**Creation Myth**

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**Creation Myth**

by **YaminoTenshi202**

**Summary**

Running from the Shadows was all he ever wanted to do, and the other Yuugi knew that he would never succeed. When Mutou Yuugi solved the Puzzle, his other self was so thankful that he served the boy to the best of his ability. The very best, in whatever way he saw fit.

No matter who stood in his way.
Chapter Notes

Mutou Karuta - Daughter-in-law of Sugoroku, Yuugi's mother.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

_Hell is empty and all the devils are here._ - William Shakespeare

He knew no rest. He knew the pain of the Shadows' teeth piercing his flesh.

He knew of the vague memories that managed to pierce through the veil of pain.

He knew how to serve, and that his pain was serving.

Serving a God.

How many years had passed?

He sensed movement once and was then lost to the darkness again, dismissing the motion for something that the Shadows had used to deceive him.

A false hope of release.

When he awoke, for only a moment, it was when a small hand touched the prison that he was trapped inside of. It was a soft hand, belonging to that of a truly pure being. He needed to see this person, the one who let him feel a sensation other than pain for just a moment.

In the form that he possessed, he could touch nothing and his eyes were sensitive to the light. Looking around, he saw that he was in a storage room. There were boxes piled up and so much dust decorated the tops of them.

"He wants to see it again, oto-san." Somehow, he recognized that the voice was that of a woman and the words were not the ones that whispered to him in the darkness, not even the language. They were words of a foreign land, but he understood that something significant was present here.

Someone.

"All right, Karuta. Only because my grandson wishes to see it." The door opened and he was bathed in light. He looked down to himself and saw robes. The man, elderly, that came into the storage room passed through him, making him shudder. The elderly man left the room with a golden box.

His prison.

As he followed his prison, he saw different and new things that he was fascinated by. There was a box connected to a knobbed stick, with small inserts marked in digits, on a table, next to pictures that seemed so lifelike, he expected the people in them to jump from the picture. A circle on the wall was marked with digits as well, two hands, akin to a sundial, pointing to spots on the circle that he
couldn't see. He noticed a room with a cabinet for bottles that seemed to have magical properties of healing, and another room that the woman that he had heard earlier was in, fire coming from one of four small firepits on a large metal box.

"Jii-chan! Is that the box?" The spirit turned and saw a child with large eyes that were a hue between the sky and blood, like the sea slugs.

"Yes, Yuugi. It is." The old man handed the golden box to the child and the spirit was shocked at the audacity of the man. Surely he knew that it could hurt the child.

"It's so pretty," the child mused, holding the box close to his face, perhaps trying to examine all of the symbols on it. "Jii-chan, can I have it?"

The old man laughed, his expression warm.

"If you think you can solve it, of course you can."

"Solve it?"

"Look, Yuugi. It's a puzzle!"

The spirit paid no more attention to their words, watching the child and his grandfather - Jii-chan - interact. There was something warm there, and the spirit found himself longing for it.

'Why would the Shadows let me see this?'

'When you are happy, bad things happen,' harked the Shadows as they began to take hold of the spirit's vision, the family in front of him disappearing. The pain came back and the spirit found himself voiceless.

'You protect him, He who shall solve the Puzzle. Out of our will, you shall do this.'

The spirit held tightly to his sense of sight for a moment longer to see the child, Yuugi, touch a piece of the Puzzle. At the same moment, he felt warmth and softness against his body.

'No. I shall protect him because he is himself. The only Yuugi in the world.'

For never had he met a soul so bright.

Chapter End Notes

This was originally "Naraku no Chibi Neko" on ff.net (published 2008), which is horrible. I knew from the beginning that it was bad, but I was really trying to develop my writing style and figure out the plotline at the time. Other shit happened and now this story, along with others, have developed into something else entirely, which is closer to what I wanted for it originally.

This story is the mixture of the manga and anime.
Yielding to a love
that recognizes no bounds,
I will go by night—
for the world will not censure
one who treads the path of dreams.

- Ono no Komachi (c. 825 - c. 900)

Yuugi placed the puzzle box at the bottom of his backpack, not wanting it out of his sight. His mother had already threatened to take his games away that morning and he would hate to see that the puzzle was gone when he got back from school. The box was never really heavy, which he found surprising for a golden artifact. It wasn’t gilded; his grandfather’s friend from America had informed him that it was not, from information that Sugoroku had given him when Yuugi had asked.

“Yuugi, you’re going to be late for school!”

“Yes, Jii-chan!” The fifteen-year-old yelled down, smiling as he placed his books over his puzzle box, made sure his emergency medication was in the side pocket, and closed his backpack. He remembered that he still had a game at school in case his mother did take his other games anyway and smiled.

As he made his way out of his room and to the stairs, Yuugi spotted his mother at the top. She had on her coat to go out.

“Oka-san, you’re going out?” Karuta turned to her son and nodded.

“Your father hasn’t been home in so long, Yuugi.” She looked down to her hands and Yuugi saw that she was holding a container. It was one that Yuugi was familiar with. A plastic container for food, his parents decided to use it to write letters to each other over long periods of time. He looked at it, wanting to know what his parents wrote about, private things he couldn’t see. At the same time, he didn’t want know how intimate they were in regards to what they wrote to each other.

“Do you know when he’ll come home?”

The unspoken question was in the air.
Do you know if he’ll come home?

“I don’t know, Yuugi. He called me yesterday.” Karuta smiled and Yuugi felt his heart soar. It was a smile he hadn’t seen in such a long time. “He sent a plane ticket. Just one since you still have school, but-”

“It’s all right, Mama.” He came close and hugged her tightly. Her arms settled around him and he felt content. There was always a worry that his mother wasn’t happy, and he never wanted to see her be lonely. “I’ll wait to see Oto-san on the holidays or my birthday.”

Karuta bent her head down to kiss his forehead. He made a face and smiled, waving to her as he headed down the stairs. He almost tripped at the bottom, the bottommost step having been lower on one side since Yuugi’s father had dropped a heavy box on it when Yuugi and Karuta had moved into Sugoroku’s house. Forever dented, the step was the bane of Yuugi’s time of day when he was rushing out of the house.

Passing through the kitchen, he grabbed a granola bar and grabbed some of the toast that his grandfather had in the toaster. All he had to do was get to the door-

“Mutou Yuugi.”

He cringed and turned to face his grandfather.

“Jii-chan?”

“You need to eat your breakfast, Yuugi.” Sugoroku looked sternly at his grandson, deeply bothered by the fact that he would often skip breakfast.

Yuugi looked to the table. There was an omelette on his plate, along with some bacon. Jii-chan had decided to go for a Western breakfast, something Yuugi liked. He looked to the clock.

“Can I fit it on a sandwich, Jii-chan?”

Sugoroku stared at his grandson for a few moments before smiling and nodding.

“You will be late if I keep you longer.” Yuugi handed over the two slices of toast that he had in his hand and his grandfather quickly made a sandwich of the omelette. With his breakfast in hand, Yuugi hurried towards the door.

“See ya, Jii-chan! Mama, have a good time with Tou-san!” With that, he left his house for school.

The morning passed as normal once Yuugi got off of the city bus and hurried to his classroom. He sat down at his desk and pulled out the books for his first lesson.

His name stood out to him as he listened to the teacher’s voice drone on.

‘Maybe today will be a fun day,’ he thought.

Then recess came.

It had been eight years since he and his prison had been given to the child that he decided to serve, the child of purest light.
The spirit of the puzzle had been aware of every year that had passed since his captivity, but he did not know why he had been placed there. He knew he had a purpose, to protect, and that there was something else inside of his prison with him.

Maybe multiple things…

He felt very lonely, though.

Even if he didn’t very well know what “lonely” meant.

“Recess! Time for basketball!”

“Let’s let the girls play!”

The sound of teenagers flooding into the hallways as they had a break between lessons started softly but rose quickly as everyone rushed to see their friends, go outside, and enjoy the air.

Those who had a free period felt as though it had been extended, the rules changing from studying to being outside of the classroom. Studying was optional, of course, many students talking amongst themselves or playing desktop games.

On one desk, there was a pop-up pirate game.

“Hey, Yuugi! Don’t you wanna play some basketball, instead of sitting here alone?”

The pirate popped out of the main game system and Yuugi shook his head, ignoring the fallen toy for now.

“I’m fine.” Yuugi looked over at Haaga shyly, the taller boy holding a basketball in his hand. “The team I join would just lose anyway…”

As his classmate left and the room emptied, Yuugi sighed as the door slid shut.

“I’d like to go play with everyone, but I keep plenty of games in my bag.” He stood up and walked over to where the pirate piece fell. With that in hand, he sat back in his seat, putting it into his backpack. Having opened it, he smiled at the glint of gold at the bottom. “Yes! Today is the day I complete it!

“The treasure I always carry!” He set the puzzle box on the desk and smiled as the sunlight coming in from the window made it shine. It held an air of power about itself, a feeling that Yuugi couldn’t shake, that it was more than gold. It was warm in the sunlight.

It was like a riddle, so he made up one of his own to describe the object inside. He smiled, excitement stirring inside of him as he moved to lift the lid-

“Heh heh… Yuugi,” the boy heard, as he felt the box be snatched from his grasp. Yuugi turned and saw Honda Hiroto, one of his classmates, with the golden box in his hands. “What’re you doing in here alone?! It’s way too dark and gloomy!”

“It can be seen, but you haven’t seen it’?!” Honda pulled the box closer, trying to bait Yuugi. Noticing the gold, he smiled. “Hey, this must be your treasure.”

“Honda-kun, give that back!” Yuugi went after him, not able to catch the pass Honda made to his classmate.
“And he passes to Jonouchi!” Honda laughed, as Yuugi jumped for his box, too short even with the admittedly good jump he had.

Jonouchi Katsuya caught the box easily and sighed.

“Since you’re acting like a girl about it, this must be pretty valuable to you.” He tossed it up and caught it again. “All your jumping around is getting irritating; knock it off, Yuugi.

“I’ll teach you how to act like a man!” He raised the box high above his head and slapped himself on the chest. “Look! I’ll give you back the box if you try with all your might to get it!”

Yuugi looked up at the taller classmate of his and felt a sick feeling in his throat.

“But I hate fighting and violence!”

Jonouchi winced at the volume of Yuugi’s voice.

“Ugh… No guts behind a loud voice…”

“Please, give me back the box!” Yuugi held out his hand, feeling tired already. Perhaps he should eat…

“Not a chance!” Honda sneered down at his classmate. Yuugi backed away from him, seeing Jonouchi lift the lid of the box. His heart started to race, beating against his ribs.

“Y-You can look, but don’t lose it!”

He saw Jonouchi peek into the box and, contrary to what Yuugi thought of the contents, he frowned and tossed it to Honda, with an uninterested comment of how dumb it was.

“If it’s so dumb, then give it back to Yuugi!” Yuugi smiled as a young girl walked into the room. She held the golden box in her hands, fingers keeping a tight hold of the lid.

“Anzu!” Yuugi smiled, happy to see his friend. Basketball must have upset her.

“Mazaki!” Jonouchi and Honda backed away from her.

Yuugi smiled at their reactions. Mazaki Anzu had been his friend since elementary school. She was quite tough for a girl but very gentle and wonderful to be around.

“Picking on weaker people, you guys are idiots. Just beat it!” She scowled at Honda and Jonouchi as they left the classroom.

She set the box on Yuugi’s desk and sat down in front of it, watching as Yuugi stared at the door.

“Thank you, Anzu,” he said. “That was great! One word from you, and they ran!”

She scoffed, placing her chin on her hand. “Don’t flatter me. I saw a nice guy being taken advantage of and I didn’t want them tossing you or your treasure around!”

He shouldn’t have felt a bit of jealousy as the priyAlu spoke to the child, his ward.

But he did, and it curled inside of him, like a flame.

However, he did not know what ‘flame’ was.
‘Jealousy’ should have been a part of existence that he was not aware of.

But he was, and it hurt.

And the Shadows were starving.

Yuugi had never been bothered by Jonouchi-kun too badly. There were times when others were more cruel and Yuugi would come home with bruises and things that needed some attention from the first aid kit.

*Mutou is such a wuss.*

*His scores are absolutely horrible.*

*I bet his mom still packs his lunch.*

*No wonder nobody hangs out with him.*

Jonouchi was the only one who seemed to be trying to communicate something.

*How is it that you like yourself?*

In his room, Yuugi sat down at his desk. Anzu had come to visit him after school and the two had played one of the video games that they had played when they were in elementary school.

Now he sat down to work on the golden puzzle that his grandfather had been joking about selling.

He had a vague recollection about when he first saw the puzzle. He remembered that a child had gotten lost in the rain, and his grandfather had brought him inside to get warm with hot chocolate.

The boy, two years older than him, had been called Iza. He was very kind, and he had been the one to find the puzzle in the first place. The next day when the boy had already gone home, back to "The Slopes" - wherever that was-, Yuugi had asked for the puzzle again.

Now, after eight years, he had gotten about halfway done.

He wondered now, as another piece managed to slide into place, how Iza was, and why had Iza stopped writing letters back to him.

When Yuugi arrived at school the next day, he was called by the school's hall monitor Ushio-san to see something that was "sure to please" him.

The scene was horrific to him. Yuugi didn't know why, but it made him think of a nightmare that he would occasionally have; he always woke up just before the victim in his dream - before he would be beaten more forcefully. Jonouchi had bruises on his face, as did Honda, from where Ushio had decided to target with his fists, akin to the ones that Yuugi would have in this dream. Somehow, Yuugi knew that this was mild to what Ushio could do, large fists powerful and his position of power in the school could give him enough leverage to cover him should they try to get him into trouble.

When he approached Jonouchi, he was aghast at the thought of Jonouchi's suspicion of him, that he wanted this. It was never cruel to be kind, yet it seemed that someone had taught Jonouchi-kun the opposite at one point.
When Ushio came at his classmates again, Yuugi rushed forward, standing in front of Jonouchi and Honda.

“I won’t let you hurt my friends anymore!”

He received wounds of his own, but he felt quite brave for standing up to Ushio. After the older boy left, Yuugi sat against the wall of the school, wondering just what was going to unfold because of these events.

He didn’t notice as Jonouchi helped Honda up. As the blond boy walked away, he muttered a "thank you" to Yuugi, but Yuugi was sunken in thought, feeling more lonely than before, and never heard the words.

200,000 yen.

There was no way that he could get that much money in one night. Even if he was somehow able to convince Ushio to let him pay the 1656 yen that he had in his savings, Yuugi suspected that Ushio would probably filet him with that knife that he had brandished.

His hands wandered to his golden puzzle, fingers deftly placing the pieces into their appropriate spots.

The spirit inside of the Golden Puzzle could hear its master’s wish.

'Friends who wouldn't betray me! Friends whom I would never betray!'

A humble wish.

The spirit inside smiled.

‘So it has been ordered.’

No more threats to his child.

He would defend this child with every fiber of this existence.

Jonouchi Katsuya ran out of the apartment, his home, with only a thought driving him forward. He didn't know if he'd be able to find the puzzle with the sun close to setting, but he needed to try.

"You worthless kid," his father had told him after the divorce. "You'll be lucky to even like yourself one day, but I doubt it."

He didn't like himself afterwards.

His life had been fists, yelling, and booze; today, there was someone who had been cruel towards, defending him as though their history had been those horribly cheesy Disney films that his parents took him to go see when he was in kindergarten, where there were defenders of the weak and happy endings weren't just promises but reality.

As Jonouchi climbed down into the water, he recalled the one person in his life that had been so kind as Yuugi was. He remembered her chestnut hair, her sweet smile, and how she said that he was her only friend, for spending time with her

Was that what Yuugi thought? Jonouchi held his breath as he dove under the water and pondered
over that thought. He had never seen Yuugi play with anyone. He couldn't remember if he had seen Yuugi in middle school or if he had even seen him in the city when they weren't in school. He knew that Yuugi lived with his grandfather in the small game shop that was on the edge of town, but that was all he knew about the kid's personal life.

Yuugi never bothered anyone. Never asked to be bothered.

'Why did he defend us? After all that bullying that we did to him?'

He saw the glint of gold and in his excitement, Jonouchi had to come up for air. He hurriedly went back under and reached for the golden puzzle piece. As he held it in his hand, Jonouchi could have sworn that the light coming from it was not sunlight but from the gold itself. The excitement he felt would be nothing to what Yuugi would feel, if that kid truly treasured his puzzle.

For the first time in a long time, Jonouchi liked himself a bit.

A small part of his consciousness was aware of the other child, the one that had thrown a piece of his prison into the water. This soul was strong, and the Shadows were tempted to devour it.

He asked the Shadows to spare this "knight inside the castle" and he thanked the bright soul that held the majority of his prison, his child that he swore to protect.

He didn't know how to feel when the Shadows conceded.

When he was awake, finally awake, his mind was flooded with memories. A child who had a friend that seemed to come over when it suited her, a doting but submissive mother, a father that was constantly away, and a grandfather who was the closest friend that he ever had; this would be his master. He wished to meet him, to make sure he would never be lonely again!

The brightest soul that he had seen in his years of captivity, so bright it pained him, and he would use the mortal body of his Master to defend him. All would know his achievements were his Master's. For now, he let his Master rest, the young human mind not yet able to handle the Shadows that would obey him.

When he opened his Master's eyes, he found that his mind, with the memories provided, could name the items there.

The light! It was strange, not painful, to his eyes, as his master's light had been. The clothes were soft and warm on his skin, and the chair upon which he sat was firm, hard. The light wanted to burn his eyes, the textures slough off his skin!

This body was hypersensitive while he was in control, he understood, and everything was overwhelming. Every texture was torturous to him; why?

He could hear the Shadows laughing.

When you are happy, bad things happen.

Then... He would carry out his task, and he'd deny himself what he allowed himself to crave.

The spirit hated himself for it, but he would keep his master asleep, even if he would mature soon. The Shadows, volatile, would consume a brilliant soul like his.

At least the Soul Room of his Master was bright.
For now.

The Shadows demanded nourishment.

The spirit frowned and looked to the obedient ones, the Shadows that licked his master's palms in excitement and curiosity at the world around them. He would need to feed them.

Give us the darkness of the soul.

He remembered the boy, the cruel one that harmed his Master, the knight, and another.

"Yes," he said to the Shadows, and he could hear his raspy version of this voice. "Ushio-san will make a good meal."

Sugoroku could hear movement in Yuugi's room, and he was shocked to see the time.

11:30 PM

He stood from his bed, yawning and rubbing his eyes. Words were also audible, some of them curses.

"Yuugi?" he called, walking to his door. As he opened it, he saw his grandson in his school uniform. "Yuugi, why are you awake... and in your uniform?"

Yuugi turned to him, a strange sort of smile on his face.

"Jii-chan," the boy said, with an air that sent him on edge. This was not his boy.

"Who are you?"

The boy, not his Yuugi, faltered for a moment before saying, "I am many, and our task is to your progeny, the owner of this body who must be your God and Watcher of Warriors, for he is so kind as to not fight even when the moment presents itself. My current task is to defend him, as he currently forced to submit to Cruelty's devices."

Sugoroku was awestruck, shaken by the power that filled the air, the anger that laced it when this... spirit, mentioned cruelty.

"Do you mean that bully at the school that is demanding 200,000 yen from him?"

The boy-spirit focused on him at those words.

"My master did not tell you these things."

"The boy that gave me the last piece of the puzzle..." Sugoroku trailed off as he watched the spirit possessing his son, eyes landing on the now complete puzzle that hung from his grandson's neck.

"Jonouchi-kun did?" The spirit smiled at that.

The old man nodded, his chest suddenly light from the moment the spirit smiled.

"What are you going to do?" He didn't want the bully to suffer from the power the ancient spirit obviously displayed - the shadows seemed to move at his whim! - but he did not want him to go unpunished for the barbaric things that he did to Yuugi and to that Jonouchi boy.
The spirit smiled.

"My Shadows are hungry, master's Jii-chan, and that boy's cruelty shall be their first meal. Not his life, as I am a mother at heart, but he shall be punished and he shall learn if he values living. Now, I suggest you head back to bed and cease pondering this. You will give yourself a headache."

Sugoroku allowed himself to be lead back to his room and helped back to bed. His dreams were nonexistent that night, but his sleep was still poor.

When the Shadows fed, they curled around the spirit's ankles, many of them complacent. They pleaded their obedience to this mother figure and he let them feed on the darkness that lived in the school.

The older Shadows continued to feed on the darkness that he found in the boy out of spite.

As he walked his master's body home, the spirit took time to gaze at the moon, the stars, the ankhs that had placed themselves on the sleeves of his master's school uniform.

No. Whatever God they symbolized, he did not care for. The beauty in the night sky, he owed his sightseeing to his Master.

He wouldn’t wear them when he could control it.

My child, the youth and man, I shall leave a game for you.

Please help me; it is all I ask of you.

What is my name?

Chapter End Notes

Bishamonten is the god of fortunate warriors and guards, as well as the punisher of criminals. Said to live halfway down the side of Mount Sumeru, the small pagoda he carries symbolizes the divine treasure house that he both guards and gives away its contents.

In 1996, the year of the first Yu-Gi-Oh! release, 200000 yen was about $1838.76.

The Spirit uses "ore" and "warera" to refer to itself. "Ore" is a more masculine way of saying "I," whereas "warera" is a very archaic way of saying "we/us."

(The ankh thing, my stab at the disappearance of the ankhs from the character design after chapter 2 of the manga)
Kagu-tsuchi and the Escaped Criminal

Chapter Summary

Not unseen,
Yet not seen, lady;
Have I longed
To no purpose, today,
Lost in thoughts of you?

-Ariwara no Narihira

Chapter Notes

Time skips will now become apparent.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I give you my tale, and ask my question.

Yuugi placed his hands on the puzzle. The light glinted off of the Golden artifact brilliantly, the light reflecting off of it and casting light upon his desk. He could hear his grandfather calling him down for breakfast.

'How did I finally finish this? Eight years and I just recently began to understand it. Maybe because I've gotten older...'

He couldn't shake away the dream he had had last night. He had become stronger, faster, more agile, and no one could hurt him. Like a superhero.

After the meal, he bid his grandfather a good day, not noticing how the man was staring at the puzzle.

"Yuugi?"

"Yes, Jii-chan?" Sugoroku raised a hand and set it on the Puzzle.

"Do you feel different? Are you tired or just feeling a bit strange?" Yuugi thought about the questions, vague as they were.

"A little tired, I guess," he responded. An image of the day before came to mind, of Ushio, and he dreaded the thought of going to school.

If I tell Jii-chan, I'll have to tell him everything.

"I'll be okay, Jii-chan." He smiled at his grandfather, grabbed his backpack from where he hung it on his chair, and ran to his bus stop.
The spirit who stayed inside of the Puzzle smiled as he explored the inner workings of the artifact. Door after door lined the walls of the seemingly endless hallways and he was content with keeping the more malicious doors closed.

‘Is this where I have been? For the last 3000 years, I have been surrounded by these mysterious doors?’

There was one door that intrigued him the most. He had opened it and was impressed by the amount of decoration on the walls, floor and the missing ceiling. The creature inside had been so lacking of energy, as the spirit never had been, that he continued to let it rest.

‘Better that you rest until you are stronger to fend off the Shadows that would surely eat you.’

He had fed the Shadows three times now, with the bully Ushio, the director of that phony reality TV show that had gotten Yuugi and Jonouchi-kun beaten, and Sozoji who had hurt his Master Yuugi and his friend Hanazaki-kun.

‘I wonder when the Shadows will be sated.’

He knew he was lying to himself if he thought it would be some time soon.

____________________________

"Yuugi, Jonouchi-kun is here for breakfast!"

This was the first time Jonouchi had come by his house. After the incident with the director, where Jonouchi had protected Yuugi, the two had gotten much closer, trying to figure out why the cruel man had been yelling about someone taking his sight away. Perhaps something with the camera he had been carrying...

He told him about what happened with Sozoji and after being called an idiot for not telling Jonouchi, the blond said that he was proud.

"You’re becoming a man, Yuugi,” was what he was told and Yuugi felt proud.

Today, Yuugi told Jonouchi about what he did growing up and what games he would play.

Jonouchi nodded when hearing about one game.

The game of Pretend.

"I used to play when I was younger," he said, a strange smile that Yuugi couldn't understand on his face. "I'd be Superman or one of those other American heroes. No one could beat me or keep me in one place!" He took another bite of his pancakes. "Gua! These pancakes are amazing, Mutou-jiisan!"

Sugoroku laughed.

"I'm glad you think so."

____________________________

The day had gone on without incident, the only strange thing being that the teacher had announced the escape of a convict from Domino City Jail.

Yuugi worriedly thought of his grandfather, who wouldn’t be able to defend himself if the convict sought refuge in the Game Shop, not against the pistol that he was said to have on him.
“Yuugi?” He turned Jonouchi, seeing his friend excited over something. “Wanna go to the new burger place?”

“You mean Burger World?” Yuugi felt his heart pick up. Hamburgers were his favourite food, ever since his family had gone to California for one of his father’s business trips when he was small.

He could have sworn he heard a laugh, a distant one, directed at him in a joyful tone, one without malice or aim to harm him. He looked around and saw no one. Strange...

“Yeah, it opened not too long ago.”

“Hey, guys,” Anzu interrupted, walking over to Jonouchi’s desk to stand next to Yuugi. “Did you two just mention Burger World?”

“Yeah. Anzu, do you want to go too?”

The girl shook her head and had a panicked look in her eyes. She told them about the new scare that the restaurant had had, people getting sick on the first day and Anzu’s own worry that there was something in the meat.

“I really recommend you guys not going! There were people who ate there and got sick right after!”

‘I heard that the food was really good there.’ Yuugi hummed softly, remembering the reviews he saw of the restaurant and wondering if what his friend was saying was true. Yuugi rubbed the back of his head, confused. “Maybe we can go to another place? Like the MOS Burger.”

Anzu shook her head and gave her friend a smile.

“Sorry, I have plans for today,” she said in earnest. “And we’re not supposed to go anywhere else except for home, remember? With the convict on the loose, it could be dangerous.”

With those words, Anzu left. Yuugi felt a finger poking his arm. Turning, he met Jonouchi’s eyes.

“Hey, Yuugi, hasn’t Anzu been acting strange lately?”

Yuugi hummed in thought. “Now that you mention it, we haven’t gone home together in a while.”

“Yuugi. I have a hunch.” Jonouchi leered, making Yuugi wonder just what his friend was thinking of. “I think that, after school, Anzu has been going on enjoukousai!”

“Eh?” Yuugi raised an eyebrow at that. “Enjoy kouhai? What do you mean by that?”

“Well, Yuugi,” Jonouchi began, in the mocking of a teacher’s voice. He leaned in close to Yuugi’s ear and whispered. “A girl finds a rich, old man, and they ---- and ----! Rumour has it that a few girls in the other classes do it for pocket money!”

Yuugi felt his face burn and he could swear that he heard someone laugh at his embarrassment. “Jonouchi-kun, Anzu wouldn’t do that kind of stuff!”

“Jeez, what a reaction!” Jonouchi laughed and grabbed his bag, cackling as he dragged Yuugi out the door. “Your face is bright red!”

“No, it’s not!”

“Come on…”
The spirit inside of the Sennen Puzzle laughed in delight at the shyness of his charge. Despite the crudeness of those moving pictures, the videos, that his master watched and borrowed from Jonouchi-kun, he was still so shy and desired more intimacy than the passion that pooled in his belly when he watched those pornographies alone.

His master had followed his friend, Anzu, to the new Burger World restaurant, and soon everything fell into place, save the reason for the girl’s work.

“After graduation, I’m going to America! And I’ll need money!”

According to his master’s lessons, America was across the vast salt water to the East.

“I’ll study dancing in New York! It’s my dream, so don’t laugh!”

The spirit felt anxiety well up in Yuugi’s heart as he tried to maintain the seriousness of the situation. Of course his master would find this a serious matter; Yuugi’s own dream for friends was serious as well and he would never laugh at someone else’s.

Jonouchi was a different story. He was more crass, but he was kind to those who felt earned a kindness. The spirit was not at all disappointed.

“Don’t worry, Anzu! We won’t tell a soul. All it’ll cost you is ten thousand burgers!”

The spirit laughed again, even as the shadows licked at his feet.

‘Something is coming, mother.’

The laughing stopped, and red eyes glowed in the dim light of the Puzzle.

Yuugi rushed to stand, seeing a man with a strange “777” tattoo on his forehead hold a gun up to Anzu’s temple.

“Anzu!” His heart was pounding and everything was so loud for a moment, his mind focusing. He heard someone scream in terror.

“All of you, shut up!” The convict let out a chuckle. “Don’t worry, I don’t think I’ll be staying long! I intend to eat and get going!” His hand stayed clasped over Anzu’s mouth. He turned to her and spoke in a deep, raspy voice that sounded like he’d been running.

“In the meantime, stay next to me and be quiet!” The girl made a noise and he scoffed. “Make another sound and I’ll kill you.” He raised the gun up to her eyes, watching as she focused on the gun. Good…

“I’ll blindfold you with this ribbon! When a human’s eyesight is blocked, they become more frightened, while being muted has the opposite effect!” He grabbed the ribbon from Anzu’s hair and handed it to her. “After all, before executing a prisoner, do they mute or blindfold him? Reminds me of how I was on death row…”

Anzu shook, feeling the metal of the pistol on her neck. It was steady and cold. If she tried to run, he probably had good enough aim, if this was the criminal that Yuugi had mentioned earlier. She could hear Yuugi call her name as she tied the yellow ribbon around her eyes. Everything disappeared and it felt as though her balance was thrown off.
'Ever since I was little, I’ve had a dream of dancing on Broadway.' The restaurant was silent, save for the faint whispers that she could hear. 'Will my dream end in this place?!

'Someone! Help me!'

Yuugi stood in front of the crowd, feeling his sweat run cold in fright.

"Now bring me whatever I want!" The convict was looking around and he pointed the gun to Yuugi. "The weak-looking shrimp! You! Everyone else, get on the floor! Come close at all, and this girl dies!"

As Yuugi got closer to the table, he heard the convict order alcohol and Lucky Stripe cigarettes. He nodded and spotted the manager, who was hiding in the kitchen. The manager handed him a platter, on which Yuugi had to balance a bottle of vodka, a glass, lighter, and cigarettes.

As the convict continued to yell outside, the manager showed to Yuugi the corded phone on the countertop, a controlled voice relaying instructions over the line.

"We just need to stall," the manager said, placing a hand on Yuugi’s shoulder and squeezing slightly. "I’ll try and get some of the customers on the other side of the restaurant out."

Yuugi nodded and walked out of the kitchen, trying to ignore the fact that there was only one door to the kitchen.

---

The Spirit of the Puzzle stayed silent, feeling the Shadows grow excited at both the thought of a new meal and the danger that threatened their master.

*Stay calm.* The Spirit curled his hand over the shadows, trying to soothe the smaller ones that he hadn’t used the previous times. *Let’s watch this play out.*

He could see, through Yuugi’s eyes, as Anzu stood and yelled at Yuugi to get away.

"Before you get hurt, Yuugi!" Her head whipped to the side, the convict slapping her so hard at the Spirit brought a hand to his cheek in empathy. He felt the pain in Yuugi’s heart as his master hurt for his friend.

He was hit with Yuugi’s memories and he saw a little girl in a leotard, dancing around in the gymnasium at their elementary school. She waved to him and the Spirit could feel Yuugi wave back.

She made Yuugi a card when he came home from the hospital. She played with Yuugi when he was lonely and when she had time. They were not so close, but it was enough that Yuugi didn’t always feel lonely.

Anzu was important to Yuugi, so she was important to the Spirit.

A shadow gently whispered to him.

*Doesn’t that mean that you and Master are the same?*

The Spirit did not answer. He just pushed Yuugi out of his body and into the Room that was Yuugi’s own.

---

The Spirit set down the platter quickly and grabbed the items upon it. He walked to the table where the convict sat and set down the alcohol and cigarettes.
“Here’s what you ordered!” The Spirit sat down and crossed his legs, hopefully exuding confidence as he sat in pain at the union of his soul and Yuugi’s body.

When will it stop hurting?

“Did I say you could sit down?!”

“What?” The Spirit smiled, laughing. “I thought I’d keep you company. If you’ve got guts, how about we play a game?”

“A… A game?!” Shock was apparent in the convict’s eyes and the shadows smelt the anxiety coming off in clouds from the man.

He shows no remorse, Mother.

Then he gets no mercy. Threatening a girl like this…’ The Spirit could see the same anxiety in Anzu’s face, probably frightened. She should be.

“A game, huh? I need to have a little fun…” The convict placed a cigarette in his mouth and held it there with his lips.

“Here’s the catch,” the Spirit explained. “The loser of the game loses his life!”

The convict laughed, excitement building. He was lucky! He’d be fine. “What are the rules?” He grabbed the bottle of vodka with one hand, the other waving the pistol towards the Spirit.

“I’ll explain. You and I stay where we are. We just choose one of our ten fingers and only move that finger. Choose whichever you like.” The Spirit held out his hands and spread out his fingers in a show of choice, keeping his eye on the convict.

The convict himself, pouring the vodka into a glass, had first been intimidated by the blood-red eyes of the boy in front of him. Now, he wanted entertainment, at least before the cops showed up.

“I choose my trigger finger,” he said, holding out his right index finger. “All I need to do is pull the trigger to win.”

“Okay!” The Spirit pulled back his hands and set them by the edge of the table. His hand slipped into his pocket for a moment, and he brought up a fist, only his thumb extended. “In that case, I’ll choose my right thumb.” He gave the convict a cocky grin. “What will you do when we start?”

“I’ll pull the trigger, of course!”

The Spirit remembered the lack of remorse they felt from the convict, the one who was threatening his master’s life and his friends.

“Yes, course… Let’s begin. Or should I light the cigarette in your mouth?”

It almost happened too fast, even for the Shadows to comprehend, but the lighter from the manager was balanced on the hand that was pouring vodka into the convict’s glass.

“Take that lighter with you to hell.” The Spirit grabbed Anzu’s wrist and his hand burned - painful - at the sensation of mortal flesh against what he possessed now. He watched the convict shake in shock at the turn of events. The hand that balanced the lighter shook so much that the lighter fell and-
'This was fun,' the Spirit thought, letting go of Anzu's hand as the burning became too much.

Anzu pulled off her blindfold, looking around for the man that saved her. She was surprised to see Yuugi there instead.

“Yuugi?”

“Anzu, thank goodness you’re safe!” He cheered and Anzu smiled at his childishness. She supposed that he was justified; she had been so close to dying. If it had not been for…

'Who in the world was that man? Who saved me?'

As Anzu looked for her saviour, she could hear Jonouchi coming over to them, explaining how the criminal had burst into flames. She ignored his words, refusing to go back to just minutes ago. The flames had been warm, but that man’s hand had been like electricity on her wrist.

'I'll never forget that voice, of that man that saved me with a game.'

The Spirit residing in the Puzzle curled around the darkness he had collected for himself, the rest of the criminal's darkness consumed by the Shadows themselves. He could feel more turning towards him in loyalty. He had been feeding them well in the last few weeks, on the darkness of souls and even some souls themselves.

The shoe salesman deserved his judgement, as did those school children and the teacher than tried to get Honda-kun expelled from school. It was a delicious feeling.

As the darkness sunk into him, giving him more power, the Spirit stood and looked around the Room where he stayed a majority of the time. The Room was dank and had so many rooms that branched off of it. There were countless doors, aside from the special rooms that he had set aside for the other resident of the Puzzle and himself. If he had not done so, the Shadows would have probably eaten them in an instant.

You think yourself safe? He lifted his head at the voice. It seemed terribly familiar, and it gave him chills while making feel violently ill. He felt somewhat safe.

That terrified him all the more.

'Yes,' he answered, truthful. He let a bit of pride inside of him come forward. 'Why wouldn't I feel safe, Faceless One?'

A violent sound erupted through the Spirit's hearing, and he covered his ears, gritting his teeth.

Will he keep begging you for mercy? Will he speak to you with gentle words?

The Spirit looked towards the door that led to Yuugi’s Room and he watched in horror as the coiling darkness, the darkness that was surely not his, threatened to break through, cross the hallway, and invade the gentle Yuugi's Room. The Faceless One continued to speak.

Nothing on earth is his equal—a creature without fear.

The Faceless One gave the Spirit no time to react, rushing back at the vulnerable one with a speed unmatched. His body was burning! He hated the fire! He didn't deny that he enjoyed burning that man alive in the eatery, but the Spirit hated the unseen fire that he could not put out!
He looks down on all that are haughty; he is king over all that are proud.

'Please...' the Spirit begged. The Faceless One purred and curled its darkness close to his ear, mimicking a lover.

Will he make an agreement with you for you to take him as your slave for life?

The Spirit closed his eyes. He thought of his gentle Master, Yuugi, who was kind and innocent in the ways of cruelty towards others.

'Yes... He will.'

Chapter End Notes

Kagu-tsuchi is the Kami of Fire mentioned in the Kojiki. Kagu-tsuchi's birth burned his mother Izanami, causing her death. His father Izanagi, in his grief, beheaded Kagu-tsuchi with his sword, Ame no Ohabari (天之尾羽張), and cut his body into eight pieces, which became eight volcanoes. The blood that dripped off Izanagi's sword created a number of deities, including the sea god Watatsumi and rain god Kuraokami.
Zennyo Ryūō, Mizuchi and Toyotama-hime

Chapter Summary

Feeling:
This thing-most of all-is
The world of men’s
Unbreakable
Bond.

- Ono no Komachi (c. 825 - c. 900)

Chapter Notes

Beware of all of the foreshadowing and the change in perspectives.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The Faceless One smiled and played with his new slave as he slept. It caressed the boy's face and threaded its curls through his hair.

The young one - at least, young to the Faceless One - continued to sleep.

*Little one,* the Faceless One whispered. *Would you like a story?*

Without expecting an answer, the creature continued.

*Eons ago, there existed a dragon. Its power was great and terrible, but it was a kind beast. It fell in love with a human that walked upon the Earth. Oh, such slovos there! The beast, burdened with a love that would never come to fruition, created a daughter, so that she may have that man.*

*That man with the Blue Eyes.*

The Spirit of the Puzzle came to at the Faceless One soon after.

'Please. Don't abuse what I don’t remember.'

*Let me continue the story...*

Sugoroku pulled out the new products that he had heard more about in the last few months. The packets flashed in the light, their foil coverings rather colorful and the pictures reminding him of a wisp of a memory.

"Jii-chan, what are you going to show us?"

He chuckled.
"Us'... It was a good feeling, knowing that his grandson had friends that could come to the house. Anzu had never come so often and the one friend that Yuugi seemed to have a good connection to had stopped contacting the boy a few years ago. The letters that had come after were kept in a box in Sugoroku's room.

The first had frightened him, and he made sure to keep the subsequent letters hidden from Yuugi, for fear of them scarring his mind. Innocent, his grandson was, but he was no idiot.

Sugoroku handled the new products carefully and spotted one character on the wrapper of a product that made him nostalgic, reminding him of his friend.

"Just be patient now!"

Perhaps Yuugi would make friends through these cards as well.

"'Magic and Wizards'?

"Or 'Duel Monsters'?

Sugoroku laughed as Jonouchi and Anzu tried to decide on a name. "'Duel Monsters' is the more popular name for it in America! Personally, I think it will be a hit in Japan as well!"

"Me too!" Yuugi looked through some of the cards that his packet had held. A fiend card, a warrior... It reminded him of another game from America...

"The pictures are well done," Anzu commented. "Some of them are really grotesque, though."

"But how do you play the game?" Jonouchi weighed the card in his hand; it didn't feel like any paper or plastic that he had ever seen, but it was still very lightweight. "Is it like menko?"

Yuugi explained the rules of the game, as well as the cards themselves. They could be a bit confusing, due to weapons giving power to warriors and shields raising the defense points of armored beasts and warriors.

"Wow. All this from a trading card game?"

"Yep. Look at all of the different kinds! Dragons, fiends, elves..."

Sugoroku laughed as Jonouchi seemed to get drawn in to the idea of the game. Yuugi only grew more enthused.

"Some cards are valuable too! Jii-chan has one!"

"A valuable card?" Jonouchi turned to Sugoroku, looking over to the elder in scrutiny. "Really?"

The old man laughed. "I guess I'll have to show it to you now. It's my treasure." He turned to reach a box on a nearby shelf. "Only a few copies were made. It's a strong card, but the creator realized that they were too strong. Some even killed to have just one!"

The Blue Eyes White Dragon - almost lovingly painted, it seemed - was alive on the card. The blue eyes were fixed onto whoever was holding the card, and they were filled with adoration.

"It makes me feel solemn, just seeing it," Anzu whispered, her voice barely audible.

Jonouchi looked through his pockets and found a few yen-bills in his pocket. "Hey, Jii-san, I'll buy
some packs. Hopefully I'll get strong cards!"

