

Another Generation

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Inhaltsverzeichnis

Prolog: Another Dream	2
Kapitel 1: Another Encounter	4
Kapitel 2: Another Big brother	10
Kapitel 3: Another Tragedy	16
Kapitel 4: Another Darkness	23
Kapitel 5: Another Memory	30
Kapitel 6: Another Hope	36
Kapitel 7: Another Father	43
Kapitel 8: Another Family	50
Kapitel 9: Another Love	59
Kapitel 10: Another Friend	68
Kapitel 11: Another Tag	75
Kapitel 12: Another Final	82
Kapitel 13: Another Partner	89
Kapitel 14: Another Rainbow	96
Epilog: Another Sunrise	104

Prolog: Another Dream

Someone was calling his name.

The voice seemed to come from far away at first, but it became clearer and louder each time it called him. Gradually he realized that there was not one, but two voices speaking. One was deep and agitated, the other high-pitched and calm. They kept repeating his name in turns.

The voices were unfamiliar, but the place he was in was not. The circles of high stairs around him, cast in sand-colored stone. The heavy pillars outside the arena that pointed into the perfectly blue sky. The rainbow that arched above him, in spite of the absence of even a trace of a cloud. He didn't get the chance to be here often, but he felt more at home here than in places he was seeing every day. Because this was where he was meant to be:

Ancient City – Rainbow Ruins

He had been standing in this coliseum dozens of times before, but this time there was no opponent and when he checked his arm, he was not wearing a Duel Disk that would explain the existence of a solid vision hologram. He immediately concluded that he must be dreaming.

The voices said his name again, and suddenly he was not alone anymore.

Two figures had appeared in front of him in the blink of an eye.

Their physique was human, but the fact that they were floating in midair and that he could see through them to a degree identified them as the spirits of duel monsters. At least that was the most likely explanation, but he had not seen these monsters before. And yet, seeing them he felt like they belonged in this place, the sanctuary of the Crystal Beasts, just as much as he did.

They were a pair like day and night. The one on the left wore light clothes and a metal breastplate. His dress was dominated by light violets and blues set off with golden accents. His short hair was blonde. At his side hung a giant sword, identifying him as a warrior.

The other displayed a dress made of dark heavy leather with dozens of belts wrapped around his torso. In spite of the dress and his long flowing hair that fell down his back in a thick braid he looked very masculine thanks to the steel-like muscles his sleeveless clothing revealed. He carried a crimson staff with a huge ornament at its top. In terms of Duel Monsters, he was most likely a Spellcaster.

As different as they were, they clearly belonged together. The emblem that appeared on the hilt of the knight's sword and his belt was the same as the ornament on the spellcaster's staff.

He could not see their faces – the warrior's eyes were covered by a metal visor and the spellcaster wore a mask that covered his face completely. But that did not quench the inexplicable feeling that he could trust them.

"Johann Andersen."

It was the light one, the warrior, who called his name once more. It was not a question. They knew that he was the one they had been calling. Nobody else was here anyway. He still felt compelled to nod.

"Please listen to what we have to say", the one in dark clothes said. His voice was gentle and melodious, but also sounded incredibly sad.

As they continued to talk to him, neither spoke for a long time. Johann continued to turn

his head from one to the other. It was almost like he was watching a pendulum swinging back and forth.

"You need to help us", the warrior said. It almost sounded like an order.

"We are powerless, so all we can do is ask for your help", his dark counterpart admitted sadly.

"Darkness is closing in", said the knight grimly, "If we cannot beat it..."

The other took over: "First it will take our hope for a shining future. Then our will to fight for it. And in the end, everyone will sink into the abyss of nothingness."

Johann swallowed hard. He could feel how serious the two were.

"But it is not too late yet!"

"With your help, we can stop Darkness from spreading."

Johann realized they were waiting for a reaction. He straightened his back.

"I will do whatever I can", he promised.

His words had hardly left his lips when he felt a familiar aura. Turning to both sides, he saw that the Crystal Beasts had appeared next to him. The duo did not seem surprised to see the seven mystical animals appear.

Crystal Beast Sapphire Pegasus stepped forward as their representative. "And he will not fight alone", the winged beast announced proudly.

A faint smile appeared on the lips of the knight as he nodded approval.

"Then listen, and listen well."

"Because we can only win if all the conditions are met."

Kapitel 1: Another Encounter

The main branch of Duel Academy was located on an island in the Pacific Ocean. Going there by helicopter from Domino City took two hours, and they had been told that the passage would take half a day by boat. Johann was thankful that they had opted for flight because of the limited time. Had they gone by boat, he would probably have hidden in some cabin for the whole cruise to not let anyone witness him in a pathetic state of seasickness.

When the pilot announced that the island was coming into view, Johann immediately craned his neck to try and peer out of the windows. But all he could see from this angle was the vast ocean that lay flat like a mirror in bright sunshine. It took a few more minutes until the pilot started the descent. When the helicopter turned sideways to adjust to the landing platform, the island was already up close. Now he could see an impressive volcano towering over everything and green forests covering most of the island. At the foot of the volcano was the academy's main building, prominently displaying large obelisks and three smaller domes in the colors blue, yellow and red as part of its architecture.

"Hey Caren, we're almost there", Jim Cook said. He was one of only four human passengers, a tall and lean man wearing a Cowboy's hat. Johann turned and saw him caress the crocodile that was also on board. As Jim had explained, Caren was his family and he would go nowhere without her. Johann had been slightly worried about the predator on board, but during the whole flight Caren had been calm and hardly moved.

Amon Garam adjusted his glasses. "I must say I envy the students of this academy. So far away from everything they are able to concentrate on dueling and nothing else", he remarked. Amon was bronze skinned and muscular, but the glasses and his behavior gave the redhead the air of an intellectual.

"Yeah, that's really cool", Johann agreed and looked out of the window again. Amon seemed nice enough, but the way he spoke always gave the impression that he knew something everyone else didn't.

Outside, Johann could see a long paved alley leading to the main building. Students dressed in uniforms were heading towards it. The uniforms were either blue, yellow or red, and most of the students seemed to move among groups of their own color. Watching them, Johann added to his previous words: "But I really wouldn't-"

He was interrupted by the jolt that occurred when the machine touched ground. The sound of the rotors slowly faded.

Austin O'Brien, the fourth passenger, got up calmly. He had not talked since they had introduced themselves when they gathered for the flight at Domino City airport. He did not talk now, either. He simply stepped to the door and activated the unlock mechanism. Johann would not even have known where to look for it. When the door slid open, warm air came in. The temperature was noticeably higher than back in Domino.

"I heard it's always good weather on the island", Amon said when he got up to follow O'Brien. "There are no mountains that would cause rainclouds to open here." He jumped off the helicopter and put his head back. "No clouds", he confirmed with the same profound smile that he had been wearing all day. Johann climbed from the helicopter after him. Jim came last. He had taken the time to strap Caren to his back

in order to free his arms for climbing down.

They were already being awaited. Two men came to them across the landing platform. One was tall, lean and blonde; the other small, fat and dark-haired. Johann thought they might as well be a comedy duo.

"Signori", the tall one addressed them and spread his arms proudly, "welcome to Duel Academy."

*

The main auditorium of Duel Academy was large. For today's event, all students had gathered, neatly divided between the colors of the three houses of the school: Obelisk Blue, Ra Yellow and Osiris Red. Johann was standing on a platform in front, next to the other three from the helicopter, so he had a good view on all of the students. Two caught his eye because they were not wearing uniforms.

One of them was sitting in the front row, among Obelisk Blue students. He was wearing a black, shabby-looking coat. Johann recognized him – he was a third-year student who had recently played some noteworthy duels under the nickname of Oja-Manjoume.

The other was sitting in the last row, also among Obelisk Blues. His dress was a silver suit that matched the platinum blonde of his hair. This one was probably known to anyone who had any interest in professional dueling. Edo Phoenix, the youngest person to ever gain a professional license, stepson of the former world champion and an ever-rising star in the pro league. Johann was surprised to see him here, out of all places. But given his age it was probably not too unlikely that he was a student at this prestigious school.

Johann had no time to examine the other students because now the principal of the academy stepped forward, a professor Samejima who had warmly welcomed Johann and the others shortly before. He was a thick, bald man with a friendly face in a dark red coat. The duo that had picked them up at the helicopter landing was also there. In the meantime, Johann had learned that the tall one was Chronos de Medici, head teacher of the Obelisk Blue house, and the smaller was the vice principal who had introduced himself as Napoléon.

"Dear students...", Samejima began.

He went on to explain the particulars of the academy's Graduation Duels. Johann listened duly; the gist was that the students who were hoping to graduate needed to gather enough points. Points were awarded per played duel, but of course there were bonus points for winning, depending on the year and house of the opponent. The maximum number of bonus points was 5, which could be earned by beating a 3rd year Obelisk Blue student.

"And this year we have some special guests to make it even more exciting", Principal Samejima announced and gestured at Johann and the other three. "We have invited representatives of four branch schools of Duel Academy. Each of them has been selected as the best of his respective school. You could say they are champions. Please give them a warm welcome."

Applause filled the auditorium.

Samejima waited for it to ebb out. Then he cleared his throat. "Let me introduce them. First, the representative of the Duel Academy East Branch: Amon Garam."

Amon stepped forward and waved politely. There was a new wave of applause, but a

bit shorter than the last.

"Representative of Duel Academy West Branch: Austin O'Brien."

O'Brien just made a step forward and gave a court not. The applause still came.

"Representative of Duel Academy South Branch: Jim Crocodile Cook."

Jim made a huge step that, thanks to his long legs, brought him farther ahead than the other two, and loudly shouted "Howdy!" Caren, who was still strapped to his back, growled. Only a few students clapped their hands. They seemed to be just as wary of the crocodile as Johann had initially been.

"Last but not least, the representative of the Duel Academy Arctic Branch: Johann Andersen."

Johann stepped next to Jim and waved with both hands. There was some more applause again, but it quickly died when Samejima cleared his throat once more.

"And of course, our Duel Academy also has a champion. Please come up here, Jūdai Yūki."

The moment the name was dropped the whole atmosphere in the room changed. Everyone in the room felt silent as a boy in the first row stood up. He was wearing the coat of Obelisk Blue like the students next to him, but unlike them he had not zipped it up. As he made his way up to the stage, whispers broke out here and there. Johann noticed unhappy faces, some openly hostile glares. Only a handful of students that had been sitting right next to Jūdai demonstratively clapped their hands. Jūdai had his eyes fixed on some point on the wall and was obviously trying to ignore the atmosphere around him when he climbed the steps to the platform. Samejima made an unhappy face when Jūdai trod past him, but did not say anything. Jūdai passed the four champions and silently lined up next to Johann.

Johann glanced sideways at him. This was not what he had expected.

Samejima took up the explanation again: "As you might have guessed, these five play a special role in the Graduation Duels. Beating any of them will grant you 10 points. But you can be sure that they will not be easy to defeat, so choose wisely!"

He closed the meeting by asking everyone to duel fairly, then the students started to leave.

The other champions started to move as well, but Johann turned around to Jūdai and held out his hand.

"Hi, nice to meet you", he said.

Jūdai looked at his hand, then at his face. A weak smile appeared.

"Nice to meet you", he answered.

The moment they shook hands, something happened. Jūdai's eyes went wide as two silhouettes appeared on both sides of Johann, then vanished again. He immediately let go and took a step back, looking bewildered. Now another silhouette appeared next to him – it looked transparent to Johann and was, without doubt, the spirit of a duel monster. It looked humanoid, but had purple skin and giant bat-like wings. And it was staring at Johann with distrust.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to startle you", Johann said. "It's just my friends."

With a purr, a small creature appeared next to him. It jumped and climbed on his shoulder, then said "rubiii" in a small voice. "That's *Ruby*", Johann introduced his companion, then looked at the spirit behind Jūdai. "And who might you be?"

Jūdai's face lit up with excitement. "Oh, you can see them?"

Johann nodded.

"How impolite of me. Please allow me to introduce myself", the spirit said. "I am *Yubel*."

Johann looked at it, fascinated by its eyes. One was dark green, the other orange. On its forehead there was a third eye with a red iris.

"Nice to make your acquaintance, *Yubel*", Johann said.

It looked like *Yubel* didn't find that so nice, though. They only gave a court nod.

"Sorry", Jūdai apologized, "*Yubel* is a bit overprotective sometimes."

Yubel folded their arms. "That's because you're too naïve sometimes", they countered.

Johann chuckled at the exchange. "So that's how it works", he remarked, "you must be really good partners."

At these words, Jūdai looked unexpectedly surprised. "Something the matter?" Johann asked.

Jūdai scratched his chin. "We didn't meet before, did we?" he asked.

"I'm pretty sure it's the first time", Johann said, "but it doesn't really feel like that to me, either."

Jūdai smiled, expressing that he agreed.

"Hey, we should duel", Johann suggested, "that's the best way to get to know each other."

"I'd love to", Jūdai answered.

Johann turned around and realized that the others had already left. "Let's go", he said. He would have started the duel right there, but it was part of the rules that all duels must take place outside the main building.

*

The duel did not come about as planned. As soon as they left the main building through a glass door, a group of at least 20 students gathered around them – or rather, around Jūdai. Johann was pushed aside and could only watch how Jūdai gave in and took the first duel challenge from an Obelisk Blue student of small build. Johann gathered from the conversation that his name was Okuda. When the opponents took their stances, the other students gathered around them in a circle. Johann decided to stay and watch. As long as nobody challenged him to a duel, he could at least figure out Jūdai's style of dueling. And there was another thing that he was curious about.

"Duel!" the two opponents shouted, marking the start of their battle. Jūdai looked a bit insecure when he drew his first cards, and eyed the people around them. None of them looked particularly friendly, except for Johann, who gave Jūdai an encouraging smile.

Okuda went first. "I draw! I set a monster in face-down defense position and set two cards face-down." The card holograms appeared on the field. "Turn end."

Jūdai drew. He looked at his cards for seconds only before he started to play.

"I summon *Neo-Spacian Grand Mole*." The monster appeared on the field, true to its name a mole with some gear around its neck. Johann had already heard of the Neo Space monsters but never seen any up close.

"Now I activate the magic card *Fake Hero* which allows me to special summon an Elemental Hero monster on my side of the field, but it cannot attack this turn and will return to my hand in the end phase. I choose *Elemental Hero Neos*."

The monster appeared, a muscular giant in white. Okuda did not look surprised, though.

"A strong starting hand, as always", someone close to Johann commented.

"You know what comes next, right?" Jūdai said to Okuda. "Neo-Spacians are capable of contact fusion! By returning *Neos* and *Grand Mole* to my deck I can special summon a card from my Extra Deck. Appear, *Elemental Hero Grand Neos*!"

In a flash of light, Neos and Grand Mole disappeared and made way for a muscular Hero in green armor that wielded a giant drill in place of its right hand. Johann was impressed. Getting out such a strong fusion monster so quickly was not easy.

Okuda was less impressed: "You think you've got me in the bag, but look at this! I activate *Chthonian Polymer*! I tribute the monster on my side of the field to take control of the Fusion monster you just summoned!"

The card hologram was flipped up, showing the image of a dark figure in the middle of a firestorm. The set monster on Okuda's field that he had announced to be tributed burst in flames and vanished. The flames did not appear after that but crawled across the ground towards *Grand Mole*.

But Jūdai smirked. The insecurity had all but disappeared. He was clearly having fun now.

"Not so fast. I activate the quick-spell card *Contact Out* to return *Grand Neos* to my extra deck! Now I don't have any fusion monster anymore that you can take control of!"

The monster disappeared as quickly as it had come. The flames disappeared, leaving only a black spot where Okuda's monster had been.

Jūdai was not done yet: "With *Contact Out*, I get *Grand Mole* and *Neos* back from my deck!"

The monsters appeared on the field again.

"But the card I just tributed was Warm Worm! When it is destroyed, I send the top three cards from your deck to the graveyard", Okuda shouted.

The hologram of a red worm sprang forth from Okuda's deck and jumped at Jūdai's Duel Disk. Jūdai put the three cards away as required, but didn't seem to mind so much.

"Your field is almost empty now. I activate the magic card *Contact Soul*: When I have Neos on my side of the field, I can special summon a Neo-Spacial from my hand, field or graveyard. At the end of the turn I need to return all monsters from the field to my deck, but I'm taking that chance!" Jūdai announced.

This was a risky move; if Okuda's remaining set card could stop Jūdai this turn, he would be left with an empty field and only the single card he still had in hand.

Jūdai went on: "I choose *Neo-Spacial Flare Scarab* from my Deck."

The monster appeared, a humanoid monster in a black in insect-like armor.

Jūdai went on: "Now I activate *Space Gift* which allows me to draw one card for each Neo-Spacial I control. With *Grand Mole* and *Flare Scarab* that's two."

Johann nodded to himself. Jūdai had just increased his chances, but he needed to draw something that would help him get over that set card unless he was going to recklessly rush in and just hope that the card would not stop him.

Jūdai's wide smile betrayed that he had drawn just what he needed "I activate one of the cards I just drew. *R – Righteous Justice* destroys as many spell or trap cards as I have Elemental Hero monsters. I have only *Neos*, but that's enough to get rid of your remaining set card."

Okuda flinched as Neos pointed at the card and shot through it with an energy beam. Apparently he had no means to stop that from happening.

"Now I contact-fuse again! *Grand Mole*, *Flare Scarab* and *Neos* – combine into

Elemental Hero Magma Neos."

The monster that appeared this time still looked a lot like Neos, but had the claws of Grand Mole and the wings of Flare Scarab. Its Attack points were 3000.

Jūdai continued: "*Magma Neos* gains 400 Attack points for every card on the field. Right now there's only one card, *Magma Neos* itself, so it has 3400 attack points."

"I'm going to survive this!" his Okuda shouted angrily, "I still have 4000 Life Points!"

From everything that he had seen already, Johann was pretty sure that he would turn out to be wrong.

"Sorry", Jūdai said, and inserted the last card from his hand into the field spell slot of his Duel Disk.

"I activate *Neo Space*! It gives fusion monsters which have *Neos* as a fusion material a boost of 500 attack points! Also it's one more card on the field, so *Magma Neos*' attack becomes 4300!"

The field was warped and became a wide space filled with stars and cosmic dust. Okuda's face went blank. He stared at the cards in his hand, then back at Jūdai. "This can't be true", he murmured, "I haven't even really started..."

Jūdai did not respond to that.

"Battle! I attack your life points directly with *Magma Neos*! There is nothing you can do!"

And there wasn't. The monster's hologram raised its arm to conjure a giant ball of magma and hauled it at its opponent. The boy was knocked from his feet by the shockwave and his Life Point counter went down to 0.

"Gotcha. That was a fun duel," Jūdai said and pointed at Okuda with two fingers. But his smile quickly died when whispers broke out among the surrounding students again.

Johann heard things like "He *killed* him" and "He's really *that* merciless, isn't he?"

Someone loudly exclaimed: "Fun duel my ass!" Jūdai's head sagged more with every comment.

Johann found it hard to bear to watch and was about to say something when another student stepped in front of the defeated Okuda. This one was a Ra Yellow.

"I'll be next! Can you also *kill* me so easily?" he shouted.

Jūdai flinched at those words. *Yubel* appeared next to him. "Don't listen. Just duel like you always do", they said in a consoling tone.

Nevertheless, there was a hint of desperation in Jūdai's expression when he shouted "Duel!"

Kapitel 2: Another Big brother

While Jūdai Yūki was surrounded by dozens of students in front of the main building, Shō Marufuji stood below the rustling trees of the forest that covered large parts of the island. Draped over his shoulders he wore a black coat with silvery seams. It was obviously too large for him. Its tails were dragging in the grass next to his feet. But the somewhat clumsy impression this could have given was easily set off by the impressive figure of the pointy steel fangs and wings of a dragon-like beast that hovered in front of him and which was wired to a similarly vile-looking dragon with black scales.

"*Cyberdark Dragon*, direct attack", Shō ordered coolly.

His opponent yelped when the impact of the solid vision hit him. His life point counter went down to 0. He fell onto his knees.

Shō adjusted the small pair of glasses on his nose. "Does anyone else want to test what an *easy target* I am?" he sneered.

Two Ra Yellow students who had been watching quickly shook their heads. One of them helped the loser, also a Ra Yellow, back to his feet. A fourth student from the same dorm who gloomily stood next to them didn't show much of a reaction.

"Yeah, I thought so. Excuse me then", Shō said coldly and turned around, dragging the black coat behind as he advanced through the woods. The eyes of the other students followed him until he vanished out of sight. Only then did one of them let out a sigh of relief.

"Man, I had no idea the younger Marufuji could be that scary..."

Shō had not gotten very far, but already tripped over a tree root and almost lost his coat which was caught in a tree, when he encountered a new person. Although he had been warily looking around, he was taken aback completely by the figure that suddenly entered his vision. He had not seen it moments before, nor had he heard anyone approaching. But even if he were not shocked by the sudden appearance, the looks of the man who was blocking his path would have sent a chill down his spine.

He was tall, several heads higher than Shō who had to put his head back to see the other's face. Said face was angular and bony, and the skin had an unhealthy color, even adjusting for the slightly dim light beneath the trees. The man's eyes were hidden behind a pair of glasses. His hair was styled backwards and looked somewhat spiky. There were also spikes at his joints and along his upper thighs adorning the black leather suit he wore. He was definitely not a student of Duel Academy.

Shō bumped back and almost tripped over his coat. He caught his balance, gathered the coattails and turned his back on the man with a muttered "Sorry, gotta go".

He managed to advance just one hurried step before his path was blocked again. The same man was now standing in front of him, at the opposite direction of where he'd been just a blink of an eye ago.

"Now now, don't run away", he said. His voice was calm, but something about it made the hairs on Shō's neck stand up.

"Stay away from me!" Shō shouted and turned the other way again.

This time he couldn't even make a single step before the man stood in his way again like a wall.

"It's useless, young Marufuji", the man said.

Shō flinched.

"Who are you?" he asked with a shrill voice.

"You can refer to me as Mr. T, short for Trueman. That is how I introduced myself to your friend Jūdai."

"He is not my *friend*!" Shō shouted. The anger in his voice drowned out the previous hints of fear.

A thin smile appeared on the lips of Mr. T.

"Well, anyway. Your *not-friend* was able to beat me. I was wondering if you are capable of it as well."

At this, Mr. T raised his left arm. It quivered as if its insides were boiling. Structures that resembled bat wings shot forth from it. Shō realized that there were five wings and that each of them had a small flat area in the same form as the card slots on a duel disk. A deck of cards rose from Mr. T's wrist as well.

Shō understood. "If Ani-, I mean, Jūdai beat you in a duel, there's no way I will lose", he proclaimed and turned on the duel disk on his left arm.

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"It's here, I can feel it!"

The sudden exclamation made Johann jolt.

He was still standing in front of the Duel Academy's main building watching Jūdai duel. He would be dueling himself had anyone challenged him, but so far he was completely being ignored in the questionable favor of Jūdai.

The shout had come from one of the two spirits that were now showing faintly on either side of Johann. He just inclined his head a bit in the direction of the one who had spoken, the white knight who was known as the *Crystal Keeper*.

"Are you saying...?" Johann asked in a whisper, just too aware of how weird it looked to regular people when he spoke with spirits that nobody else could see. Well, "nobody else" was not true anymore, but Jūdai was too absorbed in the duel to even have noticed. Only Yubel, who had silently been standing behind him all the time, had turned their head and was staring in the direction of Johann and the two spirits with open distrust in their oddly colored eyes.

"I can feel it too. Darkness is gathering on this islands", the darker spirit, *Crystal Master*, said, his voice thick with worry.

Johann turned his head in several directions. "I don't notice anything special", he replied.

"Not yet", the Keeper said grimly. "Just make sure that you stay close to Jūdai. When the time comes you have to stand together."

Johann nodded, but he kept scanning his surroundings with a worried expression while he followed the ongoing duel.

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Shō's starting hand was not ideal but something he could work with. After scanning his cards, he raised his head to check what his opponent was doing. Mr. T already had his five cards in hand and was looking at him with an unreadable expression.

"Please go ahead", he said and made an inviting gesture with his right hand.

Shō gave a concentrated nod. When he felt for the top card in his deck he told himself that all he needed to do was duel the way he had practiced all the time. But he could

not shake the nervousness that had gripped him. This was no ordinary opponent, and he was already convinced that he would lose more than just a duel if his life hit zero first.

"My turn! Draw", he announced.

The card he pulled from his deck was a trap that might come in handy later but that didn't alter the plan for his first turn that he had already played out in his head.

"First I normal summon *Infernal Dragon*", he announced.

The hologram of a dragon with black scales appeared in the air before him with a roar. It displayed an impressive attack power of 2000.

"It's very strong for a level four monster", Shō explained, "but if use it to attack, it will be destroyed in the End Phase. Not that I could do that in my first turn, anyway."

There was no visible reaction in Mr. T, so Shō continued. "Now I set three cards in the Spell- and Trap zone."

The card holograms appeared face-down in front of him when he inserted the real cards into the duel disk.

"That ends my turn", he concluded. He adjusted his glasses, satisfied that he was off to a solid start.

Mr. T nodded as if something made a lot of sense. "You are going all out with a strong monster but keeping your defense up with all those traps. Your friend Jūdai didn't keep a backrow like that when he dueled me."

"I said he is not my friend", Shō said sharply.

"Excuse me", Mr. T said in an ironic tone. "He is not your friend but your *Aniki*, or big brother."

Shō quickly shook his head in revulsion. "I don't call him that anymore", he retorted, trying to sound cold. But his voice was shaking ever so slightly. In his distress, he did not even wonder how his opponent, whom he had never met before, could possibly know such a detail.

A mean smile appeared on Mr. T's thin lips. "Right, right. You have a real brother, after all", he said.

At this remark, Shō averted his gaze. Suddenly he looked very small with the black coat thrown over him, but the mass of fabric did a good job of hiding his shaking fists. Mr. T ignored Shō's obvious internal struggle and reached for his deck.

"It's my turn now. Draw. I summon *Zure, Knight of Dark World*."

The monster that appeared as a hologram was as ghastly as its master, with a skull-like face, thick horns on his head, and a full plate armor. The attack points were displayed as 1800.

"And I equip *Zure* with the Spell *Axe of Despair*. This way it gains 1000 attack points."

An axe with a handle made of knotty roots that resembled the shape of a head appeared in the hands of the monster.

Shō slowly looked up again. He needed to concentrate on the duel!

"Too bad", Mr. T taunted him. "Even though you brought up such a strong dragon in your first turn, it is mere fodder for my Knight. *Zure*, attack *Infernal Dragon*."

A faint smile appeared on Shō's face.

"Did you really think I was not ready for this? In fact I should be thankful that you allow me to play this move."

Now it was too late for Mr. T to call off the attack. The axe cut right through Shō's dragon and the hologram shattered.

"I activate *Power Wall*! When I take battle damage from a monster, I can send cards from my deck to the graveyard and reduce the damage by 100 for each card!"

Shō went through his deck quickly. "I am sending 8 cards to reduce the damage from 800 to zero", he announced before he inserted the cards into the graveyard slot of his disk.

"This move... He was famous for it, wasn't he?" Mr. T hinted. Shō narrowed his eyes, but Mr. T did not dwell on the topic.

"I set three Spell- or Trap cards face down and end my turn."

Shō made a determined face. The conditions were good. He could win this. He could already see how he would do it.

"My turn! Draw!"

The card he had drawn was another trap he had no use for right now. Checking the remaining cards in his hand, there was another one he could not use, but seeing it made him feel uneasy. He should have left it out of his deck, after all. Had he even played it once since he started using it?

But that was not what he needed to think about right now. The other card there was all he needed. His way to victory. He would be a fool not to use it just because of the risk that came with it.

"I activate a Spell card! *Cyberdark Impact!*"

Shō inserted the card into a free slot of his disk with a sweeping movement.

"I return *Cyberdark Horn*, *Cyberdark Edge* and *Cyberdark Keel*, which I just discarded to activate *Power Wall*, to my Deck. Now I can Special Summon *Cyberdark Dragon* from my Extra Deck!"

Holograms of the three fusion materials appeared on the field just to vanish again in a whirl of dark energy. The dragon appeared, a creature with steel fangs and pointed steel wings. When it let out a metallic cry, Shō grit his teeth and clutched his chest.

"I activate a trap", Mr. T announced. Shō bent over as if these words had caused him more pain, then his head shot up in panic.

"*Triggered Summon*. When a monster is Special Summoned to my opponent's field, each player can Special Summon a level 4 or lower monster from their hand."

Shō breathed deeply. He had feared that his freshly summoned dragon would immediately be destroyed, but this was not so bad.

"I summon *Dark Archetype*", Mr. T announced and laid the card on one of the bat wings of his disk. The hologram that appeared was another ghastly creature that looked like it had just escaped from a tank in a mad scientist's lab. Its main body consisted of raw muscles and oozed a slime-like fluid. The extremities were covered in grey skin that was coated in slime as well. They were wired to a technical device around its head.

"You can summon a monster as well", Mr. T advised. Shō checked the cards in his hands although he already knew, then shook his head. "I don't have any."

"But," he added, "the effect of *Cyberdark Dragon* activates when it is Special Summoned. I equip to it a Dragon-Type monster from either player's Graveyard. And I choose this one...!"

His duel disk released the selected card and Shō put it into a free Spell- and Trap slot. The hologram that appeared was a dragon without doubt - but one made of metal.

"*Dragonroid* is a Machine-Type monster, but while it is in the Graveyard, it's treated as a Dragon-Type, so I can equip it to *Cyberdark*", he explained. Electronic wires shot forth from the main body of *Cyberdark Dragon* and attached themselves to *Dragonroid's* bright red panels. The Roid gave a weak sound of protest as it was pulled into the fangs of the sinister Dragon. *Cyberdark* screeched again, and just like before, Shō winced with pain. As *Dragonroid's* body went limp, the attack points of *Cyberdark* which were displayed next to the hologram started to increase.

"Cyberdark... gains attack points... equal to those of... the equipped monster", Shō said, still clutching his chest and breathing heavily.

"*Dragonroid* has 2900 attack points, adding to *Cyberdark's* 1000 that makes 3900... also..."

He had to draw a deep breath in order to continue talking.

"Also, *Cyberdark* gains an additional 100 attack points for each card in my graveyard... Right now there are *Power Wall* and *Cyberdark Impact*, the *Infernal Dragon* that you destroyed... and four of the cards I discarded to activate *Power Wall*— a total of 7 cards. So he gains 700 more attack points. That's... a sum of 4600!"

Shō spread his arms dramatically just when the attack point display in the air stopped increasing.

Mr. T's expression stayed blank, at least as far as one could tell despite his sunglasses. But he raised his hands to clap, slowly and deliberately.

"Most impressive indeed", he said. "But looking at this, I wonder... which one is you?"

Shō frowned. "What do you mean?"

A hint of a smile appeared on Mr. T's lips. He pointed at the monster holograms in the air with one of his long, bony fingers.

"Using others or to be used... One of them is preying on the strength of the other and making it his own. You may think of yourself as the one who controls this deck, but to me you look just like your *Dragonroid* which is strong enough on its own but is offering itself to the vile dragon that uses its strength and draws from its life force."

"What would you know about me?" Shō shouted angrily, but there was a quiver in his voice.

"I know all I need, younger brother of Hell Kaiser", Mr. T said calmly.

