

"Hero and Nim"

Episode 1 "WIND-KISSED"

Teleplay by Lauren Swintek

INT. MUSEUM IMMEMORIAL - NIGHT

A gallery in the Museum Immemorial lays bathed in moonlight.

Artifacts and costumes from the Koh Nation are displayed throughout the room. Close up on a glass case containing a simply carved wooden fish, hanging from a necklace of blue string.

A scaly claw emerges and traces a symbol on the case, which glows briefly, then disappears, along with the glass itself.

The claw snatches the pendant from its stand, leaving an empty hook.

EXT. THE DESERT - DAY

A shellfly (hybrid between a crab and beetle) scuttles across the desert floor. A shadow passes overhead, scaring the crab, who flees into the air on a pair of buzzing wings.

He bumbles through a school of fish, who swim lazily through air as if it is water.

One fish lunges for the shellfly and misses.

Beat.

A second, larger shadow passes overhead, followed by a fishing lure.

CUT TO:

A wooden sailboat is sailing across the sky.

The sailboat's name is HERO, and he has been painted in sun-faded colors to resemble a fish. The gills on his hull open and close as he breathes, and on either side of his bow are two eyes painted sky blue.

A teenage girl with brown skin and freckles is stretched across the bow. Her name is NIM (17) and she is sleeping. Nim wears a pair of faded overalls and a thin well-worn book lies open on her chest. The fishing pole is trapped against the rail by her foot.

The tip of the fishing pole twitches, then dips drastically and is yanked from under her.

Hero's eyes blink and look towards his stern with sudden urgency.

Nim jolts awake and lunges for the pole, just managing to grab it before it goes over the stern.

NIM
Thanks - got it!

She starts to reel the fish in, grinning wide.

NIM
Looks like it's white-fin tonight.

EXT. MOUNTAIN FOOTHILLS - NIGHT

Hero sails over grassy foothills, propelled by the wind blowing down off the mountain. The sun has recently set. The grass ripples silver in the twilight. The portholes glow yellow and the faint sounds of a radio drift from the cabin.

INT. HERO'S CABIN - NIGHT

The cabin is warmly lit and slightly more spacious than should physically be possible. A small but tidy space, there are coils of line, a box of lures, folded bits of sail, and a shelf stuffed with well-worn romance novels, their titles written in a pictographic language.

The walls of the cabin are almost completely covered with maps and charts, but glimpses of a colorful mural can be seen underneath the paper folds.

Nim is checking on a small bait tank sunk into the floor. It is half full of water and has two fish swimming in it, her catch of the day.

She shuts it and sits on her bunk, picking up a portable radio as she goes, and tries to find the right station. She mostly gets static.

NIM
Eyah, I think we missed the takeoff...

She turns the dial, getting hints of music, until she finally finds the desired station.

RACE COMMENTATOR
-and the Mako falls all the way back to third, Bleeding Heart taking the lead, quite the risky maneuver there, but I think we can all agree on the results! Oh no, looks like Dead Set has taken a hit, her ship is billowing

smoke, she's careening through the air
and-

Nim lets the sounds of the race wash over her as she leans back against Hero's hull.

EXT. OUTSIDE ENDELPORT - NIGHT

Lights from Endelport can be seen in the distance, nestled against the mountain's foothills, an overgrown town clustered close to the mountain to avoid the flood plain below.

Nim steps out onto the deck, radio clipped to her belt. The commentators have lapsed into a conversation on the merits of various racing engines. She looks ahead to the town.

NIM
(sarcastically)
Oh Endelport, I've missed you so.

She smiles ruefully at Hero, who rolls his eyes in response.

EXT. ENDELPORT MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Tall buildings with bases of adobe and walls of dark wood line the dirt road.

Hero jostles past other forms of air traffic. This mostly consists of plain, wooden ships with smoke-spewing motors, or large rayfish with saddles mounted on their spines.

On the ground, creatures of all kinds mingle, and go about their business. Nim is the only one who looks human.

Despite the diversity, a brightly colored and motor-less Hero stands out.

Hero and Nim (still listening to the race) make their way to the OFFICE OF COURIER AFFAIRS, a respectable enough building squeezed in between a leaning hotel and an overcrowded bar whose customers have spilled out onto the street.

The array of drunks are uncharacteristically reserved, talking uneasily, and in a moment Nim sees why.

Docked in front of the office are three motorboats, ships made entirely of metal. Their bows are painted with a blue and yellow checkered pattern, and there are guns mounted on their bows and sterns. Military ships.

NIM

The MNR? What are they doing this far west?

Hero and Nim pull right in between two of them. The motorboats tower over Hero's wooden frame.

Six soldiers in blue uniform, all frogkind with mottled green skin and yellow eyes, are lounging around a radio (listening to the same race) on the building's porch. One of them stands when they see Hero.

Nim turns off her own radio and jumps off of Hero, landing on the hard-packed earth.

SOLDIER #1

Hey! Get that painted dinghy out of here!

Nim ignores him

NIM

(whispering to Hero)

Try not to attract too much attention, yeah?

Hero looks pointedly at the drunken crowd who are shooting the pair disbelieving looks.

NIM

Well, no more than these ugly beetles are getting.

SOLDIER #1

Hey, I'm talking to you!

Nim flicks one of their metal hulls, then winces when it produces a too-loud metal ringing. She smiles guiltily at Hero.

NIM

Whoops.

SOLDIER #1

Hey!

He starts towards them. Nim steps onto the porch, meeting the frog's bug-eyed glare.

NIM

Easy soldier, just admiring your fine ships there.

She pulls a small, leather-bound document from her pocket and opens it, showing him the contents.

NIM (CONT.)

I'm a courier, see? Got my license and everything.

He grabs it from her roughly, scanning it with more scrutiny than is needed.

Just then, the door flies open and two officers walk out. The soldiers all snap to attention, and Nim's license is shoved back at her.

They board their motorboats, which start with an angry growl, and rise up into the night sky.

Nim shares a look with Hero, then opens the door and walks into the OFFICE OF COURIER AFFAIRS.

INT. OFFICE OF COURIER AFFAIRS

The entrance hall is spacious enough, with tall ceilings, though not all of the lamps are working and the windows are rather grimy.

The back wall is honey-combed with little wooden slots, stuffed with letters. In front of this is a high wooden desk, presided over by a birdkind called CLEMMENS (60). He wears wide sleeves, pinned back to keep them clean, and spectacles perched on his blunt beak.

Clemmens glances up with an annoyed look as she enters.

She waves at him.

CLEMMENS

Oh, it's you.

NIM

(sarcastic)

Lovely evening isn't it?

She walks up to the desk, reaching into her pocket.

CLEMMENS

Just give me the receipt.

She hands four receipts to him, then tugs a cigarette free from its packaging.

CLEMMENS (CONT.)

(without looking)

No smoking.

NIM

Don't know why you bother. Wouldn't make a difference in this place.

Clemmens glares at her, then at the receipts.

CLEMMENS

How industrious.

NIM

Yeah, we picked up a few locals out by the pass.

CLEMMENS

Authorized by their office?

NIM

Can't you do it?

CLEMMENS

Quite unfortunately, we do not have the budget for extra commissions at the moment. They must be approved before completion.

Nim pauses, about to light her cigarette.

NIM

Since when?

CLEMMENS

New directive from the head office in Miyen. I'm afraid I can only pay you for the one job. My deepest apologies, but there is nothing I can do.

But he smiles as he reaches into a drawer and starts to count out liu notes.

Nim lights the cigarette and sucks on it angrily. Ass. Clemmens pushes three 10 liu notes across the desk at her, which she snatches.

CLEMMENS (CONT.)

I believe I said smoking was not permitted.

But Nim ignores him, thinking.

NIM

You got any fishing trips lined up?

Clemmens stiffens.

EXT. ENDELPORST MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Hero floats outside the Courier's Office, trying not to stand out too much. His eyes flit around him nervously.

Nim walks out of the office, flicking her cigarette on the ground. She swings herself over the rail onto Hero's deck.

NIM

Come on, I got us a job.

EXT. ENDELPORST STREET - NIGHT

Hero and Nim sail down one of the side streets. Yellow light spills from windows and doors, the only source of light this far from the main road. The streets become narrower, the houses dirtier, the passerby fewer.

They are passing a tall building, unremarkable from the others, perhaps with a bit more graffiti on its adobe base, when Hero comes to a sudden halt.

NIM

This one?

Hero's eye is fixed on a piece of graffiti, four thick lines and one square in red paint.

Nim drops to the ground and strides over to inspect it.

NIM

Definitely Kellish. Good eye. But where...

She glances around, sees light pouring from an alley along the building's side, and runs over.

