

AETHER TORRENT #21
"THE CRAFTSMAN'S WORK"

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. KAMEUJI'S WORKSHOP - NIGHT

Faint STONE-CHIPPING sounds ring through a very spacious workshop. A traditional Japanese forge stands by a more Western furnace and a surprisingly modern steam hammer.

Dozens of expertly crafted weapons stand and hang in cases and racks like a miniature museum. The steady CHIPPING sounds nearer.

More display cases in a wood-paneled room hold rows of animal carvings made in stone, metal and vessel materials. Most of the animals are turtles and tortoises.

A pair of muscular hands CHISELS at a hunk of granite where a rough section meets a smooth one.

GEN GIKOU KAMEUJI, a bald, bespectacled and samurai-mustached Japanese man in his early 60s, steps away from his work.

The flawless equine head of a kelpie (ref. episode 3) has been carved out of most of a 3' cube of rough granite.

Kameuji holds his chin, assessing his work. His loose white clothes only hint at his thick 6' 3" build.

Kameuji positions his chisel at the kelpie's neck --

And with a single powerful speed-blurred blow he HAMMERS the chisel, CRACKING the kelpie head off its foundation.

The head THUMPS on the wooden floor. Kameuji smiles.

KAMEUJI
That's all he's worth.

EXT. FOOTHILLS - DAY

It's morning. The river snakes between rolling foothills, somewhat narrower than further downstream. Heavily wooded mountains fill the horizon.

The 100-foot yacht is stuck in the river. KLAUSER and CIRRUS (wind tiger) look up at the sail above deck.

CIRRUS (V.O.)
Well, I could just tornado us
out of here. What do you think?

Klauser GWARKS skeptically.

TORI walks out in a tank-top and boxers, her hair disheveled.

TORI
(groggily)
Hey, why'd we stop?

CIRRUS (V.O.)
The river forked about an hour
back. Now it's too shallow.

TORI
(pushes hair aside)
Is depth all we need?

Tori suddenly stands at the bow, knife out and pants on. Her hair's in a ponytail yet still a mess. She takes a deep breath and makes a lifting motion with her knife.

The river lowers as water gathers under the boat --

And the boat SURGES ahead on a private wave.

Tori pilots the boat by controlling the wave. Cirrus goes back below deck.

CIRRUS (V.O.)
Nice work. I'mmunna take a nap.

TORI
'Kay. Thanks again, Cirrus.

Tori's expression appears distant.

TORI (V.O.) (CONT'D)
She's done nothing but work her
ass off since I met her.

INT. STOLEN YACHT - AVANI'S CABIN - DAY

AVANI sleeps in a light green nightgown we haven't seen before. Her cabin contains a dresser.

TORI (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 And Avani. Compared to the crap
 she's been through, I... well, I
almost can't complain.

NAUR'S CABIN

NAUR sleeps on his stomach. His gash has already taken on a lava-cracked pattern.

TORI (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 But Naur. Man. Naur.

EXT. FOOTHILLS - STOLEN YACHT - DAY

Tori sucks part of her lip.

TORI (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 And here *I* am, almost getting
 them all killed for a treasure
 run. It's selfish. I gotta do
 something rare. Maybe a gift.

She thinks. Something catches her attention.

A town lies ahead at the foot of a wooded mountain.

EXT. HUB AIRPORT - NIM-BUS - DAY

Business-dressed COMMUTERS walk down a boarding ramp to a smallish airship with the occupancy of a commuter train car. The word "NIM-BUS," with the dash, is painted on the airship.

INT. HUB AIRPORT - GATE 44 - DAY

TARASSAS and RANDALL'S MOTHER are the last ones in a long line, tickets in hand. Tarassas wears a pith helmet.

TARASSAS
 She could've at least sprung for
 first-class.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

That's Rin for you. Failures
ride commuter.

A MUSTACHED COMMUTER ahead of them glances back. An AIRPORT
RECEPTIONIST stamps commuters' tickets at the ramp gate.

