

AETHER TORRENT #3  
"CIRRUS'S TARGET"

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. CARAVAN BLOCK - DAY

OFFICERS finish arresting and cuffing the leftover CARAVAN MEMBERS outside the Grampus Relics antique shop.

ADDANC is among the arrested. An officer SHOVES him into the back of a paddy-wagon truck. Its doors only open inward.

Across the street, the blinds on Tori's window are down.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - TORI'S APARTMENT - DAY

AVANI lifts up a blade of the blinds and peeks out. She's still in her green sweatshirt with gold dots on the chest.

AVANI

Still plenty about. I'm sorry,  
Tori, but it seems inevitable  
that the police will seize your,  
uh, "museum."

TORI sits on her couch, CRUNCHING a granola bar in her mouth and lacing up a hiking boot. The apartment, while reasonably organized, is still a mess of miscellaneous relics.

TORI

(mouth full)  
No they won't.  
(swallows)  
'Cause they won't find it.

Tori walks to her billiard table, on which lies a packed-full duffel bag. She lifts her foot onto the table and bends down, stretching her leg.

AVANI

Surely they will learn from  
someone that your room is where  
the Caravan's rarer treasures  
lie. You won't be able to come  
back and secret them away.

TORI

Thanks for the concern, Avani,  
but it's unnecessary.

Tori switches legs and continues stretching.

TORI (CONT'D)

This room's signed to a janitor  
named Steve. He lives with his  
daughter across town, never even  
been here. The room signed to my  
name is really a broom closet.

AVANI

Clever.

Tori takes her leg off the table and bends at the waist,  
flattening her hands on the floor.

TORI

I thought so too. But I can't  
count on that safeguard forever,  
so I'll need help.

Avani looks back out the window.

AVANI

If you expect me to haul all  
your things past the police...

Tori straightens up and bends backward.

TORI

I don't. I know somebody off to  
the west. She'll help. Anyway,  
you got everything?

Avani takes her mythrill-palmed band out of a skirt pocket.  
Her backpack sits at her feet. She wears sandals.

AVANI

Yes. Nothing left behind this  
time. Which way are we leaving?

Tori unbends, pats her vest, squeezes her knife reassuringly.

TORI

Same way we came in. The sewer.

EXT. CARAVAN BLOCK - DAY

A few police paddy-wagon trucks drive away with the captives.

The apartment building looms in the background as they drive away. A humanoid figure walks to the edge of the roof.

The figure is a muscular humanoid female in her 40s. Her skin is light blue on white and she wears an oversized tank top and flared shorts. Short cartilaginous flaps like tiny wings extend from her collarbones. We'll know her as CIRRUS.

CIRRUS

Hmmm. No wonder I smelled magic.  
All these cops, must be a raid.

CIRRUS'S P.O.V.:

Cirrus rapidly glances over everyone in sight.

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

Where is she. Brown skin, green  
shirt, Earth elemental. Come  
on...

On closer inspection, both of Cirrus's ears are three short cartilaginous tendrils. Her hair is a short white mess.

CIRRUS (CONT'D)

Wait. Did they arrest my target?  
Oh that would just figure.

A SWIRL OF AIR encircles her.

From ground level she appears to be a small tornado localized on the roof. Avani still peeks through Tori's blinds.

Several officers down below look up and REACT in surprise. One of them, a brown-on-white raiza LIEUTENANT, looks up grimly.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - TORI'S ROOM - DAY

Avani retreats from the blinds.

AVANI

I think they saw me!

TORI

(lifts her bag)

Time to go, then.

EXT. CARAVAN BLOCK - DAY

The wind on the roof dies down. Four animal paws stand near the edge.

Cirrus's shirt and shorts hang from a vaguely canine jaw.

Cirrus has taken on her true form: a *wind tiger*, a tiger-like, light blue on white creature with long, flat "wing" tendrils extending from her collarbones.

Several of the officers draw their guns on her.

Cirrus LEAPS off the building in a GUST OF AIR.

The cops down below guard against a DOWNWARD GALE, which ruins the aim of some and blows away the guns of others.

The Lieutenant watches her leave.

LIEUTENANT

It seems this group had more than just magical weapons.

OFFICER 1

Do we go after it, Lieutenant?

The Lieutenant's pants have a third leg for his shark tail. His black claws are filed flat and unthreatening.

LIEUTENANT

How? The foreigner is dead. We can't track any strays. But...

The Lieutenant looks up at the apartment building.

LIEUTENANT (CONT'D)

We can be thorough.

