

NIGHT BLADE

DAWN OF DISCOVERY

BOOK 1

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Night Blade: Dawn of Discovery

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For myself, proving that writing a novel is not actually an impossible task, and to my fiancée, Martha “Keat” Cahoon, who without her care and support throughout the years, this would not be possible.

Prologue

It's all come down to this. This one final moment.

I'm standing in a shadow of my former self, questioning my motivation. Surrounded by all of the friends I have made over time. We all knew that everything that has happened led up to this.

"I don't know about this." she says. What is she unsure about? Do I even know her?

"Ha ha ha! Fear me!" my old enemy says. Wait - why was he my enemy? I can't recall.

"The Medallion! Get it!" I say. What am I saying? Why is that important?

Another of my friends is crawling on the ground, just barely able to move. "Can't.... reach.... don't..... give.... up." he says, reaching for the medallion that I spoke of.

I hear "Here goes nothing," from behind me. I look in that direction, seeing another person surrounded by a flame of.....light ? Is he going to attack me?

After I turn to look, I notice that I'm holding something. In my hands, I'm holding one of the most powerful weapons, the Banish Blade. My parents told me about it. But why is it all black....and sparking? That doesn't seem right.

I look up, seeing a large powerful being. I can't make out any details of his figure, but I know that deep down, I must stop him, even if it means sacrificing my life to save others.

I take a big breath in, and quickly exhale. What choice do I have? I must do this.

As I move forward, my body seems to move on it own. I'm suddenly rushing towards this large being, sword ready to strike. "YAHHHHH!"

Niko quickly sits up in bed, the sheets fall away from his upper body. "....AAAHHHH!" The position of his arms mimicking the holding of a sword about to strike.

The jolt wakes Niko's cat, Shadow, out of a deep slumber and almost off the bed. Hanging off the edge of the bed by his claws, Shadow uses all of his might to try and climb back up on the bed.

Breathing heavily, Niko looks around, seeing nothing but a dark room with minor details of his belongings outlined by the red glow of his clock, which said 3:23AM. Putting his hands on his knees, he says aloud. "Not another weird dream!" Looking over at his clock, his eyes quickly adjust to the sudden increase of light. The right side of the clock says "May 23". As it occurs to him what the day is, he sighs as he continues. "....and on the day of the big tournament. Just great...."

A glimmer of an outline catches his eye, and Shadow hanging onto the edge of the bed. Niko reaches over to Shadow, picking up the clinging feline. "Aw, boy. I'm sorry." He picks up Shadow and holds him close, trying to apologize for his recent unexpected action.

Shadow looks up at Niko with big, reflecting eyes, but then starts to jostle, wanting away from the close hold. Niko lets him go on the bed. Shadow quickly curls up and

falls back asleep, wrapping his tail around the front of his head. Watching his cat fall back asleep, Niko says “Good idea,” then turns away from the clock, repositioning the sheets into a more comfortable position, and closes his eyes.

The slumber of sleep is cut short by a loud buzzing. Niko rolls over, hitting his alarm clock. Pulling his hand away, he looks at the clock display. 7:00 AM. Resisting the urge to go back to sleep, he forces himself to sit up in bed. Extending his arms outward to stretch, a “Mroaw” comes from his lap.

Shadow is sitting upright, looking at Niko. He pulls his arms in and wraps them around Shadow. “Hey Shadow – did I scare you last night?”

The black feline responds by moving forward towards Niko’s face, and headbutting him, purring softly. “I’m sorry, boy. I just wish that weird dream would disappear.” The purring grows louder as Niko starts petting Shadow on the head.

Shadow moves over as Niko starts to get out the bed. Taking in a big whiff, the aroma of pancakes fills the room. “Ahhh. Mom, you know just how to start off a morning.”

Running downstairs in his most comfortable khaki pants, a white t-shirt with an inverted triangular logo for “Sword Titan,” his favorite anime, on the upper left, and a red, unbuttoned short sleeve polyester/rayon collared shirt, along with his lucky black sneakers with silver accents, Niko passes through the kitchen. His shoulder-length spiky red hair bounces with every move.