MUSTACHED COMMUTER

Bosses are all the same, huh?
What do you folks do?

TARASSAS, RANDALL'S MOTHER

(automatic)
Deliveries.

The receptionist STAMPS the mustached commuter's ticket,
followed by Tarassas and Randall's Mother's.

MUSTACHED COMMUTER

Oh? Like shipping?

RANDALL'S MOTHER

We sent a package away before
securing its destination. All
things considered, it will stop
in Broken Axe. We hope.

COVERED RAMP

The last three commuters enter and descend.

MUSTACHED COMMUTER

I hear that. Once I misprinted a
region code and spent a whole
day tracking and fixing it.

TARASSAS

Rin said *not* to "fix" this pack-
ackage, right, Mod?

Randall's Mother pounds Tarassas's helmet with hollow KLONK
sound. The mustached one continues on.

TARASSAS (CONT'D)

Sorry, "Randall's Mother?"

RANDALL'S MOTHER

Only find where the package is
going. We can't risk a big fight
with my poor Randall laid up.

TARASSAS

To say nothing of Green.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

Two MECHANICS carefully CUT and SNAP parts of GREEN's joint-locked armor with metal-cutting shears. Only his head and arms up to the elbows are freed.

MECHANIC

Gods, it's tight as a rivet.

GREEN

Guide well your shears about my
tail, good--ow!

EXT. BROKEN AXE - SHORELINE - DAY

A town spreads out in the foothills on one side of the tributary. Its architecture is a blend of early Meiji-era Japan and the American Southwest. A wide road leads South.

Tori guides the wave to gently deposit the yacht on the shore at the edge of town. Klauser tilts his head.

TORI

Stay put a minute, big guy.

INT. STOLEN YACHT - NAUR'S CABIN - DAY

Cirrus sleeps on her side at the foot of Naur's bed. Naur, his robe bunched up around his waist, rests on his front and smiles at her.

Very soft FOOTSTEPS come from under the closed door.

AVANI'S CABIN

Avani sleeps facing away from her door. Tori carefully opens it and tiptoes in, heading for the dresser.

Tori's hands hover over the dresser.

TORI (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Anders style clothing bureau,
 famously squeaky rollers...

Tori silently opens the second drawer by lifting the underside and pulling out. It contains Green's broken-handled hammer, the mythrill plates from his armor, and Avani's ingot.

TORI (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 (grinning)
 Here we are. Perfect gift material.

Avani continues sleeping. Very subtle RUSTLING and a few soft off-screen CLINKS fail to wake her.

EXT. BROKEN AXE - SIDE-STREET - DAY

Kameuji walks down a paved street in Broken Axe, carrying an empty bag over one shoulder.

A few CIVILIANS give Kameuji a wide berth.

INT. MAYOR'S RESIDENCE - DAY

Fat-nosed and bushy-eyebrowed MAYOR BAKU stretches in a luxurious bed. His hand falls on a lump in the sheets.

Baku opens his eyes and blinks twice. He pulls back the sheets, revealing the severed head of the incomplete kelpie statue. He BOLTS UPRIGHT and SCREAMS.

EXT. BROKEN AXE - MAIN STREET - DAY

A couple buildings with a more traditional Japanese flavor blend with the Western ones a bit roughly. Automobiles pass.

Tori rides Klauser down the town's main artery with her barely-packed duffel bag making CLINKING noises on her back.

TORI (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Man. How old *is* this town? Some of the buildings look pre-con. Any artisans here might not be worth the delay...

Mayor Baku's voice thunders from nearby. Tori takes interest.

MAYOR BAKU (O.S.)

How dare you give me an
incomplete product?!

INTERSECTION

Around a corner, Baku confronts Kameuji with two sunglassesed, broad-shouldered GUARDS behind him. A car is parked at the curb. A small crowd has gathered to watch.

KAMEUJI

You declined to complete my
commission process, Mayor Baku.

MAYOR BAKU

You expect your clients to throw
away their lives for your work?!