*

Jūdai was showing signs of exhaustion after three duels in a row, but there were still many students who wanted to face him. Johann thought that the chances for them looked slim – Jūdai's deck was versatile enough to deal with different strategies directed at him and, more importantly, the cards seemed to always come into his hand right when he needed them. Taking him down would take a very good strategy, or a similarly close bond with one's deck. Johann flexed his fingers. He was itching to duel himself. He had hoped that someone would come to challenge him sooner or later because of the points the students were promised to get dueling one of the foreign guests, but at this rate he would have to place the challenge himself.

Lost in this kind of thoughts he had not noticed anyone approaching when someone spoke next to him.

"I thought his dueling might be affected by what happened, but he's doing as good as ever."

Johann whirled around. But before he even really checked who the speaker was, a much more important question burst out: "Affected by *what* that happened?"

Edo Phoenix looked at him, stunned at the sudden reaction.

"I mean..." Johann remembered his manners, "it's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Phoenix."

Edo raised his eyebrows.

"The pleasure's all mine. I have heard only good things about you, Johann Andersen", he said and shook Johann's hand with a firm grip.

The question from whom he might have heard those good things entered Johann's

mind, but his other question was more important.

"So... you do know why everyone at this school seems to hold a grudge against Jūdai?"

Edo folded his arms and nodded. "Right, only students of this school could know... But I assume that you have heard of the professional duelist, Hell Kaiser Ryō?"

Johann nodded. "Yes. He was really strong and I was looking forward to dueling him some day, but he just vanished... what was it... two months ago?"

Edo glanced sideways towards where Jūdai was just summoning his ace monster *Neos* again.

"You see", Edo said in a hushed voice, "the reason why Hell Kaiser disappeared is because he won't be able to duel ever again."

*

"Shut up", Shō whispered.

"You see, I am calling myself Trueman because I am the one who speaks the truth. If you believed he would wield it again, you would not be using your older brother's deck."

"Shut up..." Shō pressed his hands over his ears.

"You did not even like him that much. *He* was not the one you called *Aniki*."

"Shut UP!"

"But I can understand that this changed..."

Shō's hands over his ears shook because he was trying so hard not to hear. But it was in vain. The words still reached him.

"... because it was your *Aniki* that killed your real big brother."

Kapitel 3: Another Tragedy

"... because it was your *Aniki* that killed your real big brother."

Shō could not help it; the words of Mr. T made him think back to that fateful day.

*

It was morning and the sun was shining brightly through the windows of the large hall in the Obelisk Blue Boys' dorm where breakfast was served. It was a Sunday and before 9 in the morning, so there were not many students yet. Shō was sitting alone on a larger table and had already finished half of his food when someone called him.

When he looked up, Jūdai was coming his way, carrying his breakfast on a tray. He wished a good morning as he sat down across the table.

Shō rubbed his eyes. "Who are you and what did you do to my Aniki?" he asked with suspicion. It was far too early. Even on a weekday it would have been unusual to see Jūdai at this time of the day.

Jūdai laughed. "I just couldn't sleep anymore because I'm so excited", he explained and took a big bite from the croissant on his plate. "I mean... today is the day", he added through a full mouth.

Shō had long given up reminding his friend that talking and eating at the same time was considered bad manners, so he just gave a low sigh. "I can understand that you're excited", he admitted slowly, "but to be honest I'm a bit worried."

Jūdai took a sip of orange juice to help the last bite down his throat, then said merrily: "You needn't worry about me! I'm just gonna give it my all so no matter how it ends I won't regret it."

Shō shook his head. "It's not you I'm worried about", he admitted.

*

"Signore e signori!" Professor Chronos de Medici greeted. He was standing in the middle of the big duel arena, the centerpiece of Duel Academy. The seats around the arena were filled to the brink –there was not a single student who would miss this important occasion. Shō was sitting in the first row with Jūdai's other friends Asuka and Fubuki Tenjōin, Tyranno Kenzan and Rei Saotome.

"You have all been fighting hard but in the end there was only one student who could make it... Please greet Jūdai Yūki!"

The applause was most fervent from Shō and the people next to him, but almost everyone clapped their hands as well.

"Tch, it should have been me", Jun Manjōme grumbled when Jūdai entered the arena and stepped up to Professor Chronos. Manjōme was sitting one row behind everyone else, pretending that he was not interested enough to care for a seat in front.

"Well, it would have been you - if you had not lost to Aniki in the final yesterday", Shō pointed out teasingly.

"Shut up", Manjōme grumbled.

Jūdai waved his hands in the air, visible enjoying all the attention directed at him, and he was beaming across the whole face. After the applause had calmed down, Chronos raised his voice again: "And now let us greet his opponent. An alumnus of our dear school and

now a professional duelist. Let me hear your applause for Signor Ryō Marufuji who is known to the world as Hell Kaiser!"

This time's applause was decidedly louder – except for the group around Shō where only Asuka and Fubuki clapped their hands.

The Hell Kaiser entered the arena with long strides. The ex-student was dressed in his well-known black outfit and the tails of his long coat flapped up and down with his movements. He did not smile, nor did he acknowledge the crowd that was cheering for him. His gaze was fixated solely on his opponent. He stopped in front of Jūdai.

"Hey Kaiser", Jūdai said and held out his hand, "I got to face you again."

Ryō ignored the hand offered to him and just nodded approvingly. "I am counting on you, Jūdai", was all he said, then he strode off to his side of the field.

Jūdai seemed a little baffled when he watched him go there, then he shook his head and smiled again. "Let's make this an unforgettable duel!" he announced. He hurried over to his side of the field and turned on his duel disk. Professor Chronos took a few steps back to clear the battlefield and announced that they could start.

The two opponents called out: "Duel!"

*

Only those in the first rows heard the suppressed groan of pain that Ryō gave when the direct attack hit him. To anyone farther away, it probably looked like the usual overplaying of a professional duelist when he went down on his knees. While several students applauded Jūdai's breakthrough, Shō was jumping up from his seat and called out to Ryō, shouting "Onii-san!"

Before he could get on the field, however, Ryō raised a flat hand in his direction. "I'm fine", he groaned. The anguish in his voice made it clear that the opposite was the case. Nevertheless Shō stopped at this, just like Jūdai who had also started to move with a worried expression.

During the course of the duel it had become more and more apparent that Ryō was not in good physical condition, but so far his claims that he was just a bit exhausted had been somewhat convincing.

"So Shō was right...?" Jūdai muttered to himself.

Shō was nodding. "It's those terrible collars he wears in the underground duels", he said, loud enough so that his friends could hear it. "The pain was almost unbearable for me when I used them once and he's been doing it without a break... it must have damaged him more badly than he would admit..."

"Just as I thought", Edo Phoenix said. He was sitting next to Manjōme since he had come in during the third turn. Everyone turned around to him, which prompted him to explain in more detail: "He's been dueling less and less during the last half year. Recently I met him right after a duel and he was completely worn out. But when I said that it would be foolish to continue in his condition, he said it would be foolish to stop before he found a worthy opponent."

Asuka gasped silently. Sho hurled around again to look at his older brother with worry.

"Yes", Edo continued, "when I learned that he asked Principal Samejima to hold a tournament at this school whose winner would get to duel him, I knew he hoped to find that worthy opponent here... worthy for a final duel."

"What do you mean, final?" Kenzan asked aggressively. "He's just a bit older than we are!"

Edo did not reply. His thoughtful gaze was fixated on Ryō.

During the friends' short discussion, Ryō had gotten on his feet again. He looked instable, but was somehow holding up. Watching this, the worry on Jūdai's face deepened.

"Kaiser..." he said, hesitant. "I didn't know... I think we..."

Ryō's fierce look made him fall silent. "The duel is not over yet."

Jūdai swallowed. He sounded hesitant when he announced the end of his turn.

The last attack had left Ryō with 200 life points and no monsters. The only card on his field was a face-down spell or trap card. His hand was also empty. In contrast, Jūdai still had 2000 life points, two cards in hand, one face-down on the field, and hovering on his field was Elemental Hero Air Neos which currently had 3000 attack points thanks to the active Field Spell Neo Space. But there was still fighting spirit in Ryō's eyes.

"It is my turn now! Draw!"

He pulled the new card from his deck fiercely. Too fiercely, it seemed, because he had to draw a deep breath afterwards. But he only allowed himself that short break.

"I normal summon Cyber Valley in attack mode!"

The hologram of a huge metallic dragon adorned with red rhinestones appeared on the field. Its attack points were displayed as zero.

"I activate one of three possible effects of Cyber Valley: I remove this card and one other card I control from play in order to draw two cards!" Ryō announced. His breath was more regular now, but his stance still looked a bit weak.

Cyber Valley and the set card on Ryō's side of the field vanished into balls of light that flew towards his deck from where he drew the new cards after he had tucked away the banished ones in his coat.

Fubuki gasped. "That's an all-or-nothing move", he commented.

Edo and Manjōme nodded simultaneously. "Jūdai has him completely cornered. It's his only option if he still wants to win. And I can tell that he does", Edo remarked.

Asuka slowly shook her head. "He's sick", she whispered. Her voice was thick with worry.

"He should have different things on his mind than winning."

Ryō regarded the two new cards in his hand and a smirk appeared on his lips.

"I activate the Spell Card Overload Fusion! I can remove Monsters from my Graveyard that are listed as materials on a Machine-Type Fusion Monster to Special Summon it! The Fusion Monster I am going to call is Chimera Tech Fortress Dragon. It requires one Cyber Dragon and one or more Machine-Type Monsters as Fusion Materials. I remove from play the three Cyber Dragons, Cyber Laser Dragon and Cyber Barrier Dragon that you destroyed until now!"

The five monsters appeared in the air as holograms when Ryō pulled the cards from his graveyard and put them into his coat's inner pocket. The holograms all disappeared in an explosion that marked the activation of Overload Fusion.

Ryō's breath grew unstable when the summoned monster appeared on his side of the field: A massive dragon whose body was made up by connected metal wheels. Hatches opened in five of the wheels, showing the heads of the monsters that had just been offered for the Summon.

Jūdai gazed up at the monster with awe. He had not encountered this one before. It was impressive.

"When... this monster is summoned... all the cards I control are destroyed. But there are none anymore", Ryō said, gasping for breath after every few words. It made Jūdai focus on his opponent's condition again. "Kaiser... after all... you should..." he started.

Ryō did not let him finish what he was going to say. He raised his right arm and snapped:

"I attack Air Neos with my Chimeratech!"

The head of the Cyber Dragons in the leftmost wheel shot a beam at Jūdai's monster. Jūdai stared at the incoming attack dumbfounded. Chimeratech looked impressive, but its attack points were zero!

Ryō clutched his chest again, fighting another seizure. But his look was focused at Jūdai and expressed confidence. This was not a suicide move.

"Chimeratech's effect: When it attacks... damage calculation does not take place! But... each time this card attacks... I inflict 400 points... of damage... to my opponent!"

The beam went right through Air Neos and hit Jūdai, who staggered. His life point counter went down to 1600. The head of the Cyber Dragon that had fired the beam pulled back and disappeared behind a hatch in Chimeratech's body.

Cheers and clapping of hands welled up in the spectator ranks. Hell Kaiser was not finished after all!

Ryō grinned in spite of the pain. "That is not all. Chimeratech can attack once for every monster that was used for its Fusion Summon."

"Wait, does that mean..." Asuka gasped.

"If Jūdai can't stop him, Hell Kaiser wins", Edo confirmed.

Jūdai obviously had the same realization as his surprise made way for honest amazement. "Kaiser!" he exclaimed, deeply impressed.

Ryō was still clutching his chest. "Chimeratech, attack!" he shouted. The second Cyber Dragon released an attack.

The second attack hit Jūdai, lowering his life points to 1200.

"And attack!"

Jūdai was down to 800.

"Fourth attack!"

Down to 400.

Cheers erupted from the crowd. Now it was obvious for everyone. The attack corresponding to Cyber Barrier Dragon was still left. It would inflict 400 points of damage, and that was just enough to eradicate Jūdai's remaining life points. He still had a face-down card, but if it could help him, wouldn't he already have used it?

While excitement gripped the audience, Shō sat there and clasped his hands together like in prayer. "Please, just finish this duel already", he pleaded to nobody in particular.

When Ryō slowly raised his arm to announce the fifth attack he was gripped by a new seizure. Clutching his chest he fell on his knees again. "Onii-san!" Shō gasped. "Ryō!" Asuka chimed in. Fubuki was also shouting for Ryō. The cheers ceased and made way for confused whispers among the students.

Jūdai looked at Ryō with clear worry. "Kaiser. After all..." he started again, but Ryō shook his head. The look in his eyes was desperate. It seemed to take all of his willpower, but somehow he pulled himself back up again.

Jūdai looked insecure. It was obvious that dragging out the duel would not be good for Ryō's health.

"Jūdai", Ryō said, slowly and earnestly. "I was glad when I learned it would be you today. Because you know what it means to be a duelist with all your heart and soul!"

The words clearly affected Jūdai, but he still seemed undecided.

Ryō grimaced and raised his arm again. "Chimeratech's fifth attack!" he commanded fiercely.

The beam shot out. Jūdai raised his arms for protection and vanished in a cloud of smoke when it hit. Cheers erupted throughout the stadium.

But when the smoke cleared, Jūdai was still standing - his life point counter showed 1000. Ryō smirked as if he had expected nothing else.

"Before your attack hit me I activated my Trap, Elemental Recharge!" Jūdai explained. "It gives me 1000 life points for each Elemental Hero monster I control! And Air Neos is one! So this duel is not yet over!"

He grinned. Ryō smiled as well.

"I expected nothing less from you", he remarked weakly.

Some students cheered for Jūdai, including a high-pitched "Jūdai-sama!" from Rei that brought her annoyed looks from Asuka and Shō.

"This is the end of my battle phase. I set my last card face-down and end ... my... turn..." Ryō's voice grew faint at the last words. He staggered and for a moment it looked like he was going to collapse again.

"Onii-san!" This time Shō did jump over the barricade.

"STOP!" The shout that caused Shō to stop in his tracks had not come from his brother this time, but from Jūdai. Shō looked at him, shocked. "But..."

"Don't... interfere..." Ryō added. He was still standing, after all.

"No! Onii-san! You have to stop! At this rate you will..." Shō pleaded.

But Ryō interrupted him. "I will finish this duel", he spat out. "I don't care what happens afterwards. This is my pride as a duelist."

Shō shifted his gaze to Jūdai. "Aniki..." he pleaded.

Jūdai looked back at him sadly. "I made up my mind", he explained. "You always looked up to Kaiser because he dueled with respect for his opponent. And I think that this is how I must show my respect for him."

Shō looked back to Ryō, but he was already ignoring his younger brother again.

"It is your turn", Ryō pointed out and looked at Jūdai.

Jūdai nodded. He placed his hand on the top card of his deck.

Shō slowly moved back to his seat with a gloomy expression.

"I draw!" Jūdai announced loudly.

He checked the new card and nodded, but he did not play it and went right into battle.

"Air Neos, attack Chimeratech Fortress Dragon! When it is not the one who attacks its effects don't activate so it's only a weak monster with zero attack!"

Ryō nodded grimly. "And that's why I set this card", he said and pressed the activation switch on his duel disk. His movements were sluggish but his voice was clear.

"I activate the Quick Spell Dimension Explosion. I return one Fusion Monster to my Extra Deck! Now I can Special Summon as many monsters which were removed from play as I want!"

He pulled out the cards he had previously tucked away. "I Special Summon three Cyber Dragons and Cyber Valley in Attack Mode."

The metallic dragons appeared in the arena and loomed over Jūdai. Air Neos stopped. If he was going to continue his attack, Jūdai had to choose a new target. But none of the monsters Ryō had just called had nearly as many attack points as Air Neos – no matter which one he would choose, the difference was enough to bring Ryō down to zero.

But Ryō obviously knew that, too: "I activate one of the other effects of Cyber Valley. During the Battle Phase, I can remove this monster from play to end the Battle Phase. Then I can draw one card."

Cyber Valley disappeared just as quickly as it had come. Ryō drew the card and signaled Jūdai to go on, but the chance to end the duel was over.

"I set two cards face down and end my turn", Jūdai declared.

Shō took a deep breath. "Why can't it be over already?" he whispered.

"Isn't it obvious?" Edo asked. "They are both duelists. There's no way either of them will just give up."

"But..." Sho whispered. None of the others said a word.

Ryō drew his next card with a shaking hand. But when he saw what he had just drawn, determination took over his face and then his whole posture. He straightened himself up. Then he called out in a surprisingly clear voice that echoed through the arena: "Whether I win or lose... this will be my last turn. Prepare yourself, Jūdai!"

He pushed the card into a slot of his disk. "I activate ... Power Bond!"

Gasps were coming from the crowd. People recognized Hell Kaisers's ace card.

"With the effect of Power Bond I fuse my three Cyber Dragons to summon the almighty Cyber End Dragon!"

The dragons roared, disappeared in a whirl of energy, and made place for a monster that dominated the arena. Its three heads roared, then they faced Jūdai and Air Neos.

The only response that Jūdai was able to get out was an amazed "wow".

"The additional effect of Power Bond: The attack points of Cyber End Dragon are doubled! But at the end of this turn I will take damage equal to Cyber End's Attack Points."

The smile that underlined this announcement turned into a mask of pain when a seizure took over Ryō's body. He groaned and fell to his knees again, buckling over. It looked worse than all the previous times. Shō shrieked in horror. Fubuki rose from his seat. Asuka clenched her fists.

Jūdai started moving towards his opponent to help him. But Ryō, still cowering on the ground, uttered one word. "Attack."

Jūdai stopped when Cyber End Dragon threw back its three heads and gathered energy. The monster's attack points were 8000 now. This attack would finish him for good. Unless...

"Sorry Kaiser, but I can't just let you win. I activate the Quick-Spell De-Fusion! It lets me return Air Neos to my Extra Deck and Special Summon its fusion material monsters, Elemental Hero Neos and Neo Spacian Air Hummingbird!"

Air Neos dissolved and made place for the two monsters.

"Then I'll just attack Air Hummingbird", Ryō said calmly. He was still on the floor but not in immediate pain anymore.

"Not gonna happen! Because now I activate another Quick-Spell, Quick Summon! I can normal summon a monster – right now!"

"And what monster would be able to stand up to Cyber End's 8000 attack points?" Ryō sneered.

Jūdai smiled and spread his arms. "My dear partner", he said.

Then he slapped the card onto his disk.

Thorny vines broke out from the ground, wound themselves around Neos and Air Hummingbird and crushed them before they could even move. The vines united to form a humanoid silhouette. Bat-like wings spread out. A faint glow emanated from the head, slowly revealing shocks of white and blue hair, purple skin and sharp claws.

The crowd fell silent. Cyber End was hovering undecidedly.

Ryō raised his upper body to regard the new monster properly.

Then he smiled. It was a soft, content smile quite unlike the fierce expression he had been wearing the whole duel. "I thought you don't use Yubel in duels", he said.

Jūdai just smiled. And although it was supposed to be just a hologram, it looked like the monster smiled in the same way.

"You know Yubel's effect, don't you?" Jūdai re-confirmed, "When you attack Yubel, you receive damage equal to the attack points of your monster."

Ryō nodded. He pulled himself up from the ground once more. His legs were shaking. He could not raise the left arm with his duel disk anymore. But he managed to keep standing.

"Jūdai..." he said weakly. "That you would even use Yubel... Yes, you could not make it any clearer that you respect me as a strong opponent."

"Onii-san", Shō gasped.

"This is a feeling I forgot..." Ryō whispered. "Respect for me, after all I did... Yes, I am glad it was you in this last duel. Thank you..."

It took Jūdai a moment to realize the meaning of these words, then he shook his head in revulsion. "Don't say that. You still have a lot ahead of you", he said pleadingly.

Ryō silently shook his head. "Respect... I am going to show you my respect... my last ... move..."

His right hand moved towards his duel disk. It was shaking so badly he could hardly fit the card into the slot. It was his last one.

"Activate... Quick-Spell... Cybernetic Zone. Cyber End Dragon is banished by its effect." He slowly sank to the ground as the dragon disappeared. Those in the audience that didn't know Yubel's effect expressed astonishment and disappointment. Whispers broke out when others started to explain what was happening.

And then Cyber End Dragon came back. It threw its three heads back and let out a long, sad cry that reverberated through the arena. The counter showed its attack points: 16000. "During my End Phase, Cybernetic Zone brings back the banished monster with doubled attack", Ryō explained.

Jūdai looked up at the monster. There were tears in the corners of his eyes now.

"It's impressive", he admitted.

Ryō smiled, then he closed his eyes. "The effect of Power Bond also activates during my end phase", he whispered.

There was a bolt of lightning. Ryō raised his head towards the ceiling to greet it. It hit him.

His life points fell to zero.

The duel was over.

Ryō Marufuji, also known as Hell Kaiser, fell onto the ground as all force left his body. He did not hear the voices calling his name anymore.

Shō's eyes were full of tears. "He... **he is not dead!**" he shouted at Mr. T.

Kapitel 4: Another Darkness

Shō's eyes were full of tears. "He... **he is not dead!**" he shouted at Mr. T.

His opponent only smirked.

Shō dried his tears with his sleeves and made a determined face. "I continue the duel! *Cyberdark Dragon*, attack *Zure Knight of Dark World!*"

The sinister dragon shot forward at the armored monster, but Mr. T was faster: "I activate my Trap! *Defense Draw!* It reduces the damage from this battle to zero and I can draw a card."

"But *Zure* is still destroyed", Shō triumphed.

As the claws of *Cyberdark Dragon* bore into *Zure*, the monster's hologram burst into pieces. So did the Spell card *Axe of Despair* it had been equipped with. But Mr. T's Life Point counter stayed at 4000 as he drew a card from his Deck.

Shō flinched. With *Cyberdark Dragon* on his field he was supposed to have the upper hand, but he would have to cause some damage in order to win.

"I set a card and end my turn", he announced.

Truman drew and looked at his card, then at Shō.

"So you think he will wake up?" he asked with a mocking undertone.

Shō shuddered, but he told himself that it was because it was cooler in the shade of the trees. Still, he had no answer.

"You were not on the best terms with him, weren't you?" Mr. T continued. "You disagreed with how he dueled only in order to win, didn't you?"

Shō bit his lower lip. "T- that doesn't matter! He's still my brother!" he said, but his voice was insecure.

Truman grinned, but instead of pushing his point, he went back into the duel: "It's my turn, draw. First, I activate my set trap card *Crevice Into the Different Dimension*. I declare one Attribute, then I can select two monsters with that Attribute from either Graveyard. I declare the Attribute Dark and select *Cyberdark Horn* and *Cyberdark Edge* from your Graveyard. They are removed from play."

The hologram of the card flipped up and a shine emanated from it. As Shō's duel disk ejected the two selected monsters, balls of light flew towards the card. Shō tucked the cards away in his coat's pockets.

Cyberdark Dragon roared as its attack points went from 4600 to 4400. "*Cyberdark Dragon* loses 200 Attack Points because you have less cards in your Graveyard now", Mr. T explained needlessly.

"You still don't have a monster that can stand up to it", Shō said. But he was eyeing *Dark Archetype* on his opponent's field with suspicion. He did not know this monster. Could it have a nasty effect? He had not only avoided attacking it because *Zure* was stronger and therefore more threatening. He also sensed a trap in how Mr. T had summoned it in face-up attack position despite it having only 1400 Attack Points.

"To you, Hell Kaiser is dead already, isn't he?" Mr. T said calmly.

Shō shuddered. "That's not true!" he protested.

Mr. T slowly shook his head. "Just look at you. You wear his coat and wield his deck as if they were yours already."

"I'm just standing in for him until he comes back!" Shō shouted.

*

Johann was staring at Edo Phonenix with shock and disbelief.

"He has not woken up ever since that duel ended", Edo said, finishing his recapitulation of the duel between Jūdai and Hell Kaiser.

Johann needed a moment to gather his thoughts. "But... then it's not Jūdai's fault, is it?" he said helplessly, and looked over to where yet another student had taken up a duel against Jūdai.

Edo crossed his arms and gave a sigh. "Well, I certainly don't think it is. But among the students, nobody knew about Hell Kaiser's condition. He was very good at hiding it while in public. So to them, it looked like it was that duel, and that duel alone, that made him break down. I have also heard them whisper that Jūdai's card, *Yubel*, cursed him in some way."

Johann continued to look in the direction of Jūdai. *Yubel* was next to him in spirit form, sometimes pointing at cards in his hand or talking to him, giving advice. Sure the monster did look a bit sinister with its bat wings, the glowing red eye on its forehead and the claws on the right arm, but except for seeming a bit overprotective of Jūdai, Johann had the impression that it was just as friendly as its partner. But he also knew that he could only see it that way because he could perceive *Yubel* differently than everyone else.

"In the end, though, even knowing the details has not stopped Jūdai's friends to split over this", Edo remarked.

Johann turned back to him. "His friends?" he asked.

He shouldn't be surprised, but since no students had stayed with Jūdai when the duels were started he had somehow started to believe that *Yubel* was everything he had. He had probably projected himself into it too much.

Edo gave a serious nod. "He used to be very good friends with Shō Marufuji, and as you can probably guess by the name, he is Hell Kaiser's younger brother. He blames Jūdai for what happened and thinks Jūdai should have stopped the duel before Hell Kaiser's condition became fatal. Some of Jūdai's friends who think the same have deserted him as well."

*

Mr. T smirked. "You think you are a fitting stand-in for Hell Kaiser?" he said mockingly. "You cannot even beat me."

"The duel is not over yet!"

At this, a satisfied smirk appeared on Mr. T's lips.

"Oh yes it is."

Shō felt cold sweat on his skin. But why? There was no way he could lose now! He had *Cyberdark Dragon* with 4400 Attack Points and his face down Trap card *Fusion Guard* would be able to protect him against effect damage!

"First, I normal summon a monster. Appear: *Snoww, Unlight of Dark World*."

The monster appeared, a creature with vaguely human features. Its skin looked like it was halfway melting from its bones and on its head it had not hair but something that looked like tentacles. The counter showed 1700 attack points – more than *Dark Archetype* but not even close to those of *Cyberdark Dragon*.

Mr. T had one card left in his hand, but he did not play it and went right into battle instead: "*Dark Archetype*, attack *Cyberdark Dragon*!"

The queasy feeling that Shō had about *Dark Archetype* increased. For sure, his opponent wouldn't make it attack just to let it be destroyed.

The weird creature lurched forward, right into the claws of the dragon, and burst into pieces when it was destroyed. If Shō had any possibility to do so, he would have tried to stop that battle – but his cards did not allow it. To his surprise, the Life Point count of Mr. T reacted normally. His life dropped to 1000 in an instant.

Relief started to well up when Mr. T announced coldly: "The effect of *Dark Archetype*: when it is destroyed by battle, I can choose a monster from my Deck that has as many Attack Points as the Battle Damage I took. I lost 3000 Life Points, so I select *Dark Horus* which has 3000 Attack Points."

He searched the card from his deck and showed it to Shō, who was clenching his fists. What was going to happen with that monster?

"According to *Dark Archetype*'s effect, I send monsters whose levels equal that of *Dark Horus* from my hand to the Graveyard to special summon it. *Dark Horus* is Level 8, so it is sufficient that I discard this monster: *Grapha, Dragon Lord of Dark World*, which is also Level 8."

He put the card into the Graveyard slot and placed the *Dark Horus* card on a free slot of his duel disk. With a roar, the black metallic dragon appeared. It was filling the space between Mr. T and Shō almost completely. Shō stared at his opponent in shock and pain. He didn't even see the new monster. Unlike *Dark Archetype*, *Grapha* was a monster whose effect he knew.

While Shō's mind started to frantically think if there wasn't still a way to get out of this, Mr. T said calmly: "If *Grapha* is sent to the graveyard by a card effect, I can target one card you control and destroy it."

Wordlessly, he pointed at Shō's only monster with his left hand. A black mist spread from the Graveyard slot of his duel disk and engulfed it. Then *Cyberdark Dragon* was gone without a trace, leaving Shō completely defenseless. The two Trap cards he still had on his field were useless in this situation. And *Dark Horus* and *Snoww* had combined attack points of 4700. He had managed to not lose any of his 4000 Life Points until now, but that would be over in an instant.

"So much for your boasts that if Jūdai could beat me you would be able to do so as well. You would have done better to run back to your *Aniki* and ask him for help instead of being a poor imitation of Hell Kaiser", Mr. T sneered.

Shō just stared at the opponent monsters blankly.

"But don't you worry", Mr. T continued generously, "because now you will be swallowed by Darkness and forget everything in the embrace of nothingness."

Dark Horus opened its mouth. *Snoww* raised its staff. They attacked.

Shō fell backward when the impact hit him.

A sterile room with white walls and closed curtains. There was nothing inside except for a bed and a TV screen mounted on the wall. Ryō Marufuji, once known as Hell Kaiser, was lying in the bed. He was connected to several devices that kept him alive. His face was sunk in and his skin pale.

On the screen, someone announced: "We have a winner! Jūdai Yūki from Japan is the new World Champion in Duel Monsters!"

Someone turned off the TV. It was Shō, who was standing next to his brother's bed. He was wearing the black coat of Hell Kaiser, but it was ragged and torn in some places. He

looked at the cards in his hands, then threw them into the air. They scattered across the bedsheets and the polished floor, fell on the tubes and cables connecting Ryō to the machines.

"What... did I do this for...?" he asked weakly. "I wore myself out using this deck but I couldn't ..."

A seizure took over his body. He buckled over, gasping for air.

In that moment, there was loud beep which signified that the heart of Ryō Marufuji had stopped beating.

"If this is the future, wouldn't you rather give yourself to the darkness?" a voice asked. Shō nodded.

Then he felt his consciousness fade into nothingness.

*

"Man, where the Jurassic is everyone?"

Tyranno Kenzan was walking in the direction of the Ra Yellow dorm and looking around him. He had played two duels already and won both of them, but now the campus seemed to have become empty. He knew Jūdai was probably still held up at the main building, he had seen him surrounded by students before he left. But he did not want to go there.

He jolted when he heard a sudden scream that was cut off in the middle. It sounded unnatural – and like there was someone in real danger.

Kenzan turned in the direction that he had heard the sound from, which made him enter the forest. Beating through the bushes, he found something soon. A figure standing on a small clearing with the back to him. He didn't need him to turn around to recognize the black coat of Hell Kaiser.

"Marufuji-Senpai", he exclaimed, addressing his upperclassman properly as usual. The figure turned around.

"Hello Kenzan-kun", came the reply.

Kenzan felt the hair of his neck stand up. An animalic growl escaped him.

"Who are you?" he asked. The person in front of him looked exactly like Shō Marufuji, but his instincts told him very clearly that it was someone else – someone he had to be wary of. And his instincts had never failed him.

Shō smiled. "Why don't you try to beat me in a duel and find out?"

*

Jūdai wiped some sweat his forehead with the sleeve of his jacket.

"Am I done?" he asked and looked at the opponent he had just defeated. The group of students around him had shrunk to three who had been cheering for his latest opponent and now looked very disappointed. None of them seemed to want to take the challenge anymore.

Yubel was turning their head in different directions. "Something is wrong", they said.

Jūdai looked alarmed. "What do you mean?"

"Where is everyone?" Yubel asked and gestured around them.

Jūdai turned to look at his surroundings. There was another duel going on near them – Johann, the exchange student from the Arctic Branch was dueling Edo Phoenix. But aside from that and the four students, the space in front of the Academy's main

building was empty. The broad stone path that led up to it was completely deserted.

*

"You see, you cannot beat me", Shō said.

Hovering above him was *Cyberdark Dragon* which was holding *Cyber End Dragon* in its fangs. Its attack points read as an impressive 5800.

Kenzan stood baffled. His opponent, whoever he was, had outplayed him with a masterly use of a deck that contained some of Shō's Roids mixed with the Cyberdark and Cyber style monsters of Hell Kaiser. He had not seen the real Shō use that deck before. But then he had hardly even exchanged a word with him since *that day*.

