The Three Kings: Hunt

by AlcatrazOutpatient

Summary

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But the war had been raging for centuries beforehand and would for almost a millennia afterwards, so it was difficult to say if the great battle that took place that day truly ended anything. Perhaps it was more of a defining moment in history – a pin on the very map that was time. And yet, even that was a debatable statement, as the truth was covered up and altered to fit the stories of the victors. To turn them into heroes, into legends, and into myth.

To the Wizarding community, Godric Gryffindor, Helga Hufflepuff, Rowena Ravenclaw, and Salazar Slytherin are considered to be the greatest witches and wizards of their age. To that of the Mage society, they are known as the instigators of the largest genocide in recorded history.
The Real History of Magic

Chapter Summary

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Chapter Notes


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But the war had been raging for centuries beforehand and would for almost a millennia afterwards, so it was difficult to say if the great battle that took place that day ended anything. Perhaps it was more of a defining moment in history – a pin on the very map that was time. And yet, even that was a debatable statement, as the truth was covered up and altered to fit the stories of the victors. To turn them into heroes, into legends, and into myth.

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However, to truly understand what occurred that fateful day, one must learn of a past that was never allowed to become history. At a time when there were no mages or wizards, and magic had just been gifted to the humans that walked the earth. So while it ended, as it always did, at Hogwarts, it began in Egypt. It started with four great gods, a book bound in human skin, and a set of twin boys.

The story of these boys starts out simple enough. They were born to the Pharaoh through his wife and destined to live forever in royalty and luxury. The eldest, named Aknamkanon would become Pharaoh after his father’s death, and the younger, Aknadin, would enter the priesthood and serve
the gods dutifully for the rest of his life. But a tale that would have such an impact on the course of human history could not remain this simple for very long.

After the birthing, the royal midwife made a grave error: she forgot which boy had been born first. Fearful for her soul, she told the Pharaoh of her mistake in hopes that her honesty would save her in the afterlife. The Pharaoh responded that there was a way to test the children to discover which one was the eldest.

“Whichever one cries the loudest is my firstborn son,” he declared, and so it was. The one on the right was proclaimed to be the heir, Aknamkanon, and the one on the left became the priest, Aknadin. The two children were forbidden from ever learning the truth, but like all secrets, it eventually came to light.

By this time, Aknamkanon sat on the throne of Egypt and had already taken their sister, Mukarrama, as his wife. Aknadin was furious, convinced that his brother had stolen his true birthright and claim. He broke his priestly vows of celibacy and, in rebellion, had relations with a young noblewoman who would give him a son. Upon his discovery by the girl’s father, Aknadin was banished from the kingdom. In his exile, he discovered his real talent for magic, a relatively new thing amongst the Egyptian people and a completely unheard of trait to the rest of the ancient world, and began to practice.

In time, he discovered the Great Gods of Life and Magic. They transcended the sun, moon, and water deities upheld by the people of the earth. They were The Mother and The Father. They were Chaos and Order. And they were not to be trifled with.

The Mother and The Father were Darkness and Light. They were neither good nor evil, merely existing as they were. They watched and observed the goings on of the minor gods of the world, hardly ever stepping in to solve disputes unless it was absolutely necessary. To Aknadin, they were useless.

To accomplish what he wanted, he needed a sturdy and active divine backing. He ignored The Mother of Darkness and The Father of Light and concentrated on their younger siblings: Zorc the Destroyer and Horakhty the Creator.

These two gods represented the extremes of the world, always battling back and forth for domination. Their powers increased and decreased depending on those that followed them, and all it took was a single person to tip the balance of the scale. Aknadin was to be that one person.

They fought for his support, trying to convince him that their powers would be what he needed to take his rightful place on the throne. Eventually, Zorc created the Millennium Spellbook, a tome bound in the skin of man and containing all the secrets of magic that could and ever would exist. Aknadin made a contract with The Destroyer, pledging his life and soul to the god. In return, Zorc would finally have the power to manifest in the realm of men.

The tides of war would soon change in his favour as an invading army attacked the mighty Egyptian Empire. Try as he might, the crown could not secure a victory, and there was the talk of rebellion amongst his people. The Pharaoh turned to his brother, begging for support and promising lift his banishment if Aknadin were to provide an answer to his problem. Seeing his chance, the Destroyer’s follower suggested using the Millennium Spellbook to create seven divine weapons that would give Egypt vast magical powers, enough to destroy the enemy. Secretly, Aknadin planned to use these items to make himself a hero in the eyes of the people and then turn them on his brother once and for all.
But it was at that moment that The Mother and The Father opened their eyes and saw what would become of the future if Zorc and Aknadin were allowed to continue their plans unchecked. And so they chose three children and prepared to gift them with abilities previously unknown to humanity. They were to be given the powers of gods so that they could unite a people once divided.

The seven Millennium Items could only be created out of death and blood. Aknadin knew this and chose to sacrifice the small, outlying village of Kul Elna to bring them into this world. The inhabitants were sick and starving, often resulting to thievery to survive. In the mind of the Destroyer’s follower, they were wicked and evil and did not deserve a place in his soon-to-be Empire.

He fell upon these helpless people with an army provided to him by his patron god. Aknadin drove the people of Kul Elna into one of their crypts and killed them – a grand total of ninety-nine men, women, and children. Their bodies were melted into gold under the instruction of the Millennium Spellbook, and the seven items were formed.

However, Aknadin had missed a single soul that night. A boy of four years of age watched as his family was slaughtered and the Destroyer’s follower proclaimed himself to be the real Pharaoh. This boy would grow up to become the Thief King.

The battle against the invading forces ended just as swiftly as Aknadin had expected, though not in the way that he had planned it. Upon presenting the Millennium Items to his brother after returning from Kul Elna, Aknamkanon refused to let Aknadin wield them all on his own. The Pharaoh distributed them amongst their own half-siblings, taking the pyramid-shaped Pendant of Unity as his own and leaving Aknadin with the Eye of Thought. They fought their enemy in the village of Deir El-Medna and were assisted by the people who lived there. As thanks, Aknamkanon awarded the leader of the town a place in the royal household and entrusted him with the raising of one of his sons.

Upon his return home, Aknadin was surprised and outraged to hear that Aknamkanon’s wife had finally given birth to a child, after having lost so many to plague. Fearful that it was a boy, he secretly tried to murder the child, but to no avail. This girl would eventually become the Lady Pharaoh.

He would then turn on the son of the leader from Deir El-Medna, fearful that the man would use this boy to claim power within the empire. He was, however, foiled in his attempts and this boy would eventually become the King Commander.

For his crimes, Aknadin was declared an enemy of the state and sentenced to death. He stole the Eye from his brother, who planned to lock the Millennium Items away out of fear of their abilities, taking it into hiding with him.

Many years passed. The girl became learned in the arts of magic and ruling, the thief boy came to the city to earn his pay with light fingers, and the boy from Deir El-Medna was trained as a warrior of the Medjay. Aknamkanon would learn of the slaughter in Kul Elna and fall gravely ill out of grief, sparking a series of events that would cause the three children to meet. At first, they would not know each other’s identities, but when the truth came out, it was only the Pharaoh’s quick thinking that would save their friendship.

But Aknamkanon passed one night in the girl’s eighteenth year, making her the Pharaoh. Quite by coincidence - or, perhaps, it wasn’t at all, considering that The Mother and The Father were watching over them – that night the boy from Kul Elna would fight and kill the King of Thieves before him while the boy from Deir El-Medna watched his Commander die in the field. The three would rise to their stations as one and, unlike in the years previous, would rule together. All the
people of Egypt would, for the first time in history, cooperate.

But the Aknadin would return, bringing with him a great and powerful army. During the battle that would ensue, the Three Kings would don the Millennium Items to combat their enemy. The Lady Pharaoh would wear her father’s Pennant of Unity, the Thief King would hang the Ring of Souls around his neck, and the King Commander would wield the Rod of Thought. The Necklace of Time would choose a priestess as its owner, while the Key of Minds would gift itself to the Dragon Princess of the Medjay. Finally, the Scale of Intent would fall into the hands of Jono the Brave, then a young street rat with not but a dull knife to his name.

And all of Egypt would, for the first time, fight as one to stop Aknadin and Zorc. Many would fall, but none in a more gruesome fashion than the Kings themselves. Faced with annihilation, these three took it upon themselves to seal the Destroyer away at the cost of their lives. Their existences were wiped from history, and their names were forgotten to all that knew them.

Those that survived The Time of Millennia would become the first to begin the worship of these three, spreading the word that they would one day return to rule once more. The Items that they wore – the Pendant, the Rod, and the Ring – would be hidden away in anticipation of this event. High Priest Seth, cousin of the Lady Pharaoh, would become the next Pharaoh and rule beside the Dragon Princess of the Medjay and Jono the Brave. Together they would guard the Millennium Spellbook, which still contained such incredible power that it would be unwise to let it be seen by the rest of the world.

Time would continue on and the years would pass. Several centuries after The Time of Millennia, tension would brew again. There would be a growing fraction of people who disliked the idea of such power like magic being given out seemingly at random by forces that they would not see or prove to exist. These people wanted to possess it permanently within their families. And so it was that three brothers created a way to force the gods to bend to their will.

Cadmus Peverell, the middle brother, was the sole sibling with magical talent – a mage, by modern-day definition. Specializing in the art of necromancy, he revived the half-brother of the Lady Pharaoh, Priest Shada, to tell him the secret to creating divine weapons like the Millennium Items. Cadmus created a terrible stone that could open the barrier between this world and the next, forcing the dead to cross back over from their rest in the afterlife.

Then, by soaking the wood from an Elder tree in the blood of fourteen women and imbuing it with the essence of Death’s own horse, Cadmus created the first wand for his elder brother, Antioch, and imbued magic into his very blood. This rod became known as the Wand of Destiny, as it was so powerful that it could make the gods tremble at the very thought of it turning upon them. In retaliation, the gods of Rome and its Empire cried for help to come from The Mother and The Father, as it had come in The Time of Millennia – but it was to no avail. For his third and final brother, Cadmus created a cloak of invisibility that could shield the three brothers from even their eyes.

Using these three items, forever dubbed the Deathly Hallows for the destruction that their existence would bring, the three Peverell brothers started the movement amongst certain noble families to become wizards and witches. They offered to control magic in a way that had never been seen before and granted them whatever power they wanted. They could keep it within their families and ensure success for the rest of time.

There was controversy about this, as was to be expected. There were those who opposed this control of magic, claiming it to be theft and blasphemy. At the same time, there were those rebelled
at the idea of waiting to be ruled by the Three Kings, who, by this time, were nothing more than fairytales. In the meanwhile, wizard numbers began to increase drastically, and they began to attack those who clung to the old way of doing things.

However, neither wizard or mage did not take first blood in this war. The current king of Camelot, a man named Uther Pendragon from the island of Britannia, had had enough of the religions of magic and made it his duty to try and destroy both sides. Several other kings took up his call to arms, and thus the Purge began.

At the same time, a witch by the name of Nimueh prophesied that Uther’s son, Arthur, would bring magic back to Camelot. Both sides of magic sent their best to try and convince the Prince to support their party. The high and powerful Merlin represented wizards and witches while the Lady Morgana came from the mages. But what happened was something that no one ever thought possible.

Merlin and Morgana began to share their ideas of magic with each other. They spoke commonly with one another, learning and eventually falling in love. They married on the eve of Arthur’s coronation, and it was decided that both sides of magic would exist as equals in Camelot.

The mages were content with this agreement and, in a show of goodwill, presented the Millennium Spellbook and two of the mythical Millennium Items, the Thief King’s Ring of Souls and Seth’s Eye of Thought, to the new King Arthur Pendragon. Not wanting to be outdone, but in no way pleased with the idea of sharing power, the wizards sent their four best and brightest: Godric Gryffindor, Helga Hufflepuff, Rowena Ravenclaw, and Salazar Slytherin.

For many years, King Arthur reigned, but over time the hostility between the mages and wizards only seemed to increase. Merlin, though widely accepted as being incredibly powerful, was being pulled back and forth between his people and his wife. The battles that had caused Uther’s Purges began to occurred once more and, at the same time, the wizards started to distrust the non-magical peoples of the world as they seemed to be siding with the mages.

The fighting broke out openly once more when Godric’s son, his son named Baltazar, attempted to don the Ring of Souls. He was killed instantly by magic contained within it and, stricken with grief, Godric turned on Morgana’s family and killed her sister’s son, Mordred – a boy of fourteen. Morgana and her sister, Morgause, retaliated and cursed him to have all those whom he loved to turn away from him in death.

War was declared, and mages and wizards battled plainly for the first time. Merlin’s marriage fell apart when he refused to side with his wife and attack his own people. Instead, he stayed neutral and evacuated the city of Camelot when the fighting got too close for the citizens to live there safely anymore. Salazar and Rowena took King Arthur by surprise at the Battle of Camhalnn, killing him and his Knights of the Round Table. Queen Guinevere was spirited away by Nimueh in the middle of the night and was never seen again.

In the grounds of the deserted castle, Morgana and Morgause fought Godric Gryffindor, Helga Hufflepuff, Rowena Ravenclaw, and Salazar Slytherin. The battle carved a great ravine in the land, which willed with water to form a lake with depths that would reach the Underworld itself. It seemed at one point that a victor would never prevail, but Helga Hufflepuff turned the tides, quite unexpectedly. She had stolen the Millennium Spellbook and opened a portal to the Realm of the Gods. She revealed that, in that very moment, her husband, Emeric, was marching on the gods with the Wand of Destiny. The deities that the mages had held so dearly were brought to their knees and killed. Mages lost their grip on the world and retreated as Morgana and Morgause fell at the newly formed Lake of Avalon.
Now with Camelot empty and ripe for the taking, the four conquering witches and wizards took it for their own. They decided to use it as a school to teach their own kind, to ensure wizard domination over magic for the rest of time. They encouraged other countries to rise up and cast the mages out and assert their right to rule. And thus the Mage Hunts and the rise of blood purity began.

Those known today by the wizarding community as ‘muggleborns’ or, more offensively, mudbloods, are not the result of random genetic mutation – the Peverell brothers made sure that the wizarding ability for magic could only be passed down a family tree. However, because they enslaved magic inside the first wizards, there were bound to be anomalies that would occur – like Squibs, persons of wizard descent who could not perform magic. Squibs were usually abandoned by their families, thrown into the non-magical world, and forced to make due. It is from Squibs that wizards with non-magical lineage get their magic. Somewhere along the line, the recessive gene became dominant, and a young witch or wizard was born to one of these families.

The problem with that is that in their infancy, it was almost impossible to tell whether a child was a wizard or mages. Only if the child were to show signs of random, uncontrolled, wandless magic could it be confirmed that it was, in fact, one of them? This created fear and prejudice towards non-magics and those from their families in general for birthing them because the idea of mages infiltrating wizarding society was more than terrifying. The practice of ‘muggle hunting’ originally came from the older tradition of mage hunting. If a mage was suspected to have been born into a non-magical family than it was the job of the nearest wizarding family to kill the child and its parents. This practice was hugely successful and, as a result, the mage population dwindled to the point of near extinction. This eventually translated into fear and hatred of non-magics themselves as well as the rising idea of wizarding superiority.

It was this ideology that led to the witch hunts by non-magics in the fifteenth century and the creation of the International Statute of Secrecy in 1689. Rather than attempt to cooperate and negotiate with non-magics, wizard-kind rejected them and formed their own society outside of their laws and jurisdiction. The rewriting of wizard history began by the newly created Ministries of Magic and mages were wiped from the pages. Heroes were made of murderers and murderers were made of heroes. And, for nearly two hundred years, wizard-kind was left to revel in its own secretly assumed superiority.

And then the impossible happened: a mage was born into a wizard family. Such a case was unprecedented and covered up almost as soon as it was discovered to be the truth. The Department of Mysteries was told to contain the problem that was Ariana Dumbledore as the usual method of killing the girl, and her family would not go unnoticed by the world, especially with her genius brother, Albus, slowly making a name for himself. Ariana’s mother, Kendra, was instructed to hide her away from the world and not to let her practice her magic in the hopes that it would just go away. This led Ariana to have several uncontrollable outbursts of magic, one of which ended up killing her mother.

When it became clear that Ariana could no longer be controlled, it was arranged by the Department of Mysteries to have her secretly assassinated. The opportunity came during the three-way duel between her two brothers, Albus and Aberforth, and Gellert Grindelwald. She was struck with the killing curse from behind and left for dead. It was assumed by those that knew of her existence that that would be the end of wizard born mages. They were wrong.

In the 1900s, there were several hundred documented cases of mages being born into wizard families across the globe. Unspeakables everywhere were scrambling for some sort of explanation. They turned to the three mage-created items that were in their possession: the Ring of Souls, the Eye of Minds, and the Millennium Spellbook, studying them for the first time since the Golden
Age of Camelot.

What they found was petrifying: the Millennium Spellbook had prophesied that the return of the Three Kings was coming soon, at a place where water would meet land. The International Confederation of Wizards was notified, and it was declared that the Unspeakables were to stop this at any cost.

Nothing that the Unspeakables could do would destroy the Ring of Souls, said to be somehow instrumental in the return of the Thief King. They searched the earth far and wide for signs of the other Millennium Items, though they were only able to find the tomb where the shattered Pendant of Unity was said to be hidden. None that entered ever came out alive, so it was considered guarded enough that mages would not be able to get at it to revive their Lady Pharaoh. However, the complete lack of knowledge surrounding the location of the Rod of Thought was troublesome. If the mages were able to bring back the King Commander, said to be the fiercest warrior in all of history, there would be no doubt that this man could raise an army to take back the Items in wizarding possession.

But they also had other things to worry about, like the ever-growing problem of wizard born mages. Hiding them away was only a short-term solution to a long-term issue and having a parent agree to have their child killed was a surprisingly difficult thing to convince them to do.

However, a young recruit to the Unspeakables, an American pureblood named Maximillion Pegasus, developed the idea of conversion therapy: the concept of treating mage magic like an illness. He hypothesized that it could be possible to turn them, over time, into proper wizards. He tested his theory out on the wizard-born mage, Gilderoy Lockhart, and then duplicated the results on the young witch-to-be, Andromeda Black. And thus it became common practice amongst pureblood families that had to deal with the shame of having birthed a mage to have their children cured of their wrongness. Maximillion's groundbreaking research made it possible to regain wizarding control on wizard-born mages around the world.

However, every so often, there would be a child who would reject the program and seek to live as a mage. The story of the Three Kings begins anew with such a child: a fifteen-year-old boy from the Andrews family. His name was Ryou, and it ended for him, as it always did, at Hogwarts.

But you know what they say about endings: they just give way to new beginnings.

Chapter End Notes

This is pretty much a really big AU re-write of the Yu-Gi-Oh! Duel Monsters series with a Harry Potter crossover. The only change I've made to the Harry Potter timeline is that I've changed the year that Philosopher's Stone began. Now, instead of the canon version of 1991, it takes place in 2013. The next chapter begins just under five years previous to that.

Hunt takes primarily takes place in the time just before Philosopher's Stone, between April and August of that year. Technically, it is the equivalent to the season 0 anime, though Yuugi is not going to be the main character.
Beginning and End

Chapter Summary

Keith Howard knows Ryou Andrews for nearly five years before the boy dies.

Amane has been raising her older brother since she was five years old and Keith Howard came to their house to tell him that he was wrong.

Chapter Notes


Warning: Anorexia, depression, self-hatred, attempted suicide, homophobia, biphobia, incest, dub-con, abuse, and slight gore.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Keith Howard knows Ryou Andrews for nearly five years before the kid dies.

They first meet just before the boy starts his first year at Hogwarts, in the foyer of his family’s home in Edinburgh. Ryou is days away from turning eleven and is holding the hand of his little sister with a desperate ferocity that makes him think of his siblings back in Nashville. He’s small for a kid his age, thin in the way that most British wizards seemed to be. They’re dressed impeccably, as is expected by purebloods. Ryou’s black hair is neatly pulled back into a horsetail at the back of his neck, showing off the clenching of his jaw. The boy is scared and angry, but mostly tired in a way that was too old for a boy his age. Keith remembers that the most about Ryou – the idea that he looks older than he is.

He’s been an Unspeakable for about six years now, but he’s recently been made a part of Mr. Pegasus’s unit in charge of mage conversion. Ryou Andrews is his first assignment as part of this elite team. It’s a test from his superiors to see if he can handle the pressure. Keith knows that it’s a considerable investment; he’s going to be on call, twenty-four seven, for the next seven years. It’s going to be work, but even a single successful conversion can boost an Unspeakable’s career to the point where he’ll be able to retire in half the usual time. Keith doesn’t want to know too many secrets. He doesn’t want to give the head honchos a reason to want to kill him when this is all over. He wants to enjoy his retirement.

He reads Ryou’s file while waiting in the Portkey Office in New York. The kid’s a mage alright, and a pretty damn powerful one for his age, too. He’s been walking through walls since he was eight years old and gained complete control of the ability a year and a half later. His father, James Andrews, made the identification. Keith has met James previously; the man had consulted on the Lakewood case a few years back and is one of the few experts on mage culture that the Confederation even allowed to exist. Having a mage for a son would have hit the man right in his
pride.

Keith remembers sitting this little kid down and explaining that the things that he can do are wrong, that he is ill and in need of help.

“Don’t worry, okay. That’s why I’m here. I’m gonna help you get better,” Keith tells Ryou. The boy stares at him for a moment with his pale blue eyes.

“But how come I don’t feel sick?” He asks.

“Sometimes, when you’re really sick for a long time, you forget what it’s like to feel normal,” Keith smiles.

Ryou blinks, “Have you ever been sick like I am?”

“No.”

“Then how do you know what it feels like?”

Training hadn’t prepared him for that question, so he makes up an answer, “I just do.”

The kid looks at him and in that moment, pins Keith to the earth with just his eyes, and he realizes that he’s sitting in front of a god damn mage who has the power to reach into his body and yank out his lungs. He’s been on hunts before. He knows what mages can do when threatened, even the young ones like Ryou. Keith had once seen a fourteen-year-old girl from Oklahoma strangle a man with the vines from a window plant while wearing a jean skirt and a Katy Perry t-shirt. By the time they’d calibrated the Mage Cuffs to her powers, that girl had torn the man to pieces. There wasn’t even enough to bury him, let alone scrape what was left of him from the ceiling.

They put her down like a rabid dog. And Keith knows that if he can’t help Ryou, they’ll have to do the same to him, too.

Keith’s job is to keep Ryou sane over the course of the next seven years. Conversion therapy could get intense at times - five in seven don’t complete the program. The kid would need someone to talk to because studies showed that ex-mages don’t ever mention their status to their classmates – not if they want to keep their friends, in any case. But Keith thinks that Ryou will do well in the program. He’ll make a good wizard.

They talk for a little while afterwards. Keith explains that he works for the American Ministry when Ryou asks why he talks ‘funny,’ that his boss for this assignment recommended him. Ryou talks about his sister, Amane, the most and he kind of thinks it’s cute. She seems to be his whole world, regardless of the nearly five-year gap between their ages. The little girl loves to paint, which is an odd thing for a witch to like – or, at least, he hopes that Amane Andrews is a witch. He doesn’t think that James would be too impressed with the idea of having two mage kids.

He gets on the Hogwarts Express with Ryou a few days later and helps him load his luggage into the racks above the seats. His owl hoots in the cage that sits beside the boy.

“What did you name him?” Keith asks.

Ryou smiles and whispers, “Khonsu. After the moon god.”

Keith frowns, “Where did you learn that name?”

“I read it in some of Father’s papers,” the boy looks at him and says it so honestly that it shocks
him for a second. He composes himself and continues with what he’s needed to do from the moment he learned what he’d named the bird.

“You should change it. It’s not right to name your owl after a god.”

“Why not?”

“Because the gods are dead and Khonsu is a name for the sick. You don’t want him to get sick, do you?”

Ryou looks at his feet, “No…”

“Good. Now change it,” he says sternly.

“I don’t know what to change it to,” the boy glances off to the side, stubbornly avoiding eye contact.


Ryou huffs and pouts, and it reminds him of his own sister back home who would always whine until she got her way. But then the boy looks up and says, “Bandit.”

And Keith laughs because he’d told Ryou a few days previously about how Bandit had been his nickname when he’d started his job as an Unspeakable. He’d come to work with a pair of black eyes from a bar fight the night before, and everyone thought he looked like a raccoon. His laughs subdue into chuckles as the train pulls away from the station and Ryou plasters himself against the window to wave goodbye to his family.

The boy grows up fast. Keith blinks and suddenly Ryou’s ending his first year as a Slytherin, studying for his Potions finals. He has trouble with his spellwork and goes through three wands that year, but that’s expected for a mage going through a conversion. Keith remembers sitting in the hospital wing as Madam Pomphrey picks the wooden shrapnel of the first exploded wand out of Ryou’s forearm. He doesn’t cry, but Keith can see that he is holding the tears back. Afterwards, he grips Keith’s sleeve and whispers, “Are they going to get mad?”

‘They’ referred to the Unspeakables in charge of the actual conversion lessons, not just Keith’s job that’s the day-to-day support. Ryou goes to them about twice a week after his classes at Hogwarts. Keith doesn’t know what goes on during those sessions exactly, but he’s not going to ask. That’s something you got used to very quickly in his life of work: you don’t know any more than you’re supposed to. Go looking for answers, and you might not like what you find.

“No, they won’t be mad,” he tells Ryou. The boy relaxes and leans back into his pillow.

The next time he sees Ryou, the kid is white as a sheet and trembling so badly he can barely hold a quill. They had been mad, as it turns out.

Ryou gets really quiet around his third year – not that he wasn’t quiet before, but this actually starts to worry Keith a little. One night, he finds the boy playing chess against himself in an alcove behind a suit of armour in the astronomy tower.

“It’s after curfew. How’d you get out?” He asks, knowing that he has portraits around the entrance to the Slytherin common room, reporting whenever the boy comes and goes. They didn’t tell him anything tonight, or any other night for that matter. So how was he able to do it?

“I couldn’t sleep,” the boy answers and moves the black knight to take the enemy castle.
“Why didn’t you stay in the common room?” Keith frowns. Ryou shrugs but doesn’t say anything. That’s all he needs.

“Ryou, did you walk through the walls?”

The boy doesn’t react, but he makes another play on the board before spinning it around and staring at it again with his blue eyes.

“Kid, we’ve talked about this. I’m going to have to make a report, you know,” Keith sighs and sits down on the floor next to him.

“I know.”

“You know that they’ll get mad again, right?”

“I know.”

“Then why did you do it?”

“I couldn’t sleep.”

Keith groans in frustration. He likes Ryou, he really does, but he hates that it’s nearly impossible to get a straight answer out of the kid when something is bothering him. Keith knows that the only way to get any semblance of what is going on is to search his nearly daily letters to his sister for clues. He’s aware that Ryou’s aware that he does this, as the boy has taken to writing in some sort of code that he’s only begun to crack. Keith escorts the boy back to the common room and orders him to stay there or, so help him, he will report this.

He checks Ryou’s letter the next day and is surprised to find it written entirely in English. Keith reads the two sentences written on the page nearly ten times before he fully understands what is going on. The letter may be addressed to Amane Andrews, but it’s also for him.

“I think I like boys, too. Do you still love me?”

Keith almost snorts, but then he remembers that he’s not in America anymore. Back home, the wizarding community is pretty close to that of the muggles’. He’s familiar with the general consensus of acceptance that has grown amongst his generation when it comes to gays. But this is Europe, and the wizards here have Nazi-like ideas of blood purity and a downright medieval social hierarchy. Ryou has every reason to be scared about the fact that he’s into other guys. It could destroy his entire future.

The next day, Keith sits Ryou down in his office and tells him that he honestly doesn’t give a damn. The boy sits very still for several minutes before snorting in a way that was very unlike him. Ryou shakes his head and sighs.

“You don’t get it,” he chuckles humourlessly.

“No, I guess I don’t,” Keith leans forward. “But maybe I could if you explained it to me.”

Ryou rests his forehead in his hands and breathes of a moment. He sucks in air through his nose before speaking again, “You can’t tell anyone what I’m about to tell you.”

Keith agrees but knows full well that he is going to report this regardless. Ryou sees this and stresses, “Really. You can’t tell anyone. I haven’t told anyone this – not even Amane.”

This surprises him because the idea that Ryou could actually keep a secret from his sister is
headline-making. Keith nods for the boy to continue.

Ryou swallows hard before he speaks, “I’ve been dreaming about them since I was little.”

Keith raises an eyebrow at the 'them' comment - as opposed to a 'him,' but doesn’t say anything because the kid’s thirteen and doesn’t need to understand his particular sense of humour just yet.

“I don’t know what they look like...I always forget when I wake up. But...” Ryou pauses for a second, thinking his words over, “...sometimes, we laugh together. Other times, we talk about magic...the gods...the world. He’s fire, and she’s lightning. I know that much.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“That’s just what they are. He’s fire and the sun and the day. She’s lightning and the sky and the horizon. And I’m - “ he stops completely, jaw clamping shut.

“And you’re...?” Keith prompts.

It takes a few minutes, but Ryou keeps going, “I’m air. I’m the moon and the night.” He groans, “I can’t even remember their names.”

“They mention names?”

“Yes. But its like they’re talking underwater. I can’t hear them when they speak.”

Keith nods, slowly digesting this information, “And what happened the night you couldn’t sleep?”

Ryou goes absolutely red. He scoffs and sputters, but it’s enough that Keith gets precisely what happened in that dream.

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“No!” Ryou snaps and Keith feels a bit guilty about how relieved he is about that fact.

“Well,” Keith says, “there is the possibility that your dreams come from some inherent Seer ability. You do quite well in Divination. Professor Trelawney speaks rather highly of you. These people you talk about - the fire boy and the lightning girl - they could be people you’re going to meet.”

Ryou snorts again and looks at his clasped hands. Keith frowns and continues, “As for the whole ‘liking boys’ thing, that’s alright. If you like boys, then you do. There’s nothing wrong with that, Ryou.”

The boy fixes him with a glare that honestly sends a ripple of fear down Keith’s spine. He knows that Ryou wouldn’t hurt a fly - hell, he’s seen the kid catch and release them back into the wild before. But there’s something about that look at makes him tremble, something that’s almost ancient and it terrifies him.

Ryou’s lips curl back into a snarl, and something akin to a hiss escapes his throat. Keith’s hand flies to his wand purely on instinct. He’s heard of mages that can transform before, strong ones that took San Francisco almost a year ago as their last stronghold. These mages were supposedly unstoppable and versed in magic that no wizard had ever encountered before in their kind. A hundred years ago, the idea of a wizard-born mage was unheard of, but now it seemed like there was one born to every family of purebloods in each generation. If mages are changing again, then something big is happening. And if Ryou could transform, then he would have some serious
trouble on his hands.

But the kid doesn’t do anything other than snarl (though Keith swears that he can see fangs in his mouth) before saying, “You’re sure a hypocrite.”

“What?” He jerks back in confusion.

“So it’s fine if I want to fuck a bloke up the arse, but the moment I walk through a wall, you’ve got a problem? Where’s the line, Keith? What’s right and what’s not?” Ryou spits.

“Hey, that’s not what I meant,” he tries to explain, but the boy has nothing of it.

“I can’t believe - gods, I should never have said anything! I thought you’d understand,” he stands up so fast that the chair he was sitting on falls over. Keith has never seen Ryou so angry before. The room seems to darken as the shadows expand. The candles (the ones with ever-burning charms attached to them) flicker and, one by one, go out.

“Ryou,” Keith calls out in a deep, dangerous voice. “Calm down. Right now.”

He wands slips into his palm and he holds it out in front of him in warning. Ryou sees this and, for one second, his skin ripples and almost looks like its covered in grey scales.

But that moment passes, and Keith’s office lights up again as the candles flick back on. He lowers his wand with shaking hands and lets go of the breath he doesn’t know he’s holding. Ryou kicks the felled chair in frustration before walking right of the room, slamming the door behind him. Keith slumps back into his seat and rubs his forehead. His superiors are not going to like this. Setbacks aren’t good for mages undergoing conversion. If they rebel against the program or just don’t show signs of success, they are put down. The families are told that their children are being taken away to a special training facility and letters are falsified and sent home to ensure them of their children’s continued survival. But it is all a lie. Failure is not an option.

Keith knows that he’s messed up big time. Rule number one about mage conversion is that you don’t get attached to the subject. And here he is, contemplating faking his report so that Ryou doesn’t get marked as a possible risk. The kid’s powerful, no doubt about it. He could have torn Keith to bits a few minutes ago. But he didn’t and that means something. He doesn’t know what, but it’s not good or bad or anything really. It’s just damn confusing.

It takes him three tries before he can write a report with the complete truth in it. He needs another two hours before he can send it. Keith drowns himself in fire whiskey that night and passes out on the floor of the Hogshead. The bartender cleans him up and takes him back to the castle, slipping a hangover potion into his pocket as he goes.

After Ryou comes back from his conversion lessons with the other Unspeakables, he barely sleeps for a month. He twitches at loud noises and hardly eats anything at dinner. When Keith asks his superiors just what is going on during those classes, they tell him not to question what’s above his clearance level. That night he finds Ryou curled up under the desk in his office, fast asleep for the first time in weeks. Keith doesn’t question how Ryou got out of the common room this time. Instead, he drapes a blanket around the kid and tucks a pillow under his head.

Ryou doesn’t get better, but he doesn’t get any worse which is a good thing, he supposes. He stops blowing up wands and his spellwork is relatively decent. Trelawney may always be predicting the kid’s death, but that hasn’t prevented him from excelling in the subject of Divination. Even Snape gives Ryou the occasional compliment, though Keith suspects that it has something to do with the
kid being in Slytherin than anything else. It’s like it always is.

Ryou gets his first girlfriend in his fourth year. Igraine Selwyn is a third year Slytherin with pretty brown curls framing her face. James Andrews is more happy to hear that the girl’s a pureblood than the fact that his son is actually smiling for the first time in almost a year. Keith doesn’t really get the whole pureblood fascination that this country seems to have, but then again he is an American. When the New World offers up the lowest wizarding populations on the globe, it's genuinely rare to see anyone with magic in their families that goes back more than three generations. Keith’s own mother is a muggle - same thing with his half-brother. But things were done differently in the West.

Keith can tell that the kid actually likes Igraine. He picks up her name in Ryou’s coded letters to his sister. During their meetings, Ryou mentions that he wants to introduce her to his parents and asks advice on what to do for dates. Keith would be impressed if he wasn’t so damn confused. Hadn’t the kid admitted just half a year ago that he is into guys? Maybe he’s faking it now for his parent’s sake? Maybe he's just going through a phase back then? But it doesn’t matter. Ryou is the happiest he’s ever seen him. Keith’s almost proud.

And then the fifth year happens. The fifth year for Ryou is like something right out of a nightmare. Somehow, people start finding out. Keith assumes that someone recognized the signs of conversion - the exploding wands, the barely passable spellwork, the need for a ‘personal teacher.’ But the rumours begin and Keith is left to pick up the broken pieces of Ryou’s shattered mind.

Igraine breaks up with him - and that’s putting it lightly. He walks into his dorm to find one of his friends making out with her on his bed. Keith is actually amazed that Ryou kept a lid on his temper and that this Sam Rowle kid hasn’t turned up dead. Then, one by one, Ryou’s friends turn their backs on him and he's left to face the storm on his own.

He ends up in the hospital wing at Halloween with a curse that makes him speak backwards and warts in the middle of his back that burn like a thousand biting fire ants. Madam Pomfrey takes longer than usual to fix him up.

Dumbledore starts getting letters from concerned parents. Keith knows that the headmaster has and will never get behind the program, but the man continues to allow Ryou to remain at Hogwarts because he’s aware of the alternative. But the boy’s condition gets worse and worse, to the point where he starts regressing. Keith catches words in his letters to Amane that frighten him. Words like ‘death’ and ‘end it all.’ There are moments when he wonders if it would be more merciful to let the kid just do it than forcing him to stay here and suffer.

Ryou chugs a vile of the Draught of Living Death with his morning pumpkin juice the day before the Christmas holidays in front of the entire Great Hall. As he falls out of his seat, Keith rushes to his side and carries him out. Snape runs batlike behind him with what he hopes is the antidote. Ryou’s pale and his chest doesn’t move. Keith honestly thinks he’s dead until Snape pours Wiggenweld Potion down his throat. Colour returns to the kid’s face and he stutters into consciousness.

Keith keeps him in the Hospital Wing for the night so that he can make sure that Ryou doesn’t try anything else. The idea of the boy (and that’s what he is, just a boy, just a fifteen-year-old boy) wanting to kill himself over his own self-hatred makes Keith want to whisk him away and take him to a place where this will all be alright. San Francisco. He could take the kid to San Francisco and he could be with his own kind.

Ryou cracks open an eyelid and glances at Keith from where he’s lying on the cot in the Hospital Wing. The boy tries to smile at him and it’s so wrong that he Chokes up and cries the tears that
Ryou refuses to. He’s killing him. He’s the one responsible. And, fuck, he’s going to keep going because that’s his damn job and he has to, or they’ll kill his family. This is so sick.

Then Easter happens. Ryou finally snaps. And Keith realizes that it really is true what they say: it ends, as it always did, at Hogwarts.

Amane has been raising her older brother since she was five years old and Keith Howard came to their house to tell him that he was wrong. She hates that man more than anything in the whole world because of what he has done to Ryou.

Her brother lives two lives. The first face is the one he shows to the world. It is the mask, the part that he’s supposed to play in the script that is his life. He’s the firstborn son, the heir to the Andrews line. Ryou’s to be a scholar like their father. He’s supposed to be polite, well mannered, and intelligent. He’s supposed to marry a pureblood girl and be a father by the time he’s twenty. And most of all, he’s supposed to want that to be his life.

Except Amane knows better. She knows that if Ryou is ever going to be happy, he can’t live that life. It would kill him.

Ryou’s not a wizard. She’s known that since she was three and he ran through her bedroom wall to comfort her after a nightmare. Afterwards, she’d made him show her again; Ryou spent hours passing through walls and pieces of furniture and once even through her with a smile on his face. About a year later, he develops a new power - one that they manage to keep secret from both of their parents. Ryou can turn invisible. Needless to say, this makes sneaking extra dessert from the kitchen a heck of a lot easier.

Ryou’s never going to be a scholar. It’s not that he doesn’t enjoy reading because he does. It’s just that the history textbooks that Father and Professor Binns make him read make him angry, to use his own words. He doesn’t understand why exactly, but he says that they’re wrong.

He’s not as polite as he leads people to believe he is. Ryou’s got a mean temper on the rare occasion that it bubbles to the surface and could probably comprise an entire paragraph out of curse words if he really wanted to. He steals things, too. It’s almost impulsive. Ryou can’t go through a meal without palming a piece of cutlery to take with him. By the time he’s in his fourth year, he’s robbing Professor Snape’s personal storerooms of all the ingredients needed to make Veritaserum and gets away with it.

Amane doesn’t think that Ryou will ever get married. The idea of domestic life just doesn’t seem to suit him. This is her brother that she’s talking about: the boy that sneaks out at night to run with the centaurs in the Forbidden Forest, the one that once climbed up the Astronomy Tower on the outside just to prove that he could. She just can’t imagine him settling down with someone and talking about doilies or the weather. That’s not who he is.

Ryou’s a mage. She doesn’t think that there’s anything wrong with that. Magic is magic, no matter how you happen to use it. So what if Ryou can’t use a wand? He can do so much more without it. Besides, what’s so good about wizards anyway? Forcing someone to be something that they’re not and demonizing all those who were different isn’t exactly something to be proud of.

So Amane encourages him to practice his powers. She tells him to be true to himself. She helps him to find who he is, to just be.
Ryou is able to be real with her. And when the going gets bad in his fifth year, he can open up raw to her in a way that he never could be with Keith Howard. Amane reads his letters and sees his descent into depression and fears for her brother’s life. He comes home for Christmas a broken man and leaves in a worse state. From then until the Easter holidays, there are a series of letters from his professors about how he’s starting to fail his classes - all of them, even Divination where he used to surpass the expectations of his teacher on a daily basis. Professor Trelawney is actually the most concerned of all of the Hogwarts staff and sends warnings about how the night is coming from him. She’s more than worried but explains that fate is inevitable and that it is best to accept what is happening rather than deny it until it is upon him.

Ryou’s letters tell her about how his fellow students have turned on him. His work is regularly sabotaged and he can’t seem to walk down the corridors without taking some form of abuse. He sleeps in Keith’s office because it’s no longer safe for him to stay in his dorm. Once, Ryou writes to her asking why he couldn’t have just done it right the first time. Amane remembers his suicide attempt a few months ago and cries.

He’s home for Easter now. Tomorrow he’s going to have to go back to that horrible place. He’s going to have to return to a world that despises him for something he can’t control. It makes her sick to her stomach that a school that preaches inclusion for peoples of all magical backgrounds - pureblood, mixed, or muggle - would do such a thing to someone.

Amane is ten years old and all she can think about is her Hogwarts letter. It will be her way of always being there to support her brother. That, and the fact that she’ll finally be able to punch Igraine Selwyn in her stupid face for breaking Ryou’s heart.

Ryou sits on the edge of his bed and stares at his trunk with a drawn expression on his face. He hasn’t slept properly in weeks. Amane doesn’t think that he’s eaten in a few days either. Ryou’s always been a skinny boy, but over the course of the last year, he’s gotten unhealthily thin. He looks up at her as she comes in, blue eyes peering out from underneath his black hair.

He tries to smile at her, but can’t seem to hold it on his face. Amane swallows the lump in her throat as she sees the mess that her once proud brother has been reduced to. She sits beside him, leaning on his shoulder and holding his hand in hers.

“Don’t go back,” she whispers.

“I have to,” his voice cracks with disuse when he speaks.

“No, you don’t. You could stay here,” Amane begs.

“Do you think Father would allow that for a second?” He chuckles, but it’s dry and lifeless.

“He doesn’t have to know,” Amane says. “Ryou, we both know that you could hide from anyone who could ever want to look for you. Why don’t you?” When he doesn’t answer, she rounds on him, “Don’t tell me that you actually believe that they’re right?! You’re not sick!”

“I know,” he murmurs. “But I can’t explain it. I have to go back. I don’t want to, but I have to.”

“It’s not right,” she whispers into his shoulder. Ryou turns his head and rests his nose in her hair. His arms curl around hers and he holds her like he’s scared that she’ll disappear.

“Amane,” he rasps her name. “I don’t think that I’m going to be able to take another two years of
“Amane, I need you to listen to me,” he breathes. “If something happens, you need to disassociate yourself from me. Enroll under mother’s maiden name or go to a different school. I don’t care. Just don’t let them know that I’m your brother.”

“Ryou - “

“Please! If you don’t, they’ll turn on you. The Blacks were able to pull it off. You can, too!”

“The Blacks?” She frowns, confused.

“Promise me,” Ryou looks her dead in the eye, blue to green. “Please.”

She nods, slack-jawed and not entirely sure if she’s telling the truth or just agreeing to put him at peace. Relief floods his face and he leans forward to rest his forehead against hers. “I can’t let them hurt you,” he closes his eyes and breathes. “You’re the one good thing I have left. If they ever hurt you, I couldn’t live with myself.”

His lips open and he pins her with his eyes. Amane gets that feeling of ‘ancient’ and ‘beyond time’ that usually comes with this action of his. Except, this time Ryou raises a hand to her cheek, brushing his knuckles against her skin. There’s a heat in his eyes that’s never been there before and Amane’s heart seizes in a way that’s far too close to panic for her to stay completely calm.

“You’re all I’ve got left,” he whispers again as his lips brush against her own. Amane shudders and tries to stop herself from shaking. Ryou’s world is falling apart around him and if she rejects him now, then there’s no telling what it would do. She knows that Ryou wants her in a way that’s far too adult for her to comprehend right now, but he needs this. She’s sacrificed her childhood keeping him together. She can sacrifice this too.

She seals her lips against his and Ryou’s hands curl in her hair. He kisses her like he’s a drowning man and she’s air, and it scares her so much because she knows for a fact that if her brother is in his right mind, he’d never do this. Amane reminds herself of the Gaunt family, who married brother and sister to keep the line pure, and that her father always wanted their family to be like those in the Sacred Twenty-Eight. She thinks of this as Ryou pushes her back into his bed and tries not to cry.

His mouth moves to her jaw as he hooks one of her legs over his hips. Amane squeezes her eyes shut as his hand trail low on her stomach. Her fingers clench in the back of his shirt and she buries her face in his shoulder to muffle any sounds she might make. But something must have travelled to his ears because Ryou tenses on top of her and stops altogether. Slowly, he raises himself up so that he can look at her face. Amane tries to smile but can’t.

Ryou throws himself off of her with speed she didn’t know that he possessed. He backs into a corner, legs giving out and sliding to the floor. He hides his head in his knees and grips his hair, rocking back and forth and muttering the whole time. She gets up, limbs still shaking and walks over to him.

When she gets close enough, she hears what he’s saying, “What - why did you - sister - gods, she’s ten! Sister - ten years! What kind of monster are you?!!”
Amane kneels before him and reaches out to touch his shoulder. The moment they come into contact with each other, Ryou nearly jumps out of his skin. He stares at her with wild blue eyes, pupils like pinpricks, and she realizes that it’s not that she doesn’t care about what he just did. Because she does. It’s that she can’t afford to.

She has to forgive him because if she doesn’t Ryou will shatter into a billion pieces and she doesn’t want that. It’s in no way right and it shouldn’t be necessary but it is, and she hates Keith Howard for making it so. Amane crawls in between his knees and wraps her arms around his neck, lowering Ryou’s head into the crook of her neck. He lets out a shuddering breath before whispering, “I’m sorry.”

He says it over and over again, thin limbs enclosing around her body like a human cage. He’s terrified that she’ll slip through him and leave as everyone else has. It doesn’t make this whole situation any more okay, but it’ll have to do.

And Ryou, for the first time in five years, breaks down and cries.

Ryou is pale and skeletal as he walks onto Platform Nine and Three Quarters. Amane holds his hand with a loyal ferocity, refusing to let go even when he tries to shake her loose. She knows what he’s thinking and doesn’t (can’t) care.

She steals his money from his pocket before he gets on the train so that she has an excuse to give her parents to go after him. Ryou knows what she’s done - he is the one that taught her everything that she knows about stealing - so while she finds the shades drawn on his compartment door windows, the latch is unlocked.

“You shouldn’t be here,” he murmurs under his breath as the door slides shut behind her. “I don’t care,” she tells him and tries to mean it. Amane sits down beside him and notices as he tries to edge away. She swallows hard and composes herself, “Write to me.”

“Amane - “

“I don’t care, Ryou. Really,” she grabs him by the chin and forces him to look at her. “You’ve got to keep writing, okay? If only to tell me that you’re alright.”

He sighs and Ryou brings a hand to hers and pries her fingers off of his face.

“You care, Amane. Don’t lie to me. I tried to...” his voice seems to constrict and a low hiss comes from deep inside his chest. He’s angry, but not at Keith or the world. Instead, he’s mad at himself.

No, she realizes suddenly. She feels Ryou's his skin turn to scales beneath her fingertips and sees his pupils become snakelike slits. The sky outside darkens and the shadows lengthen around him. No, he's not mad. He's livid.

But she’s not scared. She’d never be scared around Ryou in one of his mage moments, no matter what kind of power he is displaying. She tightens her grip on his hand and speaks in a calm, controlled voice, “Listen to me. Okay, you’re right. I’m not alright with what happened. It shouldn’t have happened at all. But if that’s what you need to be okay, then I will make it alright.”

“What?!” Ryou cries out in shock and Amane sees fangs and a forked tongue in his mouth, “That’s what you think I want?”
“Isn’t it?”

“Do you even know what you’re talking about?” He recoils from her as if she’s burning.

“Not really,” she admits softly.

“You don’t - you don’t know! Merlin, this is fucked up,” he hisses. “It’s bad enough that they’ve gotten to me with this whole conversion bullshit, but you as well? You’re not even supposed to be involved.” He sucks in a breath, trying to get a reign on himself, “Amane, I don’t want that from you.”

“You did before,” she points out, though she doesn’t know what that means.

“I wasn’t thinking straight,” Ryou yells. “Father kept...he was talking about marriage prospects and how I should try to get back with Igraine because she’s a fucking Selwyn and we need connections if our family is ever going to be in the same leagues as the main families. And I kept thinking that she’d never want me, no one wants me, because of what I am! No one except you. You’re the only person that’s real who wants me.”

He takes a breath and his skin returns to normal as light returns to the platform outside, “I should never have done what I did. I’m sorry, but no amount of apologies is ever going to make it alright.”

The whistle at the front of the train blows, signalling the last call for those boarding the Hogwarts Express to get inside. Ryou gives her a withering look, “You should go.”

Amane stands and brushes the creases out of her dress. She sighs, feeling older than she actually is, and kisses Ryou lightly on the cheek.

“Write to me, okay?” She whispers. He closes his eyes and nods. She turns to walk to the door and by the time she looks back, Ryou is invisible to the eye. Amane closes the compartment door and walks away.

Keith never thought that he would see the day where Ryou would get truly and completely angry. Not just pissed enough to darken rooms and maybe, sort of, transform. Not just pout in a corner and refuse to talk. This, here, is beyond all of that. Finally, everything collapsed.

Granted, he should have seen the signs. Ryou is beyond moody upon his return to Hogwarts after the Easter holidays. He goes to class, but does nothing but stare at his desk until their completion. No one can find him afterwards and it makes Keith realize that the one time that he caught the boy out of bed after curfew only happened because Ryou wanted to be found.

He has no idea what that means in the grand scheme of things, but it’s probably not good.

Except for one morning, about a week later, he shows up for dinner in the Great Hall. He walks in halfway through the main course and everyone stops talking just to watch. Keith thinks that it’s quite ironic. For the first time since the founding of this school, all four houses were acting in harmony and it was in hatred of Ryou Andrews.

“Go home, freak!” A voice rings out from one of the tables. Dumbledore’s face looks like it’s made of stone.

“Twenty points from Ravenclaw, Mr. Carmichael,” he calls out, but just as the sapphires start to move in the hourglass behind Keith, someone throws a chicken leg at Ryou’s head. It phases right
through him Keith’s heart stops beating.

Oh shit.

An open display of mage magic, and with two already existing strikes on his record, is the equivalent to the death sentence for Ryou. There’s nothing he can do to cover this one up. The kid’s going to die. Keith actually considers doing what his mother usually does in the situation and praying because he’s that fucking desperate. But praying is useless because the gods have been dead for over a thousand years and even if they weren’t, they wouldn’t answer a wizard.

Ryou sits down next to Igraine Selwyn at the Slytherin table and she and her girlfriends immediately gather their plates and move to a different spot on the bench. He doesn’t seem to give a damn as he reaches for the food spread out before him. Keith thinks he actually sees a smirk on the kid’s face before he foregoes the knife and fork and starts ripping into things with his teeth. James Andrews would be horrified. Keith thinks that’s the point. Right now, Ryou literally has nothing left to lose.

Dinner ends and Keith has barely touched his plate. His stomach is churning, his hands are shaking, and his wishes for some firewhiskey to give him the courage to go about dealing with this. Ryou stands and, without glancing up at Keith, walks out of the Hall. He notices a group of students getting up from various tables and following him.

As he makes his way into the hallways, he sees a large crowd of students grouped together on the third floor. Cackles and jeers make their way down to where he is and Keith immediately knows what’s going on. He tries to get up there to stop it all, but the fucking staircase moves in a direction that is the opposite of helpful and he is left to watch in horror as Ryou is forced against the railing and threatened with being thrown over.

The stairs finally right themselves and Keith makes a mad dash towards the third floor, pushing past students without a care for their well being. In the middle of the crowd is a circle, within which contains four students. Sam Rowle holds Ryou up by the hair, laughing at the kid’s grimace of pain with a mouth of uneven teeth. Igraine Selwyn holds her wand out in front of her and her pretty face is contorted into something horrid and ugly. What surprises Keith more than anything else is that they are joined by Felix Cornfoot, a sixth year Gryffindor, and to his knowledge, the boy has never interacted with this pair of Slytherins in his life before today.


“We’re only doing what’s right,” Cornfoot snaps. “He’s a mage. Everyone knows what to do with mages.”

“Walk away, boy,” he speaks in his rumbling, dangerous voice. “Do it now and there won’t be any trouble.”

“We’d be doing the world a favour,” Rowle spits, but he throws Ryou down to the floor and moves towards Igraine. Keith rushes forward and helps the boy to his feet.

“Damn it, kid. Why’d you do it? You know what this means! I can’t help you,” he hisses as Ryou wipes the blood out of his eyes.

“It’s okay, Keith. Really. I know what I’m doing,” the kid whispers under his breath. “This is supposed to happen -”

Igraine Selwyn’s voice carries over to where they’re standing, “Forget about it, Sam. Next year, his
sister’s going to be a first year and we can get her, too. Do the job properly.”

Ryou goes rigid. Six types of shock, panic, and fear pass over his face before it hardens into something he’s almost intimately familiar with. Keith is reminded of the fourteen-year-old girl from Oklahoma, the one that wore the Katy Perry t-shirt and jean skirt. She’s had the same look on her face before the plants in the room came to life and ripped a man to shreds.

Ryou is going to kill them

The kid walks through him with a grace that is almost ethereal, ancient beyond words. Keith turns sharply, pulling out his wand as a knife slides out of Ryou’s sleeve. He shouts out in warning before the boy spins back to him and throws his stolen cutlery with deadly accuracy. The knife embeds itself in Keith’s wand, splitting it right down the middle and leaving him completely defenceless. He hears the sound of screaming students, sees the torches going out, knows that Ryou’s skin is now covered in gray scales and his eyes are slit like a snake. This mage stands before him, blinks, and then dismisses Keith as not-a-threat before turning towards the three that spoke about his sister. And then he vanishes.

A second later, Cornfoot’s eyes go wide, his wand falling from his grip. He hunches over and coughs up blood. As he collapses on the floor, Ryou appears behind him with what looks like Cornfoot’s stomach in his hand. Igraine screams and holds up her wand in defence. She shouts a curse and Ryou dodges left, getting in close. He spins on one foot, kicking her wand from her grasp before yanking her in close. Rowle cowers on the floor as the rest of the students that were watching run for the stairs. Keith looks on in shock as the situation becomes the stuff of his own worst nightmares.

Ryou holds Igraine like they are dance partners, hip to hip with a softness that shouldn’t have been there. He presses a kiss to her forehead and tucks a lock of the girl’s brown hair behind an ear.

“I cared for you once,” Ryou breathes. Igraine squirms as she comes to life, pushing against his chest.

“Get away from me!” She yells, “I’ll kill you, mage! You and your blood traitor sister!”

Ryou’s snake eyes narrow and a line of film flicks over them. A forked tongue slips out from in between his lips as he hisses, “So be it then.”

His jaw opens wide, exposing fangs that sink into Igraine’s neck. At first, Keith thinks of a vampire, but as he notices the silent scream on the girl’s lips and the blue veins that pop under her now translucent skin he understands that, of course, Ryou is a snake. Of course, it’s poison.

He drops her the moment he lifts his mouth away. Blood drips down his chin and there is a hint of sadness in Ryou’s face that looks so out of place that it’s almost fitting. This whole thing is unlike anything Keith has ever seen in the mage before that it makes him wonder if he’s ever known Ryou at all.

The mage turns to Rowle, who’s hunched against the railing. He takes a step towards him and Keith wonders if the High Priests and Priestess of the days of old used to walk like that. He should be doing something, but he can’t move his feet. Keith can’t move at all and it has nothing to do with magic or mages and everything to do with fear for Ryou’s life. He doesn’t give two shits about Felix Cornfoot or Igraine Selwyn or Sam Rowle. All he knows is that someone has to stop Ryou Andrews and he doesn’t think that it can be him.

Ryou kneels before Rowle, gently prying his wand from his fingers, and sets it aside. The mage’s
breath comes out in a low, almost comforting hiss and wraps the boy in his arms. Keith remembers that Rowle had once been Ryou’s friend before the mage pushes them both through the railing and into the air below.

He hears the snap of bones and whatever had been previously holding him in place lets go. Keith leans over the railing - and holy fucking crap, Ryou could use his powers to take other people with him through solid objects - and sees Rowle’s hopefully unconscious body sprawled out on one of the staircases below him. Ryou comes into view as the set of steps underneath moves. Keith sees the mage bolting towards the landing before disappearing into a wall.

But as it turns out, Ryou has no interest in hiding. A castle-wide search finds him sitting calmly on his dormitory bed, staring darkly at the candle on the other side of the room that refuses to be lit no matter what anyone tries to do. Keith’s superiors lock Mage Cuffs around Ryou’s wrists and he is led out of Hogwarts. But right before he passes through the main doors, he calls out for all that have turned out to watch him leave.

“If any harm ever comes to my sister, I will find the ones responsible.”

It earns him a smack on the back of the head by one of the Unspeakables, but Keith can honestly say that Ryou doesn’t give a damn.

And thus, it all ended of the mage Ryou Andrews at Hogwarts. Death for him would start here at this school, with its secret history of slaughter, and come to its completion on an Unplottable island just south of Hawaii.

Chapter End Notes

A few of my personal headcanons ended up in here. The first of which is that the New World doesn't have a very large population of wizarding people. This is because when it was originally being settled, wizards were forbidden from becoming colonists. However, that didn't stop muggleborns from being born into the colonies. Eventually, a few pureblood families moved over so that they could function as a 'ruling class' - the one percent, if you will.

Second, in comparison to the rest of the world, Europe (and especially Britain) have a very traditional social hierarchy. Because the Statute of Secrecy was created in 1689, they still embody many of the values from that age. America is closer to the Victorian Age, but because of their closeness to muggles, a few ideals have phased their way in.

The Sacred Twenty Eight are a group of Twenty Eight families that are the 'royalty' of British wizarding society, as they are considered to be truly pure (as their wizarding family history goes back almost a thousand years). The Blacks, Malfoys, and Lestranges are on this list, as are several other families including the Weasleys. The Andrews family are considered pureblood, however they only have a few centuries of 'purity' to them and cannot be part of the list. James Andrews, while not a Death Eater, is obsessed with power and sees having connections to the Sacred Twenty Eight as being a way to get a leg up.

And finally, the Gaunt family has gotten to the point of marrying brother to sister in an attempt to keep the line 'pure'. This is based off of the fact that the Blacks have never married into the Gaunt family - which is surprising considering that their words are
'Always Pure'. You'd think that a family that is so obsessed with purity would be gunning for a chance to have the descendants of Slytherin in their family. Also, when Morfin talked to Tom Riddle about Merope, he never seemed angry to me. I have always read it as jealousy.
Chapter Summary

“What about them?” Ryou jerks his head towards Rex and the other two.

“What about them? We have to leave now!”

“They are children, Keith! The girl is younger than my sister! You’re going to leave them here to die?!”

“Yes!” The wizard shouts and Ryou goes silent in shock, “Yes, I’m going to. I don’t give a flying fuck about them, Ryou! They are mages and they deserve it! But you don’t, so come on!”

Chapter Notes


Warning: child abuse, anorexia, suicide, character death, and gore.

Rex Raptor is thirteen years old and in chains for something he can’t control. He never asked to be a mage. He never asked to be born to a witch mother. He can’t help the fact that his skin is harder than diamonds. He doesn’t deserve to die for this. He’s not a fucking monster.

He’d managed to keep it hidden for most of his life, too. Rex makes it through almost two years at school before he's discovered. He’s heard that others aren’t as lucky. But what has luck got to do with anything when you all end up in the same place anyway?

His mother isn’t able to pay for a conversion, but he chalks it up to the fact that it's only the elite that gets that kind of special treatment. They want to preserve what little purebloods America has left and you can’t have those types of families with mages cropping up every generation. It’s so fucking stupid, but hey, they are the ones with the gold, so naturally, their reputations come before the lives of those on the other end of the stick.

Rex looks around the cell that he’s just been thrown into. There are two other kids in there with him: a nerdy looking boy with a bowl cut that seems to be about his age and, holy hell, a little girl with blonde pigtails that can’t be older than ten. It’s sick, so fucking sick that he lurches over and throws up all over the stone floor.

“You alright over there?” Bowl Cut asks.
“Just peachy,” he answers. The girl starts to cry.

“Where’s my mama?” She sniffs and Rex can’t help but feel awful.

“Hey, hey, it’s okay,” he tries to look less intimidating in his baggy clothing and skull-and-crossbones hat than he normally does. “What’s your name?”

“R-Rebecca,” she answers.

“Hi, Rebecca. I’m Rex. And this is...” he trails off, hoping that Bowl Cut will take a fucking hint.

“Weevil,” the guy says through clenched teeth.

“Yeah. That’s Weevil. And we’re all going take care of each other, alright?” Rex grins with a mouth full of braces.

“Really?” Rebecca wipes her nose with her sleeve.

“Really. Look, how long have you guys been here?” Rex asks.

Weevil answers, “A few days, I think. I’ve been here longer than Rebecca has. They transferred us all in here today.”


“Grandpa’s from London,” Rebecca whispers.

“I don’t think your grandpa’s coming,” Weevil frowns at her and the girl dissolves into tears again, calling for her mother.

“Nice going,” Rex snaps at him.

“We’re gonna die. I ain’t got time to worry about her feelings,” Weevil hisses. “Can you get these undone?”

He nods to the Cuffs and Rex tries to use his magic to call upon the insane strength that comes with his impenetrable skin, but the Mage Cuffs suck it all out of his grasp. He gives up before they drain him entirely and shakes his head.

“Damn, I thought...this is not good,” Weevil curses.

“What do you mean?”

“These chains, they’re specific to each one of our powers. Your Cuffs wouldn’t work on me and vice versa,” Weevil explains. “And if you’ve got a power they don’t know about...”

“The Cuffs don’t cover them. So we’re hoping to develop something in the next ten minutes,” Rex groans.

“Yeah. I’d almost escaped using my acid yesterday, but they caught me before I could leave the island. I got a good look at the place, though,” he shrugs. “If we can get out again, I’m sure I could lead us to the docks.”

Rex glances down at Rebecca as hope pops into his head, “Hey! Can you do special magic, too? Special magic that you’ve never shown anyone before?”
The girl doesn’t answer, shaking her head and letting out a wail that echoes around the cell. Shit. Shit, shit, fuck, what the hell were they going to do?

A noise comes from outside. The door swings open and Rex finds himself staring at the business end of a witch’s wand. Weevil shoves Rebecca behind the two of them and a series of clicks escapes from his mouth in anger. The witch snorts and flicks her wand, sending Weevil crashing into the wall. The little girl cries into Rex’s pant leg. He wants to tear them all apart with his teeth.

A second witch appears and shoves a gangly boy into the cell with them. He’s thin, almost anorexic, with pale skin and black hair. Rex can see the distinct bone lines in his face and feels compelled to get this guy a burger, or fuck, just something eat because he looks like a zombie.

The newcomer looks up at the sound of Rebecca’s snuffles and his blue eyes widen. He seems to come alive, spinning around at the closing cell door and screaming, “You sick freaks, she’s a little girl! You monsters! How is this right?!"

“Give it up. They can’t hear you,” Weevil mumbles as blood drips down his forehead. “The room’s soundproofed.”

“Damn it,” the guy slams his chained fists against the door in frustration. “If we’re all here, they’re probably going to start soon,” Rex whispers under his breath as realization slowly dawns on him. The guy can’t seem to hear him speak, can’t seem to stop staring at Rebecca with horror-filled eyes.

“She’s too young. Far too young for the program. Why is she here?”

“I want my mama,” Rebecca cries again. “Why did she let them take me? I just wanna go home!”

Oh god, he’s gonna be sick again. That’s just wrong. That’s just so fucking wrong.

The door unlocks again and a wizard bursts through this time. He’s blond, sharply dressed, and clean shaven. He points his wand and shouts, “Petrificus Totalus!”

Rex’s arms become glued to his side as his body turns to stone. He falls over with a loud clanging noise. Weevil and Rebecca quickly follow suit.

“Keith? What are you doing?” The boy gapes openly as the wizard steps forward and points his wand at his Cuffs.

“Alohamora,” he says and they spring open. The wizard - Keith, apparently - grabs the boy by the wrist and tugs, “Come on, Ryou.”

“Not until you tell me what’s going on!”

“Damn it, kid. We haven’t got time for this!”

“You tell me right now or I’m not going anywhere,” the boy hisses in a way that is anything but human.

Keith struggles with himself for a second before relenting, “I’m getting you out. They call mages into the chair alphabetically and you’re first on the list. I’m taking you to San Francisco to live with your own kind. I’ll spend the rest of my days running and they’ll kill my family, but I will not watch you die.”
“What about them?” Ryou jerks his head towards Rex and the other two.

“What about them? We have to leave now!”

“They are children, Keith! The girl is younger than my sister! You’re going to leave them here to die?!”

“Yes!” The wizard shouts and Ryou is silent in shock, “Yes, I’m going to. I don’t give a flying fuck about them, Ryou! They are mages and they deserve it! But you don't, so come on!”

"I'm a mage!" The guy shouts, "I've sent three people to St. Mungo's!"

"They deserved it, too!"

"I've done things that you don't know about!"

"Like what?"

"I attacked my sister," Ryou spits and Keith takes a step back. "I pinned her down and I hurt her and there isn't anything I can do to fix it. And just because you think you know me, you think I deserve to be saved?"

"Ryou, stop being such a fucking Gryffindor," the wizard looks around, desperately searching for something that would tell him that what this guy is saying is a lie.

"I'm not. I'm a Slytherin, I'm self-serving. I do what's best for me. And I've wanted to die for a very long time now," Ryou's voice shakes as he speaks. "I'm a Mage and I'm wizard born. This is how my people die."

Then Rex watches as he reaches down and picks up the Mage Cuffs that had fallen to the ground, locking them once again around his wrists. Something harrowing passes over Keith's face before he waves his wand once more. Rex's body unlocks and he sits up just in time to see the wizard walk away, slamming the door shut behind him.

"You could have left. Why the hell didn't you?" Weevil snaps, but Ryou runs to his side and covers the boy's Cuffs with his hands.

"Alohamora," he breathes and they open. Rex's mouth drops.

"...the fuck?" He swears and Ryou moves to Rebecca and does the same thing.

"Before I left, I defeated Keith in a fight. I take the powers of those I defeat and I keep them until I'm beaten or I take someone else down. Alohamora," the guy explains as he frees Rex.

"They didn't catch me, I went willingly with them, so I was able to keep the wizard magic."

"That's incredible," Weevil stares at him, slack-jawed.

"Thanks," Ryou smiles, but it doesn't reach his eyes. "I've got a plan."

It's pretty simple, but sometimes it's the simple ones that are the most effective. Rebecca, as it turns out, can turn into a shadow; she's the one that's going to hide them as they make their escape. Rex is on defence if they get discovered and Weevil's their guide.

"No matter what, you get her out or die trying," Ryou stresses.
"What about you?" Rex asks.

"I'm going to be the distraction," he says and Rex's blood runs cold. He pulls Ryou off to the side.

"You do that and you're gonna die," he whispers.

"I know."

"I don't care what it was that you did to your sister, man. I'm not leaving you behind."

Ryou gives him a withering look, "Please."

"No."

"Please," the look of desperation on his face is so many levels of wrong. "I planned for this to happen. I want this to happen, like this."

"No," Rex says again.

"Yes," Ryou answers in turn. "But I will not let that little girl die, not if I can help it. You get out, you go to San Francisco, and you find a group of mages to take you in. You live. Do that for me, okay? Live."

He can't help it. Rex hugs the guy. Ryou is so thin that he can count his ribs through the fabric of his shirt. He's only a few years older than Rex himself, but he's about to die so that they can live. And it's not bravery or recklessness. No, this is a strategic move so that everyone would get what they wanted. It would almost be ambitious, if ambition was fucked five ways to Sunday and so god damn wrong that it makes him want to puke.

But it is what they have and what they must do, and if Ryou happens to take down a few of these assholes while he's at it, Rex can't find it in himself to feel sorry for them.

Keith has seen a few Mage executions in his time, the first one had been a thirty-year-old man who'd had to be dragged into the chair. He raged and cursed and tried to bite all those who came near him. Keith remembers that man because that was the first time he'd ever seen a Mage before. It was the first time he'd ever thought, "They really are monsters, aren't they?"

The second one had been the girl from Oklahoma and she cried up until her last breath. The third one had been an old woman from somewhere in the former U.S.S.R. She'd prayed beforehand and died calmly, almost peacefully.

The thing about mages is that some of them can reflect magic, so randomly firing a Killing Curse at them could result in some pretty dire situations. So they use the one thing that would bypass any kind of barrier or protective enchantments that could e set up: the Thief King's Millennium Ring. The whole process in and of it's is pretty straightforward. Chain the Mage to the chair in the execution room and slip the Ring over their necks. They just stop breathing, completely serene - gentle. Keith thinks it's more humane than Avada Kadaavra. The victims of that curse seem to seize when it strikes them as if they're in pain. Mages get it easy.

The Ring is kept in the dungeon of the Department's international headquarters along with the other two Mage Items in Wizard possession. The Millennium Eye and The Millennium Spellbook are held in a separate room. Keith has seen them before. He's even read the Book on a few occasions. He's watched the Ring take lives before, but not like this. Never like this.
They won't be coming to collect the Ring for at least another fifteen minutes, so Keith slips inside and closes the door behind him. He considers grabbing it and throwing it into the ocean, but knows that he can't. Unlike the Eye, the Millennium Ring is temperamental. It won't let anyone touch it. The executioners have to wear protective gear and even then, each time they pick it up takes years off sir lives. If Keith does anything now, as he is, he'd only make it worse for Ryou in the end.

