

AETHER TORRENT #7
"AVANI'S FAITH"

Written by

Jack Duffe

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FADE IN:

EXT. STORYBOOK FIELD - DAY

An old, bearded SAGE and a YOUNG MAN sit on a hill in a rolling field with only a few trees in sight. The whole scene is animated sparsely, as though illustrating a storybook.

TORI narrates.

TORI (V.O.)

The sage and I rested upon a hill that day.

A 20'-tall GIANT walks by the hill. He wears an insulating cape made of long feathers and carries a huge, straight-edged stone axe on his shoulder.

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

At length a giant passed us by. He wore a mantle of feathers and carried a great axe of stone. He cried aloud:

GIANT

Woe is me! Long have I felled trees with only this stone axe of mine! And now so few remain!

TORI (V.O.)

The sage shouted so that the giant could hear:

SAGE

Good man, you carry your solution! If you hold in your mind the forest as it once stood and strike the soil with that straight-edged blade, you shall never want for trees again!

The giant looks at his axe in disbelief. He raises his axe and PLUNGES it into the soil. The blade goes deep.

An EARTHQUAKE hits. A HUGE FOREST immediately springs up around the giant.

The sage sits perfectly still. The young man gets up and panics. Trees rise and form a dense canopy above them. Some of the leaves GLOW.

TORI (V.O.)

And all around us a forest grew.
Great trunks shot like seizing
arms and burst with green to
blot the sun, but we still had
light to see, for the leaves
themselves glowed brightly.

The forest continues spreading out in all directions.

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

And in that glow of nature we
found ourselves amidst a great
new border between the wild and
civilized lands of Dorn, a green
sea of new life in the wastes.

INT. OTEND INN - OFFICE - NIGHT

Tori leans over the ancient book she had back in episode 1 as it sits open on a wooden office desk. A black metal box sits open on the desk too.

Tori lifts her eyes expectantly to LADY SHIITAKE, who sits behind the desk in an office not unlike Don Corleone's. The room is lit by oil lamps and a fireplace.

TORI (CONT'D)

Nice story, huh?

LOUIE and a pair of TROOPS are present too, keeping watch over AVANI and CIRRUS (human). Cirrus wears a red and white robe evidently stolen from a Guy.

AVANI

Such an eloquent description of
how magic revitalizes the world...
what *is* that book?

Shiitake impatiently TAPS a fingernail on her desk.

TORI

It's the *Chronicle of the Walking Sage*, sort of our continent's epic. I went through a lot of trouble to steal this edition.

SHIITAKE

(rising anger)

I tell you to prove what you said about re-growing our crop fields in a day and you feed me an old *myth?! Louie!*

LOUIE

Yes, Lady Shiitake?

SHIITAKE

The only food we're getting from now on is what we can find. Fry their bird and carve it up.

LOBBY

TODD puts a bucket of water on the floor. KLAUSER dips his beak down and begins drinking. The INNKEEPER looks on.

INNKEEPER

Those-a girls might've taken out Sir Beau, but the Shiitakes are just as bad! And now they're in there mobstering up my office! I say we eat-a their bird.

TODD

Give it a rest, Dad.

OFFICE

Cirrus blocks the door. Louie and the Troops are gathered around her.

Cirrus crosses her arms. Louie tilts his hat up at her with his thumb. Avani wedges herself between them.

AVANI

Please! The story is obviously about Flora magic. *That* is how it can help re-grow your fields.

Shiitake flicks her wrist at her men. They disperse.

SHIITAKE

Explain, Red. Short version.

Tori closes her book, puts it in the box and locks it in.

TORI

Flora magic, Water plus Earth, controls plant life. To summon it you need a straight blade and a rare type of stone. The story mentioned a straight-edged stone axe in a *forest* that made a whole new *border*. Still with me?

SHIITAKE

(holds chin)

Border Forest. So that axe, if it even exists, can grow the larder of seeds I kept hidden from Beau?

AVANI

Seed growth is easy for Flora magic. You will soon have all your crops again, gods willing.

