrun's foot hits the sand and sinks in an inch, timed to a simultaneous off-screen WHUMP and soft SLICING sound --

RANDALL'S P.O.V.:

Randall's hand clenches, trembling, around Karrun's throat. Karrun glares down his arm.

Randall stares blankly. Blood leaks from his mouth.

RANDALL

Mother.

Blood leaks down to Karrun's hand from the sword embedded in Randall's side, sunk into the armpit of his absent arm.

EXT. TAUNTING WALL RUINS - NIGHT

Two shining splotches of water ascend the last tiny nooks of the tower swirls. The water reaches the tops and the wall instantly GLOWS, intensely bright, as if a switch was thrown.

Tori turns her head and covers her eyes. Tarassas does too.

TORI

D'aah, what the hell!

The glowing wall SHOOTS light upward like a spotlight.

EXT. NASHTE - HILLSIDE - NIGHT

Tat freezes. He, Avani, Cirrus and Naur see the light clearly from the hillside near the edge of town.

AVANI

What *is* that?

TAT

(sprints up hill)

Hurry you fools!

EXT. ASPH HOTEL - PRIVATE BEACH - NIGHT

Karrun holds her nose, lifts her bloodied blade to her suit, and gently summons the blood stains out and SLASHES them away. The "spotlight" shines far in the background.

Addanc stares, moving his mouth mutely before he can speak. He points, presumably at the light.

ADDANC

M-m-Ma'am?

Karrun turns her head but keeps her nose pinched.

KARRUN

Most interesting. Tell me,
Addanc, have you ever flown
dragon-style?

EXT. TAUNTING WALL RUINS - NIGHT

The shining wall grows brighter, if that's even possible.

Tori and Tarassas finally turn and run.

Tat and Avani walk through a tower stump, eyes shielded --

Tori COLLIDES with Avani. Both of them fall.

Tarassas COLLIDES with Tat. Only Tat falls.

Tori blinks through squinting eyes.

TORI

*Damn this light, I'm running
into walls!*

TORI'S P.O.V.:

A discolored splotch of photo-burn obscures an already blurry sight. Two bodies sit up and speak.

TAT

Who's there? I can't see sh--

AVANI

Tori!!

Avani throws herself to her knees and HUGS Tori tight, burying her face in Tori's shoulder.

Tori, facing away from the light, gapes and blinks. Nothing comes out of her mouth.

Cirrus and Naur amble toward the tower stump, she holding her nose and he holding his head, both squint-blind.

NAUR

I, I feel... wrong, Cirrus.

CIRRUS

It's the light. It smells... like everything!

However wide the tower stump is, a 9'-wide circle inside of it suddenly SINKS like an elevator, taking with it Tori, Avani, Tat, Tarassas, and all the soil and rubble under them.

TARASSAS

What now?!

The lift rapidly descends into a pristine white-walled shaft below at least six feet of soil.

INT. SHAFT - NIGHT

Tat remains sitting. He CHUCKLES like a man not all there.

Avani looks up from her hug. Tori's expression is unchanged.

EXT. TAUNTING WALL RUINS - NIGHT

The wall's light fades dramatically to only slightly more than that of a fluorescent bulb.

Cirrus and Naur enter the stump, lowering their nose- and head-grabbing.

Loosened soil crumbles down the shaft. The white walls inside GLOW softly like the wall.

INT. SHAFT - NIGHT

Avani releases Tori as soil falls from above. Tori is still a gaping statue.

AVANI

I knew I'd find you down the path you revealed, but just where are we going?

Tat stifles his laughter with only partial success.

TAT

I see, I see. So that's how you activate that one. And why not?

TARASSAS

What are you blab-abbering about? Talk coherently!

Avani digs in her bag as if nothing were amiss.

AVANI

Oh, Tori, before I forget, Cirrus managed to save your violin. Unfortunately I couldn't find any granola and I'm a terrible judge of measurements, but I did find something.

TORI

(squeak)

You.

Avani produces an orange and holds it out to Tori.

AVANI (CONT'D)

Here, I spent our last non-melted cennar on this. It's a long story.

TORI

(small voice)

You're alive.

AVANI

(smile)

Of course. Why wouldn't I be?

Cirrus, with Naur clinging to her back, lands on the soil-packed lift in a SWIRL OF WIND.

