

AETHER TORRENT #5
"DORN'S MONSTERS"

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST EDGE - DAY

A thin plume of smoke rises from the thinning edge of Border Forest.

TORI, AVANI and CIRRUS sit on cubes of earth near a campfire, over which a tripod suspends a cooking pot. Each one of them eats a whitish stew with iron spoons from small iron bowls.

TORI

Well I hoped you would. We have enough food now to get to East Granbridge, but not on foot.

Cirrus scoops some more stew into her bowl. Even the ladle in the pot is made of iron.

CIRRUS

Two bodies plus luggage is just too much weight to fly with.
(lifts bowl, lowers it)
Even if we left these behind.

Tori feels the weight of her bowl, too.

TORI

Yeah, 'Vani, your muscles must be like rock to carry all this on your back.

Avani pokes aside bits of crab meat in her bowl to get at the rice around them. Her posture is flawless.

AVANI

So what if I'm toned? That doesn't mean I'm looking forward to carrying it.

TORI

Well somebody'll have to.

CIRRUS

(full mouth)

Don't look at me. Find some
other pack-mount.

Tori seems to get an idea. She points her spoon at Cirrus for emphasis.

TORI

I just might. You know why the
cities in this peninsula are
walled, right?

CIRRUS

They're all run by jerks?

AVANI

(under breath)

Meddon certainly was.

TORI

The fact is, there's a higher
concentration of monsters here
than anywhere else on Dorn. And
some are big enough to carry us.

EXT. BORDER FOREST - DAY

Long, scaly legs DASH through the forest.

A SHADOWY FIGURE rides atop some sort of animal, gripping a pair of handlebars at the front of the saddle.

A DIRE KIWI -- a plump, brown, short-necked *moa* with the beak of a kiwi -- speeds out of the tree cover. We'll come to know this bird as KLAUSER.

His rider is a blue-on-white male raiza, a MESSENGER. A satchel hangs from one side of his saddle and a coiled bullwhip hangs from the other.

EXT. LAKESIDE VILLAGE - DAY

Klauser TROMPS through the village at high speed. The messenger directs him to evade random VILLAGERS in work clothes. His voice is a typical raiza baritone.

MESSENGER

Make way! Please make way!

Klauser strides right over a juvenile RÜSTUNG crab.

The crab flicks its antennae. It happens to stand by the medical hut.

ADDANC looks out the window, his amazed expression suggesting he saw the speeding bird. His shirtlessness shows off a large white abdominal bandage.

EXT. LAKESIDE - DAY

KURNUNG, her gray-on-white skin shiny with water, links her fingers and STRETCHES her arms over her head.

We see her inhumanly fit form from behind. Her pants are dry. Her shark tail arcs and stiffens, then relaxes with her arms.

The messenger brings Klauser to a halt and dismounts him.

MESSENGER (CONT'D)

Ma'am Kurnung! Terrible news!

Kurnung turns her head.

KURNUNG

Oh, it's you. How are things with the division head?

The messenger is shorter than her and less thickly built.

MESSENGER

It's not that, it's about your brother! It's... he's... *dead!*

Kurnung holds her head-turned pose. Her neck muscles TIGHTEN.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

An enormous ground sloth, a JOTUN, grabs a tree branch, bends the whole tree down and browses on the leaves.

Tori, Avani and Cirrus stand a hundred feet away. Tori ties a granola bar to a string and ties the string to a stick.

CIRRUS

You're kidding.

TORI

It's big enough to carry us.
Besides, where's your sense of
adventure? It'll be really cool.

AVANI

I'm afraid you won't even get
close to it, Tori.

The jotun browses contentedly in a sitting position. Its
thick tail keeps it upright, tripod style.

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

Jotuns are Earth monsters. The
way it's sitting, it will feel
you coming.

Tori strides forth with her lure over her shoulder like a
fishing pole.

TORI

Then we'll have ourselves one
rare ride, won't we?

Avani steps back and motions for Cirrus to do the same.

We finally get a sense of the jotun's size once Tori gets
closer. It's twice as tall as an elephant.

Tori's footsteps THUMP softly on the ground.

The THUMPS reach the jotun's tail.

The jotun turns its head.

Tori stops.

The jotun lifts its clawed foot and STOMPS it down.

