

A Tenchi Muyo/ Shin Tenchi Muyo crossover fan fiction:

TENCHI MUYO! in love
First Love
Book One

The Special Edition Version

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"...The time we spent together, every smile every touch...all the hopes and dreams we've had for the future, I'll cherish them all. I will treasure every memory. And my treasure will remain right here...I have it all now Tenchi, I won't wonder about my past, and I won't feel lonely...ever again...Goodbye Tenchi..."

-Sakuya; Shin Tenchi Muyo, episode. 25

CHAPTER 1

Autumn is always stunning this time of year in Japan, and especially in Okayama. And with the ground blanketed with soft beautiful multi-colored petals of fallen flowers and leaves from recently hibernating trees, it's truly an awe inspiring sight to behold. The sun has just risen from its nights slumber and its ethereal glow warmly ushers in a bright new day as it helps to celebrate the gentle memory of the last.

Tenchi Masaki is up alone this brisk morning dawn and stares up into the crisp morning sky; he can't help but admire the beauty of the landscapes new carpeting. His adoration quickly disappears however as he looks down to the ground and realizes how much sweeping work he has laid out ahead of him.

Tenchi lets out a deep yet semi-silent depressive sigh as he dutifully begins sweeping up the massive amount of fallen shrubbery around him. Glancing over his right shoulder while attempting to keep his mind away from concentrating on the hard work ahead, he coincidentally spots Washu standing on an outcropping in the distance, though she is partially obstructed from his view by shrubbery and densely concealing foliage. Gazing out at the nearby lake, it's apparent by her countenance that she has been there for quite

awhile. Washu is not typically a person known for '*Stopping by and smelling the roses*', so this unusual behavior definitely sparks his concerned curiosity. "Washu, are you okay?" he calls out as he approaches her from behind while still clutching his broom tightly in his left hand.

"Oh, hi Tenchi...I didn't see you there." She gasps in surprise, apparently lost in thought and not expecting for anyone to see her in this contemplative state.

Turning back toward the lake she replies, "I'm Ok, just watching the sunrise. Believe it or not, I come out here alone every now and then." She adds as she picks up a small rock and tosses it into the shiny lake beyond. It makes a deep sploosh sound as it contacts the water. "It helps to keep me centered...reminds me of why we work so hard to make a difference in this world. Why I chose to live here with you and all the others."

"I guess so." Tenchi replies, not really understanding what she's talking about.

Turning toward Tenchi Washu adds "...anyway, I'm conducting an experiment and I needed to gather specimens for my work." Washu says, knowing that her recent unusual behavior is starting to make Tenchi very uncomfortable.

"Oh, I see." Tenchi replies back to her, "You had me worried there for a second."

"You know *me*, no time for play for a super genius" Washu says with a smile from ear to ear. However seconds later her smile begins to slowly evaporate. She turns back around to face the lake and utters a more somber tone, "Tenchi, I have something to tell you...it's been bothering me for the last few days."

"Well Washu, you're always welcome to tell me what's on your mind." Tenchi happily volunteers. "It's not often you're asking any of *us* to help you solve a situation. I'd be honored."

She nods then replies "For the past few days I've been getting this really odd feeling that something major is about to happen...something really *bad*."

"Really? How?"

"I don't know. I can't put my finger on it but it feels serious...like someone is gonna die or something. And I can't shake the feeling that we're being watched...it *scares* me..." Washu admits.

"Washu...none of us is going to die." Tenchi refutes attempting to comfort her.

"That's paranoid talk..." He stops to ponder for a moment then says "Actually...now that you mention it...grandpa *has* been acting really strange lately. He's been unusually preoccupied...like he's waiting for something."

"That's exactly how I feel." Washu says, still intently staring out at the lake never turning to face her companion. "...Like I'm waiting for the other shoe to drop."

"Well, I'm sure everything will turn out fine." Tenchi dismisses as he looks around once more and notice that even more leaves have fallen since his talk with Washu began.

"Well, I'm going back to my lab to try and make some sense of it all..." Washu says as she opens up a dimensional tunnel by snapping her fingers and steps through it. "...If you need me, you know where I'll be."

"Ok Washu." Tenchi says as the wormhole closes up behind her, confident that he had done something positive to help cheer her up.

Suddenly out in the distance Tenchi hears the frightened screams of Ayeka's younger sister Sasami calling out to him in panic. Something has the young girl incredibly worried so Tenchi wastes no time in traversing the distance in order to aid her in any way that he can.

"Tenchi, *there* you are..." she says as she frantically grabs his hand pulling him along with her "I've been looking all over for you. You've *got* to come with me." She says gasping hysterically "Something *terrible* has just happened."

"What is it?" Tenchi asks her, as she leads him toward the darkened cave used to house the body of the hibernating Juraian mutant Yugi.

"It's my friend Yugi...she's not in her cave, she's disappeared...!"

"*What?!*" Tenchi gasps as he drops his broom and hustles over to the cave with Sasami, now leading the charge toward their destination. After arriving at the scene, Tenchi inspects Yugi's cryogenic chamber. And just as Sasami had said, Yugi has disappeared without a trace. "Where could she have gone? It's much too early for her to have wakened up on her own." Tenchi says aloud to himself. "Washu assured us that this *wouldn't* happen before she matured."

Ryoko, a reformed space pirate who also lives at the Masaki home, suddenly appears right in front of them via short teletransportational hop. "What's going on out here Tenchi?" she says as she boldly flies behind him, giving him a tight hug. Because Ryoko's embrace is so overpoweringly crushing, Tenchi finds himself unable to respond. All he can do is point toward the tiny unoccupied chamber and hope that the space pirate gets the hint and releases him summarily.

As she turns toward the tube to glance at it, she immediately glimpses a dark shadowy figure descending upon it, then disappearing into the ether. "What the...?" Ryoko gasps as she suddenly releases Tenchi from her grip, blinking her eyes in confusion.

"Did you see that?" Sasami asks as she begins to slowly step back toward the entryway.

"I don't know *what* I saw." Replies Ryoko. "That wasn't Yugi, was it?" she asks Tenchi.

Unsure himself, Tenchi merely shrugs his shoulders and backs slowly away from the tube like all the others.

"I'm scared." Sasami says as she latches onto Tenchi.

"Well, whatever it was..." Tenchi replies, "...It's gone now." Turning to Ryoko and Sasami, Tenchi asks rhetorically "The last time I saw her she was resting here nice and snug. Where could she have gone?"

Ayeka quickly enters into the cave with them "There you guys are. I was getting worried. What's going on in here?"

Sasami rushes into her older sister's arms "Its *Yugi*..."

"What...Yugi? That she-demon is *back*?" Ayeka gasps as she forcefully grabs at Ryoko's collar shaking her wildly.

"We were doing just *fine* without *you* Miss prissy princess..." Ryoko replies to the young Juraian princess as she shrugs off her handhold while flying back toward Tenchi.

"I beg your pardon, you uncivilized country bumpkin!" Ayeka snaps at Ryoko with an annoyed look on her face. Never missing a beat, Ayeka and Ryoko both glare menacingly into each other's face as they begin to square off and power up their abilities.

"Knock it off you two, this is serious." Tenchi says. "We don't know for certain *what* it was, but it sure *looked* like it could be Yugi." He pauses "...just be prepared for *anything*. She's a crafty one."

"But she was supposed to be reformed...how could this have happened" Ayeka asks as she turns toward Tenchi, who by now is beginning to look very confused.

Before anyone can reply to Ayeka's question, a loud explosion goes off from outside the cave. Everyone rushes to investigate the disturbance. "Look, over there!" Ryoko shouts as she points to a clearing about fifty yards away. Smoke from the tiny crater billows wildly. As they rush over to the scene, they immediately notice a body lying inside the center of the crater. The female figure is laying face down totally unconscious. Her nicely trimmed Bob-hairstyle is still long enough to shroud her face making a positive ID nearly impossible. From her right hand, spews vast amounts of smoke about midway to her wrist.

Despite the fact that she's still lying in the middle of a crater that only a few short seconds ago was completely engulfed in smoke, she otherwise appears to be unhurt.

Ryoko takes it upon herself to be the emissary of the group. "Just *who* are you anyway...?" she yells to the oblivious stranger. No answer comes from the lying figure that by now is beginning to stir. "Hey, I'm *talking* to you...who the *hell* are you?!" When no answer comes yet again, Ryoko springs forth into action flying toward the young woman with clenched fists drawn.

Ryoko is not one to sit idly by and allow total strangers to boldly disrespect her, so this egregious behavior is something that she in good conscious cannot allow to continue, especially in the presence of Tenchi and the others.

"Let's see how well you do against a powerful former space pirate!" she says angrily to her adversary as she quickly reaches her. By now the girl is trying to climb to her feet. Ryoko quickly grabs her by the shoulder and turns her around to face her. She intends to square off with the rude stranger, but insists on doing it face-to-face. From what she's learned from her prior experiences, she's learned that attacking a foe before you're aware of their identity is utter reckless endangerment, and has paid the price on numerous occasions.

In amazement Ryoko turns ghost-white as she finally gazes upon the face of this interloping individual. She knows who this stranger is, and it's her identity that has her shocked beyond words.

"Ryoko, who *is* it? Is it Yugi?" Ayeka calls out. "Ryoko, can you hear me...? Is it her?"

"Worse..." Replies Ryoko a little shaken. "...*Much* worse..." Turning her around to face the crowd, everyone's jaw drops as they realize that it isn't the former prodigy of Jurai that stands before them, but it is in fact one of her most maligned of creations; Sakuya Kumashiro.

Chapter 2

The burning question that obviously runs through everyone's mind is; how could Sakuya still be alive? The last time anyone saw her was in a dream-world created by Yugi. Upon destroying her dream-world, Sakuya along with her fellow Juraian construct Matori, was counted as one of her primary casualties among the *war with Earth's Planet Guardian*.

Tenchi would have been counted among the collateral damage that day if it weren't for the brave sacrifice made by Sakuya, suffering the ultimate price in his behalf, giving up her own existence in order for him; and everybody else to survive.

The events that soon followed happily resulted in Yugi's reformation, and her adoption into the fold of the Masaki clan just as all the others had been before her.

Unfortunately, as one of the few casualties of this war, Sakuya Kumashiro was never to be seen again, or so it was assumed.

That was six months ago, and as is often the case with things assumed in life, the situation at hand apparently changed over time.

Following the successful acclamation of Yugi into the Masaki household, Tenchi's father Nobuyuki designed for himself *another* house, one which is set approximately one-half mile north-west of the existing Masaki home. Though presently living there with his current girlfriend Noriko Ayukawa, Tenchi nonetheless stays with him from time to time to keep him company.

Most notable regarding Nobuyuki's current personal circumstance is that the woman he's dating is someone through which he met while on excursion in Tokyo.

Noriko claims that they first met one day while he was running through the streets like a 'crazed madman' professing love for any of the beautiful young women he ran into on the street that day within eyesight. Her daughter Sachiko immediately took a liking to him despite the fact that it was not actually he that they met earlier and was doing the crazed antics. Oddly enough the one really responsible for those actions was an evil doppelganger called *pseudo-dad* designed and created by Matori, one of Yugi's three evil henchmen, from portions of his stolen subconscious in order to try and orchestrate circumstances that would force the hapless Sakuya Kumashiro and Tenchi Masaki together as a couple.

Today is a special day for Nobuyuki Masaki; it's the sixth-month anniversary of his and Noriko's first-meeting. In celebration of this momentous occasion, Tenchi and the others have thoughtfully planned an anniversary party for them.

Looking over into the distance Nobuyuki sees something strangely familiar. A thin contrail of smoke billows wispily from one of the downstairs windows of Tenchi's house.

"Hmmm...I wonder what *that* could be..." he thinks to himself as he thoughtfully scratches the top of his head "With the ruckus usually caused by all of Tenchi's girlfriends...there's no telling *what* could be going on down there..." he adds under his breath as he completes hanging his last article of clothing on the clothesline. "I hope everything is all right. Maybe I should give him a call to see if he's ok." Removing his working apron, he heads toward his house to make a quick phone call to his son Tenchi. Dialing the numbers in on the phone, he quickly lights up a cigarette sitting in a nearby table-top ashtray, while he awaits an answer. Nobuyuki gets no response. He leans over to his right to look out the window to see if the smoke plume is still there...it is. Taking a deep breath he quickly hangs up the phone, puts out the cigarette, and heads down toward his son's house.

Meanwhile up in space, investigating an old abandoned space-station freighter, Space-Police detectives, Mihoshi Kuramitsu and Kione Makibi are quietly inspecting each of the several small storage rooms located above the main engineering deck of the vessel.

"I don't know why we're wasting our time checking this place out, there's no one here..." Kione says to her partner over her communications Badge. "Ever since we've been permanently stationed out in the Earth-quadrant, we never get any of the *good* assignments anymore."

"We get *plenty* of difficult assignments, Kione. Remember last week when we were called in to arrest that gang of thieves out by Pluto?"

"Yeah, but they were unarmed and surrendering anyway. It was some type of plea bargain worked out by the *Jurai Royal-house* and the *New Pirates-guild*. I'll tell you, there's nothing like the exhilaration of working within the central hub of Jurai-space. Now *that's* excitement." Kione muses as she grins from ear to ear.

"...but this is *home*..." Mihoshi replies while continuing down the darkened corridor with her blaster poised high. "Y'know, speaking of home...this mission reminds me of an episode of Space-Police Policeman..."

Interrupting the rest of her statement Kione snaps back, "I don't care about that stupid show...this is real life! Will you *please* stay focused on your job Mihoshi?"

"But I..." Mihoshi lets out. Quizzically peering down at her crystal given her by Tenchi, she notices that it has begun to glow dimly. "Kione..." Mihoshi says while never letting her eyes leave the gem wrapped loosely around her wrist.

"What is it?"

"Ummmm...have you been looking at your crystal, I just noticed that it's glowing again?"

"What! Again? How long has it been doing that?" Kione asks as she immediately stops what she's doing to inspect the priceless gem.

"Oh I don't know, probably about 10 minutes now." Mihoshi says in innocent contemplation.

"Oh no!" Kione gasps in horror "Why in the world didn't you tell me? Mihoshi, you're so scatter-brained...we gotta get back to Tenchi *now!*" Kione says as she turns around and runs toward their docked vessel nearby.

Observing that her partner and best-friend Kione has just retreated the scene, Mihoshi quickly follows suit. "*Hurray*, we're heading back home to earth!" Mihoshi happily proclaims as she runs down the corridor toward the airlock with her. "I can't wait to tell the others what a nice time we've had up here on our latest assignment...!" As Mihoshi approaches the control deck of their patrol ship, Kione flips a couple of switches on the navigation grid and a message beacon begins to flicker.

"Ummmm...Kione..."