Stairs lead down into the ground, descending to a door set into the wall at basement level. Her face falls.

NIM

Oh seven hells, of course it's underground.

Hero's eyes turn worried.

NIM

Thanks, but I'll fine.

She pats his flank.

NIM (CONT.)

Wish me luck you wind-kissed bastard.

His eyes narrow with smile wrinkles, and he shoots upward as she descends with heavy steps.

INT. BASEMENT BAR - NIGHT

The basement bar, a small place with wooden rafters and tile floors, is packed with people of all species. Even a few lawmen have wormed their way in.

Moths fly near the ceiling lights, while small fish pick them off. A bar hugs the back wall and is surprisingly well-stocked, given the smoke-stained walls and dusty lamps. A single door stands next to it.

Nim shoves her way through the chattering crowd as they sway to the tune of a tinny ballad, aiming for the bar. Shoulders hunched and scowling, she finds an empty stool and sits at the bar.

A dark figure in the corner of the bar looks up when she sits down. Wears a wide-brimmed hat and fur-skin cloak. But Nim is too busy being miserable to notice the attention.

Sweat beads her forehead. She's not a fan of crowded, underground spaces. She motions to the harassed-looking bartender, who hurries over.

BARTENDER

Whaddya want?

NIM

Coffee, two sugars.

He raises an eyebrow at her.

BARTENDER

You good for it?

NIM

Not my tab.

BARTENDER

Then whose?

EKARI

I suppose that would be me.

A short furkind, with a long neck and a narrow face, leans forward over the bar, just a few stools down. This is EKARI (20). He makes eye contact with Nim. His eyes are oil-slick black.

BARTENDER

Of course Mr. Ekari.

The bartender bustles off. Ekari slips off his stool and walks over to Nim. Immediately, the birdkind sitting next to her clears off with his drink. Ekari takes his spot.

EKARI

You were supposed to get it black.

Nim shrugs.

NIM

I have a sweet tooth. Besides, not my tab, yeah?

He grumbles, but slaps a full hundred liu note on the bar. A few minutes later, it is replaced with Nim's coffee.

She takes a sip and smiles, relaxing for the first time since entering the bar.

He stares at her appraisingly, condescension written all over his smirking face.

EKARI

So Clemmens is sending us painted rats now.

Nim's eyes fly open, and she becomes very still. She sets the coffee down. Her right hand clenches into a fist.

EXT. ENDELPORT STREET - NIGHT

Hero stops circling the building. His eyes shoot downward towards the entrance to the bar, gaze sympathetic but stern.

INT. BASEMENT BAR - NIGHT

Nim doesn't move at first, but then she relaxes the fist and takes another sip of coffee.

Ekari stares, still waiting for her to rise to the bait, but when she says nothing his smirk fades, losing interest.

EKARI
Door on your left.

He reaches over and taps a short pattern on the bar.

Nim slides off her stool.

NIM
Watch my coffee, yeah?

She disappears into the crowd, while Ekari looks down at her steaming cup.

The stranger in the corner watches her go.

INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT

A sentry leans against the door at the bottom of the stairway. His name is DEREN (25). He is a scalekind, tall and lanky, with a stoop to his shoulders. Muffled sounds of the bar can be heard.

A pattern is rapped out on the other side of the door. Deren opens it and lets Nim in. He holds his hand out and Nim automatically hands over her revolver and knife.

DEREN
Fourth floor. Second on the right.

When Nim reaches the second landing (out of the sentry's line of sight), she stops and lets out an angry breath. Her fists clench again, but she relaxes them, shaking her head, and continues up the stairs.

INT. FOURTH FLOOR - NIGHT

Nim knocks on the door.

DAGMAR
Come in.

Nim walks into a poorly lit storage room. The majority of the ceiling-length shelves are filled with bolts of cloth, but there are also boxes of bullets and sacks of grain.

She makes her way to the back of the room where DAGMAR (60) is going through the stored items, making marks on a clipboard.

Dagmar is furkind, looking very similar to Ekari, though her muzzle is grizzled with age. She has a brusque efficiency to

her, and when she greets Nim it is with a:

DAGMAR

Ah, good, you're here. Clemmens sent word.

Behind her, at a too-small desk, a hunched scalekind wearing neatly patched robes leans over something she cannot see.

NIM

Like the new digs. You own the whole building?

DAGMAR

Moving up in the world is what it is. Even got some operations up north now too, if you can believe it.

Nim nods.

NIM

Well your doorman is a piece of crap.

Dagmar sighs.

DAGMAR

Ekari? Yeah, kid's a real piece of work, but my sister asked me to give him a job. Can't say no to family right?

NIM

Right.

DAGMAR

To business, then.

She claps the scalekind on the shoulder.

DAGMAR

Nim, meet our Authenticator.

He turns and nods furtively. He is wearing a magnification eyepiece. Nim nods back, then looks at Dagmar, worried, but also curious.

NIM

What's up? On a normal ferrying job, I'd have no idea this guy ever existed.

DAGMAR

You're right and I don't like it, but our timetable on this one is short. This thing needs to leave Endelport tonight.

She gestures to the item the Authenticator is bent over. Nim edges around to finally glimpse the object she is supposed to be smuggling.

It is the carved wooden pendant that was stolen from the museum.

As soon as Nim sees it, her eyes widen and she takes a step back.

EXT. ENDELPORT STREET - NIGHT

Hero stops his circling and just hangs in empty air, eyes wide open, stunned at what Nim, and therefore he, has seen.

INT. FOURTH FLOOR - NIGHT

NIM

That's Koh.

AUTHENTICATOR

(snaps)

I am the judge of that.

He takes off his eyepiece and faces Dagmar, ignoring Nim.

AUTHENTICATOR

It's genuine. 9th age, carved out of living wood by the nomadic Koh nation.

DAGMAR

You're certain? Living wood is some of the rarest stuff out there. I don't want it said that Dagmar trades in fakes.

AUTHENTICATOR

(indignant)

I know my business, Dagmar. This is made of the very same stuff that they carved their ships out of. And, as a scholar of some repute, I was allowed to study the only remaining fossils, long dormant of course, at Hesten Collegiate, an honor offered to only a

select few in the academic world. If you want, I could describe how the width of the wood grain is quite distinct from other wood types and-

DAGMAR

Okay, fine, I believe you. Just want to be sure.

NIM

Find someone else.

DAGMAR

What?

Nim is staring at the carved fish, looking as if someone just slapped her.

NIM

Find someone else. I am not ferrying that thing for you.

Visibly shaken, Nim backs away, heading for the door.

DAGMAR

(angry)

You do not walk out on this!

NIM

I won't breathe a word of what I just saw, I swear on the Windmaker, but I am not touching that thing.

She yanks the door open and flees down the stairs.

INT. BASEMENT BAR - NIGHT

Nim shoves her gun and knife back through her belt as she makes her way through the crowd. Her movements are panicky, off balance. The mysterious stranger is gone.

EKARI

Aren't you going to finish your coffee?

She turns to see him drink the last of her coffee and place the cup upside down.

Nim stares at him. It is painful how much the coffee does not matter anymore, yet at the same time Ekari presents a welcome target.

EKARI

What's the matter? Fallen out-

Nim's punch snaps his head back, and he falls off his stool.

People around them stop talking and back away from Nim, who has fallen into a fighting stance. Music fills the space.

NIM

You were supposed to watch it, not
drink it.

Ekari shakes his head, focusing on Nim and glaring.

He LUNGES at her. Nim sidesteps, but it's too crowded, and Ekari TACKLES her to the ground.

The crowd cheers them on as they wrestle on the floor.

Dagmar arrives in the doorway, face stern. She pushes the sentry, Deren, towards the fight. Two lawmen also struggle to get to them, but the crowd is too tightly packed.

Ekari struggles to his feet, and kicks Nim in the STOMACH. She curls up, moaning.

He kicks her again, but she grabs his FOOT and yanks hard.

His head CRACKS on the floor, and Nim straddles him.

Ekari turns a bleary gaze to look at her and is met with a FIST. Then another. Then another.

A constable finally breaks through the cheering crowd. She pulls Nim off Ekari and tries to restrain her.

Nim sees Dagmar through the crowd, and then Deren, struggling to get to her. It's time to go.

She BREAKS FREE from the constable's grip, pushing her aside and shoves her way to the door.

EXT. ENDELPORST STREET - NIGHT

The door slams open and Nim races up the steps. Hero has not moved, still hanging in midair, still stunned by the revelation of the Koh artifact.

NIM

Hero!

He snaps out of it and rockets down towards her, slowing just enough for Nim to grab onto his rail, then he races off into the night.

