

NEW CHAPTER

By Ryan and Jocelyn
Manns

EXT. FANTASY LAND - FIREFALL - TWILIGHT

NOTE: the fantasy land is ANIMATED.

A river of liquid fire CRASHES over an obsidian waterfall.

EMILY (V.O.)
*Setra knew the Imperial Guards
weren't far behind!*

SETRA (14, curly hair, mousy look, heart of a warrior) jumps quickly from rock to rock across the top of the firefall.

EMILY (V.O.)
*She'd managed to steal the
ingredients she needed, obsidian
and Red Fern, from right under
Raza's nose.*

The flap on a bag on Setra's hip reveals: OBSIDIAN STONES AND RED FERN.

EMILY (V.O.)
Now all she had to do was escape.

On the opposite bank, A HOT AIR BALLOON, repeatedly patched, waits. At its helm, a cute blonde boy (CADEN) and another cute boy, brunette (FELIX) beckoning her aboard.

FELIX
Come on!

EMILY (V.O.)
But nothing could be that simple.

In the river, between Setra and her friends, a BLACK SUBMARINE BURSTS from the fire below.

Out of a hatch climbs RAZA (14, pin straight platinum hair, elite crimson uniform). She smiles, wicked eyes flashing.

RAZA
Didn't your parents ever tell you
stealing was wrong?

She draws a crescent-shaped blade and LEAPS at Setra. Setra draws her own sword, battered and rusty, and barely blocks.

Raza leans in, face to face.

RAZA (CONT'D)
Oh that's right, my father killed
them!

SETRA
But he didn't kill me.

Raza expertly hooks her blade around Setra's, backhands her. Setra nearly loses her balance.

Immediately Raza's on her again. Another swing. Setra ducks. She counters, Raza deftly steps out of range.

RAZA
You fight like a street urchin!

SETRA
I am a street urchin.

CUT TO:

INT. HOT AIR BALLOON

FELIX
Bring us closer!

CADEN
I can't! You know how combustible this thing is? I go any closer and we're all dead!

In the corner of the balloon, A RED PANDA WEARING A MONOCLE looks sad and worried.

BACK TO:

Raza strikes relentlessly. Setra's losing ground.

CADEN (CONT'D)
Setra get out of there! No one can beat Raza!

FELIX
(low)
But if anyone can...

The pair lock swords again. Raza deftly kicks Setra in the stomach, Setra stumbles, loses her footing. SHE FALLS OVER THE LIP OF THE FIREFALL!

FELIX & CADEN
NO! RED PANDA
(wails)

...but by her fingertips grabs the edge of a rock!

Raza circles the dangling Setra like a predator.

RAZA
I have to say, you've certainly
gotten better. I may even break a
sweat this time.

Setra LEAPS up. She's got a clear run to the balloon.

CADEN
Run, Setra!

RAZA
Better listen to your boyfriend.

Caden smiles, Felix looks devastated.

Setra attacks Raza, each strike punctuated by a word, as Raza
parries each blow effortlessly.

SETRA
He. Is. Not. My. Boyfriend!

Now Caden looks devastated, and Felix smiles.

Raza's own blade flicks out, a surgical cut. Slices the strap
of Setra's leather bag.

It tumbles. Setra dives for it.

Too slow. The bag falls off the cliff toward the lake of fire
below.

RAZA
Oops. So clumsy. Such a shame. I
know how long you've been trying to
get those... what are they?
Ingredients for a spell? How
quaint.

Setra gets to her feet. The imperial guards have reached the
bank, hundreds of them.

EMILY (V.O.)
*Raza had her surrounded and cut
off. But there was something that
Raza didn't know.*

SETRA
For a summoning spell. And do you
know what the final ingredient is?

Raza ignores her and LUNGES.

SETRA (CONT'D)
Fire.

Far below, a DISTANT ROAR.

SETRA (CONT'D)
I summon... the wizard Konmelo!

At the bottom of the falls, a sphere of pure white light. A shadow steps out, and lifts his staff--

JENNY (V.O.)
Emily!

An EXPLOSION knocks Raza and Emily off their feet.

Raza, hair falling out of place, turns to spit at Setra:

RAZA
You think the wizard can save you!?

JENNY (V.O.)
(louder)
Emily!!

SETRA
No. But I think together, we can
save the world.

JENNY (V.O.)
EMILY!!