Yuugi reached to put some coins into the cashier and grab some of his own; he could only have two free packs before having to pay his pocket money for them. Anzu came behind him and asked for some as well.

When Jonouchi opened his packs, he showed Yuugi and Anzu his cards. "These look strong!"

The door to the shop opened and Yuugi heard a voice.

"Oh, is this where you live, Yuugi?" The boy had the same uniform from Domino High; unlike the rest of his classmates, however, Yuugi noticed a large metal briefcase that he noticed in class.

"Ah, Kaiba-kun, from my class, right?" Yuugi smiled.

Kaiba Seto had been a mystery to Yuugi for a while. He showed up to class a few times a week to none at all. He was often reading during the lesson, sometimes taking down notes if they were going to be graded on them. He was quiet, certainly.

"You guys are playing 'Duel Monsters,' huh?"

"Yeah, do you play it?" Jonouchi smiled. "That's great! Maybe we can all play tomorrow at school!"

Kaiba laughed softly. "I don't know if you guys are good enough to play with me. Let me see your cards for a second..." He took the cards from his classmate's hand and glanced at them. After looking at the freshly revealed cards, he tossed them over his shoulder.

"No way! What a beginner! You're not cut out to duel me, not even close!" As Jonouchi reached down to get his cards, Kaiba continued. "I was the champion in the Duel Monsters National Tournament in America; I only work with strong cards! Maybe you can call me when you've collected ten thousand!"

Jonouchi, having grabbed his new cards, held his other hand in a tight fist. "What the hell is up with him?"

"Jonouchi-kun," Yuugi protested. "We can still play on our own..."

Kaiba smirked and approached the register. Sugoroku set down his dragon card to the side and kept on his retailer face.

"Jii-san, do you buy and sell cards here?"

"Of course!"

As he browsed the display case, Kaiba didn't notice anything that caught his eye.

'All of these common cards. Hardly any attack strength- What is that?!!'

The Spirit of the Puzzle had no choice but to listen to the tale that the Faceless One - this Great Beast - had decided to share.

While she had swum down through the Holy Sea to come to the Earth, she had gone on adventures that surely would leave the Blue-Eyed Man amazed at her serenity and bravery.

Before that, she had to earn his trust and respect. When she revealed herself before him, it was as a
damsel. There was no harm a frail woman could do to a man, after all. He allowed her to stay in his home, speaking curtly. He had fought beasts and hardships, leaving her stunned at his tenacity and the soft heart that he had hidden, revealed in the kindnesses of having her stay with him and helping her learn skills that humans need to use.

She was no idiot, though; if there were affairs of business that needed doing, she would assist in what ways she could. She kept records and kept him safe when the days grew long and he had run out of energy to continue business.

These were the powers her father had given unto her.

And the Blue-Eyed Man took notice of all she did.

Kaiba stared at the card in front of him. It was a white dragon—no, the Blue Eyes White Dragon!

As he reached for it, his hand hesitant, Sugoroku reached out and grabbed it. Foolishness, leaving it in plain sight...

"How, this card! What's it doing here?"

"Please," Kaiba pleaded. "Let me see it!"

Sugoroku saw desperation in the boy's eyes and he saw an adoration for the card that he had hardly seen on most card collectors.

'He is in love with the card...'

"You can look," he said softly, gingerly, as he handed the card to Kaiba. That fearful look continued.

Kaiba felt a cold sweat take over, gooseflesh on his arms. 'I'm finally seeing it in person... It is the strongest and rarest card made! I would be unbeatable! In everything!'

When the card was plucked from his fingers, his blood ran cold. Kaiba froze, watching the man hold the card that he coveted, and collected himself enough to put his briefcase on the counter and open its latches.

"Jii-san, for that 'Blue Eyes White Dragon' card, I'll trade you all of mine!" He turned and revealed all of his cards there. Every type and level, certainly it was enough, with the way that Yuugi and his friends were crying out in amazement.

"No."

Kaiba's heart skipped at the refusal, which seemed in time with the other teens' amazement at the rejection of the offer.

"Can you tell me why?" His voice was raspy with want, at least to his own ears.

Oh, the Blue-Eyed Man adored this woman, who had come down from the Heavens to be his partner, his equal, and his adored. He kept himself closed off still, as he had gone through another love that had damaged his heart.

But he did covet her.

The Spirit felt shadows curl over his flesh as he tried to keep a watch on Yuugi and his companions
in the Game Shop. He spotted the newcomer, a boy.

"You must really want this card, Kaiba-kun."

"It's nothing to do with how strong or rare it is..." Kaiba saw Sugoroku nod and hold the card up in recognition of it.

"This was a gift from my gaming companion in America. I could never part with this card, even if it was weak. Memories of our good times fill this card, you could say." The old man was gazing at the card in fondness, his eyes misting over as though he were taken somewhere far away, in a far away time. "This one card is worth more to me that that entire trunk! The true strength of this game is in valuing the cards you do have."

The shop was silent for a few tense moment.

"I understand." Kaiba closed his briefcase, somewhat harshly, and turned towards the door. "Goodbye!"

The Faceless One laughed in delight.

*Oh, this will be a fun game. Look, the Shadows are dancing, dancing at the Blue-Eyed Man coveting that woman again! He has the wrong one!*

The Spirit tried to keep his face calm, fighting the urge to answer to the dragon that was weeping in the card.

'It's in pain.'

The next day, Yuugi was dueling with Jonouchi during their break. After beating his friend, he heard his name being said.

"Yuugi-kun!"

"Ah, Kaiba-kun!"

The younger boy was smiling, a calm welcome after yesterday's harsh exit. "Your game was fun to watch. I was wondering; did you, by chance, bring the Blue Eyes White Dragon to school?"

Yuugi looked over to his backpack, where the other boy was pointing. "You said you understood," he recalled, trying to keep that tension from yesterday from forming. "Anyway, Jii-chan agreed to lend it to me just for the day; I can't play with it, though."

"That's alright," Kaiba assured. "Could... Could I just look at it again? After holding it once, I was too excited to sleep. Because I do understand what your grandfather said!"

"I'm in love with that card."

Yuugi saw something in Kaiba's eyes - love? - and reached into his backpack.

"Alright. You can see it."

When Yuugi got the card back, he bit his tongue to stay silent.
This card didn't have his Jii-chan's heart in it at all.

Kaiba gloated about how he would win the next tournament. His inner thoughts were a stream of victory speeches, fake smiles, anything that would help him forget his losses at home.

"Kaiba-kun!"

He turned and saw Yuugi standing there.

"Yuugi-kun, are you heading home?"

If Kaiba hadn't seen Yuugi in class before and after he started hanging around Jonouchi, he wouldn't be able to believe that Yuugi was accusing him of taking the Blue Eyes White Dragon card.

"Are you calling me a thief? I gave it back!"

"I know the difference between a copy and the real thing... Please!" It was almost pitiful, how Yuugi was asking him, begging him. "If I broke my promise and didn't return the card, it would break his heart! He means so much to me and I don't want to let him down, Kaiba-kun!"

Kaiba readjusted his grip on his suitcase, feeling its weight.

"I don't know anything, really! If we're friends, why don't you believe me?"

"Kaiba-kun!" Yuugi's face was still pleading and that face grew more pathetic after Kaiba's suitcase left a good bruise on Yuugi's cheek.

"I can't believe you're making such a big deal about his sentimentality." Kaiba laughed and turned to walk away. "Your old man don't understand that winning is more important than anything!"

Oh, let us not pity the poor man! He was lost in lust for that woman, there!

The Faceless One stayed a spectator as the Spirit of the Puzzle pulled Yuugi into his Soul Room and took the control of Yuugi's body.

What lust there...

"Yuugi, I accept your challenge!" Kaiba crossed his arms, shaking his head slightly. He'd won tournaments of Duel Monsters, chess, and other games; hadn't Yuugi heard of those victories, or was he just ignoring that information in hopes of being able to beat him?

The boy across the table did look different than the one he attended school with, though. Yuugi's purple eyes seemed to become a sanguine red, and those eyes seemed haunted by a darkness that Kaiba sometimes saw while looking in a mirror. There was a cockiness to the other boy, a cockiness that he'd have to get rid of.

"The rules of this duel," this Other Yuugi said. "Are a little different. You'll understand soon."

"Sounds interesting..." Nothing would beat his deck, and the Blue Eyes would ensure it.

"2000 life points, 40 cards per deck with one card per turn, and the first to zero loses."
"Let's start," the Other Yuugi decreed, initiating the game. He gestured for Kaiba to go first, which he accepted.

The first card, Gargoyle, with its high attack and defense points would have an easy time in this duel. Level 5 cards were sometimes hard to get a hold of. As Kaiba set the card down, a strange smoke appeared from the card, and the sense of foreboding filled him in such a way that could only be described as "otherworldly."

"What the hell? The monster is coming out of the card!" The Gargoyle let out a low growl and stayed in attack mode as Kaiba had left it.

The Other Yuugi let out a small smile. "This is a whole new game. In that case, I'll attack your Gargoyle with my Dark Dragon!"

Out of the smoke, like the beast coming forth from its lair, the Dark Dragon emerged from its card. The Gargoyle sprang into action, but it could do nothing but let out the sounds of a choking beast as the fire began to roast its flesh. The scent of burning skin filled the air and Kaiba was in awe at the scene appearing in front of him. It was when the card disappeared, like the creature it represented, that Kaiba began to move again.

"Don't worry," the Other Yuugi assured him. "The image is gone; one of us will deal with the consequences of losing. Those are the rules of this Shadow Duel.

"Now you lose the points from the Dragon and Gargoyle's power difference - 500 points, dropping you to 1500."

Kaiba, in shock and slowly coming back to the reality of the situation, looked up to Yuugi. He didn't need everything explained to him like some petulant child!

"What kind of consequence do we get if we lose?"

"The defeated will experience a penalty game similar to 'death'." The Other Yuugi sat with an amused expression and Kaiba could only bring himself to laugh.

"This could be the ultimate duel to the death!"

The Other Yuugi spoke again. "It's your turn."

When Kaiba drew his next card, he smiled. "Minotaurus, a rare 'beast soldier' card!" He threw the card down into an attack position and was amazed as the Minotaurus emerged from its card. The Other Yuugi's surprised face was good to see as well.

"It's superior to your dragon in attack and defense. Minotaurus, tear that dragon limb from limb!" He was holding power in his hands, his will directing the ax of the Minotaurus in front of the fire blast from the Dragon, driving it forward and slicing the Dragon's head and shoulders. It fell apart with no blood shed, but the pieces of Dragon disappearing in smoke, just as his Gargoyle did, was a rush of energy and pleasure.

"The difference in attack points was 200," he gloated, toying with the Other Yuugi in much the same way the other boy had surely been with him.

"Then I lose 200 life points."

"Draw your next card, Yuugi," Kaiba ordered, regaining his composure.
The Holy Elf came onto the field, fingers interlaced. The Other Yuugi turned the Elf's card sideways, letting her genuflect as she whispered her holy spells like a lullaby. "She'll be safer this way, with 2000 defense points. Greater than the Minotaurus' attack points."

Kaiba nodded at that choice. "I can't attack or else I'd lose life points from the difference. I'll defend as well. My draw."

Kaiba placed his next card face down on the table, watching his Minotaurus on the field. He could see its shoulders moved as it seemed to breathe. The Holy Elf's lips were moving subtly, a show of dainty and passionate reverence to a God.

The Other Yuugi was eyeing the new card, a magic card. The next card that he drew left a nervous look on his face; it was probably some X00 card that couldn't even be on par with Kaiba's monster. He was proven right when the Wight was summoned.

"My turn!" Kaiba flipped his magic card, revealing the Giant Transformation card. "20% increase to both Minotaurus' attack and defense points, meaning I can take your Holy Elf's head!"

The wail of the Elf had no negative effect on Kaiba; in fact, it whet his appetite for more of this horrific game. The scream ended and soon the Wight followed in the Holy Elf's footsteps.

"This one card can beat anything in your deck!" Kaiba laughed, wiping out each card that the Other Yuugi managed to summon. Turn after turn, the other duelist lost points. "You should just give up."

With only 500 life points left, the Other Yuugi reached towards his deck slowly. His eyes opened wide in shock as the Summoned Demon appeared on the field.

"Summoned Demon? How do you have such a rare card?"

The Other Yuugi smirked and continued. "I attack Minotaurus with Demon Lightning!"

The Minotaurus let out a terrible groaning, becoming wisps of smoke and costing Kaiba 460 life points. "No...! My Minotaurus!"

The tides of the duel changed completely, Kaiba losing monster after monster and soon looking across the table, intimidated, with only 800 life points.

'This is bad. My chances of drawing a card that can beat the Demon is too low.

'I still have that card in my pocket,' Kaiba realized. 'If I can bring it out, I will win!'

"Yuugi-kun," he began, drawing on the persona that he used for his public appearances. "You're pretty good! Until now, I wasn't afraid for my life!" He reached into his pocket as he spoke and hid a card under his hand as he reached for the deck.

"With this trump card, however, I still don't fear this game. After all, this card is the Blue Eyes White Dragon!"

He threw the card down onto the field and watched in awe and adoration as the Dragon appeared in a beautiful white smoke. Its scales were shining as though the Dragon was the Sun, its teeth bared and menacing.

"Amazing! Beautiful, as a rare card should be!"

"That's my grandfather's card, Kaiba-"
"You thought I wouldn't use your grandfather's card? You're right," Kaiba insisted. "Because this one is mine! This duel is mine; the Dragon will obliterate your Demon and bring your life points to zero. Attack!"

The Dragon, however, closed its jaws and let out a low rumble of a purr. Kaiba saw the Dragon's head turn, its blue eyes questioning its commander. Its eyes were innocent, and surprisingly, there was no life in them.

"What's wrong? Why isn't it attacking!?”

The Other Yuugi sat and his eyes, bloody, held an older soul in them.

"Kaiba, you don't seem to understand this game at all. It isn't attacking me because the Blue Eyes White Dragon doesn't have your heart in it. It doesn't even have one of its own."

'Soulless blue eyes... Or are they just aged?"

"But I can see a heart in it, if not its own. I see Jii-chan's heart in the Blue Eyes." Smoke covered the Dragon, and to Kaiba's horror, the Dragon silently disappeared. "You thought it would disregard the loyalty it has to Jii-chan and win you the game. Well, did you?"

"You... You idiot!" Kaiba's heart was pounding. No, nonsense! For these creatures to have souls, for cards to have souls- "A card can't have loyalty! It's a damn card!"

"It's my turn, and while you were on your winning streak, I set a magic card face down. I'll use it now." Kaiba looked to the other end of the table, spying that card that had been played after the Wight had been summoned.

"Monster Reborn, used on the White Dragon itself!" The Blue Eyes White Dragon appeared, its eyes full of a blue fire and its attack was a stream of light, feeling like a brand on Kaiba's skin. He yelled at the pain, his heart pounding wildly against his ribs.

"Now, the Penalty Game!"

Kaiba felt himself falling, and the voices of a man and woman shushed him when he found himself in a misty plain. It was the same kind of cloud that he saw when the Duel Monsters were summoned or destroyed. He felt the ground shake beneath his feet, and monsters came at him from all angles. Some, he did not recognize, and others were disfigured into beings from pure nightmares.

The voices that usually helped him in his dreams, those kind voices, the ones he could bring himself to trust, were no longer there.

"Kaiba-kun, in that world, you will experience something like death." The Spirit of the Puzzle spoke to the boy in front of him, the body still being receptive... Deep down, anyway.

"Don't worry, child. It's only one night's worth of nightmares, illusions. Perhaps you'll learn to understand the hearts of these creatures!"

The Faceless One whispered in the Spirit's mind.

*He'll be a True Master of Games.*

"Yes," he agreed hesitantly. "Like Master's Jii-san. I have to return it now.

"He'll be so happy," the Spirit added, smiling.
"I appreciate this, don't mistake that," Sugoroku assured, holding his Blue Eyes White Dragon more securely in his hand before turning to place it in its box. "However, I don't appreciate you running Yuugi's life for him."

The Spirit nodded.

"I agree with you, Master's jii-san-"

"'Jii-chan' is fine."

For a few moments, Sugoroku situated the card box on its shelf underneath the display case, locking it away, while the Spirit hardened his jaw slightly in odd discomfort.

"Jii-chan..." The sounds fell clumsily out of the Spirit's mouth, but they settled well into the atmosphere. "I don't want to take away Yuugi-ue-sama's life. I would want to keep him safe from the painful truths of the world. Regrettably, this would only hurt him more, so I must have him learn these things." The Spirit set his hand on the display case and looked down at the cards that were hidden away in their packets. Some of their hearts responded to him and he smiled slightly.

"Yuugi-ue is innocent. He forgives and shows compassion. I will dirty my soul for his sake. He needs to strengthen the resolve and confidence to keep going forth, to stand against the cruelties of the world. Today, he learned more about betrayal, something that is too apparent in your human history." The Spirit looked up to Sugoroku, whose eyes were deep and wise, and still they were young. "If my standing aside will help him learn, or if it will allow him to continue living his life, I will not intervene. I would rather fight his life or death battles, and let him not remember as I turn my energies towards healing him."

"Stay to that please." Sugoroku sighed and walked around the counter to lock the shop door. "If you could stay with him, I'd appreciate it."

"Is there any reason in particular?"

There was silence, save for the buzzing of the electric light.

"For the past couple of years, Yuugi has been sent letters. Frightening letters."

"Show me."

*How he lusted*, the Faceless One said. It laughed, its hissing grinding against the darker sound to create a frightful din. It recalled what the letter said, and it continued to laugh in its unique way.

- *Dear Yuugi,*

- *It's been a while since you got a letter from your friend. Many things have happened since your previous letter. I regret to inform you, dear little friend, that your friend has died.*

- *I'm here now.*

Chapter End Notes
Zennyo Ryūō, Mizuchi and Toyotama-hime: These three are all dragons/dragon-like people, mentioned in Japanese mythology. They are not the names of the three Blue Eyes; rather, they represent different people.

Slovos: Anyone ever read Anthony Burgess?

M&W v. DM: "Magic and Wizards" was primarily used in the Japanese manga and in the early Viz translation. Everything else, Duel Monsters. It is a reference to "Magic: the Gathering" or simply "Magic," which came out in 1993, three years before the Yu-Gi-Oh! manga.

*I'm going to stick with Duel Monsters as the title, because that the name I grew up knowing the game by. I felt it was valid to note the names though.

Menko: A player's card is placed on the hardwood or concrete floor and the other player throws down his card, trying to flip the other player's card with a gust of wind or by striking his card against the other card. If he succeeds, he takes both cards. The player who takes all the cards, or the one with the most cards at the end of the game, wins the game.

Explaining: I know the Other Yuugi is explaining things so we don't get confused, but why to Kaiba? It's like he's trying to get Kaiba to snap out of the "trauma" of losing his card. Silly, Other Yuugi.

Dueling: To the Death, or don't come. Just shoot the Vice President or be shot... and lose your position as the Secretary of Commerce and have people learn to hate you from School House Rock songs.

Cards: I'm going to use the transliterated Japanese names for the cards. "Holy Elf" has a different ring to it than "Mystical Elf." Hell, "Dark Magician" sounds more Satanic to me than "Black Magician" (Were they also avoiding a race commentary when changing the name, observing the origins of the Magician?).

Ue (上): Never has an honorific brought me more terror. Added onto chichi (father) and haha (mother) to become "honorable father/mother" (respectively), it elevates the person rather high, up there with people regarded as nobles and even royalty.
Chapter Summary

From darkness
On a shadowed path
I must make my way;
Let it faintly shine,
The moon upon the mountain’s edge.

- Izumi Shikibu (?976-?)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Faceless One sighed and looked to the room where the Spirit of the Puzzle cared for the other being that resided in their host's mind with them. It was a younger spirit, certainly, though it felt the same age as the Spirit, despite the evidence of said being having lived several millennia more. The Spirit cared about this one deeply, though he had no reasoning as to why.

'I wish to care for him,' the Spirit said. 'Keep your 「slovos」 away from this 「malchick」 and from Yuugi-ue.'

You're completely boring, you 「bratchny」. You best be thinking of that 「droog」 - the one that snuffed it.

The Puzzle Spirit grew silent and laid down the washcloth that he had been using on the Resting Spirit's face. The boy - yes, a boy, probably about Yuugi-ue's age - was still resting in that strange state in which he did not move or change in his breathing, and the Puzzle Spirit preferred that it was that way. For the last three thousand years - at least that was what Sugoroku-jiichan had said, in regards to the Puzzle's age - the Spirit of the Puzzle had been attacked by the Shadows...

Which had been trying to get to the young Resting Spirit.

The child had almost died, while one of Yuugi-ue's friend had truly died.

'What do you know about this friend, this 「droog」 of his, Faceless One?'

The Faceless One curled about his opposite number, serpentine tongue tracing the Puzzle Spirit's ear.

I do know who died, 「malenky bratchny」. I do. But he did not die in the way you think.

The Spirit of the Puzzle sighed and put his washtings away, making sure to close the Resting Spirit's chamber door as he and the Faceless One exited.

Something wicked this way comes, the Faceless One mused, and the Spirit of the Puzzle could only wonder why it spoke in such a manner.

'Yuugi-ue's getting ready for school. That is all.'
It was a normal Monday, as it should have been; however, there was only one person missing that made Yuugi wonder if everything was okay, even now that he had friends.

"Yuugi!"

Yuugi looked up and greeted Honda and Anzu, trying to ignore the empty desk in the classroom. There was no loud, brash talk filling the room, not like every day before.

"Jonouchi-kun isn't here today?"

"He's not?" Honda turned to his friend's desk. Sure enough, it was empty. "This is bad... Why is he absent? He's rarely ever sick!"

"This is the first time Jonouchi-kun's been absent..." Yuugi said softly. "Do you have any idea where he is, Honda-kun?"

"I don't know how to contact him."

Anzu huffed lightly. "He keeps to himself too much!"

"I'll go to his house after school," Honda offered. He'd been there a few times, though not recently.

"Yeah, me too," Yuugi said.

"I'll go, too, since I don't work today."

The rest of the day passed by without problems. The walk towards Jonouchi's home, however, sent shivers through Yuugi's body.

"Honda-kun, you've known Jonouchi-kun since middle school, right?" Yuugi turned to Honda, who was pointing his index finger in the air, trying to remember which direction to go.

"Yeah, but he almost never invited me to his place." He led them to an apartment complex - Shūri Danchi - and began to lead him up the stairs. "I was here, a long time ago. The first door on the third floor."

They walked up the flights of stairs and heard no noise as they walked towards the first door. Honda frowned and reached for the doorknob.

"The door's unlocked," he said. "I'll peek in. I thought his family worked all day."

"Just a peek," Anzu agreed, leaning forward. Yuugi came right behind her, managing to see inside of Jonouchi's house. As they opened the door a few centimeters, nothing happened.

The door creaked and almost instantly, a beer bottle made contact with the wooden door.

Anzu let out a yelp and the three of them jumped back, some beer splashing through the doorway from the force of the throw.

"You! D-damn brat, haven't been home... Two d-daysss..." Honda opened the door a little bit farther.

Beer cans were littering the floor of what seemed to be the dining room, and even the table that was in sight was covered. Garbage bags were propped against the walls, scattered around the room.
Bottles were on their sides and haphazardly balanced against the broad legs that were crossed on the table.

The door closed, Honda's face twisted with shock.

Yuugi shivered and followed Honda, as if on auto-pilot, as his friends turned and ran.

"Weird..." Yuugi tried to rationalize what just occurred. Jonouchi-kun hadn't been home, apparently.

Anzu turned to him and gave him an awkward smile. Yuugi could see sweat on her forehead, her nervous expression sitting strangely on her usually confident face.

"Honda, was that his dad?"

Honda sighed and his expression hardened. "Yeah, that's his old man. He's been like that for a long time. I guess... That's why Jonouchi never invites anyone over."

Everyone was silent for a moment. Jonouchi always bragged about being the first one in class during the day, and he said that he spent a lot of time at Honda's house, and now even Yuugi's house. He'd spent the night on Thursday, and nothing had seemed off about Jonouchi's behavior.

'Probably to avoid going home.'

"Well, he's not home." Honda turned to Anzu and Yuugi. "His dad said that Jonouchi's been missing for two days. I can't think of where he'd be."

Anzu smiled and stepped in front of Honda and Yuugi.

"Let's keep looking, guys!"

The Faceless One was quiet for now, and the Spirit of the Puzzle was trying to keep his magic spread out over Yuugi. The drunkard was a threat to Yuugi-ue-tachi. If he had not been Jonouchi's family, the Spirit might have sought to punish him.

He sighed, trying to think of possible places where Jonouchi could be and sending any ideas to the forefront of Yuugi-ue's mind. He looked down to the Resting Spirit, wondering if this one could help him find Jonouchi.

'You'd like him,' he said, tracing his fingers over the other's tan skin. It was like the sun had touched his blood and it was showing out through his skin in rich color. 'He's bright like the Sun - his hair anyway. You're rather bright too. Like a king. Perhaps that shall be your name, if you've forgotten yours as I've mine.'

A soft sound alerted him to the Resting Spirit and it amazed him to see bright red eyes - a soft crimson color that reminded the Spirit of the Puzzle of roses that he'd seen in Yuugi's memories.

'Who are you?'

The Spirit of the Puzzle smiled.

'Name me what you wish, Ou-sama.'

The once-Resting Spirit looked confused for a moment.

"Ou-sama"?"
The Spirit of the Puzzle's smile faltered for a moment before shining just as brightly.

'Do you remember your name?'

'... I don't.'

The Spirit of the Puzzle nodded in understanding. 'I don't remember mine either. You have a regal air, so I thought that title seemed appropriate. Forgive my boldness.'

The alert spirit, now named King, smiled and sat up slowly, his eyes still tired.

'That's all right. Now, who are you? And Jonouchi? And this Yuugi-ue you tell me so much of?'

The Spirit of the Puzzle nodded. 'I can answer two of your questions, milord.'

King nodded slowly, and the Puzzle Spirit felt as though the sun was rising.

The sun was starting to go down when Yuugi raised his hand up to his mouth, covering a yawn. They'd covered most of the places that they had been to in Domino City, and they'd come back to the shopping district.

"No good. Not in any of the usual places..."

"Jonouchi-kun..." Yuugi looked down at the ground, starting to wonder if they'd find him at all.

"You guys go on home. I'll keep looking," Honda offered. "I'll find him by tomorrow for sure!"

Yuugi clenched his jaw for a moment.

"Don't worry!" Anzu tried to keep her voice level for Yuugi's sake. He and Jonouchi had bonded after that fight with Ushio. It was a wonder, truly.

A shout was heard and the three turned. A group of guys in different high school uniforms were harassing another student from another school.

"I'm sorry! I didn't mean to bump you-"

"That's okay, if you've got some money for me."

Honda scoffed. "Those thugs are from Rintama High. They're all the same." His voice was harsher than before. "Let's get out of here-"

Yuugi pointed towards the group, some of the members starting to beat down the weaker student who had bumped into them. A Domino High uniform was exposed from behind them, and Yuugi recognized the student.

"But, it's Jonouchi-kun!"

"W-What's he doing with those Rintama jerks?!" Honda seemed aghast at the discovery.

Yuugi looked to Honda, waiting for an answer, but he didn't hear one. Instead, he heard the voices of a Rintama student.

"Let's head back to the base, at 'J'z Bar'!"

Yuugi felt a burst of energy rush through him, as though it wasn't his own energy, his own
confidence urging him forward. It was his certainly his desire, to see why his friend was with these violent people.

"Jonouchi-kun!"

He ignored his other friends, who were trying to get him to come back. Why would he? He blocked everything out, even that energy that was alive inside of him.

"Why weren't you in school?" He managed to get Jonouchi to turn for a moment and their eyes met. "Why are you with those-"

"You know that guy?" A Rintama student in a hat turned to look at Yuugi, sneering as he pulled a smoking cigarette from his lips to let out a puff of smoke. "He's talkin' to ya."

"Nope, never seen him before..." Jonouchi looked to Yuugi for a moment, and that spark of fierceness that Yuugi had known before becoming friends with Jonouchi was apparent in the blond's eyes. "Let's go!"

"Jonouchi-kun!" Yuugi ran closer to the group, the Rintama gang walking nonchalantly as if they hadn't beaten another person to the ground. Yuugi received no answer.

"Jonouchi." A taller student, someone that looked more like an adult than a teenager, came towards Jonouchi. He stood, imposing on Jonouchi's space. "You've gotten soft. You shouldn't let some Domino brat follow you around! Not if you want to go to Rintama with us."

Honda felt his heart stop.

'Hirutani! Jonouchi met that guy in middle school, but why is he with them now?'

"Jonouchi-kun, walk home with us!" Honda watched as Yuugi tried to convince Jonouchi to come with them. He wondered what was going on in his head to try and take on guys that were twice, three times his size.

"Hirutani-san, that brat's annoying. Jonouchi-kun doesn't know him anyway..."

Jonouchi still didn't turn around.

'This is going to get bad.'

His mouth dropped in shock as that hat-wearing thug came forward and gave a punch to Yuugi's face. Honda saw a flash of metal. The bastard was wearing two rings, and Yuugi was still trying to call to Jonouchi.

Jonouchi didn't even turn around.

"Don't stress out our friend Jonouchi!" Honda could hear that thug's voice as he and Anzu ran to Yuugi. The bruise was already blooming like a fresh spill of red juice on a floor. "Make any noise, I'll kill you!"

"Yuugi! Are you okay?" Anzu stood with her handkerchief out, trying to reach Yuugi's face. Honda helped him stand and was shocked when Yuugi pushed Anzu's hand out of the way, reaching towards Jonouchi.

"J-Jonouchi-kun..." It was like something made all his pain go away, just to focus on his goal.
Anzu's eyes filled with anger and she turned to Jonouchi.

"You're awful! I was all wrong about you!"

Honda felt his own heart fire up.

"What wrong with you, Jonouchi?!"

He didn't answer, and Jonouchi left with the Rintama gang.

'What the fuck happened to you, Jonouchi?'

'So he is Yuugi-ue's friend, Danava?' The King listened to the explanation that the Spirit of the Puzzle had given him, and he wondered why Jonouchi was acting in the manner that the Shadows were relaying to the both of them.

'Yes,' the other spirit said, drawing symbols with the Shadows. Healing spells, recognizable by the deepest parts of the King's memories. They were being sent to Yuugi's body, to prevent the more serious damage from being hit with metal.

They could hear everything outside, from Anzu's concerns and Yuugi's assurances that he was all right.

'He's so compassionate,' the King said. Yuugi felt so much concern for his friend, it was difficult not to ask the other Spirit - the Danava, the King had decided to call him - to go and find Jonouchi.

'I wish to help him.'

The Puzzle Spirit - now the Danava, called - sighed.

'He held me back. My Shadows can protect you from the more ravenous ones, but Yuugi-ue actually held me back.'

The King blinked in amazement.

'Wow...'

'Something tells me we've seen nothing yet.'

They heard Yuugi's voice again, this time. The voice of his thoughts filled their ears.

*This puzzle was what started the friendship between Jonouchi-kun and I...*

The Danava smiled and let out a burst of energy, making sure that Yuugi would feel it.

He was not disappointed.

"I believe... I'm sure that Jonouchi-kun hasn't changed!" Yuugi smiled to Honda and Anzu. The two had pensive expressions on their faces. Then Honda smiled.

"Yeah! He's not that kind of guy." Honda stood and with a hard set expression on his face, he turned back towards the shopping district. He picked up his briefcase from where he had set it on the park bench and sighed.
"They said they were going to J'z. Let's go!"

Inside of J'z, the air was stale, the smoke of American-made cigarettes having taken any possible vitality from it. The owner had heard of Hirutani in middle school and had been intimidated by those stories. High school did nothing to stop Hirutani's violent tendencies, leading the owner to let the Rintama gang use J'z at their leisure.

As he was welcomed inside, Jonouchi made his way to the couch, throwing himself down onto the new cushions. He crossed his legs after resting his feet on the table, seeing some of the darker looks that the other members gave him. He dropped his gaze down to the magazine on the table. He had trouble reading the title as his attention was pulled away from it.

"Jonouchi," Hirutani bellowed. "We've gotta celebrate you joining the group!"

Jonouchi could remember the satisfying crunch of bone under his fist when he hit some kid's jaw while in middle school. The high schooler was down on the ground faster than he had expected, almost like when his dad went bar-hopping and came back home just to barely make it to the sofa.

"Let's start a huge brawl!"

The satisfying crunch, the sight and smell of blood, and just the sense of power he got - it had always been enough. Beating anyone who got in his way, that would always be enough.

Jonouchi looked up at the sound of that hat-wearing underling offering a cigarette to Hirutani, like a dog licking the boots of its master.

The flame from the lighter burned for a few moments, but Jonouchi could smell the flame burning even longer. He stared at the boy with the hat, fire in his chest.

"What is it? Why are you starin' at me?"

Jonouchi continued to stare, trying to reign it in, that bloodthirsty thing that he used to be. The hat-wearing guy was already being bothered by it.

"You've been acting strange for a while, Jonouchi."

No more honorifics. No more respect between then, though any respect that could have existed for Jonouchi had disappeared in his mind when...

"In the end, I can't forgive you." He stood, slamming his hand down on the table where he had had his legs resting.

It seemed instant, instinctual, as his fist collided with the thug's cheek. That elation of having bone crunch under his knuckles, it was nothing to the sense of restoring his honor.

'Yuugi.'

"I can never forgive you for hitting my friend!"

Hirutani made no move to help his underling, who'd been hit so hard that blood came out of his mouth and he didn't even try to get up from the floor. He stared down at Jonouchi, holding onto that intimidating air that he had developed in middle school.

"Jonouchi, you finally look like your old self. Too bad you chose to antagonize me." Jonouchi was surrounded and the tension in the air finally sparked to life.
"Get him, boys! Well teach him a lesson, even if we have to kill him!"

"Great!" He moved to avoid a punch, trying to keep his balance. 'Five guys. This isn't good.'

He delivered a kick to the same guy and punched him right after. A sudden blow to the back of his head made him double over, and the hits that followed became a barrage of blows that sent him to the floor.

"We'll take him to the Execution Grounds." Hirutani still stood with a smug grin.

Jonouchi looked up at Hirutani and saw that grin stay in place.

'Totally not like my friends that I have now... No compassion at all.'

Outside of J'z, Honda turned to Yuugi and Anzu. Yuugi looked at his watch.

'It's only been 10 minutes! He'll be here!'

"I'll go alone," Honda was saying. Yuugi felt sweat mix with the newly pouring rain that ran down his forehead.

"But Honda-kun-"

"I don't want to have to worry about you guys while I fight!"

Yuugi stood silent, feeling Anzu grab his upper arm to keep him from running.

"Yuugi! We're friends, but this is going to get rough. Rather you not see me."

Yuugi looked to Anzu as Honda ran towards the door.

"Don't worry; he'll bring Jonouchi back." Anzu smiled in earnest, her eyes bright with confidence. Her cheeks were flushed with the stress of running about and watching so much violence in a short span of time.

"I hope so, Anzu."

"They're not here!"

Honda came dashing up the steps, looking like things were disappearing in smoke around him.

"Then where..." Yuugi pulled away from Anzu and stood apart from both of his friends.

"I don't know... It looked like there was a fight." Honda grit his teeth. "This is bad."

"We'll split up and search!" Anzu stood her ground despite the look that Honda gave her. She could defend herself in a jam.

"Okay." Honda turned to start running towards the Rintama School District. "If you find me, come get me! Don't try to fight them!"

"You look good, Jonouchi." Hirutani's voice was quiet, menacing in Jonouchi's ears. With his hands tied above his head and his body hanging by his wrists, feet just touching the floor, Jonouchi presented no threat to the gang, leaving him open to all the punches and kicks that they could throw.
at him. Hirutani smiled at seeing his once-underling in such a deplorable state, defenseless.

Jonouchi spit out blood. The last punch had hit his cheek, making his teeth cut into the weakened tissue. He laughed at Hirutani's words.

"Well, everything around here looks good, compared to these baboons," he countered, nodding his head at the gang underlings.

Hirutani nodded his head and Jonouchi felt his neck snap as a punch whipped his head to the side.

"Jonouchi," he could hear Hirutani say; his mind was wandering, though, as he felt himself separate from reality with each blow. "You haven't changed since middle school! I always hated it that we think the same way!

"Even so, we had nothing to fear as partners. They shouted our names in every school, and we had so many underlings. There was just one thing I could never do."

Jonouchi looked up at him, and Hirutani could see fire still burning in Jonouchi's eyes.

"I knew it! You brought me here to teach me!

"Is it over, Hirutani?" Jonouchi gave a wry smile. "I don't remember a thing, besides all of your faces... You should try to double your efforts."

A laugh, a cackle, filled the warehouse. Hirutani, after calming himself, had a composed expression on his face.

"Don't worry... We've got a special menu, a full course of beating some sense into you."

Jonouchi just stared at the stun-gun that was in front of his face. It suddenly appeared, and he kicked the goon that held it, knocking the guy unconscious.

Energy set his body on fire, 200000 volts of electricity lighting him like bright lights in the city. His vision went white, and his body went tonic-clonic as the stun-gun burned him through his clothes.

He thought of his friends, Yuugi, and his girl with bright, gradually duller eyes.

Yuugi could hear a wail, like a dying animal stuck in a trap that savored the slowest death.

"Jonouchi-kun!" He looked down at his Puzzle, the golden pyramid suddenly feeling like the 6 kilograms it should weigh. It seemed to shine brightly, rain rolling off of it smoothly, as though it showed no concern for Yuugi's frantic heart.

'If I wish hard enough, will you tell me?' He whispered his plea under his breath, holding the pyramid in his hands.

'Please, tell me where Jonouchi-kun is!' He closed his eyes and saw a rusty roof, dark walls of concrete, and high, metal rafters. A thought came to him, like a whisper, to see the warehouses by Domino Pier.

'I'll trust you.'

Yuugi felt his mind slip into darkness, and he could feel warm arms wrap around him.
'Who-

So many slips into the dark, and he just wanted to know what it was this time, who this thing was that always took such sweet care of him and told him kind things.

'... A King,' he heard, before losing his hearing completely.

The Danava used the Puzzle's magic as he ran, seeing the appearance of the warehouse as he ran. He saw a tire, barrel, and that one of the gang members was unconscious.

'Probably Jonouchi-san's doing,' he thought.

Rain was pouring, and if the scream Yuugi had heard was what he had thought, Jonouchi didn't have much time left.

He saw a hole in the warehouse that the Puzzle recognized. As he ran, he saw the grey uniforms of the Rintama Gang, and the monstrous form of Hirutani stood in contrast of his master's body. He'd have to use his energies wisely.

"Kill him!" Hirutani's voice was booming like thunder, and the shock of that voice awoke a protective instinct inside of the Danava.

'How dare you... I will never forgive you! Never!'

After being punched and having them accept his custom game, the Danava smiled.

"Can you find the bomb switch in time? If you can, you've won and you can kill me. If not, you'll suffer the Penalty Game and the land mine."

Hirutani caught on quickly, something that made the Shadows spark to life. The Danava hushed them; feeding them now, with Jonouchi still in harm's way from the gang, would only drive him into further harm.

"We can still beat him with our fists, instead of the stun-guns! The rain can't do shit to help him then!"

A groan alerted them to their unconscious member.

"Wrong answer, and your time's up!"

As the rain pooled under the rubber tire that the Danava stood upon, it created a conductive current that would certainly amp up the stun-gun's power.

The underling woke up, and his arm fell, his stun-gun landing in the water, and, for a moment, the Danava smiled.

Jonouchi awoke to loud screaming, Hirutani's voice like nothing he'd heard it as.

He felt a gentle hand on his forehead, and a lullaby that his mother had stopped singing to him when she had found out that she was pregnant again.

He blacked out again, and Jonouchi finally stayed conscious when he heard Yuugi, Anzu and Honda's voices.
'I'm alive?'

Yuugi was smiling...

"Jonouchi-kun, let's go home!"

He hadn't felt this happy in a really long time.

Chapter End Notes

Agatamori - The leader of the Kasa-no-Oni clan, he challenged the water dragon; losing would lead to Agatamori slaying the water dragon. Mizuchi lost and Agatamori further sought out the water-dragon's fellows. Now the tribe of all the water-dragons filled a cave in the bottom of the pool. He slew them every one, and the water of the river became changed to blood.

*I appreciate the interest in this story ::bows:: but sadly, school will be starting in about a month, so updates will practically disappear from their already monthly basis. I have not started the next chapters, though I plan to have a good deal done before school starts during my free time.

Thank you for your already invaluable patience, and I hope that you keep interest in this story of mine. As horrible as this sounds, I would like to see a few more reviews. I'm not the kind of person that wants x number of chapters before I put up the next; I really value any criticism that I can get and I will take note of all of it.

If there are any pressing questions (without spoilers, even if it has been over 10 years), I will be constructing a Q&A page shortly. Just leave a question in a review with 'Q:' in front of it and I'll add it to the list.

