

AETHER TORRENT #3  
"CIRRUS'S TARGET"

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. CARAVAN BLOCK - DAY

POLICEMEN finish arresting the leftover CARAVAN MEMBERS in the street outside the antique shop.

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.

TORI sits on her bed with a granola bar in her mouth and laces up a hiking boot. Her jacket is absent. A full duffel bag leans against the bed.

TORI  
(muffled)  
You got everything?

Avani's backpack sits at her feet. She wears sandals.

AVANI  
Everything I came with. Which way are we going?

Tori wolfs down the rest of her snack.

TORI  
There's a secret route that leads out under the walls, but it's a little unpleasant.

AVANI  
How so?

TORI  
It's, um. The sewer.

EXT. CARAVAN BLOCK - DAY

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

A butch female figure in her 40s looks over the edge. Her skin is light blue on white and she wears an oversized t-shirt and flared shorts. We'll come to know her as CIRRUS.

CIRRUS

No wonder I smelled magic. Must be a raid.

CIRRUS'S P.O.V.:

Cirrus rapidly glances over everyone in sight.

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

Brown skin, green shirt, gold dots. Come on, where is she?

Cirrus's hair is a bunch of short white tendrils.

CIRRUS (CONT'D)

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.

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*, an Air-elemental creature with long, flat "wing" tendrils extending from her collarbones.

Several of the officers draw their guns on her.

Cirrus LEAPS off the building with 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.

A gray-on-white-skinned raiza LIEUTENANT watches her leave. A human OFFICER speaks up.

OFFICER

Lieutenant! Do we go after it?

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.

(glances at apartments)

But we can be thorough.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - HALL - DAY

Tori and Avani hurry down a hall. Avani still wears her thin green sweatshirt with the diamond of gold dots on the chest.

TORI

Doesn't it get hot in that sweatshirt?

AVANI

My temple makes me wear it.

TORI

And that has *what* bearing on your life now?

Avani stops.

She drops her backpack and WHIPS OFF her sweatshirt, revealing a lighter green t-shirt with the same dots.

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

TORI (CONT'D)

You sure like that design, huh?

AVANI

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

EXT. MEDDON STREETS - DAY

The police trucks roll along, SIRENS BLARING. Their top speed is in the 30 MPH 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 IMPACTS knock each of the rear doors open.

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 truck. Cirrus reaches down, GRABS him by the back of the shirt and LIFTS him onto the roof. The other escapees make a COMMOTION in the background.

CIRRUS

S'cuse me. Did you see a brown girl wearing green get arrested or killed? Her name is Avani.

ADDANC

What? No! She escaped with Torrent -- tallish, ponytail, calls herself Tori, like. Promise you'll kill her, she's always upstaging me!

The DRIVER of the lead truck exits and pulls his pistol on Cirrus.

DRIVER  
Hold it, monster!

Cirrus's eyebrow twitches.

She FLINGS Addanc at the driver without hesitation. Both men fall to the pavement.

CIRRUS  
Escaped, huh.

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

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - STAIRWELL - DAY

Tori and Avani descend a dim and narrow stairwell.

AVANI  
I'm sorry I made you abandon  
your museum...

TORI  
It's no big deal, I can rebuild.  
I know somebody on the western  
coast who can help. We can stay  
at her place, too.

AVANI  
(turns corner)  
The coast? Now I know I was  
meant to meet you. There's so  
much *nothing* near the ocean. I  
always wanted to help people  
fill that nothing with the love  
of the gods.

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

TORI  
Now wait just a minute.  
(MORE)

TORI (CONT'D)

The whole *point* of living near the ocean is seeing that big nothing every day. It's peaceful. Why clutter it up?

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 mythril-palmed mitten out of her pocket.

AVANI

Hold on, I'll compress the door frame.

TORI

Wait--!

LOBBY

The Lieutenant steps back and the wall RUMBLES. The frame SQUEEZES the door tightly enough to make it CRACK.

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, which go down deep.

The Lieutenant BREAKS DOWN the cracked door with ease.  
He looks down just in time to see the final door SLAM.

INT. SEWER - DAY

Tori leads the way down a stone path in a sewer system resembling that of real-life Paris, France.

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

The Lieutenant and three officers aim their guns.

LIEUTENANT

You can't escape, thief. You can either leave with us or die in a sewer.

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

TORI

Okey-dokey. I like the "leaving" one. 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 running alongside the path RISES UP in a single wave in front of her.

The wave CRASHES DOWN on the path --

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

Tori and Avani flee.

The 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 --

His hand 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 his arm to no effect.

LIEUTENANT

You're under arrest.

Avani SLAPS the wall with her mitten hand.

A chunk 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, 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. Which way now?

TORI

Out. Care for a little jaunt in  
the wilderness?

EXT. MEDDON - DAY

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

A great field of agriculture spreads out to the Northeast. A dense, hilly forest stands to the West.

INT. BORDER FOREST - FOREST CREEK - DAY

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

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.

EXT. SEWER EXIT - DAY

A giant stone sewer tunnel sticks out of a small hill in the forest. A creek flows into it.

