

KODAMA

木靈

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ON BLACK

In Japanese Tradition,
spirits were known to inhabit certain trees,
and the cutting of these trees
would bring misfortune to all responsible.
These spirits,
and the trees that inhabit them are

Kodama.

木靈

FADE IN

EXT. ISLAND - EAST CHINA SEA - MORNING

SUPER: REMOTE ISLAND - EAST CHINA SEA

White sandy beach as far as the eye can see. Lush green canopy of huge thick trees cascade up the mountainside.

An island paradise.

A BOY (8) sprints down the beach toward the cove, hardwood sword in hand. Eyes terrified.

He runs to a conclave of dwellings nestled against the cove and up the mountainside.

These buildings have been here for centuries. Intricately carved and decorated. Revered.

The boy ducks around a corner of a dwelling and hides behind a stack of woven baskets. Tucks himself tight. Sword ready.

Catches his breath. Steels himself. Ready to spring out. One...two...

He pounces from behind the basket, hardwood katana sword outstretched.

BOY

AAHHH!

And smack dab into one of the largest, muscular, and scariest warriors you could imagine. As if The Rock was made from actual rock covered in ritual tattoos.

This is HERU.

Heru slowly unsheathes the five-foot steel katana sword and lifts it overhead, eyes bulging, chest puffed out. ROARS.

HERU
AAAAAAAHHHHHH!!!

Any courage the boy once had is gone.

He panics for a moment, scared. But then his eyes steel, and he assumes a proper warrior pose. Sword balanced. Ready.

Heru smirks.

The boy thrusts his sword forward with a loud GRUNT.

Heru smiles. Nods. *Proud*.

Heru parries, tapping the boy's sword away. Guides the boy through the next warrior pose.

A lesson in progress.

A SECOND BOY runs up and joins in the battle as Heru spars with them masterfully. Both try to impress Heru with their tactics, skilled for their age. They have been taught well.

A loud BELL echoes downward from the mountainside.

Heru turns to look toward the source. *Time to go*.

The BOY takes advantage of the distraction and lunges at Heru. His hardwood sword jabs him in the belly. Hard.

Heru turns at him with rage in his eyes. Yanks the sword from his hand.

The playfulness in the boys eyes shift to terror. *Oh shit*.

Heru pauses, hardwood sword raised overhead.

Chuckles. Ruffles their hair.

The boys sigh in relief.

Then Heru slaps his son's butt HARD with the hardwood sword. Ouch...that's going to leave a mark.

HERU (cont'd)
(translated from Japanese)
Go help your mother.
(to Second Boy)
You too.

BOY
Ai, Father.

SECOND BOY
Ai, Heru.

They take their swords and run off, as Heru looks back to the wooded mountain enclave where the monk's bell RINGS.

EXT. WOODED SHRINE - LATER

Under the canopy of large Sugi pine trees, a small clearing centered around three LARGE TREES positioned in a triangle. A bell in the center.

An elderly man in ornamental robes, MAGI (muscular, long white beard), strikes the bell with a large wooden hammer.

He strikes it one last time, the CHIME deep and low, replaces the hammer on its stand, then bows to it.

MEN IN ROBES walk silently up from the beach path through the woods and into the clearing, then kneel around the three center trees, each taking their proper place.

Meditation begins.

Magi steps toward a raised platform, where a special MAN kneels, facing the group. Head bowed. He is peaceful, yet hard. There is greatness here, reverence.

This is SOHI, their leader.

Dressed in black robes, Sohi turns his gaze slowly to Magi. Stern. Serious.

SOHI
You are certain?

Magi bows to him, then kneels beside him.

MAGI
It has been seen.

SOHI
Then we must prepare.

Heru jogs up the path, through the clearing to the platform. Bows, then kneels alongside Sohi, to his left.

Sohi nods.

Magi and Heru face the triangle and their brothers, then bow toward the trees. Everyone does the same.

In the center, three trees spaced thirty feet apart. Tall, wide, majestic Sugi Pines. The bark formation unique, almost FACIAL. One, a gnarled beard. On another, a chiseled jaw.

The one in front, facing the raised platform, is different. Polished smooth, not carved. Expertly crafted. A TOTEM.

All are bowed toward it. Only Sohi remains upright.

Eyes focused intently, yet in complete peace. A spiritual connection made.

Sohi HUMS a singular note in perfect pitch. Holds it longer than what seems humanly possible.

It is the only sound in the forest.

Sohi glares into the eyes of the Totem as he HUMS.

The Totem vibrates as a trail of BLACK OOZE seeps from its carved and polished eyes.

