

I am writing this now to atone. Perhaps in a few decades someone will be able to read this journal and my memories won't be lost forever. I am alone, as I have been for the last twenty nine years... well, save for Buri Buri. I guess the two women who recently dedicated their lives to tattoo my body are with me as well, but they aren't much for conversation.

I suppose I should start from the beginning. I was born on the small island of Vex, but I don't remember much of my childhood. My mother's and father's faces have been burned from my eyes by that abhorrent hellfire that burns within me... but I am getting ahead of myself. I remember my brother. Anthony was 3 years my elder, but I looked up to him like a god. His body was strong and his mind sharp. I can still remember him rambling on and on about his dreams of sailing the Grand Line and I remember the day a passing ship had moored at our little harbor. The captain of that ship stood taller than any man I had ever seen and when his dark eyes fell on my brother a wicked grin tore his face asunder. He saw something in him. Something that he did not see in me.

The ship left Vex with little incident, but my brother was never the same. 'Come find me when you're stronger,' The captain's words still grated through my mind. On quiet nights I would often find my brother awake and staring out to sea, but I never revealed myself to him. Silently I observed from the darkness of my room, until one night he packed his things and left. I didn't have to follow him. I already knew where he was going.

On the other side of our island there stood an abandoned building, overgrown with moss and vines. I was ten then, so I should've known better. My brother definitely should've known better, but he was blinded by his desire to become strong enough to sail with that man. So I followed him... Through the dense forest that clung to the side of Wyrmsstooth mountain I followed my brother to his death, but again, I am getting ahead of myself.

There was a story told to the children of Vex to keep them from roaming too far into the woods. A story of a beast that ate anyone foolish enough to wander towards the far side of the island. How I longed for those tales to be nothing more than lies to make unruly children behave, but as we neared that abandoned facility I could not shake the feeling of being watched.

In my carelessness I stepped on a fallen branch and my brother's eyes were upon me, his hand already on his sword. His face relaxed into a smile that I'd seen so many times before, but that would be the last time. A blur of fur and legs leapt down from the building, crushing Anthony into the dirt. How interesting it would've been under any other circumstances to see a bakitamidan spider that had grown so large. Their size varied based on their time alive and available resources, but I don't think I'll ever see another so large. Known for their painful venom, bakitamidan spiders are mostly harmless... Well, unless they are the size of a carriage. Its fangs pierced into Anthony's back and his cries echoed through the forest. I couldn't move. I only watched helplessly as my brother's body was carried up the ruins wall and through a window.

No amount of my screaming or tears would bring him back. I could have left then, but my grief had consumed me. I decided that I was going to find my brother and take him back home. How foolish. It took some effort to pry the rusted doors open just enough for me to squeeze through. Inside it was dark, but I could see something odd glowing in the distance. I was drawn to it and found myself unable to look away. A lone tree grew within the large room. The concrete

around its base was cracked and broken and its branches pushed through the walls that struggled so valiantly to hold up this structure. As grand and magnificent as the tree was, it paled in comparison to the single fruit that hung from its lowest branch. It was bright green and emitted a soft light with swirls across its smooth, spherical face. The Genshi Genshi no mi, or Nuke Nuke fruit.

I couldn't help myself. I am ashamed to admit that my desire to save my brother was forgotten and in its place was a longing I had never known. I must taste this strange fruit.

I hadn't noticed how difficult it became to walk. I hadn't noticed the skittering coming from all around me. I hadn't noticed their eyes upon me or their web that coated the walls and floor. Even when they were crawling across my flesh, I was oblivious to their presence. There was only me and that fruit. Nothing else. Until there was pain.

Pain so searing hot that it was blinding. I began to try and run as their fangs pierced into my flesh, releasing their terrible venom. I stumbled and fell, but nothing could stop me as I crawled towards that tempting prize that drew ever closer. Finally it was in my grasp and soon after its flavor was upon my tongue. Disgusting. Like a mouth full of ash.