Thank you again and I hope you all have a good day.
The Man from Egypt

Chapter Summary

That he had no pain
At the end-to hear that
Pleases me;
Yet in any parting
There is no consolation.

- The Monk Jakuzen (c.1120-c.1182?)

Chapter Notes

We start to veer into canon dissonance and the mythology behind the story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Yuugi looked into the mirror, focusing on his Puzzle. It never weighed like solid gold should, and it never hurt him as he slept. It certainly looked like a big metal pendant.

'Who was that king I heard?' It had been a kind presence, the one who brought him into the dark. All he remembered from the fight with Hirutani's gang last week was waking up on the ground, a barely-painful bruise on his cheek and Jonouchi-kun safe on the ground next to him.

Was the King the one that seemed to lull him into easy sleep? The first night that he had his Puzzle complete, even if he'd been tired the next morning, he had the vaguest memory of someone singing him to sleep, trying to keep him from thinking of Ushio and that extortion plan the older student had.

'That king's kind... That's what matters, even if it's just a dream,' he told himself. Yuugi smiled and turned at the sound of his door opening.

"Yuugi, look at this!" Sugoroku came running in, holding the newspaper.

"Jii-chan? What's wrong?"

"My friend, Professor Yoshimori, is in the paper!" Sugoroku opened the paper to an article about the Domino City University's archaeological team. A discovery in Cairo was-

"A tomb of a Pharaoh?!" Yuugi read through the details and remembered how the Egyptians would also bury their Pharaohs with their possessions, even games.

"That had to be how my Puzzle was found!"

'And it gained a consciousness, the King!'

He didn't see his grandfather's small smile.
The tomb disturbed, Professor Yoshimori saw no reason to continue through the underground darkness. As he looked down at the collection of artifacts in his arms, he noticed one that intrigued him.

It was colored with a dark violet, rich and most likely as deep as the day it was created. Yoshimori pulled it gently at one corner and saw characters that were certainly not Egyptian hieratic, hieroglyphs, nor pictographs.

'What is something from so far to the East doing here?'

"Professor Yoshimori?"

He looked up and saw his youngest student looking at him with wide eyes.

"I'm sorry...?"

"Call me 'Mi-Nee,' Professor."

"Mi-Nee-san," he addressed the girl. "I just saw this papyrus and... I'm surprised."

Mi-Nee came over to him, holding her lantern in hand. Yoshimori was surprised a girl so young was in the university classes, even if just online.

"Professor, this is Vedic Sanskrit."

"Vedic?"

"It's the older form, from around 1700 B.C, over three thousand years ago. It's used in the Vedas, religious texts." Mi-Nee glanced at the words and Yoshimori saw her forming the shapes of words with her mouth.

"Could you translate it for me, Mi-Nee-san?"

The girl smiled.

"Of course... Could you wait a while? A month, possibly. It doesn't seem very long, but ablative and locative cases sometimes confuse me."

Yoshimori laughed at the gravity of her voice. She sounded serious in her confusion, as though punishing herself for simple human error.

"You're about seventeen years old, right? Take your time. You have other classes to worry about, too." He looked down at the scrolls and saw that more of them were decorated in the same violet.

"There are more."

"... Maybe two months, then, Professor."

A month later, when Yoshimori was writing a letter that would never be sent, he received an e-mail from Mi-Nee.

#Subject: Translation
#I reviewed it several times, Professor. I think you will find it interesting.

# Y.I. (Mi-Nee)

Clicking on the file attachment, Yoshimori stared at the screen. The picture file had loaded, and Yoshimori was struck with beautifully translated works.

Fairy tales, of the Egyptian Gods, and of magical creatures, a world beyond their own.

"Amazing." 'But why would they be in Sanskrit, from as far as India? The Silk Road would have been barely new at this time in Egypt.'

As he continued reading - stories of Horus and Seth, Isis and Osiris, and of Ra - Yoshimori stopped at a passage of what seemed to be a letter.

Dear one,

You die today. Fifteen years and already dead, you are. May your parents stay their tears, for you will not join them now.

Fifteen years, I watched you grow, from my milk which I nursed you. Fifteen years, my dearest friend, a master that any servant would be proud to obey.

Pharaoh, departed, you never planted roots in the blackened earth, but you shall come again and begin your after-life.

Let me tell you a story, my master, in the time we have left.

Yama and Yami, twins and the first to walk upon the Earth, are the mirrors of all hearts. The longing to stay at home and with kin and the longing to leave the parents' house and start anew, these are longings presented by both siblings. A being of sky and of Earth, forever interacting but distantly.

You are like Yama, holy of holies, whose fire burns bright at morning, brightest at noon-day, and dims until the moon, your Chandra, fills your role as you rest your holy energies.

Dare I say I am like the other? I am the Earth that will forever miss your presence, who will raise the obelisks in mourning for you. Days will pass as nothing and the darkness shall leave me in suffering.

A pain that will heal, I do not think it so.

Yoshimori nodded. He knew that time did not heal every loss; his unsent letters certainly showed that. He did find himself intrigued.

'Hindu gods and Egyptian gods, and the only way this could get to Egypt would be by the Chinese passes... These two could even mimic the Japanese deities!'

He continued to read.

Darkness descends again, seed of Man, Living Horus - The Game will start again, no matter where you are.

The translation descended into the Book of the Dead, and Yoshimori was confused.

'What game? Maybe I'll ask Mutou-san about this.'
A month after the translating of texts, and two months after the newspaper reading, Yuugi came to school with excitement coursing through him.

School passed as normal, and when break time came, Yuugi hurried to tell his friends the news.

"An ancient Egypt exhibition?"

"Yeah," he said. "Tomorrow, at the art museum!"

Anzu smiled. "It sounds interesting! I think I read about it in the papers. Let's go!"

"I heard he found a mummy," Honda commented, turning to Jonouchi when the boy seemed to jump.

"A mummy?! I don't want a curse!"

Anzu turned to Yuugi at that.

"Wasn't your puzzle found in Egypt, Yuugi?" At Yuugi's nod, she continued. "Your grandfather mentioned... The people who found it all died mysteriously..."

Jonouchi freaked out and began to ask Yuugi if he was cursed. Yuugi shook his head and stayed silent after Honda started to tease Jonouchi for his fears.

'Those memory losses... Could it have something to do with those dreams I have? With that King?' Yuugi looked to his friends. 'They might say that it's too weird...'

They agreed to meet the next day, Sunday.

Yuugi, Anzu, Jonouchi, Honda, and Sugoroku all met Professor Yoshimori at the front of the Domino Art Museum the next day.

"I'm sorry that I didn't write to you, Mutou-san."

Sugoroku laughed. "I'm guilty, too, Yoshimori-kun. Thank you for inviting us." He turned to his grandson and his friends. "This is Professor Yoshimori."

A man emerged from behind the professor and looked sternly over the students.

"This is the museum superintendent, our sponsor," Yoshimori explained.

"Kanekura's the name," the superintendent announced, breaking his stern expression into something far more amiable. He turned a bit towards Yoshimori and nodded his head slightly.

"Oh, yes. Mutou-san, you mentioned your grandson had solved the Millennium Puzzle..." Yoshimori watched as Sugoroku laughed.

"I did."

Yoshimori turned to the boy with sharply spiked hair and-

'It's complete! It really is!'
"Are you Yuugi-kun?" His excitement was barely contained. The joy of every Egyptologist was true!

Kanekura expressed the same interest and turned to Yuugi.

"Yuugi-kun! May I put this Millennium Puzzle on the display in our exhibit today?"

Yuugi stepped back, aghast. "I haven't been separated from my Puzzle before... One day?"

"Just one day, I beg you."

"... All right."

"Thank you very much, Yuugi-kun."

Kanekura held the gold in his hand and was surprised at how heavy it was, more than six kilograms.

'All I need is today, anyway.'

---

Mi-Nee looked down at her watch and looked around the lobby of the Domino Art Museum. Her head was pounding, and her shoulder bag was getting heavier by the minute.

'Last time I do my math homework late.'

"Mi-Nee-kun!" She turned and saw Professor Yoshimori approaching with several others.

"Everybody, this is Mi-Nee-kun, our translator and my youngest student." She bowed in greeting. As she was given the names of the professor's friends, Mi-Nee smiled at them. They reminded her of her younger days.

"It's a pleasure to meet all of you."

Jonouchi came close and smiled at her.

"You're his student? I thought that you were in high school, too."

Mi-Nee laughed. "No, I'm a university student."

Honda chuckled. "Really? How old are you, miss?"

"Seventeen."

"Wow..."

Yuugi stood amazed. 'Seventeen?! I'm barely passing my classes!'

"If you have any questions, especially on the papyri or games, just ask me." Mi-Nee nodded at them and joined their group.

"Games?" She turned to Yuugi, who had spoken.

"Yes. This was a young pharaoh that was found, about your age, actually." Mi-Nee smiled. "Do you like games?"

"I love them! My name is Yuugi, after all."
"I can show you his Senet board, Yuugi-kun. Perhaps we can even buy one from the gift shop and play together!" Mi-Nee had a spark in her eyes, and Yuugi could see then that they were close in age. She had seemed older, and more tired, when she was standing by herself.

Yuugi’s smile was wide. "Sure."

As they admired the treasures that the excavation group had found, Jonouchi found himself admiring the gold.

"Does all of this belong to you guys?!"

Yoshimori laughed. "If only! Egyptologists used to own half of everything they found, but a law passed in 1922 entitled the Egyptian government to claim them all. Tutankhamen's tomb was found in 1922, and the discoverers couldn't keep any of those treasures!"

Yuugi leaned a bit towards Mi-Nee. "I thought archaeologists want to get rich off of the treasures."

"Not really," Mi-Nee explained. "Archaeologists don't make much money. Knowledge and history, stories that haven't been told for millennia, that's enough for me! It's like a new universe!"

"What are you going to school for, Mi-Nee-san?"

She smiled. "Linguistics and sociology. History is a big part of sociology, though. It provides a good perspective on what happens in the world.."

Kanekura approached them, smiling and holding the Millennium Puzzle in his hands. "I'll be back to join you soon. I'm going to put the Puzzle on display!"

Yuugi saw Mi-Nee stare at the Puzzle. "Have you heard of the Puzzle, Mi-Nee-san?"

"... Yeah. I never thought I'd ever see it, completed at that!"

'Why does she look so sad?'

Mi-Nee turned to him. "But it's amazing that you figured it out! How long did you work on it?"

"Eight years. I never knew how it would look in the end, so it was a lot of guesswork." Yuugi looked after Superintendent Kanekura and sighed softly. "I feel like a worried parent..."

"Yuugi! With your treasure on display, you'll be famous!" Jonouchi laughed, gesturing to where they were going now. As Yuugi and Mi-Nee followed, Anzu pulled a camera out of her pocket, suggesting a picture to be taken of the Puzzle's display.

Yoshimori turned to Yuugi. "I'm sorry, Yuugi-kun. You seem worried about your treasure."

"Well, it's just for a day."

Yoshimori turned to Mi-Nee, who nodded. "Kanekura-san made this excavation possible, so I have no right to say it."

"He seems like a selfish person," Mi-Nee finished.

"It's so pretty!"

Anzu gestured to the papyri on display. Figures of dog-headed people and scales were apparent. Off to the side, a podium had a copy of the papyrus and a translation of it.
Yoshimori turned to Mi-Nee, who stepped forward.

"This scene is the 'Judgement of the Dead'," Mi-Nee explained. "The Egyptians believed their hearts were weighed before Osiris, the King of the Dead. If the heart was heavier than Maat's feather, the Feather of Truth, the demon Ammit would devour it!"

"Honda nodded. "Like Enma-san!"

Yoshimori nodded. "Yes. Many cultures share similar beliefs in the life beyond death, despite the distances between them. Next, the Mummy section."

Jonouchi looked sick for a moment. "I think I'll pass!"

Yuugi approached the mummy, the dead man looking as though it was sleeping in its coffin. The body was small, perhaps about his height.

"He was fifteen, Mi-Nee-san?"

"Yes, very young." Mi-Nee looked down from the body. "I wish we could have left him there, but the seniors insisted. If I was dead, I would not want people to dig me up."

Yuugi was pensive for a moment, looking at the withered face with hollow cheeks. It was amazing that there was still flesh on him, but the Egyptians were very knowledgeable in preserving bodies, he'd heard.

"I guess I wouldn't want that either." He noticed somebody come up on his other side and saw a flash of gold.

'A foreigner... He looks like the people in the photos that Yoshimori showed us of the excavation team before we met up with Mi-Nee-san. Is he Egyptian?"

'And why is he crying?"

"Sir, why are you crying?" Yuugi asked, before wondering if the man understood him.

The man in the turban turned to him and looked back to the mummy. "These are not my tears." He reached up to the glass for a moment, hesitated, and let his arm fall again.

"In this rotted state, He looks like a doll of dust. However, the Pharaoh is eternal, and his soul will live on with his name; yet, he had been denied eternal sleep, and so his grief appears as tears upon my face..."

Yuugi stared at the man. 'Maybe he's crazy. He's even carrying scales!'

"Sir?" Mi-Nee turned her attention to the man carrying the scales.

The man turned and smiled at them both. "What nice children you both are..." He ruffled Yuugi's hair and walked away.

"Child?" Yuugi growled beneath his breath. "I'm in high school!"

"He probably didn't mean any harm, Yuugi-kun," Mi-Nee assured him. "Let's get back with the group."

"Look!" They heard Jonouchi say loudly, and they saw him point towards a display. "It's Yuugi's puzzle!"
"Really?!"

"I'll get these photos developed soon," Anzu assured everyone. "It makes me want to go to Egypt someday!"

"Me too!" Yuugi stretched his arms out. "For now, we can plan out our trip!"

Yuugi's grandfather thanked Professor Yoshimori for the fun time.

"No problem," Yoshimori insisted. "Please, come visit my office at the university sometime! I should actually be getting back..." He turned to Mi-Nee.

"When are you going back to Osaka, Mi-Nee-kun?"

The girl looked down at her watch. "My train leaves around six o'clock. I insist that you get back to your office, Professor Yoshimori. You could get some rest, perhaps?"

Yoshimori nodded. "Good afternoon to you all then!"

"Bye!"

Honda began to head off. "I've got to get back home. My dog just got some news from the vet that I need to handle."

"I'm going home too!" Sugoroku smiled. "I've got a shop to tend to."

"I'll help you out, Jii-san," Jonouchi offered.

"What about you, Yuugi?"

"I'm going to wait until closing time, so I can get the Puzzle back," Yuugi explained. "You can go home if you want."

Everyone, save for Mi-Nee, left, the two teens waiting by the entrance sign of the museum.

"It's about four-thirty. Are you sure you want to wait with me, Mi-Nee-san?"

"Of course," she reassured him. "It's half an hour. I'm not going to wait over an hour at a loud train station. Anyway, I also have something for us to do." She reached into her shoulder bag and pulled out a wooden board and bag.

"I promised that I'd teach you Senet, if you wanted."

Yuugi nodded. "Please!"

The Man in the Turban entered Kanekura's office, leaving behind the shell of the man that had wanted to buy the Puzzle.

'A Puzzle of God must not be soiled by human flesh,' he thought.

As Kanekura panicked, the man introduced himself.

"I am from the family gravekeepers who have worked for three thousand years to protect the Pharaoh, whose grave you have desecrated. I am a disciple of Anubis."
"A-Anubis?!" Kanekura almost jumped out of his seat before relaxing slightly. "Oh, I understand. A spy for the Egyptian government. I'll have you know that I never deal with the Black Market!"

The Man set down the scales he was carrying and pulled a feather from his turban, setting it on one of the scale's plates. "I shall not be your judge. You shall be judged by the Scales of Truth.

"With this, let us begin this game. A Shadow Game!"

Kanekura lost the game quickly, the fool's heart made of lead compared to the Feather of Truth.

That did not surprise the Man in the Turban. Using the key around his neck, he let the shuet, the shadow, of Kanekura's heart manifest into Ammit, and devour the man's life.

What did surprise him was the Treasure which he had never been blessed enough to see.

"The Millennium Puzzle?! Complete?!!"

'Who?!

Yuugi wandered throughout the museum, lost in the labyrinth of displays and podiums.

He had waved to Mi-Nee and promised to get better at Senet with the board and pieces that she'd given him. 'She's really good! I hope we become good friends!'

She had headed off in the direction of the train station, leaving him a phone number to call her at.

"Whenever you need a translator or a new game to play, Yuugi-kun! Just ask for 'Mi-Nee'!"

"I wonder if the director- Oh!" The Man in the Turban was there again.

"Hello, again!" The man looked at him with a solemn expression. "Maybe you can help me?

"I'm looking for the director. He said he'd return my Puzzle at the end of the day." He made a triangle with his fingers. "It looks like this."

The Man started but stayed silent. He continued to stare at Yuugi.

"Um... You're staring at me... Kind of scary..."

Yuugi had no time to react as the Man in the Turban pressed the key to his forehead.

He was awake one moment, asleep the next.

Chapter End Notes

Religious pluralism - I'm using it to mean as "the understanding that the exclusive claims of different religions turn out, upon closer examination, to be variations of universal truths that have been taught since time immemorial," as I use the Isis/Osiris and Yama/Yami examples here to show that. Many religions show similar themes, such as incest and marriages. Even Yama, Ammit, and Enma are all seen as punishers of the damned, all showing similar characteristics.
Mi-Nee - Ah... I've been looking for a spot to introduce her and here she is.
* -kun: Yoshimori refers to her as his junior but does not use -chan, as to show respect, nor -san, to show that she is his colleague.
* -san: Everyone else uses -san because they do not know her well.
The Flowers of Papever

Chapter Summary

Every three thousand years,
'Tis said, the peach bears fruit
And in this year
It blossomed with the spring:
That's what we have chanced across.

- Ōshikōchi no Mitsune (898-922 A.D.)

Chapter Notes

Pronouns get confusing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

If he had been aware, Yuugi would most likely not have given the Puzzle to Kanekura. Being pure and compassionate to all, Yuugi would not have sent the two spirits in his Puzzle to the dark again.

The Danava held the ravenous Shadows back, his obedient ones ushering the King into the same room where he had had his inordinately long rest.

Hours felt like an eternity, and only when someone had brought the Puzzle within a short distance of Yuugi's soul, did the Danava see it safe to lower his guard.

'Dana-

The King felt the Shadows pull him out of the room.

'What do you- Danava!' The pale spirit came into view, and blood-red eyes glanced him over.

'You're all right.' The King nodded, letting out a yelp when the other spirit grabbed his wrist and began to pull him towards Yuugi's room.

'What's happening? Danava?'

The Danava turned towards the main door of the Labyrinth of the Puzzle. Someone had come, and there were dark energies, swirling about him.

'My King, go to Yuugi-ue's room, please.' The King had never heard such a pleading tone used, and he obeyed the request.

'May I help?'

The Danava smiled.
'As much as I appreciate your concern, I fear that this may be very dangerous.' He ushered the other spirit across the hallway, where Yuugi's room lay open for anyone to see.

'If he is forced in, my King,' the Danava asked. 'May you take care of him?'

The King nodded.

'Why wouldn't I?'

Yuugi's door closed behind him, and the Danava could feel Yuugi being pushed into his soul's room. He ran back into the Room he and the King shared. Closing this door, the Danava waited.

The door being closed made everything dark, and the scent of a damp, salty death permeated the air.

The Puzzle's voice whispered to the Danava, 'Two more come.'

The Danava nodded and gathered his control, for the door had begun to open.

'If you have courage, enter! Welcome to the Soul's Room!

'A game awaits you!' The Man in the Turban, the same that had been in Yuugi's most recent memories, entered the doorway and did not step forward.

'What's wrong? Are you scared? Come on!'

'In the past,' the Man said. 'I've visited many Rooms; never have I seen a mind split into two Rooms.' He closed his eyes for a moment. 'Three Souls in a sane mind...'

'How did you enter here, pray tell?' The Danava smiled when the Man opened his eyes again, focusing on the one in front of him. 'What power allowed you to do it?'

'Then I am an unexpected guest? Out of respect, I suppose I must answer. I wanted to know the secret of the power of the Millennium Puzzle, so I came to visit.' He nodded in acknowledgement of the spirit in front of him.

The Danava hummed. 'You knew of it?'

'Yes, I knew of it, and the other Millennium Items.' The Man looked around the room a bit more, trying to examine it further. The Shadows came forward, shrouding the room in further darkness. Sighing, he focused on the Danava again.

'For three thousand years, the Millennium Items have been kept in the Valley of the Kings. 'Created by mages for the Pharaoh Akhenamkhanen and used to judge the hearts of sinners,' so it is written in the Sacred Scrolls of the Duta, additions that the Pharaoh had for the Book of the Dead.

'I've come with the blessed aid of the Millennium Key, which opens the doors of Soul Rooms to reveal all. '

'And the other?' The Danava nodded towards the Judge, who let his second item make itself known.

'The Millennium Scales, to weigh sin and punish the guilty, as well as to join knowledge and find a Golden Truth.

'However, Spirit,' the Man said. 'I do not know the power of the Millennium Puzzle, and I don't know if the one who completed it - possibly this boy - was given any power. May I?'
The Danava stood still, the Shadows curling at his feet. The Man approached, no ill intent apparent. His eyes, however, held a lust that the Danava did not understand.

'What do you want?'

The Man stopped his approach. 'If I can see one's room, I can determine one's power. I would like to see for myself.

'If necessary, young spirit, I will take the Puzzle back to my family.'

The Danava let out a breath that he didn't know he could hold.

'The power you speak of, it must be asleep somewhere in my room.' He smiled. 'I don't think it will be easy to find!

'I challenge you to find it. A Shadow Game to find what you desperately seek!'

The Man listened as the rules were explained. Finding a room within the Soul's Realm should be simple enough.

'Shall I tell you of another power I have then, as it could enable me to win?' He raised his Key. 'Entering a Room, I may remodel it to my will, changing the person and destroying their personality.'

The laugh that rang in the darkness caught him off guard.

'You think this will be easy, child? I'm afraid this will be more difficult that you realize.' As the Labyrinth of the Puzzle made itself bright, the Shadows receding, the Danava found amusement in the Man's surprise. There was no evidence of an end to the strange, endless staircases.

'Let's begin. It doesn't start until you take a step.'

---

*What is that Creature?* The Man brought his hand to the handle of the first door that he chose, jumping back as a trap was triggered, almost crushing him.

'Don't be scared, child.' The Man looked up and saw red eyes gazing down at him. 'At this rate, you may be looking for quite a while!'

The Man stood and looked back at him, feeling trepidation curl inside and out of him as a pale hand came close to his face, catching the Feather of Ma'at between nimble fingers.

'Keep going; I'll wait in my True Room.'

The Shadows stole the strange spirit away, and the Man was alone again. The air was stagnant, he noticed, and it carried the scent of some kind of plant. It made him dizzy.

*It's not... this door*, he thought. As he walked, he felt a cloud of confusion wash over him. Door after door, he passed, and he continued to deny each passageway.

He found himself caring less about finding that True Room...

*He's hindering my invasion... by confusing me!* He grabbed the Millennium Key at his neck, grounding himself. He needs that power!

He felt a pain in his foot. A door appeared, same as the others but emitting a different feeling. He reached for the handle.
The Room was empty for the most part, as well as dark. The scent of plants was overwhelmingly strong, white flowers on the floor, roots evident between the stones.

'Yo!' The Red-Eyed Spirit sat upon an unfurnished throne, legs and arms crossed.

'Have I arrived to the True Room?' The Man saw no reaction, so he stepped forward. As the stones fell underneath his weight, flowers hit his face. The scent flooded his nose, distracting him from the blocks hitting him. In a burst of coherence, he grabbed the edge of the hole, his grip fueled with all of the strength in his body.

*These flowers...*

Looking down, he saw the darkness of an endless abyss. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the Spirit.

'You think I'm going to push you?' The smile accompanying the comment felt cruel, unlike the hand being offered only moments later.

'It's okay. My hand isn't a trap!'

The Man nodded slowly, reaching up and grabbing onto the Spirit's hand. The smell was still clouding his mind, lulling him into a sense of safety.

The stone floor meeting his back was a comfort. The flowers seemed to disappear, leaving only the urge to vomit the remaining effect.

'Take deep breaths.'

He did so, finding his self-control soon after. 'I can't believe... I had to accept this other boy's help. I am in your debt.'

He rolled onto his knees, his lungs full of clean air again.

'Maybe that'll be good enough to teach you not to peep into others' Soul Rooms,' the Spirit countered. The Man looked up and saw concerned eyes looking down at him.

'All right.' The Man stood and walked out of the Room, seeing the entrance to the Labyrinth ahead. 'I suppose I have lost this game...'

'Or is this just the first round?' The Man turned around and met the Spirit's gaze.

'... Do I know you, Spirit?'

'Perhaps, child.' The Shadows overtook his field of vision...

'Farewell, Spirit.'

"Hey?" The Man heard a kind voice. Flexing his fingers against the floor tiles, he realized he was on one knee, genuflecting.

'Am I bowing down to you, Spirit, or to this boy you possess?' The boy in question, when the Man looked up, held much concern on his face.

"Are you okay? You're pale, and your eyes were moving a lot."
"Yes... I'm fine." The Man stood and looked down at the boy. Looking at him now, he seemed older than his height would tell. "You're certainly an odd child.

"Oh, here."

The joy on the boy's face when the Millennium Puzzle was held out to him was greater than what was expected.

"Thank you so much!"

"No need," the Man insisted. "I am the one who is in debt... to the other you."

The boy stared at him for a moment and laughed.

'Is he unaware of his other self?'

"What is your name, child?"

"Yuugi," the boy said. "Not 'child'; my name's Yuugi!" Yuugi cradled the Puzzle in his hands, smiling all the while.

"Yuugi, from now on, be alert." The man in the turban walked past Yuugi, holding his scales securely in one hand. "You may discover your other self!"

"What?!" Yuugi felt ice rush through him. What could he mean, other self?

"Someday, you shall discover the true power of the Puzzle, which had been sealed for three thousand years." The man's voice fit that of a much older man, though he still looked so young. If Yuugi hadn't heard him speak before, when they had been going through the museum, he would have assumed the man was, at most, five years older than them.

"My name is Shadi." Shadi, the mysterious man that was now making Yuugi thoroughly confused, chuckled.

"I have never told anyone my name before..."

When Shadi mentioned another man - "to judge in place of the Gods" - Yuugi gripped the Puzzle tightly.

'I'll be seeing him again. I feel it!'

Coming home, Yuugi avoided talking with his grandfather, not feeling up for talking. The next day at breakfast, he still avoided talking about what had happened once he had gone inside to get the Millennium Puzzle.

School managed to distract him for a while, but the world history class decided to discuss ancient religions, including Egyptian mythology. The drawing of Anubis with his scales reminded him of Shadi and made him remember that warning.

You may discover your other self.

In his room, there was no comfort. He set the Puzzle on his desk, watching it glint under the light of his desk lamp.
It was like any other interconnected creation of metal. It took Yuugi's body heat and brought it back to him, his fingers a bit colder than when he set them on the little pyramid. It felt solid, though he remembered that many of the pieces were hollow. He couldn't feel any of the crevices where he had had the parts come together; it had become a unified piece of gold.

'The Millennium Puzzle... holds another me?'

Was that King a dream, then? Was it of any importance?

'And that other man that Shadi mentioned. What does he have to do with this?'

Yuugi rubbed his head. He had too little information to go on to solve anything about this Shadi guy!

A loud stomping up the stairs drew Yuugi's focus away from the Puzzle and Shadi.

"Jii-chan?" Yuugi watched his grandfather rush into his room. The story that came from his grandfather's mouth was not what Yuugi had expected that morning; someone dying was not what he wanted to hear that day, especially from an exploded heart.

"Jii-chan, do you think it's a curse?"

Sugoroku sighed. "They said the same thing with the discoverer of Tutankhamen's tomb. I'm worrying now for Professor Yoshimori."

Yuugi nodded, trying to calm himself. "Yeah, he said he doesn't believe in curses? He'll keep on going with his research."

Sugoroku nodded. There was a worry in his eyes that left Yuugi far more worried for his grandfather.

"Yuugi, I'm going to visit him."

That was certainly no surprise.

"Jii-chan, can I go too?"

'It's like a... voice is telling me to go.'

The Danava sighed, holding one of the flowers that covered the floor of his Room.

'What are you planning, little King?'

The King was lying down in the flowers, the white petals kissing his darker skin and making him sleepy.

'What are the Millennium Items for? Why is that man, Shadi, interested in them?'

'Why bring Yuugi-ue into it, though?' The Danava brought his flower up, cutting its stem and inhaling its intoxicating scent. 'Shadi has no quarrel with Yuugi-'

'Shadi was the only other person in the museum when Yuugi entered to get the Puzzle,' the King reasoned. 'You think that Kanekura just had a bomb in his heart that conveniently was set for yesterday? Shadi was leaving after the time of death that they mentioned.'

The King sat up slowly, feeling dizzy from the flowers.
'What are these..? Yuugi's memories don't have these...

'Let's ignore that for now.' The Danava stood without hindrance, closing his eyes. The flowers disappeared, the air instantly getting clearer.

As Yuugi and his grandfather went towards the Domino City University, a voice interrupted their journey.

'Jonouchi and Anzu are coming along, too.' The Danava looked to the King. 'Was this part of your plan?'

'I have no power over them! No one does!' The King stood, legs a bit unsteady. 'Do not blame me for something I have no control over!

'Then do not blame me if I cannot keep them safe.' The Danava grabbed the King's hand, pulling him along.

'... Right. Though, why wouldn't you be able to?'

'Yuugi held me back before. He has a strong soul and...' The stern voice faded.

'I would not want to break it.'

'Of course... Just don't let Shadi break it instead.'

Chapter End Notes

The Flowers of Papever - A roundabout way of saying 'opium poppies.' They are the flowers of euphoria, oblivion, forgetting pain/Death, imagination, and passion.

Shadi saying 'young' and the Danava saying 'child' - Shadi is described as a boy at some point, a man at others. The Danava has an excuse - he's a spirit in a Puzzle.
Game of the Singer

Chapter Summary

Journey piled on journey
At a distance of a thousand years
Will you see?
From the pines of Sue,
To the living pine groves.

- Lady Sagami (998-?1061)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The hallways of the Domino City University were dark, and they made Yuugi feel paranoid. With all that went on, Kanekura's death and meeting Shadi, meeting up with Yoshimori to cheer him up might make things worse.

'Especially with that face that Jonouchi-kun can't seem to stop making.'

As they opened the door and let themselves in, Yuugi noticed that the air felt strange. Yoshimori's grin was also strange.

"I'm so glad you came!" the professor greeted. He welcomed them in to sit. "I've been waiting for you all."

Sugoroku held out a bottle of beer that he had brought for the occasion, saying that he remembered that Yoshimori had liked that brand.

"We brought some souvenirs," Jonouchi said, "from when you showed us around the museum."

"You idiot!" Anzu hissed.

"Yes... The museum..." Yoshimori began to cackle softly, the sound gaining strength as he continued. "I killed that man, the curator!"

Everyone in the room froze. Was Kanekura's death making Yoshimori feel guilty for discovering the tomb of that unnamed Pharaoh?

"Professor Yoshimori, what's wrong?" Sugoroku asked, his hands loosening on the bag that he had brought.

"Nothing is wrong," the professor reassured. "I was just waiting... for Yuugi-kun!"

'What?'

Everything happened too fast for Yuugi to understand. He only knew now that Yoshimori was choking Jonouchi and Shadi had made himself know.
"I apologize for the rudeness of my puppet," Shadi said, tone even and calm.

"Shadi," Yuugi shouted at him, trying to pull the professor's hands off of Jonouchi's throat. "What have you done to him?"

"I believe I'll meet him soon, that other Yuugi-kun." Shadi showed no emotion as the scene unfolded, the lives in front of him meaning nothing at all. 'If I give you no other alternative, I'm sure that will call the other Yuugi.

'My heart has burned from the defeat. I wish to meet you, to confirm that power you hold.'

The girl, one person that Shadi had ignored as the puppet had not interacted with her, surprised Shadi by grabbing a globe from one of the file cabinets. Of all things, she apologized as she hit the professor in the head, the force of her strike forcing the professor away from the blond boy.

"Good job, Anzu!" Yuugi rushed to Jonouchi's side to help him up. "Are you okay, Jonouchi-kun?"

"Yeah." Jonouchi coughed and turned to Anzu. "Nice hit!"

They stood in shock as Yoshimori stood again, obeying Shadi’s will.

"Oh, God!" Jonouchi yelled. "He's a zombie!"

"Everyone scatter!" Sugoroku ordered the teenagers.

'Separating wasn't your greatest plan, old man.' Shadi quickly found his target, that strong girl.

Her Soul Room reflected the most confident of girls, amiable and innocent. It was a sacrifice he was willing to make, the remodeling of this girl's personality, but she would be a lovely doll, one to tempt the other Yuugi out of his Soul Room.

---

Yuugi watched as Jonouchi led the zombie-like Yoshimori away. "Jonouchi-kun!" He could see Jonouchi smile, and he could only assume it was to keep him safe.

"You have a kind friend. Without hesitation, he chose to save you, Yuugi-kun, possibly choosing his death."

"Shadi!" Yuugi turned to face the Egyptian man, stopping when he saw Anzu. Her usually lively eyes, bright with energy, were blank, as though dead. "What have you done to her?"

"I did a remodeling of her Soul's Room. She is now a doll with no voice nor memories. She cannot even move without my will!" He smiled as Yuugi's face gained a shocked expression, one he couldn't ascertain in specificity. "Let your body shake with rage! Tremble with sorrow! Awaken him!"

'Hate me! When your emotions grow too great for you to handle, he will take on your burdens!'

Yuugi still showed control on his face. His strength was commendable, but that was all it was; commendable, truly not worthy of the full attention of Shadi - his Soul Room had been closed when Shadi had infiltrated that mind.

"Listen, Yuugi. I have even set a trigger on this girl." He reached for Anzu's hair, letting his fingers caress her soft hair, and he trailed his fingers through a few strands. "If I give her the command "die," she will die!"
Yuugi felt his heart begin to break down, and that strange presence he had felt so many times before took over.

'Save Anzu... Please!'

"Shadi!" The other Yuugi made his presence known, red eyes full of a furious fire.

"At last, I meet the other Yuugi."

"I go not by Yuugi-ue's name."

Shadi blinked at that. "No matter. What are you then, creature?"

"I am called the Danava."

To the Danava's shock, Shadi bowed his head slightly. "To meet the Faceless One, I am truly honored."

The Danava felt ice in his heart.

'The Faceless One? Me?'

"Now our second game shall begin, Danava. A Shadow Game." The Danava felt an overwhelming presence in Shadi, as if Shadi was not human either. "I invaded your Soul's Room and was humiliated, never knowing what the power of the Millennium Puzzle was. Reality will grant me some safety."

"... I must accept your challenge, child."

"Yes," Shadi affirmed, looking to Anzu. "Lest you don't mind this girl spending the rest of her life as a doll." He walked over to a nearby shelf, reaching for objects that looked like dolls in their own right.

"These are all I need for our game." He turned away, leading Anzu to the door. "We begin at eight o'clock, on the roof. Ten minutes."

Ten minutes passed slowly for the Danava, though not as slowly as the three millennia that he had been in the Puzzle.

'He wants to learn of the Millennium Puzzle's power then. He mentioned his family. Do they want to use it or destroy it?' The Danava walked over to the shelf, admiring the strange dolls, several of whom had been taken by Shadi. He found them sad, mourning their friends.

'I don't even know what that power is. It is not in the Room I have. Perhaps in the King's Room. Other than its occasions of allowing me to use small bursts its power, it seems to lie sleeping... Like a predator waiting for its prey.'

He looked to the clock. Nine minutes.

'Shadi, you threaten my master's heart and his friends. You are my enemy; I'll play your game, and I'll win!'

On the roof, the Danava saw Anzu standing on a platform that hung off of the edge of the roof, only
"Anzu!"

"Let the game begin, Danava!" Shadi stood close by, presenting his work. "The Weighing of the Mind!"

The Danava paid no mind, running to the fence that normally kept people from going over the edge of the roof. "How dare you put her in danger like this? This is your game?!!"

"Yes, Danava." Shadi had a rather bored expression on his face. "If you lose, this girl will die. However, before we begin, I would like to say something about the Millennium Puzzle.

"I do not know how or why the Puzzle of the Gods came into the possession of Mutou Yuugi, or how he was the only one who manage to solve it. I do know that it chose him, as these two items have chosen me."

"Don't equate yourself to Yuugi!" The Danava felt exasperated; he hadn't come for introductions or exposition. "Explain the rules, Shadi!"

"I see," Shadi said. "You're frightened, Danava."

"What makes you think that?!" The Danava thought back to his thoughts of before. The Puzzle was a waiting predator...

"You are frightened by the power hiding, the unknown power of the Puzzle! Yes, it's your weakness. Look to the fence."

One of the dolls that Shadi had taken, it began to crack. One of the ropes that had been attached to Anzu, had been held back by the doll, and it left its friends, leaving only three dolls left to support Anzu.

"If you haven't noticed, Great Danava-" Shadi's voice was laced with sarcasm. "- the game has begun. Your girl stands on the 'Bridge of Life.' Each rope supports it, tied to its own ushabti doll. As ushabti means 'answerer,' these shall reveal the answer to the state of your mind. Any weakness you show, a doll will break! As you only have three left, I recommend you hide it all!

"If you break my ushabti, however, my Millennium Key will slide along those ropes of yours. Your girl shall be returned to her normal state as soon as she touches its divine shape."

"And so you weigh my heart, Disciple of Anubis?"

"Yes." Shadi gave an interesting sort of smile, one an old man would give in recollection of fond memories. "The sacred texts state that the Danava is often represented by the Cobra, the serpent that would serve Pharaoh. Anubis is represented by the jackal, an animal that preys on serpents. Fitting, is it not."

The Danava stared at his opponent. "Let us start."

'How does he plan to test me?'

The ground beneath the Danava shook and hands rose from below, grabbing onto his ankles. The sensation was painful, even more so by the fact that this body was not his own.

"What?!" Bodies, decaying and melting, came towards him, latching onto the Danava.
"This is the first game to test your mind!" Shadi spoke without emotion, only certainty. "I ask you: 'I crawl from the Earth and cling to a pillar. What am I?'!"

The Danava looked down at the bodies, which clung to him.

'It has to be an illusion! That's the only way to think of it!' He could feel a question brush his mind, the King asking why he felt so much fear from the Danava. He could also feel Yuugi's fear, something he did not want to experience again.

'I have a mission. Something that clings from the Earth.' The Puzzle was pulled on, and the answer made itself known.

'The pyramid is a symbol of light. Upside-down, the Puzzle is darkness, clinging to Yuugi-ue by grasping at its neck. A darkness that clings to humans, follows them on the ground!'

"The answer is 'shadow'!"

The bodies disappeared and the Danava could hear congratulations from Shadi over the sound of his calming heart.

"The next test is more difficult, Danava!"

'... Shit!'

Yuugi saw nothing in the darkness, only a bit aware of the game that his other self, the other Yuugi, was playing. It was just like the presence that was around him.

'Are you... the King... Real?'

'... Yes... Stay... safe!' The presence was kind and it kept most of the game that Shadi created out, though his words still made it through. The second game went by without problem, but the third, to hear that this Spirit, the King, would fight against Jonouchi!

'No!'

"I caught a glimpse as I traveled by Yuugi's mind! These bad memories of his are very strong. This final game is to the death, to be played with your friend!"

The Danava looked at his new opponent. It looked too much like Jonouchi; to deny its realistic visage would be to lie.

"The Millenium Puzzle shall be a die, with both of you rolling for your opponent. When your opponent rolls, you shall walk to squares in that direction. The valley around you shall be your graveyard!

"Danava! Destroy that memory in the name of your Master!"

The Danava turned to the illusion - it just had to be one! - and growled, "I'm not playing this game with you, Jonouchi-kun!"

He felt Yuugi's heart burst forward for a moment, and in a moment's decision, the Danava let Yuugi control his mouth.

"Jonouchi-kun!" Yuugi cried, and the Danava felt an earnest fear for his friend's life spark.
The illusion came forward, almost invasive, and its voice was a toxic syrup. "This is your treasure Yuugi? It must be pretty valuable, since you're acting like a girl about it!"

Yuugi's heart was in pain, making the Danava push him back into the blackness of unconsciousness. The Danava was shocked that those words came out of Jonouchi's mouth, insulted!

'That's not Jonouchi-kun!

But the damage was done, both hearts reflected by the shattering of two ushabti.

'King, please keep him asleep!'

A silent affirmation came back to him, and the Danava calmed himself.

"I'll go first, Yuugi!" The illusion dropped the Puzzle, and the Danava took steps towards the valley, now three squares away. "Your turn!"

"I do not want to play this game with you, Jonouchi-kun."

