

Drip... drip... drip... one after another, the tiny bits of unidentifiable liquid dropped down from the sewer wall and into the channel. Rhythmically and in a steady manner, almost like a clock. They were kind of hypnotic. Usually Lessandro would have liked a calm distraction like this to calm his nerves and to help him concentrate on the task at hand, but right now it didn't have quite the intended effect. He rested his back against the filthy wall, still gasping for his breath after the shock of what just happened to him. He tried to put his hands at ease, taking a deep breath. He instantly regretted it.

*What in the world is this stench?* he wondered, while coughing his soul out, *Is this really how humans down at the blue sea put up with their filth? Back in Skypiea it was way more clean.*

Yes, Skypiea. His home. Well, at least it was his home, once. Before they came.

Lessandro Cortez lived a happy and peaceful life back with his family Skypiea. His father, Cordovan, and his mother Anna looked after him and his four brothers. Life was always buzzing back then, always something to do, always someone to defeat in one of their many, many games. Of course, Lessandro didn't always win – far from it, in fact. He always made sure to let his youngest and favourite brother, Miguel take the lead and crush his other brothers – especially Rahjacomos- spirit. He had way too much of it anyways. Life was simple, but good. Lessandro was always busy looking after his younger siblings. So busy in fact, he didn't even notice how seldom his father came back from work. Sure, mother was always there, but she too had so much stuff to do. Sometimes, Lessandro asked himself if his parents even wanted to see their kids. What kind of work did his father do anyways?

Well, one day he would certainly find out. And then, everything would change.

And boy, did things change, Lessandro thought, letting out a bitter laugh. He swept his hand over his face and sighed. *Where did it all go wrong? What was it my father overlooked?* Wait- what was that? Lessandro sniffed at his hand. Was that... ink? Did he break his pen? If not, where did it come from? drip... drip... drip... was it the ink that dropped down the wall? Did they find him? Was it a strange plan of them to mess with his brain?

No. They wouldn't do that. They were killers, yes, but they didn't terrorize their prey. At least not with psychological tricks. They wouldn't need those. They didn't need those for his family.

One day, Lessandro had just turned eleven, he saw smoke rising up from where he knew his family's house was. He had Miguel on his back and pointed at the smoke. „Look Miguel!“ he cheered „There's smoke coming from the chimney! Mum is already making dinner for us! Let's hurry so we don't get too late!“ Miguel laughed and played with Lessandro's black hair. It kinda hurt. „Hey, stop that!“

When the brothers went around the hill to their home, they saw the fire. And it wasn't just the chimney. The whole house was on fire. Shocked, Lessandro didn't move an inch. He just stood there and stared at the ruins of his home. Miguel began to cry.

„You should really stop that child from crying, or they will come for you next.“, a voice behind them stated in an absent minded tone. Lessandro turned around as fast as he could and saw a man leaning on the hill, a doughnut in one hand and a little knife in the other. On the shade of his sunglasses Lessandro could see the reflection of the flames engulfing his home, his family, his life.

„Name's Tempest, boy.“ The thin man exclaimed, „Well at least that's the name I go by.“

He flicked the knife in his left hand up, whirled it around and then, before Lessandro could even get a second look at it, it was simply.... gone. Out of the house he heard a wild, angry scream. The man, his facial features were almost unreadable, put down the bandana he had wrapped around his mouth, stuffed the doughnut in his mouth in a very loud way, put it back on and, still chewing, said: „Wrun, wittlw bwy, thwey awe aftw ywu.“

The boy blinked twice. „Erm.... Excuse me? I didn't quite catch that.“ What's wrong with this guy? Doesn't he know that he can't eat and talk at the same time? „Maybe you should –“, „Run boy! They're not only after your father, but your whole family! The World Government has found you!“

Before Lessandro could say another word, the walls of his home exploded in a mess of dust and smoke. Whatever was in there – it was dangerous. He couldn't see what happened, but he felt it. There were shockwaves all over the place. In a split second he thought he saw the silhouette of two fighting people, but it could very much have been his imagination. His eyes didn't show him what was going on. All Lessandro could detect was the crying of Miguel. Miguel, his youngest brother. The little brother he had to protect. What happened to his other siblings? What happened to the joyful Ilderico? What about the inquisitive Melponeo? And passionate little Rahjacomio? Were they all gone? Was Miguel the only one left? Lessandro knew what he had to do. Miguel was the only one he could protect. The one piece of family he still had.