Nim hoists herself up and over onto the deck as they rise up into the cloudless, moonlit sky, leaving a thunderous Dagmar standing in the doorway.

EXT. HERO - DAY

Mid-day. They are flying above a flat sea of clouds. Nim sits on deck manning the tiller. She has a bruise on her forehead and moves her left shoulder gingerly. They are sailing at the same speed as the wind, so all appears calm.

She pulls out a spyglass and scans the clouds. Nothing.

NIM

We're too small for her to bother
with, yeah?

Hero just looks down, preoccupied. They are both avoiding discussing the previous night.

Both are silent, and all is still above the desert of clouds.

EXT. DESERT LAKE - DAY

Late afternoon.

Nim kneels at the edge of a shallow, glassy lake, her hands deep in a fish's belly. A cigarette pokes out of the corner of her mouth, stained with bloody fingerprints.

INT. HERO'S CABIN - DAY

The bait tank sits open and empty.

EXT. DESERT LAKE - DAY

She pulls out some unwanted guts and throws them to waiting fish and birds, who circle her catch, eager and hungry. A rucksack lays behind her, twitching every so often with the second fish.

Hero floats over her shoulder, half curious, half horrified, wincing at the wet snapping of tendons.

NIM

Don't be so squeamish, yeah? It's not
like you have to eat food like the

rest of us.

She yanks on an organ, the movement sending a spray of blood and bits of gore across Hero's hull. He shudders violently.

NIM
(grinning devilishly)

oh, eyah, let me get that for you...

And she reaches towards him with her bloody fingers.

Hero recoils and sails overhead, landing in the lake, where he tries to splash as much water on himself as possible.

Nim watches him for a beat, her smile fading, then goes back to her work, putting out the finished cigarette in the sand, where it stands like a paper tower. She reaches for a second one from the slightly squashed pack in her belt.

Later.

Hero drifts, dozing in the lake. Three cigarettes form a little doorway in the sand.

Nim wades into the water with four fillets and washes them in the shallows. Once clean, she puts them in a leather bag, and tosses it to shore.

As she rinses off her knife and washes her hands, Hero drifts closer, hull rising and falling gently with each breath.

Nim sheaths the knife and flicks water at him. Hero half opens one eye.

NIM
Come here, you. Ye've missed a few spots.

His eyes narrow, but when she raises clean hands, he moves closer and allows her to rub the dried blood off.

NIM
There you go, good as new. Well, sort of...

She runs a hand across a section where the paint is scuffed. Scratches and scars criss-cross the wood, revealing the honey-colored wood beneath

NIM (CONT.)

Next time we're out at Mr. Lee's I could pick up some paints, yeah? I've been saving up. I know you don't want to, but wouldn't it be nice to get a new coat? Maybe something a little less bright-

Hero's gaze becomes resentful.

NIM

I'm just saying you're starting to look a little...shabby.

He shoots a piercing look her way. She frowns back.

NIM

Fine, your decision.

Nim squints at the sun's position. A beat.

Finally, Hero looks back at her with an inquisitive glance.

NIM

Want to talk about what?

His eyes narrow.

NIM

Fine. It just- took me by surprise. That's all.

Hero's expression turns hopeful.

NIM

(exasperated)

Hero, don't start that again, yeah? They're gone. That *thing's* existence doesn't prove anything, except that some rich lord somewhere is bemoaning the loss of a priceless Koh artifact.

Hero looks down, disappointed and resentful.

She sighs.

NIM

Eyah, look, you got me, don't you? I'm right here.

Nim bumps him playfully.

NIM
And I'm not going anywhere.

INT. OFFICE OF COURIER AFFAIRS - DAY

Dagmar confronts a terrified Clemmens, backed by two lieutenants.

DAGMAR
No. I just told you, I want
the painted rat. Tell me
where she is.

GANG MEMBER #1
But Boss, the Buyer-

DAGMAR
No one hurts me and mine and gets away
with it.

She fixes Clemmens with a piercing stare.

He fumbles with his paperwork, and resurfaces with five slips of paper.

CLEMMENS
These are the addresses I gave her. I-
I don't know if she is going to-

DAGMAR
Thank you kindly. You've been a
wonderful help.

Dagmar takes addresses and they sweep out of the room, leaving a relieved Clemmens sitting at his desk.

EXT. OFFICE OF COURIER AFFAIRS - DAY

The door bangs closed behind them.

DAGMAR
Helpful old bird.

She hands the slips to one of her lieutenants.

GANG MEMBER #2
You want us to go stake these out?

DAGMAR (CONT.)
No. She's got too much of a head
start.
(thinking)
Have the constabulary wire the local
authorities. Tell them that a nomad

stole a courier's credentials and is
using the delivery list to rob homes.
And give them those.

She nods to the addresses.

GANG MEMBER #1
This still might take days...the Buyer-

DAGMAR
Will get what we promised before Emya-
ovae, just like was agreed. Tell me
when we have her.

EXT. SAND DUNES - NIGHT

Nim lays on her stomach at the top of dune, looking through
her spyglass at a small grouping of clay huts below. Behind
her, at the base of the dune, Hero floats, waiting.

Nim collapses the spyglass, waves to get Hero's attention,
then makes a few hand signs. All clear. She turns and half-
slides half-runs down towards the village, the letter she is
delivering in her back pocket.

Later.

Hero floats alone at the base of the dune, pacing.

GUNSHOTS echo across the sand.

He races up the side of the dune, cresting it to see Nim
backing away from one of the houses, gun drawn.

The family's matriarch (birdkind with brown feathers) stands
in the doorway, clutching a bullet wound at her side.

She drops her gun, an old military rifle, and slumps against
the doorway.

SON
Mom!

He runs to her side with a sister. They ease her down to the
ground.

Nim takes a another step back, the gun in one hand, her
courier's license still clutched in the other. She is angry
and shocked.

The son glares at her furiously, eyes streaming,

He reaches for the RIFLE.

Nim takes off, running straight for Hero, who flies down to her.

BANG! BANG!

The son fires two shots. They miss.

BANG!

The third misses Nim. It GRAZES HERO.

He shudders violently, and keeps going, eyes determined.

But Nim freezes in her tracks.

Hero rushes past her and circles back.

BANG!

Another miss. He tries to fire again, but the gun only clicks, empty.

Nim turns and stares down the son. He throws the gun away and stands in front of his mother and sister.

SON

Dirty nissen! I hope you fall off the
edge of the world and die screaming!

NIM

You hurt him. You hurt Hero.

She takes a step toward him.

Hero blocks her path and tries to push her back up the dune.
His eyes are wide, pleading.

NIM

But he hurt you.

She looks at the long clean wound across his hull, weeping a
clear, greenish sap.

Hero locks eyes with Nim. The anger drains from her and she
sags.

There is the click of a safety being released.

Nim turns to see the barrel of a GUN. A grizzled furkind holds it. On his jacket shines a pin with two metal stripes.

Behind him are two battered hybrid sailboats, from which dismount four officers in faded uniforms.

CAPTAIN

Drop it.

Nim puts the safety on and drops it. She offers her license.

NIM

Look, I-

He SMASHES the butt of his gun against her face and she falls, unconscious.

INT. HOLDING CELL - NIGHT

Nim sits on a threadbare cot, leaning back against the wall. Purple bruises are forming on her forehead and around her right eye. This is the only cell, and she shares it with a pair of sleeping drunks, slumped against the opposite wall.

NIM

(under her breath)

Idiot.

Through the metal bars, there is a one room constabulary. The on-duty warden, the captain from before, sits reading at the only desk in the room.

The front door opens and Dagmar walks in. The captain sees her and closes his book.

CAPTAIN

(to himself)

Think I'll go smoke a blue.

He grabs a pack of cigarettes and nods to Dagmar.

CAPTAIN

Cousin.

Dagmar nods, and he leaves. She leans back against the bars.

NIM

Where's Hero?

DAGMAR
(casual, friendly)
Can't say I blame you. Ekari's quite
the asshole.

NIM
Where is Hero?

DAGMAR (CONT.)
But he is family. Gotta protect our
own.

NIM
Where is my ship!?!

She stands, a little unbalanced.

DAGMAR
And I still can't figure why you would
have run off like that... Just doesn't
make sense.

She turns to face Nim, just as Nim makes a grab at her
through the bars. Dagmar backs away just in time.

NIM
TELL ME WHERE HE IS!

DAGMAR
Tch. Don't be rude to your business
partner. Bad manners. Your ship - Hero
was it? - is fine, for the time being.
We're taking good care of him.

Nim glares at her but pushes away from the bars and sinks
back down on the cot.