INT. KEELUNG CITY OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

SUPER: KEELUNG CITY, TAIWAN

CHAD LIVINGSTON (37, blond hair, blue eyes, smothered in white privilege) stands at the penthouse window overlooking the park and harbor side, yelling into the air.

CHAD

I don't give a shit how it gets
done, just do it! Stay on schedule!

EXT. MARINA - DAY

JACK CHANG (48, hard-nosed, gruff) holds a phone to his ear.

JACK

Deposit the money and I'll take
care of the rest.

Hangs up and whistles toward a group of boats, waving his finger around in the air.

JACK (cont'd)

Let's move out!

INT. KEELUNG CITY OFFICE BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Chad stares at the dead phone in his hand.

The office intercom BUZZES. It's his SECRETARY.

SECRETARY (O.S.)
Sir, your appointment is here.

Chad walks to his desk and pauses. Gulps. Pushes a button.

CHAD
Send him in.

He collects himself, demeanor shifting completely. Smarm and charm activated.

The door opens as the secretary guides the CLIENT inside.

Chad crosses the office to meet him. Holds out his hand.

CHAD (cont'd)
Just got the good news. Everything
is right on schedule.

Client's face is emotionless. Leaves him hanging.

Chad guides him toward his desk to sit, the smarm wearing off. Nervous.

Client stands silent.

CHAD (cont'd)
And...oil and freight are secured.
The operation begins shortly.

A very uncomfortable moment passes between them.

Chad's knows he's either dead or rich. The next few seconds will tell which one.

Client reaches inside his jacket.

Dead.

Client slowly pulls his hand out holding a long, black envelope. Aims it at Chad like a gun.

Then lowers it on the desk. A large TIGER emblem on it.

Client turns and walks out. Silent.

Chad takes the envelope. Looks inside.

Exhales.

Rich.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

CHIA-JUNG 'CJ' LI (23, ponytail, fit) tosses clothes into a duffel while another woman, ANNYA (24, short pink-tipped blonde hair, glasses) sits on the bed sipping her drink.

ANNYA

You've been after Chad for over a year now.

Chia-Jung looks over at her. Edgy.

CHIA-JUNG

What do you mean?

Annya peers over the edge of her drink.

ANNYA

C'mon CJ, it's so obvious. You want him to pop the question.

CHIA-JUNG

(relieved)

No, no, no. It's serious, but not like that. You packed yet?

Annya waves her off.

ANNYA

You know me, I need your special touch.

CHIA-JUNG

Well, the sooner you help me finish, the sooner we can get to the marina.

Annya lifts her drink, toasts, and sips.

ANNYA

Got my hands full already.

Chia-Jung's phone CHIMES. Glances at Caller ID. Answers it as she turns away from Annya.

CHIA-JUNG

We were just talking about you.

INT. KEELUNG CITY OFFICE BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Chad is all smiles as he looks at the check with all the zeroes in his hand, staring out the window toward the water.

CHAD

Of course you were. We have a lot to celebrate tonight. You ready to have a great weekend?

INTERCUT BETWEEN CHIA-JUNG AND CHAD ON PHONE

Chia-Jung walks over to the closet, searches through different outfits, pulls out a stunning red one.

CHIA-JUNG

You know it. Can't wait to hear about your good news.

CHAD

You gonna pack that slinky red number I like so much?

CHIA-JUNG

You'll just have to wait and see.

CHAD

Meet me at the boat.

CHIA-JUNG

Catch ya' later.

Chia-Jung pulls the red dress, along with a couple others out of the closet, and lays them on the bed.

Annya sees the dress. Smiles.

ANNYA

Ooh, that's hot.

EXT. EAST CHINA SEA - LATER

Jack stands on the deck of a forty-foot patrol boat, wind and spray hit his face as it speeds ahead, sun at his back.

He turns and sees the crew of at least ten men sit, mull, and joke about. All of them armed.

Then shifts his focus out on the FOUR other patrol boats behind his wake, following close. Battle formation.

Turns his attention back to an island in the distance. Getting closer.

EXT. ISLAND BEACH - LATER

Sohi stares across the water as the sun sets. Silent.

Turns and walks toward the village. With purpose.

As he passes through, everyone works intently. Women and children gather and stack piles of rocks, men with bows and arrows run up the hillside.

The two boys from earlier apply war paint on their face, small steel katana blades at their side.

Play time is over.

EXT. FOREST - LATER

Sohi rushes up the path toward the shrine, as Heru approaches him in full battle robes.

HERU
We are ready.

SOHI
I will need you and Magi close.

HERU
But the village-

Sohi puts his hand on Heru's shoulder. Stern.

SOHI
Hurry. But stay close.

Heru nods, then hustles down the hillside path.