Ryou. Fuck. Ryou. He can't do anything. He can't stop this. And even if he could, the kid would probably slit his own throat the moment they got off the island because he planned this and he wants to die. It's all Keith's fault. He did this to Ryou. He's killed him.

Ryou had turned on his own sister. On Amane Andrews. The one person in his life that he'd sworn to defend at all costs. To what brink had Ryou been driven for him to act out like that? What had gone on in those ‘classes’ that Keith had never really looked into to transform the ten-year-old boy he’d first seen clutching his sister's hand into the person who would rather die than continue on another day?

It isn’t his job to ask, but he should have. And now its too late.

He looks at the Millennium Ring. It’s made of gold: a thin sheet shaped into a triangle with the corners connected by a full loop. Hanging from the circle are five tines and at the top is a small hole where a cord has been slung through. In the middle of the triangle is the Eye of Horus and Keith is convinced that it’s watching him.

He sits down and stares at it - this thing that is going to end Ryou’s life. It shines in the dimly lit room and Keith hates it all. The Ring, the mages, his job. Himself. But not Ryou. He can’t find it in himself to hate Ryou. He never will.

And then he hears it: a rasping sound that comes from behind him. He knows what this is, but he’s never seen it before. Others have - just a select few - but not him. So Keith turns and sees him.

He can’t tell how old the Spirit of the Millennium Ring is. His skin looks like its been stretched over his skeleton, like a hundred-year-old corpse that’s been dug up and exposed to air. The tattered remains of clothing hang from his hips, barely holding itself together. The Spirit looks at him with bloodshot eyes from under hair so matted with dirt and grime that its impossible to tell what colour it is naturally. It’s long in some places and shorter in others as if it’s been ripped off at odd angles.

The Spirit looks like it got into a fight with a werewolf and lost. Dark blood is dripping from a gash on his forehead, and that’s the least horrifying of his injuries. There’s a large chunk of flesh missing from his calf. Keith can see the barely healed claw marks that criss-cross his chest and a cut that slashed his throat wide open. The spirit brings a hand to his neck so that he can breathe properly.

Keith sits motionless on the bench in front of the Millennium Ring and watches as the Spirit limps towards him at an agonizingly slow pace. He sits and realizes that, dear Merlin, this is all that’s left of the supposedly great and powerful Thief King of the mages. That incredible person has been reduced to this: a skeleton of a man that has to hold himself together with his hands. It would be sad if the Thief King weren’t an enemy.

“Are you here to kill me?” Keith asks calmly, but inside his is anything but. His stomach coils in on itself because he can feel the raw power that rolls off the spirit. It’s terrifying.

The Spirit either doesn’t or can’t answer and he suspects it’s the latter because of the rasping breath and the cutthroat. He pauses momentarily, gazing at Keith with his eyes, red and bloody with veins
in stark contrast with their white backgrounds. And then the Spirit almost seems to sigh before moving to sit down on the bench beside him.

Keith doesn’t know whether to laugh or cry, so he does neither and continues to stare at his feet. After a few minutes, he glances up and sees that spirit’s eyes are still, unnervingly, fixed on him.

“If you’re not going to kill me, what do you want?” He scoffs. The Spirit blinks, blood continuing to drip from his wounds. Keith chuckles humourlessly at his predicament, “What the hell am I even doing? You can’t understand me.”

The Spirit’s lips curl back and what teeth he has left are crooked and black. Keith realizes that he’s smiling. Or smirking. Probably smirking. And that’s weird in and of itself because the spirit of the Millennium Ring has never been said to interact with people before.

The Spirit reaches forward with his hand (his left one that’s missing two and a half fingers) and taps the wood between them twice. Keith’s eyes jerk between them and the Spirit’s face.

“Wait? Can you really...?”

The taps come again and the Spirit’s smirk of a smile widens until it looks uncomfortably stretched. Keith knows he should probably contact a superior, but the question just comes out.

“Merlin, how old are you?”

The Spirit’s mouth closes as his brow furrows as if trying to remember. Then he starts tapping once more, and Keith counts. One, two, three, four. Past ten. Past fifteen. There’s twenty and twenty-one and then they stop. Twenty-one. He was twenty-one years old when he died.

Keith knows the legend - well, the basics, but that’s pretty much all that anyone knows these days. The Lady Pharaoh, King Lord Commander, and Thief King were chosen by the gods to rule Egypt and ended up dying in a battle against a great evil that threatened to destroy the world. He’s always assumed that the three of them were his age, in their thirties, when it happened. And to think that the Thief King had been that young, that he’s died at twenty-one years of age.

Just like Ryou, his life had been over all too soon. And just like that, he gets an idea.

“You...know what happens to the people that put on your Ring, right?” Keith leans forward. The Spirit looks away as his remaining two and a half fingers curl into a fist. He waits and hears two knocks.

“It’s going to happen again. Today. And there’s a boy. His name is Ryou Andrews. Can you save him?”

One knock. No.

“Why not?” Keith growls.

One knock. Damn it.

“Save him!”

One knock. Keith lurches forwards, grabbing the spirit by the shoulder and he’s thrown into a memory that’s not his. He watches as the Spirit stares down into a pit of fire and darkness and something looks back. It roars and rages and struggles against the chains that bind it. And the Spirit looks on, holding his neck closed with one hand and limps away.
Keith is thrown back and the spirit stands up, backing away as fast as he can with a barely functioning leg. He picks himself up and watches in horror as the tines of the Millennium Ring start to twitch and move around. The Spirit looks at Keith with wide, surprised eyes before tapping twice on the wall behind him. And then he disappears completely.

Pete Coppermine is relatively new to the whole Unspeakable thing. He was an Auror in Detroit for a few years before being hand-picked for the Department by Mr. Pegasus himself. He’s proud to be able to serve the wizarding world in its endeavours, no matter what it means he has to give up. Sacrificing contact with anyone he’s ever met before is all in the name of the greater good.

This is going to be the first time he’s ever seen a mage. For the last few months, he’s been doing paperwork, but this is it. If he can pull this off and see a mage at it’s worst, then they’ll let him out into the field. Maybe he’ll get paired with one of the legends, like “Bandit” Keith Howard.

Bandit Keith has over twenty successful hunts under his belt and has been apart of three executions, which is more than a lot of other Unspeakables can boast about. Pete knows that one of the mages that are in today is Bandit Keith’s conversion project, but hey, some aren’t meant to be saved. It’s not like it matters much anyways. If there’s one less mage in the world, he sure as hell isn’t going to complain.

Pete walks with two others towards the detention cell block where the mages are being kept shortly after twenty-one hundred hours. There’s four of them scheduled for termination tonight: Ryou Andrews (Bandit Keith’s conversion, fifteen years old, wizard born from Scotland), Rebecca Hawkins (eight years old, throw away from New Jersey), Rex Raptor (thirteen years old, capture from North Carolina), and Weevil Underwood (fourteen years old, muggleborn mage from New Brunswick).

One of the two Unspeakables, Willa Mette, opens the door to the cell and calls for Andrews to step forwards. The mage is thinner than a blade of grass, with black hair and blue eyes. He moves away from where the other three are standing, out of his own free will, and walks towards them.

Andrews gives Raptor a shaky smile before the door closes behind him.

“Alright. Move it, monster,” Mette shoves Andrews down the hallways and trades a smirk with Pete. He can’t believe it’s this simple. The mage is so pitiful and weak that it’s almost easy to despise him. He’s nothing. He can do nothing.

The mage stops moving, causing Reiko Kitamori, a transfer from the Japanese Department, to bump into him. She shrieks and backpedals quickly before Andrews whispers, “Alohamora.”

The Cuffs fall to the ground and then everything goes straight to hell. Pete sends his Patronus to call for back up as Andrews dodges Mette’s spells, inching forward until he’s within striking distance. Kitamori screams as the mage grabs Willa Mette by the face and, in a voice so cold, hisses, “Reducto.”

Mette’s skull is blown open and his brains splatter against the wall. Pete fires off the Cruciatius curse and it clips Andrews on the shoulder. He screams and drops to his knees and Pete laughs because the parasite is getting what he deserves and -

The mage looks up, eyes like ice and grabs Mette’s wand. He leaps forwards, holding it above his head in a fist. Foregoing the wand’s magical properties, Andrews stabs Pete in the hollow of his collarbone. As he yelps in pain, the mage snaps the wand in half, lodging the wood in his body,
before he is blasted away. Kitamori had blown him into the wall, knocking the mage out. Andrew’s head lolls to the side as he sits, slumped in his unconsciousness.

Kitamori runs to Pete and presses her hand to his wound. Back up finally arrives and they place the Cuffs back around Andrew’s wrists. She looks in between him and the mage and whispers, “They really are monsters, aren’t they?”

The moment that they have Ryou chained to the chair, Keith storms into the execution room because he needs a fucking explanation for all the shit that’s gone down in the last half hour.

He dismisses Coppermine and Kitamori with a wave of his hand and kneels down in front of Ryou. The boy’s fingers dig into the wooden arms of the chair, finding a home in the deep gouges left there by its previous occupants.

“Damn it, kid. You’ve really done it this time,” Keith swears.

Ryou chuckles, dry and lifeless, “I assume that they got away?”

“Yeah. News like that travels fast.” It’s not every day a mage escapes from this island, let alone three.

“They were just children, Keith. I had to.”

“I know,” he sighs. “I know you did. You crazy son of a bitch.”

He looks up into Ryou’s eyes and sees that ancient gaze of his staring back. Keith has never met someone like this kid before and he doubts that he ever will again. Something one of a kind is going to die in a few minutes and the world will be a little less bright because of it.

“The three that I hurt at Hogwarts - Igraine, Sam, and the other one? How are they doing?” Ryou asks suddenly.

“Igraine’s doing better, last I heard. They found an antidote for whatever you pumped into her, but it’s slow-going and she’ll probably have to repeat a year at school. Sam, well, it was a spinal injury so magic can only do so much. He’ll walk again, but he’ll limp for the rest of his life.” Keith takes a breath and continues, “Felix Cornfoot was the third one. And you took out his stomach. Regrowing organs isn’t like regrowing bone. He’s going to be touch-and-go for a while.”

Ryou nods slowly and then lets out a shaky laugh, “Three lives destroyed. Three lives saved. It’s fitting.”

Keith realizes that the kid has said nothing about Willa Mette, the man who had his brains blown out fifteen minutes ago. He wonders if Ryou ever cares? He wonders if Ryou’s death is supposed to even the odds?

“I dreamt of them last night.” Keith looks up just in time to see a single tear roll down Ryou’s face. The boy is smiling and it makes him want to die. “We were…sad. Because we were going to die. Does that…mean I’m going to meet them now, Keith?”

He reaches up and covers Ryou’s thin hands with his own much larger ones. And he lies because the gods are dead and there is nothing beyond the Veil of Death but emptiness and finality. But Ryou doesn’t need to know that. Not now, “Yes, it does.”
“I think I love them. Do you think that they love me back?”

“Of course, they do,” Keith whispers, lies through his teeth because he’s not even sure who they are or if they were ever anything more than figments of Ryou’s broken mind. “I think they’ll be very happy to finally meet you.”

The executioner walks in, wrapped head to toe in cloth embroidered with glowing, ancient markings. In his (or her’s, he can’t tell) hands is the Millennium Ring and Keith remembers the spirit and hopes that maybe - just maybe - there’s a chance to save Ryou. The executioner motions for him to get out of the way and he does because it’s his job and Keith is a fucking puppet and he hates himself.

“Tell Amane to take care of Bandit for me,” Ryou shouts his last words. “Promise me, Keith.”

“I will,” he says and he means it. He’ll do this one last thing because it’ll be the one thing that he will not fail Ryou at. He refuses to fuck this one up. He can’t.

The rope of the Ring falls around the boy’s shoulders and breath leaves his lungs. Ryou finally seems to relax as his body slumps forwards in the chair. Keith can’t stop his hands from shaking.

The executioner, silent as ever, reaches for the ancient Mage artifact, wanting to remove it from the corpse of the child it just killed.

And then, suddenly, it all goes wrong.

A pale hand grips the executioner’s wrist with such strength that Keith can hear it snap on the other side of the room. The woman behind the mask howls in pain as the Spirit of the Millennium Ring emerges from the shadows. He doesn’t bother holding his slit throat together anymore, so blood gushes from the gaping wound and flows down his skin-and-bones chest as he stretches his hands open in front of him. Not a single word is uttered, but the air in the room just seems to move and then the executioner is blasted straight through the brick wall behind her.

Keith fumbles for his wand, but he is infinitely too slow. The Spirit appears in front of him, slamming his open palm into Keith’s throat. He chokes and it disorients him long enough for the Spirit to kick his legs out from under him and send him crashing to the ground. He tastes vomit in his mouth as the Spirit climbs on top of him, smirks with his black teeth, and then smashes his head against the floor.

When he finally comes to, Keith is helped to his feet by Tilla Mook, a fellow Unspeakable that he worked with in Lakewood. She tells him the impossible: the Spirit of the Millennium Ring is trying to help Ryou Andrews to escape.

“But he’s dead. Ryou - he died,” Keith tries to wrap his head around it all.

“Yes, he did. But somehow, he started breathing again.”

He jumps to his feet, ignoring Mook and the dizziness that hits him because Ryou is alive and he has to help him. Somehow. Anyway he can. Because he got too close and he should regret it, but he can’t and never will.

Keith finds the two of them at the cliffside, surrounded by what seems to be the entire wizarding population of the island. He pushes his way to the centre of the circle and calls for everyone not to fire on them.

“Are you mad, Bandit?” Someone calls, “They killed Willa. They killed Maico. There are three dangerous mages on the loose. Like hell, I’m not going to drop ‘em!”
“One of those so-called ‘dangerous mages’ is an eight-year-old girl who couldn’t stop crying for her mother!” Keith shouts, just as the Spirit turns towards him all. With the wave of his hand, the calm night breeze becomes a whirlwind of chaos that knocks everyone back nearly seven hundred yards. Keith gets the feeling that the spirit wasn’t even trying that hard.

The Spirit is holding Ryou up as a coughing fit racks his body. His nose and ears are bleeding and as Keith runs towards him, he can see that the kid’s eyes are bloodshot red. Keith sees Ryou’s veins underneath his near-translucent skin as his knees give out.

The Spirit seems to ignore his own injuries as he gently set Ryou down on the earth. The moon shines behind the two of them and Keith sees the other man from before, the one that threatened to kill them, point his wand at the pair. Keith shouts for him to stop with the Spirit disappears and instantly reappears in front of him. The remains of the Thief King grabs his face and whispers something unintelligible. The man screams and falls to the floor, unmoving.

And then the Spirit turns to Keith, the blood from his cut throat impossibly dripping down his chest, and he thinks that this is it - it is how he’s going to die. His wand hand drops to his side and he closes his eyes, wondering if Ryou felt like this moments before he drank the Draught of Living Death, before he used mage magic in the Great Hall, before the executioner slipped the Millennium Ring around his neck.

“No!” Ryou’s shout echoes across the field. Keith’s eyes snap open and he sees the Spirit in front of him, dead hands inches away from his face. The Spirit almost looks annoyed, sneering through black teeth and staring with red-veined eyes. He moves back, grasping at his throat.

A hiss escapes his mouth and Keith can swear that he hears the spirit rasp, “Lucky.” He falls to his knees as the pale ghost of a man disappears and reappears in front of Ryou again. No one else dares move as Ryou guides the spirit’s hand to his chest. The boy glances over at Keith, blue eyes bright in comparison to the rest of his dying body and smiles.

“You couldn’t have fixed me. There was nothing to fix.” Ryou turns to the echo of the Thief King, “Do it.”

The Millennium Ring, still hanging around Ryou’s neck, jumps to life. The tines dance as it shines unnaturally before they impale themselves in the boy’s chest. He screams as the Spirit dissolves into Ryou’s form. He hunches over, clawing at his face and face. Something, and Keith nearly faints when he realizes that its skin, slouches off his arm. Ryou is coming apart. Literally. Keith tries to deny it, but when the boy’s fingers fall off his hands and onto the grass, he can’t. He rolls over onto his back and tries to breathe, but he’s bleeding so severely that it clogs his lungs and throat and he’s left to cough and sputter in his attempts to find air. His legs shake and then it happens.

The hairs on the back of Keith’s neck stand on edge as a wave of pure magic rolls off of Ryou’s broken form. The shockwave blows past him, colours churning so fast that it looks white. The air around the boy ripples and steams off his body. Ryou throws his head back, arms open wide, and screams as another wave rips its way out of him.

And then it stops. For a moment, all there is is an eerie calm where Keith can only hear the crashing of waves at the bottom of the cliff. But then Ryou, impossibly, starts to move again and he rushes forwards to help him to his feet.

Half the kid’s face is missing, he can only count to six on his fingers, and there a streak of white in his hair, but Ryou Andrews steadies himself in Keith’s arms and stands there like he hasn’t just
died and come back to life twice. He looks down and sees the Millennium Ring still impales in the kid’s chest. He swallows hard and speaks.

“Kid, come on. We have to get out of here. Right now,” but Ryou doesn’t listen. That’s when Keith notices that he’s not breathing. In fact, he’s not doing much of anything. It takes him a full second to realize that standing up again was the last thing that Ryou had done before dying a third and final time. His eyes are purple, lifeless, and empty.

The Millennium Ring flashes, it’s tines removing themselves from the boy’s body, and Ryou turns to sand. His corpse dissolves as the becomes dust in the wind, his clothes falling to the ground. Keith’s knees give out as he, too, collapses. And only when the sun finally rises hours later does he move again.

Chapter End Notes

So I'm feeling really sick right now, so I thought I'd post another chapter to cheer me up.
Chapter Summary

But before he gets the chance to clarify, he hears Rebecca scream. The two of them are at her side immediately, ready to take on any threat to her, when something comes out of the water.

It’s a hand, he realizes. One that’s quickly followed up by an arm, shoulders, and head. But they’re completely featureless, like a manikin in a shore window. As the creature moves through the water towards them, Weevil can see pure white hair shooting out of its head as it gains eyes and a nose and a mouth. When it makes its way completely onto shore, it stops looking like its made of clay and more like skin and muscle and bone.

Weevil blinks and realizes that he’s staring at a very wet, very naked man. Rex slaps his hand over Rebecca’s eyes in response.

Chapter Notes


Warning: Nudity, mentions of self-harm, PTSD-induced flashbacks, self-hatred, depression, homophobic slang, and sexist slang.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Only when the shoreline disappears and they’re out over the open water does Rex realizes that they’re being followed. It scares the crap out of him for a whole lot of reasons because it’s dark, they’ve got no offensive capabilities, and they managed to steal the shittiest brooms that the island had to offer.

It’s Weevil’s first time on a broom, too, since he’s a muggleborn mage and all. But that means that he can barely control the damn thing and he veers back and forth every few minutes. Combined with the fact that Rebecca is clinging to Rex like a second skin and screaming for her family, they’re completely and utterly fucked. He wishes Ryou was here. But he can’t because Ryou’s dying for their freedom back on that island and Rex refuses to let his sacrifice be in vain.

There are at least five wizards behind them, gaining quickly on their lightning fast brooms. One of
them fires a spell at Rex, but he turns his skin to diamond and it harmlessly bounces off his back. He wraps an arm around Rebecca, pressing her face into his chest. He’s not letting a little girl see this. It was bad enough when Weevil had to melt a witch’s arm off while they escaped. He falls behind Weevil to give him some protection. But the wizards are coming in fast and Rex and hear their laughter. It’s all just a game to them. Hunting mages is a fucking sport. They’re killing kids for fun, those fucking monsters.

Then something really weird happens. A bright light flashes behind Rex and he turns just in time to see a column of pure magic fade into the night sky. The shockwave hits a second or two later and he struggles to maintain control of his broom. Rebecca stops crying and looks over his shoulder to watch.

“Ryou?” She whispers. And, for some reason, it fits. That magic felt like the skinny Scottish boy from the cell, but at the same time, it doesn’t. Ryou is only part of that wave. And oddly enough, that feels right as well.

The second shockwave knocks Weevil clean off his broom. Rex darts down, catching him singlehandedly and swings him behind him. But this costs them precious seconds that they can’t afford to waste. And now the enemy has surrounded them, laughing at the prospect of killing three kids in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. It’s fucked up. Beyond fucked up. And Rex wants to see them all dead.

But Rebecca isn’t crying. She’s staring back towards the island, blinking in the darkness like she can see something that everyone else can’t. Then, for the first time since he set eyes on her, Rex sees the girl smile.

“He’s not dead,” she breathes, eyes bright with wonder. “He’s coming back for us.”

Then, just as her mouth closes, the night sky goes from clear to cloudy. The stars disappear as the waves below them become choppy. The wind whips around, churning and cutting, so fast that Rex can’t keep his eyes open. He hears the screams of their pursuers as they get caught up in the storm of the century and are flung around like ragdolls. It stops just as quickly as it starts and Rex opens his eyes to see the remains of brooms and bodies in the water below.

“Look,” Weevil says suddenly, pointing to the air in front of them. At first, he can’t see anything, but then he squints. There’s fine dust in the air, almost like ash. It floats and swirls, catching in the moonlight as the clouds dissipate, before coming together and circling them twice. Rebecca giggles and passes her fingers through it as it flies by. Then the dust shoots off into the distance as if telling them to follow.

“Do you think that’s...?” Weevil never finishes his question, perhaps because he’s not willing to hope that the impossible happened and Ryou somehow manages to escape. But that begs the question: why the fuck is he sand?

Rex nudges the broom forwards, flying in the direction he hopes land will be in. But, strangely enough, he feels calm. Weevil occasionally swears at the fact that they’re flying over an ocean on ‘cleaning supplies,’ Rebecca is humming a song under her breath, and they’re following a friend who’s disintegrated, but that’s fine. Rex wonders how the hell this is his life.

Weevil doesn’t know how long they’ve been flying and he doesn’t really care, to be honest. What he does remember of the trip is a whole lot of fear and trying not to vomit (he gets seasick and
carsick and apparently broomstick, as well). When the shoreline finally comes into view, he’s more than a little bit grateful.

The sand takes them into a bay and Weevil recognizes the lights along the Golden Gate Bridge. They’re in San Francisco. Somehow, they made it there alive. He dares to feel some hope after all of this. But then he remembers that he’s never going to see his family again, that he’s never going to go home. And that hurts more than anything those people from the island could ever do.

Rex touches down on a beach near the famous landmark of a bridge. Weevil immediately rolls off and lays flat on the earth.

“Oh god, I swear...never again. Never flying ever, ever again,” he groans.

Rex laughs behind him, “We nearly get killed and that’s what’s freaking you out? Flying?”

“Fuck off, man,” he throws back.

“Dude! Language!” The guy nods towards Rebecca. Weevil finally admits defeat and promises to keep it PG from here on out - an expression that, strangely, goes over Rex’s head like he doesn’t know what a movie is.

But before he gets the chance to clarify, he hears Rebecca scream. The two of them are at her side immediately, ready to take on any threat to her, when something comes out of the water.

It’s a hand, he realizes. One that’s quickly followed up by an arm, shoulders, and head. But they’re entirely featureless, like a manikin in a shore window. As the creature moves through the water towards them, Weevil can see pure white hair shooting out of its head as it gains eyes and a nose and a mouth. When it makes it’s way onto shore; the creature stops looking like its made of clay and more like skin and muscle and bone.

Weevil blinks and realizes that he’s staring at a very wet, very naked man. Rex slaps his hand over Rebecca’s eyes in response.

The man blinks at them before cracking a grin.

“We made it,” he says. “Knew the Ring wouldn’t lead us wrong.”

Then his eyes roll up into the back of his head and he falls face first into the sand.

“What the fuck?” Rex stares. Weevil doesn’t even care about the hypocrisy of him swearing. Instead, he cautiously approaches the man and flips him onto his back to get a better look at him. He’s dark, with a wicked burn scar that passes through his right eye. He’s short but wiry and his bone white hair sticks out at odd angles like he’s stood in the middle of a wind storm.

There are other scars as well, he notices. Faint, half-healed nicks cover his fingers and feet, while his nose looks like its been broken at least twice. There are a series of razor lines on the insides of his wrists that make Weevil’s throat clench. He’s seen those marks on his sister before. He knows what they mean.

“Is he dead?” Rex calls from where he stands. Weevil presses his fingers into the man’s neck and feels a steady pulse thumping beneath his skin.

“No, he’s fine,” he responds. “Who the hell is he, though?”

“No idea,” Rex says. “What should we do with him?”
It’s a valid question. Some clay mannikin walks out of the San Francisco Bay, turns human, and then collapses into a dead faint - all of Weevil’s instincts are telling him to leave the man behind. He doesn’t look normal, from the white hair that’s apparently natural (he didn’t mean to look, really) to the mark that covers half his face. But the scars on his wrist remind him of the sister he has back home, the one he has left teetering on the knife’s edge, and it calls to him in a way he can’t ignore.

“We should find him some clothes,” he decides.

Rex nods and takes Rebecca with him to loot one of the shops along the street. They return with new shirts and jeans on, with a pair for him and the man. They’re incredibly touristy, with the words Torpedo Wharf emblazoned across the fabric. Rebecca also seems to be clutching a stuffed seal toy and when he asks about it, Rex grumbles, “His name is Flipper.”

Between the two of them, Rex and Weevil manage to get the man dressed in a hoodie that’s far too big for him and a pair of cargos with more pockets than should be legal. Then they haul him up onto their shoulders. The man’s bare feet drag against the ground as they carry him towards the street. Nothing is open; the roads are empty and the lights are off. The four of them are all that move in the night.

Fifteen minutes into their silent trek, Rebecca complains that her feet are sore. So, they set the man down on a bench before flopping on either side of him. The girl crawls into Rex’s lap and looks like she’s about to fall asleep. They have to keep her awake, though. There’s no way that the two of them could carry the man and Rebecca at the same time.

“Where are we going?” Rex asks.

“No idea,” Weevil answers.

“That’s not good, is it?”

“Not at all.”

And that’s when things start to get worse. A cop car drives by and stops when it sees them. Weevil can only imagine what the four of them look like: two teenagers, one little girl, and a passed out man in stolen clothes sitting on a bench in the middle of the night. It doesn’t help that they’re so sleep deprived that they look like meth addicts. Yeah, they were so screwed.

“You kids alright over there?” One of the officers asks as he approaches, shining a light into Weevil’s face. He shields his eyes, rapidly blinking until they adjust.

“Yeah, we’re fine,” Rex growls. The cops don’t appreciate his tone.

“That’s not good, is it?”

“No idea.”

The officers must be able to smell their uneasiness because they glance at each other and then ask if, perhaps, the four of them what to take a ride to the station. This sets Weevil’s nerves to near-PTSD levels of edginess because this is precisely how the wizards caught him. They’d posed as police officers and taken him right out from under his parent’s roof. The idea that these two might not be real cops passes through his mind and his acid fills his mouth out of reflex.
Rebecca clings to Rex with an urgency that shows just how scared she is as one of the officers slowly reaches for his gun-- except, no, it’s not a gun, it’s a motherfucking wand, and they have to go now and--

The man wakes up.

His eyes snap open and he lurches into action. He moves so fast that Weevil honestly doesn’t know how he knocks the two cops out, but he blinks and the man stands over them, the air around him moving unnaturally. And he thinks it’s impossible because Weevil could swear that he looks familiar, but he’s never set a man this young before that has white hair and scars that bisect his eye.

“We need to get out of here,” the man says, pulling at the collar of his hoodie and looking at his chest.

“Who the hell are you?” Rex asks suddenly, eyes wide in shock or surprise. Weevil can’t tell which.

The man opens his mouth to answer, but he pauses and thinks about it as if he doesn’t know. He sends Rex a perplexed look before reaching under his hoodie, “Bakura.”

“What?”

“Bakura. That’s... That’s my name. I think. Oh,” the man’s knees buckle and he stumbles to keep himself upright. Weevil reaches out to hold steady him and sees that his eyes are purple - as if he could get any weirder.

“Alright there?” Weevil frowns.

“But...not really, I think I’m going to throw up,” and then Bakura does just that. All over the cops faces. He’d laugh if he knew what the fuck was going on.

When the man - Bakura, apparently - stops puking, he reaches back under his hoodie and pulls out a really gaudy necklace that Weevil knows for a fact wasn’t there when he popped out of the Bay. It’s a massive gold ring with five cones hanging off of it. Bakura mutters a few words in a language that ultimately escapes him and the thing jumps to life. A few seconds later, all of the cones are pointing in one direction: down the street.

“We need to got that way,” Bakura says.

“Why the hell should we trust you?” Rex scowls, “You just walked out of the ocean. We’ve never met before. How do we know you’d not just a wizard trick?”

Bakura looks at him with his purple eyes, before sighing, “I don’t understand it myself. I don’t know and I don’t remember. What I do know is that my name is Bakura, that I’m twenty-one years old, and that I had to get you all to San Francisco.

“I also know that, a few hours ago, I wasn’t who I just said I was. Rex, we met in a cell and I told you to live. I’ve also never seen you before in my life. So you can see why I’m confused. I honestly don’t know.”

He takes a breath and continues, “This is the Millennium Ring.” He points to the gold pointy thing around his neck. “I asked it to take us somewhere safe and it hasn’t let me down yet. So, we need to go that way. Now.”
“Ryou?” Weevil asks, breathless.

“Yes,” Bakura answers. “And, no. I’m him, but he’s not all I am. Now, come on.”

Rex gathers Rebecca up in his arms and turns to follow the man that was once Ryou. Weevil looks back at the cops before they disappear into the night. There were no wands, just guns. He’s been seeing things. That shouldn’t comfort him, but it does.

To say that Bakura is confused is an incredible understatement. He knows what he’s doing. He’s leading three children to safety, whatever and wherever that is. But how he’s doing it is a mystery to him. He’s never used the Ring before today, yet he knows how to work it like it’s been in his hands his entire life. Except, it hasn’t been in his hands. Instead, he lived inside it.

He remembers it all. The endless hallways, the darkness, the loneliness. And the pit. Bakura remembers the pit most of all. There was a monster inside of it, one that roared and burned eternally. Except, they aren’t really his memories. They’re the spirit of the Millennium Ring’s. And yet he is the spirit, just like he is Ryou, but isn’t at the same time.

He doesn’t get it. As the four of them walk in the direction the Ring is pointing them in, he tries to make sense of it all but almost tips over again in the process. Bakura’s head spins and his stomach threatens to heave again. Rex puts a hand on his shoulder and asks if he wants to take a break. Bakura thinks that he can’t remember the last time he ate - or if that one time even counts for anything because he’s pretty sure this body is somewhere between brand new and thousands of years old.

“Got anything to eat?” Bakura asks meekly.

They don’t, so they break into something Weevil calls a convenience store. Bakura is baffled by the concept of bottled water and canned pasta (though this Chef Boyardee person might be brilliant for coming up with the idea). Weevil offers to warm it up for him in something called a microwave, but he downs the contents of the can cold.

Before they leave, he excuses himself to use the washroom and ends up staring at himself in the mirror. He touches the scar that cuts through his right eye and is hit by a series of memories of a dark alley, the smell of burnt flesh, and the sound of someone - a woman - shouting his name. Bakura, she’d called him, that lightning girl that was his horizon.

Bakura shakes his head, clearing his thoughts. He takes one more look at himself, thinking that Amane wouldn’t be able to recognize him now, and then leaves.

They set out again a few minutes later. Rex is carrying a practically passed out Rebecca on his back. Weevil hands Bakura a can with the words ‘Red Bull’ on it and tells him that it’ll give him wings.

“Really?” He looked at the can and wonders when muggles learned to make potions like that.

Weevil snorts, “No. Come on, haven’t you seen the commercials?”

Bakura doesn’t answer because, no, he hasn’t. He takes a swing of the drink. It tastes like cranberries and he doesn’t get how something named after a cow and tastes like fruit is supposed to turn him into a bird.

The Ring leads them to an inn almost an hour and a half away from the Wharf they washed up on.
By that time, Rex and Weevil look like they’re about to fall over and Bakura is the one carrying Rebecca on his back. There’s a light on in the lobby and for that he’s grateful. Someone is there and, hopefully, they’ll be able to tell him what’s going on with his head.

Bakura wakes up Rebecca and sets her on the ground as she rubs the sleep out of her eyes. He hides the Millennium Ring under his jumper and pushes the door open for the kids to walk in.

The lobby is empty, though there is a steady beat of—Bakura thinks it’s music, but it’s unlike anything he’s heard before. But the sound is coming from the door behind the front desk. Someone is back there, singing along to the words.

“Hello?” Bakura calls as Rex curls up in one of the chairs on the other side of the room and falls asleep.

“~All the bad boys were standing in the~ one second! I’ll be there in a sec!” A voice calls back. “Best part’s right here ~And I’m freeeee! Freeee fallin’!~”

There’s a laugh and a blonde mop of hair appears through the doorway. It belongs to a boy in his late teens who’s almost a foot taller than Bakura. He carries a mug of coffee that had the word ‘Yankees’ painted across the front.

“Sorry about that. Don’t get a lot of people at...four in the...” the boy stops talking, gaping at Bakura like he’s never seen another human being before. Then, very quickly, he sets the mug down and walks around the desk. He grabs Bakura by the shoulders and looks him dead in the eye.

“It’s you...” he breathes. “It’s really...it’s really you! I knew it! I just knew!”

Bakura blinks and finds himself getting crushed into a hug so strong he can feel his bones creaking. He thinks the boy is on the verge of tears when he whispers, “I know it’s been a few millennia, but don’t ever fucking pull a stunt that again, you crazy son a bitch!”

He pulls back and holds Bakura at arm's length. The boy still stare at him like he can’t believe his eyes. But then the grin slips from his face and a look of horror replaces it, “Oh shit, tell me you know who I am?”

Bakura frowns in concentration and—

_They’re surrounded by figures dressed in black. Their leader’s face is blurred to his mind, but he’s so familiar and the memory of him is warm like a lover’s touch. He smirks and raises a hand in greeting._

_The man beside Bakura gives him a flat look, “You better have a damn good explanation as to why a Medjay captain is calling you ‘friend,’ or the boss’s gonna have your head.”_

“It’s a long story, Jono,” he answers—

Bakura gasps as he rights himself in reality. He stares at the boy - no, the man in front of him. The hair is a different colour and he’s far too young, but it’s him. It’s him.

“Jono?” Bakura grabs his forearm, a smile working its way onto his face.

The man’s eyes light up, “It’s Joey here. Joey Wheeler. I knew you’d come back this time! I just knew it! Rich-boy owes me money!”

They both laugh, hugging and holding each other like long lost brothers. For the life of him, Bakura
can’t figure out why he’s so happy, but he doesn’t give a fuck. He can’t remember the last time he felt like this.

“You two are giving me cavities,” Weevil mutters behind them. “When you’re done catching up with your boyfriend, Bakura, I would like to sleep in something that isn’t a cell tonight.” Joey’s jaw drops, “Bakura?”

“Yes,” he answers.

“Bakura?”

“What?”

“You name. He knows your name. I remember your name! But that’s impossible. You gave it up,” Joey looks panicked. “The three of you gave up your names and right to an afterlife when you sealed the Destroyer.” He turns to Weevil, “How the hell do you know his name?!”

“He told it to us. He said that it was the only thing he knew. That, and the fact that he’s twenty-one,” the kid shrugs.

Joey gapes at Bakura again, “You know your name?!?”

And Bakura tries to forget it, forget the lifelong battle that Ryou and the spirit of the Millennium Ring had against the beast in the pit. It had taken place in the few seconds between Ryou’s first death and revival and in the end, as the creature was consumed by the shadows, it had named them both.

Bakura, it cried. Child of the moon and the night and the air. The master of Souls. The bloodborne survivor of Kul Elna.

“Yes,” he answers. “I know my name.”

Joey lets out a shaking sigh, “Fucking hell.”

“Who am I?” He asks, begging for some kind of answer. Joey gripped his shoulder.

“It’s a long story, Bakura.”

Keith usually takes his coffee with milk. It’s a habit he picked up young from his father, who made it the exact same way. It’s not that he particularly likes it that way. If anything, he wishes he could do without the damn drink at all because it tastes like crap, in his opinion. But he needs the caffeine, so he sucks it up and drinks it.

However, there are some days when he takes it black. Pure, straight, liquid shit burning it’s way down his throat. Keith only does this when he hits rock bottom and usually finishes the day by downing a bottle and a half of firewhiskey and waking up with a splitting hangover.

But as Keith stares down at the dark, murky depths of his coffee mug, he knows that there’s not enough booze in the world to make this any better.

Ryou Andrews is dead. He’d died screaming at the hands of a mage weapon. There was no sign of the Millennium Ring amongst the pile of clothes that had been left behind when he turned to dust. Merlin, he could barely believe it himself and he could still feel the grit under his fingernails from
where the bits of the kid that hadn’t sailed off into the wind. Keith doesn’t feel anything. Not sadness or guilt or hatred. He doesn’t feel sick. He’s just empty.

He hasn’t slept in at least twenty-four hours. Keith tried eating a few hours ago, but only managed a few bites of a sandwich. He just sits at the table in the staff room, drinks his shit-tasting coffee, and wants to get drunk.

He doesn’t do much more than blink when Tilla Mook puts a hand on his shoulder. She gives him a small smile and he tries to return it, but can’t. He remembers Ryou and how he never had looked happy and wonders if this is what he felt. Keith understands now why he had tried to end it all. He’d hate to think like this all the time.

“They want you in the conference room,” Mook says.

“No, this really can’t. Bandit, come on. It was just a mage.”

“Don’t!” Keith snaps, “Don’t you ever fucking say that again! He’s not just a mage. He’s so much more than that. You don’t know... you don’t... understand...”

His throat closes off as he feels his eyes starting to water. He doesn’t dare let them fall. Not here. And not in from of Mook.

“The mage is dead, Bandit. And they need you in the conference room. Now,” her face is cold and emotionless, her voice clipped. When she walks away, her heels click against the floor and her skirts swishing around her ankles.

Keith stares at his coffee one last time before he downs the last of it. It burns all the way down and settles in his stomach like a pool of acid. Then he stands up and makes his way to the boardroom.

The island is a single massive compound, almost as large as Hogwarts itself. Except, unlike the school with its moving staircases and the magic embedded in its walls, the buildings here are stone and mortar. Mages could feel magic and, in some cases, could reverse or change it. All the magic that the island has is the spells that make it Unplottable and shut down muggle technology.

The island has no name or code name. It’s just the island. He never asks why. He does that a lot, it seems - not asking. Keith should begin questioning things. Like why the island has no name. Or why mages have to die.

The island serves as a base for the main headquarters for the Department of Mysteries. There were sections in almost every wizarding government, using their money to fund experiments with magic to discover its secrets. It was part of a deal that was made between the newly started Department and the International Confederation of Wizards when the first wizard born mage was discovered. Ariana Dumbledore changed the world and the world doesn’t even know. Things had been found in the last hundred or so years since the Department’s creation. And all of those secrets had been used in the war against mages.

The order to kill Ariana had been issued here. The first and second mage conversion had taken place here and Gilderoy Lockhart and Andromeda Black had become wand users. Keith himself had been trained here. The island is the centre of this war and now it would be remembered as Ryou’s grave.

Keith knocks on the door to the conference room and announces his presence. A voice comes from the other side, “Enter.”
He walks through the door and comes face-to-face with one of the leading men of the Department of Mysteries.

“Mr. Howard,” Maximillion Pegasus smiles over a glass of wine. “Please, have a seat.”

He waves a hand to the free seat beside him. There’s no one else in the room.

Pegasus looks to be about ten years older than Keith. His salt and pepper hair is tied back at the base of his neck and his face looks like it’s been carved into marble. The man is wearing a dark suit with a blood red tie. He gives off the feeling of power and entitlement. Keith rarely gets intimidated, but he is by this man. He doesn’t know what that means.

“I thought that there was going to be others,” Keith lowers himself into the chair.

“Bah, they bored me, so I sent them away. Such busybodies, always bickering and squabbling for one reason or another. They’ve never been out there in the field, so they don’t understand,” Pegasus takes a sip of wine. “Would you like a drink?”

“I-I’m sorry?”

“Would you like a drink?” He indicates to the dark bottle on the table, “It’s from my own personal stores: an Elvish red from 1997. Quite good, if I say so myself.”

“Sure. Why not?” Keith grumbles. Wine is not really his thing, but he’s been planning on getting drunk tonight anyways. Might as well start now.

“Your record is impeccable, Mr. Howard. You are one of our best assets,” Pegasus says as he pours Keith a glass. “How many hunts have you been on again? Twenty-two?”

“Twenty-four, sir.”

“Ah, yes. Twenty-four. You know, most give up or retire after ten or twelve. And you’ve done nearly double that. Might I ask why?”

Keith takes a gulp of wine and thinks over his answer, “Honestly? Got nowhere else to go.”

“You have far more than the average amount of O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s. Prior to beginning your service to the Department, you worked for the American Ministry of Magic where you stopped an assassination on the Minister herself. Surely there would be someone that would take you in - and gladly, too,” Pegasus raises an eyebrow.

Keith doesn’t answer. But that’s all Pegasus needs to understand.

“A mage able to survive the Millennium Ring is incredible. However, the boy did succumb to it, in the end, I suppose. And in such a spectacular way, as well. Doesn’t it just send shivers down your
spine to think that our enemies could have possessed such a power, say, had young Ryou Andrews ended up running away to San Francisco?” Pegasus’ smile seems more threatening than comforting. Keith swallows hard. Did the man know that he’d tried to get Ryou to run away and live? No. It’s impossible. Keith’s Occlumency is top notch. He’d yet to meet someone who could penetrate his shields.

“Yes, it would have been quite...troubling. But that didn’t happen,” Keith looks at the red liquid in front of him.

“Here’s to that then,” the man raises his glass in a toast that Keith rushes to respond to, however reluctantly. “Do you have any idea what happened?”

“No, sir.”

“Are you sure? You practically lived with the boy for five years. Surely, there must have been something.”

Keith shakes his head, “No, sir. There was no indication that that would happen. No one expected this, least of all me.”

“Odd then, that it would happen. However, out of such loss for us,” and Keith remembers Willa Mette and Maico and the three children in St. Mungo’s, “there has been unexpected fruit.”

Keith frowns, “I don’t follow.”

“The Millennium Ring, Mr. Howard. It’s gone,” Pegasus talks to him as if he’s a child.

“Gone?”

“Yes. Gone. Destroyed. After one thousand years of trying, finally, it has happened. And by a mage, of all people. I’m sure no one saw that coming,” the man smirks.

“Oh. Right,” of course. It’s not about the life that was lost today. It’s about the Ring. The fucking Millennium Ring and the fucking Thief King. It’s about the war. No one cares about Ryou.

“Right,” Pegasus nods sage-like. “Now, have you given any thought to your next assignment?”

Keith downs the rest of his glass, “No...not, really. A few days ago, I thought...”

“You thought that Ryou Andrews would be your ticket to early retirement.”

He nods, jaw clenching. It seems like a ridiculous dream right now. How dare he have thought that he could use a young boy to ensure a spot on a beach at the end of a seven-year period. He’s such a monster.

“You’ve been reassigned, Mr. Howard. For the foreseeable future, you’re going to be reporting directly to me. I want you to compile a team that will be ready for deployment at a moment’s notice and be prepared to enter incredibly hostile environments,” Pegasus grins. “You said you liked killing mages. I’m going to give you the opportunity to do that again.”

“Forgive me, sir, but it almost sounds as if you’re...promoting me.”

“I am,” he says. “You brought in the thing that destroyed the Millennium Ring. That alone is enough to guarantee your position as the head of this team, not to mention a pay raise substantial enough for you to buy a small country. And we need you, Keith Howard. We need you to take
back San Francisco."

This shocks the shit out of him.

“You’re kidding me! Sir, that’s suicide! The mages in that city are beyond anything we’ve ever seen before. Who knows what else they’re hiding in there? For all we know, they could have a Millennium Item!”

“We have the Spellbook.”

“And in the thousand years we’ve had the thing, we’ve managed to translate, what? Ten pages?” Keith runs a hand through his hair in frustration, “Sir, it’s been three years. Why in the world is this happening now?”

The man locks his fingers together and rests his chin in his hands, “That’s classified, Mr. Howard.”

“If I’m going to be leading this team, I want to be completely in the know. No more being in the dark. No more not asking questions. Declassify it, or I walk.”

It’s an empty threat and they both know it. If this assignment is indeed as big as it seems then Keith honestly doubts that Pegasus would have any qualms against having some of his experimenters taking his brains out and reprogramming him to take whatever command he’s given. It had happened before. He’s seen the soulless corpses of those who had refused work before. Men like Pegasus worked them until they dropped.

But that’s not the point. Pegasus knows that Keith knows this. So he’s either going to be impressed that he said it at all or... if the man isn’t then it would matter. Keith isn’t going to feel much as a walking corpse.

Then, suddenly, Pegasus smiles again, “Croquet.”

A house elf cracks into existence beside its master. It’s ugly and wrinkled, with wisps of hair on its head and upper lip. There’s a dirty rag hanging around its waist.

“Master?” The elf croaks and Keith realizes it is male.

“Give Mr. Howard the Mutuo file.”

“Of course, Master,” the elf snaps its fingers and then hands him the series of papers that appear. Keith takes them wordlessly before flicking through them.

Pegasus sighs, “Do you know why we never did anything after the mages took that city?” He doesn’t wait for Keith to answer, “To be honest, no one gives a damn about San Francisco. It’s a city of fags and liberals and whores. The only reason people even know about it is because of some bridge and an island prison. So when they took it, there was no reason to get it back. We decided to keep it quiet, but take no action because we never wanted the city in the first place.”

“But then you found out about...this. Whatever this is,” Keith mutters as he continues to read.

“Yes. Thankfully, the Confederation hasn’t heard of this yet, but they haven’t liked the fact that we kept San Francisco covered up. So they’re pressuring the American Ministry to take action. I don’t think I need to tell you how well us Americans would deal with the idea of unknowingly harbouring terrorists for three years. Thank Merlin that it isn’t public knowledge yet. Could you imagine the reaction?”
Keith can. He doesn’t like it. Except, he can understand how people would be angry at being kept in the dark.

“And then we found this,” Pegasus points at the photo paperclipped to the third page in the file. It’s a middle-aged man standing in a hotel lobby. The description on the back tells him that it’s the Hilton Luxor Resort & Spa.

“Who is he?” Keith asks.

“Solomon Mutuo. Muggle - or, at least, we think he is. This photo was taken about twenty-five years ago, back when he worked on and off as an archaeologist - you know, a muggle historian that likes to dig in the dirt. Except, he had a nasty tendency for cracking mage tombs wide open. Needless to say, we kept tabs on him.”

Pegasus points to the picture, “Twenty-five years ago, Mr. Mutuo took an interest in the tomb of the Lady Pharaoh - though, he didn’t know it was her’s or who she even was at the time. He planned to enter it and see what was inside. We set up two of our own to act as tour guides, under orders to kill him if worst came to worst. Our last communication with them told us that they had entered the tomb. We never heard anything from them and Solomon Mutuo dropped off the face of the earth. Naturally, we assumed they were all dead, just like the rest of those who have set foot in her tomb. That is, until three months ago.”

Keith turns the page and reads the headline of a muggle newspaper written just over ten years ago: SFSU GIRL GENIUS - THE LIFE OF A PROTEGE.

The girl in the picture appears to be in her early teens with her long black hair (black like Ryou’s and, damn it, that’s a punch to the gut) spun into a series of dreadlocks. There’s a thin scarf wrapped around her neck and a leather bag slung over her shoulders. Keith thinks that she’s pretty in a soft way that makes you want to treat her like a china doll.

“Yuugi Mutuo,” he mumbles as he reads the caption. “Daughter?”

“Granddaughter. They mention him in her family history about halfway through the article. Apparently, he’s her ‘inspiration,’” Pegasus says mockingly. “That, and Solomon Mutuo alive and well, living in San Francisco. He owns a comic book store, whatever that is.”

“An IQ of 217... Got her first Ph. D. at seven years of age... Been working at the University of San Francisco since she was nine. Holy crap!” Keith is genuinely impressed. She’s a freaking genius.

“Yes, Ms. Mutuo is quite awe-inspiring, for a bastard girl who has no idea who her father is. But she is not important. With this new information, the question is how did Solomon Mutuo survive the tomb of the Lady Pharaoh and did he take anything from its depths?”

“Let me guess. He did?”

“We sent in scouts and they came back, Mr. Howard. The traps were deactivated and the tomb emptied of its contents. Whatever Millenium Item was in there is missing.”

Keith's fingers clench on the table, “But now that the Ring is gone, doesn’t that mean the prophecy is useless. The Three Kings can’t come back?”

“I don’t know, Mr. Howard. But that doesn’t change the fact that the mages in San Francisco have access to a Millennium Item with incredible, untapped, and unknown powers,” Pegasus looks him dead in the eye. “We need to act now. They chose that city for a reason and we need to take it back before those creatures get any more of a foothold there. We should have taken care of this three
years ago. Are you ready to serve?"

“No,” Keith closes the file and looks the man dead in the eye.

“No?” Pegasus’ smile takes on a false tint and a shiver runs down his spine.

“Well, not yet. I still have to tell the Andrews family what happened to their son. They deserve to know how he’s ‘been sent to the camp,’ after all.”

Pegasus relaxes, chuckling into his wine, “Of course, of course. You have twenty-four hours to brief them on the situation, Mr. Howard. And get a few hours sleep. You look like you could use it. I expect you to gather your team within the week. Good day.”

Keith knows a dismissal when he hears it. He manages to make it out of the room and down the hallway before his knees give out and he breaks down crying. He’s a fucking monster.

Ryou’s death means nothing in the end because he hasn’t changed. He’s still the same murder he was five years ago. He does it because it’s his job and he has nowhere else to go and he fucking likes this.

“Where’s the line, Keith? Where’s the fucking line?” He says to himself, “Just because you think that you knew him made him different? What about the others? If you’d known the other twenty-four, would you have tried to save them, too?”

He thinks of the girl from Oklahoma who wore the Katy Perry t-shirt and the jean skirt. She must have had a family that never found out what happened to their daughter, friends who searched for weeks after her death for a sign. That girl had been so much more than just a mage and he’d condemned her for that. He’d watched her die with tears on her face and a plea on her lips. And then he’d gone out for drinks with his team afterwards. He’d picked up a hooker, fucked her behind the bar, and brought her home with him for round two. Keith hadn’t cared that he’d been part of the murder of a fourteen-year-old girl.

What the fuck is wrong with him?

Chapter End Notes

Joey is a badass. He was Bakura's second-in-command back in the day and took over for him after his death. Not only that, but I really want to get into Bakura's friendships with people outside of his romantic relationship. Because he has some amazing friends.

As for my headcanons in this, I believe that Pharaoh Atem and Thief King Bakura (in actual canon) had their souls split upon the sealing of Zorc. Everything 'light' about them went into Yuugi and Ryou and everything 'dark' went into Yami Yuugi and Yami Bakura. Together they make their ancient versions of each other. Only Yami Bakura also had the entirety of Zorc with him in the Ring and after a few thousand years of driving each other insane, the two of them could no longer tell the difference between themselves. However, in the Three Kings Series, Zorc's sealing is split between three different people, which is why Yami Bakura still has his sense of self.

So now that the spirit of the Millennium Ring and Ryou Andrews have combined
together, Bakura is able to rise once more.

Also, yes: Yuugi is an utter genius. I believe that while Yami (in canon) received the cunning and resourcefulness of Atem, Yuugi received his raw intelligence. Yami, in the beginning, doesn't know how to play Duel Monsters - and how could he? He'd been trapped in the Puzzle for thousands of years. He learned through Yuugi. Everything he knows he learned from that boy. Which is why Yuugu is a genius here. That article was written several years before the series began, so she'll be about 24 when she eventually shows up.
Past Meets Present

Chapter Summary

The white hair is what he notices first, how it sticks out at odd angles as if it’s been cut at random with a knife. Seto sees the scarred, callused hands and the tiny, wiry frame of a world-class thief and knows the power that lurks just beneath that man’s skin. Bakura turns to look at them and his breath catches in his throat. His eyes are purple, the same royal colour they’d been five thousand years ago. There were only two other people on the planet who had purple eyes and they were the only one who could possibly keep up with Bakura.

Chapter Notes


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Warning: Nudity, child abuse, self-hatred, depression, and hoarding.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“~’Cause I’m T.N.T! I’m dy-na-mite! T.N.T! And I’ll win the fight!~”

Joey Wheeler has hijacked his phone. Again. And this time, the moron has customized his ringtone.

Seto Kaiba is going to murder him.

He groans into his pillow, cursing the idiot to the pits of hell. He fumbles around blindly for the phone on his bedside table, knocking a thick book on various macroeconomic theories onto the floor. Finally, he finds the damn thing. He cracks open an eyelid and sees that it’s 7:27 in the morning. Three minutes before his alarm is supposed to go off.

Joey has also added a picture of himself doing that ridiculous duckface pose. The police are never going to find his body.

“Do you. Have any idea. What time it is?” Seto growls when he finally answers the call.

“Good morning to you too, sunshine,” Joey says in a sarcastic rebuttal. “I guess I caught you before
“your first cuppa joe, huh?”

“You know, some of us have nine-to-fives. And a regular sleep schedule,” Seto snaps.

“Well, some of us have girlfriends. How about that?”

Seto doesn’t say anything at first, just grinds his teeth together, “Wheeler, make your point, or I’m hanging up.”

“Geez, no need to get your underwear in a bunch,” then, all of a sudden, Joey gets serious. This sends up all kinds of red flags, “Look, some people showed up at my work around four last night. I need you to get your ass down here asap.”

“Mages?” Seto asks, sitting up straight and wide awake.

“Oh yeah. Definitely.”

“Then you know how to handle setting them up with a place. Why do you need me?”

“Dude, seriously. This is something you need to see for yourself to even believe,” when Seto doesn’t answer, Joey lets out a frustrated whine. “Asshole! Look, I’ve got a box of those crap health bars that only you and Tea eat. And coffee. Now, hurry up and get over here!”

“Fine. I’ll see you in an hour.”

“Fuck you, rich-boy.”

“Goodbye, Wheeler.”

“Yeah, whatever. Later,” and with that, the line goes dead.

And then this alarm goes off. Swearing, Seto waves his hand and it goes dark, the electricity powering it having been cut. He makes a mental note not to keep doing that because resetting the clock is damn annoying.

He crawls out of bed, pulling off his pyjamas as he goes and steps into the shower. He blinks the sleep out of his eyes as he rinses the suds from his hair. Once he’s dressed in a shirt and a pair of slacks, he texts his co-worker, Z, and tells him something’s come up and that he’ll be late for work.

“Morning bro,” Mokuba says when he enters the kitchen. Seto’s little brother sits at the kitchen table, hunched over an open textbook, his black hair falling into his eyes. When he looks, he can see that his brother is studying for his psychology exam, which is in two weeks if he remembers correctly.

“Good morning,” he responds. “Joey called.”

“Oh god. Did you see what he did to your phone?”

Seto raises an eyebrow, “You knew?”

His brother chuckles awkwardly before changing the topic, “So what did he want?”

“Apparently, some mages showed up at the hotel he works at. And he wants me to come down.”

“Can’t he handle that on his own?”
Seto sighs, “That’s what I said. But, according to him, this is something I need to be there for.”

“Do you think...?” Mokuba pauses, “Do you think it could be one of us? Perhaps, one of the Medjay?”

“You know, I hate it when you dance on eggshells around me. You can say her name.”

“Fine. I’ll just ignore that you haven’t said ‘Kisara’ since the last time you two cycled together - which was, what? Three hundred and seventy-two years ago,” Mokuba huffs. “I know you miss her, Seto. But the last few cycles, you’ve been kinda hostile.”

He sits down across the table from his brother, tapping erratically on the glass top. That’s his tell, Matthew keeps saying. That’s the sign that he’s pissed because he’s got a lousy hand.

“It’s just...this is the closest we’ve ever been to matching our original lives. We’re brothers. Joey has Serenity. Half the Pharaoh’s court is here. All of Bakura’s group of bandits are walking around. It’s just that there’s no sign of the Medjay - why are you looking at me like that?”

Mokuba stares at Seto like he’s just said that he was going to sell his company and take up bee farming. And considering that he swells up like a balloon when stung, that’s saying something.

“Bakura,” his brother repeats. And Seto feels like someone just hit him upside the head with a pipe.

“No...” he breathes, disbelieving. “No way. That’s...oh gods... Oh, Osiris and Isis and Ra-”

Mokuba slams his textbook closed and runs to his room. He comes back three seconds later with his backpack slung over his shoulder.

“There’s no way I’m missing this! I don’t freaking care about how important that review class is supposed to be. Screw my grades!”

“Normally, I’d object. But today, I’ll make an exception,” Seto grabs his jacket and wallet, holding the front door of their condo open for his brother.

“Now that’s one for the record books!” Mokuba laughs.

They make their way to the roof. The sun is hidden in the clouds and a layer of thick fog rolls along the streets below. Seto strips his clothes off, standing in the cold morning breeze in nothing but his own skin. And then he calls upon the White Dragon.

That white lightning that scorches through his veins makes his bones creak as they shift, organs rearranging themselves as they move within him. Seto’s teeth become fangs, nails become claws, and a great pair of white wings sprout from his shoulder blades while a tail grows out of the base of his spine. His skin hardens and turns into plates of armoured scales. He throws his head back and lets loose a roar that shakes the air around him.

He’ll never get over the rush of transforming into his Ka. The feeling of power is almost overwhelming. Seto Kaiba is a dragon, unbent and unbroken, despite everything. He is High Priest Seth, named after the god of chaos, cousin and heir to the Lady Pharaoh, and the once wielder of the Eye of Thought. He is proud of who he is.

“You are so damn lucky that the Mist covers up your dragon-y shenanigans,” Mokuba sighs. “Otherwise, the whole state would know you’re a freaking lizard.”
Seto growls in slight annoyance but bends down so that his brother can climb onto his back. Once Mokuba is seated, he spreads his wings and takes off.

Seto circles the city once before heading in the direction of the Financial District. The hotel that Joey both works and lives at usually caters to travelling businessmen and women, and his manager lets him and his sister lives there as long as Joey keeps working for him. He touches down in a parking garage a few blocks away and reverts back to his human form. Mokuba hands him his clothes and a few minutes later, they’re both walking down the sidewalk towards the hotel.

They barely make it inside before they are ambushed by Joey, who’s so wired up on caffeine that his hands are shaking.

“You are never - not in a million, billion years - going to guess who showed up last night,” the guy grins as he tosses Seto the box of health bars he’d promised. “Never. So just warning you, don’t pass out, alright? Don’t wanna have to explain your comatose ass to my manager. He’s already pissed about how I keep lifting his wallet off of him. Not that he knows it’s me, anyway. Too good for that.”

“Wheeler, just how much coffee have you had?” Seto raises an eyebrow in inquiry.

Joey laughs nervously, “I might have drunk the whole pot. But I made a fresh one! And, frankly, when you see who it is, you won’t be able to blame me. Seriously, I could not afford to fall asleep, you know, in case I woke up and thought it was all a dream.”

“It’s Bakura, isn’t it? The Thief King’s back,” Mokuba can’t seem to hold back any longer, so he blurts it out.

“No, it’s - wait,” Joey stops moving for the first time since they showed up. He looks between the two brothers before his eyes rest on Seto, who smirks. The guy glares at him, “You’re an ass.”

“So you’ve mentioned. On multiple occasions.”

“No, you don’t get it. You. Are. An. Ass. I had this all planned out. You were supposed to freak. And Mokuba - wait a minute. Mokuba? Don’t you have school today?”

“Joey, you really need to switch to decaf. This can’t be healthy,” Mokuba honestly looks a bit scared.

“Tell me something I don’t know. God, I need to piss,” he takes a breath, trying to calm himself down. “Alright. Okay. Yes, Thief King fucking Bakura showed up here at four in the morning with three kids in tow and asked for a room. They were all wearing tourist-trap clothes and looked like they hadn’t slept in a month. One of them mentioned having slept in a cell recently.”

Joey starts leading them towards the elevators. Mokuba frowns, “Do you think they were being chased? By wizards, maybe?”

“Probably. And shit, those kids are young. Like, younger than Serenity. The girl, - Seto, Mokuba: she’s eight.”

The bottom drops out of his stomach. Seto stares at Joey in horror, “Eight? Eight?! Tell me you’re joking.”

“Dude, I know I’ve gotta crap sense of humour, but even I wouldn’t joke about that. And that’s not even the worst part.”
“How the hell can this get worse?”

Joey bites his lip and then reaches out to push the stop button on the elevator. The machine grinds to a halt seconds later. Seto starts getting very worried.

“After I got them a room, the girl freaked out a bit. At first, I thought she was just scared of the dark or of sleeping in a new place. But Bakura...well, you know how protective he is of kids,” and Seto does know because he’s very, very aware of what happened in Kul Elna. Aknadin had made sure that his son knew about the slaughter that created the Items.

Joey continues to speak, “He got her talking, see. And from what I heard... Seth, I’m pretty sure that girl’s mother let those wizards take her.”

“Father of Light, give me strength,” Seto prays. He’s utterly horrified. How could anyone do something like that to their own child? Even Gozaburo, his and Mokuba’s adoptive bastard of a father, wouldn’t have done that. That being said, the man treated Seto like a favourite weapon because of what he could do. And Gozaburo Kaiba had never been one to share.

He’d pushed the bastard off their balcony when he was fifteen. Then he took Mokuba and ran. Seto regained his memories three years later and still doesn’t regret it. He wants to push this girl’s mother off a balcony as well.

Joey gets the elevator going again and the doors open on the seventh floor. “There’s something else, too, but I want you to see them first. I’m not really sure about this one, so I wanna a second opinion. ‘Cause, man, if I’m right about this, then holy crap, I’m gonna need a drink.”

“You set them up in the room across from yours?” Seto asks as the familiar number twenty-six comes into view.

“Yeah. Wanted to keep an eye on them, you know?”

Just then, the door bursts open and Serenity Wheeler pops out of their room. Her tutor must be coming around noon today because she’s still wearing her pyjamas. The girl’s long auburn hair is tied back in a low ponytail and her face is pale and panicked. Joey cringes.

“Hey, sis -”

“The Thief King - he’s...he’s...” she trails off, jaw flapping uselessly as she tries to find words. “He’s alive and in our room, Joey! He heard my audiobook playing and just walked in and - oh my god! He’s actually here! Gods above, I’d almost forgotten how his aura felt! But I knew it was him!”

“Serenity,” Joey walks up to his sister, wrapping his hands around her’s to calm her down. “Serenity, he’s back. And he has the Ring. I’ve seen it. Bakura’s really back.”

She looks to be on the verge of tears, blind eyes watering as a grin splits across the face. Seto doesn’t think he’s seen her smile like that in almost a year.

“I think...he’s in the kitchen,” she says, pointing towards their room. Joey looks at Seto and his brother, asking if they were coming.

He takes a breath, trying to compose himself. The Thief King, the man who could control the wind and the air, the man of darkness and shadows, the man who laid claim to the souls of humanity - he is standing on the other side of these walls. But Seto also remembers Bakura, who laughed and danced to music, who never thought he was worthy of his god-given position, who kissed the Lady
Pharaoh and King Commander like they were salvation because his love for them was the purest thing he’d ever known. And for a minute, he dares to hope that Bakura’s return means that he’ll be able to see his cousin again. Seto misses the girl who called him brother long before discovering their relation. He’d give anything to have her back, to be able to call her by name once more.

Seto nods and Mokuba grips his elbow because they’re both shaking like leaves. Joey goes oddly silent as they walk through the doorway. And his heart stops. Because there he is.

The white hair is what he notices first, how it sticks out at odd angles as if it’s been cut at random with a knife. Seto sees the scarred, callused hands and the thin, wiry frame of a world-class thief and knows the power that lurks just beneath that man’s skin. Bakura turns to look at them and his breath catches in his throat. His eyes are purple, the same royal colour they’d been five thousand years ago. There were only two other people on the planet who had purple eyes and they were the only one who could possibly keep up with Bakura.

And then he sees the scar. That old burn that nearly cost Bakura his sight is still there after all these years. It takes Seto a few minutes to realize that it’s the exact same scar. That’s his old body. But that’s impossible. The Three Kings bodies turned to dust shortly after the sealing. So how the hell is this even possible?

Bakura blinks, eyes flickering over the two brothers. Mokuba moves to introduce himself, but Joey holds him back, “Just give him a minute.”

“Sera,” Bakura points to Serenity. “Your name is Sera. You ran out before I could say hello. And you’re...” he looks over at Mokuba, “you’re...Monthu? Right?”

“Yeah,” his brother sounds like he can’t believe his ears. “But how...? How can you remember? You were never supposed to...”

“And you,” finally, the Thief King turns to Seto. He squints, head tilting to the side in an attempt to rack his memories for something. A smirk work it’s way onto his face and Seto forgets to breathe -

“You’re a dick,” Bakura looks so damn proud of himself. Joey starts laughing so hard it looks like he’s going to have a conniption.

“Oh my god, Bakura! Welcome back!” The guy clings to his sister’s shoulder to stay upright. Mokuba and Serenity hide their mirth behind their hands.

“I hate you,” Seto growls at him because he really should have expected this. Despite the incredible amount of respect the two of them had for each other, they have never gotten along.

“Right back at’cha, Seth,” Bakura grins. He sits down at Joey’s kitchen table, elbows resting on his knees. The pose is familiar. It’s how he always used to sit right before he got down to business.

“You’re looking better. Get any sleep?” Joey asks as he moves forward and takes the chair to Bakura’ immediate right. Serenity, knowing this room like the back of her hand, quickly finds her seat at the table. However, Mokuba and Seto stand. Because while the Thief King is god-chosen and powerful beyond imagination, he is not theirs and they are not his. They will sit if the Lady Pharaoh sits and she is not here.

“Not a wink. Weevil gave me this drink called ‘Red Bull,’” the guy actually uses air quotes, “and I think it’s keeping me awake.”

“It’s been known to do that,” Joey says but gives Seto a look. He caught it, too.
“But it’s given me some time to sort things through. My memories, mainly. What I have. What’s still missing,” Bakura explains. “I remember my name. I remember how old I am. And in the last few hours, I’ve remembered...” he trails off, fingers twitching against the fabric of his jeans. Then he looks up, “Who, or what is Zorc?”

At the mention of the name, a series of unintended reactions are displayed by the people in the room. Mokuba lets out a small shriek and goes as pale as a sheet. Serenity grabs her brother’s hand so hard her knuckles turn white. Joey’s teeth grind together audibly. Seto schools his expression, refusing to let anything show, but his heart hammers in his chest. Even after all these years, the Destroyer still strikes fear into him like nothing else ever could.

“We don’t...say that name,” Seto says stiffly.

“What? Like You-Know-Who?”

“Who knows who?” Mokuba frowns as his skin starts to return to its usual shade.

“You know. Him. You-Know-Who,” Bakura gives them all strange looks. “Come on. You’ve had to have heard about him.”

Alarm bells start ringing in Seto’s head and Joey’s giving him that look that’s telling him, ‘See? See? He keeps on saying weird shit.’ And he thinks about how the Millennium Ring has been in possession of wizards since the fall of Camelot and how...no, but that’s impossible. They’d have known, right? They’d have known if it were true.

“You-Know-Who. Pureblood supremacist. The leader of the Death Eaters. He was killed a little over ten years ago. It was all over the papers, you must have...” Bakura falls silent. He looks at his feet, “Did the muggles really not know what was happening?”

And there it is, out in the open. Only a wizard, or someone raised by them, would call non-magical people muggles. The term is actually quite offensive - not that wizards care much. But the idea that Thief King Bakura had been a mage and born into that kind of society is almost impossible to believe.

“You’re wizard born,” Joey states. “I didn’t even think that could happen to mages.”

Bakura looks off to the side, almost as if he’s ashamed of that fact, “It happens. There’s usually a few handfuls in each generation. It’s been going on for the last hundred or so years. No one knows why.”

“How come we’ve never heard of this?” Serenity questions.

“Their society is pretty closed off. Even wizarding newspapers go blank in the hands of someone who doesn’t have an active wand,” Mokuba answers. “This could have been going on for centuries and we’d never know.”

“The girl, Rebecca. She’s also wizard born, isn’t she?” Joey asks Bakura. He shrugs, still looking very uncomfortable.

“Same with Rex. Weevil, though, I think he’s muggle-”

“Please don’t use that word,” Mokuba interrupts him suddenly.

Bakura blinks, “Why?”
“Because it’s a stupid name wizards came up with to alienate and dehumanize us non-magical people,” his brother grinds out.

“Oh. I didn’t know,” Bakura nods slowly, storing the information away in his mind. Then he makes the connection, “Wait. ‘Us’ non-magical people? You’re not a mage?”

“No,” Mokuba crosses his arms over his chest as if daring the Thief King to say something about it.

“But you’re working with mages,” Bakura says.

“Yes,” his brother answers.

Bakura leans back in his chair, “It’s just...I’ve never met a mug - uhh...non-magical person before. Is it true that someone walked on the moon before? I heard one of the Hufflepuff girls talking about it once, but Igraine said that she was lying because the girl also said that the Earth went around the sun. Which is wrong, obviously. But, did someone actually do that?”

Seto raises an eyebrow, “Who the hell is Igraine?”