NIM
If you hurt him-

DAGMAR
Why would I? You're going to need him
to go on that fishing trip.

NIM
No.

DAGMAR
See, I'm reasonable. I'm willing to
make a deal. You're going to ferry
that object for me, and in return, I

make all this go away.

NIM

Pass.

DAGMAR

Or you go to trial. Maybe they hang you for theft. Maybe they find that contract you ran out on.

Nim looks at Dagmar sharply.

DAGMAR (CONT.)

Five years left on the indenture, if I'm not mistaken. Your ship would be sold off -

NIM

Leave Hero out of it! I did this, not him.

Dagmar smiles, triumphant, and turns to face her.

DAGMAR

Then take the job.

Nim's glare becomes pained and she looks away.

EXT. CONSTABULARY - NIGHT

Nim runs out of the Constabulary. The building is one of a few still left standing along an overgrown main street.

Hero rushes to greet her, but is held back by ropes securing him to a mooring. She presses her face to his hull.

NIM

Miss me?

He leans into her, causing her to stumble back a little bit, his eyes reproachful and worried.

NIM

I know, I know...

She gently touches his wound, now scabbed over. He winces.

NIM

I'm sorry.

Dagmar stands in the doorway behind them, watching. Two other

members of her gang lean against the building, in the shadows.

EXT. UP AMONG THE CLOUDS - DAY

Hero is being towed through the sky by Dagmar's ship, an old metallic motorboat. He tries to escape the trail of exhaust, but the tether is too short.

He gives up and lets himself be pulled along, eyes angry and narrowed against the smoke.

Something shiny flashes off to his port. He squints in that direction but whatever it was has disappeared behind a cloud.

He hears raised voices over the rumble of the motor. His eyes turn worried. The voices subside.

Then Nim walks out of the motorboat's cabin, followed by Dagmar, one of her lieutenants, and Deren, the sentry from the Endelport bar. Nim does not look happy.

Hero is pulled up to the starboard side of the boat, and Nim climbs over onto his deck.

At her touch, he relaxes, eyes closing in relief.

Deren steps aboard Hero.

Hero shudders with clear revulsion, making Deren look at his feet nervously.

NIM

Hero doesn't like him.

DAGMAR

I don't care what your ship likes. You can't expect me to trust you after that little stunt. Deren is just here to make sure you get the job done.

Dagmar nods, and her lieutenant gives Deren Nim's gun and knife.

Then she hands him a small parcel, packaged like it's from the Courier Office and a satchel full of letters.

GANG MEMBER #2

Your destination is the Well. When you're two leagues out, get on channel 2.35. Our contacts over there will

give you the drop point. Make sure the letters go through the office, so it looks all legal.

NIM
(sulky)
I know the drill.

DAGMAR
Remember, it must be delivered by Emya-ovae.

They nod. Nim unties the rope from a cleat and tosses it over to them.

Dagmar pushes Hero away from her ship with one boot.

As they float away, Hero unfurls his sail and they catch the wind, speeding off into the clouds.

EXT. HERO - DAY

DEREN
Hey, kid. You got a place to stash this?

INT. HERO'S CABIN - DAY

Nim stows the letters in a locker, then rolls up a map, exposing a section of the mural. On it are painted flying ships that look like Hero.

She taps the wood and a panel slides back, revealing a hidden compartment. Deren puts the package into the hidden compartment. It starts to close with his hand still inside. He yanks it back.

NIM
(smirking)
Easy Hero, don't want to make a mess, yeah?

DEREN
How do I open it?

NIM
Ask Hero.

DEREN
Hey, wait a minute-

INT. HERO'S CABIN - NIGHT

Nim sits on her bunk. The radio is on, a wavery singing issuing from it, occasionally interrupted by some political debate a channel or two over. Something about the MNR. Deren is watching Nim suspiciously.

Nim pulls out a half-carved fishing lure and starts to work on it with a knife.

DEREN

Hey, no, give that to me.

NIM

Oh, come on, this thing's dull as shit.

DEREN

I don't want to wake up in the morning with my throat slit. Give it to me.

NIM

(teasing)

I don't know what Dagmar told you, but-

DEREN

You shot a mother in front of her children.

Beat. Nim flips the knife, catches it by the blade and offers it to him without a word. He pockets it.

He starts rooting through his pack, and emerges with a long-stemmed pipe.

Hero shoots him a glare.

He is just about to light it when-

NIM

Hero doesn't allow smoking in here.

Deren glares at her. She smiles wickedly. He goes on deck.

NIM

(whispering)

I don't like him. Look, I find it hard to believe that Dagmar is just going to let us sail off into the sun when this is all over. You get me?

Hero blinks in agreement.

NIM

We need to ditch this lizard first
chance we get, before we get to the
Well if possible. Are you going to
need to sleep tonight?

Hero blinks a pair of tired eyes.

NIM

Yeah, thought so. We've been having
fun these past few days, haven't we?

Hero just blinks sleepily and starts to descend.

DEREN

Hey! Why are we losing altitude?

NIM

We're making camp.

He stalks over and stoops to look in the cabin.

DEREN

(trying to sound commanding)
Camp? Kid, I'm in charge here and I
say we're flying through the night.

Nim puts aside her fishing lure and stands.

NIM

Hero isn't like one of your
motorboats. He needs rest, unless you
rather he fall asleep 2 leagues up?

DEREN

Fine.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

The desert here is scattered with tall rocky pinnacles.

Hero has settled on the ground, leaning against one such
pinnacle. Deren and Nim sit beside him, eating fish (the
white-fin from before) out of shallow tin bowls with their
fingers. Hero has fallen asleep, hull rising and falling with
each breath.

Deren looks at Nim, hunched protectively over her food. She
looks more vulnerable on land.

DEREN

So. A ship that sleeps?

NIM

Yep.

DEREN

Not a very common thing. I mean I've heard of ghost ships and boats that have demons sewn into 'em, and seen weirder things then that, even. You mind me asking-

NIM

Yes.

He sighs.

DEREN

Look kid, neither of us want to be here. I'm just trying to make nice.

Deren takes out his pipe and lights it, then offers it to her. She shakes her head.

NIM

I prefer cigarettes.

DEREN

So...

NIM

Eyah, fine. A couple of years ago, some old star-seer died, and they were selling off his stuff. Hero was a ship he had been experimenting on. Kind of caught my eye.

DEREN

So you bought him?

NIM

If you like.

Deren chuckles.

DEREN

Did you paint him like that?

NIM

Like what?

DEREN
Like the Koh.

Nim becomes still.

NIM
He came like that. Do you want first
watch or should I take it?

DEREN
I'll take it.

Nim licks her fingers and takes their now empty bowls. She
walks over to Hero to climb up onto his deck.

DEREN
Actually I'd rather you slept out
here.

NIM
Still don't trust me?

DEREN
Not really, no.

CUT TO:

Nim lies awake in her sleeping bag. Deren sits next to her, a
rifle slung over his shoulder.

NIM
Deren?

DEREN
Hmm?

NIM
The um, mother I shot... is she okay?

DEREN
Sure kid. She's doing fine.

Later.

Deren checks to make sure Nim is sleeping, then lays down the
gun and climbs onto Hero's deck.

INT. HERO'S CABIN - NIGHT

He lifts up the map and taps on the hidden compartment twice,
but nothing happens.

Hero's eyelids flutter slightly, but he doesn't wake. Deren tries a couple other sequences, before giving up.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

Deren shakes Nim awake. She bolts upright, reaching for a knife she doesn't have.

DEREN

Easy, just me.

NIM

Oh, you. My watch?

DEREN (CONT.)

Your watch.

CUT TO:

Nim leans back against Hero, letting his breath lift her up and down. Deren sleeps on Hero's deck.

Hero's eyelids flutter and twitch, though he remains asleep. He is dreaming.

EXT. HERO - DAY

Deren wakes up with a start.

NIM

Morning.

Hero is flying through an early morning sky, not a cloud in sight.

DEREN

Hmph. Gotta say, I'm surprised you didn't toss me overboard in the middle of the night

She shrugs.

NIM

Your fat carcass is too heavy to toss.

He frowns at his skinny arms as he stands and stretches, then packs away his bedroll.

NIM

Anyways, we've got a problem. We're being followed. Hero thinks since the

handoff.

She hands him the spyglass and points over Hero's stern. He looks through it and sees a little speck of a ship, gleaming metal in the morning light.

DEREN

Shit.

NIM

They were able to hide in the clouds yesterday, but now... We can see them and-

DEREN

they can see us. And they've probably figured our destination too.

She nods.

NIM

Going to make losing them damn near impossible.

She grins fiercely, excited by the challenge.

