

# Sai's Disciple

Von distinctive

## Kapitel 2:

There was a lone person sitting in a well-lit room. It was a richly furnished chamber but still managed to maintain a modest air. Only the low hum of a ventilator running broke through the stifling silence.

A figure was sitting on the floor, legs in traditional seiza, odd for someone that young to do in a casual situation.

The low hum's source was a medium large device, the monitor showing a discreetly yellow and black coloured layout, featuring a logo that read NetGo.

Lips smiled, somewhat sad and deprecating, as if remembering another time and not agreeing. A hand moved.

Dreams are like a mirror to your innermost wishes and fears. At least according to past philosophers from far before Hikaru's time. Not that the boy knew all too much about the time he currently occupied either.

Therefore, understandably, it came as a huge surprise to him when his dreams recently started wandering off to historical spheres.

*Faint rustling of wind through leaves. Water burbling softly. A bouncing sound of stone against wooden surface, a soft plop.*

*Buildings, shadowing. Motion from a covered tsuridono.*

*A soft questioning voice. Answered by an even younger, eager one.*

*Another stone. This time a deliberately elegant grip. A perky praise.*

*Blurry view, narrowing on a figure approaching.*

*A tilting of lips. His mouth opening.*

"Hikaru..."

*Huh? How did that person know his name?*

"Hikaru." This time a bit louder and more urgent. He scrunched his nose in a confused way. But what really got to him was what happened next.

*Whack.* A sharp breath of air right next to his face. His eyes widened almost comically.

"Shindou, you lazy brat!" Hikaru reeled backwards in shock, overdid it and overturned the chair ending in an undignified sprawl.

"Ow... huh, sensei?" The class laughed, amused at his plight. Akari was repeatedly hitting her forehead with her right palm. Geez and to think I tried to save him.

"What do you mean *huh sensei?*" The furious face of his homeroom teacher was truly a sight to behold, if you were into dungeon crawler games. And he much felt like a level 1 hero finding himself staring down the ultimate boss monster.

"That means detention right after school for you, is that clear?"

The boy groaned and tried a shaky: "But, sensei-..." If possible she looked even more like a dragon devouring little kids like him for breakfast now. Even her gaze seemed to spit fire.

"No buts, little boy, that's the third time this week I've caught you sleeping during one of my lessons!"

Hikaru sighed, knowing when to resign. Maybe there was actually a real Go player lurking inside of him somewhere.

And there goes my free time this afternoon, I didn't even have soccer practice. Stupid teacher.

Thus this beautiful afternoon found the boy grudgingly working in a musty dusty tiny chamber the school kindly called the Forgotten Archive which was located near the banquet hall, sorting out old tests, REALLY old, home works and other (pretty much boring) stuff.

*A pin-set u-huh, some kind of weird looking contraption, looks like a bottle opener u-huh, a recent map of... Heian-kyo?... u-huh, something that's not even identifiable anymore u-huh, a mouldy green goop of goo u-huh... a -...* He halted. Huh, what? *EWV!* He ran towards the water faucet and wildly started scrubbing off the puke-inducing U.O. that had stuck itself to his fingers.

"Why always meee?" He faux-acted tears and a desperate move of hanging himself but soon gave it up seeing he was his only audience for silliness, instead rubbing his fingers in futile attempts to get rid of all the green substance.

When he went back to the containers, glaring disdainfully at the offending objects, he noticed something out of the corner of his eye. The wooden shelf next to the

doorway, that only left one step between itself and the opposite wall, was separated into four up-down rows and on the third row something stuck out of the other junk.

A goban? Shouldn't it have been given to the Go club instead of letting it rot in here?

He trudged closer to the shelf, stretching on his toes and finally pulled over an empty wooden container to reach the goban without messing himself and the room up by getting all that junk on them.

Even he could tell that the material felt rough and porous from age, but otherwise the goban looked pretty well-preserved. But for that icky stain on the lower left side. Heck, what can you expect from some junk anyhow?

He jumped down the container to assess the board more carefully, finding a small name tag on the bottom side. Huh? Fujita Mamoru? Seems like a former teacher owned this board originally but found it too creepy to keep and didn't manage to sell it either and just left it here... or something like that.