EXT. MEDDON STREETS - DAY

The police trucks roll along. Their top speed is in the 30mph range.

Cirrus LANDS in the street on all fours, clothes still in her mouth, and SWEEPS her collar-wings forward.

A BLAST OF WIND hits the leading truck, HALTING it and CRACKING its windshield.

Each of the trucks behind it CRASHES into the ones in front of them.

The successive IMPACTS knock each of the rear doors inward and open.

Caravan members spill out of the trucks and run away.

Cirrus LEAPS at the leading truck, an opaque TORNADO surrounds her --

And she STOMPS the roof, clothed and in human form.

Addanc is the last one out of the lead truck. Cirrus's arm GRABS him by the back of the shirt and LIFTS him up.

Cirrus sets him ungently on the truck roof. Officers leave the trucks and pursue the escapees in the background.

CIRRUS

S'cuse me. Did you see a brown  
girl wearing green get arrested?

ADDANC

What, you mean the skirt?

CIRRUS

Probably.

ADDANC

(lifts wrists)  
Kinda hard to think with these  
cuffs on, like.

Cirrus roughly grabs his wrists and YANKS them apart, SNAPPING the chain connecting them. Addanc flinches and rubs his wrists.

CIRRUS

Better? Now where is she.

ADDANC

Prob'ly escaped with this girl  
Torrent. Tallish, redhead,  
ponytail. Promise you'll kill  
her, she's always upstaging me!

An officer pulls his pistol on Cirrus.

OFFICER 2

Hold it, monster!

Cirrus's eyebrow twitches.

She grabs Addanc by the shirt and FLINGS him at the officer.

Addanc COLLIDES with him and both men fall to the pavement.

CIRRUS

Escaped, huh.

Cirrus LEAPS up off-camera with another GUST following her.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - HALL - DAY

Tori and Avani hurry down a hall, toting their luggage.

TORI

Hey. This is a weird question,  
but you're Tergaian, right?

AVANI

Central Tergaian, yes. Amritan.

TORI

Then what's with the sweatshirt?  
Doesn't it get hot?

AVANI

I thought it would be colder  
this far North. Besides, my  
temple made me wear it.

TORI

And your temple has exactly *what*  
bearing on your life now?

Avani stops within sight of a door marked "STAIRWELL."

She drops her backpack and WHIPS OFF her sweatshirt,  
revealing a gold-trimmed t-shirt in the exact same shade of  
green.

Tori blinks. Her eyes are gray, for the record.

TORI (CONT'D)

Favorite color, huh?

AVANI

(stuffs sweatshirt in pack)  
It's the color of Teizen, my  
patron god.

STAIRWELL

Tori and Avani descend the stairwell, turning corners where  
appropriate.

AVANI (CONT'D)

So, who is this person you know?

TORI

Um. Old friend, let's say.

AVANI

Will she agree to moving stolen  
goods?

TORI

She will if it's for me. We can  
stay at her place, too, it's  
right on the coast.

AVANI

The coast? Wonderful! There's so  
much nothing near the ocean. I  
always wanted to help people  
fill it with the gods' love.

Tori stops halfway down a staircase. A door marked with a "1" stands at the bottom of the landing.

TORI

Now wait just a minute. The whole point of living near the ocean is seeing that big nothing every day. It's peaceful. Why clutter it up with gods?

AVANI

The gods are not clutter, Tori. They fill the void with meaning.

TORI

Maybe for you, but--

A door opens at the bottom of the stairs. The Lieutenant looks in.

Tori sees him and impulsively FLINGS her bag at the door.

It HITS the door shut. The Lieutenant tries re-opening the door but Tori SLAMS it shut with her shoulder.

Avani takes her mythrill-palmed mitten out of her pocket.

AVANI

Hold on, I'll compress the door frame.

TORI

Wait--!

LOBBY

The Lieutenant steps back, CRACKING his knuckles.

The wall suddenly RUMBLES and squeezes the door tightly enough to make it SNAP lengthwise.

STAIRWELL

Light shines through the crack.

TORI (CONT'D)

(deadpan)

Door's made of wood, genius.

The girls grab their luggage and RUN LIKE HELL down the remaining stairs.

The Lieutenant BREAKS DOWN the cracked door with ease.

He descends the last stairs just as the hidden shelf-door SLAMS shut. He stops, looks toward it.

INT. SEWER - DAY

Tori leads the way through the sewers. As seen before, a channel runs between two paths under an arched ceiling.

