# From Lonely Warrior to Underworld General: A Strategic Deep Dive into the "Dark Blade" Legacy and the Memento Archetype

## Part I: The Legacy of the Dragon-Manipulating Warrior

The history of the *Yu-Gi-Oh! Trading Card Game* is populated with countless monsters that, while memorable for their design, never coalesced into a functional strategy. "Dark Blade" is a quintessential example of this phenomenon. First released in the 2003 set *Magician's Force*, this DARK Warrior was a product of an era defined by high-ATK Normal Monsters and simplistic combat interactions. An analysis of its original wave of support reveals a clear thematic vision that was ultimately crippled by the game design limitations of its time, providing a crucial foundation for understanding its powerful modern rebirth.

### The Original Cohort: A Card-by-Card Analysis

The initial cards centered around "Dark Blade" attempted to translate its lore—that of a "dragon-manipulating warrior from the dark world"—into tangible gameplay mechanics.1 While ambitious, the execution was linear and fragile.

* **Dark Blade (The Progenitor):** The cornerstone of this series is the Level 4 DARK Warrior Normal Monster, "Dark Blade." With stats of 1800 ATK and 1500 DEF, it was a formidable Level 4 monster upon its release, capable of overpowering most other common monsters of the era in battle.3 Lacking an effect, its entire strategic value was derived from its stats and its potential as a target for its specific support cards.
* **The Union Monsters (Pitch-Dark Dragon & Kiryu):** The "dragon-manipulating" aspect of the card's lore was realized through two dedicated Union monsters. These monsters could be Normal Summoned and then equipped to "Dark Blade" from the field.
  + **Pitch-Dark Dragon:** This Level 3 DARK Dragon Union monster provides a modest boost of 400 ATK and DEF. Its more significant contribution is granting the equipped "Dark Blade" the ability to inflict piercing battle damage, allowing it to damage the opponent even if their monster is in Defense Position.5
  + **Kiryu:** A more powerful Level 5 DARK Dragon Union monster, "Kiryu" offers a substantial 900 ATK boost, elevating "Dark Blade" to a formidable 2700 ATK.7 Its secondary effect is a potential game-finisher: by Tributing "Kiryu" while it is equipped, "Dark Blade" can attack the opponent's Life Points directly for that turn. However, as a Level 5 monster, "Kiryu" required a Tribute to be Normal Summoned, adding another layer of difficulty to its use.7
* **The Fusion Form (Dark Blade the Dragon Knight):** The intended boss monster of the original series was a Fusion monster that combined the warrior and his dragon. Summoned using "Polymerization" with "Dark Blade" and "Pitch-Dark Dragon" as materials, "Dark Blade the Dragon Knight" is a Level 6 Warrior with 2200 ATK.1 Its effect allows the player to banish up to three monster cards from the opponent's Graveyard each time it inflicts battle damage. In the early game, this served as a primitive form of graveyard control.1
* **The First Retrain (Dark Blade the Captain of the Evil World):** Released nearly a decade later in 2012's *Order of Chaos*, this card marked the first evolution of "Dark Blade".9 It is a Level 4 DARK Warrior Effect Monster that shares the original's 1800 ATK and 1500 DEF. Its effect represents a significant shift in design philosophy. Once per turn, by banishing a DARK monster from the Graveyard, it can target and equip a Level 4 or lower LIGHT monster the opponent controls.9 This provides targeted removal and protects "Dark Blade the Captain of the Evil World" from destruction, as the equipped monster is destroyed instead. This card serves as a conceptual bridge between the original's focus on simple ATK modification and the modern archetype's focus on control and resource management.11

### A Fractured Strategy: Analysis of Inviability

Despite a clear thematic identity, these legacy cards failed to constitute a viable deck for several fundamental reasons that highlight the evolution of game design. The strategy was plagued by a profound lack of consistency, an over-reliance on the Normal Summon, and a low overall power ceiling.