"Then you pass?" The Puzzle dropped again and the Danava took another two square spaces in the same direction.

"Will you roll the die now, Yuugi?" the illusion asked.

"I pass."

Thrown off, his confidence waning, Shadi stepped forward. "Are you forfeiting? You are giving up your master's life!"

"'Forfeit'? No, Shadi." The Danava looked over his shoulder to his true opponent, the one who dared to hurt Yuugi's heart. "I believe in Jonouchi-kun!"

Shadi scoffed. "You are unable to break away from Yuugi's past! You've lost!" He shook his head. "Such a powerful demon, the Danava is said to be... To believe in others? With your so-called power, believing in others is a weakness! Believing in yourself is the only strength!

"Toss the Puzzle once more! Finish this!" he shouted to his illusion. He heard no tumble of the Puzzle on the ground, and Shadi was aghast at the sight of his illusion fading away.

"Shadi," he heard the Danava say. "A child, still. Friends don't exist in past nor present. All sins are forgiven, but they're not forgotten, something Yuugi-ue understands. Once that friendship is made, it can overcome anything!"

A snapping sound alerted them both to Anzu, the Danava's last rope that supported her fraying. Jonouchi made himself known, supporting the Board of Life.

"I... don't understand..." Shadi heard his own ushabti crack.

"I trusted Jonouchi-kun with Yuugi's life, and now I trust Anzu's in his hands! Trust, Shadi, is a way to true strength!"

'Trust?' The largest ushabti shattered, as well as Shadi's heart.

Anzu felt as though waking from a dream. She was standing and she could see the lights of Domino City.
"Huh? Where..?" She remembered coming to the University, seeing the professor... Why was she so cold?

She looked down and-

"Ah!" Anzu fell to her knees, more frightened as she felt the board beneath her shake. "What's going on?"

"Hey, Anzu!" She turned to see Jonouchi, holding the board that kept her from falling. "Shut up! Don't ask questions! Just move to the roof!"

"I can't!" she cried back, and she recalled being this scared with that crazy convict. "I'm too scared!"

"Anzu, hurry up! The zombie professor is back!"

"I'll try!" Anzu turned, crawling back. She took slow breaths, recalling her old gymnastics classes. 'Just like the balancing beams...' The thought made her want to stand, and she did, holding her arms out on either side to stay balanced.

"I can't- Anzu!"

The board beneath her slipped and fell away, a warm hand the only thing to keep her close and get her to the roof.

"Anzu!"

The voice was familiar, and the hand caressing her hair was as warm as the hand that had grabbed hers. She focused on the roof, trying to process everything that came through her senses.

'Is that... Yuugi?'

He gave orders to Jonouchi, who also seemed thrown off by the voice.

"Professor, you're back to normal!"

"Jonouchi-kun, what- What happened to my teeth?!"

As all of them made their way over the fence and onto the roof, Anzu spotted Yuugi's grandfather coming from the roof's stairwell.

"Jii-san, you're alright?"

"I was just knocked out..." He turned to Anzu, who said she was all right. "It looks like everyone is safe."

"Jii-san, what about that man? The one Yuugi's talking to?"

Yuugi's grandfather looked over to Yuugi and the man that her friend had called Shadi.

"I'd leave them to talk, Anzu. This is between them."

"Danava, I have been defeated. Your heart has passed my judgement." Shadi looked down at the roof tiles. "I used the items to tempt you into darkness, yet, to me, it seems I was in the darkness, with my illusion of strength. Perhaps my loss isn't such a sad thing, to have learnt that."
"Shadi," the Danava uttered, the word almost difficult to say. He seemed somewhat disoriented. "I think I understand the power of the Millennium Puzzle; combined of its parts, and like the trust Yuugi-ue places in his friends and that I emulate, it is only powerful when unified.

"The Puzzle's power is Unity, a power that brought Yuugi-ue to the Puzzle!"

Shadi could hear the power of the Puzzle now, having understood it, a menacing voice.

"Leave!" it said.

"You have passed every test, Danava. In my defeat, I am happy." Shadi turned away, began to walk away. "My family has been searching for people like Yuugi, for a very long time."

"Do you have any answers?" The Danava called after him. "You call me 'Danava' and you say I have power? What am I?"

"... I know not all of your story. I can give you information, though little.

"Three curses are upon you, Great Danava." Shadi looked back to the Danava, and the demon could see a small smile on Shadi's face. The words he spoke, the Danava could not understand, but they struck a chord in his heart, and it terrified him.

"I wonder if Yuugi can open that door..."

And the Man from Egypt was gone.

In Osaka, Shadi arrived at the Hotel Hitobashira. The woman who had entered the Pharaoh's tomb lived here, one that could translate the texts found there.

He made his way inside without issue. There was very good security, guards with weapons that would have killed him had they been able to detect him.

The girl, Mi-Nee, was in her room, looking for Assyrian texts. Her lips form shapes that seemed too well-formed, the words almost too familiar to her mouth and tongue. When she looked up, Shadi froze, recognizing the pale face, smooth features, and the eyes that enthralled him.

"I've been waiting, Shadi," she said. Mi-Nee turned to him, spinning her desk-chair around. "How is my love doing?"

"Why are you here, Duta?" Her eyes sparkled with mirth. "Did you lead these men to the Tomb of the Nameless Pharaoh?"

"Yuugi-kun is important. He may be the one to open the Door of Memory." Mi-Nee nodded, as if hearing a good story. "Yes, I believe it's him..."

"Duta, this is a gamble at best-"

Mi-Nee raised her hand, signaling for the man to grow quiet. "I know. I trust him, though."

Shadi closed his eyes at that word. 'Trust.'

"Shadi?"

"I will... put my faith into your hands, Holy Scribe," Shadi answered, bowing his head. "I hope I have chosen the right person."
"... I hope so, too." Mi-Nee said her sentence softly, but Shadi had already gone.

Chapter End Notes

Game of the Singer - Shadi's name means "singer"; songs have often been used to praise deities in the form of hymns.

- Mi-Nee (introduced in 'The Man from Egypt') is important, as a translator.
Byronic Hero

Chapter Summary

When in sleep-
Is only what we see then
To be called a dream?
This fleeting world, too,
I cannot see as reality.

- Mibu no Tadamine (Court poet active 898-920)

Chapter Notes

Time for two of the most ignored: Hanasaki and Zombire

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After asking for a few issues, Yuugi scanned through the Zombire comics that Hanasaki had brought. His friend seemed very impassioned with the character, this death god that had awoken from the power of human love. It was interesting.

'Maybe... What is the King, then?' The spirit that seemed to watch over him whenever he fainted, it had come from the Millennium Puzzle. 'The God Puzzle,' he remembered his grandfather calling it during bedtime stories.

If the King was a god, awoken by Yuugi solving it...

'It wasn't love... I wanted friends!' Did the King grant his wish? Would the King be his friend then?

"Are you ready to go, Yuugi-kun?" He looked up, seeing Hanasaki smiling. He seemed so excited to have friends coming over after school.

"Sure!" Yuugi handed the comics back to Hanasaki, and he grabbed his backpack from the floor. "Let's go!"

Honda and Jonouchi came to Yuugi's desk, briefcases packed.

"So how big is your Zombire collection, Hanasaki?" Honda asked.

"Really big! It's all from America, too!"

"Directly from America? Wow!" Anzu, her backpack ready, hurried towards the classroom door. "Let's hurry and go see this collection of yours, Hanasaki!"

The collection in Hanasaki's bedroom was enormous and vast in the different media that Zombire seemed to have presence in. Action figures, posters, models, and even gold figures!
"You collected all this, Hanasaki?" Jonouchi picked up one of the models, careful of the paint that had a bit of dust on it. It must have been a few months old, at least.

"Whenever my papa returns from business trips in America, he brings me something for my collection," Hanasaki explained.

Yuugi admired the gold figures. "You can't get these in Japan at all! My grandfather has been trying to get them for weeks since they started advertising Zombire here!"

A knock on Hanasaki's door alerted them to Hanasaki's mother, who came in carrying tea and what seemed to be biscuits. "Welcome, everyone. I brought some American Zombire snacks!"

Anzu thanked Mrs. Hanasaki for them all and helped her with the snacks.

"Tomoya brought so many friends over," Mrs. Hanasaki said. She looked around the room and giggled. "But it seems like there's one more surprise guest!"

From behind her, a figure emerged, with a grotesque face and beastly teeth.

'Zombire?!' Yuugi sat in silent shock, even more shaken when Hanasaki hurried to the figure.

"Papa!" Hanasaki's smile was wide and bright. "When did you get home?! Is that a real mask?"

Hanasaki's father took off the mask and revealed a rather kind face. Yuugi felt something pull in his chest, something like envy.

"Anything to make you smile, Tomoya. I have something else for you, by the way." Mr. Hanasaki turned to Yuugi and his friends. "Could I borrow Tomoya for a little while?"

"Of course," Anzu said, sipping her tea.

"It's a real Zombire house," Jonouchi said, once the Hanasaki family was out of ear shot. He looked around the room and spotted something on one of the shelves. "A garage kit!"

"Hanasaki must not have enough free time to assemble it!" Jonouchi turned to his friends after jumping to grab the box. The pieces of the plastic Zombire were very well-made, and it made Jonouchi all the more excited.

The four of them began to put the soft-vinyl kit together, engrossed in the unifying of the pieces. Jonouchi and Honda did the majority of the work, with Yuugi reading off the instructions and Anzu helping with the gluing of the pieces.

As they admired the finished model, the door burst open, revealing a small, though still frightening, Zombire. He yelled out in shock, coming close to the group.

"You made it?" Hanasaki's voice came from behind the mask, quivering slightly. "I wanted to preserve the box..."

Jonouchi's face grew pale. "You did?! I'm really sorry, Hanasaki!"

"That costume must be what Hanasaki-kun's father wanted him to see!"

"Hanasaki-kun, that costume is amazing!" Yuugi hoped to distract from the vinyl model, and the attention went from the model to the costume, luckily enough.

"Yeah," Hanasaki said, a bit soft. The mask didn't change his voice so much, enough space inside of
it to let him breath normally and sound just a bit muffled. The design of it looked very similar to the comic book character, an air of menace surrounding the costume, but Hanasaki's shyness still made itself known with how he hunched over and sat in the group.

Hanasaki talked a bit about Zombire, his origin story, and how the love he had for his human lover, Amanda Evans, managed to awaken him and solidify his mission to fight evil-doers.

The stories lasted until the sun went down, and it left everyone with good memories of the night. As they left, Jonouchi turned to Hanasaki.

"Sorry about the garage kit, Hanasaki."

"It's okay," Hanasaki reassured him. "You did a great job!" He waved to his friends and headed back inside with his mother.

As Yuugi and his friends began to walk away, they heard a voice. Turning, they saw Mr. Hanasaki coming towards them.

"Everyone... Please, stay friends with Tomoya!" His face, riddled with desperation, held pain at the thought of Tomoya not having friends. It was enough for Yuugi to turn and reassure the man that they would stay friends with his son.

"Tomoya's body has been weak for a long time," Mr. Hanasaki explained. "I can't always be around because of my job, and it occurred to me that his only friends may be those action figures."

Jonouchi nodded. "You don't have to worry. He's not weak at all."

When Tomoya had been born, the crying had been so weak that his parents had worried that he may not live through the night. He had heard something about a "hemolytic disease" as they took his son past him in the hallway and hurried to ask questions, one of the desk nurses trying to calm him and letting him to his wife.

"Akio." His wife softly pleaded, her son the only thing on her mind. "Akio, where's my baby?"

"I'll ask, Chie. Rest now... You lost so much blood."

While his wife rested in the hospital bed, her body trying to heal and accept the 650 milliliters of blood that she had been given, his father went to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.

"I'm looking for my son. Um-"

"Could I have your name, sir?" The nurse looked him over, just for a moment, and smiled. "Sorry. It's policy."

"Hanasaki." He showed her the identification band that he had received in the delivery room and she read over the numbers, mouthing them.

She looked through the computer files and clicked the buttons of her mouse.

The nurse nodded and invited Hanasaki Akio to follow her around the corner of the nurse's station, to room four. The fourth room was close and as quiet as the rest of the rooms.

"Here he is."

There was a wooden cart-like object, one with wheels and a plastic tub on top of it, a tub filled with a
small mattress and a bundled-up infant. The baby inside had his eyes closed, a mark around his eyes. It was distinct on his yellowing skin.

"What is that from?"

"Your son has jaundice, Hanasaki-san," the nurse explained. Grabbing gloves from a box, she put them on and approached the infant in his little box. She undid the swaddling of the infant and showed him the yellow tint on the baby's stomach. "We did his levels in a hurry, as the cord was also wrapped around his neck and his heart signs were off as your wife began to push.

"We meant not to worry you. My sincerest apologies, Hanasaki-san." She bowed to him, watching as he bowed in return.

"Thank you for saving my son." He approached the infant, noticing a bit of residue on his skin. "What is this?"

"Vernix, from his mother." The nurse smiled, grabbing a water tub. "Would you like to bathe your son, sir?"

Akio nodded and followed the nurse's instructions, massaging the vernix that had not been cleaned off into the skin. Then, he moved his son under the overhead heater, to keep him warm, while the nurse filled the tub with some warm water and procured towels.

After that, Akio took one of the towels that the nurse had brought and got it wet with warm water. His son made a small baying noise, but he quieted himself, his arms moving a bit jerkily, not used to them having so much room for movement. His son yawned and went back to his napping.

"That's right," Akio whispered. "You rest up. It's a wise thing to do, after you've been fighting to get strong. Just focus on getting stronger, son."

It was that moment that Akio decided to name his son in honor of his currently resting mother, who had fought so hard through the pregnancy.

'Tomoya.'

His son would get stronger; not only in body, but in heart as well. When Akio was given a higher role in business and would have to go to America, Tomoya would smile and wish him good luck, looking forward to having his father come home and the souvenir that would follow.

It had been when Tomoya was thirteen that Zombire became a part of their life. It had been on another hospital visit, after his gall bladder surgery.

"Wow, Papa!" Tomoya admired the action figure. "Another one, but it's so different and cool! Who is he?"

"That's Zombire, and in America, he's the strongest hero around!"

"Really?" Tomoya looked at the action figure behind the plastic packaging. "Just looking at this figure makes me feel stronger!"

Akio smiled. "Then whenever I return to Japan, I'll buy you a Zombire toy!"

Tomoya lit up, and for a moment, Akio felt the same happiness that he felt when he gave his son his first bath.
Tomoya trained in his room, his Zombire costume filling him with pride and strength.

"I've never felt like this before!" He turned to his window. "Maybe I'll pretend to be Zombire! An avenger in the darkness, the night streets suit Zombire just fine!"

As he climbed out of his window and landed on the street, Tomoya cheered in his mind. He felt so strong, compared to the times he'd been in the hospital. He felt free and strong and like the real Zombire! Wandering the streets didn't fill him with fear at all!

Stopping on a park bench, he kicked his feet out.

'I could get used to- Is that-?'

"Take that!" Closer to the playground, a guy was punched to the ground, landing on the pavement.

Trepidation filled Tomoya. He was small, and he couldn't help, even if it was just two against one. As he turned to walk away, a thought stopped him.

'But Zombire never runs away!'

The bullies turned to him. "Who the Hell are you?!!"

"..."

"Brat, I'm gonna pound you!"

Tomoya squeaked and turned away. He stretched out an arm pushed the bully, making him cry out. The next guy fell down just as easily, confusing Tomoya.

"Let's just get out of here!"

"We're no match for him!"

The victim stood, looking at the masked boy in terror, before running away.

And Tomoya was alone.

"I am Zombire!"

He didn't even think for a moment that the whole thing was an act, set up by his father.

No, his father would never do that to him.

As Tomoya left school the next day, he saw Yuugi being picked on by the same bullies that he had beaten the night before.

'This is a job for Zombire!' He hurried over, standing between the increasingly-growing nervous Yuugi and the bullies.

"Stop it, you two!"

They towered over him, but Tomoya didn't budge.

Finally, one scoffed and turned away. "Let's get out of here! They're not worth it..."

"Are you okay, Yuugi-kun?"
"Yeah," Yuugi said, sighing in relief. "That was amazing, Hanasaki-kun!"

"If you see any more bad guys, please come to me! I'll protect you, Yuugi-kun!"

Yuugi nodded, cheering Tomoya on and waving good-bye to him.

"See you later, Hanasaki-kun! I'm going to work on my Zombire garage kit! I'll show it to you tomorrow!"

Tomoya nodded. "See you later, Yuugi-kun!"

That night, after dinner, Tomoya received a note while training his body with a Zombire punching doll. In through the window it came, and out through the window did Zombire-Tomoya go!

'I have to save Yuugi-kun!'

That night, Akio received a phone call from the boys he had hired, demanding more money, lest he'd wish to see his son in a hospital bed by the time that they were done with him. After finding his son's room empty, he found his worst nightmare coming true.

He shakily made his way downstairs, vaguely hearing the doorbell ring. As Akio passed his wife in the kitchen, he smiled at her, not wanting her to worry.

He clutched the note that Tomoya had received in his hand.

He went to the doorbell speaker, pressing the button on it.

"Hello."

「Good evening,」 he heard, remembering that it was Hanasaki's friend. The one with the wild hair, like in the note Tomoya got! 「Is Hanasaki-kun there? This is Mutou.」

Akio hurried outside.

'Please... Help my son!' He had thoughts of hospital visits and never wanting to go to one again. He remembered his son's first bath. 'Help Tomoya!'

He remembered rage, then the King again.

Yuugi stared up at the ceiling of some room. When he turned his head, he saw toys littering the floor.

'Where am I now?' he asked the room, but he felt so tired, the mysterious bed beneath him so soft, and the strange power that the King let out was soothing him.

'Just rest, Yuugi.'

'Please, save Hanasaki-kun!'
And he fell asleep.

He felt a warm hand on his head.

As the Danava presented his game and Tomoya was taken by his father, the gang leader smiled.

"You're going to take on the three of us?" He dropped his cigarette to the ground, next to the can of spray paint that they had used on Tomoya's eyes.

The Danava smiled and picked up the aerosol can. He quickly read the label and saw that it was a slow-drying paint. "This is all we need to play a fun game!"

The gang members reached into their pockets, pulling out pocket knives. The Danava smiled at bit at the thought, amused as he noticed a metal object fall out of the leader's pocket.

As they pursued him, the Danava dodged, shaking the spray paint can and spraying the red paint onto the ground. He noted that Yuugi's body could handle how fast he willed it to dodge and thought of how many times Yuugi probably had to run from bullies like these.

'This is just amusement then.' The Danava backtracked for a moment and picked up the lighter that the leader had dropped. He had run so many lines and right angles that by the time the gang had chased the Danava to the edge of the dock platform, he was out of paint.

"Nowhere left to run, brat!"

"Idiots, did you think I was running randomly? Look at your feet!"

"You've been drawing on the ground? So what!" The third and second bullies looked down, seeing their feet on the paint, smearing the thick liquid.

"It's no ordinary drawing," he explained. He pulled out the lighter, and the leader seemed to understand. "And here's the fuse."

"Wha? Wait!" The lighter fell, and flames ignited as the paint caught fire.

It was a strange sensation, the Danava realized, seeing them suffer. It was enjoyable. There was a beauty that he found in it, like all his games before. As he ushered them, told them of their safety if they reached the other side of the maze, to fall into the water below them, the Danava laughed.

When he saw Hanasaki, however, he stopped.

'This should not have happened to him.'

"Yuugi-kun, I'm sorry. This is my fault... You had to save me..."

The Danava placed his hand on Hanasaki's shoulder.

"It's all right, Hanasaki-kun."

"No matter how hard I try, I'll never become a hero..."

"No," the Danava assured him. "You can!"
'You would be a better hero than I could ever be.'

Chapter End Notes

Byronic hero: described by the historian and critic Lord Macaulay as "a man proud, moody, cynical, with defiance on his brow, and misery in his heart, a scorn of his kind, implacable in revenge, yet capable of deep and strong affection."

I totally cheated: Tomoya = Blessed with wisdom; Akio = Bright one; Chie = Blessed with wisdom
*Tomoya had a biliary obstruction leading to neonatal jaundice. He repeatedly has gall stones; the medication used to combat this development (ursodeoxycholic acid) inhibits the immune system.

Cigarettes can't light much unless at their hottest, when being inhaled.

I really want to write a Zombire story now.
Small Ksitigarbha and Yamuna

Chapter Summary

Even the suffering
That is my life,
Until he, who leaves,
Returns, will be
All the more pitiable.

-Lady Sagami (998-?1061)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sometime, Mokuba would dream. His dreams were rare, soft blessings of peace after enduring Hell. The dreams involved his family, his father and brother.

Sometimes, they were completely different but similar. In these dreams, father and brother were the same. Those dreams were strange, but they were wonderful. He felt warm and safe.

The real world always had to interfere with his dreams. Business, school, and empty dinner tables had been a good chunk of his life in Domino City; they had not been good memories. His brother wasn't the stern and doting; nothing like the dream, but a demon!

If his brother could just..!

It was all he wanted! It had just gotten worse with the defeat that his brother had suffered.

"I'll beat him for you, Big Brother!"

Yuugi sighed, looking at the clock on the classroom wall. Today was moving even slower than normal.

'I want to go to the candy store on the way home!' When the bell rang, he hurriedly packed his bag, waved to his friends, and rushed out the door.

"What's he so excited for?" Honda had never seen their friend so worked up.

"The Capsule game, man," Jonouchi explained. "Yuugi has to live up to his name and get every game he can," he said with a smile.

At the candy store, Yuugi saw a line of children outside, a queue extending from the 100¥ machine that stayed outside. He rushed to the line, smiling as he saw kids retrieve Capsules from the machine. As he looked at the kids battling and trading their Capsules, someone cut in front of him.

"Hey, you! I was next!" The elementary school boy turned around and looked Yuugi over.
"Sorry. By the way, aren't you a high school friend? Aren't you a little old for this game?" he sneered.

"What does age have to do with gaming?" Yuugi chuckled awkwardly. 'Wow, he's full of himself.'

The boy moved aside. "Go ahead of me, if it means so much."

'I have a bad feeling,' Yuugi thought, though he reached into his pocket for a coin. Slipping the 100¥ into the machine, Yuugi turned the knob and waited for the sound of plastic clinking into the metal receiving tray. Disappointingly, there was no rewarding sound or Capsule in sight.

"What? No Capsule came out!" He hit the machine repeatedly, hoping that he would get what he had put his money for. A sudden hit to his head erased the thought from his mind completely.

"Hey! Stop abusing my machine!" The owner of the store, the miserly and obstinant Old Man Dentures, shook his fist at Yuugi.

"Ow..."

The man was furious, ignoring the kids that were laughing at his antics. "Will you break my machine for a hundred yen? You can't afford to replace it!"

"I'm sorry." Yuugi rubbed his head, wondering how he ended up apologizing after losing money.

Yuugi heard the laughter around them stop after a few minutes of being berated. Murmurs around them were mentioning the "Capsule Monsters Champion" and the name "Kaiba."

An elementary school boy with long hair covering his eyes stepped forward.

"Hey, Yuugi!" the boy addressed, voice demanding all of the teenager's attention.

"Eh?!"

"You're Yuugi, right?"

Yuugi nodded. 'Who the heck is this kid? How does he know my name?'

"Don't act so surprised; you don't know me, after all. I know you, though." At the look of confusion on Yuugi's face, the boy smiled. "You know Kaiba Seto? He's my older brother."

'Kaiba-kun's younger brother?'

"I can't believe my brother, the person I respect most because he had never been defeated, was beaten by a midget..." The boy laughed. "I thought I was going to respect you, but come on!"

Yuugi bit his lip a little, looking around and noticing that the other kids went quiet as soon as Kaiba's brother and his friends showed up.

"Yuugi, I've won some championships for Capsule Monsters? You know a little about Capsule Monsters right?"

"Not that much," Yuugi responded. "I just started, actually."

"Such modesty..." Mokuba raised his voice so suddenly that Yuugi froze in place: "Get him!"
'What does Kaiba's brother want with Yuugi?' The King touched the protection spells that the Danava had placed in Yuugi's Soul Room. They were holding up at the moment; whenever one of Mokuba's underlings was being careless, they would brush Yuugi with their stun-guns, but the magic would brush the stray sparks away.

'Probably something involving pride.' The Danava smiled, pinning down the last spell that he had finished and whispering to it softly. Complacent and calm, the spell purred and let itself blend into the natural pattern of Yuugi's Room.

'Pride?'

'I'm arrogant, my King.' The Danava turned to smile at the young man on the bed in Yuugi's Room. 'I'm arrogant and I love to hurt things. The feel of power over another person...'

'Including Yuugi?'

The King noticed fire erupt in the Danava's eyes, and something told him that he had said the wrong thing.

'Yuugi-ue has all the power in the world over me, when it is for his benefit,' the Danava said. 'Do you ever recall the name of Apep?'

'... I do, but vaguely.'

'If I am Apep, Yuugi-ue is Ammit.' The Danava sighed, lazily tracing the spell-patterns his protections had created on Yuugi's wall. 'I am Chaos, while He is Truth and Justice. I cannot exist without him, as Chaos cannot be without Order.'

'If one does not exist, the other cannot either.'

The King pondered the other's words and smiled. 'You hold back, for Yuugi's sake. You've been playing your games but not taking all of their darkness like before.'

Laughter answered him. 'I am hungry, yes, as I live off of the very darkness that lies within human hearts. However, there is no answer for what may happen to Yuugi-ue's soul. His soul is bright and pure, and my Shadows and feeding may damage it, should these spells ever fail.'

One of the spells, the one that alerted the Danava to the Puzzle, was triggered, along with the one that alerted to Yuugi's safety.

The King sighed as the Danava faded from his sight and Yuugi's soul, in the image of the boy himself, was now curled up on the bed covers. The King idly petted Yuugi's hair and kept watch over the spells.

"Get your filthy hands off of the Puzzle! Goddamn brats!" The Danava watched as the boys surrounding him jumped back. The Shadows were asking, pleading, to take their darkness now, but the Danava held them back.

'I have to play a Game, lest they decide to feed on Yuugi's soul...' He looked to his opponent. 'But a child...'

A familiar child, no less.

The vague memories of pressing kisses to tanned cheeks, being something of a nurse-maid, flashed
in the Danava's mind. He would punish this child, but it wouldn't be as severe as his brother's.

"My brother told me about this. Welcome, other Yuugi!" Mokuba said in mock courtesy. "I'm eager to beat you!"

"Instead of sitting around and bragging, how about we play?"

The board set for their chess game, Mokuba had one of his underlings bring the machine that they had gotten from Old Man Dentures. "The Capsule Machine is ready. You get one first, Yuugi, and we'll switch so we get our pieces one-by-one."

Seeing the pieces that he and Mokuba collected, the Danava sighed. 'The difference in power levels is too great. He's cheating already, assuming that his three level-5 monsters and two level-4 monsters will be victorious over my level-2 and 1 monsters, with only one level -4.'

"Yuugi, how about a wager?"

"What kind of wager, little prince?"

Mokuba frowned at that, but he let it slide. "If you lose, I'm going to cut off one of your fingers," he proposed, brandishing a switch-blade.

"All right," the Danava agreed. "If I win, you'll receive a Penalty Game!"

Both players scanned the bottom of their Capsules, reading over the characteristics of the monsters inside. Setting down the capsules and revealing the monsters there, the game began.

"You should know in advance, Mokuba. This is a shadow game!"


"Then I'm all the more determined," the Danava countered, moving his level-1 Eye Mouth creature forward.

One of Yuugi's monsters was slaughtered, right in front of Mokuba's eyes. He remembered his brother mentioning how the Duel Monsters Cards had come alive, and now it was happening to his Capmon.

"You've lost a monster already, Yuugi," he cackled. He didn't expect the chuckle that answered back. "What are you so happy about?"

"Teaching you a few lessons in gaming. When one player is disadvantaged, the other might reveal weaknesses as he brags! That's your first lesson!" Mokuba absorbed the words, and he remembered his pride.

"Y-You, coaching me?!" And why did it seem appropriate?

"Never lose your temper, little prince. That's lesson two." Yuugi placed his level-4 Great Paa forward, the swordsman killing Mokuba's Cobra'd and dying in battle.

"Now I have three monsters, and you have four, Mokuba."

"Idiot!" Mokuba laughed. "I'm still much stronger than you, even if I did just lose a monster!"
The boy brought his Dinosaur Wing, level-5, forward, killing Yuugi's weak Flowerman. As it burned under the dinosaur's flame, Mokuba laughed at the small shrieking at accompanied.

Yuugi lost another monster after trying to escape, Mokuba laughing all the while. "You only have one monster left, Yuugi! I've already won!"

Yuugi's laugh surprised him.

"What are you laughing at? Don't act like you still have the upper hand!"

"It's a laugh of victory, child. Look at your monsters?" Mokuba looked down and saw his remaining monsters in a perfect, diagonal line.

"Wh-When did that happen?!"

Yuugi merely smiled and offered no explanation. "My last monster, the Trigun, has the ability to kill any monster on a diagonal axis, even level-5 monsters!"

'He sacrificed his monsters?!' Mokuba felt his mouth fall open in shock, as the Trigun flapped its wings and blasted a hole through all of Mokuba's monsters.

"Save your trump card for the end! That's the third lesson, little prince!" Yuugi smirked. "Remember it well."

As Yuugi stood up, Mokuba heard the darkness call to him. 'I... I lost!'

"Penalty Game!"

As a Capsule formed around him, Mokuba remembered his brother, coming home in the middle of that night in April. He had spoken about a Hellish experience.

'Is this Yuugi's style, that drove my brother crazy?!!'

"Yuugi! My brother is steadily preparing his revenge! Death-T!"

As the Capsule began to close around him, he heard Yuugi speak. "Sorry to break it to you, but you're not my enemy! Think about that while you stay in the capsule! We'll play again when you understand the lessons I've taught you."

And Mokuba was trapped in the darkness.

After what seemed to be hours in the darkness, neither feeling nor hearing anything, Mokuba felt a softness around him. He clung to it with a power of desperation.

"Poor little one," he heard, a voice that sounded much like a woman's, whispering in his ear. "You've suffered so long."

「 janayitrI... 」 The word came from Mokuba's mouth without issue. The woman's arms were around him, warm and protective. He latched onto her, still not able to see her. "It's so dark."

"I know." The woman petted his hair down, pressing a kiss to the top of his head. She hummed against his hair, some tune that Mokuba remembered Seto used to sing to him. "Don't worry, I'm here for you now."

"But... Seto!" His brother had always told him-
"Little prince, you can re-

"No!" He pushed the woman away, and Mokuba felt himself falling. He caught a glimpse of something - something besides the darkness - and felt himself wanting to go back to the woman there.

'Mama.'

He woke up in his bed, feeling lost.

"... Seto..."

It was strange, seeing the Danava in such a vulnerable state. The King had made sure that Yuugi was sleeping as he should be, while the Danava sat in the Room that they shared - the Labyrinth.

All the demon did was sit, with his eyes looking at something far away. For a while, as the King watched him, the Danava stayed still, legs crossed in front of him in the definitively masculine way that Yuugi's mind told them in terms of sitting on the floor. His eyes focused, unblinking, and the King felt tempted to break the stupor, had it not been for the words uttered around the middle of the night.

'... suffered so long.'

'Danava? Who are you talking to?' The King settled himself on his knee to the Danava's side, trying to communicate.

The Danava's hand reached out and the King felt his hair being settled down, like the memory of Yuugi's mother doing the same when the boy had had a nightmare.

'I'm here...' the Danava mumbled. The King found himself in an embrace, warm and tight. The embrace became a bit tighter, as though the one who was receiving the demon's affection was trying to pull away.

'My little prince...' The voice that came from the powerful demon embracing him was soft and delicate, like that from a child that was lost.

The King sighed.

'You are younger than you think you are, Danava...'

Chapter End Notes

It is around the beginning of July at this point. With Kaiba's resources, Death-T could be built in a couple of months.
The Damson Garden

Chapter Summary

When the spring has come,
First flowering at my house
The plum blossoms:
In your thousandth year,
I see you with them in your hair.

- Ki no Tsurayuki

Chapter Notes

Time for sexy stuff~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

'... Are you serious?'

The King laid a hand on his face. The protection spells had driven him and the Danava into an alarmed state. However, when the Danava went to take over Yuugi's body, in hopes to defend him, the Shadows did not come to him.

'The Shadows are starving,' had been the explanation.

'I'm quite serious.'

The King let some of his own magic, a formless cloud of Shadows, flow towards the path to Yuugi's body, trying to numb the pain from that fight from that Bruce Lee fanatic.

'So you and the Shadows are starving. Why?'

The Danava sighed. 'I can't... control myself all the time. As I said before, I'm arrogant and I like to hurt people... Well, the ones that hurt Yuugi-ue. He doesn't like hurting people at all, and I-

He cut off suddenly, looking away from the King. Sighing, the King approached him and grabbed his shoulder.

'What? Are you holding back for Yuugi's sake?'

The Danava nodded and took a slow breath. 'It's that and a more selfish reason.'

'If it hurts Yuugi, like it has this time, I need to know.'

The Danava smiled.

'He's frightened of me.'
There was silence for a moment, interrupted only by the swishing of fabric of the tunic that the King wore as he came to hug the demon.

'You care so much for Yuugi... You can use the bit of power that I have.'

'Thank you.'

"Are you okay, Yuugi?"

"Yeah, it's getting numb now. I'm fine now! Especially now that I have the Puzzle again!" Yuugi rubbed his cheek, noticing that yes, it was feeling better by the second. He smiled to Jonouchi, thanking him again for saving his Puzzle from that bully in the arcade.

"Oh, Yuugi," Jonouchi said. "I did get you a cola, but-"

"Jonouchi-kun, just getting the Puzzle was more than enough. You got hurt, too."

"Yeah, well." Jonouchi felt the cut on the side of his face sting a little. "It was nothing."

As they walked out of the arcade, discussing something to do for that evening - the first night of summer break - they heard a car slowing down and braking on the road. Turning towards the car out of interest, they were surprised to see a man in a proper chauffeur's outfit.

"You are Mutou Yuugi and a friend, correct?" His tone was clipped and proper, unnerving the two teens. "I have received orders from Seto-sama to come and meet you!"

"Kaiba-kun?" Yuugi jumped a bit as the chauffeur moved to the side, opening the back door for them. He and Jonouchi looked at each other for a moment before deciding to enter the vehicle.

"Why would Kaiba call us?" Jonouchi asked, the door closing behind him. He crossed his arms behind his head and leaned backwards.

"I haven't seen him at school lately..." Yuugi commented. He'd been gone for a few weeks, actually. It was now that he thought of just how long ago his classmate had stolen his grandfather's card that he realized that Kaiba hadn't been at school since then.

"Yes, sir. Seto-sama has been very busy, working on important matters as of late." The chauffeur did not bother to turn around, avoiding his passengers' gaze. "Of course, he is the president of the Kaiba Corporation."

"Eh?!" Jonouchi practically jumped in his seat, leaning forward. "President of Kaiba Corp?! That huge entertainment company?! He's just in high school!"

"Kaiba Corp?" Yuugi asked. He'd heard of the name, but it was always in adverts for technologies.

"It's the world's top game and leisure company," Jonouchi explained, leaning back in his seat and crossing his arms. "No wonder Kaiba's such a creep. He's got all that money at his feet!"

Yuugi recalled the events of the duel he had with Kaiba with gravity, though the Blue Eyes White Dragon fading away was pretty strange.

'I didn't know there was so much pride at stake when I played against Kaiba-kun...'

"And I'm vice president!" came a voice from the front passenger seat, one that Yuugi recognized. A boy with long black hair and green eyes turned in his seat to face Yuugi and Jonouchi. "It's been a
while, Yuugi-kun! We had fun the other day."

"Y-You're Kaiba-kun's little brother?" Yuugi felt a skip in his heart that he didn't really understand. 'A grade-schooler is the vice president?!

"The name's Mokuba. Kaiba Mokuba."

Yuugi nodded. 'These brothers don't like me very much.'

"Ah, Yuugi. Don't look so glum!" Mokuba turned around in his seat, facing the front again. "You guys are my special guests!

"To tell you the truth, my brother's project is finished. Tomorrow is its grand opening day!"

"'Grand opening'..?" Jonouchi asked. Why on Earth would Kaiba invite them?

"My brother's so thoughtful!" Mokuba gushed, compliments falling easily from his lips. "He wanted you guys, his friends, to have a good time, so you're invited to the special Eve party!"

"What sort of project is it, Mokuba-kun?"

Mokuba giggled. "It's secret! I'm not going to spoil the surprise!"

'Ah, Yuugi. It's a revenge project! Your other self didn't even tell you about it!'

The rest of the drive continued in silence. Arriving to the Kaiba Mansion, however, was cause for excitement.

"It's huge!" was Jonouchi's first comment. As they drove up the driveway to the mansion, he and Yuugi admired the atmosphere of the grounds.

Walking inside felt even more overwhelming.

"It's like a royal castle!" Yuugi looked up to see high-arching windows and pillars.

"Welcome home, sir!" A butler and several men in suits stood at the foot of the stairs. They stood at attention as Mokuba, Yuugi and Jonouchi came forward.

"These people are all my servants," Mokuba introduced.

"You're Yuugi-sama, right?" The butler in the white coat, small and seeming very old, came forward. "I have orders from Seto-sama to see to your every comfort!"

Yuugi nodded dumbly.

"Hey, where's my brother?" Mokuba came forward to the butler, who seemed to relax a bit in his posture.

"Sir, he went to lie down earlier."

'What the Hell..." Mokuba frowned. "Friends are over, and it's a special night..."

"He's been working for days with no rest. I don't wish to interrupt his sleep..."

Mokuba nodded and turned to Yuugi and Jonouchi. "Bad news, Yuugi-kun. It looks like my brother won't be partying with us tonight! It looks like you're my guests tonight!"
"For now, Mokuba-sama," the butler said, "shall we prepare dinner?"

Jonouchi perked up the mention of food. "That would be great! I'm starving!"

"Why didn't you say so earlier?!" Mokuba smiled. "Prepare to eat some of the best food in the world."

"Best in the world!" Jonouchi smiled and his stomach agreed.

"It really is like being in a royal palace!"

'We're going into the fortress of our enemy, so to speak,' the Danava mumbled, securing more spells in Yuugi's Soul Room.

'If something else happens here, you may not have enough energy to protect Yuugi and Jonouchi,' the King advised. 'Try not to use your Shadows. Better yet, let's make Yuugi leave now.'

'I will not command his life.' Tying one more spell in place, the Danava turned to the King, who sat on Yuugi's bed weaving a spell. 'He's strong. I just wish to help Yuugi-ue with the problems and enemies that he is not able to handle.'

'Then let Yuugi handle this.' The King sighed. 'Only in the extremes, take over. I have a feeling that he is going to be disapproving of us possessing him once he realizes the extent of control-

'I am not controlling him!'

The spell was ripped out of the King's hands, viciously moving hands pushing him down onto the bed and pulling on his tunic.

'Oof!'

'I would not do anything that Yuugi-ue does not wish for! He saved me from the darkness; why would I take advantage of this?'

'It's like what you told me,' the King reasoned, hissing as the sharp fingernails of the other felt as though they were piercing into him. 'You're arrogant, and you like to hurt people. Heh, you gave a Penalty Game to a child! Who knows if you will turn that towards Yuugi?'

'You are a demon in every sense of the word. Aren't you the Shadows?'

The Danava froze, and the expression that settled on his face, the King had never seen before, not even in Yuugi's memories.

Self-loathing.

Mokuba smiled as he led the two high-school students to the dining room. As he saw the spinning table being set on one of the round tables that they usually saved for gala parties, Mokuba felt giddiness well inside of him.

'You may have beaten me once before, Yuugi, but I'll have my revenge tonight!'

The servants came and set various plates down, just as the three boys made it to the table.

"Time to eat!" On the table sat different food than expected.
Jonouchi grit his teeth. 'What... He promised amazing food, but we've got hamburgers, kiddie meals, and a cake?'

"Dig in, guys," Mokuba invited. He paused. "That would be boring, though. How about a dinner game?"

"A dinner game?" Yuugi looked surprised.

"Look at this table! It's like the ones that you can find in Chinese restaurants! We'll spin the table and you have to eat the meal that stops in front of you!" Mokuba smiled. "That sounds like fun, right?"

Jonouchi nodded, receptive to the idea. "You didn't poison any of it, did you?"

"My guests don't have to worry about that! There's actually a treasure inside one of the meals. The one who finds it wins!"

"Let's eat then!"

"Then, you'll go first, Jonouchi-kun!" Mokuba made a gesture for him to go.

The table spun around and around, finally stopping at the kiddie meal. The little Japanese flag in the rice stood in defiance to Jonouchi's excitement.

"Really? The kiddie meal?"

"Jonouchi-san, if you don't eat it all, you're out! It's in the rules!" Mokuba smiled. "Maybe you'll get the prize!"