Tori picks up her book-box as if to leave.

TORI

Gods or not, we'll search the forest for that axe tomorrow.

SHIITAKE

The whole forest? I don't think so, Red. You'd just skip town on me.

AVANI

We would not so quickly abandon
the people of this polis after
freeing them from that Sir Beau.
If you want collateral, then I
will stay behind with Klauser.

Tori SMACKS her forehead. Shiitake looks at her and she
nonchalantly brushes a few strands of hair behind her ear.

EXT. CASTLE SHIITAKE - DAY

The three-layer brick castle looks harmless in morning light.

INT. CASTLE SHIITAKE - THIRD LEVEL JAIL - DAY

One of the blue-tiled jail cells is crammed with far too many
red-robed GUYS. One of them is robeless.

SIR BEAU sits in the other cell, his mouth covered by an iron
mask and his arms and neck chained to giant iron balls.

ROBELESS GUY

S...Sir Beau? Somebody'll come for
us, right?

Sir Beau's voice echoes slightly behind the mask.

SIR BEAU

Oh, they'll come. Come to make
an example of me.

ROBELESS GUY

It's not that bad, Sir.

Sir Beau droops his head. His chains clank softly.

SIR BEAU

Yes it is, you idiot.

INFORMATIVE MAP

We see a map of Rannom and surrounding areas. Little red
sparkles appear in a swath from the city through crop fields
to an expanse of hills to the west.

SIR BEAU (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Rannom's near a huge supply of this crystal called, uh, zincite. Natural crystals are rare, but you can't make good orichalcum without 'em.

The field BURNS to the ground.

SIR BEAU (V.O.) (CONT'D)

That's the whole reason why we torched the fields. To make Shiitake trade orichalcum for food.

THIRD LEVEL JAIL

Sir Beau GROANS and holds his head, beside himself with despair. His Guys look understandably concerned.

SIR BEAU (CONT'D)

But I had orders to take over if Shiitake was a problem. If the flow of orichalcum stops, the division head might think I'm taking the orichalcum *and* the zincite for myself! There's nothing more useless than a traitor, even a suspected one! We're all done for!

A door OPENS off-screen.

Shiitake and Louie stand in the doorway.

SHIITAKE

Sounds like you're ready to spill what I want to hear. Now, who's this "division head?"

INT. OTEND INN - UPSTAIRS ROOM - DAY

An upstairs room in the inn resembles something out of a classy Victorian bed-and-breakfast. Cirrus (human) lies prone on the queen-sized bed. One of two tall windows is open.

Tori changes behind a privacy screen. We see her silhouette.

TORI

So Cirrus. How fast can you fly?

Avani rummages in her backpack beside the bed. A pillow or two on the floor suggests she slept there.

CIRRUS

You know what a shockwave is?

TORI (O.S.)

Huh?

CIRRUS

(rolls over on back)

Nevermind. Anything with as much elemental power as the axe in that story will reek of magic. If it exists, I'll find it.

Tori pulls a pair of navy blue jeans off the privacy screen.

TORI

We wouldn't have to worry about it at all if 'Vani hadn't opened her big mouth.

AVANI

Avani. Three syllables. And pardon me if I would never leave people who need help.

Avani stops rummaging. She smiles a little.

Tori buttons up a men's safari shirt and straps on her knife.

Tori steps out from behind the screen, almost colliding with a palm-sized mythrill square which Avani holds up to her.

The pale green square has a diamond of shiny bronze circles riveted in. Tori takes it.

TORI

What's this?

AVANI

A sigil of Teizen. It's a
mythril charm from my temple.

Tori hands it back immediately. Avani pushes it back to her,
but meets resistance. The girls forcefully seesaw the square
back and forth as they speak. Cirrus watches.

AVANI (CONT'D)

I know you excel at Water magic,
but you never know when you
might need to summon Earth!

TORI

No thanks, I don't need any
religious charms. Besides, you
left your temple last week.

AVANI

I left my superiors' rules, not
my religion. I still believe you
were sent to me, so I want to
ensure your safety!