“My girlfriend. Well, ex-girlfriend, I mean,” he says.

“Bakura, geocentrism was disproven almost four hundred years ago,” Serenity says softly. “The Earth goes around the sun. Everyone knows that.”

“Really?” The Thief King actually looks confused.

“Yeah,” she tells him.

He looks at his feet, “Guess it wouldn’t be the first thing she was wrong about.”

But Seto can tell that he’s embarrassed. In the beginning, the primary strife between the two of them had been Bakura’s lack of education. The Thief King had been jealous of Seth’s schooling despite his bastard status (though it might have also been coupled with the fact that the Lady Pharaoh used to have a crush on him). And in return, Seth had hated that, even with his inability to spell his own name, Bakura soaked up information like a sponge. No peasant could possibly be as smart as he had been.

Five thousand years ago, Seth would have prodded the man with this information until a fight broke out. But he likes to think that he’s matured these last few millennia, so he doesn’t. Bakura, who’d apparently been expecting this, looks surprised when it doesn’t happen.

“Someone did walk on the moon. His name was Neil Armstrong. He died a little over a year ago,” he says instead. Bakura nods.

“Oh. Thanks, I guess.”

“Damn, though. I mean, we all knew that the wizarding world was on the other side of the Iron Curtain, but I didn’t think it went that far,” Mokuba shifts from side to side.

“Bakura, you said that there are handfuls of mages born to every generation of wizards. How come more haven’t escaped like you and those three did?” Serenity asks. Seto raises an eyebrow. It’s a valid question.

The Thief King sits silently for a few minutes, wearing an expression on his face that Seto had only
seen once before - when they had found out that they would have to go to Kul Elna to confront Aknadine. He wonders what the hell could have happened in this life for that look to pass over his face again.

“When a witch or wizard finds out that their child is a mage, two things can happen,” Bakura explains. “If your family is wealthy enough to afford it, you go through conversion therapy. The Unspeakables have this program that they put you through and, supposedly, it can turn a mage into a wizard.”

“Can that really happen?” Mokuba asks, horror evident on his face.

The Thief King shrugs, “I’ve heard of a few success stories, but I didn’t do too well.”

“What’s the other option?” Seto tries to get the conversation away from this topic. Bakura is clearly uncomfortable talking about this so-called therapy.

“They take you off to this camp and keep you away from everyone else. Or at least, that’s what they tell people. Recent events tell me that they just take you to that island and kill you.” Joey’s jaw drops, “You’ve been to the island?”

Bakura nods, “That’s where I met the three of them. And it was where they kept me for the last hundred or so years while I was in the Ring.” He looks at his hands before shifting his gaze upwards, “Can anyone explain why I have two sets of memories. Or why I know all of you?”

“You didn’t tell him?” Seto snaps at Joey, who rolls his eyes.

“We both know that I’d make a total ass of myself if I tried to explain this,” he throws back.

Seto sighs, acknowledging this as truth. He’d never understand how Joey’s mind works. Same thing with Bakura’s, though the Thief King took it to a whole other level. But Joey learned by doing things - not understanding the hows or whys behind something. He just did and he is able to accomplish almost as much as Seto himself - and he had to study for years to get to this point.

That also means that Seto is much better at explaining the details about how a spell works. And he spent the three cycles after his first life trying to understand what the hell happened the night the Destroyer was sealed. To be honest, Seto still doesn’t get specific parts. It’s one of the many reasons why he wants Kisara to return to him. Seto really needs to pick her brains for ideas.

“What do you know about the legend of the Three Kings?” He asks.

Bakura snorts, “It’s just a story. Like the Fountain of Fair Fortune. Or Seth and...the...Dragon Princess... Oh, gods. Merlin. Fuck, my head. Not again.”

He leans over, resting his head on the table in front of him. He looks a bit green around the gills.

“It’s not a story, Bakura. It’s real,” Seto tells him.

“You married Kisara?! When?” He looks up suddenly as if confused that the words even came out of his mouth.

“A few months after you, the KingLord Commander, and the Lady Pharaoh died,” he answers.

“But that means...I’m...”

“The Thief King. Thief King Bakura,” Joey interjects. “Come on, you thought it was just some
coincidence that he and I are Jono and Seth?"

“Yes...No...Urg, this can’t be happening,” he groans. “I’m not some legend. I just...gods, I’m supposed to be dead by now.”

“You were born in the village of Kul Elna. You were chosen by the Father of Light and the Mother of Darkness to lead the common man and let their voices be heard. You control the air and can read the souls within people’s bodies. You are bloodborne and a child of the night,” Joey tells him. “And you did die. You died five thousand years ago and took the Destroyer down with you. You gave up your name, your memories, and your life - everything that makes you who are - to stop him. You ripped your soul apart to pull it off!”

“Just stop! Stop for a second,” Bakura tugs at his hair, shaking and shivering. “If...If I really gave all that up, how come I can remember your names? How can I remember how to use the Ring?”

“I think I can find out,” Serenity says softly. She stands up and moves in the direction of the Thief King’s voice. “Can I have your hand?”

“She’s clairvoyant,” Mokuba explains. “She’ll be able to read you.”

Wordlessly, he responds her reaching for her hand. As his fingers interlock with Serenity’s, she gasps, “Oh.”

“You alright?” Bakura asks.

“Yes. Yes, I’m fine. You’re just...intense.”

“Thanks,” he chuckles and Seto can see Joey going into his over-protective-brother mode. It’s little wonder why Deuel and Sera had kept their relationship secret for years before they got married.

“Your soul. It’s whole. I can See where it was split - like a scar,” Serenity tries to describe what she can sense. “It’s trying to heal, though something is stopping it. The Destroyer. You were in charge of sealing his body away, but it’s gone. And that’s why some parts are getting through. Yet, if I Look -”

She clams up, a terrible scream tearing its way out of her lips. Bakura wrenches his hand away and Serenity stumbles back into Joey’s arms.

“What did you See?” Mokuba questions.

“You’re still connected to Him,” she whispers, shaking in fear. “He’s what’s blocking your memories from fully returning. I Saw Him, Joey. I Saw His eyes. Isis, watch over me - I Saw Him.”

“Did He hurt you?” Bakura asks before Joey gets the chance to.

“No, but...He hurt you. Back when you were two - the Spirit of the Millennium Ring and...Ryou Andrews? That was your name before, wasn’t it? Before you became one.”

“Andrews? Like James Andrews?” Seto remembers the name and the face it belongs to. He remembers the lies.

“He’s...was...my father,” Bakura says. “How do you know him?”

Fucking hell. Seto understands why the Thief King had never mentioned his father in the rare talks about Kul Elna. If this is who the man was in this life, he could only imagine what he’d done in the
past.

“About six years ago, there was this incident in Lakewood, Ohio. Serenity and I hadn’t regained our memories just yet, but we’d been on the run for nearly four years at that point. And Lakewood was the first attempt at a mage haven in nearly a decade,” Joey sighs. “We thought he was one of us. He knew our ways so well. We thought we’d be safe.”

“Luckily for these two, we’d been in the area at the time. We got Joey and Serenity out, but...Andrews, he led almost twenty mages into a trap. The wizards surrounded them and blew the warehouse to Hell,” Mokuba explains.

“He said he was doing research in America, for a book,” Bakura mumbles. “I’d just been diagnosed.”

“Being a mage is not an illness, man,” Joey tells him.

“Tell that to them,” he huffs. “You never did answer my question.”

So they do, telling Bakura about the four Great Gods. They tell him about the Items and the Three Kings. They speak about his sacrifice. It takes over an hour for the entire story to be told, and the Thief King sits there listening to them the whole while.

He asks when they’re finished, “Do you know where they are now? The other two, I mean.”

Joey shakes his head, “No. Sorry, Bakura. We don’t. Hell, we didn’t even know about you until this morning.”

“I dreamt of them sometimes. When I was Ryou. In the last year, they were one of the few good things I had,” he admits. “I think I knew them, too, as the Spirit. I used to carve them into the walls of the corridor.”

He says no more than that, but a soft smile works its way onto his face. And Seto wonders how the hell it took him so long to realize all those years ago that the three of them had been in love.

Bakura shakes his head and the moment ends, “Why San Francisco?”

Joey shrugs, “Not a lot of wizard protections against mages, mainly. And the general attitude about the city is that it’s too liberal or some shit like that.”

“Equality for all people, no matter who they are, has never been a wizarding strong-point,” Mokuba explains.

“And then,” Serenity spoke, “there’s the prophecy.”

Bakura’s eyes widen at what Seto assumes is a familiar term. The girl continues, reciting Isis’s words from almost one hundred cycles ago, “The Three Kings shall return where land meets water. Sand shall turn to clay, then back to flesh, and their blood shall run gold.”

“We figured out that ‘where land meets water’ meant a coastal city, or at least one near a river,” Seto says. He doesn’t mention that the Three King’s final minutes had been them walking - stumbling, carrying each other in their agony - into the Nile, turning to dust. He doesn’t think that Bakura would want to remember that just yet.

“Clay turning into flesh is a reference to Khnum, the Divine Potter, He Who Creates Things From Himself. He makes human bodies from clay and places them in the wombs of women,” Mokuba
tells him.

“Rebirth,” Bakura whispers under his breath.

“The gold blood part...that still confuses me,” Joey frowns. “Gold skin, yeah, that would have made sense. The gods have gold skin. But blood -”

“It means immortality,” Bakura interrupts. The four of them turn to him in confusion. The Thief King continues to speak, “It was in a book in the Restricted Section at school.” Seriously? What school had a restricted section in their own library? “I snuck in after curfew a lot in the last year. And in one, it talked about gold blood - well, after I got it to stop screaming at me. Only immortals are supposed to have it.”

Seto takes a moment to collect himself before asking, “Bakura, what colour is your blood?”

“Red, of course.”

“Are you sure?”

The Thief King sneers at him for a second before it drops and he stares at his hands. His eyes travel over to the cabinets where Joey keeps his cutlery (and Seto’s not even going to question how Bakura knows where they are because he sure as hell hasn’t asked anyone yet) before he stands up and walks over to them. Bakura pulls a knife out and, very purposefully, draws it across the skin of his palm.

“Well,” he says calmly - too calmly - as liquid gold drips out of the cut. “That’s new.”

“Holy fuck, man. How the hell are you so damn calm?” Joey gapes.

“Yesterday, I was a fifteen-year-old kid. Now, I’m twenty-one and a legend of some kind. Having golden blood isn’t exactly the weirdest thing I’ve gone through in the last twenty-four hours.”

Joey stares at him like he’s insane. Serenity makes a noise that sounds like understanding. When her brother hears it, he sputters, “Seriously, you too? Serenity, how are you not freaking out about this?”

“I could feel it in him earlier,” she answers, and that’s the end of that.

“What happened to you?” Seto asks because it’s the only thing he can think of right now.

Bakura’s hand closes into a fist. He stands there in Joey’s kitchen, wearing his Golden Gate Bridge hoodie that’s too big for him, and looking all his five thousand years.

“I lived,” he says. Seto knows that they will get no more than this. Bakura had never talked much about his past before. He doubted the man would start now.

Seto’s phone alerts him to a received text message. The Thief King nearly jumps out of his skin at the beeping noise. It’s Z, asking where the hell he is.

“I hate to break this up, but I need to get to work,” he sighs.

“Dude, I thought owning your own company meant that you could show up whenever you wanted,” Joey complains.

“If I were CEO of a multi-billion dollar corporation, then yes, it would. As it stands, I’m an indie game developer who just happened to get a good idea last year. And Mokuba has class,” he jabs
his brother in the shoulder.

“Yeah, in, like, four hours. You go ahead, Seto. I’ll be fine,” Mokuba rolls his eyes.

“Are you sure? I could -”

“Go, Seto. Don’t worry. I know my way around the city. I’ll take the M Line in,” his brother responds. He doesn’t know how he’s managing to handle Mokuba’s independence. It only seems like yesterday when he had to fly him around for every little thing. To be honest, Seto kind of misses it - though that may just be the mother hen in him talking.

“Bakura,” he turns to the Thief King and feels like he has a million and one things to say. Seto wants to tell him that his return is like the Second Coming of Christ, that it could mean that mages will stop having to run and hide from wizards. Maybe peace is finally on the horizon for their people. Perhaps he’ll be able to remember his cousin’s name.

Maybe he’ll see Kisara again.

But he doesn’t say any of this. He just doesn’t have the time. So he smirks at the man-turned-immortal and says, “Don’t be an ass.”

The Thief King looks ready to throw a knife at his head. Seto snickers and makes his exit before that happens. He sends off a text to Z and tells him that he’ll be at the office in ten.

It’s only when he’s touching down on the roof of the building that he remembers that he never got the coffee Joey promised. Also, the moron has swiped his wallet this time. Death will not be swift for Jono the Brave, not if High Priest Seth has anything to say about it.

Albus Dumbledore walks beside Keith as they head towards the Slytherin dorms in silence. He feels like the weight of the world is on his shoulders and it’s taking everything he has to put one foot in front of the other. He knows that the Headmaster is probably one of the least judgemental people on the planet, but Keith can feel the disgust rolling off the man like he knows what he’s done.

Finally, the oppressive quiet is broken. Dumbledore asks, “You are here to gather his belongings?”

Keith grunts in response, words being beyond him at the moment. Dumbledore continues, “The students refuse to touch anything of Mr. Andrews’. They believe that he cursed his possessions before he was taken away. Mr. Flint claims that one of the curtains on his bed tried to strangle him when he got too close.”

“Ryou wouldn’t have done that,” Keith growls, unconditionally defending the boy in death.

“I would hope not,” Dumbledore responds. “What is going to happen to him, might I ask?”

“Ryou? He’ll - “ he chokes up for a second, “he’ll be taken to the camp. To be...kept away from society.”

“Ah yes. The camp. Of course,” he can just tell that the old man can see right through his bullshit, but he’s thankful that Dumbledore doesn’t call him on it. But...

“The hangings...they didn’t really try to strangle Flint, did they?” He asks because he honestly
doesn’t know if Ryou would be incapable of such an act.

“Not that I know of,” Dumbledore raises an eyebrow and there is an eerily creepy light in his eye. Keith worries that he’s lying.

Dumbledore tells him that he’ll wait outside the common room door. Keith goes in alone, the stone wall sliding back after he utters the password (“Aqua Pura”). A few Slytherins are sitting near the back wall. They turn towards him as he steps inside. When they look down, Keith moves towards the room where Ryou slept the last few years.

The fifth-year dorm is dark. Only a few candles have been left to burn and supply light. But from what Keith can see, the students have trashed Ryou’s bed. What few possessions he had have been torn to pieces. His mattress has been flipped over. Keith takes a hesitant step forwards and glass crunches beneath his feet.

He looks down and sees a painting in a shattered frame. It’s a portrait of the Andrews family, perhaps about a year or two old. Keith leans down and picks it up, holding it in his hands like it’s made of china. Ryou stands in the middle with James Andrews’ hands on his shoulders. His sister, Amane, stands to the boy’s left and his mother, Natsuki the beautiful Asian bride James had brought back from a trip to the Orient, is behind her. Keith watches as the people in the painting breathe and occasionally shift in their places. But they never move from their positions. It’s stiff. Unnatural.

Fake.

There’s a cold emptiness that settles in Keith’s gut as he pries the portrait from its frame. His teeth grind together as he tears James and Natsuki away from their children. Portrait-Amane yelps silently and clings to her brother. Ryou hides her face in his chest and looks up at Keith with that ancient gaze of his, judging him.

Part of him wants to rip the girl out of the picture as well. That part is the one that wants to mourn Ryou by himself, to be the only one to feel something by his death. But he sees how selfish that is. He’d loved Amane. Keith has already taken so much away from him, did he really need to separate Ryou from his sister as well?

Keith slips the portrait into his pocket and then moves towards the bed. He collects what he can, putting shirts and pants back into Ryou’s luggage. The books are next, stacked neatly on top of the piles. Keith has to stop once or twice because it just gets to be too much. But he carries on until there is nothing left.

He frowns, staring at the half empty case of belongings. This couldn’t be all the things Ryou has...had. There were no personal items, like his chess set, amongst the stuff Keith had found on the ground. He thinks for a minute that they’d been stolen-- but no, that couldn’t be it. Ryou was smart. And not just that-- he’d been cunning, too. The only reason that he’d been taken into custody is that he’d wanted to. He must have hidden them. But where...?

Ryou could walk through walls. Of course.

Keith levitates the bed frame off to the side, clearing the wall behind it. He carefully chisels away at the bricks until they give way. Keith puts them off to the side and then gazes into the hole. There looks to be a small treasure trove inside the walls. Everything from old, battered quills to decks of cards to gold galleons and silver sickles reside there. Keith starts pulling things out and finds more underneath. There’s a miniature library - at least fifteen books are inside the wall, half
of which look to be from the Restricted Section of the Hogwarts library. Keith finds four boxes of cutlery that matches the set used in the Great Hall and jewelry that looks centaur in origin.

And then he finds the code that Ryou and Amane had been using to communicate. It’s a book, buried under almost a foot of Ice Mice and salt water taffy wrappers. A simple Muggle dictionary. Keith can tell it’s the one used for the code because it’s the only book Ryou has written in. He can now translate their letters. But does he want to? No. Probably not.

Keith sits amongst Ryou’s secret life, the one he’d hidden behind walls so that prying eyes would not be able to see, and finally, he realizes that he’d never really known the boy at all. He remembers the one time that Ryou had opened up to him, shown him the real personality that lurked beneath, and had wanted Keith to understand. The real Ryou got angry, kicked a chair, and had reached out to Keith for held. And he’d failed to reach back.

No one else could see this. This side of Ryou was never meant for the outside world. Keith puts everything back where he found it, with the single exception of the dictionary. He seals up the hole and sets the bed back in place. Keith stuff the book into his pocket next to the portrait and closes the boy’s luggage before floating it out of the room behind him.

The common room is near capacity when he re-enters it. Just like before, all conversation comes to a halt. There are smirks on some of their faces, looks of fear on others. Keith just feels exhausted by it all. He walks towards the door with all the liveliness of a dead man and can’t meet the Headmaster’s blue eyes when it closes behind him.

Chapter End Notes

I’d like to thank the two guests who left kudos on this story!

The reason that Seto is much, much tamer than his canon counterpart is that he has had a lot more time to come to terms with the things that have happened to him. He’s also without the massive ego that came with being a multi-billionaire before finishing high school. Not to mention that he can actually feel as if he can admit that Joey is his best friend, he actually cares about people, and that he’s in love with someone. Canon!Kaiba doesn’t do all of that because he’s scared of being seen as weak.

Next time, Amane makes a return and we learn more about what’s going on in the Andrews’ household. And as time goes on, we’ll learn more about Lakewood and the girl with the Katy Perry t-shirt and the jean skirt that Keith talks about a lot.
Consequences of Isolation

Chapter Summary

Sleep evades Bakura. Not that this is a new concept or anything. It’s just a bit annoying. Ryō had always had difficulty falling asleep, running most days on a maximum of maybe five hours. He’s not even sure the Spirit of the Millennium Ring knew what sleep was. And on top of that, in the last half hour, Bakura has taught himself how to use a coffee maker by watching Monthu (no, his name is Mokuba, remember that) and following a set of written instructed that he found nearby. He’s on his second cup and regrets absolutely nothing.

Chapter Notes


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Warning: Domestic abuse, abuse apologism, mentions of suicide, unhealthy dependent relationships, insomnia, homophobia, biphobia, bullying, and mentions of starvation.

Amane is in Ryō’s room when the doorbell rings. Her heart skips a beat and she jumps up from the bed, racing down the stairs. She’s hoping, praying, that her brother is on the other side. They’d gotten the letter two days ago that Ryou had attacked three students with mage magic and had been taken away by the Department of Mysteries. She knows that he can escape them. He had to have gotten away, he just had to.

Except, when she reaches the front door, Amane sees her mother opened it to Keith Howard. He’s holding Ryō’s trunk and owl and looks like he hasn’t slept in a week.

“May I come in?” He asks and Amane wishes that her mother would slam the door in his face. But she doesn’t because Amane’s mother is dutiful, quiet, and utterly submissive to the wills of her husband.

“Send him through,” her father calls from the lounge. Her mother bows her head and offers to take
Keith Howard’s coat. The man’s eyes slide over to where Amane stands at the foot of the stairs. His jaw clenches before he turns away.

Her father greets Keith with a firm handshake when he comes into the lounge. The Unspeakable sits in the armchair opposite to the one by the fire that Amane’s father has claimed as his own. She and her mother rest on the sofa in between them.

Keith stares at his hands for a minute before he speaks, “I believe that you have been debriefed on the situation concerning your son.”

“Yes,” her father says without a single trace of emotion in his words.

“Ryou was... Ryou’s actions have been deemed unfit for him to continue living -” Keith’s voice cracks suddenly, but he keeps going as if nothing happened, “- amongst witches and wizards. He’s been sent to a camp, where he will...live out his life away from anyone he could hurt.”

Amane’s heart stops beating as the blood drains from her face. She hears herself ask, “But...but...he’ll come home, right? Even if it’s just sometimes?”

Keith makes fists in his trousers, “No, he can’t.”

“But why?”

“Because he can’t.”

“Why?!”

“Amane! Be silent!” Her father snaps and her mouth shuts automatically. Tears fall from her eyes and she hides her face in her hair. Her father speaks again, “Is there any way to cover up this mess? Clear the family name?”

Amane’s hands shake with barely suppressed rage. The family name and reputation. That is all that man had ever cared about. Damn him and his pureblood superiority bullshit.

An odd look passes over Keith’s face. For one moment, Amane sees something in that man that she knows almost as intimately as she knows her own hatred. She thinks that Keith wants to snap her father’s neck. She wants to watch.

“I’m not sure,” Keith answers and Amane is disappointed in his lack of action. “As far as I know, it’s made the papers over here.”

“Damn that boy!” Her father curses. She wonders if that means she won’t have to marry Blaise Zabini anymore since the family name’s in the dumps.

“He wanted to give this to you before he left. Technically, I’m not supposed to hand this over, but -” Keith’s voice cracks again, “- I thought that...here, just take it.”

It takes Amane a minute to realize he’s talking to her. Keith is holding out an enveloped letter with her name on it. It’s Ryou’s handwriting. She almost tears it in her haste to open it. She’s written in their code for nearly five years now, so the numbers turn into their matching words almost immediately. Her heart stops.

No.

Keith is leaving now and she stares at the piece of paper with such a look of horror that she’s
surprised that no one has asked if she’s alright. Her mother is wordlessly helping him put on his coat. Amane can’t feel anything except the vice around her chest and the rock shoved down her throat. When the door closes, she waits for her parents to move into her father’s study before bolting outside.

Keith hasn’t apparated away yet. He sits outside on the curb, his head in his hands. When she gets close enough, he turns.

“What do you want?” All politeness is gone from his voice. She wonders if that means they’re on equal terms. The thought almost makes her laugh. Keith Howards is a man with the build of a professional Beater, hardened by battles and duels that she knows he’s strong enough to have won. In comparison, she’s a tiny girl with two handfuls of years learning how to be a good wife. And yet, she feels like she had just as much standing here as he does.

“Ryou sent me a letter about a week ago. Do you know what it said?” She asks.

Keith looks at her, blue eyes tired and half hidden behind greasy blonde hair. He hasn’t shaven in at least a day. Amane remembers him as being well dressed and clean. This, however, is the manifestation of his secret, his guilt. She knows what that is now.

“No. I don’t,” Keith answers.

“He said, ‘I’m sorry. Goodbye.’” tears run down Amane's cheeks, but Amane is not sad. She’s angry, “How - how could you?! How could you just walk in here and lie to us! My mother and father -”

“Your father already knows. He’s worked with us before. He knows what we do to mages,” Keith looks at his feet. “What gave me away? In the letter? Is there a second code?”

“Take care of Bandit for me.’ The owl’s name is Khonsu. It was only to you that he called it Bandit.”

Keith lets out a shaking laugh, “Of course. Of course, it was the damn bird. Merlin, he had it all planned out, didn’t he?”

“Ryou’s dead,” it’s not a question.

“Yes.”

“And we were...” she finds it hard to breathe, “...we were just supposed to believe that he was just...that he’d gone away.”

“Yes.”

“I hate you,” Amane hisses. “You’re sick, you-- you monster! How could you?! He was everything to me!”

“He said that he hurt you,” Keith mumbles, unable to face her.

“He - that was -” Amane’s mind scrambles for words, for some kind of explanation. Because it wasn’t okay, but it had to be, “That was nothing! Nothing! Ryou loved me! I was the only one who-- who was real that wanted him! He’d never hurt me!”

“Who was real...?” So he told you? About...them?”
No, Ryou had never explained why he’d said those words. But she isn’t about to let Keith know that, “Yes, he told me everything!”

“About the girl of fire? The lightning boy?”

“Yes!”

Keith stands, a humourless chuckle escaping from his lips, “It was the other way around. The girl was lightning. The boy was fire. He told you nothing.” That stops her dead in her tracks.

Keith continues, “He told me something that he never told you. He trusted me with them.”

“Did he trust you with the centaurs? Did he trust you with the library books? Did he tell you about Charlie Weasley? Did he tell you about the time he robbed Snape blind?! No! He told me! You never knew him like I did!”

“Did he tell you about his plans to...to die?” Keith asks and there is an element of hesitation in his voice that makes her answer truthfully.

“No,” then, “did he tell you?”

“No.”

There is a silence between them where only the wind can be heard. Keith stares at the pavement awkwardly before whispering, “I tried to save him -”

“I don’t care,” she cuts him off.

“He wouldn’t let me -”

“I don’t care what you did. You killed him.”

“I -”

“I don’t want your damn excuses! You - you...” Amane trails off, unable to finish. She takes a breath, “He was all I had.”

“Your parents are still here.”

“My parents? Hah! You think I matter to them?!” She laughs cruelly, “All I am to my father is a mistake, a child that was never supposed to be born! All I am to him is a political alliance and breeding stock! And my mother learned long ago not to stop him!” Her voice quivers as she whispers, “Ryou was everything to me. What am I supposed to do with my life now?”

“Amame,” the sharp, clipped sound of her father comes from behind him. “Inside now.” His tone indicates that he had heard some of her words and she finds herself not caring about what he probably has planned for her as punishment.

She spits at Keith’s feet and hisses, “I hate you. Go die.”

Her father grabs her by the back of her neck and throws her inside the house. Amane sees her mother staring blankly at the walls, a tear running down her freshly bruised cheek. She remembered what Keith let slip earlier, that her father knows that Ryou is dead and a sense of dread runs down her spine. She looks back at the door and sees the Keith Howard is still standing there, a broken look on his face and almost wants to run to him. But her father closes that passageway to freedom, wood slamming against its frame.
Amane Andrews will not see Keith Howard for several years.

Sleep evades Bakura. Not that this is a new concept or anything. It’s just a bit annoying. Ryou had always had difficulty falling asleep, running most days on a maximum of maybe five hours. He’s not even sure the Spirit of the Millennium Ring knew what sleep was. And on top of that, in the last half hour, Bakura has taught himself how to use a coffee maker by watching Monthu (no, his name is Mokuba, remember that) and following a set of written instructed that he found nearby. He’s on his second cup and regrets absolutely nothing.

He sits curled up in one of the chairs that’s by the window in the room Joey set him and the kids up in. Legs dangling over the armrest, Bakura stares at his own hand as his fingers stretch open from the fist they’d been in. They’re a bit thinner than they’d been when he’d been Ryou and much larger than the bone-thin hands that the Spirit had, with twice the amount of fingers, too. He blinks and realizes that he’s black. Part of him is a bit shocked at this revelation because Ryou had become pale as a sheet after a year of neglecting to eat properly and the Spirit had forgotten what his skin looked like when it wasn’t covered in dirt and blood. But most of him doesn’t really care because this feels right.

It’s his hair and eyes that freak him out the most. White strands fall into his vision and he pushes them back into place with an irritated huff. The moment his hand moves away, they fall back to the exact same bothersome position. Bakura sighs and gives up on trying to force his hair to be reasonable. He glances at his reflection in the glass and sees purple eyes staring back at him. Quickly, he turns away because, damn it, they bother him.

A noise comes from the bed where the kids are sleeping. Rex’s eyes open as he stretches, back arching under the covers as he makes his way into consciousness.

“How long have I been asleep?” He asks.

Bakura shrugs, “It’s almost noon, so long enough, I guess.”

“Is that coffee?”

“You want some?”

“Dunno. I was always told that it would stunt my growth,” all the same, Rex climbs out of bed and grabs a mug off the counter beside the machine. He pours himself a cup and with the proclamation of, “Here goes nothing,” takes his first sip. He promptly spits it out.

“Oh fucking hell, that’s disgusting! How do people even drink this - and where the heck is the sugar?”

Bakura shrugs again, taking a swig of his own mug, which at this point contains more sugar than coffee after he dumped half the little pink packets that the room came with into his drink. That’s how Ryou had taken his and the first time he’d gone to Madam Puddifoot’s Tea Shop with Igraine, she’d thought it was funny.

“This blows...” Rex groans and pores the drink down the sink. He cracks open a bottle of water (and that invention still causes him to tilt his head in confusion) and sits down in the chair across from Bakura, “So you find anything new out while we were asleep?”

Yes. Because now Bakura's some kind of prophesied hero when yesterday he was...two different
people. It’s still a bit confusing, but it’s becoming a lot clearer. He’s learning to cope. Bakura wonders mildly what this whole being-the-immortal-Thief-King thing comes with as perks. He wonders if he’ll be able to meet them.

His lightning girl and fire boy. The two people that he’s been in love with since he was old enough to dream. And he doesn't even know their names.

But he doesn’t say any of that. Instead, he mentions, “Joey’s gonna introduce me to his girlfriend, who’s going to set me up with an apartment. Then he’s going to take us all to get some ID, whatever that entails.”

Rex nods, slowly taking in the information, “So...what about us?”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m, like, thirteen, man. Never been to a muggle school before, so I don’t know shit. Don’t have any money. Rebecca’s in an even worse boat ‘cause she’s eight. Maybe Weevil’s got some potential, but let’s be serious. No sane person is going to hire us, let alone give us a place to stay.”

“I don’t know,” Bakura sighs, exasperated. “I really, really don’t know. Merlin, I don’t even know this world.”

Rex shrugs, “Well, I guess it’s a bit different from normal, but it’s all somewhat familiar -”

“No, it’s not. You don’t get it, ‘cause you’re a damn Yank.”

“What?”

“Non-magic and magic. Where I came from,” where Ryou came from because he’s not all Ryou, not anymore, “they’re separate. Completely separate. None of this,” Bakura waves his hand around the room, “is familiar.”

“Seriously? None of it?” Rex looks astonished, “Even this?”

He holds up the damn water bottle. Bakura feels really uncomfortable. And more than a little stupid.

“No,” he grits out.

“Shit,” Rex raises an eyebrow. “I mean, I know you Brits were a bit eccentric with your traditionalism, but - really? Not even a water bottle?”

He’s not telling the brat about not knowing that the sun went around the earth. He already feels like a creature in one of Professor Kettleburn’s cages - something to be studied and prodded at.

“Don’t call them muggles,” Bakura says suddenly. Rex frowns.

“Why?”

“It’s offensive.”

“Oh.”

Things go quiet after that. Bakura stares out the window, amazed at the fact that the building is more than seven stories high and not made of stone and magic like Hogwarts. He could see taller structures in the distance, giant masses of metal and glass and realizes that they can’t be held up
with magic because the world doesn’t have access to it. So how in the name of Merlin’s beard were these people able to construct such a thing?

His - Ryou’s - father had always looked down on anything even remotely non-magical, even going as far as to campaign for the removal of the Hogwarts Express.

“Muggle inventions, like the locomotive, have no business in our world. Our ancestors were able to send our children to Hogwarts for centuries without relying on such things. We’re raising a generation that may want to start flying to school on muggle aeroplanes or worse, drive there in automobiles.”

Ryou had gotten that spiel every time he hopped on that train to go to Hogwarts. James Andrews had petitioned for the Knight Bus to be shut down, for the elevators in the Ministry of Magic to be removed, and to end the Muggle Studies program at school. Bakura smirked at the memory of the few times his father had come in contact with his main opposition, Arthur Weasley. Thank Merlin that the man never discovered that Charlie Weasley, Arthur’s son, did funny things to Ryou’s insides whenever he thought about the redhead. The same sort of things that the thought of Igraine used to do to him, back when their relationship was happy.

That had been something that carried over to Bakura as well - the liking boys thing. The same with the confusion that comes with it. Because he liked girls too and he isn’t quite sure if that is even possible. From what Sam Rowle had told him (when word got around that Gabriel Trueman didn’t wank to the thought of tits), blokes like girls and girls like blokes. Anything else is wrong. At least, that’s what he said before Marcus Flint shoved Trueman’s head down the toilet.

Maybe it’s a mage thing, liking both. Bakura would ask Rex, but he already feels like an idiot for not knowing about water bottles. Besides, there’s no way that he can bring up that topic without sounding like a creep. Bakura twitches in his seat and vows to remain silent.

The Spirit had kissed Ryou once or twice. Or a few handfuls of times. They’d gotten close in that battle, that instant of a second that lasted a lifetime inside the Ring. Between running from the freed body of Zorc the Destroyer and beating him back into the Shadows, the Spirit kissed Ryou with a mouthful of blood and tangled a hand that only had two and a half fingers in his hair. And Ryou had kissed back because why the fuck not.

Bakura shakes himself out of his thoughts, banishing the difficult-to-keep-Ryou-and-the-Spirit’s-memories-separate headache that he can feel coming on. Also, Rebecca seems to be stirring and they have no food for breakfast (or lunch, since the clock is telling him that it’s now one-thirty in the afternoon).

Just as Rebecca stumbles out of bed and into the washroom, there’s a knock on the front door. Bakura frowns as Weevil shoots upright in the sheets.

“Who’s that?” He asks. Bakura’s hand unconsciously falls to the Millennium Ring hidden under his clothes. His vision inverts as the divine weapon activates. The shadows lengthen and he sees the incandescent light and dark of the souls of the people in the room. Their names hover above their heads like ghostly nametags. Bakura might not be able to see the name, face, or soul of the person beyond the door, but he can sense them and their lack of evil intent.

“Come on, open up,” a male voice filters through the wood. “Joey sent me, the lazy ass.”

Bakura gets up and opens the door. On the other side is a boy about Joey’s age and height. His brown hair is shaved close to his scalp. He looks down at Bakura with wide brown eyes, “Well damn. Joey wasn’t yanking my chain about the hair, then.”
“No, he wasn’t. You aren’t gonna cry on me either, are you?”

“Joey cried?” The boy laughs.

“A bit,” Bakura shrugs, then frowns. “I don’t know you.”

“You won’t. The name’s Tristan Taylor. And I don’t cycle like Joey does. Just a regular old mage.”

“Oh,” he’s a bit surprised, but he’s done weirder things in the last day, so he’s going to run with it. Bakura moves out of the way as Tristan walks inside. “So how’d you meet up with Joey and the rest?”

“Twitter,” the guy says offhandedly. Bakura makes a noise of confusion, so he keeps talking. “Tea, our blogger, set it up about a year before I showed up here. She’s all over the social networking sites, contacting people she thinks might be mages. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube - hell, I think she might even be using that weird ass site, Tumblr. The internet’s the only thing wizards haven’t been able to tap yet. It’s our last means of communication.”

Bakura doesn’t understand a word Tristan is saying, but neither does Rex, so it’s a bit comforting. Weevil, on the other hand, seems to be following along like it’s second nature.

“Yeah, she first contacted me through Facebook about half a year ago and explained a bunch of things,” Weevil nods. “She told me to keep an eye out for wizards. Only wish I’d have paid more attention. Might not be here, if I did.”

“Sorry,” Rex interrupts. “What the hell is a Facebook?”

“You’ve never heard of Facebook?” Weevil looks at him the way Serenity and Joey had looked at Bakura when he said that the sun went around the Earth. He decides not to comment.

“Crap, that’s right. Joey mentioned that. You two are wizard born, right? You and...Rebecca? That’s her name. Where is she, anyway?” Tristan asks. As if on cue, the young blonde girl walks out of the washroom. Her hair is wet from the shower and her eyes are red-rimmed from crying. She looks up at the newcomer before running over to Rex and hiding her face in his leg.

“It’s okay,” Rex puts a hand on her shoulder. “He’s here to help. He and Bakura are friends. Right?”

“Yeah,” he says automatically.

“Uh, if it’s alright with you guys, I’d like to get a move on. We’ll hit rush hour traffic otherwise,” Tristan points to the door. “And I fucking hate commuters.”

“Dude! Language!” Rex snaps as he wanders over to the door. Rebecca trails after him like a little duckling, looking oblivious - though Bakura has the sneaking suspicion that she isn’t. He smirks at her tenacity. Adults say interesting things when they think kids aren’t listening.

Tristan leads them down the corridor to a different elevator than the one Joey took them up last night (or was it this morning?). He punches a separate button, one labelled P2 instead of the L for the lobby. The doors of the lift shut soundlessly and the ride is much less jerky than if he’d been riding one at the Ministry of Magic. Ryou had been on one once, long ago with his father. Those had been the days before he had been diagnosed. Those had been the days when they had been a family. But that was in the past now. No need to drag up unwanted memories that weren’t even his.

The doors open upon a sizeable underground structure made entirely of concrete. It’s filled with
cars of almost every shape and size. Tristan pulls a ring of small keys out of his pocket, though he ignores them and presses a button on a black square of material Bakura doesn’t recognize. One of the cars lights up and he hears a quiet clicking noise.

“Get in,” Tristan says. The kids clamber into the back through the space behind the passenger seat. Bakura slides in the front as Tristan gets behind the wheel. He mimics the driver and slides a strap of fabric across his chest and hooks it in the clip on his left hip.

When the car turns on, a box attached to the dashboard lights up with all sorts of buttons on a flat piece of glass—that-isn’t-glass at its centre. Bakura reads options like ‘New Destination’ and Point of Interest and several others that are immediately stored away in his mind and the car starts to move.

Bakura can count on one hand how many times he’d been to the non-magical portion of London. Ryou’s father had complained the entire trip about the injustice of someone like him having to travel through the ‘mudswamp’ (his words, not Ryou’s or Bakura’s). But as Bakura stares wide-eyed at the scenery of San Francisco, he wonders how the hell anything created by non-magical people could ever be considered swamp-like. Hell, he’d love to see wizards try to build structures like this without magic.

The number of people shocks him at first. He’s never seen these many people driving, walking, and just existing in the same place before. Bakura listens to Weevil’s explanation of traffic lights to Rex. Tristan presses a button on the dashboard as the boy is talking about the difference between the yellow and red signals and music fill the small compartment. Bakura thinks that it’s a radio being played with an odd contraption that has a circle in the middle.

“You like Eminem?” Tristan asks as a song with an incredibly fast-paced singer comes on. Bakura can only nod because he’s never heard anything like this before in his entire life. Tristan smirks, “You know, for a five-thousand-year-old dead guy, you’ve got a good taste in music.”

It’s at this point that Rex blurts out “Five thousand year old dead what?!?” and demands an explanation that Bakura absolutely refuses to give. Remembering how Tristan had adjusted the volume, he drowns the ranting teenager out with the lines of “~I’m standing up, I’ma face my demons. I’m manning up, I’m a hold my ground.~”

Twenty minutes later, they pull up to the curb at what appears to be a restaurant of some kind. Through the massive open windows, Bakura can see black and white checkered floors and booths covered in a fading red fabric. There’s a bar with stools that have seats made of the same material. He reads the sign Nomad above the window. The door chimes when he opens it.

“Mai! I brought the new people! Special order from your boyfriend!” Tristan shouts.

“You’re late!” A woman’s voice responds, thick with a southern American accent. “I swear to God Almighty, if you weren’t like family, I’d kick your ass back to Jersey! And then I’d fire you!”

“I’m not on shift ‘til six, you hag!” Tristan barks. Then he turns quickly to Bakura and the rest, “Look, she’s in a mood. You guys have a seat and I’ll find out what’s gone horribly wrong. Be right back, ‘kay?”

He disappears behind the counter and into what Bakura assumes is the kitchen. Snippets of the conversation flow through the walls and he can tell that someone had quit unexpectedly, leaving with little more than a few hours notice. Then a loud “What?!” sounds throughout the room and a door is slammed open. Bakura assumes that it is this ‘Mai’ person that marches through. He blushing so hard that his entire body feels like it’s on fire.
Mai is... gorgeous, to say the absolute least. Long, thick curls of blonde hair tumble down past her shoulders, stopping midway down her back and framing her face. She possessed the elven features that the pureblood families of Britain would kill to get their hands on. Bakura’s gaze is drawn to her eyes, which are so dark blue they almost seem to be violet.

Her clothing is what throws him completely off guard. He’s never seen anyone wear clothing this...tight before. Or with a collar that low cut. Bakura’s not even going to get started on the skirt that ends above her knees. It’s odd and more than a bit frightening - good frightening, of course. It is almost as altering as seeing Sera (no, Serenity - come on, moron, get it right) in trousers this morning. Most of the women and girls he had known wore dresses and skirts that ended at their ankles. Clearly, that was no longer going to be the norm.

Mai’s boots make a soft, padding sound as she walks towards him and hauls him to his feet. “Let me have a look at you, boy,” she frowns and suddenly there are two hands on the sides of his face with nails painted the same ruby red as her lipstick. Mai’s searching for something, Bakura realizes. She’s looking for recognition.

And he remembers another woman with thick black hair and the same dark eyes who’d put a plate of food in front of him after a long day’s work - “It’s all I got left. Eat up.” In times of plenty, there were dates and lettuce leaves, bread and milk. When the droughts would inevitably come, she would give onions and single cloves of garlic. But there was always something that Maya would provide. You just had to work for it.

Bakura thinks that she sees it in him because Mai smiles, radiant in her joy. He feels lips press into his forehead and she whispers, “Thank God. Finally, some good news.”

“Okay, that’s it! How do you know these people?!” Weevil shouts. “And why does he,” he points to Tristan, “think you’re dead? I mean, you’re not - right?”

He asks that last question with such hesitation that Bakura almost tells him what little he knows and remembers. But, undoubtedly, he’d make a mess of it all, so he doesn’t. Hell, he still doesn’t get most of it. He’s dead, but he’s alive. He’s supposed to have died earlier this morning (or a lifetime ago), but he also needs to live. He’s got a purpose, but he doesn’t know what that is.

Bakura misses them, but he doesn’t know who they are.

“You didn’t tell them?” Tristan frowns.

“I figured it was a need-to-know kind of thing,” he shrugs.

“Don’t give me that crap, Bakura,” Mai whaps him over the head with a thin notepad that she keeps in her apron. “I don’t mind you keeping some secrets. Where you come from and who your people are - that gets left at the door, you know that.” And he does know because while she may look different, Maya has changed very little in the handful of millennia since they last saw each other. “But we are your Court. Even them. They became yours the moment you laid claim to them. They deserve to know.”

Bakura shifts from foot-to-foot awkwardly, before looking at the three kids sitting in the booth. They’re waiting expectantly. He sighs. If he’s really this mythical hero, he better get used to leading.

“What do you know of the tale of the Three Kings?”
Mai is used to seeing ghosts. Not the spiritual kind, mind you. As far as she’s concerned, dealing with the dead is something to be left to professional spellcasters. She means the ghosts that people leave behind after they go where she has never been able to reach.

She cycles. Most people don’t, but she does. Mai has been Maya and Madeleine and Maeve and Makyla. There’s even been that one time where she’d been Masilo and a woman in everything but body. The names get hard to keep track of sometimes because there are literally hundreds of cycles that she’s been through. And that is why she sees ghosts. She doesn’t know who they are or who they remind her of, but she feels like she remembers them from somewhere before.

Sometimes she does remember them, though. People like Joey (or Jobe or Jomahl or Joyf), people like Amanda (or Manerva or Manika or Mana), they remember and she remembers them. Seto thinks that their cycling is a result of prolonged exposure to the Three Kings, back when they were young and still developing their powers. The last time the two of them had cycled together (which had been in and around the second World War), he as the young Seann Penner compared the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the Atomic Sickness that followed, to what happened to them. Maya of Thebes had been knocked loose from the natural cycle of life and death because she’d given food to a starving boy when she was fourteen.

That boy isn’t starving anymore. He sits across from Mai, purple eyes flicking around the Nomad and taking everything in. She’d gotten used to those eyes thousands of years ago. But now they fascinate her. She hasn’t seen them in forever. She’s missed Bakura. She’s missed the bone-thin boy half dead from hunger that grew up to be a King, even if he is smaller than she remembers.

Where have you been? She wants to ask him, but she already knows that. Joey sent her a text around noon today to tell her the news. She’d laughed for an hour afterwards in relief. Maybe, finally, there would be answers. So instead she asks, “How much do you remember?”

“Bits. Pieces. Nothing really connected,” Bakura answers. “I remember you, though. A little. It’s been...confusing, to say the least.”

The two boys that Tristan had brought in with the Thief King continue to stare owlishly at him after his explanation of his past. Mai understands that they’d briefly known one half of Bakura’s soul before he returned in-full. It must be as jarring for them as it is for him. The little girl named Rebecca seems to be taking it well enough. Mai wonders if, perhaps, she has some latent Seer ability. She has a bit of the Sight herself - enough to tell if someone is lying, but not much else. It’s come in handy over the last few cycles.

She wants to catch up, she really does. But right now, they don’t have time for that. She reminds herself that there will be a later for all that to happen, and gets down to business.

“Housing,” she says suddenly and the Thief King and children look up at her. “For you all. Rex, Weevil, and Rebecca - we’ve gotten in contact with a couple that relocated here a little over a year ago. They’re willing to take you three in, once we get some forged adoption documentation, of course. We’ve got Matthew on that - same thing with birth certificates and medical documents and passports.”

“Oh god, you’re kidding right?” Weevil groans, “You telling me that I’m gonna have to pretend to be this moron’s brother?”

“You wish you were cool enough to be my brother! Seriously though, I’m not living with this guy. He’s a total nerd!” Rex retorts.

“What?!”
“Yeah! You heard me!”

“Asshat!!”

“Oi! Leave my hat out of this, four-eyes!”

“Really? Four-eyes? That’s the best you can do? What are you: six?”

“Yeah, well...shut up!”

“Stop yelling!” Rebecca shouts suddenly. Mai watches as the eyes of the two arguing brothers-to-be turn to her, jaws clamping shut. The little girl squares her shoulders and clears her throat, “I want... I wanna go home. I really do. But...b-but I can’t. Cry didn’t help me so shouting and yelling won’t help you!” Rebecca seems to deflate a bit when she adds, “We’re a...a family now. I don’t want my family to shout. Not anymore.”

Mai makes a mental note to arrange a playdate between her daughter and Rebecca. Something tells her that this girl and Haley would get along really well.

The boys grunt out their apologies to one another, though she gets the feeling that round two had merely been postponed rather than cancelled. But Mai will take what she can get, so she continues. She pulls out her notepad and sets it on the table in front of them, “I need you three to write down any medical conditions you might have so we can get your prescriptions. Same goes for you, Bakura.”

“You gotta pen?” Weevil asks, unenthusiastically. “And get them another notebook. I’m gonna be a while.”

She raises an eyebrow but figures she’s seen weirder stuff than a teenager with an extensive list of meds. Tristan gets off his lazy ass to grab another pad of paper.

“Pre...script - what?” Bakura frowns at her across the table.

“You know: pills,” she says offhandedly. “Do they call them something different in England?”

The Thief King gives her a look that could have felled a charging rhino, “I’m Scottish.”

Well, that explains the weird accent. It’s the same, odd way that he used to talk. Bakura had never really told anyone where he was from, but it was clear even then that he wasn’t a native speaker. To this day, Mai has no idea what his background had been. And now he’s forcing the English language out through that - whatever it was. It’s a wonder how she could understand him at all.

“Regardless, you must have received some kind of medical treatment,” she says.

“Like potions,” Rex clarifies for him. “Were you on anything?”

Bakura squirms and rubs the back of his neck, “No.”

That’s a lie, but he looks so damn uncomfortable that she doesn’t press it. And then a terrible thought comes to her.

“Bakura, you haven’t gotten your shots yet.”

Weevil drops his pen and nearly jumps out of the booth. Tristan stares on in horror as he whispers in a panicked voice, “You mean… holy crap, they could be carrying smallpox! Oh damn. Oh shit. Oh -”
“Them. Hospital. Right now!” Mai is practically shouting night now because her daughter does her homework in this booth after school. And who knows what she might pick up because apparently wizards don’t vaccinate their kids and Bakura’s running around in a body from five thousand years ago and that’s just not safe.

As the three wizard-borns are stuffed back into Tristan’s Jeep and taken to the nearest walk-in clinic to get every injection in the book, Mai looks around and realizes that she’s probably gonna have to shut down the Nomad for a few days until she can get this place scrubbed down. Not to mention that she’s gonna need to find a new baker, since Jake up and left this morning. Mai sighs and gives thanks to the fact that she is also renting the apartments upstairs out to people. At least she has some savings to keep her and her kid afloat.

Bakura will probably like the middle room. Small as it may be, she doesn’t really think he’ll be using it for much more than a place to crash. And despite all the trouble he’s caused in the last half hour, she’s glad he’s back. Maybe she’ll stop seeing ghosts now that the Three Kings are returning.
Blood and Water

Chapter Summary

“Goddess, give me strength,” Matthew’s voice takes on the same tone of awe Mai’s had as Bakura steps into view. “So the rumours are true…”

Bakura does the thing were he seems to zone out before a smirk splits across his face, “Well, this is a surprise. I didn’t think I’d be seeing one of the Pharaoh’s brothers this early in the game.”

“You’ve met Seto already,” Matthew raises an eyebrow.

“Seth’s an ass. He doesn’t count.”

Chapter Notes


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Warning: Homelessness, racism, sexism, sexual situations (Keith Howard/Female original character; Younger woman/Older man), nudity, the beginnings of alcoholism, self-hatred, depression, mentions of rape, mentions of murder.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“He’s just escaped from a cult, doc. You know, one of those ranches that don’t believe in medication that isn’t from a plant they grew. He’s been staying at a friend’s place the last few weeks - you should have seen it. Didn’t even know that television was back then and now we can barely get him to stop watching America’s Next Top Model.”

Tristan figures that if he’s going to taxi around a possible epidemic inside of an immortal human being, he’s going to have some fun with it. The pissed off looks that Bakura keeps sending him to make dying of polio or smallpox almost seem worth it.

The nurse at the clinic they go to raises an eyebrow but doesn’t say a word as he wipes Bakura’s
arm with an antiseptic. Tristan supposes that he’s just seen weirder clients than a white-haired, black dude with a massive scar on one side of his face that is visibly uncomfortable about needing every shot in the history of modern medication. They want to take a blood sample, but Bakura took him aside and explained exactly why that is a terrible idea. The whole gold blood thing freaks him out, but Tristan figures that this is one thing that he’d be unable to explain his way around. Better to avoid the conversation entirely.

Bakura takes the shots like a champ, though it’s evident that his arms are crazy-sore afterwards. He holds Rebecca’s hand through her turn and scowls when Weevil laughs at Rex for crying halfway through his first injection. Tristan books a follow-up appointment about a month down the road for the series of shots that they didn’t get today, as well as one for himself later in the week. After all this, he wants to make sure he hasn’t caught anything.

The nurse hands Bakura a care package as they leave the clinic. It’s full of pamphlets on STIs and half a dozen free condoms. The guy’s eyes are as round as dinner plates when he realizes what they’re for, but that doesn’t stop him from reading through the information provided. Tristan is just glad that he has the good sense not to ask any questions because there is no way in hell that he’s going to answer anything.

He’s filling up his tank at a gas station when he gets a text from Matthew saying that he’d gotten all the kids papers in order and that their new guardians were on their way in. Tristan slides back into the driver’s seat of his Jeep and relays the message. In the rearview mirror, he sees that Rex and Rebecca are nodding, though Weevil is looking out the window with a downright miserable look on his face.

“Text?” Bakura asks.

“Text message. On my phone - you know what? Here,” he tosses his cell at Bakura as he starts up the engine. “Go nuts. Just don’t buy anything from the App Store or iTunes, okay?”

Five minutes later, Bakura mutters, “This Rachael girl is really pissed at you” and Tristan immediately regrets his decision. Rachael is his most recent ex-girlfriend. Needless to say, things ended badly between them. Tristan promptly distracts Bakura with Angry Birds and he’s silent for the forty-five minutes where they are stuck in traffic. Then the guy announces that he’s beaten the game. The entire game. Tristan nearly rear-ends the car in front of him in shock.

“What?!"

“I won. The birds are finally happy.”

“How did you do that?”

“Wasn’t that hard. I just figured out how each one of them flies,” Bakura shrugs, completely unhelpful. It’s not possible. It can’t be possible.

Thankfully, Solitaire seems to stump the guy - or, at least slow him down to the speed of an average human. When they pull up to Matthew’s condo, Bakura’s staring frustratedly at the arrangement of small, electric cards.

Matthew greets them in the lobby next to the elevators, looking like he just got home from the office. There’s a yellow envelope tucked under one arm and his suit jacket is thrown over one shoulder. The man is freakishly tall and skinnier than a blade of grass. He greets Tristan with a warm smile and a firm handshake. Matthew’s the kind of guy that you just trusted on instinct, but Tristan knows that he’s more slippery than an eel covered in oil. It doesn’t help that he’s one of the
most dangerous kinds of mages out there.

Tristan could move the earth at will, controlling the ebb and flow of the lava deep down below the tectonic plates. He knows that make him pretty darn formidable in his own right, but he’d never stand a chance against Matthew. The man’s a Spellcaster. No one in their right mind goes up against a Spellcaster without some serious backing and a shitload of luck.

It really doesn’t help that Matthew cycles, too. From what Tristan understands, he’d been some High Priest back in the old days with Seto and the rest of the Lady Pharaoh’s Court. Mahad, he thinks his name was. Doesn’t really matter. Tristan just privately refers to him as Rambo v.2.0.

“Goddess, give me strength,” Matthew’s voice takes on the same tone of awe Mai’s had as Bakura steps into view. “So the rumours are true…”

Bakura does the thing where he seems to zone out into the back of his head before a smirk splits across his face, “Well, this is a surprise. I didn’t think I’d be seeing one of the Pharaoh’s brothers this early in the game.”

“You’ve met Seto already,” Matthew raises an eyebrow.

“Seth’s an ass. He doesn’t count.”

Matthew towers over Bakura as he steps closer to the white-haired, scar-faced man. He places two hands with long pianist’s fingers on the Thief King’s shoulders and looks him dead in the eye.

“It’s good to see you, old friend. Try not to break too many laws while enjoying your stay here. I can only perform so many miracles in the courtroom.”

“They’ll have to catch me first,” Bakura grins. “You’re a judge?”

“Lawyer. Haven’t got enough years behind me for that. Shall we?” He waves his hands towards the elevators and the six of them step inside.

Tristan leaves Bakura and Matthew to catch up (or as close to catching up as they can with the Thief King’s hit-or-miss memory) and checks his reflection in the shiny metal of the elevator walls. He runs his fingers through his buzzed-short hair and tries to smooth the wrinkles out of his shirt. Popping a piece of gum into his mouth to remove any trace of the burrito he had for lunch, Tristan wishes that there was a way to remove the smell of sweat and car interior in, like, five seconds. He’s pretty much been living out of his Jeep since his landlord kicked him out about three months ago (he’s yet to tell anyone, though Tristan’s pretty sure Joey suspects).

He’s not gonna lie: he’s got it bad for Amanda, Matthew’s half-sister and fellow cycler. He knows that he’s got no chance. She’s so far out of his league, not to mention that it’s just not happening. Tristan’s not waiting for her or anything, nor is he pissed that she said no (because he gets why and totally respects her enough to back off). Doesn’t change the fact that after a whole year, she still gives him butterflies and he makes sure his breath doesn’t stink when she’s around him.

Tristan notices the nerdy kid, Weevil, giving him a weird look and doesn’t care. He knows his crush is beyond pathetic. He’s just stopped giving a shit about what people think about him.

Matthew unlocks the door to his condo, announcing to the occupant that he’s coming in and please be wearing pants because he’s got company. Tristan’s nose is assaulted by the smell of ginger, lemon, and dill. Amanda, as it turns out, is in the middle of one of her spells, “~As surely as I pierce this candle, so shall you feel this curse on you. Your evil deeds will turn to dust, you shall no longer be a threat to anyone.~”
Unlike her brother, Amanda is short and curvy with bright green eyes and long blonde hair. Matthew mentioned once that she took after her mother, while he must look like their shared father - not that either of them would know for sure, as they’ve never met the guy. So while Amanda looks like the All-American girl from Insert-Stereotypical-Sitcom-Here, Matthew’s won two lawsuits against members of the TSA for racially profiling him in their bullshit ‘random’ selections.

“Why are you cooking up a revenge spell?” Matthew asks with no attempt to hide his apprehension. Amanda doesn’t say anything to him, just nods to the cellphone on the kitchen counter, as she mutters an incantation under her breath and striking a match over the black candle she is holding.

“~I call to the gods for wisdom and guidance: look favourably upon my request. As I light this candle for hexing Zhao Xu, my intentions are not entirely selfish. I ask only for a good and happy life. I have tried all other avenues and feel the only way to achieve this is by asking for your assistance in attaining my goal. May my request be granted, may all things come to pass.~”

Her brother walks over and scrolls through her recent texts. He elegantly raises an eyebrow, “Oh. Is ice cream for dinner tonight?”

“And pizza. Extra large. Extra cheese,” Amanda growls without looking up.

“Breadsticks?”

“That lying, sexist bastard stole my thesis! Of course, I need breadsticks!” Amanda shouts before getting up and shoving a wax doll in the microwave. She glares at it as she sets the timer, reciting,

“~I curse you for the person you are. I curse you for what you have done. May your days be filled with despair, may your nights be filled with loneliness. I despise the very sight of you, and cast you from my life for good.~” She pushes the ON button with gusto and growls, “~Now my spell begins, may my magic find its mark.~”

“Did you call upon Anubis for this?”

“Sekhmet.”

Matthew lets out a low whistle, “Damn.”

“That asshole might have cost me my scholarship, Matt! All because he’s got some stupid idea that women shouldn’t be engineers! ~My spell has been cast, may nothing stop its course.~”

“Give him all kinds of hell then. Have the Simington’s showed up yet?”

“They’re, like, five minutes out. Oh hey, Tristan,” Amanda looks up and smiles. His stomach does about six cartwheels as he waves back. The microwave beeps and the wax figure has been reduced to a molten puddle of black goop. “~My spell is now complete. May the result be all I desire.~”

“Is she like you?” Weevil asks suddenly, looking Tristan in the eye. “Like, is she not gonna freak out at the fact that Bakura’s standing in her kitchen?”

The mention of the Thief King’s name causes Amanda to shriek and upset her spell. As she topples to the ground, sparks fly everywhere and one of the locks of her hair catches fire. Bakura waves his hand and a gust of air puts it out. Amanda stares with wide eyes from her awkward position on the floor.

“I spoke too soon, then,” Weevil grumbles.
“Hello, Mana,” Bakura tries not to laugh.

“Mana? Like High Priestess Mana? From Seth and the Dragon Princess?” Rebecca asks. “She was my favourite.” She says that last bit like Tristan’s sister used to say to say that Jasmine was her favourite Disney princess.

“Oh. My. God. Oh my god! Why didn’t you tell me?!” Amanda jumps to her feet.

“Joey sent a mass text out around noon,” Matthew sighs at his sister’s antics. “How’d you miss that one?”

“I was busy!”

“Doing what?”

“Finding out that Zhao stole my thesis!”

“Okay. I see your point.”

Amanda then proceeds to throw herself at Bakura, wrapping her arms around his neck and hugging him for all his worth. The white-haired man stands there in confusion for a whole three seconds before his arms slowly encircle her waist.

“Moron,” she whispers.

“I know,” he says back.

Of course, Mr. and Mrs. Simington take this moment to knock on the open door and announce their arrival. Mr. Simington raises an eyebrow and asks, “Are we interrupting something?”

Tristan gets the feeling that nothing is ever going to be normal ever again. But, he can’t really remember things being normal in the first place, so it’s probably not going to be much of a change.

Keith wakes up with a splitting headache and a girl he doesn’t know between his legs. He groans half from the pleasure that arcs through his body as her tongue licks his cock from base to tip, half from the pain of the sun that gleams through the window. He cums greedily and without warning, gritting his teeth and tugging harshly at her hair.

“Morning,” she grins and he notices the hickeys on her neck and shoulders as her dark hair sways forward when she leans over him.

“Morning,” he says in return. He doesn’t recognize where he is, but the picture of the girl and another man on the nightstand (a brother, maybe, or a boyfriend) makes him think that they’re at her place. It’s not moving, so she’s probably a muggle. He feels like shrugging. He has gone for far less before.

“Last night was fun,” she climbs on top of him, long nails running down his chest and leaving red marks in their wake. “You’re pretty good...for an old man.”

“...not old. I’m thirty-five,” Keith slurs as his hands reach up and cup her tits. He’s half-hard against her leg. It’s the potions that the Department make him take that makes that even possible. His body should have started showing signs of age years ago, but he doesn’t feel a day over twenty-three. The magic in those things does weird stuff to his body and apparently, a nearly non-
existent refractory period is one of the many side effects (not that he’s complaining).

“Still older than me. Like, over a decade older.”

He freezes, “What?”

“Relax. I’m legal,” she laughs as Keith slides back inside of her. “ Barely, anyways.”

Ah well. Too late to back out now.

He sits up, vision spinning with his damn hangover, and grabs the girl by the ass. Keith sets their rhythm, slamming her down on his cock until she’s completely incoherent. He growls, lifts her off of him and flips her over onto her front. She’s barely propped herself up on her hands before he shoves his way in and fucks her from behind. When he feels himself getting close, he tugs at her black hair until he can see her face. Keith manages three more thrusts before he goes over the edge and empties himself inside of her, looking into her blue eyes the entire time.

It hits him later when he’s dressed and leaving the girl’s apartment, that he’s just fucked a female version of Ryou. And then he remembers that Ryou’s dead. It makes him stumble over to the side of the road and vomit up the entire contents of his stomach. It’s pretty much just beer and whiskey, which explains why he can’t recall much of last night.

He sits on the curb of the street, some road in some muggle town that he can’t seem to remember right now. The smell of the puke next to him burns his nose. Keith puts his head in his hands because, seriously, what the fuck?

The resemblance between Ryou and the girl is there if he looks hard enough. Both have dark hair and blue eyes. Both are skinny - though Ryou had been much, much more with bones visible through his skin, not to mention that he was paler than a fucking sheet. And both were frighteningly young. Far too young to be involved with the likes of him.

The scary part is that Keith has never once even thought about Ryou like that. The boy had been more of a younger brother or, hell, even a son. He isn’t even into guys - or, at least, he better not be because thirty-five is far too old for him to be figuring out that he’s gay. That confusing shit is supposed to go down when you’re a teenager. It’s not supposed to be a symptom of a mid-life crisis.

He shakes his head, trying to scrounge for any memory of last night. Keith manages to drag up the scraps of a conversation with the girl. Thankfully, her tone and mannerisms are anything but the soft, shy voice that Ryou had. So the girl hadn’t been a substitute for the boy to his drunken mind. She’s probably just been more of a reminder, something comforting to look at at the bar so that he could pretend the kid was still alive. Then she’s invited him back to her place. Things must have snowballed from there.

A bird waddles in front of him. It looks like a small, compressed goose. Keith blinks and realizes it’s a Nene. He’s in Hawaii. It makes sense. The island isn’t that far off the coastline of America’s fiftieth state. Not to mention that you can’t apparate across national borders. The United States technically had jurisdiction, having ‘claimed’ the island during the Pacific War in the 40’s. Keith could have apparated here after leaving work last night.

The island. Work. Pegasus. The new job comes rushing back into his memory. Shit. He needs to get going on that.

Keith stumbles down the road until he finds a gas station. Digging out some muggle money, he
buys a sixer of a brand he doesn’t recognize and a pack of gum. He’s got a long day and an even longer night ahead of him and, frankly, he doesn’t want to be sober when planning a suicide mission like retaking San Francisco. Because, let’s face it, the Department lost enough people trying to defend it. The mages in there were in a class of their own with powers that no one had ever conceive to be possible before.

He apparates onto the island with a crack. As he walks through the hallways, his co-workers turn towards him and smile. A few cheers echo against the stone walls. A man he doesn’t recognize asks to shake his hand. Keith puts a grin on his face and feels empty inside.

They’ve given him an office somewhere on the third floor of the building. When he realizes that he’s directly on top of the execution room, Keith cracks open on the beers and downs half the can in two gulps. Other than that, though, the place is surprisingly comfortable. There’s a leather couch and a few armchairs in front of an imposing desk. The dark wood matches the array of bookshelves that line the walls. Keith skims over the books and sees several familiar titles (Fantastic Beasts and Where To Find Them, Numerology and Grammatica, Extreme Incantations, Alchemy, Ancient Art, and Science) and a few that he’s pretty sure are banned in a few countries (The Muggle Conspiracy, Mudbloods and How to Spot Them, When Muggles Attack). Keith remembers reading The Mage Menace by James Andrews after being recruited by the Department. He’d been young and stupid back then, so ready to defend wizard kind against the ancient threat of mages. James had portrayed them precisely as he needed to: brutal monsters that killed and raped and bathed in blood. The magic that they conjured was an abomination and their gods nothing more than the fantasies of a delusional freak of nature. Wizarding purity must be upheld and he, Keith Howard, had been chosen to take a stand.

What utter bullshit. And Keith had fallen for it, hook, line, and sinker. Look where it landed him. What a child he’d been back then.

There’s a knock on the great wooden door of his office. Keith kicks the beer cans under his desk and banishes the one in his hand into nothingness.

“Come in,” he barks, hoping that whoever’s on the other side wouldn’t smell the booze on his breath.

It’s Pete Coppermine, the overly energetic newbie from Detroit. The kid doesn’t look a day over twenty-four. Young and stupid, Keith thinks. Young and stupid.

“Sir, hi - hello. Good morning,” he immediately corrects himself, already sucking up. Had word gotten out about his promotion this fast?

“What do you want?” Keith growls because it’s too fucking early to be dealing with this shit.

Coppermine tries to look more professional by standing up taller and straightening his robes. Sadly, the only thing he succeeds in doing is looking like a puppy trying to walk for the first time.

“Mr. Pegasus sent me, sir. With books and maps and stuff. He says that they’d be of use to you. Sir,” the kid opens the door a little wider and Keith sees piles of texts and rolled up scrolls floating in the air behind him.

“Put them on the table, then,” he grunts and Coppermine smiles as he waves his wand. The books stack themselves alphabetically on the coffee table. Keith walks over and unrolls one of the scrolls. It’s a map of -

“Is that San Francisco, sir?” Coppermine asks, wide-eyed, “Are - are we planning something? Are
we taking it back?"

“How long have you been with the Department, kid?” Keith snaps.

“Six months, fourteen days, sir.”

“Six months and fourteen days and you haven’t learned not to ask questions yet? When I started, they beat that out of you on your second day. And that was for the idiots too stupid not to get the message the day before.”

That shuts Coppermine up for all of three seconds. Then the brat mutters an apology and tells him that he’ll do better next time. Keith rolls his eyes and tries not to remember that it took nearly a month to get him to stop questioning orders.

“It’s just - sir, if you want help or anything, I was born in San Francisco. I know the place pretty well.”

That catches Keith’s attention. He frowns, “I thought you were from Michigan?”

“Worked there, yeah, before I got chosen to be part of the Department. My family moved to Detroit from California two years before the mage takeover,” Coppermine shrugs. “We were lucky to get out when we did, sir.”

Keith looks from the kid to the map in his hands and hopes that it’s not the hangover talking when he thinks that, yeah, Pegasus had asked him to put together a team.

“Sit,” he indicates to the couch. Coppermine looks confused, but does as he’s asked, “What’s your background?”

“Um...I’m half-blood if that’s what you’re asking.”

“No. Background. What’d you do before all this?”

“I was an Auror, sir.”

“In Detroit?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What kind of action did you see there?”

“Half-breeds, mostly. There’s a huge unregistered werewolf colony squatting in the vacant lots. Then there are the half-giant gangs. The Veela sex trade. Vamps and hags. Just before I got recruited, we shut down this group that was -”

Keith holds up a hand to tell him to stop, “And you know your way around San Francisco?”

“I can get around, yeah,” Coppermine frowns suddenly. “Sir, I know I’m not supposed to be asking questions, but...is this a test?”

“That depends on whether I like your answers,” Keith says in a deadpan voice that gives away nothing. He sits down in the armchair directly across from him, “You were...the one who brought Ryou Andrews to the execution room.”

“Me and Kitamori. Yes, sir.”
Keith bites his lip and clenches his hands into fists, “What the hell happened?”

Coppermine rubs his shoulder unconsciously, “There’s a report -”

“I don’t care. I’m asking you.”

“I-- I’m not really sure, sir. One minute, the mage was calm and quiet. And the next,” Coppermine makes a face, “the bastard was free and using wizard magic, sir. He wasn’t even using a wand. He just...and then Mette was gone. Blew his head off. How does that even work? How could he use wizard magic with no wand? And how did no one know about it?”

“Ryou, he…” Keith pauses to find words and wonders if this is ever going to get easier to talk about. He wants another beer, “He kept a lot of secrets.”

Coppermine snorts, “I guess.” He looks off to the side, “You heard the news yet?”