Jonouchi shrugged and picked up his fork. "Okay, I get it!" As he cut into the grilled chicken that came with the meal, he saw its leanness, and its taste was rather good. He began to eat contently, enjoying the taste.

"Ugh..."

Why did... His chest, his heart was hurting! It beat against his rib-cage so quickly that it was in pain! His head was following suit, a pounding headache forming.

"What's wrong, Jonouchi-kun?!" he heard Yuugi ask, but he didn't care right then. He just felt dizzy.

Mokuba laughed, clapping his hands. "Jonouchi wins the Grand Prize!"

"What?!"

"I poisoned that meal!" Mokuba's face twisted into a sneer, malicious and dark. "This game is 'Deadly Food Russian Roulette'! This poison will take full effect in thirty minutes."

"Russian Roulette?!" Yuugi felt disgust rise in his stomach. Anger soon followed, and the familiar feeling of a darker shadow floating up within him washed over him.

'Change to your other personality!' Mokuba felt anticipation, excitement!

"Mokuba! I'll never forgive you for this!!" The Danava came forward, his face contorting itself to a scowl.

"There's five meals left, Other Yuugi, with one being poisoned!" Mokuba's eyes narrowed. "Your turn!"
The Danava looked down at the rotating table and frowned. It would figure the one time food was in front of him, there would be poison involved. Nevertheless, he spun the table. As it slowed and stopped, the table section with spaghetti sat in front of him.

"Spaghetti. Now eat!"

The Danava grabbed the plate and grabbed the fork to the right. It felt awkward in his right hand, but it was how Yuugi normally had grip of things. He tried not to shake as he brought some pasta to his mouth; in any other case, he would want to savor the meal, but time was of the essence.

"Safe!" Mokuba cried out, a grin splitting his face. "There was no poison in the spaghetti!" He giggled in the manner a child would when lighting ants on fire. "Was it good, Other Yuugi? A life-or-death fest; you should be happy if you don't die after eating! After all, the relief of being alive should make the food seem like the best in the world!"

The Danava growled in response.

Mokuba took his turn, tapping on a syrup bottle before doing so. His fingers idly wavering over the crystalline bottle, and the boy appeared carefree as he spun the table.

"Chocolate parfait! My favorite!" Mokuba pulled up his spoon and indulged himself in the nutty, fudge-filled treat.

'He's not worried at all...' The Danava looked over to the syrup bottle that Mokuba had next to him. 'That bottle... Is there a trick with it?'

"Mokuba, what's in the bottle?!"

The boy froze. "Oh, this? A syrup bottle! For the hotcake!"

"But it looks empty." The Danava could see the child grow more anxious as he spoke; obviously he had learned nothing from their game before.

"Yuugi, when you eat the poison, this bottle will be filled! The saying goes that 'the misfortune of others is like sweet syrup!'" Mokuba steeled his eyes, and the Danava saw that only part of his lessons was learned. "Your turn, Yuugi!"

The Danava smiled. Three meals left, and there was a one in three chance that the next meal for him would also be one for Mokuba.

"Mokuba, the next spin will end the game! We'll each eat what stops in front of us." He let his hands come to the Puzzle and slid it off from his neck, letting his powers flow into it to keep the King and Yuugi safe from the Shadows. 'Let this work!'

"That sounds good!" Mokuba looked down to the syrup bottle, smile growing wider at it.

The Danava spun the table, putting as much strength as he could into it. The sound of shattering metal, thin, and Mokuba's shocked face told him all that he needed to know. 'No more ticks! This game will be decided by luck!'

Luck was definitely on his side.

Yuugi opened his eyes slowly, humming as he stretched his body. The bed beneath him was as soft as he remembered. He heard the shifting of fabric, and rose-red eyes came into his view.
'King?'

'Hello, Yuugi.' The man - 'Boy? He looks around my age...'- sat on the edge of the bed and smiled down at him. He looked a lot like Yuugi - the similar hair, anyway, with blond bangs shooting up into black hair that was framed in red. His skin looked like it had been browned by the Sun. 'How are you feeling?'

'I'm all right,' Yuugi reassured him. He sat up, the King monitoring him. 'Where am I?'

'This is your Soul's Room,' the King explained, gesturing to all around them. As Yuugi's eyesight focused, he noticed many toys littering the floor. He looked to the King who smiled. 'Everything in here means something, as a symbol. You are rather kind and accepting, something that society associates with children; hence, the toys.' The King reached down and picked up a box. Chess pieces lined the inside, sitting on top of the folded board.

'And I end up here every time I...?' Yuugi wiggled his fingers in the air, receiving a nod in return. He felt rather comfortable with the King, who set down the chess set next to him and began to play with the pieces.

The other male was dressed in a short-sleeved tunic and loose pants, black leather shoes on his feet. The choker that he wore was different from Yuugi's, made of fabric instead of leather. His back was straight, making him seem older. The prudence that he took with the chess piece, the Knight, certainly showed some form of propriety, regalia, that Yuugi couldn't hope to emulate. This person - for Yuugi felt some living force next to him, unlike the Shadows that made him forget everything - could have been the Pharaoh that had been buried with the Puzzle, for all that he knew.

'Are you the one that is taking over... when I lose my memory?' Yuugi asked, curiosity washing over him as the King picked up the King piece.

It fell into the box, disturbing the pawns and black knight.

'No... I merely protect you from the Shadows here, as well as provide you company.' The King picked up the Queen piece, scrutinizing it. 'He looks very much like you; pale skin, but he has red eyes like mine, blond that goes upwards into his hair. When he's in control, everyone calls him 'Yuugi.'" He rolled over the Queen, sighing. 'I don't know what else-'

'Tell me about him, please. I want to know more about him... My other self.' Yuugi reached and grabbed the King's arm, not ready for the warmth that flooded through him at the touch. He let out a quick, shaking breath, one that mirrored the King's, carefully pulling away. The other's hand quickly came to Yuugi's, and the warmth washed over him again.

'Yuugi.'

His name, from another person's lips, had never had so much weight. It sent heat throughout Yuugi's body, sending much of it to his lower abdomen and making him feel things that usually only happened with those videos that Jonouchi let him borrow.

'I... What was that?' Yuugi didn't pull his hand away, but their hands fell to the bed. As unused to it as Yuugi was, he couldn't find the will to pull away.

'Touch means different things.' The King looked down at their hands, and he looked up to Yuugi, their gazes meeting and staying. 'What does this mean to you? When you're awake, I mean.'

'In settings like this,' Yuugi murmured, taking in the fact that his Soul's Room was very much a bedroom, the only place where he could really be himself when he was alone. His fingers squeezed
harder around the King's. 'Closeness... but this feels different.'

'How?' The King smiled. 'You can tell me. Please.'

Yuugi looked away from the King for a moment. The longer he looked into those red eyes, the more intense the burning emotion became. Why did he feel so trustworthy, as though only truth could come from those lips? 'Passion?'

The King's hand wrapped around his more tightly. 'I do believe that's what it is.'

Yuugi heard shifting of fabric, the dips of the mattress changing as the other boy moved, and he shuddered when the King's free hand came to touch his cheek. The touch made that passionate feeling worse, and Yuugi managed to choke a noise while it was still in his throat. Instead, it came out as a strange squeaking sound. Fingers padded at his cheekbone, fingernails grazing his cheek, and the touch was foreign, hypnotizing in the strangeness of it. Yuugi turned to the King, almost hitting their faces together. Their noses were close to touching, and strangely, neither seemed to feel uncomfortable. Their intertwined hands felt hotter, more so than their soft exhales that mingled in the space between them.

'Who are you?' Yuugi asked, leaning forward a bit. Soft, pliant lips met his, his heart clenching. His own free hand came to travel up the King's arm, slowly moving up to cradle the other's neck. Yuugi hummed as the King moved his lips against his. The passion burned hotter, he realized, and it was only the strange sense that this was all a dream that made Yuugi not throw the other down and show what else he wanted.

'I'm yours... if you'll have me.' Yuugi pushed the King down, their chests hitting together and the tanned-skinned boy hit the mattress, legs off the side of the bed, as Yuugi pressed their mouths together again, wanting that passionate fire to stay lit. Thoughts began to filter into his ears as he wormed his tongue into the other's willing mouth, clumsily imitating the actions that were usually hidden by pixels.

'Kindness' was a paramount thought, as well as 'happiness,' 'light,' and even 'heavenly,' with the single concept of 'Yuugi' taking up the middle of them. This person beneath him, the one that was letting out pleas that were riddled with desire and a desperation that Yuugi had never seen with him as its target, wanted him. He wanted Mutou Yuugi.

And Mutou Yuugi wanted this person, this one that was helping him grow confident and protected him from those Shadows that his grandfather had mentioned in the Puzzle's history. This King in front of him made something come alive inside of him, something archaic and basic, something that desired and coveted things. When asleep, guarded by the King, he had wisps of dreams - memories, a deep-living voice told him - of sun-kissed lips against his cheek and a Prince telling him the sweetest of nonsense.

'And I'll be yours, if you want me.' Hands came to pull at his white school shirt and at the leather armor underneath, the fabric giving way as though magic had whisked them away. Fingers explored his chest, examining the flatness with avid interest. Yuugi kissed the other's neck, not sure of what else to do. He'd seen porn with women in it; there wasn't too much he knew about initiating with men. Hell, he didn't even think of wanting to be with anyone but Anzu up 'til this point. His fingers wandered down to the tunic's bottom hem, but he couldn't bring himself to lift up the fabric, to see if the King's torso was just as bronze and lithe as the rest of him.

'Shall we stop?' The deeper voice that the other had was soft, soothing. 'You seem tired.'

Yuugi nodded and let out a yawn before he realized that yes, he was tired. 'Will you be here when I
wake?"

'I will be in the Puzzle, while the other you stays in your mind.'

'In my mind?'

'Don't worry,' the King crooned. 'He means to keep you safe; nothing more.' It did not stop Yuugi from curling in on himself.

'I... became friends with Anzu again and became friends with Jonouchi-kun and Honda-kun because of the Millennium Puzzle.' He noticed that it currently didn't hand around his neck, that the pyramid lay by the foot of the bed. 'If... What if the other me, a person they don't know me as... What if that drives them away?'

The King brought his hands up to Yuugi's face, cradling the pale cheeks that were growing a pink tinge at the prospect of crying. 'Hush, now. Your friends seem more faithful than you make yourself believe. Your other self only comes out when you are in danger, but your fear has been holding him back as of late. Your anger triggers him as well, but you can trust him. He knows your personality well enough that he can imitate you, if he must.'

'But why would he take over in the first place?'

'Because he wants to keep you safe?'

'... Shouldn't split personalities want to be out and living their own life?'

The King looked at him in mild confusion before shaking his head in the negative. 'He doesn't want to take over your life. He knows you're strong and he will only tread over that he thinks that he needs to.'

Yuugi nodded and laid his head down in the crook of the other's neck. He felt safe.

'What did he do to Mokuba?'

'The boy put poison in the food. He doomed himself, but the servants had the antidote for both him and Jonouchi-kun handy.'

'Okay.'

As Yuugi dozed off, the King moved him to lay comfortably on the bed, pulling the covers around his small body and smoothing out the bangs that had gotten messy in their intimacy.

'If you hurt him,' the King heard. He looked to the doorway and saw the Danava there, eyes bright and seeking blood.

'I won't.'

'If you do,' the Danava insisted, 'you shall regret it all.'

'I won't hurt him.' The Danava's answer was a stare, his eyes moving to gaze protectively at Yuugi, and a turn-about to walk into the Labyrinth of the Puzzle.

His shoulders seemed to droop, but the King assumed that it was tiredness.
Title and Summary: "Damson Blossoms" by Ki no Tsurayuki; Damson flowers are plum blossoms. In Chinese culture, the plum blossom is the symbol of endurance. The fragrance of plum blossoms “comes from the bitterness and coldness,” as the Chinese saying goes. Souls are tempered in the depth of experience, growing in inner strength and unyielding courage. Chinese also see the five-petaled flower as symbolizing five blessings: longevity, prosperity, health, virtue, and good living.

Haptic communication: "touching behavior in humans," which can also be called "skinship." Displays of affection vary from culture to culture. In Japan, it seems that more affectionate touch can occur in private settings or in places where it is to be expected (ie. an onsen). In public situations, it is best to keep it to a minimum, regardless of sex, though girls can hug without much dissent. It makes people feel very uncomfortable.

"Icha icha" (that "lovey-dovey" mood) is what our two boys are partaking in, and it can extend from hand-holding and light flirtation to making love.

Knight, King, and Queen: Chess pieces have spiritual symbolism. While the other Yuugi uses mythological figures to symbolize others, the King uses the chess board.

*The Knight is Law and Truth; synonymous with this could be the demon Ammit, who sits at the side of Ma'at Goddess of Truth and who is related to Yuugi, according to the other Yuugi. Because of these associations, the King chose Yuugi as the Knight.

*The King is the reason for all to be; our nameless King's name is the name of the Creator God. The Creator is neither good nor bad, synonymous with the demon Shezmu. The King is acting more as a neutral judge, as Shezmu does.

*The Queen governs all and is the symbol of esotericism; it has more information on which it chooses to take interest in. Due to the extreme interest in things and people that the other Yuugi has, especially in regards to Yuugi's safety, the Danava/other Yuugi is this.
Chapter Summary

Every year
She meets him, yet
The Weaver Maid's
Nights of passion
Are few indeed.

- Ôshikôchi no Mitsune (Fl. 898-922)

Chapter Notes

Sexy stuff... and then Death-T.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The curtain rises.

It always began the same way. This benevolent goddess in front of him, whose eyes always reflected back a deep cynicism of the world. It mirrored his own and he felt whole when he was against her, feeling her body against his in the most primal of desires. Her pale legs were wrapped around him, even when not in the midst of passion, her lips telling him that the love they shared was not the one that was desired, but it was a love that would stay alive for an eternity. It was a passion - volatile, aggressive, and only understood by them - that enraptured them in their strange battles.

Not even their spouses could intercede with their relationship, one so full of a deep-seated resentment for those who had the perfect ending and satisfaction for the victories hard-won.

But it disintegrated.

Soon, it fell away, the beautiful goddess and the dream. It fell into the sky and he could only reach as he stood upon the animal they left him, the holy beast that reminded him of her in how it took care of him when he was ill. His wife, a princess from the sky, caressed his face, and she whispered to him that she could give her all for him, and it was all that he could love of her. He drowned in the love for his wife, but he always missed his friend.

Along came a beast, a demon, that looked like his goddess. The demon bared his fangs and brought up the creatures that he desired most to see. The creatures, the ones that had kept him alive with the stories his mind created for him in dreams, attacked him, brought him to Hell. It was just as his step-father had described it.

'Death comes to the loser.'

"I lost at Duel Monsters?!" The shock was rattling his bones, just as the shock of losing his goddess and losing even the princess that she had assisted in sending down from the stars, his most lovely
The demon that lived inside of Yuugi pointed at him, his powers coming from his shadows, sweeping around him.

"This is the 'sensation of death'?!" It was the only thing that he could say, thrown off by the darkness that this demon, this man that was nothing like his goddess, emitted. It reminded him of the dark nights when his father would leave the bills unpaid, his brother huddling against him to keep the nightmares away; this was worse.

He would destroy himself if it could make the darkness go away. It lasted the whole night. Morning was a blessing.

Kaiba Seto sat up in bed, reaching for something that he couldn't remember once he came back to full clarity. It had been the princess that he had married and lost.

"Th-That dream again..." Kaiba stood from his bed, body having vague tremors after his deep sleep. He walked over to the window, his pyjamas a size to large and making shifting sounds as it rubbed against the carpeted floor. Opening the windows, he felt no breeze. There was only a bright sun to greet him.

'But when is the darkness going to come again?'

A knock came at his door, and he granted entrance.

"Good morning, Seto-sama." His butler entered, and Kaiba let what was needed be done. First, however, he walked over to a round table in the center of his room. His briefcase of cards lay there. He opened it, spotting the creatures that devoured him in his sleep, at the beckoning of that demon. "As you requested, Yuugi and one of his friends - Jonouchi Katsuya - stayed here in the mansion overnight."

Kaiba nodded his approval and waved his butler to fetch something as he changed into his white suit.

White. Untainted. Holy. He was shaking now.

A cloak came around him, his butler adjusting it for a more regal appearance.

"I invited them for the Eve party and fell asleep," he said, more to the air than to his butler. "All my life, I've had restless nights when I couldn't wait until morning. Isn't it ironic that I had that nightmare."

'After today, I'll never have that nightmare again...' He looked over at his calendar.

_July 11th._

Yuugi sat at the end of a long rectangular table. Apparently, this was the eastern conference hall. A flight of stairs was behind him, tall, imposing. He saw the candelabras on the table and thought of heat.

'... If the King is so gentle like that... is the Other Me just cruel?' He recalled Jonouchi telling him about Hirutani's gang. Everyone had ended up in the hospital due to electrocution. Hanasaki's attackers and the convict from the Burger World had to have burn treatment. Before that even, Ushio, Sozoji, the director that had hurt him and Jonouchi...
'They were sent to the Mental Institution.'

He saw Jonouchi out of the corner of his eye. Would his friend accept this other Yuugi? Would Anzu or Honda accept him?

"Jonouchi-kun, are you all right?"

"Yeah!" Jonouchi stretched his arms over his head and sat down in the seat adjacent to Yuugi. "All I needed after that weird medicine was a good night's sleep!" He settled into the seat. It was definitely softer than the one soft armchair that he had back at the apartment. His father was usually sitting in it anyway.

He crossed his arms and frowned. "I don't like staying here at Kaiba's house, though. Now I owe him!" He saw Yuugi staring off into space. "Do you know what this opening ceremony's about?"

Yuugi shook his head, looking out of the corner of his eye to the door. "I don't know, but... I think we've been watched this whole time. It's like they don't want us to leave the mansion."

The butler that had come yesterday to greet them came again, silent in his movements across the floor.

"Sorry to keep you waiting. Seto-sama has awoken."

"Good morning, Yuugi-kun! Jonouchi-kun!" Yuugi and Jonouchi turned to see Kaiba at the top of the steps, a gown, like a western king, on his body. His smile was rather warm, from how they remembered it. "I've been looking forward to seeing you again!"

"Kaiba-kun!"

Silence filled the air, the room pregnant with tension.

Kaiba smiled. "What's wrong? You don't look happy to see me... We should be celebrating!"

Jonouchi's chair squeaked as he stood up. "We didn't want to come! Your little brother tried to kill us! Like we'd say we're happy to see you!"

The young master of the mansion raised his fingers to his forehead, rubbing his temples slowly. "Mokuba... What a saucy kid. Why are you so worked up about a child's game?"

"Because that game almost killed us!"

Yuugi spoke up, voice in stark contrast to the airy-lightness of Kaiba's speech and Jonouchi's brashness. "Kaiba-kun, where are we going today?"

"To a dream-like place." The warm smile stayed strong, and Yuugi felt somewhat disarmed by it, as well as by the hand that gestured almost humbly to the main hallway. "No time to waste! We should get going now! I can't wait to show it to you!"

As Kaiba led the two down to the main hallway, onto the carpet that was stretched to towards the main doors, servants became visible, perfectly aligned and bowed.

"Have a good trip!" they said in unison.

Yuugi gripped at his Puzzle around his neck as they entered the car that would lead them to their destination. He felt a wave of sadness come over his consciousness, and he wondered if it was his other self.
Kaiba nodded to his driver through the rear-view mirror and off they went.

"As you know, I'm the one that runs Kaiba Crop. My father, the founder, died six months ago, and I had to take over. Since then, I've been working on my dream project, and it's finally finished." He looked to the window, and his companions could see a large building in the distance. "A dream tower, from which you can see all of Domino!"

'Kaiba Land?'

As they approached, Jonouchi turned to Kaiba. "So what is Kaiba Land, exactly?"

He received a smile and a short answer. "An indoor amusement park."

The car slowed and applause filled the open doors. Men bowed in two parallel lines, making a pathway for the three boys. Kaiba walked out of the car easily, showing no sigh at being bothered by the cheering. Praise fell upon him and he returned the gestures, waving like royalty to an eager crowd. Children waved back, smiles on their faces bright and truly happy.

"Yuugi-kun," he said, turning to his companion, who was somewhat caught up in the attention. "Kaiba Land doesn't really open for another three days, but today some have been invited to come in and play for free! I want you two, you and Jonouchi-kun, to have fun as well!"

He signaled to the children and workers that the park was now open. Children ran from their chaperons, the adults looking over the children with alert and caring eyes. Yuugi saw one woman that seemed familiar, but Kaiba caught his attention again.

"Yuugi-kun! My dream is to give kids all over the world a place like this to have fun!" The joy in Kaiba's eyes seemed genuine.

'It looks like I really misjudged you, Kaiba-kun. I'm sorry.'

"Yuugi, let's go!" Jonouchi gestured over to the 3D motion ride, and Yuugi nodded eagerly.

"Hey, Seto!" A man in a suit, hair worn shabbily, approached the three boys, pointing accusingly at Kaiba. The air grew thick. "You killed the company president!"

Kaiba's face hardened, Yuugi noticed as he and Jonouchi paused on their way to the rides.

"You took over Kaiba Corp and forced your own father out of business! That's why he killed himself, you monster!" The man's face contorted as he spat out the last word.

Kaiba's face, however, was stoic. He waved a hand and a guard came. "Get him out of here!"

As another security guard came, the man struggled against the first. He was carried off of the premises without lenience.

Yuugi approached Kaiba, a questioning look on his face but no words to ask what just occurred.

"He used to be my father's right-hand man. Now, he's unemployed." A smirk grew on the CEO's face. "Looks like he's spreading rumors. Father's death was sad, but I had nothing to do with it..." The smirk changed into something just a bit more menacing, almost sadistic. "Though, I'd like to think he died in peace, knowing that I was his heir."

The words came out with a hold of truth, but that was all the positive that could be taken from it. The words themselves carried a tone of resentment.
Suddenly, Kaiba's face changed again, one of excitement.

"Come on, Yuugi-kun! I'll show you around the park!"

They walked a small distance before a voice called out to them. A girl with a familiar face approached them, smiling.

The girl appeared different from before, which was probably the reason for Yuugi's hesitance when seeing her. She wore her hair up high and it was all black, unlike the brown it had been before. Her eyes were not brown but a sharp green that reflected the world. Fake eyelashes decorated her right eye.

"Hello, Yuugi-kun. Do you remember me?" The girl smiled at Yuugi, voice polite and proud. It was the same as before, a voice that didn't quite fit a woman nor a man but was feminine in dialect.

"Mi-Nee-san!" Yuugi smiled and the girl was pleased. "You're here to play at Kaiba Land too?"

"Yes." Mi-Nee nodded to Jonouchi and greeted him. She turned to Kaiba last and bowed. "Thank you for inviting me, Kaiba-kun."

"Anything for the daughter of the Mikoto Corporation." Kaiba bowed slightly, not nearly as deep as Mi-Nee's had been, but it was expected.

"Mikoto..?" Jonouchi mulled the name over on his tongue for a moment before straightening his back in shock. "You mean 'Mikoto' as in the medical group?"

Mi-Nee nodded, noticing that Yuugi had no recognition of the name. "Yes. My grandparents run the main business, while my parents and brothers run separate project. I'll continue with the medical."

"Wow..." Yuugi looked to Mi-Nee and noticed her status now. A good head on her shoulders and a good family, as well as a fluency in languages, if the translations from last month were anything to go by; why did she seem eager to see him, a high-school student that didn't even do that well in school, then?

Mi-Nee turned to Yuugi. "Enough of that. I came here to play, and seeing you two, Yuugi-kun and Jonouchi-kun, will make that the best time."

Kaiba nodded. "Of course. All of our attractions are high-tech machines, such as the 3-D motion ride..."

After partaking in the motion ride and seeing the advancement that virtual reality was taking at Kaiba Corp, Yuugi's heart was racing in excitement. At Kaiba's mention of preparing a special show just for Yuugi, he could hardly stand still.

"For me?! That's too much, Kaiba-kun..."

Mi-Nee smiled. "Is it a game, Kaiba-kun? I've yet to see someone beat you, and Yuugi-kun is very good."

The voices of people, mostly children, were filling their ears as they walked towards what seemed to be a stadium in the building. As they walked in, Yuugi noticed that it was an arena, loud and ambient in sheer size.

"There's a box in the middle!" Jonouchi could feel his own heart pick up and he almost dropped his
briefcase in shock when he saw who was inside. "Yuugi, look!"

Yuugi froze. "Jii-chan!" What was his grandfather doing here?

As the two boys ran to the box, Sugoroku visible due to the clear walls and voice silent due to the wall thickness, Mi-Nee turned to Kaiba.

"What are you planning, Kaiba?"

Kaiba's eyes turned cold. "Yuugi beat me, Mikoto. I will not lose my honor, like I almost did before."

"What are you doing to Yuugi's grandfather?" Mi-Nee’s eyes were getting irritated, like she was going to cry, but she refused. "Yuugi is the one you should be dueling, but fairly!"

"This is the way the world works, Mikoto. You know that."

Mi-Nee was left silent, her fake eyelashes seeming to burn her now.

Cheers for the Kaiba Corp CEO were loud in everyone's ears, the young heir striding forward towards the box as Yuugi and Jonouchi were brought back to stand by Mi-Nee.

"Mi-Nee-san, what's he planning?" Jonouchi asked as Kaiba pulled away his cloak and revealed his briefcase of cards.

"Yuugi-kun," she answered, turning to the boy. "Did you beat Kaiba?"

Yuugi nodded, though it was a slow movement.

"Sit back and watch our match of Duel Monsters!" Kaiba announced to the crowd. "This elderly gentleman claims to be an undefeated master, and he has challenged me!"

"Duel Monsters?" Yuugi felt his heart seize in his chest at the seriousness on his grandfather's face. "Does it matter so much, Mi-Nee-san? He should be fighting me!"

"That's how the world works, Yuugi-kun."

Mi-Nee sighed and looked to the box where Kaiba and Sugoroku were setting up their decks. The will to fight was rattling through the air and affecting everyone in the stadium. "'To devastate is easier and more spectacular than to create' is how this world works, when dealing with pride."

Yuugi looked at Mi-Nee and saw something dark in her face, something that seemed hopeless, and furious, all the same. He saw shock there and looked towards the box. A monster, from the Duel Monster card for the Cyclops, sprung forth, reaching for his grandfather, claws bared.

"That's like the virtual reality that we saw on the ride!" Jonouchi yelled. "What's he planning with dueling like this?"

Yuugi shook his head and proceeded to watch. The duel was intense, with attacks and defense maneuvers played by both his grandfather and Kaiba.

"I can't tell who will win!"

Suddenly, a white dragon emerged in the dueling box, and the world stood still as three more came to attack it.

"Jii-chan lost..!" Yuugi felt himself crumple, barely managing to stay up. The game had been so
intense, like the monsters were really coming forward and fighting for his grandfather... only to lose!

Kaiba was telling his grandfather something, something that made his kind grandfather's face contort in horror. As the screens in the stadium replayed the winning maneuvers, Kaiba ripped the White Dragon that Sugoroku had placed his friendship in, laughing as more of the virtual-reality monsters came to flood his space.

"Jii-chan!" Yuugi's voice couldn't pierce the box, his grandfather still flailing as the monsters attacked him. Kaiba left the box unscathed, a smug smile on his face. "Kaiba! Get my grandfather out of that box right now!"

Kaiba looked down at the boy that had defeated him- No, the vessel of that demon that had beaten him. What would make him come up?

Anger? Loss? Hopelessness?

"We've tested that simulation on humans," he said nonchalantly. "A normal human will go mad after ten minutes. If it isn't stopped, he'll be crippled."

"Kaiba!" Mi-Nee stepped forward, eyes piercing, only being stopped by the bodyguards that Kaiba had close by. Jonouchi was not to be found; he had mentioned something about a phone call to an ambulance, but the heart could only take so much! "Stop that now!"

"If you want me to stop the simulator, Yuugi, you'll have to agree to participate in Kaiba Land's secret attraction, Death-T!!" Kaiba paid no attention to the girl, avoiding her eyes. "The Death-Theme Park I've constructed made as my revenge!"

Yuugi ran towards the box, shouting for his grandfather. And still he heard Kaiba's words.

"Ten billion yen went into building this just for you! Agree to participate in Death-T, Yuugi, and I'll stop the simulation!"

Yuugi turned to him and nodded. "I'll do it!!"

As the box opened and Yuugi ran inside, Jonouchi turned to Kaiba. "You'll kill an old man? Just to get revenge?"

Kaiba laughed. "It's his own punishment for losing."

The blond ran to the box, surprised that he saw Yuugi holding a deck of cards.

"Yuugi, I called an ambulance!" It seemed too long to wait, but the paramedics came quickly. They wore the Kaiba Crop logo and Jonouchi felt bitterness. He turned to Yuugi, looking down at the deck. "Your grandfather's deck?"

Yuugi nodded.

"You think you can beat me with the same cards your loser grandfather used?" Kaiba crossed his arms and reached into his pocket. "Even when I have three copies of the strongest card in history?" The Blue Eyes White Dragons were held tightly in his hand, a symbol of his pride, unbroken.

'You tore up Jii-chan's Blue Eyes, you coward!' Yuugi's hands tightened on the deck, listening to the characteristics of the Death-Theme Park. Determination filled him, and the shadows from the King - or even his other self, possibly - were wild, making it hard to focus.
Five levels to beat on his own, and their rematch would be on Death-T 5.

"Kaiba, I'm going with him!" Jonouchi stepped forward, in front of Yuugi with his fists clenched. "I'd plant my fist in your face, but it'd be pointless. Yuugi will beat you in that card game!"

"Are you so sure?"

"Yes." Mi-Nee stepped forward, eyes blazing. Yuugi smiled at her and Jonouchi, though short-lived as a guard came to grab the girl's arm.

"You'd best stay away from the action, Lady Mikoto. It's called a 'Death' park for a reason." She turned to the guard, face stern.

"Will you try and stop me?"

Kaiba smiled at her. "You only have so many disguises, running away from your family, Mikoto. It'd be such a hassle to cause trouble with a family like yours."

Yuugi felt a tension build around them. It grew around Mi-Nee and Kaiba, becoming something that was passionate and disorienting. They were the only two in the space that had ever held such a presence in Yuugi's life. It reminded him of some dream that he often forgot but could feel the rest of the day. stepped towards her.

"It's all right," he heard himself say. "We'll be alright." He didn't expect to see sadness in Mi-Nee's eyes; surprise, perhaps, but not sadness.

"But... You two will be alone."

"Have you forgotten me?" Someone from the stands came close, and Honda emerged from the crowd.

"Honda-kun?" Yuugi smiled and felt tears well up at the corners of his eyes as his friend lent him his support as well. Even carrying his nephew, Honda was willing to lend his strength, something Yuugi could never have expected before.

"Yuugi-kun?" He turned to Mi-Nee, who was still held by the guard. Her lips were set in a harshly thinned line. She let out a breath through pursed lips and smiled at him. "I'll be cheering for you."

'Why?' was the only question in Yuugi's mind. If she was as strong or powerful as she seemed to be - Kaiba acknowledged that, as did Jonouchi - why did she care about Yuugi?

"Thank you, Mi-Nee-san."

The Danava sat in the Puzzle, watching the group of teenagers - Yuugi, Jonouchi, and Honda, plus his nephew Jouji - as they walked through the gate of Death-T 1.

'So we begin.'

'Now?' The King sighed and came forward, standing in front of the Danava. 'You're still weak, aren't you?'

The Danava nodded. 'I can only protect Yuugi-ue if he allows me. I won't be able to do many Penalty Games. Perhaps just one.' He looked through the recent memories to see Kaiba. 'Perhaps I'll only need one.'
'What will you do to him?' The King noticed that the Danava looked longer at the memory of Kaiba's face, particularly when the boy had mentioned his father's death not being his fault.

'To devastate is easier and more spectacular than to create'... The Danava turned to the King and nodded. 'That girl was right. If I can break Kaiba... Perhaps he can be rebuilt.'

The King placed his hand upon the memory, sending it away. 'What will you do to him?'

'Tell me, my King,' the Danava said, sickly sweet. It was a tone that the King had not heard before; it was an attempt to be seductive, to entice and force obedience. 'If you lost your choice - to be good or bad, that is - are you still human? How interesting it would be, if I took that choice away for a while. Enough for the aforementioned blank slate of Kaiba's heart, to be molded into something that had less open wounds and scars not so prominent. Something damaged him and I want him to overcome that influence.'

The King stared down at the Danava, whose eyes were somewhat glazed over at the thought of having such power.

'It'd be cruel, to have that much power over somebody.'

'No, my King.' The Danava turned up to him, smiling brightly and wicked. 'Unless we change Kaiba, help him see his errors, nothing will change. He has a younger brother, my King. And so it would 'itty' on to like the end of the world, round and round and round.'

In that moment, the King was afraid of this being before him, who seemed to expect a different result after trying the same thing before. A definition of insanity. As the Danava fabricated Shadows in the air, he mumbled to himself words that the King did not understand. He only knew that they were powerful, and eventually they turned into a repetition with a rhythm that was a song.

The King couldn't move from his spot; the Shadows kept him from leaving.

Chapter End Notes

The Weaver Maid and the Cowherd: The tale (from a collection of poems from 11th to 7th centuries B.C.) associated with the Qixi Festival, it is a love story. In 2004, when this chapter takes place, in the Gregorian calendar, this would be July 7th.

Three: It seems to be an important number for Seto. His world basically consists of his dream, Mokuba, and Yuugi. He can only have 3 Blue-Eyes in his deck (per all DM rules) so he eliminates the 4th one. (More of something that I noticed: he goes through 3 outfit changes in the series.) Before his rivalry with Yuugi, it was him, his brother, and his dream. Anyone standing in the way of these three things got shoved out the window...

The third eye: This chakra (located between the eyes on the forehead) governs intuition, imagination, wisdom, and the ability to think and make decisions. It is the seat of one's beliefs. Issues with this chakra involve an unwillingness to look with in and deal with one's fears, fear of truth, fear of valid judgment, fear of your shadow side, fear of receiving coaching or feedback from another and fear of discipline.

*Following this rule, Kaiba kidnapped Yuugi and Jonouchi on the 10th of July, 3 days after the Qixi Festival.
Mikoto, Y.I. "Mi-Nee": She somehow made her way to this scene. This is the first physical description that she has, though this should not be taken at face-value. 'To devastate is easier and more spectacular than to create'; The goodness of Man and his choices: Philosophies that are prevalent in the Yu-Gi-Oh! universe, at odds with the Power of Unity.
Heket and the Beginning

Chapter Summary

In this world of travels
Once again my journey break
Pillowed on the grass,
And within a dream
A dream to see, perhaps.

-Abbot Jien (1155-1225)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

"You will keep me here to watch, then?" Mi-Nee sat down in the cushioned chair that Kaiba bade for her to sit in. "You are determined to kill Yuugi-kun and you want company to see it?"

Kaiba shook his head. "No, you fool. There is another Yuugi there." He looked Mi-Nee over and sighed. "You remind me of him, actually."

"Another Yuugi?" The girl scoffed and crossed her legs at her ankles. "All right. Why? Are we both cruel?"

"No. You both understand the pride of winning, the honor of it." Kaiba sat down, having been busy turning on the monitors for the Death-T tower, and waved to one of the servants in the viewing room. A tray of tea, a Twining's red tea, came forward, the scent of oil of bergamot apparent when Mi-Nee raised the cup to her lips and tasted it upon her tongue.

He knew, though, that she was imagining something else; she did not choose to regret things, anything that she did. Unlike him, Mi-Nee chose to be ruthless and cruel when she decided one was worth her time. Then, like the other Yuugi, in a sense.

"Tell me, Kaiba. What do you hope to gain?"

"What do you mean, Mikoto?" Mi-Nee smiled.

"All men want something in the end. You seem to have much hubris, rather than pride. Do you believe you're on par with God, Kaiba?"

Kaiba turned to her. "Aren't I? I run one of the largest companies in the world."

"Not of your own merit, not just yet."

"I'm already famous with games. But you are a goddess, Mikoto?" Kaiba watched her grab a lady finger biscuit and bite it without delicacy. "Your name even says it, and that nickname of yours... 'Mi-nee'? Older sister Mikoto..."

"We are talking about you. Do you think yourself as above Man?"
Kaiba sat back in his chair, back pressed to the cushion. "God is dead, and people, like you and I, killed him."

Mi-Nee nodded. "We did? 'Perhaps, somewhere, some day, at a less miserable time, we may see each other again.'"

"Are you miserable? Do you find me caring? Does God care for people like you or me?" Kaiba looked to the monitors, seeing the group of players approach the entrance to the first game. "Let's watch to see if God cares for Yuugi."

"Death-T 1." The door to the first arena opened with a hiss, and Yuugi slipped his grandfather's desk into his pocket. A voice over a speaker, shrieking of an emergency. He noticed Jonouchi and Honda moving forward, Honda's nephew Jouji grabbing onto his uncle.

"Help me!" a voice came, bouncing off of the walls. It was a voice that had them jump, especially as the speaker came into the light.

"Anzu?!" Anzu came forward, dressed in stylistic combat wear with a gun at her waist, looked just as surprised.

"What are you doing here, guys?"

"What are you doing here, Anzu?" Jonouchi pondered for a moment if this had all been planned. Kaiba had hurt Yuugi's grandfather; had Anzu been chosen specifically to target Yuugi's heart more?

"Today's my first day of work here. I lost my job at the Burger World..." She sighed and mumbled something about sexual harassment in the workplace. "I found a job here as a guide after."

"Why were you shouting, then?" Jonouchi narrowed his eyes at her.

"It's my line," she explained, thinking back to her task. "Then I say: 'This space station is being destroyed by a raid! Brave heroes, you are the only ones who can save us!'"

Honda sighed and looked to the equipment on the walls. "A shooting game, then?"

Anzu smiled and ushered them to the cyber-vests and guns like her own. "Three-against-three," she explained. "You'll aim for the sensor on the opponent's vest, right over the heart. There will be a small shock. Once the entire team is eliminated, it's game over."

Yuugi envied Anzu for a moment. 'Kaiba must have set up traps here.' The feeling of shadows, the same that came before he would fade into darkness at the hands of his other self, licked across his consciousness, but he pushed it away. His friends were all here, and there was no doubt in his mind that Mi-Nee was being shown what was going on, if Kaiba really wanted all of Death-T shown to the audience he'd seen before.

"Who hired that girl?!" Kaiba turned to one of his subordinates. "She's one of their friends."

Mi-Nee sighed. "Do you check your employee records?"

He turned to her and sneered. "Do you?" He shrugged. "No matter. It's not like she can help them. Yuugi and his friends are armed with toys... These opponents that I've set up are armed with lasers that shock with more than a million volts."
“I have a front-row seat to a game of death!”

His companion sipped at her tea rather loudly. He knew that she had the same passion for overpowering others that he did, after suffering, as he had.

“And I get to watch as you snuff someone out?” Mi-Nee bit into another lady finger. “Fun, fun...”

Kaiba turned on the screen that would allow his face to be transmitted to the screens in Death-T 1. “Welcome, Yuugi...”

As he introduced the game and the opponents – a professional team of mercenaries wouldn’t seem to hard for the one who beat him – Mi-Nee nodded her head. The game began and another biscuit disappeared. “Gods watch death games. Do we have the right to make a show of this?”

“Spare me your incessant talk.” Kaiba sat and watched. “They hit a sensor, die of electrocution, and finally leave me be. It's not bad for television. Violence is common these days. We'll cover this up well.” His eyes flitted across the screen, watching as Jonouchi managed to knock out one of the mercenaries by kicking him in the face.

“Avoid death and you'll have a rather healthy conscience, Mister.” Mi-Nee stood up from her seat and walked to stand next to where Kaiba sat. She leaned down and pressed a hand to his shoulder.

“You're too casual with me, Mikoto.”

“You have a stick too far up your ass. I'm too casual with people I know too well.” Mi-Nee squeezed her fingers a bit tighter before relaxing, watching the screen as Yuugi’s group retreated for a moment before seeing Honda come back alone. “They've figured it out, I believe.”

“... I don't expect anything less from my greatest opponent.”

"We cleared the first level!” Jonouchi turned to Yuugi and smiled. "That was just a warmup!"

"But the last game almost killed us!” Yuugi shook his head, recalling how close the laser had come to hitting them all. "Kaiba-kun must have more dangerous games prepared!"

"Yuugi's right!” Honda looked around. "We shouldn't let our guard down."

"Hey!”

The boys turned to Anzu, who was carrying Jouji. "Why do I have to carry this kid?” The four-year-old babbled about dating Anzu and stayed close to her.

"But I don't want to be with Honda!”

Anzu sighed. "Do you think I'll play in the next game? I'm better at puzzles and dances. Not shooters..."

"Whatever's up ahead, we'll beat it!” Jonouchi turned to the group and smiled, confidence brimming in his grin...