Without knowing why he did it he packed the thing into his backpack. A brief glance at his wrist clock later an impish smirk crossed his face.

Guess it's time for my break out, sensei should be at the teacher's room about now.

Slinging his backpack over his shoulder Hikaru skipped out of the nightmare-inducing chamber and stealthily swerved around the corner, when he found himself face-to-face... eh –back with three boys standing in front of the bathroom speaking something incomprehensible.

What's going on here?

Once he quietly approached he could understand what was said.

"... see why Kaga-taicho wastes his time with you all."

Is that... Tsutsui they are talking with?

It actually was. When Hikaru crouched down on the other side of the corner he recognized his senpai's characteristic stiff figure opposite of the three guys.

Four-eyes looked as calm as the situation warranted, which didn't say much conceding that one of the three boys looked as if Shogi was his hobby but body building his life.

"I bet if you tell Kaga-taicho to quit he will. Just tell him you don't need him for the tournament any more."

"Yeah and it will be much easier with your club's current situation! Come on, two years of recruiting and still no functional team of three for an inter school tournament? We have a serious annual tournament rolling on and our captain isn't up to snuff because of playing around with Go." Huffed another one of the boys with obvious indignation.

"Just shows that Shogi is superior to Go." Hikaru's recently acquired friend breathed a heavy sigh, before jumping into the proceedings by giving a retort.

"Kaga joined voluntarily for this year's inter school tournament, because it's my last year at Haze Jr. High." Tsutsui adjusted his glasses, belying his cool attitude with a slight shake.

"And he will quit right afterwards." The three Shougi members shared a speaking stare, the meaning "It's Kaga's last year too" clearly written on their faces.

"Then let's make a deal." The third boy, the burly one, who had been silent until now suddenly suggested.

"If you can't find a third member until tomorrow morning our captain returns to the Shougi club immediately. If you can, he may stay until your tournament is over."

"Tomorrow morning? But..." While concentrating Hikaru didn't get the rest of his words because Tsutsui had spoken them in a low voice. When the burly guy approached him in a threatening way though without thought he jumped out of his hiding place, deciding he had listened in enough.

"I...I'm the third member, so let Tsutsui go!" Four heads jerked around, blinking in unison.

"Let him go?" The burly guy deadpanned when he had got over his initial shock. "We didn't plan on doing anything to him in the first place."

"But... y...you just... weren't you about to...?" Obviously impatient with the younger guy's blabbering the other boy interjected.

"Harm him? Heck, no we were just about to shake hands on the deal."

Hikaru felt blood rush into his cheeks. Aww, how embarrassing! The situation looked probably much worse from my point of view! The other two boys looked at each other and snickered, jabbing their fingers at Tsutsui who was staring at him, aghast.

"You that guy's friend?"

"Uh...I guess." There was imaginary sweat running down his forehead.

"Fine, when you play in third board I guess it's alright. Just tell that guy to stay out of the Shougi club's business from now on, alright?" And they strolled off, leaving the two behind in silence.

"Shindou-kun?" His senpai finally asked quietly, still bemused by the other's sudden appearance. "You really will join us, really?" Hikaru sighed. Guess I have no choice now, huh?

Right then eager Tsutsui seemed to have a flash of inspiration.

"Ah, it's already quite late for registration so let's talk to Tamako-sensei immediately." And like that, and before he could protest, Hikaru was once again dragged out of a room, this time by his overjoyed senpai.

Tamako-sensei turned out to be a ditz of a woman who didn't know a thing about Go. No wonder the club turned out like this, the younger boy mused. As far as I know all the other clubs have a knowledgeable teacher as supervisor. While a student-only club certainly sounded cool and all there always was a whole lot of problems piling up someone his age oftentimes couldn't keep pace with.

"Oh, the inter school Go tournament, right?" She said in her faintly scatter brained way and began filing through papers at her chaos of a desk. Tsutsui coughed contritely.

"Um... that might take a while." Hikaru jumped when someone stepped up next to him. It wasn't his teacher, lucky. Not so lucky for the other boy though. Tamako-sensei was holding a sheet of paper in one hand, shaking the same one at Tsutsui in a chiding way while putting the other hand on her waist.