“What news?”

“Felix Cornfoot - the kid that got his stomach ripped out by Ryou Andrews. He died at St. Mungo’s this morning.”

Keith should feel something for the Gryffindor boy but doesn’t. So instead he asks, “What about the other two?”

“Not really sure, sir. But no news is good news, I guess.”

Keith nods. He turns back to the book the kid brought in. Forbidden texts that would never see eyes beyond the Department of Mysteries lay before him, documenting tactics and strategies about how they had infiltrated and destroyed magic havens before. He’s pretty sure Lakewood’s in amongst the piles. Keith remembers the warehouse hire and the screams of those inside. He hears them pleading for God, for their mothers, for anyone to help them. He remembers clapping James Andrews on the shoulder afterwards and congratulating him on a job well done.

“What do you think of them? Mages, I mean,” he asks.

“I’m not sure what you’re asking, sir,” Coppermine hesitates. “I mean, I haven’t really got one. Isn’t that the point?”

“Maybe I should rephrase that. What do you think mages are like?”

Coppermine frowns, “Well...um...they’re monsters, right? Just, well, they’re freaks. Sorry, sir - I’m still not sure what you want me to say.”

“Monsters and freaks, huh?” Keith laughs, but it’s dry and flat and lifeless. “yes, that’s what they’d like you to think, isn’t it? Those idiots upstairs.”

“Sir?”

“San Francisco has become the largest mage haven in the last century, kid. What does that tell you?”

“That there’s a lot of them living there?”

Keith lets out an exasperated sigh, “It’s more than that. They’ve had that city for three years. Three years and there’s more of them living in that one spot than there has been in over a hundred years. Think, kid. Come on. It’s not that hard.”
Coppermine frowns in concentration, “They’re gathering? Planning something, maybe? But then, how do they know to go there? They’ve...got a way of communicating that we don’t know about! They’re - they’re smart!”

“What else?”

“Mages...usually come from muggle families. Most don’t know what’s happening to them when they start developing their powers. That would lead to estrangement from their families and friends, making it easier to break ties and run away to another city. Am I...” Coppermine hesitates, “Am I one the right track?”

“Yeah. I’ll take it from here, actually,” Keith clears his throat. “What it means is that mages generally come from broken households. If they aren’t forced out or leave on their own, we generally find them. You know what that means, right?”

Coppermine nods. Of course, he knows. Every Unspeakable does. It means that the mages are captured, brought to the island, and killed.

“Those that survive or get away, they don’t trust easily,” and they had every right not to. “When mages form groups, they get protective. Territorial. Almost obsessively so.”

He remembers James Andrews’ report on Lakewood, of the mages that he’d met while working his way into their ranks. James had mentioned that the leader, known only as Kane, had been particularly violent upon discovering his betrayal. James had barely made it out of their with his limbs attached to his body. Of course, by that time, it had been too late. Kane and his followers burned. There were no survivors.

“Like a herd,” Coppermine misunderstands.

“No. Like a family.” Because isn’t that what outcasts looked for the most? Just somewhere to belong? “You’re right about one thing. We are going to San Francisco. We’re going to try and take it back. But we are not, under any circumstance, going in blind. That means that when - not if, but when you go into that city and when you meet a mage, they're not going to be monsters and freaks.

“You’re going to meet kids. Kids from good homes and supportive parents that they had to leave behind. Kids from shitty homes with shittier parents who are so emotionally fucked up that they wouldn’t know what love looked like if it slapped them in the face. You’re going to meet adults who are just scraping by and those that are going to be financially secure for the rest of their lives. You’re going to meet single mothers and homeless teenagers and dropouts with only a few galleons to their name. You’re going to meet students and teachers, professionals and entrepreneurs.

“Kid, you’re going to meet a bunch of people that we drove together. And if you go in there thinking that mages have three heads, tails, and the most unnatural magic you’ve ever seen...you’re not going to be able to function when you get too close.”

Because that’s what Ryou taught him - that Keith had been fighting people and not freaks of nature. That he’s responsible for the murders of twenty-four people, not the hunts of twenty-four mages. That he’d led a fifteen-year-old boy to his death and got a fucking promotion for his sins.

He has no idea how he’s going to lead this team, thinking as he does now. Part of him knows that the moment he points his wand at a mage, he’s going to see black hair and blue eyes and hear, “There’s nothing wrong with me, Keith. I’m not sick.” He wants to hate Ryou for changing him, for making him question everything he’s ever known. But that’s not Ryou’s fault. And, fuck him,
he could never bring himself to hate Ryout Andrews.

“So what should I do, sir?” Coppermine asks - why is this brat of a kid allowed the ask questions that Keith has no answers to?

“Know that for every mage you kill, there is a mother, a father, a sibling, a kid who will mourn them. Know that they have friends and lives and meals left uneaten because they rushed out of the house to protect the last bit of family they have left. Know that, so when you kill them, you never forget who they are. Know that they died for the greater good.”

Even if he never knows what it is, Keith has to believe that there’s a reason behind all of this. That’s what he’s trying to get across to Pete Coppermine. There has to be a greater good. Because if there isn’t... If Ryout and the twenty-four before him died for nothing…

Keith has no idea what he’s going to do.

Matthew has worked all kinds of magic to get papers for Bakura and the kids within twenty-four hours. The Thief King wonders if the man has any underground connections because there’s no way that this is legal. He’s kind of proud, to be honest.

The Simington’s signed all the necessary documents to make their adoption of Rex, Weevil, and Rebecca look halfway legit. They’d left with the three of them fifteen minutes ago. Rebecca had wrapped her arms around Bakura’s waist and whispered, “Thank you for saving us,” into his stomach. Rex had shaken his hand and promised to see him around. Weevil just looked his way and nodded. Bakura doesn’t take offence to that. The guy had had a tough week. He’s allowed to be grouchy.

Between Tristan, Amanda, and Matthew, he manages to understand what’s on the papers and cards in front of him. There’s a birth certificate that says that he was born in a very obscure village in Egypt (“Sorry my friend, but there’s no way you can pass as being born here with that accent.” “I have an accent?”) and accompanying immigration and citizenship papers. Beside those is a peach coloured card that Amanda explains is a drivers license (“Matt, do we seriously want to put him behind the wheel of a car? Remember what he was like on a horse?” “Oi!”). There’s a booklet of sheets called a passport that will allow him to get into other countries (“So...like a Portkey?” “A what?” “Like, a boot. Or a can. That takes you places.” “Wizards are fucking weird, man.”), another card that gives him remote access to a bank account with a few hundred dollars worth of cash (“Is that a lot?” “It’s enough. What kind of money do wizards have anyways? I’ve always wondered.” “Coins, mainly. They’re made out of gold, silver, and bronze.” “Solid gold?” “Yeah.” “Holy. Shit.”), and something called a social insurance number (“It’s so you can get a job.” “You need a number to get a job?” “Yeah.” “...And wizards are the weird ones how again?”).

Matthew has also gone and got him some extra clothes and one of those cell phone things that Bakura saw everyone and their grandmother using during the trip over. Amanda pulls her chair up next to his and shows him how to use the basic functions. She tells him that it’s an outdated model, that flip phones stopped being mainstream years ago. She laughs when she calls him a ‘hipster,’ and he has no idea what that is, but he cracks a smile regardless.

The sun is just starting to set when his stomach growls. His eyes are also beginning to droop, but he doesn’t let it show. Tristan says that he needs to head out and help Mai at the Nomad, so Matthew and Amanda let Bakura crash on their couch for the night. Matthew leaves to go get supper (“Can we get take-out from down the road?” “What happened to pizza?” “I’ve had weirder
changes in cravings. Can we not question this?”), so Amanda throws herself upon the duty of
getting him up to speed with technology.

Within fifteen minutes, he is able to operate a microwave, television, and is working on learning
what the hell a computer is. Then she introduces him to Wikipedia, which Bakura thinks is quite
possibly the greatest thing on earth.

He pecks words on the keyboard, single finger punching out ‘Neil Armstrong’, and up comes an
incredibly detailed biography of the man. The words burn themselves into his mind as Bakura
reads the entire page. He looks up the moon landing and the Space Race and NASA. The pictures
from the Hubble Telescope are the most amazing things he’s ever seen before and he drinks in the
information being sent back by the Mars rovers like a man who hasn’t seen water in a week.

SETI blows him entirely out of the water. The idea that humans aren’t the only ones out there in
the universe is so utterly foreign to him that Bakura actually has to read it over twice to make sure
that he isn’t going crazy. Aliens. Living beings from other planets. Wow. Just...wow. He literally
has no words.

Matthew comes back with two plastic bags full of containers.

“It’s Thai. Do you like Thai?” Amanda asks.

Bakura shrugs as Matthew opens up the containers on the table. Immediately, his nose is assaulted
by the intense aromas of the food inside. Amanda points to each dish, explaining what they are.

“That’s a seafood curry. And that’s pad thai. And that tom mara - it’s a melon soup. You might
want to skip it, ‘cause you’re kind of new to this. Uh...and that’s - oh my god, you got me deep
fried prawns! Matt, I love you! Have I told you that recently?”

“Not today, no,” Matthew smiles and then nearly panics when he sees Bakura grabbing a bowl of
soup. “Bakura, wait - “

His words died on his lips as Bakura tries it. The soup’s interesting, he’ll give it that. Really acidic,
with vegetables and leafy greens and what he thinks is chicken.

“What?” He raises an eyebrow. Matthew stares with his jaw hanging open.

“Isn’t that...a little spicy for you?”

Bakura blinks, “No. Why?”

“Damn,” Amanda laughs. “And here I thought that I was the only person who could even stomach
that stuff.”

“Just...just...uh, yeah,” Matthew gives up and shakes his head. He grabs a pair of wooden sticks
and uses them to eat his supper in silence.

Afterwards, he finally finds out what America’s Next Top Model is. He stares at the television
screen in muted horror and fascination because how could something this dumb and mind-numbing
be (he hates to admit it) as addicting as it is. Bakura eventually has to shove the remote at Amanda
with specific instructions to please, please, change the channel because he just can’t. She laughs so
hard that she nearly falls off the couch.

That’s when he’s hit by a wave of pure exhaustion that nearly knocks him off his feet. Bakura
manages to make it through a hot shower without falling asleep. He stares at his naked body in the
mirror for a bit, cataloguing the scars that he has no idea how he got. There are still so many
questions that he still has, but they can wait for the morning.

Thief King Bakura passes out on his stomach in nothing but a pair of boxers on the living room
couch. He sleeps for nearly twelve hours and snores like a bear the entire time.
It’s the first decent amount of sleep he’s had in thousands of years.

Chapter End Notes

I'm just going to explain a bit of what's going on in Keith's mind right now in regards
to Ryou. It may seem a bit odd, considering that he just compared the boy to a girl that
he just slept with. But I want to stress this: Keith is not sexually attracted to Ryou.

However, Keith has no friends.

He has co-workers. He has bosses. He has people that answer to him. Ryou was the
first meaningful relationship that he's ever had. Was it love? Yes. But it was platonic
and familial, not romantic or sexual. And when Ryou died, he took with him the most
emotionally intense thing that Keith has ever known.

Keith is grieving right now and he's going about it in an incredibly destructive way.
He's unconsciously trying to replace that relationship he'd had with Ryou with
something that he believes is equally as intense: sex. Specifically, sex with people that
remind him of Ryou. But it's not working. If anything, it's making things worse for
him because Ryou is gone and there is no way to replace him. Even Bakura couldn't
because while Bakura was once Ryou, he is not completely Ryou anymore.

So, no: Keith is not sexually attracted to Ryou Andrews. He's just really messed up
right now.

Also, the Department's island is located within the Pacific Ocean, just south of Hawaii.
It's technically owned by the muggle American government, though they don't
remember it. And since it's my headcanon that you can't apparate outside the borders
of a country (hence the reason for the existance of port keys), he could make it to the
island. Nene's, by the way, are a bird native to Hawaii. I've never seen one in person,
but I know someone who has and they described them to me as a 'compressed goose'.
The Game Is On

Chapter Summary

All magic is just science that we have yet to explain. Magic is energy and energy is matter. Highly specific, oddly used matter but matter none the less. You can't destroy matter. But you can't create it either.

You have to manipulate it.

Chapter Notes


Disclaimer (2): The Westfield San Francisco Centre is owned by Westfield Groul and Forest City Enterprises. Dunkin’ Donuts belongs to Dunkin’ Brands and William Rosenberg. RadioShack is chaired by Daniel Feehan. Independence Hall is one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites. YouTube is a subsidiary of Google. The Mist belongs to Rick Riordan and his Percy Jackson series.

Warning: Mentions of alcohol, underage sex, pregnancy, PTSD trauma, the abuse of a mentally disabled child, minor character death, and gore.

A month later finds Bakura in the apartment above Nomad, attempting to change a light bulb. He thinks it’s ironic: all this godly power, this complete control over the air, and he can barely manage this without electrocuting himself.

Rebecca, Rex, and Weevil are adjusting well enough to life with the Simington’s. Bakura spent the afternoon with them yesterday, going to the Westfield San Francisco Centre to shop for clothing and school supplies. He learned how to use the credit cards Matthew had given him and discovered how American money worked. He also may have pickpocketed a few people that he bumped into and made fifty-six bucks. Stealing turns out to be surprisingly easy when you can phase your body through solid objects and wallets don’t have curses attached to them. Now he just needs to figure out how security alarms systems work and he’ll be set.

His apartment is a small, quiet place. The tiny living area is enough for a sofa and a television that has about thirty channels (Joey keeps telling him that he can set Bakura up with cable, but he doubts he’ll watch the hundreds of channels that come with it). There’s a refrigerator in the corner and a microwave on a countertop about a foot away from the sink. Along the short corridor off to the side is a small bathroom with an incredibly compact shower and toilet. Bakura’s bedroom consists of a mattress, a few boxes containing what little clothing he has, and a stolen laptop.

So there he is, trying not to break his neck, changing the bulb in the kitchen, when he gets the call.
Bakura’s phone rings on the counter and he swears slightly, but he keeps his balance on the edge of the sofa. He grabs it just before it goes to voicemail (whatever that is).

“Hello?”

“Yo. Boss! How’s it going?”

“Can’t really complain. You?”

“Fine, fine. Look, thanks for covering for Mai tonight with Haley. I owe you one,” Joey says.

Bakura remembers very suddenly that he agreed to babysit her daughter while the two of them go out on a date. He shrugs and then realizes that the guy can’t see his reaction on the other end, “Not like I’ve got anything else to do.”

“Yeah, about that. You busy this afternoon?”

“No,” Bakura’s eyes narrow. “Why?”

“Rich-boy’s wondering if he can stop by and talk to you about something. Bakura groans, “Why?”

“Dude, don’t shoot the messenger! Just...he may have mentioned this crazy idea a few days ago and frankly, I think it’s about time you saw some action on this side of the century,” Joey chuckles. “So, you game?”

“Fine. Yeah, sure,” Bakura sighs. “But tell him he’s not welcome unless he pays tribute.”

Joey laughs out loud and Bakura is hit by a memory from long ago. From back when Joey was Jono and he’d always laugh like that after a successful raid, grinning as he sorted through his plunder.

“One day, you’ll see. I’ll be so rich that I’ll have my own palace, with gold and jewels and servants. Just you wait! One day, I’ll hit the big score and I’ll be done with robbing!”

Bakura also remembers everyone getting utterly smashed that night on stolen wine. He’d woken up half-naked on the banks of the Nile, surrounded by bowls of dates. Even thousands of years later, he can’t understand why.

“Hey, hey - Bakura? You still there?”

“Yeah. I’m fine. Just...remembering.”

There’s a pause before Joey asks, “About what?”

“Remember when you raided that tomb with all those creepy dolls? The one with the curse that would have made all your hair fall out?”

“Wait, wait - oh god, you remember that?” Joey sounds like he wants to forget it. “Damn, that was, like, forever ago, boss!”

“You thought you’d found the mother load!”

“Oh fuck off, man!” Joey laughs, “I was fifteen. How do you even remember that, anyway? We barely knew each other back then.”
“Because I went back afterwards.”

“...What?”

“You completely missed the anti-chamber on the other side of the northern wall.”

“No. No way. What was in there?”

“Gold, Joey. Gold like you wouldn’t believe.”

“No. No. What did you do with it?” Joey seems spellbound.

“Told what I could. But, Jono, there was so much. And the quality - god, you should have seen it. I couldn’t sell it. Hell, I could barely will myself to part with it. So I buried the treasure and wrote a map telling me where to find it,” Bakura grins. “But the map was stolen from me and my gold was lost forever.”

“You could have goddamn told me!” Joey shouts, “Or at least shown me the - wait, why are you laughing? What’s so - oh, you didn’t!”

“I can’t believe you--”

“You little shit, you made that up!” Joey is howling with laughter, “Gods, you couldn’t even read back then, let alone write a map! Oh fuck, that was good. I’ll give you that.”

“I do remember the wine, though.”

“Heh, heh, yeah. That was an awesome night.”

“Really didn’t need to know that, Joey.”

“Those girls from Cyprus where fun. Not my fault you missed out.”

“I was twelve, you idiot.”

“Times were different back then.”

Bakura sputters, getting a flash of an incredibly embarrassing and awkward night about a year and a half later. There was little wonder why he never heard from that girl again.

“Go. To. Hell.”

“Yeah, yeah. Look, Seto’s dropping by around two. I’ll tell him to bring doughnuts. Good?”

“Fine. Later. Wait, Joey?”

“Yeah?”

“Back then, do you have any idea where I would have gotten fourteen bowls of dates from?”

“...Noooo? Should I ask?”

“Probably not,” and with that, he hangs up and goes back to changing the light.

Seto does show up at two, on the dot because he’s a punctual freak like that, with an assorted twelve pack from Dunkin’ Doughnuts and a girl (there’s a joke in there somewhere, but Bakura’s going to keep it to himself). The Millennium Ring twitches under his shirt and he can see that her
name is Tea Gardner.  Ah, so he’s finally going to meet the infamous blogger.

“This enough ‘tribute’ for you?” Seto says, voice dripping with sarcasm, as he shoves the box of doughnuts in Bakura’s direction.

“For now,” he smirks and opens the door wide enough for the two of them to enter.

“You’re Bakura, right?” Tea extends her hand for him to shake and he grasps it firmly.  He feels a burn scar that runs the length of her palm press against his skin, “Wow, they really weren’t kidding about the hair.  Mind if I set up?”

“Yeah, sure.  Go ahead,” Bakura blinks as Tea makes her way inside.  Seto takes her coat and scarf and Tea opens up her bag, pulling out a laptop.

“Which one’s your wifi?”

“Uh, I’m kind of running off the connection from the Radioshack down the street.”

“Oh.  Password?”

He gives it to her and then turns to Seto, “What’s this about?”

“After you and those kids came in, we started asking some of our friends on the outside about wizard born mages.  Last week, Tea got a hit from the Jackals.”

“Jackals?” Bakura asks.

“They’re this network of mages.  Totally underground.  They’re kind of our eyes and ears and, occasionally, they do some legwork,” Tea explains.  “And Leo, he’s one of our oldest contacts.  The guy has literally been with us since the beginning.  And he’s online!  Awesome!”

She types frantically for a second or two and asks, “You wanna talk to him?”

“Who?  This Leo guy?” Bakura raises an eyebrow.

“Yeah.  Just be a bit carefulful.  I’m pretty sure he’s willing to flirt with anything that casts a shadow.”

Bakura blinks as the information clicks in his mind, “Uh...um, alright.”

He sits down next to her on the couch, ignoring the spring that jabs him in the side.  She pulls up a window on her laptop.  It’s some kind of messaging program and it looks like Leo is typing.

> dancer!
> how you doing beautiful?
> hey leo!
> i’ve got some friends here that need to see what you told me about
> awwww!  you ever gonna drop me a line for something that’s not work ;)
> in your dreams leo
> lol
> you said friends?
> priest and a newbie
> is he cute?
> he’s as pretty as they come
> DAMN GIRL!!!!!!
Bakura feels his face start to burn. Tea smirks as she types.

> down boy
> pics, plz
> :P killjoy
> alright
> read it and weep

< File Transfer: Accept or Decline? >

Tea clicks the ‘accept’ button and the document opens up. Bakura raises an eyebrow at the blurry photograph of a building that could belong to any major city and grabs the laptop from Tea.

> i can’t see a fucking thing
> who’s this?
> new guy
> PRETTY BOY?!?!?!??
> NO
> call me snake
> you have no appreciation for what has occurred here because of my awesomeness
> also is that an innuendo?
> NO
> you’re no fun :(  
> let me impress you
> THAT is the entrance to the AMERICAN MINISTRY OF MAGIC
> in motherfucking PHILADELPHIA
> BULLSHIT
> there are spells to prevent non-magic tech from working
> LOL
> broke those YEARS ago

Bakura looks at Seto for confirmation. The man shrugs, “How’d you think we managed to take this city? It’s all science, really. Leo was the first person to think of it.”

He looks back at the screen to see the next block of words pop into sight.

> all magic is just science that we have yet to explain. magic is energy and energy is matter. highly specific, oddly used matter but matter none the less. you can’t destroy matter. but you can’t create it either.
> you have to manipulate it
> wizards can manipulate the mist - kind of like our illusionists except not really. illusionists work with the mist. wizards force it to conceal what they want. but they both show that there is a way to alter it
> we observed an illusionist under some lab conditions and saw he was giving off some interesting energy waves. so we created a machine that could replicate them. it can alter any forced mist usage within half a mile of its location so tech can be used.
> currently working on a pocket-size version. because i’m a bad fucking ass like that
> how’d you know it was philadelphia?
> wizards are pretty old-fashioned. and philly was the original capital of the usa. so we googled historical landmarks and started taking pics
Bakura gives the laptop back to Tea very quickly because his face won’t stop burning. Seto chuckles in the background, so he scowls and grabs a doughnut, “Where’s this leading anyways?”

“They have to keep a record of wizard born mages somewhere. We might as well start there,” Seto says.

“You want to raid the American Ministry of Magic? No, scratch that. You want *me* to raid the American Ministry of Magic.”

“Why so nervous? Think you can’t handle it, Thief King?” And there is far too much of Seth in that smirk for him not to respond.

“No. I’m just surprised that you and the stick up your ass are that willing to break the rules,” he laughs when Seto flips him the bird. Then Bakura soberes up and puts his mind to work, “Can Leo get anything clearer? Or some kind of blueprints?”

Tea nods and types:

> dancer again
> snake wants to know if you have hd pics and blueprints
> can a dog play poker?
> i’m not even gonna ask

Leo typed in a YouTube link that, low and behold, actually led to such a video.

> OMG WHY DO YOU EVEN KNOW THIS?!
> DON’T JUDGE ME!!
> IT WAS EITHER THIS OR A SKATEBOARDING CAT!!!
> LOL!!!!!!!

< File Transfer: Accept or Decline? >

> get to work bitches
> we got mages to save
> leo out

Leo has sent them a massive file comprised of satellite images, on ground photographs, and the blueprint for an underground pathway system that supposedly never went into use. The Jackals, for all their resourcefulness, had never managed to get inside.

“How are we planning on getting there?” Bakura asks.
“Either Matthew or Amanda. They can teleport us close enough to the city for us to remain undetected,” Seto explains.

“Which one is less likely to be recognized?”

“Amanda, probably.”

“Then I want her. Joey and Serenity, too. And I need to talk to Rex.”

“You’re not doing this alone?” Tea frowns.

“A raid like this? I’m leaving nothing to chance,” Bakura says. Then he asks, “What exactly is the Mist?”

“That’s right, you wouldn’t know,” Seto exclaims. “It came into effect after Camelot fell. You remember that, right? Because the Ring was there.”

Bakura does remember. And he thinks of Baltazar Gryffindor slipping the cord of the Millennium Ring around his neck, despite the spirit’s warnings. He remembers the slaughter that followed.

“Anyways, the Mist keeps non-magics from being able to see magic. When it happens naturally, it’s usually for mages. But wizards have this way or artificially forcing it to occur and we can’t seem to lift it in any other way than to allow technology to get through.”

“Can mages see through it?” Bakura questions.

“Most of the time. But they don’t realize that they have, so usually, things get overlooked. Human error, you know,” Tea answers. “Non-magics can see through the Mist if it’s naturally occurring and they’re looking for it. But if it’s forced, no. We can’t.”

“Then I want a non-magic on my team, as well,” Bakura nods to himself. “I need someone who can see something different from me so that I can tell where the entrances are.”

“Why?” Tea asks. “Leo already told us where the entrance is.”

“Because we’re not hitting the Ministry first. And that’s why I need to talk to Rex about where he got his school supplies.”

Keith fucking hates red tape. That damn bureaucratic bullshit that has people jumping through hoops just to get something done makes him want to scream. Because it’s been almost a month since he formed this team and it’s only now that they’ve been allowed access to the Archive. Keith decides that it’s far too early for this, especially with the last of his buzz quickly being replaced by a hangover, which just sucks.

The delay is not a direct result of any security clearances or anything (though they certainly don’t help). It’s the fact that they are so backlogged that even high priority visitation requests like his own takes days to even be acknowledged. Not to mention that due to ‘strict Department policy.’ each member of his team has to file a separate form, so this shit takes an entire month to get sorted out.

Keith thinks he’s done a pretty good job setting up his little group in the limited time frame that he had. There’s Pete Coppermine, who’s still just as annoyingly attached to Keith as ever, but has
been invaluable in mapping out the city of San Francisco. After him is Reiko Kitamori. He’d had his doubts at first, but it turns out that the girl is an expert on mage culture and legends, having studied under James Andrews himself. Then he’d picked Deschutes Lew and Tilla Mook. Lew had been Keith’s partner at the Department when he’d first started before he’d been transferred to the branch in France.

As for Mook, well, they had history together. She’d been his partner before he’d been assigned Ryou’s conversion. The two of them had gotten on like oil and water, but fought well enough together when push came to shove. They may have also had angry hate sex about a handful of times, so Keith’s not exactly sure what they are.

The only person Keith’s worried about is Depre Scott and that’s only because he’s convinced the kid’s a Plant. Plants are Department grown soldiers that go out into the world to do their masters’ bidding. It doesn’t help his cause that Scott was recommended by Pegasus himself. Keith has seen one other Plant before and Scott has the same dead look in his eyes that that woman had.

The morning that the approved request form comes through, Keith gathers his team in his office for a prep talk. The conversation is short and straightforward: they have been granted four hours in the Archive to collect what information they can about the mages that they might meet up within San Francisco. Take notes, but do not make copies. Remove nothing from the shelves and take nothing home with you. Speak to no one outside the team and the guide assigned to your detail.

“And don’t go wandering around,” Keith stresses. “Seriously, there are horror stories about what happens to the people that get lost there. They turn up in London, in the labs dedicated to studying the effects of getting Splinched across time.” He wishes he was kidding about that last bit, but he’s not.

As a group, they apparate into an alleyway on Ionic and South 8th Street. They walk a few blocks to Independence Hall and find the glamour hiding the secret passageway near the statue in the middle of the park. They tape their wands twice on the second step and disappear behind the illusion. The inside of the Ministry of Magic is just how Keith remembers it from when he worked in the Secret Service. It seems like forever, but it was only ten years ago.

They bypass the security desk at the front by waving their Department issued badged at the bored looking wizard at the front desk. A few people in the extensive line beside them shout, complaining about the unfairness of their situations. Keith rolls his eyes because, yeah, nothing has changed.

The Ministry is a massive complex of tunnels that run underneath Philadelphia. They haven’t always been there. About twenty or thirty years prior, the Ministry had been located in the basements of several muggle office buildings, making it nearly impossible to get anything done. But then someone got wind that the muggles were building an underground city to deal with ‘gridlock’ (whatever that was), so the Minister at the time bought the project and moved the Ministry in there.

The Archives is a vast library of sorts where all the Department files are located. But the job isn’t as prestigious as it sounds. The people working there are either on some form of probation or completely inept when it comes to fieldwork or research and development. They’re basically glorified secretaries and everyone knows it.

But it does have its uses. So when their guide, a pudgy, elderly man named Cyril Weller, introduces himself with a thick South African accent, Keith is completely on board with Lew elbowing Coppermine in the side for laughing.
Weller is silent as he leads them inside. The Archives themselves can be seen through the large glass window that spans the entire left side of the hallway. Keith peeks at it out of the corner of his eye and sees that he’s actually staring at the ceiling of a charm several miles deep. The tops of the shelves look like long, rectangular islands in the middle of a sea of air.

Weller finally stops in front of a conference room with walls made entirely of glass. Inside, Keith can see the files he requested stacked neatly on the table.

“Your wands, please,” Weller holds out his hand expectantly. Before Coppermine can object, he adds, “It’s Department policy. Magic reacts badly to the spells already put in place. Don’t worry. You’ll be getting them back when you leave.”

Depre Scott is the first to hand his over and the emotionless way he goes about it kind of freaks Keith out. He follows suit, setting the tone for the rest of his team. Lew smacks the back of Coppermine’s head because the kid keeps looking like he’s going to argue. Finally, they are let inside.

“You have four hours,” Weller says as he flips the hourglass on the table. “When your time runs out, you will be transported to my location, where you will have your wands returned to you and be escorted outside.”

Just as the glass door shuts behind him, Keith makes his announcement, “Alright, I asked if we could get a look at the few identified mages in San Francisco, as well as any other possible threats we might face. So pick a box and read through it. In an hour, I want a detailed summary of its contents. I want names, birthdays, backgrounds, powers and weaknesses. Team up if you want to, I don’t care. Just get the job done. Go.”

Kitamori tugs Coppermine away to look through the closest box. The others grab their own as Lew and Keith share an eye roll at the two kids. Tilla purposefully sits down on the opposite side of the table as Keith, but he doesn’t exactly blame her. It’s awkward enough being in the same room as her and having to be polite.

It almost feels like he’s been there for days when he finally realizes that his time is up.


Thankfully, it’s Kitamori that speaks, “Well, first of all, we’ve got Seto Chen. Born October 25th, 1987 to Chinese-American Lin Chen and an unknown father, possible Arabic in decent. He has a half-brother through his mother’s later marriage named Mokuba Liang, a muggle. After their parents were killed in a car accident, they moved in with Lin’s sister, Shan, who dropped the two off at an orphanage after running through their inheritance. Gozaboru Kaiba adopted them when Seto was eleven, which explains why he goes by the man’s surname now. However, Gozaburo fell from his balcony four years later under suspicious circumstances. Seto was the chief suspect in the investigation.”

“He killed his own adoptive father? The man took them in out of the good of his own heart. Undeserving son of a bitch,” Tilla mutters under her breath. She stares at the photo of Kaiba in his teens. He’s all arms and legs, awkwardly shoved into a muggle business suit. He looks angry, Keith thinks.

“That’s one way of putting it,” Coppermine smirks. “Anyways, after Gozaburo died, Seto and his brother drained his bank account and disappeared. No one heard anything from him until he showed up nearly ten years later in San Francisco. I’m guessing he developed his powers during that time because he’s one of the ones we have to watch out for. Seto Kaiba’s a goddamn lightning
dragon with crazy self-healing powers. The person who wrote this said that they punched a hole in his sternum and three minutes later, it was gone.”

“He’s not the only transformer either. No one knows who it is, but there’s a black dragon in that city as well. It’s insanely fast, with black fire that can’t be put out by any means,” Kitamori supplies. The photo she holds up shows a black shadow streaking across the San Francisco skyline.

“Then there’s Mai Valentine,” Coppermine continues and shows the woman’s picture. She’s a gorgeous blonde beauty with dark eyes and ivory skin. “Born November 20th, 1986. She was part of this case in Austin where there were four mages born within a few city blocks of each other. She’s a real looker - too bad she’s a mage, I’d totally--”


“Right,” Coppermine chuckles awkwardly as Lew rolls his eyes. “Anyways, she ends up marrying one of the other three right after graduation - Valon Thompson. He joins up with the military and gets deployed in Iraq, where he’s killed in action.”

She throws down a muggle picture of Thompson in his military uniform. There’s a red stamp across it that reads ‘Deceased.’

“Valentine finds out and the other two, Rafael Eatos and Alister Lewis, they get her out. No idea what happened to them, but she showed up in San Francisco looking like a harpy,” Kitamori chuckles.

“A harpy?” Tilla frowns. “But they’ve been extinct for centuries.”

“Yeah, well, I guess they can’t all be dragons,” Kitamori shrugs.

“What else can she do?” Lew asks.

“File doesn’t say,” she responds. “But if I were to guess, something air related, maybe?”

“And that’s it for us,” Coppermine states.

“Great. Then I’ll do next,” Lew smirks. “I’m sure you’ve all heard of Matthew Jacques.”

Murmurs of acknowledgement go around the table and Keith swears under his breathe. Lew slides the photo onto the desk and he sees the tall mage in all his blazing glory. Matthew Jacques, holy shi.

“Yeah, he’s there. A damn Spellcaster right in the heart of it all. Not to mention that there are rumours of a second one. Unconfirmed rumours, but they are there. A woman. But there’s nothing confirmed on her. And then there’s this.”

Lew throws a file on the table and Tilla grabs it. She stares at the blurry moving image of a kid with black hair, “Who the hell is that?”

“No idea. But the scary thing is, we’re not even sure if this kid’s a mage.”

“They’re recruiting muggles?” Coppermine laughs. “Wow, talk about desperate!”

“You idiot,” Scott speaks for the first time. “It means that the mages are letting muggles know about us. Everything that the Statute of Secrecy stands for will be overturned if mages reveal
themselves to the world. Not to mention that we all know that muggles and mages have always naturally sided with each other.”

“But…” Coppermine looks at the picture of the black haired boy. “He’s just a muggle. What damage can he do?”

“We’ve never thought to track muggles. Maybe we should start,” Tilla suggests, then turns to Keith. “Is it just me, or does this kid look familiar?”

Keith takes a look when she passes him the photo, “Vaguely. But muggles all start to look the same after a while. Does it matter?”

“Probably not,” she answers. “Still, might be worth looking into.”

“Tracking muggles sounds like a waste of resources to me. For all we know, this could just be some kind of fluke,” Lew shrugs. “And that’s it for me.”

“Wait, is that it?” Because Keith knows that Scott, Tilla, and himself didn’t get files about the Battle of San Francisco. “Are you seriously telling me that they took that city with five mages and a muggle?”

“Well Bandit, San Francisco was never really a high priority city,” Lew shrugs.

“But still. Five mages. Five. And a freaking muggle. What the hell happened?”

“They might have had help,” Tilla holds up her files. “Ever heard of the Jackals?”

“The Jackals. An international network of mages who have an unknown method of communicating. They’ve been in operation for about six years and are known for their hit-and-run tactics,” Scott states emotionlessly. “The members remain anonymous, though the two leaders of the group are quite well known to those that are in charge of tracking them.”

“Oh, thanks,” Tilla cuts him off. Lew and Keith share a look. Yeah, Scott’s definitely a Plant. Probably one of the defective ones, too, because he sucks at blending in. Tilla continues on, “There are only two known Jackals. This is Cassandra Bleu and as far as we know, she’s one of the most powerful mages that France has ever produced. She was born on the same day as Seto Kaiba to a French minister and his mistress, which was why no one ever made an attempt to get rid of her. She joined the French Armed Forces when she came of age and disappeared shortly afterwards. The first solid evidence we have of her existing was two years ago when she led a strike against Unspeakables in Madrid. They were trying to break up a mage haven and she killed them all. The mages got away. There’s no information on what she can do exactly because there’s no one to date that survived a fight with her.”

Lew asks if he can see the single picture they have of Bleu. She looks far too soft to fit the description that Tilla had just given with her long hair and delicate blue dress blowing in the wind, “I saw her at a distance once. Ms. Bleu is both beauty and death wrapped up in a woman. Watch out for her.”

“She’s the second-in-command, and this is who she answers to,” Tilla throws down another photograph. Kitamori shrieks.

“Fuck! What happened to his face?” Coppermine swears.

“That’s Odion Ishtar. And as far as we can tell, those marks are self-inflicted.”
Keith looks at the picture and see a tall, bald man of Middle Eastern descent. Carved into half of his face is a series of symbols that Keith can’t understand. The man looks intimidating as fuck, enough to make even the toughest of Unspeakables piss themselves if he came after them.

“What can he do?” Keith asks.

“He can control people's minds,” Tilla tells him. “And here’s the thing: we have no idea who he is or where he came from before the creation of the Jackals. It’s like he appeared out of nowhere.”

“Damn,” he hisses. He can feel hangover coming on and wants to take a swig of the flask in his pocket.

“Sorry, did you say Ishtar?” Kitamori asks.

“Does it mean anything?” Lew raises an eyebrow.

“Clan Ishtar. It’s famous amongst those that study the legend of the Three Kings,” she explains. “They were the King Commander’s family.”

“What?” Keith frowns.

“Wait a minute. That can’t be right,” Tilla says. “Ishtar is a Mesopotamian goddess. The King Commander is Egyptian.”

“Actually, he wasn’t. His family moved to Egypt from Assur, the ancient Akkadian city, shortly after he was born,” Kitamori says. “In fact, it was only the Lady Pharaoh who was born in Egypt proper. The Thief King was from a village closer to Israel than Egypt.”

“What’s the significance of the Jackal leader being connected to this clan?” Scott asks bluntly.

“Sorry. It’s just... they’re said to have disappeared shortly after the Kings’ deaths. No one knows what happened to them. So if this Odion guy is going by the name Ishtar, he’s either using it to gain supporters amongst the mages who are familiar with the legend, which isn’t that much of a stretch because muggles tell the story too. Or-- “

“Or Odion Ishtar is a living descendant of the King Commander,” Keith finishes her sentence for her.

“Yeah.”

“Is that likely?”

Kitamori shrugs, “I have no idea. I mean, in training, there was an entire course dedicated to the Three Kings and the other legends that spawned from them. Half the class thought the King Commander and the Lady Pharaoh were married. The other half thought that she and the Thief King were in a secret relationship.”

“And you?” asks Coppermine.

“Ah. Well,” Kitamori blushes. “Personally, I think the King Commander wasn’t... interested in the company of women.”

Keith remembers *I think I like boys, too. Do you still love me?* He thinks of Ryou and it feels like someone is choking him.

“Oh,” Coppermine makes a face. “Seriously?”
“The few records we have of him were written by one of his fellow Medjay. And, well, the man’s descriptions of him are rather… intimate.”

“So, no then,” Keith changes the subject. “Odion Ishtar isn’t his descendant.”

“Probably not,” Kitamori mumbles.

“Anything else?” He asks Tilla. She shakes her head. “Alright. Scott, I think we got the box on mages that moved to the city afterwards.”

“Correct. Tristan Taylor. Born in New Jersey. Age 19. Controls lava flow. Known to cause earthquakes. Spent time in prison for breaking and entering when he was fourteen,” Scott says, showing them a mug shot of a teenaged boy with short cropped brown hair and a black eye. He then holds up a photo of a red-headed woman, “Akiza Izinski, an illegal immigrant from Russia. Age 28. Controls wood.”

Coppermine snickers and Kitamori looks at him, scandalized. Tilla rolls her eyes. Scott continues on, oblivious to the interruption.

“Mako Tsunami. Jamaican born immigrant. Legal. Age 20. College student. He can control water,” Scott nods to Keith to signal that he’s finished. He clears his throat.

“We’re also supposed to be on the lookout for--” his throat seizes and he remembers Ryou’s words again: *They were just children. I had to, Keith.* Because the next three files are the ones he saved.

“--Rex Raptor, Weevil Underwood, and Rebecca Hawkins. But they shouldn’t be much of a problem because they’re *kids.* Still, the Department has made a special request: if we see them, pick them up. They aren’t taking the fact that they escaped lightly.”

His hands are shaking and he can’t get them to stop. He looks from photo to photo of each child, scared and crying, that had been taken when they were brought to the island. Underwood has vomit staining his shirt. Hawkins has rope burns around her wrists and ankles. Raptor is unconscious - they’d had to knock him out because he kept screaming for help.

“They’re just kids,” he thinks and then realizes: all of the mages that they talked about today are *actual fucking human beings* and don’t deserve this.

“Our real target is this man: Solomon Mutuo. As far as we know, he’s a muggle but he’s wanted by the higher ups because he may be in possession of a Millennium Items. The Lady Pharaoh’s to be exact,” Keith explains, trying to keep his voice from cracking as he passes around the photo of the man in Luxor. “When you find him, don’t kill him. Pegasus wants him alive.”

They talk a bit after that, about possible strategies on how to combat the mages that they will find, all the while knowing that there will be much more than the ones that have been identified in the files. The main problem they keep bringing up is Matthew Jacques because the man is legitimately terrifying. Kitamori discusses the legend of the Three Kings and how the Ishtar clan was involved in it all, but Keith thinks it’s just mindless drivel. Who the fuck cares about how they were given noble status in the Egyptian court by the Lady Pharaoh’s father in a battle that affected absolute jackshit? When the hourglass runs out and they are teleported to the front desk of the Archives, he’s almost relieved.

Cyril Weller returns their wands and bids them a pleasant day. Keith dismisses his team and wants nothing more than to go back to his apartment and down the rest of the six pack he has in his fridge because he can’t deal with Ryou’s ghost haunting his mind. But before he can do that, Lew pulls him over.
“Are you alright?” He asks.

“I’m fine.” Keith snaps.

“Are you sure? You look like shit, mate.”

“Well, you aren’t exactly looking like Lockheart, but you don’t see me mentioning it.” Lew grabs his arm but Keith shoves him off, “What the fuck do you think you’re doing?”


“I’m fine,” Keith hisses. “Leave me alone.”

“Hey, come on. We were partners-- “

“Yeah. *Were.* Things change in ten years. So don’t think you know me. Now fuck off.”

Keith turns on the spot and apparates to his apartment without another word.

When Igraine Selwyn wakes up, she screams and claws at her neck. She can still feel fangs biting through her skin. It takes three doses of Calming Draught before she is able to think coherently again.

The Healers tell her that whatever Ryou poisoned her with has weakened her lungs considerably and they can’t fix organs as well as the rest of her body. She yells at them to leave, that she wants her parents, that she wants to go home. When her mother walks in, looking like she hasn’t slept in months, Igraine bursts out into tears. She’s so scared. The memory of Ryou Andrews haunts her every time she closes her eyes. Because she remembers two different Ryous’: the one she loves and the one that tried to kill her.

The thing is, he’d seemed so sweet when they first met. They are introduced to one another by a mutual friend at Chess Club and almost immediately hit it off. Igraine is amazed by his strategies and challenges him to a game. It is the first time she loses in years. And then he’d gone back and shown her how he’d done it so that she could learn.

After that, they started sitting together at meals, talking quietly about homework and classes. He’d helped her with Divination and Care of Magical Creatures and in return, Igraine assisted him in his spellwork. It didn’t seem to matter that there was a year’s difference in between the two of them. It was like they’d known each other for years.

A month later and Igraine Selwyn kissed Ryou Andrews outside their dorm. It was shy and soft - in the way most first kisses are. And Ryou had smiled nervously and leaned in for a second.

Igraine loves him. She loves the way he laughs and smiles. She loves his mind, his intelligence. She loves the way he kisses her, holds her, and cares for her. She loves how Ryou has the most massive sweet tooth on the face of the earth, yet he’ll eat bloody steaks and mashed potatoes that are more garlic than spuds. She loves him. And he’d lied to her.

Ryou Andrews is a mage trying to convert into a wizard. Igraine has a cousin who’d been like him. Emil had been hidden away by the family, chained away in the cellar and only interacting with the house elf. She’d seen him once in the summer before her fourth year. Emil hadn’t even been able to talk properly, only capable of playing with the balls of light that he could summon.
When she’d tried to get closer to him, he’d snapped at her with his teeth. And she knew at that moment that Emil wasn’t even human. Not anymore.

Igraine finds out about Ryou through Winona Hartmann, her dorm mate. The girl whispers to her at night, “Did you hear about Ryou Andrews?” And her hearts stops. She thinks of Emil and sees Ryou in chains, snapping and laughing at nothing - something less than human. A monster in the skin of a boy. And he’d lied to her.

He’d lied to everyone. Igraine is terrified, so terrified that she turns to Sam Rowle. And she tells him what Ryou is. She shakes the entire time. Sam says that he’ll take care of it.

Ryou ends up in the hospital wing at the end of the week. Igraine visits him in secret and asks, “Is it true?”

“Igraine, please--”

“Answer me!”

He looks down, hands fisting in his sheets. He says nothing, but it’s enough for Igraine.

“Were you ever going to tell me?”

“No,” he says it so bluntly that she takes a step back. “I’d never hurt you, though. I swear!”

“How can I trust you? How do I know that this isn’t another lie?”

“Because it’s not anything bad!” Ryou says, getting out of the hospital bed and moving towards her. Igraine backs up quickly, so he throws his hands up in surrender. “Just trust me. Just this once.”

She doesn’t want to, but she stands still as he approaches slowly. Ryou takes her hand, just like he used to on their Hogsmeade dates. And then he walks straight through her. Igraine has to clamps a hand over her mouth so that she doesn’t scream.

“See!” He smiles so honestly, so beautifully, like he couldn’t understand what he’d just done. “See! Igraine, there isn’t anything bad about it!”

“Nothing - nothing bad? Ryou, this isn’t - you can’t,” she’s almost on the verge of tears. “This is wrong!”

The smile on his face drops and it’s like she just watched him die. He doesn’t speak, so she does.

“You can’t do that! Mage magic is terrible magic! You’ll - you’ll turn into-- “ Emil, with his balls of light. Emil, who attacked all that came near him, “a monster!”

“I’m not,” Ryou’s voice cracks. “I’m human. You know I’m human.”

“But won’t be anymore. It’ll infect you and everyone else and-- oh Merlin! I can’t. I can’t do this anymore!”

She runs out, flees from Ryou who’s calling her name. Igraine cries herself to sleep that night and thinks that, maybe, had Ryou told her, she might have stayed. She might have accepted him.

But he’d lied to her. He’d lied and tricked everyone, put them all in danger. Ryou is sick and he’s not ever going to get better.
Sam Rowle tells her that he’ll take care of her. Sam tells her that he’ll protect her and that Ryou and mages like him will never touch her again.

In her dreams, the infection has reached her because Ryou and Emil live under her skin. And she can walk through walls and create light. When she wakes up terrified, she slips from her bed and into the fifth year boy’s dormitory. Ryou isn’t there. But Sam is. She crawls under his sheets and asks him to help her.

Sam kisses her and doesn’t smile afterwards. But he says, “Anything for you,” and holds her as she cries.

Ryou finds out the next morning when he walks in on them kissing. He stands there shocked a whole minute before walking out and slamming the door. San and Igraine both jump when they hear Ryou let loose a hiss of frustration and throw something against the wall. She never knew that Ryou even had a temper.

Sam makes her feel safe. Sam swears to always tell the truth. He talks about he was the one to finally figure Ryou out because his brother-in-law’s stepsister was a mage that went through the program. He is able to see the weird things about Ryou for what they are.

“What happened to her?” Igraine asks when she realizes that Sam referred to the mage woman in the past tense.

“She killed herself three years ago,” he says. “Don’t know why. The note just said ‘No more.’”

No more. No more. Then, suddenly and without warning, Igraine sees Ryou with grey scales for skin and fangs as long as her fingers and she’s burning and can’t get away. She screams and screams and screams. Because there is the Ryou she loves and he’d been destroyed by the mage sickness. He’d become the monster who tried to kill her.

No more. No more. Igraine has to save them. Save Ryou’s sister, tricked by the mage sickness into supporting the monster inside her brother. And Sam told her the only way that could happen: they had to kill the family. Only they could do it. For the Ryou Andrews they’d known and loved.

No more. No more. Ryou tried to kill her. And as the healers drag her mother away so that they could sedate her again, she hopes that wherever he is now, Ryou is no longer sick.

On the other side of the world, a man is jerked out of his nap rather abruptly by his granddaughter.

“Hey jii-chan,” she smiles. “I’m heading out.”

“Oh. Right, right. The lecture. Is this the one on Syria?” He asks as he blinks sleep out of his eyes.

“That’s next week. This one’s on what’s going on in Ukraine.”

“Will you be home in time for dinner?”

“Probably not,” she answers. “I’m gonna brown bag it, so don’t worry.”

“I never worry,” he smiles as she picks up her helmet from the stand by the doorway. She slips it
over her bright purple hair and waves before walking out the door. He sighs into his cushy armchair. The apartment above the comic book store is silent.

Twenty-five years ago, if you had told Solomon Mutuo that he’d be back in the city of his birth, he’d have laughed until he was sick. He’d travelled the globe, discovering all that he could about the world’s ancient civilizations. But that was before The Tomb. That was before The Call.

He hadn’t known whose tomb he’d found that day, all those years ago. He hadn’t known that his two guides had been anything but. Solomon had known about the magic. He’d had to, to open up as many tombs as he had in the past. And he is very good at getting around the spells designed to kill intruders.

The return of memories from a previous cycle is usually the result of a traumatic event. So as Solomon dangles on the edge of a bottomless pit, his supposed guides worse than dead, he suddenly becomes Shimon and he’s inside of the tomb of his grand niece. His mind reels and his fingers start to slip. He thinks, how ironic. He’s alive for the first time in over a hundred years and he’s about to die all over again.

Then a hand grips his wrist, hauling Solomon-Shimon up onto the landing. He looks up and lays eyes of the Lady Pharaoh for the first time in several millennia.

“Oh, my girl,” he whispers, hands cupping her face as tears roll down his cheeks. “My darling, beautiful child. What has happened to you?”

The Spirit of the Millennium Pendant is aged, wrinkled, and withering away. And she is blind, eyes cut out of her head by the same force that had burned open her torso and turned her organs to ash. Her hair is so long that it brushes the floor, wispy and white from stress or age, he cannot tell. But it kills him to see that the blood that ran through her veins has dried up, that the very heart and soul of that vibrant young woman has been reduced to this husk of a shell.

The Spirit makes an incoherent noise, low and broken, but she reaches forward with hands that shake uncontrollably and flattens her palms against his chest. Solomon feels a warm glow inside his soul, feels the muted power of the Pendant changing his very make-up, and he leans forward to touch his forehead to her’s.

“What happened?” He whispers again and again. Because he loves this girl like a daughter and he could think of nothing else to say.

Then she disappears. Gone forever, back to the abyss inside the Pendant - Solomon doesn’t care because the Spirit has left him alone. So he runs to it, towards the solid gold chest at the end of the chamber.

Solomon Mutuo is the first person to walk out of the Lady Pharaoh’s tomb and the first to take something from inside. The memories of Shimon wonder how the man who had stood so staunchly against tomb robbing had become a plunderer himself. The Thief King would never let him live it down if he knew.

Upon his return to the hotel he is staying in, he receives a call from his daughter, who Solomon hasn’t talked to in almost seven years - not since he and his wife divorced. Megan tells him that she’s pregnant and her mother’s new husband kicked her out. And Solomon just knows who that child really is.

So he moves home, abandoning his job as an archeologist to help his teenaged daughter raise the child of a man who left her when she’d discovered his wife. The moment he lays eyes on his
granddaughter, tiny prematurely born Yuugi Mutuo, he sees the child he’d held as Shimon. He hadn't lived to see her crowned, but he'd heard the legends of how she's become a King.

He’s not blindsided by her brilliant mind like his daughter is. He watches Yuugi astound men and women several times her age while only two years out of diapers. Her political analysis papers change the way that the world looks at government and she’s ten years old. Yuugi grows up quickly, faster than any child should, and Shimon remembers the Lady Pharaoh and how she had thrown herself into political theory and the histories of their allies - things that she had never been expected to learn as a woman. And she'd been so brilliant at it all that she and the other two Kings sparked a Golden Age of prosperity that surpassed all those that had come before.

Yuugi has her mind and her smile. Solomon Mutuo wonders if he will live to see her regain the rest.
Calm Before The Storm

Chapter Summary

“Wait!” He calls before he can stop himself. There’s something about her that almost familiar, but not in the way that Jono and Sera and Maya are familiar. She stops, a bit confused. Bakura gets up and shoves the rest of his plunder into his bag, “Have I met you before?”

“I don’t think so,” she tells him. Now that he’s a bit closer, he can see the dark make-up around her eyes and the piercings in her brow and lower lip. She’s wearing a black mini-skirt with nylons that tucked into purple boots, a comfortable looking hoodie, and a shirt with the name of a band on it. Bakura knows that he recognizes her, but for the life of him, he can’t figure out from where.

Chapter Notes


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Warning: Mentions of depression, bullying, suicide, internalized homophobia, sexual situations (Bakura x Marik x Atem, Keith Howard x Reiko Kitamori), power imbalance, theft, nudity, alcohol consumption, and religios discussion.

To Matt
Master of Judo
Thanks for all the help

"Mom and I went to William’s Abbey. Why?” Rex responds when Bakura asks where American wizards usually went for their shopping. The kid is bending over his school work at the
Simington’s kitchen table, struggling with a math question.

“Where’s that?” He asks.

“Massachusetts. Around Salem, I think. Why?”

“I’m planning something nefarious,” Bakura smirks. “Can you describe the street to me? In as exact detail as you can remember.”

“William’s Abbey isn’t a street. It’s a small village,” Rex corrects him and Bakura knows that this is going to be more complicated than he thought. “I mean, it’s tiny,” the kid stresses when he sees the look on Bakura’s face. “There’s the main road and maybe four blocks in total and that’s if you’re generous. The prices in the Abbey were the only stuff we could afford. Dad didn’t exactly leave us much when he left.”

So it’s a low-income area, Bakura thinks. It sounds perfect.

“Okay, can you describe it?” He asks again.

“Do we have to do this now? I’ve got a math test to study for and I have no idea how I’m planning on passing.”

“Why don’t you ask Weevil for help?” Immediately, Bakura realizes that he’s made a mistake. Rex tenses and eyes the thin staircase to his right.

“He’s… not exactly doing well… Adjusting, I mean. Most nights he just shuts himself up in our room and only comes out for dinner,” Rex shrugs helplessly. “I’d say he’s homesick, but Rebecca says otherwise. Weevil’s scared, Bakura. Like, full on fucking terrified - and he won’t tell anyone why.” The kid sighs, “Like, I get that we’re supposed to be family and all, but we’re really not - no matter how much Dem and Mina want us all to be. But we all escaped wizard prison together and that means something. Weevil’s freaking Rebecca and me out and there’s not a damn thing we can do!”

Rex lets out a shaking breath, “Sorry. Shit, I didn’t mean to unload on you like that.”

“Don’t really care. How long have you been holding that in?”

“Can we not talk about this now?” Rex groans, “Look, I’ll draw you a map, okay? Just give me a second.”

“Fine,” Bakura says, glancing at the stairwell which he knows leads up to Rex and Weevil’s shared room. The moment that Rex leans over his scrap of lined paper, sketching out streets and stores, Bakura quietly slips through his chair and goes upstairs to find Weevil. He’s gone before Rex even notices he’s moved.

Rebecca, however, does see him as he passes by her door.

“Bakura!” She smiles, “I didn’t know you were here.”

“Yeah,” he tells her, just as the smile slips from her lips.

“You’re… concerned,” she says the last word like she’s testing it out on her tongue.

“Now words?”

“Dem bought me some books to read before bed,” she explains, holding up a soft cover with the
words ‘Alanna: The First Adventure’ on the front. “ Doesn’t change the fact that you’re concerned. I can feel it.” When Bakura raises an eyebrow, she says, “Mina says I’m an empath.”

“So that’s why you were so panicked back on the island. You weren’t just feeling your own fear. You were feeling everyone else’s.”

“Yeah. Because it definitely wasn’t the fact that I thought I was going to die,” Rebecca rolls her eyes. “You’re avoiding the question.”

Bakura leans against the side of her door, “Maybe. What’s going on with Weevil?”

“He terrified,” she says. “Of what, I don’t know. I wish I did, though.” She frowns, “You’re going into his room. You’re gonna talk to him.”

“Yeah.”

“I’m coming with you.”

You sure?”

She nods, “I can read his emotions. I can tell if he’s lying.”

“Yeah. And you coming has nothing to do with the fact that you’re concerned as well,” Bakura jokes and she blushes slightly. He thinks that, had she been a bit older, Rebecca may have smacked him in the arm. She takes the hand he offers to her and together they step silently through Weevil’s door.

The boy is sitting at his desk with his back to them. He stares blankly at his laptop, doing nothing to change the screen. His shoulders are tense, but his leg jumps uncomfortably under the table. Bakura signs for Rebecca not to move as he silently sneaks across the floor and peeks over Weevil’s shoulder.

He is staring at a Facebook profile, which is something that Bakura has forced himself to become familiar with in the last month. The girl it belongs to is a year and a half younger than Weevil himself and has the same straw coloured hair. She looks happy in the photo that she’s using on her profile, but the posts on her wall say that she must be anything but.


“Jesus Christ! Don’t scare me like that!” Weevil’s voice comes out in a series of angry clicks as he slaps the laptop shut. “What the hell are you doing here?” He rounds on Rebecca, “Did you let him in?!”

“No!” She stamps her foot on the ground and puts on her most intimidating face, “But he’s here for the same reason I am. I’m worried.”

“There’s nothing for you to worry about. Now get out!” Weevil hisses.

“You sister is being bullied at school,” Bakura says, blunt as a hammer.

“This is none of your business, damn it!”

“Yes, it is!” Rebecca yells, channelling Weevil’s own anger. “We’re your family! Your problems are ours!”
“You are not my family!” Weevil snaps. There’s a series of thuds that comes from down the corridor and suddenly the door is yanked open. Rex stands int he arch.

“I heard shouting. What’s going on?”

“What is this? An intervention?” Weevil rolls his eyes, “Are Dem and Mina coming home from work early so we can all talk about our feelings?”

“Maybe they should,” Bakura says.

“Don’t even start. You’re not my dad, so don’t pretend to be.”

“I’m not anyone’s dad,” he growls, his temper simmering under his skin as voices filter into his mind.

“Bastard Bakura! Bastard Bakura!”

“Where’s your father, bastard?”

“A whore for a mother. That boy will turn rotten, mark my words.”

“He’s not my son. He could be anyone’s kid. Who knows how many other men you’ve had.”

Bakura grabs the edge of the desk to steady himself as he comes out of his flashback. After his mind settles, he realizes that the argument between the three children is still going on.

“You don’t know a damn thing about what I’m going through!”

“Of course we do! We were all taken - all of us - from our families-- “

“You weren’t taken!” Weevil spits, “Your families gave you up because they’d rather have seen you dead than spend another minute with you all! So don’t pretend to know-- “

Bakura’s had enough. He steps forwards and grabs the kid by the collar. Bakura can’t lift him off the ground because Weevi’l’s an inch or two taller than him, but he can feel his skin ripple into grey scales as he tongue becomes forked inside his mouth and knows that these parts of the Demon Snake will be enough to shut him up.

“Listen up, brat,” he hisses with a mouth full of fangs. “You’ve got people here that give a damn about you and you’re treating them like trash. They want to help and you’re just shutting them down so that you can continue to feel sorry for yourself. And right now, you've got two choices. One, you can sit here and wallow into your own shit. Or two, you can grow up and ask for some goddamn backup because, for all you know, we can do something to fix this!”

He shoves Weevil back into his chair and stands with his arms crossed over his chest, “Now decide.”

The boy stares at his hands before whispering, “She’s always been ill with it. All her life. Depression, it’s always just been eating at Willow since forever.”

“I know disease, okay. I spent the first five years of my life in and out of the ER because I kept getting sick. I’m a walking biohazard. I gave the first girl I kissed salmonella. But those things can be cured. Germs, bacteria - you swallow the right pills or take the right shots and they just go away. But depression, it’s up here,” he points to his temple, “and the pills can cover it up but it’s never going to leave.
“I’ve always been there for Willow. Always. Through the pills and the doctors and the kids at school. Through everything. And then those damn wizards kidnapped me and I can’t go back because we ran. We pissed them off and now they’re probably just watching my family, waiting to finish us all off. If I tell them where I am and they move, they’ll go after the rest - my cousins all live in the area. I just… I just can’t. All those power and there’s nothing that I can do.”

“Weevil…” Rebecca’s hands cover her mouth.

“There’s nothing. Nothing. I’m terrified that Willow's going to try and kill herself again,” Weevil says. “Mom and dad think it's a phase she'll grow out of or something that they can just get the doctor to fix with enough medication. Because they don't fucking sit down and talk with her.”

“Can't you do anything?” Rex turns to Bakura.

“There’s nothing to do,” Weevil says again. “I’ve gone over it again and again and again.”

“Why don’t you just send her a message?”

“If she starts acting differently… I just can’t take the chance,” he shakes his head. “There’s just no way that I can get around whoever is watching them.”

“What if you don’t try to get around them? What if we get rid of the problem entirely?” Bakura suggests.

“If the people watching them disappear-- “

“I’m not talking about killing them,” he says. “I’m not stupid. But there are other ways of making people stop paying attention to something. Look,” he stops Weevil before he can interrupt, “I can make some calls. We’ve got people outside this city. I can see if they can persuade them to leave your family alone.”

“You… think they can do it?”

“I make no promises, but it’s better to try,” Bakura shrugs. Weevil slumps forwards in relief. He puts a hand on the boy’s shoulder, “I’ll also see if they can set up a secure connection, just in case.”

“You only know about those from movies,” Weevil’s laugh sounds broken. Bakura snorts because, yeah, that’s true. The boy looks up at Rex and Rebecca, “Guys, I…”

“It’s okay. You were angry. People say a lot of things when they’re angry,” Rebecca says, but she clutches her elbows with white-knuckled fingers.

“No, it’s not. It’s anything but okay. And I’m sorry,” Weevil hangs his head in shame. “You were just trying to help.”

“Just don’t do it again,” Rex says, coming forward and punching Weevil lightly in the shoulder. “We’re not trying to replace your family or anything. We’re just trying to make due with what we have. And we’ve got your back, but we can’t do a thing if you don’t tell us what’s wrong.”

“Sorry for being an asshole,” Weevil mumbles.

“Dude,” Rebecca smiles. “Language.” That gets a laugh out of the three of them.

Bakura gets up and tells them that he’s going to text Tea to get the contact information of the guy
he needs to talk to. Before he leaves, Rex hands him a scrap of paper that he’d drawn the map of William’s Abbey on. Bakura quickly scans it, committing it to memory, before shoving it into his jacket pocket. Tea responds back and says that, if he can get on his laptop around seven o’clock tonight, Leo would be on and willing to do what he could. That reminds him that he’s also got to meet up with his team before then.

“Look, guys. I’ve got to run. Rex, thanks for this. You’ve been more of a help than you know. Take care of each other. I’ll be in touch with Leo as soon as I can. Willow will be fine, one way or another,” he says and dashes out the door.

Navigating the San Francisco transit system during rush hour is the stuff of nightmares, which is something Bakura has discovered in the last month. It’s not that the BART is late or the buses are unhygienic - because they aren’t and even if they were, he has slept next to pig shit before, so he’s dealt with worse. It’s the sheer amount of people. He’s okay with tight spaces, can look at a massive crowd from a distance, but get him in the middle of one and Bakura feels like there are ants under his skin. They just bother him and he can’t figure out why.

His solution to his problem is a bit unorthodox but no less effective: he takes the roofs, leaping from building to building and using his newly discovered (except not because it was the Spirit’s and he was a master) power over the air to help him clear the largest of gaps. It’s practice, Bakura rationalizes. He’s going to need to know exactly what he’s capable of, both physically and mentally, if he’s going to be a competent Thief King.

Bakura had gotten the idea from a movie he’d watched with Joey during his first week in San Francisco. The guy had invited him over to his place after his night shift had ended with the words, “If Rich-boy thinks that your first movie is going to be some crappy PBS documentary on ducks, I will never forgive myself. Serenity and I are marathoning The Matrix. You game?”

He spends most of the time hoarding his heavily salted popcorn and quietly marveling at the fact that in the non-magical world people could get paid to act out stories - not to mention that Serenity had on headphones that described what was going on so that she wasn’t missing a single thing. She lets him listen for a few minutes and when he handed them back, she asks, “Do wizards have movies?”

“No,” he answers. “There were a couple of radio programs that were sort of like this, but they never got overly popular.”

At that point in the movie, Neo takes his first leap in the Jump Program and falls head first into the rubbed concrete below. And Bakura thinks, hey, he could pull that off.

Much like Neo, Bakura doesn’t make his first jump. Unlike Neo, the road he hits is very solid and would have killed him had he not had an immortal’s gold blood. Bakura wakes up in the Tenderloin District seven hours after he falls to his ‘death’ and scares the shit out of the homeless man going through his pockets. He hobbles home, ribs no longer broken but very bruised, and spends the night icing his swollen ankle, looking up how airplanes fly and cursing his own stupidity. When he’s well enough to move, Bakura uses air pressure to make sure happen again.

He makes it to Nomad in record time because he may have phased through a few buildings on the way. Bakura’s thick green jacket protects him from the evening chill that is slowly creeping in and walks inside. He leans over the first bench and checks in on Haley, Mai’s six-year-old daughter. She has a book in front of her. He can see her moving her lips as she reads. It comes so naturally to her, he thinks and remembers struggling to learn what the inked in symbols on papyrus meant. Back then, he’d never gotten the hang of it. Bakura thanks the gods that Ryou had learned. Reading makes such a difference.
Mai waves to him as he moves towards the nearly filled booth in the corner, “You want anything?”

“Saw you had spicy meatballs on special,” he flashes her a grin. “Tell Tristan to be mean.”

“You know, one day we’re going to find a limit to the amount of spice you can take,” she warns.

“And when that day comes, I’ll probably be seven feet tall,” he laughs and joins the group at the table, shoving the backpack he carries with him everywhere beneath the seat. He recognizes all of them. Bakura sits next to Amanda, who had once been the girl who’d ridden bravely into their rag-tag company with her half-sister, the soon-to-be Lady Pharaoh. He’d liked Mana. She’d never looked down on him for being as common as they come. Bakura guesses that that’s what happens when your mother is a slave.

Across from them sits Joey and Serenity. They look different from the Jono and Sera he’d known, with their lighter skin and hair. But there’s the same strength to them that’s always been there. They’d always been different, even amongst mages. Most wanted to keep Sera from being in the thick of things, but even without her sight, she was an incredibly valuable asset. And then there was Jono, who couldn’t use his powers outside of taking on the form of his Ka. They are odd even now, forever to be underestimated. Serenity’s cane is hanging on the coat hook at the end of their bench, just within her reach. He knows better than to think them fools.

The final person at the table is both a newcomer and an old friend, though Bakura doesn’t remember Deuel looking quite like this. He’s Asian, with his black hair streaked with green. His arms are covered in tattoos of symbols that he can’t understand. On his shirt with the words ‘Sarcasm is my body’s natural defence against your stupidity.’

“You’ve changed,” Bakura comments.

“You haven’t,” he answers back. “That was one hell of a trick you pulled back then, Bakura. I hope you don’t plan on trying to top it.”

“Oh, don’t worry. He won’t,” Amanda’s grin is practically feral. “I’ve made that quite clear.”

“I’m Duke Devlin now,” Deuel says. “Heard you need some non-magical eyes and I volunteer as tribute.”

“What’s this about anyways, Bakura? Last I heard, we’d found the Ministry entrance in Philadelphia,” Serenity points out.

“We’re not going to get far wearing these,” he points to his clothes. “Not to mention that we’re going to need wands to get through the doors. The American’s are known for having a lot of security in their Ministry. Their Ministers get assassinated a lot. What we’re doing is raiding the wizarding town of William’s Abbey for disguises and wands.”

He puts Rex’s scrap paper map on the table for everyone to see. William’s Abbey is a small collection of shops along four roads. It reminds Bakura a little bit of Diagon and Knockturn Alley. William’s Abbey had the same stores as Diagon but has a lot of abandoned buildings like it’s darker counterpart. Ryou, surprisingly enough, had never actually gone into Knockturn Alley before. When he’d bought his school supplies, he’d gone with Keith. And Keith was always watching.

Bakura has no idea what to feel when he thinks about Keith Howard. He’d love the man like a father - in fact, he’d been better at raising Ryou than James Andrews ever had. But he hunted mages for a living. Keith killed people like Ryou and Bakura, thought them to be sick and wrong.
But he’d kept Ryou alive. He’d tried to save him, too. Bakura can’t figure out why, though.

He shakes his head and continues, “We’re going to need wands to get in. You take a wizard’s wand from him and it will give it’s allegiance to you. If they test it upon our entrance to the Ministry, it will show that those wands are ours.”

“What about the actual owners?” Serenity asks, “Won’t they report their wands as stolen?”

“That’s why we’re going to have to work fast. Clothes first, wands last,” Bakura explains. “Mana, you’re good at teleportation. Think the Mist will cover our appearance in Philadelphia?”

“I’ll ask, but I’m pretty sure we’ll be fine. The Mist likes playing tricks, after all,” she smiles.

“What about me? Non-magics can’t pick up wands. Tea proved that,” Duke says and Bakura remembers the burn mark that runs across Tea’s right hand. “Aside from being a pair of eyes, do you need me for anything else?”

“Unless something has changed completely since the last time we met, I remember you being damn terrifying in a fight. And if something were to go down, I know that I want you to have my back,” Bakura says and then winces. “That being said, no. I don’t want you stealing a wand.

“When we go into the Ministry, our cover stories will be that we’re looking for jobs. I don’t know about the non-magical economy, but wizarding America is in the middle of a recession - and it’s bad. We won’t be the only ones in line with that excuse and we won’t be the oddest looking ones either,” Bakura says at Duke “When they ask you for a wand, say you’re a Squib.”