EXT. FOREST CREEK - DAY

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

The girls follow the creek. Tori stares up at the trees.

TORI

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 sleeps quietly on her branch. Her eyes open at the word "monsters."

AVANI (O.S.)

Then how do you explain monsters? How did they arise if not by divine will?

Cirrus looks down.

Tori and Avani approach her tree, oblivious.

TORI

I read about this once. See, the elements in the Aether act like pollutants.

AVANI

You think magic is *poison*?

The girls walk to and pass under Cirrus's branch. Cirrus watches them closely.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

What have we here?

TORI

(overlapped by Cirrus)

No, I said *like* pollutants. All bodies absorb elements and that's part of how we summon magic, but if an animal body absorbs too much of one, it becomes an elemental monster.

Cirrus hunches over and prepares to pounce.

AVANI

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

Cirrus BLINKS hard.

CIRRUS'S P.O.V.:

Avani walks away with Tori.

AVANI (CONT'D)

They cannot exist without the blessing of a patron god or goddess because they break the rules of summoning magic.

Cirrus bites her thumbnail.

TORI (O.S.)

They don't break any rules, they just follow ones that we can't.

AVANI (O.S.)

(growing distant)

That's exactly my point!

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Just grab her. Come on, don't waste any time. But what's this about a blessing?

(MORE)

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

(glances aside)

She's not going anywhere. I can  
take her whenever I want.

Cirrus LEAPS off her branch with a whisper-quiet RUSTLE of  
leaves.

EXT. BORDER FOREST - DAY

The sun indicates the time as early evening.

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  
stand near the pool. Their luggage is on the ground.

TORI

Just look at this. It's made of  
nothing but boring old water and  
earth, but it's beautiful. 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

*Thank you.*

AVANI

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

Tori stares at Avani for all of a second. She sits on her duffel bag, 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, 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 grins at Avani. Avani understands the message, frowns back at her 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.

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 us from harm.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Get to the good part. Talk about  
monsters again.

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

AVANI (CONT'D)

I thank you also for the one you  
sent to me, but I worry about  
her. She has wisdom enough to  
understand your ways, yet 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 (B-plus). 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  
living things have purpose, but  
none is to be a mere unthinking  
tool for anyone or anything.

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. I'll  
start right now.

Avani steps into her sandals and strides away.

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 white and he sinks straight down.

Tori gets PULLED UNDERWATER.

Avani looks on in horror.

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.

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.

A WHIRLPOOL forms in the middle of the water.

The water SWIRLS and forms into a KELPIE, a white water-horse monster with a 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 finds Tori's knife under her discarded shirt. She HURLS the knife into the pool --

Cirrus FLICKS her wrist --

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

UNDERWATER

The kelpie's current PINS Tori to the bottom. It's about fourteen feet deep.

The knife sinks and lands on the top of the drop-off, well out of reach.

WATERFALL POOL

Avani scratches her head in mind-wracking panic.

CIRRUS (O.S.)  
Having problems?

Cirrus stands two feet from her.

Avani BACKS UP, surprised.

AVANI  
What -- who are you?

CIRRUS  
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 congeals and LUNGES at her.

Tori PUNCHES it in the nose.

The current slows perceptibly and loosens around her body.

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

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!

UNDERWATER

Tori goes under again and grabs her knife.

The kelpie's head rises from the deeper part.

Tori sees it.

WATERFALL POOL

The shoreline recedes considerably.

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

Tori runs ahead of the returning tide.

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

The girls' luggage gets soaked.

Tori 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 congeals at the waterfall and STOMPS the water threateningly.

Tori grips her knife.

TORI

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

Avani steps back and folds her hands.

Cirrus SWINGS herself up and sits on the branch.

The kelpie CHARGES.

Tori holds her left hand to the back of her knife, points it at the Kelpie --

And SWINGS the blade with a GRUNT OF EXERTION.

A mass of water FLIES OUT of the kelpie in the direction she swung.

A formless blob of thick grease remains to SPLASH over the water.

Its momentum carries it to Tori and flows it over her feet.

TORI (CONT'D)  
(kicks wildly)  
Oh, ew! Ick!

Tori SWINGS her knife again and water FLIES OUT of the grease, leaving a fine powder on the water and her feet.

CIRRUS  
Unbelievable...

Something underneath Cirrus CRACKS HEAVILY. She looks down.

Avani holds her mitten to the trunk. A deep, jagged crack goes completely through it.

Cirrus remains on her branch. The tree CREAKS and TILTS in her direction.

She JUMPS clear 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  
I'll ask again.

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

Tori steps away from Cirrus and looks her over.

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

TORI

I've read about wind tigers. They're not native to this continent and 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.

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 GROANS and begins gathering her wet clothes.

CIRRUS

I'd be glad to.

INT. FOREST PATH - NIGHT

The sun has set.

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.

(MORE)

AVANI (CONT'D)

She may be in opposition to my patron but I'm sure we can get along. "Let all elements come together in life," so he says.

CIRRUS

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

Tori half-smiles at them.

TORI

(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 around.

The moon hangs over the forest. 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!

FADE OUT