Tori brings Klauser around to spectate too.

KAMEUJI

I *expect* my clients to learn
some of the subtleties of being
a craftsman. It is only fair.

MAYOR BAKU

Fine. Then you will subtly craft
me a refund, lest my guards
subtly craft some broken bones.

The guards CRACK their knuckles in unison.

KAMEUJI

I have reshaped uglier material
than them.

Tori looks impressed. The crowd OOHS encouragingly.

Kameuji resettles his glasses with his thumb.

KAMEUJI (CONT'D)

But luckily I dislike violence.
Your five thousand cennars lie
under your bed. Satisfied?

Mayor Baku stares up at Kameuji. Baku makes a gesture and his heavies return to the car.

MAYOR BAKU

You're a madman, you know. No one could do what you demand for a commission, Gen Gikou Kameuji.

Tori GASPS at the name. It's a happy gasp of recognition.

TORI

Uh--! I, I could! Let me!

The crowd takes sudden interest in Tori. She's easy to spot up on Klauser. Kameuji and Baku notice her too.

TORI (CONT'D)

That is, if Eyebrows there wasn't being sarcastic and you're *really* the master stone-crafter and damn good metalsmith Gen Gikou Kameuji.

Kameuji smiles. Baku self-consciously fingers an eyebrow.

KAMEUJI

Fine! You're young, perhaps you can complete my requirement.

TORI

Awesome! What do I do?

Kameuji's glasses reflect the sun and shine opaquely. His smile remains fixed.

KAMEUJI

Follow me through Hell.

INT. NIM-BUS - DAY

The airship seats are arranged exactly like a commuter train.

A HEAVY COMMUTER noisily eats a sandwich in an aisle seat and squeezes Tarassas and Randall's Mother toward a window. The width of the commuter's stubble-gray jaw is impressive.

Randall's Mother stares out the window. Foothills roll below.

RANDALL'S MOTHER (V.O.)
 Pity we're on business. Wonder
 how Gen's been doing...

EXT. BROKEN AXE - MARKETPLACE - DAY

Tori follows Kameuji through a pedestrian-only marketplace, gushing with adoration. The individual markets are mostly Japanese and mostly labeled in that language.

TORI
 You picked a great place to move to, sir, but I gotta say it doesn't look like Hell. Not that I believe in it anyway, outside of emphasizing a point. Y'know?

KAMEUJI
 We haven't begun yet. It's still early. Would you like some breakfast?

TORI
 Hell yes I would, sir!

FRUIT STAND

Kameuji walks up to a fruit stand. The VENDOR sees him coming and searches under the counter for something.

TORI (CONT'D)
 It's just so great to meet you, Mr. Kameuji. You work with stone, metal, even vessels like they were clay. Skill like that is rare -- no, *peerless*.

The fruit vendor produces a mesh draw-string bag full of peaches while Kameuji takes out his wallet.

KAMEUJI
 Do you think my skill came easily?

TORI

Well yeah. Some people are just high-water marks of quality in this or that. No common craftsman could make *this*.

Tori whips out her knife, flips it in her fingers and points it at Kameuji handle-first. The fruit merchant sticks his hands up as Kameuji unflinchingly looks at the weapon.

KAMEUJI

Well well. I see you aren't just another gushing fan.

Kameuji leaves a pair of paper bills on the counter and takes the bag of peaches. Tori sheathes her knife and the vendor SIGHS in relief.

Kameuji, Tori and Klauser resume walking. With the bag dangling from his arm, Kameuji takes out a peach and tears it apart in his thick fingers.

KAMEUJI (CONT'D)

You might like my commission process. If you survive it, you'll know what it means to be a craftsman of art.

TORI

What's it involve?

Tori reaches for the peaches. Kameuji SLAPS her hand down.

KAMEUJI

First, respect for your support.

Kameuji holds up a pit-free section of peach. Behind his back, Klauser SNIFFS at it and snaps it up. Kameuji keeps feeding him bits of peach as he speaks.