“A what?”

“A Squib. A non-magical person born into a magical family,” he explains. “They’re gonna give you shift for it, though. Squibs are… embarrassments. Jokes. Some try to make it in the wizarding world, but they aren’t really considered citizens. So there is no way for them to check if you’re lying.”

“And they’ll underestimate me,” Duke smirks. “Don’t worry about me, Bakura. I’ve stayed alive this long because wizards are constantly underestimating me. You’re practically handing me my advantage.”

Bakura returns his grin because, much like Maya, Deuel hasn’t changed. He’d always been able to find a handhold anywhere.

“So what then? Once we get in, Duke, Amanda, and I are on defence?” Joey guesses correctly.

“Right. Joey, you’re also going to be our backup transport, just in case Mana can’t get us out. You were always a fast transformer. How quickly can you become the Black Dragon?”

“Just over half a second,” it’s Mai who answers as she sets Bakura’s food in front of him. “Thankfully, he’s not that fast when it comes to other things. Anymore.”

“Oh my god, Mai. It was one time,” Joey’s face burns red. “Can we just forget it? Please?”

“Uh huh,” he jokes. “Don’t worry about it, honey. You’ve gotten better.”

“Mai, I really don’t want to know what you and my brother are doing behind closed doors,” Serenity squeaks, hands covering her ears. Joey collapses on the table and hides in his arms.
“Alright, alright,” Mai leans forward and kisses Serenity on the cheek. She turns to Bakura, “Tristan told me to tell you that if those don’t kill you, he hates you more than anything.”

Bakura shoves some food down his throat and laughs, “Tell him ‘Better luck next time.’”

“Thief King, there is a ghost pepper in those meatballs. Ordered especially by Tristan in hopes that it would make you weep.”

He says nothing, just smiles annoyingly. When Mai goes back to the kitchen, he waits for Tristan’s cry of anguish. He is not disappointed.

“Right, so if Mana is blocked somehow, transform and we’ll blast our way out.”

“What about you, boss? Can you transform? The Demon Snake could get us out even faster,” Joey frowns.

Bakura looks off to the side, “I can’t.”

“What?” The others lean forwards.

“It’s like… it’s been blocked. Like my memories. I can’t transform fully. All I can get is the fangs and skin,” he admits.

“It could be something to do with the seal. I’m not as familiar with it as Seto or Matt, but I’m pretty sure that it’s possible for the Destroyer to have taken part of your powers with Him when you broke your seal,” Amanda says. “I doubt he’d be able to hold onto your Ka if all the seals were broken, though. Great God He may be, but you’re pretty powerful. And He can only hold so much.”

“Why would the Destroyer want to take parts of you in the first place?” Serenity frowns.

“Revenge. The three of us pissed off a Great God. There were always going to be consequences,” Bakura shrugs. “But that’s not what we’re here to talk about.” He pushes his finished plate aside.

“Once we get through security, I want Serenity to start Looking for where they keep the records. Anything that’s owned by the Department of Mysteries could be it. Once we get closes, I’ll pull out the Ring. I don’t want to use it in public.

“We get in. We find the records. Knock out any Unspeakables who see you, but don’t kill anyone. The last thing we want is to give the wizards a real reason to attack us.”

“How are we going to get the records out without them noticing what we took?” Duke asks.

Bakra raises an eyebrow, “Who said we were taking them?”

“Well, how else are we going to get the information?”

“We read them.”

“And we’re supposed to just remember it? Bakura, I know you’re new to books and all, but people usually don’t remember everything they read,” Joey tells him.

Bakura tries to ignore the jab at his former illiteracy, but the sting is still there. He grinds his teeth and speaks through gritted teeth, “I know how to read.”

He tries to forget that he’s never been able to say that before.
“Then you know that people can’t-- “


His brow furrows as she passes Joey the paper in such a way that Bakura can’t see its contents. But it doesn’t matter since he’d read it this morning. The words come to him, appearing out of the depths of his mind, and he says them out loud to his listening audience. He stops at the end of the article and looks up. Joey is staring at him like Bakura has grown a second head, “What?”

“That was word-for-word. How - how could you possibly-- “

“You have an eidetic memory,” Amanda says. “Bakura, that’s incredible.”

“What’s that? Some kind of mage power?”

“No! It’s your brain. You remember everything you see. It’s - wow, it explains so much,” she says. “You taught yourself to play Senet before. You beat Mahad on the first try and no one beat him, ever.”

“That explains your skill in the tombs, too,” Duke nods. “You always knew where the traps were. It was really freaky.”

“It means you’re a genius, Bakura,” Amanda tells him and he stares at the table, feeling a bit overwhelmed.

“It means we can get the files out without physically taking them with us,” Bakura tries to get the conversation back on track. The longer the subject stays on him, the more embarrassed he feels at not realizing he could do something like this earlier, “I’ll have to read them all then. Damn it. That’ll complicate our timing.”

“If we’re silent enough, we can stay as long as we like,” Joey says. “It’ll be fine. Don’t over plan everything. You’ll worry yourself sick.”

“Where do we leave?” Serenity asks.

“I realize some of you need to take time off work and school, so three days from now is when we set out,” he says. “We should only be away for a day.”

“Could we possibly move it up a day? I may need to drift with Sekhmet and it’ll help if this whole thing is two days out instead of three,” Amanda asks.

“Two days shouldn’t be that much of a problem,” Duke says.


“What’s done is done, sadly, in concerns to my paper,” she sighs. “I can, however, take pleasure in the fact that the wheels literally fell off of his bike and his dog has taken to pissing on his laundry. And it’s only going to get worse from here on out. Personally, I’m holding out for a computer virus from hell.”

“You are truly terrifying,” Serenity smiles.

“I try. I really do.”

“So two days from now, we meet up at my place at eight and we’ll head over to William’s Abbey,”
Bakura says and the meeting is over. “Be ready for anything.”

He makes it upstairs and onto his computer just as the clock strikes seven. Bakura is putting on a pot of coffee on when he gets the alert that Leo is online.

> hey
> dancer sent me your 911. what’s up?
> i need a favour
> yeah, i got that. what do you need, pretty boy?
> what are the chances of the family of a non-magic born mage still being alive if they run away?

Leo pauses for a bit before answering.

> depends
> on what?
> usually, the family is just watched for a few months. if they aren’t contacted within that time, they’re left alone. but if they are… well, yeah. they get killed. it was a huge problem we had in the beginning. it still is.
> how do those watching tell if they’ve been contacted?
> not really sure
> it’s like they read minds or something
> legilimency
> ????
> sort of like mind reading. it’s something wizards can do
> snake, are you wizard born?

Bakura hesitates.

> maybe
> would it be a problem if i was?
> i don’t think so
> no
> it wouldn’t be a problem
> oh
> okay
> is this about your family?
> no no
> it’s about a kid that escaped with me
> spider
> he needs to get in contact with his family, specifically his sister, asap. his folks are non-magic and they may be being watched
> what do you want me to do?
> i don’t know what YOU can do, but if you could ask around and see if there was someone who could modify memories or something like that. someone who could CONVINCE whoever’s watching spider’s family forget that he’s in contact with them
> scorpion king could
> but i’m gonna need a really good reason to get him in on this
> who’s scorpion king?
> he’s the closest thing us jackals have to a leader
> basically everyone shuts the fuck up and listens when he’s on the chat boards
> he can do something like that. but like i said, he’s gonna need a reason
spider’s sister is dying. he can help her
how?
she’s got depression. he might not be able to make it go away, but he can keep her alive
they’re family. they need each other now more than ever
i’ll ask. no promises, though
but i think we’ve got a chance. scorpion king’s not without a heart and all
it’s just that he’s busy most of the time
that’s all i ask. thanks leo
hey no problem
you called me snake
????
earlier
you called me snake
not pretty boy
heheheh
yeah well i figured that this was a bit too serious for flirting
there’s such a thing with you?
ha ha
funny :)
you’re probably prettier with your mouth shut
i

He stops typing suddenly, the words seemingly stuck to the tips of his fingers. Bakura swallows hard.

you?

i don’t really mind

Leo doesn’t answer for a whole minute and the whole time Bakura thinks he’s messed up catastrophically.

i

wow
leo i’m sorry
i shouldn’t have said that
no!
i mean, it’s fine
I don’t mind that you don’t mind
really?
yeah. just… not really used to people not minding
if you know what i mean
that being said, if you ever saw me irl then you’d probably mind
i’m not as pretty as dancer says i am
bull
i’ve got baggage
baggage can be hot :P
no it’s not
i’ll be the judge of that
so… maybe we could meet?
someday?
maybe
i don’t know
I don’t know if you really want to
doubt it. i’d really like to
i’ve got problems
we all do
not like this
i still wanna meet you
i don’t know your name
you don’t know my name
and don’t tell me that doesn’t matter
seriously. don’t.
we can’t even know what each other looks like. it’s too much of a security risk

Bakura clenches his fists, taking a deep breath. It’s fine, he thinks. He likes girls. He likes guys. He likes Leo. Maybe.

i still want to meet you
oh wow
you really know what to say, pretty boy
so?
someday
maybe someday
i can work with someday
yeah
i
i’ll ask around
about scorpion king
and helping out spider
i’ll do what i can
thanks leo. really. i mean it
yeah
yeah
do you wanna talk some time?
anytime?
i’d like that
cool
i’d like that too
i have to go. ttyl?
????
Talk
To
You
Later?
oh
yeah. sure
oh
okay
okay
> bye :)
> bye

Leo signs off and Bakura pushes the computer off of his lap. He runs his hand through his hair and breathes. They’d been talking for almost an hour. No, they’d been flirting for almost an hour. *Hell. Wow.*

He grabs his backpack and decides that he needs some air.

He ends up riding the trains until ten at night, disappearing every time a conductor came around to check for tickets. The night calls to Bakura in a way nothing else does. Memories twist up from the depths of his mind and he remembers *them.* *Their* touch. *Their* smiles. Bakura thinks of kissing the Lady Pharaoh and King Commander, fumbling with the knots *their* clothing. He remembers waking up beside *them,* knowing exactly who he was and what he wanted.

Bakura sends a text off to Mokuba as he gets off the train near San Francisco State University because he’s in the area and needs somebody to talk to and maybe get somewhat drunk with. But the kid’s in class for another hour, so that’s not happening. So he breaks into the campus bookstore, slipping through the walls and passed the security systems. He grabs an iPod Nano and a pair of headphones and discovers that the smallest adult t-shirts available are only slightly too large for him, so he shoves three into his bag. He takes off the anti-theft bars at the desk and moves outside to find a beneath in front of Mokuba’s building to take off the tags. And that’s where she sees him.

“Are you lost?” The woman calls from the doorway. He looks up and feels a slight bit of kinship when he sees that she’s dyed her hair purple. She has it pulled into a pair of pigtails at the base of her neck.

“No,” Bakura answers as she walks forward.

“But you’re not a student.”

“What makes you say that?”

She raises an eyebrow, “There aren’t any textbooks in your backpack. Also, you look like you had a decent amount of sleep last night.”

“Funny,” he hisses. “I’m waiting for a friend. He goes here.”

“I thought as so,” she smiles politely. “Well, goodnight.”

“Wait!” He calls before he can stop himself. There’s something about her that almost familiar, but not in the way that Jono and Sera and Maya are familiar. She stops, a bit confused. Bakura gets up and shoves the rest of his plunder into his bag, “Have I met you before?”

“I don’t think so,” she tells him. Now that he’s a bit closer, he can see the dark make-up around her eyes and the piercings in her brow and lower lip. She’s wearing a black mini-skirt with nylons that tucked into purple boots, a comfortable looking hoodie, and a shirt with the name of a band on it. Bakura knows that he recognizes her, but for the life of him, he can’t figure out from where.

“Do you know when classes will be let out?” He asks.

She looks just behind him, towards where the doors are, “They just did.”

A group of about twenty students of varying ages walk out of the building. Mokuba is in the thick
of it, talking to an older man about some kind of study that goes entirely over Bakura’s head. He
waves when he sees the Thief King standing there, but his eyes pop when Mokuba sees who his
company is.

“Doctor Mutuo! I didn’t know you and Bakura knew each other.”

“We don’t. We just met,” the woman tells him, her smile relaxing into something warm and
comforting. “Heading home with your friend?”

“I think we’re gonna go get a drink first,” Mokuba says. “You want some company walking to the
parking lot?”

“You know I never mind your company,” she grins and Mokuba blushes slightly.

“Doctor?” Bakura asks in confusion as they walk together down the pathway.

“Come on, Bakura. You’ve heard of Doctor Mutuo before,” Mokuba has on that voice where he’s
talking about something that’s rather commonplace, but Bakura has yet to catch up on it. “The
Chronicle wrote an article about her a few years back. She’s a-- “ he stops, his cheeks becoming
more and redder. “Sorry, Doctor. I didn’t mean to brag about you or anything.”

“Ah,” she nods before effortlessly switching into what he assumes is Arabic. “حقيقة مشروط أنت؟”

“Um…” Bakura feels dread descend upon his shoulders. He has no idea what she just said.

“Bakura’s a member of one of the few Jewish communities left in Egypt,” Mokuba covers for him
quickly.

“Really? I had no idea that there were any left,” Doctor Mutuo looks surprised.

“There’s not a huge amount,” Bakura says, trying to calm his racing heart. He knows, he thinks
and attempts not to panic. But he needs to keep the story going, so he draws on what he’s read
about the conflicts in the region. “There’s not many of us left after what happened with Israel.”

“There was at one time, millennia ago - if you believe such things. A rather large population,
though perhaps not to the sizes that the Exodus portrays,” she says. He’s become familiar enough
with the modern Torah and Old Testament to understand what she’s talking about. “After all,
archeologists have yet to discover evidence of such a mass migration taking place in the Sinai
Peninsula.”

“There weren’t thousands of freed slaves. There were a hundred, maybe two hundred at the very
most,” Bakura says, suddenly remembers the stories that he mother had told him of her
grandparent’s journey so long ago. “And no one walks around in the desert for forty years and
lives to tell the tale. It would have only been a month.” He laughs nervously, understanding how
he sounds, “Presumably, of course.”

“That’s quite an interesting theory you have there,” Doctor Mutuo raises an eyebrow. “You tell it
almost like you were there.”

“Obviously not. It’s impossible,” Bakura backtracks.

“Definitely,” her smiles doesn’t completely meet her eyes. “This is me.”

“They’re standing in one of the university’s reserved parking spots. Inside is a bright blue Vespa.
Doctor Mutuo swings into the seat and turns it on. The lights flash and she pushes a matching
helmet over her purple hair. Just before she closes the visor, she tells Mokuba that she’ll see him in a few days. Then she turns to Bakura.

“I hope to hear from you again. Your theory about the Exodus is something that I’d like to discuss with you in detail,” she snaps the visor shut and drives off into the night. The two men stand there awkwardly for a minute before Bakura asks the question.

“How long have you known?”

“Known what?”

“That I am… “ he hesitates, trying to find the right words. “You told Doctor Mutuo that I was Jewish.”

Mokuba shrugs, “I’ve known that you’re an Israelite for a while. I mean, not in my original cycle - a few lifetimes afterwards. Seto told me,” he admits. “He’s known since Kul Elna.”


“It’s not a bad thing. Not anymore,” Mokuba tells him. “Hell, Judaism is one of the largest religions in the Western Hemisphere. And throughout our cycles, we’ve been almost every faith out there. Seto was Jewish in his last cycles, back when he was Sean Penner. He went pretty hardcore, from what Mai tells me. He almost abandoned the old gods of Egypt. And my brother’s never done that before.”

“Monthu, you know that I worship completely different gods than they do now, right? I’m not Jewish. Not in your sense of the word, anyways,” Bakura tells him. Mokuba looks completely baffled.

“Wait? Gods? I thought that it was, you know, the whole one-true-god thing with you guys?”

“Maybe it became that afterwards, but when I was first alive, no,” he answers. He looks up at the kid, “You seriously didn’t know?”

“You were the only Israelite that I knew back then. And it was like pulling teeth to get you to admit anything to us, let alone your religion,” Mokuba shrugs. “Did they know?”

“I think so,” Bakura says. “I can’t really remember.”

“You will someday,” he grins. “Now tell me, what got you coming out this way to see little old me.”

“You are neither little nor old. Also, I have money and you know where the bars are around here,” Bakura flashes him a wad of green bills.

“Is that your money? And will you be leaving the bar with more cash that you walked in with?”

“Ask me no questions and I will tell you no lies.”

“I go to university, Thief King,” Mokuba laughs as they head back towards the rail station. “I literally pay people thousands of dollars to let me ask them questions all day.”

“Do you pay extra to ask Doctor Mutuo questions?” Bakura waggles his eyebrows suggestively and Mokuba blushes so hard that he nearly lights up the entire street.
Keith wipes the floor with Coppermine. It’s actually a little sad that the kid can’t hold his ground in a fight for longer than ten minutes.

“Get up,” he growls as the brat lays sprawled out on his back at the end of the duelling stage. Coppermine shakily gets to his feet.

“I’m trying. I really am. It’s just-- “Keith is not in the mood for excuses today.

“You think trying means anything when a mage has it in his mind that he’s going to kill you? You think it’s gonna matter that you’re tired, that you’re on your back? No,” he fires off a silent Reducto, tinting his spell green so that it looks like a killing curse. Coppermine flies off the stage and hits the wall behind him, “You just died, kid. Try getting up from that.”

“Bandit,” Tilla appears at his side. “Switch sparring partners with me.”

“Back off, Mook. I know what I’m doing.”

“The point of training Coppermine and Kitamori is to make sure that they would be able to fight on the same level as the high-end mages that we will find in San Francisco. The idea was not to break them beyond repair,” she tells him. “Take Kitamori. She’s not that good with her throws.”

He glares at her but concedes. Keith walks over to where Kitamori is standing. He face is red and she’s drenched in sweat. She smiles at him as he approaches.

“Oh, and here I thought Ms. Mook was giving me a break,” she laughs timidly.

“If you think that she gives anyone a break, you have a lot more to learn,” Keith snorts. “Wands down. I heard you need work on your physical fighting.”

Kitamori is surprisingly sturdy for someone of her stature. It’s one of the admittedly, few things that she’s good at when it comes to hand-to-hand combat. She also got a few bad habits that need to be fixed. He takes advantage of her pre-emptive step forwards to flip her onto her back a few times before she decides to do something about it. She tries to do an outer leg sweep instead and he has to improvise an escape at the last minute. Keith gives her a nod of approval and Kitamori preens in response.

He enjoys working with her - or as much as he enjoys anything these days, which is to say that he doesn’t completely hate it. Kitamori learns quickly, unlike Coppermine who has it in his head that if he does the same thing over and over again, he’ll get a different result. At one point, she ends up on top of him and he thinks that she’s not that bad looking. Kitamori isn’t his usual type, but not someone that he’d kick out of bed either. He’s thinking about asking to see if she wants to go and grab some drinking after work when Kitamori’s leg steps slightly out of her stance. Keith almost rolls his eyes at the amateur mistake and moves forwards into his throw.

It’s over before he knows it. Kitamori grabs his arm with one hand and his shoulder with the other, sweeping his leg out from under him and setting him off balance. He feels her twist his torso as she sends him sprawling onto the ground. The back of his head connects with the very solid stage and the air is forced out of his lungs as he hits the floor hard.

He blinks the stars out of his eyes and, very slowly, picks himself up. Kitamori is standing over him, her eyes wide and her hands covering her mouth.

“I’m sorry!” She squeaks. “I just-- I wanted to try something, but I swear, I never meant-- “
“It’s - it’s fine,” Keith wheezes because he think’s he’s bruised something really badly. He sways slightly and forces a smile onto his face. Damn, if Lew hears about this, he’s never going to live it down.

“And that’s how you do it,” he hears Tilla behind him. His smile immediately drops. Shit, “Did you see what she did?”

“Besides kiss his ass?” Coppermine’s face is comprised of a shit-eating grin. Keith wants to throw him into a damn wall. “She, uh... she took out his legs and then basically pushed him down while he was off balance.”

“Yes, but how’d she get him into the position to do that?” Coppermine shakes his head, unable to answer. Tilla smirks at Kitamori, “You baited him.”

“What? No! No! I just... Back in Japan, there was an instructor and I saw him do something like that. I just tried to copy it!”

“Then why’d you stick your leg out?”

“I did what?”

“It was a good move,” Keith cuts the conversation short, rolling a kink out of his shoulder.

“I hurt you,” Kitamori gasps.

“It’s fine.” Damn, he really regrets the shot or two of whiskey he took this morning. His head is spinning. “Really,” he stresses when he sees the girl’s concerned look.

“Practice is over,” Tilla calls. “I’m going to go find Lew. I’ll see you all tomorrow then.” And with that, she turns on her heel and leaves.

Keith shrugs, shaving out the arm he’d landed on as he heads towards the changerooms. Coppermine follows him in and stops trying to make small talk when he realizes that Keith doesn’t give a crap about what he’s saying. The kid slinks out ahead of him, probably hoping to catch Kitamori before she left - Coppermine clearly has it bad for her. But that means that there’s no one but him in the changeroom, so there’s no one for him to hide from as he takes a sip of the flask in his right pocket. By the time he walks out the door, he’s a bit more than buzzed but his words aren’t slurring yet.

Kitamori is waiting outside for him. He blinks in surprise, “If there’s something you want, make it quick. I’m heading home.”

No, he’s not. Home may be a tiny, spartan apartment just outside of Monterey Bay, but that’s not going to be his first stop upon leaving. There’s a muggle bar about three blocks away, where the staff have started to get to know him by name. He’ll spend a few hours there, drinking and watching whatever constitutes a sport in that world before grabbing some cheap vodka at the gas station and turning in for the night.

“I’m really sorry about today,” she says again. Keith rolls his eyes.

“Stop that, will you? You were supposed to throw me. I’m not gonna get pissed at you for doing something right.”

“Still, I want to make it up to you,” she tells him and he sees a slight blush pass over her cheeks. “First round’s on me?”
Well, isn’t this interesting? Keith has never been one to pass up free drinks, especially when he thinks that he’s about to be propositioned. They apparate to the bar that he usually ends up at and she orders a glass of bourbon.

“Strong drink for a little lady,” he comments as he swirls his whiskey in one hand.

Kitamori shrugs, “It’s those damn potions they make us take - the ones with the random side effects. I could drink vodka like water if I wanted to. Nothing really gets me drunk anymore.”

“Ain’t you lucky,” he says and she giggles slightly, eyes flicking from him to her drink. “So what’s the story with you, then? How’d you end up on this side of the pond?”

“I moved here after I graduated from Mahoutokoro,” she answers, naming a school in Japan that Keith is familiar enough with. “I wanted to become a historian and get my citizenship, so I applied for grant money and started researching Ancient Egypt. I guess I was really good at it because the Department approached me with a job offer four weeks after I arrived. If I signed up, they’d pull some strings to hurry along my application process. And here I am.”

“You speak really good English for someone who’s only been here a few years.”

“Thanks. But I’ll tell you, it took a lot of practice,” she says. “What about you? Who’s the man behind the legend of Bandit Keith?”

“So I’m a legend now?” He raises an eyebrow and looks at her over his drink.

“With how often I hear Pete talk about you? Yes.”

He groans, “Don’t get me started with him. What’s going on between you two anyway?”

“He’s my friend if that’s what you’re asking,” Kitamori says.

“He likes you,” Keith points out.

“He-- oh,” she realizes what he meant. “I, um, didn’t realize.”

“Not that I care or anything,” Keith tells her. “As long as it doesn’t affect your ability to perform in the field. It doesn’t matter to me who you see.”

“No! It’s not like that. It’s just…” she searches for the right words. “He’s not my type.”

“Oh. Then what is?”

She blushes, glancing at him again, “Blond.”

Keith, whose yellow hair is a stark contrast to Coppermine’s brown, grins, “I see.”

“You - you never answered my question,” she stammers.

“True. Not much to tell, I guess. I’m from Tennesse,” he tells her and watches as her blush disappears under the collar as he plays up his accent. “Dad’s a wizard. Mom’s a muggle. Same with my half-brother. She had him through her first marriage,” he explains. “I’ve got a younger sister, too, so that made for a really crowded house growing up.

“I enlisted in the army after graduation and did a tour in Iraq. Then I worked for the Secret Service for a while before I was recruited like you were.”
“And twelve years later, you’re still here,” she comments. “You know, most take a desk job after their seventh-year hits.”

“You’ve got to be a bit crazy to join up for this job in the first place,” he says as he drains his glass. Keith calls to the bartender, “Another round.”

“I hear you were top of your class at school,” she looks at him as the bartender refills her glass. He shrugs, not denying anything. Kitamori smiles, “Wow. They fit brains and brawn into you. It’s a nice, neat little package.”

“Thanks, I guess,” he smirks.

Kitamori glances down at her glass, staring at it like she’s decided something important, before downing it in two gulps. Keith’s eyes widen for a second and then he remembers that she can’t get drunk.

“You live far from here?” She asks suddenly.

“A few blocks east. Why?”

“Because I want you to show me your apartment.”

Well, that was blunt. Not that he’s one to say no. Keith follows her lead and finishes his whiskey in one shot. As it burns it’s way down his throat, he slaps some muggle money on the table and stands the best he can.

They nearly don’t make it back to his apartment. The alley behind his place is significantly closer, and it’s not as if Keith has much shame left in him. But Kitamori complains that the brick hurts her back. Pain has never been a turn on for him, so he compromises by apparating them directly onto his bed.

She’s not the best fuck he’s ever had, but she’s not the worst either. Kitamori is a bit shy and covers her tits with her hands when she catches him staring, so he takes him and pins them above her head. He smirks down at her and she laughs slightly, hooking her legs around his waist.

Keith moves inside her and she writhes beneath him, gasping for air. She’s so tiny, he realizes and wonders how someone like Reiko Kitamori is supposed to survive as an Unspeakable. She’s a scholar, for Merlin’s sake, not a warrior. So as he pounds into her, his hips a frenzy of movement, Keith wonders if they’re both going to be alive in a month. Is she going to remember his face above her as she sits beside his corpse? Or will it be him holding her body on some dirty street and thinking, Remember when we were... what? They’re not in love or even together. It’s just sex. He needs to stop being so damn sentimental. It’s what got him into this shithole in the first place.

Keith doesn’t remember much of what happens after. When he wakes up the next morning and sees his naked co-worker (and yeah, he knows how much crap he’ll be in if Pegasus finds out) in bed beside him, Keith hopes that he at least made the night somewhat enjoyable for her. Kitamori stirs and opens her eyes.

“Hello,” she smiles.

“Hi,” Keith says back.

*Kitamori’s Japanese*, his mind supplies. *So was Ryou.*

*Shut up*, he thinks right back.
Kitamori pushes herself up, stretching her arms above her head. She seems much less shy than she’d been the night before as she rises from his bed and walks naked around his apartment, collecting her clothes. Keith groans when she opens up the blinds and lets in the sunlight.

“Merlin’s beard, woman! Some of us actually get hangovers, you know?”

“We need to get going,” she tells him. “We still need to finish planning what the western front is going to be doing in San Fran. Not to mention that I want to pick up a visitation form at the front desk so that I can get some time with the Millenium Spellbook. It might have some more information on the Lady Pharaoh’s Pendant.”

“Alright, alright. I’m moving,” Keith says and slowly throws his legs over the side of his bed. The room spins and he puts his head in his hands until it stops. He looks blearily up at Kitamori, who’s pulling a spare set of clothes out of her bag. An Undetectable Extension Charm, he notes. And it’s really well cast, too. Despite its name, there were way to tell if an Extension Charm had been placed on something - if you knew what you were looking for, of course. But Kitamori lifted her bag like it didn’t weigh more than it should, nor did it clunk when she set it down on the table.

“You do this often, then?” He comments as he pulls on a fresh pair of pants.

“Excuse me?” She raises an eyebrow as she steps into her shirt.

“The extra clothes,” he points out. “It’s just… uh, you seem really prepared.”

“I sleep with who I want to sleep with, Keith Howard. There isn’t anything shameful about that,” Kitamori growls. Keith doesn’t say anything to the contrary because that’s not exactly something you bring up the morning after.

“That’s not what I meant,” he lies and switches tactics. “It’s just, this wasn’t a spontaneous thing.”

Kitamori blinks, “You think I want a relationship with you because we had sex?”

Yeah, sure. He’ll go with that, “Don’t most girls?”

“I don’t like you like that,” she tells him, and he doesn’t exactly know how to take that. “I think you’re rather handsome, though. And that’s why I’m here.”

“Oh,” he says. “Okay. So, do you want this to be a one-time thing?”

Kitamori shrugs, and that’s enough of an answer as any. When they’re both properly clothed, they head down to the sidewalk.

“Don’t you have an appointment with Pegasus today?” Kitamori asks before they apparate to work.

“Yeah,” he answers. “It’s just a progress report, though. He wants to keep up to date on the invasion plans.”

“We’re not really invading, though. It’s more of a liberation than anything else.”

“The mages will treat it as an invasion and I doubt they’ll take it very well,” Keith says.

“But it’s not like they’re in a position to mount a counterattack,” Kitamori reasons. “They have no idea where anything wizarding is.”

“True. But you can never be too prepared,” Keith responds as the sun his him at just the right angle and pain screeches through his skull. He needs a damn drink.
Kitamori doesn’t notice as they turn the corner into an alley where no one will hear the cracks of
the apparition. She looks at the ground for a minute before glancing up at him, “You seem to
know mages really well.”

“You fight them for long enough and you pick up on a few things.”

“I’ve never seen a mage before Ryou Andrews,” she admits, and he remembers, fuck, Kitamori
was one of the last people to see Ryou alive. “He was… terrifying. I didn’t understand it then
because it seemed like he was attacking us out of nowhere. But he wasn’t. He was helping those
three kids escape. He died for them.”

“Where are you going with this?” Keith growls.

“Ryou Andrews cared,” she has no idea how much her words kill him inside. “Are… are other
mages like him?

Where’s the line, Keith? I’m not sick. There’s nothing wrong with me.

“No,” he answers very quickly. “There aren’t any other mages like him.”

Now all he has to do is convince himself that that’s the truth.


"It doesn't matter," he says finally. "You may write them off as a lost cause, but I don't. We will find who we can, save who we can - even if there's just one. Because if we can take one away from the hell that is their lives here with you, it'll set a precedent. And more will follow."

The mage kneels in front of him and Cyril can see his white hair and purple eyes and feels the power that radiates off him in waves. And he is reminded of the Spirit of the Millennium Ring, whom he had once glimpsed at a distance. He doesn't know why he makes that particular connection and he doesn't want to guess.

The Ring is gone. It was finally destroyed after years of trying. A mage took it with him to the grave.

"You asked what we wanted," the mage is still talking. "I want my people to have the right to live their lives as they want, free from harm."

Kisha Borrego has been working at Putnam's Clothing Store since graduating from Salem three years ago in hopes of paying off her student loans. William's Abbey isn't exactly the glorious position at the Ministry that she'd imagined when she'd gotten out of school, but it's work and it's money. Kisha may regret her decision to attend a private academy like Salem, but when there comes a day when she can move out of this dump, the name will come in handy.

It's a dull, cloudy Thursday and she's hoping that no one's going to show up so that she can close early. There is absolutely no one on the streets since it looks like it's going to rain. Kisha turns the page of her book, A Storm of Swords - which had been banned at Salem because of its muggle origins. She spots movement in the corner of her eye just before the bell above the door rings. Kisha hides her book under the desk and looks up.
They are the oddest group of people she's ever seen. There's five of them. One of the girls is blind and is being helped around by who she assumes in her brother. The other girl reminds Kisha of a friend, all blonde and curvy and beautiful. There's an Asian boy with muggle tattoos on his arms and - whoa.

The final boy is tiny, with white hair and purple eyes that are in direct contrast to his dark skin. There's also a prominent burn that passes directly over his right eye. Kisha can't tell how old he is, though his height makes her guess that he's the youngest in the group.

"Can I help you?" Kisha asks hesitantly. The blonde girl turns to her and gives her a smile that all pearly white teeth.

"Yeah," she even sounds exactly like Kisha's friend, valley girl accent and bikini body and everything. "You know that Job Fair that they're having at the Ministry this week? My friends and I wanna go, but we need some clothes that aren't… you know," the girl looks down at her red muggle t-shirt.

Kisha hasn't heard of the Fair, but then again, she stopped reading *The Quill* after its chief political correspondent wrote an entire article on how Reyna Polamo, the new Minister of Magic, couldn't do her job and be a single mother at the same time. But she's not getting paid to give out lectures on her opinions (not that this California girl would probably care), so she says, "Sure. Anything, in particular, you're looking for?"

"I don't know about them, but I've always felt really confident in a red dress. You got anything like that?"

They're not a bad group to work with, but there is something very off about them. It might be the blind girl, whose disability is such a rarity to see out in public, as most wizarding families just hide those kinds of kids away in their homes. It's not the brother, who looks like he could play Quodpot professionally, but gets really confused when she brings up the topic in hopes of inspiring some small talk. Not to mention that the kid with the tats looks like he's keeping watch.

Surprisingly enough, it's the white-haired guy with the creepy scar that gets Kisha to relax and think that she's not about to get robbed. He catches her staring at him while she's pinning Valley Girl's dress and laughs, "I got caught in a transfiguration accident."

"Sorry. I didn't mean to- "

"It's fine. I get it a lot. I wouldn't be pissed, but I lost, like, a half foot in the process. Do you know how annoying it is to be in your twenties and constantly being denied service at bars?"

"That's not the worse of it either," says California Girl. "We stopped at McDonald's on the way here and they asked him if he wanted a toy with his Happy Meal."

"Thanks for reminding me," and he calls the girl by a name that she doesn't quite catch. She blames it on his accent. Kisha wonders where he's from.

"Glad to help, your majesty," the girl shouts back.

Things calm down after that. The five of them get a single outfit each and Kisha finds that a bit odd. Are they expecting to wear those clothes every day if they get jobs at the Ministry? For a second she thinks it's a money thing, but Scar Face handles the bill so that can't be it. Tattoo Guy raises an eyebrow when he spies what she's been reading and asks how far she's gotten, mentioning that he's just started *A Feast for Crows*. He's also really shocked to see that she even has the books.
Kisha snorts and says, "Just because muggle books are banned at school doesn't mean they don't still make their way in."

She finds it odd that everyone in the room jerks suddenly when she says the word 'muggle.' Tattoo Guy recovers first and hesitantly asks, "Your school had an illegal book trade?"

"Your's didn't?"

"Ah, well, um..." he laughs nervously. "I'm a Squib."

"Oh." Damn, he is so not getting a job at the Ministry then. Which is a shame; Kisha kind of likes him, enough that she scribbles her floo address on the back of the receipt and hands it to him.

"Thanks for all of this," Scar Face says right before they leave and Kisha honestly wishes them luck even enough it's pretty unlikely that things are going to go well for any of them. She glances at them as the door swings shut, trying to think of precisely what it could have been that had bothered her about them.

When she gets home that night, her roommate tells her that the Ministry's Job Fair isn't for another three months. And Kisha Borrego remembers that she hadn't seen a single wand on any of them.

_Tituba's_ isn't the nicest place in the world, but in the humble opinion of Royce Land, they have the best jerk pork in the country. Which is precisely why he's decided to take his boyfriend here for lunch.

"It's fine, Shawn. No one is gonna recognize you," he says.

"That's not what I'm worried about," Shawn tells him and that's a big, fat lie if Royce has ever heard it. He knows that if they're caught together, Shawn's family is going to disown him. Royce is a muggleborn and very, very male. And the Pendergrass's are up there with the Hawkins's when it comes to American wizarding royalty.

"Then what?"

"Come on, man. You know what they say about William's Abbey. You look like you're carrying around a few galleons here and you'll get mugged faster than you can say Quodpot."

"Please, it's not that bad. Besides, there's only been three deaths here in the last week, so - whoa! Hold your hippogriffs, Shawn," Royce laughs. "I was only joking."

"That's not funny!" Shawn hisses.

"Relax! Look, the people here at this time of day are pretty harmless," he jabs his thumb in the direction of the window behind him, beyond which are five kids dicking around with their wands like it's the first time they've ever used them. "Besides, if something did happen, do you seriously think that I'd just leave you behind?"

"No," Shawn smiles softly and, in a rare gesture of public intimacy, reaches across the table to take his hand. "I don't think that."

"Yes, so-" Royce stammers and grins, looking down at their entangled fingers with a fond longing. They can't hold hands for long. They found that out at school when one of their teachers caught them kissing in an alcove and would have destroyed them had Shawn not wiped the man's memory.
They have to be careful. They cannot be seen. Those are the rules.

They move apart just before the waiter, a muscular blond teenager, comes to their table. They order their food and Shawn swears that he'll try some of Royce's jerk pork even though he hates anything even remotely flavourful. They laugh over some joke before Shawn looks through the window behind him and frowns.

"What in Merlin's name are they doing?"

Royce turns in his seat and stares at the group of kids from before. They're making random sparks with their wands and every so often, there is a loud cracking sound. Then the white-haired says something that Royce can't hear and levitates some of the pebbles on the road. The others try to copy him.

*He's teaching them*, Royce thinks. And then, *Wasn't there five of them earlier? One's missing.*

"Excuse me. Are you ready to order?" Royce looks up suddenly to see a very different young man in a waiter's uniform pull out a quill and piece of parchment, standing in front of their table.

"Someone's already come around," Shawn says.

The man frowns, "I'm the only server on shift."

"Then who…?" Royce is taken aback, his hands going to his pockets in search of his wallet. It's there, though several Knuts seem to have disappeared (seriously, who steals Knuts?). And then he makes a discovery that nearly gives him a heart attack.

"My wand is gone."

And in the panic that follows, no one brings up the missing waiter or the group of kids outside that have mysteriously disappeared.

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Gerry Maler, like most working-class Americans, hates his job. Yeah sure, it puts food on the table, and *maybe* it's helped him get laid all of once, but it feels like it's sucking the life out of him. Day in and day out, he sits in his chair and waits for people to queue up to be let into the Ministry. Gerry's a security guard - a glorified wand checker (and yes, he's heard *all* of the jokes before). And he hates his job.

He's been sitting here for an hour, having taken over for Tony after lunch, but it already feels like an eternity has passed. Gerry doesn't look at the clock much anymore because time just seems to move slower when he does. The last person that he let through was some lady in her fifties who bitched about the long lines and his complete lack of quality customer service. Gerry's almost tempted to deny her access to the building, but she works for the Department of Magical Transportation and that shit can get him fired. He sighs and shouts out, "Next!"

A group of kids comes up to his station, but he only really focuses on the hot blonde chick with the hourglass figure all wrapped up in a tight red dress. He leans back in his chair and remembers how Nicole from International Co-operation once offered to blow him if he'd let her jump the line on her way to work.

"Names and registration," he smirks at her. She glares back, fishing in her purse for her wand. One of the guys in the group, a short-as-fuck black kid with a scar across his face, scowls and slams his wand on the table.
"Morgon Sammons," he says. Gerry looks up the name in the logbook and matches it up with the nine-inch cedar wand the kid has presented. His friends, Ellen Messer, Royce Land, and Delphia "Hot Ass" Caro, do the same before he turns to the tattooed Asian kid.

"Wand?"

"Don't have one."

"What? You lose it or something?" Gerry rolls his eyes.

"I'm a Squib."

Gerry smirks, "What the hell do you think you're doing here then?"

"Job interview," the guy answers.

"Funny. Pull the other one."

"I told you. I'm looking for a job."

He snorts, "Well, I'm gonna do you a favour and turn you back. We don't take your kind here. Go home and play muggle like a good boy, okay?"

"What? No!" The one he remembers as Royce Land shouts. The five of them exchange glances before the beautifully curvy Delphia nods and Gerry wonders if that means he's going to have her legs around his waist before the end of the shift.

But instead, the blind girl, Ellen Messer, approaches him and it's not that Gerry'd say no to this one either, but she rates a solid five on his scale and he likes to stick to the category of 'Above Average.'

Messer grabs his hand before he can move it away, "Hey, what the hell, lady?"

"~Stop~," she says in a voice that sounds like wine, spiced and aged to perfection. Gerry could listen to her for the rest of his life and have no regrets.

Messer continues on, speaking in that voice that he's come to love, "~You're going to let us pass through.~"

"I'm going to let you pass through," he repeats, smiling at her the whole time. She sounds like music. She asks him to quickly finish the paperwork needed to make that happen and he does, because she wants him to. When she hums in approval, Gerry feels his heart hammer in his chest.

"~Have a pleasant day,~" she wishes him and turns to leave with her friends. He stares longingly at her retreating form until it disappears into the crowd of people in the main lobby, and catches Morgan Sammons order of "Code names from here on out." He calls up the next person in line and grins happily when he greets them.

Gerry Maler loves his job.

Cyril Weller is at the front desk when they walk into the Archives.

"Excuse me, you're not allowed to be here- " he's cut off when the tattooed teenager raises a muggle gun and points it at his head.
"Hands where I can see 'em," the kid growls and he does exactly as he's told. The blond boy next to him moves forwards and pats him down.

"No wand."

"He wouldn't dare. Not with all the magic in here," says one of the girls. She has long auburn hair and is slumped against the wall. Cyril thinks she might have a headache. The black boy with white hair slips her arm over his shoulder and helps her up.

"Just a little longer, Seer," he tells him.

"Liar," she chuckles humourlessly.

He shrugs and looks directly at Cyril, touching his free hand to his stomach. Then he turns to the final girl, a beautiful young woman in a red dress, "Priestess, I know his name tag says Cyril Weller, but his real name is Seedling 115-36M."

"What the hell kinda name is that?" Priestess frowns as she pulls a length of rope out of her purse.

"Make a sound and you're dead," the tattooed boy threatens as Cyril feels the blond boy jab a knife into his back.

"It'll have to be the quick version," Priestess advances on him and wraps the rope around his wrist.

WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE? He wonders, WHAT DO THEY WANT? MY NAME IS CYRIL. CYRIL WELLER. I WAS BORN IN MOSEL BAY. MY FATHER WORKED FOR THE GOVERNMENT. WHY DO YOU SAY THAT MY NAME IS A SERIES OF NUMBERS?

"~With the thread of the crimes of your own design, I bind your soul as Isis, Clever of Tongue, bound Ra. I bind you from behind. I bind you from Before. I bind you from the left, the right, by day and by night. I bind you from below. I bind you from above. I bind you with your own soul within. And so let this magic unfold and spin.~"

She holds the two ends of the rope and ties a knot, "I know your name, Seedling 115-36M. I own your soul. And you will do exactly as I say."

"Or what?" He sneers as he thinks, SHE'S A MAGE. THEY'RE ALL MAGES. AND THEY'RE IN OUR ARCHIVES.

"There is no 'or what.' Seedling 115-36M, you can't alert anyone to our presence, in any way, shape, or form," Priestess smiles.

"Holy shit. Snake - hell, everyone. Take a look at this," the boy with the knife calls. Priestess tells him not to move and he finds that he can't do anything more than breathe.

"How far down do you think it goes?" The one he assumes is Snake asks. Cyril realizes that they're looking through the window into the Archives below.

"Dunno. Can't see the bottom. Bet it's no worse than a tomb, though."

"It's got a better payload than a tomb, Dragon."

"Seedling 115-36M," Priestess calls again. "We're looking for your files on wizard born mages. Be a dear and show us where they are."

Cyril's body moves against his will and he walks them down the corridor. When they enter the elevator to take them to the ground floor, Priestess pulls what looks like a bottle of oil out of her
"Really?" Dragon complains.

"We're in the middle of enemy territory. So suck it up," Snake says and it sounds like an order.

Priestess suddenly winces in pain and rubs just below her stomach, but continues on with whatever she's planning. She dips her fingers in the oil and draws a line on the foreheads of everyone in the elevator barring Cyril and, surprisingly, Snake.

"~I ask the power of Nephthys, She who is skilled in magic and words of power, Lady of life, and the Mistress of the Two Lands. Keep us safe. Dispel the darkness. Allow no evil to touch our lives. Keep fear at bay. Do not let us stumble. Surround us with light so no one can harm us. Let us be protected at all times.~"

Snake bows his head and whispers softly in a language that Cyril can't understand. They're praying to their dead gods, he thinks. How futile.

The elevator opens up and the six of them step out. There's an Unspeakable nearby. Cyril remembers that his name is Sid Griffith. The man turns to them and-

Griffith stops in his tracks, hands clawing at his throat. A blue aura surrounds the man as his body convulses and he spits up more water than his body could hope to contain. He falls to the floor and finally stops moving.

"And that is why we ask for help before trying anything. I know I haven't been able to pull a move like that in a while, but I can now," Priestess gives Dragon a despairing look before glancing upwards. "Thanks, by the way."

Cyril can swear that he hears a woman laughing.

"I thought we weren't killing anyone," Dragon says.

"He's not dead," Seer tells him as she leans against the wall. "There are others in here."

How can she tell? Cyril thinks.

"I know," Snake smirks and, Merlin, it's terrifying. And there's something about him, something ancient and powerful that makes the hairs on the back of his neck stand up as the mage steps forwards.

He's small and hunched over. His clothes are too big for him and his face is marred by a scar, but Cyril looks at this mage and is more frightened of him than the one that bound him with a rope.

The mage takes a breath and it feels as if all the air in the room moves with him. Then he raises his hands and the wind picks up, blowing around at impossible speeds. But he has such excellent control over it all that the contents of the shelves don't shake in their boxes.

"Don't move," he warns and makes a sudden swirling movement with his arms. The wind blasts upwards and the sound of screams echo throughout the vast corridors of the Archives. Cyril watches as his colleagues are blown into the air, arms and legs flailing as they are lifted above the tops of the shelves.

Cyril wants to cry. They're defenceless, he thinks. No one is allowed a wand. We weren't prepared.
Snake stamps his right foot to the ground and makes a compressing motion with his hands. There is a shockwave of air that rockets down from the ceiling and Cyril's only chances of hope are thrown to the floor and crushed.

He finds himself on his knees, his hands clasped over his mouth. He's scared. Snake doesn't look tired after taking down every witch and wizard in the Archives. He's too strong, too powerful. How does the Department not know about him? It's not like he could have just come out of nowhere.

There's a hand on his shoulder. Cyril looks up into the eyes of the girl who bound him.

"We have to go," she tells him.

"What do you want?" He weeps openly.

"Shhhh," she moves her hand to his cheek. "It's okay. It will all be okay."

"What more could you possibly do?"

"We want the files," the boy with the tattoos says. "The ones about wizard born mages."

"Why would that do you any good?" He cries out, "Most are either converted or dead! There's no one left for you to save!"

There is silence for a moment. His captors glance from him to Snake. The boy sighs.

"It doesn't matter," he says finally. "You may write them off as a lost cause, but I don't. We will find who we can, save who we can - even if there's just one. Because if we can take one away from the hell that is their lives here with you, it'll set a precedent. And more will follow."

The mage kneels in front of him and Cyril can see his white hair and purple eyes and feels the power that radiates from him in waves. And he is reminded of the Spirit of the Millennium Ring, whom he had once glimpsed at a distance. Cyril doesn't know why he makes that particular connection and he doesn't want to guess.

The Ring is gone. It was finally destroyed after years of trying. A mage took it with him to the grave.

"You asked what we wanted," the mage is still talking. "I want my people to have the right to live their lives as they want, free from harm."

"You'll never get away with this," Cyril says.

"Show me the files," the mages tells him. Priestess repeats the order, calling him Seedling 115-36M while she's at it, and he is forced to comply.

It's nearly the end of Auror Kimberly Ambrose's shift when Captain Laird touches her elbow gently and tells her that there are still some people in the waiting room. She glances quickly at the clock and sees that it's nearly seven.

"Let me guess. Silvana's manning the desk?" Kimberly asks, mentioning the receptionist known for dealing with complaining individuals by putting their reports on the bottom of her pile.

"Got it in one," Laird smiles. "Look, Ambrose. Would you mind grabbing this one? McAfee's husband just flooed her. Apparently, her son's coming down with something."
"Fine. But you owe me," Kimberly laughs. Laird waves her away and promises to buy her a drink after work.

Kimberly walks over to reception, grabbing her partner, Micah Clemons, on the way. Silvana’s at the front desk when they arrive. She looks up from her crossword puzzle and smirks.

"Still here?"

"Still here," Kimberly says. "They giving you trouble?" She points to the small grouping of people sitting on the chairs in the waiting room.

"They weren't too bad in the beginning. Then one of them kept coming up to me and saying that he was Shawn Pendergrass and that he'd get his father down here if I didn't let them all jump the line," Silvana rolls her eyes.

"Is he really?" Micah asks, a little worried. The Pendergrass's are a bit more than a household name amongst Aurors. The current patriarch of the family is Head of the Department.

"Honey, if his daddy was really Neal Pendergrass, you seriously think I'd still have a job?" Silvana says and hands them the file folders. "Theft. In William's Abbey."

Kimberly and Micah glance at each other and roll their eyes as one. Because it's always William's Abbey where these things happen. When are people going to learn to just avoid the place entirely?

Micah thumbs through the files and calls out, "Royce Land, Ellen Messer, Delphia Caro, and Morgan Sammons."

"Well, it's about damn time," one of the men from the group calls out. "Are you usually this disorganized? We've been here for five hours."

"It's been a rather hectic day," Kimberly tells them. "But if you come with me, my partner and I will get your details and you can all be on your way."

As they move towards her desk, Kimberly swears that she hears the man from before grumble, "My father will hear about this."

"Can you please list the items that were stolen from you?" Kimberly asks.

"Our wands," says Morgon Sammons, a balding man in his fifties. Immediately, they have her's and Micah's attention.

"The four of us all had our wands stolen today while we were at William's Abbey," explains Ellen Messer. "Between twelve and twelve-thirty. This can't be a coincidence."

It's not. While petty theft is a rather common thing in William's Abbey, even the most brazen on lowlifes weren't stupid enough to steal someone's wand. The hard penalties associated with wand theft and the overall wizarding right to perform magic kept most people from even thinking about it. And four in one day is entirely unheard of.

"I'll need descriptions of each wand that was stolen so that we can track them down," Micah says as he grabs a piece of parchment and a quill. He scribbles down the measurements, wood types, and cores in his nearly illegible handwriting. Then he moves off to the corner of the room where the logbook containing the wands and owners of every witch and wizard is located.

"How long is it going to take to get them back," asks Delphia Caro.
"We'll put everything we have into finding the people who did this," Kimberly tries to reassure her.

"That's not an acceptable answer! I can't afford to buy another wand. Kiddel already charges an arm and a leg," she says in return.

"Hey! When did you guys all get here?" Micah calls from where he's standing next to the constantly updating reels that magically recorded those checking in and out of the Ministry security desks.

"A quarter after two. Here," the man who claimed to be Pendergrass's son pulled a piece of parchment from his pocket. "Here's our floo slip. It's time-stamped."

Kimberly raises an eyebrow. Only high ranking Ministry officials or their relatives could floo into the building, therefore bypassing security.


"What's up?" She says as she approaches.

Micah glances at the theft victims and indicates that she should keep her voice down. "How accurate are these logs again?"

"They've never been wrong before," she responds.

"Then you really need to see this," and he points to an entry made this afternoon. Kimberly's heart thumps as she reads:

13:37 - Delphine Caro. Eleven inches, cherry, unicorn hair
13:38 - Royce Land. Ten inches, english oak, kneezle whisker
13:38 - Ellen Messer. Thirteen inches, redwood, kelpie hair
13:38 - Squib

- Gerry Maller

Kimberly spins around and stares at the group, wide-eyed and panicked. She whispers, "It couldn't have been them. Pendergrass's floo slip says that they all arrived at 2:16."

"Unless the people at the desk weren't them," Micah theorizes. "They stole the wands to get through security undetected. That's... brilliant, in a terrifying way." He pauses, frowning, "What's up with the Squib, though?"

"No idea," she says and hurries back to the group. "Was there anything you remember about the events just before you noticed your wands were missing? Anything strange? Maybe a group of people hanging around somewhere they shouldn't be?"

"It's William's Abbey, lady," Morgan Sammons snaps. "You just described ninety percent of the people there."

"It would have been a group of five people," she stresses, but all she gets in response are the shaking of heads. It's not that uncommon, she reasons. Most witness testimony is unreliable anyway. So unless they could get a warrant for their memories, there was no way to get a definitive answer, "I need to talk to my partner."

Very quickly, she ushers Micah into Captain Laird's office and signals that there's an emergency.
The man ends his floo call with his wife and rises to his feet, "What's the problem?"

They explain the situation as efficiently as they can. Laird swears, "Someone broke into the Ministry using stolen wands?"

"There's five of them - and one's a Squib," Micah says.

"And how long ago did this happen?"

"Just after 1:30."

"That was over six hours ago!" Laird shouts. "Why am I just hearing about this now? Wait, don't answer that. Damn it, Silvana!"

"Sir, there's something else," Micah says. "Before we came in, I check the outbound logs. Whoever these people are, they haven't left the Ministry yet."

Laird gets up and throws a handful of floo powder into his office fireplace. He kneels down and shoves his head into the flames. Kimberly can hear him yell, "Someone find Neal Pendergrass! I need to lock the Ministry down! And I want Gerry Maller from Security in my office yesterday!"

Cyril has been ordered to remain silent and sit absolutely still unless one of his five captors asks him a question. That had been hours ago and he can barely feel his legs anymore. He wants to die.

The mages all settled around the shelves holding the files on wizard born mages. Snake is reading through them at nearly impossible speeds and taking absolutely no notes. It had taken Cyril almost an hour to realize that he must have some kind of photographic memory and is planning on carrying all of that information out in his brain. Chills run down his spine. This is the last place that someone like Snake should be in.

Priestess has taken to aimlessly wandering the nearby shelves. Occasionally, she asks for confirmation about what a particular artifact is and Cyril isn't always able to answer because he doesn't know everything in the Archives. Seer has been violently ill at least twice in the time that they've been sitting there and currently has her head on Dragon's lap. Cyril has learned that Seer and Dragon are siblings.

The final boy is called Smuggler and he is currently starring Cyril in the eye.

"So explain something to me," he smirks and Cyril eyes the gun that's still in his hand. "Why do you do it?"

"Do what?"

"This. Kill mages. Why?"

Cyril wets his throat, "We have to protect our kind from you. Mages are dangerous, deadly creatures. You will destroy us if given the opportunity."

"Is that what you tell yourself so that you can sleep at night?" Smuggler growls, "I call bullshit. Most are just kids when you take them-"

"Age doesn't matter. The return of mages would bring the world to its knees-"

"You mean your world," says Dragon. "Because, let's face it, you don't give a shit about non-magics."
"The purity of the ancient and noble houses must be preserved," Cyril looks down at his hands.

"Who are they? Your one percent?"

"They are The Sacred Twenty-Eight, named in Cantankerus Nott's Pure-Blood Directory," he answers, unable to stop talking. "The twenty-eight British families of true pureblood decent. They can trace their legacies back a thousand years to the time of Merlin."

"Twenty-eight…? You mean - gods, you mean the twenty-eight families that Hufflepuff's husband promised magic to if they helped them overthrow King Arthur," Snake looks up from his reading.

"The noble houses of Black, of Malfoy and Greengrass and Weasley-"

Snake snorts, "They weren't noble - at least, not back then. The Greengrass' were farmers. The Malfoys were mercenaries. Did they tell you about that when you joined this place?"

"No."

"The Blacks were a group of players," Snake hisses. "They approached the castle in costume and said that they wanted to put on a show for the children. Then those bastards cast the Imperius Curse on them and made them put their parents' heads on spikes. You want to protect that legacy?"

"Your Thief King was said to have travelled with a band of circus performers. What do you think he did while in their company - what with his title!"

"He stole. Everyone knows that. But he never took anything from anyone who couldn't live without it!" Snake shouts. "I… He never killed innocent children!"

"How could you know?"

"Because he knew what it was like to go hungry. And he knew what a dying child looked like," the mage growls.

"Snake," Seer moans.

"I know," Snake says and touches his stomach again.

"What's up?" Dragon calls from his seat on the floor.

"We're gonna have a problem in ten minutes," Seer explains and Cyril's heart soars. "Fifteen people. Not Unspeakables, just… they feel like police officers."

"Aurors," Snake tells her.

"They've been searching the building ever since they found out that we stole those wands," and Cyril notices her hands, both flat on the floor as she reads the entire Ministry. She's clairvoyant, he realizes. And the objects in the room are amplifying her powers. She can see everything, "They've locked the front entrance."

"I told you. You'll never get away with this," Cyril laughs.

"Snake," Smuggler sounds nervous.

"I'm done," the mage answers and puts the last file down. "Priestess, we've got company for supper." The smile on his face is more of a smirk and Cyril hopes that fifteen Aurors will be enough.
"And uninvited, too," Priestess grins and lifts something off the shelf. Snake's eyes shift towards the staff in her hands and gloss over like he remembers something. Cyril stares at the staff and hears his heart pounding in his ears.

It had been found in the Yucatan about four hundred years ago by the Spanish Division inside of a temple dedicated to the Aztec god of rain. It was said that its former owner was a high priestess who'd been able to take the forms of gods. Cyril had never believed the story, but when Priestess holds that staff in her hands and gazes at it like it's an old friend, he thinks that he may have been wrong.

"Let's get going," Snake orders and everyone gets to their feet. "Priestess, clear the way. I'll calm you down if things get out of hand. Dragon, Smuggler, Seer - get to the doors as soon as possible. Seer, you know what to do when you get there. And remember-

"No one dies," Dragon rolls his eyes. "We know. Let's get moving while we still have the advantage."

"One last thing," Priestess turns to Cyril, wearing a smile that makes him think of how she could order him to kill everyone allied to the Department, to murder the Sacred Twenty-Eight in their beds, and he could be helpless to stop his own body.

She stares at him, beautiful and deadly, and whispers, "I need you to pass on a message for me."

The Department of Mysteries is the last place they are supposed to sweep in search of the five thieves. It's because of a few reasons, the main one being that they are located at the very end of the tunnels. Then there's the whole issue surrounding the fact that they're not even supposed to go in there without an appointment. But no one except an Unspeakable or a high-level government official can make those. Kimberly has always thought that it was a little unfair, but she guesses that the Department just really takes their name seriously.

But they haven't got a choice. Captain Laird is willing to make a few enemies upstairs if it means that they'll put an end to this manhunt early. That man has always been one for acting first and dealing with the red tape later. Kimberly would find it reckless, but Laird's headstrong attitude has saved people's lives before. So they turn the corner and prepare for their advance on the Department of Mysteries.

Micah stands beside her, steadfast as always. He smiles down at her and she loves him. It's not the kind of love where you date and move in together and get married, but it is powerful. And it's real. She nudges him on the shoulder and laughs, "Let's bring them in."

There are fifteen Aurors in total, which is all they could find in the building at this late an hour. But that's more than enough to take these punks down. And frankly, when this hits the press (and it will), it's going to be a high profile case, so everyone wants their name attached to it. Not to mention that Unspeakables are cocky as hell. It's about time someone took them down a peg.

Laird and Lieutenant Zielinski stand on either side of the door. Laird knocks loudly and shouts, "Auror Department! Open up!"

There's a sound on the other side. Kimberly and Micah raise their wands in anticipation. Then the door is blasted off its hinges. Sand and wind blow into the tunnel as the temperature skyrockets. Sweat drips down the black of her neck as Micah coughs, "What the hell?"

The sand on the floor moves, rising up into the form of a woman nearly eight feet tall. Kimberly
sees a mouth full of fangs the size of her fingers before the creature's eyes open. They're glowing amethysts, embedded into the constantly shifting sand. The woman's head moves towards the Captain and morphs into that of a lioness.

The woman roars and blood leaks from her mouth. She leaps at Captain Laird with inhuman speed, grabbing him by the neck and slamming him into the wall. She uses the staff in her other hand to club Lieutenant Zielinski in the head and knocks him out. Kimberly and Micah raise their wands as one and fire a pair of stunners, the others following suit in their panic.

The red lights are blocked by an invisible force. A man - a boy? - appears in the middle of the room, a wicked looking knife in his hands. Kimberly's mind registers that it couldn't have been a disillusionsment charm that hid him because she can spot them miles away. Who is he? What is he?

The boy throws the knife and impales Micah's left hand, causing him to drop his wand. Kimberly shouts, reacting instinctively and fires off a hex. The boy jumps and twists over it. When his hand connects with the ground, he flexes his arm and launches himself into the air. His legs wrap around her neck and he spins, yanking her down to the ground. She cries out as the air leaves her lungs and a dragon, black as night with burning red eyes, bursts from the door to the Department of Mysteries.

"Kim!" Micah calls, wandless and terrified, and the dragon's rider points a muggle gun and pulls the trigger. Micah falls, a red stain expanding around his shoulder. The boy that pinned her passes right through her skin like a ghost and crushes her wand hand under his foot. Kimberly screams. Her wand snaps at the handle.

The dragon opens its mouth and breathes a terrible fire, encircling the last remaining Aurors. One of them tries to cast a spell - something, anything, to hold their ground - but the woman made of sand lets out another roar and throws Captain Laird into its path. The man collapses on the ground and doesn't move.

The woman grins, her mouth horrible and dripping with blood, and laughs as a red aura surrounds her like a thin linen dress. She stalks forwards, dragging Lieutenant Zielinski by the back of his collar as she went. Kimberly clutches her broken hand to her chest and moves towards Micah. She bundles up the bottoms of her robes and presses them into his wounds. He's barely conscious, but she whispers to him anyway, "It's okay. It's going to be okay. You're going to make it home. You have to. She's waiting for you."

'She' is Micah's fiance, Marie Foreman, who'd been his girlfriend for nearly six years. Kimberly loves her too because Marie is as hardworking and tireless as Micah himself. She's training to become a healer. When Kimberly feels like giving up, she thinks of Marie and gains the strength to continue.

The boy runs towards the sand woman, grabbing her by the wrist. There's an actual person under there, Kimberly sees. The boy has reached through the golden sand and is touching flesh. He makes a face and says something she can't hear. The lioness laughs again, her free hand swinging her staff at him. He hisses, a forked tongue snaking out from between his lips.

"-Do not think that you can threaten me, bloodborne,-" the sand woman speaks and she sounds like an oncoming desert storm with howling winds and scorching heat. "-I am more than you. I am blood and death and war. You are but a child to me.-"

"You are not my goddess. I don't answer to you. Give her back," his skin turns grey and ripples into scales
"~She called upon me. She wanted me. And so did you.~" the woman tells him. "~I do not answer to mortals. I do not spare my enemy. I will tear their hearts from their chests and burn them for their insolence. They dare attack me. They dare to murder me again. I am Sekhmet. I will show them no mercy.~"

"It's not mercy. It's strategy. They die and the rest of their kind will kill us all. How long do you think you'll last this time with no one to know your name?"

The woman wrenches her arm from his grip, "~Do not lecture me on strategy, blood born. I spit on your plans. She called me. She called. And I answered.~"

The dragon behind them snorts and leans down. It's riders (and there had been two, Kimberly notices. She had not seen the girl) slide off it's back. They kneel before the sand woman.

"Goddess, please," the one who'd shot Micah says. "We know how you've suffered:"

"~You know nothing. You understand nothing. She called me. For the first time in a thousand years, I heard a prayer - a mortal voice asking for my power. I answered. I had to. She called and I answered!~"

"I know. But if these people die now, it will be another thousand years, another million before you'll hear a voice again," the boy who'd broken her hand threatens. "If there is going to be a war, it will be on our terms, fighting the enemy we want. Be satisfied with that."

The sand woman leans down and roars in the boy's face as if to have the last word. Then she growls, "~I will answer her if she calls again. But you... I will remember this, bloodborne. I always remember.~"

"I don't answer to you," he tells her again and shoves a flask into her hand. The woman spits blood on the floor at his feet and eats the entire thing, metal and all. She shudders, eyes closed. And when she opens them, they are green and human.

"Sorry about that," she says, but her voice is different. It's a girl who is beneath the sand, not a terrifying lioness. "I thought I had a hold on her."

"You haven't done this in several cycles," the boy tells her. "Hell, I'm rusty, too. You're allowed to slip."

"No. No, I'm not," the woman says and turns to the final girl. "Seer? Shall we?"

"Yes," Seer answers and Kimberly sees how young she is. The sand woman drops Lieutenant Zielinski on the ground next to Captain Laird and touches the girl on the shoulder.

The girl burns with power.

"~Forget us~," she says. And Kimberly does.

Seven hours later, Keith is awoken by the sound of thunder. It takes him a full minute to realize that it's not actually coming from outside his window, but his front door. He pulls on a shirt and stumbles out of bed. He smells like a bar.

"I'm coming," he growls as the person on the other side starts to knock again. He hopes that it's just an impatient, horny-as-fuck Kitamori because he isn't planning on being pleasant for anyone else.
"What?" He growls as he opens the door. It's not Kitamori. It's Mook.

"Get dressed. We have to leave. Now," Mook says bluntly.

"You know, the last time you showed up at my place at this time of night, you were saying the opposite of 'Get dressed,'" he slurs.

"Are you drunk?" She hisses.

"It's Saturday night. I can do what I want."

"It's Thursday," Mook corrects him. "Merlin's beard, Bandit! Sober up and get dressed. Pegasus is calling us in."

"What the fuck does Pegasus want with us at two in the fucking morning?" Keith grumbles.

"Something escaped from the Archives," she says and Keith immediately straightens.

"What?" That's impossible. There's down there with a conscience.

"That's not the weirdest part either. No one can remember anything except Cyril Weller - and he isn't talking."

"Why not?"

"He can't."

"What the hell happened?" He yells and regrets it as soon as he does. His head is spinning.

"I don't know. But fifteen Aurors are in the hospital, the entirety of the Ministry's lobby has been turned into a desert, there's fiendfyre blocking the main entrance, and there are dragon prints outside in plain view of muggles. We have to go. Now."
“I’ll be heading to the Minister’s office. When you’re done here, come find me and we’ll discuss what should and shouldn’t be made public,” the man says and hands Keith several chains with tiny hourglasses attached to them. “Five minute intervals should do it.”

Then Pegasus turns and walks away. Keith looks at his team, “You heard the man. Time-Turners on. Let’s get going.”

Keith and Mook arrive at the Ministry three minutes after he’d put on a shirt. He’s pretty sure that Mook can smell the alcohol on his breath, but she makes no comment and that’s all he can ask for.

Scott stands at the entrance to the Ministry, gazing down into a paw print that is as long as he is tall. Keith silently thanks whoever the Department has in charge of controlling the muggles in the area; there isn’t a single one in sight.

“There was a dragon here,” the Plant answers.

“No shit, Sherlock,” he snaps. “What kind?”


“If you know what’s good for you, you’ll shut up about it,” Keith growls, ignoring the way Mook tenses up.

“Working under the influence will decrease your proficiency by--”

“Don’t make me order you,” he tells him. Scott’s jaw shuts with a click.
There are a pair of cracks behind them as Lew and Kitamori appear. They jog across the grass to join the group. The five of them move inside of the Ministry and find Coppermine standing in front of a wall of fiendfyre.

“Hey,” he waves as they approach.

“Pete,” Kitamori grins at him, friendly as ever. Keith feels a twinge of jealousy in his stomach and nearly laughs at himself for being ridiculous.

“Y-yeah, so,” Coppermine starts. “We’re gonna have to take a Portkey over - no apparition allowed, you know. Especially with this place still in lockdown.” He leads them over to where a Portkey station has been set up. As a very tired looking Ministry wizard casts a spell over a piece of driftwood, Coppermine continues on, “All of the aurors that were injured in whatever this is are at Buchanan Hospital. From what I’ve heard, most of them just have burns and smoke inhalation and will be fit for duty within the hour. There’s a witch with a broken wand hand. Her partner has a bullet wound in his shoulder—”

“A muggle weapon? But that’s impossible, isn’t it?” Mook frowns. “There are wards that prevent muggle technology from being used—”

“But only if it’s powered by electricity,” Coppermine points out. “Firearms aren’t. They’re all gunpowder and sparks and mechanical stuff.”

“How do you know that?”

“Back in Detroit, most of the werewolves couldn’t afford to buy new clothes, let alone wands. They had to protect their packs somehow between the full moons.”

“Your Portkey,” says the Ministry employee. The driftwood he’s holding looks just as tired as him. Keith reaches out to take out, but the man grabs his wrist first.

“You’re Unspeakables,” he hisses. “What did you… what was in there? What did you unleash?”

“Let go of me,” Keith growls.

“My brother is in the hospital because of you! And I can’t remember why!”

Keith rolls his eyes and wrenches his hand out of the man’s grasp. He steps forward to strike back, but Mook puts a firm hand on his shoulder before he can.

“Bandit,” she warns.

“Yeah, I know,” he snaps back and swipes the Portkey from under the man’s nose. His team all slap a hand on it and Keith feels a tugging motion from somewhere behind his navel. When he opens his eyes, he’s on the other side of the wall of immortal fire. There’s another Ministry wizard, this one managing to look even more exhausted than the previous one, who takes the now useless driftwood from him and throws it in a bucket. The look he gives Keith is anything but supportive.

“Holy crap,” Lew gasps as he looks out upon the Ministry’s lobby and Keith feels inclined to agree with him. With the exception of the seven feet in front of the fire, the floor space has been transformed into a desert. A foot of sand buried everything within sight and anything that hadn’t been nailed to the ground looks like it had been picked up and thrown against the wall. His eyes are drawn to the edges of the tunnel. There are hundreds of employees lining the walls, with frantic looking healers running back and forth between battered patients.
“I didn’t know that it was this bad,” Mook whispers. “Merlin, how many are dead?”