AVANI

I'm so sorry, I didn't--

TORI

--It's okay Avani, we're home free now.

A GUNSHOT rings out and a bullet SHOOTS THROUGH the corner of Tori's bag.

The Lieutenant and two officers aim their guns.

LIEUTENANT

It's over. Your criminal friends proved magic isn't bulletproof. Now, you can either come with me or die in a sewer.

Avani timidly moves behind Tori. Tori puts her bag down and grips her knife hilt.

TORI

Okey-dokey. I like the "leaving" option. I'll pick that.

LIEUTENANT

I'm glad to hear it. Now throw down your weapon.

TORI

Yes sir.

Tori unsheathes and SWINGS her knife in the same motion.

The sewer water RISES UP in a sideways wave.

The wave CRASHES DOWN on the path --

KNOCKING DOWN the Lieutenant and the officers and sweeping them into the channel.

Tori grabs her bag and she and Avani flee.

The three policemen bob to the surface. The officers GASP and FLAIL for the nearest dry surface.

The Lieutenant RIPS OFF his shirt and coat and DIVES under.

SEWER CHANNEL

The channel is deeper than it looks. The Lieutenant's tailfin OPENS, pulling taut the membrane between the edges.

A dorsal fin OPENS in the same way.

The Lieutenant SWIMS SWIFTLY ahead.

SEWER

The girls keep running.

The Lieutenant's fin cuts the water, following fast.

His arm BURSTS from the water and he GRABS Tori's ankle.

Tori falls forward, guarding her face just before IMPACT.

The Lieutenant climbs out of the water. He lifts Tori up by her ankle as he does. She KICKS at him to no effect.

LIEUTENANT

You're under arrest.

Avani SLAPS the wall with her banded hand.

A square of the ceiling LOOSENS with a fine rain of dust.

The Lieutenant looks up --

A stone slab two feet square CRASHES down on his head.

Tori falls with him and KICKS free of his loosened grip.

Rubble decorates the Lieutenant, who lies flat on his back. His chest rises and falls.

Tori hefts her bag.

TORI

Thanks. But you coulda done that  
a minute ago.

AVANI

Forgive me, I saw their guns and  
I... choked. Never mind. Which way  
now?

TORI

Out. Hope you like nature walks.

It's clear from Avani's expression that she does.

EXT. MEDDON - DAY

Meddon, seen from a distance, remains a walled city-state with a river running through it. The wind turbines seen in episode 1 surround it, embedded in the walls.

A dense, hilly forest stands to the west of the polis.

INT. BORDER FOREST - FOREST CREEK - DAY

Cirrus (human form) lazes on a branch up in a tall tree by a creek. She looks skyward.

CIRRUS

(sigh)  
Stupid assignment.

A serpentine cloud passes in front of the sun. A THIN, GRAVELLY VOICE comes from nowhere.

GRAVELLY VOICE (V.O.)

Retrieve that girl without  
delay, Cirrus. Do this one thing  
and you shall become a most  
useful agent for us.

CIRRUS

Useful.

(yawns, stretches)

That's all I've ever been. Maybe  
I should just...

The tree SHAKES as if struck. Cirrus looks down.

A dome-skulled, brown-striped dinosaur called a STUNNER looks  
up at her. It's about human height and would resemble a  
*Pachycephalosaurus* if not for the carnivorous teeth. It  
HEADBUTTS the tree a second and third time, SHAKING it.

Cirrus scowls at it, rolls over into a crouch and LEAPS clear  
out of frame with a WIND GUST.

CIRRUS (CONT'D)

Damn nap-stealer.

Cirrus deftly leaps from tree to tree, assisted by WIND.

The Stunner tilts its thick toothy head. Follows her.

EXT. SEWER EXIT - DAY

A stone sewer tunnel sticks out of a small hill in the  
forest. A creek flows into it, not out of it.

AVANI (O.S.)

No grate?

Tori and Avani walk out of the tunnel. Tori directs the shin-  
high water out of their way with her knife.

TORI

Grampus took it off as an escape  
route. Not that he needs it now.

AVANI

Don't monsters wander in?

The girls step out of the water's path and Tori sheathes her knife.

TORI

Nah. They know better.

(beckons)

Come on, it's great out here.

EXT. FOREST CREEK DOWNSTREAM - DAY

Birds CHIRP and CALL to each other in the pristine forest.

Cirrus alights on a bird-filled branch and the birds SCATTER, CHIRPING madly. She lies down comfortably.

The girls follow the creek. Tori stares upward.