There were no in-theme methods to search for the required combo pieces. To summon "Dark Blade the Dragon Knight," a player had to naturally draw "Dark Blade," "Pitch-Dark Dragon," and "Polymerization"—a three-card combination with no internal support to assemble it.8 While generic searchers like "Reinforcement of the Army" could find "Dark Blade," the other crucial components were left entirely to chance.13

Furthermore, the entire strategy was glacially slow and easily disrupted. It depended on successfully Normal Summoning "Dark Blade" and having it survive an entire turn before it could be equipped by one of its Union monsters, which themselves required a Normal Summon.5 In a game where monster removal became increasingly common, this sequence was exceptionally fragile. The final payoff, "Dark Blade the Dragon Knight," possessed a mere 2200 ATK and an effect contingent on battle damage, making it an underwhelming reward for such a resource-intensive and unreliable setup. This original suite of cards serves as a perfect case study in early game design, where theme was present but the mechanical pillars of a modern archetype—consistency, special summoning, and resilience—were absent.

| **Table 1: The Legacy "Dark Blade" Cohort** |
| --- |
| **Card Name** |
| Dark Blade |
| Pitch-Dark Dragon |
| Kiryu |
| Dark Blade the Dragon Knight |
| Dark Blade the Captain of the Evil World |

## Part II: Rebirth in the Underworld - The "Memento" Archetype

Over two decades after its debut, "Dark Blade" was reborn not as a standalone series, but as a central figure in the "Memento" archetype, introduced in the 2023 set *Valiant Smashers*.15 This modern incarnation preserves the spirit of the original—a DARK Warrior with 1800 ATK—but completely reimagines its function, transforming it from a simple attacker into the primary engine of a complex and powerful combo deck. The Memento archetype is a masterclass in modernizing a legacy card, integrating its identity seamlessly into a new, potent strategy.

### Core Philosophy: Synergy Through Self-Destruction

The central mechanic that defines the Memento archetype is the act of destroying its own monsters, either on the field or in hand, to activate powerful effects.16 This strategy of calculated self-destruction is the engine that drives the deck's plays. Each time a Memento monster is destroyed, it achieves several goals simultaneously: it triggers a potent effect (like searching a card or summoning from the deck), it populates the Graveyard with uniquely named Memento monsters, and it enables other cards that require a Memento to have been destroyed that turn. This gameplay loop—destroy, trigger, and recycle—creates a resilient and resource-rich system that can build overwhelming board states from a single card.

### The Memento Cast: Key Players and Their Roles

The Memento archetype is composed of a diverse cast of monsters, spells, and traps, each playing a specific role in the overarching strategy.17

#### The Starters (Mementotlan Dark Blade, Mementotlan Angwitch)

These two monsters are the primary starting points for the deck's main combos.

* **Mementotlan Dark Blade:** The retrained hero is a Level 4 DARK Warrior that perfectly embodies the archetype's theme.17 While it has a useful secondary effect to discard a Memento card to destroy an opponent's Spell or Trap, its main effect is the engine's ignition: "During your Main Phase: You can destroy 1 'Memento' monster you control, and if you do, Special Summon 1 Level 3 or lower 'Memento' monster from your Deck".18 Crucially, it can destroy itself to activate this effect, making it the deck's most efficient one-card starter.19
* **Mementotlan Angwitch:** This Level 3 DARK Spellcaster functions as the deck's "Stratos"—a term for monsters that search on summon. When Normal or Special Summoned, "Mementotlan Angwitch" allows the player to add any "Memento" monster from their Deck to their hand.17 This makes her another premier starter, capable of searching for the exact combo piece or extender needed to begin a sequence.19

#### The Extenders and Enablers

This supporting cast facilitates the combos initiated by the starters.

* **Mementotlan Goblin:** A Level 1 monster that can destroy itself to send any two "Memento" cards from the Deck to the Graveyard, setting up the GY with key resources like "Mementotlan Fusion".16
* **Mementotlan Tatsunootoshigo:** A Level 5 monster that can be Special Summoned from the hand if you control only Memento monsters (or no monsters). It can then destroy a Memento you control to send two Memento monsters with different names from your Deck to the GY.19
* **Mementotlan Mace:** A Level 2 monster that can destroy itself to add any "Memento" card from Deck to hand. It is also used as an interruption, revived on the opponent's turn to steal one of their monsters.16

#### The Boss Monsters

These are the powerful monsters the deck aims to summon to control the game.