INT. HERO'S CABIN - DAY

The two are bent over a map.

NIM (CONT.)

You know the lay of the land better than I do. Anything we can use on the ground?

DEREN

Not really. There's the Devil's Chair, but it's too far out of the way. Hey kid, this ship is supposed to be fast. Can't we outrun them?

Outside, Hero's eyes, set and focused, spare Deren an annoyed look. Clearly not a sailor.

NIM

We are outrunning them. It's losing them that's the problem. Hero is already busting his tail to keep us ahead, especially with your added weight.

DEREN

If we could just get out of their line
of sight.

EXT. HERO - DAY

Hero scans the skies. He spots what looks like a very distant
school of fish.

INT. HERO'S CABIN - DAY

Nim cocks her head, listening.

DEREN

We could wait til night, but-

NIM

Wait. Do you hear that?

The faint sound of whale song drifts through the cabin.

EXT. AMONG THE WHALES - DAY

Hero looks very small among the huge pod of swimming whales.
They have wide mouths, small eyes, and leg-like fins tipped
with blunt claws. Their bellies are sky blue and their backs
are a vague sandy grey.

They are giant and majestic.

Deren and Hero are extremely nervous. Nim is excited.

DEREN

Kid, I really don't like this plan of
yours.

NIM

Don't be a baby.

Scans the whales, searching...

NIM (CONT.)

(to Hero)

That one. You think?

He blinks and they veer off towards a particularly old
looking whale. Hero positions them right over his head.

Nim vaults over the rail and lands in the middle of a resting
flock of birds, who take off in a flurry of feathers.

The old whale takes no notice.

NIM
Gun please.

DEREN
Yeah... that's not happening.

NIM
Kind of hard to ambush someone without
a weapon.

DEREN
I know.
(mutters)
I can't believe I'm doing this.

He drops down next to Nim, stumbling a bit. He shoulders his rifle.

DEREN
I'll take the shot.

Nim is a little taken aback. Opens her mouth to protest.

The whale shifts under them, forcing them to kneel.

NIM
Okay, Hero, like we agreed. Give her
something to chase, just don't let her
get too close, yeah? Try and lead her
by the port flank.

His eyes narrow with determination, and he sails off.

Nim trains her spyglass on the pursuing ship.

The enemy has reached the tail end of the pod of whales. It's a hybrid with a sleek wooden design and a powerful engine. The stranger from the bar is at the helm.

Hero hides in a whale's shadow. He slows, edging out into the open long enough to be seen by the enemy.

The stranger lunges forward in pursuit, but is BLOCKED by a whale and her calf.

When they pass, Hero has DISAPPEARED.

The stranger pushes forward, cautious.

HERO rises up behind the enemy, silent. Suddenly, he DIVE BOMBS the stranger, pulling up at the last minute and racing ahead.

The stranger guns the engine, and SPEEDS after him.

Hero dodges up and around the whales, quick and agile. The stranger manages to keep up, though is not as nimble.

EXT. ON TOP OF WHALE - DAY

Nim and Deren take up position in between two patches of barnacles. Deren sights down the barrel of the rifle, following the enemy ship.

NIM

You are a good shot right?

DEREN

Only thing I'm good at.

Hero leads them closer, closer. He RACES PAST.

Silence. Deren's trigger finger tightens. Nim presses her hand against the whale.

NIM

(whispers to whale)

Sorry.

The stranger SPEEDS INTO VIEW.

Deren aims at the engine. FIRES.

BANG!

The whales panic. A collective scream, deep and chilling fills the air.

The stranger's ship PLUMMETS, leaking smoke.

Their whale BUCKS, throwing Hero and Deren into the air. They land on his back hard. Deren loses his grip on the RIFLE and it skitters away down the whale's flank. He foolishly LUNGES for it. Nim YANKS him back, saving him, just as the whale ROLLS to one side.

They are sliding towards empty air. Deren manages to grab onto a mound of BARNACLES. Nim slides past him.

He SEIZES her arm. He saves her.

EXT. HERO - DAY

Hero races towards the two tiny figures clinging to the whale. As the whale continues to roll, their feet start dangle. Soon they hanging from an UPSIDE DOWN whale.

Deren loses his grip and they fall.

Hero catches them.

They slam into his deck with a THUMP.

Hero, not slowing down, shoots upwards like a cork, leaving the panicking whales far below.

Nim and Deren lay on the deck, gasping for air. Nim looks over at Deren, incredulous. Then she smiles at the sky.

Hero looks back towards her begrudgingly.

NIM

I knew you'd catch me. You always do.

She jumps up, unclips her spyglass. Aiming it at the ground, she sees smoke trailing from a wreck on the desert floor.

NIM

And they're down. Good shot.

She turns around. Deren is still lying on the deck, stunned. His left hand is bleeding from the barnacles.

DEREN

That was the stupidest thing I have ever done.

EXT. DRY-SEA BED - NIGHT

Hero flies low across the desert. The portholes glow a warm yellow.

INT. HERO'S CABIN - NIGHT

Nim looking at a map. Deren is reading one of her romance novels. His left hand is bandaged.

He pulls out his pipe and tobacco, and is about to light it, when he remembers and goes outside, taking the book with him.

Hero notices, and his eyes wrinkle in a smile. Nim pretends not to notice. He looks back over at Nim, reproachful.

NIM

I was going to... at some point.

Hero narrows his eyes.

NIM

Alright, alright, I'm going.

She gets up and goes outside.

EXT. HERO - NIGHT

Nim sits across from Deren, not looking at him.

NIM

You like it?

Nods at the book.

DEREN

Yeah, I liked *Sword Through the Heart*
better though.

NIM

Me too.

Awkward silence. Deren goes back to reading. Hero looks at
Nim expectantly.

NIM

Deren?

Deren looks up.

NIM

Hero wanted to say thank you, for
saving my life.

(beat)

And uh, that's from me too.

DEREN

(surprised)

You're welcome.

She nods and ducks inside.

NIM

The Well. We'll ditch him and that
package before the trade.

EXT. DRY-LAKE BED - DAY

Nim wakes up in her bunk and sees her gun and knife laid out next to her.

She jumps up, sees Deren sleeping on deck. Nim frowns. She wasn't planning on him being likable.

Later.

Hero swoops down towards the lake bed. Nim has the radio out and switched to channel 2.35. Deren sees her wearing the gun and knife, but neither of them mention it.

NIM

Courier to base, courier to base, this
is Courier #452 approaching base,
requesting location for landing,
repeat, this is Courier #452
approaching base, requesting location
for landing, over.

Only static in reply.

A ship appears in the distance, a large, sleek motorboat, with attendants on rayfish. They zoom past Hero and Nim without a glance.

A second ship of similar status passes by, then a third.

Hero and Nim look at each other.

NIM

Something's wrong.

The stream of ships passing by widens and slows. Now there are smaller, poorer vessels, packed with as many belongings as they can carry. An evacuation.

Hero spots a hybrid ship sitting in the sand, engine smoking. Two scalekind, similar looking to Deren, stand next to it with a defeated air, while three kids play in the sand, oblivious.

Hero looks at Nim inquisitively.

NIM

Sure, might as well.

(to Deren)

It won't mess with your schedule?

Deren shakes his head.

Hero pulls up beside the broken-down ship. The kids run and hide behind their parents. The wife is SARIL ANI (30s) and the husband is FERS ANI (30s).

DEREN

You need a hand with that?

SARIL ANI

Appreciate the offer, but unless
you're a mechanic..

(looks up)

Hey, now that's a friendly looking
face.

Now up close, it is clear that they belong to the same
species as Deren.

SARIL ANI (CONT)

Not often we see another Hahndim this
far west, and on a painted ship?
You've got stories I'm sure.

Deren jumps down, and they clasp arms. The kids ogle at Hero.

DEREN

Ha, uh, yeah, definitely. The name's
Deren. You guys from Davon?

He is awkward but pleased. Her husband walks up, greets Deren
the same way.

FERS ANI

Yeah... it's been awhile since we've
been up there, though. I'm Fers Ani,
and this is my wife Saril. Hey, kids,
come over here and meet Deren!

The kids ignore them, too busy inspecting Hero, who looks at
them curiously.

FERS ANI

Don't get too close!

Nim jumps down next to Deren.

NIM

You want me to take a look? I'm not
much of a mechanic, but I know a
couple tricks.

FERS ANI
I don't know...

He looks suspiciously at Hero and Nim.

DEREN
I've been traveling with her for a while. She knows what she's about.

SARIL ANI
Yeah, I think that'd be okay.

NIM
Great. You're welcome.

Later.