“Good morning, Niko.” Misaki says, flipping another

pancake in her dark turtleneck, a nice A-line pleated skirt draping down just below her knees over a pair of black tights under, and a white apron on top.

“Mornin’ mom! Smells delicious!” Niko replies as he inhales the delightful aroma of delicious pancakes once more.

Niko reaches over, grabbing a couple of hot pancakes. “Be careful, they’re fresh.” his mom warns.

The pancakes hop from one of Niko’s hand to the other. “AH! Yeah, you’re right,” he says as he pops them into his mouth, hanging mostly out. He continues his sprint towards the garage.

“You are sure in a hurry, son. Think you’re going to be late for the tournament?” Himuro says, looking at his tablet in a traditional dark blue yukata.

“Dad!” Niko responds, “You know with the rush hour traffic, I gotta get there early, or I’m gonna miss the opening ceremony! Don’t forget: I’m in it!” He grabs his gear bag from beside the door to the garage. Putting a hand on the door handle, he pauses before opening it. Frantically looking around, he notices that something is missing. “Where’s my-“ he starts to ask, but is cut short.

“I got your uniform dry cleaned. It’s in your car.” Himuro says, not looking up from his tablet.

Niko lets out a sigh of relief. “You had me worried there for a bit, dad. Bye!” he says as the door slides open and rushes through.

A few seconds later, a small sequence of beeps is heard from the door as it slowly slides shut. “That boy still hasn’t

learned to close a door yet, has he?” Misaki says.

Not looking away from his tablet, Himuro nods his head in agreement. “Just be glad those doors are automatic.” Seconds of silence pass by, then he looks up at Misaki. “Tell me again why we aren’t going to see him at the tournament?”

Misaki places the last pancake onto a stack ready to be served then turns off the electric griddle. “You remember: we were told by Lord Tora that he must complete this on his own, and his adventure begins tonight.”

Himuro places his tablet on the table. “Okay, okay. I’ve known Lord Tora for quite a while, but I’ve never heard him say something so.....isolated.”

Misaki places the stack of pancakes in the middle of the small round table, then sits across from Himuro. “You know how cryptic he can be. I’m sure he had his reasons.”

Driving down the road, the loud bass reverberates inside of Niko’s car. His mind starts to think about the dream. *Who were those people? “Ha ha ha! Fear me” sounds like a cheesy line from a kid’s show. Why did I need to get the medallion? What’s so important about it?*

What does it mean?

His car pulls into an already full parking lot. Finding a lone parking space seems like finding a needle in a haystack, but on the far side of the lot, Niko finds one and pulls in. Countless people are migrating from the parking lot inside the large glass-covered Convention Center.

Stepping out of his car, Niko reaches into the back seat, pulls out his gear bag and his uniform, throws both over

his shoulder, and starts to follow the crowd to the entrance. Approaching the entrance of the building, a familiar voice comes from out of nowhere.

“NIKO! DUDE!” A person with short, spiky blonde hair with thin sun glasses races towards Niko with arms raised and waving. His blue school uniform jacket is loosely blowing in the wind.

Slightly startled, Niko responds. “Daisuke? What are you doing here?”

Daisuke puts one arm around Niko, opposite the gear bag and uniform. “Just here to wish you good luck, dude. Like you need it!”

“Don’t worry about me – let the ring decide my fate.”

“Dude, you sound like a fortune cookie!” Daisuke says as he walks with Niko through the entrance.

Now in his pristine white Taekwondo uniform, Niko walks with Daisuke into the main event area, with his gear bag is still over his shoulder. Entering from one of the spectator areas, the two of them stop walking and take in the sights. The amount of the many different rings, the countless people in uniform on the main floor walking around, the reflectiveness of the trophy table, and the large digital display at the front, hanging from the roof, behind a large banquet table. “Wow, this is one heck of a view!” Daisuke says as he places his sunglasses on top of his head.

Niko lets out a large sigh. “Yeah, the best of the best are here. They even made a special area up front for the top ranked people.”

Daisuke looks up at the large display. Amazed by the

size and resolution, he says “Dude, that is one *killer* TV.”