"What is it now Mihoshi?"

"I was just wondering...are we just gonna abandon our mission? We haven't even captured Captain Yumi Takahara yet."

"I know...I don't like it either. But Tenchi's *life* may be in danger...besides, we're competent officers. As soon as we're done on Earth we'll head right back here and complete our mission. With any luck none of our superiors will catch wind of this." Kione replies.

"Aye, aye..." Mihoshi says while giving her a mock salute.

Now aboard their space cruiser and preparing to leave dock, Kione notices something on the control console that catches her eye "These instruments are going crazy."

"What's wrong?" Mihoshi asks.

"In our academy training, we were told that readings like these usually indicate a spatial anomaly somewhere close." She checks a few more readings "Sensors indicate there's a tachyon energy-signature somewhere in subspace, locked within Earth's orbit. It's pretty massive, too. If I didn't know any better I'd say that it was some type of cloaked space vessel."

"But Kione...?" Mihoshi interrupts while scratching her head in confusion. "Didn't you tell me that cloaked vessels in Earth-space weren't possible because of the high gravitational field given off by the planet?"

"Mihoshi, I know what I said..." she says in annoyance "But there it is as plain as day." She adds as she points to it on the display screen. "We gotta investigate this...something is terribly wrong."

"Wow...this exact same thing happened on an episode of *Space police policeman*, the one where the *Wargons* somehow found out how to travel through time and dimensions...that was my favorite episode..."

"Mihoshi, you're hopeless..." Kione says while too frustrated to initiate an argument over it. "C'mon, let's go. I just hope Tenchi is ok by the time we can reach him. We may need his power sword."

As their ship rockets toward earth, they both hope that they are not too late.

Chapter 3

"Sakuya, is that *you*?" Tenchi calls to the stunned young woman just found at the scene of the crater. As he stares at her his face becomes flooded with emotion. Logically he knows that this new figure cannot possibly be the *same* woman that he met and fell in love with in Tokyo. The woman he spent October-fest with and all the other pleasant memories that's currently flooding his mind. He knows this young lady can't possibly be her. She's dead, and this young woman *has* to be an imposter. But in the back of his mind remains the nagging question; what if it *is*? What if she *has* somehow returned from oblivion to haunt the Masaki household? Can he afford to take the chance and get involved with her again? Can he afford *not* to? He remembers all too well the pain of trying to forget her, the countless sleepless nights crying till he eventually fell to sleep. Mustering the strength to walk toward her, he calls out to her once more. "Sakuya, Is that *you*?"

She stands there transfixed attempting with all her mental-might to remember something about the familiar young gentleman standing before her; anything. Suddenly without warning something hits her. Not noticeably at first, but the more she stares at him the more she begins to feel a deep emotional connection grow until finally her complete memory of Tenchi slowly fades back into her conscious mind.

"...Tenchi...you're *here*?" She says ecstatically while her eyes quickly fill with tears and her mouth widens into a really big smile.

"Sakuya...!" he replies with equal enthusiasm in his voice.

"...Tenchi."

As they call each other's name they both instinctively move toward each other like magnets. Unable to contain their swelling emotions, they explode into each other's arms.

Tenchi grabs her closely and after staring deeply into her emerald green eyes lost in pleasant memories, he moves in and gives her a passionate kiss. By now tears are streaming down both Tenchi and Sakuya's cheeks.

"I...I thought I *lost* you." Tenchi follows up while still clinging to her tightly. "How could it be possible for you to be back?" Tenchi asks rhetorically "No, *wait*..." he interrupts in answer to his own question "I don't care *how* you came back; the important thing is that you *are* back. I've missed you so much..." he says while kissing her once more "I promise you, I'll *never* leave your side again."

At this Sakuya turns her head toward both Ryoko and Ayeka, and as she does so she gives them a quick, empty, soulless gaze. The next moment it has completely melted away and is replaced by a very warm smile.

Understandably and as to be expected, Ayeka, and Ryoko, are not too pleased about Sakuya's overly physical activities toward Tenchi, and quickly move to intervene. "Hey...take your hands *off* him!" They both insist as they too try to make sense out of what has just happened.

"I don't believe this." Ryoko says to herself as she scratches her head in total disbelief. "Just as I was starting to make some *real* progress with Tenchi, *this* crap happens. It's just not *fair*."

"What are *you* doing here Sakuya?" Ayeka fumes "I *demand* that you take your hands off *my* Tenchi *now*! I believe that I speak for *everyone* here when I say that you're *not* welcome."

"Give it a rest Ayeka." Tenchi firmly says as he finally releases Sakuya from his warm embrace.

"But Tenchi...you don't understand...you're not thinking clearly. This has to be one of Yugi's treacherous schemes..." Ayeka pleads.

"Yeah Tenchi...*think* about it." Ryoko gets in edgewise. "Moments ago we found Yugi's cryo-tube empty, and now her annoying little *shadow*-girl mysteriously shows up. This all *can't* be just some weird coincidence."

"I don't wanna believe it either, but it really *is* starting to look like my friend Yugi has turned evil again." Sasami says tearfully as she struggles with the idea that her best friend has betrayed her yet again.

Thinking about all that has just happened, and what Yugi was capable of in the past, Tenchi painfully and tearfully decides to take a step back from Sakuya. He doesn't know whether or not what his friends are telling him is true, but he *does* know that Yugi is *certainly* capable of all this...and *more*. In the past Sakuya was just a pawn, an innocent victim of Yugi's sick and twisted dream to control the world. He didn't fault Sakuya *then* for what she was when he found out the truth of her existence...was it right to fault her *this* time? He didn't know. He *did* know however that he loved Sakuya and that it would take time for him to decide what to do about all of this. Turning away from the crowd, Tenchi lowers his head and walks away toward his house; all the while fighting back tears he knows will eventually overtake him.

"Tenchi, what about her...?" Ryoko says while pointing back at Sakuya and cracking her knuckles as though preparing for a fight. "We can't just leave her here."

"Just leave her alone..." he replies "I don't want *anyone* doing anything against her until I figure out what to do."

"...But..." Ryoko gets in the quick little quip.

"...Please guys. Would you *please* just do that for me...just leave her be...?" He says.

Gritting her teeth Ryoko reluctantly relents, but not without cutting her an evil glance of disdain.

"But Tenchi, I don't understand...I *love* you. You love *me* don't you?" Sakuya says holding her hand out to him wishing for him to turn around and return to her; yet he never does.

"Sakuya I'm truly sorry." Tenchi says under his breath. His voice is raked with pain. Turning down the love of this young woman is almost *too* much for him to bear.

As Tenchi reaches his house, his father Nobuyuki finally makes his well-timed appearance from just beyond the far clearing in his yard. Instead of greeting Nobuyuki with kind words however, Tenchi instead gives him an emotional hug and drags himself slowly into the house, heading straight for his room. "What on earth is going on here?" Nobuyuki asks the girls as they all begin to trickle into the house and head toward their respective rooms as well.

"Why don't you ask *her*?" Ayeka replies with a very snide accusatory tone to her voice pointing to Sakuya who is now standing several feet away from them with tears gushing from her eyes.

"Sakuya Shirokuma, is that *you*?" Nobuyuki gasps while giving her a warm hug. "But the kids all told me you were...will somebody *please* tell me what's going on around here?"

Chapter 4

Several hours have passed since Sakuya's fateful return back to the realm of the living. However short-lived Tenchi's joy was in his initial meeting with her, is now long since gone, and he's now terribly despondent and worse off than he ever was when he originally lost her before.

Even though he didn't much feel up to enjoying any company earlier, Tenchi felt it best to continue in his plans to celebrate his father's six-month anniversary with Noriko. A lot of planning went into the gathering, and since a guest list was compiled and invitations sent, it was felt that it would be inhospitable for him to back out of the celebration so late in the game at this time.

The issue of what would be done with Sakuya was also settled rather quickly. The crew decided that for the time being it would be best if Sakuya stayed at Nobuyuki's place with Noriko and her daughter Sachiko. Nobuyuki would temporarily move back to the old Masaki house. Even though the girls didn't particularly want him living in their home,

they've found it infinitely more preferable than for Sakuya to be staying there under the same roof as Tenchi.

Back from an interstellar policing mission, Both Mihoshi and Kione have made it safely to earth and have reported their unusual findings to Washu.

Washu has also been monitoring the gravimetric displacement of the spatial alignment in the solar system. Using information that she gathered from her instrumentation and readings found from Mihoshi and Kione's ship, she was eventually able to compile a startling revelation.

Genuinely excited over her findings, she tells everyone in the household that she will make an announcement down in her lab. The group consists of herself, Mihoshi, Kione, Tenchi, Ayeka, Sasami, Ryoko, Azaka, Kamidake, Ryo-Ohki, Nobuyuki and grandpa Katsuhito. After the group assembles, she begins relaying her crucial findings. "Now listen up everyone, I'm not sure exactly what it means, but ever since Yugi decided to live here with us I've taken it upon myself to study calculations and measurements based on the data retrieved from the Jurai databanks. Remember months ago when I ran Sakuya's organic energy field through that pulse filter?"

"That was when you determined that Sakuya wasn't human, right?" Kione blurts out.

"Exactly!" Washu replies.

"Yeah, so?" Tenchi says while crossing his arms.

"Guess what? I ran those *same* tests today, and got some pretty interesting results."

"What are you saying Washu?" Tenchi asks, appearing much more interested now than he was initially.

"Somehow the Sakuya that just arrived is psychically different from the one Yugi originally created months ago."

Everyone's eyes widen as they listen on.

"Unlike last time, Sakuya was able to materialize for herself a *real* non-phantasmagoric body."

"Speak normally Washu. Not everyone here speaks *dork*." Ryoko lets out in frustration crossing her arms.

"Well, *excuse* me..." Washu replies "In *other* words, she doesn't appear to be Yugi's shadow any longer. Don't ask me how...but somehow, she's as *real* as you or I."

"Impossible!" Ayeka yelps as her voice crackles slightly at the prospect.

"I'm not *totally* sure of what's going on myself. So just to be certain I was dealing with the same person; I ran a brainwave data-scan on her."

"What'd you find out, Washu?" Tenchi asks while nearly biting his nails in anticipation.

"There can be no doubt; this is the *same* Sakuya Kumashiro that we knew from before, but somehow she's *different*, she's *evolved*."

This new revelation catches Tenchi totally off guard. As he stands there in Washu's lab dumbfounded, he makes a final conscious decision regarding how he'll handle Sakuya from now on.

"Excuse me everyone." He says as he immediately heads toward the door. "I've got some unfinished business to tend to."

After closing the door and heading outside, he quickly makes his way toward Noriko's house in an effort to set right his actions toward his girlfriend earlier. And this time, he has determined that no matter what, ***nothing*** will stop him from conveying his ***true*** feelings to the woman that he loves.

Back at Washu's lab, Ayeka and Ryoko turn toward each other. From the expression on their faces it's clear that they have finally realized that they've just lost Tenchi to Sakuya, and *this* time there is ***nothing*** that they, or anyone else, can do about it.

Chapter 5

"Marvelous is the power of her majesty..." Dr. Clay recites as he turns away from his view-screen with the inside of Washu's lab still on display. He apparently has overheard the entire conversation between Washu and the others. He lets out a diabolical laugh as he sits comfortably in his space ship *The Shunga*, located hundreds of miles above the earth's surface spying on its oblivious inhabitants. Reveling in the fact that nobody has ever been able to detect him with any type of scan while cloaked; the evil doctor lets out another devilish laugh. "There isn't ***anything*** that cannot be duplicated by the power endowed me by Lady Tokimi...and yet, just like those accursed gems of Washu-prime's, those power crystals of this dimension are also impossible to recreate. I don't understand how this can be...it's inconceivable." Clay says to himself. "Ever since I lost Zero to Washu-prime, I've had to rely on *other* abilities granted me by Tokimi to accomplish this most important mission of hers."

"...Washu-***prime*** doctor?" Zero 2 asks.

"Yes, Washu-*prime*. That's the name I've given to the Washu from our own native dimension. The Washu here is known simply as Washu-*theta*."

"I see." Zero 2 replies.

"Washu-*prime* has made my job *infinitely* more difficult." He interrupts "Are you sure that the copy of this girl's memory has been completed successfully?" He says as he depresses a tiny yet concealed button within a nearby console, releasing a hidden platform containing the cryogenically frozen body of Yugi.

Both Clay and Zero approach the unconscious girl and continue their conversation.

"Yes sir." Zero 2 replies. "We must be extremely careful doctor. If this mutant child were to ever wake from her slumber, it would mean the end of our mission. In fact, it would most certainly be the end of *us*."

"Not to worry, the special sleep-gas contained within her cryo-chamber has been studied and replicated. Like I've said before, I can make a perfect facsimile of anything. Besides, we only needed her until we've successfully completed the memory duplication process. Now that, that is done, we may dispose of her as we wish." As Dr. Clay and Zero 2 decide what to do with Yugi's unconscious body, they are paid a visit by Tokimi's assistant D3, who appears before them so that he can assess a progress report for Lady Tokimi.

"I see that the dimensional gateway that Tokimi provided you has worked satisfactorily. Tell me...how close are you to completing your mission?"

"...Sir, you honor me with your presence yet again. I'm happy to report that the plan is *well* underway. In a little while, we will have Washu..." Dr. Clay says as he bows subserviently to the high-level dimensional being.

"Good...Make sure that you do not disappoint Lady Tokimi...otherwise she'll be forced to dispatch Z to clean up your mess."

At hearing the name Z, Clay takes a hard swallow and slowly nods his head in response.

While back on earth, as Tenchi approaches Noriko's house, he can feel his heart race in anticipation. "I *love* Sakuya..." he thinks to himself "How could I have let the others talk me into letting so many hours pass with me separated from her...hours that I'll *never* win back?"

Finally arriving at Noriko's house, Tenchi feels a sudden surge of adrenaline hit him in all the excitement. The thought of spending the rest of his days with the woman he personally handpicked as his one-true-love, is very appealing to him. It gives him an instant energy high. There is *so* much that he plans to tell her about his life, about what has happened to him since her departure, that he finds it difficult to organize these

experiences into words so as to be able to explain it all to her coherently. Tenchi knocks on the door and patiently awaits its answer.

As expected, the door suddenly swings widely open, nearly hitting him. Looking down he notices young Sachiko standing there with a beaming smile on her face. "Sorry Tenchi, I'm just excited. We were expecting you."

"You were?" he asks.

"Yeah, silly." she says while waving him in. "Sakuya is waiting upstairs for you in her bedroom. I can go get her if you like..."

"Well, if you don't mind..." he says while shuffling the hair on the top of her head "I'd like to talk with her privately upstairs on my own."