And so he ran. He ran for his dear life. He ran faster than he ever imagined he could. He didn't stop at the town. He didn't even stop at the gates. He just ran on and on for what seemed like hours. And then, when his legs finally broke down under him, he fell down. Then it went dark.

*‘And when I woke up, he was gone, too. Miguel was not there.’*

Drip... drip... drip... this time it was tears running down Lessandro's face. Like the little child he still was in his heart, he cried out all of his sorrow and misery. He lost everything that day. All thanks to the World Government. His home, his family, his friends... all gone in the matter of seconds. Even though it happened twelve years ago – twelve years already? – Lessandro still had nightmares about that day. Of course, in his dreams, everything changed up a bit. Sometimes it was midnight. Sometimes he saw the face of the killer. Sometimes he even fought him. Sometimes it was not a man but a woman. And sometimes he dreamed about saving his family. Most of the time with Tempest's help. A strange guy, that Tempest. Stoic and not very friendly, but always quick on his feet to help those in need. It was thanks to him that Lessandro survived that fateful day.

„You made it quite far. Good.“

Lessandro started from his sleep and focused his gaze on the masked man behind him, still a bit dazed from the sudden awakening. The guy didn't move at all. He just stood there and watched him. Now that he didn't need to run away, Lessandro took the time to observe the strange person.

Tempest had pale white skin with an almost sickly tone. He hid his eyes behind a pair of sunglasses and his mouth behind a bandana he had wrapped around his face. In the brief moment Lessandro saw him eat the doughnut he could make out razor sharp teeth which looked like some sort of animal teeth. Tempest's face was framed with shaggy brown hair on which he wore some kind of hat Lessandro never saw before. It was round like a bonnet

but it had a strange brim on its front that extended about four inches. Was it there to shield his eyes from the sun? Or maybe to draw attention? To say the least, the fashion choices of this man were.... Interesting. His vest was of a bright red colour with even brighter yellow sleeves. It was only buttoned on the lower half and even those buttons were in wrong order. Then there was his trousers. His pair of awful trousers. With a bright shining green on his left leg and a no lesser shining pink on the other one, those pants were a crime by themselves. Together with his light blue – were those hiking boots? – his outfit was definitely a sight to behold. „You done looking, little snot?“ the man asked. Quickly, Lessandro dropped his gaze. It was not polite to stare.

„Tell me what you see, kid.“

Lessandro raised his eyes again, unsure, what to tell him. „I.... I see you.“

„No shit. And what do you see?“

„a... a man?“

„A real genius, I see. And what else?“

„some very bright clothes?“

„Come on, you idiot, I mean the real thing. Don't describe what I show you, tell me what you see.“

Lessandro hesitated. Did the man mean his clothing? Or did he – wait a minute. What was that?

Under all this colourful distractions Lessandro noticed something about the stranger's skin. That it wasn't skin, in fact. Those were... scales? His eyes widened.

„You... you're a fishman?“

„Bingo. Seems like you got eyes after all. Yes, I'm a fishman. And yes, I'm in Skypiea. Wanna know why?“

Lessandro nodded.

„Because I hunt the guy that hunts you.“

And all of the sudden, everything broke. The cold reality came back and crushed onto Lessandro's feeble mind. They were dead. They were all dead. Even Miguel was gone. His whole family, his home, his – SMACK!

All of a sudden, Lessandro was lying on the floor, his right cheek burning with pain.

„Don't you dare to start crying now, you little shit!“ the man before him shouted. „I just saved your life and I will not take this as a reward. Damnit, I hate kids!“ He crouched down to be closer to the kid. „Listen closely, kid. I'm a revolutionary. I'm here to kill the man that killed your family. I'm not here to care for a sobbing snot like you. I'm just doing this for your father. If you want to grieve over your family's grave, fine. But don't come running for my help, got it? If you however want to revenge your family and find out who's behind all of this, meet me and my contacts at the Grand Line. We will find you there. You got potential kid, but you need to lose this softness of yours.“

He stood up again and turned to go.