Which quickly was wiped off of his face once the Horror Zone, when they were greeted by Kaiba's butler.
"Welcome, everyone." Anzu crinkled her nose, setting Jouji down to let him hold her leg.

"Who are you?" Jouji asked, looking over to the butler.

"You're Kaiba-kun's butler!" Yuugi realized, seeing the familiar, weathered face.

"Honored guests," the butler welcomed, ignoring the child's question. "If you wish to survive this level, you mustn't scream so much past this point..."

"This guy just snuck up behind me," Jonouchi mumbled, laying a hand on his chest.

"I will guide you to the next attraction. Please follow me." The group was led to a strange cart that was attached to a track, much like a mining cart. The seats looked uncomfortable, made of flat wood and metal.

"Everyone, take your seats," he invited. "You're in for quite a ride."

"Where does the ride take us?" Yuugi inquired.

"You'll find out."

As they settled into their seats, Yuugi felt a chill go down his spine. Jouji's voice, the child liking the fact that he got to sit on Anzu's lap, was almost muffled by the sound of his own heartbeat. He felt metal surround his wrists and a container come down over his head.

"What the..?!"

The butler chuckled. "This Game of Death will take you to the Murder Mansion... This ride is our Mini-Game: the Electric Chair Ride of Death!

"Fearsome things will come to make you scream! However, if your voice is detected by the voice sensor on your helmet, you will be jolted with one million volts of electricity. Don't worry, I'll participate in the game, too."

"Jouji," Yuugi heard Anzu say softly. "We have to be very quiet during the game, okay? It's a serious game; if we make any noise, we lose."

"Okay... How do we win?"

"We have to make the butler make a noise, I guess."

Yuugi saw Jouji pout and settle into Anzu's lap, hugging her as much as he could. Anzu's arms were also restrained, just like everyone else's.

"I'm sorry, Anzu. It's my fault you're in this mess..."

Anzu looked over to him. "Yuugi..."

"I'll protect you, Anzu-chan!" Jouji's face set into a stern, determined glare to the butler.

Darkness surrounded them and left them like that for a few minutes. The air was getting colder, gooseflesh forming on their skin.

A mummified figure came down from the ceiling, illuminated by dim lighting. Yuugi jumped and bit his tongue, cursing all the while.
Death-T 2 passed without any casualty to Yuugi's group. The butler and the Chopper Man were not to be missed terribly.

"Boring..." whispered Mi-Nee. She mumbled something about not being able to have fun if the opponents were too suitable.

“Too suitable?”

“A boy that plays shooting games, a boy that can fight, and a girl to calm them with her infinite grace and strength, as a woman can. The only one not suitable is the child, that little boy that came with Honda-kun. Did you plan this?” Mi-Nee sighed. “What is this other Yuugi like, that he's traumatized you so? Is he so special that you created this just to fight him?”

“He talks like you do. He acts like a king among kings, but he throws the crown around, like a paltry gift.” Kaiba grit his teeth. “He knew what loss meant. It's death, to the loser.”

“... It's not your fault, what happened.” Mi-Nee's words were soft, as though they were a prayer.


“That doesn't matter,” Kaiba stared at the screen as the group found themselves in a completely blank room. They examined the scene; walls white and ceiling too high were all that met their eyes. “What matters is that the other Yuugi comes out.”

“Where is he from, do you think?” Mi-Nee leaned against her companion's chair. “I had asked Mutou-san about Yuugi-kun. Yuugi-kun lives with his grandfather; parents are rarely home together. He's fairly isolated, but he is well balanced. Not a disorder of the mind, no. Perhaps the Puzzle about his neck has answers.”

“What do you mean?” Kaiba glared up at Mi-Nee, whose eyes gained a whimsical spark.

“Whereas you stopped believing in magic when your mother died, it's all I've ever known of mine.” She looked to the screen. “The Millennium Puzzle, according to legend, houses the spirit of a king. It was this king whose tomb we found not so long ago. His guardian, the Danava, rests in the Puzzle. Whenever someone threatens the safety or sanctity of the being that solves the Puzzle, the Danava shall come forth to punish those in his way. It is rumored that neither King nor Danava lost at games.”

“... A guardian spirit?”

“Like your Blue-Eyes is to you.” The mention of the dragon made Kaiba shudder. He'd always been obsessed with the creature, since the moment he'd first gazed upon it. Why did he have the need to possess it, he wondered when he was coherent; any other time, he was glad to still be breathing and focused on his work.

“I don't have the patience for faerie tales.”

“You used to.” The door clicked and Mi-Nee stood to open it. Another worker, with water to drink. Yuugi's group was running towards Death-T 3, and Kaiba recalled what Mi-Nee had said.

"Their teamwork has proved unexpectedly useful... It might be necessary to separate them."

"Why do that?" A plastic bottle, cool and smooth, pressed against the side of his face and he took the bottle willingly.
"Their unity is fake, of course. As soon as their situation becomes too dire, they'll betray each other without a second thought. I'll prove that in Death-T 3." Kaiba drank from the water bottle quickly, hardly changing the amount inside. As he monitored the group, he focused on the one currently keeping his attention. The erratic movements, brash actions and attitude were the most interesting so far.

A hand came into his hair, and Kaiba felt the delicate, feminine fingers turn into hard digits that gripped at cigars and machine guns. "You're a hypocrite, you know. What of blood and covenants? Aren't we friends?"

Cigars and machine guns.

"Get off of me, Mi-Nee, or I'll make you."

Mikoto gripped his hair and pulled his head back. Her eyes were wild and fierce, so like a demon's. "You would not be here, powerful and sly, without him. I should hurt you for the cruelty you have there, make you appreciate what you are."

After the horrors of Death-T 2, Yuugi didn't expect for a blank white room to be their next destination. They had checked every crease in the floor and the ceiling was black to them, being so high.

"There is a gap in the wall," he said out loud to his friends. "Ten meters high..."

"Damn it!" Setting Jouji down, Honda punched a wall in frustration.

Yuugi felt his shoulders slump forward. "It's a dead end..."

"Don't give up so easily, Yuugi!" Jonouchi placed a hand on the smaller boy's shoulder and stared down at him, eyes full of confidence. It was a look that Yuugi saw when Jonouchi was at his most serious, like he could see the truth of the world there.

"Okay."

Jonouchi nodded and moved to sit down. "It looks like we'll be here a while."

Everyone followed suit, Anzu moving to have Jouji in her lap. "Jouji's been asleep for a while now..." she said, the preschooler snoring softly.

"He can only take so much excitement." Honda shuddered at his memory from the Death-T 2 Murder Mansion, Jouji having been a pawn in the game against the saw-wielding Chopper Man.

Silence settled and Yuugi found himself looking down at his shadow. For a moment, he saw a small flash of light where his shadow's forehead would be, and he shook his head. His other self couldn't come out now! Even if it was why Kaiba probably set up this game in the first place, he couldn't let his other self out! He was terrifying!

Madness, pain, and death followed his other self, this other Yuugi, and now Yuugi had brought his own friends into the mess.

"I'm sorry..." The words were coming out of his mouth as Yuugi slumped forward, punching the ground. "I'm so sorry. This is all my fault! If it wasn't for me, you wouldn't be in this mess!"

'If I was strong enough to go against my other self...!'
“Say that to my face, Yuugi!” Jonouchi grabbed at Yuugi’s jacket, pulling him close to stare at him at eye-level.

“Jou…”

“Don’t waste your breath, Yuugi…” Jonouchi’s voice was softer now, but it carried a bitterness that rivaled Yuugi’s. “Did you forget why we came with you?! Because we’re a team!”

Honda ushered Jonouchi to let go of Yuugi, reminding the blond that he wasn’t a bully anymore.

“Honda,” Jonouchi uttered, his hands almost shaking as he let go of Yuugi’s jacket, fingers reaching for something to grab and losing sight of it. “We were useless punks back then…”

“Yeah.” Honda closed his eyes and nodded his assent.

"Useless punks with useless parents, in a useless world." Jonouchi turned to his attention back to Yuugi, relaxing his shoulders a bit. "I never liked myself at all until... Until I met you, Yuugi!"

Yuugi let his jaw drop slightly in shock. What about him had made Jonouchi like himself?

"Dumb like a kid, too kind for your own good; at first, those things made me hate you!” There was a conflict in Jonouchi’s eyes, one that Yuugi had never really seen, save in wisps of dreams where he was someone else, dreams of children. "But... it was really myself that I hated."

"I know what you mean...” Honda stepped forward. "I picked fights and fought with all my strength. Every time I beat someone up, I was beating myself." He smiled at Yuugi a bit. "You defended us from Ushio, even if you didn't stand a chance..."

Anzu adjusted Jouji in her arms, then chose to set him down on his back. They had never mentioned Ushio; no one did after the older student had been put into the hospital. She remembered that all three of them had come with wounds the next day to school. Jonouchi was closer to Yuugi than Anzu or Honda, it seemed, and it was the first time Honda had expressed feeling such caring for Yuugi since then.

"Yuugi, a long time ago," Jonouchi began, breaking the tension that filled the white room. He grabbed the Millennium Puzzle with a gentle hand, smiling at the winking gold. "I stole a part of your Puzzle. When I returned it, I thought I might embarrass myself, so it took guts.

"But after that... For the first time, I started to like myself a little bit." He let go of the Puzzle and placed his hands firmly on Yuugi’s shoulders. "The fact that we're a team, that's what I started to like! To not be alone! I could feel another person's pain! You gave me that! Isn't that what being a team, being friends, is all about?!

Yuugi felt something inside him shake at those words, and tears came from his eyes.

'I wished for friends who would never betray me, and whom I'd never betray. Is that everyone's wish, too?'

"I'll never give up on myself or on you." Jonouchi's voice was warm and friendly, something that made the tears stop. Yuugi nodded in response.

Anzu looked to the walls of the room. Blank, telling no story but the one you could tell yourself: the story of your life. Was that what this game was for? To make you hate your life if it was a pitiful one? That would certainly keep one from winning the game, if there was no goal in sight.
She reached into her pocket, feeling for the marker that her supervisor had given her to mark the players during Theme-1. "Guys, come here."

As her friends came close, she told them to put their hands together, like how the baseball and soccer players would before their games. She uncapped the marker, ignoring their questions and continuing to speak. "If we were playing alone, we could only write about ourselves, and we get lonely."

The boys were quiet as the cool Magic Ink came to decorate their hands. A smiley face appeared and Anzu only offered a smile in return. "It's okay. Someday, we'll graduate and move away from each other. We may feel lonely, but these marks will remind us of our friendship. We'll remember this room, always."

"Yeah!" Jonouchi felt a grin spreading on his face to match Anzu's, Yuugi's, and even Honda's small one.

A sound, like that of a hatch, made them look up. A large block was coming down from the ceiling, falling faster and faster.

Kaiba smiled. "How many of you will escape that room alive?"

"How many do you expect to escape?"

"One."

Mi-Nee frowned. "You'd like that, wouldn't you."

The first block was quickly followed by others. Soon they began to pile up, and Yuugi realized that they could climb up to the opening that they had seen before. Jouji was being passed from Honda to Jonouchi and back forth.

Anzu watched some of the blocks fall and noticed a pattern to them. "There's a rhythm to these blocks!" She hummed for a few moments, remembering the steps and tune to an old dance that she had seen her mother do years ago.

She pointed to the next spot, and there the block fell. "It's a dance! A simple dance!"

She pointed to the next spots where the blocks would fall, and soon they were only a few meters away from the exit. Jonouchi put Jouji through first, the four-year-old still asleep. Anzu grabbed the hand that he held out for her and didn't notice that the blocks' rhythm had changed.

Honda let out a yell as he jumped to the side, Yuugi letting out a cry as well as the block fell right behind Honda.

"Are you okay, Honda-kun?!!"

"Yeah... What the fuck..." Honda wiped his forehead and looked to Yuugi who was hanging by his feet. "Let's hurry!"

Time stood still for a moment, Yuugi noticed, as Honda froze. Yuugi saw Honda's clothes pulled a bit tight, trapped between the blocks. They would be too tight to slip out of.

"Give me your hand! Hurry!" Honda's hand came forward and Yuugi was frightened to grab it. What if they didn't have enough time?
"You go ahead, Honda..."

Another block came and Yuugi hurriedly jumped to the right, landing just in front of Honda.

"It's all right!" Understanding was clear in Honda's eyes, and Yuugi was frightened by the determination of it. Stricken, he raised his hand up.

A strong hand wrapped around his forearm. Yuugi realized that his small size was an advantage here but only for him. Honda handed him off to Jonouchi, who ushered Yuugi into the exit.

"This is as far as I go, guys."

Jonouchi looked to Yuugi, who stared at Honda. No, behind him...

"Hon-" His jacket and shirt were trapped between the blocks, leaving them too tight to wiggle out from.

Honda smiled and slipped his hand into his pocket. He gave them a thumbs up.

"Farewell, everyone."

The falling of a block left Yuugi, Jonouchi, Anzu, and Jouji in the dark.

"Honda!"

The Danava saw all and nothing. The King did the same. When Yuugi's rage and fear took hold, however, the pain was also theirs. The King pushed his small amount of shadows forward, the Danava pushing forward to take over Yuugi.

He didn't want the child in pain. He wouldn't have that! Not for the one who freed him and was so compassionate, kind, pure, like a God.

'All I want is to keep you safe, to keep you oblivious to the cruelties of the world for a while longer. Think of me as Mother, child, who only wants your happiness.'

The Danava tried harder to push through that unseen barrier, and he felt his chest burst into pain as he felt the love that should not have been there. Something in his heart was coming back, and he did not want it there.

Chapter End Notes

Jouji - The level of perversion, trickery, and language understanding from the original manga does not exist in a baby, if "baby" means a child under the age of 2.

「」 - Japanese typographic marks used as quotation marks. In the Kamiyonanayo story, they will be used when someone speaks in a language other than Japanese. I will go fix earlier chapters in regards to the use of these 「kagikakko」.

Death-T 2 - I left the Murder Mansion and the Chainsaw Deathmatch out. They weren't that memorable for me. The Chainsaw guy I found lacking... finesse.
Honda not being able to escape from D-T 3 - Honda's clothes are too tightly caught to be physically possible to slip out of. Ripping the clothes would take too long and would be difficult.
The Invitation

Chapter Summary

This world of men
Is a hard place, is it not?
Folk's words
Saying this and that
Spread rumours, causing pain.

- Tsurayuki (872-945)

Chapter Notes

To give a long chapter and to finish up Death-T...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Yuugi's heart was pounding and his eyes burned, his mind cloudy with rage and denial.

"Honda-kun is... Honda-kun is..." His voice, soft, trembled to vocalize what had just happened. One moment Honda had been helping him to the exit; next, a block fell, covering the exit.

"I don't believe it!" Jonouchi punched the block, his fist leaving a pound to resound in the new room that they were in. The announcement of a commercial break was signaled by an unknown speaker; his stomach did a flip. "He wouldn't die so easily."

Anzu turned to Jouji, seeing that he was still asleep. How were they to explain what had just happened to his uncle? As she rubbed his stomach in attempt to distract herself, she noticed that Yuugi was curling in on himself, eyes lost.

She reached to comfort him, but he wasn't responding to her words at all. It looked like he was fighting something.

"Jonouchi, something is wrong with Yuugi!"

Jonouchi's face told her that her judgement was correct.

'Yuugi...' The King sat in Yuugi's Soul Room again. He held one of the pillows from Yuugi's bed against his chest, fury flowering in his chest.

He felt rage towards Kaiba. How could he hurt so easily? He showed no shame in the idea of killing someone that was his own age, an old man, and possibly his own father.

He felt rage towards Honda. Honda, selfless and selfish, was going to die, unable to save himself as he wasn't able to move. He was proud to have knowledge of this young man, but this loss was unforgivable.
He felt rage towards the Danava. Cruel, malicious to all he didn't care about; this demon cared so much for Yuugi that he was trying to take over the body against the boy's will. His love was a dangerous thing, and the King felt that Yuugi wouldn't survive it.

He felt rage towards himself. So much for being a King, he was useless. He had command over the Shadows, but they bore him no power outside of the power that the Danava managed to gather for them both. The Danava slept more often now, to conserve it, but the King was not allowed to explore the Labyrinth nor exercise his power without supervision.

A mother's love, the Danava had told the King when he was still asleep, is as fierce as a lover's, a fire unsubduable. Why, then, were neither lover nor mother able to help their loved one now?

Fear flooded the Soul Room and the King heard the door open.

'Danava,' he said, for the demon was moving the the middle of the Room, moving some of Yuugi's toys and games. 'He's frightened.'

'I know!' It was the first time that there was desperation in the Danava's voice, that the King had heard. The King watched as the flowers that the Danava had in his own Room appeared at his feet. The petals, white and powdery, fell and the center of the flowers swelled. The Danava grabbed at one, his knuckles white as he crushed the capsule. White drops, like tears, oozed from his fingers, mixing with Shadows that came forward from his hand. Sleepiness washed over the Room, and the King felt frightened.

'You put him to sleep?' he asked, mouth opening into a yawn. He stood up, legs a bit shaky. Shadows curled around him loosely, steadying him.

'I must! Now hush,' the Danava hissed. The white tears and Shadows became a silvery mist that covered the floor, wisps of cloud coming up as the King made his way to the Danava. He grabbed the pale arms, ignoring the protests that the action caused.

'Don't...' The Danava was surely going to have bruises from how tightly the King was gripping onto his arms. 'Stop, Danava!'

'He's in pain!'

'You hurt him more!' The mist was rising now. The Danava let out a pained noise and his eyes reflected recognition.

'You hurt him more!' The mist was rising now. The Danava let out a pained noise and his eyes reflected recognition.

“Big brother!” Mokuba Kaiba, in his own cloak that mimicked Western royalty, came in with a look of anguish on his face. “Are you still holding your bet?”

“Bet?” Mi-Nee saw Kaiba stand up, annoyance on his face. “What bet?”

“I bet that I would beat Yuugi on Death-T 4,” Mokuba said, fists tight with rage at his sides. “But you... Big brother, you bet that you'd beat Yuugi on Death-T 5!”

“And?” Kaiba's voice was flippant and Mi-Nee had the urge to go to Mokuba, ignoring any trace of unfitting adult pride that he had. She looked to the screen.

"I know, Mokuba. I bet on my Duel Monsters battle with Yuugi!" Kaiba's voice lost any annoyance, or disinterest, that he had. "I stand by that bet. You can't beat Yuugi... From the start, I was opposed to you being involved at all."
"You secretly challenged Yuugi to a game. I don't know the result, but I can guess..."

Mi-Nee heard Mokuba's voice crack slightly. "I just wanted your approval."

"Get a clue!" Mi-Nee gripped the chair's cushioned back. "In the world of games, there's no room for brotherly affection! Until you know that Mokuba, you'll never be anything more than a loser!"

Mokuba yelled to his subordinates of the readiness of Death-T 4. At the affirmation, he left the room.

"You'd have him suffer like you did? What do you want him to learn, Seto?"

Kaiba turned to her with hard eyes. "What gives you the gall."

Lips came down to his forehead and Kaiba could catch the whisper of a memory, his mother's perfume. It was one of the reasons that he was unnerved by being alone in the room with this woman; something about her was overpowering to him, and it frustrated him to no end.

"What are you doing? Are you blaming yourself for what happened?" Mi-Nee's voice was much like a mother's. He wondered if his suspicions were true.

"I blame myself for nothing."

The girl let out a wry laugh. "Everyone carries the guilt of something like that. Why do you think I carry my acquisition like a badge?"

"You did everything to keep him safe, your little brother that was only a few minutes old when the world started to fall apart around you two. Practically a son to you." "He'll learn better this way."

There was no more talking for a while.

"Something..." The first word to escape Yuugi's lips, and Anzu could hear something shaking there. "Something inside of me... I can't control it."

Was Yuugi afraid that he would go hurt Kaiba after they got out of here? She would understand if he did; they all felt the same way surely. However, that didn't explain the exhaustion that he exuded.

"Yuugi," she urged. "You're just tired from the strain."

He shook his head. "There's something I haven't told you..." His heart was pounding in his chest, fear threatening to make itself apparent on the floor in front of him. "I think, inside me..."

'How the fuck do I explain this?!'

'Be truthful,' he heard, a strong voice that was not the King's in his ears. It wasn't the King's but far more similar to his own in pitch. Was that his other self?

"There's another me... I don't know him at all."

"Another Yuugi?" Jonouchi immediately thought of the night with Shadi and how different Yuugi seemed.

"Ever since I solved the Puzzle," Yuugi explained. "I've occasionally blacked out and I change..." There was disgust in his belly that threatened to come up as bile and half-digested
breakfast, but he kept it at bay. "I was so scared... But we had just become friends and I thought you
would leave if you found out about this other me. I was so scared!"

Jonouchi looked to his friend, small and meek. His shoulders were shaking and it seemed as though
the world was on his shoulders. Yuugi did seem different at times, as though another person was
inside of him and would come out in short bursts. What was it like not to be aware of what your
body was doing? Did it give him nightmares? Did he ever find out what happened to whoever he
encountered? The other Yuugi had a murderous feel to him, like Hirutani but more calculating and
patient. He was more like Kaiba in that regard. He was even more like Yuugi in that he had saved
Jonouchi, Anzu, Yuugi's grandfather, and Professor Yoshimori from Shadi's twisted games. Even if
some people had gotten hurt in the process...

'But none of that is Yuugi's fault. Yuugi's my friend and if the other Yuugi is willing to save us again
or not.'

"Yuugi, I swear." Jonouchi placed his hands on Yuugi's shoulders, if just to see them stop their
shaking. "Even if there is another Yuugi inside of you, we'll always be friends."

Anzu nodded. "Of course. Yuugi, don't ever doubt that." She smiled at him and wondered how her
friend could have kept such a big secret that made him doubt so much.

"Anzu... Jonouchi-kun..." Yuugi wiped his eyes. Their words were what he wanted to hear, and he
was almost too willingly believing them.

As they ran towards the next Death-T stage, Jouji still asleep somehow, Yuugi realized why he was
unaafraid to believe them.

They were sincere.

To see a mother cry was most certainly painful, the King deduced. A powerful figure, to care and
protect, falling apart must be a tragic thing to see. Seeing the Danava cry was just strange.

His entire body was as though formless. The flowers were dead around him and the sweetness of the
air disappeared. Only the King was holding him up. His face was hidden, but small, weak tremors
were coursing through his body.

'Danava?'

'I don't want to hurt him. We don't want to do that.'

The King sighed, looking to the dead flowers. 'Neither of us do.'

'He's frightened of us, of me.'

The King felt the Danava's arms come up to hold him. From Yuugi's senses, they heard a roar of
applause.

Yuugi, welcome to Death-T 4! My stage! came Mokuba's voice to their ears, and the Danava moved
in the King's arms for a moment.

'He won't let us help.'

The King sighed and looked back at the memories that Yuugi had gained, the acceptance of his other
self, this Danava.
'He will.'

The Danava looked up and found something confused and unaware in the Danava's eyes, this tiny creature that seemed so oblivious.

'Do you look at Yuugi's memories?'

'Only what I need to protect him... and his friends.' The Danava looked to the room about them, especially to the walls. A sharp, bright blue was coming forward from an almost sickly yellow.

'I'm not afraid... Afraid of my other self anymore...' they heard. Yuugi appeared on his bed, eyes closed and his face in complete peace. The Danava and King looked to one another before the Danava disappeared.

The King noticed a smile, but he didn't know on whose face it was.

The Danava turned to Yuugi's friends and he smiled, assuring them of his coming victory.

Jonouchi was absolutely shocked, whereas Anzu had a blush that was steadily growing on her cheeks.

The Danava stepped forward towards the Battle Box, stepping into the transparent box and seeing his opponent there. Mokuba smirked up at him, eyes filled with an ill-willed fire.

"You're reached Death-T 4! Congrats!"

The Danava scoffed. "You again, and still the same brat as before..."

Green eyes gained more spark at his words. "The Other Yuugi. It's good to see you!" The elementary-school boy pointed over to the right, where an elevator stood. "I'll tell you, the final stage that you've been aiming for, to fight with Seto, is upstairs, via that elevator."

"Are you saying that I have to beat you first to get there?"

Mokuba let out a cruel spiel of laughter. "But that's impossible. You die here, Yuugi! Your friends, too!"

Sure enough when he looked, two men were holding onto Jonouchi and Anzu, seemingly holding something to the back of their heads. The Danava turned to the boy and felt the Shadows rise again, pressing against him, hungry and eager.

"Don't worry about us!" Jonouchi smiled, though his eyes were filled with a certainty that was unrecognizable. "Just kick his ass, Yuugi!"

It was the look of a man willing to die fighting.

And the Danava would hold all honor to it.

Kaiba sighed as the battle between Mokuba and the Other Yuugi progressed. He knew the results before they had even started. With Mokuba making moves without thinking, the match would end quickly and his younger brother would lose.

The Other Yuugi finally made a move, moving his Beeton, a level 2 CapMon, one space forward. Mokuba quickly went forward with his Armorzaurus, killing the Other Yuugi's level 1 Brain.
Armorzaurus went forward again at Mokuba's command, using his Armor Attack to kill the Toppo monster behind the Brain.

Having only three monsters now, the Other Yuugi seemed to be in a bad position. It was only when he commanded his level 1 Mogrin to disappear by digging, the little mole leaving the Armorzaurus to kill Mokuba's Megaton behind him.

"He's a good strategist," Mi-Nee mentioned, watching Mokuba's shocked face and feeling empathy for the boy. "Mokuba's losing himself."

She heard Kaiba's chair creak and turned to see him standing. He pressed a button that signaled his guards.

"Where are you going?"

"He's going to lose. I have to get up to the fifth level."

"Don't you dare leave!" Mi-Nee inhaled sharply after she realized that she had let out that outburst. The door was opening, and the familiar guard Isono was entering the room.

"Seto-sama?" The guard looked to Kaiba, who was now glaring at the older girl.

"Get my briefcase, Isono."

"Yes, sir." As Isono moved to his task, Kaiba came close to Mi-Nee and glowered down to the shorter woman.

"Are you giving me orders, Mikoto?"

Mi-Nee maintained eye contact, unshaken. "He's your brother. You've raised him for years. What's different now?"

"People grow up. People have to adapt to living and suffering. They have to find meaning in all of that!" Kaiba turned to Isono as the man handed him the briefcase. "Everything I've done has been for Mokuba's sake, and you're telling me that I am wrong for that?!"

"'To live is to suffer, to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering.'" Mi-Nee quoted the words that Kaiba was so familiar with. "But have you noticed that you are making Mokuba suffer, especially when he doesn't have to?"

A laugh answered her, Mi-Nee holding back the urge to punch the younger boy. "Just like how your brothers suffer? They have an overbearing sister that hardly lets them breathe, and she runs away when all options don't suit her needs! You leave them with everything and give them nothing. I ask Mokuba for nothing except the confidence in my abilities and to stay back. If he wants to get hurt, I will let him because he will learn best from it... Better than having him stare after me like a lost dog."

"The winner is Mutou Yuugi!"

Both teenagers looked to the screen, the final scene of Bigfoot splitting in two replaying.

Kaiba, silent, walked over to the screens and turned on the camera.

"I'm sick of waiting, Yuugi! --"

"-- And I'm bored with these sideshows! Take that elevator to the final stage!"
The Danava glared up at the screen. Kaiba seemed to be infuriated with something. With what, it didn't seem to matter; those eyes were glaring down at him.

"Yes, I'm on my way! Wait for me, Kaiba!"

The Danava kept his eyes on the screen, watching another advertisement for something-or-other flash on. He began to turn towards the elevator to Death T-5, but he stopped when hearing a scream of terror and noticing a horrified expression on Mokuba's face.

Smoke was filling the hologram box and he could see the images of scales and claws.

'Kaiba's giving his own brother a penalty game?!

He didn't hesitate in running back.

"Mokuba!"

The Danava threw open the door and reached inside; if Mokuba was surrounded by holograms, he might not be visible at all. He called out to the boy, asking for his hand. When a small hand eagerly wrapped around his, he quickly pulled Mokuba out.

The boy was unsteady for a few moments. Able to stand again, he pulled his hand away from the Danava roughly, burnt by the touch.

"Why? Why did you...?"

'Show kindness? Mercy?' The Danava scanned the boy's face, wondering if these questions were sincere. Tears welling up in Mokuba's eyes proved true, as the boy's pride would normally prevent such an image. He offered a small smile.

"Mokuba, I was able to beat you because my friends helped me, in their own way."

Mokuba stared at him, surprise on his face. The boy grabbed his own head and shook it. "Friends... but... Seto... Damn it!"

The Danava turned and walked to the elevator.

'Child, life is suffering with meaning, but you're far too young to know that now.'

As the door to the elevator closed, he made a quick pass with his hand over his stomach, trying to ignore the pain that seeing Mokuba be frightened had caused.

There was a girl in the elevator, one that Yuugi had met a month or so back. She nodded to him, wishing him luck for his final game.

In the elevator to the final stage, the Danava sighed. Leaning against the wall, he shyly did something that he had longed to do. He reached out to Yuugi's emotions, trying to feel his consciousness.

A feeling of curiosity, worry, and wakefulness answered him. It was a pleasant thing, Yuugi's soul, when felt against his consciousness. The connection made at Yuugi's bravery, to brave him, was still too weak for communication, but it was there, real, and he let the memories of his game with Mokuba be sent to Yuugi.

After a moment, a small sense of happiness for his kindness and hope. Hope for their victory, and for
"You are a very interesting creature, Other Yuugi."

The Danava turned to her. "Mi-Nee-san?"

She gave him a coy smile. "Seto-kun says that we are alike. He says we know the value of winning, but I see something else. You are protecting Yuugi-kun, as the Danava does, like he has tried to protect Mokuba and I, my brothers, older and younger."

"How do you know of me, and what is your intention of telling me this?" The Danava stood up straight as Mi-Nee walked closer to him, resting a hand on his cheek, another on the Millennium Puzzle that hung around Yuugi's neck. Her lips were cold against Yuugi's mouth, pressing a kiss that the Danava smartly left out of his communications to Yuugi.

There, in his lower belly, a fire burned. It led to no physical reaction, but it burned pleasantly, and the Danava thought of how he wanted to do something to the girl in front of him, something intimate and sweet, to have a memory just of her... to immortalize this moment.

"Gods are taught to learn of each other early. Why shouldn't I tell you this, sweet and cursed Danava?" Mi-Nee pressed another kiss to the questioning mouth. When she pulled away, the Danava looked up slightly, meeting her eyes. Her eyes were fierce, piercing, and ever alert for something that the Danava could reveal. "What makes you think that you can be above us and expect us to give you our everything?"

"Who are you?"

The elevator chimed. The sound of the announcer finishing the final commercial was audible and almost deafening as Mi-Nee thought of how to word her answer.

"I'm the one you should love the most, Danava. My intention, you asked? You have had to change to care for Yuugi-kun, yes? Seto-kun needs to change now. If not, the cruelty that rages in his soul may consume him and his only family left."

The Danava nodded. "He has so much potential, but I cannot forgive him... If I can give the opportunity-"

"I beg you. Save him."

Their eyes met a final time, the elevator door signaling that it would open, and the two gods moving away from each other.

"Shit."

Anzu looked over to Jonouchi, who put away the wireless phone that he had taken from one of the guards that were restraining them.

"What's going on?"

"I called Hanasaki, asked him to go to the hospital to stay with Yuugi's grandfather." Jonouchi grunted as the guard behind him pushed him forward, making him stumble.

"My phone?"

Jonouchi frowned, but he returned the device. Turning back to Anzu, he replied, "The doctors sound
desperate. He's been in surgery since they got him there... Honda isn't answering his cell phone either."

Anzu shifted Jouji in her arms, flinching a bit as the boy's uncle was mentioned.

"We can't do anything right now, right?" Jonouchi surprised her with a determined and stern face.
"We have to watch the last fight that Yuugi has."

"Welcome to the final stage, Yuugi-kun!"

"Kaiba!"

There was energy in the air as both boys sat down. They switched decks to cut and shuffle them.

"Duel Monsters. 2000 lifepoints each. Penalty Game to the loser," Kaiba affirmed, letting the Danava have the first turn.

The first battle between the Guardian Dinosaur and Cyclops was bright, fiery, exhilarating, and both Duelists were left with their strategies whet for more.

"I will let you have the first battle," Kaiba conceited, losing a monster in the second battle to the Dinosaur's skill of "Aviation" and setting a monster in defense mode.

The Danava looked down at the monster, a dark clown by the name of Sagi. It made a sound of what the Danava understood as respect. Kaiba had learned from the Penalty Game, but he had most likely taken what he wanted or had expected to learn from it.

'I don't care about that right now...' the Danava thought.

During Kaiba's next turn, the Clown's attack points tripled by use of the magic "Dark Energy," its "Dark Glide" hitting the Dinosaur and reducing the Danava's lifepoints by 400.

'It will not be raw strength at all like before. It shall be every thought of strategy with magic and monsters. He has learned the whole of Duel Monsters!' As he drew his next card, the Danava was surprised to see a limb of a monster. Weak at only 200 attack points, he kept it in his hand.

"I set a monster in defense mode."

Sagi destroyed monster after monster, Kaiba smiling all the while, until a knight appeared.

"I play the Dark Knight Gaia!" The Danava's knight came forward with its lance, piercing into the Clown and sending him to the Graveyard. The crowd watching them was getting excited.

"Don't give yourself airs, Yuugi! The ends have had their means decided!" Kaiba scoffed and reached for his deck.

Light seemed to flow into his fingers, and he knew what card was beneath his skin.

"I drew the Blue Eyes White Dragon!"

The dragon was intimidating, and its eyes held a glowing fire that spoke of protection, jealousy, and a desire to serve. The Danava sat still, horrified by the beauty of the creature. He and his Knight made no sound as the dragon attacked, leaving the Danava with no defense and with only a question that he had never felt desperate enough to ask.
'Grandfather Sugoroku... What should I do?'

Having one monster to defend him could only do little, as it would be immediately destroyed by the White Dragon's light. His saving grace was the magic of the Swords of Light.

"That shall hold your Dragons for three turns, Kaiba."

Yuugi yawned softly, doing his best to stay awake and receive the memories that his Other Self was passing along to him.

'Are you all right?' The King had a hand placed on Yuugi's forearm and was looking down at the boy lying down, with some concern.

'Yes. I'm just trying to think of something that could help my Other Self.'

He thought of when he would be stuck on something, like a game or homework. His grandfather would always encourage him.

'It's not like you to give up,' he'd say. He could feel his grandfather telling him this even now.

'I don't know what to do,' he answered aloud. Yuugi looked up to the King, who had a thoughtful look on his face, index finger of his free hand under his lower lip and rubbing the flesh there in a sideways motion.

'Let me try something, Yuugi.'

A flood of electricity - or something close to it, as it didn't hurt at all! - went into Yuugi's body, and he was surrounded by a darkness that was rather welcoming. There was no King, and he was not in his Soul Room either.

It was a blank, empty space, with unlimited potential.

'Yuugi?' he heard a voice call. He turned and saw his grandfather.

'Grandpa! How..?'

'I could hear your heart, Yuugi.' Sugoroku smiled warmly at his grandson, placing a hand on his shoulder. 'A long time ago, when you last felt lost, what did you do?'

Yuugi thought back. A few months ago... 'I completed the Millennium Puzzle!'

'Yes. You put the pieces together one by one, never stopping until it was complete. All the pieces - puzzles or cards - have a meaning in that unity.'

Sugoroku began to fade into the darkness, but the brightness of his soul did not leave Yuugi's side.

As Yuugi came back to himself, lying on the bed of his Soul Room and the King providing solace, he sent that thought to his Other Self.

'Pieces of the puzzle...'

The Danava felt the heart in the chest he was borrowing skip a beat.

'Exodia?' He looked down to Sugoroku's deck. 'Inside this deck is Exodia?!' The cards in his hand...
He had three pieces of the Sealed One already!

"Draw your next card, Yuugi! You've had enough time to snivel about for your life!"

"I'll draw!" The Danava reached for the deck and was rewarded with another piece. He noticed Kaiba scrutinizing him, before turning to his deck and bringing the Judge Man to destroy the Beaver Warrior Louise that protected the Danava's Life Points.

"Two turns left!"

The Danava frowned slightly, reaching to the deck and feeling a familiar presence. 'A magic-bearer, surely, but why do we know it?'

"I summon the Black Magician to attack the Judge Man!"

Kaiba scoffed. "You and your useless struggling..."

"Until the very end, I won't give up! I know there's a way to beat you, no matter how grim it looks!" The Danava could feel the heart in his borrowed chest beat faster. It was exhilarating! He had only felt this way since waking from the Puzzle - the first time that he had dueled Kaiba.

But it reminded him...

"I will not stop until I beat you! No matter what!"

Kaiba's laugh deterred him from thinking further into the thought, as the third - and final - Blue Eyes was summoned, destroying the Black Magician with its ruinous Burst Stream. "Draw your final card, Other Yuugi! No matter what you choose, you're still going to die!"

"You, who has nothing but the clothes on his back, think you can beat me! You are hitting the walls of your own coffin in a useless struggle!"

'If this is the Phantom God Exodia,' he thought, 'there is only one card left to draw.'

The Danava looked down at the four pieces of the Sealed One in his hand, and then he turned to the deck of Sugoroku in front of him. His heart was beating fast, and his blood was creating an ocean in his ears. 'It would take a miracle... 0.038... The odds are too great against me, almost nil!'

"Hurry and draw! Other Yuugi!"

His hand was an extension that he didn't understand. Why was he here and what was the purpose of being saved by Hari himself? Why was his hand not reaching the- The deck was pulling away? Why was his chest hurting? It was a feeling that he could not enjoy at all... He felt like something wanted to burst out of him, a fire that wanted to consume everything out of a need to stop the aching hole in his chest. It was one of the feelings that he did not understand, like the light from Yuugi, or the Sun from the King... Even the warmth that Sugoroku made him feel, or the fire that Mi-Nee had created.

He understood nothing. The Danava looked up to Kaiba one more time, seeing the Dragons that bared their teeth to him. A memory waved across his mind, bringing understanding to him.

'I'm scared... to draw the card. I am scared, of the darkness.' The Faceless One, the one long since silent, whispered to the Danava again. 'We are frightened. We know of a fate worse than death, and we are frightened of it, the Madness.'

No, the Danava understood nothing but this fear. He did not know what to make of the other
feelings...

But he understood that Yuugi's presence was a soothing one, and it made him feel calm. The King's presence, gently curling against the forefront of his mind, was quieting. The voices of Yuugi's friends, Jonouchi-kun, Honda-kun and Anzu, were welcome to him. Despite their lack of comprehension, they were trusting him.

His fear ebbed away, and the Danava smiled. He opened his eyes slightly, and he saw Yuugi's friends there, visions in the darkness.

'This is Master Yuugi's light?' The visions were stable, holding the deck closer to him. 'They are with us.'

"Is that a desperate, hopeless smile?" Kaiba asked. It was familiar, perhaps one he'd seen in a mirror at some point.

"You're wrong, Kaiba." The Danava showed the face of the card that he drew, along with the other four. "I drew Exodia, the Sealed One!"

Hellfire filled the Hologram Box as Exodia unleashed his fury on the Dragons, and on Kaiba.

"M-My Blue Eyes..." Kaiba's eyes saw nothing save for the disappearance of his creatures, his most faithful beings. The Danava could feel the pain in the three hearts at the anguish of their master, but they understood the reason for such a punishment that was soon to arise.

"And to the loser, a Penalty Game! This is for your atonement, Kaiba!"

Kaiba looked to him, face aghast. How the Danava felt anger and sadness at once - finally, the feelings had names - as he understood what he was doing to the young man in front of him. Trapping him in the darkness, left to build himself from basic parts. The darkness quickly broke Kaiba down to pieces, memories and emotions. However, the emotions soon faded into a haze that seemed all but nonexistent.

'Much like us,' the Faceless One said. It probably did not help that the last Penalty Game seemed to have brought up monsters from Kaiba's heart that had festered as long as they had been hidden. The stare that faced them, the stare that Kaiba had as the expression on his face... It was almost dead.

The chair squeaked as he pushed it backward, standing up and leaving the Hologram Box. The Danava's ears were bombarded with noise, the audience alive with cheers, jeers, and the sounds of excitement. He smiled as he caught sight of Yuugi's friends.

"Good job, Yuugi!" Jonouchi cheered, patting his friend on the back. Anzu set the wakeful Jouji on the ground, letting him hold onto her leg as she congratulated him as well.

"Yuugi!"

The Danava turned and felt the three souls in the body he occupied soar.

"Honda-kun!" He was alive! Without his jacket, but there was no scratch on him.

Turning to Yuugi's friends, the Danava thanked them sincerely. "You all really saved me back there."

Jonouchi nodded and turned to Honda, who was asking about the other two games. Anzu called
over to somebody over the Danava's shoulder.

"Mokuba-kun!"