Niko looks up at the 6-meter high, room-spanning digital display. “Whoa. They went all out for that, didn’t they?”

Daisuke hits Niko on the back. “You ain’t kiddin’.”

Walking away towards the spectator seats, Daisuke gives a ‘thumbs up’ to Niko. “Good luck, dude! I’ll be up here rootin’ for ya!”

Niko gives a ‘thumbs up’ back at Daisuke, then descends the stairs into the main area.

While on the floor, Niko finds his ring and places his gear bag down in a storage area. Looking up at the large digital display, the display cycles between a few items, including a large clock saying “10:00 AM” and the date, the convention center logo, the series of school logos from among the country, the founders of the sport and top ranking instructors, and a series of brackets, with each competitor’s face next to the edge of the display. Niko quickly finds his face among them, but doesn’t have time to recognize any of the others before the brackets cycle away. “I guess I’ll find out who I’m fighting when the time comes.”

* * *

“Score! Final point: Niko Sakuna!” a judge says from the floor as he and other judges around the ring hold up white flags.

Niko and his opponent face each other in the center of the ring, bow, and shake hands, then part ways.

The large display continues to cycle through items. The clock displays “4:15PM”. Shortly after the brackets show up, many of the faces are grayed out as they did not proceed. Niko’s face moves from the semi-final bracket into the finals bracket.

Daisuke jumps over the safety bar from the spectator area and lands hard on the solid concrete below. He picks himself up and runs to Niko’s ring.

Niko approaches the edge of his ring, pulling off his protective foam helmet. Sweat drips from his hair and helmet onto the ground.

“Niko! Dude!” Daisuke calls from afar.

Niko pulls out his mouth guard, places his helmet under one arm and raises the other. “Daisuke! Hey!”

Daisuke quickly runs up to Niko. “Dude! I can’t believe you got this far! You must be dead tired!”

Niko walks over to his gear bag, grabbing a towel. He starts to wipe the sweat off of his head. “A little, but when you train like I have, this is nothing....” He quickly sits into one of the vacant judges chairs.

Daisuke reaches into Niko’s bag, grabs a half-empty water bottle and hands it to Niko. “‘Nothing’ my butt! You’re exhausted!”

Breathing heavily, Niko has to catch his breath before responding. “Maybe you’re right.”

“Dude, I don’t mean to rush things, but you’re up again in 15 minutes to finish this tournament.”

Niko looks up at Daisuke, realizing that his final match is only moments away. “Too bad they won’t let me take

a shower. I'd like to be clean before competing before the Masters."

"I don't think you have a choice." Daisuke says as he sits in another vacant chair. "So, any idea who you'll be facing off against?"

Niko continues to breathe heavily. "No idea. They should be finishing up their match now" he says as he continues to wipe off as much sweat as possible.

Daisuke looks up at the large display. The series of brackets show up again. Opposite of Niko's picture, another photo advances from the semi-final brackets to the finals. The photo shows a square face with some-what tall spiky black hair with a red headband. "Dude, he looks tough."

Niko starts to rub the towel through his hair. His matted shoulder-length red hair now starts to get the "bounce" back it had before. "Who is it?"

Daisuke tries to make out the name. "Tsu...yo....ki. Why does that name sounds familiar?"

Niko's eyes quickly open wide, his expression is worrisome as he starts to comprehend the situation. He looks up at the display, hoping that the name was associated with someone else. Seeing the photo displayed just solidified his uneasiness. "Not again!"

Daisuke looks at Niko, confused at Niko's statement. "Old friend?"

Niko bends downward, throwing his face into his towel again. Slightly muffled, he says "Long story. I'd rather not talk about it right now."

Daisuke places a hand on Niko's back. "Don't worry

dude; you can take him!”

Pulling his face from his towel, Niko starts to sit up. “You don’t understand. Tsuyoki was....”

A large announcement comes from above the intercom system, cutting off Niko’s statement. “The final match will commence in 15 minutes in the Master’s Ring. Finalists, please be prompt.”

Niko closes his eyes, takes in a deep breath, exhales, and reopens his eyes. “Well, let’s get this over with.” He grabs his gear bag, stands up, and starts walking to the front of the event area.