EMILY (V.O.)
What, Mom!?

SLAM.

EMILY (14, nerdy) CLOSES the book and we are brought out of the fantasy world and into:

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM - REAL WORLD

NOTE: The real world is live-action.

STOMP. STOMP. STOMP. JENNY (40s, Emily's mom) marches in. Emily puts her book aside on a NIGHTSTAND.

JENNY
Special delivery, just in time for
the dance.

She holds up a dress. It's the bad dress trifecta: poofy, glittery and orange.

EMILY
Why is it orange??

JENNY
It's seasonal! And it was on sale.

EMILY
Mom, I don't wanna go to the dance.

JENNY
(getting annoyed)
You never want to. Am I supposed to chaperone a dance my own daughter isn't going to?

EMILY
I don't have anyone to go with.

Jenny's face softens, just a little.

JENNY
You don't have to take a date. You could go with a friend.

Emily blushes deeper, and stares at the ground.

EMILY
I don't have a friend to go with either.

JENNY
Whatever happened to Michelle?

Emily MAKES A FACE, disgruntled as the phone RINGS.

EMILY
You don't get it Mom--

Jenny cuts her off.

JENNY
Oh! I gotta get that. Call Michelle sweetie, she'd love to hear from you I'm sure.

She leaves to answer the phone.

Emily sighs. She considers, then pulls out her cell phone, scrolling to "MICHELLE -skull emoji-".

It rings, and then is picked up. In the background: CHATTER and LAUGHTER of young girls getting ready for a dance.

POPULAR GIRL #1 (on phone)
Oops I answered it - hey Michelle, someone named Emily called you!

MICHELLE
(distant)
Gross.

PEALS OF LAUGHTER. Shuffling sounds, then MICHELLE is on the line.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
Yeah?

EMILY
Hey. Are you going to the dance?

MICHELLE
Yeah.

Emily's cheeks are BURNING RED. She soldiers on.

EMILY
Could I - come with you?

MICHELLE
I don't think so. There's not room in the limo. Plus I'm not sure they'll have a reading room at the dance, it's mostly for people who actually want have fun.

LAUGHTER.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
See ya, Emily. Or ya know, probably not.

Emily sighs and throws the phone away.

She gets up and feeds a GOLDFISH on her NIGHTSTAND. The fish's tank is decorated with a RED FERN and the aquarium gravel is OBSIDIAN ROCKS.

EMILY
If only I could go with you, Setra.

Emily gets an idea.

EMILY (CONT'D)
Hmm...

She sticks her hand in the tank and grabs some of the red fern and obsidian.

INT. KITCHEN

Jenny talks on the phone.

JENNY
I think she's just nervous. But
I'll be there too, I'm chaperoning.

Through the window over the sink, Jenny spots Emily heading to an old HOLLOW TREE in the backyard.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Yeah, some goodwill for my
campaign. If I'm gonna be president
of the school board, I need to show
my face around the school.
(pause)

She sees Emily place something inside the hollow tree. Her brow furrows.

JENNY (CONT'D)
I'll call you back.

EXT. BACKYARD

Emily stands at a HOLLOW TREE, she has tucked the red fern and obsidian rocks inside the tree, she takes a breath. Closes her eyes.

EMILY
(softly)
I summon Setra...

She strikes a match and lights the red fern.

JENNY (O.S.)
What are you doing?

Emily WHIPS around. Her mother has come out, she's looking curiously at Emily.

EMILY
Uh--

JENNY
Shouldn't you be getting ready?

Emily's eyes wander back to the lit candle, desperately trying to keep an eye on it without her mother noticing.

EMILY
I was about to--

Behind Emily, smoke ERUPTS from the tree.

JENNY
OH MY GOD!

EMILY (CONT'D)
Oh no!

Emily runs away from the tree, Jenny grabs a watering can and dumps the contents into the tree, extinguishing the flame.

Jenny spots the obsidian rocks, the charred red fern and a half-melted candle inside the hollow tree.

JENNY
You could've burned the whole tree down!

EMILY
I'm sorry Mom--

JENNY
Do you understand, the house could've caught fire! Is this from those *stupid books*? You need to stop living in a fantasy world and spend more time with *real kids*!

Emily has tears in her eyes.

EMILY
I'm sorry! I'll go to the dance!

JENNY
Oh no you won't, you're grounded!

Jenny storms off.