TORI (CONT'D)

I haven't been out here in way too long. I almost forgot how much silence there is in the nature-noises, if that makes any sense.

AVANI

I know what you mean. The gods make themselves the most apparent in the quietest corners of their creation.

TORI

(sighs, looks back down)

This forest is special because nothing created it. Nothing made *anything* in nature. It all just came together.

Avani frowns in Tori's direction.

Cirrus settles down to sleep on her branch. Her eyes open at the word "monsters."

AVANI (O.S.)

Then what of monsters? They break the rules of summoning magic, so how did they arise if not by divine will?

Cirrus looks down.

Tori and Avani approach her tree, oblivious to her presence.

TORI

They don't break any rules, they  
just follow ones that we can't.  
See, the elements in the Aether  
act like pollutants.

AVANI

You think magic is *poison*?

Cirrus watches them closely, rolling over silently to keep  
watching when they pass underneath.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

(overlapping Tori)  
What have we here...

TORI

Look, all bodies absorb  
elements, but if an animal body  
absorbs too much of one, it  
gives birth to a monster.

AVANI

I can't believe you! All  
monsters, especially ones that  
can take human form, are beloved  
creatures of the gods.

Cirrus BLINKS hard. Glances away. Scratches her head.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Beloved...?  
(self-convincing)  
Maybe that's not her. Yeah. Too  
coincidental.

TORI (O.S.)

Speaking of monsters...

Cirrus looks front.

The Stunner dinosaur walks into clear view from behind a couple trees, looking up and SNIFFING the air.

Tori slowly draws her knife. Avani holds very still.

AVANI

Wait, that's just a Stunner,  
it's not elemental.

TORI

Still got teeth.

The Stunner looks back down and tilts its head as if seeing the girls for the first time.

Avani reaches into a skirt pocket. Tori slides her duffel bag off her shoulder and holds her knife underhand.

AVANI

You're not going to kill it, are  
you?

TORI

(looks at her)  
Says the girl who killed a raiza  
in one hit?

The Stunner lowers its head. Tori and Avani argue too much to notice it.

AVANI

That was protection and self-  
defense!

TORI

And this isn't?

Cirrus narrows her eyes. They're yellow.

AVANI (O.S.)

You're definitely showing  
primary aggression, so--

The Stunner crouches and CHARGES ahead fast --

TORI (O.S.)

--Sometimes you just have to!

Avani takes her hand out of her pocket, the square of her band on her knuckles, and PUNCHES the ground.

AVANI

Duck! Now!

TORI

Huh?

A squared-off pillar of earth BURSTS up under the charging Stunner --

Timed perfectly to THROW it up and over Tori's head.

The man-sized dinosaur SLAMS HARD into a tree.

It's Cirrus's tree. Cirrus clings to her branch.

The ground RUMBLES and a thick half-circle wall of earth RISES up between the girls and the Stunner.

Tori slings her bag back on. Avani never took hers off.

TORI (CONT'D)

Nice.

AVANI

I didn't kill it, let's hurry!

Avani turns to leave in one direction, but Tori grabs the back of her backpack and points in another.

TORI

This way.

The girls leave with haste.

The Stunner gets up and looks at the new wall, confused.

Cirrus descends in a blur --

Fast enough to land heel-first on the Stunner's neck and send the poor thing to the ground with a muffled CRACK.

Cirrus steps off of it and bites her thumbnail worriedly.

CIRRUS (V.O.)  
Brown skin, green clothes, Earth  
elementalist. I could just grab  
her... but what's this about gods?

Cirrus toes the dinosaur. It's not moving.

She LEAPS out of frame with a WHOOSH of wind.

EXT. MEDDON STREETS - DAY

The officer who spoke to the Lieutenant earlier walks the streets in plain clothes.

The officer who pulled a gun on Cirrus earlier waves to him and walks over.

OFFICER 2  
Hey. Any luck?

OFFICER 1  
None. If the rats weren't caught  
already, they're gone.

Addanc blends into pedestrian traffic, wearing a different shirt. He flinches and subtly turns his face away.

OFFICER 2 (O.S.)  
How's the Lieutenant?

OFFICER 1 (O.S.)  
Headache, nothing major.

Addanc passes them as nonchalantly as he can.

OFFICER 1 (CONT'D)  
Better than the foreigner. Or  
the boss raiza. That guy's  
deader than sushi.

OFFICER 2  
Don't be racist.

Addanc keeps walking.

He bites his lip, hard. His lower-right eyelid twitches.