I truly thought this would be where I died as I closed my eyes and accepted death's warm embrace, but no. No rest would come to me. White light burst from my body and my eyes grew wide as I witnessed for the first time the terrible power that had been gifted to me. The bakitamidan spiders covering my body turned to ash first. Then the great tree and the factory were swept away. Wyrmsmooth mountain was reduced to nothing more than a hill and my hometown was leveled. The very sea boiled as a large cloud in the shape of a mushroom rose into the sky. My brother and whatever had taken him were dead. My family was dead. I was alone and once more I wept, but my tears evaporated as soon as they touched my face. A combination of exhaustion the venom had caught up with me and I blacked out.

I woke aboard a ship that I would later learn was called The Delicious Endeavor. I couldn't tell at the time if it was the venom, the medication or my terrible seasickness, but I vomited all over the ship's doctor who was diligently tending my wounds. She was beautiful, even covered in what I had most recently eaten. I never did ask her name. Her bright red hair was kept in a tight bun, save for her two antennae, and I was unaware at the time, but she was a Skypiean. She must have made special effort to hide it though, as I didn't catch a single glimpse of her wings. She told me that the captain of this ship was a hunter of rare cuisine and having seen a giant mushroom in the distance, he took it as a sign and changed course immediately. He was apparently inconsolable after only finding a deserted island. Well, and me of course. Unconscious, naked and covered in spider bites.

I was so grateful. The idea that strangers would take me on board without a second thought, treat my wounds and feed me was overwhelming. I didn't understand what I had become, but I knew I wanted to protect this ship's crew. As I gained my strength over the next few weeks more and more of the ship's crew had fallen ill. 'Was this my doing?' I asked myself, but there was no way to be sure at the time. We were still a few days from the port that the captain had chosen to sail to and they were getting worse. Some of the sick crew were even laid into beds in the same room as me, but no one noticed that their conditions worsened more rapidly the closer they were to me.

Finally my chance had come. Only one day out from land and the doctor's will finally gave out. She was forced to rest in bed like all the other unfortunate souls unlucky enough to cross my path. That night I didn't sleep. I couldn't. In the dead of night I walked out of the cabin and up onto the deck. My stomach was fighting me every step as the ship was tossed and thrown about by the waves. Looking over the starboard beam I only hesitated for a second. My brother's grinning face was the last thing I wanted to think about before I threw myself to the briney deep.

The cold water was refreshing and I sunk like a stone. Perfect. Just like the stories. The water around me began to heat up and slowly boil. 'Just how deep is the sea?' I remember thinking as my lungs began to scream for air. Pressure built and my ears squealed in protest. Everything seemed to be going as planned until the burly arms of the ship's captain wrapped around me. I was thrown onto the ship's deck, coughing and wheezing. The air was so much sweeter than it had been before. As the mountain of flesh climbed onto his ship I could see that the arm he had used to grab me and his chest were badly burnt. He just smiled with a weak thumbs up before collapsing. Captain Marco Pierre White. This man who didn't even know my name saved me twice and was lying dead on the deck of his own vessel.

I felt bad then, but those feelings slowly faded with time. I didn't move from that spot until the sun rose. By then the rest of the crew had suffered the same fate as the captain, but land was in site and luck would have this ship carried into port by current alone. With no crew, the ship collided with a dock sending broken splinters of wood cascading onto the deck. I wasn't quick, nor was I stealthy, but I ran through Kanai City as fast as my feet would carry me. Nobody stopped me. They were all concerned with the ship and the crew that had died so mysteriously. I swear, some of the stories I've heard.