"Go right ahead." She says while closing the front door behind him. As Tenchi walks deeper into this newly developed house his father made, he notices the sweet smelling aroma coming from the kitchen. Noriko is busy putting the finishing touches on a cake that she's been baking for the gathering being held later in her and Nobuyuki's honor. Poking his head into the kitchen Tenchi gives Noriko a quick hello as he heads toward the upstairs room. "Hi Noriko, it smells good in here. Your cake looks delicious."

"Oh hi Tenchi...thanks. You're here to see Sakuya aren't you?" Noriko says.

"If it's ok..."

"Sure...you'd better head on up there right now then. She seemed really depressed a little while ago. She could really use some cheering up, and you're the perfect person to do it."

"I'm on my way...and I even have good news for her." Tenchi says as he quickly leaves the kitchen and starts up the stairway. Down the hallway he can hear the sniffing of someone in one of the guest rooms. It sounds like someone has been crying. Reaching the bedroom door, he knocks on it gently trying not to startle the occupant too terribly.

"Come in." She answers while attempting to quickly dry her watery eyes.

"Hi Sakuya." he says gingerly. "We should talk."

"I knew you'd come back for me..." Sakuya says while refusing to look him directly in the eye.

Grabbing her left hand and sitting next to her on her makeshift bed, he tries to ease her hurt feelings and broken spirit with kind words of encouragement.

"I told you earlier that I would *never* leave your side..." Tenchi replies. "I'm sorry about leaving you dry like that earlier. It was inexcusable. I'm here to make good on my promise...and to grovel for your forgiveness if I have to." Tenchi replies.

She chuckles briefly while still deeply upset by the earlier events of the day "Why is it that after all we've been through in our lives we still continue to have all these problems?" Sakuya says while trying to fight back her tears. "It seems like we're destined to remain apart. Everyone and everything is *against* us...even fate itself...I don't know if I can take it anymore."

"Sakuya, that's why I'm here..." he admits to her as he tilts his head to the side "I have some good news for you."

"I could certainly use some." She replies.

Tenchi pauses briefly searching for the correct words of encouragement to give her. Sakuya stands up from the bed and walks over to the open window staring out at a nearby tree. The cool breeze is refreshing against her skin. It blows against her face and displaces her nicely trimmed hair so that portions of it obscure her eyes.

"I've never been that great at expressing myself." Tenchi throws out.

"Yeah, I know..." Sakuya replies as she continues to stare outside at the sunset.

"My father once told me that even though he wasn't an elegant Romeo, he still found a way to convey his thoughts to my mother...it helped me a lot."

"Why are you telling me all this Tenchi?"

"I...well...I *love* you." He tells her.

She chuckles briefly again "Thank you, but you've told me that already, silly." she says while never turning around to face him.

Tenchi approaches her from behind and pulls her gently toward himself giving her a reverse hug. "But I also wanted to give you some good news I just found out today. Do you remember Washu?"

"Professor Washu...? Yeah...she's lived for thousands of years. How could I forget someone like her? She's the one who created Ryoko, and who made that rat-thingy at the school carnival."

"Professor Washu...? Created Ryoko...? ...lived for thousands of years...?" Tenchi repeats as if not hearing her correctly. "Washu didn't create..."

"I mean...she's so smart that it almost *seems* like she's done all those things." She backpedals, quickly correcting herself.

Shaking his head in confusion, he finally blows it off finishing up his story. "Well anyway...She's the one who first let me know that you were Yugi's shadow...She had some interesting news regarding you today."

"**Good** news...I hope." She says while resting her head against him. "I mean...do I *want* to hear what she said?"

"It was **great** news. She ran some tests on you today and confirmed that you're no longer Yugi's shadow. She also said that as far as she could tell you were as normal as everyone else."

At hearing this awesome news Sakuya's eyes widen as tears of joy swell within. She gives out the widest most cheerful smile she's ever shown. Unable to contain herself, she turns around and gives Tenchi the biggest kiss ever, nearly knocking him down on the floor.

Finally it seems that things in her life are changing for the better, and she's elated. "Sakuya, I would be honored if you came with me to the gathering tonight at my house as my date?" Tenchi asks staring closely into Sakuya's glistening emerald green eyes.

"I would love to go with you but...what about the girls...? I'm not exactly on their favorite persons list."

"You needn't worry about them anymore. They have to realize that you're a part of our lives now, and **nothing** they do can change that."

"Well, in that case I wouldn't miss it for the world." Sakuya reveals happily as they both stand together at the window watching the sunset. "This is the happiest day of my life."

Chapter 6

Meanwhile, in Dr. Clay's home universe dimension-*prime*, Washu-*prime* and the members of the Masaki household examine recent information gathered by her computer's information network databank. "Hmmmmmmm...I thought so." Washu muses to herself as she types away on her trans-dimensional laptop. "See these readings. If I didn't know any better I'd say that Dr. Clay is *back*, and that he's up to his old tricks again."

"Little Washu, wudda you mean?" Tenchi asks while resting his right hand on her left shoulder.

"Here, take a look at this. Since our last little encounter, I took the precaution of planting a tracking beacon on the doctor. I know the doctor pretty well and figured he'd find a way to escape Mihoshi, so I prepared for it."

"So what are we looking at Little Washu?" Mihoshi asks as she scratches her head trying to make some sense of all the blinking and flashing lights on the dimensional laptop.

"It's quite simple really...I've been able to track the doctor across dimensions into a *parallel* reality. It's simply *fascinating*, though how *he* acquired the ability to do so is *beyond* me." Washu replies. "They don't even have the technology to jump parallel realities on all Jurai."

"Washu, any suggestions as to what we're supposed to do?" Noike interrupts.

"I'm still trying to figure that part out. I suppose I could build a trans-dimensional temporal cross-link, but there's no way of telling what effect it might have on that parallel universe. The science behind it is all very hypothetical." She muses.

"Meow, meow..." Ryo-Ohki says as she interjects her own personal comment into the conversation.

"I'm not sure I want to do that just yet Ryo-Ohki dear." Washu says in response to her near incomprehensible language. "To be honest, I can't even be sure that whatever he's doing will even affect us here in our own universe. However knowing him, if he's involved...then it most certainly *can't* be good."

Growing very anxious Ryoko makes a quick suggestion, "Washu, just send *me* in...I've been waiting for a chance to get even with that *bastard* Clay. I owe him a knuckle sandwich."

"Not a chance. If you think I'm sending my own daughter out there into unknown territory, then you're sadly mistaken. Don't forget how easy it was for him to capture you the last time."

"No fair *Mom*." she says sarcastically "...he just caught me off guard is all. I won't make that same mistake twice."

"Of course you won't...'cause I'm *not* sending you." She replies "Hmmm, I think I've just decided who I am going to send after all." She says as she reclines back in her chair in silent contemplation.

"Who is it?" they all ask in unison.

"*Myself* of course..." She quickly replies as she begins packing away a few of her personal items for the trip. "*I'm* the only one besides Tenchi who can *really* handle Dr.

Clay. Besides, I get the distinct impression that this somehow has something to do with me."

Ryoko goes to interrupt but Washu quickly snaps her fingers and the well intentioned space-pirate is suddenly encapsulated in an impenetrable glass-tube.

She turns to Noike and gives her specific instructions. "I want you to stay here and monitor my progress." Washu says as she hops down from her levitating chair. Standing in front of a mirror, she transforms her physical appearance into that of her true form, a strikingly beautiful young woman. "There, that should do it. Since I'm pretty certain this other dimension has a Washu doppelganger of its own, I'll have to be extra careful not to interfere with its natural flow of time. That means I'll have to mask my appearance."

She turns toward Tenchi and gently caresses his face. "Wudda ya think Tenchi, am I gorgeous or what...?" She says as she presses her newly acquired ample chest against his, shoving her face just inches in front of his.

Tenchi turns beet red before his eventual reply "...Uhhh...how will we be able to contact you Washu?" Tenchi says, as he desperately stands there stiffly, trying to ignore Washu's flirting. Crossing her arms for a second to think, Washu leans over and starts clicking buttons on her dimensional laptop once more. Moments later, a small black wormhole opens up beside her and a round metallic device pops out into her awaiting hand.

"...Here, use this..." she exclaims, as she hands over the small device to Tenchi and the others "Well guys...wish me luck. By the way, these two dimensions may be slightly out of synch, so expect for there to be a slight temporal delay in the transmission...it could be anywhere between a couple of seconds, to a few days." Tenchi nods his head as he accepts the information.

"Good luck Washu...come back safely to us." Tenchi says as he waves her goodbye.

"I will Tenchi." Washu says as she uses her laptop to open up another slightly larger wormhole. This one is big enough for one person to step through. Pausing for a few seconds and waving to her friends, she steps into the disc's blackness and disappears from sight.

Chapter 7

At approximately eight o'clock p.m. the anniversary party has begun full-swing, and nearly everyone invited R.S.V.P. showed up to the party. Nobuyuki and Noriko have exacted quite an impressive turnout. Because of this, portions of the house that had been designated as non-party areas have been opened up to accommodate all of the extra guests. The kitchen had become the dessert pantry and was filled with various cakes, pies, and other delicious confection treats. The drinks were stored nicely in coolers that have been strategically placed throughout the house for the guests' convenience. Outside in the back yard sits a nice sized buffet table, containing all the gifts that the guests have

brought for the honored couple. Among those present are Tenchi's close friends from Tokyo, Kazuhiko Amagasaki and Tsuchida Umanosuke. In the main room of the house lies a nicely spread table, filled to the brim with all of the dinner provisions you would expect to be at a gathering of this size. All in all, it's a pretty successful party, and most of the guests are happy and satisfied.

Among the folks that weren't particularly happy however, were Ayeka and Ryoko, who have taken to sitting at one of the couches in the main party-room and simply staring at Sakuya brooding all evening long.

"I can't believe that Tenchi is falling for that little flirt Sakuya again." Ryoko says to Ayeka as she sips down a little sake that she has secretly smuggled into the party.

"...Especially since he and *I* are destined to be together." Ayeka interrupts as she quickly yanks the shot-glass from her hands and chugs down the rest of the alcoholic beverage herself.

"I don't like it Ayeka." She replies while taking back the glass and quickly filling it up again with Sake "There's something really fishy about that girl. I can't put my finger on it...I just don't trust her." Ryoko replies back to Ayeka.

"I know what you mean. If only lord Tenchi would listen to us, she's definitely bad news." She exhales in frustration "I suppose all we can do now is keep an eye on her and catch her when she finally does something suspicious." Ayeka says as she begins to look elsewhere around the room.

Looking at the front door, Ryoko makes a rather interesting observation. "Ayeka, do you see that woman that just arrived? If I didn't know any better I'd say that she kind of looks like Washu..."

"Yeah, but much older..." she replies.

"I don't think I've ever saw her before, who do you think she is anyway...?" Ryoko asks. "Did you invite her?"

"No, and I don't know who she is either. Perhaps we should keep an eye on her tonight as well."

Meanwhile at the party Amagasaki and Tsuchida are also enjoying themselves. This has been the first time that they've had the opportunity to hang out with their friend Tenchi since he moved back to Okyama from Tokyo. "Hey Tenchi...so who's your friend there?" Tsuchida asks while looking at Sakuya who's standing next to Tenchi holding his hand with a beaming smile on her face.

"Ok guys...remember when I was sweeping up at Tsuchida's shrine last summer and you guys were trying to get me to go swimming with you?"

"Yeah, you kept talking about some girlfriend of yours we never met..."

"Well, guess what...This is *her*." Tenchi segue ways happily "Guys meet Sakuya. Sakuya Kumashiro."

"Pleased to meet you." she says as she shakes both of their hands, allowing herself to be introduced to two people that she is already *quite* fond of.

Amagasaki and Tsuchida don't remember her because every trace of her existence was erased from everyone's mind in Tokyo when Yugi re-integrated Sakuya back into herself as her plan neared its completion, and destroyed the gem that was holding her essence to this mortal plane.

"Wow Tenchi, you're lucky. How'd you meet *her*? She's pretty." Amagasaki says with his mouth wide open.

"Yeah, just *how* do you get the chance to meet all these pretty girls when you're cooped up right here on this boring farm working all the time?" Tsuchida asks of his friend.

"Well I...uh..." Tenchi stammers.

"Maybe *I* should learn to be a farmer..." Tsuchida says jokingly as he grabs Tenchi playfully in one of his wrestling holds, giving him a noogie.

"...Hey, knock it off guys..." Tenchi says playfully in return as they all head outside laughing.

Reaching the back porch, Sakuya and Tenchi excuse themselves from the crowd and decide to go for a little walk alone. This will be their first one since Sakuya's return, and they're both looking forward to just enjoying each other's company. As they head down a narrow path that leads to the lake, Sakuya chooses a short detour near a camellia tree that has sprouted sweet smelling flowers. "Don't you think its beautiful Tenchi? This tree..." she says contemplatively "It reminds me of those wonderful cherry blossoms we enjoyed together last fall."

"Yeah, it's really pretty..." Tenchi replies as he gazes off into the darkness of the night. The crickets are chirping softly in the distance, and the relaxed atmosphere's soothing affect on the young couple eases their apprehension toward one another as they begin to explore their growing feelings once again.

"Tenchi...do you ever think about the future?"

"What do you mean Sakuya?"

"About *us*...what *we'll* be like in the future, if we'll even *be* together. I've thought a lot about those things lately." She says as she picks up a small rock from the ground and tosses it into the darkness.

"...To be honest, yeah. I've thought a lot about it over the past twenty-four hours. Why do you ask...?"

"I...I love you Tenchi." she says as she looks off into the distance getting lost in her own private thoughts. "It's just...I wish I could take this moment and capture it forever...like in one of my photographs. I feel so safe when I'm with you. It's almost like *I'm* the one living in a dream-world this time...and I don't want it to ever end. But like all dreams, you must eventually wake up."

"I don't understand...what's with the sudden riddles?" Tenchi asks while scratching his head.

"Nothing..." she replies while backing herself into his comforting arms "hold me Tenchi, *never* let me go. You're *all* that matters to me."

Pushing herself from his embrace Sakuya makes the suggestion that they continue on to the lake. "With you Tenchi I'm the happiest I've ever been. You make me feel complete."

Sensing something nagging in her oddly constructed words, Tenchi wonders if there's anything wrong but makes no mention of it. "So Sakuya, have you given any thought as to where you're going to stay once this party is over?"

"I don't know. Noriko has been telling me that she and your father have been planning on living together. I have nowhere else to go so I thought that maybe I could stay with them until I can get on my own two feet...If it's ok with him, of course."

"I'm sure he won't mind. Of all the women in my life, I think he likes you the best. He's told me lots of times how much he appreciates the fact that you're just an ordinary *normal* girl...you can't fly or erect force-fields like the other girls...*and*...You're *not* from outer space. That's a *big* plus for you, you know?" Tenchi says with a beaming smile on his face."...To tell you the truth, I kinda like that myself." he muses.