Nim has gotten the ship to hover again, and is forcefully rooting around in its metal innards, as if she has a personal grudge against the machine.

Deren stands talking with Fers and Saril Ani.

The kids are crawling all over Hero, laughing and making a mess. Fers keeps glancing at them nervously.

SARIL ANI
We tried to put it off until the last moment, but we couldn't wait any longer. Last we heard, the Myennese New Republic is supposed to be here a day or two after Emya-Ovae.

DEREN
That soon?

NIM
(mutters)
Oh, lovely.

FERS ANI
I wanted to leave earlier, but Saril here thought that all the MNR's talk of "liberation" from the Salis Confederation was just that - talk.

DEREN
Seven hells. Is Salis sending reinforcements?

The kids shriek with delight and surprise as Hero blinks at

them.

SARIL ANI

Not entirely sure... Even if they are,
we're so far east, they won't get here
in time.

One of the kids has plopped themselves in front of Hero and
is repeatedly poking his eye. Hero winces, but bears it.

NIM

Hey! Your children are torturing my
ship!

SARIL ANI

(not looking)
Kids, play nice.

They completely ignore her. Nim sighs.

NIM

(stage whisper)
Hey. Hey kid.

The kid stops poking Hero and turns around.

NIM

You know how he does that?

He shakes his head.

NIM

He's possessed by a ghost.

The little kid freezes mid-poke and scrambles backward,
hiding behind Nim.

KID #1

Really?

NIM

Mm-hmm. Hold these for me, yeah?

She drops a couple of bolts in his hands. Dives back in.

FERS ANI

Ano? I don't want you hiding back
there, okay?

ANO

Okay!

NIM
Hand me one of those.

He does. She screws it in, he hands her the second, the third.

NIM
All done. Let's see if this thing runs, shall we?

CUT TO:

The engine roars to life. Everyone has gotten back into their respective ships.

DEREN
Well thank you for the information.
We'll probably stay though Emya-Ovae tonight, watch the White Parade, leave in the morning.

FERS ANI
I wouldn't stay too long.

SARIL ANI
(to Deren)
Thank you so much for your help! Oh, and if you want to avoid the militia checkpoints, they hadn't set up on the eastern side yet.

Nim frowns. Deren waves his thanks and they loop around to continue towards the Well.

EXT. LO AEVELIN (THE WELL) - DAY

Hero and Nim (and Deren) draw closer to the city, which looks like a gigantic well dug straight into the ground, over five times the width of Endelport,

They skirt the edge of the Well and the buildings that grow over onto the lakebed, finally reaching the east side.

There are no checkpoints here.

EXT. HERO - DAY

The radio crackles to life.

SHAW
This is base to Courier #452, base to

Courier #452, do you copy? Over.

NIM
Yes, this is Courier #452, I copy.
Over.

SHAW
ID code? Over.

Nim taps out a pattern on the receiver.

NIM
And yours? Over.

A muffled pattern is heard over the transmitter. Deren
listening in, nods confirmation.

NIM
Identity confirmed, over.

SHAW
Okay, that's a copy. When the White
Parade starts, meet at the Blue Fei
Manor. Number 5, Ring 2

NIM
Copy, over.
(to Deren)
You know it?

DEREN
Yeah, I know it.

Hero swings out over the yawning abyss of a city. Lo Aevelin,
or the Well, is carved into the white rock of the walls,
stretching down, down until it reaches the reservoir that
gives the city its nickname.

Hero looks down and shudders.

NIM
And I thought an underground bar was
bad.

They begin to descend.

They pass row after row of stone avenues and balconies,
pillared homes and temples, all eerily empty, too quiet.

EXT. LO AEVELIN DOCK - DAY

Hero floats next to a dock, about midway down into the well. Deren stands next to him while Nim argues with a scruffy looking dock master in the distance.

DEREN

(to Hero)

She's lucky to have you, you know.

Hero looks at him, gratified.

Nim slaps a few notes into the dock master's hand and walks back to the other two.

She is clearly on edge, and keeps glancing up at the coin-sized bit of blue sky.

NIM

Since we've got some time, I'm going to deliver the letters. Deren, want to come? I'm not very familiar with the city.

DEREN

Sure.

INT. HERO'S CABIN - DAY

Nim grabs the letters from a locker. Then she goes to the hidden compartment. She taps it and Hero opens it. She pockets the package.

EXT. LO AEVELIN DOCK - DAY

Nim steps from Hero to the dock. She claps a waiting Deren on the shoulder, and at the same time slips the package into his knapsack. Time to get rid of both of them.

Hero watches them walk away with trepidation.

EXT. LO AEVELIN DOCK - DAY

Nim appears at the far end of the dock and runs towards Hero. He watches her approach with sullen eyes.

She reaches him, and goes to step onto his deck. He moves away.

NIM
(panting)
What's wrong? We need to get out of
here before Deren gets here.

Hero narrows his eyes.

NIM
No? What do you mean, "no?"

Hero looks defiant.

NIM
Look, I like him too, he's - nice, but
that doesn't mean he's trustworthy.

Still defiant.

NIM
So what? He knew that if I died, you
probably wouldn't stick around. And
besides, just because he helped us out
once, doesn't mean he's not going to
turn on us later. Come on, I'm just
trying to be practical.

Hero glances down, kind of self-conscious.

Nim is silent for a moment. Then:

NIM
Is that what you think of me?

Hero's eyes widen. No, not what he meant.

NIM
Mm-hmm, yeah, we're leaving.

She reaches for him, and he pulls back again.

NIM
Eyah! I'm trying to protect you, you
idiot! Stop being such a baby! Grow up-

Hero cuts her off with a glare.

Whatever he says, it hurts. Nim opens her mouth but nothing
comes out.

Beat.

NIM

You don't understand. I- shit. We are not doing this now. You know what? Fine, you win. Let's see this to the end. Who knows, might be fun! But on one condition.

Nim looks Hero straight in the eye.

NIM (CONT.)

I don't want you anywhere near the drop. If this goes wrong, I'm taking the fall for it, not you.

CUT TO:

Deren arrives on the docks panting, surprised and relieved to find Hero and Nim still there. Well, at least one of them.

DEREN

You okay? I was worried when you weren't on the steps.

NIM

Sorry. I figured you knew how to get back.

Nim stands in a rickety hybrid ship.

DEREN

Where's Hero?

NIM

Around. He stands out too much for this sort of thing. He's going to meet us back here afterwards. Get in. The parade is about to start. You want to be on time don't you?

DEREN

Wait, where's the package?

NIM

Look in your bag.

EXT. LO AEVELIN - SUNSET

Nim and Deren ascend through the well, cutting switchbacks in the air on their borrowed dinghy. Passing the abandoned city, all is silent except for the hum of the motor.

Deren is at the tiller; Nim stares glumly into the darkening city.

DEREN
Not long now.

EXT. DRY-SEA BED - SUNSET

The sun sinks behind the horizon and disappears.

EXT. LO AEVELIN RESERVOIR- TWILIGHT

Something glows beneath the water. A ghostly prow rises into the air, not disturbing the surface of the reservoir. It carries two figures: a SPIRIT (emya), a shifting, vaguely human-shaped creature, light made liquid, and a GHOST, a transparent but detailed afterimage of a scalekind. He even wears semi-transparent clothes.

They rise up towards the mouth of the Well. They are followed by other strange, ghostly ships carrying the souls of the dead. Some simply drift upwards of their own power.

They come from everywhere, emerging from the doorways and alleyways, from solid rock. The spirits act as shepherds, guiding the mass exodus.

Behold the White Parade.

EXT. LO AEVELIN - NIGHT

Nim and Deren are surrounded by the parade. Deren is awed. Nim just looks sad. Something about her is distracting to the spirits, some of whom come to look at her closer. She waves them away.

EXT. LO AEVELIN - NIGHT

Hero tails Nim and Deren from a distance. No way is he leaving her to deal with this alone. A few emya pause in their duties to circle him with curiosity before returning to the procession.

EXT. DRY-SEA BED - NIGHT

Ghostly ships rise from the earth and ascend. They join a wide stream of ghosts and spirits, some as tall as giants, some in the form of fish-like creatures the size of whales. They all travel in one direction.

EXT. ENDELPORST MAIN STREET - NIGHT

As the White Parade passes by overhead, a physical parade mirrors it on the ground, a solemn procession of people in costume carrying lanterns.

Dagmar stands in the crowd, a nephew sitting on her shoulders for a better view.

EXT. SAND DUNES - NIGHT

A grave with no headstone, only a cup of wine and a piece of bread. Two birdkind, a brother and a sister, watch the ghost of their mother pulled from her grave by a tall emya. The mother that Nim shot in self-defense.

