

MICROFICTIONS FROM A CHRONICLE OF THE OCTOPODES

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1. On the Giant Octopus Who Used to be a Hairy Red Spider

The akkorokamui is a humanoid octopus, part cephalopod and part human, and hurls boulders at the fishermen in the northern bay of the archipelago. I suppose it's upset because nobody accepts it as a person, and none of the cephalopods welcome it, either. It's one of the multifarious challenges of transhumanism, so to speak. Fortunately, it's equipped with extra skills: The akkorokamui can pop off its eight arms and regenerate each one, not much different than an octopus in the wilderness. With mystical healing powers, it imparts pearls of wisdom to the seafaring fishermen. Don't sail to the southeast; storm winds will arise soon. Beware of the whirlpool to the west. I assume this means the akkorokamui has a tongue to speak, unlike an octopus of the wilderness who has a multitude of soft mouths yet no tongues. On hindsight, please allow me to refashion this myth with a confession, having shamelessly fabricated the part where the akkorokamui is a mystical healer. In fact, it is a notorious destroyer and champion rock-hurler who started out as a gargantuan red spider – in a higher altitude than sea level near a mountain village – who terrorized its inhabitants by going on rampages. Before the advent of gene editing, he morphed spontaneously into an octopus thanks to local folks with superpowers, and lived out the rest of his days in the ocean without clemency or pardon, serving out his mythic sentence as a monster of the deep.

2. On the Enormous Cloth Octopus Who Swallows Ships

The akkorokamui's cousin, the koromodako, resembles a paper nautilus or argonaut small enough to hold in your hand. Translations of this tale say either it's cloth or paper, like a chapbook or folio. In other words, it's an octopus of cloth, yet it doesn't wear clothes. If offended, the koromodako swiftly expands into an enormous tablecloth bigger than a ship – several acres wide, in fact, swallowing phytoplankton, people, and fishing boats alike, thanks to its polymorphism. The saying goes, don't make either one angry: neither the akkorokamui nor the koromodako. With pomegranate-colored skin and a tangle of string-like arms rising out of the water, the akkorokamui changes the sky and sea to red, and you will vanish in its maw in a minute. The koromodako will open like a giant table cloth and swallow you. To the koromodako's defense, however, the cloth octopus only attacks if provoked. Most of the time, it's happy to swim about as a harmless argonaut, minding its own business in a spiral paper shell. The akkorokamui, on the other hand, goes into a rage if it is simply hungry for people. With a yokai octopus, whether it's akkorokamui or koromodako, however, you can't win. We aren't talking about adorable cephalopods at the aquarium. You cannot make the monsters love you or calm down when they're annoyed, no more than you can tame the open sea or hold a typhoon in the palm of your hand. My grandmother, however, has wisely pointed out how real monsters aren't the ones at sea; of course, the true behemoths of the deep lurk within us.

3. On the Mystery of the Sea Cucumber at Dinnertime

The atuikakura is a giant sea cucumber who came into existence when a woman's lost undergarment washed downstream into the bay, centuries ago. Was she kneeling at the river, washing the day's laundry on a heap of stones, when it floated into sight? Is she a survivor of a textile malfunction? A gap exists in the narrative, so I must read between the lines and embellish a little, or else circumvent it entirely; we don't know what elapsed. As the myth goes, the undergarment settled at the bottom of the aforesaid bay and morphed into a giant sea cucumber, one who attaches its mouth to fragments of

driftwood and more often, the merchant ships that cross its path. I've often wondered, why a sea cucumber and not a beluga whale or black pearl oyster? The koromodako drags them under the waves, right to the chambers of watery graves. Thanks to the atuikakura, I can no longer eat sea cucumbers for supper with my stir-fried vegetables. On my dinner plate, in lieu of an innocuous sea cucumber of the wild, a giant atuikakura balloons before my eyes and attaches its orifice to a leg of the dining room table, an upcycled piece of distressed wood which surfaced in my life after I moved south, and where I planned to start a new life. Instead, I am plagued by one monster cephalopod after another in my waking hours, including the atuikakura who seals itself to a table leg and belches out its guts over the carpet so I can't dine in peace. Its mouth attaches to the wood with such force that I can't pull it off with my detachable vacuum hose. When I moved south, the monsters evidently swam with me under the radar, in a manner of speaking. To this day, I'm unable to say, good riddance.

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