* **Mementotlan Twin Dragon:** A Level 6 Fusion Monster that, on summon, destroys a Memento monster to search for two more. When destroyed, it summons another Memento from the Graveyard, extending combos.19
* **Mementomictlan Tecuhtlica - Creation King:** A Level 9 Fusion Monster that, when summoned, sends three "Memento" cards from the Deck/Extra Deck to the GY. It can also banish itself from the GY to search the Field Spell.17
* **Mementoal Tecuhtlica - Combined Creation:** The ultimate boss monster. A Level 11 Wyrm with a staggering 5000 ATK and DEF. It is summoned from the hand or GY by shuffling five other Memento monsters with different names from the hand/GY into the Deck. It can attack all of your opponent's monsters once each, and once per turn, if your opponent activates a card effect, you can Special Summon one Memento monster from your hand or GY.17

#### The Spell/Trap Arsenal

The backrow provides consistency, interruption, and recovery.

* **Mementotlan Bone Party:** A Quick-Play Spell that is arguably one of the most vital cards in the deck. It allows you to destroy a Memento monster in your hand or on your field to Special Summon any Memento monster from your Deck.17 This makes it a starter, an extender that can dodge targeting effects, and a form of interruption on the opponent's turn.19
* **Mementomictlan:** The Field Spell. It protects Memento monsters from being targeted by Spell/Trap effects during battle and allows you to Special Summon a lower-level Memento from your hand or GY when one of your monsters is destroyed.17
* **Mementotlan Cranium Burst:** A Continuous Trap that forces your opponent's monsters to attack the Memento monster you control with the highest ATK. More importantly, when your opponent activates a monster effect, you can have "Mementoal Tecuhtlica - Combined Creation" lose 1000 ATK/DEF to negate that effect. This turns your 5000 ATK boss into a walking multi-negate.17

### The Engine Room: Mapping Search and Access

Unlike its legacy counterpart, the Memento archetype is defined by its incredible consistency and interconnectedness. Nearly every card can access another, creating a web of possibilities that allows the deck to adapt and play through disruption.

* Angwitch can search any Memento monster.
* Dark Blade can summon any low-level Memento from the Deck.
* Bone Party can summon any Memento from the Deck.
* Twin Dragon can search any two Memento monsters.
* Mace can search any Memento card.
* Goblin and Tatsunootoshigo can send any Memento card to the GY, which is often equivalent to searching due to the archetype's many revival and recovery effects.

This dense network of searchability ensures that the deck can almost always access its key engine pieces, a design feature that stands in stark contrast to the luck-based assembly of the original "Dark Blade" cards. The deck's strength lies not in a single, rigid combo path, but in its ability to pivot and utilize its toolbox of monsters to navigate any given game state.

| **Table 2: The Memento Archetype - Core Monsters** |
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| **Card Name** |
| Mementotlan Dark Blade |
| Mementotlan Angwitch |
| Mementotlan Goblin |
| Mementotlan Tatsunootoshigo |
| Mementoal Tecuhtlica - Combined Creation |

| **Table 3: Memento Spell/Trap Arsenal** |
| --- |
| **Card Name** |
| Mementotlan Bone Party |
| Mementomictlan |
| Mementotlan Cranium Burst |

## Part III: The Art of the Combo - Building the Memento End Board

The practical application of the Memento strategy involves intricate combo lines that leverage the archetype's self-destruction and searching capabilities to construct a formidable end board. While the lines are adaptable, they generally follow a core sequence initiated by one of the deck's primary starters. These sequences are not merely about summoning monsters; they are a careful process of "sculpting the Graveyard," ensuring the right resources are available for both the initial board and follow-up plays.

### Primary Combo Line: The 1-Card Mementotlan Dark Blade Starter

The most efficient combo begins with a single "Mementotlan Dark Blade," showcasing the deck's power and consistency.19