A four-foot pillar of dirt SHOOTS UP under Tori, destroying
her balance.

She falls forward off the pillar to an ungraceful landing on
her chin and chest.

Avani stifles laughter. Cirrus lets hers BURST OUT.

Tori lays on her front, her knees bent and propped against the pillar. She looks like an L on its side.

TORI (CONT'D)

Plan B.

INT. KURNUNG'S HUT - DAY

Kurnung sits cross-legged on a plush cushion. Her elbows dig into her knees and her nose rests on her fingers.

The messenger kneels before her. The hut interior is very Spartan except for the cushion and a bookshelf.

Kurnung lowers her head and rubs her yellow eyes one-handed. She speaks in **subtitled** raizan language, an incomprehensible resonating bass full of consonants.

KURNUNG

You bring old news. Addanc told me yesterday, but I didn't listen. My brother, dead -- the Caravan, ruined -- would you have believed him?

MESSENGER

Did he say how it happened?

Kurnung's hand moves down her nose and she glares over it.

EXT. KURNUNG'S HUT - DAY

Klauser stands at the ready outside Kurnung's hut. Some villagers have gathered, but they keep their distance from the giant bird.

Addanc steps out of the crowd, wearing black slacks and an unbuttoned long-sleeve denim shirt over his bandage.

ADDANC

Why are all of you afraid of it?
A tame monster serves people,
dead or alive.

INT. KURNUNG'S HUT - DAY

Kurnung rests her nose on her fist.

MESSENGER

**Don't worry, Ma'am. Klauser and
I will find them.**

KURNUNG

(eyes flash open)

Your pet. Did you tie him?

A loud GWARD sound is heard among SHOUTS of villagers.

EXT. KURNUNG'S HUT - DAY

Addanc sits in Klauser's saddle, feet in the stirrups and holding the saddle's handlebars for dear life.

Klauser FLAILS, trying and failing to throw him off.

Addanc PUSHES the handlebars forward. A protruding tab at the front pushes into the base of Klauser's neck.

Klauser GWARD again and takes off running. Villagers SCATTER to make way.

Kurnung and the messenger exit the hut too late.

EXT. LAKESIDE VILLAGE - DAY

Addanc fights with Klauser to direct him to the ridge around the lake.

ADDANC

Submit, bird! Just for now! I'll
return you once I've found Tori
and killed -- *uwah!*

Klauser JERKS ahead, cutting off Addanc's sentence.

The messenger's satchel falls off amidst the jerks and re-directions, but the bullwhip remains hanging from the saddle.

A clear diamond of at least a dozen carats is studded in the tip of the whip's handle.

EXT. WATER HOLE - DAY

Six WILD DIRE KIWIS drink from a water hole at the foot of a hill.

Tori, Avani and Cirrus lay down and spy on the birds at the top of the hill. Their luggage rests behind them.

TORI

Dire kiwis. Perfect. They're no more dangerous than big feathery horses.

AVANI

They still have claws. I really don't think you should try this.

Tori's curved knife rests in its holster between her light blue vest and dark blue shirt. She withdraws it.

TORI

(grin)
I won't -- alone, anyway.

The dire kiwis continue sipping the pool.

Cirrus approaches the water, now in wind tiger form with her clothes in a pile on her back.

The dire kiwis cautiously gather on the other side of the pool. Cirrus lowers her head to drink.

The dire kiwis' footsteps THUMP softly.

Avani crouches behind the hill, holding her pale green mythril ingot to the ground. Tori crouches next to her.

The THUMPS reach Avani's hand through the ingot.

A semicircle wall of earth suddenly SHOOTs UP behind the birds. They GwARK loudly and sprint into the water, the only direction open to them.

Tori runs around the hill and THRUST-TWISTS her knife.

The water CHURNS into swirling tentacles which GRAB the birds' legs.

Wind WHIRLS counter-clockwise around Cirrus, taking some water with it just for the visual effect.

The dire kiwis try to escape the water trap. The tentacles hold them, for now.

Tori points her knife at the water with both hands. Her arms are TENSED.

TORI

Make it fast, we only need one!

Cirrus, now clothed and in human form, JUMPS on the back of a dire kiwi and CLINGS tight.

CIRRUS

Done!

Tori drops her arms and the tentacles COLLAPSE. The dire kiwis SPLASH and scatter while Cirrus wrangles hers.