KAMEUJI (CONT'D)

Artists indulge in creation and study -- difficult skills to make marketable. Without others' support, we cannot exist.

(MORE)

KAMEUJI (CONT'D)

And without others to appreciate us, we have no reason to exist. How often have you overlooked the contributions of your mount?

Tori looks a little guilty. Klauser juggles a peach chunk down the length of his beak.

TORI

Well... not *that* often...

KAMEUJI

And you haven't described the commission you want. Is it just something for yourself?

TORI

(direct eye contact)

No. It isn't. I have some great samples of mythril in my bag there. I need them made into a gift for a friend of mine.

Kameuji CRACKS the peach pit in his fingers.

KAMEUJI

That's more like it. Now we can truly begin.

INT. STOLEN YACHT - AVANI'S CABIN - DAY

Avani stirs in her bed. Her eyes flutter open.

She rolls flat on her back if she isn't there already and splays her hands out at her sides.

AVANI

Support my day as you've supported my night.

She brings her hands together in a single soft CLAP.

The top drawer of her dresser opens with a ROLLING SQUEAK. A piece of paper lies on her perfectly-folded clothes, reading "CHECK SECOND DRAWER."

Avani lifts an eyebrow.

The second drawer SQUEAKS open. It holds only a folded note.

NAUR'S CABIN

Avani strides into Naur's cabin with the note unfolded in her hand. There's only enough room for one and a half strides.

AVANI (CONT'D)

Cirrus!

Cirrus rolls from her back to her side with an airy WHUMP and continues sleeping. Naur, on the bed, looks toward Avani and makes a shushing motion.

NAUR

(whispered)

Out like a flame. What is the matter?

AVANI

(whispered)

Tori's gone. She took Klauser and went "out for a walk" with the mythrill we... liberated.

Cirrus's paws twitch.

AVANI (CONT'D)

I checked outside. We're not hidden. We're a large target and only you two are armed.

NAUR

I see. Then let me help.

Naur pushes himself up. His giant scab CRACKS like glass in three places and he restrains a GRUNT.

Avani gently touches his shoulder.

AVANI

Don't, I can--

Naur sits up. His scab CRACKS a couple more times as he threads both arms through the sleeves of his robe.

NAUR

--Please. I can at least defend
Cirrus. She defended *me*.

Cirrus's paws twitch in her sleep.

Avani looks down at her. Nods at Naur.

HALLWAY

Avani walks the short distance from Naur's cabin to hers.

AVANI

I'll be fast. Lord only knows
what horrors we may face this
time.

EXT. LOW MOUNTAIN FOREST - DAY

Broken Axe is visible from one of the wooded mountains.
They're not nearly tall enough to have snow.

Tori rides Klauser behind Kameuji, following a thin beaten
path through the forest. She eats a peach.

KAMEUJI

With support, we can begin
working toward a goal. However,
sometimes things get in our way.

STEEP RAVINE

Kameuji steps out from the trees and stops at the sheer edge
of a rocky ravine. Tori abruptly halts Klauser.

TORI

Whoa.

The ravine is dozens of feet deep and twenty feet across. A
slow stream flows at the bottom.

KAMEUJI

This is crafter's block. You have all you need to begin work, and even a goal in mind, but you cannot progress.

TORI

There's gotta be a way around.

KAMEUJI

There is, if you have enough time. But will your support hold out while you search for one?

Tori seems to consider that. She scratches Klauser's neck.

TORI

He will. But I don't have time.

KAMEUJI

Then this is a line of death.
(bends down, stretching)
You may cross it, die in the attempt, or give up entirely.

The gap looks more impressive from above.

TORI

I can't give up. I took track and field back in school, but still, that's a hell of a gap.

Kameuji retreats several long paces into the woods.

KAMEUJI

Then use your support. If you are experienced enough...

Kameuji turns, DASHES for the ravine --

And LONG-JUMPS the twenty-foot gap.

He LANDS hard on his feet on the other side.