CIRRUS

Sorry we're late. So where're we going exactly?

EXT. NASHTE - NIGHT

Rapidly SWIRLING water covers Karrun's torso and arms as she hugs her sword.

Karrun flies inside a tight SWIRLING STREAM of water which covers her up to the neck, identical to how Youdai flew in episode 13.

Addanc clings to her back for dear life, totally immersed in the stream. His puffed cheeks suggest tightly held breath.

INT. THE WELL - NIGHT

The lift reaches the bottom of a vast column, seen through a tall, 18' by 8' by 2' rectangular opening at the bottom.

A ring of nine such columns support a titanic domed ceiling which glows fluorescent white. Gray fractal tentacles, which do not glow, snake up the columns and fan out on the ceiling.

The fanning gray tentacles curl out and down along the unbroken dome walls, making dizzying fractal spirals with tentacles reaching up the other way.

The lower tentacles curl up from the sunken black parabolic floor, from which the columns rise.

Tarassas, Cirrus, and Naur walk out into this sight. End to end, the dome covers about a fifth of a mile. Floor to ceiling is about nine storeys tall.

NAUR

My word. The colors, the designs... they are like those of Granbridge.

CIRRUS

They even have the same scent. It's thin, like wet silk.

TARASSAS

What's that?

The support columns surround a 9'-wide circular pool of water, each at a distance of over 200 feet. White fractal tentacles radiate from it into the black floor.

Tat walks out, seemingly back in control of himself. Behind him, Avani stands up and takes Tori's hand.

TAT

That is the tower -- or, rather,
the Well. But who are you?

Tori stands somewhat shakily with Avani's assistance. Avani's bag remains on the ground.

CIRRUS (O.S.)

Hey, yeah, aren't you Tarasque?

TARASSAS (O.S.)

Tarassas! Consider me a Federal
invest-estigator of this site!

AVANI

Another friend at the end of the
path, hmm?

Tori smiles. She rubs her eyes and a couple tears fall out. Avani looks both confused and concerned.

TORI

You... you don't...

AVANI

I don't what?

TORI

I didn't, I mean, I...

AVANI

You didn't what? What's wrong,
Tori? Why are you crying?

Tori drops her orange and HUGS Avani with all her strength.

Tears leak from her tightly-clamped eyes. Avani's clothes bunch up in back where Tori grasps them.

TORI

Nevermind, Skirt. Just shut up.

The orange rolls up to Avani's bag, where Tori's violin case and Avani's mythrill turtle lie with Rin's cane-sword, Avani's ingot and the refurbished half of Green's old hammer.

The water in the Well is very deep. Even with its white rim and interior walls glowing, we cannot see the bottom.

CIRRUS (O.S.)

So this is it, huh?

Tori, Avani, Cirrus, Naur and Tarassas stand at the rim and look in. Tat walks backwards and circles around them.

TAT

The equivalent of a tower, with a treasure at the *tip* -- which in this case is the bottom.

AVANI

Does it even have a bottom?

Tat slowly approaches Naur from behind.

TAT

It does. And just as the raizan poem says, the treasure is shadowed by Abaoaqu.

NAUR

A what?

TORI

A-bao-a-qu. It's a fictional monster, a metaphor for personal ruin. Dwell on it and you'll go mad.

Tat GRINS and lifts his foot high as if to kick Naur in.

A tiny wave of water rolls down the black floor, around Tat's foot and into Naur's feet, which SIZZLE --

Naur cringes and moves just far enough aside for Tat's KICK to hit his back off-center.

Naur leans dangerously close to the water --

Cirrus, being closest, grabs Naur by the wrist and PULLS him back to safety.

CIRRUS

What the *hell*, Tat?!

AVANI

What's the meaning of this?

KARRUN (O.S.)

What indeed!

Karrun walks out of the column, a slick path of water running down her drenched self. Addanc remains, leaning on the doorway, WHEEZING for breath.

KARRUN (CONT'D)

Tat? *Tat?* That's the cleverest pseudonym you could devise, *Tatzelwurm?*!

Tat falls to his knees and tangles his fingers in his hair in unexplainable horror.

TORI

Mom?!

TARASSAS

Karrun Mariana?

The water flows into the pool.