TORI

This treasure run has nothing to
do with religion!

Cirrus hops off the bed.

CIRRUS

Am I going to have to separate
you two?

Tori relents and sticks the charm in her pocket.

EXT. OTEND INN - SECOND FLOOR - DAY

Cirrus (wind tiger) perches her front paws on the windowsill.
Tori climbs on her back and Cirrus flies out.

INT. OTEND INN - UPSTAIRS ROOM - DAY

Avani waves goodbye. The instant they're out of sight --

Avani falls instantly into a cross-legged sit, bows her head and splays her hands on the floor.

AVANI

Great Teizen below. If it does not go against your plan, please make my avenger or defender or *whatever* she is less rooted in atheism. At *least* let her see that faith can bring her peace of mind...

Avani looks up suddenly. She tilts her head and smirks.

EXT. PUBLIC SQUARE - DAY

Avani stands barefoot on the rim of a low-flow fountain in a public square. The back of Castle Shiitake looms in the background behind a fence. Klauser looms in the foreground.

AVANI (CONT'D)

Come, everyone! I bring with me the good news of Elementism, unburdened by unthinking doctrine! Change is at hand!

A few curious SPECTATORS have assembled. Todd and the Innkeeper are among them. The rest of the square is empty.

Many other spectators peek from open windows.

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

Now, I am no charlatan. I do not expect you to listen without proof of what the gods' power of elementalism can do for you.

Avani walks a few steps away to a lawn portion of the square and drops her mythril ingot.

It lands on a flat side, as physics demands. One of Avani's feet STEPS on it.

AETHER VIEW

Avani's silhouette-body is packed full of green swirls. The ground is far less dense with them. A bunch of the swirls in her body align in her leg.

The enter the ground through the solid green mythril ingot.

NORMAL VIEW

Avani stands cross-armed as the ground RUMBLES. A perfect cylinder of soil RISES under her as smoothly as a piston, lifting her five feet up.

AVANI (CONT'D)

See for yourself the power--hey!

The small crowd pays more attention to Klauser. A little girl pokes at his leg and he backs away.

AVANI (CONT'D)

Please don't bother him!

SPECTATOR GIRL

But I'm hungry.

Avani motions to Klauser, who keeps an eye on the many eyes watching him.

AVANI (CONT'D)

Well you can't eat him, he's a riding mount I met in the wild.

The people stare hungrily at Klauser regardless.

SPECTATOR WOMAN

You tamed a dire kiwi? I wish I could. I'd eat for a week off just one.

Avani's mouth turns upwards in a slow, clever grin.

AVANI

Through Elementism you may tame great beasts as well.

INNKEEPER

And-a eat them?

AVANI

I suppose, if you must.

Doors open.

People begin leaving their homes around the Square and massing in a growing crowd around Avani and Klauser.

Klauser takes a step back and bumps the fountain rim. Avani, grinning, scratches his neck and he calms down.

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

Good. The rare power of swaying
a crowd ought to impress Tori.

INT. BORDER FOREST - DAY

The forest is quiet.

A vine coiling around a tree GLOWS faintly yellow-green.

A serpentine tail coils around the tree, matching the vine. Long blue and yellow feathers emerge from the tail-tip.

A long, thin, green-on-white reptilian hand carefully plucks the vine off the tree, but suddenly recoils from it.

A violet eye in a white reptilian socket rolls upwards. We hear the distant sound of RUSHING WIND.

EXT. FOREST AIRSPACE - DAY

Cirrus flies far above the trees.

Wind RUSHES LOUDLY around her. She transports Tori on her back in an air bubble which only her collarbone wings breach.

Inside the bubble we hear a quiet HUMMING of wind. It sounds like riding in an airplane without engines.

Tori clings to Cirrus's neck and leans over to see the ground.

TORI
 Cirrus? I think I need to say
 something.

CIRRUS (V.O.)
 Go ahead--*ghahk!*

TORI
 (hugging Cirrus's neck)
This is so goddamn cool!