Tori wipes her forehead. Avani rounds the hill and sticks her ingot in a pocket of her dark green skirt.

AVANI

She's doing well. I'm impressed.

TORI

Takes a monster to tame one.

Cirrus's mount tries to throw her, with no success.

A PIERCING SCREECH suddenly comes from above.

Tori and Avani look up.

Cirrus's mount goes completely wild and THROWS her off.

Cirrus lands on her butt and the dire kiwi sprints for dear life.

A THUNDERBIRD, a 7'-tall bird of prey with a 30-foot wingspan, DIVES at the dire kiwi and PINS it to the ground. Its patterned plumage is black, white and red.

Tori watches in mixed surprise and anger.

TORI

What the *hell!* That was our
ride, you freak!

The thunderbird SNAPS the dire kiwi's neck in its beak, lets
it go and turns its head.

Tori and Avani simultaneously freeze.

EXT. FOREST RIVER - DAY

A small river runs through Border Forest.

Addanc rides Klauser with some degree of control.

He unhooks the whip from the saddle and examines the diamond
in the handle.

Klauser pulls to the right. Addanc tilts the handlebars to
the left and Klauser stops.

ADDANC

Don't fret. We'll cross easily.

(holds up whip)

You see this? This weapon's a
curved pole with a rock of
adamant. It's perfect, like.

Klauser fidgets.

ADDANC (CONT'D)

If it's too much for your brain,
let me show your eyes!

Addanc CRACKS the whip at the river --

And FREEZES a smooth six-foot-wide ice dam in it. A heat
shimmer rises over it and dissipates.

Addanc struggles with Klauser, steadying him after a second.

Addanc BREATHES deep and slow as if overheated.

ADDANC (CONT'D)

Heh. The power of a combined
element. Now hurry, beast!

(MORE)

ADDANC (CONT'D)

Torrent may have a head start,
but I know just where she's
going. She'll never outdo me
again.

Addanc **SHOVES** the handlebars forward. Klauser **GWARKS** and runs
at the ice dam --

SLIDING across awkwardly yet upright.

EXT. WATER HOLE - DAY

The thunderbird steps off the dead dire kiwi.

Cirrus stands defensively between it and Tori and Avani.

Tori rubs her chin in thought.

AVANI

Don't.

TORI

But it's big enough for--

AVANI

--Just don't. Thunderbirds are
Air monsters like Cirrus.

Cirrus keeps both eyes on the thunderbird.

CIRRUS

Except I'm not a huge predator.

The thunderbird **SCREECHES TWICE** and shrugs its wings at them.

AVANI

(calming tone)
Easy, there. We don't want it.

The thunderbird lowers its wings.

It walks halfway around the carcass, looks up at the trio,
looks down and jealously **TEARS** at its prize.

Tori blinks. Looks at Avani.

AVANI (CONT'D)

I've dealt with many monsters.
Most are tolerant of harmless
bystanders when they eat.

TORI

(snaps fingers)
That's it!

Tori's legs run up the hill.

Her arms open the leather suitcase and remove a wooden box
next to a canvas bag. Nothing else is in the suitcase.

Her legs run back down the hill --

And she pats the box lid.

AVANI

Don't we need that?

TORI

Not if we can fly straight to
the next polis and get more food.

CIRRUS

Besides, it's god-awful salty.
Feed it all to him.

The thunderbird busily rips apart the dire kiwi. It's a lot
of meat, even for such a large predator.

Tori approaches.

TORI

Hey, look what I got.

Tori opens the box, revealing white meat packed in salt.

The thunderbird looks up, its beak dripping with gore.

It extends its right wing and FLAPS.

A gale-force wind SLAMS into Tori.

Tori HITS the ground, scattering the seafood.

The thunderbird folds its wing and keeps eating.

Tori calmly stands up, calmly dusts herself off and angrily KICKS the spilled box off-screen.

Frustrated, she pulls an elastic band -- thin, blue and easy to miss -- out of her ponytail and claws her fingers through her orange hair.

TORI (CONT'D)

Can you do me a favor, Cirrus?

(thumbs at thunderbird)

I need you to catch some king-sized bait for this guy.

CIRRUS

Oh, I see how it is, have the wind tiger hunt the meat. She has to be good at it, tiger's right in the name!