„Like I said, we will find you once you're on the Grand Line.“

„I saw one more thing“

„Huh?“ the shrouded man turned around once more. „And what would that be?“

„You're hurt.“

For a few moments, Tempest just stared at the boy.

„What gave it away?“

„You're bent over a tiny little bit, so I thought you got some pain in your stomach. Also your vest is a bit of darker shade on that region which points towards some spilled blood. You're not leaving a trail behind though, so I think it's not a serious or fatal wound, but it still looks like it hurts.“

The man chuckled. „So your father taught you one or the other thing, right?“

Lessandro straightened his back and looked where he presumed Tempest's eyes to be. „He taught me to see the things as they are, not as someone wants to make you believe.“

„Good. Then you're not completely hopeless.“

The strange man tossed a little coin purse to Lessandro's feet. „Prepare the funeral for your family. You've got three days. I will wait no longer.“

Lessandro didn't even look at the purse. „What about Miguel?“

„What about him?“

„Where is he?“

„I don't know. If you want to find out though, you have to learn how. Three days.“

And with that, he vanished into thin air.

Finally, Lessandro raised his hand to his cheek. A small dribble of blood trickled over his face and dropped onto the ground.

Drip... drip... drip... would the sewer walls ever stop to emit this strange fluid? It had a very distinct smell. Not the usual stench of a sewer. It was that smell again. Like ink. Lessandro remembered that smell at once. He smelled it everyday when he was working with the revolutionaries.

Back when Tempest took him under his wing, things started to get better again. Lessandro's days and nights were filled with rigorous training and missions, he couldn't even stop to think about his past. He was quite thankful for that. He was wrapped up in his work and came along well enough with his new nakamas. He studied the old language of the past, learned how to disguise himself from Seth, the dog-mink, and to never trust anyone that works for the world government.

„There are three rules to survive in this world“, Tempest used to say. „first of all: See the truth. Do not get ensnared in someone else's web of lies. Learn to use your eyes for more than just looking. Secondly: Protect your nakamas. I cannot stress this enough. You oughta be able to survive by yourself, but if you're lucky enough to have a crew, a gang, or some other group you can trust your life on, be sure to save them whenever you are able to. They will do the same for you, and it is always a good thing to have someone who can do things you can't. And last, but not least: Never show mercy to your enemies. I did once, and it still haunts me. The reason your family died is the mercy I showed to Kei Wharton, today known as the black tiger. Back then he was about your age now. I didn't think he could do any damage to us. And now he joined some world government organisation and hunts down revolutionaries like your father and me. So if you get the chance to kill one of them, no matter how pretty, nice or young they are, always finish the job. Or else it might finish you or your nakamas.“

Lessandro listened closely to the lectures and learned fast. He never became the strongest or the most endurable of his group, however he was crafty and quick on his feet. Within the next years he became an infiltrator and the second hand strategist of his crew. Morgana showed him how to steal from unsuspecting guards, Tempest displayed how to cause good

distractions to get away and most importantly: They all told him how to use ones abilities to the best benefit of the group. After a while, Lessandro found his trust in humanity again. Well, at least part of it.

And then, one faithful day they received a present from the headquarter. It was sealed in a solid metal box with no pattern whatsoever. It was just a sturdy little box. Andy et Lessandro felt something when he looked at it. Something about this box was.... off. He almost expected it to explode in his face at any second. However, Tempest seemed calm enough. He was the one with the key around his neck. „everybody here?“ He started. „Good. Now listen closely, everyone. Whatever it is that's inside this little fella here“, he shoved the box with his elbow, „it's verrrry valuable. Even more valuable than the bounty on my head, that is.“ Lessandro winced a bit inside. Even more than that? Tempests bounty was lastly estimated to be about 92 million bely! What could possibly be in that box? It wasn't heavy enough to be gold and it was too small to be anything complicated.

„Nww lwsten hwre, ywu littlw shwts....“, Tempest began, already a new doughnut in his mouth. Lessandro learned pretty quickly that everyone of his squad had his own little quirks. Seth was obsessed with thriller novels, Morgana always needed some of her booze to get loose and Tempest had his doughnuts. And Lessandro... well Lessandro really liked to play little pranks on his friends. Be it a Bucket of cold water on top of the door or drawing on the faces of his sleeping comrades, he always found something harmless, yet funny to do with his victims.