Tori's mouth hangs open.

KAMEUJI (CONT'D)

(turns, beckons)

You can pass any barrier.

Tori closes her mouth and GULPS. She looks at Klauser, who looks between her and the ravine as if to say "Are you nuts?"

Tori tilts back the handlebars of Klauser's saddle. Klauser backs up nervously.

TORI

We can do this, big guy.

KAMEUJI

It *has* to be "we."

Tori grips the handlebars. She SHOVES them forward and applies leg pressure.

Klauser DASHES straight ahead --

A claw grips the rocky edge and he VAULTS off --

Tori holds on tight and SUCKS AIR through her teeth --

Klauser only clears about eighteen feet. He COLLIDES with the opposite edge claws-first and SCRAMBLES for a foothold that isn't there.

Tori and Klauser plummet. Klauser GWARKS in panic.

Tori keeps hold of a handlebar and whips out her knife --

The slow stream SHOOTS UPWARD like a geyser.

It SPLASHES hard into Tori and Klauser, forcing them back up.

Kameuji wisely takes a step back.

The geyser lifts Tori and Klauser with nothing resembling careful support, bends toward Kameuji's side of the ravine and deposits them there.

The geyser falls away and SPLASHES heavily into the dry stream bed.

Tori instantly dries herself and Klauser with a SWIPE of her knife. Klauser's feathers FLUFF out.

Kameuji adjusts his glasses.

KAMEUJI

Excellent show of skill. But
that was the easy part.

TORI

(pats Klauser)
What comes next? I -- we can
handle it.

KAMEUJI

I'm glad you think so. Next you
face your critics.

EXT. BROKEN AXE - MAIN STREET - DAY

Avani walks down the street, alternating fretting and fuming.

AVANI (V.O.)

Dear Lord Below, why did you
guide her to take my link to
you? If our enemies strike now,
I cannot defend anyone!

INT. WINDOWED RESTAURANT - DAY

Mayor Baku moodily eats a big breakfast made mostly of eggs
by a restaurant window. His guards sit with him.

MAYOR BAKU

(grumbling)
Eyebrows... what *about* eyebrows?

The guards shrug.

Avani passes the window, sees Baku and KNOCKS on the glass.

AVANI (CONT'D)

(slightly muffled)
Excuse me, sir! Have you seen a
girl riding a dire kiwi pass by?
Kind of tall, had a ponytail?

EXT. BROKEN AXE - MAIN STREET - DAY

MAYOR BAKU

(slightly muffled)

The tourist? Probably eaten by
the mountain tengus. Go away!

Avani GASPS and runs off-screen.

Across the street, Tarassas and Randall's Mother watch her
leave. Randall's Mother smiles.

EXT. LOW MOUNTAIN FOREST - SHADED GROVE - DAY

Tori and Klauser follow Kameuji up the thin path. The trees
are older here and block out more of the sun. Dark, rounded
shapes fill the branches.

Tori tosses bits of peach. Klauser snaps them out of the air.

TORI

I see what you're doing, sir.
Not many artists bother to teach
their clients anything. But, um.

KAMEUJI

You don't quite understand how
this can be Hell?

TORI

Yeah. It's not an "art is
suffering" thing because, well,
we're not suffering. It's not a
"Hell is other people" thing
because I'm relying on someone
else to get through it. So how?

Kameuji stops. Tori does too.

KAMEUJI

Have you ever expressed a dream,
only to have it assaulted?

Tori looks aside at nothing.

FLASHBACK:

INT. CARAVAN HIDEOUT - DAY

ADDANC and some CARAVAN MEMBERS laugh derisively at a slightly younger, short-haired Tori in the Caravan's hideout.

ADDANC

You want to open a *museum*? Some dull dusty crypt full of relics you can't even sell, is it?

They laugh. Short-haired Tori doesn't.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. LOW MOUNTAIN FOREST - SHADED GROVE - DAY

Tori looks forward again.

TORI

Yeah.