She smiles at her children but says nothing as she joins the procession.

EXT. MR. LEE'S GENERAL STORE - NIGHT

A whitewashed wooden house, propped up on stilts above a shallow lake. An old furkind sits on his porch drinking a brown-bottle.

He watches souls as they leave the lake and ascend.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

The stranger from the bar sits next to his wrecked ship, ignores the parade as he vigorously cleans his rifle.

EXT. LO AEVELIN STREET - NIGHT

A group of militia soldiers lounge behind a blockade. Some watch the parade. A few kneel in prayer.

EXT. LO AEVELIN (THE WELL) - NIGHT

Deren and Nim stand in front of the Blue Fei Manor. Like the others on this ring, it is made with white alabaster stone with blue ceramic roofing. Lush greenery overflows from a rooftop garden.

Deren knocks on the door, wooden and ornate.

A small birdkind that only comes up to Nim's shoulders opens the door.

SHAW

Hello Deren.

DEREN

Hey Shaw.

SHAW

(to Nim)

Your license.

She shows it to him. He nods.

SHAW

This way.

INT. BLUE FEI MANOR - NIGHT

He leads them across the foyer to the foot of a grand staircase. Wealth is shown in the abundance of polished wood and high ceilings, but decoration is very spartan. Shaw stops at the foot of the stairs.

SHAW

Package please.

Deren reaches into his bag and hands it to him, a little reluctantly.

SHAW

After it has been authenticated, you will receive payment. Please DO NOT ascend to the second floor. However, feel free to partake in some refreshments-

(he motions to an open door on the left)

Emya-Ovae only comes once a year, after all.

He scuttles up the steps and disappears. Deren watches him go. Nim makes a beeline for the "refreshments room."

INT. BLUE FEI MANOR, HALLWAY - NIGHT

Shaw runs through the seemingly empty house. He stops at an intricately carved wooden door. Knocks

THE BUYER (O.S.)

Come in.

Shaw enters.

INT. THE BUYER'S STUDY - NIGHT

The study is surprisingly cluttered, completely stuffed with artifacts. Purposefully arranged, but it's still too much.

The Buyer sits, writing, at his desk. Behind him, the White Parade can be seen through floor-length windows. He pays it no mind.

He is birdkind. Feathers are stark white, face is owlshly flat, and clothes are dark velvet. He looks up.

Shaw presents the package.

The Buyer fixes on it with black eyes.

INT. BLUE FEI MANOR, PARLOR - NIGHT

Like the foyer, expansive and sparse. A doorway leads to a balcony. It also has its own bar.

Nim reaches over to grab a bottle of some milky liquid. Hesitates. Screw everything. She pours some into a little porcelain cup, throws it back. Drains a second. Then a third.

It hits fast. She stares out the window, eyes glazed.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Deren, alone in the foyer. He starts up the staircase. Makes it a few steps, then stops, indecisive.

EXT. BLUE FEI MANOR, BALCONY - NIGHT

Nim walks onto the balcony. The stone shines alabaster white in the light of the moon.

Emya-ovae, the White Parade is still going strong. Pale ghosts and accompanying spirits drift slowly upward, casting translucent shadows over the smooth stone buildings.

Slightly unsteady with drink, Nim jumps on to the balcony wall and stands, arms wide for balance. She walks along the parapet, feet tracing the invisible line that separates her from empty space.

Far, far below, the Well's reservoir reflects stars back up at her. She stops, lets her arms fall, and stares at the ghosts as they pass, swaying slightly.

DEREN

That's a long way down.

She looks back to see him in the doorway and says nothing. But when he leans on the balcony beside her, she sits down, letting her legs swing out over the city.

He reaches into a pocket and pulls out a packet of cigarettes, the packaging of which is surprisingly expensive, gold letters on a field of china blue.

NIM

Are those-

DEREN

Yep, real Blues. Got the watermark and everything. I've been saving them for a special occasion. Want one?

NIM

Are you kidding?

They both take one and Nim lights them. They take a simultaneous drag on their blues. Nim exhales smoke (tinted pale blue) with a smile.

NIM

I'd forgotten how good these are.

DEREN

(surprised)

You've had a Blue before?

Nim holds out the cigarette, examining it. It has a blue filter and a small round watermark.

NIM

I used to know someone with a taste for them.

DEREN

Expensive taste.

He waits for her to elaborate, but she says nothing. Just as the silence is about to stretch into awkward-

NIM

They're beautiful, yeah?

She motions at the ghosts and emya (spirits) who accompany them, drifting by.

DEREN

Yeah. I love this time of year. Back home we would set out bread and milk for the emya on their journey. One time my sister ate it all when no one was looking.

Nim smirks.

NIM

Sounds like something I would have done.

DEREN

Yeah, we had bad luck for a year afterwards. Mom was furious.

Deren smiles at the memory.

NIM

Good times?

DEREN

Good times.

Nim takes another drag on her blue, then sighs.

NIM

So then how did you end up celebrating with me, in this hellbound city?

He looks down.

DEREN

We're not really speaking, at the moment.

NIM

Ah.

A second silence stretches. Deren is lost in his own thoughts, the cigarette dangling forgotten from his fingers.

Suddenly, he looks at Nim, gaze uncharacteristically direct.

DEREN

You're one of the Koh, aren't you?

The blue cigarette slips through her fingers, bounces off the balcony and falls out of sight.

NIM
Eyah! You owe me another one.

DEREN
What for?

NIM
(dismissive)
For asking stupid questions, that's why. Everyone knows the Koh Nation died out a long time ago.

He keeps looking at her, sympathy on his face.

DEREN
It must have been very lonely, with just you and Hero. Is it true what they say? That Koh ships are carved entirely from living wood?

NIM
Don't talk about Hero.

DEREN
It's okay, I won't tell anyone.

Nim stands on the balcony, glaring down at him.

NIM
There's nothing to tell!

He still just looks at her with that calm, sympathetic, infuriating gaze.

DEREN
I'm just trying to-

NIM (CONT.)
You think you know me? After what, three days? Just because your family hates you, doesn't mean you get to make crazy assumptions about my life!

The sympathy is wiped from his face. He puts out the cigarette on the balcony.

DEREN
Right. Enjoy the view.

He turns and walks back inside.

INT. BLUE FEI MANOR, PARLOR, FOYER - NIGHT

Deren stalks through the parlor and into the foyer. He draws his gun and marches up the stairs.

EXT. BALCONY - NIGHT

Only after he is gone does Nim slump down, still fuming.

She looks over at his stubbed cigarette. Nim strikes a match and relights it, taking a puff.

NIM

Idiot.

The shadows of the dead continue to pass over her, silent in their leisurely pilgrimage.

INT. PARLOR - NIGHT

Later.

Nim walks back inside,

NIM

Deren?

Not there.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

NIM

Deren? Deren, I wanted to apologize, I-

Deren freezes at the top of the staircase. Gun in one hand. The Koh pendant dangles from the other.

Comprehensions dawn.

NIM

Oh.

Deren doesn't look at her. He holsters the gun and barrels down the stairs, shoulders past, out the door.

She stands frozen, then follows.

EXT. LO AEVELIN (THE WELL) - NIGHT

A militia sentry stands in a crow's nest dangling under a

balloon, which is tethered to a checkpoint down below. He scans the skies. The stars have been obscured by low clouds.

A rocket SLAMS into the balloon, which is immediately consumed by fire. It loses altitude, tether burnt through, then plummets down into the Well.

EXT. LO AEVELIN STREET - NIGHT

Nim stalks after Deren. Anger has replaced shock.

NIM
(sarcastic)
Leaving so soon?

Deren doesn't answer. She opens her mouth, but the words die in her throat.

The FLAMING WRECK plunges past them.

EXT. LO AEVELIN - NIGHT

Hero floats a safe distance from the manor

He sees the WRECKAGE fall.

EXT. LO AEVELIN STREET - NIGHT

NIM
They're early.

She makes eye contact with Deren.

He turns and runs away.

Nim stands stock still

NIM
(whispers)
Hero.

She runs to the edge of the street and leans out over the city.

NIM
HERO! HERO!

There is the pop of faraway gunfire, the distant noise of motors being revved and ships launched.

A low rumbling grows into a deafening ROAR.

Nim looks up to see a MASSIVE WARSHIP with a blue-and-yellow checkered prow break through the clouds. Accompanying it is a squadron of smaller fighters and troop carriers

Movement from the left catches her eye. It is HERO, racing towards her. He is so close. Everything is going to be okay.

BOOM!

A giant EXPLOSION tears them apart, as a volley of rockets crash into the walls of the city.