“None, as it would turn out,” comes a voice from behind. Keith turns and sees Maximillion Pegasus approaching with an older man, his white hair slicked back.

“Sir,” Keith greets him, half a beat behind the rest of his team.

“Mr. Howard, I’d like you to meet Neal Pendergrass, the Head of the American Auror Department. Neal, this is Keith Howard, one of our best and brightest,” Pegasus says.

“Mr. Howard,” Pendergrass nods as he shakes Keith’s hand.

“Hello, sir,” Merlin, he hopes he can keep the fact that he’s still very drunk hidden long enough to get out of here.

“What do you make of his mess, Mr. Howard?” Pendergrass ask.

“We won’t be able to draw any conclusions this early in the game,” Keith says.

“But you must have some theory?”

The cogs in his brain seem to be moving too sluggishly to come up with anything, but thankfully Coppermine saves him by opening his big mouth, “Someone could have messed with the environmental spells, sir.”

“And who are you again?”

“Pete Coppermine, sir. I used to be an Auror in Detroit.”

“Never heard of you. Well, Mr. Howard? Do you agree with Mr. Coppermine here?”

“No, sir. I don’t,” he says on principal.

“And why not?”

“W-well, it’s obvious, isn’t it?” Kitamori stammers, looking at Pendergrass’s feet the entire time. “While a tampering of the controls may explain the heat, it doesn’t account for anything else. The sand, the thrown furniture, the injuries…”

As she trains off, Keith glances over to the walls and the Ministry employees that are leaning against them. Some are sporting claw marks. Others look like they’d gotten into a bar fight. One had a bullet wound in his leg.

“Or the memory loss,” Lew chimes in.

“The Fiendfyre could explain the heat,” Pendergrass points out.

“Fiendfyre, while nearly indestructible in nature, only affects that which is within five to ten feet of it,” Depre Scott lets loose a stream of information that sounds like it’s straight from a textbook.

“And are there dragons that breathe Fiendfyre?” Pendergrass asks in a voice that is anything but friendly. Pegasus makes a very subtle motion to say nothing.

So Keith says merely, “I don’t know, sir. I’m not a dragonologist.”

Pendergrass’s eyes narrow in suspicion. Pegasus smiles and touches his shoulder, “I’ll have a
report on your desk by the end of the day, my friend. Don’t worry about it.”

“And like always, I’m sure most of it will be redacted,” Pendergrass scowls. “I’m not your friend, Pegasus. Never have been and never will be. And you Unspeakables think that you can just walk into my Ministry to shove your mistake under the carpet? I want my report - a full report. Or I’ll go to the Minister and risk making an enemy of every wizard you have in your pocket.”

Pegasus’s smile doesn’t drop, but changes from polite to deadly, “Oh, Neal. I’d love to see you try.” He turns to Keith and his team, “Walk with me.”

He nods towards Pendergrass and moves forward, a step behind Pegasus, “You’re not going to give him a report, are you?”

“Neal Pendergrass, if he thinks of following through on his little bluff, will find a surprisingly unresponsive audience and a very quick dismissal from his position,” Pegasus shrugs. “Bah, I don’t want to speak of him now. Poor fool. A little money and some family history and he thinks that he rules the world. What a child. No, no, I’m here because Minister Palamo has issued a more potent threat. She will tell the Confederation of our little issue here unless the Department sends someone to meet her - someone with an explanation,” Pegasus sighs. “I’m a familiar face, so I was sent. Which is why you’re here. I need people I can trust to find out just what happened last night.”

“Sir, is there anything… alive in the Archives?” Keith asks.

Pegasus shakes his head, “Aside from the employees, no. And to answer your next question, nothing that spews something as specific as Fiendfyre is down there either. Merlin, what in the world happened?”

They walk the rest of the tunnels in silence. Sand, rather annoyingly, finds it’s way into Keith’s shoes. About a third of the way to the end, he calls for a halt to empty them. Kitamori rushes over and allows him to hold her shoulder to keep his balance.

“You didn’t tell me that Pegasus was coming!” She whispers.

“I knew he called us in. Didn’t know he’d be here,” he tells her before glancing up at the man. Pegasus is staring at Kitamori with an odd look on his face.

When they start walking again, Pegasus asks, “Who is that?”

“Reiko Kitamori, sir. She’s a scholar with a specialty in mage history.”

“And where did you find her?”

Keith swallows hard, hoping that his and Kitamori’s momentary interaction hadn’t somehow given away the fact that they were sleeping together, “She was an initiate with Coppermine.”

“Interesting. Yes, quite…” Pegasus pauses and glances back. Kitamori shuffles behind Lew. He shakes his head and changes the topic, “You’ll find the scene of the crime untouched. Even I haven’t been in there.”

They turn the corner and reach the door to the Archives. There is another ring of Fiendfyre here as well. When he asks about it, Pegasus tells him that this is where they’d found the fifteen Aurors.

“I’ll be heading to the Minister’s office. When you’re done here, come find me and we’ll discuss what should and shouldn’t be made public,” the man says and hands Keith several chains with tiny
hourglasses attached to them. “Five minute intervals should do it.”

Then Pegasus turns and walks away. Keith looks at his team, “You heard the man. Time-Turners on. Let’s get going.”

Pete thinks that this ‘time travel investigation’ thing is the coolest thing ever. It’s also kind of sucky because he can’t talk to his future selves. He wants to, but he swears that Bandit Keith can smell his intentions and glares at Pete everytime he thinks about it.

The Bandit puts him in charge of interviewing Cyril Weller after an investigation of the main area turns up nothing. Whatever escaped from the Archives left jack for them to track it by and only a shit ton of sand to identify it by (which is entirely unhelpful). Pete thinks he can rule out dragons, though. There’s no way that a dragon as large as the footprint outside could fit through the tiny person-sized door at the front of the Archives without blowing a hole in the wall.

But frankly, this whole thing is fishy. Pete thinks about the last time he was here and knows that there’s no way he could have missed a dragon, either in the Archives or the Ministry itself. And then there’s Weller, who’s shaking in his seat, nervously tugging at a rope bracelet on his wrist.

“Mr. Weller,” Pete says as he sits down. “My name is Pete Coppermine. We met a few days ago. Do you remember me?”

Weller nods, fingers twitching against the table top. He mutters, “Yes,” under his breath.

That’s good. Pete had been told that the man wasn’t speaking and had initially believed that meant that he couldn’t. And while he could use a pensive to extract memories from the man to figure out what happened, Pete would rather talk it out. It’s a lot less invasive.

But first, he has to get Weller to calm down. So he decides to ask about his job, “So you work the desk here at the Archives. What’s that like?”

“You laughed,” Weller says hesitantly. “At me. Last time, you laughed.”

“I did.” He sees no point in lying.

“Do you think we don’t know what you all think of us?” Weller hisses. “We know. We all know. I was recruited over thirty years ago, right out of Daniel Malen’s School of Wizardry. They recruit me and then tell me that I’m not worth their time to train. So they put me behind a desk and they make me fill out paperwork and they take away my wand because the artifacts in here don’t work well with wizarding magic. My family have been witches and wizards for close to a hundred years and now I’m no better than a Squib.”

Weller curls in on himself, hopelessly tugging at his bracelet. Pete sighs, realizing that he’s not going to get far by being nice, “Tell me about the breakout.”

The man looks close to tears, “There was no break out.”

“Something happened here, Mr. Weller. Tell me about that,” Pete says.

He doesn’t. Weller squeezes his eyes shut and shakes his head back and forth. A whine escapes from between his sealed lips.

“Hey, hey, calm down!” Pete puts his hands up in surrender. “Okay. We don’t have to talk about his now.”
“I’m not some seed. I’m - I’m… my father worked for the Ministry. We’re one of the oldest families in South Africa,” Weller just seemed to be babbling now, hysterical and terrified, “I - I--”

Pete cuts him off, “Why don’t you tell me about your bracelet.”

He’d hoped that it would get Weller to come back down to earth, but this topic makes him go back to his catatonic state. It’s almost like the break-out and the rope bracelet was connected…

Oh. Oh.

He’s run into cursed artifacts before: shoes that burned the wearer’s feet, strangling necklaces, even a shirt that forced anyone that looked at it to turn into an uncontrollable rage monster. So a cursed bracelet isn’t exactly off the beaten path. But it’s not exactly something he specializes in removing. So he calls someone who might.

And no, it’s not just because he wants to hang out with Reiko. He can do that on his own time. He actually needs her expertise right now. And frankly, he’s glad he did because Reiko takes one look at the rope bracelet and goes absolutely pale.

“There was a case,” she starts off once she’s ushered him out of the interview room. “It was almost a hundred years ago, a few decades before the war with Grindelwald swung into full gear. There was this mage named Mala Pukar and she was a Spellcaster - no where near as powerful as Matthew Jacques, but enough to get noticed. She could do this thing with ropes where she could bind people to her will. She had nearly twenty of our people under her control at one point. It got so bad that they apparently sent Kiyoshi after her.”

“What’s she got to do with this?” Pete swallows. Kiyoshi was the Department boogie man. He remembers one of his early instructors laughing, *Follow your orders or Kiyoshi will come for you.*

“That’s her work, Pete. That’s her exact work,” Reiko says in a shuddering voice, fumbling with the Time-Turner around her neck. They reset back to five minutes prior and he experiences a weird moment of vertigo before realizing what she’s just said.

“You mean… Weller came into contact with a mage? Who had the power to take control of him with a piece of string?”

“Not just any mage. A Spellcaster - had to have been. Regular mages, or even muggles, could maybe perform the simplest of their abilities, but this is too advanced. And for it to be the same… no, that’s impossible.”

“Could Mala still be alive? Or, at the very least, taught someone how to do it?” Pete inquires.

“No,” Reiko shakes her head. “Mala died alone and friendless. And old. She was in her late eighties when she was killed.”

“But what if--”

“She’s dead,” Reiko snaps and it’s final. Then she relents, “Maybe a student. Or a student of a student. Or...,” she pauses, looking thoughtful. She shakes her head, "It’s not probable, but it’s a possibility.”

Pete grits his teeth, “Then let’s prove it.”

“What?”
“This Mala, dead as she is, had a signature. That’s why you can recognize it,” Pete says, thinking about his time as an Auror and how he’d once identified a serial killer through the pattern in his victims. “So what is it?”

“The knot itself,” Reiko murmurs. “How it’s tied, that’s all Mala. The fact that Weller can’t speak. She probably forbade him from talking about what happened. And - a message!”

They wait until their past selves clear the interview room before rushing back inside. Reiko practically shouts at Weller, “Is there a message?”

Pete’s heart seizes as he watches Weller give a shaky nod.

“This is my boomstick.”

Reiko blinks, looking bewildered. Pete frowns, “Did that just happen?”

“You know what it means?”

“Yeah. Some mage just quoted Army of Darkness. I used to watch it with my dad as a kid,” Pete tells her. She still looks very confused.

“Why would they send that message? Mala was always so straightforward. She’d say exactly what she meant,” Reiko looks so out of her depth. But Pete isn’t. Suddenly, he’s right at home.

“Because it’s not Mala Pukar back from the dead. It’s someone else - like a modern version of her. But that’s not the question we should be asking right now,” he says. “If this wasn’t a breakout, but a break in by a Spellcaster who knows how to do the same trick as a dead lady...” and he remembers Ash Williams holding his Remington over his head, “…What is the boomstick?”

Tilla has done maybe four or five crime scene investigations before and has discovered that there’s an art to it. Especially when time travel is involved.

The Department uses Time-Turners for two reasons, the first of which being that it keeps the evidence fresh. While nothing is removed until the final turn, it meant that photographs could be taken, spell analyses could be performed, and theories could be drawn up in a period unheard of in most Auror investigations.

The second reason for using Time-Turners is, in Tilla’s option, far more important. They insured that clean up crews could come in and vanish all that needed to disappear before prying eyes came looking (the Lakewood incident had been covered up in three minutes). And not just muggles eyes, but wizards, too. People wanted to know what the Department did behind it’s closed doors. The fact that whoever founded the organization had decided to tack ‘of Mysteries’ to their title didn’t help in the least.

A PR nightmare was caused because some old men wanted to sound cool. Tilla rolls her eyes. Fools.

The trick to time traveling in such a small time frame is surprisingly simple: wrist bands. Every time you made the jump back, you tapped the band with your wand to change the colour. Then you made sure to only interact with people who had the same colour of wristband as you. That way you didn’t end up causing a paradox by telling someone from the past something that they haven’t investigated yet.

Tilla finds it more comfortable to just not interest with anyone, which isn’t a thing she can pull off
well on a team like this one. So she grabs Depree Scott and volunteers to check the Archive’s catalogue to see if anything was stolen.

She doesn’t mind Depre, though that’s because she’s been working with him out of the Gardens in France for the last five years - not that Bandit knows that. When she heard that Keith had requested her to be on his team to take back San Francisco, she’d immediately gone to Pegasus to stop her transfer.

It’s not that Tilla dislikes Keith Howard irrationally. They get along fine in professional settings. It’s their contrasting personalities that annoy each other. Keith prefers a much more aggressive approach to things than she does, but usually falls short when asked to make the hard calls. Tilla’s far more cautious, though much more willing to do what it takes to accomplish the mission. She can live with people dying if it means getting the job done. Bandit Keith isn’t. And that’s going to be a problem if he’s planning an attack on a fortified mage city.

She’s a better leader for this plan and Pegasus knows it. But she’s also a woman and, for the life of him, the man can’t see her in a command position.

What he does is put her in charge of assigning a Plant to the unit. He hands her a file folder full of names and profiles. She recognizes a few: Marie Moore, John Griffin, Aaron Taylor… The list went on until the end, where she found Depre Scott, Plant #85,470. There’s a handwritten note attached to his profile.

To Be Retired

But she’s known that. She’d been his Monitor for five years. And after what happened in Belfast… Merlin, the bastard had her. So Tilla chose Depre and bit her tongue about Bandit coming in to work drunk.

“Ma’am,” Depre calls and she’s brought back from her musing. His dark hands held up the Archive’s catalogue, “There’s a missing item. Article 68-12.”

She nods and, noticing her five minutes are up, makes the trip back in time. She and Depre take the elevator down to the Archives.


Depre runs back into the elevator and jams the up button. Tilla turns towards the pack of Archive Unspeakables that have congregated in front of her.

“They sent help…” one woman mutters, sucking in a breath and holding her ribs like they’re broken.

“What happened?” Tilla asks.

“I don’t know,” the woman answers. “We were just working and then… I forget…” she looks up at the ceiling and shudders.

Between Keith, Depre, and Tilla, they manage to get the Archive workers upstairs within the five minutes of their cycle by enlarging the inside of the elevator and creating illegal Portkeys, but no one complains because they all need some form of medical help. One of the men tries to walk to her on the way out, but seems to vomit up water. Another Unspeakable leads him away with the words, “Come on, Sid.”

“The missing item should be this way,” Depre tells her as Bandit heads upwards and back to the
rest of the team. He leads her to the shelves and reads aloud from the catalogue to find out just what Article 69-12 is.

“What could break out of here that would want a dead priestess’s staff?” She wonders. Depre shrugs and points to a shelf where their future selves have grouped around.

“It was stored there.”

“Now the question is: did whatever broke out of here intend to steal the staff, or did they take it as a weapon of convenience? What else is in the area?”

They spend the next five or six time cycles here, scouring the shelves for any clues. At one point, Tilla finds a box of vomit and yelps, stumbling backwards and losing her footing. She nearly falls over, but Depre catches her at the last moment.

“Thank you,” Tilla says. Depre nods. His hands linger half a second longer than necessary.

_He’s in love with you_, a voice in the back of her head whispers. And it’s true. She’d known for close to three years now, when he was nineteen and glanced at her lips during a mission briefing. And then again, two months ago in Belfast, when he’d abandoned his target and come for her after she’d been compromised - she knew.

For all her ability to plan and calculate, Tilla has made a handful of poor decisions in the past. Drunkenly spending the night in Keith Howard’s bed accounts for two of them. Leaving her family behind to become an Unspeakable accounts for the rest. She will not let Depre Scott - her Subject, a Plant, a traumatized boy fifteen years her junior - become part of that list.

“It’s ten hours old,” Depre comments and sniffs the throw-up in the box. “Digestive contents appear to be from a human diet.”

“From whoever broke out?” It’s not entirely impossible. The labs in London kept humans for their experiments. But then again, there are no experiments taking place here. The Archives is just a giant storage locker.

“What if…” Depre’s eyes narrow, “…this wasn’t a breakout? What if it was a break in?”

_For the staff?_ She frowns. No, that couldn’t have been it. According to the catalogue, the thing had been a relic when it was found and they’d never gotten it to work. Besides, who on the outside would have known of it’s existence? Unless…

“They were in the area and took it…” Tilla mumbles. She turns on her heel and stares at the shelf behind her. She points at the boxes of files, “What are those?”

Depre shifts through the catalogue, “The profiles on wizard born mages.”

Tilla’s heart stops, “Oh no.”

Keith has a headache. It’s mostly because he’s hungover as fuck, but it certainly doesn’t help that everyone accept Lew seems to be yelling at him. Eventually, the pain gets the better of him and Keith shouts, “Shut up!”


“Mages,” Coppermine says and Keith looks at him like he’s mad. “Sir, it wasn’t a breakout.
Mages got in here and one of them’s a Spellcaster and they took the boomstick.”

“The what?” He hears himself say, all the while thinking about the three mage children who escaped the island, never to be seen again. Two of them had been wizard born.

“Some weapon,” Kitamori supplies. “The Spellcaster bound Weller and probably had him show them into the Archives. Sir, mages did this. They know where we live.”

“They didn’t come for the staff, Bandit,” Mook butts in.

“What staff?”

“Article 68-12. A staff procured by Spanish Unspeakables. It used to belong to an Aztec priestess said to be able to take on the form of the gods,” Scott monologues.

“It was a weapon of opportunity. It was located on a shelf nearby what they were really after,” and Mook looks so pale that Keith gets nervous himself. “Sir, they were after the files on wizard born mages.”

This is Ryou’s legacy, he realizes. His death had created the opportunity for those three children to escape. And Keith, by driving that boy to the brink, had been responsible.

You’ve started a war, Keith Howard. Are you proud? The voice that asks sounds far too much like the ghost of Ryou Andrews for him to ignore. Where’s the line? We’re not sick, you know?

I know, Ryou. I know.

“There’s something else,” Lew finally speaks up. “And it makes a lot more sense now that I know this. Earlier, I was at the Auror Office. I was wondering why they’d send a strike team to knock on our doors - especially one with a captain on it.”

He hands Keith an Auror report about the stolen wands of four people in William’s Abbey.

“That’s how they did it, Bandit. They walked in through the front door and nobody noticed for hours,” Lew says.

“Gerry Maller…” Keith mutters the name of the security wizard who’d let the mages in. “Do you have an ID on anyone from his memories?”

“I got the memory. I didn’t recognize anyone, but I thought I’d run it past you two,” Lew nods at Keith and Mook, “before I started any research.” Lew takes out a glass vial from his pocket and unstoppers it. Silvery smoke trails out and takes the form of five individuals.

“Why’s it so hazy?” Coppermine asks.

“Maller’s hypnotized. Kept telling me how pleasant a day he was having.”

But Keith isn’t listening. He’s staring intently at the girl in Maller’s memory and remembering that he’s seen her before, only much younger and much more afraid.

She’s supposed to be dead. How come she’s still alive but Ryou isn’t?

“Bandit? Is that who I think it is?” Mook whispers.

“Yeah,” he answers. “That’s Serenity Wheeler.”
I sincerely apologize for my lack of updates as of the last few months. I've been concentrating on some personal projects that have eaten up most of my time, as well as recovering from a rather bad hand injury.

I'm going to be working at responding to all the reviews and PMs that have been piling up in my inbox over the next few days. I hope to get back to all of you that have contacted me and thank you for sticking around so long. You guys have the patience of saints.
“Listen Maxie, the Department’s made way too many allowances where you’re concerned, especially after Ryou Andrews. You were supposed to stay his execution until we came to check him out. But what did you do? Shove the Millennium Ring around his neck, blow them both the hell up, and take several ‘loyal’ Department operatives out with them.” Latner’s remark about Ryou makes Keith’s heart clench uncontrollably. “So how about you learn to shut your trap for once and I will make sure your little pet projects never come back to haunt your ass,” Latner flashes a grin at Keith. “Hey sweet heart. Be a good lacky and shut your boss the fuck up.”

The first thing Bakura does when they land in San Francisco is to send a message to Leo.

> i have a present for you

The next thing he does is open a Google Doc and start to type in the names and locations of every wizard born mage that the Department of Mysteries has access to. As people filter into Seth’s and Mokuba’s condo, Bakura glances up from where he’s sitting cross-legged on the floor and waves.

“You know, you could sit at the table like a civilized human being?” Seto drawls. Bakura rolls his eyes and tells him to order pizza.

“You come into my home and order me around?” Seto growls. “At least, back in the day, you’d-- “

“Seto, we’ll all pitch in,” Tea sighs as her icon appears on Bakura’s screen seconds after he shares the document with her. She leans over and pulls an orange bottle of pharmaceutical pills out of her bag. He catches the word ‘Tivicay’ before she dry-swallows a pill. “Hey,” she calls. “Everyone, cough up money if you want food!”

Between the time the pizza is ordered and when it shows up, every good sitting surface becomes
occupied. The Wheelers and Mai got lucky, squishing themselves onto the couch; Mai looks up occasionally to watch Haley and Rebecca, who are leaning over a book and giggling to themselves. The Simmington’s are at the table with Seto, Mokuba, Tea, and Duke. Duke’s also brought his parents with him and, when Bakura’s introduced to them, he learns that they’d moved here to support the mage cause after losing their daughter to wizards nearly seven years ago.

Even more people pile in, leading Seto to grab the chairs off the balcony and nearly losing his seat (because Bakura’s a piece of shit like that). He recognizes Matthew and Amanda, Rex and Weevil, but the others - no. But but the end of the night, he learns the names of Akiza Izinski, Mako Tsunami, Vivian Wong, Rafael Eatos, Alister Lewis, and some guy named Abe who refuses to give his last name out to anyone.

Then there’s Joey’s manager, Serenity’s tutor, Tea’s doctor and his entire extended family, all the staff at the Nomad, Amanda’s favourite TA and six of her friends from university, half of Matthew’s clients and all of his co-workers from his firm. Bakura has to stop counting when twenty-five people walk in and Mokuba tells him that they’re from the improv club at SFSU. He’s getting a little claustrophobic, but at the same time, he feels struck dumb with awe.

Bakura knows that some of them are mages. He also knows that most of them aren’t. And from what Joey tells him, this doesn’t even cover the number of people in San Francisco that they’re in contact with.

“There’s close to two thousand of us,” Joey tells him and those numbers ring in Bakura’s ears. Two thousand. The part of him that’s still Ryou Andrews, the boy who went to such desperate lengths to just meet another mage before the end, suddenly doesn’t feel so alone anymore.

Tea divides the group up just as pizza arrives. After everyone’s got a slice, she tells people to pick a name on Bakura’s document and pair up with either a member of the Jackals. They’re to get mages, talk about discreet ways to get in contact, extraction plans, and the like. To some of the more tech-savvy people, she tells them to get in touch with the leaders of some of the other mage havens around the world to pass on the list to them. Bakura’s hands shake when he realizes that there are more San Francisco’s out there - smaller ones, with much fewer people and defences. More homes. More chances for kids like him to feel safe.

Leo responding to his earlier message brings him back down to earth.

> you have ruined me for all other people
> chocolates and roses are never going to cut it ever again
> i hope you’re happy, pretty boy

Leo also appears to have several admirers amongst the members of the Jackals, as Bakura has a dozen new messages that are either telling him to back off or inviting him into what appears to be an orgy. He forces himself not to hide his face in his hands and types:

> immensely
> omg i can’t handle you right now
> seriously, though. tell me you didn’t break into the american wizard government just to impress me
> well
> not JUST
> O///O
> holy shit, pretty boy
> i just can’t with you sometimes
“Doctor Mutuo?” He exclaims, looking at the figure who’d just appeared in the doorway. Doctor Yuugi Mutuo smiles and waves, fingernails painted a shade of neon blue.

“I hope I’m not too late. I must have circled the building twice before I found parking,” Doctor Mutuo says as she steps inside. Mokuba gets up to take her coat.

“I - I didn’t know that you were-- “ he starts, but Doctor Mutuo cuts him off.

“Were a mage? That’s because I’m not,” she smirks, her lips coloured the same purple as her hair.

“Though I would recommend that when you and your friends,” Doctor Mutuo looks pointedly at the improv group, “try to organize your get-togethers, you don’t do it in the middle of my class. You know I don’t like it when you’re on your phones.”

“Sorry, Doc,” says one of the girls from the club. “Make it up to you with pizza?”

“Ms. Sanchez, you know far too many of my weaknesses. This may be a problem.”

“You love me and you know it! And it’s Mrs. now,” the girl grins and shows off her ring. “Went down to the courthouse last week!”

Bakura pretends not to be disappointed when Doctor Mutuo moves off to talk to Sanchez and doesn’t even say hello to him. He then hopes to hell that Mokuba’s crush isn’t contagious.

> hey! you still there?

Bakura glances back at the screen and sees that Leo has returned.

> yeah sorry
> what’s the news on scorpion king?
> he’s getting on a plane tomorrow to head up to canada
> you’ll have confirmation within the week about it being safe for spider to contact his sister
> no dead bodies
> don’t want people noticing
> relax pretty boy
> this isn’t the king’s first rodeo
> besides, his specialty is memory modification, amongst a few other tricks
> cool trick
> thanks. i’ll tell spider
> np.
> and yeah, it comes in handy
> wtf
> what’s up with the chats?

It’s at this point that Bakura realizes the shift in tone in the room. Leo seems to be commenting on how the message boards are dead. All attention on Bakura’s end is on Doctor Mutuo and Seto Kaiba, who are going head-to-head in the middle of the condo.

“Your plan isn’t sustainable,” Doctor Mutuo says. “Yes, we have names - hundreds, thousands of
names - but what about next year when they identify more? Will breaking into the wizarding Ministries have to become an annual occurrence? Because I’m willing to bet that they’ll be ready for us next time, or at the very least, they’ll move the files somewhere more secure.”

Seto stalls momentarily. It gives Bakura an opportunity to slip into the conversation, “Then what do you suggest we do?”

Doctor Mutuo glances over at him and there’s isn’t any surprise in her eyes. She knew that I’d be there, he realizes. She’d known that he was a mage - or at least a supporter. And of course, she would. She’d seen him with Mokuba a few days ago. Bakura touches the Millennium Ring through his shirt. What else had she guessed?

“We need more information,” she says, somewhat bluntly.

“On the Department of Mysteries?”

“Well, that wouldn’t hurt, but I was thinking more along the lines of wizarding society itself,” Doctor Mutuo answers. “If we can fully understand how it functions - government structure, how the economy is run, cultural hierarchies - we might gain an advantage that we’ve lacked all these years.”

“Oh, is it ‘we’ now?” Seto’s eyes narrow in suspicion. “How do you know about us anyway? The Jackals have no record of you being in contact with us. And according to the article The Chronicle did about you, you’ve been living in San Francisco for years. You didn’t lift a finger to help us when we took the city. You didn’t fight.”

“Violence isn’t the answer to all our problems,” Doctor Mutuo tells him.

“And diplomacy is? We tried that a thousand years ago. Do you know what happened?”

Seto opens his mouth to continue, but Doctor Mutuo stands up and cuts him off, “I know what happened in Camelot. I know what they did.”

“Then you know the time for talk is over!” Seto states, “They stripped us of our safety, they tore down our gods and our temples, and now they torture and kill our people because we are different! They kept it secret for years and we couldn’t do a damn thing, and now we have the power to stop them. We can win for this first time in centuries. And you want to reason with them,” Seth spits on the floor. “Wizards are beyond reasoning.”

Doctor Mutuo doesn’t even flinch, instead of wiping her hands on her bright yellow leggings. When she looks up, there is a sort of age to her gaze. Bakura thinks, She’s old. And then, No. She’s ancient. I know her. But from where?

“Don’t twist my words. And don’t think that I have not lost family to this war. I had a… a friend once. And he wasn’t safe here, so he went where he thought he could be. Then six years ago, I got a phone call from the police. They found Aiden’s body in a burned out warehouse in Lakewood, Ohio.”

There is a gasp off to the side. Bakura glances over to where Joey and Serenity Wheeler are sitting, hands clasped over their mouths. He hears Serenity’s muffled whisper, “I remember him.”

“I’m not saying to open up a discussion with them - not now. Diplomacy is still an option, but it’s going to be years before it becomes a viable one,” Doctor Mutuo approaches Seth slowly, carefully stepping in between all the people sitting on the floor. “You want to save those people that are on that list - I get that. Really. And I’m not saying not to do that. What I’m telling you to do is to have
a look at the long term. What about the next wave of wizard born mages? Can you ensure that wizards won’t turn on them once they figure out what you’re doing?”

“No,” Seth speaks through gritted teeth.

“No, you can’t,” she agrees. “Because you don’t know their culture, you cannot predict how they will react. I may not approve of fighting, but even I know walking into the ring wearing a blindfold isn’t something you want to do.”

Someone from Mokuba’s group of friends lets out a low whistle and whispers, “I fucking love it when the Doc gets into her lectures.”

“She’s right, you know,” Bakura says. “You don’t know the enemy. And that’s one hell of a problem.”

“And you know them, Bakura?” Seth raises an eyebrow. “You may be wizard born, but you were fifteen when you… left.”

“You can say ‘died,’ Seth. It’s the truth.”

“Doesn’t change the fact that you were a child.”

“Fifteen years amongst them is more than you had,” he points out. “I had been trained to be the head of a pureblood household, had a father working freelance for the Department of Mysteries, and was an insomniac with an eidetic memory and had access to one of the largest libraries in their world.” Bakura snorts, “I know enough about wizards to know that Unspeakables have the Confederation in their back pocket. That means that they get free range to do whatever they want and it pisses people the fuck off.

“Why do you think I decided to run my opp the way I did?” He smirks, “The American Ministry of Magic is one of the most security-conscious buildings wizards have and we made it look like the Department of Mysteries was hiding something incredibly dangerous in their basement. Even if the Department figures out it was us, there’s no way in hell that they’re going to tell the Ministry what happened because they think they’re better than everyone else. And then the Confederation will come in and sweep it all under the rug. Within a month, the papers won’t even be mentioning that we turned the main lobby into a desert and wiped everyone’s memory. But the people will still want answers. And the Unspeakables won’t be talking, as usual.”

“Driving a wedge between the Department and any supporters they might have. Well done,” Doctor Mutuo nods. “This Confederation… are they different from these Ministries I hear about?”

She knows there’s more than one, Bakura raises an eyebrow. Was that a mistake or an intentional slip?

“Each country has a Ministry. The Confederation is more global.”

“A global government… Interesting…” she ponders. “Are the two on good terms?”

“Depends.”

“On what?”

“Whether or not a dragon attack happened recently.”

Doctor Mutuo laughs and Bakura starts to smile. He feels like he’s dancing, or maybe even flirting.
Had he always been like this as the Thief King? Because Ryou was hopeless at flirting and dancing and he doesn’t even want to imagine the Spirit of the Millennium Ring attempting to court someone.

First Leo, then Doctor Mutuo. I swear, next thing you know, I’ll be trying to pick up Sera.

“What else do you know about them?” Doctor Mutuo asks.

“A bunch. If you give me a week, I can go back to William’s Abbey and grab you some books.”

“Won’t they recognize you?”

“I’m a thief by trade. Breaking into Hale and Tale won’t be too hard.”

“Thief?” Doctor Mutuo frowns and he waits for the usual response of ‘That’s illegal.’ Her eyes widen ever so slightly and her hand trails to the book bag she has slung over her shoulder.

Is she protecting its contents? He’s gotten that look from a few strangers when he walks by them on the streets, with his odd hair, scar, and black skin. And again, there was that ancient gaze. Or is it something else?

There are two explanations for her knowledge of both wizard governments and mage history. One: there was someone in her life that knew and had been telling her about it all. Which either meant that there was an unknown cycler somewhere in San Francisco or a rogue wizard with knowledge of things that hadn’t even been made public in their world. Or two: could Doctor Yuugi Mutuo cycle herself? Is that how I know her? Bakura wonders. From a past that I can’t remember.

“If I may interject,” Bakura nearly jumps out of his skin when he hears Matthew’s voice behind him. He’d completely forgotten the man was there, “How we divide and conquer? Mokuba tells me, amongst many other things, that you have doctorates in political science and economics, Doctor Mutuo. Between you and Bakura, you two should be able to hash out a proper way to deal with the wizarding community and form a long-term plan on how to keep them at bay. In the meantime, the rest of us will work on the list that Bakura has provided us.”

“I was just about to say that,” both the Thief King and Doctor Mutuo say in unison. Matthew looks at them and frowns.

“Odd,” he mutters under his breath. “Deja vu.”

“Seth,” Bakura turns to the former High Priest and does something that he’d never done millennia ago. “Sorry for calling you out in front of everyone, but it needed to be said.”

Don’t burn your bridges, Bakura. Seth may be a dick, but he’s one hell of an ally. For some reason, he thinks of kinslaying and how it was a terrible crime in the eyes of all the gods. Yet somehow, Aknadin was dead.

“Maybe,” Seth says. “Fine. Gather what intel you have on wizard culture. But if you are planning on going back to the Abbey, do it silently. I don’t know much about wizards, but I can guess enough about them to know that they won’t take kindly to a second attack by us.”

This was the second attack, Bakura wants to say. But then again, he hadn’t seen anything about Ryou Andrews in the headlines of The Quill or even Cosmos when he’s passed by the newsstand on Walcott Lane in William’s Abbey. Either the Confederation had taken care of that as well, or British news just didn’t make it to America. Maybe both. They won’t say anything. My attack was too public. If the Department of Mysteries tells the truth about what we did in Philadelphia, the
governments might revolt against them, say they aren’t doing their job right. It was a risky plan, but worth it. It changes the rules.

No one else will go through what Ryou Andrews did.

“Bakura, right?” Doctor Mutuo holds out a hand. “I’m glad to be working with you. Maybe, while we’re at it, you can explain your theory on the Exodus to me.”

“Maybe,” he says as he takes it.

The look in their eyes is the same. They’d both recognized a mystery and were intent on solving it.

Who are you, Doctor Mutuo? And how do you know so much?

They’d transferred Cyril Weller to the island after Keith and his team informed Pegasus of what had occurred. He’s being held in one of the interrogation rooms on the second floor. Keith almost feels sorry for the man, who was still under the influence of the Spellcaster who’d bound him. But then Keith remembers that Gerry Maler, the security guard who’d let the mages through the front door of the American Ministry, was somewhere in the lower levels, drugged out of his mind and getting his brain picked apart. If Maler’s lucky, he won’t survived the night. I doubt it, though.

It seems like the entirety of the island had dropped what they were doing and were helping Keith’s team to identify the other mages in Maler’s memory. The easiest of the group had been the blond boy who’d stood beside Serenity Wheeler - her brother, Joseph. Mook and Keith remembered the both of them from Lakewood, though neither knew how the two siblings had survived. Lew and Coppermine were on their way to Scotland to bring in James Andrews to provide some form of explanation. Keith knows that he should have gone to collect the man himself, but he can’t bare to go back to that house.

What confuses Keith and his team the most is that, according to all the documents surrounding Lakewood, Joseph Wheeler is a muggle. He and his mage sister abandoned their poverty-stricken, drug-addicted parents when Serenity had been eight years old to find a place where she could be safe. But even then, Serenity Wheeler had never been a high-priority target. Her powers were limited to clairvoyance - a watered down version of divination - not to mention that she’d been blind. But now she was a definite threat.

Keith remembers how Gerry Maler’s mind had been putty in her hands, how all those that had been at the Ministry repeated, “I forget” when they’d asked for statements. Now she could hypnotize entire populations. The mage victory in San Francisco was starting to make a lot more sense now.

As for Joseph Wheeler, he had to have been the Fiendfyre-spitting dragon that left the giant footprint outside. Keith tries to remember anything about the kid from Lakewood and can’t. But had he known that Wheeler could transform, they would have made special care to make sure he perished in the blaze. To think that he’d escaped and was not roaming free was almost as terrifying as the knowledge that he’d developed this ability undetected sometime in the last few years.

The next match that had come up shortly after Kitamori had the Wheeler siblings’ file transferred from the Archives (Pegasus had talked with some of the higher-ups so that they could throw regulation out the window). The second girl had been identified as Amanda Green by one of Mook’s contacts from the Gardens.

“Are you joking?” Mook hisses at the woman who’d come to deliver the file. “She’s a twenty-three-year-old Spellcaster who’d never even seen an Unspeakable until San Francisco. How is that
“possible?” When the woman mutters her answer, Keith isn’t able to hear it. But Mook could, “What do you mean, you forgot about her?”

“There were more pressing matters, ma’am,” the woman says, scared.

“More pressing matters than a Spellcaster?!”

Thrice damned red tape.

Scott steps around Mook and takes the file from the woman’s hands, glancing through the information.

“Sir,” the Plant addresses Keith. “Amanda Green appears to match the description of the rumoured female Spellcaster that helped in the taking of San Francisco.”

Keith groans and puts his face in his hands. Beside him, Kitamori asks Scott if she can see the file. To her right is a folder with a picture of a dead, old woman adhered to the front.

“Is that Mala?” He asks.

Kitamori’s eyes flicker to the picture, her mouth a thin, tight line, “Yes.”

“Unbelievable,” Mook mutters and sits down on the opposite side of the table. “What could possibly take priority over the removal of a Spellcaster?”

“Perhaps, after Matthew Jacques, the Department is backing off?” Scott supplies as he takes the spot to Mook’s right.

“And look like cowards?” She says, “Taking out a Spellcaster is possible with the right plan and well worth the risk. They’re dangerous. They’re-- “

“God avatar,” Kitamori says suddenly.

“What?”

“It was her; it had to have been! Amanda Green! The staff, she knows how to use it!”

“Article 68-12 was used by a Priestess said to be able to take the forms of the gods,” Scott states, sounding just as much like a textbook as he usually does.

“She must have become - wait, let me just--” and with that, Kitamori reaches into her robes and pulls out a battered notepad, flipping through it with a ferocity Keith hadn’t known she possessed. After a few minutes, she stares intently at one page. Kitamori looks up and smiles, “Sekhmet.”

“The Egyptian goddess of war?” Mook questions.

“What?”

“Spellcasters are infamous for their battle magic. Mala Pukar had mind-controlled armies, Matthew Jacques can make cities come to life, and this one can take the form of a god by dressing or acting like one,” Kitamori waves her wand at the memory of Garry Maler that’s hovering off to the side, focusing it on the image of Amanda Green.

“The red dress,” Kitamori explains. “Sekhmet is usually depicted wearing red. Her breath turns all it touches to desert. There were claw marks. Sekhmet’s a lion! And then, there’s this.”

Waving her wand again, Kitamori gets the memory to loop on Amanda touching her belly and wincing.
“Stomach cramp?” Keith guesses.

“No. She’s menstruating.”

This is, of course, when Coppermine and Lew walk back into the room. The kid flushes red from head to toe, “W-what?”

“No, no, no!” Kitamori stammers and retells her explanation. Lew snorts and bends down to whisper in Keith’s ear.

“James Andrews is here. He’s in the old execution room.”

Of course he is.

Keith stands up and excuses himself just as Kitamori says, “Sekhmet is the Ancient Egyptian goddess of menstruation. They must have timed the raid to coincide with whatever day she experienced her worst symptoms.” He calls for Lew to come with him because there’s no fucking way that he’s doing this alone.

On the way there, they pass by the interrogation room just in time to see Pegasus step out.

“Sir,” Cyril Weller calls from where he sits inside. “Mr. Pegasus, you promised! I told you what I could. You said that when I finished, you’d take the binding off!”

Pegasus stays silent for a moment, staring at Keith with an unreadable expression. Finally, he sighs and says, “I promised that, when we were done, I’d free you from its effects.”

“Sir?” Keith hears Weller ask before Pegasus pulls his wand from its holster to point it at the man.

“Avada Kedavra!”

The spell connects. There is a sharp intake of breath and then a heavy thud.

“Merde,” Lew swears.

“Croquet!” Pegasus calls and the ugly house elf appears again, “Take him downstairs. Quickly, now. Before his memories decay with the rest of him.”

“Yes, master,” the elf rasps and walks inside. The door closes and Keith hears a disapperation crack on the other side.

“I apologize for that,” Pegasus sounds tired. “Was there something you gentlemen needed me for?”

“No, sir,” both Keith and Lew say at once.

“James Andrews is here. We were just…” Lew pauses and looks at Keith out of the corner of his eyes.

Come on; there’s no reason to be nervous. It’s not like this is the first time you’ve seen someone killed - Ryou finally seems to relax as his body slumps forwards in the chair - shut up, shut up, shut the fuck up!

“His report on Lakewood has come into question,” Keith tries very hard to keep his voice flat.

“And that is relevant to your current investigation, how?”
“There were survivors, sir. They were part of the Ministry attack.”

“Oh. Well, then,” Pegasus’s eyes narrow. “Find out what you can. Report back to me later.”

“Yes, sir,” Keith answers and moves past him, Lew following a step behind. They make it around the corner before the older man bursts out into rapid-fire French swears.

“That man terrifies me,” Lew tells Keith in a hushed whisper. “How you walk by him without blinking, I will never know.”

Maybe it’s because he just doesn’t give a shit about what Pegasus could do to him if he fails - hell, he might even welcome it, at this point. Keith shrugs, “Any idea who the other two in the raiding party are?”

Lew shakes his head, “No. There have been no matches on either of them, though the black haired boy is most certainly a muggle, as Maler tried to throw him out of the Ministry for being a Squib. As for the other…” Lew frowns, “You think getting a match would be easy, what with his hair and that scar on his face. But no. Nothing. Still, we’ll tell our people to keep digging. There’s got to be someone out there who knows who he is.”

When they reach the door to the execution room, Keith takes a breath and goes inside.

James Andrews doesn’t really look like either of his children with his broad shoulders and brown hair flecked with grey. Though Ryou clearly got his height from his father, that was the only trait they seemed to share. For a brief moment, Keith wonders where Ryou had gotten his blue eyes from. He considers that the wife may have had an affair, but then thinks that Natsuki Andrews probably hadn’t been allowed out of her husband’s sight in years.

“Is this...where he died?” Andrews asks.

Call him by his name, you son of a bitch. Keith wants to say that out loud, but he can’t get the words passed his lips.

“Yes,” he says instead.

“Such a waste,” the man mutters and Keith’s hands clench furiously in his robes. Andrews touches the gouges in the chair’s arms - They were just children. I had to - and Keith almost curses him for it. “What am I here for?”

“We have some questions regarding your last field assignment,” Lew tells him.

“Field assignment? May I remind you that I am not an employee. I’m a consultant - and a barely used one, these days,” Andrews frowns. “Why could I have not answered these questions back in my home?”

“Lakewood, Ohio. 2006. You were contracted by the Department of Mysteries to infiltrate the mage haven that was forming under the leadership of a man named Kane. You used your extensive knowledge on mages, provided to you by the Department, to convince Kane that you were a muggle man looking for his mage son, who’d disappeared three years prior. You informed us of their powers and weaknesses, drew them into a trap, and then identified the bodies when we were done.” Keith says, calling up a copy of Garry Maler’s memory from one of his pensive flasks. “Seems you forgot to mention a few things.”

Andrews’ eyes widen in recognition as the images of Joseph and Serenity Wheeler appear before him.
“So, did you know before or after we set the warehouse on fire that they were missing?” Keith hisses.

Something just cracks in James Andrews’ facade and it’s damn satisfying to watch, “They said to - they said --”

“Mr. Andrews,” comes a voice from behind Keith. He turns and sees two wizards in the doorway, “Don’t say another word.”

“Excuse me, but this is a private interview,” Lew snaps.


The wizard to the left rolls his eyes and slashes his wand through the air. Andrews’ voice is cut off, “Not another word, I said.”

“Just who the hell do you think you are?” Keith shouts. He is ignored.

“James Andrews, if you will come with us, my colleague and I will escort you back to your home. We apologize on the behalf of the Department of Mysteries for any inconvenience this may have caused you,” the second wizard states.

“He is not going anywhere until we get our answers!” Keith yells.

“You and your team are no longer in control of this investigation. The matter has been resolved. Any complaints should be taken up with your supervisor,” says wizard number one just as Kitamori and Coppermine rush into the room.

“Sir, they’re taking everything!”

And they are. When Keith gets back to the room, two witches are cleaning the place out. All the evidence that they’d collected at the Ministry was being sealed inside of a set of boxes and levitated out of the room. Mook looks furious but says nothing. Scott stood beside her. Keith thinks he sees the Plant glance at her out of the corner of his eye, but when he looks back, Scott’s face is blank.

Pegasus is livid.

“Latner, I don’t know how you pulled this off, but I will drown your career for this!” He hisses at one of the witches. Latner turns to him, all dark hair and dark eyes, and smiles.

She’s young, Keith notices. Maybe sixteen. That was way too young to be an Unspeakable. It’s unsettling.

“Listen, Maxie. The Department’s made way too many allowances where you’re concerned, especially after Ryou Andrews. You were supposed to stay his execution until we came to check him out. But what did you do? Shove the Millennium Ring around his neck, blow them both the hell up, and take several ‘loyal’ Department operatives out with them.” Latner’s remark about Ryou makes Keith’s heart clench uncontrollably. “So how about you learn to shut your trap for once and I will make sure your little pet projects never come back to haunt your ass,” Latner flashes a grin at Keith. “Hey, sweet heart. Be a good lackey and shut your boss the fuck up.”

“Don’t talk to him,” Pegasus threatens.

“Oooh, touchy! What are you trying to be, his dad?”
“Tris,” warns the second witch.

“Yeah, yeah. I know,” Latner rolls her eyes. “Look, Maxie, you’re not in charge anymore. I am. And you’re going to go back and plan your little attack like a good boy and let the grown ups do the real work, okay?”

“You don’t give me orders, you little bitch,” Pegasus spits.

“Actually, I do. See, unlike you, the Department Head has deemed me so important that I don’t have to wade through bureaucratic shit to get things done. And nice going, by the way, calling your superior a bitch,” Latner laughs. “It must kill you, knowing that. Merlin, you couldn’t even see it, could you? You got so blinded by your career that you couldn’t even see what was right under your nose.”

“Get. Out.” Pegasus points stiffly towards the door.

“What’s the matter? Still thinking about--”

“Tris,” the other witch shouts. “Not here.”

“Fine. Come on, Nat,” Latner groans as the moves towards the door. But then she stops just as she passes Kitamori and says, “Hey, if you ever want to move up in the world, you come find me, okay? Just tell ‘em that Trista Latner sent you.”

“Get out!” Pegasus finally snaps. Latner and the other witch leave, taking all the boxed up evidence with them.

Pegasus rounds on Kitamori, “You never contact them, you hear me! Never!”

The girl stands there, pale with fear. And then, her face goes completely blank. It’s such a fast transition that Keith is genuinely disturbed.

“Yes, sir,” Kitamori says.

The man doesn’t speak for a moment. Then he turns to Keith, “My office. Now.”

He leaves his team where they stand and follows Pegasus through the halls in complete silence. This is it. Keith’s first big project on his own and he’s fucked it up. It must have been when he called in James Andrews - that tipped off Latner and whoever she worked for. Keith made a mistake and now he’s going to pay for it.

“Sit,” Pegasus tells him when they arrive, gesturing to the chair across from him at the desk. As Keith sinks into it, he thinks of another chair and the other person who sat in it.

“I’m not sick. So why didn’t you save me?

I’m sorry. I’m so, so sorry.

A life for a life then. It’s fitting.

“You prefer whiskey, correct?” Pegasus asks, jarring Keith from his thoughts.

“What? Yeah. Yeah, I do,” and then Pegasus pours him a glass. Frankly, he’d never taken the man for the type to use poison.

But then Pegasus pours himself some as well. He even drinks it - actually, he downs the entire
thing like it’s a shot and then pours himself another.

“Well,” the man raises an eyebrow. “It would be criminal to make me drink alone.”

So Keith drinks. And he doesn’t die. What now then?

“You are worried,” Pegasus leans back into his chair. “You have no reason to be.”

“I failed. I know what happens to people in my position that fail,” Keith realizes that he should be scared, but he isn’t. He feels hands on his shoulders with bone-thin fingers that are surprisingly comforting.

“No one kills anyone for failing their first assignment,” Pegasus is lying and Keith knows it. Hell, Pegasus knows that he knows. Then he continues, “If that were the case, then I would be long dead by now.”

“You?” Keith frowns. Then, “Latner, you… knew her?”

“I worked with her on a few projects over the years,” he spits. “If you call what she did working. When she wasn’t making up crack pot theories, she’s sit at her desk-- what’s the modern phrase? Stoned?” Pegasus clicks his tongue, “Idiot slut.”

“But when? She looks so young,” even Scott, the youngest of their group, looked older than Latner.

Pegasus’ eyes glaze over as he stares off into the distance. He stays silent for almost five minutes before his entire face seems to wither.

“I’m going to tell you something that I probably shouldn’t. It might be the whiskey. It might be because I hate Latner with every fibre of my being. It might just be because I like you, Keith Howard. Either way, I’m going to tell you about my first failure, which is so classified that if it ever got out, they would kill us both in a heart beat. Can I trust you with that?” Pegasus sounds like he’s eighty. But the hands disappear from Keith’s shoulders and he almost thinks he can smell the ash from the cigarettes that his father used to smoke. It makes him feel like he’s home.

“Trista Latner,” and Pegasus spits the woman’s name like it’s a curse, “is about as old as I am.”

Keith freezes, his glass halfway to his mouth. What?

“And now your next question is, how old do you think I am?” Pegasus asks almost innocently, as his fingers intertwined together on his desk.

“That’s just become a very dangerous question,” Keith mumbles and the man smirks. “Ten, maybe fifteen years older than me. Why?”

“I’ll turn one hundred and seventy-eight in three weeks.”

Keith chokes on his drink, “What the fuck?”

“You heard me right,” Pegasus chuckles and ignores his profanity. “One hundred and seventy-eight. And I dare say that I don’t look a day over forty-five.”

“But...but how?” And then it hits him, “The Elixir of Life? But I thought...Flamel couldn’t be found, let alone be willing to part with the recipe?”

“He hasn’t. Tricky man to find, Flamel. The Department has set up several search groups to try and
find the man. I was part of one in the fifties with Latner,” Pegasus sighs. “The man’s paranoid and rightfully so. He’s faked his death at least fifty times that I know of and has thousands of false copies of the Philosopher’s Stone hidden around the globe. I believe he’s got at least five of them in various vaults at Gringotts. I know that some people outside the Department have claimed to meet him or his wife over the years, but anything can be faked with a little magic.”

“So you don’t have the Elixir?” Keith frowns.

“No, but we have the closest thing to it. An incredibly enhanced anti-aging potion,” Pegasus reaches into his desk drawer and pulls out a small flask. “One of these once a month and there you have it. Your aging process slowed by one fourth, at the very least.

“You’re wondering why I’m telling you this,” Pegasus leans forwards and smiles. It’s the damn creepy smile that makes Keith think that the man is about to snap his neck. “It’s so that you’ll understand when I say that I was around during the Grindelwald years. In fact, that was my first major project. It was my first failure.”

“We created Grindelwald?!”

“Grindelwald? Yes, but, no, not the way you’re thinking. Not him. Albus Dumbledore, he was my mistake. And Merlin, what we could have done with Albus Dumbledore.”

Pegasus leans back in his chair and stares at the whiskey glass, swirling it slowly in his hands, “Dumbledore is a genius. Not just smart, no, he is truly, genuinely intelligent. He has the brains, the family, the lineage. He doesn’t know it, but he’s one of the few remaining descendants of Godric Gryffindor himself. The man had a few daughters with one of his mistresses - I can’t remember which one. Godric had about seven major ones that he took over the years.

“But what Dumbledore really had was the backstory. The mage sister, Ariana - now that was something we couldn’t pass up. The girl did kill her mother. There was no accident. Kendra was poisoning her, you see. Put lead in her dinner. But after the explosion, my, what an opportunity that we had. Don’t you see?”

“Not really…” Keith says.

“Revenge, Mr. Howard. Revenge. Dumbledore would have fought bravely to avenge his mother and in the process, inspired Britain into open warfare against mages,” Pegasus exclaims. “Oh, we could have forced the Ministries of the world to go to war long ago, but to have the people choose it willingly - nothing could have compared.”

“Albus Dumbledore was supposed to be a Dark Lord?” Keith gapes.

“Dark Lord. Revolutionary Leader. What’s the difference?” Pegasus waves his hand dismissively and brings the glass of whiskey to his lips. “Good and evil are subjective. Whoever wins is the one that gets to write the history books, Mr. Howard.

“You’ve heard of Lord Voldemort, I suppose?” Pegasus doesn’t wait for an answer, “Tom Marvolo Riddle. He was Plan B - what we could salvage out of the mess that was Dumbledore. My superior decided to have him start killing muggleborns, but that was the stupidest decision I’ve ever seen.

“Don’t get me wrong, Mr. Howard. I’ve got nothing against muggleborns. Many of my friends have muggle parentage. But they are the backbone of British society, more so than in America. Surely you saw it in your time there. They take the jobs that no wizard worth his wand would want. Without them, society would just fall in on itself. Riddle, had is moronic ‘dreams’ ever come to
fruition, would have destroyed our world, not improved it. Thank Merlin he was killed off by a baby - well, I say ‘killed’...”

“So, he’s not dead, then?”

Pegasus frowns, “You ask a lot of questions, don’t you, Mr. Howard?” When Keith tries to back up and apologize, the man shakes his head. “No. No, it’s quite alright. It’s a refreshing change from the mindless drivel I have to deal with normally.”

But still, Pegasus gives him a look that makes Keith feel like he’s being examined. The moment passes and the story continues.

“Riddle’s not dead. Not really. He’s missing his body and possessing snakes in Albania right now, if memory serves correctly. But that’s not important right now.

“What I’m trying to say is that Dumbledore could have given us everything. A loyal following that loved him, not feared him. A brilliant mind. An unstoppable duelist. We could have had true wizarding dominance. Open control over the world. Muggles would become the working class while we ruled over them like kings. We would have been able to pick off mages like flies. Could you imagine it, Mr. Howard? We could have had it all.”

“What went wrong, then?”

“Grindelwald did, I guess. He was a Plant, you see. And I chose him. Looking back, I know that there is no way I could have known, but I still wonder if things would have gone better if I’d just listen to Bathilda and chosen Gara.”

“Gara? Was he another Plant?”

“She was, yes. Gara and Gellert Grindelwald. The only pair of twins in the batch. Pretty girl. Dangerous, too. She was much more frightening than her brother, that’s for sure. Not only that, but she was more in control of her urges. I’m sure you heard about the experiments Grindelwald got up to at Durmstrang. Gara would never have gotten caught.

“I still worried, though. Gara was a girl and even with all of Bathilda’s reassurances, society is still much more harsh on the fairer sex than they are on men. Look at the American Minister of Magic. The moment Reyna Palomo took power, she was slammed with all sorts of questions that never would have been asked had she been a man. And this is the twenty-first century. Imagine what it was like a hundred years ago.”

Pegasus huffs, “So I chose the boy and sent him off to Durmstrang to cultivate a background. And when the two met up in Godric’s Hollow, for the first time, I thought maybe I’d been worrying for nothing.

“Grindelwald was supposed to push Dumbledore to his peak potential and then die in a battle against mages and muggles. His death would have driven Dumbledore’s need for revenge to heights previously unseen. He could have been everything we ever wanted. But then it happened. The one thing we could never predict.”

“Dumbledore found out?”

“No. He fell in love.”

Keith’s eyes pop, “Dumbledore had a *wife*?”
“A wife?! Hah!” Pegasus laughs and it echoes throughout the office. “Oh, how I wish. No, no. Albus Dumbledore, as it turns out, is as bent as they come.”

“...What?”

“Bent. Queer. Gay, Mr. Howard,” Pegasus spits that word like it’s made of poison. “We couldn’t have that in a leader. Think of the utter scandal that would have occurred had it been made public. Two months in and we had to pull the plug because our boys couldn’t keep it in their pants.”

“Albus Dumbledore...was in love...with Grindelwald...” Keith says it a few more times in the hope that it would make more sense with each passing syllable. It doesn’t.

“We scraped the project. Let Grindelwald loose to do whatever he wanted. I was shunted off to look for Nicholas Flamel with Latner after I disagreed with Blaine Garrish one too many times and some fools came together to create Lord Voldemort, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. The only thing those idiots did right was removing his ability to love. But in comparison, Riddle was just a silver medal with half the looks and twice the daddy issues.”

Keith contemplates everything, just for a moment, before asking, “What happened to Gara?”

Pegasus’s head snaps to his, “Why do you ask?”

“Curiosity.”

The man frowns, “We...gave her to Bode, I think. He likes the mad ones. And she did go mad after she was rejected. She was a bit obsessed with Dumbledore, completely convinced that she was going to marry him and have a herd of blond and red-headed children. When she found out that I’d picked her brother, well…” Pegasus rolls up his sleeve to show a healed burn mark on his forearm, “she was upset.”

“And now?”

“Still in the Labs, probably. Bode’s probably just waiting for her to die now.” Pegasus pauses for a second, “I think I’ve kept you from your team for long enough. Go back to them. I doubt Latner left you anything to work with, but that doesn’t matter now. You can still salvage what you can. This is off the books, obviously. Find out what the mages know about us and then crush their supposed haven.”

“Of course, sir,” Keith says and makes his way to the door. He’s almost outside when Pegasus stops him.

“Gara Grindelwald had a son in captivity. Did you know that?”


Pegasus smiles softly, looking at Keith strangely, “He died. Two days after he was born.” He smirks, “She named him after his father.”
Hello

Chapter Summary

“We both know why I’m here. Let’s not pretend, alright. Wizards are launching an attack on San Francisco,” the mage scoffs slightly. “Pete Coppermine - 3613 Cobweb Road, Detroit - isn’t exactly the brightest person in the world, is he? I know that my friends wouldn’t go shouting about our secret plans in the middle of the street. Who knows who’s listening?”

“Are you threatening my men?” Keith hisses as his head pounds.

“No. I’m informing you that the guy made a stupid mistake. I’m not here to fight,” the mage says. Then he leans forwards, “Why did you try to help Ryou Andrews?”

Chapter Notes


Disclaimer (2): The Crucible and all its characters are owned by Arthur Miller. Lord of the Flies is written by William Golding. The Greater Moncton International Airport is owned by Transport Canada. The McDonalds Corporation is founded by Richard McDonald, Maurice McDonald, and Ray Kroc.

Warning: violence, alcoholism, depression, and self-hatred.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bakura sits on the roof of Hathorne’s Broom Shop, cloaked by his powers of invisibility. He stares at the corner of Warren and Parris, where the Abbey’s bookshop resides. He glances down at the bag at his side; it’s filled with all sorts of texts. Bakura almost wants to stay up there and read them all, but he only has a few more hours before the bus that will take him back home leaves. He looks at his phone again. It’s still dead - has been since he arrived.

This is stupid, he thinks. He knows that Doctor Mutuo isn’t going to text him. Bakura had told her about the wards right before he’d entered the town. He hasn’t even been able to receive a response. When he gets back, maybe he’ll send Leo a message and ask him about the handheld version of whatever it was that took out the wards in Philadelphia.

Leo. Shit.

Bakura runs his hand through his hair, trying to calm down. What was he going to do about Leo? He still wants to someday meet the guy, maybe go get coffee and actually see what he looks like. But then there’s the chance that both of these crushes were completely one-sided and he’s
worrying about this for nothing.

He sighs. This liking two people at the same time thing had been so much easier when he’d known Igraine liked him back and Charlie Weasley didn’t even know he existed.

Bakura stares back at the street. In the distance, he can see Putnam’s Clothing Store, where he and the others had bought their wizarding outfits. He remembers the girl who works there: Kisha Borrego. Duke had talked about her afterwards, hoping that their visit wouldn’t get her in too much trouble.

“I don’t know, man. She just seems...nice,” the former smuggler said. “Never met a witch that was nice before.”

“You’ve never met a witch that wasn’t trying to kill you before,” Joey told him.


“There was one at Hogwarts,” Bakura supplied. “They ran it out of Ravenclaw tower. Tolkien was always a favourite.”

And he thinks of Ryou Andrews, cooped up in the North Tower during his final months, reading and re-reading Lord of the Flies while professor Trelawney tried to get him to eat.

“The night is coming for you, my dear boy,” she used to tell him. “You must be strong for when it does. Have some chicken.”

“She knew,” Bakura smirks, slipping into an old tongue that he learned in a mud brick home. “‘The night is coming’. She wasn’t predicting my death. She was talking about this. Damn seers. Do they have to speak in riddles all the time?”

And then, all of a sudden, the bottom drops out of his stomach. He touches the Millennium Ring, hidden under his jacket, and his vision inverts as it activates. The souls of those walking through William’s Abbey burn dark and their names hover above their heads.

Bakura watches from a distance as Kisha Borrego throws Keith Howard out onto the street.

His fingers are numb. His heart is pounding in his chest. Bakura stares at Keith and tries not to hyperventilate. What is he doing here?

*He’s tracking you, obviously, he thinks. What you did made sure that the Unspeakables would know that it was mages that were behind the raid. And if they managed to connect the stolen wands to us, William’s Abbey isn’t exactly a big leap.*

But why Keith?

Keith had mentioned once his intention to use Ryou’s conversion to get on the fast track to retirement. He might have intended it as a joke at the time, but Ryou had known that it was the truth. He held Keith no ill will, though - it had been one of the reasons why he’d refused to run away with the man when Keith had tried to rescue Ryou from that cell. Keith Howard had wanted to spend the rest of his life on a beach with a fruity drink in one hand and a pretty girl in the other. Everyone was supposed to get what they wanted.

So why was Keith still working for the Department of Mysteries?
That’s when Bakura takes a closer look at Keith’s name. And to his horror, he sees the same coding of numbers below it was Cyril Weller had had.

Keith Howard II
Seedling 123-42M
Bandit

The Millennium Ring shows all the names that a person collected in their life, from first to last. The more faded the name, the less that it was being used. Keith’s name and the word ‘Bandit’ shined brighter than he Seedling code, which was some form of relief. But those numbers - 123-42M - were still just enough to be visible. And that was terrifying.

Bakura watches as Keith walks down the street and is joined by a woman. The incredibly faded names of ‘Anja Simola’ and ‘Seedling 123-37F’ stand above the bright, bold letters of ‘Tilla Mook’. A young man not much older than Bakura joined them as they pass in front of Hathorne’s. He either goes by ‘Misha’ or ‘Pete’ or ‘Seedling 283-06M’. Bakura can’t tell. All three of his names burn with the same intensity. What the hell?

Okay. Okay. What is he going to do? The safest option would be to do nothing and let Keith go on his merry way. But then Bakura thinks about the Keith Howard he used to know and the one that stands before him now. Keith had always taken pride in his appearance, cleanly shaven with neat hair and clothes. Now he had scruffy bread with greasy hair, stains on his shirt and a coat that looked far too big for him. Not to mention the general air of doom.

Bakura remembers Keith holding his hand in the Hospital Wing, snapping at Madame Pomphrey for refusing to treat the likes of him. He remembers Keith covering him with a blanket and letting him crash on his couch when sleeping in the Slytherin dorm became too dangerous. He remembers Keith helping him cope with breaking up with Igraine. He remembers Keith staying with him to the bitter end and how he’d taken comfort in the fact that he wasn’t going to die alone.

He was being paid to do all that. The people who hurt Ryou, hurt you, were the same people he worked for. Bakura remembers the potions that make him hallucinate, made him feel like his veins were on fire. He remembers the curses, the broken bones, the bruised that he covered up. But Keith Howard…

“Damn it,” Bakura hisses, rising to his feet. “Damn it, damn it, fuck, shit, fuck-- “

Keith is his. Just like Joey is his, like Duke and Mai and Amanda are his, like Haley and Serenity are his. Most people might call people like that friends, family - hell, even acquaintances or strangers on the street. But Bakura - who is possessive and desperate to keep what little he has from slipping through his fingers - they are his.

He jumps down from the roof, still invisible, and rolls when he hits the ground. Bakura runs towards where Keith and his two companions stand.

“Damn it,” he hisses, still speaking that half-forgotten language from a place he once called home. “What the fuck are you doing, idiot?”

Three men block their path. Bakura slides past Keith unseen and stand between them. The Millennium Ring twitches beneath his shirt.

Only two of the newcomers have the same Seedling codes, but all of them have dozens of names. Kadin Spurrell, Blaine Gerrish, and Jermaine Sport are the ones that glow most intensely, but Bakura catches others: Dawid Fronczek, Kamil Potocki, Jay Biddick, Henry Ratcliffe, Heath
Plumlee, Bryan Burritt... the list goes on.

None of them have a code like Keith and his companions do. Bakura doesn't know what that means.

“Você,” he hears the woman, Tilla Mook, hiss. “What are you doing here?”

“I could ask you the same question,” Gerrish responds calmly, as the shops begin to close up for the evening. His black hair is slicked against his scalp. “I told you already. Your team is no longer in charge of this investigation. You three are out of your jurisdiction.”

“Pegasus--” Keith starts but is cut off.

“Maximillion Pegasus is no longer in charge of this investigation. I just told you that,” Gerrish smirks. “If you have any complains--”

“Yeah, take ‘em up with our supervisor. I got that the first time,” Keith slurs.

Bakura’s jaw drops. Is he drunk?

“Then you know that you should not be here,” the one called Spurrell speaks. “Turn over any evidence you collected today.”

“Or what?” The kid by Keith growls and his fingers twitch towards his wand.

“Coppermine,” Mook whispers and shakes her head.

“No. They walk into our investigation, try to boss us around - no fucking way. They’re not getting anything else.”

“And how are you planning on stopping us?” The third man, Sport, smiles wickedly.

“Fucking try me, pretty boy,” and in one smooth movement, both Coppermine and Sport draw their wands.

Bakura gets out of the way just in time. The two men fight brutally, casting spells in blinding colours that move faster than anything he’d ever seen before. The other four palm their wands as well. Mook shouts out a name (“Depre!”) and forms a shield to protect herself and Keith from an onslaught of magic.

The most frightening thing about it all is that they’re moving - and not just the small steps that wizards normally take when dueling. The six of them roll to dodge spells, swap opponents on the fly, and dance in a way that he’s never seen wizards do before.

This was how you fought when you were trained to kill mages. You didn’t stand your ground.

You moved with your opponent. Bakura watches them in fascination and realizes that this would be the enemy he would be facing, if he ever had to fight an Unspeakable.

Keith is a bit sluggish, though. He’s hampered and off his game and Spurrell know it, judging by how he’s throwing spell after spell at the man. Keith is on the retreat, backing himself against a wall. *He’ll be a sitting duck there, Bakura thinks. Make your choice. Do it now and don’t look back.*

And Bakura does, timing it with the cold precision of a perfectionist. Just as Keith begins to slash his wand, Bakura sends a powerful stream of air shooting towards Spurrell’s knee. There’s an
awful cracking sound as the bone break and the man falls to the ground. Keith looks confused, murmuring, “What the fuck?” before kicking Spurrell’s wand away from him.

A blast of energy brings Bakura’s attention back to the main fight. The two sides have been separated, thrown onto opposite sides of the street. Another man stands in between them. He’s dark skinned like Bakura, but heads taller and sturdily built. His dark eyes are blank, but not empty.

Two codes, Bakura’s eyes narrow. That...probably isn’t good.

“What the hell are you doing?!” Coppermine snaps.

“They are in command. We will hand over all evidence collected,” the newcomer states, watching as Mook rises to her feet.

“They aren’t getting jack shit from me!”

“Pete, just do what he says,” Mook sighs. “We’re in enough trouble already.”

“But--”

“Do it!”

Coppermine spits blood on the ground, but waves his wand. A receipt flies from inside his jacket over towards Gerrish. The man catches it, turning it over in his hands.

“An order of jerk pork and a chicken club at Tituba’s,” he reads. “Taken by a waiter that doesn’t exist.”

“Joseph Wheeler. Older brother of Serenity Wheeler,” says the man with two codes. Bakura clenches his fists. They knew about Jono and Sera.

He could stop them right now. He could drop a tornado on them all, suck the air from their lungs, crush them beneath a building he’d blow on top of them. He could tear this town to shreds, even without tapping into the powers of the Demon Snake or the true, terrifying potential of the Millennium Ring.

Or he could do nothing and they’d continue to spill their guts about how much they knew. Bakura hates making the tough choices.

“Was that so hard?” Gerrish smirks. Then he turns to Spurrell, who’s still clutching his broken leg, “Let’s go. We’ve got what we came here for.”

There are three cracks as Gerrish, Spurrell, and Sport disappearate. Immediately, Coppermine turns on the Unspeakable with two codes.

“What the hell is wrong with you?”

“You attacked a superior officer and refused to follow orders,” he responds. “Punishments for such actions--”
“I don’t give a damn about punishments! Pegasus gave us an order!”

“Pegasus also said that if we got caught, we were supposed to lie low, idiot,” Keith slurs.

“So say the guy who broke one of their legs!” Coppermine spits, “Pegasus gave us an order! San Francisco can wait until we find the mages who broke into the Ministry!”