Kameuji takes a peach out of the bag.

KAMEUJI

Have you ever put your heart and soul into something, only to have both ripped apart?

QUICK IMAGE:

KARRUN smiles toothily at us. It's the only way she smiles.

TORI

Yes.

Kameuji tosses the peach to himself, one-handed juggling.

KAMEUJI

Then you can face the creatures who exist only to shred your work before it is complete.

Kameuji HURLS the peach into the canopy.

It THUMPS against a dark hunched object on a branch. The object SHRIEKS and spreads its wings.

HORRIBLE SHRIEKING fills the canopy. All the dark shapes spring to life, FLAPPING their wings.

Tori and Klauser look up and around, clearly frightened.

TORI

What are those?

The shriekers are TENGUS, housecat-sized black and brown raven/owl hybrids with large, hooked, solid red beaks.

Kameuji steps behind a tree and stays there.

KAMEUJI

Tengus. Your spiteful critics.
Survive them.

The tengus descend. Tori whips out her knife.

SLOW STREAM

Avani SPRINTS across the stream. The ravine towers in the background. The tengu SHRIEKING faintly reaches her.

AVANI

Lord support my legs!

EXT. BROKEN AXE - SHORELINE - DAY

Naur leans on the mast, acting as lookout. He sees something.

Randall's Mother approaches the shoreline alone.

She carries two long, curved daggers. Sharp-eyed viewers might recognize them as belonging to Rin.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

You're far too easy to spot from
the air!

Naur releases the mast and takes a threatening step.

NAUR

Cirrus is napping! She has
worked hard! Do not disturb her!

Randall's Mother SWEEPS her borrowed daggers out and up.

A double-helix rises from the water and drills toward Naur.

Naur THRUSTS his hands at the double-helix and it EXPLODES into steam. He jumps off to the shore and runs at us.

His robed back makes several GLASS-CRACKING sounds.

Naur grits his teeth and runs down the shore, hands IGNITED.

Randall's Mother smirks and holds her daggers defensively.

Tarassas sneaks out of the woods by the shore and boards the yacht to off-screen sounds of WHOOSHING FIRE and HISSING STEAM.

EXT. LOW MOUNTAIN FOREST - SHADED GROVE - DAY

A water stream BLASTS away a diving tengu.

Another one dives directly at Tori. She SLASHES it in midair and directs its blood to SMASH another one against a tree.

Five tengus attack Klauser, who FLAILS around and only manages to claw one of them down. The others peck and claw his saddle and neck. He GWARKS throughout.

Tori WATER-BLASTS one away, PUNCHES another clear off the saddle and SLASHES a third.

The fourth attacks her with two more, CLAWING thin red lines into Tori's arms. Tori swiftly DECAPITATES the fourth, grabs the fifth by a leg and HURLS it into the sixth.

Three more descend on Tori from above, SHRIEKING and clawing. She SLASHES her knife back and forth as if fighting bees.

Kameuji calmly eats a peach. A tengu dives at him and he SWATS it out of the air in mid-sentence.

KAMEUJI

You'll need tough skin indeed to
keep them from bleeding away all
your joy for your work!

WOODED HILLSIDE

Avani PANTS heavily as she ascends a steep climb. The shrieking sounds clearer.

A GRAVELLY CROAK sound comes from somewhere above. Avani slowly cranes her head up.

Avani looks up at a bald-headed, blue-skinned tengu more raven-vulture than raven-owl. It's the size of a wolf. It shrugs its wings on its perch and eyes Avani intently.

EXT. BROKEN AXE - SHORELINE - DAY

Naur THROWS FIREBALLS at Randall's Mother, who DOUSES them with summoned water-balls from the river. She summons one extra which hits Naur and makes him SIZZLE and flinch.

INT. STOLEN YACHT - TORI'S CABIN - DAY

Tarassas rifles through Tori's messy drawers. They SQUEAK.

TARASSAS

Gotta be some clue as to where they're going.