„Now listen here, you little shits“, Tempest announced, now that he swallowed one particular big chunk of dough, „I will give the content of this box to one person, and one person only. That person is...“ he made a dramatic pause, „the one who can steal it from me. You got two days to do so. If I catch anyone, I will beat them up. If anyone tries to persuade me for it, I will beat them up. If none of you get it in the two days, I will bet all of you up and keep it for myself. Got it?“

Drip... drip... drip...

It seemed so long ago, yet it was only four days. Four days since the trouble began. Three days since Lessandro won the box and pried it open. He never would have guessed its cargo.

It was a devil fruit. Lessandro never believed in those legends about supernatural powers and food made by the devil himself. But there it was. Just in his hands. It looked kinda funny. Like a yellow coconut with spirals and stripes all over it. „Are you sure this isn't fake?“ he asked Tempest. The doughnut lover just gave a thumbs up as he devoured an whole box of his sugary treats.

„But is it really okay for me to have it? I-I mean i'm st- still the rookie, and-“, Lessandro started to stammer but was promptly interrupted by a grinning Morgana. „Oh, shuddup, kiddo! You won this fair and square. Eat up already! I want to see what this thing does!“ Lessandro swallowed hard, looking at the thing and pondering about his choice once more. I won't be able to swim once I eat this thing. I could always sell it and live a good live. Yeah, sure, as if that wouldn't draw attention to us. I guess there's nothing else I can do. Well, here goes nothing!

The first thing he noticed was an awful taste.

*And nothing else. No sign of power. No animalic strength. No glowing red eyes. Nothing. I just feel weak when in contact with water. That's why he hid down here, in the sewers. Who would search for a person that can't swim in a system of pipes full of... liquid? Three days since I ate the devil fruit. Two days since the the government traced us down. And only one day since....*

It all happened so fast. They were attacked, divided and Lessandro didn't even latch on to what happened to his teammates. Suddenly, he was alone again. Alone in the streets and on the run.

He hi das good as he could, always on the move, never resting. He üulled that off for about one day and one night. Then they found him. The government had sent a group of killers. At least this branch of the organisation was. They were always on the hunt for pirates, revolutionaries and other outlaws. They didn't hunt to arrest, they hunted to kill.

Just when the first one of them, a slender girl with a knowing smile, was about to send a bullet right through Lessanderos skull, a throwing knife dug deep into her shoulder and out of nothing, a badly wounded and very angry Tempest was there.

„Run, Rookie!“ he screamed from the top of his lungs. „The black tiger is with them! We are no match for him! Save yourself and live! Be nameless! Be a shadow! Be safe!“

And with his sight shrouded by tears, Lessandro obeyed his last order.

Drip...drip...drip...

Was he really that desperate? To hide inside the sewers just to get away from them? Or was he afraid? Afraid of being hurt, afraid of hurting, or even killing them, once they cornered him? Tempest always told him there was no point in mercy. Kill the enemy while you still can. Otherwise they will kill you. But that must have been the same thought Wharton had when he didn't just kill his father, but his whole family as well. And now his nakamas as well. Had Tempest not showed up to save him...

*Enough of that. Self-pity will not help me here. If I want to take my revenge, I need to get moving. And fast.* There would still be a ship in the harbour even at this late hour. Whatever happened was not important right now. What's important was what he would do in his future. He just had to find a ship and get out of this mess. Maybe he should find a new crew. Maybe he could infiltrate the marines to get information about the Hydra. Maybe he could find clues about Miguel's whereabouts and wellbeing. Or maybe he could even find out what happened to the forgotten kingdom of the past. Maybe, just maybe, he could help to save this rotten world.

Lessandro found a little ship right about to set sail and managed to jump on board just in time. „Hi there fellas!“ he pronounced with a big grin on his face. *Don't let them see how you really feel. Be nameless. Be a shadow. Be safe.* „Do you need one more hand on board? I', sure I could help you out!“

„Who the hell are you, boy?“ asked a grim faced captain.

Lessandro straightened his back, looked the captain in the eyes and proclaimed: „Call me Tempest.“