AVANI

Please don't be upset, she didn't mean it like that.

Tori pulls back her hair and fixes a tighter ponytail, holding the hair elastic in her teeth until needed.

TORI

Yes I did. I could tame him for sure if I had another dire kiwi carcass, so I need one fast.

Cirrus crosses her arms like a humorless mother.

CIRRUS

I'm not a predator. I don't hunt.

AVANI

But you hunted *me*, didn't you?

CIRRUS

That... but... that was completely different!

AVANI

How so?

Cirrus opens her mouth to speak. She glances aside and closes it partway.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

Cirrus flies levelly in wind tiger form. Her mouth doesn't move but we can still hear her GRUMBLING.

Cirrus surveys the field below her.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

All right, big feathery horses,
where are you?

EXT. WATER HOLE - DAY

It's late in the afternoon, an hour or two from sunset. Avani drops her backpack, opens one of the pockets and removes a pair of binoculars. She hands them to Tori.

TORI'S P.O.V.:

The thunderbird rips flesh off the dire kiwi carcass in much closer detail.

Tori keeps looking through the binoculars. The thunderbird keeps eating, about 30 feet away.

TORI (CONT'D)

Thanks, but you didn't have to
bring the whole backpack over
here.

Avani zips up the pocket.

AVANI

It's not really that heavy.

Tori seizes Avani's wrist.

The thunderbird SNAPS its beak on the dire kiwi's ankle.

Tori squeezes up and down Avani's arm. The muscles do not compress as would be expected.

Avani JERKS her arm away.

TORI

Nothing must be heavy with arms
like that.

AVANI

So what if I'm toned?

TORI

You're not just toned, your
muscles feel like wood. All
things considered, I should've
known. Cirrus's body can change
shape *and* density, y'know.

AVANI

What does that--

TORI

--You're an Earth monster,
aren't you.

Avani's jaw drops. She holds her arm but doesn't answer.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

From Cirrus's altitude, a speck of a dire kiwi crosses the
prairie.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

There we go.

Cirrus descends.

Addanc rides Klauser across the prairie, oblivious to the
danger until he looks up --

And JERKS Klauser to the left as Cirrus DIVEBOMBS them.
Klauser GWARKS.

Cirrus passes within a few inches --

BANKS in the air and lands softly on all fours.

Addanc turns Klauser around and halts him.

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

You there. Get off the... wait,
you're that guy Tori beat up.

ADDANC

My name is Addanc Meyrick. And
you're that butch middle-aged
wind tiger, aren't you?

Addanc grabs his whip, uncoils it with a dramatic SWING of
her arm and CRACKS it at Cirrus.

The standing grass around Cirrus's feet FREEZES into a mat of
ice needles. Cirrus's legs sparkle with frost and she GASPS
from the temperature shock.

She steps back, immediately PIERCING her feet on the frosted
spikes of grass.

Cirrus FLINCHES. She looks up.

Addanc struggles to steady Klauser. He looks more exhausted
than he should be.

Cirrus narrows her eyes, understanding.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

I see. The heat from untrained
Ice magic... well, who cares, he's
riding my target.

Cirrus JUMPS off the frosted grass and flies away.

Addanc maneuvers Klauser around and begins pursuit.

ADDANC

She must be running to Torrent!
Come on, beast!

Cirrus flies low, leading him back the way she came.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Way too easy. Avani's gods must
like me.

EXT. WATER HOLE - DAY

Avani moves her mouth mutely, stunned by Tori's accusation. Eventually she finds the words to reply.

AVANI

You... you think I'm a monster?

TORI

Why not? Every element has at least one shape-shifting monster to it. That would explain a lot.

Avani holds her wrist, clearly evasive.

AVANI

If... if I was a monster, why didn't I free myself from those maids back in Meddon?

QUICK FLASHBACK:

Back in the first episode, Tori watches the mob of MAIDS hustle Avani through the hall of Drach Yenech's mansion.

The thunderbird continues eating in the background. Tori and Avani flank it in the foreground.

TORI

Maybe that would've revealed your secret. Look, I'm sorry if you don't like this subject, but it's pretty important since we're traveling together. I just want a yes or no here.

AVANI

Then no. I'm completely human.

Avani squeezes her wrist and moves her fingers, feeling her arm muscles move.