Kenzan had *Dark Tyranno* on his field with 2600 attack points, so *Cyberdark Dragon's* attack would give him 3200 points of damage. He had only 1000 life points left. Sure, he still had *Survival Instinct* face-down and ready to activate, but that would only buy him 1600 more life points if he banished all the monsters from his Graveyard. He knew he had lost.

"Why do you think you lost?" Shō asked.

Kenzan growled. "Because you're strong!" he replied. What was the point of that question?

"No, it was because you couldn't decide. You could have destroyed *Fusion Guard* when you attacked last turn, but you let me activate it and then used *Dino Stomp* on last card I had. If you had tried to guess you could have stopped me from using *Fusion Guard* and then I wouldn't have had *Cyber End Dragon* in my Graveyard."

"That sounds so simple when you say it now", Kenzan growled.

"You had a chance and you did not use it. Just like with me."

"What?"

The false Shō chuckled. His body quivered, and suddenly burst into fragments. They quickly gathered again to form the silhouette of an unknown man in a black leather suit.

"If you had decided to take Shō's side after his brother fell into a coma, he would not have been so desperate to show everyone that he could do it alone. He might not even have run into me, or you could have come to his help. But you shied away from him. Yet, you didn't even support Jūdai instead. You just acted like everything has nothing to do with you and put all your energy into that stupid graduation album."

"It's not stupid!" Kenzan shouted desperately. "I mean... what should I have done!? I've admired Jūdai all this time, but Shō was my friend! How could I take a side and go against the other!?"

He clenched his fists. They were shaking.

"It's over now, Tyranno Kenzan", his opponent said coldly. "You have lost your friend Shō because you could not take his side, and you have lost the duel because you would not dare to guess which of my cards was the bigger threat to you. And now Jūdai is losing you as a friend and ally – but don't worry, before long you will all be reunited in Darkness."

With that, the man gestured for *Cyberdark Dragon* to attack.

*

"No!"

The call made Johann hesitate. He had been about to order *Sapphire Pegasus*, who

was equipped with *Crystal Release*, to attack *Destiny Hero – Dasher*. But the exclamation from *Crystal Master* and the appearance of the two spirits next to him stopped him momentarily.

"What is wrong?" he asked.

Crystal Keeper pointed.

Johann turned in the direction and called out: "Jūdai, where are you going?"

Jūdai stopped. He had already made a couple of steps down the stone path. Johann had been too absorbed in the new duel to notice that he had finished his final duel.

"Yubel says something's wrong. I am going to look for my friends!"

He was going to turn around again, but Johann shouted "Wait!" and he hesitated.

"I need to go! They could be in danger...! Asuka, Fubuki, Manjōme, Rei or Shō..." Jūdai said wearily.

The spirits next to Johann gasped. Johann looked up at *Crystal Keeper*. "What's wrong?"

"Someone is missing already", *Crystal Master* said in a whiny voice.

"Who is missing?" Jūdai asked. He had heard the monster spirit as well. *Yubel* appeared next to him again, glaring at Johann's ghostly companions with suspicion.

"Let me confirm: Do you remember Tyranno Kenzan?" *Crystal Keeper* asked Jūdai.

Jūdai looked lost. "Kenzan? As in the card *Hero Kenzan – A Hero Emerges?*"

"What is everyone talking about?" Edo interrupted them. "Are you seeing anything I can't?"

"Yes", Johann confirmed to him, "and the monster spirits are saying that people are going missing."

"They are not missing", *Crystal Keeper* said grimly, "they have been swallowed by darkness and that is why nobody can remember them anymore..."

"But you can", *Yubel* pointed out.

"You mean that ... Kenzan? Was a friend of mine and I just forgot about him?" Jūdai said in disbelief.

"Yes, I'm afraid", *Crystal Master* confirmed.

"That's crazy", Edo said.

Johann looked at him. "I think we have more pressing concerns now than ending this duel, don't you think?" he suggested.

Edo still looked a bit confused, but nodded. Johann put his hand on his deck and indicated a surrender. The holograms disappeared. Edo moved over to the other two and they stood together for a moment.

"The good news is that by this logic, everyone we *can* remember should still be fine", Johann summarized.

"Then we have to find them before something happens to them!" Jūdai said. He sounded really concerned and turned to leave again.

"Who are we up against, even?" Edo asked, but started to move in the same direction as Jūdai. Johann followed.

"It's a force called Darkness. It seeks to consume everyone, first this island and then the rest of the world", *Crystal Keeper* said. "Those who have a weak heart it swallows just like that, but with people like you it would use duels to weaken your resistance."

Johann relayed the words to Edo.

"I see. But that would mean we can repel it if we do not lose the duel. Then it's best if we gather the best duelists. People like Manjōme", Edo suggested.

"Right", Jūdai nodded. "People like... uh... who was that again?"

“As I said... eh...” Edo stopped walking. “I can’t remember who I was talking about.”

In a distant corner of the island, Jun Manjōme’s consciousness was swallowed by darkness while the fake version of Shō Marufuji was cackling.

Kapitel 5: Another Memory

"I see. But that would mean we can repel it if we do not lose the duel. Then it's best if we gather the best duelists. People like Manjōme", Edo suggested.

"Right", Jūdai nodded. "People like... uh... who was that again?"

"As I said... eh..." Edo stopped walking. "I can't remember who I was talking about."

The whole group came to a halt below the trees. They looked at each other. Jūdai looked seriously shaken.

"You mean... I just forgot that person we were talking about?" he asked with a hint of panic in his voice.

None of the other two dared to confirm, but their worried faces said it all.

The hesitation only continued for a moment, then Jūdai turned into the direction they had been walking and moved again.

"We need to find the ones we can still remember!" he exclaimed.

Johann nodded and quickly caught up with him. "Yeah, I think that's our best option", he agreed. "We should find and warn as many people as possible."

Jūdai stopped again. "I'm going to look for Asuka", he announced.

Edo gave a nod. "I have no objections. Among the students she's one of the most skilled duelists I can still remember. Personally I would go looking for the other students who came here as the champions of their schools."

"You mean we split up?" Jūdai concluded. He was tapping his feet nervously. It was obvious he would rather get going now than to further discuss.

Edo looked at Johann. "I think it is an option. If our opponent is using duels, moving in a group doesn't help a lot."

Johann looked insecure. The monsters had already stepped in to remind him that he and Jūdai should stay together, but right now they didn't interfere although they were still floating next to him. And he would have to agree that finding the other school's champions sounded like it would help them.

"Yubel, you'll protect him, right?" he asked the monster which had been quietly following Jūdai ever since they had noticed people were missing.

"Of course I will. That is what I was made to do."

Johann nodded. "Then I'm okay with splitting up. Let's meet again in front of the main building in half an hour, whether we find anyone or not."

The three young men nodded, then Jūdai finally turned around and dashed down the path. He was only a few steps away before he started shouting Asuka's name.

Johann looked at Edo. "I think we should stay together", he admitted, "since I don't know the school grounds very well. But the same goes for the other champions, so I hope they are still somewhere close to the main building."

Edo confirmed with a nod, and they started to move as well.

*

Jūdai was jogging along, shouting Asuka's name every now and then. He had already forgotten several of his friends - that much was clear even though he couldn't even remember whom he had forgotten. What a frightening power. He mustn't forget Asuka as well. Not her. Because he still owed her an answer to the question. The

question from back then...

"Hey, Asuka."

Night was falling over the island. Most students were most likely back at their dorms by now, but two of them walked slowly along the banks of the small lake in front of the Obelisk Blue dormitory. Both of them wore the dark blue color of the dorm.

The girl, Asuka Tenjōin, stopped and turned to the one who had silently been walking beside her.

Jūdai Yūki gave her an honest but slightly worn out smile. "Thank you for being my partner today."

Asuka smiled too, but there was a hint of sadness in it. "I'd always tag with you again, you know?" she emphasized.

Jūdai nodded. "I wasn't so sure about that when the tournament was announced" he admitted, looking on the ground. "After everything that happened..."

Asuka sighed. "I know a lot of people blame you for what happened to Ryō. But I... I know what a kind person you are. I'm sure you didn't want this. You don't deserve to be shunned by everyone."

Jūdai was still staring at the ground. "But they're not wrong... I could have stopped the duel. Then he wouldn't..." He couldn't finish the sentence. Asuka saw him clench his fists. "Listen", Asuka said, raising her voice, "I know this is hard for everyone. But I think you have done everything you could. Ryō wanted to duel you. He knew his condition. And as a duelist, it was right of you to see his challenge through to the end."

Jūdai looked at her again. "You think so?" he asked.

Asuka nodded. "I've always liked how you approach dueling. When I got into this school it was to find out what happened to Fubuki-Nii-san, and of course I was confident in dueling. But meeting you taught me that fun is also a part of it. And I hope that today I could remind you of that a little."

Jūdai looked astonished, but then he smiled. "Yes. Yes, I think you did. Thank you."

They stood silently for a while, listening to the soft splashing of the water and leaves rustling in the wind. By now, night had engulfed the island. The lake and the trees behind it had become a huge black mass. The light from the dorm's windows barely reached them, but provided just enough guidance so they could make out each other's silhouettes.

"This might not be the right time to say this", Asuka started, slowly, "but we'll graduate soon and if I don't say it now, I might miss the chance altogether."

Jūdai looked at her, but didn't say a word.

She took a deep breath. "I really like you. No, wait. You'd just misunderstand that. What I want to say is... I love you."

They were both silent again. Asuka's feet scratched the ground nervously.

"Can you... accept these feelings?"

*

While Jūdai walked across the Academy grounds, shouting Asuka's name with increasing desperation, he wished he had reacted differently back then. He had thanked her, but then claimed that people would hate her as well if she stuck with him, then left. They had not really talked since then. And now it could be too late already. But no, as long as he could still remember, it was fine, right?

He had checked the path to the Obelisk Blue Dormitory, then gone down to the other

dorms but without success to find Asuka. Or anyone else, for that matter. Even the forest seemed so silent today. Did the animals disappear, too? Now he was already going back in the direction of the school building.

Turning towards the forest which was now on his left, he shouted Asuka's name once again.

When he turned his head back in the direction he was heading to, he stopped abruptly. Someone was standing in front of him, blocking his path. But it was not Asuka.

It was like a flash hit him. He knew that person, but realized at the same time that only seconds ago he had been unable to remember him.

"Shō."

How could he have forgotten the one person who had been with him since day one? The small build, messy hair and the glasses that made his eyes seem too big for his face? The one who had never doubted him – until that terrible thing happened to his brother?

"Shō, are you still mad at me?" he asked.

Yubel materialized next to him. "Be careful. We had already forgotten about him, which means that he already fell victim to the darkness. This one might not be the real thing."

Jūdai looked at them, then back at the small figure who was wearing the far too big coat of Hell Kaiser. "But..."

"Ah, it's no use trying to fool your Guardian", Shō said, but his voice didn't sound like Shō at all. His figure dissolved into dozens and dozens of black cards which set themselves back together to form the shape of a much larger and taller man. Jūdai had seen him before.

"You're Trueman!"

"Indeed. And just like last time you are too late."

"What do you mean? I beat you!" Jūdai protested.

The tall, bony man who called himself Mr. T smirked. It looked more similar to a crack appearing on the lower half of his face than to what would commonly be called a smile.

"Oh right, you cannot remember him, can you... I don't mind telling you now. When we met the first time, I had already accomplished what I wanted to do. The monster spirit *Honest*, which was threatening my plans, is gone."

"A monster spirit...?"

Mr. T shrugged. "You wouldn't know about him. Fujiwara was the only one who could remember *Honest*. That's why it was so easy to erase him."

Jūdai and *Yubel* exchanged glances. It was obvious that both of them didn't really know who their opponent was talking about.

"And this time you will be the one to be erased", the man continued. He raised his arm, which burst into a flock of cards that, when rearranging themselves, formed a Duel Disk in the form of bat wings. "Face me, Jūdai Yuki and *Yubel*."

Jūdai pulled the deck from his belt and inserted it into his Duel Disk, but before he could activate the device, a voice called out: "Not so fast!"

A third person arrived on the scene. It was one of the new arrivals from that morning, the dark-skinned champion of the West Branch. He must have rushed their way and was still catching his breath.

"Hey, you're... O'Brien, right?" Jūdai said, remembering his name.

"Affirmative."

Mr. T looked dismayed. "Why are you interfering? Don't worry, you will be erased as well. Your turn will come soon."

"My orders are to ensure the wellbeing of Yuki Jūdai", O'Brien replied. "I will face you in his stead."

He stepped in front of Jūdai without hesitation.

"I don't need someone to protect me", Jūdai protested immediately. "I will beat that guy and save everyone!"

O'Brien turned around to him. "Don't be naïve. You have no way of knowing if you will win. And if you lose, all will be lost."

Jūdai looked taken aback. "But..." he started, but *Yubel* interrupted him. "He is right. The last time we faced Mr. T we almost did not make it. I think we should avoid the risk."

O'Brien could not hear *Yubel's* words, but used Jūdai's sudden silence to add something: "There's something I need you to do. Mr. Crawford has let me know that the *Rainbow Dragon* was created. It is on the way here. Mr. Andersen needs to know about that."

Jūdai looked very confused. "Johann...? And Crawford as in the creator of Duel Monsters? What's the *Rainbow Dragon*?"

Before O'Brien could answer, he suddenly pushed Jūdai away. The teenager was propelled several meters and fell backwards on his buttocks, unable to keep the balance. "Ow, what the..." he complained, but when he got up again, he saw that Mr. T had closed in on them and was now standing right where they both had been just seconds before. O'Brien had managed to withdraw a few steps and, at the same time, attached and activated his Duel Disk which looked very similar to a rifle gun.

"I will take you on", he said.

Mr. T, whom he had addressed, looked bored. "Fine. It will not take long anyway."

He took a few steps backward to make place for the playing field and held up his left arm with the bat-wing Duel Disk.

"Duel!" shouted the opponents.

Jūdai scrambled to his feet. "O'Brien..." he said with worry.

O'Brien turned to look at him over his shoulder. "Just go", he urged him.

Then he turned back to his opponent. "I start! Draw! I summon *Volcanic Slicer* in Attack position!"

Jūdai saw the hologram of a fully armored monster appear from the corner of his eye while he was hurrying back to where he had come from.

*

"Jūdai is coming back", Edo said and pointed.

Several heads turned to see a figure in an Obelisk Blue uniform running up the path to the main building.

"Jūdai", Asuka shouted. Hearing her, he increased his speed. "Asuka! You're okay!"

He arrived in front of her and caught his breath. "I'm glad", he said, looking at her. She smiled. "Me too", she admitted.

There was a short awkward silence between them, but it was cut short by Johann who asked: "Did you find anyone else?"

Jūdai raised his head and saw that aside of Asuka and Johann, there were Edo as well as the champions of the East and South branch. Not many, but most likely capable

duelists.

"Yes, um... I met O'Brien", Jūdai said and went on to explain what had just happened as briefly as possible.

"The *Rainbow Dragon* is good news", Johann said when Jūdai asked about it. "It is the final Ace monster that I need to complete my deck. I was told it will be needed to beat the Darkness."

"It is based on the legend, correct?" Amon Garam reconfirmed. The muscular champion of the East branch had been quietly listening so far. Johann replied to his question with a nod, but Asuka cut in: "What Legend?"

Amon looked at Johann and then decided to tell it himself: "Johann's deck contains seven ultra rare monsters, the Crystal Beasts. They are based on a legend according to which Julius Caesar, the emperor of Rome, once collected seven gemstones from different parts of the world. They were supposed to be put into a single stone tablet depicting a Dragon. But the gems and the tablet were lost in rough seas. Mr. Crawford has been able to track down the stone tablet recently, and created the *Rainbow Dragon* card based on the dragon carved into it."

Johann frowned. "That's true but how do you know about the tablet?" he asked with a hint of suspicion.

Amon adjusted his glasses. "I don't think that is the most pressing question right now", he appeased.

"I agree", Asuka said. "I still think we should look for Fubuki-Nii-san. He must be somewhere on the island."

"I'm repeating myself, but I do not think that finding him is worth the risk of splitting up", Amon said.

"He is my brother", Asuka protested.

"He is important. His connection with Fujiwara is a key to beat Darkness." This remark came from *Crystal Keeper*, the blonde knight monster that was now showing up next to Johann again.

"Did you say Fujiwara?" Jūdai gasped.

Everyone looked at him. "Nobody said Fujiwara. What are you talking about?" Amon said.

"Are you hearing the voices of your monsters again?" Asuka asked. Jūdai nodded.

Amon sighed. "I guess in this situation it would be irrational to doubt that you can hear the voices of the cards. But can you please let the rest of us know what they are saying?"

Johann spoke: "They are saying that Asuka's brother is important because his connection to..." he listened to the spirit before he continued, "... to Fujiwara is a key to beat Darkness."

Then he looked at Jūdai. "Why did that surprise you? Do you know who Fujiwara is?"

"I don't", Jūdai admitted, "but that Trueman guy mentioned him and a monster spirit called *Honest*."

"Is *Honest* not with you?" *Crystal Master* asked worriedly.

Jūdai looked at the sinister monster with surprise. "No, I've only ever heard about him when Trueman mentioned him."

The face of *Crystal Master* was not visible behind his mask, but the mouth of the other spirit, *Crystal Keeper*, showed great dismay.

Yubel rose behind Jūdai with crossed arms and eyed the monster duo next to Johann.

"Why do you think he should be with Jūdai?" they asked sternly. When neither of the

two answered, *Yubel* continued: "You seem to have already known that something would happen here. Why do you want Jūdai and Johann to stick together? How do you know about Fujiwara when nobody else seems to remember someone with that name? Who..."

They stopped when Jūdai rose a hand. "*Yubel*, I understand that you are suspicious. But... I can't help it, I want to trust them."

Yubel sighed. "You are naïve as always. What if this is a trap?"

"I know it's strange, right?" Johann cut in. "These two just appeared one day and told me that Darkness is approaching and that they know the way to beat it. But we already found the *Rainbow Dragon* thanks to them, and if it weren't for them, I and the other champions wouldn't even be here. I vouch for them."

Yubel squinted at him. "And why should I trust *you*?"

Johann was at a loss, but Jūdai announced: "Well, I trust him."

He continued, looking at *Yubel* while he talked: "Nothing comes out of distrusting strangers. If I had not trusted a stranger back then, we would not even be here, I think. I couldn't even thank that guy back then, but I want to honor his memory by accepting help from others."

Yubel kept eye contact with Jūdai a little longer, visible struggling, and finally shrugged. "You have a point. Distrusting him will probably not help us."

"I think we missed a lot here, but the gist is that we should trust the voices of the spirits you hear, yeah?" Edo confirmed, guessing from the continued silence that the conversation was over.

Jūdai and Johann nodded simultaneously.

"Then we should-" Edo started but stopped talking when he heard some noise that was getting louder by the second. The others started to listen as well. Then the tallest of the group, Jim of the South branch, who had not said anything all the time, raised his arm to point at something in the sky. The crocodile which was tied to his back started to squirm and growl.

Jūdai got excited as well. "That must be the helicopter with the *Rainbow Dragon* that..." Suddenly he hesitated. "... I forgot who told me about it."

Before anyone could say anything more, the helicopter started to change direction. It had been approaching exactly in their direction, but now it suddenly swayed left and started to lose altitude.

"Something must have happened to the pilot!" Edo exclaimed.

There was nothing they could do from their position. The machine shot past them in a safe distance, continuously losing altitude, and appeared out of sight behind the Academy's main building. Then there was a loud crash.

Kapitel 6: Another Hope

There was nothing they could do from their position. The machine shot past them in a safe distance, continuously losing altitude, and appeared out of sight behind the Academy's main building. Then there was a loud crash.

Jim was the first to overcome the shock of the sudden event. "The *Rainbow Dragon's* in that helicopter, righ'?"

Johann pulled himself together. "Yes. We have to get it." He turned to look at the others.

"Please do", Asuka said sternly and crossed her arms. "I am going to look for Fubuki-Nii-san. Alone, if I must."

"I'll go with her", Jūdai said immediately and stepped closer to her.

Amon just raised his eyebrows and adjusted his glasses, but held back a comment. Jim nodded, as did Edo. Johann looked at his two spirit companions for guidance.

Crystal Master answered in his usual unhappy tone: "Fubuki is equally important as the *Rainbow Dragon* in order to beat Darkness. It cannot be helped." His counterpart nodded grimly: "But remember that you need to reunite if you want to beat Darkness."

Johann nodded and held out his hand to Jūdai. "Well, you heard them. Take care, and let's meet again here."

Jūdai pressed the offered hand briefly.

"That's a promise", he confirmed. Then turned to Asuka: "Let's go."

*

The crash site was impossible to miss, even for the new arrivals who were completely unfamiliar with the school grounds. A pillar of thick black smoke that rose high into the sky marked the spot perfectly.

Nonetheless they had to enter the forest behind the academy building where no student ever seemed to have set foot. The trees stood closely and the underwood was deep. But Jim nonchalantly pulled a knife out of his belt and went ahead, cutting off branches when needed. Johann followed, but not too closely, because the crocodile that was strapped to Jim's back still seemed intimidating even though it could hardly move in this position. The other two were closely behind him.

"Did I catch that right? We're just here 'cause of this Darkness thing?" Jim asked over his shoulder after he had cut off another branch.

Johann made an uncomfortable face. "Essentially... yes", he admitted.

"Because you heard the voices of the spirits?" Amon reconfirmed from behind.

"Yeah." The answer was accompanied by a meek nod.

Jim moved again and everyone else followed, but Amon kept up the topic: "So what exactly did the spirits tell you?"

"Well..." Johann faked a laugh in a desperate attempt to lighten the mood somewhat, "they just appeared in my dreams one day. They told me that the world is in danger and that the only way to stop Darkness is for me to go to Duel Academy and join forces with Jūdai Yūki."

"Oh, but why are we here then?" Jim asked, slashing another vine. "You're not to join forces with us?"

Johann shook his head apologetically. "When I discussed everything with Mr. Crawford, he suggested that each of the Duel Academy branches should send one student. I guess he thought it would look weird if only I came."

"So according to the spirits we're not needed here?" Amon concluded sourly.

Before anyone could answer, Jim burst through a bush and exclaimed: "There it is."

They had been aware that the stench of burning plastic and metal parts was coming closer, but they were unable to see anything but the black smoke until they stepped out of the forests after Jim.

Amon gave an exasperated sigh.

The smoke came from a deformed part of metal that lay in the dirt just where the forest faded and gave way for the rocky terrain at the slope of the volcano. It was not a helicopter. At least not a whole one.

"So the fuel tank exploded...?" Johann surmised.

Edo crossed his arms. "That's obvious, isn't it?"

"Well, the other parts oughta be around here, righ'?" Jim mused and turned his head to look around. They could already see some smaller metal parts under nearby trees.

"Worst case the card we are looking for caught fire and is nothing but ash by now", Amon pointed out.

"That's-" Johann started in a protestful tone, but interrupted himself and finished, "... possible, I guess."

"It is not", said the blonde *Crystal Keeper* angrily. "You as its master should be able to feel the Dragon's presence!"

Johann turned to look at the monster with surprise, then his face slowly lit up. "Then that warm feeling..."

"Yes, it is the presence of the *Rainbow Dragon* no doubt", the dark *Crystal Master* confirmed.

Johann nodded and turned to the other humans, who were looking at him with varied expressions. "The spirits again, I guess?" Amon smirked.

Johann nodded. "The card must still be intact. I can feel the presence of its spirit." He turned around on the spot and looked in all directions. "But I can't really tell from where."

"Let's go looking for it, eh?" Jim suggested. He got on his knees and loosened the strap that had attached the big crocodile to his back. "Caren will help us."

When the reptile was on the ground, Johann, Edo and Amon all took a step back, but Jim already had something in his hand that looked like meat. Caren turned to him and opened her big jaws. Everyone held their breath when Jim put his hand right between her teeth and let go of the meat. But she shut her mouth very carefully, and with enough delay to let Jim pull his hand back out. "Good girl", he said and patted her head, then got back up.

"Let's go", he announced and started to walk to the left. Caren started crawling in his direction. Johann followed after exchanging a glance with the other two.

*

"Say, Jūdai... who do you still remember?"

Jūdai looked surprised when Asuka posed the question.

"Uh... hm... Well, there's Edo, right? And the exchange students. Johann, Jim and ... what was his name? The one with the glasses."

"Amon", Asuka confirmed, "I guess it's a good sign that we can still remember them

all. And Fubuki as well... But who else?"

Jūdai scratched his chin.

"You know", Asuka elaborated, "I keep thinking about my memories with Fubuki, but some of them are so blurry... I know there must have been other people in my life. I must have parents, too. And I just can't remember any of them."

Jūdai slowly shook his head. "I can't remember my parents either," he admitted. "And who knows, maybe I even have brothers or sisters, but already forgot them."

Asuka nodded sadly.

"That's why we have to find Fubuki at all costs", Jūdai said and held up his fist.

She smiled. "Thank you... It's good to see you so motivated again."

"Yeah... I really don't know why I was so down recently."

They took a slightly brisker pace when walking on. Asuka had suggested they go to the conference house of the Academy and they were now on the way to it. She remembered that Fubuki had gone there often recently, although she could absolutely not recall why. They had concluded that it must be related to someone they had already forgotten.

"Oh!" Jūdai suddenly exclaimed. He ran a few steps ahead and started to walk backwards so he could look at Asuka while walking. "There is someone else I remember. Actually, there's two people. One of them is Yūgi Mutō, the King of Games."

Asuka smiled. "Who could ever forget him?" she mused. "Especially you..."

Jūdai nodded eagerly.

"And who's the other?"

"I don't know his name, actually", Jūdai said. "But he helped me and *Yubel* a lot. Right?" He looked at his monster partner with a smile.

Yubel nodded. "Yes. It should not surprise me that he seems to have not been consumed by Darkness so far. After all he could see me, which means that -"

"I think I never heard that story", Asuka said to Jūdai, oblivious to *Yubel* speaking, "can I hear it?"

Jūdai grinned. "Of course."

*

Fubuki Tenjōin felt chased. Even though he had just repelled the sinister-looking man with the unhealthy skin color, he did not really feel successful – except that he somehow knew that if he had lost, he would have faced bad consequences.

He knew he'd had a reason to be in the conference house which was located rather far away from the school's main building on top of a cliff, looking out to the sea. He knew it had once been built to house the academy's owner whenever he was staying there, but as far as he knew it had not been used for that purpose for the entire time since he had enrolled.

Why had he been there? There were no occasions in Duel Academy's schedule that had students come there. He still knew that he had gone there often in the past few weeks, but he could absolutely not remember what he had done there.

There was also something off about the facility itself. He had checked all rooms after he'd chased his opponent away, to make sure there were no other sinister figures hiding. He'd found a room full of medical devices with a sickbed, and there had been a file with patient's data lying around – except all the fields that should have patient information were blank. He'd also found a mobile phone which was decorated with a

cat mascot on a strap, but although it had been unlocked, he had been unable to determine its owner. There was only one number saved in the address book – his own. It had prompted him to check his phone, and he had realized there were no numbers saved on there, either. Which was weird, because he knew that he was a collector who'd ask everyone, especially women, for their numbers. It was all really unsettling. When he decided that he would not get any answers at the conference house, he left and went on his way to the school's main building. Something weird was happening here, and he was worried about his sister who was also at the Academy. If something had happened to her...! The thought of her made him increase his pace.

He did not get far before he heard footsteps and saw someone coming up the gentle slope that led to the conference house. Instinctively, he stopped and waited for the approach. It was not long until two dark figures entered his vision.

"It's you again!" Fubuki exclaimed with terror.

"You... why are you wearing that mask?"

Before him stood the man he had been fighting earlier, the one who had introduced himself as Mr. T. Except that this time there was two of them. Two Mr. Ts that looked exactly the same. As if the man had not been eerie enough when appearing alone.

"I don't have to explain myself to the likes of you. Just try to beat me!" Fubuki shouted aggressively.

The two men exchanged a glance.

"We're not here to beat you. We were looking for you to...", one of them started.

"I don't care what you came here for! All this weird stuff is happening because of you, isn't it? Then I have to beat you!"

"You're not being yourself, Fubuki Tenjōin", the second Mr. T said.

"What do you even know about me?" Fubuki retorted.

The first Mr. T stepped forward. "You are not going to listen to either of us, are you? Then I'll duel you. Maybe that will make you realize what is really going on here."

"That's exactly what I want", Fubuki agreed and readied his Duel Disk.

The opponents took opposite stances and drew the initial cards from their decks. The Mr. T that was not going to duel placed himself at the side with a good view on both of them and crossed his arms.

Fubuki's opponent started: "I go first. I set a monster in face-down defense mode and a face-down spell or trap card, then I end my turn."

Fubuki eyed him suspiciously. Apparently his opponent was waiting for him to make a move first.

"Here I go, then. I draw!" He only regarded his cards briefly before he decided on the next move.

"I summon *Red-Eyes Black Chick* in attack position!" he announced.

The hologram of the monster, a tiny black dragon half hidden in a big reddish egg, appeared with a squeal.

The monster had only 800 attack points and anyone who didn't know its effect would probably have taunted Fubuki for playing such a weak monster in attack mode. Mr. T did not.

"I use *Black Chick's* effect. I can send it to the Graveyard to special summon *Red-Eyes Black Dragon* from my hand!"

The small dragon made way for a much larger dragon, which was also black. The hologram let out a nasty scream, but Mr. T did not budge an inch.

"I activate from my hand the Spell Card *Inferno Fire Blast*. It damages your life points

by the attack points of my *Red-Eyes Black Dragon*!"

The dragon roared, threw back its head, and then launched a red fire ball at Mr. T. The man in black braced himself against the attack, but was pushed back a few steps when it hit. His Life point counter dropped to 1600.

"That stung", he testified, "but according to the effect of *Inferno Fire Blast*, your *Red-Eyes* can't attack anymore."

This opponent really knew his cards very well, Fubuki registered. He had not even used this card in the previous duel. But it would not make a difference. He had beaten Mr. T once already, he would be able to do it again.

"*Red-Eyes* can't attack, but that doesn't mean that your monster is safe." He held up a card from his hand: "This monster can only be special summoned by tributing a *Red-Eyes Black Dragon*. So I do that and summon *Red-Eyes Darkness Dragon*!"

The dragon that appeared on the field now looked similar to the one that had been offered as a tribute, but had several dark-red stones set in its armor. It gave a vile screech when it appeared. "*Darkness Dragon* gains 300 attack points for every Dragon in my graveyard. Right now there's two, so it gains 600!" The counter next to the dragon jumped to 3000. "*Darkness Dragon*, attack his face-down monster!"

The attack went through and flipped up the card, showing the attacked monster just for seconds before it vanished.

Fubuki stared at it with surprise. He had not expected this kind of monster.

"I activate my face-down trap", Mr. T announced: "*Hero Signal*. When a monster I control is destroyed, I can special summon a Level 4 or lower monster from my hand or deck. I choose *Elemental Hero Bubbleman*!"

The hero in blue appeared on the field. "And because I have no other cards on my field, its effect allows me to draw two cards", Mr. T added and drew.

Fubuki stared. "E-Heroes?" he murmured.

"Is something the matter?" Mr. T asked.

Fubuki clenched his teeth. "If you think I'll go easy on you just because you use the same cards as Jūdai you're very mistaken!"

His opponent grimaced. "Is it that mask that blurs your vision?"