I was in a strange city with nothing to my name. I was scared, honestly. I couldn't just live without being a danger to others. That's when I decided to start trying to control this strange power. It only just occurred to me that there might be some way to deal with this that didn't involve my death. So I lived alone on the outskirts of town for thirteen years. It may have been cruel, but I captured animals alive and tried to hold them in my arms without cooking them alive. Most of my attempts were unsuccessful, but at least I always had enough to eat. There was only one creature that I couldn't kill. I remember thinking for a moment that I might have been on the verge of a breakthrough, but no. I would find out that it was a cockroach. Vile, disgusting, disease harboring vermin. A fitting ally for one such as me. I named him Buri Buri and he was my only companion.

During this time I watched the people of Kanai City from afar. I watched children grow up and the elderly pass on. I watched birthdays and weddings and funerals alike. Humans. How badly I missed their company. I couldn't risk endangering anyone to ease my loneliness, but at least I had Buri Buri with me. My hair had begun to fall out. All of it and in large patches until I was left with nothing; Not even eyelashes. Years passed and with some effort I finally was able to hold an animal without killing it instantly, but it still slowly became ill and passed after some time. When I slept it was the worst. I could do nothing to restrain myself while sleeping.

I must have looked a mess, but soon after my twenty third birthday I was approached by a man wearing tabi socks and sandals. Hakama covered his legs and a black montsuki haori jacket weighed heavy on his shoulders atop a simple black kimono. His jacket was adorned with

two emblems on either side of his chest that shined bright chrome. The same symbols that I wear presently. All this old world clothing made his glossy black sunglasses and gold wrist watch seem out of place.

He bent towards me and lowered his shades. After his dark eyes scanned me over, a grin split his face. I had seen this look before, but never directed towards me. He stood and snapped his fingers. Before I knew it I was being carried by muscular men in suits through the city. It all happened so fast, not that I thought I could have stopped them, but there I was. Sitting in a plush leather chair, that I undoubtedly ruined, across from a man that would shape my life. His name was Hideyoshi Daigen. He told me that I looked strong and that the strong should stick together. He asked me if I wanted to join his family. Of course I was wary at first, but this man seemed genuine in his desire to help me and I was so very lonely.

After being accepted by my new family, Tochi no Norikumiin-Kai or 'Yakuza Land Crew,' I was cleaned, fed and clothed. I declined getting any tattoos at the time for fear of the artist's health, but the suit fit nicely. Well tailored to fit my gaunt frame it was a simple black affair, with a white undershirt. It was only later in my life that I would truly understand my use to Daigen. He planned to use me as part of a cleaner crew. Wherever I was sent I only had one objective: Kill everyone. The only difference was that now I was being rewarded for my destructive nature. It took me little over a year to work my way through the ranks of the Shatei and Kyōdai, or little brother and big brother respectively. A little over a year and I was already a second lieutenant, or Shateigashira. Above me there were only three others, besides Daigen who sat as the Oyabun, head of the family.

The senior advisor, or Saikō-komon, was a mousy man that stayed isolated, locked away with his books and ledgers. His name was Nobunaga Hideki and if trouble started he would be the first to flee, but he was never far from Daigen's side. His advice to the Oyabun was instrumental in our crew's success.

The Captain, or Taichou, was too far beyond my reach. I was lucky to get a glimpse of the man. However, the first lieutenant, or Wakagashira, was named Nakamura Ken and I looked up to him much like Anthony. He was a gentle man with spiky black hair that was shaved short on the sides. He too had tasted the Devil's fruit, but I had only seen his power once. Wings of blue flames coated his arms as he darted around the air. I tried to model my own strange abilities into wings like his. Imitation is the purest form of flattery, after all, but I had little success. I could only concentrate enough energy into my hands to melt away the flesh of anyone caught in my grip.

During my two years with Tochi no Norikumiin-Kai, I learned a style of martial arts: Wado Ryu. It translates into Path of the Gentle Fist. 'How fitting,' I had first thought, but to my surprise it was mercy through a swift death that made the style gentle. It mattered little to me at the time, but looking back it was a key to my survival. These were some of the happiest years of my life, but I was forced to leave due to an easily avoidable accident. Ken had taken a shine to me. Very few others in our ranks were cursed by devil's fruit and he admired my power, much like I did his.