AVANI (CONT'D)

It's just that my body is... dense. Every part of me is stronger than in normal people. Skin, muscle, bones... organs too, I would guess.

Tori absorbs that information.

TORI

Why be shy about it? It sounds awesome.

AVANI

It was part of my initiation to my temple. They used the full range of Earth magic on me. Said it would bring me closer to Teizen and let me feel his presence in my very bones.

Tori looks Avani over with intense interest, not unlike how she too-closely scrutinized Cirrus two episodes ago.

AVANI (CONT'D)

It did, of course, and I'm glad for it, but I'm still not sure if I'm happy about being -- can I help you?

TORI

It all makes sense... but what kinds of people are skilled enough to elementally augment a body?

Avani looks sidelong at the ground.

AVANI

Monsters.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

Cirrus flies low over the grass, which WAVES in her wake.

Addanc CHARGES Klauser after her.

EXT. WATER HOLE - DAY

Cirrus flies over the hill.

CIRRUS (V.O.)
Hey Tori! Got a delivery!

Tori turns around and waves.

Addanc rides Klauser over the hill.

Tori stops waving. Her arm drops an inch.

Cirrus zooms over her discarded clothes near Tori's duffel bag, picking them up in her wake.

Her human-form feet SKID in the grass nearby.

Addanc raises his whip.

ADDANC
This is the end for you!

The thunderbird SCREAMS warningly.

Klauser's bird-eyes widen in fear --

And he flails his body until Addanc is THROWN off.

Addanc hits the hill, whip in hand.

Klauser RUNS for his life --

Trips over Avani's heavy bag --

And tumbles to the ground.

The thunderbird SCREAMS again and opens its wings.

Tori's gray eyes dart back and forth.

TORI'S P.O.V.:
The thunderbird summons wind to FLY upwards without flapping.
Across the water, Addanc stands up. Near Cirrus, Klauser
FLAILS in his panic to right himself.

TORI (O.S.)
Okay. Okay. Uh. Crap. Okay.

Tori looks at Avani.

TORI (CONT'D)

Wrangle the dire kiwi.

AVANI

Excuse me?

TORI

Catch it. You've got a strong
body, just do it.

(looks to Cirrus)

Cirrus! Change of plans! Kill
the thunderbird!

CIRRUS

(grumble)

And I just got dressed again...

The thunderbird zeroes in on Klauser.

Cirrus LEAPS UP with wind assistance, shedding her clothes on
a torpedo trajectory --

AIR SPACE

To deliver a HEADBUTT in wind tiger form to the thunderbird's
wing.

A gust WHIRLS the bird into a barrel roll, ending with a
powerful upside-down FLAP --

Which BLOWS Cirrus away in midair.

WATER HOLE

Tori stares at Addanc across the water. He stares back.

Cirrus and the thunderbird dogfight in the air, unnoticed by
the humans. Avani makes her way to the grounded Klauser.

Addanc pulls the whip taut between his hands.

Tori pulls out her knife.

TORI

Bad idea, picking a fight with
me so close to a pool.

ADDANC

What pool?

Addanc CRACKS his whip at the water --

And it FREEZES OVER. A heat shimmer SHOOTS upwards --

AIR SPACE

Giving extra height to the thunderbird.

Cirrus SOARS up to meet it --

And misses a headbutt by inches.

WATER HOLE

Klauser gets to his feet. Avani cautiously approaches.

Understandably spooked, Klauser CHARGES her.

Avani's face registers panic for an instant.

She JUMPS aside, grabs hold of one of his stirrups --

And gets DRAGGED along as he flees.

The pool, meanwhile, is a pane of ice. Addanc BREATHES HARD.

ADDANC

(points at ice)

Look, Torrent! Not even you can
use Ice magic! Admit it, I've
finally outclassed you as an
elementalist!

TORI

Nice try, Addanc. Any idiot can
summon magic with the right tool
and vessel material.

Tori STOMPS the edge of the ice. Her hiking boot breaks
through easily.

TORI (CONT'D)

Let me show you what it means to
use it.

AIR SPACE

Cirrus SLAMS her head into the thunderbird's stomach.

The thunderbird RAKES its claws at her back. Two talons connect and SLASH bright red lines in her blue and white skin down her lower back and left thigh.