Fubuki felt for the mask on his face. When he had received it he had sworn to never wear it, but it had not been long until he had been forced to – in order to survive. This time was similar. In the previous duel he had quickly realized that he needed this power in order to win. And surprisingly he was still feeling pretty much himself, although the mask had previously tried to take over his mind even if he wore it just for a short time.

"Nothing is blurred. I see clearer than ever!" He checked the card in his hands again. "I set a card and end my turn. Just try to overpower *Darkness Dragon*!"

"It looks like Darkness already got a hold on you", the Mr. T who stood at the sidelines remarked.

Fubuki clenched his right fist. He was starting to feel the pressure of a foreign consciousness invading his own, but he was still himself: "What does it even matter to you! I will use its power to beat you!"

"I see", his opponent said. "But I won't make it easy for you."

Mr. T drew. Due to *Bubbleman*'s effect he now had six cards in his hand.

"I equip *Great Sword* to my *Bubbleman*."

A Katana appeared in the left hand of the monster and the display next to it indicated that its attack points had just risen to 1100. Fubuki stayed alert. He knew the additional effect of *Great Sword*: the monster equipped with it could be counted as

two tributes to summon a Warrior monster. But his opponent was using an E-Hero deck, and those decks were built around Fusion summons. Was there even an E-Hero that required two tributes?

"I tribute *Bubbleman*, who is counted as two tributes, to summon *Elemental Hero Neos*!"

Fubuki stumbled backwards.

"But that's...!" he exclaimed with shock. "I know only Jūdai has this card! How..."

"Are you understanding now?" Mr. T asked.

Fubuki straightened his back. "What did you *do* to Jūdai?" he shouted angrily. The Darkness seemed to press against his mind even stronger. Maybe he should just give in to it. This opponent needed to be beaten.

Mr. T shook his head. "Apparently not", he muttered.

"I equip *Neos* with *Neos Force*. He gains 800 attack points."

The hologram of *Neos* flexed its impressive arm muscles and energy started to gather around its right fist. The attack points now displayed as 3300.

"The additional effect of this equip spell is that when *Neos* destroys your monster, you receive damage equal to the attack points of the destroyed monster."

Fubuki's hand moved towards the switch that would activate his set card.

"That won't beat me yet!"

"Right", Mr. T confirmed. "*Neos*, attack *Darkness Dragon*!"

Neos stormed forward with his right fist pulled back, then jumped and released a punch that shattered *Red-Eyes Darkness Dragon*. The hologram burst into particles that fell to the ground. The impact even blew the card from its place in the duel disk. Fubuki's life points fell by 300 points due to the difference in attack points between their monsters, and another 3000 by the effect, leaving him with only 700.

But something odd was happening. Fubuki blinked.

When the hologram particles dissolved, the one in front of him did not look like Mr. T anymore. It was –

"Jūdai!"

His opponent's face lit up. "Can you see it's me now?" he asked.

"Nii-san!" came a voice from where the other Mr. T had been standing. But it was a blonde girl in the Obelisk Blue uniform who was standing there now. She ran towards him.

Fubuki suspended the duel and the hologram disappeared. Then he took off his mask. The one coming towards him still looked like...

"Asuka", he responded with relief.

His younger sister hugged him. "I'm so glad!" she exclaimed.

"Eh... me too..." he muttered. "What the hell was wrong with me?"

Jūdai pointed at the card on the ground that was supposed to show *Red-Eyes Darkness Dragon*. It looked pitch black. As the three looked on, the card dissolved, just like the hologram before.

"The power of Darkness must have grabbed a hold of you through that card", Jūdai concluded.

"I... it really looked like I was dueling this terrible man, Mr. T... But... Darkness is in the mask, isn't it? How did it go into the card?" He was very confused.

"I don't get it all either, but I know that everything is different now", Jūdai said.

"Because Darkness has taken form and is trying to consume the world."

*

Edo had not been left with much of a choice except following Amon after Johann had gone with Jim. Not that he disliked him, but something about the attitude of the champion from the East branch annoyed him. He always acted as if he knew everything there was to know. Also he was walking ahead as if he was alone, not caring if a branch that he pushed out of his way would spring back and hit someone behind him. Edo had therefore let the distance between them increase quite a bit.

"Are you sure it makes sense to go farther that way?" he asked.

Amon did not even turn to answer. "The explosion of a fuel tank has a massive power. There must be bigger parts somewhere here."

Edo clenched his fists. Yes, if it was Amon asking him the same question, he would probably act in a similar way. That was the most annoying part of it.

"We should have-," he started, but he got short because he spotted a shadow below the trees.

He turned.

A small figure was standing beneath the trees. It was a small boy, but he was wearing the uniform of Obelisk Blue, the most prestigious of the Academy's dorms. He was smiling.

"Edo Phoenix... duel me."

Edo glanced at Amon, who was still moving and had apparently not noticed about his encounter.

If he could stop the enemy here, the others would be safe, right? And even if he could not he would be buying time for Amon, Jim or Johann to find the *Rainbow Dragon*.

"I guess it's time to play hero", he muttered, then got his Duel Disk ready and turned to the boy.

"Alright, let us duel!"

Kapitel 7: Another Father

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"I guess it's time to play hero", he muttered, then got his Duel Disk ready and turned to the boy.

"Alright, let us duel!"

The boy started to advance in Edo's direction. His movements were eerily smooth and he made almost no sound moving about the dense forest. His lips were twisted into a wretched smile that looked out of place on that small, round face.

"You think you have chances to win, don't you?" the boy asked.

Edo retreated a few steps. He was not one to be easily intimidated by an opponent, but the sound of the kid's voice made the hair on his neck stand up.

"I don't *think I have chances*. I *know* I can win," he said nevertheless.

The boy slowly shook his head. "You cannot win, you just don't know it yet," he said.

Before Edo's eyes, the figure of the small student burst into what seemed to be a bunch of duel monsters cards, except they were all pitch black on either side. They dispersed and set themselves back together in the shape of a much taller, lanky man. He was still coming closer, causing Edo to move further backwards.

"You are Darkness?" Edo surmised.

The man smirked. "I am merely a messenger. There is no need for master Darkness to face you himself. If you need a name, call me Trueman - because I speak the truth. The one that you are running away from."

Edo frowned. "I do not care what you call yourself. I will beat you."

Pushed back by the advance of the other man Edo reached a small clearing in the woods. It was barely large enough to fit a playing field, but it would do for a holographic duel.

He moved to the opposite side of the clearing, focused on his opponent and put his deck into the Duel Disk. Trueman smirked and grew a deck and duel disk out of his left arm. The sight of it made Edo uneasy but he kept his pokerface.

"Duel!" they announced.

*

The fact that Edo had fallen behind and cornered by the enemy had not escaped Amon. But Edo had not called out to him so Amon had judged to not try to help him, either. A duel was, as the latin origin of the word expressed, a confrontation between two individuals. He had no right to interfere anyway, so it was the smarter course of action to continue searching for the *Rainbow Dragon*.

When he pushed through the underwood the next time, he saw something. Tangled

up in the vines of a tree there was the entrance hatch of the helicopter. It was largely intact, except for the glass of the window in its middle which was thoroughly burst. One edge touched the ground, the rest was still hanging in the air. And there, half hidden by the door and partly obscured by the plants around it, glinted something made of a more silvery metal.

*

"Please go first," Trueman said to Edo.

It was entirely welcome. His starting hand had been amazing already, with some immensely useful cards, but the one he drew at the beginning of the turn made the setup perfect. He used *D-Spirit* to special summon *Destiny Hero - Disk Commander* as his first monster, which he then tributed for the normal summon of the *Destiny Hero - Dasher* he'd just drawn.

To round it off perfectly and establish his dominance over the playing field, he activated his field spell:

"*Clock Tower Prison!* When the time has passed it will reveal its power!" he announced. Virtual walls and towers rose around them. Having this card on his field in the first turn was a huge asset. Being a professional duelist meant that most of his opponents knew its effect - but if anything that made them even more prone to feel the pressure of having to find a way to win, or to remove this card from the field, before it gained its full power after four turns.

Trueman, however, was very unimpressed. "You think you will still be alive when the time has passed?"

Edo maintained his poker face. "Let's see if I even need this to keep you in check," he taunted back. "I set a card and end my turn."

Trueman drew.

"At this time, the hands of the *Clock Tower* advance!" Edo announced. The minute hand sprang to the next quarter.

Trueman acted as if it did not concern him at all. "I summon *Dark Archetype* in attack mode."

The monster appeared, a behemoth whose head, torso, tail and extremities seemed to come from entirely different life forms. Edo had never encountered this card before. With 1400 attack points it was much weaker than Edo's *Dasher* and that was a clear sign it had some effect that would be useful for Trueman.

"*Dark Archetype*, attack *Dasher*," Trueman ordered.

Edo rose his arm. "I activate my trap *D-chain* and equip it to *Dasher*. It gains 500 attack points so it now has 2600!"

There was a chance that this was somehow playing into Trueman's hands, but it was too good a chance to reduce his life points to not do it.

The hologram *Dasher* evaded the clumsy attack of the gooey *Archetype* and lunged at it with the hook that was attached to the chain it had just been equipped with. Trueman's Life Points dropped to 2800, but he smirked as if that was a good thing.

Edo did not let that get to him: "The additional effect of *D-chain*! When the equipped monster destroys another monster and sends it to the cemetery, it inflicts another 500 life points of damage!"

Trueman's life was down to 2300 now. "Well done," he lauded, but his tone was still entirely unimpressed. "Now let me tell you about the effect of *Dark Archetype*. If it's destroyed by battle, I can choose a monster from my deck with attack points equal to

the battle damage I just took. The damage is 1200, so I choose *Enigma the Creator*." Edo caught his breath when Trueman pulled the card from his deck and presented it. This was one he knew all too well, and it did not exactly invoke good memories.

Trueman continued: "Now I send monsters whose total level equal the level of *Enigma* from my hand to the graveyard in order to special summon it. I choose another *Enigma*, which I already had in my hand."

He put the card from his hand into the graveyard and placed the one from the deck on a card slot. The monster appeared, a masked creature in a wide robe and a monstrous left arm which was wrapped in bandages. The hologram's appearance was accompanied with a low growl.

A shudder ran down Edo's spine. He would admit it to no-one, but he had seen this monster way too often in his nightmares. It almost felt like the ground below him was starting to sway like that of a boat.

"I see you like that one," Trueman grinned.

He knew, Edo realized. By some sinister means, Trueman was completely aware what seeing this monster did to him. That was why it was in his deck.

"Let me see how you will go against this one. I set a card and end my turn."

Edo swallowed against the feeling of nausea that was building in his throat. He had been aware that this was not an ordinary opponent, right? It had to be expected that he would try to exploit his weakest points. But he must not falter.

"I draw!" he announced and immediately checked the card.

"I activate *Destiny Draw*! By sending a "*Destiny Hero*" to the cemetery, I can draw two cards!"

The cards this brought into his hands were useful enough.

"I activate *Doctor D*. I remove from play a "*Destiny Hero*" from my cemetery to special summon another Level 4 or lower "*Destiny Hero*" from there. I remove the *Destiny Hero - Celestial* which I just discarded from play to bring back *Destiny Hero - Disk Commander*."

He tucked away the removed card in an inner pocket of his suit and placed the monster on the field that he had tributed in his first turn, this time in defense position.

"The effect of *Disk Commander*! When it is special summoned from the cemetery, I can draw two cards!"

Edo drew once more and a smirk appeared on his face. Sure he had had to help it quite a bit, but now all pieces were there to summon his ultimate monster.

"Looks like you are out of luck, Mr. Trueman. One of the cards I just drew is this! I activate *Fusion Sage*. It allows me to draw *Polymerization* from my deck!"

He sought out the card and shuffled his deck before he put it back. "It probably won't surprise you when I activate the *Polymerization* I just drew. I combine *Destiny Hero - Dogma* and *Destiny Hero - Plasma* from my hand to fusion summon the ultimate *Destiny: Destiny End Dragoon*!"

On the field, the holograms of the two selected monsters appeared briefly, only to disappear in a whirl and make place for the announced *Dragoon*, a sinister humanoid creature with the wings and tail of a dragon. The monster, which displayed 3000 attack points, was the most recent but also the most powerful addition to Edo's deck.

"I use the effect of *Dragoon*! I can destroy one of your monsters and you receive damage equal to its attack points."

Edo pointed at *Enigma*: "Begone!"

Destiny End Dragoon raised its left arm which ended in a cannon in the shape of a

dragon head and pointed it at the opponent monster. A laser blast shot out of it and pierced *Enigma* which burst into light particles, then Trueman himself. The opponent's life point counter dropped to 1100.

"Because it was destroyed by an effect, you cannot activate *Enigma's* effect that lets you summon a token in its stead," Edo pointed out. With this monster gone he felt much better. Trueman had tried to exploit his darkest memories, but in the end it was the better duelist that would prevail.

Trueman was left without a defense now, but having used *Destiny End Dragoon's* effect Edo could not battle this turn. For a brief moment he wondered if he should have just attacked with the three monsters that were now on his field. Even considering *Enigma's* effect, that should cause enough damage - but there was the unknown factor of that face-down trap card on Trueman's field. In a professional duel he would surely have chosen the flashier option of an all-out attack, but the stakes were so much higher now. Even if *Dragoon* could not be destroyed by card effects, there was just no telling in what way that trap could bite him back if he let go of all caution.

*

Amon slowly approached the helicopter door from the side. There was no telling how well it was held by the tree's branches, and he certainly did not want to be buried beneath it. The object that he had spotted earlier became more clearly visible when he got closer. It was a metal suitcase, the kind that was often used to transport valuable objects and cash. He was almost sure that he had found what he was looking for.

With a cautious glance to the helicopter door he extended his arm and touched the handle of the case, which was also made of metal. He had been concerned that it would be hot from the earlier explosion, but it was only warm by now and could be touched without fear. He grabbed the handle and quickly moved to safety, pulling the case with him. It was heavy for its size, a sign that someone had wanted to make really sure that the content would not be damaged.

On closer examination, the case was dented on one side in spite of the thick walls. That made it difficult to open it, but Amon had enough muscular strength to yank the lid off completely. The content seemed undamaged at first glance. He caught his breath when he saw it.

The case was filled with padding that had a rectangular cutout in the middle. Inside of it lay one of the rarest and most powerful Duel Monsters cards aside from the rumoured Egyptian Gods.

When he reached for it, he realised that the card was still enclosed in another container. It was slightly translucent, almost like glass. Amon frowned. The card was trapped in it and there were no handles to open it. Was one supposed to break the glass to get the card out?

He was still examining the object when he heard a rustle in the trees behind him. He turned around warily.

*

Trueman drew.

"Oh, this is too bad," he said when he saw the card. "You should have attacked me

when you had the chance."

Edo knew that kind of statement. Opponents always tried to make you think that they had already won when it was actually the opposite. He still had all of his life points, too. So he kept his cool.

"First of all, the clock advances," he announced sternly. The hand on the clock tower moved to the half hour.

Trueman shook his head. "It's the end for you, you just don't know yet," he said calmly. "The clock will never make the full round."

Edo crossed his arms. "You have no monsters and I have *Dasher*, *Disk Commander* and *Destiny End Dragoon*. What are you saying you can do?"

Trueman's lips curled into a mean smile. "First I activate the spell card *Claret Note*. You know this card, don't you?"

Edo nodded as he watched the hologram of a book appear in midair. The nausea and the feeling of standing on insecure ground came creeping back. This card had been used against him only once, but that one time was what haunted him ever since.

Trueman felt obliged to explain the effect of the card anyway: "I select one of your face-up monsters. For every four levels it has I can special summon a Plasma Token. I choose *Destiny End Dragoon* which is Level 10 - so I can summon two tokens."

The book opened and a drawn image of *Destiny End Dragoon* appeared on one of the open pages. The drawing melted into blood that fell to the ground where it bubbled up into the shape of two vaguely humanoid creatures. The tokens' attack points were shown as zero.

Edo covered his hand with his mouth. He felt like he was back on that boat, swaying in the waves, facing *that person*. But it's not him! he desperately tried to tell himself. It did not really help.

"Next I activate my spell card *The Unchosen One*. I can only activate it when you control two or more monsters. You must select one of your monsters and destroy all other cards you control."

Edo grit his teeth, but despite his uneasiness he was still up to the game. "I select *Dasher*," he announced.

Trueman stuck forward his right arm and clenched it into a fist. "All your other cards are destroyed!" he announced. The clock tower behind Edo burst into flames, as did *Disk Commander*, *Destiny End Dragoon* and the *D-Chain* that was still equipped to *Dasher*. The flames were just a solid vision hologram, but Edo felt the need to shield his face with his arms and he could almost feel the heat of fire on his skin. Or was it the fire from the boat in his memories?

When the smoke cleared, *Dasher* and *Destiny End Dragoon* were still on the field.

"Too bad - *Destiny End Dragoon* cannot be destroyed by card effects," Edo explained grimly.

Trueman smiled. "That would have been a pity, anyway," he remarked.

"I can special summon one of the monsters that was destroyed by *The Unchosen One*'s effect to my field. I choose *Disk Commander*. Just like you I can draw two cards when it is special summoned from the graveyard."

Trueman drew, but he shrugged when he had checked what cards they were.

"Next I normal summon *Dark Psycho Eye*," he announced and played a card that had already been in his hand. The monster looked similarly gruesome as the earlier *Dark Archetype*. "It doesn't stay long. Because now I special summon *Destiny Hero - Plasma* which requires 3 tributes. I tribute the two *Plasma Tokens* and *Dark Psycho Eye*."

Edo felt like it was becoming hard to breathe. He watched the three monsters disappear and make way for the dreadful "Destiny Hero" which appeared and spread its wings wide.

"If you want to win you will have to kill me once again," his opponent said. When Edo focused on him, it was not Trueman, it was the man known as the Destiny Duelist, short DD, whom he had admired and trusted for such a long time. But also, as he had found out way too late, the one whom he had sought to punish since that one fateful night - the murderer of his father.

Edo blinked. Surely it must be an illusion. But it did not go away. "You're dead!" he said.

"Yes. Because you killed me."

"Like you killed us," another voice said. Edo looked up. It was just like in his recurring nightmares. On the folds of *Plasma's* wings, faces were forming. Faces that showed nothing but agony and fear. One of them was that of his father. It was him who had spoken.

"I didn't! I laid you to rest!" Edo protested. "I... I said goodbye!"

DD spoke again: "And me? I was just a poor soul who was manipulated by the Will of Light. And you left me to die."

Everything seemed to turn before Edo's eyes. "You... you were scum! You told me! You broke into our apartment just to obtain a powerful card and had no qualms killing my father to get it!"

"And you are saying that that makes it okay to kill me? Did the ten years we spent together mean nothing to you? I raised you! I taught you how to use the Destiny Hero deck! I got you into the Pro League!"

Edo held his head. He closed his eyes. "Stop playing with me, Trueman. Just continue this duel!"

But it was still the voice of DD when his opponent spoke again: "I use the effect of *Plasma* to equip one of your monsters to it. Of course I choose *Destiny End Dragoon*. *Plasma* gains half of its attack points."

Plasma roared and spread its wings even further. Edo watched in horror how his *Dragoon* was sucked into them. He had always seen it as a symbol of a new start, the physical proof that he was moving on, leaving *Plasma* and the pain surrounding it behind while honoring the memories. But now it was eaten up by the exact monster that had caused the death of his real father, and in a way also that of DD, his adoptive father.

The attack points of the dreadful monster rose to 3400.

Edo's legs were shaking, but there was still hope. He had been able to keep *Dasher*. He would survive this turn and then a new chance would come. He had beaten *Plasma* before and he would do so again. He had to.

"I don't have to explain this to you but I will do it anyway, my *dearest Edo*," DD said.

"*Plasma* also steals the effect of the monster it absorbed. So I can use *Destiny End Dragoon's* effect to destroy your monster and inflict its life points as damage to you."

Edo nodded slowly. It just made sense. It was more effective than to attack him for 1300 points of battle damage. The upper body of *Dragoon* emerged from *Plasma's* left wing and took a shot that went right through *Dasher*, then Edo.

He had to remind himself that it was a hologram, because he could swear he felt the pain of his chest being pierced. He struggled to keep himself on his feet as his life points fell to 1900. The nausea was almost unbearable now. And was the sun already sinking, or why did it seem to him like the edges of his vision were growing darker

every second?

"But according to *Dragoon's* effect you cannot attack anymore," Edo said. It came out hushed and he wondered why. He was safe for now. He just needed to hold out until next turn and then his deck would surely...

His opponent's twisted into a mad grin. Edo's legs finally gave way and he fell to his knees. He had been glad at the time that DD had shown him his true face, that of a villain who would mercilessly kill to get what he wanted... but in the time that came after, it was what made him suffer the most. It had tainted all his memories of that man. He could not remember his words of advice, consolation or encouragement, nor the face he had made while speaking them. It had all been a lie. Ten years of his life. Nobody could even start to understand what that meant. And if the counseling had made one thing very clear to him then that he would never, ever, be completely free of that feeling again.

"I activate my face-down card. *Skill Drain* negates the effects of all face-up effect monsters, including the one that says I cannot attack anymore. I just have to pay 1000 Life Points to activate this card," DD explained.

The life point counter of his opponent plunged from 1100 to a mere 100. But however little it was, it meant he was still in play, able to finish him.

"*Skill Drain* also nullifies the absorption effect of *Plasma* that boosts its attack points, but its original 1900 attack points are just enough to wipe you out now," DD's voice said.

Edo was not looking at him anymore. The black was closing in on him. "Please just... just let me forget..." he begged.

"You will forget. That is what Darkness is," a voice said. It was not DD this time but Trueman again.

Edo raised his head to see the figure of *Destiny Hero - Plasma* one last time as it jabbed at him for the direct attack. He did not feel the impact anymore. His consciousness was already gone.

And with it, the pain.

*

The person who stepped out from among the underwood in front of Amon was not Edo Phoenix. It was a student of Duel Academy, dressed in the uniform of the Obelisk Blue dorm.

Amon quickly got to his feet and hid the *Rainbow Dragon* behind his torso. "Who are you?"

The student smiled. He was at least a full head smaller than him, but somehow Amon could feel that he was dangerous. Was it the enemy they had been warned of?

"Amon Garam. It had to be you who finds this card, hadn't it?"

Amon stood his ground although he felt a strong urge to retreat. "What do you mean?"

The small student smiled. It was not a friendly expression. "You are here to retrieve the *Rainbow Dragon*. But not for the sake of Johann Andersen or saving the world - only your own personal advantage."

Kapitel 8: Another Family

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Amon adjusted his glasses. "What does it matter to you for what reason I am trying to retrieve it?" he asked calmly.

The small boy smiled. "Oh, it does not matter at all," he admitted, equally calm. "I am going to take it from you anyway." He raised his left hand with the Duel Disk as a clear signal that he was not here to only talk.

Amon gave him a thin smile and activated his own Disk. "Because it would pose a danger to you if Johann actually obtained it?" he inferred.

The boy did not reply. Instead, he inserted a deck into his Disk. "Let me duel you and show you the power of Darkness," he announced coolly.

Amon nodded and was glad that years of practice had perfected his poker face. He was physically trained and of great intellect, anyone who had been working with him would have confirmed that. And yet he felt a little uneasy facing this person who was at least half a head shorter than him. It was not the boy he was seeing, he knew, but the force behind him.

He was a rational type, but that did not mean he discarded the possibility of the supernatural. It was quite the opposite - he would have been a fool to not admit that what was happening at this very moment could not be explained by science. They had come to this island to take part in the graduation of 3rd year students, he remembered that as a fact. But of those 3rd year students, he could not remember seeing or meeting any except for the Japanese branch champion Yūki Jūdai, his friend Asuka Tenjōin and her older brother Fubuki. He also remembered being introduced to the whole school but in his memory the auditorium was almost empty. He still knew the rules of the graduation duels but he could not recall who had introduced them.

None of this made any sense unless you accepted that some sinister power was erasing people both physically and from the memories of those who had known them. It was not hard to guess what would happen to Amon if he lost the duel. Which was why he must not.

They took opposite stances on the small clearing.

"I start," Amon announced. Having the first turn was not usually an advantage, but making the first move like this gave him the feeling of being in control. He already had five promising cards in his hand and drew a sixth.

"I activate *Lucky Cloud*. This will let me draw two cards during the End Phase of a turn where I summoned two or more 'Cloudian' monsters of the same name."

Amon placed the card on his Duel Disk and a ring of white clouds appeared above his head. Rays of light shone from its middle as if there was clear blue sky above and not the thick green of the forest.

"And if you wonder how I will be able to summon more than one monster this turn: I activate the Continuous Spell *Summon Cloud*. Once per turn I can Special Summon a

Level 4 or lower 'Cloudian' in my Main Phase if I don't control any monsters."

More clouds gathered above Amon, but these were heavy and dark, and if they had not been a hologram he would have expected rain to pour down within seconds.

"I use the effect of *Summon Cloud* to Special Summon *Cloudian - Sheep Cloud* in defense position."

A lightning bolt stuck from the rain clouds and materialized another cloud on the field, but this one was just a single small white ball that looked as if it had eyes. The counter displayed zero attack and defense points.

"I Normal Summon a second *Sheep Cloud*," Amon continued and placed the second monster next to the first, but this one in attack position.

"And this ends my turn. Since I summoned the two *Sheep Clouds*, the effect of *Lucky Cloud* activates and I can draw two cards."

Light shone from the ring of clouds above him, then it disappeared. Amon drew and checked the cards he had just drawn. *Cloudian - Nimbusman* and *Natural Disaster*. The latter was always a core of his strategy and he could not have it on the field too soon. He could not be sure, of course, what his opponent would try to do, but whatever he would do in the next turn - he had two *Sheep Clouds* in place and even if they were to be destroyed, they would call forth Tokens that he could use to summon his ace monster *Cloudian - Eye of the Typhoon* which was already in his hand.

This was looking better than he had hoped.

*

"Fujiwara?"

Fubuki repeated the name dropped by Jūdai with an air of hesitation.

Jūdai nodded. He, Fubuki and Asuka were walking back to the Academy's main building and on the way they had tried to explain everything that had transpired so far. Fubuki had listened with an uncharacteristically serious air. And then *Yubel* had reminded Jūdai of the name that had been mentioned a couple of times now.

"The spirits apparently said that you're important because you have a connection to him," Asuka added.

Fubuki scratched his chin. "Fujiwara..." he repeated thoughtfully. "Somehow that *feels* familiar... but I can't associate anything."

"So it's someone we already forgot?" Asuka suggested.

The three (and *Yubel*, who had appeared next to Judai again) exchanged puzzled glances. If she was right, there was nothing they could do about it, could they?

*

The small boy in the Obelisk Blue uniform announced it was his turn and drew. A mean smirk appeared on his lips.

"I activate *Polymerization* to fuse three monsters from my hand: *Cyber Dragon*, *Dragonroid* and *Drillroid*."

The three monsters appeared on the field and were drawn together immediately, forming a whirl of colors. "I summon *Chimeratech Fortress Dragon*!"

The appearing dragon looked like a giant metal snake. Its body consisted mainly of three large metal rings. Inside them, Amon could see the monsters that had been used to summon it.

"When this monster is summoned, all other cards I control are sent to the Graveyard, but there are none," the boy mentioned.

"I know," Amon replied. "I know this monster's effect. It was often used by..." his voice trailed off, but then suddenly he blinked and continued with more conviction: "... by Ryō Marufuji who is also known as Hell Kaiser. And you are... his younger brother, Shō Marufuji, or at least you pretend to be."

The boy nodded. "That is correct, Amon Garam," he said.

Amon adjusted his glasses. "I had forgotten both of them until now... so you can not only *erase* memories?"

"Indeed. If you don't remember anything from your life, there is no darkness inside you that I could get hold of."

Amon chuckled. "Well, aren't you generous," he said. There was no reason to laugh in this situation, not really, but for Amon, who had always thought of knowledge as far more valuable than money or physical strength, it was like he had regained some of his power. And he would use it.

The boy continued the duel: "I don't need to explain this to you, but *Chimeratech* can attack your monster three times and each attack will cause 400 points of damage to you without destroying the attacked monster. I attack your *Sheep Cloud* three times." One by one, beams were fired at his monster from the three circular parts of *Chimeratech*. Amon endured the impact stoically and watched his Life Points drop to 2800.

"This is just a small taste of what is to come," his opponent said. "I set two Spell or Trap Cards and end my turn."

"Well, that was disappointing. I thought you would try to obliterate me in one turn," Amon taunted.

Strategically, what his opponent had done was solid. Usually, a monster like *Chimeratech* was best suited for a finishing blow. But summoning it this early could serve the purpose of getting the Fusion Material monsters to the Graveyard. That sounded likely if his opponent was using Hell Kaiser's *Cyberdark* deck. So he was just trying to see if he could provoke.

His opponent did not buy into it. "You of all people should know how important patience is. Look at how you have been waiting all those years, to now use this invitation to the Japanese Duel Academy to try and get your hand on two immensely rare cards."

Amon adjusted his glasses. "Are you trying to make me feel guilty? Because that will not work. It is my turn I draw."

He drew. *Rain Storm*. That card was useful, but he had to figure out how to use it most effectively before making a move.

"I have to discard one card during my Standby Phase to keep *Summon Cloud* on the field. But since its effect only works as long as I have no monsters on the field it's useless to me right now," Amon announced and removed the Continuous Spell. The rain clouds above him dispersed.

He focused on his opponent. "You are right. I came here hoping to find a way to get my hands on *Yubel*, which is in the hands of Yūki Jūdai, and the *Rainbow Dragon*, which my intel told me was just being created by Pegasus J. Crawford himself."

His opponent sneered. "And yet you are acting like the valiant hero who is defending that precious card from me."

Amon went on with the duel: "I tribute the two *Sheep Cloud* to summon a new

monster, *Cloudian - Eye of the Typhoon*."

The monster that appeared was a darker cloud in a shape that resembled the upper body of a human, with a single eye in the middle of the forehead. It showed an impressive 3000 Attack Points.

Amon adjusted his glasses. "I am not an idiot. I can see what is happening. It is not only the people on this island that are disappearing. I cannot remember business partners, people I spied on, not even my family - people from all over the world.

I wanted those cards to give me power, but power is meaningless if there is nobody left to apply it to. So I have decided that it is my best chance to aid Johann in defeating you. So - let us see how well you can withstand bad weather. I attack your *Chimeratech* with my *Eye of the Typhoon*."

He saw his opponent's hand flick towards the switch that would activate his face down card. Amon smirked. "According to *Eye of the Typhoon*'s effect, when it declares an attack, the battle positions of all face-up monsters are changed. That obviously applies to your *Chimeratech*."

The hand stopped. Amon smirked. "You had better not given me my memories back. I know that the Hell Kaiser liked to use *Power Wall* which lets you avoid damage and discard cards to the Graveyard where you need them to use with the *Cyberdark* cards. But since *Chimeratech* is now in defense mode, there is no damage."

The cloud-like monster shot a beam from its single eye that hit the metal dragon in the head and the hologram dispersed without interruption. It looked like Amon had guessed right, and like the other face-down card was not something that would help his opponent in this situation, either.

His opponent did not look too unhappy about it. He even smiled. "Well, aren't you clever, Amon Garam. As expected of *an heir* to the Garam Group."

The words echoed through Amon. Suddenly, there were memories crushing into him. Memories that, it seemed, he had already lost but that his opponent was now giving him back as a new attempt to get to him.

That man saying "You are now part of the Garam family. I expect only the best from you."

A proud smile and a big hand on the shoulder of a worn-out Amon who had just won a boxing match. "Well done, Amon."