“I’ll be rootin’ for ya, man!” Daisuke says as he walks away to the back of the event area, trying to get back to the spectator seats.

Standing on the edge of the Master’s Ring, a large gold-rimmed square area right in front of the banquet table, Niko is back in his full gear, ready to fight. While waiting on the fight to commence, he becomes lost in thought again. *Ha ha! Fear Me! The Medallion! Here goes nothing....*

The banquet table begins to fill in with all of the high-ranking master instructors from across the country. Many of them gleamed with the bleach-white, decorated uniforms, others had all of the wear-and-tear that uniforms can get over decades of use. Some of the instructors dressed extremely formally, wearing white button up shirts and solid black suits, almost like government agents. Any student knowing of the intimidating power gathering behind the banquet table would be easily wrecked with nervousness. The approach of the master instructors rounded out

the presence of the tournament's grand prize: an ancient okatana with a deep red leather-braided handle, sheathed with dark scales, on shining display in the middle of the stage, surrounded by a light red velvet-lined leather box.

However, Niko is lost in thought and doesn't realize that they are gathering.

Shortly after, Tsuyoki appears on the opposite side of the ring, also in full gear. His tall, black spiky hair starts to poke out through the holes of his foam helmet. He looks across the ring, acknowledging Niko, but doesn't say anything.

A judge walks into the middle of the ring in his pristine black suit, wearing countless memorabilia pins on his lapel commemorating all of the different branches he had worked for along with his current rank. Facing away from the banquet table, he raises a hand between the competitors signaling the commencement of the final match. "May I have your attention, please?" The whole convention center is filled with his voice. "The final match will now commence." The audience cheers loudly in response. The judge extends his left hand towards Niko. "Niko Sakuna..."

Niko, recognizing his name being called, quickly composes himself and snaps to attention. "Sir!" The audience continues cheering.

The judge lowers his left hand and raises his right towards Tsuyoki. "...will face off against Tsuyoki Konkura." The audience's cheers double in volume, especially from the young females.

Tsuyoki, looking relaxed, doesn't acknowledge the judge.

The judge turns around to the banquet table above him. The audience becomes silent within a matter of seconds. “Grand Master Li, may I have your permission to begin the Final round?”

The person above the judge stands up, pushing his chair backwards as he stands. While many of the instructors had bright white or slightly off-white uniforms, this person’s was very different. His slightly-tattered uniform told the signs of his commitment to the sport. The repairs that were made, the black bordered and gold lapel and stripes on his sleeves, and his hair is whiter than the well-worn gray of his uniform. Slightly bowing to the judge, he says in a low, raspy voice, “You may commence,” then pulls his chair towards him to sit down again. Claps from the audience grow for a few moments until the sound fills the whole convention center, then slowly dies down.

The judge turns around away from the banquet table. Two other pristine black-suited judges appear from the far corners with red and white flags in their hands. The judge shoots his open right hand in front of him, between the two fighters. “Competitors, please greet each other.”

Niko and Tsuyoki walk to the center of the ring. They both bow towards each other, then Niko extends his gloved hand in preparation to shake.

“Well, I didn’t expect to see you here, Tsuyoki.” Niko says in a cheerful mood.

“Shut it. We’re here to fight, not chat.” Tsuyoki extends his hand, but fist-bumps Niko’s glove instead of shaking it, then starts to backup.

"I was just trying to make it friendly...." Niko says, trying to make the best of the situation as he backs up, preparing to start the fight.

Tsuyoki quickly gets into a fighting stance, ready to start the final fight of the tournament. "Well, here goes nothing."

Niko gets into a fighting stance, then pauses as he recognizes the voice from his dream. *What? No way that was him!*

The judge looks at Niko, then Tsuyoki, then back in the middle of the ring. He raises his hand, lowers it quickly and steps away to the edge of the ring. "FIGHT!"

As soon as the judge spoke the word to start the fight, a side kick starts flying in Niko's direction. Still distracted by the thought of what he could have sworn was a connection to his dream, the side kick harshly hits him in the ribcage. His protective padding only dulled the pain, but he could still feel the impact throughout his chest as he stumbles backwards trying to regain his balance. "BREAK!" The judge yells. The two competitors step back from each other, standing straight up. Niko starts to rub his chest, trying to coddle his injury. "Judges: Score!" the judge continues.