ADDANC (V.O.)

*Torrent...*

EXT. BORDER FOREST - DAY

The sun over the forest indicates the time as early evening.

TORI (O.S.)

Nice sunset, huh?

AVANI (O.S.)

One of Degalvyi's finest.

Tori, wherever she is, SIGH-GROANS.

EXT. FOREST CREEK UPSTREAM - DAY

The creek is noticeably wider and flows down a slight incline. Tori and Avani hike along it. The quiet, lush scenery is as important as they are here.

TORI

Okay, I'll bite, who's that.

AVANI

God of Fire, he who is all heat everywhere.

TORI

How many gods do you have, anyway?

AVANI

Just the four.

The creek water BABBLES softly.

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

Fleuve, cyclical goddess of Water...

Cirrus alights on a high branch and jumps to another one, wind RUSTLING the top leaves.

AVANI (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Atmas, unbound goddess of Air...

Tori and Avani push aside a low-hanging branch in turn. Cirrus is visible for just a fraction of a second up above.

AVANI (CONT'D)  
Degalvyi, of Fire -- and of course Teizen, my patron, tireless god of Earth.

TORI  
Anthropomorphized elements. Neat. Makes more sense than some gods, I'll give you that.

AVANI  
Of course they make sense, they're real.

The sound of RUSHING WATER grows more apparent. Tori smiles a little, as if aware of what's ahead.

TORI  
Then you can point them out in a second.

Avani looks confused.

EXT. WATERFALL POOL - DAY

A cascading 30-foot waterfall BEATS down a natural jagged staircase into a wide pool. Trees in the upper background and gray rock walls in the foreground frame it nicely.

The sun hasn't yet set behind the waterfall. Tori and Avani approach the pool and set down their luggage.

TORI  
Hasn't changed a bit.

AVANI

Goodness.

TORI

Sure is.

Tori walks to the edge of the pool and admires the waterfall. It's calming yet impressive, like a good desktop background.

TORI (CONT'D)

It's made of nothing but boring old water and earth, but it's beautiful. It's rare. It's a little nexus of greatness out of all the ways that water and earth could interact.

(gestures to waterfall)

Now point to the gods in this picture.

WATERFALL P.O.V.:

Something in the waterfall watches Tori and Avani. The girls can't see it, nor can we.

AVANI

I cannot, Tori.

TORI

Thank you.

AVANI

*Because,* the gods themselves are intangible. However, two of them created the water and earth you see here.

Tori stares at Avani for all of a second.

Tori harshly sits on her duffel bag with an appropriate WHUMP of compressed luggage, slips off her vest and unties her hiking boots.

TORI

Tell me. Are human bodies creations of the gods too?

AVANI

Of course.

TORI

And is every creation holy?

AVANI

Naturally.

TORI

Then you should have no problem revealing that holiness by skinny-dipping with me.

Avani suddenly looks very uncomfortable. Tori takes off her socks and stuffs them into her shoes.

AVANI

Well I, I mean, that is...

TORI

What?

AVANI

The body *is* holy, but there's something to be said for modesty.

TORI

(stands up, stretches)  
Modesty? So you're saying people should just keep some holy things to themselves?

AVANI

Yes, exactly...

Tori just grins at her.

Avani understands the message, frowns at Tori and turns to leave in a huff.

AVANI (CONT'D)

Shout when you're done bathing.  
Take your time.

Avani keeps walking away, deeper into the trees.

A familiar RUSTLE comes from the treetops, but all we see of Cirrus is a blur of a leg, if anything.

Tori smirks, turns to face the waterfall and looks down to undo her pants. She looks up and FREEZES.

A blindingly handsome redheaded YOUNG MAN, 20-ish, reclines on a flat rock in the cascading waterfall. He HUMS melodically, stark naked, letting the water drench him.

Tori stares. Lets her pants fall. She wears boxer shorts.

The young man rolls his head to Tori and SMILES at her. His eyes are hypnotically, unnaturally blue.

Tori keeps staring. She blushes and her eyes glaze over.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - DAY

Avani takes off her sandals, sits cross-legged and splays her hands on the ground.

Cirrus, still in human form, alights on a branch above her.

AVANI

Great Teizen below, I thank you  
from my very bones for  
delivering me from harm today.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Get to the good part. Talk about  
monsters again.

Avani closes her brown eyes and bows her head low, letting her black hair just barely touch the soil.

AVANI

I thank you also for sending me  
a savior, but I worry about her.  
She has wisdom enough, yet she  
seems content to disbelieve in  
you. I pray you will protect her  
regardless.