1. **Normal Summon Mementotlan Dark Blade**.
2. Activate the effect of Mementotlan Dark Blade, destroying itself. **Special Summon Mementotlan Goblin** from the Deck.
3. Activate the effect of Mementotlan Goblin, destroying itself. **Send Mementotlan Fusion and Mementotlan Ghattic** from the Deck to the Graveyard (GY).
4. Activate the GY effect of Mementotlan Ghattic to **Special Summon itself**.
5. Activate the on-field effect of Mementotlan Ghattic to **add Mementotlan Fusion** from your GY to your hand.
6. Activate Mementotlan Fusion. Use Ghattic on the field and Dark Blade in the GY as material to **Fusion Summon Mementotlan Twin Dragon**.
7. Upon summon, activate the effect of Twin Dragon, destroying itself. **Add Mementotlan Tatsunootoshigo and Mementoal Tecuhtlica - Combined Creation** from your Deck to your hand.
8. When Twin Dragon is destroyed, its second effect triggers. **Special Summon Mementotlan Dark Blade** from your GY.
9. Activate the effect of Mementotlan Tatsunootoshigo in your hand to **Special Summon itself** (since you control only Memento monsters).
10. Activate the on-field effect of Tatsunootoshigo, destroying Dark Blade. **Send Mementotlan-Horned Dragon and Mementotlan Shleepy** from your Deck to the GY. At this point, you have five uniquely named Memento monsters in your GY (Goblin, Ghattic, Twin Dragon, Dark Blade, Horned Dragon/Shleepy).
11. **Special Summon Mementoal Tecuhtlica - Combined Creation** from your hand by shuffling the five Memento monsters from your GY back into the Deck.
12. This sequence establishes the core boss monster while leaving key cards like Mementotlan Fusion in the GY, ready for its secondary effect. Further steps involve using the remaining monsters on board to Link Summon into powerful generic monsters to complete the end board.

### Secondary Combo Line: The Mementotlan Angwitch Starter

Starting with "Mementotlan Angwitch" leads to a similar end state but follows a different path, highlighting the deck's flexibility.22

1. **Normal Summon Mementotlan Angwitch**.
2. Activate its effect to **add Mementotlan Tatsunootoshigo** from your Deck to your hand.
3. **Special Summon Tatsunootoshigo** from your hand via its own effect.
4. Activate the effect of Tatsunootoshigo, destroying Angwitch. **Send two Memento monsters** (e.g., Mementotlan Goblin and Mementotlan Ghattic) from your Deck to the GY.
5. From this point, the combo proceeds similarly to the Dark Blade line, using the GY resources to Fusion Summon, search, and ultimately summon Combined Creation.

### Resilience and Extension: The Role of Mementotlan Bone Party

"Mementotlan Bone Party" is the deck's ultimate utility card, enabling it to play through common forms of disruption.19 For example, if an opponent attempts to negate the effect of a Normal Summoned Angwitch with a card like "Effect Veiler" or "Infinite Impermanence":

* **Response:** The Memento player can chain "Mementotlan Bone Party" to the opponent's negation. Bone Party will resolve first, destroying the targeted Angwitch and Special Summoning a different Memento, such as Dark Blade, from the Deck. Because Angwitch is no longer on the field, the opponent's negation will resolve without effect, and the Memento player can proceed with their combo using Dark Blade instead. This ability to pivot between combo lines is a key feature of the deck's competitive strength.25

### The Final Board State: A Fortress of the Underworld

A typical Memento end board is designed to present multiple layers of interaction, making it incredibly difficult for an opponent to dismantle.22

* **Monsters on Field:**
  + Mementoal Tecuhtlica - Combined Creation: The 5000 ATK/DEF centerpiece.
  + S:P Little Knight: A powerful Link-2 monster that provides a quick-effect banish for interruption.
* **Face-Up Spells/Traps:**
  + Mementomictlan: The Field Spell, providing recovery and protection.
* **Set Spells/Traps:**
  + Mementotlan Cranium Burst: The primary source of monster effect negation.
  + Mementotlan Fracture Dance: Provides targeted card destruction.
* **Available Interruptions:**
  1. **Monster Negation:** Cranium Burst allows Combined Creation to negate up to five monster effects on the field.
  2. **Targeted Destruction:** Fracture Dance can destroy one card on the field, or two if Combined Creation is present.
  3. **Targeted Banishment:** S:P Little Knight can banish one card on the field as a Quick Effect.
  4. **Monster Steal/Pop:** The effect of Combined Creation can be activated in response to an opponent's card effect to revive a Memento from the GY. Reviving Mementotlan Mace can steal an opponent's monster, while reviving Mementotlan Dark Blade can destroy a Spell/Trap.22

This combination of overwhelming stats, multiple negations, and various forms of removal makes the Memento end board a formidable challenge for most strategies to overcome.

## Part IV: Strategic Integration and Competitive Outlook

While the Memento archetype is powerful on its own, its full potential is realized through integration with synergistic external engines and a well-constructed side deck to address its inherent weaknesses. This adaptability is a hallmark of modern deck design, where archetypes are often created with deliberate "hooks"—shared names, types, or attributes—that encourage creative deckbuilding and prevent strategies from becoming one-dimensional.