AVANI'S CABIN

He rifles through Avani's drawers next, which also SQUEAK.

TARASSAS (CONT'D)

A map, a note, any-anything.

NAUR'S CABIN

Tarassas opens the door. He GASPS and covers his beak.

Cirrus snoozes serenely at the foot of the bed.

Tarassas tiptoes to the dresser with exceptional caution.

He sticks the tips of his red-orange rock hammers under the edge of the top drawer, lifts up and pulls out. No squeak.

Cirrus lazily sniffs the air.

CIRRUS (V.O.)

You doin' okay Naur?

Tarassas JERKS his head toward Cirrus, wide-eyed. He glances at his orichalcum hammers.

Cirrus nuzzles the floor.

CIRRUS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
You're a good kid... mmm...

Cirrus snores lightly.

Tarassas holds his breath. He peeks in the drawer.

Naur's white spiral disc lies inside with his folded cloak.

EXT. LOW MOUNTAIN FOREST - SHADED GROVE - DAY

A tengu claws and tears at Tori's duffel bag. Tori KICKS it away and SLASHES and misses a different one.

TORI
How many are there?!

Kameuji flicks a peach pit over his shoulder.

KAMEUJI
Critics never stop coming.

AVANI (O.S.)
Toriiiii!

KAMEUJI
Yes, lots of them -- eh?

Avani runs into the grove, chased by the vulture-tengu.

Tori WATER-BLASTS a tengu off Klauser and he claws at it.

TORI
Why are you out here?!

AVANI
I heard about the birds!

Kameuji peeks around his tree.

KAMEUJI
My word.

Tori SWINGS out a baseball-sized water sphere. The projectile SPLASHES hard in the vulture-tengu's head. It SHRIEKS and collides with a tree.

Avani reaches Tori's bag and unzips it. A tengu attacks her head. She SWATS it away and retrieves her ingot from the bag.

AVANI

How could you be so reckless,
Tori?! I need you to stay alive
and reveal my path!

Tori KICKS another tengu out of the air, twirls her knife and WATER-BLASTS another one. Klauser pounces on the kicked one and STOMPS repeatedly.

TORI

What's a path without side-
tracks, huh? Sometimes a goal
needs distractions!

Avani STRIKES the ground with her ingot.

Three RUMBLING pillars of earth strike three diving tengus.

An angled pillar knocks another off Klauser's saddle.

The vulture-tengu comes to. It straightens up and spreads its wings, but Kameuji's hand taps it on the head. It looks up.

CANOPY TOP

Repeated RUMBLINGS strike the forest. Tengus fly away. The vulture-tengu also flies, but seems to be thrown out first.

EXT. BROKEN AXE - SHORELINE - DAY

Naur is on his hands and knees. His skin SIZZLES and steams.

Randall's Mother twirls a dagger around in her fingers.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

It's a shame you're with the bad
guys. We could really use you.

NAUR

My friends are not bad.

Far behind Naur, Tarassas hops off the boat, waves excitedly two-armed and heads for the woods. Randall's Mother sees him.

NAUR (CONT'D)

Especially not Cirrus. She is...
she is almost like a mother.

Randall's Mother's expression turns sympathetic. She sheathes her daggers under her blouse behind her back.

RANDALL'S MOTHER

Then go back to her. No one else
will bother you here.

EXT. LOW MOUNTAIN FOREST - SHADED GROVE - DAY

The grove is tengu-free. All the grass is shriveled and a couple of the trees drop dry brown leaves.

Tori dries her numerous bleeding scratches, including at least one on her cheek. Avani calms down Klauser with some throat-scratching.

Kameuji CLAPS slowly. The peach bag hangs from an elbow.

KAMEUJI

Well done. I suppose this is the
friend you spoke of?

TORI

(introductory gestures)
Yeah. Avani Lahar, Gen Gikou
Kameuji.

AVANI

Oh, the famous metalsmith?

KAMEUJI

Among other things. I was
teaching your friend here about
the artistic process.

TORI

It's been hellish, all right. So
what comes after the critics?