"I heard that, young man." The boy stiffened, his face turning a bright red.

"Anyway, you two, as you probably know this is the last day for registration and I can't leave school until late evening today." Tsutsui looked crestfallen about this piece of information. "But." Tamako-sensei went on.

"The good news is you can go register yourself at the Go Institute. You just need my signature here..." she pointed at a place on the bottom right of the document.

"...and to put down your names in the list."

"Yosh!" The Go club chief immediately brightened.

"The Go institute?" Hikaru dumbly asked, while they were exiting the teacher's room. Tsutsui couldn't believe this culturally ignorant guy. "You don't know about that?"

"Err... no...?"

"Well, it's the main organization for Go related things, it also sponsors tournaments and such, like this inter school tournament for example. How about you come with me, take a look?"

"Alright." Hikaru suddenly impatiently bounced up and down, tucking at his senpai's sleeve. "But let's leave right now, hurry hurry."

"Why are you in such a rush anyway?" Tsutsui asked, bemused at the younger boy's antics.

"I've got detention by this dragon Asano\*-sensei that calls herself my homeroom teacher." He confessed, not aware of the other's sudden comprehensive stare. "Um... Shindou-kun?" But Hikaru only went on with his rant.

"Can you believe that? There's one boy sleeping away most of the time too and she NEVER gives HIM detention! That's discrimination you know!"

"Shindou-kun, I don't think-..."

"What?"

"Err... behind you?" Hikaru turned around, glaring, then blanching, turning purple and finally gazing down at his feet which seemed particularly well-formed today. "Uh... hehe... h...hello, sensei."

In the end Tamako elegantly diffused the situation by telling his teacher that they were running an errand for her anyway (as in "Hikaru working his ass off", situation unchanging).

On the way out of school they gobbled Akari up from the library. Turns out Tsutsui had generously offered to guide her through her worst subjects.

While they actually weren't dating (Eww, Hikaru, how could you even think that! Sheesh, Akari, don't hurt Tsutsui's fragile self-esteem!) they had a thick relationship that could even survive such teasing in a calm manner. When the Go club captain had to do his own private business he had used the bathroom next to the banquet hall.

That was when some devoted Shogi club members had turned up and accused Tsutsui of forcing their captain to join, disbelieving that actual friendship existed between the two of them (OK, even their close friends often doubted).

When Akari learnt about Hikaru's decision to become a member, she eyed him doubtfully.

"Hikaru, you are weird." Akari finally observed, poking him in the ribs playfully. He dutifully dodged.

"Weird!"

"Mh, not any more than usual actually but still. You're totally not honest to yourself about Go." Hikaru groaned. He probably shouldn't have told her about his experiences in the Go salon. And then he had complained to her about not wanting to join the Go club since his soccer comrades might find out too...

"Can't I change my mind occasionally?" He grumbled, somewhat miffed.

"Sure, and next time you can get all buddy-buddy with Kaga, to rest my case."

The front door to the Touya residence opened and shut with a soft click.

"Akira?" Came a soft female voice from the house's interior. "Is that you?"

"Hai, mother. Tadaima." A boy clad freshly in the Kaiou Jr. High school uniform replied, putting away his shoes carefully and putting on a pair of guest slippers.

"How was school? Was it fun?" Akiko's voice drew closer as Akira wandered towards the kitchen, accompanied by the soft clicks and clacks of things being moved, opened and closed.

"It was ok." He conceded.

"We had to work on some kind of project today, but it was hard to get something done. Most of my classmates are riled up because of the upcoming Go tournament." Ever the dutiful son he helped his mother, who had recently been out shopping, put the remaining items into the correct places.

"Where's father?"

"Your father has some matches today." His mother replied, arranging the fresh fruits into a large basket. She pursed her lips as if in thought.

"He will return pretty late that evening. If you really want to catch him you'll have to go to the Go institute I guess..."

"oh..." Akira deflated. His mother sent him an encouraging smile. "Is it something important?"

"Well, I wanted his opinion on the game Ogata-sensei and I played. This morning, after father's and mine usual pre-school game, we didn't quite have the time to go over it." Akira bent down to put the rice into a cupboard.