EXT. WATERFALL POOL - DAY

Tori's shirt lands on her knife holster by her duffel bag.

Tori steps slowly into the pool, wearing boxer shorts and a sports bra (36-B). She's very fit.

The young man stands in the pool directly under the waterfall, submerged to the hip bones. He keeps HUMMING melodically and extends a hand towards Tori.

Tori moves closer with a dull hypnotized expression.

UNDERWATER

The young man's human form stops at the water line. Below, he is a single translucent tentacle snaking into the depth of a steep drop-off in the pool.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - DAY

Cirrus looks down and makes a "get on with it" motion. Avani hasn't moved from her praying pose.

AVANI

What must I do to make her see  
your glory? You know I wish only  
to be useful to you...

Cirrus CLENCHES her jaw. She leans forward as if to jump down but Avani's next words stop her.

AVANI (CONT'D)

No. I misspoke. You are not so  
cold as to want only service  
from me. In your words, all  
lives have purpose, but none is  
to be an unthinking tool.

Cirrus holds her pose, eyes wide.

AVANI (CONT'D)

*They* would have me be your tool.  
*They* would have me impose on...  
(abruptly stands up)  
That's it! I won't impose, I'll  
be a good example and let her  
come to your ways in time.

Avani steps into her sandals and strides away.

AVANI (CONT'D)  
I'll swallow my pride and start  
right now.

Cirrus watches Avani leave. She rocks on her heels up on her branch and visibly ponders something.

EXT. WATERFALL POOL - DAY

Tori draws closer to the middle of the pool, thoroughly entranced. The water gets deeper as she goes.

The young man approaches from the opposite side. The water doesn't get deeper for him.

Tori's boxers touch the water. She notices.

TORI  
Silly me. Still dressed.

Tori hooks her thumbs under her sports bra. Avani enters the scene in the background.

AVANI  
Hey, Tori? -- *Tori!*

The young man and Tori simultaneously turn their heads at Avani. Tori quickly blinks a few times.

TORI  
Huh?

The young man SMILES wide. His blue eyes GLOW.

AVANI  
Get out of there! *It's a kelpie!*

Tori looks back at the young man too late. His body turns translucent blue and he sinks straight down.

Tori gets PULLED UNDERWATER.

Avani looks on in horror.

UNDERWATER

A translucent tentacle ensnares Tori's leg. Tori KICKS at it furiously.

The tentacle reaches out from an undulating, vaguely equine mass slowly rising from the drop-off of the pool.

The mass, a KELPIE, has solid blue eyes.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - DAY

Cirrus chews on a thumbnail, still thinking.

AVANI (O.S.)

Get out of there! *It's a kelpie!*

Cirrus stops chewing. She LEAPS out of frame.

EXT. WATERFALL POOL - DAY

Tori BREAHCES the surface just long enough to GASP a breath.

TORI

My--

(pulled under, resurfaces)

--My *knife*--

(pulled under again)

UNDERWATER

A current snakes around Tori and pulls her into the drop-off. Tori CLAWS at the current and her hands go through.

The kelpie's equine head turns opaque. Its teeth are sharp.

WATERFALL POOL

Avani unzips Tori's bag and rummages inside.

AVANI

(rapidly)

Great Fleuve forgive her she  
might have to kill your beloved  
creature in self-defense.

Tori resurfaces and clings to part of the rock wall, GASPING for breath.

A whirlpool forms in the middle of the water.

The water SWIRLS and the kelpie rises out in its true form, a strong white horse with a dark blue mane and giraffe-like reticulations on its neck and shoulders.

Tori looks back at it --

The kelpie CHARGES at her on the surface of the water, quickly blurring into a WAVE --

Which CRASHES into Tori and takes her under again.

Avani lifts Tori's discarded shirt, unsheathes the knife and HURLS it into the pool --

Cirrus FLICKS her wrist --

A GUST knocks the knife just short of the middle of the pool.

UNDERWATER

The knife sinks and lands on the top of the drop-off.

The kelpie's current PINS Tori to the very bottom, about fourteen feet deep and well out of reach of the knife. Tori STRUGGLES against the current.

WATERFALL POOL

Avani scratches her head in mind-wracking panic.

CIRRUS (O.S.)

Having problems?

Cirrus suddenly stands two feet away from her. Avani turns and backs away, surprised.

AVANI

What -- who are you?

CIRRUS

My name is Cirrus the Gale-mother. Your temple misses you, Avani Lahar.