Unseen by Emily and her mother, the red fern in the tree still SMOLDERS.

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM

Emily is flopped on her bed. She speaks to her goldfish.

EMILY
Guess it's just you and me again, Setra.

Setra the fish swims over toward her.

EMILY (CONT'D)
OMG, you know your name!

She swims away.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Oh. Maybe not. I guess there's only
so many places you can go in there.

Setra circles the bowl.

Emily rolls onto her side, and stares out the window as her
mom pulls out of the driveway.

Emily flips onto her back. She picks up the BOOK she was
reading earlier.

Then tosses it away.

FLASH. White light emanates from the tree.

Emily sits up, rubs her eyes and when she opens them the tree
is IN FLAMES.

EMILY (CONT'D)

AHHH!

She LEAPS UP, and RUNS for the backyard.

EXT. BACKYARD

Armed with a hose, Emily SOAKS the burning tree. As the
flames die down, Emily coughs from all the smoke.

When Emily raises her head, a SILHOUETTE is moving toward her
through the smoke: a teenage girl, like her.

EMILY

Setra?

The silhouette moves out of the smoke, revealing platinum
hair, a crimson uniform, and the face of evil.

Emily's face turns from hope to horror.

EMILY (CONT'D)

RAZA!

RAZA

WITCH!

Raza SWINGS at Emily, who falls backward, barely avoiding the
blade.

EMILY

(from the ground)

Wait! You don't under-

RAZA

Where am I? Where is Setra? *And who are you!?*

EMILY

I'm nobody! I'm sorry!

Raza stops swinging, confused by an adversary who doesn't want to fight.

EMILY (CONT'D)

I give up, I surrender!

Raza looks around.

RAZA

I was at the Firefall...

Raza drags Emily to her feet, then swings her about, using her as a shield with her sword at Emily's throat.

RAZA (CONT'D)

Where are your friends? Preparing an ambush? If anyone makes a move, you're dead!

EMILY

It's just me! There's no one else!

Raza steps back and looks at Emily, eyes smoldering rage.

RAZA

Then who are you?

EMILY

Nobody. I'm just Emily. I didn't know I could really do that-
(starts to get excited)
-that I could really bring someone out of the book!

RAZA

What book?

EMILY

You don't know you're from a book? You're fictional.

RAZA

(sneers)

Liar! I am the Grand Princess of the Firefont Empire, not some silly made-up character.

EMILY

I have the books inside, I can prove it to you.

RAZA

Psychological warfare! I must say, the rebels are getting smarter. Very well, escort me to your headquarters.

EMILY

Come on, we've got oreos in the kitchen.

CUT TO:

INT. EMILY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

Raza sits at the kitchen table staring into a cup of tea, untouched oreos beside her. Her whole world is upside down.

RAZA

I've never told anyone that I speak to my mother's statue.

Emily stands nervously across the room, arms full of *Tide* and *Tempest* books.

EMILY

Chapter 3, paragraph 10. It's one of my favorite parts of the book actually, it really makes you seem--

Raza looks up at Emily.

EMILY (CONT'D)

--real.

RAZA

But I'm not real.

EMILY

If it's any consolation, the books were always very real to me--

Raza SLAPS the cup of tea across the room. Emily flinches, then gathers her courage and sits at the table.

EMILY (CONT'D)

I know these books, but I don't know how to send you back.

(MORE)

EMILY (CONT'D)

Setra only ever uses the
'summoning' spell, there's not
really a 'go back' spell.

RAZA

(seethes)

Setra. This is her fault, somehow,
that peasant.

Raza pounds the table.

RAZA (CONT'D)

Bring her here! Then she'll have to
take us back. I bet she knows the
spell, that witch.

EMILY

I was actually trying to summon
her, but you came through instead.
The book said she uses the power of
friendship to summon Konmelo and
defeat you--

RAZA

She defeats me?! With the power of
FRIENDSHIP??

EMILY

You underestimated that power.

RAZA

(scoffs)

Friends make you weak.

EMILY

Friends are amazing!

RAZA

Then where are yours?

Emily is silent.

RAZA (CONT'D)

(sneers)

Is that why you tried to summon
Setra? You wanted to join her
pathetic crew of misfits?

EMILY

You're mean!

RAZA

I'm a *villain*, you said yourself!
And Setra's not all that.

(MORE)

RAZA (CONT'D)

(bitter)

I never understood what anyone in
her love triangle saw in her.