"Ah, Ogata-san." His mother smiled.

"He is quite worried about you, you know?" The boy visibly startled at that, his shoulder-long hair swinging swiftly as he turned towards her.

"Worried about me?" She nodded at that.

"Yes, when we talked last time he mentioned something along those lines."

"I see..." Akira looked pensive and discomfited at once. "May I help you with anything else, kaa-san?"

"No, thank you, that's all."

"Then may I take a short detour to the Institute before studying?"

His mother approved, but one minute later seemed to have a thought, following her son into the front room.

"Akira?" He looked up from where stood. "Hai?"

"Could you drop off this registration sheets for the upcoming Tengen-Tianyuan match while you are at it? Your dad left it lying around after breakfast."

The boy nodded in ready agreement, picking the sheet of paper from his mother's fingers before going back to the task of putting on his shoes.

"Akira?" His mother asked just before her son left through the front door.

"Yes, mother?"

"Is it true what Ogata-san told me, that there is no one your age you're interested in?" Without a pause Akira answered.

"There is no one, mother." The door clicked gently shut as he left a worried Akiko behind.

*That boy needs someone. He wears this gaze devoid of inspiration so many children his age have. People say he gets along with anyone, but that in itself can be a wall too. I wonder if he will ever make friends that can get him out of this lonely shell.*

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"THAT'S the Go Institute?" Hikaru exclaimed, sceptical. He had expected something made from only wood, something... well... more traditional and ancient. They entered and while Hikaru was looking around, hands in pockets, their captain and Akari were checking out the orientation sign.

"Tournament registration...registration...ah, there! Shindou-kun!" Turning around he and the girl nearly sweat-dropped when they saw said boy watching the fake fish in the tank with child-like fascination on his face.

"Hikaru, come on!" Akari yelled, startling the boy.

"Hai, hai!" Came the slightly sulky reply but he obediently stepped towards them.

After an equally silly comment about the modern elevator's existence on the boy's part they finally reached the right floor. The lady looked at their application, her brow furrowed, then she returned it to Tsutsui with an apologetic smile on her lips.

"I'm very sorry, but match ups have already been decided."

After seeing the defeated look on his face she took pity on him and relented. "If you really want to join you can try giving it to the supervisor in person. One moment please..."

She picked up the desk phone's receiver and dialled in a short number.

"Niwa-san? Is Shinoda-sensei in by any chance?" A pause.

"He is?" Another longer one.

"Ah, that's too bad. Thank you." She terminated the call, diverting her attention back to the waiting three.

"He is in, but busy with the Insei right now." She explained.

"It might take a while until he's finished."

"May we wait?"

Momori hesitated, then a considering look grazed her face. It would be truly great to make young players even more interested in what Go could offer.

"Guess what, if you behave yourself you three could even go upstairs and wait for him there." Tsutsui's eyes widened in glee when thinking about the opportunity to watch awesome kids like the Insei playing.

"Wow, really, YAY!... ah, I mean," he bowed, reddening, "thank you very much for this generous offer."

"Insei?" Hikaru asked when they were passing the threshold of the doorway back into the corridor.

"They are kids about our age undergoing special training for becoming a Go pro." Akari explained readily. While Hikaru wondered how his childhood friend was so knowledgeable about the ways of Go, sometimes even better informed than Tsutsui, another thought busied him even more.

"Oh..." Hikaru muttered. "So they must be really strong at Go."

I wonder if they all are like serious Tsutsuis intently bent over a goban. Maybe he knows.

"Tsutsui?" He began. "About the insei, are they..." His voice drifting off when he pinpointed the person coming from around the corner. He felt his eyes widen in recognition.

Crap, what's that guy doing here?

Ok, so Akari was right. He was in some kind of childish denial. One side of him still was of the consent that Go was a useless game only geezers and nerds played, while another part of him considered the game to be pretty fun since the moment he grasped the basics and could solve more or less simple problems.

And he so didn't want to face this Go-obsessed guy who he had this eye-opening encounter with in his current condition of divided opinion. Plus his pride part had said something silly like

"I'll defeat you next time" too... while he wasn't even sure if it was important enough to him yet.

"Hide me." He hissed.