"Tenchi...I *know* that you love me, but...supposes I *could* fly and do things like all the others, would you *still* want to be with me? Would you still love me like you do now?"

Taken aback, Tenchi summarily answers the question with a simple response, "Of course I would...but that isn't even an issue because you don't do *any* of those things anyway."

"Yeah I suppose you're right...that was a silly question." Sakuya says quickly, trying desperately to change the uncomfortable subject. As Sakuya and Tenchi reach the nearby lake, the reflection of the moon shimmers hypnotically against the surface of the water. It is very romantic. Holding each other's hand, they both silently stare at it for a few

moments before continuing their prior conversation. Sakuya picks up several small rocks on the shore and begins to skip them into the water.

"You have something serious to tell me don't you...?" Tenchi asks straight out.

"I'll tell you sometime...but tonight isn't the right time." She quickly responds. "Tonight is **our** night Tenchi. I want you to remember it as one of those special moments in your life."

"If I didn't know any better, I'd think by the way you're talking that something terrible is about to happen..." Tenchi says, half seriously and half jokingly.

"Don't talk like that Tenchi..." she chuckles in a slightly guilty manner "Besides; I wouldn't let **anything** happen to you...remember...a woman in love can be very...**very** dangerous."

Chapter 8

Meanwhile at the party, things have taken on an interesting twist. With Tenchi and Sakuya still out taking a leisurely walk, Ayeka and Ryoko have been free to observe the mysterious Washu look-alike stranger that is now present at the party without any hindrance. Much to their surprise, this stranger soon approaches them secretly and tells them that she has a message for them regarding their old friend Washu. The message must be given in private so the three of them decide to assemble upstairs in Ryoko's room. The mysterious woman surprises them once more by opening up a dimensional tunnel that leads directly into the awaiting room.

"Okay lady, I want some answers...just who the hell *are* you, and how are you able to do stuff that only Washu can do?" Ryoko snaps out as soon as the hole closes behind them.

"Yes...I demand to know what's going on here." Ayeka also insists.

Studying them for a few seconds, the woman with the reddish pink hair finally speaks up. "You may not believe this, but please hear me out. I'm Washu...actually I'm Washu from *another dimension*."

Ryoko crosses her arms as she calmly refutes the admission. "Riiiiight! And you expect us to believe that load of craaa..."

Before she can finish her sentence Washu-prime interrupts "I'm following someone from *my* universe that somehow ended up here. He goes by the name of Dr. Clay." Snapping her fingers, a small holographic computer display-console appears before her. She begins quickly typing in several numerical coefficients until a series of projected images suddenly appear in front of them.

The first image is that of an unusual looking man with a uniquely shaped white beard. Pushing a flickering button on the console, the new image enlarges and quickly fills a large portion of the room. "This man is extremely dangerous and has an ego the size of a small solar-system." Washu-prime says as the image begins to rotate. "Here's where things start to sound a little improbable. But listen up because all of it is true. Besides, knowledge is power and the time may come in the future where you might have to engage him in actual combat."

"Whatever happens, we'll be ready" Ayeka says as she tightly clenches her fists in confidence.

"What you need to know about him is that he's a rogue scientist given the capability to replicate virtually anything or anyone on a near subatomic level. The copy will have their abilities, voice patterns, brain-wave signature...even smelly breath...*everything*."

"Replicate...?" Ayeka responds. "You mean like a cloned-copy?"

"Exactly." Washu-prime replies. "I'll try to explain everything as I go along..."

After Washu-prime hits one more button on the console before her, another series of scenes display in front of them.

"A little over twenty thousand years ago, Dr. Clay and I were both colleagues attending the prestigious Science-Academy together.

I have to admit that he had a brilliant scientific mind, and was a promising young student who shown near limitless potential. But shortly after our arrival it became apparent that some of his goals were not in harmony with those of the Science-Academy.

This worked to my advantage however since the directors were looking for a way in which to study the doctor to make sure that he kept up with his studies, and stayed out of trouble."

Ryoko quickly interrupts "So they turned you into a snitch..."

"Well I wouldn't exactly put it *that* way, but they did ask me to keep an eye on him and relay my findings."

"Uh huh..." Ryoko chuckles as she crosses her arms and reclines back. "This story is definitely starting to get juicier"

"So anyway...while under my observation it was eventually found that Clay had secretly plotted to steal the director's chair and use it to gain control of the galaxy."

"Weren't you two supposed to be friends or something?" Ayeka asks.

"Well I thought so...but only months after we first arrived, Clay made it clear that he wanted nothing to do with me because I had been rejected and humiliated by the powerful Kuramitsu family. He saw me as being unworthy of his association."

"I see..." Ayeka adds.

"So to make a long story short; he was strummed out of the academy. I was eventually made director, and he's blamed me ever since." Washu pauses and clicks more buttons on her console. Other pictures begin to appear. She now continues her story, "For the next Twenty thousand years he wandered the galaxy perfecting his technology and planning his revenge. Recently, he caught up with me and in an ill-conceived attempt tried to exact his revenge.

After losing the battle I was able to get various bits of information out of him. Apparently, he currently works for my sister; a *'High-Level Dimensional being'* known as Lady Tokimi"

"High level dimensional being? Your sister?" Ayeka questions.

"Long story...but suffice to say, my sister has hired him, and is plotting to capture me."

Washu finishes recanting the story and the images being transmitted holographically begin to fade and disappear. "I wish I could tell you more, but time is of the essence and we must find the doctor before it's too late.

Clay is *highly* skilled in the ability to create artificially-morphing genetic clones. He used this particular technique to infiltrate our household back in my home dimension.

He *would* have succeeded in his plans if it weren't for my knowing him so well. I was able to spot and identify his duplicate."

She pause then snaps her fingers once more. Suddenly the console she was just typing into disappears altogether "This brings me to why I felt the need to show up here and warn you of this madman *personally*.

Dr. Clay is capable of committing *terrible* atrocities in the name of conquest and in science. There's no telling who or what he's using here to help him accomplish his goal in *this* universe, but *whoever* it is, you can bet that he'll use someone that's most likely *well* trusted."

As Ryoko and Ayeka both listen intently to Washu's story, they both turn toward each other as they realize whom it is that Dr. Clay has duplicated for this infiltration, "*Sakuya*...! It *must* be her. Who else could it be?" they both gasp in unison.

Chapter 9

Downstairs, Sasami and the others are having a pleasant time at the party. The gathering is starting to wind down and the guests are slowly departing to their separate destinations. Nobuyuki and his girlfriend Noriko have just finished opening up the last of their gifts and are now thanking the remaining guests for attending the party. Sachiko is fast asleep on Nobuyuki's bed upstairs in his old room.

"I wonder where Tenchi disappeared off to." Mihoshi says to Kione as she spots Ryoko and Ayeka returning from upstairs with Washu-prime.

Ryo-Ohki, who has been nestling comfortably on Sasami's head for the duration of the party, hears Mihoshi's statement and answers her in her typical cabbit language. However since Mihoshi is unable to understand it, Ryo-Ohki jumps from Sasami's head and heads over toward the back patio door. "I think she's trying to tell us that Tenchi is still outside..." Sasami says.

"...Talking to that *wench* Sakuya no doubt..." Ayeka says under her breath.

"We should go out and look for him." Kione insists.

"Honestly, I don't see what he sees in her...she's not prettier than us..." Ayeka says.

"Well, you're at least *half* right Ayeka...She's definitely not prettier than *me*...*You* on the other hand..." Ryoko says back to her in an instigating manner.

"I know *you're* not talking...you're nothing but a *monster*."

"Say that to my face *ugly*...!" Ryoko taunts.

"Come on you two...save the bickering for later. We've got to find Tenchi." Kione interrupts, trying to break up the impending quarrel.

"Has anyone seen Washu...?" Ayeka asks as she turns around and scans the room with her eyes.

"She's been locked up in her lab since earlier today. She said that she was working on something...she didn't tell me what." Mihoshi replies.

"Leave her..." Washu-prime interrupts as she heads for the back door.

"Who's *she*?" Sasami asks pointing to Washu-prime as she follows the others to the back door.

"Who...*her*? Oh, she's Washu...she's from *another* dimension." Ayeka responds to her sister.

"I'll bring you all up to speed as we head out." Washu-prime says to the group as she alters her appearance to once again mimic the preadolescent form that she uses most often. "Just follow me. We'll get to the bottom of this...I have a plan." She says.

Meanwhile back at the lake, Tenchi and Sakuya are resting comfortably against a tree that has grown on the shore of the lake. By now Sakuya has been laying her head against Tenchi's chest, so comfortably that it looks as though she's close to falling asleep in his arms. "This feels really nice," she says to Tenchi as he sits there running his fingers through her soft nicely-trimmed hair.

"Yeah, I know what you mean...I wish we could stay here forever." Tenchi says, dreaming away in his thoughts.

"Tenchi...we *can* be together forever."

"I'd love that..." he responds "But realistically..."

"We could run away together..." she quickly interrupts "...just the two of us...away from the girls, the doctor, *everyone*..."

"I would *love* to do that, but...we *can't*...I have responsibilities...you know that." Tenchi says as he continues to play in her soft hair.

"...I can't do this...not anymore. Not to *you*." Sakuya says while standing up and turning toward the moon in the darkened sky to ponder. "Tenchi, I...I have a confession to make. I thought that I could just ignore it, but...I see now how impossibly naïve that notion and attempt was. I can't escape the truth, no matter *how* hard I try."

He gets up and steps closely toward her, hugging her from behind "Sakuya what is it? We can get through this *together*; just tell me what's bothering you."

Sakuya fights with all her might to respond but unfortunately all that comes out are her own streaming tears. Unable to face the horrible truth of what she is and what she must do, she finds herself quickly fleeing the scene deeper into the darkened woods.

Deeply confused over Sakuya's actions Tenchi doesn't know whether to follow, or to let her alone to her thoughts.

As Sakuya tries desperately to gather her thoughts together and compose herself from her out of control emotions, she is instantly transported involuntarily into the stratosphere. She finds that she is now in the company of Dr. Clay, and this doesn't sit too well with her.

"Dr. Clay...it's *you*..." Sakuya shrieks as the ancient scientist's holographic projected image displays before her.

"Who else could it be?" he exclaims as he crosses his arms "I'm the one who *sent* you on this mission in the first place. What is your report Xenon?"

Looking extremely guilty Sakuya shrinks back and sheepishly replies to the evil super scientist. "I've got it all under control doctor."

Pausing for a moment to read her countenance before replying he finally lets out "From up here it looks quite the opposite. Is there anything you're failing to report? I'll eventually find out if you're lying to me...after all, you are my ultimate creation; The Quantum Interphasic Theoretical Biological android...Powered entirely by zero-point energy."

Hanging her head lowly she refuses to respond.

"I thought so..." Clay says as he outstretches his hand and activates a holographic console display situated before him. After hitting several buttons on the sophisticated electronic device, a powerful arc of energy cascades from the Shunga and engulfs Sakuya in a painful release of electrical current. She convulses and screams as the torturous energy renders her virtually helpless.

"There..." Clay exclaims smugly. "That's to remind you of who's *really* in charge. Now go. Take care of your mission quicker or I'll be forced to replace you with another more loyal marionette."

With tears streaming down her cheeks she nods her head slowly in reciprocation.

"My sensor grid indicates that someone *else* from my home-dimension has crossed over into this universe, and there's only *one* person smart enough to have pulled off such a feat..."

"...Washu-prime...?" Sakuya lets out in interruption.

"Precisely..." he replies "I'm so close to completing this mission that I can almost taste it. I *cannot* afford to loose everything so close to my total victory."

"Yes sir..." Sakuya reluctantly replies while wiping her eyes dry.

"Need I remind you Xenon of how expendable you really are? As easily as I can swap a light-bulb, so to can I replace you if need be. So *don't* cross me."

"I understand doctor..."

As Xenon-Sakuya's transmission is abruptly ended, she is instantly transported back onto the planet into the spot from which she was taken. Feeling trapped in her current situation, but also compelled to finish things, she falls into a deep melancholy. With her

true love's life at stake, her mission doesn't seem quite as important to her as it used to. But she knows that to disobey the doctor means almost certain deactivation.

The biological android decides that maybe it finally is time to take a stand for what she believes in. She knows that she cannot simply return back to her prior existence aboard the doctor's ship once the mission is completed. Too much has changed in her life since her arrival on the planet. She is different now and her feelings have grown to mean *too* much to her to let go. It's *impossible* for her to go back to what she once was.

So she decides that since she *is* Sakuya, body and soul...she will remain on the earth, and live out the rest of her life as the young woman, hopefully with Tenchi by her side. The thought of this proposition calms her tortured soul. She has grown to enjoy her life as it is now. She has *become* Sakuya, and now it's time for her to start acting like it.

Chapter 10

Back in space Clay ponders the events of the previous conversation with his newest creation "Hmmm, this Sakuya character warrants further investigation...it would appear that her memories and emotions toward that boy are much *too* powerful for her to carry out the rest of my plan. This is the *second* time that this has happened to me...first with Zero Ryoko, and now with Xenon. I figured that I had all the bugs worked out. There can't be any flaw in my work...there *can't* be...Zero 2!"

"...Sir...?"

"I want you to go down there and finish the rest of the mission. We're outta time. Destroy that boy Tenchi and bring back Xenon. We'll need her intact if we're to be successful in capturing Washu-theta. But if she refuses...eliminate her."

"Yes sir." Zero 2 replies as she instantaneously disappears from the scene and transports down to the unsuspecting planet below.

Meanwhile back on Earth Sakuya has found Tenchi again and is attempting to smooth over her past actions. "Tenchi...I'm sorry for earlier. I guess I'm acting a little more emotional now because of everything that has happened to me today...it's all so...*overwhelming*." Sakuya says to Tenchi as she returns to him next to the tree with a welcoming smile. "I'm ok now."

"I'm glad to hear it." Tenchi replies with a big smile on his face. "We should probably start heading back home now. The others will be getting worried soon."

"Ok." Sakuya says with a big beaming smile on her face as well. With her resolve to remain on the earth with her memories intact, she is very happy and content. She has *finally* found the relative peace of mind she's been looking for that was absent earlier.

Arriving at the scene seconds later, Zero 2 wastes no time in assuming another more insidious form. This time selecting a form that she knows *everyone* will be willing to accept...*Tenchi Masaki*.

With the physical duplication process complete, she now needs the real Tenchi to scan so that she can upload his memories and personality down into her archival databank.

Unbeknownst to her, Xenon has implanted in her a tracking device. For this reason, Zero 2 can track Xenon anywhere, and because Tenchi is sure to be with her, Zero 2 is certain that she has a good chance in actually capturing Tenchi off-guard once she locates her sister Xenon.