### External Engines and Synergies

Competitive Memento decklists often incorporate small packages of non-Memento cards to enhance consistency and raise the deck's power ceiling.20

* **Goblin Biker Engine:** A key point of synergy lies with the "Goblin Biker" archetype. Because "Mementotlan Goblin" is a "Goblin" monster, it can be searched or summoned by "Goblin Biker Grand Breakout".20 This effectively provides three additional copies of a starter/enabler, significantly boosting the deck's consistency. This interaction is not coincidental but rather a conscious design choice that links the two archetypes.
* **Fiendsmith Engine:** The "Fiendsmith" engine, known for its powerful Fusion Summoning capabilities, also pairs well with Memento.19 Fiendsmith cards can provide additional bodies on the field for Link Summoning and offer access to powerful Fusion monsters, complementing Memento's own strategy without conflicting with its core mechanics.
* **Generic Support:** Like any competitive deck, Memento benefits from a suite of generic "staple" cards.
  + **Reinforcement of the Army:** This Limited Spell Card can search for any Level 4 or lower Warrior monster, making it another way to access the deck's best starter, Mementotlan Dark Blade.14
  + **Called by the Grave:** This Quick-Play Spell is crucial for protecting combos from disruptive hand traps that target monsters in the Graveyard.20
  + **Powerful Extra Deck Monsters:** The deck's ability to easily summon multiple monsters allows it to make powerful, generic Link monsters like S:P Little Knight and Apollousa, Bow of the Goddess to supplement its in-theme boss monsters.22

### Matchup Analysis and Siding Strategy

Understanding the deck's strengths and weaknesses is critical for success in a competitive environment.

* **Strengths:** The deck excels at generating significant card advantage and can build an incredibly resilient end board with multiple forms of interaction. Its ability to recur resources via Mementomictlan and Combined Creation gives it a strong grind game, allowing it to outlast opponents in longer duels.
* **Weaknesses (Choke Points):** The archetype's primary vulnerability is its heavy reliance on the Graveyard. Cards that prevent access to the GY or banish cards directly, such as "Dimension Shifter," "Macro Cosmos," or the "Bystial" monsters, can be devastating.25 As a combo-heavy deck, it is also susceptible to well-timed hand traps. The most effective points to interrupt the combo are often the effects of the first monsters that send cards from the Deck to the GY, such as Mementotlan Goblin or Mementotlan Tatsunootoshigo, as this cuts off the fuel for the rest of the sequence.29
* **Siding Recommendations:** A well-constructed Side Deck should aim to counter these weaknesses.
  + **Against Floodgates:** Cards like "Cosmic Cyclone" or "Harpie's Feather Duster" are essential for removing problematic continuous Spells and Traps like "Macro Cosmos".28
  + **Going Second:** When forced to play second, board-breaking cards like "Lightning Storm" and "Evenly Matched" can help clear an established enemy board. Additional hand traps like "Nibiru, the Primal Being" can stop opposing combo decks before they start.28

## Conclusion

The journey of "Dark Blade" is a remarkable narrative of evolution within the *Yu-Gi-Oh! TCG*. It began as a simple Level 4 Normal Monster, a relic of a bygone era, supported by a handful of cards that shared a thematic vision but lacked the mechanical cohesion to be viable. For nearly two decades, it remained a piece of nostalgia, a testament to early, unrefined card design.

Its rebirth as "Mementotlan Dark Blade" within the Memento archetype represents a complete strategic paradigm shift. The card's identity as a DARK Warrior was preserved, but its function was radically transformed from a blunt instrument of battle into the intricate lynchpin of a sophisticated combo engine. The modern Memento strategy, with its core mechanic of synergistic self-destruction, is the conceptual and mechanical solution to every problem that plagued the original cards. Where the original was inconsistent, the new archetype is a web of interconnected searchers. Where the original was slow and fragile, the new deck is resilient and explosive.

Ultimately, the Memento archetype stands as a high-skill-ceiling, resource-intensive combo deck that rewards players who have a deep understanding of its non-linear play patterns and the crucial importance of Graveyard management. "Dark Blade" is no longer a lonely warrior; he is the general of an underworld legion, a powerful and competitively relevant force in the modern game.

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