He had asked me to go drinking with him. An idea that I had strongly opposed, but he insisted. The man was unrelenting and he would not be satisfied until he had his way. The stubborn fool. Were he still alive today he would be my Taichou or Oyabun, depending on how

the dice fell. Sadly, alcohol clouds the mind and my will faltered. I only touched him once. On the shoulder. His smile twisted into a face of agony and his screams silenced the noisy pub. All eyes were on us, so again I ran. I tried to run from everything, but you don't just leave the Yakuza.

So I was hunted. They followed me far from Kanai City. All the way to Loguetown. I was twenty five and my heart was reckless. I was done being chased, so I decided to make my stand here. Waiting was the worst. I waited until the sun set before any of my brothers arrived. Holding my hands up I begged for them to stop. For them to leave me be and to just carry on with their lives, but they would not listen. They had their orders and they readied their weapons. Only after killing a handful of Daigen's best men and women did I see him.

It was the Taichou. I still don't know his name. He spoke for the first and last time I would ever hear it. 'Is this really what you want?' I didn't answer. I couldn't, but my eyes did not waver and that seemed to be enough. He made the call and the survivors left carrying the corpses of their brothers. I collapsed with my grief. It was my family that I had killed and I was dead to them. That night was the first time I could not sleep well. Terrible nightmares haunted my dreams and Buri Buri offered little comfort. I now blamed myself for the death of my family. For the death of Captain White and his crew. All those I had killed for Daigen and now this. It was all my fault and I would have to find some way to repent.

The next morning I dragged myself into town. People stopped and stared as I shambled through the cobblestone streets of Loguetown. My black suit was ripped and torn, with holes burnt through it from my own reckless power. Using what little money I had left I bought a simple katana. My plan was to end my suffering that night as far from town as possible. As the sun set for what I had hoped was the last time I would see it, I walked from town back into the nearby mountains. My attention was on my own plight and I had grown careless. I had failed to contain myself and in my wake I left a trail of sickness and disease. That was probably how she found me.

Her name was Pandi Dorathea and her slim visage came as a shock. She looked just like the ship's doctor that had cared for me all those years ago. Her hair and clothing was different, but I was convinced that a ghost had followed me from my past. I panicked, drawing my sword and as her watery grey eyes grew large I plunged that blade into my own stomach. The cheaply made sword turned molten and ran down my flesh. I still wear the ruined blade on my hip, but it's just for show. Again I was saved by the kindness of strangers. Dorathea treated my wounds and when I awoke we were not alone.

She had retrieved her captain and some of his crew. Messy hair sat atop the captain's head in a loose bun and much of his face was covered by a thick beard, but his eyes. Dark and piercing, they would not leave me. I begged and I pleaded for him to kill me. I could feel the murderous intent and the spear he carried looked more than sharp enough to end me with a single thrust, but he would not falter. Those eyes, worse than any nightmare and unescapable. 'Weak' he muttered, spitting into the sand. That evening he spoke to me until the sun rose the next morning.

He explained how death would be the easy way out and how it would only bring suffering to others elsewhere. How if I died someone else would find my devil fruit and this cycle would continue. He explained that if I wanted to atone I would need to become strong and I would

need to carry this burden. To my surprise my injuries were completely healed thanks to Dorathea and I was filled with the same determination Anthony must have felt all those years ago. The captain explained how he was going to fight me with his bare hands, unless I lost control of my power. I thought I was ready. I thought I was going to fight this man and win against all odds.

He beat me like a rented mule... and when I felt that I could no longer continue Dorathea healed my wounds. For seven days he beat me and anytime he felt I reached for my power his spear plunged into me and kept me back until I calmed down and found the will to continue. At the end of that grueling week I was more calm than I had ever been. I had found control and I had found my resolve, but I wasn't done. I refused to let this man leave before I returned a single punch.