Zero-Tenchi's eyes glow a brilliant fluorescent/yellow green as she uses her advanced tracking sensor to detect her sister-android and to possibly hone in on Tenchi's heat signature. "With any luck, I will find them soon..." Zero-Tenchi says to herself in Tenchi's voice, though sounding monotone and bereft of feeling or life.

She turns her head to the right and momentarily scans the sector. After allowing a tiny grin she discontinues her search "...Ahhh, there you are sister..." Zero-Tenchi adds.

Activating an internal comlink, Zero-Tenchi opens a communicating channel with the doctor. "Doctor, I have spotted them. Do you wish me to engage...?"

"Yes...but do so quickly. Ship sensors indicate the others are nearby and gaining. We can't afford to engage them all at this time. Bring Tenchi and Xenon here. We'll deal with them on the ship."

"Yes sir." Zero-Tenchi responds mechanically, "I will comply."

Meanwhile as Sakuya and Tenchi stroll happily back toward the house Sakuya admits something deeply personal to him while resting her head nicely on his left shoulder "Tenchi, I want you to know that this has been the happiest day of my life...spending this time with you has been magical." Sakuya says to Tenchi as she cuddles his left arm while they walk toward the house. "This is all I've ever wanted."

"Today's had its bumps...but I've enjoyed it also..." Tenchi replies.

"I never want it to end, I..." Sakuya says. Stopping abruptly mid sentence she begins looking around as if she senses something is wrong. Her eyes fixate on a tuft of bushes not far ahead of them. "Ok, whoever you are...show yourself." She suddenly spits out.

"Hello sister..." a voice slowly echoes out into the woods. As they stand there transfixed, the familiar figure of Tenchi Masaki steps out into the open.

"What the...?" Tenchi chokes out. "Who the heck are *you*? You look just like me!"

"Zero...!" Sakuya spits out while assuming a defensive posture.

"You've been a very naughty girl. Did you honestly believe the doctor wouldn't learn of your treachery?"

"I don't care...I love Tenchi." She replies.

"The doctor is not pleased with your recent behavior..." Zero-Tenchi says as she steps out of the darkness into their oncoming path. "...However...if you surrender to me now, I'm sure that he may be persuaded to ignore...your gross incompetence."

"Forget it Zero" Sakuya defiantly replies to the deadly android "I'm no longer Clay's servant."

"Very well, have it your way." Zero-Tenchi says as its eyes grow brighter.

She swiftly snaps her fingers. Just then, thick slimy goop erupts from the ground and engulfs Sakuya and Tenchi rendering them powerless to escape. Gloating Zero-Tenchi says "You should have listened to my offer sister, now you'll both be destroyed." As the substance engulfs them and dissolves into the ground taking Sakuya and Tenchi with it, Zero-Tenchi laughs at the ease of their capture.

For Zero, the substance has an added purpose, not only does it serve to restrain its intended victims, but it also acts as a downloading catalyzing-agent between organic and bioelectric energy thus facilitating retrieval of the subject's memory patterns and making it easier to upload this encrypted brainwave data to its new host; Zero-Tenchi.

"Tenchi's memories are now mine." Zero-Tenchi boasts as she turns around just as the others arrive at the scene.

Chapter 11

Meanwhile back at the Masaki home, Washu-theta has just completed making a discovery of her own. "**Eureka**...I've *found* it. I knew something wasn't quite right about Sakuya...and *now* I have the information to *prove* it." She pauses then adds "History repeats itself. I have to tell the others." Washu says as she prepares to exit her lab. Exiting the door from underneath the stairwell, Washu notices that most everyone has gone. The only remaining ones in the house are Katsuhito, Noriko, and Nobuyuki, with Sachiko still sleeping soundly upstairs in Nobuyuki's old room. "Katsuhito, where is everybody?" Washu-theta asks.

"They all left a few minutes ago. I think they were looking for Tenchi...They had a young woman with them, she looked a lot like you."

"...Like *me*...?" she gasps as she ponders further "Hmmmmmm, this situation is getting weirder and weirder. I've got to find them; I've got *no* time to waste." Washu says as she returns to her lab to retrieve a device that will help her to locate the others. Just then her crystal starts glowing brilliantly. "I *knew* it...Tenchi *must* be in trouble."

While back in the woods, Zero-Tenchi has suddenly come face to face with the others and has decided her final course of action.

"With Washu-theta here, I can grab Washu-prime and complete the mission for the doctor..." Zero-Tenchi says to herself in a way so as to remain inaudible to the others. "If they're all *here*...little Washu must be all alone at the house." she says with a wicked smile.

"Tenchi, you're ok!" Kione says as she rushes in unknowingly giving Zero a hug. "Where's Sakuya?"

"It was awful" Zero-Tenchi convincingly replies to the others "Yugi has returned." Zero adds further credence to her story by forcing up phony tears "She reabsorbed Sakuya back into herself. I've lost her again." She says in his distinctive voice "She said that she no longer needed her shadow and that she would now finally destroy the Masaki family once and for all." Zero-Tenchi replies persuasively to the crew.

"I *knew* it!" Ryoko says as she balls up her fists. "Where is that little pipsqueak right now, where'd she go?"

"She headed out toward *Yugi-cave*." Zero-Tenchi points out "She said that *this* time she'll *make* Sasami want to stay with her." Falling to his knees Zero-Tenchi reveals " Things are *bad*, everyone. I've got even worse news for all of you. I...I failed you all again. Yugi...Yugi took my crystal."

"...She *what*?" Ayeka chokes out in disbelief. "How'd she get her hands on it...?"

"I'll explain later." Zero-Tenchi replies "Head out there quick." He adds "No time to explain right now...Washu...come with me...I've got a plan...the rest of you, head out to the cave. I have to find a way to somehow regain my crystal."

"You got it Tenchi..." Kione replies as they all turn around and run off in preparation of a battle with Yugi.

After they have all dispersed, Zero-Tenchi's eyes brightly light up again, this time in crimson. "I thought they'd never leave..." she says while transforming back into her true robotic form and grabbing Washu-prime thinking it Washu-theta. Taking a single step toward the Masaki household to abduct the Washu she believes is located there, she is stopped mid-stride. Seconds later they are transported aboard Dr. Clay's ship high above the earth's surface.

"Zero!" Clay yells sternly "Why are you wasting your time with *this* Washu?" he asks Zero in a frustrated overtone. "You were supposed to grab the *real* Washu...not this *inferior* copy." He lets out.

Smiling slyly Washu-prime coolly replies "Hey there...who're you calling an *inferior copy* octopus-head? I didn't travel all this distance just to be insulted by *you* doctor. Tell me...what're you up to?" she insists.

Gasping in surprise doctor Clay chokes out "Washu-prime? It's *you*?"

"Washu-*prime*? Is that some sort of perverted nick-name you've cooked up for me this time? You don't think you'll get me in a nurse's uniform and have your way with me, do you?" mercilessly taunting him. She adds "I'm so flattered...but I must inform you that you're not my type."

Seething he grits his teeth while balling up his fists. "Washu...it *is* you! I should have known."

As the evil scientist stands there before Washu-prime he quickly calms himself and begins gloating with a sinister smile on his face. "You've just made things infinitely easier for me. Now I don't have to continue my plans in luring you here."

"What're friends for...?" Washu adds sarcastically. "So, mind telling me what's going on?"

"Simple...I'm killing two birds with one stone. Though still mandated to capture you for Lady Tokimi... as a side quest; if you must know...I'm also exacting my revenge." He reveals to her. "After my last humiliating defeat I knew that I wouldn't allow you to get away with it...so I came up with this plan based on Tenchi's gullible personality. I knew that he'd fall for my bait. All dimensions have some things in common. For example; Tenchi is a gullible blockhead in our own home-dimension so I gambled that he'd also be the same out here in this one, as well."

"Risky...But what does that have to do with *me*?" Washu asks while crossing her arms.

"I'm glad you asked Washu. I know that Tenchi from our dimension is much too powerful to capture on my own..."

"So you hoped to pass the one from *this* dimension off as ours?" Washu interrupts happily.

"Let me finish!" Clay snaps back angrily. "In short, yes. But not only that...if I were to capture the Washu from *this* dimension also, it would've certainly caught your attention, thus luring you into my clutches eventually out of curiosity."

"Bait...I see..." Washu adds as she tilts her head to the side. "I gotta admit...very complex...really *risky*...but highly effective. That's pretty well thought out Clay, even for *you*." She adds.

Seething again Doctor Clay is barely able to calm himself to conversational levels.

"I do my homework."

"So...how'd you know that Tenchi here wouldn't tap into the light-hawk force and use it to defeat you?" she asks casually.

"I've been watching him for a few days now, and it would seem that *here in this* dimension he can't materialize the three Light-hawk wings needed in order to adequately defend himself against me. In fact, he can't even generate *one*. All of his feeble powers are linked and relegated to a pathetic crystal he holds in his possession."

He pauses for a moment to allow Washu time to process this newest bit of information.

"All of this basically means that he's a *sitting duck* out here." The doctor says aloud as he gloats over his presumed victory. Turning around to face a holographic screen-image of Washu displayed on it, Clay says, "*Finally* Washu...*finally* I have you where I want you. Finally I will have my payback for all the indignities that I've had to suffer at the hands of your infernal tampering into my affairs...and Lady Tokimi will grant me my *ultimate* wish. In just a little while...an entire galaxy...will all be *mine*."

"Uh huh..." Washu says incredulously as though not impressed or intimidated at all.

"Uh huh?" Clay turns to face her seething with anger and rage on his face, but he is quickly able to regain his composure. He quickly grabs for his concealed blaster. "I have learned from all of my past failed mistakes. You will not ruin my plans this time."

Elsewhere on the ship, Sakuya and Tenchi are having a conversation of their own while trying desperately to escape from their cylindrical containment cages. Banging one last time on his hermetically sealed enclosure, Tenchi asks of his one-time girlfriend to clarify their current circumstances. "What's going on?" he insists as he looks her directly in the eyes "That robot called you *Xenon*. Is that true? Are you some sort of faker-spy sent to destroy me and my family?"

Horrified by his questioning all Sakuya can do is stand there in a trance. She attempts to open her mouth to say something, but nothing comes out.

"Then I guess it's true." He answers his own question as he hangs his head. Upset and discouraged over the deception, he punches at the cylindrical enclosure once more, not in an attempt to escape imprisonment but this time in an effort to vent his frustrations. "So be honest with me *Xenon*, why did you do this?" He says as he looks at her before losing himself to the moment.

"I...I'm sorry Tenchi. I never meant for it to end up this way." She admits "I *never* intended to hurt you. I did this all for *us*..."

"*Us*...?" Tenchi says aggravated, "What the hell?" he lets out before crossing his arms and hanging his head under the weight of her betrayal.

"Tenchi please...you have to understand...none of this was my fault..." Sakuya pleads futilely

"Stop your ridiculous *lies*!" he spits back at her more upset than angry. "You preyed on my emotions...you toyed with me just to get what you wanted, and you lied about who you were." He glumly bangs the back of his head against the cage a couple of times before resuming the conversation. "You've done exactly what *Yugi* did...you manipulated me...I hope you're satisfied." They both give up trying to escape and slide down the inside of their glass cages with their backs turned toward one another.

"Tenchi...*pleeease*...I've *always* been honest with you...*please* believe me..." she begs, trying desperately to explain herself to him. She knows that this is her only small window of opportunity, if she doesn't succeed in convincing him soon, she'll have lost him forever. She succumbs to tears in the sobering realization over what she has unwittingly done. "...Remember last fall Tenchi?" she says meekly while staring blankly out into space.

"Yeah, it was one of the happiest times of my life. That was when I finally admitted to myself that I loved you..." gritting his teeth he angrily corrects himself "...I mean...*Sakuya*."

She hangs her head in shame before continuing. "That was when *I* told you that '*people can't live on illusions*'"

"Yeah, I remember that." Tenchi replies with a saddened smile as he begins to sit back and reminisce fondly.

Staring at him for a moment trying to decide whether or not to explain everything to him she finally sighs and says "I have to tell you everything...I owe you that much...if you still hate me after that, then so be it...I'll gladly stay here and give up my life." she says while a single tear trickles down her right cheek.

"What is it...?" Tenchi says tenderly as his voice unconsciously softens up not wanting to see her in any pain.

"When I told you before I sacrificed myself in Yugi's dream-world that I wouldn't feel lonely...*ever again*...it was under the assumption that I would cease to exist."

She sighs deeply while running her left hand through her soft short hair.

"The *truth* is, when Yugi thought she destroyed me, I was somehow reabsorbed back into her subconscious mind. I *didn't* cease to exist but stayed very *much* alive under a level of *sub*-consciousness similar to lucid awareness...

I was literally conscious and trapped between a state of asleep and awake. However unlike Yugi who was definitely asleep, I was totally awake and could hear everything.

When Yugi was lying motionless in that chamber, I could see it *all*...I could hear *everything*. Sasami would come by everyday and tell me...*Yugi*...stories. And I enjoyed my time with her. But through it all, I knew that something important was missing. I needed *you* Tenchi. I needed to be able to touch you again, and I knew that the dream-world within Yugi's mind that I was living and trapped inside wasn't real. It was a prison, a constant reminder of what was forever lost to me...I *was* lonely Tenchi, *very* lonely. Everyday I suffered my own personal version of hell without you. It felt like a twisted eternity of torment and despair..."

"I...never knew..." Tenchi interrupts. "You went through all that when you gave yourself up to save me?"

"I'm not asking for your pity Tenchi, but please let me finish." she says as she wipes the tears swelling in her eyes "I didn't know how long I was trapped in that hellish nightmare but I knew that if I stayed there long enough, I would've certainly gone mad from hopelessness. I decided that I had to try something...*anything*."

I remembered what Yugi told me about being a part of her before she reabsorbed me into herself that last night in my apartment; so I figured that since she was so super-powerful, that maybe I could somehow tap into those abilities that she possessed and do something about it.

And that's what I did.

Using Yugi's powers, I was able to send an empathic distress signal. I broadcasted it everywhere in hopes that someone somewhere would intercept it and help me out. I didn't know it at the time, but with Yugi's awesome mental-powers at my command; I was even able to send the distress-signal across dimensions. It was then that my prayers were answered and my dreams came true...though I didn't know it at that time, my dreams would soon become horrible nightmares."

"Sakuya...*who* intercepted your message?" Tenchi asks with genuine concern.

"A super-scientist named Dr. Clay. Telling me that he could create for me a *new* body if I did just as he asked, he seduced me into helping him to capture Washu.