EXT. LO AEVELIN - NIGHT

The city descends into chaos. The air is full of gunfire and ships engaged in dogfights. Frogkind soldiers pour into the streets, taking fire from militia behind barricades.

The warship blocks escape from above, as it fires rockets from its swollen metal belly.

Civilians flee from burning homes, and are shot down in the streets.

People and ships plunge into the lake at the bottom of the well, blood and fire pooling across its clear surface.

INT. COLLAPSED BUILDING - NIGHT

Nim opens her eyes, ears ringing. She is blearily able to see militia around her. She's slumped against the ruins of a building wall, the militia shooting at something behind her, she cannot see...

She closes her eyes, met with darkness.

Fade to black.

BANG!

Nim wakes with a start. She is surrounded by the bodies of the militia. Uniformed soldiers are walking among them. One walks to a wounded furkind and points a PISTOL at his head.

Nim closes her eyes.

BANG!

SOLDIER #1

That's the last of them. Let's move on.

She holsters her gun.

Her partner walks to Nim and kicks her. She is covered in dust from the explosion, and blood trickles from a wound on her head.

She doesn't breath. The soldier raises his pistol.

SOLDIER #1

Don't waste your bullets. The explosion already got her.

SOLDIER #2

Just being careful.

He cocks the gun.

Nim's eyes blaze open. She surges to her feet. The soldier stumbles back, FIRES. Nim dodges, grabs the wrist of his gun hand and forces it away.

Nim gets right up close, shoves her revolver in the soldier's gut and PULLS THE TRIGGER.

It's over in a second. The soldier drops. Nim grabs his pistol as he falls. She looks at the remaining soldier, a gun in both hands, shirt bloody, expression manic.

Frozen silence.

The soldier grabs for her pistol, but Nim is faster. Two bullets rip through her chest and she falls.

Nim turns to go and stumbles, her head wound catching up to her. The crazy anger fades into numbness. She holsters her revolver.

NIM

Hero.

EXT. LO AEVELIN STREET - NIGHT

Hero is buried under rubble, one eye barely visible. It's not clear whether he is breathing or not.

INT. COLLAPSED BUILDING - NIGHT

Nim almost makes it to the collapsing doorway when-

SERGEANT

Rowlins, Ganet, move out!

A tall frogkind in uniform walks though the doorway to stare straight down the barrel of Nim's STOLEN PISTOL.

His eyes flick away to see the bodies of his soldiers.

SERGEANT

Bastard.

Nim pulls the trigger. CLICK. It's empty.

NIM

Shit.

He smiles.

Nim drops the gun and lunges for a section of collapsed wall, and tumbles into the alley beyond.

SERGEANT

GOT A RUNNER OVER HERE!

Bullets ricochet off of the stone around her. Nim chances a look over her shoulder-

The sergeant and five soldiers chase her down the alley.

Nim vaults over a pile of rubble, but mistimes the landing and STUMBLES. Balance still not right.

The sergeant aims for her heart and FIRES. At the same time a nearby EXPLOSION shakes everyone off their feet.

The bullet GRAZES Nim's left arm.

NIM

Ow.

She claps a hand to the wound and pushes off, barreling through the twists and turns of the alley, sees a DEAD END ahead.

Changes direction at the last minute, running through a passageway on her left, comes out into a lush COURTYARD.

A group of monks kneel in the center of the courtyard, and are praying to statue of a six-legged deity. A school of tiny silver fish swim in a ring over their heads.

Nim pauses for a second, stunned by the sight, then runs through them to get to a DOOR on the other side.

They ignore her.

She slams the door shut behind her, and finds herself in a long, OPEN-AIR CORRIDOR with no cover. The door has no bolt, nothing to brace it with.

Columns line the opposite wall, creating a balcony, beyond which is empty air.

INT. COURTYARD - NIGHT

The sergeant stalks over to a monk and grabs him by the collar.

SERGEANT
Where is she?!?

The monk ignores him and continues praying.

The sergeant drops him and draws his gun.

EXT. LO AEVELIN CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Nim hears shouts of pain and gunfire from behind the door.

NIM
Hero, where are you?

EXT. LO AEVELIN STREET - NIGHT

Hero, still buried in rubble, blinks. He's awake!

EXT. LO AEVELIN CORRIDOR - NIGHT

The door bursts open. Two soldiers run through.

SOLDIER #3
Check that end.

The other soldier takes off down the long corridor. The first runs in the opposite direction, but soon hits a dead end, the corridor filled with debris. He turns back.

Comes back to the original door, which is ajar. Through it the bodies of monks splayed across the courtyard can be seen.

He walks to the balcony and looks out over the city under siege.

Below him, Nim clings to the decoratively carved stone. She inches downwards towards a rooftop jutting out into space.

Her left arm is weak and slick with blood.

She is reaching for a new handhold, when her wounded arm gives out and she FALLS-

and LANDS on the rooftop below.

The soldier hears her and looks down.

SOLDIER #3
HERE! SHE'S HERE!

The sound of footsteps running.

Nim gets to her feet, cradling her ribs. Bullets crack against the roof.

NIM
Hero, please catch me.

The rest of soldiers arrive. The hail of gunfire intensifies.

Nim runs to the edge of the roof and launches herself into the air.

For a terrible, wonderful moment she is in free fall, rushing past the city on fire.

And then Hero is there, right beside her, matching her falling speed. Nim is smiling like an idiot, tears streaming upwards, as she reaches for him, grabbing onto the rail.

As he slows down, she pulls herself over onto his deck and collapses on her back, as he comes to a gentle stop, then shoots upwards.

NIM
(sobbing)
Thank you, thank you...

She takes a great, shuddering breath, then gets back on her feet and rushes to the cabin,

INT. HERO'S CABIN - NIGHT

grabbing a box of bullets and reloading her revolver, then dashing back outside.

EXT. LO AEVELIN (THE WELL) - NIGHT

Hero swerves to avoid gunfire, rockets and ships. There are

very few militia ships left in the air.

As they near the edge of the Well, Nim spots a battered hybrid ship trying to make a break for it across the desert. Deren is at the helm.

Nim's desperate fear is replaced by anger. He betrayed them. He left them.

NIM

Deren.

Hero sees him. His eyes narrow. They give chase.

EXT. DEREN'S STOLEN SHIP - NIGHT

Deren sees them behind him and smiles. Then he kicks the engine into high gear.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE WELL - NIGHT

They are soon racing low across the desert, the Well behind them. The armada above blocks a skyward escape. The sounds of the battle recede somewhat.

But the relative silence is broken by a volley of rockets, aimed straight at them. Someone has noticed their attempt to escape.

Hero and Nim swerve around two explosions, and are showered in fountains of dirt. As the dust settles, they see Deren has made it as well.

A second volley. Hero and Nim swerve again, narrowly missing one, but Deren is not so lucky.

His ship lays on its side, on fire. Hero and Nim approach, and are forced back by the intensity of the heat.

Nim vaults over Hero's side and lands on the ground.

Nim peers into the burning ship, trying to discern any sign of life.

DEREN

(weakly)

Hello.

Nim spins around and spots Deren, laying half-hidden behind a piece of his fallen ship.

NIM

Hey.

DEREN

I think I might need help.

He tries to lift his head but can't. His eyes, wild with barely controlled shock and fear, glance down to his midriff. Nim follows his gaze.

Some of her anger abates. She kneels beside him.

She lifts the arm that covers his stomach and pulls aside his coat. Hero flinches, closing his eyes.

Nim tries to hide her reaction to what she sees, but the horror is plain on her face.

Her hands come away covered in blood.

DEREN

Oh.

For a long moment there is only the sound of the ship burning.

NIM

Where is it?

He gestures towards his neck. Seeing the blue string, Nim gently lifts the necklace from around his head. The wooden pendant dangles in front of her eyes. When she closes her hand around it, she shivers. A breeze ruffles her hair.

DEREN

Return it to my family.

He looks first Hero, then Nim directly in the eye.

NIM

Your family? What- Why should I?

DEREN

PLEASE.

He grips her upper arm with his bloody hand. Nim tries to pull away, but his grip is strong.

DEREN

Promise me. You must return it. Tell them I, tell them...

His arm falls, leaving a bloody handprint on her skin.

At that exact moment, Nim hunches over in pain, grabbing at her arm. The HANDPRINT BURNS white hot.

NIM

Ahh!

And it fades just as suddenly, leaving a pale blue imprint of Deren's hand on her arm. She stares at it in disbelief, then down at Deren.

NIM

What did you-

His eyes are glassy and still. He's dead.

Nim falls back and pushes herself away from the body in a panicked haste.

She backs into Hero and leans against him, breathing hard, both silhouetted against the flames.