

# The Cup of life

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## Kapitel 1: Cup of chaos

"For a land of sun it's rainy quite often", Tandrak muttered, tilted back his head and looked at the grey sky. There was just slight drizzle but a moist fur didn't feel that much better than a wet one. "What a great start..."

"Aw, don't be such a pessimist." Layton patted his back. "It's just the arrival day so we still have time. I bet as soon as we start playing there will be so much sun and hot weather that you will curse the sky another time."

"Now that also doesn't sound too optimistic to me."

It was just a short distance they had to walk to their quarters but they met a lot of other teams on their way and many dedicated fans who already wanted to see their heroes and buy their tickets early enough.

"Hey, mateys, good to see ye again."

Ol' Dash approached them. A few meters behind the rest of the Krawk Island team just seemed to have noticed that their former captain was missing and walked over to the Darigan team as well.

"Ah, grandfather Dasher", Layton said with a grin, "How's retirement going?"

"Well, let's just say I got bored and so I took over the role as trainer for this year. Ye can be sure I don't want to watch another cup of winners curse. Hope our rookie is as good as she was during training time."

Now the others were there as well and Hale dragged Tandrak into a quite rough hug.

"Glad to have ye back", he whispered into the Gelert's ear.

"Me too", was Tandrak's answer.

They couldn't hug for too long else it would have looked suspicious. Their fifth Altador Cup and their fourth year - for such a long time they had been together and still no one knew about it. No one should know. It would have been the greatest scandal in the Cup history, could even affect their careers. Together with another female player - yes, but not with another male.

"Hey, what's going on there?" Tormo suddenly said and nodded to the entry to the quarters.

The big place before their quarters always had been a good place for meeting and greeting old friends from other teams but this more and more growing crowd was just ridiculous. It looked like they all were staring at one of the walls, all at the same spot.

"Wait there, I'll take a look", Dasher said and walked over to the crowd. "'scuse me, mateys, Ol' Dash can't see a thing."

Some people made place for him and only a few seconds later he returned with a

sheet of paper in his hands, looking like he had paid a visit to Davey Jones' locker.

"There were about twenty of them hanging on the wall, one beside another as if the people who put it there thought we were too stupid to read it if there was just one. I don't know what has gone wrong with the Altador Cup committee but - to say it politely - I think a clown has joined them." He looked down at the paper and started summing up what he just has found out. "The players are now only allowed to move in straight lines on the field, each turn must be made in a perfect 90 or 45 degree turn." To the confused gazes of some of the people around him he explained, "Just imagine ye're standing in a giant chess game and want to jump from one field to another. The committee members think the game would be less confusing to watch for the audience. That sounds as if we just have idiot watching our games. But that's not the only thing new. Instead of catching the Yooyu in flight or slightly tackling your opponent so he might loose his Yooyu you are now allowed to ram him, punch him, kick him, whatever necessary to get the ball from him."

"What?" Tandrak shouted.

"This isn't a game of honour anymore if some people really do that", some Shenkuu player standing near them threw in.

"That would be a battlefield if we all do that. So much for easier to watch for the audience", Layton said.

"Also the goal is no taboo zone anymore for the rest of the players", Dasher continued with a voice as if he wished someone would jump in front of him and tell him everything was just an April fool's joke, "Players can literally walk into the goal. And if the the goalie has caught the Yooyu ye're allowed to race over to him and do whatever ye want to get the ball back and score it, even if ye've to do it over the knocked-out goalie's body."

"Can I retire as well? Immediately?" Reshar's voice was heard.

"Oh please", Hale huffed, "Who on Neopia would play like that? No team has hooligans as members."

"There might be ROOLigans but no hooligans", another team member stated.

Dasher suddenly laughed but it rather sounded bitter than amused. "They really want us to take steroids. Seriously, this isn't a sport anymore. They call them power-ups and each player can freely decide if he wants them or not but they highly recommend them so that we all have the same chances."

"How great ... one year and they decide to make everything turn to the worst", Layton hissed, "Are there any other idiotic things they are doing this year."

"At least nothing concerning the teams directly", the Krawk sighed resigned, "They just want to open up the whole Altador Cup even more to the public. Fans are allowed to look behind the scenes which means they can visit everything – even the Yooyu pen or the locker rooms – but at least only when there are no games."

"Let's just hope that there won't be any hooligans among the fans. I want to return to a still okay looking locker room. And I also don't want to be the one a panicking Fire Yooyu tries to hide on."

Around them the other teams were raging about the news, the Pirates and Draconians just shared grim gazes. They all hated the new rules but what else could they do after the decisions were already made?

"They at least could have told us in advance when there was still enough time to change something", Layton finally said, "Alright, maybe we should go now. After we aren't allowed to do our old moves anymore we will have to make up a few new tactics. No matter what, we'll prove them that we're a power team that can take up

any kind of challenge.”

“Now that’s the right attitude”, Dasher said, “Me and my mateys will have to make up new plans as well. See ye soon ... maybe at Krawk Citadel.”

Tandrak and Hale shared a gaze and sighed in unison. The first day they saw each other after many months and then something like that had to happen. The Cup was still lasting for a long time; there were still so many days to be together, so many nights to share with each other. But then again it also was a long time for other things that could go wrong.