AVANI

They *already* know I left? How?

CIRRUS

I don't know the details. I'm just supposed to bring you back.

Avani glances down. Cirrus stands between her and her backpack.

AVANI

No thank you.

CIRRUS

I overheard you pray. Your god sounds interesting. You asked him to protect your friend?

Avani looks up at her, questioningly.

CIRRUS (CONT'D)

If she can survive a fight with a kelpie, I'll believe anything your god says.

UNDERWATER

Tori is still pinned. Her lungs finally give out and she exhales a BURST of bubbles.

The kelpie's head suddenly LUNGES at her.

Tori PUNCHES it in the nose.

An odd THRUM is heard and the kelpie draws back.

The current slows and loosens perceptibly.

Tori CLAWS at the kelpie's eyes. The head goes translucent and melds back into the current, which loosens enough to free her.

Tori KICKS off the bottom and swims up with all her might.

WATERFALL POOL

Tori's bubbles reach the surface.

Cirrus cracks her knuckles.

CIRRUS (CONT'D)

Too bad. I can't afford to throw  
in my lot with an inattentive  
god. Now you're leaving with me.

Tori's head BREACHES the water and she GASPS FOR AIR.

CIRRUS (CONT'D)

What the--?!

AVANI

Tori! I threw you your knife!

TORI

I know, thanks!

Tori takes a DEEP BREATH --

UNDERWATER

Goes under again and grabs her knife.

The kelpie's head rises from its body-mass on a long tentacle.

Tori sees it. Grips her knife.

Tori KICKS off the drop-off, knife out, in a SWIRLING DRILL  
of water.

The kelpie STRIKES --

Snakes its long flexible body around Tori --

Who STABS her knife into it and makes a long cut, from which  
oily grease flows.

The kelpie makes a LOW MOAN and snakes away, wound healing  
instantly.

It congeals into a horselike form at the bottom of the pool.

WATERFALL POOL

Tori sticks her head up at the waterfall side of the pool just long enough to GASP and duck back down --

UNDERWATER

Does a half-flip to point downward and KICKS off the wall.

The kelpie turns opaque and LEAPS upward to meet her, mouth open --

Tori SLASHES through its open mouth, turning its head translucent again, but it still COLLIDES with her --

SLAMMING her against the drop-off wall.

Tori flips her knife around and STABS the kelpie in its liquid neck.

The kelpie MOANS and BUCKS its head, hurling Tori out of frame --

WATERFALL POOL

And clear out of the pool, vertically. Tori REACTS ad-lib.

Avani looks up, hands clasped tightly.

AVANI

Tori!

The kelpie's head emerges --

Tori, on the descent, SLASHES her knife --

Dozens of gallons of water SPLASH out as if from an asteroid impact, centered on the kelpie --

A center into which Tori DIVES.

Cirrus flicks her wrist and any incoming water blows away.

Avani bites her lip and clenches her hands tighter.

The pool UNDULATES turbulently. Another MOAN is heard.

The shoreline recedes considerably. Avani notices.

A HUGE SWELL rises in the middle and CRASHES like an ocean wave into the waterfall.

Tori climbs out of the drop-off and runs ahead of the returning tide, but it catches up to her and knocks her down.

Cirrus JUMPS straight up. The returning wave hits Avani's knees and she STUMBLES backwards.

The girls' luggage gets soaked.

Tori staggers out of the water and PANTS for breath.

TORI

Ah, crap, now I'll have to dry it all.

Cirrus hangs diagonally from the nearest tree, clutching a branch one-handed and bracing her feet on the trunk.

CIRRUS

You think you're done? You can't kill a kelpie like that.

TORI

The hell are you?

CIRRUS

(points towards pool)  
Better watch out.

The kelpie rises up at the waterfall side, turns opaque and STOMPS the water threateningly.

Tori grips her knife, still PANTING.

TORI

I swear, if it's not one thing today it's another.

Avani steps back.

Cirrus SWINGS herself up and sits on the branch.

Tori holds her left hand to the back of her knife, points it at the kelpie.

AETHER VIEW

Blue swirls from the water and Tori herself bombard the kelpie's blue-packed silhouette --

NORMAL VIEW

The kelpie CHARGES --

And Tori SWINGS the blade with a heavy GRUNT OF EXERTION.

HALF-SPEED:

A mass of water FLIES OUT of the kelpie in the direction she swung, softening and blurring the monster's hard edges.

Tori SWINGS the opposite direction with another GRUNT.