Raza waves her hand.

RAZA (CONT'D)

Anyway, it doesn't matter if she
beats me at the Firefall. Father
and I had a plan for that.

EMILY

...to retreat to your airships and
take the fight to the skies?

RAZA

How did you know that?

EMILY

That's book three, *Battle for the
Sky*.

She holds it up.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Setra beats you there too.

RAZA

What, but- then what happens?

EMILY

That's all. You lose. Your father's
thrown in the volcano and you're
thrown in prison.

Raza's face clouds.

RAZA

Is there going to be another book?

EMILY

Haha, I wish--!

Raza leaps across the room, lifts her up and SHAKES HER.

RAZA

IS THERE GOING TO BE ANOTHER BOOK!?

EMILY

Hey, whoa, I don't know! I'm not
the author!

Raza puts Emily down, realizing something.

RAZA

Author...

EMILY

If you think you're gonna track her down, don't bother. No one knows who she is. Diehard fans have been trying to find her for years.

RAZA

I am not a diehard fan, I am a diehard enemy.

EMILY

Wow, you really do have a gift for one-liners. Even without the author writing you.

RAZA

NO ONE WRITES ME!

Raza begins to pace, stalking back and forth.

RAZA (CONT'D)

Who runs this world?

EMILY

Uh- the President? Well, for our country. For the world I guess it's the UN Chief? But only sorta in theory, I think...

RAZA

Who is the SUPREME ruler of the ENTIRE world?

EMILY

There isn't one.

RAZA

Then this world is chaos.

She crosses her arms behind her back, and turns to stare out the nearest window.

RAZA (CONT'D)

You say Setra defeats me, yes? Then my world is lost. Yours is not. Perhaps that's why I was brought here, to bring order to your world.

Emily scratches her neck.

EMILY

I don't know if we...want that.

RAZA

Who's going to stop me, you?

EMILY

Um, no. But like, the police, armies, adults in general--

RAZA

Adults don't matter.

EMILY

I know things are different in your world - like you command an army even though you're 14 - but in this world, adults *do* matter, and kids don't. I can't even leave the house tonight, my mom grounded me.

RAZA

She shot down your war balloon?

EMILY

No, she pointed at me and said "you're grounded". I can't leave.

Raza cocks her head.

RAZA

What happens if you disobey?

EMILY

She'll be mad. I could get grounded for longer.

Beat.

RAZA

That makes no sense.

The doorbell RINGS.

EMILY

Hopefully they'll just go away--

Raza is already halfway to the door to answer it.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Hey, wait!

Emily leaps in front of Raza and opens the door just a CRACK.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Hello?

Standing outside: AMIR (14, in a faux-leather jacket).

AMIR

Uh, hi Emily. I was just wondering,
are you going to the dance?

EMILY

No no, sorry. Not going.

AMIR

(rambling, awkward)

It's just that I'm new, so my dad
said- I mean, I thought- I should
go with somebody cuz I don't know
anybody--

EMILY

I can't go.

SLAM. She shuts the door in his face. Amir turns away, and
tugs uncomfortably at the sleeves of his faux-leather jacket.

AMIR

(mumbling)

Was it the jacket?

INT. EMILY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

Raza has a wicked, teasing grin on her face.

RAZA

Now that, was cold. Perhaps I
underestimated you.

EMILY

It's just a stupid school dance for
mean popular girls.

RAZA

These "popular girls" must be
powerful. You fear them.

EMILY

(unconvincing)

No I don't!

RAZA

I should go to this dance, and join
their ranks.

EMILY

You can't! If anyone finds out who you are, they'll think we're both nuts!

RAZA

Their opinions don't concern me. Show me where the school is.

EMILY

I told you, I'm grounded!

Raza looks at her with disgust, then pushes past her.

EXT. EMILY'S HOUSE

Raza spots Amir down the road, and jogs after him.

RAZA

You there! Take me to the dance!

AMIR

You wanna go to the dance with me?

RAZA

That's what I just said, fool.

AMIR

Ok, sure! Um, Right this way.

He offers her his arm. She just looks at him.

He coughs. Puts it down.

AMIR (CONT'D)

It's- it's down the road.

Raza marches off. Amir follows behind.

INT. EMILY'S HOUSE

Emily watches Amir and Raza walk away. She's panicking.

EMILY

Oh no, oh no...!