CIRRUS (V.O.)
 You like flying, huh? Then hang
 on, kid.

Tori's line trails off into a roller-coaster YELL as Cirrus
 does a BARREL ROLL.

TORI
 I'm not a kid, I'm twenty-
twooooah!

Cirrus BOLTS ahead and begins a high backwards somersault.

Tori LAUGHS wildly and holds on with leg pressure. She THROWS
 her arms up as she inverts --

And the temple charm Avani gave her falls out of her pocket.

Cirrus starts heading downwards. Tori's joy-filled expression
 switches immediately to panicky shock and her SCREAMING
 LAUGHTER switches to a SCREAM OF SHOCK.

The charm shrinks to a sparkle and vanishes in the trees.

INT. BORDER FOREST - DAY

The charm WHUNKS edge-on into a tree branch and sticks fast.

The reptilian hand closes around the charm.

EXT. CASTLE SHIITAKE - DAY

The mushroom flag still flies atop the third level.

Lady Shiitake stands outside on the roof of the second level.
 Louie stands by, guarding her from nothing.

Avani has amassed a crowd of a hundred in the Square. A row of Troops guards the castle behind the fence.

LOUIE

You're not gonna keep sending
orichalcum, are you?

SHIITAKE

Hell no.

LOUIE

But that guy he mentioned,
"Kiran Krawn" or whatever --

SHIITAKE

--Is a problem, yeah. But those
ladies can handle it.

Louie stares at her incredulously.

Shiitake keeps watching Avani.

SHIITAKE (CONT'D)

The redhead told me they were
going to East Granbridge 'cause
the brown girl has some people
after her.

(furrows brows)

And something about a museum.
Anyway, if she wasn't lying,
they're bound to meet the one
holding Beau's leash. With any
luck, they'll take him down as
easy as Beau.

LOUIE

And if they don't, Lady Shiitake?

Shiitake doesn't answer.

EXT. PUBLIC SQUARE - DAY

Avani stands on Klauser's saddle next to the pillar she made.
The crowd has grown some.

AVANI

Elementalism can give more to
you than mere control. It fills
the soul and--

TODD

--Get to the taming part!

AVANI

(scratches Klauser's neck)
Taming animals takes a certain
grace. Attune yourself wholly to
an element, *any* holy spirit of
the gods, and even monsters will
see that you are no threat.

SPECTATOR MAN

Screw elements! Screw magic!
They got us into this mess!

Some in the crowd SHOUT ad-lib agreement.

INNKEEPER

Just-a tell us how to tame
monsters! I'm-a hungry!

AVANI

All right. Calm down. Any
element matters, so your
abundant Fire vessels--

SPECTATOR MAN

--What did I just say?!

The crowd turns unruly. Avani keeps her cool but Klauser
looks a little nervous.

EXT. CASTLE SHIITAKE - DAY

Shiitake grips the edge of the wall. One of her nails SNAPS.

INT. BORDER FOREST - DAY

Tori digs through the underbrush.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

I thought you didn't want that charm.

TORI

I only refused it to make Avani think about what she was doing. Of course I wanted it.

Tori keeps searching. Her tone turns solemn.

TORI (CONT'D)

Luck is what runs the world, so every little bit helps. Besides, she'll think I'm a real jerk if I lose it. Can you sniff it out? There can't be much other metal around here.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

(sniffs)

Tori.

Tori looks at her. Cirrus's sensory tendrils stiffen.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

We're not alone.

Tori slowly stands. Tension builds.

Something RUSTLES above. Tori and Cirrus simultaneously look up.

A KETZALRAL, a plumed serpent with the face of a dragon, stares down, coiled around a treetop. Long feathery wings colored blue and yellow like a macaw enfold him like a cape.

Tori and Cirrus stare back, Tori far more fearfully.

The good-luck charm is in the ketzalral's hand. His torso is the size, and has roughly the structure, of a human's.

He unfolds his wings and FLAPS once, slipping off the branch and quickly flying away -- more like swimming in the air.

Tori stares after him, petrified. Cirrus bristles.