AETHER VIEW

Still half-speed, one step above slow-motion, a mass of blue swirls SHOOTS out of the kelpie, leaving it with much less.

NORMAL VIEW

The kelpie has shrunk and drips grease in its wake, but still it charges, nearing Tori --

Tori SLASHES with one more GRUNT --

REGULAR SPEED:

The last of the kelpie's water FLIES OUT, leaving a formless blob of thick grease to SPLASH over the water.

Its momentum carries it to Tori and it flows over her feet. She KICKS it off wildly.

TORI (CONT'D)

(repulsed)

Oh, ew! Ew!

Tori STABS the blob and SLASHES out, gruntless.

The grease dries into a fine powder, which she brushes off frantically.

Cirrus gapes, up in her tree.

CIRRUS

Unbelievable...

Avani slaps her banded hand on the ground. The earth underneath the tree RUMBLES and TILTS.

Cirrus tilts with it.

Cirrus JUMPS off before the tree comes CRASHING down into the waterfall pool. The impact SCATTERS the kelpie's powdery remains.

Cirrus lands in a crouch. Tori holds her knife to her neck before she finishes standing up.

TORI

(finally catches breath)  
I'll ask again. Who are you.

CIRRUS

You think you can hurt me? A wind tiger is nothing like a kelpie.

Tori steps away from Cirrus.

TORI

A wind tiger?

CIRRUS

That's right, and--

TORI

--That's *awesome!*

Cirrus blinks.

Tori orbits Cirrus, looking her up and down. Cirrus stands up straight -- she's taller and more muscular than Tori despite looking and sounding twice her age.

TORI (CONT'D)

I've read about wind tigers. The females are usually a lot more elegant-looking than this. You're a pretty rare find! Are you a mixed-breed or something?

CIRRUS

My name is Cirrus and I'm not an animal. Hell, I'm more dressed than you are right now.

Avani approaches Cirrus and folds her hands.

AVANI

Forgive her. But she did defeat the kelpie. Will you now hear and believe the words of my patron god?

Tori SMACKS her own forehead.

CIRRUS

(pleasant smile)  
I'd be glad to.

INT. FOREST PATH - NIGHT

The sun has set, but the last light colors still linger.

Tori, fully dressed and dry, glances behind herself on a narrow forest path.

Avani and Cirrus lag far behind.

CIRRUS

There's nothing to explain, my magic just comes naturally.

AVANI

That's because the Goddess of Air has blessed your kind. She may be in opposition to Teizen but I'm sure we can get along. "Let all elements come together in life," so he says.

Tori looks back over her shoulder and half-smiles.

CIRRUS (O.S.)

I like that. Now tell me about that usefulness thing again.

TORI

(sigh, V.O.)

Another religious-minded stray.  
I've got a collection now. At  
least they're rare.

(aloud)

Yo, Skirt! Quit lagging!

CIRRUS

Her name is Avani! Respect it!

TORI

You quit lagging too, Kitty.

Cirrus GROWLS and wind SWIRLS around her. Avani backs away.

Cirrus's front wind tiger paws hit the ground.

TORI (CONT'D)

(holds up hands)

Okay, okay, sorry, Cirrus!

Cirrus DASHES at Tori. The resulting wind WHIPS Avani's hair and skirt.

The sky over the forest is blue-black. A cacophony of CRASHES comes from the forest as trees WOBBLE or FALL OVER in a line.

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

Give me a break! I give  
nicknames to everybody, honest!

EXT. MEDDON ALLEY - NIGHT

A darkened alley exits into an unfamiliar street.

ADDANC (O.S.)

No one else? Are you serious?

A human CARAVAN GUY huddles in the alley by a big trash bin.

CARAVAN GUY

You're the first I met who  
escaped all the sweeps.

Addanc leans against a wall, arms crossed, near the guy.

CARAVAN GUY (CONT'D)

Maybe they're lying low. Can't  
blame 'em.

Addanc HITS the wall behind him with the back of a fist.

ADDANC

Cowards. None of 'em care.  
Torrent rats us out. Scatters  
us. Killed Grampus, she did. We  
can't rebuild like this. Not  
without help, like.

Addanc steps out of his lean and walks down the alley.

CARAVAN GUY

Where're you going?

ADDANC

Torrent's out to ruin us for  
good, isn't she? Only one place  
to go for that.

(seething)

She'll pay, she will. A billion  
times the grief.

Addanc keeps walking. Somehow the alley looks even darker.

FADE OUT