He said that I would be strong, strong enough to defend myself against the girls. I liked that, I would finally have the chance to defend myself, and our love, against those awful

girls staying at your house. But what really convinced me was my desire to be with you again, and his expertise provided an opportunity for that. So I agreed to help him. He then used my empathic signature I was broadcasting to track the exact location of this dimension."

"That was when he abducted Yugi wasn't it?" Tenchi asks as he ponders his next course of action.

"Yes...shortly after he acquired her and scanned her brain for my personality signature, I was placed in this body here...an *exact* replica of the one I had in Tokyo. With one exception...instead of being somebody's shadow, *this* body was *real*...it was *my own*. Later, at the clearing where you found me, the doctor had just been trying to replicate your power crystal. It blew my hand off when he tried..." She pauses as she grabs her hand and massages it gently. "With all the new sensory input he had just incorporated into this body, it was more painful than you could possibly imagine. Dr. Clay used his advanced knowledge of robotics to instantly replace it with a cybernetic one so as not to attract any attention, but even so...the pain that it had caused was so overwhelming that it temporarily overridden my long-term memory."

Tenchi turns away again and while gritting his teeth angrily punches the wall of the cage. She's now successfully convinced him of her innocence in the matter "I'm sorry...I didn't realize how difficult this has all been for you. You've been through so much. And it's true...you did it all for us." Tenchi says as he faces her, placing both hands on the glass wall in order to simulate touching her. Sakuya reciprocates by doing the same.

"I've had to sell my soul Tenchi. I'm not looking for you to condone what I did, or even for your forgiveness...I just want you to understand why I did what I did." She reveals. "I want you to know that no matter what, I love you. I'd give anything for the promise of being with you again. And if I had to...even my life." She says as she stares lovingly into his deep-brown eyes. Anguish and emotional misery fill her countenance as she finishes recanting her story.

Suddenly, out of nowhere...

"Enough! I've heard *enough* of this." Zero 2 says as she appears from out of concealment in the darkness previously shrouding her. "The doctor was right. You've gained an *overdeveloped* sense of emotion sister...how very unfortunate for you...but don't worry; I'm certain the doctor can fix you right up."

"What are *you* doing here Zero?" Sakuya says as she quickly dries her eyes.

"...Keeping an eye on *you* of course. The doctor is busy with Washu and I thought I'd give my little sister some company...and I must say you're *very* entertaining."

"I don't *want* your company Zero...just leave us alone...!"

"...I'm afraid I can't do that..." Zero replies "What *happened* to you sister...? You've *changed*...you've malfunctioned...you've become...*weak*."

"She *isn't* weak!" Tenchi interrupts. "She's stronger than you'll ever know." He adds in defense of her.

Amused Zero lets off a slight chuckle before responding "I've come to offer you your *last* chance to join back with us, since it's *obvious* your emotions are causing you to malfunction in this manner."

Standing in direct defiance to Zero, Sakuya boldly replies "I would rather *die* by Tenchi's side than to live with either of *you*...!"

"Very well sister...if that's how you want it...?" Zero shrugs "Prepare to die by your man's side." Zero then activates several buttons on a console located next to her in the large room. After a few seconds, the glass container that has up until now housed Sakuya begins to tremble, and finally shatters into a million pieces. Sakuya confidently steps down from the raised platform and poises herself to fight Zero.

She is about to engage in the fight of her life...and she is ready.

Chapter 12

Meanwhile back on earth, things are also starting to escalate. As the group reaches Yugi-cave, they are greeted by Washu-theta who informs them of her new findings. "C'mon guys, we don't have *any* time to waste, we've got to rescue Tenchi. I'm not sure *who* this Dr. Clay is, but I'm certain that I can come up with something to help us out." Washu says, as she and the others race to a clearing and instruct Ryo-Ohki to transform into her crystalline spaceship form. "I've been able to track Tenchi you guys...but he's in outer space." Washu adds as Ryo-Ohki sends down a teleportation beam to transport them into her cockpit. "We've gotta find him...and we've gotta do it right now."

"...I can't believe we were all taken so easily for suckers...!" Ryoko rants as Washu pilots Ryo-Ohki up into outer-space. "When I get my hands on that Sakuya, she's gonna be *sorry*."

"I just can't believe Yugi would do something like this..." Sasami says to herself as she stares out of one of the navigation displays into the emptiness of space.

"Yeah...I just wanna know what happened to her...Tenchi said that Yugi was headed toward the cave, but when we got there she was nowhere in sight." Ayeka says aloud to the group, though speaking to no one in particular.

"What does it matter? When we get our hands on the both of those traitors, I say we pound 'em into meat-sauce!" Ryoko interrupts.

"I've been thinking about that guys..." Kione says "Tenchi seemed a little different to me somehow. I can't put my finger on it." Kione says. A momentary silence falls upon the group as they all ponder over the past events of the day.

Minutes pass, then finally Washu breaks the silence by making an interesting quandary. "So guys, what you've told me so far is; there's somebody involved in all this named *little Washu*, an alternate-universe version of *me*. And there's an evil doctor named Clay who wants to capture the *me* from the *other* dimension...What doesn't make sense to me is; what does that have to do with *me*...or any of *us*? How are we involved in any of this? I wish I knew what was going on."

"Yeah I'm very confused." Mihoshi says.

"Now *that's* a shocker..." Ryoko says sarcastically of Mihoshi under her breath.

"...But what confuses me *more* is Sakuya." Washu says.

"How so?" Kione asks.

"First of all, what does Sakuya have to do with all these interdimensional travelers? Why would Yugi re-integrate her back into herself if she weren't even her shadow anymore?"

She ponders further, and then adds "Come to think of it, why would Tenchi ask you all to leave him there *alone* if his crystal were just stolen? Wouldn't he need to keep you all around for added protection, especially since you all possess portions of his gems?"

"Maybe he thought that there was no need to keep us with him since his master-gem was missing." Ayeka replies.

"Maybe..." Washu-theta responds though not really convinced "...but then there's the issue; if Yugi had taken his crystal, she would've certainly taken advantage of his current vulnerability and just destroyed him on the spot. He's too dangerous to her plans to be left alive. Something just doesn't seem to add up about all this..." Washu says as she continues to pilot the ship. "I suppose all our questions will be answered once we meet up with Clay on his ship."

"I hope Tenchi's ok." Mihoshi exhales.

"He's ok...somehow...I can sense it." Ryoko says as she looks out the view-screen and daydreams about her love while clinching her crystal tightly.

"...Somehow, I get the same feeling..." Ayeka adds. Looking down at her glowing crystal she says in a whisper, "Don't worry Tenchi my love, we'll find you and bring you back...I promise."

Meanwhile back on Clay's ship, Washu-prime and the doctor are having an intensive physical confrontation as they continue to converse with one another. "How did you find out about my plan...? It was *perfect*...there was *no* way..." Clay says as he takes off a few more shots at Washu while she successfully dodges the incoming fire.

"If you really want to know Clay...the last time we met, I took the precaution of secretly planting a tracking-bug on you..."

"You what...? *Impossible*."

Smiling with an impishly sly grin and a quick eyewink, Washu then adds, "You'll *never* guess where it's hid..."

Stopping to think about the comment for a second, Dr. Clay briefly allows his hands to run across his posterior then explodes with furious anger. "...*Washu*...! I will get you for this! You will be made to suffer!" Clay says as he makes several better placed shots at Washu, yet missing every time.

Washu laughs, as she realized that she just antagonized him to the point where he loses all self-control. "Listen up Clay...I would *love* to sit here and chatter with you all day, but...I have *better* things to do with my time."

"Let there be no mistake Washu...you're coming with me to see Lady Tokimi, one way or the other...!"

"There's just one problem with that criteria Clay..." Washu replies to Clay's threat.

"And what would *that* be...?"

"You have *no* way to carry out the plan...just like last time, you've again miscalculated your own creations...you've lost your puppet, and I bet that Zero will be having her hands full trying to keep up with ms. Kumashiro for quite some time...so it's just *you* and *me*. And trust me Clay; I do *not* intend to give up quietly."

In another room, Zero and Sakuya stand poised against one another. Neither of them moving, but both are staring into each others eyes as they mentally prepare for the impending encounter. Tenchi, who is still contained in his nearby glass cage, is forced to watch the imminent clash; he is powerless to assist his love in any way.

Suddenly breaking the standoff Zero makes her decisive move.

She immediately executes a teleportational hop while at the same time duplicating herself using one of Ryoko's doppelganger techniques. Her intention; confuse and distract her

prey while moving in for her final fatal blow. However, familiar with this technique, Sakuya quickly dodges left and then right to evade Zero's deadly energy blasts. Moving with blinding speed, she is able to easily outmaneuver Zero's counterstrikes.

This new ability is but one of many new improvements that Dr. Clay has graciously incorporated into Sakuya's new cybernetic body as a defensive mechanism against Ryoko and the other girls.

Sakuya makes an impressive reverse somersault, and while in mid-air places a well-timed spiral kick that lands squarely into one of Zero's optic visual displays, shattering it. The damaged android recoils as the duplicate Zero takes advantage of this newfound opportunity of distraction to move in for the literal kill.

"Sakuya, look out!" Tenchi yells as he sees the second android move in quickly behind her. Without even turning around to verify that the statement given by Tenchi were true, Sakuya makes her own teleportational hop, and appears right behind the undamaged Zero. Borrowing another super-powered ability mimicked from Ryoko, Sakuya quickly creates an energy sword and swipes it toward the midsection of the advancing android. Surprised, Zero falls prey to the attack and falls down to the floor in two separate pieces.

Outraged that she could be beaten so easily, Zero quickly re-integrates both of her damaged doppelgangers back into herself to re-absorb their energy before they have a chance to completely lose power and dissipate into nothingness. "I must admit sister, I'm impressed. You're *good*; I completely underestimated your abilities..." Zero says as she begins glowing brilliant red. "...But you see...that wasn't all the tricks I have in my repertoire. Now the gloves go off."

Elsewhere, Ayeka, Ryoko, and the others have found themselves engaged in an equally disastrous situation. Dr. Clay has learned from his prior loss with Washu-prime and the others from his home dimension, and has equipped his newly redesigned ship with a defense grid that constantly creates new shield probes designed to fire off a full spread of energy blasts in order to protect the ship much like an energy field, they also serve to siphon off energy from the intended victim's vessel rendering them helpless. As they desperately struggle to gain any affirmative foothold in their mission directive to reach Clay's ship they all know that getting *into* his vessel once they reach it isn't going to be easy.

Washu is a very capable pilot. Making a few maneuvers that she learned while she was on the run as a fugitive with Ryoko years ago, she is able to evade most of the deadly energy discharges sent out by the probes. Kione, Mihoshi and Sasami have all manned small gunning stations allowing them to control the weapons systems of Ryo-Ohki, and they have been trying tirelessly to destroy the deflector drones. "I can't wait to get my hands on that *no-good* Sakuya and the doctor..." Ryoko says in anticipation. "Washu, if you can get in closer I can teleport into that ship and deactivate these blasted probes." Ryoko adds.

"You got it." Washu says as she struggles amid the continuing onslaught to fly Ryo-Ohki in a little closer. She quickly pulls goggles that she has on her head over her eyes. "Don't take too long, I don't know how long we can keep this up."

"Take me with you..." Ayeka insists as she grabs Ryoko just as she begins to teleport off the ship. "I can help you..."

"I don't think so princess..." Ryoko says in rejection to the idea as she tries to break her vise-like hand-hold. "I can do this just fine *without* you."

"I'm going *with* you and that's *final!*" Ayeka says as she clutches onto Ryoko harder.

"Oh all right..." Ryoko concedes "I don't have time to argue with you anyway. Hold on tight, this may be a bumpy ride."

Ryoko and Ayeka quickly dematerialize from the cockpit of Ryo-Ohki and rematerialize into Clay's ship in a small room that appears to be the navigation-control center. "How on earth are we gonna find the controls for the shield probes...in all this?" Ayeka questions as she looks around in horror at all the blinking lights, strobes, buttons, and various other knob devices.

"And you expect me to have an answer for you? How the hell would I know?" Ryoko snaps back at Ayeka. "It's not like I was ever here before." Then suddenly she gets an idea, "I got a plan...since it's impossible to know exactly which controls run those blasted probes...lets just *blast* them *all*..."

"Good idea, with no controls, the ship can't possibly create more probes...Let's do it." Ayeka responds as she and Ryoko prepare to destroy the control console.

While the others struggle valiantly to board the well fortified *Shunga*, Washu-prime and the doctor are still continuing their private conversation. "I have to know doctor. How on earth were you able to make it here into *this* dimension? It takes an understanding of dimensional sciences and quantum mechanics that, to be honest, didn't think you possessed?"

"There's a *lot* about me you don't know...but the answer is simple...and since we're in for a long ride...I might as well tell you." Clay says as he pushes a button on his pinky ring and a fluorescent green substance envelops Washu from specially concealed ducts located in the floor.

"What the...you're using *this* stuff again?" Washu says as if more *annoyed* by the situation than concerned over her own safety.

As Clay laughs over his apparent victory over Washu he begins recanting how he acquired the ability to travel dimensions. "Like I said earlier, the answer is *simple*. Lady

Tokimi granted me the ability to open up dimensional wormholes with a power that she dubbed the wings of the *'Dark Hawk'*."

"Hmmm, I never knew such a thing existed..." Wasu-prime ponders.

"To be honest...neither did I...But I *do* know enough to know that its power is *quite* awesome indeed. Said to be at least as powerful as the light-hawk version. I'm told by Tokimi herself that it's the antithesis of the *'Light Hawk'* wings."

"I see. And how're you able to harness it?" Washu asks with the same uninterested tone to her voice.

"...Wouldn't you like to know...?" Clay says with a sly grin on his face. "Let's just call it a trade secret." Just then an explosion goes off in the distance and a wall two meters in front of them explodes into flame. Ryoko and Ayeka step through the hole just made.

"Little Washu...!" Ayeka calls out. "Are you ok?"

"Yeah I'm fine...just having a little friendly conversation with the doctor here. Wanna join us?"

"Have you seen Tenchi here at all?" Ryoko asks.

Interrupting the small conversation, Clay adds, "Ahhh, the *boy*. If you're looking for him you're *too* late. By now Zero has dealt with him and his traitorous girlfriend." Clay smugly reveals with a smile.

"**Damnit** Clay, if *anything* happened to him, you'll *pay!*" Ryoko threatens with her fists clenched tightly.

As Clay stands there momentarily weighing his options, Kione and the others show up en masse.

"Sorry were late." Washu-theta says, "...we got held up finding a decent parking spot."