DENSE TREES

Cirrus DASHES in a blur, keeping her wings tucked in.

Tori rides Cirrus, hugging her arms around Cirrus's neck.

The way her ponytail FLAPS gives some idea of the velocity.
The blue elastic slips out and her hair goes wild.

Tori squints in the wind and blinks rapidly.

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

What in the world is a ketzalral
doing here? Any ideas?

TORI

No, sorry. The history books
said they all left.

(V.O.)

Ketzalrals... the plumed serpents.

QUICK FLASHBACK:

Back in episode 1, the painting of the human general signing
a treaty with the winged snake-man hangs on Yenech's wall.

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

They haven't been in Dorn since..
could this one be a leftover?

Back in the present, Tori lifts her head. She BLINKS hard.

EXT. KETZALRAL TEMPLE - DAY

A smooth earthen pyramid as big as the Great Pyramid of Giza
sits in a deep, round crater.

Cylindrical stone towers stand randomly around the pyramid.
Long-rooted trees grow from each one and keep the forest
canopy more or less level.

The ketzalral flies towards the pyramid, snaking around
whatever towers and trees are in his way.

Cirrus isn't nearly as agile in her flying.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

What's a ketzalral temple doing here?

The ketzalral SNAKES 90 degrees around a tree. Cirrus BANKS and KICKS off the tree in hot pursuit.

TORI

This place might be as old as the forest. Remember the story? A giant with a feathery back and a tree-growing axe?

CIRRUS (V.O.)

So where's the axe? All I smell is Earth magic.

TORI

Let's beat him up and find out.

EXT. PUBLIC SQUARE - DAY

The crowd closes in around Avani and Klauser.

Klauser fidgets backwards. Avani leans on his neck for balance.

A ROARING ARC OF FIRE speeds overhead, demanding attention.

Avani's gaze follows the arc to its source.

Shiitake, Louie and a number of Troops stand outside the fence. Shiitake is armed with her orichalcum-spiked parasol.

SHIITAKE

This assembly is unlawful as of *right* now!

The Innkeeper shakes his fist.

INNKEEPER

You can't-a tell us what-a to do! You threw our-a only food source in jail!

Avani FLINCHES.

Many members of the crowd look at each other, confused.

SHIITAKE
 (points parasol)
 Don't listen to him!

SPECTATOR MAN
 She locked up our meal ticket?!

The crowd turns belligerent.

AVANI
 Everyone! It is true that Sir
 Beau is imprisoned, but that
 does not mean you will starve!

SHIITAKE
 Come on, people, listen to her!

AVANI
 Have faith!

Shiitake SMACKS her forehead.

AVANI
 And I don't mean religious.
 (V.O.)
 Forgive me Great Teizen.
 (aloud)
 Just believe! Believe in my --
 my traveling companions! They
 will soon return with the magic
 necessary to supply everyone in
 the polis with food!

SPECTATOR WOMAN
 What if they don't?

Avani glances around for an elusive solution.

She reaches out and covers Klauser's ear-pits.

AVANI
 Then you can eat him, all right?

Klauser GWARKS questioningly.

EXT. KETZALRAL TEMPLE - DAY

The ketzalral flies up at an incline to match the slope of the pyramid.

He heads for one of two square tunnel mouths carved halfway up the pyramid.

A GUST knocks him against the slope and he ROLLS upwards a few yards, well short of the left tunnel.

Cirrus lands in the tunnel mouth. Tori dismounts and Cirrus RUNS down the slope.

The ketzalral rights himself and looks up --

Just in time to get a CRASHING HEADBUTT from Cirrus.

The ketzalral drops the charm.

Tori RUNS down the slope at a sufficient angle to keep her balance while Cirrus and the ketzalral ROLL down past in the background.

The ketzalral rights himself first and LASHES his tail --

KNOCKING Cirrus away with a strike to the ribs. He's strong. Cirrus continues rolling.

Tori deliberately falls on the seat of her jeans and SKIDS past the charm, SNATCHING it up as she passes.