Cirrus releases a loud, bizarre CRY, like a wine glass tone over steel cutting steel. She plummets thirty feet --

Flattens her wings, banks straight up --

Passes the thunderbird and keeps going.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

Avani has lost her sandals but keeps a death grip on Klauser's stirrup.

She HOPS to avoid being dragged, but can't quite mount the saddle.

At the peak of a hop, she wraps her legs around his backwards-pointing knee --

Restricting his stride just enough to topple him towards Avani's side.

Avani TENSES, bracing for impact as she falls.

EXT. WATER HOLE - DAY

Tori SLASHES her knife upwards, summoning a stream of water from the hole in the ice.

Addanc catches his breath and WHIPS the air, failing to crack his weapon. The whip harmlessly THUMPS the ice.

AIR SPACE

Cirrus stalls, far above the thunderbird. Her back and thigh bleed.

The thunderbird rises.

Cirrus rears back, raising her front legs.

WATER HOLE

Tori SWINGS her knife at Addanc, directing the stream at him.

AIR SPACE

Cirrus SWINGS her front legs down, somersaulting.

An air column falls, SUCKS DOWN passing clouds --

And SLAMS into the thunderbird.

WATER HOLE

Addanc guards his face.

Tori's stream DRILLS into him, knocking him down and pinning him to the ground.

Tori holds her hand to the back of her knife and maintains her stance. The stream flows up from the ice hole to Addanc in a high, perfect arc.

Not far away, Cirrus's air column brutally DRILLS the thunderbird into the ground.

Soil and feathers FLY from the wind blender.

Tori breaks her stance to guard her face against the sandblasting.

The stream falls and CRACKS the sheet of ice into the all-but-empty pool.

Cirrus SWOOPS, enveloped in the clouds her attack drew in --

And CRACKS the de-feathered back of the thunderbird with her human-form right heel.

The wind abruptly stops. The air is full of dust and deafening silence.

Tori peeks over her stacked forearms. She blinks.

Cirrus INHALES and EXHALES slowly and shakily.

Her twin lacerations are clean, but begin to bleed freshly. They extend from her lower back over her bare butt down her left muscular thigh.

Her yellow eyes glare.

CIRRUS

What.

TORI

(glances down, up)

Nothing.

CIRRUS

Then return my favor and stop
this annoying bleeding.

Addanc lies wet, knocked out and breathing shallowly. The whip is still in his hand.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

The sun hangs low on the horizon.

Avani stands next to Klauser, who crouches in the grass so she can more easily scratch under his chin.

Cirrus (dressed) and Tori approach. Klauser turns his head half around to look at them.

AVANI

Tori, meet Klauser.

TORI

You named it already?

Avani points at the rear of Klauser's saddle. It clearly reads "Klauser."

AVANI

He was a handful, but he calmed
down after he fell on me.

Cirrus nods, only half-listening. She then thinks about that statement and stares incredulously at Avani.

AVANI (CONT'D)

I'm durable.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

Avani rides Klauser at a decent canter towards the setting sun. The weight of her backpack doesn't seem to slow him.

Cirrus (wind tiger) flies overhead with Tori on her back. Tori carries her duffel bag.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

You sure we should leave your friend back there? He'd look dead if he wasn't breathing.

Tori closes her bag and smiles nostalgically.

TORI

Addanc's had worse. And he's not a friend. In fact he's not even a rival anymore. He's just an untalented idiot from my past life.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

(chuckle)

Past life, huh? So when did your present one start?

Tori's smile breaks out into a grin.

TORI

Oh, about five minutes after I met you guys.

EXT. WATER HOLE - NIGHT

The sun has set.

Addanc is awake, but he hasn't moved.

ADDANC

Useless. Completely useless. I have no purpose anymore. No leader. No revenge. I can't even *fight* her, let alone...

His face contorts and he begins to cry. A low GROWLING off-screen straightens his face.

He raises his head.

Despite the darkness, a LION-MANED WOLF is clearly visible a scant few yards from him.

A pack of similar monsters tear apart the dead thunderbird.

A few others fight over the dire kiwi carcass.

Addanc stares at his stalker. Sits up.

He GRIPS the whip's handle.

Addanc GLARES at the lion-wolf, dark eyes full of hate. He breathes through his teeth.

The lion-wolf bares its fangs.

A WHIP CRACK rings through the quiet prairie sky.

FADE OUT