SUNNY GROVE

A single banyan tree grows in a more sunlit grove. At this distance it seems to have grown around a giant boulder.

Kameuji leads Tori, Avani and Klauser in.

KAMEUJI

Do you know what this tree is?

AVANI

I do. It's a rock banyan. There are a lot of them back home.

KAMEUJI

Look closer at that rock.

On closer inspection, the boulder is a soil-packed tortoise shell fifteen feet in diameter.

AVANI

Is that... it *is*, that's a Great Tortoise shell!

TORI

I didn't know they lived here!

Kameuji flattens a palm on the massive shell. Tree roots penetrate it.

KAMEUJI

I met this one in his last days. He spent centuries crossing barriers and weathering attacks with all the layers of the earth for support. Over time the dust of experience gathered on his shell. Fertile ground for the right seed of an idea.

Kameuji pats one of the roots.

KAMEUJI (CONT'D)

One day the right seed landed.
(MORE)

KAMEUJI (CONT'D)

The work that grew had a life of its own, and lived beyond him.

AVANI

But it ended his life.

KAMEUJI

Does it matter? Without him, it may not have been made at all. And now part of him lives in it.

(distantly)

How do you think he would have felt if he had all that support, all that experience, all that time, and nothing to show for it -- nothing to prove he existed?

Tori seems to get it. Avani looks a little lost.

TORI

Certainly not like heaven. If you believe in that stuff.

AVANI

Why exactly did you bring her here and show her this? Do you two know each other?

KAMEUJI

We do now. And I put my clients through this process because it, even more than my stonework, is proof I exist.

TORI

How come?

KAMEUJI

You young craftswomen won't ever forget it.

Tori and Avani take a moment to think about that. Tori CHUCKLES and looks at Avani, who smiles back.

EXT. BROKEN AXE - SHORELINE - DAY

It's much closer to evening than morning. The party sits at the aft section of the stolen yacht while Klauser roots around in the shoreline.

Cirrus (human) rubs her eyes.

CIRRUS

You shoulda woken me up, I'd
have blown away those birds.

TORI

No biggie. So after that we went
back to his workshop. For the
price of the diamonds I
liberated from Addanc and
Randall's Mother, he sharpened
my knife, then made *this* stuff
out of the mythrill.

Avani pulls the hammer from Tori's abused duffel bag. It has a new unbroken one-hand handle and a tortoise is etched into the freshly-polished head.

AVANI

First he made the raizan
knight's weapon respectable. I
suppose I could use it, but I
much prefer this.

Avani next removes her ingot, made into a perfect trapezoidal prism with a flat, low-clearance handle on the top.

TORI

I still think it looks like a
clothes iron. But go on, show
them the last thing.

Avani takes a mythrill tortoise from the bag. The shell alone is about the size of a baseball. The whole work is shaped and etched with remarkable detail.

Avani passes it to Cirrus and Naur. They make ad-lib ADMIRING SOUNDS.

AVANI

It's a rare gift. Thank you
again, Tori. Very much.

TORI

(embarrassed head-scratch)
Just repaying for the violin.
But that's only *your* gift. Since
I'm apparently the official holy
path-revealer around here...

Naur turns the turtle over in his appraising hands. Cirrus
leans in close to examine it and looks up at her name.

TORI (CONT'D)

Cirrus. As soon as we're done
checking things out on Djittor,
I want to put all our focus into
finding your cubs.

Cirrus is speechless yet clearly appreciative.

TORI (CONT'D)

And Naur. If we *do* find a
treasure up there, you get first
crack at it. Okay?

NAUR

I... I do not know what to say.
Are you certain?

INT. NIM-BUS - DAY

Tarassas's stubby fingers trace over the black pictographs of
the spiral disc.

TORI (V.O.)

Of course! Without your disc, I
wouldn't have thought to go
there in the first place.

No one sits with him and Randall's Mother this time. Both of
them CHUCKLE at the disc.

FADE OUT