A scene viewed through a partly opened door of that man and his wife on a sofa, gently looking at her big belly that announced upcoming childbirth.

Amon gasped and pressed a hand to his forehead in an attempt to keep the emotions that came with the memories under control.

"Oh, I'm sorry," his opponent said. "You are not the heir. The Garams have a natural son after all."

"You are right. I was adopted by the Garams to inherit the Group, but when they had a natural child..."

"... you were cast aside," his opponent said calmly.

Amon straightened his back. "I took on a new role," he clarified sharply and adjusted his glasses.

A younger Amon standing beside a bed, an infant inside. The infant was smiling at him and clutching one of his fingers with its tiny hand.

He had his grip back now. The memories had reminded him of his moments of weakness, but also of why he was here.

"I set two Spell or Trap Cards," Amon announced. The two cards were *Natural Disaster* and *Rain Storm*, setting him up to destroy his opponent in different ways.

"During my End Phase, the Attack Points of *Eye of the Typhoon* are reduced by 500." The counter went down to 2500. "I end my turn."

The small boy drew. "I activate my Continuous Trap *Rebirth Judgement*. From now on, all monsters in our Graveyards will be treated as Dragon Types."

Amon nodded. The monsters *Dragonroid* and *Drillroid* that he had already seen were not cards he knew Hell Kaiser to use. Amon had not been very interested in the younger brother Shō so far, but he assumed that the Roids were originally part of his deck. To use them with the *Cyberdark* monsters, this effect would be immensely helpful.

"Next I Normal Summon *Cyberdark Horn*."

With an infernal screech, the dragon-like creature appeared. Its whole body was covered in an insect-like shell and all its extremities ended in sharp edges.

"When this card is Normal Summoned, I select a level 4 or lower Dragon-Type monster from the Graveyard and equip it to *Horn*. I select *Drillroid*, which I used for my Fusion Summon earlier and which is now treated as a Dragon due to *Rebirth Judgement*."

Cables shot out of *Cyberdark Horn*'s body and dug into the ground to pull up the cartoony monster with tank treads as feet and a big drill as a nose. The attack point counter jumped from the original 800 to 2400.

"*Horn* gains the attack points of *Drillroid* as its own", the boy explained needlessly.

"It is not as strong as *Eye of the Typhoon*," Amon pointed out.

"Not yet," his opponent agreed with a mean smile.

Amon knew that very well himself. One more turn and *Eye of the Typhoon* would be left with only 2000 attack points. But he was not planning to wait until then.

*

Johann stopped and turned around to where they were coming from.

"I think we are going in the wrong direction. My connection with the *Rainbow Dragon* is getting weaker rather than stronger," he announced after standing still in concentration for a moment.

Jim, who was in front of him, slashing through underwood with a bushing knife, turned around as well. Caren gave a low growl. "You saying the others might be luckier than we are?" he asked and wiped the lower part of his face with the bandana he wore around his neck.

Johann nodded. "I hope they are okay," he added. He looked at *Crystal Master* and *Crystal Keeper* who kept floating beside him. "What happens if they run into our opponent?"

"It is up to them," *Crystal Master* said in his usual sad voice. "But every human has darkness inside them. Only someone who knows and accepts their own darkness could hope to win a duel against such an opponent."

*

Amon drew and was, again, glad that he had such a good poker face, otherwise he would have smiled. *Diamond-Dust Cyclone* was a perfect fit with the monster he had been keeping in his hand. *Cyberdark Horn* was not a threat anymore.

"I Normal Summon *Cloudian - Ghost Fog*."

The monster appeared next to *Eye of the Typhoon*, a fleeting accumulation of thin clouds that only vaguely formed a humanoid shape. It had zero attack points.

"*Ghost Fog*, attack *Cyberdark Horn*," Amon commanded.

The monster moved forward. *Cyberdark Horn* responded with a counterattack that used the drill on *Drillroids* nose. The fleeting clouds dispersed.

"Battle damage between *Ghost Fog* and another monster is reduced to zero. But when it is destroyed, I can distribute Fog Counters equal to the Level of the monster that destroyed it. *Cyberdark Horn* is Level 4 so I can distribute four Fog Counters. I place all of them on *Horn*," Amon explained.

The dispersed clouds gathered back together and formed a ring around *Horn*'s neck that consisted of four separate grey clouds.

"This is what I need to activate *Diamond-Dust Cyclone*. I destroy a monster with 4 or more Fog Counters, then I can draw a card for every 4 counters it had."

The cloud ring around *Horn*'s neck exploded, taking the monster with it.

"And I also activate my Continuous Trap Card *Natural Disaster*. Every time one of your cards is destroyed, I inflict 400 points of damage for every destroyed card!"

The card flipped up and a whirlwind shot forward from its image, hitting the opponent and knocking him off his feet. His Life Point counter went from 4000 to 3200 since *Drillroid* had been destroyed together with *Horn*.

"As I said I can draw a card due to the effect of *Diamond-Dust Cyclone*," Amon said and drew.

"Very effective," his opponent complimented. "No, I could say you are perfect. You are not leaving things to chance in a duel. You plan things out. And you are physically trained, too."

Amon did not react. He knew all that. What was the point?

"The Garam Group would deserve someone like you as their leader. You, and not some snot-nosed brat who knows nothing about the hardships of this world."

"I have sworn to support my brother in every possible way," Amon said calmly. "My abilities *are* the strength of the Garam Group. I do not need to be the leader."

He checked his freshly drawn card. *Mirage Target*. Very useful. "I set this card face down and end my turn. This is when *Eye of the Typhoon* loses 500 attack points due to its effect."

The attack point counter of *Eye of the Typhoon* dropped to 2000. But that was okay. Amon already knew what to do next.

*

Yubel was the first to notice and alerted Jūdai, who advised Asuka and Fubuki to stop.

"What is it?" Fubuki asked.

"We are surrounded," *Yubel* said. Jūdai repeated the words to the siblings who could not see his spirit partner.

"Oh, your partner really has sharp senses," a deep voice said.

The lanky, leather-clad figure of Trueman appeared from the shades of the trees that

lined the path they had been walking.

"But it does not help you," the same voice said, but it was coming from another direction.

More figures that looked exactly like the first came forth from the forest and stepped into the way of the group.

"You will not reunite with your friends. And soon you will forget about them, anyway." Suddenly the air around them felt very chill.

*

The being that pretended to be Shō Marufuji drew a card. Amon's opponent still had 3200 Life Points, but only two cards on his field, *Rebirth Judgement* and the face-down card that he strongly suspected to be *Power Wall*. This would be difficult to turn around for anyone.

But apparently he was not out of options yet. "I Normal Summon *Cyberdark Keel*. Same as *Horn* I can equip a Level 4 or lower Dragon from the Graveyard to it. I choose *Drillroid* yet again."

The monster that appeared had a simple snake-like body and connected to *Drillroid* with cables shooting from its body in the same fashion as *Horn* before. Even the combined attack points were the same at 2400.

Amon's opponent raised his hand. "*Cyberdark Horn*, attack *Eye of the Typhoon*," he ordered calmly.

Amon smirked. "Not so fast," he said. "I activate my Trap Card *Rain Storm*. I can decrease the attack points of a 'Cloudian' I control by multiples of 1000 to destroy cards you control, one per 1000 attack points. That means I can decrease *Eye of the Typhoon*'s attack points from 2000 to zero and destroy two of your cards. I select your face-down card and *Keel*!"

Gushes of rain shot from the image of the unveiled Trap and united into a crashing wave that hit the opponent's field. *Keel* disappeared in the waves, which then hit the Trap Card which was - just as Amon had thought - revealed to be *Power Wall* just before it got destroyed.

"And this activates the effect of *Natural Disaster*, you lose 400 life points for each destroyed card, which makes 1200 in total because *Drillroid* is destroyed together with *Keel*."

The effect hit his opponent and reduced his life points to 2000.

Amon crossed his arms. "Well, what are you going to do now?" he asked. "You have no monsters left, no cards in your hand, and *Rebirth Judgement* is not going to help you out in this situation."

The false Shō Marufuji wore a sour expression. "You think you are winning," he noted. "I *am* winning," Amon corrected.

"Aren't you full of yourself. That is exactly how you cause others pain. Others like your *brother* Sid."

The words agitated Amon, but he managed to hide that.

"He's afraid that you will leave him. Because he is old enough to understand that someone with your capabilities is not obliged to work for him forever. He fears he will not grow up to be worthy of your support."

"How would you know?" Amon asked sharply.

The shape of the small boy in front of him seemed to quiver. It was like there was a looming black shadow rising behind him. When he opened his mouth, it also sounded

like there was more than one voice speaking.

"I am Darkness. I consist of the fears of people. What do you think why they disappear from the earth and from your memory, and why I can give you the memory back?"

Amon made an involuntary step backwards, stumbled over a tree root, and almost fell. It felt like a physical weight was trying to push him down.

The Darkness loomed over him. "Do you understand, Amon Garam? You may think you can outwit me but it will not bring them back. Because they *chose* to become one with me. To soothe their fears of the future."

Amon swallowed. He felt cold sweat trickle down his neck despite the almost tropical heat of the island.

"You can beat me! But destroy me you will not."

The shadow disappeared.

"I end my turn," Amon's opponent said.

*

Jim was charging ahead again, and Johann was thankful for it. He was not afraid of getting dirty, but having someone bigger in front of him who moved swiftly and made sure that vines and tree branches were out of the way greatly increased their pace.

"I hope Amon is okay," he said out loud because the silence seemed so depressing. Not even the sounds of birds and other animals resounded in the forest.

"Me too," Jim said. "Why'd he go alone, anyway?"

"He didn't go alone... did he?" Johann sounded insecure. He looked at the two guardians at his side, but even they seemed to be at a loss.

"I don't *remember* anyone else," Jim said. "But apparently that don't mean anything here."

Johann nodded and clenched both fists. They needed to find the *Rainbow Dragon* as soon as possible.

*

Amon drew, then looked at his opponent.

"I Normal Summon *Cloudian - Nimbusman*," he announced. "It's a Level 5 monster so I have to tribute *Eye of the Typhoon*."

The monster that appeared was a humanoid shaped out of thick gray rain clouds. It displayed 1000 attack points. That was more than *Eye of the Typhoon*, at least.

"*Eye of the Typhoon* is a Wind Type so I cannot activate *Nimbusman*'s effect that occurs when I tribute Water Types for it," he explained for completeness.

Amon raised his hand. "*Nimbusman*, direct attack."

The monster attacked as ordered, punching through the small boy with its cloudy fist. His Life Points fell to 1000.

"You are acting like it will mean nothing if I beat you but I think you are just a bad loser," Amon added. "The fact that you are trying to take the *Rainbow Dragon* means that it poses a danger for you. So I will defeat you and make sure that Johann gets it. I trust that if he destroys you, the people that you spirited away will come back."

His opponent smirked. "How foolish to cling to the *Rainbow Dragon* as your hope. All it takes for me is to defeat you and take it, and you *will* accept the darkness."

Amon looked at him stoically. "I do not think so. I set a Spell or Trap Card and end my turn."

His opponent drew and suddenly a wild smile appeared on his lips. "Well, maybe you should reconsider. I Normal Summon *Cyber Dark Edge*. Same as with *Keel* and *Horn* I can equip a Dragon to it, and I choose *Drillroid* again."

The monster appeared with a screech, *Drillroid* in its fangs. Predictably, it showed 2400 attack points.

Amon shrugged. "*The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result,*" he mused, "this quote is commonly attributed to Albert Einstein but the actual origins are unclear."

"Quit your yapping, fool," his opponent hissed. "*Cyberdark Edge* can attack directly but then the battle damage is halved. I choose to attack *Nimbusman* because you lose more life points that way."

The monster lunged forward.

Amon gave an exaggerated sigh. "You cannot hurt me," he said. "I activate my Trap Card *Mirage Target*. When you declare an attack, I can tribute a 'Cloudian' to negate the attack. And by doing so I gain life points equal to its attack points. I tribute *Nimbusman* to stop your attack and gain 1000 Life Points."

The drill of *Drillroid* in *Edge*'s claws slashed right through *Nimbusman*, but the dispersing clouds gathered around Amon, shining with a warm light. With that, Amon's life was back at 3800.

"I end my turn," his opponent said. He glared at Amon. "But you did not get rid of *Edge* yet. One turn and I will destroy you."

"I draw," Amon announced. He looked at the drawn card. *Big Summon Cloud*. This was even better than he could have hoped.

"Now I activate my set card. It is a normal Spell Card, *Pot of Avarice*. According to its effect I shuffle five monsters from my Graveyard back into the deck, then draw two cards. In my Graveyard I have two *Sheep Cloud*, *Nimbusman*, *Ghost Fog* and *Eye of the Typhoon* which I shuffle back. I draw!"

When he saw the cards he had just drawn, Amon knew he had won.

Kapitel 9: Another Love

They were surrounded. Jūdai counted six figures looming around them, all looking exactly the same. Lanky, clad in black leather, eyes hidden behind dark sunglasses. None of them was saying anything.

"This is not a deception again, is it?" Fubuki asked warily.

"If it is, we are all deceived," Asuka noted. "And they don't look like they want to help us."

The six men took a step forward - all of them moved at exactly the same moment and with the same foot. The sound of six feet touching the ground simultaneously instilled a feeling of dread in the three students.

Jūdai raised his left arm with the Duel Disk and reached for his deck in a well-practised motion. But Asuka stepped half in front of him and touched the wrist of his right hand to stop him from inserting the deck into the Disk.

"Jūdai, Nii-san, please let me handle this," she said.

There was a short pause.

Then Jūdai exclaimed "no way" so loud that his voice drowned the protest that Fubuki raised at the same time. Jūdai moved his hand away from Asuka's to finally put his deck in place.

Asuka turned around to him and caught his gaze. The determined look on her face made him freeze with his right hand on the way to the Duel Disk's activation switch.

"Jūdai, we heard that you are the one who can beat Darkness and that Nii-san is also important. So you both need to go on," Asuka said sternly.

Jūdai stared back at her. "We can fight them together," he said with conviction.

"But if you lose, everything is lost!" she protested.

"And if we win we are one step closer to beating Darkness!" he replied eagerly.

Asuka looked sad. "I know you have done amazing things that nobody thought possible... but the monsters have told you to team up with Johann, right? We split up so he can get the *Rainbow Dragon* and we can get Nii-san. So you should not risk everything here but reunite with the others."

"I agree with her," Yubel added.

It made Jūdai turn and look at the monster. "You are telling me to ditch Asuka!?" he asked angrily.

"I am telling you to look at the options realistically. It was you who decided to trust *Crystal Keeper* and *Crystal Master*, so you should go with their plan."

Jūdai stared at the ground, then back to Asuka who had stayed silent, guessing that he was talking to the companion she could not see.

A low chuckle came from the Trueman who was standing closest to Jūdai. "It is nice to see you argue, but the discussion is pointless. We are not going to let any of you get away."

He raised his left arm, which burst into fragments that looked like cards and set itself together as a Duel Disk. His doppelgangers on his left and right did the same.

Jūdai took a ready stance. Fubuki reached for his deck.

*

Somewhere in the forest off the Academy's main building, the duel between Amon

and the false Shō Marufuji was coming to an end.

"I activate *Big Summon Cloud*. Due to its effect I can pay half of my Life Points to Special Summon one 'Cloudian' monster from my hand. I pay half of my Life Points to Special Summon *Cloudian - Eye of the Typhoon* that I just drew with the effect of *Pot of Avarice*."

As Amon's Life Points dropped from 3800 to 1900, the one-eyed Cloudian appeared in front of him with a low growl. The monster had 3000 Attack Points.

"I attack your *Cyberdark Edge* with *Eye of the Typhoon*," Amon calmly ordered.

A beam shot from the eye of the monster like a lightning bolt, but it did not hit *Edge* itself - the monster pushed *Drillroid*, which was caught in its fangs, forward to intercept the attack. The Roid was destroyed, but *Edge* stayed afloat. Amon's opponent did not bother to explain this part of *Edge*'s effect. They both understood how it worked.

The opponent's Life Point counter fell from 1000 to 400 by the battle damage from the attack. Amon straightened his back and adjusted his glasses. "The effect of *Natural Disaster* occurs. You take 400 damage for *Drillroid* which was destroyed and sent to the graveyard."

A whirlwind shot from the card image and engulfed the opponent as well as the remaining monster. *Edge* screeched. The Life Point count showed zero.

"Damn you, Amon Garam."

The voice did not sound like the small boy anymore, it was much lower, but that could also be because the wind distorted the sound.

"Darkness is not defeated. It can never lose, because there is always darkness. And some time you will give in to it, too," the voice said.

Then the whirlwind disappeared. Amon's opponent was gone like he had never existed in this world. And with him, the memories of a boy called Shō Marufuji.

*

Trueman grunted.

Before the eyes of Jūdai, Asuka and Fubuki, the shapes of the sinister men in front of them quivered, then burst into shapes of pitch black cards that scattered on the ground like falling leaves.

Just a moment later, the cards gathered again, but they only formed a single person this time. That one looked dismayed.

"What happened?" Jūdai asked.

"I don't know but this is your chance!" Asuka said loudly and pushed Jūdai's back. He stumbled forward, past Trueman. Asuka pushed Fubuki as well.

"As if I am going to let you go!" Trueman wheeled around.

But Asuka dashed into his way. "I am your opponent," she said fiercely.

She raised her left arm with the Duel Disk.

Trueman's lips twitched, but after a short pause he nodded. "Fine. I will beat you in no time."

The Duel Disk appeared on his arm again. He took a tall posture and glared down at her. Asuka did not flinch.

"Asuka, no!" Jūdai protested.

This time it was Fubuki who yanked him back by grabbing his arm. Jūdai turned to him with an irritated look.

Fubuki's expression was serious. "She wants to fight. We must not stop her," he urged.

Jūdai looked conflicted. "But if she loses..." he glanced back at Asuka, "I will forget about her... I have already forgotten so many, I just don't want to..."

Asuka had heard him talk and turned around. "Jūdai, please trust me. I won't lose so easily," she said with confidence.

Jūdai stared at her for a moment and then his expression became determined.

"Asuka," he said. His gaze flickered before he found the resolve to look right at her. A hint of a blush appeared on his cheeks.

"That night I couldn't give you an answer. I'm still not sure if... if I like you the same way you said that you like me."

Jūdai was speaking fast, and with an uncharacteristically low voice. But she could tell that he meant the words he was saying.

"There is one thing I can say, though: You are an important person and I don't wanna lose you!"

That part came out stronger, resembling his usual demeanor more closely.

Asuka smiled gently. "Thank you, Jūdai."

Jūdai raised his right hand into the air. "I trust your skills as a duelist. You beat that guy, and I will beat Darkness, and then we can figure the rest out."

Asuka nodded and took his cue for a high-five. Their hands touched ever so briefly.

"I will," Asuka said.

"Good luck," Fubuki wished her.

Then he and Jūdai turned around and started to hurry back towards the main building.

*

"Wait," Jim urged, and Johann followed his advice immediately.

They had been moving through the jungle-like vegetation somewhere behind the Academy's main building, but now both stood still. Even Caren fell quiet. The only sound was rustling leaves, but that could have been from a breeze.

Except someone stepped out from between the trees no two meters away from them just moments after.

Johann's tension vanished as he recognized the tan skin and the dark red hair that was pointing up like a flame.

"There you are," Amon Garam said.

He was slightly sweaty, but so were Jim and Johann. Otherwise he looked absolutely fine. And in his left hand he carried something.

Seeing it, Johann suddenly *felt* something, too. A presence. Similar to the spirits.

"Is that...?" He approached Amon and extended his arm without even really thinking. It was like the object was drawing him in. Which was probably the case.

"Indeed," Amon said and raised his lower arm to present what he had found. It looked like a rectangular brick of glass, but the material was shimmering in soft rainbow colors and inside it, they could make out a Duel Monsters card.

Johann took another step towards Amon. He was slowed down by the awe he was suddenly feeling. He turned his head to his two ghostly companions, who both nodded without saying a word.

Johann slowly extended both hands. When the tips of his fingers grazed the material, it started to dissolve, as if it was melting. A soft light shone from the card inside. And then the glass-like material was gone and the card was right in Johann's hands, and none of the onlookers could have said how that had happened.

"Good to see you again." It was *Crystal Keeper* who had spoken. *Crystal Master* stayed

silent, but although his face was hidden behind the mask, his posture seemed relax just a little bit, showing relief.

Johann did not even register the words of his guardians. His attention was fully on the card that he now had in his hand. He held it closer, mesmerized by the drawing of a long, slender dragon covered in white armor-like scales that were decorated with seven differently colored gems.

This was the card he had been wanting to obtain ever since the Crystal Beasts had chosen him as their master. But it felt like he had actually been waiting for this moment all his life.

The Ultimate Crystal God, *Rainbow Dragon*.

*

"I normal Summon *E-Hero Sparkman* in attack mode," Trueman declared.

Asuka had already successfully set up her field by Ritual Summoning *Cyber Angel Benten* and setting two cards during her first turn. Now it was for him to really start the duel.

The appearance of the Elemental Hero made Asuka hold her breath for a second.

"That's..." she gasped.

Trueman smirked. "Is something the matter?" he asked.

Asuka quickly regained her composure. "No. Go on," she said.

Sure, *Sparkman* was a staple card in Jūdai's deck, but that did not mean that it was forbidden for anyone else to use it. Still... it did not feel right.

Trueman did nothing to quell this feeling: "I attack *Benten* with *Sparkman*," he ordered calmly.

Asuka's hand flicked to the activation switch of her trap card. *Sparkman* had only 1600 attack points and would be destroyed by the stronger *Benten*, so it was obvious that that was what Trueman wanted, for whatever reason. But what reason could that be? *Sparkman* had no effect. Was there a card effect he could activate when his monster got destroyed? Or was this about losing life points?

Even if it was the latter, there was a way to turn this in her favor, and she would use it.

"Not so fast. I activate *Double Passé!* I can turn an attack against one of my face-up monsters into a direct attack."

Benten evaded the incoming monster elegantly and the solid vision hologram shot its lightning at Asuka instead. Her life dropped to 2400, but she smiled.

"And now my monster that you targeted can make a direct attack against you, too. *Benten*, go!"

Following her pointing finger, the Cyber Angel in the skin tight suit dashed forward and swung her nunchuk at Trueman. His life fell to 2200 when it hit.

She had used this move before with *Sparkman* on the field. It was years ago, but she still remembered that duel clearly. The first time she had played against Jūdai. Back then she had just been curious to figure out what that guy was all about. He had piqued her interest as an Osiris Red who didn't act like he had just landed in the least prestigious dorm of the Duel Academy. Who openly challenged some of the best new Obelisk Blue students (Who exactly? She could vaguely remember interrupting a duel between Jūdai and someone else, but that person was already gone from her memory).

That first duel had shown her that Jūdai was passionate about dueling, and that he

easily respected anyone who was the same. Later she had learned that he could be reckless, but that an inner voice of reason kept him from doing outright stupid things. Even later than that she had come to understand that that voice of reason was his spirit partner Yubel, whom she could not see. But after the strange events surrounding the Seven Stars in their first year and the Society of Light in the second, believing in Duel Monster spirits came easy to her.

"Not quite bad," Trueman said, but his smirk did not look like he was feeling threatened by her move. "You are the Queen of Obelisk Blue, after all."

Asuka did not reply, but the remark made her frown. She *had* been called that before, although she could not remember by whom. But she was sure that was almost as long ago as her first duel against Jūdai. At least she was sure that he had never called her that. To him, they had always been equals. There were too many at the Academy that saw her as a woman before they saw her as a duelist. But Jūdai had never been like that, right from the start. And maybe that was why she had fallen for him.

Thinking of him made her gather her resolve again. She would not lose. He had not discarded the possibility that he could love her back, after all.

"I set three Spell or Trap cards and end my turn," Trueman announced, breaking her line of thought. She had to concentrate on the duel now!

Asuka drew and smiled. If he could not stop her next move, she had already won.

"I activate the Ritual spell *Machine Angel Ritual*. I offer my *Cyber Angel Benten*, which is Level 6, and *Petit Angel* from my hand, which is Level 2, to Ritual Summon the Level 8 Ritual Monster *Cyber Angel Dakini*."

An altar appeared on the field right in front of her and her two monsters turned into whirls of energy that gathered just above the altar's center. The new monster emerged from that exact place in a flash of light and took a striking pose.

"When *Dakini* is Ritual Summoned, you have to select and destroy one of your monsters. Say good-bye to *Sparkman*!"

Trueman shrugged as if this was not a bad thing. The hologram of the four-armed Cyber Angel lurched forward and slashed at *Sparkman* with the sword she was holding. The opponent monster disappeared easily.

Asuka almost gave a sigh. With the three face-down cards the possibility that this would not work had been high. But it did not look like that. On the other hand he had aimed at getting *Sparkman* destroyed from the start. Was she just playing into his hands?

But no, she must not let this chance go: "You have no monsters left to protect you. I attack directly with *Dakini*."

The Cyber Angel jumped forward again, but this time Trueman did react.

"I activate my Trap Card *Draining Shield*. It negates your attack and increases my life by *Dakini's* attack points."

As the card flipped up, the hologram of a large shield of light appeared in the air and intercepted the blow from *Dakini's* spear. Then the light fell down on Trueman like a curtain and Asuka watched his life rise to 4900.

Well, this was bad. If he had tried to destroy *Dakini* she could have stopped it with her set card *Angel Blast*, but now he had more than full life again. On the other hand, she did have her ace monster *Dakini* and *Angel Blast* left so there was a lot she could still do.

"I end this turn," she announced.

Trueman announced his draw.

"I Summon *Dark Psycho Eye*."

The appearing monster was a weird mess of limbs made from flesh and some grey substance. It did not look like it had a face, or anything comparable. There was just a grey blob where, on an animal, the head would be. It displayed only 400 attack points. Asuka frowned. This was a monster where it was likely that it would be a pain because of its effect, not its strength.

A mean smirk appeared on Trueman's lips. "Let me show you what this monster is about," he said in a low, menacing voice.

The blob that was the monster's head shook, then opened up like a flower, except the petals were muddy grey flesh and the middle of it was a big eyeball. So that was what the monster's name referred to.

It made Asuka feel dizzy to look at the eye so she quickly cast down her look to the feet of the creature.

"Now I activate my Trap Card *Birthright*. It allows me to Special Summon a Normal Monster from the Graveyard. I choose *Sparkman*."

The card flipped up and the *E-Hero* appeared on the field again with a low grunt.

Asuka suddenly felt uneasy. This move...

"Next I activate *Polymerization*. I fuse *Sparkman* from my field and *E-Hero Clayman* from my hand to form *E-Hero Thunder Giant*!"

Clayman appeared and got pulled into the vortex of the fusion before the big, sturdy *E-Hero* appeared and flexed both arms.

"Cool, eh?", her opponent said.

Asuka blinked. That voice... She blinked again. But there was no doubt. Standing across from her was Yūki Jūdai. But something was weird, because he was wearing the uniform of Osiris Red.

"If you are trying to fool me, don't make it so obvious," she scolded.

"Hey, Asuka! What are you angry about. Let's just have a fun duel!" Jūdai replied.

He sounded just like back then. Young, ambitious, and cheerful. He had not been like that recently, not since...

She could not remember what had happened, but she knew that Jūdai had been rather gloomy recently. And she had kept her distance ever since her confession.

Had she been afraid of hearing his answer?

Or of the reaction people around them might show if they actually got together?

"Hey, snap out of it! We're in the middle of a duel," Jūdai called out.

Asuka shook her head to get rid of those fruitless thoughts and quickly assessed the duel situation.

"You are right. But I think you miscalculated. You cannot use *Thunder Giant*'s effect to destroy a monster because it only works on ones that have fewer attack points than itself."

"Oh gosh, you're right!" Jūdai sounded outright shocked.

But then he grinned. "Just kidding. I have something in mind."

*

Jūdai and Fubuki did not stop to run until they were on the straight path that led up to the main entrance of the Academy building. There, Fubuki slowed down first and turned around to check if they were being followed. There was no trace of Trueman. Nor of any other person.

"Will Asuka be okay?" Jūdai asked, halting as well.

He was talking mostly to himself, but *Yubel* still felt obliged to answer. "She will be fine. You know she is strong," the monster said gently.

Jūdai nodded slowly as they walked on. Fubuki did not say anything, even turned back to where they were coming from with a worried expression.

They did not get much farther when someone called Jūdai's name. He turned in the direction the voice had come from and spotted blue hair and a cowboy hat behind one of the statues. Seconds later, Johann Andersen emerged, closely followed by Jim Cook. A few steps behind them came Amon Garam.

"Guys! You're okay!" Jūdai exclaimed and hurried over.

Johann showed him a confident smile. "Sure are."

"Did you find it?" Jūdai asked excitedly.

Instead of saying anything, Johann proudly held up a card in his hand. By the color of the card it was an Effect Monster. And by the presence that Jūdai could feel it was a considerably powerful one.

*

"Are you ready, Asuka? Because here I go," the false Jūdai announced.

Asuka nodded slowly. "Try to beat me," she said.

Jūdai, especially the one from the past, always acted like it was already decided that he would win, even if it was not. The record was on his side - in important matches he had almost never lost. She could remember that as a fact, although she had trouble to remember all the duels she had watched him play in detail because mist had already settled over the memory of his opponents.

"First I attack *Dakini* with *Dark Psycho Eye*. Go!" Jūdai commanded.

The weird monster moved forward. *Dakini*, which had the absolute upper hand in terms of attack strength, slashed back at it with the second knife. *Dark Psycho Eye* disappeared just like that and Jūdai's life fell to 2600.

If her opponent had not boosted himself with *Draining Shield* last turn, this damage would have wiped him out. So he had been preparing for it?

"Now comes the cool part! When *Dark Psycho Eye* is destroyed, I can select one of your monsters and take control of it until the end phase," Jūdai announced.

Asuka felt like a knife was stabbed in her gut.

She had felt well protected with *Angel Blast* there to protect *Dakini* from destruction and the monster itself being on the strong side. But against this move she was helpless.

"That's not... not like you, Jūdai," she managed.

Well, she *knew* her opponent was not really Jūdai. Now more so than before. Because the real Jūdai would not do something like stealing her monster and using it against her. Even Yubel's effect of turning the opponent's strength against them was something he outright hated (and mostly successfully refused) to use.

"Well, yeah, but I thought it would be nice to have both our monsters together!" Jūdai said with a grin and spread his arms.

"After all, I don't want to fight *against* but *with* you."

Asuka swallowed.

This was not the real Jūdai. But his words... they were so alluring.

"We... we can fight together but first we have to beat Darkness..." she weakly said.

Jūdai shook his head.

"Come on, Asuka. You know that that's not true. I'm aiming to be a pro duelist and you decided to leave Japan and study in the United States. Once this is over we're going to be separated."

That was another stab.

How Trueman knew she had no idea.

She had not told him. Not the real Jūdai. But it was true.

That was another reason why she had kept away from him all the time.

She had struggled with her decision, an offer to study at an abroad branch of the Duel Academy. But after he had not given her a positive response to her confession, she had made up her mind and accepted.

His promise to figure things out was directed at the void she was inevitably going to leave.

"We... can keep in touch... Pro duelists travel all the time, just look at... uh... I think I knew some pro duelist but I can't remember that person..."

Jūdai shook his head.

"You're lying to me and you're lying to yourself. After graduation it's goodbye. So why not give in to the Darkness - where nothing ever changes?"

She was out of moves anyway.

She had no monsters and only a useless Trap card left on her field and both *Thunder Giant* as well as *Dakini* had enough attack points to wipe out her remaining life on their own.