She spots a *Tides and Tempest* book on the table: Setra, hair blowing, looking heroic, graces the cover.

Emily does the only thing she can think of: she grabs a lighter and runs outside.

EXT. EMILY'S BACKYARD

The Red Fern is burning, the tree starts to spark...

EMILY
(closed eyes, muttering)
I summon Setra...

The fire spreads. The tree is burning. Emily opens one eye, peeking. She slams it shut again.

EMILY (CONT'D)
Setra, Setra, I need help, Setra...

The fire climbs. Smoke begins to billow. The tree is REALLY burning now.

EMILY (CONT'D)
C'mon, Setra... let's go, Setra--
(HACKING COUGH)

Emily opens her eyes, they immediately WATER from the smoke. She lifts up the hose. She hesitates.

EMILY (CONT'D)
Please, Setra.

In the house, the SMOKE ALARM GOES OFF.

EMILY (CONT'D)
Dammit!

She hoses the tree down, putting the fire out.

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM - CLOSET

Emily rifles through her clothes, she flips past GRAPHIC TEE after GRAPHIC TEE.

EMILY
Nothing to wear...

She has a realization. Oh no.

She turns to face the dress her mom bought her: an abomination, but it's all she's got.

She grabs it.

END OF ACT ONE.

ACT TWO

INT. SCHOOL GYM - LATER

Pop music playing. Bobbing for apples. A very lame hay maze. The middle of the place has been cleared to make room for a dance floor. Absolutely no one is on it.

Amir and Raza walk in.

AMIR

So do you wanna--

Raza's already walked away from him.

AMIR (CONT'D)

...dangit.

Raza scans the gym.

A group of POPULAR GIRLS stand in a tight circle. The alpha popular girl, MICHELLE, is telling a story.

MICHELLE

-so I said to Jason, it's not like Todd told me, even though he totally did, and Jason's like, well if Todd did tell you would you tell me? And I'm like dude, if I did, then Todd wouldn't have!

The popular girls all GIGGLE.

Raza elbows her way into the circle, and LAUGHS ALONG.

RAZA

MWA HA HA HA! Excellent field report. Greetings. My name is Raza, and you will never forget it.

MICHELLE

So are you like, a new student?

RAZA

I am nothing like a student.

The popular girls all look at each other.

MICHELLE

Do people at your old school drink?

Michelle looks over her shoulder, then pulls a bottle full of dark liquid from her bag.

RAZA
Potions? No we do not, witchcraft
is banned.

Michelle gives her a strange look, then drinks, and COUGHS.

She passes the bottle to another girl, who also swigs. More coughing. Another pass.

An older man passes by on his way to the punch bowl.

MICHELLE
Stop, stop! If Mr. Cleary catches
us we're dead.

Raza snaps to attention.

RAZA
Mr Cleary... he has power over even
you? The popular girls?

MICHELLE
Yeah, he's like, the principal,
dude. He runs the whole school.

RAZA
Which one is Mr. Cleary?

Michelle points to the older man, PRINCIPAL CLEARY (50s). He wears glasses and a tie with corncobs on it.

RAZA (CONT'D)
That's who you're afraid of?

Raza looks again just as Amir walks by Cleary.

PRINCIPAL CLEARY
(joking, friendly)
Hey Amir, nice jacket! Where's the
rest of your motorcycle gang?

This devastates Amir. He immediately runs out of the gym.

Raza looks back at the popular girls.

RAZA
You have been disappointing.
Goodbye.

Raza strides off in Principal Cleary's direction.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE GYM

Music pulses behind the door.

Emily, in her awful orange dress, puts her hand on the door to the gym. Steels herself.

INT. SCHOOL GYM

Emily enters. The MUSIC STOPS, it's SILENT. EVERY SINGLE EYE IN THE ROOM BORES INTO HER.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL GYM

It was all in her head.

The music plays loudly, no one's even noticed Emily's entrance, and no one notices as she loses her nerve and leaves the gym.

Nearby, Principal Cleary is doing a goofy two-step alone on the dance floor. Raza marches up to him.

PRINCIPAL CLEARY

Hey! You must be a new student. Nobody tells me anything! Nice costume, by the way. Never too early for Halloween.

RAZA

Principal Cleary, I want to be your second in command.

PRINCIPAL CLEARY

Haha, sorry, but I already have a vice principal.

RAZA

I will defeat them in single combat.