Sohi watches him go, then heads to the shrine.

EXT. WOODED SHRINE - LATER

Magi concentrates and prepares small berry-sized capsules of BLUE POWDER as Sohi approaches. Without looking up, Magi finishes up and leads Sohi to the center of the triangle.

MAGI
We must hurry.

SOHI
There is no other way?

MAGI
No.

Magi removes the hammer from its stand and RINGS the bell. Its tone HUMS through the forest.

He turns and bows to Sohi.

Sohi bows back then kneels before the Totem.

Magi pulls a powder capsule from his pouch, cups his hand, and extends them to the sky and CHANTS a mantra.

MAGI (cont'd)
Kodama Inochi Hi.

The capsule IGNITES and burns a low BLUE FLAME in his hand.

Sohi joins in the chant.

Magi brings the blue flame to his lips. Sips it in.

Then presents the flame to Sohi, who cups Magi's unburned hands in his, and brings the blue flame to his lips.

Closes his eyes and bows toward Totem. Holds the pose.

Rises. Looks up.

Opens his eyes and looks to Magi.

Blue flames GLOW AFIRE in both of their eyes.

EXT. ISLAND BEACH - TWILIGHT

The boats now ashore, teams of armed men dressed in black scatter toward the shoreline in formation.

Jack fastens his munition belt, locks a magazine into his rifle, and directs traffic on his radio.

JACK
Teams Alpha and Bravo, secure the beachhead. Charlie and Delta, take the hillside. Echo, secure the perimeter. Copy, then maintain radio silence.

Affirmatives crackle back. Then silence as the men advance.

EXT. ISLAND VILLAGE - DUSK

A villager rushes out of a hut and is immediately struck down by a bullet.

A mercenary steps into the hut. Several muffled gunshots go off, and then he steps back out.

As he does, the blade of a large katana blade slides through him like a knife in butter.

Heru, eyes enraged, pulls out the blade and runs off, the mercenary falling to the sand.

MONTAGE OF VILLAGE BATTLE

- HILLSIDE: As the Charlie and Delta teams advance, a hail of arrows cut through the air and hit their helpless targets randomly. Two men are cut down, while the rest advance.

- BEACH: Alpha team swarms along the enclave of huts, as the villagers attack from vantage points on the mountainside with rocks, arrows, and swords.

Echo team picks off their positions easily from afar. Like shooting fish in a barrel.

Heru slips through the dusk, pulls out a dagger and slits the throat of a mercenary from behind, then rushes hillside.

- FOREST: Beta team advances through the woods, firing and felling villagers by the dozen.

- HILLSIDE: Heru remains hidden and cuts down another mercenary as he advances up toward the pathway.

Heru stops suddenly. Looks down.

The lifeless body of a boy, sword in hand.

He kneels down, turns the body over.

The boy from the beach.

His Son.

Dead.

Lifts him tight to his chest and ROARS out a primal scream.

Carries him as he rushes up the path.

END MONTAGE

EXT. WOODED SHRINE - LATER

Sohi stands before Magi, sips from a wooden chalice. Magi turns and strikes the bell with the hammer.

As the TONE passes through the forest, Magi raises the chalice to his lips and sips. Strikes the bell again.

A mercenary approaches from the path and takes aim at Magi.

He's about to pull the trigger when his head DETACHES from his body, the full force of a katana blade severing flesh from bone. The body falls to the ground.

Heru picks up his son and hurries to Sohi's side. Rage and anguish as he looks to Magi.

HERU

Save him!

MAGI

It is too late.

Heru drops his head. Sohi places his hand on his shoulder.

SOHI

We will avenge them. Hurry.

Heru turns to Magi, who pulls out a powder capsule and extends his hands upward. It IGNITES into blue flame.

Sohi pulls out his katana and rushes into the darkness.

Heru kneels before a chanting Magi and starts the ritual.

EXT. HILLSIDE - CONTINUOUS

A pair of mercenaries approach the shrine and watch the mysterious blue flame being sipped from Magi's hand.

They look at each other. *What the fuck?*

Both shrug and take aim.

Sohi removes the arm from the first with a single slice from his blade, then pivots and slides the blade through the heart of the second, then removes it just as easily.

The first mercenary pivots and falls backward, grabbing the stub as blood spurts out. He's about to scream when Sohi's blade slits his throat open. Blood streams everywhere.

Sohi turns and hurries back toward the shrine.

EXT. WOODED SHRINE - CONTINUOUS

Magi strikes the bell with the hammer, as Heru rises, eyes ABLAZE in blue fire.

Sohi joins them, as they form a triangle inside the triad of trees. Sohi in front of Totem, Magi in front of the gnarled bearded pine, and Heru in front of the chiseled jaw trunk.