"Well, well, well...it looks like the gang's all here." Clay says as he pushes another button on his pinky ring. Green ooze slithers up from the floor and swallows up the rest of the crew. "As you can see, I've learned a lot from my past failures. This time the story will end *very* differently." Then reveling in his own presumed victory Dr. Clay says, "If you're all so interested in what's happening to your precious Tenchi, then how about I show you what he's up to." Clay raises his left arm and a large view-screen lowers from the ceiling into view in front of them. Displayed on the large screen are Zero, Sakuya, and Tenchi. Tenchi is still encased in the glassy container, but the fight between Zero and Sakuya still rages on.

"See Clay...I told you your puppet has been *lost* to you. Look familiar...?" she rubs it in to him "It would appear that Sakuya is winning the battle. Why don't you just give it up now, you've *lost* Clay?" Washu says hoping to hit a sore spot in his ego.

"On the contrary Washu, it is *you* who have lost this time." he says while he hits various buttons on a nearby console located in the room. "It's my wish that you never forget this day Washu...It's the day *I* finally win." As he completes typing away on the console, electricity by the megawatts begins flooding the ooze in which he is using to hold Washu. But as he begins his sadistically maniacal laughter over torturing his nemesis, he hears a familiar voice appear from right behind him.

"Gee Clay...you still playing with those '*widdle*' dolls?" Washu-prime says as she stands safely behind him holding an energy sword to his neck that she has just created. "You're slipping doctor; you fell for that same trick the *last* time."

"What? ...How did...?" Clay responds stupefied.

"It's over Clay, give it up now." Washu-prime says confidently.

"*Never!* ...Never do you hear...? *Never!*" Clay yells back as he retreats into one of the adjacent rooms. "I've planned for this contingency as well." He says as the metallic door closes securely behind him. As the group anxiously looks around the room in anticipation for any unexpected attacks, Clay's voice is suddenly transmitted loudly across the ship's intercom speakers. "As you can see...*I* play to win. In a few moments the room you're in now will be flooded with anti-particles. All organic matter within will be instantly atomized..." The doctor pauses momentarily to indulge in maniacal laughter once more. After he's calmed enough to speak further, he tosses in the statement, "...Oh well Washu...looks like I won't be taking you to see Tokimi after all. Between you and me, I don't really care if she gives me my own solar-system at this point or not...my only payment is in seeing you *dead*."

"I'm sorry for getting you all into this, guys" Washu-prime apologetically says to the group as she uses her dimensional-console to quickly release them from the restraining goo keeping them prisoner. "All kidding aside, Clay is usually pretty thorough in his death-traps. Knowing him, he's probably specially shielded the room so that even Ryoko can't teleport out..."

"You mean we're gonna die?" Mihoshi says hysterically as she starts crying on Kione's shoulder.

"I'm afraid that's *exactly* what I mean..." Washu-prime replies unnaturally calm considering the circumstances. "Our only hope is in Tenchi somehow finding a way to rescue us..."

After Washu-prime makes the statement, the group runs to the view screen displaying Tenchi. They watch the battle between the two androids intently, knowing that their fate hinges on the outcome of Sakuya's encounter with Zero.

Chapter 13

Sakuya and Zero are still going strong. With Zero 2 re-integrated with her doppelgangers, she's at full-power and a fearsome foe to be reckoned with. However, Sakuya with all her added abilities is also nobody to be underestimated. The fight rages on with neither party gaining nor losing the upper hand or ground. "We gotta do something." Sasami says as she watches helplessly from a remote location of the ship. "If we don't, Sakuya might loose and we'll *all* die."

Thinking intently for a few moments, Washu-theta comes up with a plan. "Ok everyone, I can't believe that we never thought of this before. We need to clutch our Tenchi-crystals tightly and use them to reach out to him. It worked the last time in Tokyo; it brought us all together when we were fighting Yugi, it may be the *only* chance we've got to survive now."

They all grab their glowing crystals and reach out to him just as she instructed. As they do so, something miraculous occurs. While Tenchi sits helplessly in the glass tank watching his girlfriend battle the evil Zero, tiny light sparkles magically appear around the mentally and emotionally focused young man. With a sudden blinding flash of light, the cage Tenchi was just held captive inside begins to rattle violently and inexplicably disappears in a puff of brightly colored glittering white powder.

At seeing his escape, Zero immediately redoubles her tactics to include both Tenchi and Sakuya Kumashiro. "I see the *boy* has found a way to escape his imprisonment...*impressive*." Zero says as she blocks several concussive strikes thrown at her by Sakuya. "However, I grow tired of this game sister..." Zero says as she flexes her arms and sends feedback energy back at Sakuya. "It's now time to *end* this."

By now, Sakuya is beginning to exhibit signs of extreme exhaustion as her artificial body crackles with bio-energy as she lies on the ground seizing. The feedback energy that Zero sent to her was specially designed to overload the neural-network inside Sakuya's techno-organic body. If Zero's technique goes according to plan, in a matter of moments she will be rendered completely immobile.

"*No...!* Sakuya *get up!*" Ryoko yells out from the confines of the other room, though Sakuya cannot hear her to reciprocate. "You *can't* go out like *that*. Show that stupid robot who's boss!" she adds apparently cheering her on. "*Damnit!* We've got to get out there and *do* something..."

"Maybe we should try contacting Tenchi one more time..." Sasami requests sheepishly to the group.

"Let's do it. It's worth a try..." Ayeka says, as she stands determined. They all reach out with their hearts one last time to try and contact Tenchi.

Miraculously as though by magic, *this* time Tenchi feels their telepathic communiqué with him.

"Ayeka, Ryoko, Sasami...you guys are *here*?" Tenchi says as he looks off into nothingness. "I can *sense* you...I can *feel* your presence. Washu, Mihoshi, Kione and Ryo-Ohki, you're all here too..." he adds.

"*Tenchi, we need your help.*" the girls tell him empathically, "*...please hurry, we don't have much time.*"

As Tenchi visually searches the room for any escape routes, he can hear Zero speaking to Sakuya off in the distance.

Zero, sensing that she has affected more damage on Sakuya than she is letting on, taunts her, "I see that you're not as agile as you *once* were sister." She says as she ejects a power-coupling rod from an external recharge array and connects it up to a connection-port located at the base of Sakuya's neck. "Don't worry; I'm not *totally* devoid of compassion. I gave you my word that you would die by your precious Tenchi's side, and I will *keep* that promise."

Pressing a square-shaped area just above the elbow-joint of her left arm a weapon ejects and folds out into place. "I have just the weapon that will allow me to do it...but don't worry; I'll try to make this as painless as possible." As Zero rises up her cylindrical arm, a small compartment opens up and a rod-like protrusion folds out into place. "Remember this sister? The doctor has been prototyping this weapon for quite a while."

As she sees it Sakuya is barely able to let out the words "...the matter/anti-matter de-stabilizer..."

"That's right little sister. This device can pulverize organic and non-organic matter on a subatomic level, leaving the victim to die painfully as his insides *slowly* disintegrate away. *Nasty* little device this thing is...I've been saving it for a *special* occasion and it looks like this qualifies." Zero says as she aims the device directly at Tenchi. "If you have any last words for Tenchi...I suggest you tell him now."

As the relatively tiny device begins to glow and power up, Sakuya's eyes widen in terror as she is forced to make a split second decision that will determine the life or death of the man that she loves.

Zero's visual optic-display thins out to a single vertical line as the evil construct prepares to make the lethal shot. "**NO!**" Sakuya yells as she jumps out with the last remaining energy from her malfunctioning body in front of the blast so that she can shield Tenchi.

The pain she encounters by the shot is painful beyond comprehension as her inner mechanisms and sensory nodes are literally liquefied as she lies there on the ground being torn apart from the inside.

To add insult to injury after Sakuya can no longer physically scream out in pain, Zero says "All you've done is delay the inevitable. Once you're dead sister I'll be sure to lay Tenchi's lifeless body next to yours. Like the original Zero, you're nothing but a *failure*...a disgrace to the genius of Doctor Clay, and as my sister."

As every bio techno-organic circuit and cell synapse in Sakuya's body begins to malfunction and short circuit, her body flails and seizes.

"I can't watch...this is awful." Sasami says as she covers her eyes during the horrible spectacle. "Can't Tenchi *do* something?" She says as she turns around and hugs her older sister Ayeka for support.

While Zero is in the middle of synthesizing a horrific mechanical laugh at Sakuya's expense, Tenchi stands up to avenge his beloved Sakuya. As he stands there with his anger blazing, his crystal starts shining so brightly that its glow shows through his thick cotton-shirt. "What did you do to her you *monster*?" He says while gritting his teeth in anger at the evil creation of Clay "I *promise*...you will *pay!*"

Tenchi leaps into the air, and as he does so, his crystal phases through his shirt and starts glowing with a blinding intensity. After a few moments Ryoko, Washu, and the rest of the girls, are all standing safely within the same containment-bay as Tenchi, Sakuya, and Zero. Without saying a word, Tenchi lifts his gem into the air, and the crystals all fly from the girls and converge upon each other, coalescing to form the '*Ultimate Power*'...*Sword Tenchi*.

Able to read its power-signature, Zero quickly examines *Sword-Tenchi* with her sensitive sensors and swiftly moves to avoid any physical attack with it. She starts charging up her weapon to prepare for another deadly attack. "You *cannot* win...even if you *do* somehow manage to defeat me, you must still contend with Dr. Clay." Zero says as she lets off another series of shots with the weapon.

As the energy globules make contact with the floor they quickly dissolve large holes into the ship's inches-thick bulkhead demonstrating just how powerful it really is.

Neither responding nor dodging, Tenchi lifts the sword to block the shots aimed directly at him and prepares to end this battle once and for all. He brings the crystalline blade of the sword down upon Zero 2 easily slicing her in half.

"You may have defeated me, but the hour of the end is coming, and you are not prepared." After Zero makes this last cryptic pronouncement, she explodes into a fiery ball of metallic debris.

"What do you suppose she meant by that?" Ryoko asks as they all stare angrily at the fiery blaze.

"I don't know." Tenchi responds as his anger fades and is slowly supplanted with disheartened melancholy.

Before anyone has a chance to respond, a shot streaks forth from the darkness and strikes the hilt of Tenchi's sword, shattering it. As everyone turns around to face the person who fired the shot, Dr. Clay lets out an insane laugh from his concealed vantage point from the shadows in the storage bay.

"HA! I knew the hilt was the sword's one weakness..." he reveals to all. "So you bested my robot huh? My hat goes off to you boy. Defeating one of my creations is not an easy thing to do." He chuckles manically "But let's see you get out of *this*." Clay says as he motions toward Tenchi's shattered sword. "I'm *through* playing games...time to eliminate you the old fashioned way. I'm just going to *blast* you...*All* of you. It's time for you all to *die*."

As Dr. Clay raises his blaster to make a final shot, an unusual spatial manifestation appears right alongside him. Suddenly a figure dressed in a black-jacket, red shirt, green hair and a peculiar left purple eye appears before him.

At seeing him, Dr. Clay immediately winces back.

Calmly the newly arrived gentleman crosses his arms while giving him a grimacing smile. "Well Clay, it looks like I'm once again sent to clean up after your blundering messes. Just come quietly..." he tells him "...I haven't the patience for *fetch-quests* today."

"Z...*Nooooo!*" Clay shouts as he trembles in fear. "Don't do this...not when I'm *so close*..." Clay lets out as his hand on the blaster begins to tremble. "Give me more time..." Clay pleads.

"Not my problem..." Z replies coldly. "D3 has given you all the time that he's prepared to spare."

In a panicked frenzy over not being able to complete his mission, Dr. Clay points his blaster at Z in hopes of buying himself more time. Clay fires several shots directly at Z point blank range. The shots deflect from him harmlessly as he stands there motionlessly waiting for Clay to finish his assault.

"I told Tokimi and D3 that you were unworthy of being granted the power of the *Dark Hawk*" Z says "...but they wouldn't listen. They *never* listen. Now I have to clean up *their*

mess." He says under his breath. "I'm going to deliver you to Tokimi...and I warn you, she is *not* pleased." Z steps aside and the mysterious dimensional aperture extends toward Clay. As it reaches him, it oozes over his body encapsulating him. Clay is literally being consumed by the ominous looking black phenomenon.

"I *will* get you Washu...this I *promise*..." Clay utters one last time before he is totally swallowed up by the unknown substance. After this, Z turns toward the others and gives them an evil glance that would indicate he is somehow displeased with them as well. He makes no further comment toward them regarding Dr. Clay. Z next floats over toward Tenchi's shattered crystal and repairs the broken shards.

"I have no qualm with any of you. You are after all...*not* the Tenchi from my own universe. I'll fix your little trinket here because it suits my purpose...But next time you'd *better* keep proper care of your precious property..." He says to Tenchi as he begins to slowly float toward the anomaly backwards. "Don't think that in my helping you, that I am in *any* way partial to you or your cause...I merely have a vested interest in your survival for the time being." Z adds, "But remember...*next* time we meet...you will *not* be so lucky."

"What do you mean...?" Tenchi asks of him.

"Just like the robot said...For *you* the *End of Time is* coming. And there is *no* way that you will be prepared..." as the last verse of Z's sentence is uttered, he slowly disappears into the shrinking aperture.

After Z is completely gone and the aperture disappeared, the group hurries toward their respective gems to try and collect them; however they notice that there is one *extra* to the bunch. In the confusion, Z has repaired the crystal, but invariably created one more than before.

"This is very interesting." Washu-prime says to herself as she watches the others put their gems back onto their wrists "Why on earth would he create eight?"

Chapter 14

Now that the primary threats have been eliminated the group is now free to mournfully walk over to where Sakuya's body is still lying motionless.

Electrical sparks arc wildly from an exposed section of her damaged body containing critical information used to keep her vital subsystems functioning properly. A thick reddish liquid leaking from her body gives the same visible impression of gushing blood spewing from open wounds.

Tenchi is the first to reach the silent figure of his girlfriend. He gazes down upon her and tears begin to swell in his eyes. As he stands there weeping, his tears begin to fall upon the lifeless girl.

Much to everyone's surprise, Sakuya is still alive. As the tears fall silently on her face, she begins to stir ever so slightly.

"Tenchi, *look*..." Kione excitedly shouts to him pointing down at Sakuya. "She's still alive."

As Tenchi falls to his knees and tenderly grabs the fallen heroine to pull her toward him, she finally begins to speak. "...Tenchi...?" she says weakly. "...Did we get them...?" she asks, too weak to even look up toward his face.

"Yeah...we got them. Clay and Zero have *both* been defeated."

"...Good...I'm glad..." she responds as she gives in to a long pause.

As Tenchi sits there holding her, he tries to cheer her up by giving her a little good news. "Sakuya...look, *see*...?" he says while holding up the one remaining gem that was previously lying on the floor. "...*See*, sweetheart...the gems...There's one extra. I wanted to give it to you." He says to her.