Tori KICKS down with both feet to brake. Her heels scrape two ruts in the side of the pyramid.

The ketzalral FLAPS up the slope towards her and finally speaks a **subtitled** language of growls and squawks, like gravelly birdsong.

KETZALRAL

You dare defile my temple?!

Tori WHIPS OUT her knife, SLASHING it in the same motion --

A water ball spontaneously congeals and SMASHES into the ketzalral's eyes.

The soil around Tori's feet CRUMBLES, suddenly dry, and she SKIDS down again.

She GRIPS the charm so as not to drop it --

STABS the slope with her knife and TWISTS it sideways to stay put. She pushes herself up, flattening the square mythril charm on the slope as she does.

The ketzalral FLIES towards her, his face wet.

KETZALRAL (CONT'D)

**Now you mean to fight me with
such weak magic?!**

Tori's eyes widen.

Her hand twitches around the square mythril charm.

SLOW-MOTION:

A MOUND OF EARTH shoots up out of the slope with perfect timing to BREAK the ketzalral's right wing and KNOCK his flight path awry.

The ketzalral corkscrews harmlessly over Tori.

REGULAR SPEED:

Cirrus TACKLES the ketzalral out of frame.

She and he tumble to the base of the pyramid. She PINS him down and his tail THRASHES.

Tori SKIDS down the rest of the way, staring at the charm in her hand.

KETZALRAL

(thrashing)

No! No! Defilers! De--

Cirrus STOMPS on the ketzalral's throat.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Tori, listen. I caught a whiff of something up where I landed. The axe is probably in there.

(looks up)

I'll hold him here and you...

Tori is already clamoring up the pyramid.

KETZALRAL

(choking)

I am the last... I must defend...!

Cirrus glares down at him, applying pressure to his throat.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

(quietly)

Luck really does run the world.

I used to work for a ketzalral.

I didn't like him at all.

Up on the pyramid, Tori enters the left tunnel.

INT. KETZALRAL TEMPLE - EARTHEN HALL - DAY

Tori walks from pitch blackness to a SOFT YELLOW-GREEN GLOW.

Glowing vines cling to the walls, floor, and ceiling of a perfectly square hallway cut in living soil.

TORI

Luminescent vines. But they'd
need sunlight to grow, unless...

The hall turns to the right up ahead.

Tori turns the corner. A connecting hall to the left glows brighter.

INT. HOLY OF HOLIES - DAY

Tori turns the corner and is bathed in yellow-green light.

A network of glowing vines illuminates a HUGE SLOPE-CEILINGED ROOM which, by the volume of it, must take up most of the pyramid's interior.

A log of petrified wood five feet long, a foot around, and sharpened to a foot-long wedge on one end sits on a stone pedestal in the middle of the room.

About a hundred ketzalral skeletons litter the floor. They seem to have died in reverent positions around the chunk.

Tori sees all this from several meters above the floor. She stands on the edge of a sheer drop-off.

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

A whole log of Lithodendros...
 well, there's the Flora magic.
 Guess they worshipped it here.
 (looks down)
 No stairs to it, of course.
 Guess I can make some and break
 off the sharp end.

Tori takes the mythril charm from her pocket and rubs one or two of the bronze circles with her thumb.

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

Thanks, Skirt.

Tori grips the charm. She SLAPS it against the wall --

AETHER VIEW

Tori's silhouette-body is full of colorful swirls, mostly blue. What green swirls there are align in her hand and enter the wall through the charm.

NORMAL VIEW

The floor of the room RUMBLES.

A rough mound of earth RISES under the drop-off, disturbing the bones between it and the petrified log.

EXT. KETZALRAL TEMPLE - DAY

Tori carries the foot-long wedge of the log in both hands, presumably having broken it off with Earth magic. It's heavy.

TORI (CONT'D)

All done, Cirrus! Cirrus?

Cirrus lies down at the bottom of the pyramid. The trees RUSTLE all around. The ketzalral is nowhere to be seen.

Cirrus looks up.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

Sorry! He got away!

Scraps of green and yellow feathers litter the trees.