I only had an opening because he looked down on me. He didn't see me as a threat and I used that to my advantage. I feigned frustration and called for that power, but as his spear came I quickly grabbed hold of it and pulled my fist into his face. He was faster than me though, and while I think I surprised him, my face was also met with a punch that had far more heft behind it. We were both smiling and after I thanked him and Dorathea, I left. She insisted on healing the black eye, but I wanted to wear it like a badge of honor. What a strange man, this captain. His name was Gintoki. That's it. How am I supposed to address him if he only has one name... Seriously.

I returned to Kanai City a new man. Tochi no Norikumiin-Kai had fallen on hard times in my absence and it was no easy feat to regain their trust. It took me eight years working as a dog below even the Shatei. Eight years for the eight men I killed, but in this time I could finally get my body tattooed like all the other members. With the control that I had now, I would not endanger the artist and I spent much of my spare time under the needle of a skilled professional. The rate that the ink would fade from my flesh was irritating. In only a year's time it would look as though I had never had any work done. After those eight hard years of servitude, I quickly rose through the ranks and became Taichou to Daigen. It was like a dream being around him. I still miss him and his wise words of council. He was a greater leader than I will ever be.

On his deathbed he spoke with me alone. He had already passed on his title and his estate to me, but as long as he was still alive he held power over me. I prayed the day that he would leave me alone as the head of this family would never come, but it was inevitable. He was ancient and his body gave out under the strain of time. He passed peacefully, but in his last moments I think his mind left him.

He kept calling me Toshiro. It was the name of his son. His blood son that had died some years before we had ever met. A rival gang gunned him down in the street over a small dispute concerning territory. They had long since been eradicated. Personally, I don't think I look anything like his son, but that's mostly because his son wasn't hairless. Maybe it was my eyes... I don't know. It was touching and is still one of my most cherished memories.

What was I to do? I was 38 years old when he finally passed and I gained both the title and power of Oyabun. Has it really only been a year since then? No. More than a year. My birthday is coming up again so quickly. In that time it's been difficult to rebuild the Yakuza Land Crew. I still haven't found a suitable Taichou to help me, but I have found two interesting individuals. I had been getting tattooed every three months or so and they saw how fast they

would fade away. Saitama Raijin and Fūjin. Twin tattoo artists that decided to dedicate their lives to placing their art on my flesh. They were the first to insist on tattooing eyebrows onto me: What a simple solution! They have been with me for a little over a year now and I could not be happier with their work.

I have not moved on yet. Maybe upon concluding this journal I will find the peace of mind I so desperately seek. I just have so much that I want to say to those I've lost.. so I will. Say it that is. Here goes.

To my family and all the families of Vex: I am sorry that my weakness to temptation brought the end to so many lives. To my brother, Anthony Tsukiku: I am sorry that your life which held such promise was cut short. I cannot pursue your dreams of sailing the Grand Line in your stead, but perhaps one day I might be able to stomach the sea long enough to try. To Captain Marco Pierre White and the crew of the Delicious Endeavor: I am sorry that your kind and selfless acts were rewarded with nothing but pain and suffering.

To Nakamura Ken: I am sorry that I was so careless in my youth. I know that you truly cared for me and would have been a great friend and rival. To my fallen brothers whose names I may never know: I am sorry that I ran from you. I should've faced my punishment and returned home honorably with you all. To Hideyoshi Daigen, my mentor, father, and friend: I am sorry that I was not there for you when times were hard. You were there for me at my darkest time, but I let you down. I promise you that I will not lead the family astray.

My life has been shaped by your kindness and sacrifice. I will never forget any of you. Here I am, crying again... maybe tonight I will sleep soundly and dream of happier times.

Isaac "Boss" Tsukiku

Oh... I had almost forgotten. To Captain Gintoki, Pandi Dorathea and the rest of the Apocalypse Pirates: Thank you for not giving up on me when I wanted to give up on everything. May the sea rise up and meet your vessel and may the wind be ever in your sails. Until we meet again.