Remembering how important the gems were to him Sakuya musters enough strength to lift her head and gaze contentedly into his eyes. "...But these gems mean *so* much to you...it's a symbol of your bond with the girls...I don't have the right to own one...to intrude upon what you have with the others..." She says as her malfunctioning body begins to tremble.

"Don't be silly...of course you do..." He says to her. "If *anyone* deserves it...it would be *you*. You've given your life for me...a *second* time...and I will *never* forget that."

She forces up a weak smile while a tear runs down her cheek. "...But Tenchi...I'm dieing...why waste your time giving it to me? Soon I won't be here, and you'll be forced to take it back...I love you *too* much to put you through all that..."

"Let *me* worry about that...*you* just conserve your strength...OK...?" Tenchi replies as he places the makeshift crystal necklace around her neck. The others begin to crowd the young couple in order to give kind words of their own.

Ryoko kneels down beside her and grasps her hand. "What you did today for Tenchi kiddo...was *very* brave. You helped save us all. I just want you to know that I'll never forget you. You can consider yourself one of my friends."

Ayeka also has a word or two of condolence for the dieing young girl. "Even though we didn't see eye-to-eye...I want you to know that secretly...I've *always* liked you. It was

kind of nice having you back and seeing you again, I've never seen Tenchi happier than when he's with you."

Sasami tearfully kneels down beside her and gives her a tight hug. "Don't die on us Sakuya...I *knew* you weren't bad *all along*...we *can't* lose you again..." Sasami gushes over her.

Sakuya is able to reply, albeit barely "...Sasami...I just want you to know that, even though I'm *not* Yugi, she and I have *really* enjoyed our friendship with you over the past few months...I am *really* going to miss you...I'm *proud* to call you my friend." Sakuya says to Sasami who by now is weeping severely as she hugs the dying girl.

Likewise Washu-theta, Kione, and Mihoshi, all have last words that they impart to Sakuya as well. Even Ryo-Ohki, who can't utter a single word of Japanese, manages to convey to Sakuya, her feelings by walking up to her and licking her cheek in an expression of her genuine acceptance. But despite it all, without displaying any grievance whatsoever, and making no attempt to console the dying young Sakuya, Washu-prime calmly stands there observing the others as they all make their tearful condolences to the suffering young woman.

"...This is truly the *happiest* day of my life...to know that I have so many friends...to know that I'm not alone any more...as I leave this world...I do so happily, because I *now* know...that I have a *true* family. I love you all..." She manages to turn her head to face Tenchi one last time "...and...I...love...you...Ten...chi..." she says with a peaceful grin on her face. Her eyes flicker momentarily as the green illuminated light coloring her iris's fades away, leaving it lifelessly black and unlit. Her lifeless body goes disturbingly limp in Tenchi's arms and she becomes completely immobile.

"Sakuya...*No*...Don't leave me again..." Tenchi says, as he shakes her for a moment trying to rouse her. When she doesn't respond he breaks down into tears. "You *can't* do this to me again...you can't leave me alone in this world without you..."

As the others also begin to hold back tears, Washu-prime finally takes advantage of the silence as an opportunity to speak up in order to make a startling revelation. "You know...Sakuya is not *really* dead...at least...not yet..."

"What do you mean?" Ryoko asks as she tries to dry her watery eyes "If this is some stupid joke you got from a movie about her being *mostly-dead*, I'm gonna knock your block off."

"Well, since her brain signature is still intact in her neural-network, it would be a simple procedure for me to just transfer her consciousness into a new body, an *organic* one." Everyone looks dumbfounded at the statement "Don't worry, I've already created complex life forms in the past in my *own* dimension...and frankly, as a fellow scientist and colleague to Dr. Clay, his work was simply *embarrassing*. I'm sure that I can do a *much* better job with her than *he* did."

"You mean you can help her?" Tenchi asks with a ray of hope in his eyes.

"You betcha..." Washu-prime says. "I'll just need to take her body back with me to my *own* dimension for a little while...and when she returns; she'll be as good as new, *better* even."

Walking over to Washu-prime, Tenchi rests his hand on her shoulder and thanks her for all her efforts in bringing back Sakuya and helping them out. "Thanks Washu..." Tenchi says. "I'll *never* forget this." He then gives her a crushing hug. Washu is barely able to break free to respond

"No problem, I'd be glad to do it, especially since you remind me of someone very close to me from my *own* dimension. Oh yeah, and by the way...Call me '*Lil' Washu*.'" She says as she gives him a playful smile. "Well, my work here is done. It's been a pleasure getting to meet you all. Especially *you*." She says as she winks over at Washu-theta. "I can't wait to tell my friends all about you when I get back home." She says while snapping her fingers calling up a dimensional console. After typing several key sequences, a small black temporal portal opens up roughly one meter behind Washu-prime. As Washu-prime slowly steps toward the bizarre black gateway, she pushes more buttons on her laptop and Sakuya begins to levitate and float toward the dimensional rift. Tenchi and the others silently watch Washu-prime and Sakuya disappear harmlessly through the portal. They can't help but to eagerly await with mixed feelings the return of their newest and beloved family member.

Chapter 15

Now that Washu-prime and Sakuya have departed, it's now time for Tenchi and the others to find a way off the ship. One slight problem remains however; Dr. Clay has somehow rigged the ship to auto-self destruct in the event of his absence. Listening to the overhead intercom, the group quickly realizes that the countdown to the system explosion ends in less than five minutes. "...I almost forgot. Yugi is somewhere on this ship." Tenchi says as he remembers a conversation that he had with Sakuya earlier.

"*What*, Yugi? She's *here*?" Ayeka gasps.

"Yeah, Sakuya told me all about it before Zero showed up...I'll explain later." Tenchi says as he sprints down the hallway.

"We must find her before this ship blows up." Sasami screams frantically while also running down the hallway preparing to help Tenchi look for her misplaced best-friend.

As the group feverishly runs through a room-by-room search, they finally come to a large metallic chrome-plated door at the end of an extremely long hallway one floor

above engineering-control. The door is locked with a specialized thumbprint and retinal scanner.

Metal and debris are starting to fall from the weakening ceiling struts and support beams of the ship, indicating that time is starting to run out fast on the self-destruct timer.

Being the first to reach the heavily-secured door, Ryoko futilely places several precisely calculated punches to its hinge-points in an attempt to dislodge it out of their way.

The others finally reach her. "I thought you were supposed to be this *incredible invincible colossus*..." Ayeka taunts as she also attempts to utilize her abilities to breach the door. "Step aside *amateur*...I'll show you how it's *really* done."

Tensing up several muscles in concentration the Juraian princess is able to successfully conjure her ultimate fore-field attack...but to no avail. When she sees that she is having as little effect on the door as did her rival, she steps back in confusion.

"I don't understand." She muses "I *couldn't* have failed...not when all our lives depend on it."

"We don't have time for this." Ryoko interrupts. "I have another idea up my sleeve." Suddenly disappearing before the group, she teleports several feet beyond the air-locked door and attempts to deactivate the doors interlocks from the inside.

Shortly after arriving on the other side of the door, Ryoko notices that the room is extremely dark and poorly ventilated. A stale aroma hangs in the air. The life support systems in this room have long since given out. It's to no surprise that she finds that she has difficulty breathing here. She compensates for her lack of fresh air by taking very shallow breaths to conserve her oxygen.

As she struggles to open the latch with very little air, she looks around and spots an illuminated cylindrical glass tube approximately five feet high, and two feet wide. Suspended in this chamber is an unconscious Yugi.

"Yes! She's alive!" she lets out happily. "Now we can get the hell outta here!" she says to herself.

Fortunately for her, her slowed metabolism is the only thing keeping her alive in this sealed room since the life-support systems have failed far too long ago to have sustained anyone conscious for more than a few short minutes.

Ryoko finally unlatches the door. As she slowly opens it the room instantly fills with air. "*Come on guys, I found her*..." Ryoko says as she uses her superhuman strength to lift the very large and heavy cylinder, and hoist it above her head.

The ship's timer is nearing its last few seconds of the five-minute countdown. As they quickly struggle to make it to an airlock to board Ryo-Ohki and make their hasty escape, Washu reveals to them her simple plan. Ryo-Ohki can be teleported outside by Ryoko, who can then teleport inside her, after her transformation into the crystalline vessel is complete; Washu can then set up a quick dimensional tunnel leading directly to Ryo-Ohki's cockpit. Everyone else can use this tunnel to gain access onto Ryo-Ohki. They all agree that this may not be the best plan, but it is the only option available to them on such short notice, especially since with only fifteen seconds left on the detonation timer, nobody else has enough time to come up with or even to implement a better one. As it is, they'll be cutting it dangerously close.

Ryoko quickly takes a deep breath, holds it, and grabs the small cabbit and Yugi's cryo-tube. Next she uses her teleportation powers to vanish from sight. Outside, nearly fifty meters from The Shunga, Ryoko reappears and Ryo-Ohki begins her transformation into her spaceship form. As she completes the transformation, Ryoko makes a final teleportational hop with the cryo-tube into Ryo-Ohki's cockpit.

So far the plan has gone without a hitch. It's now up to Washu to execute her portion of the plan so that she and the others can make it safely onto the small vessel. She quickly finishes typing the coordinates of the nearby awaiting Ryo-Ohki, and activates the dimensional tunnel using an existing door-frame as the focal point for the gateway. The gateway is set for a two second timer to shut off. With only two and a half seconds left, they all dive into the doorway and land safely inside Ryo-Ohki's cockpit. As they quickly leave the vicinity of Clay's ship, they can see through the view-screen that the ship makes a spectacular display as it explodes into brilliant yellow, white, and orange colored fiery gases. The Shunga is no more.

"**Hurray**...we're going home!" The group lets out with a final sigh of relief. Unseen to the others, Tenchi falls silent as he contemplatively stares out into space thinking about the welfare of his fallen girlfriend, and the entire chain of events of this very eventful day.

By now it's nearly midnight and severe exhaustion has begun to set in. Tenchi gently grabs for his crystal, which now hangs safely around his neck, and whispers to himself as he gazes upon a particularly bright shining star that twinkles off in the distance that he eagerly awaits the day that he and Sakuya will be reunited.

Chapter 16

Elsewhere in dimension-prime, several weeks have passed. Washu has been locked away in her lab obsessively making final corrections on the new biological body that she has been painstakingly creating and preparing for Sakuya Kumashiro of dimension-theta.

"Ok Sleeping Beauty...it's finally time to bring you back to the realm of the living." She says as she pushes the final button.

She waits for a moment, but *nothing* happens. Confused, but certain that her calculations are correct, she makes a second attempt. As the button is pushed this time, the embryonic fluid that houses the new body begins to bubble furiously. Suddenly after several seconds, Sakuya's eyes finally open up. She has *done* it...Sakuya Kumashiro is ***back***.

Later that evening after Sakuya's new body has been fully tested by Washu and given her full seal of approval; Sakuya turns toward her and asks her a very personal question.

"I was wondering little Washu...I know that you consider Ryoko your daughter. And this is probably not my place to ask but...I have no family that I'm aware of...and you're the closest thing that I have to having a biological mother since I'm to understand that you used one of your very own ovum to create this body...it would mean a lot to me if I could call you...mom. Is that ok with you...?"

Teary eyed, Washu turns toward Sakuya and gives her a really big hug, "Of course you can...I would be *honored* if you considered me your mother."

"Thank you mother..." she says as she hugs her one more time. Chuckling she adds "...its funny calling somebody mom that looks like she could be my younger sister...but it's also very nice just to have a mom." She adds warmly "I'm so happy. I'm *finally* able to create my *own* life...just like a *real* person...Thank you." She says excitedly.

After Sakuya finishes her statement she looks over to her right and notices a young woman resembling herself walk past the doorway leading into the lab toward the living room. She however summarily dismisses it, believing that since she is occupying another dimension similar to that of her own, it probably was *herself* from this resident universe-prime that she was seeing.

Moments later, Ayeka-prime makes her way into the lab carrying a small gift-wrapped box, she hands it over to the Sakuya, who is now seated on a small workbench.

"Here...Sakuya, this is for you." She says while bowing respectfully toward her, "...while you were...recuperating, we all pitched in and got you this little gift."

Sakuya immediately stands to receive the small present. She opens the tiny box carefully. In it is the tiny crystal given to her by Tenchi. Attached to the crystal is a very expensive looking platinum necklace.

"Thank you all *very* much..." she replies as she puts the necklace down on the workbench next to her and gives Ayeka-prime an overpowering hug "You've replaced the other necklace with this ***beautiful*** one. What made you all want to do this for me?" she asks.

"We all wanted to do something nice for you." Ayeka-prime replies. Stepping closer to her she tells Sakuya secretly, "...somehow I feel like you're a part of us here, like you're

family...and most of all" she says while giving her an impish wink "...You're not staying here to be any competition for Tenchi."

Able to appreciate the honest gesture without taking offense Sakuya allows herself a brief reciprocal smile "Thank you...I will treasure it...*always*..." Sakuya replies as a tear trickles down her cheek. She wipes the moisture from her eyes as she smiles. "I never knew being *normal* could feel so...*wonderful*..."

Before she has a chance to expound Washu-prime immediately chimes in and says. "Well Sakuya, as much as we've all enjoyed your stay here with us, it's about time you headed back to your own dimension. I bet Tenchi and the others are all worried *sick* about you." She says as she pushes buttons on her lab console making a dimensional portal open up. "Promise me you'll remember me from time to time..."

"I will." Sakuya replies, "Besides...with your dimensional portals, you can visit me any time you wish. I would love to receive visits from my mom from time to time." She happily reveals.

"I might just do that..." Washu says with a rather friendly grin on her face. "I'm about due for a vacation anyway..." Washu suddenly looks down at her lab table and notices Sakuya's crystal lying there. "...Oh here...don't forget *this*..." she says while tossing it toward her. Sakuya swiftly catches it and places it safely around her neck "...now that you're a member of the *Tenchi extended family*, you'll need to keep this with you at *all* times."

"I will, mom." She says with a warm enthusiastic smile. "Oh, and by the way...thank you for adding those incredible extras into this new body..." She says with a wink while playfully flexing the muscles in her right arm.

"No problem. Just remember, try to use your abilities responsibly. I don't wanna come visiting sometime in the future and find that you've accidentally cut *your* Ryoko in half or something..." Washu says as they both laugh in unison.

"In that case, I'll try extra hard not to incinerate anyone by *accident*..." she adds in jest. Washu lets out another slight chuckle. "You can count on me." Sakuya says as she gives her new mother a gigantic hug. "Well, here goes. Wish me luck. I'm off to Okyama to start my new life." As Sakuya steps through the blackness of the spiraling portal, Washu-prime silently rubs a tear from her eye while she witnesses her surrogate daughter, and good friend, leave into an unknown future.

...To Be Continued...