EXT. PUBLIC SQUARE - DAY

Klauser's feathery head peeks over an earthen wall late in the afternoon.

He's penned between four of them.

Avani and the Troops guard him from the remnants of the crowd. The Innkeeper watches Klauser's head closely.

TROOP

You're one crazy chick. Border
Forest goes from coast to coast.
Your friends could be gone *days*.

AVANI

Just wait, please. I have faith
in them.

Todd looks up in the sky and prods the Innkeeper in the arm.

TODD

Dad! Look, they're back!

INNKEEPER

Not back, eh? Then we can eat--

Todd punches him in the shoulder.

The crowd looks up too. Some people begin CHEERING and the rest join in.

Avani smiles.

Tori waves down at them. Cirrus strains from the excess weight of the petrified wood cradled in Tori's arm.

Shiitake and Louie look up at Cirrus and Tori. Cirrus circles in a holding pattern.

SHIITAKE

Louie. Unlock the basement and get the seeds out. I wanna start harvesting first thing tomorrow.

EXT. RANNOM FIELDS - DAY

It's morning again. A couple hundred people stand outside the walls -- everyone in the polis, or close to it. The fields are still overgrown with wild grasses.

Closer to the ground, we see subtle rows of upturned earth.

The wedge end of the lithodendros slab HITS the ground heavily and sinks there. Avani's hands spread out on it.

The soil rows converge on her, Tori, and Cirrus (human). A dozen or more barrels full of water are arranged behind them.

Tori withdraws her knife.

TORI

Just keep you hydrated, right?

AVANI

Yes. I can supply the Earth half of Flora magic, but without you supplying Water, I could desiccate myself to death.

TORI

(twirls knife)

No pressure, then. Whenever you're ready, Avani.

Avani looks up at Tori, a little surprised at her using her full name. Avani smiles.

Tori grabs one of the water barrels with her left hand and points her knife at Avani with her right.

Avani focuses her strength on the slab and PRESSES DOWN HARD.

AETHER VIEW

Blue swirls flow from the barrels to Tori's knife and into Avani's silhouette. Green swirls flow from Avani to the slab.

The blue and green mingle in the slab and a surge of brown swirls PULSES outward in a circular wave.

NORMAL VIEW

The wild grasses ROT and FALL OVER in a circular wave with Avani as the center. Soon a giant swath of field is dead.

Cirrus looks more than a little concerned.

CIRRUS

What are you doing?

AVANI

Extra fertilizer first!

Avani PRESSES her whole weight on the slab.

The soil rows suddenly BURST with life. Tall green stalks rise up literally like magic.

A wave of green sweeps through the field, following the rows.

The townspeople at the walls REACT in reverent shock.

Tori tightens her grip on both the knife and the barrel. The water levels in all the barrels lower at the same rate.

Avani focuses and sweats.

AVANI (CONT'D)

Lend me your power, Great One...

Her fingers TENSE on the slab --

And yellow and red maize (mostly yellow) grows on the stalks.

A wave of yellow meshes with the green. This wave peters out before the end of the field, however.

Avani braces herself on the ground, her hands to either side of the slab.

She catches her breath, exhausted.

The spectators can't contain their joy. Dozens of them RUSH the field en masse. The Innkeeper and Todd go with them.

Cirrus and Tori block the stampede from Avani.

TORI

Way to go! Now just do it a
half-dozen more times and
they'll be set!

Tori good-naturedly punches Avani in the shoulder, flinches
at the impact and rubs her hand.

Avani LAUGHS, exhausted.

SHIITAKE'S P.O.V., BINOCULARS:

Specks of townsfolk run through the swath of fresh cornfield.

EXT. CASTLE SHIITAKE - DAY

Shiitake watches from the third-level roof under the flag.

SHIITAKE

Nice work. Nice stopgap, anyway.
(lowers binoculars)
But nothing's solved 'til you
get where you're going. If Beau
wasn't lying... we'll see how good
you really are.

The mushroom flag flies in the morning breeze.

FADE OUT