Principal Cleary stops dancing.

PRINCIPAL CLEARY

Please do not fight Mrs. Applebottom. She has enough lawsuits.

RAZA

How do I become vice principal?

PRINCIPAL CLEARY
Well, you go to college for
childhood education, get a masters,
work as a teacher for about-

RAZA
Will turning on my peers help?
Those girls over there are drinking
potions.

PRINCIPAL CLEARY
Potions?

RAZA
Aren't you going to do something?

PRINCIPAL CLEARY
I haven't technically seen anything
so...
(shrugs)
Nothing I can do.

RAZA
I'll help you.

Raza turns on her heel. She marches back to the popular
girls, and snatches Michelle's purse.

MICHELLE
Hey!

Raza pulls the alcohol out of her purse, waves it around.

RAZA
As you can clearly see, they are
drinking!

PRINCIPAL CLEARY
Hey don't-

Raza SMASHES the bottle on the ground. She marches back to
stand with Cleary.

She turns to look down at Michelle and the other girls with
her arms folded, lips curled into a satisfied sneer.

RAZA
And what are we going to do with
the rule breakers, Cleary?

Cleary rubs the bridge of his nose.

PRINCIPAL CLEARY
I guess, go to my office, girls.

RAZA
Don't give them trial! Just send
them straight to the dungeon!

The popular girls grumble and exit the gym. Michelle
purposely bumps into Raza on her way out.

PRINCIPAL CLEARY
You too, uh, what did you say your
name was?

RAZA
You may address as Your Highness,
the Grand Princess Raza.

PRINCIPAL CLEARY
Raza. My office, please.

EXT. SCHOOL - BASEBALL FIELD

Emily's walks, her arms crossed tight against the cold but
more importantly to her, covering her goofy dress.

AMIR
Emily?

Emily turns to see Amir sitting in the baseball dugout.

AMIR (CONT'D)
What are you doing here?

EMILY
I was at the dance, but I left.
What are you doing in the dugout?

AMIR
Nothing, just...something stupid...

He tugs at the sleeves of his jacket.

EMILY
Was it about your jacket?

Amir looks mortified.

AMIR
Is it that bad!?

Emily laughs.

EMILY
No, it's a good jacket! Way better
than this stupid dress. I couldn't
go in there in this.

Amir blushes.

AMIR
I think it looks nice.

Emily blushes back, then starts to shiver.

EMILY
Can you help me? I need to get my,
uh, friend. I'm worried about her.

AMIR
Raza? She's kinda scary, isn't she?

EMILY
She's not that bad. Could you get
her for me? I can't go back in
there.

Emily shivers again.

Beat.

AMIR
My dad's about to get here, but--

Amir takes off his jacket, and tosses it to Emily.

AMIR (CONT'D)
Here. If you really hate your
dress.

EMILY
(touched)
Thanks.

She pulls the jacket on as a car pulls up and HONKS.

AMIR
Raza's lucky she's got a friend
like you.

He leaves. Emily smiles after him.

INT. SCHOOL - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

Michelle and the other popular girls are in full-blown TEARS.

MICHELLE
 (sobbing)
 We- didn't- mean- to-

RAZA
 This is pathetic. He hasn't even
 asked a question yet.

Principal Cleary hands the girls a BOX OF TISSUES.

RAZA (CONT'D)
 (to Cleary)
 False sense of security. Good move.

PRINCIPAL CLEARY
 Now, girls--

Renewed WAILING interrupts his mild statement.

RAZA
 (to girls, with disgust)
 It's hardly even fun when you break
 this easily. I'll say one thing for
 the rebels, they held up under
 questioning.

PRINCIPAL CLEARY
 Ok, I think we're done here.

Raza leaps up.

RAZA
 Which way to the dungeons then?
 I'll escort them.

PRINCIPAL CLEARY
 No, Raza, I want to speak to you.
 The rest of you may leave.

The popular girls get up and file out, sniffing. From
 beneath her hair, Michelle WINKS at Raza.

RAZA
 You little--!

The door SLAMS behind the popular girls.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY OUTSIDE OFFICE

Emily's making her way back to the dance when: around the
 corner walks HER MOM, looking at her phone. AAA!

Emily, desperate for somewhere to hide, opens the bathroom door next to her INSIDE: MICHELLE AND THE POPULAR GIRLS.