“Don’t talk about that here!” Keith grabs him by the collar, “And didn’t they teach you anything in auror training! The spell I was casting would have knocked the wind from him, not break his leg.”

“So fucking what?”

“There’s someone here,” Mook realizes, eyes sweeping the street. “Watching us. Cloaked.”

Immediately, Two Codes flicks his wand and a dust storm flies around the street. Bakura turns intangible just as it reaches him.

“Nothing detected,” Two Codes says.

“Regardless, we should get out of here. Wipe the town,” Mook orders. Two Codes nods and waves his wand in a circle above his head. A glowing ring appears around them and Bakura dives inside it.

“Obliviate Maxima!” Two Codes curls his wand slightly and the circle expands, rushing inside the buildings. He can’t see it, but Bakura guesses that the occupants of William’s Abbey now had no recollection of the fight. The four disapparate without another word.

Shit, Bakura thinks. Shit, we’re fucked.

There is only one reason why they’d talk about San Francisco: the Department of Mysteries is planning an attack. He needs to get home, now.

He can’t take transit back - it’s far too slow. So he bolts out of the Abbey, propelling himself forwards with a blast of air. Bakura reaches the town’s limits in under a minute and his phone lights up, alerting him to the fact that he has three new texts and a dozen emails (most of which are spam). He flicks through his contacts until he sees Matthew Jacques.

Emergency evac ASAP <

Bakura waits three nerve-racking minutes before he gets a response.

> Turn on your location services

HOW <

> Settings. Privacy. Location Services.

Done <

> Stand by

There’s a crackle of energy and a faint buzzing sound. His screen flickers for a second before going completely white. Bakura smells ozone and burning rubber and turns to find Matthew standing behind him.

“I still have no idea how you’re doing this without active ley lines,” Bakura mutters.
“Had to learn to make do the last thousand years without the gods actively powering them. I’ve been using rivers, air currents, streets, and recently, the transmissions between cell towers - though they are pretty chaotic,” the older man shrugs. “Let’s get going.”

Bakura grabs his hand and watches as Matthew calls up a picture of his office building on his phone, encircled by a green ring.

“~Guard and guide our trip and all who venture on this road. May the Crone see us safely to our destination, see us safely home. Blessed be.~”

The world around him fades to black and he catches snippets of a thousand conversations as they fly through the air waves. Finally, they touch down in front of Owl and Sun Ltd.

“Now, what’s the emergency?” Matthew asks as he flattens the creases in his suit jacket.

“Wizards are planning an attack on San Francisco,” he answers and watches the colour drain from Matthew’s face.

“Did… would the raid have brought it on?”

“Don’t think so. By the sound of it, it’s been in the books for a while. I’ll start contacting our people and get the message out. You--”

“Fortify the city’s defenses. Of course, right away,” and then Matthew’s on his phone again, calling up Duke to get his team to start painting.

Bakura spends the rest of his evening visiting the homes of their people in the city, reassuring families and talking about emergency procedures. He also attends meetings with Seth, Jono, Maya, and the others to talk about plans for defence.

At one point, Jono makes a joke about how much easier it would be if they had a spy in the wizard ranks. Afterwards, Bakura wonders if it’s because he’s been up for nearly twenty hours that he thinking, I could help with that.

Which is why he finds himself on top of Nomad at one in the morning, contemplating using the Millennium Ring to find where Keith Howard lived.

Divine weapons are tricky to wield, to say the absolute least (though considering that they were forged with the intention of fighting the gods, it’s understandable). Most of the time, the simplest of their powers could be used without consequence, which is why he could see names and souls and even track within a city’s limits. But the weapons were powerful enough that he could use their abilities on a global scale. And with that power came the risks.

The more you used a divine weapon, the more it consumed you. He can’t recall much, but he knows the legends regarding who he and the other Kings had to fight during the war. He remembers Aknadin, the Dark Priest, with his terrifying gaze, mad laughter, and the death and blood that followed. The last thing he wants is to become that.

Aside from the insane power boost and gaining a new set of divine abilities, there is one major complication: all divine weapons are connected. That means that if he used the Millennium Ring for anything more than its simplest abilities, then anyone who had another weapon would know. Of course, they wouldn’t know that it was him, that he was using the Ring, or even why he was using it at all, so there was an advantage. But usually, those who possessed such weapons didn’t just let that information go.
And then… the other thing was, using the Ring just made him feel uncomfortable. He can’t remember why, though. Bakura gets a flash of a cauldron filled with gold and a figure cloaked in shadow, but nothing else.

So Bakura sits on the roof of Nomad, thinking about what he should do. And then, two hours before sunrise, he makes his decision. And as the Ring activates, his eyes glow purple and nothing in world remains hidden.

At exactly 3:48am PT, a series of events occur simultaneously around the globe.

A college professor sits up suddenly in bed, gasping for air as a dream about two boys, one fire and the other air, fades from her mind. She glances at the golden puzzle box beside her and contemplates her choices.

A man on crutches goes into a coughing fit in the middle of the Greater Moncton International Airport. A security officer watches as his exhausted traveling companion rummages in her pocket for an inhaler.

Two people sitting side by side, one dead and one very much alive, pause in the middle of an auction and lose their chance to purchase a rare artifact.

A golden eye, located on an island with no name, spins on the spot and shines with an unholy light.

Albus Dumbledore, alone in his office, mutters, “Curious,” and glances at two objects: his wand and a cloak, folded on the center of his desk.

A shattered mess of a soul writhes inside of the body of a snake somewhere in Albania. His student, Quirinus Quirrell, voices his concern before he is silenced with a curse.

A diary belonging to a former Hogwarts prefect opens in the depths of the Malfoy Manor and a series of scribbles appear and disappear on its pages.

A mystical ring of unearthly power sits in a shack just outside of Little Hangleton. It leaps a foot in the air before coming down to rest on the rotting kitchen table.

A locket inside a crystal cave starts to scream and hiss, causing the pool it’s sitting in to boil rapidly.

A cup, hidden deep inside a Gringotts vault, rattles and falls from it’s shelf.

A beautiful diadem shakes on top of a pile of books and clatters when it hits the floor.

A boy with green eyes and a lightning scar shudders as he sits in his bed inside of the cupboard under the stairs.

And finally, a woman with thick red hair and blue eyes frowns, glancing upwards for a moment. “Damn you, Pegasus,” she murmurs and then shakes her head. “Looks like you’re back, Thief King. Now… let’s see if the rest follow.”

Keith Howard wakes up in his bathtub. He blearily remembers Kitamori coming over after they
witnessed Pegasus getting chewed out by that Latner chick. He thinks they might have had sex again, but all he can remember is that he spent the night drinking from a bottle of firewhiskey and holding Kitamori’s hair back as she threw up in his toilet. For a moment he’d been concerned that he’d gotten her pregnant, but she’d shaken her head.

“No, that’s not possible,” she’d sighed. “Not anymore.”

“You alright then?”

Kitamori had looked at the mirror before taking the bottle of firewhiskey from his hand. She took a sip, switched it around her mouth, and then spit it out into the sink, “Just… memories.”

He hears his radio playing in the background, turned to some muggle station. They’ve got one of their weather prediction people on, who’s talking about some weird air pressure anomaly that was spotted at ten to four this morning along the California coastline. He listens half heartedly for a few minutes before he smells grease coming from the kitchen.

Keith finds his shirt from last night and pulls it on, stumbling out of the bathroom. He blinks rapidly as the sunlight hits him, “I didn’t know you could cook.”

“It’s McDonalds,” a male voice responds. “Besides, your eggs are three months past their expiry date.”

Keith stares unbelievingly for a moment. The man (boy? He can’t really guess his age) sits at his kitchen table eating from a styrofoam container of hotcakes and sausage and cup of coffee. He’s black with bone white hair. Keith sees the massive burn scar that passes straight over his right eye and instantly knows who this person is and how much shit he’s in.

“You…” he breathes, hand going towards his belt where he keeps his wand. It’s not there. Well, fuck him.

“Keith Howard, I presume?” The one unknown mage from the break-in smirks and Keith realizes that his eyes are actually purple. Seriously, what the hell?

“I’m not completely defenseless without a wand, you know,” Keith scowls.

“Your wand is in the fridge. You’re free to go get it at any time. I’m not here to fight,” the mage tells him before nodding to the seat on the other side of the table. “Sit.”

It’s not like he has much of a choice. Keith carefully edges his way over to the table and into the chair, “Then why’d you take it?”

“To keep you from cursing me right off the bat,” he says. Keith has to hand it to him, that actually makes sense. He hates the smart ones.

“How do you know where I live?”

“You know I read your files.”

That’s actually new information to Keith, but he isn’t going to say that, “You read the one on wizardborn mages. My address is not in those files.”

“You were in Ryou Andrews’ file.”

If anything, that just makes him all the more pissed, “I was only mentioned in there as his Handler.
I’ll ask you one more time: how do you know where I--”

“For fuck’s sake, fine!” The mage rolls his eyes. “So much for trying to be mysterious. Calm down. Look, I was at William’s Abbey today. I… accidentally followed you home when you did the,” he makes an exaggerated disapparation sound, “teleporting thing. And I thought, ‘Hey, you just saved me having to buy train tickets.’ So I brought you breakfast.”

“You broke that guy’s leg.”

“Guilty as charged,” the mage shrugs.

“Why?”

“Why not.”

“What were you doing at the Abbey?”

And if that isn’t a shit-eating grin, “Shopping for a friend. Coffee?”

The mage pushes a travel cup his way. It’s got milk in it. Keith takes it and drinks. Still tastes like crap.

“What do you want?” He growls when he finishes.

The mage’s smirk drops and he almost looks concerned. But that can’t be right. He’s a wizard and the mage is… well, a mage. No mage would ever give a damn about him.

“We both know why I’m here. Let’s not pretend, alright. Wizards are launching an attack on San Francisco,” the mage scoffs slightly. “Pete Coppermine - 3613 Cobweb Road, Detroit - isn’t exactly the brightest person in the world, is he? I know that my friends wouldn’t go shouting about our secret plans in the middle of the street. Who knows who’s listening?”

“Are you threatening my men?” Keith hisses as his head pounds.

“No. I’m informing you that the guy made a stupid mistake. I’m not here to fight,” the mage says. Then he leans forwards, “Why did you try to help Ryou Andrews?”

Ryou is, like always, a punch to the gut. So Keith gets up and goes to the fridge. Part of him wants to see how the mage will react (the answer: a very controlled inhale but other than that, he does nothing to defend himself… which is actually terrifying) and part of him just wants to drink something other than shit-tasting coffee. He sees that his wand is hidden behind the milk and comes to the conclusion that the mage is a brat.

He grabs a beer - because he’s not kidding himself - and cracks it open with his hand. Keith sits back down at the table and takes two large gulps so that he can maybe pretend that he doesn’t give a fuck, “What does it matter to you? He’s dead. You can’t help him.”

“Why do you think it matters? A wizard attempting to break a mage out of one of the most secure cells on the planet. Of course I want to know why.”

“How did you… oh, right. Those three,” Keith glances off to the side. They were just children. I had to, “They… made it?”

“Yeah. They made it.”

Good, he thinks. He didn't die in vain.
“You didn’t answer my question. Why did you try to help him?” The mage asks.

“You…” his vision gets a bit blurry. “You have no idea… no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Keith--”

“Don’t. Just don’t,” he hisses. The mage sighs and grabs the plastic sugar container he keeps on his table for the off chance that he gets guests. But then the mage just dumps the whole thing into his coffee and Keith’s heart clenches. “Why are you doing that?”

The mage blinks and then realizes what he’s referring to. He runs a hand through his hair, embarrassed, “Pretty gross, huh? I just can’t take my coffee any other way.”

“You know, you could just add milk,” Keith says, but behind the scenes his mind is whirling. Ryou took his coffee like that. Keith knows it, but he never put it in the file. The mage couldn’t have known about Ryou and his sweet tooth from his recon. So that means…

That means he’s doing it because that’s how the mage takes his coffee. The familiarity of it all is almost too painful.

“Yeah, but where’s the fun in that,” the mage answers and takes a sip of the now semi-solid. He makes a face and scrapes the bottom of the plastic container with his fingers. Keith takes another swing of his beer.

“I got too close.”

“What?” The mage frowns.

“You wanted to know why I tried to save Ryou Andrews. It’s because I was an idiot,” Keith spits. “I cared. That’s why.”

There’s a dull thud as the plastic hits the table. Keith looks up just in time to see the look that passes over the mage’s face. If he didn’t know better, he’d almost say it was relief.

“You… you cared about…”

“What?” The mage frowns.

“You wanted to know why I tried to save Ryou Andrews. It’s because I was an idiot,” Keith spits. “I cared. That’s why.”

There’s a dull thud as the plastic hits the table. Keith looks up just in time to see the look that passes over the mage’s face. If he didn’t know better, he’d almost say it was relief.

“You… you cared about…”

“Look, you got what you wanted. So why don’t you just piss the fuck off,” he snaps.

“But I got you an Egg McMuffin,” the mage pushes a styrofoam container towards him and, horrifically, it doesn’t sound like an attempt to mock him. Keith just snaps.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?”

“What? Should I have gotten one with sausage?”

“It’s not about the fucking eggs!” Keith hisses, rising to his feet. “I gave you what you wanted! Now leave me alone!”

“No,” the mage snaps back. “No, fuck you, no, I’m not leaving. You’re hungover and smell like shit and you were sleeping in your shower, for god sake. So, no. I’m not leaving you alone. So sit down, shut the fuck up, and eat your breakfast. Idiot!”

Keith’s jaw clamps shut. He takes a series of deep controlled breaths, easing back into his chair. After what feels like hours of lost time, he reaches out and grabs his McMuffin. It smells like grease and fat and it sets his stomach churning. But he’s hungry. Really, fucking hungry because the only thing he’s eaten in the last twelve hours is beer, whiskey, and a bag of chips. So he digs
“What’s your name?” He asks around eggs and bread (and how the hell does this guy know that he likes this shit anyways?).

“Bakura,” the mage tells him.

“First or last?”

“First, I guess.”

He guesses? “What, they don’t have last names where you come from?”

Bakura snorts, “Believe it or not, no.”

“What the hell kinda name is Bakura, anyways?”

“It’s the one my mother gave me. Got a problem?”

“None,” Keith rolls his eyes and then reaches for his beer… which has mysteriously been replaced by orange juice. He looks up at the mage, “How did you…”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Bakura’s grin is so full of bullshit.

“I swear, if your power is turning beer into juice, I’m walking out of here right now.”

Bakura laughs and digs into his hotcakes, “Nah. That’s not my thing.”

Keith drops his food, “You’re an illusionist.” Fuck, fuck, he hates illusionists. You could never tell what was real with them.

But the mage shakes his head, “Nope.”

“Then it’s poisoned.”

“No, I told you. I’m just--”

“Here to talk. I got that. Shit,” he leans forwards and the palms of his hands dig into the sockets of his eyes. “What is happening?” Seriously, he’s making small talk with a mage. How the fuck did his life get to this point?

Except, he knows exactly why he’s doing this. Those phantom skeletal hands are on his shoulders again and he imagines that it’s Ryou sitting across from him, with his black hair and blue eyes and smiling in the way that he hadn’t in years. He wishes that could happen. But people don’t just come back from the dead.

Bakura puts down his plastic fork and knife and stares at him. And Keith nearly freaks out because there in those purple eyes (and really, who the hell has purple eyes?) is the same ancient gaze that Ryou had. The mage looks somewhere between fifteen and a thousand, million years old and it shakes him to his core.

“All it takes is one to start a revolution,” Bakura says.

“What?”

“One voice. One person saying ‘no’. You could be that person. You could be the one to change
how wizards treat mages like Ryou Andrews.”

Keith grits his teeth, “What makes you think I give a damn about mages?”

“Because you could have gone for your wand when you went to the fridge. But you didn’t. You’re hearing me out. How many other wizards would ever give me that chance?” None. He knows that had Bakura approached anyone else, he’d have been blasted into next week. Keith wishes the mage wasn’t right.

“So is that what you want? For me to be your spy?” He sneers.

“I want you to do what you think is right,” Bakura tells him.

“And you think I know right from wrong?”

“...You’re a good person,” and that just sets his temper on fire because he can tell that the mage is lying.

“I led a kid to his death - a fifteen year old kid. I stepped back and watched him die and didn’t do a damn thing to stop it. I kill mages like you for a living and I do it because I think that’s right--”

“You kept him alive for five years--”

“Doesn’t change the fact that he’s still dead!” Keith yells. “Doesn’t change the fact that he died hating himself! Hating me!”

The mage’s fingers clench into fists and honestly looks to be in pain. Keith thinks for a second that Bakura might up and leave. But then he opens his mouth and says the one thing in the world that would make Keith want to strangle him.

“Ryou loved you.”

“How would you know?” He hisses and for the first time, he’s tempted to go get his wand. Bakura must see this because he gets up and walks over to the fridge. Keith watches as the mage pulls his wand from behind the milk, eyes widening as Bakura sits right back down and offers it to him.

“What are you doing?” He whispers.

“So maybe you’re not a good person. Maybe you could have done more to help Ryou Andrews. But right now, I’m giving you back your wand and you are going to do whatever the fuck you want with it. And whatever that ends up being, I’m going to be sitting here eating breakfast at your kitchen table and there isn’t a damn thing that’s going to change that.”

Keith barely breathes when his hand closes around the handle. He pulls his wand back and stares at it for a whole minute. There’s nothing wrong with me, Keith. I’m not sick. So, he puts it away because Ryou would be disappointed if he didn’t.

Bakura’s smile is closer to a smirk, but it’s genuine.

“I just don’t want to start a fight before 10am,” Keith sneers before the mage can say anything.

“Sure, we’ll go with that,” Bakura says and points to his food. “You should finish that before it goes cold.”

Then he takes a sip of his coffee flavoured sugar and it’s so stupid that Keith has to shove his face
in his breakfast to keep himself from laughing hysterically.

After he finishes his food, the mage gets up and moves towards the sliding glass door that leads to his balcony, which is unlocked and explains how he got in. Keith is shocked by how short the guy is - Bakura doesn't even come up to his shoulder - and wonders if he's just been given the pep talk of his life by a child. But Keith knows better than to underestimate him because Bakura moves so soundlessly that he probably wouldn’t know the kid was there if he wasn’t looking directly at the mage.

Bakura checks some kind of device in his pocket, “This is where we part ways, I guess.”

“Hopefully, we’ll never meet again,” he answers. Bakura chuckles at that.

“Oh, we probably will. I’m willing to bet on it.”

“You realize that ‘next time’ will be when we’ll be on opposite sides of the battle field?”

“So we’re not now?” Bakura raises an eyebrow and Keith honestly wants to say no. The mage sees that in him, too, “When it happens, it happens. But… I don’t want to kill you.”

“Will you?”

“If I need to, yes. And don’t give me that look,” Bakura scoffs when Keith does just that. “Like you wouldn’t do the same if you were in my position. I got people that are mine and as much as I don’t want to kill you, I will if you try to take them from me.”

“Wonderful,” he sighs.

“Hey, you know how to work a phone?” Bakura asks and hands him a folded napkin when he nods, “You ever feel like you want to talk, call me. I know you probably won’t because of what we both are, but still. Offer’s open.”

“Why?” Keith opens it up and sees a series of numbers separated by dashes.

“Because you cared about Ryou Andrews,” Bakura answers. “And I don’t want to kill you.”

He snorts, looking off to the side for a moment, “Has anyone ever told you that you’re the most confusing little shit--” He looks back just in time to see Bakura jump off his fucking balcony. Keith panics and rushes over, leaning over the railing. He sees Bakura rising from a crouch on the sidewalk below. The mage waves. “Yeah, I bet they have. Asshole.”

And then he realizes that he’s late for work. He downs the last of the McMuffin and rushes out the door. Strangely enough, he feels a little better.

Chapter End Notes

I’d like to thank all of you for your patience, as the time between updates has been (and will probably continue to be) absurdly lengthy. I promise that Hunt is not abandoned and that I will try to update as often as I can, but my job is sucking up a lot of my time.
Clandestine Operation

Chapter Summary

“Your artwork has gotten a lot better,” he says instead.

“That’s what happens when you live through the Renaissance,” he quips back. “That being said, not all of my team are as talented as me and Viv. Tristan’s guarding his block with a hoard of angry stick figures.”

“Tea’s got Sesshomaru,” Vivian adds and when Duke asks how the hell she managed that, she responds with, “Her roommate’s got, like, twenty posters.”

Chapter Notes


Disclaimer (2): Inuyasha is written by Rumiko Takahashi and Shogokukan. The UCSF Medical Center is affiliated with the University of San Francisco. The Lord of the Rings is written by J.R.R. Tolkien.

Warning: Mentions of divorce (Duke Devlin x Serenity Wheeler), character death, dysphoria, misnaming, classism, slavery, alcoholism, and child abuse.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bakura is late. Duke is annoyed. Slightly worried - the guy is normally about as punctual as Seto - but mostly annoyed. He lets loose a long suffering sigh and finishes touching up the face on the terrifying, shadowy creature that he’s painting on the side of an aging brick wall.

“All good up there?” His partner and adopted sister, Vivian, calls from the bottom of the ladder.

“Done,” he responds and slides down to the ground. He pushes his hair out of his eyes, “Any sign of Bakura?”

“None. I’ve shot him off a text. No response yet - wait,” she glances at her phone as it lets off a beeping sound. “I stand corrected…”

“What?”

“’eta 10 min,’” Vivian reads, smirking slightly. “’You know, I realize that you all say he’s, like, a thousand million years old, but you’d never guess by how fast he picked up texting.’”
“Technically, I’m older than him, if you think about it,” Duke shoots back.

“You’re seventeen, dude.”

“I’ve been seventeen a few hundred times, Viv,” he quirks an eyebrow.

“Jesus,” she crosses her arms over her chest. “What’s that even like?”

Duke pauses for a moment, thinking about how to respond. He’s never really considered his cycling a big thing before, never gotten philosophical about it like Mai does. The only time he’d ever been hit by the magnitude of it had been during his time in Camelot, which had been the cycle directly after he and Sera finally split. Duke remembers catching a glimpse of her before Rowena Ravenclaw ran him through with a sword and immediately regretting having stayed angry at her for that whole lifetime.

“Complicated,” he says. “And yet, surprisingly simple.”

Vivian rolls her eyes, “Now you sound like an old man.”

“Ha ha. You’re hilarious,” he snorts and they head towards the sidewalk. There’s a bench in front of an antique shop that they settle down on to wait for the Thief King to arrive.

“Can I ask you something?” Vivian looks at him out of the corner of her eye. Duke shrugs in response, but still feels a little wary about what her question might be. Because he likes Vivian - seriously, she’s like family at this point. But there are still things about his past that are none of her business.

“You’ve... been in a war before, right?” She asks instead of the dreaded ‘Have you always been this way or is it a one time thing?’ And Duke’s not sure if he’s relieved or not.

“Yeah. Loads of times.”

“It’s just... I haven’t,” she says, looking at her feet. “And, well, maybe it’s different for you, because if you die, you get to go again. But I’ve got one shot at life. Just one.” Vivian licks her lips, her hands clasped tightly in her lap. “If they come... and I die...”

“Nothing’s going to happen to you, Viv,” Duke puts a hand on her shoulder. “I won’t let it.”

“Thanks,” she lets loose a nervous laugh. “But we both know that you shouldn’t make promises you can’t keep.”

It’s the truth and he knows it, just like he knows that not everybody in San Francisco is going to make out of this alive once the wizards swoop in. Even with Bakura - and he remembers the man from so long ago that could crush people with the swing of his hand - there was no way that they were going to get out of this scott free.

“Just do me a favour, okay?” Vivian smiles at him. “Send me home to my family.”

Vivian’s mother, father, and four brothers are lying in a cemetery somewhere in Cleveland, side by side. And Duke, a sixteen year old kid with over a millennia of hand-to-hand combat experience to his name, punched an Unspeakable in the throat and crushed his windpipe in order to make sure she didn’t join them.

“Are you religious?” He asks her.
“Not… not really,” Vivian shrugs. “I bet that’s kinda weird, isn’t it? A mage that doesn’t believe in anything.”

“It’s more common than you think,” he tells her. “I just wanted to know, in case you wanted a special ceremony or something.”

“Now you’re making it seem inevitable,” she smirks slightly, so Duke knows she’s joking. He still feels a bit like an asshole, though. Vivian puts an arm around his shoulder and leans against him. “Hey, while we’re making death pacts, you want anything special, just in case?”

He swallows. He’s finding it a bit hard to breath with his binder strapped to his chest. “Just make sure they get my name right on my tombstone.”

“Always.”

Bakura appears - literally appears - a few minutes later. He glances between Duke and Vivian and raises a suspicious eyebrow. And Duke realizes that, holy shit he doesn’t know about Serenity.

Bakura doesn’t know that they got married and were together for seventy-six lifetimes before calling it quits. He still thinks that they’re secretly dating and crap, Duke didn’t sign up for this when he woke up this morning.

“Explanation later,” he says, guiding the Thief King into the alleyway where his shadow monster is still drying. “Super-secret, Spellcaster-powered, city-wide defense talk now.”

“Yeah. Sure,” Bakura pauses a moment and waves awkwardly at Vivian and Duke is really trying to shut down all the voices in his head that are crooning that the Thief King probably thinks he’s meeting Duke’s mistress and other messed up shit like that.

Thankfully, Bakura doesn’t bring it up. “Your artwork has gotten a lot better,” he says instead.

“That’s what happens when you live through the Renaissance,” he quips back. “That being said, not all of my team are as talented as me and Viv. Tristan’s guarding his block with a hoard of angry stick figures.”

“Tea’s got Sesshomaru,” Vivian adds and when Duke asks how the hell she managed that, she responds with, “Her roommate’s got, like, twenty posters.”

“I’m not even going to ask what a Sesshomaru is,” Bakura says, hands ghosting over the paint. “Matthew can activate them all at once?”

“Amanda’s working with him on this one,” Vivian explains. “I think she’s going to try and drift with Isis for help.”

Bakura nods, “What about…” he pauses, thinking. “I don’t know what we’d call them now… in English, I mean. The holes in the wall that let you move throughout the city at will.”

“Fast track points,” Duke tells him. “There’s one at the corner of every intersection.”

“Activation requirements?”

Duke rolls up his sleeve and shows Bakura one of the marks that he has tattooed on his arm. It’s one of Matthew’s earliest symbols and is something that Bakura would be able to recognize, “Mine’s permanent, but we’ve got temporary tattoos for everyone else. Unless you wanna get some ink done, in which case, I know a guy.”
“You always know a guy. I think I’ll stick with temporary for now,” Bakura says and points to another set of symbols on the wall. “These are for… communication? In case cell phones go out? I thought we had that equipment from the Jackals that allowed us to shut down the tech inhibiting charms.”

“We do. Those are back ups, just in case,” Vivian says.

“Good,” Bakura nods. “What’s our status on setting up a medical facility?”

“Doctor Mutuo’s pulled in a few favours for us, actually. She knows some of the people at UCSF Medical Center and they’re willing to help us out,” Duke supplies.

“Plus, we have a necromancer on site right now. By the time everything goes down, that building will be Fort Knox,” Vivian says.

“Weapons?” Bakura asks.

“I know a guy,” Duke tells him. “He’s shipping them in Monday morning.”

Bakura glances back at the street, “We’re stockpiling them in the street cars and covering them with the Mist. Or, that was still the plan when I last checked.”

“Still is,” Vivian confirms.

“Right,” Bakura nods and looks down at his phone - it’s a horribly outdated model and Duke so badly wants to take the guy to the mall to get it upgraded to something this side of the century - and says, “Seth wants to start testing the fast track points. You have some of those temporary tattoos on you?”

Duke fishes one out of his pocket while Vivian passes Bakura her water bottle, before digging into her purse for a tissue. He watches the Thief King’s eyes move back and forth as he reads the instructions on the back of the tattoo.

An illiterate man with an eidetic memory learns to read. Duke thinks back through all the cycles he’s been through and thinks that this might rank on his list of Top Ten Most Amazing Things I’ve Ever Seen. Totally worth it.

Apparently, it was Seto that came up with ‘fast track points’ to describe the modern day version of kekeway seba. According to the former high priest, it’s a video game term. Bakura has yet to play one that’s not an app on someone else’s phone (Tristan is still pissed about what he calls ‘The Angry Birds Incident’), but he might pick one up just to see what the hype is about.

Bakura rolls up his sleeve and applies the tattoo, wetting the plastic-paper with a swirling symbol he recognizes from the days where Mahad’s palace security would pop from the shadows if you weren’t careful enough and tripped the bastard’s alarms.

Glad I was never around for Mana’s days in charge, he thinks. The student has long since surpassed the master.

“Where are you going to try and pop out?” Duke asks.

“SFSU,” he says. “Got an… appointment I need to keep.”
Duke raises and eyebrow and coughs in a ways that sounds suspiciously like Doctor’s Mutuo’s name, but he can’t really do anything to deny it because it’s true. Instead he gives Duke a pointed look, almost daring him to say anything, before whispering the words that would activate Matthew’s symbol.

Bakura walks into the alley, passed Duke and Vivian’s painting of some monstrous beast, and into the far corner behind the dumpster. The smell coming out of the metal container reeks of something awful, but the shadows behind it are an inky black that stands in stark contrast to the red brick of the wall.

*Kekeway seba* are some of the simplest acts of magic that a Spellcaster could do, linking one location to another through the use of shadows - so simple that even a non-Spellcaster like Bakura could pull it off with a blood sacrifice and a prayer. The tricky part is limiting those that could pass through them. Back in the day, Mahad had enchanted his *kekeway seba* to only allow those with his symbols to access them, but Bakura had been one of the first to learn how to get around that with Dueuel’s help.

Apparently, when Mana had taken over her master’s position under Seth’s rule, she coded her *kekeway seba* to a vow she’d had her guards say. Bakura thinks Amanda’s way would be slightly less crackable, but if things went well, the *kekeway seba* wouldn’t be necessary in the long run and Amanda wouldn’t have to spend weeks that they didn’t have magical binding all their allies in San Francisco to the network.

He takes a breath, says “San Francisco State University” and walks into the shadow behind the dumpster.

The part of him that is still Ryou Andrews comments on how similar the experience is to using the wizarding Floo Network and has a second to ponder the ramifications between the nauseating spinning before he’s shot out of a shadow on the other side of town. Bakura rolls and land in a crouch, stopping his movement.

“Well,” he says to himself, “at least Matthew hasn’t lost his touch.”

He’s landed just where he wants to be - a little too much so. Bakura glances up and sees that he’s in the parking lot where he saw Doctor Mutuo hop onto her Vespa not so long ago. The stolen books from *Hale and Tale* feel heavy in his backpack as he touches the Millennium Ring under his clothes and asks it in his mother tongue to help him find her office. He follows the tug of the ancient artifact, pulling the hood of his jacket over his head and cloaks himself in his powers of invisibility.

Doctor Mutuo is having a meeting with a student when he arrives. She smiles at Bakura through the glass window of her door, waving slightly in a way that tells him that she’s just finishing up. She passes the student a small stack of papers and shakes his hand before leading him to the door.

“Bakura, hello! I was wondering when you’d come visit,” she grins and his stomach does a little lurch.

“Sorry about taking so long. I’ve been a bit… busy,” he rubs the back of his neck, embarrassed. “You’ve heard, right?”

She nods, “Sadly, yes. Mokuba has brought me up to date on the matter. Though that means that our works is now more important than ever.”

“No pressure, huh?” Bakura smirks and flicks his hand, sending controlled streams of air around
the room to close blinds and lock the door. He notes that while she shows no surprise at his display of magic, Doctor Mutuo is fascinated by how the photographs in the wizarding books move.

“They had gifs before it was cool,” she murmurs under her breath.

“These ones are basic history,” Bakura says, pointing at the stack he piled on his left. “A History of Magic is your best shot for any question you might have. Bagshot’s considered to be the best of the best.”

“How much did she get right?” Doctor Mutuo asks offhandedly. When Bakura stills, she raises her eyes of the pages of parchment to look at him. “Was that a bit forward? I figured that you already knew that I’d guessed.”

“How’d you figure it out?” He leans forward and the Millennium Ring hums with power under his shirt.

“Allow me to have some mysteries, Mr. Thief King,” she smirks. "I don't know if I'll be able to keep you around if I didn't have any secrets."

He raises an eyebrow, staring at her as he slowly pulls stack of books out of her reach. Doctor Mutuo sighs and relents ever so slightly, "You know far too much about the true events surrounding the Exodus to not have been from that time period, so at first I merely thought you cycled like Mokuba and his brother. But then you mentioned being a Thief... And the way everyone in that room seemed to respond to you, could you be anyone else?"

"And how do you know about the legend of the Three Kings?" He frowns.

"Non-magics have a version of the legend, too. It's not just mages and... I'm assuming wizards have one as well," Doctor Mutuo shrugs. "My grandfather used to read it to me before I went to sleep at night. Though, I'm not sure about the accuracy surrounding your supposedly secret Royal bloodline. I always suspected jii-chan made that part up."

"I'm as common as they come," he says. "Pissed Seth the hell off, having to bow to someone that was lower than dirt."

"Really? You'd never be able to tell. He clearly thinks quite highly of you," Doctor Mutuo's comment makes Bakura blink in surprise. "Thinks highly of me? What the fuck?"

She changes the topic quickly before he can think of a response, "On to business, though." She glances at Newt Scamander’s Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them. "In the old days, was it like Lord of the Rings, where you had a bunch of other races that were allies of humanity?"

“Yeah. Not a lot a left, though,” Bakura says gravely. "Our main allies were the elves and… they were the first to go. You won’t find anything about them in there,” he tells her when she flips to the E section of Scamander’s book. “When the gods fell, it shattered their connection to this world. Ravenclaw took her army and enslaved them. Today… they’re shadows of themselves. They can’t even remember their own language, let alone their history and past allegiances.”

"Ravenclaw? She was one of the wizards that was sent to Camelot as part of the peace treaty with mages, right?” Doctor Mutuo asks.

"Right. You know, for someone who doesn't cycle, you know a lot about our history, Doctor Mutuo," Bakura leans forwards.
"Please, call me Yuugi. Only my students call me Doctor and that's usually when they want something. My grandfather is an archeologist and a good one at that. He taught me everything I know about the real history of the world. More people are aware of magic's existence than you'd think," Doctor - or rather, Yuugi responds. "Now, are giants a thing?"

"Yes. And they're practically extinct."

"Merpeople?"

"Still kicking. They’ve lost most of their magic, though."

"Centaurs?"

"Angry. I don’t know about here, but in Britain the Ministry keeps trying to downsize their territory. They make a habit of completely disrespecting their customs. The centaurs do remember their contract with mages, though.” And he thinks of Ryou Andrews and the nights he spent in the Forbidden Forest running beside them.

"Dwarves?"

"Dead."

"Harpies?"

"Extinct."

"Trolls?"

"Those that aren’t dead are stupid."

"Werewolves?” Yuugi asks a bit desperately.

Bakura points to another book, this one called *Hairy Snout, Human Heart*. “All you need to know about what happened to them is in there.

Yuugi reads the summary on the back and throws the book away in disgust, “They make it sound like a disease."

"These days, it basically is one. I don't know what happened to them. I remember the Lycans being pacifists, even after the fall of Camelot. These days, it's like--""

"It's like they have rabies," Yuugi composes herself before asking. "What about goblins?"

“Alive and well, which is surprising considering how many times they’ve risen in rebellion. They’re currently in control of the wizarding bank, Gringotts.”

This causes Yuugi to perk up, “Bank? Who uses it?”

“...Wizards do?” He frowns, not really understanding why that needed to be a question.


“It doesn’t have competitors. It’s the bank.”

Her jaw drops, “You mean everyone stores their money there? Everyone - as in the entire
“wizarding population?”

“Yes.”

She covers her mouth with her hands, eyes wide and bright. Suddenly, Yuugi clambers for her laptop and starts to type madly. There’s a determined look on her face that completely and utterly terrifying.

“Which books contain information on the economy? Also, anything you have on goblin history - and specifically, Gringotts’ history - would be useful. Oh, and basic government structure,” she starts to list of topics at rapid fire speeds and Bakura struggles to keep up.

“What are you planning?” He asks when she finally pauses to breathe.

“‘Follow the money.’ That’s something I always teach my students. ‘Follow the money and you’ll find your answer,’” she tells him without looking up from her laptop. “If you look at who’s financially supporting a politician, you can predict which bills they’re support in Congress. If you investigate the cash flow in a crime ring, you’ll find your kingpin at the top. They look down Capone by finding his accountant, for god’s sake.

“It’s always about the money, Bakura. Always. Who has it. Who doesn’t. Who’s providing it and why. And, for some reason, the wizarding world thought it would be a good idea to put all their cash in the same place, under the guard of former mage allies. Maybe they have something on the goblins. Or maybe they just got cocky after all these years. Either way, it was their biggest mistake,” Yuugi smirks.

Bakura sounds a bit worried, “You know, as much as I’d love to rob Gringotts blind, I don’t know if even I can pull off that big a heist without being caught.”

“This isn’t about a robbery, Thief King. No, this isn’t going to be about stealing their wealth,” she’s glancing through a law book now. “This is about making sure that no one even thinks about retaliating when Seto Kaiba starts sending out people to contact wizardborn mages. This is about mages and their supporters ending the fighting without spilling a drop of blood.”

Yuugi looks up at Bakura, blue eyes victorious behind purple bangs, “I teach a class on white collar crime, Mr. Thief King. What we plan here tonight may not be violent, but it will certainly get our point across.”

“And that point being?”

“Leave us alone,” she says. “We’ll come back and talk when we’re ready.”

Pegasus’s unofficial mission to William’s Abbey has landed both him and their team in shit. Tilla rolls her eyes. Typical.

The two women that had confiscated their research on the American Ministry attack are in his office and she can hear their raised voices through the wall - Pegasus’ more than either Trista Latner’s or ‘Nat’s’. The three men from the Abbey stand outside with Tilla’s team to make sure they don’t do anything stupid.

Coppermine is having a heated staring contest with the man he’d gotten into a fight with. Tilla’s nerves are on edge preparing for the worst. She glances across the room at Depre, who is standing
vigilant beside Bandit Keith. She waits until his eyes shift to make contact with hers before she looks away.

Keith is drunk. Again. She’d assigned Depre to him to ensure that their great and powerful leader didn’t do anything that would get them in any more trouble with the higher ups. It was the logical decision. But... Tilla glances to her right and sees Lew sitting there. She misses Depre’s comfortable presence at her side.

Kitamori fidgets with her clothes, occasionally looking up at the door whenever a particular loud shout makes its way through the walls. Tilla has no idea how this waif of a girl made it passed the tests and exams that are required to become an Unspeakable. She knows that the girl is a brilliant historian and scholar, but that isn’t going to save her if she decides to wade face-first into a warzone.

And yet... Tilla’s eyes narrow, watching as the girl’s gaze flicks to the door just before it opens. Kitamori still jumps in her seat when it slams against the wall, but Tilla’s been around enough Plants to note that it’s a practiced move. Her blood runs cold.

Trista Latner and ‘Nat’ leave, taking their three guard dogs with them. Pegasus stands in the doorway fuming and calls Keith into his office with a shout. The Bandit stumbles out of his seat and disappears into the room.

Tilla’s mind churns with this new information. There’s a second Plant on the team; on that, judging by Pegasus’ lack of reaction to Kitamori, even he didn’t know about. So if he wasn’t the one asking her to spy, who was?

The thing is, if Kitamori really is a Plant, she’s one of the good ones. It’s not the perfectly human acting that makes Tilla think that (Depre could come alive, smiling and laughing and even flirting in a way that make her toes curl, if ordered to). No, it’s the knowledge of history that Kitamori enthusiastically shares with the team that had thrown Tilla off her scent in the first place. Because that isn’t fake. Tilla can tell when a Plant is lying or not and Kitamori hadn’t been. She’s genuinely fascinated by mythology and the past.

That’s what worries Tilla the most.

She doesn’t know much about the program that makes Plants the way they are (that’s way, way above her pay grade), but she does now that their time in the Gardens is designed to break them down to nothing and then build them up from scratch. Nine times out of ten, this works. However, there were always some that managed to survive the process with some of their former personalities intact. These the were good ones, the creme of the crop. It’s every Monitor’s dream to be assigned one of these Plants because they were guaranteed to make it through the worst kinds of pressure, improvise on the fly, and worm their ways into their targets lives by expressing genuine emotion.

Coppermine is half in love with her, Tilla muses. Lew respects her and if I’m right, Keith is sleeping with her. I even worried about her safety in the coming battle. She’s got the entire team to like her, to trust her in a matter of weeks.

Kitamori looks to be a few years younger than Depre, so Tilla should have heard of her during her time in the Gardens. Except, she has no idea who this girl is.

You’re good. You’re very good. Tilla stares at the side of Kitamori’s head. But not perfect. Looking at the door too early had been a slip up. And, thinking back on it, so had that time where she’d thrown Keith to the ground during sparring practice. You’re almost too good, Reiko
Kitamori. But I’m onto you now. And… Tilla glances up at Depre, the only person on the team that’s completely indifferent to the girl, and waits for him to make eye contact. She floods his mind with her theory and feels, through the power of Legilimency, as his brain stores and begins to process this new information without showing a single trace of emotion on his face.

And now you and whoever’s controlling you don’t stand a chance.

Just then, Bandit Keith emerges from Pegasus’ office, “The attack on San Francisco has been moved up.”

Lew stands suddenly, “What? But… we don’t have the men! Or enough information to even think of proceeding!”

“Trista Latner has provided us with both,” Pegasus emerges from behind Keith, spitting the woman’s name like it’s made of poison. "She also wants me to remind you that the primary goal of this mission is not to destroy the haven, but to kidnap and secure Solomon Mutuo."

“When do we move out?” Coppermine asks.

Keith swallows, his eyes vacant, ”Tomorrow.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you again for your endless patience with me, guys. This chapter is a long time coming, but I can promise that, in the next one, the fighting will pick up again. Pete's going to get one hell of a fight scene and we will get some answers on Tilla's suspicions about Kitamori.

Also, according to an ancient Egyptian translation site that I found, 'kekeway seba' roughly translates to 'door of darkness'. 
Ghosts of my Past

Chapter Summary

“Join the Department, they said,” he whines as he swings his leg over the handle. “It’ll be fun, they said.” He sighs, resigning himself, “When I retire, I’m buying a beach house and never leaving. Ever.”

Chapter Notes


Disclaimer (2): Dude (Looks Like a Lady) was written by Steven Tyler, Joe Perry, and Desmond Child. Barbara Gordon was created by William Dozier, Julius Schwartz, and Carmine Infantino and is owned by DC Comics. Fullmetal Alchemist is owned by Hiromu Arakawa, Square Enix, Madman Entertainment, Viz Media, and Chuang Yi.

Warning: Character death, gore, the murder of children, child abuse, and guns.

Aside from money, there are two things in the wallet that Keith keeps in his pocket.

One of these things is a ripped half of a family portrait. The two siblings that are portrayed are young, dark haired, and in no way related to him. Usually, the sister leaves the portrait the moment that Keith pulls it out. But the brother - Ryou Andrews - stays and smiles.

The other is a phone number on a small square of paper. The ink is a dark blue, the handwriting surprisingly elegant. There's a stain on one corner; Keith thinks it might be ketchup. He spends an hour staring at both of these hidden things before he calls the number.

"Keith?" The mage's voice at the other end nearly makes him hang up. They'll kill him if they find out what he's doing.

"You need to take Rex Raptor, Weevil Underwood, and Rebecca Hawkins and leave the city right now," he says.

"Where are you?" Bakura asks. Keith wants to bash his head against the pay phone in annoyance.

"Listen to me! Get them out now," he stresses. "I haven't got time to explain."

"How many of you are there?" Keith's heart skips a beat. He shouldn't answer that question, but if he does, maybe it'll convince the stubborn Mage child to protect the only legacy Ryou has left.

"Thousands. Most are human, some aren't. Dementors. Soul stealers. Mages can't see them. They've got targets. They've got all the information we've gathered. You need to get those kids
"Keith--"

"Just do it, damn you!" He shouts into the phone and slams it down on the receiver. He's done what he can. They're just children, he thinks. I had to.

They've divided the army that Latner gave them. Keith has put Lew and Coppermine in front of the western and southern front respectively. Once inside, they'd instruct the Dementor handlers to have their creatures sweep the city. After crippling moral, Kadin Spurrel, Latner's co-worker, and the human army would sweep the city, taking prisoners and killing those that resisted.

Keith is going after Solomon Mutuo. The other two men, Blaine Gerrish and Jermaine Sport, will ensure that the three escaped mages ended up back on the island.

Mook, on the other hand, is in charge of casting the vast network of spells that would put the civilian population of San Francisco to sleep. She'd also take control of port key activation, so that they could transfer prisoners directly to the island. Keith might not like Mook very much, but she's damn good at her spellcasting.

Scott's working with her and, surprisingly, so is Kitamori. Keith had wanted Reiko to stay with him, but then Mook pointed out that she could recognize any counter attack that the mages sent their way.

"We've got two known Spellcasters in there and one of them is Matthew Jacques. If she can recognize Mala Pakar's work on sight, then I want her with me in case Jacques decides to pull a trick out of an ancient tale."

Kitamori and Mook had spent most of yesterday talking excitedly about possible Spellcasters tactics and Keith had reluctantly let her go. Mook promised that she'd keep three of her best aside to protect her. Keith thinks that Mook might have guessed that he and Kitamori were a bit more than co-workers.

But he has more things to worry about now, so he'll cross that bridge when he gets there.

Bakura, Keith thinks back to the strange mage who'd broken into his apartment. He'll get them to safety. Ryou won't have died for nothing. A life for a life, right? Isn't that how it goes?

Ryou had destroyed three lives when he attacked his fellow students at Hogwarts and saved three mages on the island. Keith had witnessed three mage executions prior to Ryou's and now he was going to pay those lives back. But then he remembers the other hunts and the burning, screaming voices from that warehouse in Lakewood and knows that his hands are far from clean.

He glances up just in time to see a burst of red sparks shoot up into the sky. Keith looks out at the seven hundred witches and wizards under his command and knows that he will have blood under his fingernails by the end of the night.

Jeremy Cooper likes Reiko. She reminds him of a girl he dated back at Hogwarts, all soft smiles and sweet glanecks and quirky humour.

[85,211 analyzes her for the signs of a fellow Plant and comes up with nothing. The target is high profile and dangerous. This is to be expected.]
Reiko sits side saddle on her broom, legs swinging beneath her. She watches the San Francisco skyline with earnest eyes.

"Do you think they'd let me interview a mage, if we captured one?" She asks, "Say what you want about them, but I'd love to hear about their history from a source that's not based in wizard bias."

To Jeremy's left, Oz snorts, "Girly, trust me. This is as close to a mage as you should get. They're more likely to kill you then answer your questions." Oz holds up his left hand and waggled the three stumps of former fingers, "Lost these to a shape shifter. Literally bit them off and ate 'em."

"All you need to know about them is in that book, The Mage Menace," says Anjali, an older woman Jeremy's never met before.

"I've met the author before," she comments. "He came to give a lecture at a college the Department sent me to during training. I've seen his son too." When Anjali makes a noise of confusion, Reiko adds, "Ryou Andrews. He was a mage. He destroyed the Millennium Ring."

"Really? Didn't know that guy had a mage son. Poor man," Jeremy sighs. "You still shouldn't ask to talk to a mage, Reiko."

"And why's that?"

"Tilla's charged us with protecting you until this invasion is finished. That includes making sure you don't go making stupid decisions."

Reiko rolls her eyes and, off in the distance, red sparks ignite in the sky.

"And so it begins," Oz murmurs.

[ORDERS: Wait until the shields go up. Wait until the muggles go to sleep. Wait ten minutes after all of that. Then, make it look like an accident.]

The air around the city ripples and shimmers, a silvery bubble forming and blanketing San Francisco from any muggle technology that might be looking on. Pink dust rains down on the buildings and slowly, the city starts to go quiet.

"You know which mage I'd love to talk to," Reiko says as ominous, hooded figures descend from the sky. "Amanda Green."

"Who's that?" Oz asks.

"A Spellcaster. Except, she uses magic that's supposed to have died with Mala Pukar."

Anjali frowns, "Wasn't she the mage who could control people with ropes?"

"I remember hearing about her. Didn't she die a hundred years ago?" Jeremy asks.

Reiko nods, "They sent Kiyoshi after her."

Oz snorts, "Kiyoshi's a legend. 'Follow your orders, or Kiyoshi will kill you in your sleep,' and all
"That."  

[Kiyoshi was not a legend. Kiyoshi was #1,014. Kiyoshi was killed on a mission over twenty ago.]  

"If you say so," Reiko sighs. She looks out at the city again. There's smoke rising from the Mission District. Jeremy glances at Oz and Anjali.  

[It is time.]  

Silently, Oz drifts behind Reiko as Anjali distracts her with a question about Kiyoshi's legend. Jeremy watches as Oz draws a muggle gun from the back of his trousers and points it at Reiko. He fires and she vanishes.  

[Impossible. #85,211 sees no splash of a body below, so she didn't disillusion herself. #85,211 concludes that the target must have somehow disappeared without making a sound.]  

"Regroup!" Anjali shouts and Jeremy turns just in time to see Reiko phase back into existence behind Oz. Her face is blank when she draws Oz's wand from its holster and kills him with a flash of green.  

[#85,211 watches as #85,223 falls into the Bay and so badly wants to be Jeremy Cooper. Because Jeremy loves reading and supports the Quiberon Quafflepunchers and misses the wife he left behind to join the Department. Jeremy carries his wedding ring around his neck and didn't have to watch the closest thing he has to a friend die.]  

"Silent Killing Curse," Anjali breathes and Reiko stands up straight on Oz's broom, her wand in one hand and his in the other.  

"You know, you think that they'd have taught you lot not to be so obvious when you're with your targets," Reiko comments, the cold wind blowing around her. "I figured you out when Tilla introduced you to me."  

Jeremy and Anjali say nothing, readying their wands for attack. Reiko sighs.  

"I've gotten soft. Too many years around Seeds. I'm used to talking, used to explaining," she grips the two wands in her hands. "So be it then."  

She learns left and falls from the broom, twisting in mid-air and vanishing.  

[The target is silent. The target is fast. The target is deadly. She flashes around them, casting spells and appearing in the same breath, using both wands with lethal effectiveness. #85,211 and #84,901 are barely able to keep up as the target forces them together.]  

Jeremy's broom jolts as Reiko lands between him and Anjali, one foot on each handle. He can't even react before she holsters both of her wands and grabs their shoulders, tugging them into the air with her.  

[#85,211 feels her twist and the uncomfortable compression that comes with apparition. Then, there is terrible, crippling pain.]  

Everything below his waist is missing. She's splinched me, he thinks as he screams and watches as his blood spills out onto the pavement beneath him. Anjali lies dead beside him, her smashed brain fifty feet to her left. She splinched us both.
A bottle is forced into his mouth and a potion runs down his throat. The pain disappears and a wave of calm rolls over him. A hand on his chin forces Jeremy to look at Reiko, who's kneeling before him.

There are tears in her eyes, "I really am sorry. I just... I saw it in Depre's mind earlier. He and Tilla are expecting me to fight back. I'm so sorry that you have to die like this."

"You-y-y-you--" Jeremy stammers as the edges of his vision start to darker. "You're--"

"Yes," she says and pulls a pair of identical potion files from her robes. "I am. Shhh, it'll be over soon. I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

Reiko is crying in earnest now, sobbing as she pulls a lock of hair from her head and adding it to one of the potions, turning it a vibrant red colour. She adds Jeremy's hair to the second vile.

"What's your number?" She asks him, gently touching his cheek.

"#8...85,211," he whispers.

"Hello, Plant #85,211. You've done so well," she smiles sadly. "Drink this. Then you can rest."

She hands him the red potion and when he drinks it, Jeremy's body stretches and bubbles as he transforms into Reiko Kitamori.

She kisses his forehead and points Oz's wand at his jaw, "Reducto."

[**Mission Report**

**Assassinate Reiko Kitamori**

**Status: Failure**]

If the history books ever end up telling the story of the Battle of San Francisco, he hopes that the authors will write about how the city did not lay down for the wizards to walk all over it. Bakura hopes that this happens so that he can make a god awful joke about being asleep when the five minute warning comes through.

He and Yuugi had stayed up all night in her office, evening out the wrinkles in their plan. Around midnight, she'd stretched out on the ridiculously comfortable couch by the door and, for all intents and purposes, fell asleep. Bakura had awkwardly settled in the small area not taken up by her feet. He thinks that he dozed off around two.

His phone's annoying ringtone wakes up (it's some 'eighties' jingle about a guy who looks like a girl that Joey jokingly programmed in and he hasn't had the time to figure out how to change it). Keith's terrifying message takes all of the humour out of the moment.

Bakura hangs up his phone and sends out a mass text in order to give everyone as much of a head start as he can. Then he grabs Yuugi by the shoulders and shakes her awake.

"It's happening," he says before she can get a word out.

"How do you know?"
“I’ve got someone on the other side. Didn’t expect that he’d actually pull through. We’ve got to get you out of here.”

Yuugis eyes go wide and she immediately goes for her bag, throwing the strap around her shoulders. She shoves her laptop inside as Bakura collects his stolen books and they apply Matthew’s *kekeway seba* tattoos.

They're tearing out of her office building and running full tilt towards the nearest *kekeway seba* when Yuugi calls out, ”Wait! Jii-chan!”

“What?!” Bakura shouts.

"My grandfather. He doesn't know," and she pulls him into the shadows just as the sky shimmers silver with wizard magic. They reappear in front of a comic book store and Bakura can see an old man that, *holy shit*, he recognizes.

Bakura stumbles as the vague memory of Shimon, the Lady Pharaoh's great uncle, flows over him. He barely knows the man, even in his faded flashbacks, but the thought of *oh* hits him like a hammer.

"Yuugi?" Shimon frowns from behind the counter, his eyes passing over Bakura entirely and the Thief King realizes that even if Shimon does remember his past cycle, he probably wouldn't recognize Bakura, as the old man died before they assented to the throne. With his white hair, purple eyes, and scar, Bakura's own mother wouldn't know who he was.

But that means... He looks at Doctor Yuugi Mutuo in all her colourful glory. Her purple hair is disheveled from sleep, she's wearing a green and pink dress that flutters around her knees, and goddamn combat boots. *Mother of Darkness, thank you.*

"We're evacuating," Yuugi says and immediately Shimon's eyes widen.

"No," he shakes his head, pointing to the pink dust that seems to fall from the sky. "Get inside, quickly. And lock the doors."

Yuugi does just that and Bakura activates the Millennium Ring on habit. The world inverts and he can see the souls of those walking outside flicker as the magic hits them before they slump to the ground.

“They’re falling asleep,” he comments, glancing over to Yuugi. Bakura can’t see her name. *Of course I can’t. Divine weapons don’t work on each other.*

That’s how she knew. Bakura remembers her touching her bag at Seto’s house, the same way his hand moves towards his stomach when he wanted to draw upon the Millennium Ring’s power.  
*She saw that the Pendant’s abilities didn’t work on me... and gods, I told her I was a thief.*

“This is what happened the last time,” Bakura hears Shimon say. “They put everyone to sleep, once they noticed that mages were inside the city. Anyone caught outside when the dust came down fell asleep and missed the fighting.”

“I was out of town on a conference,” Yuugi says. “I didn’t realize until I got back.”

Bakura grits his teeth, not knowing if he can pretend his way through an invasion - doesn’t know if they can pretend their way through an invasion - so he decides, for the first time in his life, to fuck being subtle.
“How’d you stay awake then, Shimon?” Bakura turns to the old man just in time to see him blanch.

Yuugi, of course, doesn’t even react.

“Who…?” Shimon whispers, then backs up suddenly. He says something to his granddaughter in a language that Bakura doesn’t understand and reaches behind the till, pulling out a shotgun.

Bakura tries to go intangible - he really, really does. But before he can even blink, he’s shoved across the room by a pair of impossibly fast moving hands. Bakura crashes into the far wall at alarming speeds as the sound of the shotgun firing echoes throughout the shop.

“Jii-chan!” Yuugi exclaims, “He’s not a wizard!”

“He has a wand tucked under his shirt,” Shimon shouts and, fuck, okay, his bad. He’d kept the one he’d stolen from Morgan Sammons, having kept his ability to use wizarding magic due to him not being defeated in battle until this exact moment. Bakura glares at Yuugi for a moment. Not a mage, my ass…

Yuugi holds her ground, an immovable wall set between the Thief King and the dead Vicar, “Jii-chan, trust me. He’s not--”

“You have the Pendant,” Bakura groans and pulls himself to his feet. Outside the shop, he can feel Mahad’s magic flood the city. Soon, images would rip themselves from the walls of San Francisco’s buildings to defend its inhabitants. He should be out there, too. And he will, just as soon as he gets his answers. “You’re the Lady Pharaoh - or, at least, half of her. Why haven’t you broken the seal yet?”

“Broken the - are you mad? ” Yuugi turns to him. “Bakura, has it ever occurred to you that the seal was put in place for a reason?”

“Bakura?” Shimon whispers, the barrel of the gun lowering inch by inch. “Good God, boy. What have you done?”

“You knew?” Bakura hisses, “About who you are?”

“Of course, I knew. I guessed… years ago,” Yuugi says.

“And you did nothing ?”

“Nothing? We’ve been working on a way to separate the Spirit’s soul without breaking the seal,” she tells him. “Please, tell me that you didn’t shred yours when you came back. Tell me that the part of the Destroyer that was inside of the Ring isn’t free to wander the earth!”

His heart hammers in his chest. All these weeks that he’s spent living here, and not once had Bakura thought about what the consequences of his own existence might be.

“I… there wasn’t much time,” he glances down at his feet. “It was either this… or nothing. I had no choice.”

Yuugi opens her mouth to say something, but Shimon cuts her off, “There’s no time for this. Yuugi, we have to get you out of the city.”

“What? No! Our people need us out there,” Bakura shouts, pointing to the streets. “Yuugi, if you have even half the powers I remember you having, then we could take care of this invasion in an instant.”
“If she stays here - if she’s captured - who knows what they’ll do to her,” Shimon shakes his head. “We haven’t got the time--”

“How about you ask me instead of deciding what you think is best for me?” Yuugi all but shouts. Then she turns to Bakura, “Worst case scenario: they end up taking either me, the Puzzle, or both of us? How much can they learn?”

“Not much if it’s just the Pendant,” he answers, trying not to ask why she calls her Item a puzzle. “They had the Ring for close to a millennia and they barely knew how old I was.”

“Alright,” Yuugi nods, thinking it over. “Jii-chan, how did you stay awake?”

Shimon hesitates for a moment before heading into the back of the shop. Bakura looks at Yuugi, “You could have told me.”

“I hardly know you,” she says, a little sadly. “I’ve dreamt of you, of him, my whole life, but when I wake up--”

“It all slips away,” he finishes her sentence, suddenly understanding. “You wanted to know me first--”

“Before I told you,” she laughs softly. “You live up to the expectation.”

“Yeah,” he nods. “So do you.”

Shimon returns with a pair of gas masks.

“I wasn’t expecting a third person,” he says when he passes one to his granddaughter. She turns it over in her hands before giving it to Bakura. “Yuugi??”

Bakura smirks, “Of course…”

Their phones chirp - probably a text from Mahad saying that the civilians had been evacuated. It’s time.

“I thought you didn’t believe in violence,” Bakura says before sliding the mask over his face.

“I don’t. But you can’t deny that this team,” Yuugi holds up a comic with a picture of a redhead in wheelchair on the front, “is in dire need of an Oracle.”

Bakura watches as her blue eyes flash with power and grins, wild and savage. He looks at Shimon, looks at the shotgun in his hands.

“You stay here, old man, and hold down the fort. I promise I’ll have her back before curfew.”

Pete is standing in a neighbourhood park when the Dementors swoop into the streets of San Francisco. He stares at one of the swing sets, sees the eight year old muggle child lying in the sand beneath it, fast asleep, and vividly remembers his mother’s laugh. *I used to play in a park like this,* he thinks.

When he was first recruited for this team, he’d envisioned himself giving his troops some kind of rousing speech before heading out into battle, using words that would inspire them to fight against overwhelming odds and follow him through the gates of hell. But now that he’d here, here in the
streets of his childhood and seeing Dementors hovering over the prone forms of children, he can’t help but think of what Bandit Keith told him so long ago.

Pete thinks about the mages they’re going to kill today and knows that there are bowls of cereal and piles of pancakes that are never going to be eaten because the Department of Mysteries decided that today was the day that they were going to end it all.

He casts a Patronus to shield himself and his human troops from the overwhelming dread that comes with the cloaked, soul stealing monsters. Normally, he would be embarrassed about the fact that it takes the form of a dove, but now it just gives him something else to look at other than a kid dying in a playground next to his unconscious parents.

Then - and there is no other way for Pete to describe what is happening - power cracks its way through the city.

“Matthew Jacques,” he whispers under his breath. Then he draws his wand and shouts, “Get ready!”

The command comes a second too late. A massive water dragon erupts out of a nearby fire hydrant, grabs onto a set of power lines to electrify itself, and then kamikazi’s itself against Pete’s troops. Pete only just manages to escape because he’s dodging some kid who just burst out of a house and is trying to stab him with a sword attached to his metal arm.

Pete ducks out of the way and the kid claps his hands. A light flashes and suddenly Pete is staring down the barrel of a massive, gothic looking cannon. He waves his wand and causes it to backfire, exploding in the kid’s face. He thinks it’s over until he hears a call of, “Brother!” and a fucking suit of armour crashes into view and - yeah, now he’s in a fist fight with that.

Except… now that he’s looking, Pete can see that the two siblings are drawings of some sort. He notices this when he spots the first kid reforming his face out of a pool of black ink. Pete switches tactics, backing up into the street to get some space between them and - his back hits some kind of invisible wall.

He looks to his left and sees a stop sign. Pete curses Matthew Jacques and spins out of the way to avoid getting his face smashed in by an armoured fist.

If they’re made of ink… if they’re drawings… Pete bolts into the house the two of them burst from and is confronted by a woman with a handgun. Pete cuts her down before she has the chance to fire it and there’s a scream to his left. A young man, maybe a year or two younger than Pete, yells, “Mom!” and throws himself over the woman’s corpse.

Pete spots a poster with the suit of armour and the kid in a room off to the side and sets it on fire. The living drawings of the two brothers melt away into nothing.

Pete turns his attention back to the man, who’s clutching the corpse of his mother and getting blood all over his hands. He’s crying, screaming, trying to wish her back into existence with his prayers. He can see the wisps of magic floating around the man’s fingers and he wonders what this mage is trying to do. Is he a healer? A necromancer? Or is he just desperate?

There’s a plate on the kitchen table, stacked high with waffles and drizzled in syrup.

He should kill this man, or at the very least, knock him out to take him hostage. He should because mages really are monsters, because they kill without remorse, because they’re a menace to the wizarding world, because of the greater good… because they told him too.
Pete thinks of Ryou Andrews, who’d murdered Willa Mette and stabbed Pete in the collar with a wand. He thinks about how easy it was to hate Andrews, how easy it would have been to kill him.

But there’s fucking waffles on the table, so Pete just tells the mage to hide in the basement and not come out until it was all over.

Outside is a mess. Pete’s troops are a mass of burnt flesh and ruptured organs. Around him, San Francisco is coming to life. He spots a massive black dragon in the sky, Fiendfyre gushing from it’s mouth. On its back is a boy with dark hair who appears to have semi-automatic gun.

*This can’t happen again,* he thinks. He conjures his broom out of thin air, mounts it, and takes to the skies.

Getting up the dragon proves surprisingly difficult, but Pete played Quodpot back at school and could have gone pro had he not wanted to be an auror so badly. He spins and rolls around the chaos that is Matthew Jacques’ spellcasting, having to follow the laws dictated by traffic signs tens of feet below him. At one point, there’s a blast of air that shakes the entire city and it takes a miracle for Pete to stay on his broom. He spots a blur of white and purple rushing through the streets below at impossible speeds.

A few minutes later, Mai Valentine the Harpy crashes into him, clawed feet digging into his shoulders and throwing him off his broom. She opens her mouth and screams a sound so high pitched that it shatters the glass in the skyscraper behind him. He manages land on one of the floors, rolling uncontrollably into a muggle office and crashes into a series of desks.

Valentine probably considers him taken care off, which is why she doesn’t follow him - instead flying off to some other target. Pete stands on shaking legs and heals his burst eardrums before calling his broom back to him.

“Join the Department, they said,” he whines as he swings his leg over the handle. “It’ll be fun, they said.” He sighs, resigning himself, “When I retire, I’m buying a beach house and never leaving. Ever.”

Pete launches himself into the sky, heading towards the black dragon with as few distractions as he can manage. Luckily, the damned lizard and its rider are distracted from his approach. Unluckily, they are, instead, turning a small squad of airborne Unspeakables into barbeque. Pete draws his wand and shoots a curse towards the rider, following it up with a shot of deadly, green light. The two manage to evade them, turning around and focusing all of their attention on Pete.

“Shit,” he swears and barrels out of the way of an incoming blast of flame, makes a sharp turn to avoid a spray of bullets. His savaged shoulders scream in protest, but he ignores it the best he can as he flies for his life, the black dragon hot on his tail.

Pete weaves his way through the buildings of the downtown core and beneath him, the battle rages. A massive shadowy beast tries to swipe at his legs when he gets too low. An army of stick figures shoot cartoon arrows and spears - one grazes his forehead and, shit, now he has blood in his eyes and no time to heal himself. The dragon rider shouts something that’s lost in the rush of air and Pete decides that it’s now or never. He jerks the broom upwards and flies straight up towards the sky.

The dragon follows him and Pete smirks, wondering, *Is it still called a Wronski Feint if you’re going up instead of down?*

At the last second, Pete yanks the handle of the broom towards his head and makes a ninety degree
turn, ending up upside-down and flies along the edge of the barrier Mook and Reiko set up. The
dragon crashes right into it, howling as it falls to the earth. It’s rider slips from its back and Pete
darts down, grabbing him out of the air.

The rider is young, younger than the mage that he saw earlier. But his face is angry, practically
boiling with rage. The kid fights tooth and nail and for a moment, Pete thinks that he’d rather die
than have a wizard save him from a long drop and a sudden stop. As they fight, the broom spirals
and the plummet to the ground at alarming speeds.

The kid catches his shoulders, digging his fingers into the bloody gashes left by Valentine. Pete
screams in pain, lashing outwards with his wand. The kid doesn’t scream when the Cruciatu
Curse hits him, but he does tense up, his eyes going wide, jaw clenching shut, and that’s enough for
Pete to blast him off the broom.

Thankfully for the kid, he’s maybe seven or eight feet off the ground when that happens, so he
survives the fall. Pete can hear his bones break when he lands, skin tearing as he skids to a stop on
the concrete. The kid doesn’t scream and that’s the most frightening thing of all.

But he’s not exactly in control of the broom either, so he ends up crashing to the ground and sliding
into the side of a building, his wand flying out of his grasp. Pete blinks the stars out of his eyes
and focuses them on the kid. As he tries to pick himself up and run for his wand, the kid reaches
behind him and pulls out a revolver.

“Expelliarmus!” A voice shouts and the gun flies from the kid’s hand. A figure runs in front of
Pete, standing over him and says, “Stupify!”

The red light hits the kid and he slumps over, unconscious.

“Are you okay?” The owner of the voice, a tall man in his thirties, leans over and offers Pete and
hand up. “I saw you on the broom. Holy hell, that was some crazy flying.”

“Thanks,” Pete says, glancing over at the kid. He recognizes him, now that he can get a good look,
from the information gathering that his team had done at the Archives, before everything had gone
to shit. “That’s… that’s Mokuba Kaiba.”

*Saved a mage and almost got killed by a muggle, he thinks. And my day’s not even over yet.*

“Yeah. Figured he might know some stuff, so I thought capture was a better option than killing

“Pete Coppermine,” he answers. “Come on, Cooper. We’re not done yet.”
Fall

Chapter Summary

Magic is fluid. That had been her first lesson, all those years ago. Mana had sat amongst men and women twice her age and twice her worth and listened to Master Mahad tell her that everything twisted and changed and that all that humans thought they knew for certain about the world was nothing more than a hope at understanding.

“Just when you think you know the rules,” Mahad, her royal brother, had said, “the gods change them.”

Chapter Notes


Disclaimer (2): Superman is owned by DC Comics, Jerry Siegal, and Joe Shuster. Golden Gate Park belongs to the City of San Francisco. San Francisco Pride is run by the San Francisco Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Pride Celebration Committee.

Warning: Mentions of both minor and major character death, injury, gore, and child abuse.

Keith isn’t exactly having a good day.

That isn’t to say that he’s been having great days for the past few months. If anything, today is just yet another step downwards on a steady set of stairs heading towards rock bottom. Today, though… today he is trying especially hard to keep it together because he’s had to watch five of his men die in terrible, gruesome ways. One of them was his Dementor handler, and when that woman fell to the ground with a bloody splat, Keith watched as a cloaked figure swooped down over her and sucked out her soul.

Thankfully, their back up took over before the Dementors let themselves loose on whoever they could find, calm and controlled like she’d been trained. It makes things a lot easier now that they’re trying to tackle what seems to be the worst problem of the day.