Magi CHANTS louder. An AURA connects them. A light blue glow, forming a triangle between them.

Teams of mercenaries encircle them.

Magi grabs two of the capsules, one in each hand and crosses his arms in an X across his chest, his MANTRA louder now.

His fists IGNITE into blue flame, and he extends them outward quickly, shooting torrents of blue fire into the darkness.

Each ball of fire hits its target, as if guided. Charlie team bursts into flame and fall to their knees. WAILING.

Delta team closes in and opens fire all at once. A hail of bullets on the final three standing.

They absorb the bullets as each lean back against their perspective Sugi trees: Sohi onto Totem, Magi onto the aged and knotted pine, and Heru against the strongest trunk.

Unrelenting, they chant a MANTRA as the blue AURA spreads outward, connecting each of them and their trees.

SOHI/HERU/MAGI
Kodama. Kodama. Kodama.

Magi brings his bloodied arms into an X across his chest, then extends them quickly, one toward Heru and the other toward Sohi. The blue flame extends outward to them.

Sohi and Heru do the same, connecting the flame into a triangle. Each repeating their mantra.

SOHI/HERU/MAGI (cont'd)
Kodama. Kodama. Kodama

With all his remaining strength, Sohi HUMS the pitch perfect NOTE with his last breath.

The blue flames collapse on themselves and engulf each of the three trees without burning them.

The bell RINGS without being struck. The TONE echoes through the woods.

The three collapse dead against each trunk as the blue flame seeps into each tree like water through roots.

It is done.

EXT. MARINA - LATER

Chad and LIN (29, short hair, fit) sip drinks on the back deck of the 56-foot sailing yacht, *Cool Change*, moored to the dock as Annya and Chia-Jung walk up like movie-stars.

The driver carries their bags. By the looks of it, they could be gone for a month.

LIN

All this? For two days?

ANNYA

Oh shut up. Like you didn't pack anything.

Lin looks over at Chad, shrugs his shoulder.

LIN

You're looking at it.

ANNYA

Well help me get on board and let me look at it closer.

Lin helps the ladies on board, and Annya snuggles into him as they tease one another.

The CAPTAIN takes the ladies' bags from the driver, stages them at the galley steps, then gets the lines from the dock. All business.

Chad pulls out a bottle of champagne and POPS it.

CHIA-JUNG

My favorite sound!

Pours it across four flutes, fills them up. Chia-Jung passes them around as Chad lifts his.

CHAD

Big day today! Here's to us!

LIN

Hell yeah!

CHIA-JUNG
 (curious)
 Can't wait to hear more.

Annya clinks Chia-Jung's glass.

ANNYA
 To us!

Chad flips a switch and music plays, as the ladies start to dance. The boys clink their glasses together.

The boat pulls away from the dock and out into the harbor.

EXT. COOL CHANGE - NIGHT

Music and drinks are still flowing, as the ladies stretch out on long seats up front, laughing at their own jokes.

Chad and Lin light up cigars nearby.

ANNYA
 Gross! Take that downwind!

They head to the back of the boat. Lin looks over his shoulder, then gets serious.

LIN
 So, what did he say?

CHAD
 Not a damn thing. I thought I was a dead man. Instead, we're golden.

LIN
 People have been trying to get that island for decades. Why now?

CHAD
 What do I care? What I do know is that we got it done and made a shit-ton of money.

He puffs from his cigar and smiles. Raises his glass.

Lin looks concerned. Clinks his glass anyway.

Chad's phone CHIMES. He pulls it out. UNKNOWN. Answers it.

CHAD (cont'd)
 Yeah, hello?

EXT. ISLAND VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

Jack stands outside the village, watching additional boats loaded with equipment come ashore, many already unloading.

JACK
Phase one complete.

INTERCUT BETWEEN CHAD AND JACK ON PHONE

Chad turns away from Lin slightly. Cups the phone.

CHAD
Any issues?

JACK
Lost more assets than expected.
That's going to cost.

CHAD
Not my problem, that's on you.

JACK
Our contract makes it your problem.

CHAD
Just get us back on schedule.

Chad hangs up. Swallows. Turns back to Lin.

LIN
Everything cool?

Smarm and charm. Takes a drag from the cigar.

CHAD
You know it.

Everything is definitely not cool.

EXT. WOODED SHRINE - MORNING

Scores of laborers cut down trees surrounding the enclave as others are pulled down the cleared out pathway to the beachhead and trimmed bare.

The WORK BOSS calls out orders, pointing to the triad of trees at the center of the shrine. Groups of three hit each of the trees with chainsaws. TIGER EMBLEMS on their clothes.