Red flags go up at the corners of the ring from the other two judges. The center judge raises his right hand. "2 points to Konkura." he says.

The audience cheers loudly.

"I thought you would put up more of a fight. Are you really that rusty after all of these years?" Tsuyoki says in a snarky manner.

Niko doesn't respond. *Come on, Niko! Get it together! You're in the Master's Ring for the final fight of the tournament! *He thinks to himself. *You can't get distracted by what may or may not be a coincidence. *He shakes his head back and forth in quick succession to get rid of any stray thoughts.

The center judge walks back to the middle of the ring, between the two fighters. He places his open right hand between them again, looks left at Niko, then right at Tsuyoki. The two fighters get ready to begin the next round. The judge raises, then lowers his hand between them again, yells "FIGHT" and steps back to the edge of the ring.

The two fighters quickly decrease their distance, getting close enough for a kick, but don't make any contact. Instead, the two of them stare into each others eyes and slowly rotate in a circle, trying to find each others weakness. Niko throws a quick jab, but Tsuyoki parries and returns with a jab of his own. Niko moves out of the way to avoid it. Seeing a small opening, Niko picks up his right leg and tries to round-kick Tsuyoki in the chest, hoping to return the "favor". Tsuyoki rotates his forearm downwards and blocks Niko's attack, then quickly retaliates with a front kick to Niko's chest. Niko pulls his arm in close to himself which makes Tsuyoki's kick miss a scoring point. The two fighters assess each others techniques, then slowly back up from each other.

Seeing that the chest area was now one of Niko's better protected areas, Tsuyoki changes his technique. Aiming for Niko's head, Tsuyoki knew exactly what to do. "You're

making it a little harder on me than last time.” He says through his mouth guard.

Niko doesn’t acknowledge Tsuyoki’s statement.

*Fine – you want rough, I’ll make sure you go down!

*Tsuyoki thinks while planning his next strategy.

Niko analyzes Tsuyoki’s movements, thinking that an opening will become apparent any moment now. Tsuyoki’s arms open to his sides. *Perfect! His chest area is open for a wide attack!*

Niko quickly pulls up his leg and tries to aim for Tsuyoki’s head, hoping that Tsuyoki will block. His round kick comes from below and quickly raises to Tsuyoki’s head level. In response, Tsuyoki raises an arm and puts it next to his head, expecting to block. Niko pulls his leg back and lunges forward with a punch to Tsuyoki’s chest.

“BREAK!” The center judge says. Niko successfully landed a punch on Tsuyoki’s chest. “Judges: Score!” Two white flags go up, and the center judge’s left hand goes up. “Point to Sakuna.”

The fighters back up once again and get in a ready position to fight. The center judge approaches the middle of the ring and goes through his starting sequence again. “FIGHT!”

*Perfect. He thinks he got a point. Now to end this – 3 more points with a flying kick to the head, and I’ll win this match, the tournament, and the grand prize. *Tsuyoki thinks as he sets himself up for a flying kick, making sure he has his distance correct and plenty of space around him. Once again, he and Niko circle around the ring analyzing

each other.

“NIKO! Kick this guy’s butt!” Daisuke says leaning over from the stands.

Tsuyoki lunges quickly, trying to lure Niko into a false sense of protection. Niko quickly responds by moving backwards a bit and raising his guard. Realizing Niko fell for his trick, Tsuyoki backs up, increasing the space necessary needed for his technique. He tries to throw some false punches towards Niko’s mid-section, hoping to make his guard move lower and make his head available for an attack. Sure enough, Niko does just that. Finally, deciding that the time is right, Tsuyoki throws his back leg up behind him, quickly turning to gain momentum. In what seems like a fraction of a second, he throws his weight with his back left leg, hops in the air with his right leg and swings it using his weight. His right leg comes around with a strong force and is right above Niko’s head. He then forces it downwards directly at the top of Niko’s head. *Perfect. With one strike of my flying axe kick, this match will be over.*