"*Thunder Giant* and *Dakini*, attack together," Jūdai said.

Asuka nodded. That made sense with what he just had said.

"I'm sorry, Jūdai," she whispered, words directed to the real one. "I couldn't tell you that I'm leaving. It's probably best that I disappear without a trace. Goodbye."

*

"Weren't we waiting for someone to catch up?" Fubuki asked.

Johann and Jūdai, who had been looking at the *Rainbow Dragon* card together, turned

to him in surprise.

“No, I don’t think so,” Jūdai said.

Kapitel 10: Another Friend

"Weren't we waiting for someone to catch up?" Fubuki asked.

Johann and Jūdai, who had been looking at the *Rainbow Dragon* card together, turned to him in surprise.

"No, I don't think so," Jūdai said.

Johann turned to his two spirit companions. "Did we forget someone again?" he asked warily.

"It is likely," *Crystal Keeper* confirmed, "but even we cannot say who it would have been. The events are all in disorder."

Yubel frowned. "What do you mean by that? If events are in disorder, does it mean there is a *right* order for things to happen? And how would you know about that?"

Johann started to look a bit worried, too. "I trust you, but *Yubel* has a point," he admitted. "When this started you acted like you know exactly what will happen and what needs to be done, but you don't seem so sure about it anymore."

"It's because..." *Crystal Master* started, but *Crystal Keeper* interrupted him: "We cannot tell you all we know. All you need to know is that if you beat Yūsuke Fujiwara, the messenger of Darkness, then we have almost won this battle for the future."

"But how should we beat him?" Jūdai asked desperately. "We have no idea where he even is! You said that Fubuki is the key to beating him but he said he doesn't even remember him!" Jūdai turned to Fubuki: "Right?"

Fubuki looks a bit unsure. "I don't know," he said, and it looked like it was causing him pain to speak. "It's like I feel something when you mention that name. Like I connect something to it. But whatever that is, it is just barely out of reach..."

Nobody seemed to know what to reply when there was an aggressive growl. It came from Caren, the crocodile on Jim's back.

"What's wrong?" Jim asked her.

"It looks like we cannot concern ourselves with that mysterious Fujiwara person anymore," Amon said and pointed at what was likely the source for the reptile's reaction.

Someone had just emerged from the school's main building. It was a man in a black outfit with a long black coat and puffed sleeves. His entire face was covered with a black mask that had slits for the eyes and a bright red stone on the forehead. He was clearly not a student who had somehow escaped Darkness so far, which meant that he must be with the enemy. He approached them wordlessly, at a slow pace, showing that he knew there was nowhere for them left to hide.

It was then that they became aware of the state of the island. It had slowly been getting darker, but it had felt like sunset. Looking out now it became clear that it was not that the sun had set - a dark shadow had appeared before it, blocking out all the light. The eerie darkness contributed to the atmosphere of fear that the figure which was nearing them spread.

Amon, Jim and Johann tensed and activated their Duel Disks, then noticed that Jūdai and Fubuki were not reacting in the same way. Jūdai was looking more surprised than scared. "That mask looks really similar to..." he murmured, and glanced at Fubuki who had taken out the mask that Jūdai was referring to.

"That is Fujiwara," *Crystal Keeper* said.

"What?!", exclaimed Johann and Jūdai at the same time.

"That's Fujiwara?" Johann repeated to let the ones who could not see the spirits know as well.

"Fuji... wara?" Fubuki held his forehead.

The masked man stopped a few steps away from them. "Just as Master Darkness said, there is an irregularity here. It should not be possible for anyone to remember me, let alone spirits that I have never encountered."

When he suddenly moved again to close in quickly, Johann felt pressured to retreat a few steps. The spirits of the Crystal Beasts appeared in front of him in a guarding stance, however little they might be able to do against a physical human.

The man in the mask stopped. It was hard to tell because of the mask, but he seemed to be looking not at any of the seven beasts, but the two humanoid guardians on either side of Johann.

"Where are you coming from?" he asked sharply.

Before either of the spirits or Johann could respond, Fubuki stepped in front of him and faced the man with the mask.

"Who are you and why do you have the same mask as me?" he asked sternly.

The man in the mask sighed.

"Tenjōin... you would have done better to not ask. But alas, there is no reason for me to conceal myself now since I was already named."

He took off the mask slowly. Below it lay an even, outright pretty face with slanted eyes and blue irises. It was framed by a jaw protector. His slightly wavy hair was a faint green.

Fubuki stared at him. Hearing the name Fujiwara had made him uneasy every time someone said it, but now the uneasiness turned into pain. Memories poured into his head. Memories that he had not remembered seconds ago.

A dark circle with inscriptions was on the ground of the cellar room of the special dormitory building. Yūsuke Fujiwara, clad in the white uniform with light blue stripes that only the highest achieving male students of Duel Academy were allowed to wear, stood in the middle of the circle.

"Fujiwara, stop!" Fubuki called out from outside the sinister circle.

Fujiwara turned to look at him and there was a kind of sadness in his gaze.

"Tenjōin... the ritual was successful."

"What ritual? What are you doing?" Fubuki asked desperately.

Fujiwara smiled. It did not look particularly happy.

"I have finally found the entrance to the world of Darkness. I will be able to forget you all, before you forget me. Isn't that great?"

Fubuki frowned. "What are you even saying, Fujiwara? What is great about forgetting your friends?"

"Friends, family, lovers... it does not matter how close you are. Sooner or later they will forget you. Everyone will forget you. I concluded that, since this is inevitable, I would rather control myself when and who forgets me."

Fubuki disagreed: "That makes no sense! We spent so much time together as friends! And now you want to cut us off because some time in the future we might forget you? What about now! That's what's important, isn't it?"

Fujiwara shook his head.

"It is all meaningless knowing that the memories we are creating, even in this moment, will eventually be forgotten."

He held up something that looked like a Duel Monsters card.

"Take this. I do not need it anymore, but if you ever need power, Darkness will give it to you," he said and threw the card in Fubuki's direction.

Fubuki caught it - the card looked like a spell card from Duel Monsters. The card name was Darkness and the image showed a black mask with a red stone in the place where the wearer's forehead would be.

Fubuki was distracted by looking at the card long enough for Fujiwara to start what he had been about to be doing. He uttered some words, then slowly sank into the whirl of darkness that had formed beneath his feet.

"Fujiwara! No!"

Fubuki jumped forward, but then hesitated to step into the magic circle. Fujiwara slowly shook his head and gave Fubuki one last sad smile.

"You will forget about me. So there is no need to be sad. It will just be as if I have never existed."

"NO!"

Fubuki's call had no effect. Fujiwara was swallowed by the dark circle, which vanished just after.

"Fubuki, are you okay?" Jūdai asked.

Fubuki realized that he was kneeling on the ground, holding his forehead. Jūdai was next to him and had placed one hand on his back.

"Yes..." Fubuki said weakly. "I think I am okay. I just..." he looked up to Fujiwara who was looming over him and not showing a hint of concern, "I just remembered about Fujiwara."

"What do you remember?" Johann asked.

Fubuki got to his feet again. "I remember that he was the one who gave me this mask," he said and held up the mask of Darkness that he had previously been wearing.

"Seriously?" Jūdai asked.

Fubuki nodded.

"I could never remember where I got it, just that I gave in and started to use its power when I saw no other way to save my life in another dimension. As much trouble as it caused all of us, I would not be here if it was not for this mask." Fubuki smiled. "Thank you, Fujiwara."

Fujiwara did not smile back. "It would have saved you a lot of pain if you had vanished at that time," he said coldly.

Fubuki's brows furrowed in anger. "You talked about 'master Darkness' a moment ago. What has Darkness done to you?"

"Nothing. It was my own decision to become one with the Darkness. I am now part of it. And as its emissary, I am here to eradicate the irregularity that are those two spirits, and the last humans who refuse to give in to the embrace of Darkness."

"Never!" Jūdai said loudly. "How do you dare take our precious memories of the people around us!"

Fujiwara shook his head. "You do not understand yet, but do not worry. Before long all of you will wish to become one with the Darkness."

"Well, I will not let you do that!" Fubuki cut in. "I still consider you a friend, and I will stop you from doing harm to all my other friends! Duel me!"

He activated his Duel Disk and inserted a deck.

Fujiwara smiled serenely: "The order in which I defeat you does not matter. I might as well take your challenge." He raised his left arm where he wore a standard Academy Duel Disk, and activated it. He started to retreat a few steps to make enough room for

a playing field.

"Stop this duel! He cannot win!" *Crystal Keeper* shouted. He sounded more distressed than ever.

Johann understood quickly. "Fubuki! The spirit says you cannot win."

Fubuki only turned his head around. "So those spirits that couldn't even tell us which of our friends we forgot last are now so sure that I won't win?" he asked disapprovingly.

"Indeed, I would doubt the accuracy of their prediction," Amon agreed.

"He has to believe us!" *Crystal Keeper* said to Johann and Jūdai, who could see him.

"We have already seen it! Fujiwara will use Fubuki's regret of not having saved him before he joined Darkness, and turn that against him! There is no reason why it should be different this time!"

"What do you mean with 'this time'?" *Yubel* asked very suspiciously. "You make it sound like this has happened before."

"Please just believe us," *Crystal Master* chimed in. "There is not much we are absolutely certain about, but if Fubuki duels Fujiwara the outcome is already decided."

Jūdai and Johann exchanged a helpless glance.

"Alright, so if it's not Fubuki we could have a chance?"

Everyone turned to the speaker in surprise - Jim Cook, the tall champion from South Academy who had been listening silently so far. To everyone's surprise, he had taken off his hat and started to remove the bandages around his head that had been covering his right eye. Below them, there was artificial eye with a thick outline of a metallic material and a red orb in place of the iris. The orb was glowing in an eerie light.

"You can see us?" *Crystal Master* asked warily. He seemed just as, if not more surprised than everyone else.

"Aye, but only since a minute ago. I think this Orichalcon eye just activated, which means that now is the time to use it as I was foretold."

"As you were foretold?" Fubuki repeated.

"It seems like we are forgetting a lot of people we met, but I still remember the time that I got this eye, and who gave it to me," Jim explained and stepped up to stand next to Fubuki. "The old man said I will need this eye to save a friend, and that I will know when the time is right. Obviously that's now."

Fubuki looked at him in surprise. "You consider me a friend? We have barely talked."

Jim shrugged. „I'm not sweating the details. You counted me in when you said you will stop Fujiwara from hurting all your other friends, and if you count me a friend, I'll do the same. The spirits are saying that Fujiwara will exploit your guilt of not saving him before it came to this, so I will take this fight and help him in your place."

Fujiwara smiled. "You two *are* an irregularity. I did not yet know what Fubuki's darkness is, but apparently you already do..." he said in the direction of *Crystal Keeper* and *Master*. „Not that it matters if he knows or not. A weakness is still a weakness."

„I said I am going to be your opponent!" Jim opposed and stepped in front of Fubuki.

Fubuki, however, shook his head and pulled Jim back by his arm. „I appreciate you wanting to help, but this is all happening because I could not stop Fujiwara back then. Even if I really cannot win, I have to at least try. That's what being a duelist is about!"

„And I am saying that my Orichalcon eye is reacting this way because it tells me to take this fight! This is what I have been ready to do since ten years ago!" Jim

protested.

Fujiwara chuckled. „If you are both so eager to fight me, why not come at me both at the same time,” he suggested.

„But that’s...!” *Crystal Keeper* exclaimed, but his partner, *Crystal Master*, put a hand to his arm to stop him. He just silently shook his head, but *Keeper* seemed to understand. He nodded, but his mouth was pressed shut grimly.

Oblivious to the communication of the spirits, Fubuki nodded. „That’s fine for me. Let’s beat him together,” he said to Jim.

Jim smiled. “Alrighty! Caren, let’s go!”

He strapped the crocodile off his back and set it on the ground. Everyone including Fubuki took a cautious step away, but the reptile did not move. It seemed to be looking in Fujiwara’s direction.

Fujiwara nodded. „We will fight this as a battle royale. We start with 4000 Life Points each and take turns one by one. Only the first player skips the Battle Phase, so that will be me. We can only use our own cards because all others are considered opponents. Are you okay with that?”

“He’s going to try to turn you on each other,” *Crystal Master* warned in his usual sad voice.

“The spirit says he’ll turn us against each other,” Jim told Fubuki. “What do ya think?”

“Let him try,” Fubuki said.

Fujiwara and Jim nodded. Caren gave a low growl.

The three duelists took their stances. “DUEL!”

“I will go first - try attacking me right away when it is your turn,” Fujiwara announced and drew. He checked his cards only briefly, then pulled one card and put it onto his Disk: “I summon *Clear Phantom*.”

The monster that appeared on the field was a ghastly creature resembling a black skeleton but with big claws instead of arms. It also had no hips or legs, only a long tail. Around it was a large, translucent crystal. The monster displayed only 1200 attack points.

“I set two cards and end my turn,” Fujiwara announced. “Let’s see what you have to beat me.”

Fubuki and Jim exchanged glances, then Fubuki announced: “I am next. I draw.”

He looked at his cards and quickly decided what to do: “First, I summon *Red-Eyes Wyvern*,” he announced.

The monster, a black, bony dragon-like creature with red eyes, appeared on the field with a screech.

“Without further ado, I attack your *Clear Phantom*,” he said and pointed at the opponent’s monster. His *Wyvern* took off and threw a blast of dark fire at the opponent’s monster.

Fubuki had half expected Fujiwara to be able to counter with his set cards, but he did not. The *Phantom* was hit by the attack. Fujiwara’s Life Points fell to 3400.

Fubuki was about to breathe out with relief when Fujiwara said: “Since you destroyed *Clear Phantom*, its effect activates. When it is destroyed by battle, I destroy one monster that my opponent controls and send the top 3 cards of their deck to the graveyard.”

The crystal that had been around *Clear Phantom* burst under the attack and sharp, glass-like fragments shot from it. One of them pierced Fubuki’s *Red-Eyes Wyvern* and it dissolved with a painful screech. Another one hit Fubuki’s Duel Disk. He had to pull

three cards from it and pushed them into the graveyard slot.

"I still have..." Fubuki started to make clear that he was not losing just because he had a bad start, but Fujiwara interrupted: "Next I activate my continuous trap, *Memory Snatcher*."

The card flipped up. The image showed a tapir-like creature which seemed to be shattering a piece of glass, inside which a person with a hollow gaze was shown.

"*Memory Snatcher* does not allow my opponent to look at the cards which are in their graveyard. In order to activate an effect which targets a card in your graveyard, you need to name it. Only I am allowed to check if it is actually there," Fujiwara explained with a mean smile.

"That's not good, is it?", Johann asked Jūdai in a low voice. "How dependent is Fubuki's deck on having access to the Graveyard?"

"His deck features quite a few effects that get his Red-Eyes Black Dragon back from the Graveyard," Jūdai replied in an equally low voice. It sounded worried.

"Please," Amon said, standing a few steps behind Jūdai. "As a proper duelist he should remember any card that he put in the Graveyard, except the three that he just discarded without checking them."

"You're right," Jūdai said and his face lit up a bit.

Crystal Keeper and *Crystal Master* made more worried faces, but kept silent, so Jūdai did not notice, unlike *Yubel*, who had crossed their arms and eyed the two humanoid monsters with suspicion.

Fubuki looked grim about the meager results of his first turn. He might have reduced Fujiwara's Life Points, but his field was left wide open. "I set one card and end my turn," he said. "Jim, it's up to you to show him up."

Jim pushed up his cowboy hat and gave him an optimistic smile. "Leave it to me. Draw!"

He immediately played one of the cards that he had already had in hand: "I activate *Ancient Telescope*. It lets me see the top five cards on my opponent's deck."

A big telescope whose hull seemed to be made from stone appeared on the field. Holograms that represented all of Fujiwara's hand cards appeared in a half-circle that surrounded Jim.

Johann looked surprised. "That's a standard card, but in most duels it is not much use to know what the opponent will draw next. I wonder what he is getting at," he murmured.

Jim nodded after checking the cards and continued his turn: "Next I activate *Specimen Inspection*."

The card that appeared as a hologram was a spell card which showed animal skeletons. "I can send a monster from my hand to the Graveyard, then declare a type and a level. My opponent must send a monster with that Type and level from the hand or deck to the Graveyard."

"Ah," Jūdai realized. "Because of *Ancient Telescope* he already knows some of the monsters that Fujiwara has in his deck!"

Jim had heard, and nodded: "I discard my monster *Flint Cragger*, then I declare Type Machine and Level 1!"

Fujiwara nodded and pulled a card from his deck that was rather at the top. Obviously it was one of the five that Jim had just looked at. "I discard *Clear Cube*, which is a Level 1 Machine monster," he said and showed the card before he inserted it into his graveyard slot.

"The preparations are complete. I activate my spell card *Fossil Fusion*. For this special

kind of fusion, I remove from play the fusion materials either from my or from my opponent's graveyard. And I choose..."

There was a weird pause.

Fujiwara's lips split into a smile, then he started to laugh. "What, can you not remember what is in your graveyard? That is too bad, because *Memory Snatcher* applies to you as well so you cannot simply check your cards."

Jim stared at Fujiwara and did not move. Caren let out a low growl.

"Jim's deck is entirely based on *Fossil Fusion* which uses cards from the Graveyard. That's the worst possible matchup against Fujiwara," *Crystal Master* realized. "Why did I not think of that..."

Amon had not heard those words and impatiently said: "What do you mean he cannot remember? He just discarded the card. He even called it. It was..." he broke off, confusing appearing on his face.

Fujiwara's grin became wider. "Do you understand now? I am Darkness, and I can manipulate your memories. Without memories you are nothing. You cannot even duel!"

Kapitel 11: Another Tag

Fujiwara's grin became wider. "Do you understand now? I am Darkness, and I can manipulate your memories. Without memories you are nothing. You cannot even duel!"

"That's unfair!" Jūdai shouted.

"He's not here to play fair. He's here to win," *Crystal Keeper* said grimly. "Expect him to have more tricks like that up his sleeve."

Jim swallowed. He looked at Fujiwara with his healthy eye, then back at the card that he had placed in his Duel Disk.

"What is it, can you not use your *Fossil Fusion*? I guess you just wasted it if you cannot tell the monsters that you want to fuse," Fujiwara taunted.

Caren growled again and started to crawl across the ground in Fujiwara's direction. "Caren, stop it," Jim called and looked at Fujiwara again, more focused again. "You might be able to manipulate memories, but you haven't been able to take the one about that old man, and my destiny."

The red orb in his right eye socket started to glow. And then he could see it. "See, it's all fine," he said, and it was not clear if it was directed at Caren, Fubuki or the bystanders - or himself. But he looked confident again.

"I use *Flint Cragger*, a Rock monster from my own graveyard, and a Level 4 or lower monster - your *Clear Cube* - as fusion materials."

"What?" Fujiwara exclaimed. "But..."

"It looks like this Orichalcon eye blocks your nasty attempt to stop my dueling with dirty tricks. Let's go!"

Jim spread his arms. Behind him, what looked like a dinosaur skeleton rose from the earth. Next to Fujiwara, the same happened with a small mechanical box inside a translucent crystal.

"... I fusion summon *Fossil Machine Skull Buggy*!"

The two monsters disappeared in a swirl and were replaced by a large vehicle that looked like a triceratops dinosaur, except its legs were replaced by wheels. The Machine roared and stood up on the hind wheels for a moment, then fell onto the ground and roared aggressively. The monster had 1400 attack points.

"Yes! Good job, Jim!" Jūdai exclaimed.

Jim smiled. "So much for your tricks! *Skull Buggy*, direct attack!"

The dinosaur roared again and the wheels started to turn, propelling it right at Fujiwara.

However, their opponent was prepared: "I activate my continuous trap *Nihilistic Summon Technique*. I select one monster of Level 4 or lower which was removed from play and special summon it in attack position. Needless to say, I choose *Clear Cube*."

The Card flipped up and out of it came the monster that had just been removed by Jim, right in *Skull Buggy's* path. The buggy simply ran it over, destroying it yet again. Since the monster had zero attack points, Fujiwara lost 1400 life points and they fell to 2000.

"Ha! You wasted your card summoning that small-fry monster again," Jim pointed out. Fujiwara shook his head: "When *Clear Cube* is removed from the field, I can special summon another *Clear Cube* directly from my deck," he explained. He got the card

from his deck and placed it on his disk. A new monster, that looked just like the one destroyed seconds ago, appeared.

"Summon as many of those as you like," Jim said. "I set another card and end my turn."

Fujiwara smiled. "This was just the warm-up. Now I will teach you the fear of Darkness," he said and drew his card. A sly smile appeared on his lips.

"I activate the Field Spell *Clear World*," he announced.

A large, shining crystal appeared in the air above Fujiwara. Rays of light shone from it and hit the field.

"Based on the attributes of the monsters you control, an effect applies to you," he explained. "And it's not the kind of effect that you would like."

Fubuki and Jim exchanged wary glances. Obviously Fujiwara was not going to tell them what kind of effect to prepare for.

"But your *Clear Cube* also has an attribute," Amon remarked from outside the field.

"Are you not cutting your own flesh like that?"

Fujiwara chuckled. "No, I am not. *Clear Cube* is treated as not having an attribute at all."

"Bugger off!" Jim exclaimed.

Amon clicked his tongue. "That was to be expected, I guess," he murmured.

"This is just the beginning," Fujiwara smiled. "Next I activate *Clear Sacrifice*. I can reveal a level five or higher 'Clear' monster in my hand, then remove from play 'Clear' monsters as sacrifice for its tribute summon!"

He held up a card from his hand. "*Clear Vice Dragon* is Level 8 so it requires two tributes. I remove *Clear Phantom* and *Clear Cube* from my Graveyard to summon it with the effect of *Clear Sacrifice*."

"So he needed *Clear Cube* in the Graveyard and let it get destroyed so it ends up there," Jūdai concluded. Johann nodded in agreement.

The two monsters rose from the ground and then combined. The appearing monster was enclosed in a large transparent crystal, like the others. It was a dragon with massive claws. Its attack points were zero.

Something happened the moment the monster appeared on the field. Jim felt a cold shower run down his back. His artificial eye lit up again. When he glanced at Fubuki, he was standing there without moving, but he seemed to see something. His eyes were flickering this way and that way, and his lips were moving like he was seeing something, even though nothing was happening. The spectators were behaving weird too.

Jim turned; Fujiwara was smiling viciously.

"What are you doing!?" Jim exclaimed. His right eye lit up more brightly than before and tinted the whole scenery in red. Then it stopped.

"Wha-," Fubuki gasped next to him. He looked confused, but at least he had snapped out of that weird state he had been in. "Huh?" he stared at the playing field. "Didn't I just destroy that dragon?"

Fujiwara's mouth twitched. "You just had to get into my way," he spat at Jim.

"I have no idea what happened, but I guess I did," Jim said, hiding his confusion.

"Oh, that is good," *Crystal Keeper* said relieved.

Johann looked at the spirit: "Do you know what happened?"

"Based on what we know, Fujiwara was trying to see how the duel was going to proceed by letting it all happen in Fubuki's head."

Crystal Master added: "Then he would pick up the actual duel once he found his

weakness and knew what strategies he had in mind. That is how he was going to win." "Fujiwara was playing dirty again, huh?" Jim mused. "But it didn't work on my Orichalcon eye."

"I... thank you, I guess," Fubuki said to him. He was still a bit unsure what had just happened, but had grasped that what he had just seen was something that had yet to happen.

"You're welcome, mate," Jim replied and gave him a thumbs-up. Then he turned to Fujiwara.

"Dirty mind games aside, what are you gonna do with this dragon that has zero attack points?" he taunted. He knew fully well that the monster was almost guaranteed to have an effect that would make it much stronger based on some condition, but he did not want to show his growing insecurity.

Fujiwara chuckled. "Let's see. *Clear Vice Dragon*, attack *Skull Buggy*," he ordered. The dragon roared inside the crystal and opened its mouth.

"You see, when *Clear Vice Dragon* attacks, it gains twice the attack points of the monster that it is battling," he said. The dragon's attack point counter shot to 2800.

Jim grit his teeth. "Not so easily! I activate my Trap *Sakuretsu Armor*! When your monster declares an attack, it is destroyed!"

The card flipped up.

"Good move!" Jūdai called out from outside the playing field.

Fujiwara's smile did not disappear. "When a card or effect is activated that would destroy *Clear Vice Dragon*, I can discard a card from my hand to negate the activation and destroy the card whose effect was activated."

He put one of the cards from his hand into the Graveyard. A beam of light shot from the crystal that the dragon was in and pierced Jim's trap card. Then *Clear Vice Dragon* launched its actual attack and shot a dark beam from its mouth at *Skull Buggy*.

"Jim...!" Fubuki gasped and his hand moved to the activation switch for his set card.

Jim raised a hand and shook his head. "I'm fine! Keep that to protect yourself," he advised. Fubuki complied.

The attack pierced *Fossil Machine Skull Buggy* and it dissolved. Jim's life points fell to 2600. He gasped. The impact of the life loss felt so real, as if a part of him had just been eradicated.

"Jim!" Jūdai cried out. Caren growled with worry.

Jim forced a fierce smile on his face. "Don't worry mate, I'm not down yet," he reassured the watchers and stood upright again.

"Not yet," Fujiwara agreed viciously. "*Clear Vice Dragon* changes to defense position after attacking. My turn is over. But soon you will wish you had chosen Darkness immediately instead of going into this duel."

The dragon moved into a more defensive position inside the crystal.

Next it was Fubuki's turn, but the duelist looked grim already when he put his hand on his deck to draw the next card. It was plain to see that he was at a major disadvantage: *Memory Snatcher* prevented him from checking his Graveyard to do anything with the cards that had ended up there, and due to *Clear World*, his Dark monsters would not be able to attack.

"Fubuki, you can do it," Jūdai encouraged him. "You beat the Darkness before!"

Fubuki hesitated and looked at Jūdai. "Did I?" he asked weakly. "Because I only remember that *you* saved me from it, and more than once."

Jūdai looked a bit helpless, but Johann cut in: "But that means it is possible to beat

the Darkness, right?"

Fubuki looked at the duo and smiled. "With you two still so full of hope, there is no way I can just give up, I guess," he said. "My turn, draw!"

He drew and looked at the card. *Swing of Memories*. The card image showed a young girl standing next to a swing that was hanging from the branch of a tree, looking at the sunset. The sight of that card made Fubuki smile. Somehow, it filled him with a tender feeling.

"This card..." he said thoughtfully. "I think it reminds me of someone..."

"That's impossible. Everyone you knew is already erased from your memory," Fujiwara objected.

Fubuki looked at the card some more. The feeling of warmth became stronger. It was almost like he saw someone else standing next to the swing. A girl, too, but one with blonde hair. Then she turned around and said something to him. He could not remember her voice, or what she said, but the image was there.

Fubuki smiled. "I don't remember who you are, but I know that you existed," he said, more to himself, "just like the monsters in my Graveyard. I can get them back, I just know."

He put the card into a slot on his Duel Disk.

"I activate *Swing of Memories*. It allows me to special summon a normal monster from my Graveyard."

"But you don't remember what's in your Graveyard! And you cannot check because of *Memory Snatcher*!" Fujiwara pointed out.

Fubuki looked at his Graveyard. "I don't remember, but I know it is there. It has to be. I can feel our bond!"

He looked at Fujiwara with a determined expression. "I special summon *Red-Eyes Black Dragon* from my Graveyard!"

Fujiwara flinched.

The Duel Disk ejected the card and Fubuki put it on the field where it roared loudly.

"Yes! You did it!," Jūdai cheered.

"Whatever," Fujiwara spat. He was clearly not happy about the development.

"*Red-Eyes*, attack his *Clear Vice Dragon*!" Fubuki ordered and pointed at the opponent's dragon.

The black dragon did not move. "*Red-Eyes*?" Fubuki asked uneasily.

Fujiwara smiled again. "In the *Clear World*, your monsters cannot attack while you have a Dark monster on the field," he explained with a satisfied smile. "Calling your monster was completely useless, and due to the effect of *Swing of Memories* it will be destroyed again at the end of the turn."

He cackled.

Fubuki's expression dampened.

"That sucks," Jim said. "But don't you have a card in the Graveyard that can bring it back? If I remember correctly, the effect of *Black-Eyes Wyvern* is..."

Fujiwara's cackling died while Fubuki's smile came back. "You're right! I had forgotten about that card..." Fubuki said.

"Hah, all his dirty tricks are useless against Jim's eye! Way to go!" Johann cheered.

Fubuki nodded. "I set two Spell or Trap cards and end my turn," he announced. "*Black-Eyes Red Dragon* is destroyed because it was summoned by the effect of *Swing of Memories*."

The black dragon burst into pieces.

Fubuki activated a switch on his Duel Disk. "But now I use the effect of *Red-Eyes*

Wyvern in my Graveyard. I can remove it from play to special summon *Red-Eyes Black Dragon* back to the field!"

The dragon reappeared with a roar that seemed even louder and more powerful than previously.

Fujiwara shrugged. "Great, you have a monster back that cannot attack and is easily overpowered by *Clear Vice Dragon*. You're just dragging it out."

"No, I'm handing this over to Jim. Let's give him a beating," Fubuki said and smiled at the duelist next to him.

"Thanks mate," Jim said, "I draw a card!"

He checked the new card. He had only one other card in his hand and one card in his Graveyard, but most likely he would be able to form a good combo with them.

"I activate the Spell *Miracle Rupture*. I discard a rock monster from my deck to Graveyard, then I can shuffle my Deck and draw another card."

He did what he had just described, and drew the new card. This one would help.

"Let me cut in before you summon any monsters," Fubuki suddenly said. "I activate my Trap *Burst Breath*. I tribute my *Red-Eyes* to destroy all face-up monsters that have less defense points than my monsters has attack points."

He looked at Fujiwara triumphantly: "Since all your *Clear* monsters have zero defense, they have to go. And since you are out of cards in your hand, you cannot protect *Clear Vice Dragon* by discarding one!"

The *Red-Eyes Black Dragon* shot a fiery breath at the field. Fujiwara's monsters disappeared in the inferno, then Fubuki's dragon did the same.

"Good job!" Jim said and raised his right hand. Fubuki understood and gave him a high-five.

"When my *Clear Cube* is removed from the field I can summon another *Clear Cube*," Fujiwara said sourly and put the monster on the field which looked like one of the two that were just destroyed. He played it in defense mode.

"Alright, now comes my turn. I summon *Weathering Soldier*!" Jim announced.

The monster that appeared was a burly humanoid figure made entirely of two different types of rocks. "*Weathering Soldier*, attack his *Clear Cube*!" Jim ordered.

Fujiwara had no way to stop the attack. *Clear Cube* was smashed by the *Weathering Soldier's* fist and disappeared.

"Yes!" Johann exclaimed. "You are cornering him!"

"We're not done yet," Fubuki said. "I activate my other trap, *Red-Eyes Spirit*! I can summon a Red-Eyes monster that was destroyed this turn - *Red-Eyes Black Dragon* come back!"

For the third time in this duel, the black dragon appeared with a screech.

"Because you have a Rock monster on your field, you must destroy one of your monsters due to *Clear World's* effect," Fujiwara calmly told Jim. "So your turn ends with you being defenseless."

A ray of light shot from the Crystal that marked the field spell, and destroyed Jim's only monster, *Weathering Soldier*. Jim grit his teeth.

"I set a card, then I end my turn," he announced.

"You almost got him!" Jūdai said.

Crystal Keeper and *Crystal Master* nodded. They seemed to be content with the new developments.

"I do not think so," Fujiwara said. "I still have the advantage as long as *Clear World* is

on the field. Tricks like *Burst Breath* can only get you so far."