"Hikaru? What-..." Just do it." Tsutsui and Akari glanced at each other, looked back at him, just shrugged (so Hikaru WAS acting oddly, nothing new) and stepped in front of him. When he saw the bob-styled boy drawing closer he ducked down, pressed his thumbs and hoped.

The boy passed by, throwing the group a polite nod when he noticed them and disappeared in the adjourning registration room.

"Now, what was that about, Hikaru?" Akari demanded.

"Do you know that boy?" "Kinda." He confessed, scratching the back of his head.

"And I'd just prefer him not to see me, alright?"

So what if it was a bit childish.

"Today is an out of schedule training day for Insei due to this weekend's Go event taking place inside this building." The serene supervisor of the upcoming inter school tournament and teacher of the Insei, Shinoda-san, kindly explained to them.

"You can take a look around, children, as long as you don't interrupt my students." While Akari excused herself for a short detour to the vending machine, Hikaru and Tsutsui wandered back into the front room, curiously looking around.

There was a group already done with their games coming out of the game room, chatting idly and finally settling down on comfortable sofa pillows. They were too far off for our two to listen in though.

Unknown to Hikaru and Tsutsui their first topic was the two strange kids that had invaded the sixth floor.

"Do you know who they are?" An auburn haired guy asked the others, throwing the duo a curious glance.

"New Insei, someone's acquaintances?" "I don't have a clue." The others merely shrugged and the topic was quickly changed.

"Whew, that was intense today." A small chubby black-haired boy sprawled down on the ground eagle-style, rubbing his temples and staring accusingly at an older dark-haired boy.

"Isumi, you really didn't go easy on me! I thought I was about to go crazy with pressure."

"They must be Insei." Tsutsui meanwhile whispered to him, obviously fascinated. Hikaru merely nodded at that and after some consideration he decided to satisfy his curiosity as to their conversation, especially as they had been giving them cursory glances.

Moving nearer in pretence of settling down at the table, proper Tsutsui only reluctantly taking the seat opposite of him, he could hear that their chitchat was turning into a more serious direction.

"Who went bonkers?" This Isumi guy just now interjected quietly, clearly puzzled. The auburn-haired supplier of this latest tiny bit of gossip startled up, looking confused for an instant.

"Oh, right, Isumi, you weren't a member yet back then. He was a really timid, really beautiful boy. Kinda reminded me of Touya." The boy grimaced as if he had bitten into something really sour causing the others to laugh, knowing of his dislike of the boy.

Hikaru at the nearby table froze at the word Touya and strained his ears even harder.

"He was playing the person next to me when he suddenly collapsed. Everyone went into a frenzy and when he came to he started to babble stuff like that his name was not his name, demanded where he was, why everything looked so weird and if some guy really had died. And um... the Go institute kinda suspended him from entering the pro exam after that."

Hikaru, who's mind had wandered off somewhere suddenly blinked back to reality when he noticed he was missing pieces of their conversation.

"Yeah, and he was a pretty decent player too... on one hand it's good he quit, but the way he did it..." All of them shuddered and fell silent after that.

"Well, enough dark topics for today." The girl clapped into her hands, voice bright.

"How about some karaoke after this?" They all rose up from their places, obviously ready to move their friendly gathering elsewhere.

"Sure." Spiky-hair grinned, already skipping towards the exit, merely throwing a last fleeting glance towards Hikaru and Tsutsui.

"This time I'm gonna out-sing you, Isumi!"

"Sure." The usually reserved young man allowed, smirking, tousling the smaller boy's hair in a mock-paternal way.

"Since that's the only way you'll ever beat me anyhow, Waya-chan."

There was a growling noise, more laughter, the soft ping of the arriving elevator and then the doors closed and the group had left.

Well, that was weird. Hikaru just sat still, looking a bit gobsmacked until a tentative voice rose him from his confused stupor. This was Hikaru's time for revelations indeed.

His mother and everyone else he knew would scoff at the fact that Hikaru and the term revelation was included in one single sentence and in relation to each other too.

"That were Insei?" He finally asked. Surprisingly Tsutsui got the underlying message the ever ignorant Hikaru tried to convey.