The Danava turned and saw Mokuba and Mi-Nee standing together, the girl having a hand on the younger Kaiba's shoulder.

"Can you tell us..." Anzu lowered her head slightly, to make eye contact with the boy. "Why did Kaiba-kun want this revenge so badly?"

Mokuba turned away from Anzu, eyes burning green. Mi-Nee looked up to Anzu and sighed.

"I think it would help, Mokuba."

"You think so, Nee-san?" The boy looked to the Danava as well. There was an unseen longing there, the Danava knew, over something from the past, something that he now understood.

"It all started the day he played chess..."

Jonouchi bit his tongue as Mokuba told their story.

It was the story of two boys. No mother because of birth, and no father because of a sad accident. They had been shown the cruelty of the world too early, the greed of adults proving too much for the inheritance that their parents had ascertained for them.

One became a father too early, looking after the smaller one like a son.

"Don't cry," the older one said. "I will make sure that we've a good life someday!

"But don't let your guard down. It's over if you show any weakness!"

The sanctuary, an orphanage, was fine to live in. The older one taught the younger how to play games, chess being the favorite. A fun game where conquering was gone once the game was over.

One day, a man came for a child. He found the older to be like a prime meat. Mind as sharp as a needle, face that was clear, and a heart that was tenacious and fierce; all necessary things for the child of Kaiba Gozoburo.

No, Kaiba Gozoburo could not even hope to stand against Seto, even without his cheating. Any adult knowledgeable of the child's intentions would not have agreed to playing a game left unfinished, especially with key pawns missing.

"Mokuba, this man is a champion at chess, and I beat him! This is the life that we've wanted!"

But it was not so. Class upon class, beating upon beating, and endless humiliation were what Seto had obtained. The lack of sleep meant nothing if Mokuba was fed well and lived with all of his creature comforts. His bruises could be hidden away from the world, like how his emotions were being hidden away as well...

But he became cold... and dangerous...

Gozoburo could not tame the beast that Seto had become; he only lived to infuriate it. The jump out of his office window was a prize worthy of any Kaiba!

And the heart was a worthy sacrifice?
Jonouchi felt his heart being squeezed. He felt sympathy for Mokuba and Kaiba both, but there was no excuse for their cruelty... Other than a love that grew up twisted.

"Mokuba," he could hear the Other Yuugi say. "Right now, Kaiba is somewhere in the dark, gathering the pieces of his heart."

'What on- Oh, God.'

They hadn't noticed Kaiba's stare. Was it shock? A way of trying to process all that occurred? Or it was something else...

"Piece by piece, he'll put his heart back together again. He'll have to rely on himself to do it right." The Other Yuugi sounded hopeful, like Kaiba being in an unconscious state was a good thing!

"O- Yuugi..." he heard Mokuba say, and he wondered when on Earth Mokuba could have met this guy if he and Anzu had just been told about him. "He'll come back right?"

"Yeah, someday, when he's solved the puzzle... He'll return to you..."

Mi-Nee seemed complacent, and Jonouchi felt like she was the only one that could have stood up to this Other Yuugi, who seemed predatory with his blood red eyes, and the air about him was stagnant, long since alive with any hint of great kindness. When she stepped forward, Jonouchi wondered what she would say.

"Mokuba, let's bring Seto-kun home, okay?" The boy nodded and walked towards the Hologram Box.

Mi-Nee turned to the Other Yuugi. "That is a promise, right?"

"Yes."

Jonouchi found themselves escorted outside soon after.

Yuugi was walking with his friends towards the hospital to visit his grandfather, smiles on their faces. Everyone was safe and talking about how great they felt after finally winning, escaping with their lives. The King kept a close watch over Yuugi's consciousness, trying to keep the boy calm and contained with his presence.

And the Danava felt happy, that everyone felt happy. It was stirring up a memory inside of his heart. "When you are happy, bad things happen."

And now he did not feel so happy.

'Will you invite me in?' he heard. A voice that was strange and frightening and everything hurt- He wouldn't know what drove him to invite the voice in. The Faceless One that only wanted to hurt, he was letting in.

And for a moment, the Danava felt that he had been played, a legerdemain to the Faceless One. He was not lonely.

Chapter End Notes
Mi-Nee - She often dons disguises. Essentially, the descriptions given of her are not accurate to her appearance save for height, facial structure, etc. I might draw her significant outfits and coiffures at some point.

Friedrich Nietzsche is the author of the book that Kaiba is shown reading in the first episode of the NAS anime.

There is a reference here that few will get, but it fit so well.

0.038 - The actual chances of drawing the last card of Exodia; I did the math.

Hari - One of the names of Vishnu and Krishna, this Sanskrit word means "golden" or "light." In Malay and Indonesian, it means "day," while in Tagalog, it means "king."

The Faceless One - I didn't expect him to be back.
Tempation of the White Snake

Chapter Summary

At a loss,
To times gone past
My thoughts return;
Gloomily on blossoms have I thought,
This spring gone by

- Princess Shikishi (Shokushi) (d. 1201)

Chapter Notes

This chapter is inspired by chapters 41 and 5. An Anzu-centric chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"All right. I'll go home then. Rest up."

Sugoroku nodded and waved a bit at the one leaving.

Sugoroku thanked Hanasaki for staying with him in his hospital room, waiting for Yuugi to arrive. His surgery had been a success. Somehow...

He felt under over his heart and he felt the pacemaker there. The blood pressure cuff began to squeeze his arm, causing a slight pain that annoyed him.

"Mutou-san." Hanasaki smiled, having been looking towards the doorway. "Yuugi-kun is here."

When he saw his grandson, his heart wept.

"Yuugi, you're not hurt?"

Yuugi pressed himself into his grandfather's arm, gingerly as to not harm any of the work that the doctors had done to save his grandfather. He shook his head, and Sugoroku could feel tears soaking into his hospital gown. Anzu, Jonouchi, and Honda were smiling, happy at the sight in front of them. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the Millennium Puzzle on the bed sheets.

'Thank you for helping him.'

"Yuugi, why don't you tell me everything?"

The night that Yuugi went back home after visiting his grandfather in the hospital, he found someone waiting for him when he arrived. Sounds of cooking food and clinking dishes greeted him at the doorway.
"Hello?" he called out, closing the shop door behind him.

"Yuugi?"

The teenager hurried to the kitchen at the voice. When he entered the doorway, Yuugi smiled.

"Mom!"

Karuta set down her utensils and rushed toward her son, embracing him. She pressed kisses to his cheek, which she hadn't done in the three months that she'd been gone.

"How have you been, Yuugi? How's your schoolwork?"

Yuugi smiled. "It's been okay. My grades are... okay."

Karuta frowned at her son. "Are they? Well, you can bring me your next tests before your summer vacation and we can see about that." Her smile returned, however. "I'm sorry that I didn't come back in time for your birthday. Your father wrote you a letter. He also got a new game for you, though I told him you might have it already."

Yuugi followed his mother to the table, where Karuta had laid out several dishes and set up two places to eat.

"Mom? Did you... see me on the television at all?"

"I did," Karuta answered. Sitting at her place, she let out a thick sigh. "I arrived this morning, and I was certainly surprised that you and your grandfather were not here. Imagine my surprise when I go to get some shallots from the store and I see you in that..." Karuta shook her head.

"Mom..."

"What happened? You were shooting laser guns, and those blocks and chainsaw games? Why did you participate in this Death T?!"

Yuugi looked down at his plate. Shallots were staring up at him, the smell churning his stomach. It'd been years since he ate the shallots his mother made him, but she never seemed to pick up on that fact.

"Yuugi!"

"Did you know Grandpa was in the hospital? Did you visit him"

Karuta was silent.

"I was forced to join those games. He would have been hurt even more if I didn't join!"

"... I did visit him. He told me to come back home to rest."

The shallots were bitter.

They were devoured anyway.

As the next day arrived, Yuugi and Karuta kept out of each other's path. Breakfast had been silent, and the air was thicker now that summer finally began to set itself in.
The house phone rang and Karuta went to answer it.

Yuugi frowned down at his rice omelette. 'I hope Grandpa's okay...'

A comforting feeling washed over him, and he smiled. He didn't know if it was the King or his Other Self, but he appreciated the actions all the same. He tried to send gratitude back, only to receive more waves of comfort and even happiness.

"Yuugi," Karuta said as she returned to the kitchen, smiling. "Your grandfather can come home today."

"Really?!" Yuugi felt his heart pound. The entire night, he'd been worried, especially when the doctor said that they would keep Sugoroku overnight. "Can I go with you to bring him back home?"

"I was thinking that I pick him up while you're at school - Don't give me that face! - and we'll all go out together when you come home from school." Karuta gave a weak smile. "We can have a treat today - we can have some homemade hamburgers today. Besides, I'd rather know what your grandfather's eating. Heaven knows what he's been eating and that hospital food can't be helping too much..."

Yuugi nodded, reaching for the ketchup bottle on the middle of the table. He made a scribble on his omelette.

Karuta sat down, looking at Yuugi's plate and smiling. "Were you going to write a message on it? Would it be to Mazaki-san, per chance?"

Yuugi blushed.

"You still have some time before you need to leave for school. Eat your breakfast and you can relax upstairs for a while," he heard his mother say, positive that her smile was mischievous and playful, but still kind. That was certainly something that never changed.

'Knock already.'

It had been long enough that her arm was hurting, with the way she had held up her hand. All she had to do was let it fall forward - fast enough, to make noise - and then she would be knocking. There was nothing wrong with doing so, and it was a school day anyway. It would be nice to walk to school together, as they haven't done such a thing in quite a while.

Anzu let her hand fall forward, knuckles not making a sound near the volume that she needed for Yuugi to hear her.

'This is the same Yuugi that I've known since elementary school. Why can't... I..?'

She knew.

The Yuugi that she saw everyday, she knew, wasn't the one that she wanted to see. She wanted to meet the one from yesterday - his other self - and actually talk to him. He stood taller, somehow, and was cocky, a trait that she found appealing... even when it was on Yuugi's face.

'It's the same person, Anzu. He's just... changing, just like you are. We're at the age...'

His voice was different from Yuugi's, his face even. It had to be that person... The one that had saved her from that convict at the burger restaurant. She found herself wanting it to be the other
'But they're the same! If that's the person that Yuugi is becoming, then I want to be with him... in that way...'

It seemed horrible, to think of her friend in a... more romantic light because he was maturing, but Anzu had heard of that before, friends becoming closer because time had helped them along, maturing into the person that would be suitable for a romantic relationship. Anzu certainly couldn't see herself as having a boyfriend if she still had her personality from elementary school, or even middle school, running around to dance recitals, picking fights with boys, and generally causing trouble just to blame on boys.

But Yuugi was always the same, though; always kind, patient, and forgiving.

If he was changing, for the better, it seemed, she would have to keep changing, too.

'Okay... let's do this again.'

She knocked harder this time.

Steps came close to the door and soon it opened.

"Anzu-chan? How nice to see you!"

"Good morning, Mrs. Mutou. Is Yuugi home? I wanted to see if he wanted to walk to school with me today?"

The walk to school began very quietly, Anzu looking over to Yuugi. She could see a slight blush over his cheeks.

'He's nervous...'

"Ah man, today's depressing," she griped. "The aptitude test scores come out today!"

"Oh yeah!" Yuugi's face broke out into a grin. "Jonouchi-kun, Honda-kun and I promised to play a game with the scores! The loser buys burgers!"

Anzu giggled. "A game, huh."

Her smile stayed on her face. It wouldn't do for Yuugi not to be preoccupied with games.

"Oh, yeah!" She reached into one of her skirt pockets. "Yuugi, do you know what this is?"

In her hand, she held a pink plastic heart, a small screen and two buttons visible on one face. "It's 'Lovely Mate,' a compatibility tester!"

Yuugi took the heart and looked flustered, mumbling about how girly it was.

"You put in your name, your birth date, and your blood type. Somehow it uses all of that to make a personalized signal. If two Lovely Mates with matching signals get close together, they'll beep when you put the buttons once.

"You can keep that one if you want."

"Me?!” Yuugi's blush came back full force and Anzu smiled.
"Input your information, Yuugi!"

For a few moments, the two were preoccupied with putting in Yuugi's information. After that, Anzu smirked.

"Ready to test our compatibility, Yuugi?"

"Y-Yeah..."

Yuugi pushed the buttons on the Lovely Mate, but Anzu's made no noise at all.

The air smelled awful - stagnant and cold - for just a moment before Anzu smiled. "Your biorhythm may have affected it. It'll beep next time for sure."

'Maybe... Maybe if he comes out...'

When a teacher took Yuugi's Lovely Mate, Anzu watched as Yuugi actively searched for the device, even after she was called away to help with class activities.

She couldn't believe that Mr. Tsuruoka had taken it and insulted her friends, calling them 'worthless' for playing a game with the test scores. Even going so far as to threaten them with being expelled from the school; that man was despicable!

Perhaps, as adults, she would be like that, looking down on younger people. Maybe the world would be too fast; but she was a dancer and she would be able to outrun age, surely.

She just hoped that she would be strong enough on her own two feet, like the Other Yuugi was...

Fifty minutes later, with about five minutes left, she met up with him.

'He's still looking for it... The second keychain...'

Anzu, recalling her thoughts, almost slapped herself in the hallway, and she quickly gave her keychain, her own Lovely Mate, to the Other Yuugi, offering it.

"Anzu, I can find it with this!" There it was, there was the cockiness that attracted her, that made her heart feel so heavy and sweet in her chest. This person was strong but so kind, all the same.

The Other Yuugi pulled her along, mentioning that humans naturally hide things within reach. It certainly made sense.

Entering the teacher's lounge, Anzu spotted Mr. Tsuruoka, whose eyes became fierce.

"Your search game stays out of here!"

"Your words confirm my suspicions!" The Other Yuugi explained his reasoning, where students could go and couldn't go while the hiding place of the Lovely Mate was still within the school.
"Keeping it on your person would be the safest bet!"

"You can't touch a teacher. You'll have to prove it without!" Mr. Tsuruoka's face looked ugly and cruel, practically enjoying the fact that Yuugi couldn't do anything to him directly.

The Other Yuugi looked to her for a moment. Anzu's heart began to pound in her chest, and something sweet told her to close her eyes.
'Please,' she wished to anything that would listen. 'Ring out. Let those feelings match up... I want to hear it.'

Something, or maybe someone, seemed to answer her.

The beeping was loud and clear - with the Lovely Mate hidden inside of Mr. Tsuruoka's wig, weirdly enough - and it was a dear sound of validation for her heart, that it was looking at the Yuugi that she truly liked, even if she didn't know all of him yet.

A few days later, some of the rumours that she had heard earlier, before Death-T, made their way to her ears. Was it dangerous or not? She couldn't decide, but it intrigued her. Maybe she could learn more about him...

"Did you hear about Kokurano-kun from the A class?"

Yuugi didn't change then, but the boy that she'd known was curious. He listened as she explained to him about Kokurano's reputation and his flawless streak of accurate predictions.

She smiled as his cheeks turned a light pink at her mention of the girls asking for their fortunes in romance, school, and other things.

"Let's get our fortunes told!" Jonouchi proposed excitedly.

"We can during lunch, if you want. It sounds like all the girls will be there though." Yuugi smiled and looked to Anzu. "What do you want to ask about, Anzu?"

She only smiled back. "It's a secret."

They were not able to make it that day nor the days that followed later in the week. The next week, before their summer vacation, they managed to get in to see Kokurano. The room was filled with girls who were filling the room with excited whispers and pleas. At the signal of a girl who was adorned with a headband, the room fell silent.

Kokurano reached out to gently caress his first visitor's hand, stating aloud for newcomers that it allowed him into the person's fate. After telling her of the long life she would live, the room broke into applause.

"Who's next?"

"Heh. Anzu, why don't you go first? Get your fortune told!" Jonouchi smiled over to her teasingly.

"Hey, you..."

Kokurano's voice was dark and deep, like that of one who had seen many things. He probably had with all of the things that he had predicted.

'Like the house of the boy from the A Class...'

"I am no ordinary 'fortune-teller'! You must be thinking of typical methods. Palm-reading, study of patterns, Chinese and Western astrology, Feng Shui; these are based on the study of past statistics.

"I see clear and true visions of the future itself!"

Suddenly, the room shook and the familiar feeling of an earthquake sent a tremor through Anzu's heart. Was it answering to Kokurano, or was it something natural? Only one possibility was slightly
more frightening than the other.

When the tremor passed, Kokurano continued. "The words themselves can't convey the entirety of
the truth. I write my visions that will affect many on pieces of paper. Read this aloud for me, if you
will."

Jonouchi reached out and took the slip of paper. His face grew pale for a moment.

"Today, an earthquake will come'..."

The room erupted in clapping and standing awe.

"I guess I'll give it a try..." Anzu murmured. Kokurano, surprisingly, invited her forward, taking her
hand gently in his. He took a bit longer than before, but the girl had mentioned earlier that she had
come to visit Kokurano before.

"Soon!" Kokurano stated, with a passion that Anzu could feel the hand on hers shake. "The man
who has watched over you will reveal himself to you!"

'... Could it be him? The Other Yuugi!'

Jonouchi came forward as well, eyes alive with fire. "Koku-"

"You got into a fight recently; take care of the approaching darkness."

"..."

Kokurano looked to Yuugi, who was staring at the scene with scrutiny. "Would you like to
approach?"

Yuugi looked down for a moment before looking up to Kokurano, a certainty in his eyes. "You
might have psychic powers... I-i think this is a scam, but I guess I'm just skeptical."

"What?!"

"You doubt Kokurano-sama's powers?!"

"You just saw him predict the earthquake!"

Kokurano stood up, the chair upon which he was sitting squeaking along the floor. "Are you saying
that I'm lying?"

"I've seen similar tricks before. You said that you write your predictions down; you could just write a
lot of them for anybody and pull out the right one when it'd be right."

Anzu felt somewhat surprised by Yuugi's boldness, and it made her feel protected all the same.

"Kokurano-sama!" The girl with the headband caught everyone's attention to Kokurano again, the
boy's eyes rolling up and back, revealing the whites about them. He let out a noise that sounded
terrible and deep before reaching out and pointing an accusatory finger at Yuugi.

"I see it, your future! Countless words from the Heavens will fall upon you! Calamity and
destruction shall follow them!"

During their afternoon break, Yuugi was caressing the Millennium Puzzle, lost in thought. He didn't
seem to pay attention to Jonouchi trying to cheer him up.
Anzu found herself mentioning the event that made Kokurano famous in the first place.

"One of the students from Class A... His house burned down three days after Kokurano had predicted it! He's safe, but he's in the hospital now."

"I still don't believe in the predictions."

"Just be careful. Okay, Yuugi?" Anzu smiled down at him and felt her face get a bit warm at the smile he returned. "I don't have work this afternoon. We can hang out if you want."

"Sure!"

"I'll wait for you here in the classroom."

After school, Anzu stood by the front of the classroom. It was passing ten minutes that she had waited already. A sound at the door alerted her to someone entering.

"Mazaki-san, are you waiting for somebody?"

"Kokurano-kun... I am."

"I have another prediction for you. The person that you're waiting for at the moment will not come."

Kokurano came closer to her, not paying mind to her worry.

"Wait. Yuugi isn't coming?"

'He wouldn't forget... He wouldn't!'

Something covered her mouth and nose, a strange smell filling her head.

"But I told you! The man who's been watching you will come! My predictions are always reliable!"

'Why... am I so sleepy?'

She heard the door open and someone shout "Kokurano!" It was a new voice, but she could tell that it was the Other Yuugi's.

"Yuugi!"

"Unfortunately, your prediction failed, Kokurano. Now then, why don't play a game? I found this chloroform bottle that you left behind; we can play with this!"

'Sleepy...'

She could hear someone calling her name, a concerned, caring voice.

"Anzu?"

"Yuugi?"

Red eyes were looking down at her. Yuugi's school jacket, he wasn't wearing it. Something soft was under her head; he must have folded it to be like a pillow for her.

"Thank goodness. Sometimes, the chloroform lasts longer than expected."
Anzu sat up slowly. "Thank you... Other Yuugi-kun."

She saw him stiffen. "You owe me no thanks, Anzu. I merely wish for your safety."

He didn't speak like Yuugi spoke, using a more brash tone. However, his voice was just as sincere as the normal Yuugi's.

"Still," she said, reaching for the Other Yuugi's hand, surprised at how cold it was. "I should thank you for saving me." She looked at her surroundings.

They were out by their shoe lockers, where the air was not so strange-smelling.

"Nobody should be subject to the things he had planned. I'll walk you home, if you still feel dizzy."

'Please.'

"Yes, I'm still a bit sleepy. I'd feel safer." She noticed a makeshift bandage around his hand. "What is that?"

"His 'countless words' prediction... I went to return a book to the library. He was there waiting, waiting for an opportunity to knock over a bookcase on top of me. I'm all right."

"Are... Are you sure?"

The smile, a small thing, reassured her.

When she arrived home after one of the quietest walks home, Anzu sat at her desk in wonder.

This Other Yuugi, he was so quiet and polite. She remembered how he talked to Mr. Tsuruoka not too long ago, and how he challenged Kokurano, and wondered how he embodied the two. Yuugi had always been so quiet and nice.

The Other Yuugi seemed to know the world much better, like a wise adult. It reminded her of somebody that she couldn't place a name or face to. It made her cheeks flush, however, at the heat that thoughts of the Other Yuugi brought to her.

'What did he do to Kokurano, I wonder?'

A chill ran down her spine.

What did he do to Kokurano? And the other people that had Yuugi had encountered in the past months?

The morning Yuugi came to school with the Puzzle, Ushio had been found raving like a mad man in the trash.

Sozoji, who had been bragging about another concert, was last seen in a karaoke room that Yuugi had mentioned finding Hanasaki in, wounded but safe with Yuugi. Sozoji was now in a hospital, screaming about the loudness of his heart.

Yuugi had gone on his own to find Jonouchi with the Rintama boys, and all of the gang members had been found unconscious with burn marks from the electricity from a single stun gun.

Kaiba was...
"Yuugi..."

Was Yuugi safe with the Other Yuugi around?

What else would happen?

Who was the Other Yuugi exactly? An extension of Yuugi, right?

"Please... I don't want to hate you."

Whether she was talking about the new Yuugi or the Yuugi that had been her friend for years, she didn't know.

Chapter End Notes

Title: This relates to many legends and religions. The White Snake in particular comes from a Chinese story, in which a white snake consumes magic pills to become a human woman. In the Abrahamic religions, the snake itself tempts and goads Khavah/Eve/Hawwā into eating the Fruit of Knowledge, making her know Death. Eve's actions of consuming the fruit also curses humans to death, much like how the Other Yuugi's appearance leads to the suffering of Yuugi and his friends. The Hebrew name for Eve also looks similar to the Aramaic word for "snake".

*Sugoroku, with the time that he was in surgery, most likely had a pacemaker implanted, meaning that he wasn't having a heart attack but probably threw his heart into fibrillation, a quivering that does not allow blood to travel to the body efficiently.

*Yuugi's confirmed least favorite food is shallots (via Gospel of Truth).

*I like the original character of Anzu, while the English characterization by 4Kids made her incredibly obstinate and even dismissive of Yuugi. I grouped her Gakuen-chapters together for reasons; I'd be kind of hesitant to fall for a guy to willingly set someone on fire, but knowing that it's someone I know who cares about me, that may change my hesitance.

**She is a more realistic girl in the Season 0 anime, so I'm sticking with it.

*Summer vacation shall begin July 27 until August 30.

**By 2004, Japanese students no longer had to go to school on Saturdays. This practice ended in 2002, making the story weird to adapt as I go over its timeline again.
Kiyo and Momochojo

Chapter Summary

I go back and forth
Within the skies
Constantly, for
From the mountain where I make my home
The wind blows too harsh and strong.

- Ariwara no Narihira (825 - 880)

Chapter Notes

This chapter continues partway from the ending of the previous chapter. It focuses on the episodes 14 and 18 of Season 0 and their manga counterparts chapters 45, 46, and 47. Conflict and plot ensues.

When the Danava gave control to Yuugi, the boy wished Anzu a good night. He held memories of what had happened.

'That's what Kokurano meant by the falling letters.' An affirmation curled against his mind and Yuugi smiled.

'Thank you,' he thought to his other self, the one that surely took care in making sure that Anzu was safe. Kokurano hadn't been hurt either, which was a great relief to Yuugi. As he got closer to home, he wondered what kind of person his other self truly was.

He was certainly brave and prideful, from how he had interacted with Mr. Tsuruoka and Kokurano, but he was still aware and conscientious when it came to his games, never afraid to think outside of what he was comfortable doing. It reminded Yuugi of the superheroes he had seen in the American movies that his father would watch with him when he was younger, like a dark avenger of some kind.

He saw someone standing outside of his home and recognized blond hair.

"Jonouchi-kun!"

"Oi, Yuugi!" His friend approached him, smile wide on his face. "Where've you been?"

"I walked Anzu home."

Jonouchi gave him a coy smile. "Right. You 'walked' her home."

Yuugi felt his face run hot. "Jonouchi-kun!"
"Just saying," Jonouchi laughed, following Yuugi into the Game Shop. "I was just coming by for some Duel Monsters cards. They seem pretty cool."

"Welcome!" Yuugi’s mother stood at the register, nodding to Jonouchi, who quickly introduced himself as Yuugi’s friend. "Have you two been friends long?" she asked.

"Since April," Jonouchi affirmed. It surprised Yuugi, that they had been friends for almost three months now. It was almost unbelievable, considering that he had no friend before then. Anzu had really only come by on occasion, and with less frequency since middle school began.

They heard a door open and Sugoroku came walking into the Shop, carrying a strange looking object. "Welcome home, Yuugi! And you, Jonouchi-kun!"

"How are you doing, Gramps?" Jonouchi smiled and pointing to the thing that the old man was carrying. "What's that?"

"This-" Sugoroku placed the object on the counter and Yuugi could see that it was some kind of animal. "-is a bullfrog game from ancient Egypt. It’s a racing game using pointers controlled by two players."

"Ancient Egypt... People have been playing games for a really long time..." Jonouchi picked up one of the pointers and began to move them into different positions.

"The recorded history of gaming goes back in time as far as 5000 years. If we can find more evidence, perhaps we can find something even further back."

Karuta smiled. "Maybe you can start taking expeditions again, father."

A bell alerted all present to look to the door. A young boy came in with something that looked like an urn and box tied together, with the box on top.

"Heya, Yuugi!"

"Imori-kun!" Jonouchi nodded towards him. Yuugi turned to his grandfather and explained that Imori was another classmate.

'I never really did hang out with him... This might be a good chance to become friends with him!"

"I came here because I heard your family owns a game shop," Imori explained, gesturing to the objects in his hands. "I have something that I want to show you..." He set the parcel on the countertop. Upon closer inspection, Yuugi could see a phoenix, dragon, turtle, and tiger adorning each side of the box. The urn was not colorful in anyway, but there were labels upon it, ones that Yuugi couldn't understand.

"What a weird-looking thing..." Jonouchi mumbled, lifting the objects carefully. They looked ancient, though the rope didn't look nearly as old.

"My grandfather had to have brought it from China after the war was over! He collected games and a few days ago, I found this thing in the basement. Mr. Mutou," Imori addressed to Sugoroku. "I was hoping that you would know what it is!"

"Well-" Sugoroku was distracted when he saw Jonouchi place his fingers on the rope.

"Imori, can I open it?"
"Sure, I haven't even tried before-"

"Stop that!" Everyone grew quiet at the old man's outburst. There was a fear in his eyes that Yuugi had never seen before; was this not a game?

"Grandpa?"

Sugoroku sighed. "I'm sorry that I shouted, but this seal should never be broken. These are the 'Dragon Cards,' an ancient Chinese game! I never thought that I'd see them with my own eyes.

"These Cards were used in ancient times as a final test for feng-shui masters."

"Isn't that magic, Gramps?" Jonouchi asked.

"It's the art that makes use of the surrounding environment energy, and it has been in practice for more than 4000 years, since the first empires of China."

"If they're so powerful," Imori asked, "then why were they sealed away?"

"The Chinese philosophy of Onmyondo states that everything is part of a balance between yin and yang. Yin is darkness, nighttime, and matter. Yang is light, daytime, and energy. The Dragon Cards are part of Yang, and the rope around it is the Yin. Removing the seal will have an impact on this delicate balance, affecting all of the surrounding environment, maybe places far away!

"Imori-kun, right? The Dragon Cards were sealed away with the powers of Darkness. You must never remove the seal!"

"Of course!" Imori replied. "Thank you!"

Against his mind, the Danava felt something stirring. The air was scented with fire and rain.

He peeked into Yuugi's consciousness and began to scan the environment. The boy was walking towards the pool's locker room, talking with Jonouchi about what they could do over summer vacation. At his locker, Yuugi began to undress, continuing to talk to Jonouchi.

Nothing was bothering to the Danava, save for the idea that the something that he had sensed was still around... and that Yuugi was going to remove the Puzzle.

It made apprehension curl inside of him; to be separated from Yuugi, who was like the Sun itself, would mean that he and the King would be plunged into the darkness once again. However, the idea of removing the Puzzle for Yuugi's sake, to have him relax and be happy, made the Danava a bit happier.

'We shall wait then.'

'Danava?'

The demon turned towards the call. It had been the King's voice, but from Yuugi's Soul Room.

What would happen to the King if he remained there? Would he be taken by the Shadows?

'No.'

'No?' The Danava reached out to the Shadows who had chosen to answer him. 'You cannot reach into the Sun, can you?'
'No. The boy's Soul is too bright for us to touch.'

As the Darkness came, the Danava felt his connection to the King and to Yuugi begin to dissolve from his consciousness... He felt lacking of energy once more...

He could tell that Yuugi had already gone, but who was holding his prison now?

His captor had cold, lonely hands. They seemed possessed, and familiar.

'Ah... That boy...'

As Yuugi returned from swimming, laughing as Jonouchi was scolded once more by their teacher for chasing the girls in the pool, he reached for his locker door. He felt for the familiar cord, smooth metal...

'The Millennium Puzzle is gone!'

He felt a sense of worry that was not his own, but it was not like the one of his other self. This was the King's worry and fear.

It amplified Yuugi's concern, making him search under his summer uniform, only to find a note.

*If you want your puzzle back, come alone to classroom C. Tell no one; if you do, say good-bye to your puzzle forever!*

It was signed by 'The Messenger of Darkness.'

"Yuugi, what's wrong?"

Yuugi jumped as Jonouchi approached. "It's nothing, Jonouchi-kun. I just remembered I have to get something from another classroom."

"Oh, okay."

The Danava felt the Sun come closer, though not enough to have the Shadows go away completely. Part of Yuugi's consciousness was made known to him, what he could currently perceive and hear.

"I expected you to come here, Yuugi!" he heard followed by Yuugi's shout.

"Imori?!" The Danava tapped into the boy, Imori, and for the first time, he could see Yuugi.

"Imori! Give me my puzzle back!"

"Look! It looks good on me, don't you think?" Imori laughed, caressing the Puzzle like something powerful was contained inside of it. The Danava almost laughed, but the Shadows took his voice.

"I've been keeping my eye on you for a while, Yuugi... You could say that I look up to you. You were a hopeless weakling, until you gained the power of darkness from this Puzzle."

Yuugi's heart jumped with fear; whether it was a fear of the Puzzle breaking or of the Puzzle itself, the Danava couldn't discern.

"My grandfather left me many books about games. One came from ancient Egypt." Imori sighed. "At first, I couldn't make the connection between it and the games, but then I realized it. The secret
of the Millennium Puzzle!

"It said: 'The one able to solve the Millennium Puzzle will inherit the power of the Games of Darkness and become its Holy Shepherd.'"

"Imori!"

"I'll be the Shepherd of Darkness instead of you! If you want your Puzzle back, accept my Game of Darkness!"

The Danava felt the presence of the Dragon Cards before Yuugi saw them be uncovered. The dragons inside were curling around each other in a peaceful slumber before the seal was broken, he could tell. What would happen now?

'Please... Don't hurt my master...' His plea seemed to go unanswered, save for the soft rumbling growl of a Dragon.

'As He wishes.'

"Stop, Imori! You can't break the seal!"

"One of my grandfather's books came from China and explains the Dragon Cards. It says that as soon as the seal is removed, there must be a Game. Otherwise, the surrounding land and people shall be eternally cursed! The only way to reseal the dragons and to calm them once more is to offer one of the players' soul in this shin tsuen fu!"

Yuugi could speak at all, shocked. Was this what Imori wanted?! The Darkness that the Puzzle had, it was a kind Darkness and the King was-

A loving presence that supported him, reassured him that he would be safe; Yuugi thought himself selfish for a moment, that he wanted to keep the King for himself. The Game of Darkness drew him to sit down, energy racing up and down his spine in excitement.

"In this level three game, we shall draw from the center deck of cards on the table, which represents how chi gathers in the mountains and flows to the land. The five elemental dragons shall be called by us each drawing six cards, the cards representing dragons of different elements and levels, 1 through 5. Dragons can be summoned when three of the same card are gathered.

"Let's start!"

Both boys drew six cards, after which Imori stated that they could discard cards which were unfavorable.

Yuugi felt his sweat turn cold. How could he win without his other self? The King continued to send calm energy to him, but his fears were getting the better of him.

He was close to gathering his dragons. Just one-

"I can summon two dragons! Please, appear before me!"

"I also have two!" Imori smirked as he put his cards down to match Yuugi's. "Dragons, obey my orders!

"Yuugi, you have metal and fire?! I face you with water!"
'I have a level 5, but he's fire! And my metal dragon strengthens water!'

Yuugi felt his heart drop into his stomach. The King's heart seemed to be on fire with rage, fear, and something else that Yuugi couldn't understand.

"Time for a penalty game, Yuugi!"

"Yuugi!" Yuugi turned to the door and saw Jonouchi standing at the door.

"Jo-!" He yelled out in pain as the claws of a Water Dragon pierced into his soul. He felt the King reaching out to him, but it quickly slipped away from him.

He could still hear Jonouchi screaming, but it was fading away quickly.

"Yuugi!" Jonouchi ran into the room, seeing Yuugi fall onto the table while Imori laughed and the smoke around the room faded away. He could have sworn that a dragon was there just a moment ago.

"Imori, what-"

Suddenly, Yuugi's body moved, sitting up slowly. Jonouchi could see the Millennium Puzzle in his hand.

"That was too close..."

"That voice; it's the Other Yuugi!"

"Yuugi!" Jonouchi came forward to stand next to the Other Yuugi. "What's going on?"

Red eyes looked up at him. "Yuugi has been taken by the Dragon Cards. If he'd grabbed the Puzzle just a moment later, we'd be lost." He turned to Imori and glared in a way that Jonouchi thought was impossible. "Imori, I'm betting my other soul for this game."

"Shit... Just as I was about to become the Shepherd... Fine!" Imori grimaced. "We will have another match!"

Jonouchi was taken aback by Imori's anger. Souls? Darkness? Why would Imori want any of that, if it even existed?! Why take away Yuugi's soul?!

"Are you worried?" Jonouchi looked up to see Imori smirking. "You should be. Yuugi's soul is being consumed by the Dragons in the shin tsuen fu. It takes at least three months to entirely consume a soul, and there can only be one inside of it. If you win against me, you'll get your other soul back!"

"Game start!"

The air smelt of lightning, so strong that Jonouchi had to cover his nose. The sound of cards dropping to the table was like thunder. Was magic really involved in all of this? What was the Other Yuugi's connection to it, anyway?

"I'll take that!" Imori laughed and put his cards down on the table. "You can use opponent cards that have been discarded to summon a dragon! I can summon both of mine now."

A few more cards, and the Other Yuugi placed his cards down.
"I also have two dragons!"

Smoke erupted from the table and Jonouchi found himself looking up at four dragons. As much as he tried to deny their presence, he felt their breath and the energy they released. A voice inside of him told him that Yuugi's were of Metal and Earth and Imori's, of Wood and Water.

"What the-"

Imori let out a sound of glee. "Yuugi! Did you use a metal dragon again?! I'll blow it away with my water dragon!"

"That will only work once, Imori!" The Earth Dragon let out a bellow and threw itself onto the smoky surface of the game's landscape, a fissure dividing the earth and having the water disappear into it. "My Earth Dragon will protect my Metal Dragon!"

"But look, Yuugi! The Wood Dragon keeps getting bigger from the water it gets from my other Dragon!" The Wood Dragon came forth to attack the Earth Dragon, its roots leeching off of its opponent. Jonouchi heard the Dragon roar in pain, especially once its companion, the Metal Dragon came under attack again.

"Metal Dragon! Use the last of your strength!" The Other Yuugi gave his order, to the Dragon that had begun to rust under the smaller attack from the Water Dragon. Its body shook, quivering as Jonouchi saw part of its body move. At first, it had seemed like those large scales couldn't move, but as the Dragon unsheathed them, he saw that they could all along.

"Impossible!" Imori stood, aghast. "The Metal Dragon unfolded its axe-wings!"

The Metal Dragon, taking flight, tore through the Wood Dragon, cutting its roots and flesh, leaving it defenseless.

"All right!" Jonouchi shouted, a smile on his face. It began to slip as the Metal Dragon began to disappear in the Water Dragon's previous attack, its wings no longer keeping it in the air.

"The Metal Dragon used its strength to save the Earth Dragon," he heard the Other Yuugi explain. "Earth Dragon, avenge your ally! Consume the Water Dragon!"

Imori's face stayed frozen as his Dragons were defeated. His eyes held a fear that Jonouchi didn't fully comprehend.

"Now your soul shall be offered, Imori."

"What?!!" Jonouchi shouted. The Other Yuugi said it so nonchalantly, as though it was an everyday thing to hear. "What do you mean? His soul will be with Yuugi's in the-"

"No. Look," the Other Yuugi said. Jonouchi saw an orb of light leave Imori's body, the boy's eyes rolling back and closing as his soul left him. It ventured into the shin tsuen fu. The Earth Dragon quietly reached into the jar and pulled out an orb that was much brighter than the one that had left Imori. Something told him that it was Yuugi's soul.

He saw the Other Yuugi reach forward, almost cradling it, as Yuugi's soul came into his body through his chest.

"Thank Goodness," he heard the Other Yuugi whisper. The Earth Dragon let out a rumble as its fellow dragons disappeared.
'Wait. What about Imori?'

"Other Yuugi. What about Imori and his soul?" The Other Yuugi looked up at Jonouchi for a moment before standing. His face looked divided between speaking and keeping his thoughts to himself. He turned to face the Earth Dragon.

"My Lord of the Ground that we stand upon, we have energy to spare to you and the fellow Lords. May we grant this to you, so that you may feast at your leisure until to return to your peaceful slumber?"

It was not Yuugi; that much, Jonouchi knew. The Yuugi that he knew wouldn't have played this game so willingly, would not have endangered anyone's life. This also was not the Other Yuugi that he had come to know about... Not this ancient sounding thing that practically called for and gave respect.

"You ask me this, little Dragon. Why must I grant this? Let me look upon you."

The Earth Dragon's voice made the world seem to shake. It came forward, almost touching the Other Yuugi's forehead. It let out soft puffs of breath that Jonouchi could see move Yuugi's blond bangs. The Earth Dragon turned to Jonouchi, its eyes dark and deep.

"Your comrade here finds you fearful. Give us your energy in that fearful way you feel that we shall gain the most without you ailing. This will appease us."

"'Fearful'?" Jonouchi turned to the Other Yuugi and understood.

Shadows seemed to seep out of Yuugi's body, a black ooze that bled out of him. There was a strong stench that surrounded the ooze, one that Jonouchi could only identify as 'death.' As soon as it touched the floor, it became a smoke-like gas, one that forced Jonouchi to the floor, just to breathe in the low-lying, cleaner air. The gas began to fill the room.

"Yuu-" Jonouchi looked up and saw his friend's eyes glow red. It reminded him of something... It seemed like a far-away memory, one that escaped through the crevices in his mind.

"Is this enough to appease my Lord?" The Other Yuugi's voice rumbled like the Dragon's, like it was an ancient power welling up inside of him and seeping out into the noxious gas.

"Yes, this is so. We shall give back the small, squishy thing's soul, but we shall remove the impurities of it, the ones that make such souls distasteful. We shall give them to you, so that you may dine."

The gas and Dragon disappeared, leaving only the soul that floated out of the shin tsuen fu to go back into Imori's body. The Other Yuugi came forward and began to wrap up the Dragon Cards.

"Yuugi?" Jonouchi stood, breathing somewhat heavily. "What was this?"

"... A Game of Darkness."

"But why did you play it? Did Imori force it? Is that how the normal Yuugi's soul was trapped in that urn?!"

The Other Yuugi faced him, a slightly annoyed expression on his face. "Imori took the Puzzle, possibly due to its historical association with darkness. He believed he could become its master."

"Then what are you? Are you something that the darkness made, or are you part of Yuugi?"
"Yes." With that one word answer, the Other Yuugi turned to leave. When he reached the classroom door, the Other Yuugi turned around to face Jonouchi.