He drew his next card.

"I summon *Clear Rage Golem*," he announced and placed the card that he had just drawn. The monster, like all his 'Clear' monsters, was enclosed in a crystal. It looked like it was made of stone and had big arms, but its lower body was just a single piece of rock. Unlike the other 'Clear' monsters that he had used so far, it had 1600 attack points.

"*Clear Rage Golem*, attack Jim directly," Fujiwara said. Jim still had 2600 Life points and would have survived the attack, but chose to act instead: "I activate my Trap *Uluru the Guardian Spirit*! This card can only be activated when I have *Uluru's Guardian* in my Graveyard. I just put it there to activate *Miracle Rupture*. I can special summon *Uluru the Guardian Spirit* as a normal monster in defense position."

The card flipped up and set itself on the field in the vertical position of a defense-position monster. Above it appeared the image of a humanoid shape made of rocks, not unlike the *Weathering Soldier* that had been destroyed last turn. It displayed an impressive amount of 2500 defense points.

"All your attack position monsters must attack it, so you cannot stop *Clear Rage Golem*," Jim added.

The monster inside the crystal moved forward and crashed against the one on Jim's field. Fujiwara's life points fell to 1100. He flinched.

Jim fixated his gaze on Fujiwara while he was clearly suffering from the loss of life points. The red bead in his eye socket glowed. And it showed him something.

A small boy, sitting with his arms clasped around his knees.

He was crying.

"Mom... dad... why did you leave? Did you forget about me...? I don't want to be forgotten..."

Jim gasped.

"I can see it," he said and looked at the Fujiwara in front of him. "All this time... all you wanted is to not be forgotten."

Fujiwara looked at him. "Nonsense. Memories are sadness. Everyone should forget me, and I should forget everyone. That is how we can be happy."

"I don't believe that!" Fubuki said. "Fujiwara, I remember. When you left, you said it causes you pain to think that your friends will forget you someday! But that means that you *want* them to remember you!"

Fujiwara shook his head. "You still think you can save me, huh?" he asked.

"I already said so!" Fubuki said.

Fujiwara shook his head. "That is quite hypocritical, isn't it? In the end, you are just doing this for yourself. You cannot accept that you could not stop me back then. And you..." his eyes bore into Jim's, "... you don't have any connection to me or Fubuki, but you cut in because you want to be the hero, huh?"

Caren growled in protest.

Jim nodded at her. "Say what you want, we got the upper hand now," he said.

"He's right," Amon agreed. "You have only a weak monster and no other cards left. Try cheating your way out of this."

Fujiwara sneered. "I end my turn," he said.

"*Uluru's Guardian Spirit* is destroyed at the end of the turn," Jim said and looked at Fubuki. "I'm leaving this to you."

Fubuki nodded. He drew.

"You still cannot attack with your Dark monster," Fujiwara pointed out sourly.

Fubuki smiled. "I do not need to attack to beat you," he said, looking at the card he had drawn. "I activate *Inferno Fire Blast*. I can inflict to you damage equal to the attack points of a *Red-Eyes Black Dragon* that I control. That is 2400."

Fujiwara looked shaken. "No," he gasped.

Fubuki raised his hand. "Finish him!" he said.

His *Red-Eyes* roared and fired a large fireball at Fujiwara. There was no more protection for his opponent, whose Life Points fell to zero.

"You did it!" Jūdai shouted.

Fujiwara dropped to his knees. "No... I... I just wanted..."

Fubuki hurried towards him. "Hey Fujiwara! Don't worry. It's all going to be okay. Darkness will be gone soon!" he promised.

Fujiwara looked up at him. "Tenjōin..." he said weakly. Then he opened his mouth again to say more, but suddenly his gaze became blank. His body slackened. Then it turned black before it fell apart, turning into a pile of what could have been duel monsters cards if they weren't completely black on both sides.

Fubuki stared at his empty hands.

The pile of cards quivered, causing Fubuki to retreat, but he did not find the power to stand up from the ground. The cards piled up into the air and formed a shape that vaguely resembled a human.

"What...", Fubuki gasped at the figure that was now towering over him.

The dark silhouette slowly showed its features. It wore a hood that was part of a long cloak. Its face was entirely covered in shadow, but the eyes were glowing menacingly. Fubuki shivered.

"Darkness", he whispered.

Kapitel 12: Another Final

The dark silhouette slowly showed its features. It wore a hood that was part of a long cloak. Its face was entirely covered in shadow, but the eyes were glowing menacingly. Fubuki shivered.

"Darkness", he whispered.

Dread crept upon everyone present. Johann could feel a cold shiver down his back, and when he looked at Jūdai who was standing next to him, he could see that he was experiencing something similar.

"You have beaten my emissary, but you will never beat Darkness itself," a voice said. It did not sound like it was coming from the figure itself, more like it was resonating all around them.

Caren, the crocodile, let out an aggressive growl and crawled towards the figure on the ground.

"Caren, stop!"

Jim threw himself on top of the reptile to hold her. "Thank you for worrying, but I don't think you can help us against that," he said.

"That is correct," the voice of Darkness said. "Nobody can help you against me. In fact, you have not realized it yet but there is no need to *help* anyone."

Jim glared at the tall figure. The red orb in place of his right eye started to glow again, casting a red light over the scene.

There was fear. And sadness. Despair. Insecurity.

The visions of humans floated into Jim's mind.

"It's just because of Aniki that my brother died..."

"I let down Aniki and Shō at the same time..."

"I will never be accepted by the dueling world as long as Jūdai is there..."

"I cannot stay with Jūdai if I went to be independent, but I don't want to leave him..."

"I almost let my mother die because I thought she was expendable..."

Jim pressed both hands over his ears, but he could still hear them. His eye was glowing stronger than before. More and more visions rushed into him.

"Jim!" Jūdai shouted, realizing his pain. But Jim could not hear him.

"Make... it stop..." he gasped.

"Nothing easier than that," the voice of Darkness said.

And there was silence.

The red bead in Jim's eye cracked and fell to the ground in pieces. All power left his body and he fell forward. Caren howled, but then she fell silent too.

The others watched in dread how their bodies turned pitch black. The black turned into cards, just like Fujiwara moments ago. They did not fall to the ground but moved, as if being sucked in by a black hole, rapidly towards the shade below the hood of the figure before them.

"What," Johann gasped.

"He's too powerful!" Fubuki exclaimed. His voice was full of panic. "He doesn't even have to duel us! He will just..."

He fell silent when the cloaked figure crouched and got on one level with his face.

"You already know the power of darkness. Come join me, and forget."

Fubuki stared into the black below the hood, then he nodded with an empty gaze. Just like Jim, he turned into cards that were sucked in and became one with the cloaked figure, which slowly got up again, standing up to its full size that was several heads taller than a normal human.

Now, only Jūdai, Johann and Amon were left.

The Crystal Beasts and *Yubel* defensively appeared in front of their partners.

"You," Darkness said and pointed at Amon. His hand looked like that of a skeleton, it was only bones.

Amon shivered.

"How can you be the king when there are no more people left in this world?" Darkness simply asked.

Amon opened his mouth. Then he shut it again.

Without a word, he turned into black cards that were swallowed by the space below Darkness hood.

Johann made a grim face. "I guess this is where I need to make a stand, right?" he asked and readied his Duel Disk.

"Yes... you and Jūdai. If anyone has a chance to beat Darkness itself, it is you," *Crystal Keeper* said.

Crystal Master agreed: "This is why we are here. To set things right."

Jūdai looked at them. "I... I don't know why you think so highly of me," he admitted. "I was able to beat the Light of Destruction, but that was only because everyone supported me. I don't remember them, but I'm sure I couldn't have done anything myself. And I can't do anything now..."

"That's not true," *Yubel* objected. "You have a strength, and you have always shown it."

"And you are not alone!" Johann added. "It's just like with me and the Crystal Beasts." He nodded at the beasts that were still gathered around him. "We have this strong bond with the monsters. It makes us different, and that's not always easy, but it also means we will never really be alone."

Jūdai started to smile. "You are right," he agreed. He looked at *Yubel*. "As long as I have you, there is no way we can lose."

He turned his attention back to Johann. "Let's fight together."

Judia held out his hand. Johann took it. Then they both turned to face Darkness.

"I shall let you try. But know that you are only delaying your salvation," Darkness said.

"Stop talking like you are here to do us a favor," Jūdai protested. "How is erasing everyone salvation? You are just destroying everything!"

Darkness took a few steps back.

"For you who have not yet accepted the embrace of Darkness, it would look like destruction. But that is not what I am. Despair, fear of the future, sadness... there are so many bad feelings in the human world. Have you never wished these would disappear?"

The figure stopped at a distance from Johann and Jūdai that left enough space for a playing field.

"Humans who experience these feelings wish for them to be gone. That is me. I am the desire of all the people who have ever wished to be free of those negative feelings. And I am the power that grants their wish. To nullify all those negative

feelings. To feel nothing. To find eternal peace. That is what I am."

"That's terrible!" Johann exclaimed. "Life is not always easy, but there are also good things and there is always hope for a better future!"

Darkness' eyes glowed. Five wings unfolded from behind his head, two on his right side and three on the left.

"Is there, though? Who says that the future will be better? What if the future holds only more pain and sadness? What if this world itself is heading to its destruction? By becoming one with me, all those people need not worry about that anymore. They have discarded their hope, but also their despair. They exist in nothing, in eternal peace."

"That doesn't sound right," Jūdai objected strongly. He looked at Johann, who nodded in agreement.

"Show him that there is hope for the future," *Crystal Keeper* said.

"We are counting on you," *Crystal Master* added.

Johann and Jūdai both activated their Duel Disks.

"Alright, let's go," Jūdai said.

Darkness nodded. "We will play by the same Battle Royale rules as before. Try to beat me," he said.

His two opponents nodded.

"DUEL!"

While Jūdai and Johann drew their first five cards, Darkness just raised his left, bony hand and the cards appeared in it.

"I will start," he announced. "I summon *Darkness Eye*."

Darkness had no Duel Disk, the monster card that he had just announced to play simply disappeared from his hand and appeared on one of the wings on his head. The monster that appeared on the field looked like a dark ball that was attached to some veins that seemed to grow out of the ground. It had zero attack points.

"Looks like another deck full of nasty tricks," Johann remarked.

Darkness continued calmly: "I activate the field spell *Darkness*."

A dark orb appeared right behind Darkness' body. It was glowing, but the glow did not emit light. The scenery around them was swallowed by shadows. It had already been dark, but now it became hard to see anything.

"When I activate *Darkness*, I set the following five cards from my deck in my Spell and Trap zone in random positions." As he called out the names of the cards, face-down cards appeared on the outer side of the wings near his head and simultaneously as holograms on the field: " *Zero, Infinity, Darkness 1, Darkness 2, Darkness 3*."

"What is this going to be?" *Yubel* wondered warily.

"I cannot look at my face-down cards as long as *Darkness* is on the field," Darkness explained. "But you will soon learn to fear them anyway. This ends my turn."

"Let me—" Johann started, but was interrupted: "Next is me," Jūdai announced and drew a card.

Johann shut his mouth again. In his urge to do something, Jūdai had not even noticed that he had tried to suggest going first.

"First, I activate my Spell Card *Fake Hero*. I special summon an Elemental Hero monster from my hand, but it cannot attack. I choose my trusted companion *Elemental Hero Neos*!"

The muscular hero in white appeared on the field. Johann had already seen this

monster a couple of times when watching Jūdai duel. Summoning it was a standard move for him.

"Next I summon *Neo-Spacian Aqua Dolphin*."

The monster that appeared was decidedly less bulky than *Neos* but also a humanoid figure with well-defined muscles, except its head was that of a dolphin.

"I activate *Aqua Dolphin*'s effect! I discard a card from my hand to look at your hand!" Jūdai dutifully put a card to the graveyard. Holograms of the cards from Darkness' hand appeared around him in a half circle. Jūdai regarded them. "I select a monster card from your hand," he said and pointed at the card. "Then, if I have a monster which has more attack points, I destroy it and you get 500 points of damage. *Neos* has 2500 and your *Darkness Necroslime* that I selected has zero attack points, so it is destroyed!"

The card hologram exploded and Darkness' Life Points fell to 3500. The dark entity did not seem to care.

"Good job!" Johann said nevertheless, and gave Jūdai a thumbs-up.

"Now I use the two monsters on my field for Contact Fusion! I shuffle *Neos* and *Aqua Dolphin* back into my deck to call forth the aquatic hero: *Elemental Hero Aqua Neos*!" *Neos* and *Aqua Dolphin* rose into the air and combined into a monster that looked like a bulkier version of *Aqua Dolphin*. It showed 2500 Attack Points. Jūdai pumped his fist. "*Aqua Neos*, attack that weird monster!"

When Jūdai's monster got into a fighting stance, Darkness said calmly: "Now I shall activate my combo. I told you that I cannot see which of my face-down cards is which, but the effect of *Darkness Eye* lets me do it once per turn."

A slit opened in the dark ball that was the main body of the monster and revealed an eye. Darkness nodded. The eye closed again.

"I see. Then I shall activate this card first."

Of the five set cards on the field, the one second from the left flipped up at a hand signal from Darkness. The card image of the Trap showed a small ball of light amid darkness, above the rippling surface of water.

"*Zero*," he read the card's name. "When I do not control a face-up *Infinity*, I activate one set card next. This one."

The second card from the right flipped up. "*Infinity*", Darkness read. This card's image showed an entire galaxy. "When I activate *Infinity* while *Zero* is already activated, I activate all set cards which lie between *Zero* and *Infinity* in an order I choose."

"There is only one card," Jūdai noted.

"Indeed," Darkness said. "But that is all I need. The card that I activate is this: *Darkness 1*. When it is the first card activated after *Zero* and *Infinity*, I can destroy one card that my opponent controls."

He silently pointed at *Aqua Neos*. A lightning bolt shot from the revealed card, which showed a rough surface of water. The monster was stuck and disappeared.

"Damn," Jūdai muttered.

"Those cards... they're Continuous Traps," Johann realized when neither of the cards that Darkness had just activated disappeared after activation.

"You're right," Jūdai noticed uneasily. "Is there some other effect to them?"

"See, you rushed too much," *Yubel* chided him. "If you had waited to see what his combo can do..."

"Hey, I'm perfectly prepared for this," Jūdai protested. "I activate my Spell: *Relationship*. If a monster that I control was destroyed this turn I can special summon an Elemental Hero who has the same attack points as the destroyed

monster. *Aqua Neos* had 2500 attack points so I can summon *Neos* from the deck who has the same strength!"

Neos appeared back on the field from within a small explosion and flexed its muscles. *Yubel* sighed with relief.

"I set a card and end my turn," Jūdai closed.

"During each end phase, all my Spell and Trap cards are set face-down again and their positions shuffled," Darkness announced, revealing the secret of his continuous Traps. The card holograms flipped down and switched places quickly.

"Wow, that is nasty. So he can use this combo again every turn?" *Yubel* noticed.

"I guess *Darkness 2* and *Darkness 3* also have some effect that activates when they are between *Zero* and *Infinity*," Jūdai mused, "And we still have no idea what they can do."

"But it's random which cards are between those two," Johann said optimistically. "And he only knows which one is which because of *Darkness Eye*, so I only need to destroy it."

He looked at Jūdai and gave him a nod. "I'm taking over," he announced and drew.

"There you are," he said to the card he had just drawn, then looked around with a smile. "Prepare for a way of summoning that the world has yet to see!"

Johann held up two cards with the back to everyone else. They started to glow.

"Swing, Pendulum of souls. Draw a rainbow into the sky!" he announced and inserted the cards into the spell and trap card slots farthest to the right and farthest to the left.

Pillars of gentle, rainbow-colored light rose on both sides of Johann's part of the field. One of them showed the number 2, the other a 5. The holograms of *Crystal Keeper* and *Crystal Master* appeared in the light.

"Huh?," Jūdai said confused and peered at Johann's Duel Disk - but he had really put the cards into Spell and Trap card slots. "I thought they were monsters," he admitted. "They are, but also they aren't," Johann said and winked. "They are called Pendulum cards."

"Why have I never heard of cards like that?" Jūdai asked.

"Because you always sleep during the lessons," *Yubel* remarked.

Johann grinned. "Nah, they're just really special. As far as I know they're the only ones in the world."

"Wow," Jūdai gasped.

"An irregularity. Something like this should not exist," Darkness said a bit sourly.

"Well, but they do. And they're going to help me win this!" Johann said with conviction.

"Yes? What do they do?" Jūdai asked excitedly.

"Watch and see," Johann said and puffed out his chest, then he spread his arms.

"Pendulum Summon! Appear, my trusted Crystal Beasts!"

A circle appeared in the sky between the pillars of light. Two flashes of light shot out of it, one dark blue and one green. They hit the field and in them appeared two monsters.

"*Crystal Beast Sapphire Pegasus! Crystal Beast Emerald Tortoise!* Join me in this fight!"

The first monster was an elegant white horse with large wings. On its forehead glistened a blue gem-like horn. The other monster was a large tortoise on whose shell green gems were growing.

"Thank you for calling us," the pegasus said in a deep voice.

"We will help you," the tortoise said calmly.

"Thanks for coming," Johann smiled.

"Wait... did you just summon two monsters at the same time?" Jūdai said surprised.

"Yes," said *Crystal Keeper*. "We are the pendulum scales that make this possible."

"*Crystal Keeper* has scale 2 and I have scale 5. With a Pendulum summon, Johann can call forth as many monsters with a level between those scales as possible," *Crystal Master* elaborated.

"Thank you, this helps a lot!" Johann said to them, then came back to the duel: "And when *Sapphire Pegasus* is summoned, I can place a Crystal Beast from my hand, Deck or Graveyard in my Spell and Trap card zone as a Continuous Spell. Join us from the Deck, *Crystal Beast Amber Mammoth*!"

He inserted another card into a Spell and Trap slot, but what appeared was not a monster, just a round orange stone with a polished surface. "As long as it's in the Spell zone, it's just a gem," Johann remarked.

He looked at Darkness. "Well, now let's try attacking that disgusting thing there," he said and pointed at *Darkness Eye*.

Darkness chuckled. "I activate my combo again. *Zero* and *Infinity*!"

The *Darkness Eye*'s lid opened for a moment and closed again. There was a pause. Darkness silently pointed at the two cards farthest to the right and they flipped up. They were *Zero* and *Infinity*, but there was no card between them that could be activated.

Johann smirked. "You have a bad start it seems. *Pegasus*, continue to attack *Darkness Eye*."

"On it," the winged horse called and pranced on its hind legs, then took off and rushed right into *Darkness Eye* which was destroyed without resistance. Darkness' Life points fell to 1700.

"Great!" Jūdai called out.

"I summoned *Emerald Tortoise* in defense position so you are safe for now," Johann told Darkness. "I play a Spell or Trap card face-down and end my turn."

The cards on Darkness' side of the field flipped down and switched places quickly.

A new card appeared in Darkness' bony hand instead of a draw. The dark messenger was down to 1700 Life Points and he had no monsters on the field, but seemed not worried by that at all.

"I summon *Darkness Necroslime*," he announced. A black, wobbly blob that floated in the air appeared. Just like *Darkness Eye* before, it had zero attack points. "I activate its effect, which allows me to send it to the Graveyard and get another monster back instead. I summon *Darkness Eye* back to the field in defense position."

"Just when I thought I had broken his combo," Johann muttered.

"I can also special summon *Darkness Slime* in defense position if the total attack points of all my monsters are zero. Now I select an opponent's monster. *Slime*'s attack points become equal to the defense of that monster, and its defense points equal to that monster's attack points. I choose *Neos*."

Darkness Slime's shape quivered and it turned into a grey double of *Neos* that crouched in defense position, where it showed 2500 points, the same as *Neos*' attack points.

"I use my *Zero* and *Infinity* combo again," Darkness said. *Darkness Eye* opened and the

two cards flipped up at Darkness' hand signals. Jūdai and Johann gasped simultaneously: This time, the two cards were the ones on the farthest left and right, meaning that their opponent could choose freely which of the cards in between them to activate.

"I activate *Darkness 3* which deals 1000 points of damage to my opponent. I choose Jūdai."

The card in the middle flipped up. It showed a dark bubble surrounded by water. Lightning shot from the card and hit Jūdai right in the chest. His Life Point counter went down to 3000.

The boy in the Osiris Blue uniform buckled over and struggled to keep himself on his legs.

An image filled his mind - the one of another duelist in a black coat who was struggling in a similar way.

"Kaiser," Jūdai gasped.

"What?" Johann asked, unable to make sense of that word.

"Oh, he is just remembering something," Darkness said calmly and raised his hand to continue his move: "The effect of *Darkness 3* continues: For each card between *Zero* and *Infinity* that I flip up after it, I can deal another 1000 points of damage."

The second card, left of *Darkness 3*, flipped up. A second bolt of lightning from the original card hit Jūdai who cried out in pain. His Life Points fell to 2000.

"Is this... how it felt like for Kaiser...?" he panted. "And he was fighting anyway... he was... If I had known how it feels for him, I should have..."

"Jūdai, he is trying to weaken your spirit by showing you those memories," Yubel said worriedly.

"I know," Jūdai replied, "but the memory is real, isn't it? That duel... I dueled Kaiser, and I knew his condition was not good, but..."

Silently, Darkness gestured for the last remaining card to flip up. The third lightning bolt stuck and brought Jūdai's life to 1000. This time, Jūdai's legs gave way and he fell to his knees.

"This is where I activate my Trap! *Trap Strap*! I can activate it when my opponent activates a trap to set it back face down when it resolves. Then I can special summon a Crystal Beast from the deck. Appear, *Crystal Beast Cobalt Eagle*!"

The new Crystal Beast that appeared on the field with a flap of wings was, as its name suggested, an eagle. It bore a metal breastplate that presented a blue polished gem. "Here we go!" the monster shouted in a rather squeaky voice.

It was only then that Johann realized that Jūdai was sobbing. "I killed him," Jūdai whispered. "If I had not dueled him, he would still be doing well..."

Kapitel 13: Another Partner

It was only then that Johann realized that Jūdai was sobbing. "I killed him," Jūdai whispered. "If I had not dueled him, he would still be doing well..."

"Jūdai!" Johann hurried over and put an arm around the other boy's shoulder. "Stay strong! If you give in to the darkness we cannot beat it!"

Jūdai swallowed. "I know... I know that... but how can I be the hope to beat darkness when I hurt someone so much..."

"Do not falter! This is unlike you, Yūki Jūdai!" *Crystal Keeper* shouted impatiently. "You are the one who can turn this around!"

Jūdai looked up at the card spirit. He looked lost. "I really don't know why you put so much trust in me. I have done nothing to earn it," he said.

Crystal Master shook his head. "Yes you have. You just do not know. But it is Yūki Jūdai who can beat Darkness. We just know."

Johann helped Jūdai stand up again. He was still weak on his legs.

"If they say so it must be true, right," Johann said, but his optimism seemed just a little bit forced this time.

Jūdai wiped away his tears with the sleeve of his uniform and tried to look determined. "I will try my best," he said. Behind him, *Yubel* nodded in agreement.

"You have not beaten me yet!" he told Darkness. "And now it is my turn."

Darkness cards were flipped down and shuffled again when Jūdai already drew his card.

Jūdai checked the card that he had just drawn.

"I set a Spell or Trap card," he announced and put it on his field. Then he looked at his opponent.

"It has to work this time! *Neos*, attack his *Darkness Eye*!"

"Your struggles are futile. I activate *Zero* and *Infinity*."

Yet again, the *Darkness Eye* opened, telling Darkness which card was which, and he activated them. *Zero* was now farthest to the right and *Infinity* in the middle, with only one card between them.

"You get to live another turn, but you cannot destroy my monster. The card that activates is *Darkness 1* which destroys a card you control. I choose *Neos*."

The card flipped up and the lightning bolt hit *Neos* in the chest. It disappeared immediately, leaving Jūdai with two set cards, one of them being the one he had just placed there.

"Why are you still fighting?" Darkness asked darkly. "You can feel it, can you not? The memory of Kaiser and of your group of friends falling apart - you would be better off without that, wouldn't you?"

Jūdai swallowed.

"Don't lend him an ear! There might be painful memories, but you also have good ones, don't you?" Johann reminded him.

He did not wait for Jūdai to reply: "If your turn is over, let me continue!"

Jūdai nodded. Darkness' cards flipped back down and rearranged themselves, waiting

for the next turn.

Johann smiled at the sight of his drawn card. "There is still hope, and this card proves it," he announced.

"I activate my Spell *Rare Value*. I can send *Amber Mammoth* from the Spell and Trap zone to the Graveyard in order to draw two cards."

The amber gem on Johann's field disappeared and sent a ray of light to his hand. He drew and nodded.

"I activate the Equip Spell *Golden Rule*! I equip it to a Crystal Beast that I control, and I choose *Sapphire Pegasus*. Now I can place two level 3 or lower Crystal Beasts in my Spell and Trap zone as continuous spell cards. Appear, Level 3 *Crystal Beast Ruby Carbuncle* and Level 3, *Crystal Beast Amethyst Cat*!"

A bright red and a purple gem appeared before Johann.

"*Golden Rule* would also allow me to summon a Crystal Beast from my hand, but I have none. But I can do this: I special summon *Ruby Carbuncle* from the Spell and Trap Zone to the field in defense mode, then I can special summon other Crystal Beasts which are currently on my field as Continuous Spells."

The red gem glowed and became a small, cat-like creature with blue fur and a long tail that landed in the zone that was reserved for monsters. It gave a high-pitched squeal. The red gem at the end of its tail glowed magically, causing the purple gem to glow as well. That gem turned into a large cat with pink fur who had a golden emblem on its chest that carried a purple gem.

"Ready to rock!" the cat exclaimed with a female voice.

"This is the sixth of his seven Crystal Beasts, and he has five of them on the field," *Yubel* felt compelled to point out.

Johann grinned. "Just wait until I get the seventh out!" he said proudly. He turned to Darkness again.

"Time to break your combo for good. *Sapphire Pegasus*, attack *Darkness Eye*!"

The pegasus jumped forth. But this time as well, Darkness did not let it go through.

"I use *Darkness Eye*'s effect to see my cards, then I activate *Zero* and *Infinity*, and as the first card between them, *Darkness 2*," he said. The cards flipped up. The image of *Darkness 2* showed a ball of fire above a surface of water.

"We haven't seen this one yet! What does it do?" Johann asked warily.

"A monster that I control gains 1000 attack points until the end phase. It also gains 1000 more points for each card between *Zero* and *Infinity*."

There was only one card left to activate and it flipped up promptly. *Darkness Eye*'s attack points increased to 2000, letting the eyeball grow out of proportion and tower over *Sapphire Pegasus*.

"No!" Johann gasped but it was too late. A beam shot from the huge eye and hit *Sapphire Pegasus* in mid-air. Johann's Life Point counter fell to 3800.

"Crystal Beasts do not leave the field but become Continuous Spell Cards when they are destroyed," Johann explained. A blue, rough gem appeared on his field.

"But you have no monsters that can beat *Darkness Eye* or *Darkness Slime*," Darkness pointed out.

"That's right, but there is still something I can do! *Amethyst Cat*!" Johann called.

The cat flexed her claws and jumped.

"*Amethyst Cat* can attack you directly, but then the damage is halved," Johann

explained. The *Cat* had 1200 attack points, so the damage would be 600. The cat's claws ripped at Darkness' Cloak. He was down to 1100 Life Points. "We almost have him!" Jūdai cheered.

Crystal Keeper and *Crystal Master* nodded, but the expression on the visible part of the *Keeper's* face still looked tense.

"I use the effect of *Emerald Tortoise* to move *Amethyst Cat* into defense mode," Johann announced. The Tortoise nodded, pulled its extremities into its shell and raced across the field, throwing the cat onto her hind paws. She gave a sulky meowing sound, but then settled down.

Johann nodded, content with the successful turn. "I can't do any more than this," he admitted. "I play two cards face-down and end my turn."

A new card appeared in Darkness' hand. "It is time to show you that all resistance is futile," he said. "I tribute *Darkness Eye* to summon *Darkness Bramble*."

A monster appeared on the field. True to its name, it looked like a bramble surrounded by thorny vines. It had 2000 attack points.

Darkness turned his head ever so slightly, showing that he was concentrating on Jūdai. He had 1000 life points left and no monsters, but he did not look too worried. After all, he still had two set cards, and Darkness had just given up the advantage of being able to check his set cards with *Darkness Eye's* effect.

"I attack Jūdai directly with *Darkness Bramble*," Darkness ordered.

But Jūdai had waited for this. "I activate my Trap *Limit Reverse*! I can special summon a monster from my Graveyard which has less than 1000 attack points. I choose my partner: *Yubel*."

Thorns broke from the ground and formed the sinister shape of *Yubel*.

Johann had already seen the monster at Jūdai's side in spirit form, but as a solid vision hologram on the field it seemed more menacing. The bat wings spread wide, the red third eye on its forehead was glowing, and there was a harsh, merciless expression on the monster's face. It emanated the determination to destroy anyone who might threaten Jūdai.

"Thank you for calling me. I will protect you," *Yubel* announced grimly and spread their arms as well.

"I do not think so," Darkness said with a chuckle. "The effect of *Darkness Bramble* lets me check my set cards."

The dark structure of the bramble quivered, and the round sections of what had looked like a fruit turned out to be eyes that shot open, all in the same instant.

Darkness nodded and the eyes closed again. "I activate *Zero and Infinity*." The cards opened farthest to the left and second from right. There were two cards between them.

He pointed at the card. "*Darkness 1*. I destroy *Yubel*."

The lightning bolt hit *Yubel* right in the chest.

"NO!" Jūdai exclaimed desperately. He even stumbled forward as if he was trying to get a hold of the monster hologram and keep it from disappearing. It was no use. *Yubel* was gone.

Jūdai stared at where the monster had been seconds ago.

"No... this cannot... this cannot be. You *always* protected me! You are

invincible! *Yubel*...!" Jūdai shouted desperately.

"I use the second card to destroy my own card, *Darkness Slime*. After all it looks like your *Neos* right now - but he as well cannot protect you anymore."

The lightning hit. *Neos*, or what looked like it, went up in smoke.

Jūdai had one set card left, but his expression said that it would not help him against a direct attack. He looked at *Darkness* like a deer in a headlight.

"I activate my Trap! *Cut Jewel*!" Johann said quickly. "I send a Crystal Beast from my Deck to the Graveyard to halve the original attack points of one of your monsters! I send *Crystal Beast Topaz Tiger* to the graveyard to halve the original attack points of *Darkness Bramble*!"

The card flipped up, Johann searched the Crystal Beast card from his deck and put it into the graveyard. An energy pulse from the card hologram hit *Bramble*, which went down to 1000 attack points.

Johann grit his teeth. His move could have helped Jūdai if he still had more than 1000 Life Points left, but at this rate he was just using it to search the final Crystal Beast from his deck. There was nothing he could do anymore.

"Jūdai," he called out. "I'm sorry."

Jūdai looked at him. He looked utterly lost.

"It's me who is sorry," he said miserably. "You and your spirit partners thought I could beat *Darkness*, but I was totally useless. I always need the help of others to do anything... Without *Yubel* I would have been able to do nothing until now... Yes, it was all thanks to *Yubel*, and that man."

"NO!"

The cry came from both sides of Johann. *Crystal Master* and *Crystal Keeper* had spoken simultaneously.

Johann turned his head to check their expressions. *Crystal Master* was trembling. *Crystal Keeper* had balled both hands into fists and his mouth was quivering.

"Why..." *Crystal Master* whispered sadly.

"This is not what I wanted," *Crystal Keeper* said. "Everything was supposed to be *better*."