Emily looks back at her mom, she's getting closer!

Emily DIVES across the hall into the bathroom just as her mom looks up.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

The popular girls adjust their makeup and giggle amongst themselves.

MICHELLE
Ok, that girl is a *total* freak!

Another popular girl notices Emily.

POPULAR GIRL #1
(under breath)
Speaking of freaks...

They all turn to Emily. Emily puts on a brave face.

EMILY
Hey, Michelle.

MICHELLE
What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be hiding in a hole somewhere?

EMILY
I'm looking for my- friend.

MICHELLE
(scoffs)
Your only friends are in those weird books.

EMILY
That's not true. We used to be friends.

The other popular girls TITTER.

MICHELLE
Keyword: used to.

EMILY
That's two words.

MICHELLE

(rolls eyes)

God, you're the worst kind of nerd.
No wonder you missed my birthday to
go to a book release.

EMILY

Is that why we aren't friends
anymore?

MICHELLE

We're not friends anymore because
you're totally boring. Get a
personality that doesn't come from
a book and then talk to me. Now
MOVE.

Michelle and her friends push past Emily toward the door.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Oh, and tell your *friend* to watch
her back around school. If she
doesn't get expelled, of course.

Michelle smirks.

EMILY

Oh no.

INT. SCHOOL - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

Raza yells at Cleary.

RAZA

You just let them go? After that
insubordination!?

PRINCIPAL CLEARY

They are not your subordinates,
Raza, they are your peers. And if
you're going to fit in around here--

RAZA

Fit in? With the great unwashed? I
was never meant to fit in.

PRINCIPAL CLEARY

(gently)

I think you may have an inflated
sense of yourself--

RAZA

No, of course I don't. I know exactly who I am, and what I'm destined to do.

PRINCIPAL CLEARY

What is that?

RAZA

Rule this world.

PRINCIPAL CLEARY

(chuckles)

Well, I'm glad you have ambitions. But if you want to rule the world, don't you think it'd be good for people to like you?

RAZA

I don't see why that's necessary.

PRINCIPAL CLEARY

Take the other kids, for example. If you want to get along with them, it's best to speak to them as equals, not as if you're superior.

RAZA

But I am.

PRINCIPAL CLEARY

No, you're not. And when you act like you are, people are put off.

RAZA

So I should lie to them?

PRINCIPAL CLEARY

I wouldn't call it lying.

RAZA

It would be a lie not to call it lying.

PRINCIPAL CLEARY

It would- what?

Raza sighs.

RAZA

Clearly, you are not the man I should be talking to if I want to get ahead in this world.

(MORE)

RAZA (CONT'D)

I'm going back to the dance, where
at least there is punch.

Mr. Cleary is stung. Raza makes for the door.

PRINCIPAL CLEARY

Hey, wait a minute!

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY OUTSIDE OFFICE

Emily pokes her head out of the bathroom. Coast is clear. But
Cleary's office is empty. She heads back to the:

INT. SCHOOL GYM - CONTINUOUS

Emily opens the door to the gym, steeling herself for the
stares, but this time absolutely no one looks at her.

Because they're all looking at:

RAZA

Unhand me, scum!

Raza waves the punch ladle at Principal Cleary.

PRINCIPAL CLEARY

(wearily)

I haven't touched you.

RAZA

I refuse to be punished just for
informing on others! If anything, I
should be rewarded.

The whole school has gathered around by now. Emily notices
two students watching the scene and gossiping.

STUDENT #1

God, what a narc.

STUDENT #2

(giggles)

Yeah, way to tank your reputation
on your first day.

Emily looks concerned.

STUDENT #1

And *what* is she wearing?

Now, Emily looks mad.

She begins to call out:

EMILY

Ra--!

The word dies in her throat.

Jenny, her mother, has just walked over. Emily shrinks back into the crowd.

JENNY

What's going on here? How can I help?

RAZA

I am being oppressed! This must be what the rebels are always complaining about.

JENNY

Honey, where is your mother? Are you new here?

RAZA

Yes, I am new here, and my mother is dead. Well technically, she never existed.

Emily's eyes widen in the crowd: *oh, no.*

JENNY

What about your father?

RAZA

Oh, if my father knew how I was being treated he'd throw you all into his volcano!

JENNY

His what? Honey, where are you from?

Raza opens her mouth to answer, but Emily leaps out from the crowd before she can.

EMILY

Hawaii!