Solomon fucking Mutuo, the muggle archeologist, is this problem. Because despite the fact that he’s not supposed to know a goddamn thing about magic, the old man has somehow managed to figure out how to tap into Matthew Jacques city-wide spellcasting. And Mutuo happens to live in a fucking comic book store.
Keith’s half-brother is into comic books. He remembers the guy showing him some vintage copy of Superman and waxing poetic about how utterly overpowered the Man of Steel was. Keith wishes he’d paid more attention right now because there’s a man dressed in blue and red spandex blasting fucking laser eyes at him right now.

He rolls behind an overturned car, narrowly avoiding getting burned into a crisp, and tries to catch his breath. Keith is too sober for this shit, too fucking done with everything, and almost - almost - regrets making that call to Bakura, because undoubtedly the brat used his warning to give his people a five minute head start. Keith shudders, thinking about the white haired mage and hoping to whatever god the kid believed in that he fucking listened to Keith and was out saving the three kids that Ryou died for.

Keith watches as Superman unleashes a wave of frozen breath that encases three Unspeakables in ice. Of course, his mind supplies, Bakura could already be dead. Those kids could already be on their way back to the island. But why do you care? You said so yourself. They’re mages and they fucking deserve it.

“Shut the fuck up!” He yells, throwing a curse overtop the car and ducking down just in time. He hears the spell connect, hears a splatter of ink on the concrete, and knows that he has exactly three and a half seconds before Superman reforms and resumes his counterattack.

Keith runs, making it halfway across the street before a shot from inside the comic book store clips him in the shoulder. He lets out a grunt, falls to his knee, and, shit, yeah, he totally forgot about Mutuo, who’s hollered up inside the store with a shotgun. And now Keith has a bloody wound on his wand arm and there’s a comic book character behind him ready to reform at any second and--

“Fuck it,” he growls, grits his teeth, and moves.

He’s done. He’s so goddamn done with this whole thing. He told Pegasus that this was suicide, but no, no, nobody listened. The whole of San Francisco was just too big a thing to take down - what with Matthew Jacques there to tap into the power lines and the sewer systems and the shadowy alleyways between buildings. Keith’s pretty sure that the mages took the five minutes he’d given Bakura and evacuated everyone they could. This entire operation, this entire ridiculous attempt at crushing the largest mage stronghold in over a century, was just a distraction for this moment. Thousands of lives were being sacrificed so that, in the aftermath, no one would look twice at the disappearance of Solomon Mutuo.

Keith has never been the most graceful of fighters. Kitamori likes a bit of flare in her stances, but that’s just the Mahoutokoro schooling in her. But Keith was fucking Secret Service before getting recruited, and fancy doesn’t save or take lives. It’s just a waste of time, in his books.

So when Keith says, “Fuck it,” and decides that he’s done, he does the only thing that he knows is going to ensure that he goes home tonight and can sleep away this fucking mess in his own goddamn bed: he set the comic book store on fire.

It’s a risky move, he knows it. Mutuo is old, pushing sixty at this point, and if the shock of everything around him getting set on fire doesn’t kill him, the smoke inhalation might. But, if there’s anything that Keith can count on in this crazy city, it’s Matthew Jacques.

Superman rushes past Keith, ignoring everything and everyone in its way, and crashes into the building. Keith goes back down on his knee and waits, because whatever this spell is, it’s designed to protect those that Jacques cares about, even to the point of self destruction. There’s a crash and something rockets out of the burning building, leaving a trail of black, liquid ink behind it. Keith grits his teeth and fires a blasting spell straight at the comic book store.
Superman falls apart just as whatever comic book he came from goes up in flames and Mutuo falls with him. Keith’s back up Dementor handler waves her wand and slows his descent to keep him from dying when he hit the ground.

They forgot the shotgun. Mutuo, being the crafty old bastard he his, turn and fires one final round and gets the handler right in the heart. Keith gets out one final swear before everything goes straight to hell.

The Dementors swoop in, uncontrolled and free, and the wall of depression hits Keith like a freight train. He gasps at the icy cold air, all warmth having been sucked dry from the world, and the concrete snaps in the freezing temperatures. Darkness begins to cloud the edges of his vision as he hears Mutuo start to scream. Keith tries to keep control of himself, tries to crawl his way towards Mutuo because, damn it, damn it all, he can’t fuck this one up, too.

_Damn it, kid. You’ve really done it this time._

_I assume they got away_.

Keith blinks and shakes his head to clear it. Mutuo is throwing up and a cloaked figure that he cannot see leans over him. All around them, Unspeakables attempt to cast Patronus Charms, some with varying degrees of success. Keith has never actually been able to ever cast one - nothing corporal anyways. There’s something about the story behind the spell, about how those who weren’t worthy, weren’t good enough, would be devoured by it if they tried. Keith knows he’s not pure hearted enough and that, especially now, his intentions are just to save his own skin - but even if he tried, Keith doesn’t think he’d even be able to think of anything happy that would be able to bring the Charm into being.

_I think I love them_. _Do you think they love me back?_

_Of course, they do. I think they’ll be very happy to finally meet you_.

He tries, though. He tries as best he can and gets nothing more than a wisp of silver smoke. Keith thinks of his father, of his mother, of the family he left behind to do this job. He thinks of Kitamori at the bar, raising a glass of bourbon to her lips. He thinks of Coppermine and his stupid, annoying attempts to suck up to him. He thinks of Mook and Scott and Lew, his fucking team.

_But he’s dead. Ryou - he died._

_Yes, he did. But somehow, he started breathing again._

Ryou stands before him, blue eyed and dark haired, pale skin glinting morning light. There’s a smile on his face, sad and small, and he reaches a hand towards Keith.

_You couldn’t have fixed me. There’s nothing to fix._

Suddenly and without warning, a hurricane fell upon San Francisco. There’s a roar that rips through the air and a great fissure opens up in the sky. The Dementor approaching them looks up into the sky and does something Keith once thought to be impossible: it appears to be scared.

The wind whips around them and it is only dumb luck that keeps Keith from being dragged away and tossed out to sea with the rest of his men. Tears stream down his face as he tries to look up, keeping his eyes on the Dementor in front of him. It seems to shudder, shake, and then it arches its back and a silent scream erupts from its hollow form. Then, a small ball of bright light snakes its way out of the Dementor’s shaking form and rises slowly towards the fissure. Another falls, then another.
All around him, Keith can see the other Dementors doing the same thing. The utter weight of their depressing presence seems to waver and slowly ebb away. The city’s skyline is filled with tiny shining spheres, all heading towards the crack in the sky. The Dementor in front of him shudders once more as its fingers peel apart like bark from a tree, the paper thin slivers of bone cause up in the gale force winds and whisked away.

Keith watches as, one by one, the Dementors fall apart around them and - suddenly - one of the most powerful weapons they have against an army of mages is gone.

There’s another roar, so loud and powerful that it shakes the earth with its might, and the fissure closes with a bang. The hurricane dissolves around San Francisco and debris from buildings, from trees, from corpses, begins to fall from the sky.

A flash of yellow illuminates the morning sky: the signal for retreat. Keith, shaken and very ready for this to be over, looks over at the fallen Solomon Mutuo.

The old man is still alive somehow. But he’s deathly pale where his skin isn’t burned and bleeding from somewhere Keith can’t see. Keith makes his way over to Mutuo on hands and knees, the wind knocked out of his lungs. He makes sure to check for a gun this time and shakily performs a body bind hex.

“Y-y-you… can’t have… her,” Mutuo stutters, dark eyes opening ever so slightly. Keith must be tired. He can’t seem to make his spells stick, “Sh-she’s gone. Long… long g-gone.”

“Oh good, you know where her fucking Item went,” Keith rolls his eyes. “Be sure to tell that to whoever’s interrogating you. It’ll end things quicker for you.”

“The - the Item?” Then Mutuo does something Keith never expected him to do. He laughs, “Y-y-you think - oh, my boy. You… have no idea… no idea…”

Keith doesn’t have time for this. He knocks the old man out the muggle way - a quick jab to his temple - and then hauls him up. Any Department survivors would be convening on the beaches. Keith takes three tries, but manages to finally apparate away.

There are certain things that you think about when you picture San Francisco: the rolling hills and sloping streets, the Bay with the island prison in the middle, the bridge that gets blown up in every action movie. She doesn’t consider them to be the heart of the city, though. For her, it’s Golden Gate Park, with its gardens and lakes and the green, green grass beneath her bare feet. Hellman Hollow stretches out before her, bringing with it memories both good and bad.

Amanda moved here almost half a decade ago, barely into her final year of high school, planted her feet in the ground and refused to move. She killed her first man in the shadow of a tree, fingers tying complex knots in the frayed threads of her lederman sleeve. Then, two years ago, just over that hill, she’d met Tea, bumping into her in the crowd as rainbow flags flew over their heads. They’d come back here last year for their anniversary, holding hands and kissing softly beneath the blue sky, and Amanda had almost forgotten the battle that she’d fought on these grounds.

Isis is in her mind now, the power of a goddess coursing through her veins - and she remembers it. Damn it all to hell, she remembers it all.

“Call for me,” the goddess whispers, her voice rumbling and crackling like an earthquake, soft
like mother’s lullaby. “Call for me, child. It has been so long since I heard a prayer.”

“~Steady my hand. Strengthen my resolve~” Amanda begins, light flaring from her staff as a white dress of feathers appears around her. She places her hands on Matt’s shoulders, feeling the ancient powers of the earth and water coiling within him. “~We ask the power of Isis, Great of Magic, Mistress of the Pyramid, Eye of Ra. Remove all obstacles to our goals. Make our dream reality. Make our wish come true.~”

Matt sits at her bare feet, fingers clutching tightly at the grass. Her brother mutters beneath his breath, calling upon the city (with its Park and its Bay and its Prison and its Bridge) to defend them, to protect them as it has for the last five years.

“~Bless this path we choose to take, the path to our success. It may be fraught with peril and doubt, but we shall see it through. And at the end, our joy will be the life we hope to find.~”

Power blazes through her hands, into Matt (brother and teacher and mentor and everything), into San Francisco. Into home. Their city awakens.

Amanda can see it, somewhere in the back of her mind. She can see the drawings and paintings that Duke and his team etched into the walls around the city pealing themselves from the brick, lumbering out into the streets. Power cables sung as magic rippled through them, enhancing the powers of their kin. The sewers and the piles below the concrete come to life. The shadows open gateways across the land.

San Francisco is beautiful like this, stunning almost, like a forest fire or a sand storm. It’s a hurricane and they’re standing in the eye.

“Find what you are looking for,” Isis calls. “Release the knot.”

And so, together - Amanda and Matt and the Lady of Heaven - latch on to the sleeping dust that the wizards and unwinds it, slowly and carefully and watches as the cloud of pink dissolves into the air. Then, together, they work on the barrier.

Somewhere off to her left, Duke calls out to their guard, “Incoming!”

Amanda can feel those damn things approach, even though she knows that she’ll never see them, not in this reality. There’s an oppressive, deadly weight that descends on their shoulders. In her mind’s eye, Amanda sees a million, screaming souls crammed into each of their bodies, hungry and scared and searching for something that they don’t even know.

She has to trust Duke, trust his team because she and Matt can’t be distracted now that they’ve begun to unravel the barrier around the city. Upset spells on this magnitude have disastrous consequences. If Amanda’s concentration slips for even a second, the very air around San Francisco could be set alight, killing all those who fought within.

The barrier is solid, cold, and dry, like a pane of glass on a winter’s day. Amanda feels it like she’s pressing her hands right against it, trying to see beyond even though it’s all frosted over. Release the knot, Isis calls again, whispering in her ear. And Amanda knows knots, knows thread and weave and cloth and the dangers that they can bring. She remembers her life as Mala Pukar, remembers the feel of rope beneath her aging fingertips, remembers the control that she had until she had lost it all.

This is not a knot, Great Mother, she tells the goddess.
My child, have you learned nothing of my craft, Isis laughs, soft as a storm. Everything is a knot, if you want it to be.

Magic is fluid. That had been her first lesson, all those years ago. Mana had sat amongst men and women twice her age and twice her worth and listened to Master Mahad tell her that everything twisted and changed and that all that humans thought they knew for certain about the world was nothing more than a hope at understanding.

“Just when you think you know the rules,” Mahad, her royal brother, had said, “the gods change them.”

Amanda grips Matt’s shoulders, breathes once. Twice. Spreads her goddesses power across barrier and wills it to change.

Around her, the grass on the hill side is burning. Duke and his team have set it ablaze, looking through pilfered firefighter oxygen masks and suits at the smoke, finding the holes where the invisible soul eaters were. A few had caught fire and Amanda could see their skeletal faces with gaping mouths in the flames. They felt no pain, made no noise, and continued on until one of Amanda’s guards cut them down.

Chief amongst them are Mako and Akiza. They stand together, controlling the flames and arcing them away from their defenders. Mako pulls water from the air, from the leaves in the trees, from the grass and the earth beneath them, slashing it towards the blaze to keep it from creeping forwards. Akiza takes the dried wood and makes it grow, reaching out and feeding the flames, allowing it to continue to burn, but away from them.

Then, as the barrier seems to give, the hundred feet of glass and solidity giving way to the net of magic beneath its surface, Duke gets hit.

He goes down, screaming and cursing, clawing at his body as his back arches unnaturally. Tears run down Amanda’s face, knowing that there is nothing that she can do to help him. She can’t let up, not for a moment, not for anything, otherwise they’re all dead.

Witches and wizards descend on them, some from across the field, others from the air. There’s a girl leading them, barely out of her teens, with dark hair and darker eyes. She shouts something that Amanda doesn’t catch, but she’s the one pointing her wand at Duke and there’s a small, cruel smile on her face.

Once the barrier breaks, we will break her, her goddess promises. Tie her in knots until she cannot breathe and then leave her to rot.

“No,” Matt growls in front of her. “No. She’s mine.” He stands, leaving Amanda to disassemble the barrier on her own, and faces the enemy.

Amanda has no time to watch, only hope that with Matt’s help, they can hold off long enough for her to do her job. But the net inside the barrier is so vast and she can only feel the threads of magic. It would be so much easier if she could see it, but Amanda was not the one that had been born with that particular ability.

So, as the earth shifts and moves with Matt’s power, Amanda focuses her gaze skyward, tugging and pulling at the net, hoping to unravel what she could, create a hole in the mess of tangled strings.

Duke stops screaming, crawling towards Amanda to take a break from the fighting. He’s panting
behind his oxygen mask, sweating behind the flame retardant gear. His gloved hands grasp at her ankle and rubs comforting circles into her skin. She can do this.

Then, something incredible happens.

Bakura bursts onto the scene, air whipping around him and blasting the wizards on the brooms high into the sky. Before they can apparate, he twists his arms and crushes them into the ground and watches as their heads crack open like eggs.

“Amanda!” A voice from behind nearly shocks her into dropping her spell. Yuugi Mutuo, with her wild purple hair and her wide blue eyes grabs her by the shoulders and injects herself into Amanda’s magic and--

Oh. Oh.

She can see the web all of a sudden, see the twisting lines of wizarding magic at form the barrier. Amanda gasps at it, sees the ancient symbols that exist in the place of atoms, and rewrites them to her liking. Yuugi’s power flows through her, allowing her to see what she’s known all her life: that magic is just energy and energy can be manipulated, changed, but never destroyed.

Yuugi can see energy, see it and mold it to her whim. Everything from the delicate weavings of magic to the neurological sparks powering her brain was at her control. There’s only one woman that Amanda has ever known to have that power.

Amanda stares at this ghost of her sister, reaches forward to cup her neck and bring her forward, touching their foreheads together.

“Princess,” she whispers. “You have a lot of explaining to do.”

“Not a princess,” Yuugi raises an eyebrow. “Let’s get to work, Green. We’ve got a city to save.”

Tristan sometimes hates his power. It’s not often, because being able to crack the earth open is pretty cool. But at the same time, it’s pretty fucking scary to use when you live on the biggest tectonic fault line in the world.

On one hand, Tristan wants to cut loose. He’s been dying to cut loose all his life, but even when he was young and stupid, he held his powers in check, knowing full well that he couldn’t bring New Jersey to the ground and live with the consequences. On the other hand, Tristan has three mage kids and their adopted parents to worry about and causing a city wide earthquake would be seriously counterproductive.

“Get down!” He shouts as something explodes overhead. While most of them duck for cover, Rex grabs Weevil, shoving the other boy underneath him and guarding him with his own body. Chunks of rubble bounced off of Rex’s diamond hard skin.

“You okay?” Rex asked hoarsely. Weevil nodded, stunned and mute. Together they stumbled back towards the main group.

Bakura had called Tristan minutes after the first initial warning had gone out, waking him out of a dead sleep. Tristan had reacted quickly enough, though, diving through the front seats of his Jeep and slipping behind the wheel. He’d practically shoved the keys into the ignition and stomped on the pedal as soon as the dash lit up.
“They’re targeting the three I came here with,” Bakura had explained as Tristan drove quickly out of the underground parking lot, jumping the curb and cutting off an irate commuter as he merged into San Francisco’s early morning traffic. “Get to them as quick as you can. Keep them safe, Tristan.”

“I’ll take them to—”

“Don’t fucking tell me! Don’t tell me anything. Hell, don’t even tell them where you’re taking them,” Bakura had shouted. “Wizards can read minds, but only if you make eye contact with them.”

*He’s prioritizing,* Tristan tells himself, trying to keep calm. Not like a general, though. *Like a criminal, trying to buy time with the police.* Generals didn’t make plans for soldiers taken hostage in battle. They just gave them cyanide pills.

Tristan thought of his father for the first time in years. *Rest in pieces, you miserable fuck.*

So he’d raced towards the Simmington’s place, barely getting inside in time to avoid the pink dust falling from the sky. They’d waited inside for Matthew to lift that spell, applying their temporary tattoos to grant them access to the Fast Travel Points. Once the dust had been banished, they’d slipped outside into a war zone.

The Fast Travel Points couldn’t take them out of the city, but they could take them to the outskirts. From there on out, they’d have to run like hell and hope the barrier would get taken down soon. But Tristan suspected that it would be a death trap to head that way; the was no way that the wizards wouldn’t notice a mass of people trying to get out of San Francisco. Those who’d gotten the warning early enough were probably long gone by now, making their way towards San Mateo or just fucking away from here. Maybe a few of them, those that were strong enough, chose to stay behind and launch an attack from the outside. Maybe.

Maybe not.

The point is, Tristan’s taking the kids to Amanda and Matthew’s apartment, because aside from *Nomad* and the Kaiba’s condo, that’s got to be one of the safest places on the fucking planet. And Tristan knows that Amanda set him up to get past the blood seals that they placed on the front door, so he can get inside without a key. Anyone carrying a wand is going to get fried if they try and Tristan isn’t really in the business of giving a damn.

It’s a good plan. It’d be an even better plan, if there weren’t two wizards standing in front of the goddamn building.

They’re smirking, like they fucking knew he’d do this. Tristan literally wants to send them to hell.

“Stay here,” he says to the five people behind him. “Stay hidden. Rebecca—”

“Yeah. Okay,” the girl nods, voice cracking with nerves. She swirls her hands, calling upon the shadows and pulls them around her family like a cloak.

Tristan swallows, his heart beating hard against his ribs, and steps forward.

“Get the fuck outta my way,” he growls, sending a tremor through the earth to make his point. These wizards don’t have to know that he can’t go all out, they just have to know that he’s dangerous.

“Give us the kids,” the one on the right promises. “Hand them over and we’ll let you go free.”
Tristan doesn’t like the smug smile that passes between the two of them. Something tells him that they’ve let a few of Tristan’s friends ‘go free’ today.

“Over my dead body,” he says.

“That can be arranged.”

The wizards draw their wands in quick unison, barely giving Tristan any time to defend himself, and fire a set of deadly green lights at him. He manages to roll out of the way, digging his fingers into the concrete and sending a shockwave into the earth, wrenching it apart with his hands. The earth split, cracked, and up out of the depths shot liquid fire and Tristan threw towards his enemies.

The one on the left waves his wand, mutters some Latin beneath his breath, and diverts it away, giving his partner enough time to move around and charge at Tristan.

He panics, not used to fighting up close. Tristan needs some distance, so he pulls the revolver from the back of his pants and fires it blindly, hoping to buy him some time to retreat to a safe distance. The wizard on the right conjures a shield and holds his ground, the bullets bouncing off the invisible barrier and ricocheting into the walls of nearby buildings.

Tristan pulls the lava from the earth as soon as he’s at a safe enough distance, sending it flying through the air, splitting it to attack both of them at once. But it’s in vain, because they keep stopping him, keep on advancing forwards. There’s no way that he can keep this up for long and there’s no way that Rebecca can hold her shadows long enough to shield her family from them.

He grits his teeth. *I don’t have to last forever. Just until the barriers go down.* Tristan plants his feet, refusing to move another inch. *Come on, Amanda. Show us all what you can do.*

The ground shakes and moans with Tristan’s strength and the wizards struggle to stay upright. The buildings around them, built to survive some of the worst that the San Andreas can throw at them, sway like grass in the wind. Tristan focuses on the wizards, trying to concentrate the shaking just on the earth beneath them, trying to shake them apart. But even that isn’t enough, because the one on the left gathers himself just enough to cast a spell that raises him into the air and out of Tristan’s reach.

The wizard points his wand and--

“Arrrgggg!” the one on the left screams as something wet hits his face. His skin bubbles and smokes and he falls from the sky, clawing at himself. Out of the shadows, Weevil steps forward against the better judgement of those behind him.

The kid looks like a monster. Four, long spider limbs have sprouted out of his torso, ripping his shirt in two. They were so long that they touched the ground and held Weevil’s body in the air as his normal arms and legs thinned out and transformed to match his new ones. Long pincer-like fangs pushed passed his thin lips and dripped thick, viscous poison that hissed and spit when it hit the concrete. His straw blond hair was falling out of his head as his face hollowed out, his body expanding and growing, turning him into a massive, fourteen foot tall spider.

Weevil launching himself at the wizard on the left, pinning him down with his long limbs and bit into his throat with a vicious ferocity that Tristan didn’t know that the kid possessed. Tristan focused his attention on the final foe, buying the Simingtons enough time to cross the street and enter Matthew’s condo. He distantly hears Dem and Mina calling for them, telling them to retreat inside the building and for a moment, he thinks they can win.
Then, it all goes wrong.

With his last gasp, the wizard on the left blasts Weevil in the chest at point blank range, sending him flying into one of the shops nearby, stripes of blue blood trailing after him. Tristan screams as the massive spider twitches amidst the rubble, but makes no move to get up. This distracts him just long enough for the wizard on the right to catch him in the chest with a spell and Tristan can feel his ribs shattering, bone fragments piercing his lungs and heart.

He falls to the earth, blood leaking from his mouth, and he hears Rebecca screaming, Rex raging and wailing, safe behind the barrier of Matthew Jacques’ condo. He thinks, *At least they’re safe. I did my job. I did what I could.*

The wizard on the right takes one look at Tristan’s prone form and dismisses him as a lost cause. Instead, he turns to Weevil’s slowly transforming body, half human half spider, slipping Mage Cuffs around his flesh wrists. Darkness fills the edges of his vision, but Tristan keeps awake long enough to see the two of them disappear with a loud cracking sound.

*I did my best. I did what I could. Mama, I’m coming home.*

Then, feeling ever so tired, Tristan Taylor closes his eyes.
Chapter Summary

Latner tries to disappear again, but Duke is holding on tight, so he goes right with her. There’s an uncomfortable sensation, like being shoved through a rubber tube, and he’s barely able to keep from throwing up when they land. Latner uses his distraction to throw him into Amanda and Yuugi. He knocks them down and upsets their spell.

“Get down!” Duke’s not sure who screams that, but all he can see is the park phasing out of existence, the colours of the world inverting, just for a second. The ground they’re on shakes like a thousand earthquakes, trees falling to the ground around them. Duke covers his head, praying to whatever god might be listening for him to survive this. The park ignites again, flames erupting around them, and he thinks that this is how he’s going to die.

Chapter Notes


Disclaimer (2): Wikipedia is owned by the Wikipedia Foundation. Golden Gate Bridge was designed by Joseph Strauss, Irving Morrow, and Charles Ellis.

Warning: Minor and major character death, blood, gore, kidnapping, mentions of genocide, and nudity.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bakura stared down the witch standing across from him and Matthew. She looks young, small, and slight, and yet something about her told him that she was anything but. He touched the Ring under his shirt.

"Well, well, well," the witch smirks. "Matthew Jacques. I never thought I’d see the likes of you in person. There are legends about you, big boy. Think you live up to the hype?"

"You'll soon find out," Matthew says, voice calm and controlled. Bakura sees his eyes flick to the right, as if hoping to catch a glance of Amanda and Yuugi behind them. Up in the sky, Bakura sees the barrier begin to unwind and fall apart.

"And you," it seems that the witch had turned her attention towards him. "Aren't you the little mystery? You lead a pair of assaults on wizarding property, and yet no one has any idea who you are. And trust me when I say this, that's one hell of an accomplishment. Give me a hint, darling.
You got a name to go with that pretty face?

"Trista Latner," he says and smirks when her cocky expression slips just for a second as he says her name.

"W-well, aren't you talented," she reaches for her wand, but Bakura is too quick for her. He flicks his wrist.

Here's the thing about fire. Wikipedia tells him that it feeds on oxygen, burns through it like fuel. Now, Bakura has always been vaguely aware that he could control an open flame by twisting the winds one way or another, but up until this point, hand never fully and completely understood the inner workings of it all. But after trying it out in the relative safety of his own apartment (well, he says 'relative... He just hopes that Mai never takes too hard a look at the ceiling when she's over), he'd managed to extract what oxygen he could from the surrounding air and channel it in a single controlled burst.

He does this now, shooting combusting oxygen towards Latner's wand hand before she can touch her wand. She shrieks as he scalds her palm, black blisters bubbling in the place of tanned skin.

"Don't do that," Bakura warns, cold as ice.

"Turn around. Leave us be. And we will let you live," Matthew warns as Amanda and Yuugi finally take down the barrier.

Latner laughs.

"Would you? After everything, you’d just let us go? No," she spits. “You mages will be as hungry for blood as your gods if we left you to your own devices.” Then she pauses and lifts her wounded hand to the sky. "Any time now."

And--

The tug of a divine weapon, leagues and leagues away, pulls Bakura’s attention from reality for just a second. He doesn't know which one, doesn't know who's wielding it, but whoever they are, they are dangerous enough that--

Latner's hand is healed, looking fresh and young and perfect. Yuugi gives a yelp as her concentration falters.


The Spellcaster falls to the ground, fingers digging into the earth, words and prayers tumbling from his lips. The flames behind them leap up, turn a ghastly shade of green, and arch towards Latner, as quick and deadly as a snake. Latner waves her wand around her, a gush of water springing from its tip, surrounding her in a cocoon. It boils, hissing and steaming, when the fire hits it, and she spins on the spot, cracking with disappearance.

Bakura has an instant of a second to think, Where would she go? And then, all at once, he knows.

He uses the air to propel himself forward, upward, leaping over Amanda's and Yuugi's heads, catching Latner's wrist as soon as it phases into existence. He twists his spine, throwing his weight behind his move, and transfers his powers of intangibility into Latner's arm. He hears her shoulder break as he pulls her arm behind her and through her chest, before finally letting go.

Latner stands like a grotesque sculpture, her right arm broken and sticking through her torso.
There's a tight grimace on her face before she cracks away, reassembling herself properly a few metres away. Bakura guesses that perhaps the Department of Mysteries had discovered a cure for splinching a long time ago and just refused to share it with the public.

"Can you move?" He asks the girls. Amanda shakes her head, eyes squeezed shut.

"They're trying to get it up again," she explains. "If we had more power--"

"No," Yuugi snaps.

"Sister, please--"

"We are not killing them," Yuugi shouts. "I am not your sister. I am not your King. When this is over, if I find a way, I will assemble that Puzzle and you can have her if you want her so badly, but until then, I am still me and I will not kill!"

“How interesting,” Latner spoke, voice hoarse and cracking with exhaustion. Perhaps unsplinching herself took more energy than she’d cared to use. “Two little girls against the full force of our Curse-Binders and they’re winning. Aren’t you two just--”

Matthew doesn’t give her the chance to finish, pulling the clouds down from the sky and drenching the blaze behind them, sending spitting hot steam swirling around them. He aimed it towards Latner, Bakura going on the defensive to make sure that none of it touched their people. Latner moved, quick as lightning, to avoid getting burned again, spinning around a tree. Except--

The branches reached out and grabbed her, curling around Latner’s wand arm and squeezing like a boa constrictor. Bakura hears her bones crack, hears the cry of pain. Akiza Izinski stepped forwards, her hand outstretched, fingers clenched. She’s shed most of the protective gear. Mako stands behind her, his expression guarded, as he takes the steam from Matthew’s control, leaving the Spellcaster to focus on other things. Mako condenses it, cools it down, and surrounds Latner’s head with water, drowning her on land.

“No!” There’s a crack as another witch appears, wand shooting out and catching Mako with a shot of green. The water drops from Latner as Mako falls to the ground, a look of shock in his face as he dies.

“Nat!” Latner calls in between coughs. But it’s too late for her friend. Akiza screams, ripping Latner’s arm from it’s socket as she takes control of another tree, the branches reaching down and impaling ‘Nat’, blood soaking the earth beneath her.

Bakura runs forwards, pulling his knife from his sleeve, and slashes at Latner’s throat. Crimson flows from the cut, dying her robes red. Latner falls to the ground, clawing at her neck.

"Is everyone alright?" He calls, wiping the sweat from his brow and turning around. “Yuugi--”

It happens again. A divine weapon tugs Bakura’s focus from him and throws it far away. He hears a woman this time. She’s saying something, but he can’t tell what, and there’s a flash of red hair--

Latner’s eyes snap open, the cut knitting itself back together, and she blasts him across the field, opening up his chest. Gold blood splatters around him as he falls and he hears Yuugi call for him as his vision falters. I can’t die, he thinks. It’s not possible. I can’t. Not now.

He closes his eyes as everything goes dark.
“Bakura!”

Duke is still huddling next to Amanda when the Thief King falls, body convulsing with aftershocks of pain every few seconds, when Yuugi Mutuo lets loose the most strangled cry he’s ever heard in his many lives. He’s there, seconds later, when the pair of witches rise from the dead and tear through Akiza. He watches dumbly as she falls to the ground in a bloody heap. He will mourn her, like he plans to mourn Mako, but not now. Think. Compartmentalize. Stay alive.

He’s out of bullets and in no condition to fight, but he rises to his feet anyways because Matthew might need some backup here.

Amanda is swearing under her breath. Even with whatever help Mutuo is giving her, she’s struggling against whoever is on the other end of the barrier spell. Duke pulls the small switchblade from his boot and gets ready for anything.

He’s not ready for the Spirit of the Millennium Pendant.

The ghost of a woman he used to know phases into existence beside him, white hair long and clumpy, eyes burnt out pits in her head. Duke openly stares at the gaping hole in her chest, her rib cage empty and black from flame. Her skin is stretched over what are left of her bones and, Mother of Darkness, is this what Bakura had looked like back when he was still trapped within the Ring? Duke swears softly, fingers trembling as they hold his knife.

Yuugi calls out, says something to the Spirit, but Duke can’t hear it, because the Pharaoh steps forwards and disappears, reappearing beside Matthew Jacques.

“Sen ,” the Spirit whispers, her voice hoarse and broken. Her fingers graze against Matthew’s arm, so small and dainty, but the Spellcaster jumps like he’s been shocked. “Sen .”

“Is… this that…?” Nat, the witch who killed Mako, recoils in disgust.

“Yeah. Merlin , she’s… “ Latner swallows visibly as her arm finishes regrowing. “My mother read me stories about her when I was a girl.”

The Spirit tilts her head, ears turning towards Latner’s voice. A terrible grin splits across her face and thunder rumbles in the distance. She tightens her grip on Matthew, “Hemsi.”

Lightning arcs across dark clouds, crashing down in a flash of light, striking Nat before Duke can blink. It hits the witch with so much power that it incinerates her. Matthew moves at the same time, ancient prayers falling from his lips, and the earth groans, shooting up and throwing Latner into the air. Just before the Spirit can hit her too, Latner disappears again, cracking out of existence to avoid her own death.

She reappears next to Duke, who slashes with his knife just in time to catch her thigh, cutting it wide open. He fights furiously, kicking and punching, giving Latner absolutely no time to catch her breath, defending the two girls who were the only thing allowing them to continue to evacuate. Latner gives as good as she gets, making Duke wonder just how old she was, because there’s no way that she’s as young as she looks. But then again, Duke isn’t either.

“She was my friend!” Latner screams, her cocky demeanor long gone. “She was my friend!”

“They were my friends, too!” Duke catches her hands, slamming his head forwards and smashing his forehead against hers. Latner stumbles back, blood dripping down her face. “You killed my sister! You killed her! You killed her!”
Latner tries to disappear again, but Duke is holding on tight, so he goes right with her. There’s an uncomfortable sensation, like being shoved through a rubber tube, and he’s barely able to keep from throwing up when they land. Latner uses his distraction to throw him into Amanda and Yuugi. He knocks them down and upsets their spell.

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But it isn’t.

When the upset spell finally calms down, there’s a circle of peace surrounding Duke and the unconscious girls. Matthew Jacques stands in front of them, clothes torn and arms outstretched. His skin there is burnt, bubbling, and bleeding. Duke watches as Matthew wavers, falls to one knee, and collapses on the ground.

He’s all that’s left standing. The Spirit has gone back to wherever she’d been prior to this and Bakura is nowhere to be found, so he’s on his fucking own. Duke gets to his feet, spits blood on the ground, and glances over to where Latner’s body is. It’s a burnt out husk, but it’s still breathing, slowly reassembling itself. He grabs Amanda under her arms, dragging her towards the edge of the park. His whole body screams in protest, but he can’t stop now. He’s all that they’ve got left.

Latner moves, sitting up. Dead skin sloaches off her face revealing new flesh underneath, as she reaches for her wand. Latner’s spell follows her discretion, hitting the grass somewhere to the side.

“Duke Devlin,” the girl speaks with such morbid determination that Duke immediately knows what she plans to do. “I need your knife.”

Latner rises shakily to her feet, the remains of her robes hanging off her body. Duke tosses his blade towards the professor. She catches it without even looking. She reaches into her bag, pulls out a golden pyramid on a string, and hands it around her neck.

“I’m going to buy you some time,” Yuugi grips the knife tightly. “Get them out of here.”

Latner fires another spell, but Yuugi deflects it again, stalking forwards with determination. Latner continues to try, backing up to put more space between her and Yuugi, but the professor breaks out into a jog. Duke drags Amanda over the hill, behind a small bit of shelter. Latner screams, wand flashing, and Yuugi leaps, knife razed.

Latner’s bright red spell catches Yuugi in her stomach. Yuugi flies backwards, red blood flying behind her, and landing next to the hunched over figure of Bakura.

Duke doesn’t dare move, not even when Latner stumbles over to Matthew, clasps a pair of Cuffs around his wrist and disapparates. Not even when another wave of heavy depression falls upon them. He just pulls Amanda close, hides his face in her hair, and prays.

His prayers are answered.
Bakura wakes up covered in his own blood, cursing himself for being so fucking cocky, and sees the destruction around him.

“...Bakura...” a voice draws his attention to his left. Yuugi Mutuo lays there broken, trying to hold her stomach closed with one hand, guts slithering out from behind the cage of her fingers. He rushes towards her, eyes wide.

“I’m... oh gods, I’m so sorry. I should have--”

“Bakura,” Yuugi shuts him up by opening her palm, letting a knife fall from her grip. “I - I didn’t... I couldn’t... I thought, maybe I could--”

“It’s okay. It’s okay. Save your strength.” She’s wearing the Pendant, but there’s a piece missing, right there in the middle.

“I’m not her,” she cries. “Jii-chan... he always wanted her. I was... never enough... Even after all I did... never... not enough--”

“I want you,” Bakura cups her face with trembling hands. “I want - gods, Yuugi, don’t die. You’re - you’ve still got so much to do.”

“I lied to Jii-chan. T-there’s... no way to separate... This was always...” tears run down her face. In her other hand, Yuugi reveals the missing piece of the Pendant. She’s given up entirely on trying to save herself. “Does... does it hurt?”

He can’t tell her anything but the truth, “Terribly.”

“You’ll... remember me? As... as me?”

He presses his lips to her forehead, “I promise.”

Yuugi smiles, bloody and sad, “I dreamt... that I loved you.”

“So did I,” Bakura’s crying too. This wasn’t how it was supposed to go.

He stands, backs up, and Yuugi presses the final piece into position.

Yuugi screams, her back arching as she claws at her face. Her ruined stomach stretches open, displacing her organs as they spill out onto the burnt grass. Her fingers fall from her hands, hair coming out in chunks, and skin peels off her arms, her face.

Bakura remembers this, the moment when the Spirit of Ryou Andrews and the Spirit of the Millennium Ring came together, destroying the body of the boy he once was because it could no longer contain anything less than half a soul. It had gone on for so long that Ryou had thought that nothing could possibly be worth this kind of pain. And then--

And then, a shockwave of pure magic rolls off of Yuugi, blood red and full of power, knocking Bakura clean off his feet. Lightning cracks through the sky, thunder clapping in the clouds. Rain falls from the darkening sky as a second wave rips out of her.

Yuugi doesn’t stand as Ryou had. She sits up, kneeling on the ground. Her remaining hair is streaked with red, her face raw and bloody with exposed muscles, and most of her fingers missing. Bakura rushes forwards, pulls her into a hug and whispers, “I’ll remember. I promise. I promise.”

But Yuugi doesn’t answer. She’s already gone.
The Millennium Pendant flashes and Yuugi turns to sand, dissolving in the muddy ground. Bakura clutches her clothes, all that he has left of her, and realizes the depressing press of weight on his shoulders isn’t coming from him.

The rain shows him the shapes of terrible, hunched figures, attracted to the amount of power that had been thrown off during Yuugi’s death. He’s done. Bakura is done. He tugs the Millennium Ring out from under his shirt and decides, he doesn’t care what happens, doesn’t care how much of his sanity he loses. He’s going to end this.

The Ring flashes as it activates and he splits the barrier between life and death.

Amanda wakes up just as Bakura cuts loose.

She’s seen divine weapons at work before, so it’s not new, but she will never be used to it. Even from so far away, she can see the horrific, glorious flash of light that comes forth from the wielders of these weapons, watches as Bakura loses his grip on humanity and unleashes a hurricane upon San Francisco.

Wind and rain whip around her and she grabs Duke, pulling them behind the burnt out tree, thankful that he’d gotten her to higher ground. Where’s Matt? She wonders, Where’s Yuugi?

There’s a terrible roar that rips through the air and Amanda thinks of the gods of war, baying for blood before a battle, thinks of the Destroyer as the great god had descended upon her home and taken so much and so many. A great fissure opens up in the sky and Amanda wishes that Duke hadn’t left her staff below, even though she knows that it’s power was far too much for her to control safely, even now. At least then she’d be able to plead with gods for hope, for protection. For the Ring to let Bakura out of its clutches without ripping him from them entirely.

The winds pick up, whipping debris around Duke and Amanda. It’s only luck that keeps them alive ( Or maybe, she thinks desperately, some part of Bakura is looking out for us ). Thousands of small balls of light appear around them, lighting up the storm like fireflies in a tornado. They head towards the crack in the sky and disappear towards the other side.

“They’re souls,” Duke’s shout cuts through the winds. “The invisible things, they steal souls--”

“And he’s taking them back,” Amanda finishes as the oppressive weight of hopelessness ebbs away. “Giving them back to death.”

Bakura stands alone amidst the chaos, looking all the god that he claims not to be. His eyes glow gold and a third eye has opened on his forehead. The winds whip around him and a terrible white aura wraps him up like a cloak. He looks up into the clouds with such a blank expression, so unlike anything that she’s ever seen from him. Golden blood spills out of his mouth.

“It’s killing him. Duke - Duke, we have to--” Amanda stands, pushing her power outwards, praying for protection and luck and the power to make it over to the Thief King. They run together, Duke’s hand in hers, towards him, dodging trees and logs and chunks of the earth that fly through the air.

They reach him. Against all odds, they reach him. Duke grabs Bakura’s face, screaming at him to let go, please, please! Amanda stupidly grabs at the Millennium Ring and tries to pull it off him, but it burns her palms and she has to let go. The Thief King blinks, reaches out, and touches her soul, grips it like a lifeline and she hears--

Screaming. Ninety-nine screaming men, women, and children - oh god, Mahad had told her, all
those years ago, how a divine weapon could only be created through blood and death, but she didn’t know. *She didn’t know*.

There’s another roar and the earth shakes as the fissure in the sky shuts, closing the passage to the realms beyond death. The winds collapse as Bakura falls to his knees, gasping for breath, tears rolling down his face. Duke falls with him, holding him close and shaking nearly as badly.

“It’s okay,” Duke whispers, rocking back and forth with Bakura in his arms. “It’s okay, I promise, it’s okay.”

“My family…” Bakura cries into his shoulder. “Aknadin… he used my family. How could I forget that?”

It takes Amanda a few seconds to understand what he’d said, but when she does, she feels sick, desperately wishes that she could tug the Ring off of Bakura, because *Mother of Darkness*, he doesn’t need the bodies of his kin hanging around his neck. Not after everything that’s happened today.

She sinks to the ground, wraps her arms around both boys, and together they cry.

Seth roars, his teeth becoming fangs as his stretches his hand outwards towards his enemy. Electricity arcs from the closest street lamp and blasts the witch with thousands upon thousands of volts. It fries her, blood leaking from her eyes and nose and mouth as her insides turn to liquid. Burns form like a million tiny spiderwebs across her skin. She falls to the ground, legs twitching in death.

This attracts the attention of those around him and Seth finds himself surrounded by fifteen men and women on the beach. With the ocean behind him, there is nowhere for him to run. He can't transform - he doesn't have the time. So he braces himself, preparing for an all out assault, and lets himself think on where his brother might be.

*He with Jono*, Seth remembers. *They'll watch each other's back*. They always do. Seth trusts Jono, more than almost anyone in the world. He loves him. He'll keep his brother safe.

"Well, shall we dance?" Seth sneers at his opponents, "I'm getting tired waiting for you to make up your minds."

They're hesitating. They know him, he realizes. "Good. Then they know who they're dealing with. They know he won't go down without a fight.

And then something incredible happens. Seth feels something tug in his gut just before there is a blast of pure magic that rips through the air. He feels the entire western coast go out as the electricity in the area is drawn towards a single point somewhere on the beach. The hairs stand up on the back of his neck because it calls to him in a way so strongly that he almost transforms and flies directly towards it.

"Is this your doing, mage?" One of the wizards calls to him, colour draining from his face. Electricity arcs up from the Golden Gate Bridge, touching the sky, and streaking across the city. Lightning crashes down from the sky, striking down his fifteen opponents in the blink of an eye. They convulse, shrieking silently as their eyes pop in their skulls and run down their cheeks. All around the city, the sky rains it’s terrifying might in lines of death.

This is not Bakura. Seth knows what Bakura did, dipping into the terrible power of the Millennium
Ring and tearing apart the barrier between the realms of life and death. The Thief King had destroyed the invisible advantage that the Unspeakables had brought with them, bringing down a hurricane on the city of San Francisco. He wonders how many are dead. He wonders if there’s going to be much left of their city when all this is done. But this… This is not his power.

Seth knows whose it is, though.

The sounds of battle cease to fill the air. Seth picks himself up and stares at the city, heart pounding. Somewhere out there, she is back. The Lady Pharaoh walks amongst them once more and he must find her. Nothing else matters now - not the fight, not Bakura, not anything. There is a gasp behind him, followed quickly by a set of wet footsteps. He turns.

The Lady Pharaoh stands naked before him, skin slowly turning from damp clay to flesh. Her long red hair flows down her back, weighted down with water. Her eyes are dark purple. She's smaller than he remembers (or maybe he's just taller), thick waisted with slim shoulders. She takes a breath and straightens her back.

"Seth," she calls, her voice like rich honey. "Sen."

"Atem," he breathes, reaching for her hesitantly. Suddenly, he realizes that she's shaking. Her knees give out and his heart stops in his panic. Seth rushes forwards and catches her before she falls.

"Seth," she says again as he cradles her in his arms. She touches his cheek gently, "Is that you?"

"Yes. Gods, I’m yours," his voice shakes as his whispers. "I have always been yours - always and forever. Sister. Cousin. My King." He presses a kiss into her forehead. Tears sting his eyes, "Atem, I love you."

Her eyes close and she falls asleep. Seth rocks back and forth, chest heaving as his body is racked with tremors.

Thank the gods, he thinks. Thank the gods. We might just have a chance.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

'Sen' means 'brother' in Ancient Egyptian

'Hemsi' mean 'sit', 'stay', or 'dwell' in Ancient Egyptian
Latner shakes her head, “That’s not what I’m saying.” She laughs, high and heartless. “You honestly believe, after everything I’ve told you, that Kiyoshi went into a twenty year deep-cover mission, purposefully tipped you off to her, and then was dumb enough to die in a battle against a bunch of amateurs. Are you seriously stupid enough to believe that that’s her lying headless in your morgue?”

“Prove it,” Keith says, eyes daring.

“Show me the body,” Latner says in return.

On Tilla’s command, Depre had sent up the signal for retreat, a flash of yellow sparks that lit up the sky. They didn’t have a choice. After everything that had happened in the last ten minutes - the collapse of the barrier burning out their reserve, the hurricane that threw their ground force around like rag dolls, the crippling, inexplicable loss of the dementors - they’d lost more than three quarters of their numbers. The Department couldn’t keep up this seize. It was time to go home.

Besides, they’d already got what they came here for. Keith had dragged in Solomon Mutuo, bruised and broken but miraculously alive, so there isn’t much more of a reason to stay. So Tilla send up the call for retreat a second time, hoping that those who missed it at first would see it now, would come to the Oakland beaches to--

Lightning lances down from the sky, into the hills of San Francisco. Clean surgical strikes, one after the other, and Tilla knows that no one else is coming.

*We’ve done enough. Captured nearly fifty mages and their ilk. We’ve done enough and I want to go home*, she thinks. Depre stands beside her and his quiet is calming, enough to keep her from shaking. He glances at her out of the corner of his eye and something in him shifts.

It’s a persona he was given for a mission a few years back, a pickpocket with a heart of gold who’d infiltrated the magical antiquities black market. Tilla doesn’t even remember this one’s name, but
she knows that crooked grin and the Cockney accent.

“It’s alright, darling,” he closes his hand around her’s. “We’re all safe now. They can’t touch us here.”

Don’t. Please, don’t. They broke Depre so much that he couldn’t even emote without slipping into the guise of someone else. But he’s trying, Merlin, he’s trying and that scares Tilla, because she appreciates it more than anything in the world.

Coppermine appears behind them and Depre drops back into himself, his hand leaving her’s cold and clammy as he takes it back. Beside Depre is Jeremy Cooper, one of the Plants that she’s sent after Kitamori. She catches his eye and he transmits a memory of the girl’s body, of the deaths of the other Plants. Kitamori had put up more of a fight than Tilla had expected, but in the end, she’d fallen like any other target. Tilla nods at Jeremy, giving him a pulse of satisfaction.

“Reiko’s dead,” Coppermine’s voice is terribly sad and there are red rings around his eyes. He’s been crying. “We… we found her on the street. They took her head off. I - we…” he looks at Jeremy, “we brought her back. We just leave her there, I couldn’t…”

“It’s okay. It’ll be okay,” she pulls him into a hug. The boy had cared for Kitamori and he’s mourning the loss of a girl he never truly knew. Tilla had long since came to terms with the fact that she needed to tell Keith, possibly even Pegasus, about the truth, but if she she could spare him, she’d keep Coppermine in the dark.

“Lew’s dead, too,” Keith says, appearing from nowhere. He doesn’t look all too disheartened by the news of Kitamori’s death, just bone tired. “Idiot ran into an army of Jacques ink creatures. Torn him and his people apart like dogs.”

“I’m sorry. I know he was important to you,” Tilla says. She may not like Keith, but she’s not completely heartless.

“We got Mutuo, though,” he shrugs, pulling a flask out of his coat pocket and taking a few swigs. “At least that’s something.”

“We got Jacques as well,” Tilla says and Keith spits out his drink.

“You’re shitting me,” he gaps. “Matthew Jacques fell?”

“Latner got him. Apparently, the battle leveled a good chunk of Golden Gate Park. Her friend’s dead, too. You know, the one she was always with,” Tilla struggles to remember the name she’d been given at the start of the day. “Nat, she called her. Natasha Whicker.”

“Merlin,” Keith swears and runs a hand through his hair. “Let’s get out of here.”

Latner’s co-worker, Gerrish, is in charge of the prisoners that they’re sending to the island for processing. There’s fifty of them, bound and Cuffed; some are awake and some aren’t. Those that can stand huddle protectively around those who can’t. Tilla spots Mokuba Kaiba amongst the crown, hovering protectively over an unconscious Jacques.

Gerrish sends someone over to grab Kaiba, but the boy snaps, leaps into action and attempts to strangle the witch with the chain between his wrists. Three Unspeakables fire off Stunners and the kid collapses next to Jacques.

“Fuck,” Coppermine lets out a low whistle. “Take back whatever I said about muggles. That guy’s crazy. You should have seen him when he was riding the black dragon.”
“You’re lucky to be alive,” Jeremy Cooper says. He turns to Tilla, “Look, I’m gonna go check in with my crew. I’ll see you around?”

“Thank you for today. I know it couldn’t have been easy,” she says, shaking his hand. Cooper shrugs and smirks before lumbering off into the crowd.

When they get back to the island, Keith heads off to file his report to Pegasus. When Tilla follows him, he raises an eyebrow at her.

“There’s something you need to know,” she says grimly, and that’s that.

She breaks the news in Keith’s office, in front of Pegasus, who initially dismisses her theory off hand. But then she pulls up the memory Jeremy gave to her, showing them the chaos that this little girl had caused, and they have no choice but to believe her.

Keith is silent and pale as a ghost. His hands are shaking uncontrollably and he isn’t looking at anyone in the room. Finally, Pegasus breaks the silence.

“Come with me,” his voice is cold, final, deadly. And for all that he disgusts Tilla, she knows that she wouldn’t want to get into a fight with this man. “Get your team and come with me.”

Pegasus corners Latner the moment he finds her. The girl is sitting alone on a balcony overlooking the waves crashing against the western cliff, her head in her hands.

“Did you know?” He snaps, eyes like steel.

“Know what?” She answers, a poor attempt at her usual sass and flippancy. He voice gave away how tired she was, though. Latner keeps rubbing the palm of her wand hand, looking smaller than usual, like she was in terrible pain. Tilla remembers that she’d lost a friend taking in Matthew Jacques and almost feels sorry for her.

“Reiko Kitamori. Did you know that she was a Plant?” Pegasus hisses.

Latner quickly glances at Tilla, looking from her to Coppermine to Scott and Keith, “This isn’t a conversation that they need to hear.”

“Fuck you,” Pegasus growls. “They deserve to hear this as much as I do, so don’t you dare tell me what they should and shouldn’t know. I’ll have your head on a spike for his if you’re involved in any way, and I’ll make as many enemies as I have to do it. Look me in the eye and say that I won’t. Did you know about Reiko Kitamori?”

Latner sighs, any levity that she had in her dropping away. Tilla thinks she looks old, far older than her face suggests her age is.

“Sit,” she motions towards the chairs around the table she’s claimed as her own. “This is going to take a while.”

Tilla eases into her seat, muscles screaming in protest. Depre sits on her right, Keith on her left. Pegasus remains standing, looming over Latner like the hand of God.

“Did I know that she was a Plant? Yes,” Latner admits. “Is she mine? No.”

“Do you know who’s she is?” Pegasus tries his best to keep his voice level.

Latner snorts, “You know I know it’s been a while for you, but I actually am surprised that you
didn’t recognize her. Actually, who am I kidding? Of course you didn’t.”

“What bile are you spouting now?” Pegasus asks.

“She’s not one of mine. She’s one of yours,” Latner chuckles humourlessly at Pegasus’s stock.

“Well, not really. The woman you knew as Reiko Kitamori hasn’t been under your command for a long, long time, but you were in charge of her training. Plant #1,014. Are you seriously telling me that you don’t remember that little girl?”

Tilla notes two things of importance in that instant. The first being Kitamori’s Plant code. She knows that Depre’s is #85,470M; the number indicating that there were over eighty seven thousand four hundred and sixty nine Plants before him, the letter indicating his sex. But if Reiko Kitamori had been introduced into the program early enough not to receive a letter, early enough to be in the first thousand, then she must have been a hundred years old. Then Pegasus must be just as old, if not older to have trained her.

The second thing is how Pegasus’s shoulders tense as his hand twitches towards his left forearm.

“That’s… that’s not possible. They said she was dead,” Pegasus sputters.

“Not possible? Maxie, honey, we work for the Department of Mysteries. And you’re honestly surprised that someone lied to you?” Latner laughs, “You think too much of yourself.” She pauses, glancing vaguely towards the sea, before refocusing on her explanation. “But you made your choice. You chose the boy, sent him off into the world, and sent his sister into hell to keep him from going off mission. Except, you wanted to keep #1,014, didn’t you? You wanted her all to yourself. That’s why you didn’t even consider choosing her. She hated you, though. Enough to try and escape the moment she could get away from you.

“Except, you weren’t the only one watching her. The Department Head saw her talent, saw it in a way you never could. So the Head took her, trainer hed, and created Kiyoshi.”

Tilla’s heart stops.

“Kiyoshi’s a legend. There’s… there’s no way,” Coppermine stutters from where he’s sitting. “Reiko… Reiko couldn’t be…”

“A master at the silent Killing Curse and broomless aerial combat? Yeah, she is. Kiyoshi is able to hit a moving target nearly five kilometers away while in the middle of disapparating,” Latner continues. “She’s gone on four hundred and thirty-three assassination missions over the last hundred years, and she has completed every single one. She’s done over twenty deep cover missions and knows more than I ever will. I may be the Head’s right hand woman, but Kiyoshi is the most capable Plant that the Department has ever created. She’s the shadowy figure just off to the left.”

“What was she doing here?” Pegasus asks, looking stricken.

“I have no idea,” Latner shook her head. “I really don’t, I’m not lying here.” She sighs, “Ariana Dumbledore. Mala Pukar. Countless others. If there was a problem that we couldn’t handle through normal means, we gave them to Kiyoshi. And she went out and did what she did best. Until one day, she didn’t.

“It was a routine mission, nothing special about it. In Germany, I think - just over twenty years ago. We’d sent her to kill a Curse-Breaker there, one that was looking too closely into Gellert Grindelwald, into his history. And then… nothing. There was nothing, she just disappeared. No
apparition trail, no magical signature, no body, no sign of a struggle. We never found out what happened to her, so we listed her MIA. We’d all given up hope until Nat and I walked into your office and there she was.”

“But who sent her? Who’s she reporting to?” Pegasus leaned forward anxiously.

“Honestly? I don’t think anyone sent her. I think she’s gone completely off the book and running her own show. Which begs the question, what was she doing here?” Latner stops suddenly and without warning. “Who recommended her for this team?”

“Keith came to me with recommendations,” Pegasus frowns.

“But how did you know to pick her?” Latner rounds on Keith. “Who told you about her?”

“I did,” Coppermine says, shaken.

Latner stands suddenly, turning to Pegasus, “Get me his file. Now.”

Pegasus calls upon an aging, ugly house elf, who hands her a stack of papers. She glances over them before throwing them in Pegasus’ face, “I don’t have time for this, Maxie! His real file, damn it!”

The elf produces a second file, slimmer than the last, and covered in a green folder. Something about it makes Tilla’s skin crawl. She’s seen green folders like that before at the Gardens, but only at a distance in a room that she’d never been allowed into.

Latner flips through the pages before taking one out and shoving it under Pegasus’s nose. Tilla can’t see what is it, but Pegasus clearly can - she knows because the man’s face loses all of its colour.

“She got him young, must have implanted the idea somewhere in his subconscious. And, Merlin, she knew that you’d be in charge of this mission, if it was ever deemed necessary - middle management dotes on you, because you were the last to join up. Kiyoshi knew, she’s had to have known - so when the assignment went out for San Francisco, she sent the kid straight towards the mission commander, all to recommend her. For fucks sake, who brings a historian into an active warzone?” Latner practically shouts.

Beside Keith, Coppermine is muttering, “I don’t know what she’s talking about. I never saw Reiko, not before I came here. I swear, I never met her - I don’t know what she’s talking about.”

Keith lays a hand on his knee, a solemn attempt at comfort. Coppermine starts to cry.

“Kiyoshi played you like a fiddle. She had everything under control. Whatever it was that tipped you off to her, I bet she planned that too. Knew exactly what to show to give herself away, to blow her cover. I bet it was you who spotted it, didn’t you?” Latner turns to Tilla, “You worked in the Gardens long before coming here. She played you, too. What did you do, send some Plants after her?”

“They killed her, though. Kitamori - Kiyoshi, whatever her name is - her body’s in the morgue. She’s dead,” Tilla says.

“Are you sure about that?”

“You don’t survive getting your head blown off,” Tilla snaps.
Latner shakes her head, “That’s not what I’m saying.” She laughs, high and heartless. “You honestly believe, after everything I’ve told you, that Kiyoshi went into a twenty year deep-cover mission, purposefully tipped you off to her, and then was dumb enough to die in a battle against a bunch of amateurs. Are you seriously stupid enough to believe that that’s her lying headless in your morgue?”

“Prove it,” Keith says, eyes daring.

“Show me the body,” Latner says in return.

The morgue is two floors up and down a hall. The witch working there shows them to a table where a large blanket covers a corpse. She pulls back the cloth, revealing the red stump of a neck.

“That’s her,” Keith says. And of course, he’d know what Kitamori looked like naked. He’s probably staring at some birthmark or beauty spot Tilla can’t see. “Polyjuice potion wears off after an hour, even in death.”

“No, it doesn’t,” Latner shakes her head. “The stuff I can make lasts a month. And Kiyoshi was always better at potions than me.”

Tilla watches as she waves her wand over the body, making concentric circles while muttering in Latin and Greek. A glowing pale yellow strand follows the path of her wand, sinking slowly into the corpse below. Then, suddenly, Latner yanks her wand back and pulls. A bright red liquid, too light to be blood, begins to leak from the corpse’s stump.

The body twists, shifts, and becomes a man. Latner swirls her wand again and the pale image of a face rests where the head should be.

Tilla gasps, “That’s--”

“Jeremy,” Coppermine stammers. “Merlin’s beard, she saved me.”

“When was the time of death?” Latner asks the mortician.

“Mid-morning. Around… ten o’clock.”

“So right after the barrier went up,” Latner nods. “Jeremy - your Plant, I’m assuming,” she glances at Tilla, “never made it out of his confrontation with Kiyoshi. He died and she took his place.”

“But… why?” Coppermine asks, broken.

Latner looks directly at Pegasus, staring him down with cold, deadly fury. “I don’t know,” she says, clearly lying. “Why do you think she’s doing this, Maxie?”

Pegasus says nothing, just scowls and walks out of the morgue, Tilla looks at Latner, who’s shaking her head again.

“What now?” Keith asks.

Latner looks up at him. There’s something in her gaze, something sad and old and tired. “You… you and your team… You should know that she’s more than what I said. I wanted to piss Pegasus off, wanted to get him angry, so I didn’t say all that I could. Kiyoshi… Kitamori - she’s a person, under it all. She’s capable of so much. Friendship, love, companionship, compassion. When she comes, I don’t think she’ll hurt you. No…” Latner looks away, “she definitely won’t want to hurt you.”
She closes her eyes, breathes for a moment, and walks towards the door. Latner glances back before she leaves, “You should be wary of Pegasus, though. He’s proud - stupid, but proud. He’s bound to do something rash, sooner rather than later. And if Kiyoshi is doing what I think she’s doing, you don’t want to waste your time trying to save him. Don’t get in her way. Run. And don’t look back.”

That’s the last they see of Trista Latner for a long time.

Bakura stumbles into UCSF Medical Center. Both he and Amanda are supporting Duke, which isn’t going very well considering that he’s close to six feet tall and wearing several pounds of fire retardant gear. But Duke passed out from exhaustion about a mile out, so they’ve been carrying him the entire way. A very exhausted looking nurse takes him from them once they get past the army of corpses guarding the building, laying him down on a bed and pressing her stethoscope to his chest. They seem to have gotten the electricity back on.

“Amanda! Oh, oh god!” Tea Gardner races past Bakura, slamming into the young Spellcaster and kisses her full on the mouth. “You’re alive! When I heard about Matthew, I thought - I thought--”

“I’m alright,” Amanda presses her face into her girlfriend’s shoulder. “I love you. I love you.” She’s crying.

“Bakura! Over here!” He turns towards the beds and sees Joey laying in one of them. They’ve got him on an IV drip and there’s machines monitoring his heart rate, but otherwise, he seems okay. Mai, Serenity, and Haley are all sitting next to him. Serenity’s grasp on her brother’s hand is so tight, Bakura can see the whites of her knuckles.

“Hey,” Bakura breathes from the foot of the bed, gripping Joey’s ankle. “What happened to you?”

“Hit the barrier. Fell,” Joey shrugs then winces in pain. “They got Mokuba. Took him. I don’t know if he’s… Seto’s gonna kill me.”

“No, he won’t,” Mai tries to reassure him, but to no avail.

“I’d kill me, if it was any of you,” Joey sighs, then attempts a smile in Bakura’s direction. “But you though, pulling out all the stops. Don’t think I didn’t notice you dropping a storm on us or ripping a hole between dimensions. Saved our asses, you did.”

“Are you okay?” Serenity asks, the fingers of her free hand twitching towards the sound of Bakura’s voice. He takes them, lets her see some of the happier memories that had been knocked loose by his unleashing the Ring’s power, then let’s go before she sees anything else.

“Could have been worse,” he says. “Has Tristan checked in yet?”

Their faces say it all. Mai stands, puts an arm around his shoulder, and tells her daughter that she’ll be right back, so listen to Serenity, okay? There’s a small moment of joy where Joey pretends to be offended that he wasn’t put in charge, but it died in Bakura’s heart when he sees them.

Rex and Rebecca are clutching at each other in a corner next to their adoptive parents. Tristan is nowhere to be seen and neither is Weevil. Bakura’s heart sinks.

Rebecca sees him first, or maybe she just senses him; it doesn’t matter, though. He feels awful.
Keith had warned him specifically about how the Department would be targeting him. He should have gone himself. He should have been there, but he was cocky and too sure of himself. Bakura fucked up and this was the consequence that he would have to live with.

“You’re going to get him back, right?” Rebecca asks, eyes pleading. “You’ll get him back?”

“Rebecca--” Mina Simmington starts, but she’s cut off by Rex.

“You saved us. You can do anything. You’ll… you can…” Bakura watches as his eyes begin to water. “It’s my fault. I should have gone with him. I should have fought, too.”

“This is no one’s fault but those who attacked us,” Bakura says, trying to sound like the legend he’s supposed to be. “This is no one’s fault but those who refuse to let us live.”

“The moment we know where they are is the moment we start planning to get them back,” Mai says sternly. Bakura nods along beside her, about to say something, when a hush falls over the ER.

There, at the entrance, is Seto Kaiba. And at his side is the Atem.

Bakura doesn’t even realize that he’s moved until he’s halfway across the room. He’s can’t stop staring, can’t close his mouth after his jaw dropped open. She’s beautiful, all alarming red hair and dark skin and widening purple eyes, stolen clothes hanging off her frame, two sizes too big. He’s so caught up in it all that remembering his promise to Yuugi Mutuo physically jars him out of his stupor.

“I…” he starts, not sure how to proceed. Bakura’s standing right in front of her, close enough to touch, but he doesn’t dare.

He watches Atem swallow, her eyes an inch above his, “You were right.”

“I was?” He frowns.

She smirks, shrugging, “It hurt.”

He smiles, understanding that Yuugi is still there, just like Ryou is apart of him, somewhere underneath everything. Atem wraps her arms around him and Bakura leans into her and for a moment everything is okay.

This, of course, does not last.

A cry goes out from the corpses outside as they burst into flames. Both Atem and Bakura react, pushing Seto behind them and calling upon their power to defend against whoever was out there.

A Japanese witch walked through the flames, small and slight, with long black hair and fierce eyes. In each hand, she held a wand. Atem tenses beside him, ready to burst forth with incredible speed and--

The witch tosses her wands at their feet, gets down on her knees, and holds her hands high in the air.

“My name is Reiko Kitamori,” she says. “And I surrender myself to whoever is in charge.”

Solomon shares a cell with a young boy named Mokuba, who apparently took a class that his
The granddaughter had taught the year before. He’s nice, kind, and familiar in a way that makes Solomon think that this is Monthu, his grandson, from all those years ago.

It’s probably for the best that neither of them confirms anything. For all either of them knows, the wizards have placed listening spells in their cell and can hear everything they’re saying. Solomon doesn’t want to give away the secret of cycling - of course, that’s assuming that they didn’t know already.

So they talk about mundane things, just to pass the time. Something tells them that these wizards are in no hurry to start killing them. Killing was so much easier than subduing, so why go through the extra effort? Mokuba moves closer and tries his best to set the bones that Solomon’s broken.

This goes on for a while, though he has no idea how long. Eventually, a witch comes to their cell. She has straw blonde hair and tired eyes. There’s a man behind her, a bulky black boy that hovers protectively at her shoulder.

“Solomon Mutuo,” the witch calls. He sighs and tries to stand.

Mokuba jumps into action, getting in between him and the witch. The wizard in the back puts his hand on his wand. Solomon puts his hand on Mokuba’s shoulder and shakes his head.

“It’s okay,” he says. Mokuba turns to him, an expression of terrible worry on his face, and squeezes his eyes shut. The boy nods solemnly and sits back down.

Solomon limps out of the cell, stumbling slightly because his legs burn with pain. The witch rolls her eyes and taps him with her wand, muttering a word beneath her breath. The pain begins to ebb away.

“Thank you, my dear,” he says, determined to be polite all the way to the end. “Was that spell in Greek?”

The witch blinks, shock gracing her features for a second, “Yes…?”

“Interesting. I was under the impression that most of your kind used Latin spells. Unless…” He tilts his head to the side, gazing at her as they walk towards a set of stairs, “…is Latin for battle? And Greek for… healing, perhaps?”

“What is it to you?”

“Nothing, I suppose. Just a scholar's curiosity,” Solomon smiles at her, receiving a puzzled look in return.

They lead him into a room furnished only with a wooden table and a pair of chairs, one on either side. They sit Solomon down in one, locking the chain to the small ring of steel nailed into the table, and leave him alone.

He sits there, focusing on his breathing. He’s never been much of a fighter. To be honest, he’d fully expected to die in that fire than the Unspeakable had created. But he didn’t, and now he has to deal with the consequences of his survival.

A man enters the room. He looks to be about a decade younger than Solomon, with salt and pepper hair tied in a horse tail at the back of his neck. He sits down in the other chair and stares at Solomon. So Solomon stares back.

This continues on for several minutes, until a drip of sweat rolls down the man’s temple.
suddenly, he leaps out of his seat, slams his fists down on the table, and yells, “Jacques!”

He grabs Solomon by the sides of his head, forcing him across the table, “Damn it, damn it! He’s protecting you, too! Can’t get in - can’t - he’s got his thrice damned mages gods protecting you! I’m not stupid, I know what you’re hiding!” The man spits in Solomon’s face as he screams, “You stole the Pharaoh’s Pendant! You walked in and took it! You know how--”

The man shoves him away, his chest heaving. He shouts, “I will not continue to be made a fool of.”

He slams the door behind him, leaves Solomon to collect himself and wait.

There’s a terrible scream. And then--

At exactly 4:04p.m. UTC, a series of events occur around the world.

Bakura and Atem shudder and gasp, weakened terribly from their fight, and fall to their knees.

A man laying in bed shakes and shivers, rolling over and throwing up into a bucket off to the side. It’s not the first time today and his older brother holds back what is left of his hair.

Two people, one dead and one very much alive, continue to clutch at each other with fear, not knowing what has happened, but scared regardless.

Albus Dumbledore sits in his office, breathing hard enough to force his head between his knees. He’s thrown his wand in a corner, hoping that some distance will give him some relief.

A shattered mess of a soul screams inside the body of Quirinus Quirell as the man yelps and claws at his face.

A diary belonging to a former Hogwarts prefect flips into the air, causing a clatter as it falls to the floor.

A mystical ring of unearthly power jerks wildly, rolling right off of the rotting kitchen table it was resting on.

A locket hidden within a dresser drawer in London rattles so hard that it wakes house elf living in the basement.

A cup, hidden deep inside a Gringotts vault, clatters on the marble floor and knocks into a golden plate, causing it to multiply by two and four and eight.

A beautiful diadem rattles on the floor, skittering across the room.

A boy with green eyes and a lightning scar wonders what’s happening to him as he sits on his bed inside the cupboard under the stairs, pale and gaunt with dread.

And finally, a woman with thick red hair and blue eyes pauses as she comforts Trista Latner, shivers and says, “Good god. What has he done?”

--Then, the door slams back open. And Solomon knows true horror.
It's the same man, only it's not. Whatever sanity he'd had is long gone because the left side of his face is covered in blood. He's holding a red, red knife in one hand and his wand in another. His salt and pepper hair has been pulled from its tie and hangs loosely around his face.

Beneath his bangs, there is a glint of terrible gold.

“Now, Solomon Mutuo, let's see what it is you know.”

The End

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