Jūdai stared at the two spirits. He was looking bewildered.

"It puzzled me," he said in a shaky voice. "I forgot one person after another, but all this time I was always remembering the man who helped *Yubel* and me back then."

"What man...?" Johann asked.

Jūdai closed his eyes. He remembered it like yesterday.

Jūdai was sitting alone on a bench in a small park near the municipal hospital. He was only a child, but there was no adult to be seen near him. In his small hands, he held a single Duel Monsters card and sighed at it.

The boy became aware of footsteps. He quickly put the card that he had been looking at into a pocket of his jacket before he looked up.

Leisurely strolling towards him was a man, an adult. He wore black pants and a loose shirt, and had voluminous teal hair that was partly tied up into a small ponytail and partly fell almost to his shoulders. He was wearing sunglasses, but Jūdai could tell that

he was looking at him. He came closer with short, slow steps. Jūdai remembered that his teachers had told him to not talk to strangers, but he had never really understood why someone who didn't know him would have a reason to do something bad to him.

"Hey boy," the man said when he was just a few steps away.

Jūdai looked taken aback. "Oh, it's a foreigner," he murmured in Japanese. "Um, I - harro... naisu to meet... you...?"

The man chuckled. "I can speak Japanese... a bit," he said and crouched to bring his face on the same level as Jūdai's.

Jūdai looked less timid immediately: "Wow, it's the first time I meet a foreign old man who can speak Japanese!"

An eyebrow half hidden behind the large sunglasses twitched. "Old man?" the man repeated complaintfully.

Jūdai cocked his head. "You are an adult, right? All adults are old."

The man looked a bit beaten, but he sighed. "You're just a kid, I get it," he murmured in English. Then he became more serious again. "You have a problem?" he asked, changing the topic. He sounded a bit insecure about his choice of words and his pronunciation was a bit strange, but Jūdai could understand him fine.

Jūdai turned his head away. "It's not my fault," he said quickly.

"Your fault?" the man asked.

Jūdai shook his head. "I said it is not my fault!" he insisted.

The man still looked serious. "I want to help you," he said. "Please tell what happen."

Jūdai shook his head. "The doctor's say they can't help."

"Doctors? Help with what?"

Jūdai's head drooped. "Osamu. A friend. He just... he is not waking up."

The man slowly got up and took a seat on the bench next to Jūdai.

"What happen?"

Jūdai pulled up his shoulders and pouted. "If I tell you you'll just not believe it and tell me to not make things up, just like all the other adults," he said.

The man considered it for a moment, maybe he had not understood everything completely. "I believe you," he said nevertheless.

Jūdai looked sceptical. "Nobody believes me," he insisted.

"And your parents?"

"They haven't heard of this yet. Dad is on a business trip and mom said she will be late today..."

The man nodded thoughtfully. "I believe you," he repeated earnestly. "Tell me."

Jūdai hesitated, but the empathetic smile on the man's face convinced him. "I was playing duel monsters with Osamu. And I summoned my strongest monster. But Osamu used a trap card and destroyed my monster. And then he just fell asleep and didn't wake up."

Jūdai skeptically looked at the man who had been listening with concentration.

"Your strongest monster..." he said thoughtfully. "Is it a monster who looks like human with bat wings and white and blue hair?"

Jūdai looked surprised. "Yes! How do you know?"

The man smiled. "I can see monster behind you. They look sad."

"What!?"

Jūdai jumped up and turned, kneeling on the bench.

There was nobody to be seen.

"Are you making fun of me?" he asked the man with a pout.

The man immediately shook his head. "You can't see them yet," he concluded, "but I have a special... power. I can see spirits of Duel Monsters. I can talk to them."

Jūdai's eyes went big. "Really?!"

"Really," the man said with a small laugh.

Jūdai looked excited now. "Nobody believes me when I tell them that I can hear the cards speak!" he exclaimed.

The man propped his arms into his sides. "I believe you. You have the same special power like me."

Jūdai's eyes were shining. "You can really see the monsters?" he asked.

The man nodded.

"And you can talk to them?"

Another nod.

"Then you can talk to Yubel?" he asked and pulled the card from his jacket and held it in front of the man.

The man looked at the card, then at someone behind Jūdai. "Yes, I can talk to Yubel," he said.

"I know Yubel did something to Osamu! Please tell them that they must not hurt my friends like that!" Jūdai pleaded immediately. "And to wake up Osamu!"

The man scratched his chin, watching the invisible monster behind Jūdai. "Yubel can hear you," he pointed out. "But I ask Yubel why they do this."

"Thank you! Thank you so much!" Jūdai said.

The man got up. "I have done nothing. I talk to Yubel now and tell you what they say. Okay?"

Jūdai nodded happily.

The man moved a bit away from the bench. Jūdai watched him for quite a while, peering over the bench's backrest. The man was talking to someone Jūdai could not see, that much was obvious. But it still looked weird how he talked and gestured all by himself, so it made Jūdai giggle from time to time.

Then the man came back. Jūdai jumped from the bench and looked at him with great expectation.

"I talk to Yubel," the man said and got to his knees again to be on Jūdai's level. "I explain why it is forbidden to hurt people." Jūdai nodded happily.

"Yubel say they want to protect you. They say another kid is mean to you and makes you cry."

Jūdai shook his head vehemently. "I... I was just sad because he destroyed Yubel! I want Yubel to appear in the duel and beat the opponent!"

"See?" the man said. Apparently it was directed at the monster.

He turned to Jūdai again: "Yubel say they get angry when they see you cry."

"Then I will not cry anymore!" Jūdai announced.

The man shook his head: "It's okay to cry. When you tell Yubel what makes you sad, they help you. They say that. And someday, you will be able to talk to Yubel like me."

Jūdai suddenly looked timid. "O- okay... Yubel..." he looked at where he thought Yubel must be. "Then will you... will you be my friend?"

There was a short pause. "Yubel says yes," the man relayed with a smile.

Jūdai beamed. "Thank you Yubel!"

He turned. "Yubel, let's go, we have to wake up Osamu!"

He started to run in the direction of the nearby hospital then stopped again after a few steps and turned around.

"Thank you, old man!" he shouted and waved his hand.

Then he ran off.

A tear rolled down Jūdai's cheek when he remembered this. It was no use. *Yubel* was gone, and he would disappear right after them.

"Die, Yūki Jūdai," Darkness ordered with ice-cold calm.

The dozens of eyeballs that made up *Darkness Bramble* opened their lids and a beam came out. Jūdai went down with a low gasp.

"Thank you old man," he whispered. Then his body slackened.

Darkness simply continued his turn: "The effect of *Darkness Bramble*: During the End Phase, my Life Points become 4000 again if I have less."

Darkness' Life Point counter rose. His combo cards set themselves back face-down and shuffled. He chuckled.

Kapitel 14: Another Rainbow

The darkness that had been around them since the field spell had been activated weighed heavily on Johan. Jūdai was lying there. Unlike Jim or Fubuki, his body was still here, maybe because the duel was not yet over, but clearly his mind was already gone. And after they had steadily worn him down, their opponent had just recovered all his lost Life Points as if everything they had done so far was pointless.

"Johann! Don't you dare think this is over already!" *Amethyst Cat* called out from the field and shook him up.

"Yeah, we still have a lot we can do!" *Cobalt Eagle* agreed.

Ruby Carbuncle cried out as well, although it could not use words.

Johann took a deep breath.

"You are right. I just have to believe in my bond with you and with my deck."

He reached for the top card of his deck and closed his eyes. And he could feel something.

"I draw!"

Johann looked at the card.

"I will show you that the rainbow can pierce the darkness!" he called out. "The seven gems are now gathered! I have all seven Crystal Beasts on my field or in my Graveyard and that means I can summon the Ultimate Crystal God."

Johann gently put the card down on his Duel Disk. Rays of light rose from the field: A red one from *Ruby Carbuncle*, a purple one from *Amethyst Cat*, a light blue one from *Cobalt Eagle*, a green one from *Emerald Tortoise*, a darker blue from the gem that had been *Sapphire Pegasus*. They were joined by orange and yellow rays of light that represented *Amber Mammoth* and *Topaz Tiger* who had been sent to the graveyard.

The rays of light became polished, round gems, and then a body formed along those gems.

A majestic white dragon with an elegant, snake-like body. The colorful gems adorned its side. The wings that it spread were pure white, and emitted a gentle light.

"*Rainbow Dragon!*" Johann introduced the ace monster that he had just summoned for the very first time. The monster had 4000 attack points.

Darkness reacted quickly: "I shall crush your hope. I activate the effect of *Bramble* to see my cards. I activate *Zero* and *Infinity*."

The two cards flipped up. There were three cards between them. A dark chuckle came from Darkness.

"I activate *Darkness 1* to destroy *Rainbow Dragon*," Darkness said and pointed at the dragon monster.

"I don't think so!" Crystal Master called out.

Darkness' finger sank slowly. "And why is that?"

Johann explained: "In addition to enabling the Pendulum Summon, *Crystal Keeper* and *Crystal Master* have effects that apply while they are used as pendulum

scales. The effect of *Crystal Master* is that you cannot target any Crystal Beasts or Ultimate Crystal monsters in my monster zone with card effects."

"Fine, then I just destroy *Crystal Master* instead," Darkness said.

The lightning bolt from the card hit the monster in the pillar of light. *Crystal Master* cried out in pain. The pillar of light disappeared and he sank to the ground. The mask that he had worn fell off and shattered. His image flickered, and the hologram was clearly dissolved, but the spirit was still there, crouching on the ground, his face covered by his long shaggy hair.

"I activate the second card. This time, I shall destroy *Rainbow Dragon*," Darkness insisted. The lightning bolt stuck, but the *Rainbow Dragon* flapped its giant wings and continued to majestically loom over the field.

"What?" Darkness asked impatiently.

Crystal Keeper had drawn his sword and explained: "My effect as *Crystal Keeper* is that the first time you try to destroy a Crystal Beast or an Ultimate Crystal monster, it is not destroyed."

"Begone!" Darkness cried out impatiently. The third card flipped up and the lightning bolt hit *Crystal Keeper*. The pillar of light that he had been levitating in went out, and just like *Crystal Master* before, he fell to the ground and flickered back into the form of a semi-transparent spirit. The mask that had covered his eyes and nose fell to the ground and dissolved.

"Oh, I see," Darkness said, and there was a hint of joy in his tone. His eyes seemed to glow stronger.

"What?" Johann was confused about his opponent's attitude that didn't fit together with the fact that he had failed to remove *Rainbow Dragon* from the field.

"All this time I was looking for your darkness. But you are so selfless, brave and hopeful, I could not find anything... But now I see it. Your darkness is not in *this version of you*. It's in them!"

Johann turned his head when *Crystal Keeper* and *Crystal Master* slowly rose to their feet.

Because the masks had fallen off, their faces that had been hidden behind the masks were now visible.

Or rather, their face.

It was the same face.

It was Johann's.

The figures of the two monsters flickered and were pulled together by an invisible force, uniting in the middle right where Johann was standing.

Memories poured into his mind.

*

A man was sitting hunched over the counter at a bar. It was clearly Yūki Jūdai, judging by the hair that was light brown on top and darker at the ends and by his deer-brown eyes, but he was noticeably older, somewhere in his twenties. He did not wear the colors of Obelisk Blue but a worn-down jacket in the colors of Osiris Red that had been patched at both elbows.

He stared at a tumbler with an amber liquid and a few ice cubes inside which he was balancing on the tips of his fingers.

"When spirits want to be friends with humans who cannot see them, it always gets

complicated. It's good that you could help that girl," he said thoughtfully, referencing a previous conversation.

The man who sat next to him at the bar nodded. He was about the same age and wore black leather pants and a light blue shirt with frills at the end of the sleeves. He had teal, bushy hair and clear, green eyes.

Jūdai took a sip from the glass and put it down.

"Sometimes I wonder where I would be if I had been able to talk to Yubel back then," he said. "If I had understood that all they wanted was to protect me, things would have gone differently."

He looked at the other man, Johann Andersen. "It would have kept you from getting hurt."

"Come on," Johann said amicably and put an arm around Jūdai. "That was years ago and I'm doing fine. It's no use thinking about it."

"I guess so," Jūdai agreed and took another sip, but his gaze was distant.

*

Johann was lying on a bed in a hotel room and stared at the ceiling. The clothes from before were strewn across the ground, forming a path from the entrance door to the bed. He was alone.

That is, until a gentle light emanated from the card deck that was neatly placed on a low table next to the bed. Johann sat up in surprise and looked at how the light became brighter and then formed the silhouette of his ace monster, the Rainbow Dragon .

Johann looked up at the majestic creature in awe. The dragon had never showed itself like this before.

"Johann Andersen," the dragon said in a deep voice that resonated in his head.

Johann nodded.

"I have appeared because I could feel that you have a wish. A pure, unselfish wish for another person's happiness."

Johann stared at the dragon. "Yes..." he murmured. "I mean... most of the time he does seem happy, but I can't forget what he said today. He mentioned that it would save me a lot of pain, but the one who was hurt most by what happened with Yubel is himself. I wish I could help him."

"You can," the Rainbow Dragon said.

Johann gasped.

"You have used me in duels and nurtured me with your bond. It would not have been possible years ago, but now I have the power to grant you a wish."

Johann considered it. He closed his eyes for a moment. Then he opened them again.

"Thank you for the offer," he said with a somewhat forced smile. "But I like to look at the future instead of the past. I will just try harder to make Jūdai happy myself."

"So be it. But remember that this power is not lost for you. If you ever wish to help others in a way that you cannot do yourself, I will grant it."

The spirit of the Rainbow Dragon disappeared again, leaving Johann alone in the dark hotel room.

*

Months later, Johann was watching the last moves of a duel that took place in the last light of the day on an empty pier near the port of Baltimore.

Jūdai, in the tattered Osiris Red jacket as always, was facing an elderly, dark-skinned man in a green coat.

The opponent had 1300 Life Points left and the monster Vampire Vamp on his field - a female creature with bat wings, long white hair and a very beautiful face that had 2000 attack points. Jūdai had Flare Neos out, which currently showed 2900 attack points because of a set trap card on Jūdai's side of the field.

"Flare Neos, attack," Jūdai ordered and pointed at Vampire Vamp.

"Please don't!" the female monster cried out in panic, showing that it was not a mere hologram. "I promise I will not do it again! I will never steal life force from any person on this planet! Please, I just..."

Jūdai quietly shook his head.

The insect-like hero raised its arm and shot a fireball from its palm that hit the vampire. It disappeared with a scream of pain.

In the same moment, something happened to Jūdai's opponent. He had been old before, but now within seconds, the wrinkles on his face deepened, his remaining sparse hair fell off and he buckled over. Then he fell flat forward on his face and moved no more.

Johann dashed to him. "What did you do?" he shouted at Jūdai before he crouched next to the old man and pulled back the sleeves of his coat to feel his pulse.

"Arun...! Arun...!" The Vampire Vamp reappeared in translucent spirit form, hovering over Johann and the man whose name she was calling.

Johann could not find a pulse. "He... he is dead..." he realized with a gasp.

"Arun...!" the Vampire exclaimed desperately. She was crying.

Jūdai walked towards them. His face was a blank mask, showing no emotions. Johann glared at him, still crouching next to the dead man.

"What did you do?" Johann repeated his question from earlier with an impatient tone.

"I did not do anything. She was sucking the energy out of other people to keep him younger than he actually was," Jūdai said and gestured at the Vampire Vamp with his chin. "I simply cut him off from the energy that he got from her and he returned to the age he should be by now."

Johann stared at the old man for a moment. "You knew that he would die?" he asked Jūdai with a shaking voice.

"It was extremely likely, given his real age," Jūdai admitted. It was not the answer Johann had wanted to hear.

Vampire Vamp was still sobbing.

"If you miss him that much, I can help you to follow him," Jūdai said to the monster and bent down to reach for the monster card that was still lying on a slot in the dead man's Duel Disk.

Johann slapped his hand away. "Don't you dare!" he exclaimed.

He pushed Jūdai back.

"You killed him!" he shouted angrily. "And now you want to kill that poor monster too? Get lost! I will take care of this!"

Jūdai shrugged. "Fine. I'm not good at dealing with this kind of stuff anyway," he said and turned.

Johann watched him leave into the shadows of the onsetting night.

*

"Rainbow Dragon! I need your power!"

Johann was standing in his hotel room that overlooked the port of the city. He was

wearing black pants and a loose shirt and had his hair partly tied into a ponytail, just like shortly before at the pier.

The deck that he had placed in the middle of the bed started to glow and the dragon appeared in a flash of light, just like that night a few months before.

Johann looked up to the dragon. "I was wrong. I thought that I could make Jūdai happy myself if I just try... but he is already broken! He is so cold! He doesn't care about the lives of humans, or monsters... he wasn't like that when I met him. It is because of Yubel. Because they hurt him."

He had been talking mostly to himself, to rationalize what he was about to do, but then he raised his head and looked at the majestic dragon.

"I want to change the past. Jūdai said so himself: If someone had helped him understand Yubel when he was a child, nothing would have happened like this."

"Your wish shall be granted."

*

When the light abated, Johann was standing in a small park. The buildings were not familiar, but he saw some signs on them that indicated that he was in Japan. Then he spotted the young boy on the bench. Even from afar, it was easy to recognize him as Jūdai. Johann started to walk to him, then realized something. He took the pair of sunglasses that he had in his shirt pocket and put them on before he approached.

*

"Thank you, old man!" the young Jūdai shouted minutes later and waved his hand before he ran away. Johann watched him leave with mixed feelings - he was sure that Jūdai would be happy now, but there was also, deeply within him, a kind of envy that Yubel would get to be his partner from such a young age.

In that instant, the world turned upside down. Johann's vision blurred. His stomach turned. He felt something tearing him apart.

What would become of him now? He had changed it to a past where he would never have a reason to travel back in time.

Was it really the right thing?

With a painful scream that no being on earth could perceive, the soul of Johann Andersen split in two, driven by the conflicting feelings of having done the right thing and regretting it.

The two beings that he became were just fragments of a self that would never exist in the future. They had no place on this earth. All they could do was watch.

And so they watched.

Jūdai playing Duel Monsters with friends. Jūdai seeing Yubel's spirit form for the first time. Jūdai rejoicing that he had beaten the teacher at the Duel Academy entrance exam. Jūdai checking out his room in the Osiris Red dorm together with his new roommate Shō Marufuji. A duel against Asuka Tenjōin. One against Jun Manjōme. Jūdai and Shō proudly donning Yellow uniforms. A duel against a Ra Yellow student with black hair. Jūdai looking at himself in the mirror, now in an Obelisk Blue uniform, Yubel proudly floating at his side in spirit form. More and more dangerous duels that always ended in Jūdai's victory. Jūdai meeting the Neo-Spacian monsters.

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"Darkness is coming." A man with long silky blue hair and a white strand of hair on his forehead was sitting in a chair in a clean but sterile-looking hospital room. He was Takuma Saiō, a former fortune teller who had been possessed by the Light of Destruction, but Yūki Jūdai had chased it out of him not too long ago.

"Are you sure...?" an old man whispered. He was lying in the hospital bed, his back propped up mechanically and attached to an abundance of devices that measured his vitals. He was Kagemaru, the elderly chairman of Duel Academy who had once plotted to use the power of the three Sacred Beasts and steal the ability of Yūki Jūdai to gain eternal youth.

"I already saw it in a vision years ago," Saiō said. "Starting at Duel Academy, it will engulf the world and erase everything. The seed will be the young man who was possessed by it as one of your Seven Stars."

"Duel Academy, yes?" Kagemaru repeated weakly. "But could Darkness really gain foot with him there?"

"I have seen it in my visions even before the Light got hold of me," Saiō said. "They have never shown me a hint how to repel the Darkness."

Kagemaru sighed. "So we cannot count on Yūki Jūdai and his monster partners this time?" he asked.

"No," Saiō said. "The cards were very clear. There is no future for us."

They were wrong, the two fragments were convinced. They remembered it. Jūdai had been fighting the Darkness. He had almost given in to it, but then Johann had been able to snap him out of it and together they had beaten Yūsuke Fujiwara.

That was when they realized. In the world that they knew, Johann had travelled to Duel Academy by the invitation of Professor Cobra from West Academy, who turned out to be manipulated by Yubel. But in this world, this would not happen. Johann would never get to know Jūdai and help him beat the Darkness.

Shortly after that realization, the two fragments, who now called themselves Crystal Master and Crystal Keeper, appeared in the dreams of this world's Johann Andersen.

That same Johann Andersen was now standing in front of Darkness and understanding for the first time why he was here.

Except nothing had worked out as planned.

The Johann of the alternative reality had memories of fighting and beating Yūsuke Fujiwara together with Jūdai. But that was a different Jūdai - one who had forged a close bond with Johann through numerous duels where they had supported each other or teamed up. A Jūdai who had been hurt deeply by the evil schemes of Yubel who had become his enemy in that reality, but who had become stronger by overcoming that hurt. Strong enough to beat Darkness, even after the alternative Johann had been swallowed by it.

It was that Jūdai that *Crystal Keeper* and *Crystal Master* had put so much trust in all this time.

But things had gone completely differently in this world. Jūdai was just a nice boy who was good at dueling and had followed his destiny to beat the Light of Darkness, aided by his partner Yubel and the Neo-Spacians. He was a good duelist, but lacked something that the Jūdai in the other reality had possessed, something that made

him resistant to the lure of darkness. Something that the fragment's of the other Johann's souls had assumed to be inherent in his personality, but had turned out to be the result of the hurtful experiences that they had successfully saved him from. This world's Johann held his head and let out a loud scream.

Darkness laughed. The dark messenger who had been all calm and collected so far was rejoicing. "There is nothing darker than the despair of someone who has devoted everything to a single thing, just to lose it."

Johann shook his head in revulsion.

"Johann!" *Crystal Beast Amethyst Cat* called his name. The other Crystal Beasts were calling for him as well, but their voices were not reaching him.

So the cat wheeled around on the spot and jumped. Her claws ripped at his face, leaving a scratch.

That finally snapped him out of it.

"Hey, I'm not the opponent," he protested.

"That's right! Our opponent is over there!" *Cobalt Eagle* shouted.

"You finally managed to summon the *Rainbow Dragon*! Come use it!" *Amethyst Cat* added.

Ruby Carbuncle gave an encouraging meow.

Johann looked at the Crystal Beasts before him. They were right. It looked dark, but not grim. He still had his ace monster, it was way stronger than his opponent's *Darkness Bramble*, and Darkness had already used his combo for this turn to destroy his Pendulum.

"I move *Cobalt Eagle* and *Amethyst Cat* into attack mode," Johann announced. After *Rainbow Dragon*'s attack, he would need them to eradicate Darkness' remaining Life Points. He could win this.

"*Rainbow Dragon*, attack *Darkness Bramble*!"

The dragon roared and threw back its head, getting ready for the attack.

Darkness was not yet out of tricks: "When my opponent declares an attack, I can activate the effect of *Darkness Raincrow* in my hand. I send *Raincrow* from my hand and *Darkness Bramble* from my field to the Graveyard to summon *Darkness Neosphere*."

What appeared on the field was a ghastly creature in vaguely human shape. On the left side of its chest and on its right shoulder it showed an eye, and it had mismatched wings, one of which was white and bird-like the *Rainbow Dragon*'s, while the other was dark and bat-like, resembling *Yubel*'s.

The new monster had 4000 attack points, just like *Rainbow Dragon*.

And it was then that Johann knew.

This was a dead end.

He could have *Rainbow Dragon* and *Darkness Neosphere* destroy each other and direct attack with his attack-position monsters, but it would not be enough to bring down Darkness' Life Points entirely. Then it would be his opponent's turn, and he had several cards in his hand providing all kinds of options. He had already recovered all his life points once and it seemed not unlikely that he would be able to do it again. On top of that he still had the dreadful combo that harbored the possibility to destroy his remaining Crystal Beasts that were now unprotected, to boost the attack points of a new monster that he was likely to be able to summon, or just reduce Johann's Life

Points directly.

In contrast to that, Johann's only remaining set card would be useless once *Rainbow Dragon* was gone.

So he had to use it now.

"I activate *Bridge of Salvation*. There must be Level 10 or higher monsters of the field with at least two different Types. *Rainbow Dragon* and *Darkness Neosphere* are both Level 10 and they are Dragon and Fiend type. All cards in our hands, fields and Graveyards are shuffled back into the deck."

A ray of light shone from the image of the activated Trap card. It was caught in the seven colorful gems along the body of the *Rainbow Dragon* and reflected in all directions. The holograms on the field faded.

Darkness raised an arm to shield himself from the light.

"Do you really think you can win if you just go back to the start?" Darkness taunted.

Johann shook his head. He felt incredibly sad, but at the same time, the light filled him with something... hope.

"I am not using this card to reset the duel. I am using it to reset... this world."

He looked up at the *Rainbow Dragon*, who had turned his head in his direction. The monster's face was not very expressive, but Johann was sure that he could see a deep sadness there.

"Rewrite the past once more, to how it was before my other self foolishly sought to change it," he told the *Rainbow Dragon*. And to Darkness, he added: "I cannot beat you, but *that* Jūdai can, and he will."

"Your wish shall be granted," *Rainbow Dragon* said.

The Ultimate Crystal God roared.

Darkness let out a frustrated howl.

Light exploded before Johann's eyes.

Then there was only white.

Epilog: Another Sunrise

Johann Andersen blinked and found himself in a hotel room that had one big window overlooking a small harbor. It was the middle of the night and the sky was covered by a thick layer of clouds, but the lights on the buildings that surrounded the harbor, and their reflection in the water, looked like gemstones that were a thousand times brighter than the stars.

He needed a moment to orient himself, then he slowly walked towards the window. He could see his own reflection in it, and was almost startled to not see an 18-year-old student in a blue vest but the person that a younger Jūdai had nonchalantly called 'old man'. He touched the glass of the window and it felt cool on his fingers. He looked old, too, he thought. Tired, with rings under his eyes.

He certainly felt old after everything that had happened. He had spent 10 years following the growth of Yūki Jūdai and his trusted spirit partner Yubel, after all.

But for this body it was still the same night where he had called an ambulance, claiming that the old man had just collapsed on the street and that he had been around to see it by chance. He had left the man's deck that contained Vampire Vamp with its now deceased owner. He had left his contact info just in case, seen the ambulance drive off, and then returned to the hotel alone. He had tried to sleep but not been able to, and it was then that he had decided to use the wish that the Rainbow Dragon had offered to him a while ago.

Or had he?

Johann turned around and took up his deck, which was lying on the bed just as he remembered. Crystal Beast Ruby Carbuncle appeared on his shoulder as a spirit and rubbed its face against Johann's. It never failed to make him smile, even now.

"Rainbow Dragon...?" he asked in a hushed voice.

Nothing happened.

Johann looked around the room. The digital clock next to the bed showed 1:02 AM. Could he have fallen asleep, after all, and just dreamed everything?

He looked at his reflection again. He was wearing street clothes, even boots. Not the look of someone who had just been asleep.

He let himself fall backwards on the bed and spread his arms. Ruby jumped on the bed next to him and looked at him with its big, dark red eyes. "Do you remember any of it?" he asked.

Ruby inclined its head. The cat-like beast looked confused.

"Of course not," Johann sighed.

He looked at the ceiling for a while, then shook off his boots and tried to close his eyes.

Although he was terribly tired, sleep still wouldn't come.

After a while, he got up again. It was 1:27 now.

After strolling back and forth in the room for some more time that felt way longer than what the clock said, he got into his boots again, took a coat, put his deck box in one of the pockets, and headed out. Ruby followed him, expressing some worry about his unusual behaviour with little squeals.

The boardwalk around the harbor was silent. There was a light drizzle coming from the clouds, but he ignored the little droplets that settled on his clothes, face and hair.

When he had reached the other side of the port basin, he strolled further into the city. Occasionally, cars sped by, but he was left alone, wandering empty streets.

If this had really happened, if he had not made it up in his sleep-deprived mind, then it meant that he had created a world that was doomed from the beginning. The wish for Jūdai to lead a happier life had dragged everyone into darkness, without hope of being saved.

His alternate self, that optimistic and hopeful young boy that he had in fact once been, had turned it all back. But he could still remember it - didn't that mean that somewhere, somehow, that alternate reality still existed?

His thoughts were leading nowhere, just like his footsteps.

He was still wandering when he realized that the sun was rising. The rain clouds had hidden it, but at some point there was a gap in the clouds and a ray of light fell on Johann from between some buildings. He chose to follow it.

His aimless wandering had brought him back to the docks where the duel had taken place the night before.

He stepped out on the pier and somehow, he was not surprised to see a familiar silhouette. Someone in a red jacket was sitting at the edge of the pier, one leg bent with the foot stacked under his other leg which was dangling over the edge and above the water.

Next to him was the semi-transparent silhouette of a white-haired woman with bat wings and black clothes.

"I knew it was not right," the vampire woman said just when Johann came into earshot. "But I just couldn't say good-bye... He treated me well, and the thought of living on without him was just..."

Jūdai nodded silently, simply acknowledging the words.

"I can't thank you, but maybe it was for the best..." the vampire said sadly.

"Sometimes love makes people do more terrible things than hate ever could," Jūdai mused, lost in thought.

The monster and Jūdai both fell silent after that.

Johann was going to leave quietly, but when he turned he must have made a sound.

Winged Kuriboh, the small ball of fur with wings, appeared next to Jūdai with its typical call and alerted his partner, who abruptly turned his head.

"Hey..." Johann said sheepishly and raised a hand for a greeting.

"Hey," Jūdai replied, quickly relaxed again but without the cheerfulness that he usually displayed when they met.

Johann inclined his head towards Vampire Vamp: "Did you take that deck back? I'm sure I left it with that man..."

"I only took her card," Jūdai replied and showed it to Johann. He did not elaborate how he had obtained the card and just added: "When people die, their cards and monsters often end up in the hands of collectors who only care about the monetary value."

"Oh," Johann said. He had not thought that far.

The Vampire Vamp monster spirit slowly flew over to him.

"Thank you for what you did last night..." she said. She sounded tired. "I might actually have said yes to dying with him... but now I realized he would not be happy knowing

that. He always said I would be better off following someone younger..."

She sniffed.

Johann was not sure what to say. "It was just terrible enough to see one person die..." he murmured. Before his eyes flashed the memory of the other Jūdai falling over and stopping to move.

"We have to thank you too," Yubel said. Johann was surprised to see that the monster had appeared next to Jūdai. Given his memory from the alternate world it did not seem that unfamiliar anymore, but usually Yubel didn't come out in his presence.

"Cut it out," Jūdai murmured, scratching the back of his neck.

Yubel did not: "He sometimes forgets that things don't end when a duel ends, even if justice is served. Thank you for reminding him of that."

"No — It's me who forgot something important..." Johann said. He came closer and stopped next to Jūdai. There was still rain over the nearby ocean, visible only by how dark the clouds were and how blurred everything below, but closer to the harbor the clouds were dissipating.

"We can't choose our reality, so we have to live with the one we have and make the best out of it," Johann voiced the thought that his night-long wandering had helped him arrive at.

Rays of light broke through the clouds near the harbor entrance, forming specks of light that danced on the waves. Jūdai got up to see it better, so he was standing side by side with Johann. Vampire Vamp and Yubel lined up next to them as well.

"This reality sucks more often than not," Jūdai agreed. "But we shouldn't forget that there is always a new day to come and you never know what it has in store for you."

He pointed, but everyone had already seen the rainbow that had formed over the sea.

Johann blinked, and found that he had tears in his eyes.

"Yes," he said. "As long as we have that, there is hope for the future."