JENNY

What? Emily, what are you doing here, you're supposed to be grounded.

EMILY

I came to get Raza, she's my--

All eyes are on her, waiting for an answer.

EMILY (CONT'D)

--uh, pen pal. From Hawaii.

RAZA

What is Hawaii?

EMILY

HA-HA! She has such a strange sense of humor.

STUDENT #1

(whispers)

SO weird.

STUDENT #2

(whispers)

Both of them!

Emily blushes deeply, but soldiers on.

EMILY

And she's also home-schooled. And, her dad isn't so great. So...I brought her here. If she's causing problems, it's only cuz she doesn't know better, but

(eyes connect with Raza's)

she's my friend, so...

(trails off)

JENNY

(touched)

Oh, Emily.

RAZA

(incredulous)

I am not your--

JENNY

Why didn't you tell me sooner?

PRINCIPAL CLEARY

What a selfless thing you've done, Emily.

Raza cocks her eyebrow.

POPULAR GIRL #1

Yah, that's actually kind of cool.

Michelle elbows the other popular girl, but the damage is done. Murmurs of agreement ripple through the crowd.

PRINCIPAL CLEARY

(to Jenny)

Jenny, you've raised a heckuva daughter. I'm so delighted you're running for school board president, I'd be honored if you were my boss.
(winks)

Both of Raza's eyebrows leap to her hairline.

JENNY

(laughs)

Well, it's not a done deal yet.

RAZA

(blurts)

Why? Is there opposition to be crushed?

Everyone stares at her, but then Emily starts fake-laughing. Soon, they join in.

JENNY

Oh, Emily's right, you have quite the sense of humor!

Raza looks confused and angry.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOL - NIGHT

Among the crowd of students leaving the dance, Raza and Emily walk together.

RAZA

I've decided to confer unto you a high honor.

EMILY

Oh yeah? What's that?

RAZA

You are to be my translator, and in rare instances, my tutor. It's clear I don't understand your world and I may need guidance if I am to rule it. You'll be in my Imperial Guard.

EMILY
I'm not sure if I want to, the
Imperial Guard are the bad guys.

RAZA
It's only until I find better
people, obviously.

One of the popular girls stumbles by, drunk, trips and falls
into the grass.

RAZA (CONT'D)
Though I must say I'm not hopeful.

The girl points at Raza.

POPULAR GIRL #2
I know who you are, you're from
those books!

RAZA
(shouts over shoulder)
I'm from Hawaii!

Emily smiles.

EMILY
Yeah, I'll help you. I can be your
conscience.

RAZA
No, I don't need one of those.

EMILY
What about a friend?

RAZA
I don't need that either, really.
But I can see that you do, so...

She extends her arm for an incredible formal handshake.

RAZA (CONT'D)
....friends.

Emily smiles and shakes her hand.

TAG

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Raza and Emily sit on Emily's bed, reading *Tide and Tempest* books. Amir's jacket is draped over Setra's fishbowl.

A storm RAGES OUTSIDE, pelting rain, wind, and LIGHTNING can be seen out the window.

Raza sighs loudly.

RAZA

It is one thing to be fictional, it is quite another to be so poorly written.

Emily laughs, Raza looks up sharply.

RAZA (CONT'D)

Are you mocking me?

Emily gestures to the book she's reading.

EMILY

No, it's a scene with Gulliver, you know, the red panda with the monocle?

RAZA

Oh yes. I always knew that thing was little more than comic relief.

EMILY

Actually, Gulliver steals the keys to your dungeons and sets all the prisoners loose.

RAZA

When!?

EMILY

During the final battle.

(smirks)

Y'know, when the good guys win.

Raza scowls.

RAZA

"The good guys win". A sure sign you've been written by a hack. As if the world were so black and white.

THROUGH THE WINDOW: LIGHTNING STRIKES the charred tree in the backyard. It smolders, then begins to GLOW with white light.

Raza flips through the pages of the book.

RAZA (CONT'D)

For instance, I see no mention of
the Empire's literacy program in
here.

THROUGH THE WINDOW: Out of the hole in the tree, a RED PANDA WITH A MONOCLE pokes out his head, then tumbles to the ground.

RAZA (CONT'D)

I really should find that author
and give her a piece of my--

She's interrupted by the red panda's sudden WAIL.

Startled, Raza and Emily both turn their heads...

OUT.