"What did you expect Insei to be like? Even Kaga was an Insei once." Hikaru jumped from his seat, sputtering, forgetting to keep his voice down.

"What! That... obnoxious guy was?"

"You're one to talk." Tsutsui taunted good-naturedly after he had hastily shushed his energetic comrade. Before Hikaru could become miffed at him again he went on.

"Though he quit when he couldn't satisfy his father's expectations. Or that's what he told me anyway." Tsutsui's voice had drifted off towards the end as if unsure of continuing this trail of thought. Hikaru somehow caught on anyway.

"You doubt him?"

"Well... Kaga is a bad liar, you know? At least to people who know him. He gets all abrasive and cocky when he tries to hide something really badly." Hikaru merely cocked a brow at that.

"More so than usual? To be honest, I couldn't tell."

"Well you probably WILL be able to tell after a whole week of training with the both of us."

Hikaru groaned at the reminder.

When Akari finally returned both Hikaru and Tsutsui had already received the confirmation paper for joining the inter school tournament from Shinoda-san. Tsutsui was happy, Hikaru was pending between curiosity and boredom and Akari was

strangely excited as they approached the elevator.

"Hey, you'll never guess who I met out there!" She exclaimed, her eyes sparkling. The boys looked at her, inquiring. "Remember, Hikaru. I told you about this girl who taught me Go. Her name's Nase and she's an Insei. I met her downstairs."

Tsutsui flashed back to the scene with the teens talking.

"I think we saw her sitting with some other Insei." Akari nodded, smiling.

"Yes, I met her friends too. And guess what? As top Insei they have to attend this event coming week-end. Entry for acquaintances is free of charge and she invited us all to come!" Tsutsui blinked.

"Us?"

"Um... I kind of told her about you." The girl admitted.

"I probably won't come." Hikaru informed them impishly to hide his bi-polar conviction.

"Now that I'm a member of the club that's enough of Go, thank you very much." Akari huffed and Tsutsui looked somewhat dejected, as if he had failed in something profound. Probably in completely converting him to Go. Besides, Touya might be there...

Tsutsui was quick to recover though.

"Ah, but the school tournament will be sooo much fun, you'll see."

They indulgently watched the elder boy as he energetically bounced to the elevator, bounced in the button and was about to bounce through the door sliding open too... when he bounced against something, hard, and almost went down with a thud.

"Ah... gomen, gomen." The flustered boy bowed repeatedly. A man clad entirely in elegant white merely eyed him coldly from his high horse, gave a sharp nod and passed by a shell-shocked Tsutsui.

"Aww, Tsutsui's such a klutz." Hikaru started a somewhat shaky sing-song after the tense air had evaporated. From beside him Akari was looking at their senpai with a worried expression.

"Oh shut up." The poor boy muttered, promptly adjusting his glasses, his gaze trailing after the man, only to see his back disappear behind the doorframe of a small chamber next to the game room.

"By the way, who was that? That was pretty intense." Hikaru shrugged, clearly not interested anymore.

"No clue. Hey, guys, I wanna go home now." He intentionally changed the topic to alleviate their stickler of a friend of his embarrassment, using his most pitiful tone.

"Hikaru, stop whining like a child." Akari, playing along.

"So what? Are you my mother? Plus I've been running errands for hours now!" Hikaru, with a grimace.

"Alright, if you're so eager then no Ramen for you on the way home." Akari with a touché expression on her face.

"...? Who said I wanted to go home immediately?" A baffled Hikaru, changing gears.

"You just did." A smug Akari, sticking out her tongue at him.

"Did not." Hikaru.

"Did too." Akari.

"Did not." Hikaru again.

"Children..." A long-suffering Tsutsui.

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\*I forgot his teacher's real name.

Heian-kyo – The old Kyoto back in the Heian era

Tsuridono – part of Heian era architecture strongly influenced by the Chinese; small pavilions around the courtyard

Taicho – captain

Senpai – an older or more experienced colleague

U.O. – my own creation, has the same meaning as UFO only without the "Flying"

Tengen-Tianyuan match – An actually existing annual match between the Japanese holder of the Tengen title and the Chinese holder of the Tianyuan title. It got abolished in 2002 though.