Karrun strides down the concave floor.

KARRUN

Be careful Tori! He's Tatzelwurm the Sharp-Eye, second-in-command to the Beast of Fire!

Tat TITTERS madly. Cirrus, immediately incensed, grabs him by the collar and hauls him to his feet.

TAT

Fire is fire. Water is water. She awoke it. We're done for.

CIRRUS

You're done for!

Karrun's stride speeds into a jog.

KARRUN
Do not kill him yet!

Naur retreats from the water. Cirrus keeps holding Tat.

CIRRUS
Like I'll listen to you!

Tori, Avani and Tarassas look in Karrun's direction.

TORI
Why are you here, Mom?

TARASSAS
And how did you escape arrest?!

Karrun slows her jog and sheathes her sword.

KARRUN
The *far* more important question
is, why is *he* here?! Tatzelwurm
is head of Division Three's
experimental monster breeding!

The pool vibrates with a THRUM as if a T-Rex stomped nearby.
Naur sees it and huddles uselessly behind Tarassas.

AVANI
Monster breeding?

Karrun strides directly toward Tat and grabs him by the
throat. Cirrus keeps her own hold on him.

TAT
The cold, the deep --*hrk!*

CIRRUS
Shove off. My ex-husband was
born to Division Three.

KARRUN
Get a consort and deal with it.

Tat LAUGHS, which cuts off into a CHOKE under Karrun's grip.

Tori has her knife out and moves to guard Avani and Naur. The water VIBRATES again, and the girls see it too.

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

Your universe will be *pain* if
you don't talk, Tatzelwurm.

TAT (O.S.)

(choked)
'd love to.

Karrun releases Tat. Cirrus does too. Both imposing women glare holes through him.

Tat gestures to the ceiling.

TAT (CONT'D)

The place. This structure. It's
an aether conduit. I don't know
how, but it takes ambient aether
and focuses it. Down there.

Tat points at the Well and it THRUMS once again. Tarassas looks concerned.

TARASSAS

Was it alway-ways full of water?

Tat LAUGHS like a madman, faces the Well and circles the rim in side-step hops. The THRUM increases its pace.

TAT

That was *my* idea! You see,
ordinary animal plus hereditary
aether exposure equals monster.

Cirrus cautiously moves over to where Tori, Avani, Naur, and Tarassas have gathered.

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

Monster plus similar monster
equals new species, simple as
that!

Tat side-hops to a position that completes a triangle between himself, Karrun, and the party.

TAT

So I thought, why not fill the focal chamber to the brim and make it an aquarium? I could expose whole generations of aquatic creatures to concentrated magic!

Karrun grips her sword. The THRUMS come at heartbeat rate.

KARRUN

Ingenious. Such a project would be quite useful for Division Three.

(draws sword)

And quite useless for me.

TAT

Why so serious, Karrun? Don't you have a useful breeding experiment?

Tat looks straight at Tori.

Avani, Cirrus and Naur look at Tori too.

A ton of invisible bricks has fallen on her.

Tori looks at Karrun. Karrun ignores her. The water THRUMS like a war drum now and constantly undulates.

KARRUN

What creatures did you breed, Tatzelwurm? What sort of monster did you make for Salamandra?!

Tat's bearded face stretches into a great big smile.

The watery content of the pool SHOOTs straight up in a vertical torrent, blocking him from sight.

Everyone else around it looks up.

Naur backpedals so fast he falls down.

The water SMASHES into the ceiling and spreads out along the walls, defying gravity by dripping not a bit.

The water passes over the wall spirals and extends out from each one as a massive liquid tentacle. There are dozens.

Addanc huddles in the column and nervously chews on an orange peel.

Tarassas takes out his hammers and looks around in panic.

Karrun cranes her head up to look at the tentacles.

Naur hyperventilates. Cirrus crouches and steadies him by a shoulder grip.

The water keeps SHOOTING up as the tentacles close in. Avani clings to Tori's arm. Tori draws her knife.

AVANI

Lord sustain us...

Right in front of the girls, a black fluid mass rises inside the surging water column.

The inky presence twists into a WRITHING SOUP OF HUMAN FACES, each one swirling into its neighbors wide-mouthed. The liquid abomination, ABAOQU, releases a LOW, ROARING MOAN.

FADE OUT