"I mean no harm to Yuugi, nor do I wish harm to you. Believe me with that, Jonouchi-san."

With the Dragon Cards in hand, the Other Yuugi left, but Jonouchi's fear of the other persona never did.

Anzu had invited Yuugi to the amusement park for their first week of summer, to which Yuugi readily agreed, a bit of desperation in his voice. It was already getting so warm that it may be better to go and have some fun before everybody became a bit more busy with summer homework and family time. The summer was almost leaving them, the days still long but the nights getting cold. The amusement park, Saikoro Park, was an older park, but it still held many things that reminded them of field trips during elementary school.

The Danava smiled against the memories that Yuugi held of Saikoro Park, of his parents taking him on Sundays, of his grandparents taking them there before his grandmother passed away, and of cotton candy that stimulated the tongue in a wonderful way. He passed these memories to the King, who smiled.

'This will be an interesting day.'

'An amusement park?' The King nodded. 'Are you sure?'

'Yes. It would be good for Yuugi to have some fun. I hear that they're going swimming.' The King felt a warm flush come up to his cheeks, imagining Yuugi with his skin more exposed than he usually was dressed. He had managed to peek when Yuugi had been swimming at school...

'You are excited.'

'Ah!' The King pulled away from the Danava, who had come close to his face. 'What do you mean?'

The Danava smiled, as though a secret lay behind his lips. 'Let's let them have the day together. We don't need you and my master being distracted by each other.

'Besides... After what happened with Imori, I'm sure that he is stressed in his friendships, at all fault to my actions.'

As Anzu and Yuugi walked down the sidewalk to wait at the bus stop, Yuugi scanned a newspaper that he had grabbed on the way out of his house.

"Did you bring a swim suit?"

Yuugi nodded. "Yep! We'll need the pool today, since it's so hot today!"

"We might just go to the pool first!"

As the bus approached and their trek began, the two spoke of the different rides that had been added to the amusement park, looking through the newspaper which had an article about the new rides are the park.

"Have you started on any of your homework?" Anzu shook her head.

"No. I've been busy with my dance practice at home. We have a few weeks to get it all done,
Yuugi smiled and rubbed his cheek. "I haven't either. Maybe we can all study and do our homework together, since finals won't be too long after."

"I can call Jonouchi later if you want."

Yuugi didn't answer her.

"Did you read about the Card Bomber, Anzu?"

"Yes, but we might be out until dark if you keep reading that newspaper?"

Anzu and Yuugi talked about the recent attacks from a man that announced his bombings through card games. Each game was different, to the point that the police were considering hiring gamblers for assistance, though that was probably just the tabloid.

The teenagers' attention soon turned towards Saikoro Amusement Park, though Yuugi was still looking at Anzu out of the corner of his eye. Her dress fit her nicely, while her cheeks began to get a bit pink from the summer sun's heat.

'I wonder...'

"Anzu?"

"What, Yuugi?" Anzu turned to him, smiling, as they approached the entrance, tickets in hand.

"Are we on a... a da..."

"Hello, dear guests. May I have your tickets please?" The teenagers handed their tickets over to the receptionist, who smiled at Yuugi. "Boy, this ticket is for senior high schoolers!"

"And...?"

"Don't you want an elementary schooler ticket?"

After dealing with that issue, Yuugi felt more than eager enough to ride the new attractions at Saikoro. There were new roller coasters and a new water slide. It made his heart dance, which made the King send more good will to him.

"What should we do first, Anzu?"

"How about we go on the water slide? It's getting hotter every second we stay under the sun!"

The cool water was a relief for Yuugi, as his mind started going to places that he would rather not reveal to anyone. He'd seen enough video tapes to have an overactive - but not very detailed, if censors were anything to consider - imagination. Going down the water slide with Anzu didn't help his racing hormones, but the desire for intimacy, it reminded him of the King and the heat they had created between them.

After going down the slide a few more times, Anzu proposed that they lay in the sunshine. Yuugi felt awkward next to her; she was very attractive, unlike how he looked.

A curling inquiry pushed against his mind.
'Do you want to feel the sun for a while?' he asked the King, who "nodded." He found his body moving in accordance with another force - 'It must be him doing that.' - moving to sit up in the lounging chair. He could feel the King push against his mind just slightly, and his eyes were suddenly more sensitive to the light, his head ducking down to have his bangs cover his eyes.

There was a sensation of newness as he and the King took in all of the colors. The King pushed senses of inquiries into his mind, as Yuugi began to try and explain some of the colors. For the blue water, he described its clarity and freshness, while the gold of the sun was explained as warm and great.

'You should come out more... I don't think I've ever felt you come out at all.'

An affirmation was sent back to him. Out of the corner of Yuugi's eye, he saw someone approaching. Water was thrust into his face, shot from a water gun. The King let out a small "sound" of shock. Yuugi quickly took over, chasing after the kid that had shot water into his face.

He didn't notice the King's concern for Anzu, who had sat up in eagerness upon seeing the change that had just occurred inside of Yuugi's body.

As Yuugi and Anzu walked around the rest of the park later, having eaten a small meal before deciding to go on the attraction rides, the two noticed a commotion. Several police officers had gathered by the eastern plaza, where the two had decided to scout out the rides. Yuugi spotted one officer who seemed rather familiar.

Not too long after spotting one of the officers run off towards an employee station, did an announcement come blaring over the P.A. system.

"Attention please, amusement park guests. The police have informed us of a dangerous object that has been brought into the park. We apologize, but we must request that everyone leave the park under the direction of the closest police officer."

"Could it be the Card Bomber?!" Yuugi didn't realize that the officer he had thought familiar was the Chief Inspector, whose face had been shown by the end of the Card Bomber's news article. "Anzu, we have to leave!"

"This should be exciting, huh, Yuugi?" Anzu had a smile on her face, curious.

He looked at Anzu incredulously. What on Earth was she talking about?!

In his Soul Room, the Danava held his head in his hands, wondering what drove Anzu to such extremes for something that he couldn't discern. Through Yuugi's eyes, he could not find her. Her scent had been lost among the many people that had dashed out of the park.

He thought of how she had looked when speaking with Kokurano, sincerely intrigued by meeting a man who has-

"Watched over'... Shit.'

She wanted to meet him... Why the Danava? Was it because he had helped her with the convict? And he had helped her with Kokurano...
'I do not like these misunderstandings.'

Yuugi was running towards the Ferris Wheel where he saw the Chief Inspector. Looking up, he managed to spot Anzu in the third gondola of the ride.

"Inspector!" Yuugi ran to the man, who was gripping a mobile phone tightly in one hand, a deck of cards in the other. "What's wrong with the Ferris Wheel?"

"... It's rigged with explosives!"

The Danava felt his chest give a painful throbbing.

'Explosions.'

For a moment, he thought he could see behind his eyelids, the falling and ruin of a large structure. Blood stained his face, a warm and sweet feeling that made his stomach turn.

His stomach turned and his mouth watered at the scent of burning flesh.

'I desire food,' the Faceless One said.

'I don't want to hurt anyone,' the Danava pleaded.

A light began to flash around him, and he could hear Yuugi's voice.

'Please, help Anzu!'

'... As He wishes.'

"The criminal challenged me to a card game!" The Inspector felt a cold sweat begin to develop on his neck. The Danava could smell the desperation that he was starting to feel. "Who here is good at card games?"

"I'll do it!"

The Danava walked forward, taking the card deck and phone from the Inspector.

"What game are we going to play?

「 A brat, huh? Fine. The game is Clock Solitaire.」 The Danava followed the Bomber's set up instructions of the game, organizing the fifty-two cards into thirteen piles of four cards each, twelve piles in a diamond around a center pile. 「 Begin by pulling a card from the center pile. What is it?」

"Three of spades."

「 Good! You're smarter than that damn inspector! He needed to have me walk him through the games before, and here you are putting the cards in the right piles already. Repeat from the pile that you just added that card to and repeat! You have a time limit, by the way.」

'How does this fulfill the Bomber's plan?' the Danava wondered, continuing to pull cards.

'How does it not fulfill his plan?'

'Shit up.'

The Faceless One laughed. 'He gets his entertainment. You already know where he's watching us
from, don't you?"

Soon the Four O'Clock pile was completed.

"Ah!" An explosion filled the Danava's ears, and sure enough, the fourth of thirteen gondolas had exploded. He could hear Anzu's scream dully from the third gondola.

'I already have three cards in the Three O'Clock pile. One more and Anzu...'

'Yuugi! Help me!'

He continued to draw the cards, thinking only of where the culprit could be. He tried to ignore the hunger churning his belly at the thought of death, as well as the Inspector's concerned urges for him to finish.

'Two more cards... The King pile will be completed then.'

'Do you really want to finish? We can keep having fun! You can just let it all be over... and we can be alone like you wanted.'

'Shut up!' The second gondola exploded, taking the Danava by surprise, as well as the police officers.

"Twenty seconds!"

The Danava continued to draw, feeling Yuugi's heart beat faster in his chest.

'Please... let it be the last card! Let it be the one we need!'

"All four King cards!"

"Well, let's end this game then."

"No."

The Bomber glared down at the boy that managed to beat him at his game. He could feel the Ferris Wheel turning, the metal creaking every once in a while.

"What do you mean 'no'?"

"Let's have a bit more fun. The thirteenth gondola didn't blow up when I completed the pile; you're in there, aren't you?"

"Tch... Don't fuck around with me, brat! I'm going to blow up gondola three!"

"What? You're not going to look for the bomb in your gondola?"

A ticking sound made itself apparent, the turning of the Wheel knocking the Bomber off balance.

"What? Where..?" He set down the phone and began to look around on the floor. As the ticking grew louder, he reached into the seats, tearing into the upholstery, not noticing his missing fingernails as they were caught on the leather.

"Keep looking."

The Bomber turned again to where he had set the phone and instead found one of the bombs that he
Anzu was walking over to the Danava, smiling.

"Yuugi-kun!"

"Anzu, you had me worried." The Danava smiled at her and began to walk towards the Inspector. "By the way, sir, the passenger in gondola thirteen should be the criminal."

"What?"

"It didn't explode when I assembled the cards that corresponded to it. He could also see my cards and set off the bombs when appropriate to his game." The Danava smiled for a moment. "He may even turn himself over now that he's been beaten."

"R-Really?!"

A scream alerted all present to the man that fell out of the thirteenth gondola and onto the shrubbery that lay around the Ferris Wheel. With him came several deactivated switches and a mobile phone. As officers ran to help the man up, they spotted the items that he held in his possession. After several moments of trying to calm the man down - "Sir, there is no bomb there." - the man confessed to his crimes, describing in detail the many horrors that he had committed and how he had done so.

Anzu seemed taken aback slightly by the whole event, but when she turned to the Danava, she smiled again. "Yuugi-kun, why don't we finish our date?"

The Danava found himself nodding, though he did not look at the girl. As they walked away from the whole mess, a P.A. announcer spread the message that the threat was clear and those within the vicinity of the P.A. system would be able to re-enter the park without charge.

"Anzu..."

"Yes, Yuugi-kun?" Anzu gripped his arm more tightly, as though she were afraid of him slipping away.

'I could, technically."

"Anzu-san," he tried again, mirroring how she was using an honorific for him, one that she would never use for Yuugi himself. She stopped walking, bringing him to a halt as well.

"Yes?" Her tone was a bit more serious at that. Good, good...

"I'm going to let the Yuugi that you are familiar with take over. I apologize for interrupting your-"

"Why can't you stay out?" Anzu put a hand up to her mouth, shocked at her own outburst. "I mean... I've been wanting to meet you, for a long time. And I also want to ask you something."

"Yes, Anzu-san?"

"Why do you take over for Yuugi?" The Danava blinked at the question, and Anzu continued. "Were the people before like the Bomber? Did you do something to them, like you did to Kaiba-kun?"

"... Yuugi is my charge. All I do is for his sake. When it comes to his friends, such as you, Anzu-san, you are all honorable and dear to his heart, so I offer my services for your sake as well."
Anzu gave him a small smile. "Then you're just here for Yuugi."

"As much as I can be, Anzu-san."

'It's all I want to do.'

'This is all you want? I doubt your certainty.'

The Danava looked up to Anzu and noticed the strange feeling in her eyes. She smelt of nervousness.

"Okay. I'm sure that Yuugi will want to ride some more rides before the day is over."

"Thank you, Anzu-san."

The Danava left Yuugi to spend time with his friend, watching over them out of the corner of his awareness.

'What's wrong? You seem lonely.'

'I don't know what that means.'

'You want to spend time with them, don't you?' The Danava bit at the inside of his lower lip and grabbed more materials for his protection spells, weaving them together. 'The King has been spending time with them. Yes, Master Yuugi has been letting him feel, see, smell, taste... Why don't you meet Master Yuugi and have some fun!'

'I'm not here for enjoyment... I'm here for something else.'

'What are you here for?'

The Danava didn't have an answer.

Chapter End Notes

Title: Kiyo = a woman who became a serpent/dragon after the object of affection denied her. Momochojy = a play on Anzu's name "apricot," its relation to the peach and her only child status.

*Dragon Cards: Explained in story, but here are other facts.

Fire melts Metal
Metal breaks Wood
Wood suppresses Earth
Earth absorbs Water
Water puts out Fire

*In the manga chapters of the "Monster Fighter" game, stages of Shadow Games are mentioned. I have a document about that. I shall have a link to that made.

*I made the name of the amusement park Saikoro in homage to a wonderful fic on ff.net and livejournal: "Sight the King." (((Read it)))
*Honorifics: Yuugi and Anzu's lack of honorific signifies that they have a close relationship to the point that they feel comfortable with using only their given names. Jonouchi also does not add an honorific to Yuugi's name.

Yuugi adds -kun to Jonouchi's name, which is said to equals/colleagues and boys/young men. It's also used when referring to male friends. Anzu uses it when speaking to the Danava as a means of addressing him with lack of familiarity.

San is a default honorific for many, especially when referring to adults and people that do not have a relationship that is closer than being acquaintances. For the Danava, he uses -san to refer to Yuugi's friends with respect.
The Welcome of Neith

Chapter Summary

Upon the clouds so white,
Beating wings,
The flying cranes-
A distant prospect of a thousand years
I feel.

- Emperor Nijō (31 July 1143 – 5 September 1165)

Chapter Notes

This chapter is inspired by an episode of the 1998 anime/Season 0 and is not based on the manga. Rules for the game played shall be in the end notes.
Note: These typographic marks (「」, 『』) for languages other than Japanese.
*The time for that sexual content that I promised is soon.
**This is also a really... REALLY long chapter. I have decided to cut it in half.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Danava looked down to the floor of his Soul's Room and saw his many flowers blooming and dancing in the wind that he decided to make just a few moments ago. He smiled at their movements; something was calling him to join them, but he could only find himself more captivated by the game he was making for himself, a piece of paper being written upon. Would he remember the word game that he was creating for himself? There were only five out of forty-seven that he needed to figure out, and then would come the fun part; he'd keep the forty-seven just to test his memory in being up to date and to make sure that he could remember what was still being used.

'You need to play another game in due time, Sweet One,' he could hear the Faceless One say, its tongue licking the shell of his ear. 'Not by yourself, but with someone else! Judgement must come, you know that, dear Sweet One. You tremble in eagerness at the thought.'

'I wish to rest, and I shall.' The Danava scribbled the last characters onto his loom and began to mouth the syllables. When he felt that he had memorized them, he thought of the strange memories that would visit his mind when idle. They were of the language that Master Yuugi studied in school, English. Could that fit into his word game too?

He'd make it work in.

'How do you solve this game?' The Faceless One sounded genuinely curious, green eyes overlooking the code that the Danava had made.

'Without love, you are not able to solve it.' With that, the Danava decided to start his game. He closed his eyes, and he began to let a noise rush from his throat, musical in nature and coming slower once he decided a proper tune.
Yuugi opened his eyes, trying to recall the King, to recall the Room of his Soul where he had felt so calm and knowing of himself. He saw the King by the Toy Box, sifting through the assorted toys. The older boy seemed truly curious, looking for something to play with. A sound of pleasure escaped the King as he pulled out a game board. It appeared to be the same chess board that Yuugi had seen before, during Death-T. The pieces were stuck in certain places, like someone had stopped playing during a game.

Yuugi walked over the short distance to his companion and watched as the King began to look for something else, probably the pieces' box.

'Do you want help?' he asked out of habit.

Red eyes met his. Yuugi felt dizzy, suddenly, as his body began to feel cool everywhere but his lower stomach. The King stood up slowly to meet his gaze. Yuugi found himself walking towards him, eager to... to do something to this strange man that he had met a month ago.

Apparently the feeling was returned, Yuugi thought, as he felt warm lips against his, hands on his shoulders and pulling him close. From the fabric's sensation, he was still in his pyjamas, clothes that were being pulled at in eagerness. His heart was pumping at a faster rate, his excitement and nervousness taking over. He could feel the buttons on his shirt being unbuttoned, and Yuugi felt himself go cold, frozen with eager lips against his, as a hand began to wander near his lower belly, seeking and wanting. Warm breath came against his mouth, followed by a soft, soothing laugh.

'I will wait for you, young one,' the King whispered, and Yuugi desperately wished that he wasn't so nervous, as he made his fingers dig into the King's tunic. He had been more daring a month ago! He pulled gently on the sleek fabric, which was slipped off without hesitation. With his torso bare, Yuugi could see that the King had darkly rick skin, with lithe muscles that were graceful when he moved. His stomach grew warm at the thought to being able to touch it, to feel its warmth and its smoothness. He even thought of its taste, its scent, and what the other boy's heart sounded like. Was it beating as fast as Yuugi's own?

A shape passing, just out of the corner of his eye, caught Yuugi's attention. He turned to his doorway and saw a Darkness there. It wasn't a shadow, as nothing was there in his doorway to cast one; it was blackness itself.

A hand on his shoulder pulled at him, and Yuugi found himself against the King's chest, the other boy's body heat secure against his bared skin.

'W-What... What was that?'

'It's a part of Darkness, Yuugi. Darker than the Shadows, but more tamable than them. You're safe from them.' Lips came to grace his forehead. Yuugi let out a small sound - a moan, maybe? - and the
King's arms wrapped more tightly around him.

'What does the Darkness feel like?' Yuugi asked looking up to the King. The other boy smiled and led Yuugi to the bed, where he sat down and patted the spot next to him. Yuugi sat and let the King pull him down. He laid his head down comfortably in the King's lap, and the King hummed softly and hethreaded his fingers through Yuugi's hair.

'It feels as the wind does on your cheeks, cool and fresh.' The King smiled down at him and pressed his lips to Yuugi's forehead. Yuugi closed his eyes to enjoy the feeling. The other felt so soft against him; the hands in his hair were massaging his head and making him relax. It was wonderful to be in his Soul's Room, to be in soft lighting and in a soft embrace. The King continued to liken the Darkness to gentle kisses from a butterfly, the fluff of dandelions as they flew into the wind, and other soft things.

'But it can be deadly, as it can harden, sharpen, and shape itself into blades, arrows. It is Armor and Sword, meant to defend or attack as necessary.'

'What about Shadows?'

A sigh was Yuugi's answer. The King pursed his lips slightly as he thought.

'They are a delicate but powerful mixture of Darkness and Light. From what I know, Light is meant to be a Shield.' The King smiled down to Yuugi and there was a softness in his eyes that Yuugi felt surrounded by. 'Light exists in souls like yours; innocent and welcoming, brave and kind.'

'I'm not brave. I...' Yuugi turned to hide his face in the other's stomach. He thought of the bruises he once had, the bullies that always looked for him, and his friends that had to defend him from the world. Even his other self, with whom he was not yet acquainted, was strong, and they shared the same body, with which Yuugi couldn't intimidate anyone with. Kaiba had been, though, enough that he wanted to kill his other self. He had felt threatened.

'Yuugi.' Said boy lifted his head and saw the King look down at him. There was regret there.

'King..?'

'You are very brave, and I don't want you to doubt that.' The red-eyed boy pet Yuugi's hair again. 'I'm sorry.'

Yuugi sat up slowly, as to not hit the other. 'It's okay! It's not your fault at all.'

The King stared at him for a moment before nodding. 'All right. But do not think of yourself that way, Yuugi. You're wonderfully brave. Who else stands up to those they are afraid of? That is bravery.' The King took Yuugi's hand in his, kissing Yuugi's fingertips. Yuugi felt his face grow warm as his fingers, palm, and wrist were decorated with kisses. 'My brave Yuugi...'

Yuugi found no words leaving his throat. This man, who had to be a King with how he stood and moved and spoke, was praising him. Perhaps the King was lying, but it did not feel that way, not at all. He was drawn into his words and he found a reply.

'Yours.'

'Mine.' Yuugi closed his eye at another kiss, returning it and opening his mouth, tasting his King for the first time.
Since his defeat at the hands of a certain Yuugi Mutou, Seto Kaiba, teenage millionaire and CEO of Kaiba Corporation, has remained in a vegetative state for a month. Perhaps the shock was too great for a young man who has lived as the best for so long.

A young woman was sitting in a restaurant, listening to the news as the English-speaking broadcaster announced the slowly declining stock of the Japanese company Kaiba Corporation.

“Here’s your double-double, miss.” A waitress brought her a coffee, setting it on the table. She thanked the young woman. “Would you like anything else? We have snacks here, not just Tim’s.”

“No, thank you.” She offered a smile. She tried to keep it there as her stomach growled softly. “Er, maybe one doughnut. A Chocolate Dip, please.”

The waitress walked back to the counter, grabbing a pastry and coming to set it on a fresh serviette. Both young woman looked to the television. The waitress let out a hum before saying, “There’s a big kerfuffle in Japan then, huh?”

Stockholders are said to have a loss of faith in the formerly undefeated young man. Seto Kaiba, saying that the loss reflects on the CEO’s ability to run his company. Others say that this downward slope is due to the change in product and target markets, as the company had long viewed the constant winning streak of Seto Kaiba, and the worldwide chess champion title belonging to his predecessor Gozoburo Kaiba, as a standing testament to the company’s long success, as well as its military legacy.

In other news, the United Nation’s Operation HAMLET...

“Seems so.”

The doughnut was bittersweet.

"Kaiba Corp's been in the news a lot now." Jonouchi set down his television remote, looking over to Yuugi, who was bent over their math homework. Numbers and variables were dancing across the page. "Have you done any problems yet?"

"I'm working on them." Yuugi lifted his head, sighing and leaning his head back. It was too confusing right now, and the weather looked wonderful outside. The news wasn't helping at all.

He felt a shadow of concern brush against his mind. The King was trying to cheer him up, he felt. He smiled and tried to send some reassurance back.

Yuugi put his pencil to his lips, humming softly to a tune that he could only remember from a dream. As he sat, he recalled how the King had comforted him at Kaiba’s mansion. He remembered how soft the other felt, how cloudy his thoughts were when he was with him. The King had been the only one of the two people within his heart to communicate with him, kind and sincere. He wondered what his other self was like, outside of the only time that Yuugi had been totally aware and where he was watched over by the King.

Was his other self kind? Was he sincere, like the King was?

"Is it your other self?"

Yuugi looked up, seeing Jonouchi’s stern expression. His friends had been open to the idea, of another personality living inside of Yuugi, but they were still hesitant to address it. If they knew that there was another... one that Yuugi knew better, but that his friends had never met...
"Sorry. It's just that you guys know him better than I do..." Yuugi pouted. "I've never really met him. If I could find a way to talk to him-"

"You've never met him?" Jonouchi frowned. "Maybe... What if you wrote notes back and forth? Some of the girls in class have been doing that with notebooks."

Yuugi smiled. "I didn't think of that. I'll try that." He looked down at his paper and read the next problem.

He wrote down the answer.

---

"How's Yuugi doing, Jonouchi?"

The boy looked up at Anzu, who had asked him to meet after the study session that he had with Yuugi.

"I think he's doing okay. He isn't acting any differently, but he mentioned his other self today."

Anzu sighed, looking down at her drink. Since Yuugi had told them of his other self, many things had fallen into place. His avoidance of answering questions of certain events, when they had met that Egyptian when visiting Professor Yoshimori two months ago, and even the voice that she had heard when she had been captured by that convict at the Burger World; it had been the Other Yuugi at the center of everything. And he had only come after Yuugi had-

"The Millennium Puzzle."

"What?"

"I remember when... Just a day or two before Yuugi brought the Puzzle, when it was complete, to school, I went over to his house to hang out for a while. His grandfather mentioned that the inscription on its box said that whoever solved it, obtains dark wisdom and strength."

Jonouchi stared at her. "And you didn't think about this after?"

"I thought Yuugi's grandpa was just trying to scare us a little! After he had solved it, I didn't see any difference in the Yuugi before and the one after." Anzu gripped her glass more tightly in her hands, gnawing at the inside of her lip. "But when we met the Other Yuugi, when we went to the amusement park together, I remembered his voice."

"His voice?"

"At Burger World. He's the one that played the... game with that convict."

Jonouchi let out a sound similar to a growl. He tried to sound as aggressive as he could, lest he let the memory of burnt flesh back into his senses. "If Yuugi knows about this-"

"I don't think he does at all, Jonouchi. You know how kind Yuugi is. I don't think he could live with himself. When Yuugi and I went to the amusement park, the Other Yuugi didn't hurt the bomber; he turned him right over to the police. He mentioned that Yuugi was his concern, above all things." Anzu brought her drink to her lips, letting the water wet her tongue and alleviate the dry feeling in her mouth. "My problem is that if Yuugi doesn't know, how do we know that he doesn't want to hurt Yuugi, like those ghosts that come and haunt people just to hurt them?"

"Anzu, this thing isn't a ghost." Jonouchi pushed his glass away, the water inside it sloshing around
but never spilling. "Let's think about it like this; what if the Puzzle is really magic or something? What if it's the Puzzle trying to take hold of Yuugi, trying to get him attached to a different version of himself so that he won't get rid of it?"

"... Like a curse?"

"Like with what happened with Professor Yoshimori, except I don't think that this curse will leave so easily." Jonouchi stared down at his drink. The surface of it was soon peaceful again, but it only served as a bad omen for him.

---

That night, the Danava felt a brush of sleepy curiosity against the edge of his mind. He knew that it was Yuugi, the light of the boy's soul different than that of the King's. It was a kind and wonderful thing, what Yuugi's soul was. The King's soul was darker, something aged like a great tree; a tall and looming presence that seemed to have a humble, soft center.

As he listened to the wave of emotion more, he picked up an action from it. Yuugi was asking for something, something that the Danava could do.

'Wake up,' it said. 'I have something for you to do,' it said.

He sighed and smiled, giving himself over to the order.

When the Danava found himself in Yuugi's body, he found himself amazed that he was able to handle the pain so well. After being in the dark for so long, and in such pain, he was thankful for the dying light bulb in Yuugi's desk lamp. It wasn't as bright as the lights that Kaiba had set up in that Death Theme-Park, and he was grateful for it.

"A notebook..?" There was a notebook, open to its first page, with a few lines written.

---

Dear, my other self.

I've had this thought for a while now, that we should begin to know each other. I talk with the King a lot in my soul's room, but I have never spoken with you directly. Jonouchi-kun mentioned writing in a notebook, like letters back and forth. However, I haven't written letters in a while.

I want to do this because it seems that you know a lot about me, for my friends to have never suspected you to be someone different than I am. I really don't know you, Other Me.

I wanted to thank you, though, for helping Jonouchi-kun with the gang that he used to be in, with Anzu when the convict had caught her - twice, now that I think about it - and with my grandpa. I owe you a lot, especially for being my friend.

If you don't want to write back, that's okay. I just wanted to have this option between us. We don't even have to talk deeply about things if you don't want to...

I do look forward to hearing from you.

Yuugi

"'My Other Self.'" The Danava felt himself smile. This was a truly kind thing to say.
He sat down in the desk chair, pondering if and what he would write. If he wrote, he would be happy, and he already felt that it was bad. It didn't matter if it was a good feeling; from Yuugi's memories, many things that could make some feel good were often harmful to humans, and he was probably not exempt from this. The Light of Yuugi's soul was addicting and he was now getting closer and closer to it. He may allow himself the transgression of actually meeting him one day, if he didn't watch his actions. He wanted to meet Yuugi and the King, face to face...

He picked up a pencil, differently than how Yuugi held it, but it felt more comfortable like this. Less painful, anyway...

Thank you for your letter...

The next day, Yuugi helped his grandfather in the store, sweeping in the corner. He wrung the broom handle in his hands, ignoring the new splinter that he had gotten stuck in his palm. He focused instead on the notebook that had been on his desk and had disappeared.

His grandfather wouldn't have grabbed it out of his room, and he had looked throughout his room, looking behind his desk and in the small space between the desk and his bookcase.

A curious feeling brushed against the flesh of his mind, accompanied even more possibilities as to the location of the notebook. Yuugi smiled at the feeling. He could recognize the King there, gentle kisses being pressed to his cheeks and to his hands, but he could also feel another presence there as well. It was a curious and gentle thing, but he could feel its strength behind it. Perhaps it was his other self...

'Why won't you talk to me too..?'

"Yuugi, you've been sweeping the corner for the past few minutes already."

The teenager looked up to his grandfather, who was looking at him with a concerned expression on his face.

"Sorry."

"Yuugi, what's wrong?" Sugoroku placed a hand on Yuugi's shoulder and squeezed lightly. There was a small smile on his face, hoping that the problem that Yuugi was facing was one that he could help solve.

"Um... I had a notebook. It was on my desk last night."

"Hmm... Is it a really important notebook?"

"Yes." 'Yes, it is. I really, really need it!'

Sugoroku patted Yuugi's shoulder, sighing. "Don't worry. I haven't been in your room at all. It sounds like it's very important and I imagine that you've searched everywhere you can think of."

"I can look in a few more places?"

"Don't worry. I can help you look."

There was a ringing of the bell that hung above the store door that alerted the two to the door.
"Hello. Come in," Yuugi heard his grandfather say. "Ah! Jonouchi-kun and Anzu! How nice to see you!"

Yuugi lifted his head and saw his friends standing by the door, greeting his grandfather. He noticed Anzu walking closer to him.

"Hi, Anzu."

"Hi, Yuugi. How are you?" Anzu smiled, though Yuugi could tell that she was somewhat hesitant in approaching him.

"I'm okay. How are the both of you?"

"Pretty good. I just met up with Jonouchi at a cafe nearby for a drink." Said boy was looking at the Duel Monsters cards packets, talking with Sugoroku about the new cards that were being produced. "And since we were nearby, we thought it'd be nice to drop by and see you!"

"Yeah! Maybe, after my chores, we can all hang out?"

"S-Sure!" Anzu's smile seemed to be straining, as Yuugi noticed her smile grow a bit smaller.

He couldn't think of what else could have happened for her to be so nervous around him. From the memories that Yuugi had seen, Anzu had been saved without any other trouble during the bombing at the amusement park. Had anything else happened that he didn't remember? Now that he was paying more attention, Yuugi noticed that Jonouchi wasn't really looking over at him either. The only time that Jonouchi and his other self made contact that he could remember, Imori had challenged them to play the Dragon Cards and his other self had saved Imori as well.

Were they scared of his other self? Of Yuugi?

There was another ring at the door, and Yuugi found himself broken out of his thoughts. His attention was focused on the young woman that was coming into the store.

She had braids in her hair and was exposing her abdomen with a short tank top, it seemed. Her skin was kissed by the sun, her tan skin seeming more like a live ceramic clay, fresh from the earth. Her eyes were hidden by dark sunglasses, so Yuugi couldn't even see her eyes. As she turned to him, she smiled.

"W-Welcome."

"Hello," she greeted in return. Anzu and Jonouchi both looked up and greeted her as well, which she returned.

Sugoroku was making his way to the register, asking the woman what she was looking for in particular.

"Wow..." Yuugi turned to Anzu, who was staring at the woman intensely.

"What, Anzu?" Yuugi whispered.

"I know her from somewhere... A magazine, maybe?" Anzu mumbled.

"Hmm..." The woman adjusted her sunglasses onto her head, and Yuugi could see that her eyes seemed to be black from his spot in the corner. "I don't really like games where luck is involved. Maybe games where you can trick and read each other..."
"Hmm... This will be a hard order."

"My friend is coming in, too. Maybe, between the three of us, we can narrow down the choices. If that's not too much trouble, I mean..."

She turned around to look at the other merchandise in the store, as Sugoroku pulled out a reference book of the various games that he had access to. She came over to Yuugi and Anzu, removing her sunglasses. Her eyes were deep, dark, as though they saw everything and knew what it all meant.

"You must be Mutou Yuugi-kun, right?"

"Ah, yes!"

Yuugi found himself sinking into her eyes, like how he sunk into-

"Aileen Rao!" Anzu shouted. The woman jumped back, surprised by Anzu's excitement.

"Aileen..?" Yuugi mumbled, hoping that Anzu would explain.

Anzu turned to him, aghast.

"How do you not know who she is? She's an actress, singer, model, dancer." Anzu looked up to Aileen, who held a bit of nervousness about her. "Wait, what are you doing here in Domino? If-If I may ask?"

Aileen laughed. "When I was younger, I lived here in Japan for a while and I made a few friends when I came to school here. I'm staying with one right now."

"Really?" Jonouchi, tuning into the conversation, came over with a smile. "Is she famous too?"

"Yes." Smiling to Jonouchi, Aileen returned her attention back to Yuugi. Yuugi noticed her eyes travel downwards on his body for a moment before looking up, fast enough that he was unsure if she did indeed look down or not. "Mimi told me quite a bit about you, Yuugi-kun. She also mentioned that pendant that you have there."

"'Mimi'?"

The doorbell rang once more. Everyone turned to the door and Yuugi felt his heart become a bit lighter as another familiar face came through the door.

"Hello, Mi-Nee-san!"

The girl, now with red hair, smiled at the group and gave a small wave as she came over. She greeted Sugoroku with a slight bow and gave nods of recognition to the rest.

"Hello, Yuugi-kun, Anzu-san, Jonouchi-kun." She turned to Aileen, an air of eagerness about her. "Ai, did you find anything yet?"

"Not yet, Mimi."

Yuugi looked over to Mi-Nee, curious.

"So people call you Mimi, too?"

Mi-Nee smiled, her green eyes sparkling. "Yes. My siblings and high school friends call me that."
Aileen laughed. "You mean all the students you tutored." She playfully twisted a lock of Mi-Nee's hair with her finger.

"So you two graduated together?" Anzu asked, curious.

"Ah, no," Aileen said. "Mimi graduated when she was fourteen, and she stayed around to tutor. That's how we met." She pet Mi-Nee on her head, looking at her fondly. "We should hang out more often, not just when I'm in Japan."

Mi-Nee shrugged. "We'll figure something out."

"Miss?" they heard Sugoroku say. He had a list of games in his hand, which Aileen went over to review after excusing herself.

"You're staying in Domino, then, Mi-Nee-san?" Jonouchi asked, his eyes a bit bright with excitement. "We can show you around town, if you'd like."

Mi-Nee nodded. "I'd like that very much. Thank you for your offer." She turned to look at the many games in the store. "I haven't been in Domino City since it was Saikoro. It's changed a lot, but this store really hasn't."

"You've been here before?" Anzu asked.

"Yes, but that's been about eight years now." She turned to Yuugi and smiled. "I'll ask Aileen if we can stay longer, since there's so much to see."

Jonouchi and Anzu looked to each other and excused themselves for a moment. Yuugi could see them walking over to Aileen Rao and trying to get her attention. It seemed that the young woman had multiple boxes on the counter awaiting her approval. Looking back to Mi-Nee, he returned her smile.

The girl tilted her head to the side, pensive. "I think you met my older brother, if I remember correctly. He told me about this shop."

"Your brother?"

"Yes. Do you know him? His name is Ku-"

Anzu came over, excitement clear on her face. She turned to Mi-Nee. "Aileen-san invited us over to where you two are staying for tomorrow. Is that all right? She gave us the address."

"Of course." Mi-Nee looked to Yuugi. "You should come. It will be fun, if Ai-chan really is buying all of the games that she has stacked over there."

"Thank you for coming, Rao-san," Sugoroku stated, helping Aileen with her bags. Jonouchi helped her as well, nervous around the model.

"Thank you, Mutou-sama. And to you, Jonouchi-kun." The boy laughed nervously in response as Aileen called over to Mi-Nee to leave. "We'll see you tomorrow, then."

Anzu and Jonouchi bade the girls farewell, saddened at their absence. Anzu laughed at the expression on Jonouchi's face, as his red cheeks began to regain their normal color.

Yuugi found himself sweeping up the corner again.

'Who's her brother? Eight years ago...'
It was after spending time with his friends at the ice cream store, where Yuugi felt rather comfortable around than he had before. Jonouchi made it a challenge as to who could eat their dessert the fastest. Between the teenage boys, there were enough complaints of headaches to last until school started. Anzu scolded them playfully, laughing as Jonouchi asked for warm water from the server.

There was still the sense of hesitation in their actions, as if waiting for something to happen. Yuugi saw it in the way that Jonouchi didn't muss up his hair like before, and how Anzu didn't say "See you later" like she normally would. Walking home alone hurt the most; it reminded him of not having friends, of that time when he was too lonely, too tired... The letters from Iza had been his only comfort, and when those had stopped coming, he only kept his hope that Anzu or Iza would visit again.

'Maybe I'll read some of those letters... I hope he's doing well.'

As he entered his bedroom, Yuugi walked over to his box of letters, where all those from Iza kept. He looked through them for a moment, watching the post-mark dates get farther and farther away, back in time. He found one of the many tapes that Iza had made for him and pulled it out, planning to listen to it later. And to his surprise, he saw the familiar notebook where he had written to his other self. Struck by a sense of urgency, he turned the pages to his letter and then to one page further.

"He wrote back!" Yuugi pressed his notebook hard against his chest, smiling. He was elated by the response, which he set down to read... It was different than what he had expected. There were words and phrases crossed out, contrasting the rather controlled text. They were crossed out in a fashion that stopped him from reading what kanji had been there before. It surprised him, seeing spaces blacked out on the sheet in front of him.

★★★★★★Thank you for your letter.

The King speaks of you a lot. Both of you are very similar, and he speaks of you like you are a very bright person.

I have not spoken to you directly because of the Puzzle's ★★★★★ limitations. There is only so much power that the Puzzle can give over to either the good King or myself, and I would much rather have the power to protect you if the need were to arise.

What you ★★★★★owe me is nothing, for I owe you much more. The God Puzzle, in its three thousand year existence, had us inside of its labyrinth. For me, being let out of the Darkness by your hand is kindness enough to receive from you.

Please, my master, do not think of me as ungrateful nor not wishing to communicate with you as you wish; it only occurs to me that I need no thanks from you. Your happiness is mine.

There was no name written at the bottom of the page.

It was different than he expected.

He sighed, going over the letter once more. His other self was very praising of him and very polite. He mentioned both the King and the Puzzle, using very respectful or fearful descriptions of the two.

'I... I didn't want a servant. I wanted a friend.' Maybe this was the friend that he wished for, someone
that would never betray him.

'I won't betray him. I swear it.'

The next day, the three friends were arriving at a condominium. Anzu, in her admiration for Aileen Rao, had brought a small bouquet.

"Do you think these are okay?"

"Anzu, I think they're fine, but just get them out of my face." Jonouchi pushed the bouquet away from his nose, sneezing at the pollen that invaded his nose.

Yuugi reached for the door knocker, blocking out his friends. Where yesterday a sense of calm had soothed him, there was an apprehension. A chill was wandering up and down his spine.

'What's going to happen when we walk through this door?'

"Hello, Rao-san."

"Hello, Yuugi-san. You can call me Aileen." The actress was wearing an outfit that seemed to be from another culture, maybe India. Her eyes were dark and mesmerizing, inviting him to nod at her request. "Hello, Anzu-san, Jonouchi-kun. Come in, come in! You don't need to take off your shoes."

"Thank you for inviting us, Aileen-san." Yuugi stepped over the threshold and was overwhelmed by the scents of spices and sweets. It made him think of older things, of the stories of ancient civilizations that his grandfather had told him about. He recognized Kali and her husband, and he even noticed Krishna with the Phoenix.

"Whoo! This decoration is pretty cool!" Jonouchi chirped, marveling at the different statuettes that were scattered all around the room. Anzu had a look of awe on her face as well.

"Aileen-san, you are half Indian and half Canadian, right?"

"Yes. My tastes are more like my father's, if the paintings tell you anything," Aileen answered. She thanked Anzu for the flowers, inviting Anzu to help her look for a vase in which to place them. Jonouchi and Yuugi admired the various art pieces. Some were scenes of the land or gods they were only vaguely familiar with. Others were bloody scenes that became beautiful with the curving brushstrokes that mimicked dancing. They pointed out differences in how the animals looked compared to the art they studied in Japanese history and what they could recognize, like the Snake Woman.

"India is pretty rich in culture," Jonouchi mused. "The closest I've ever been to it is in class and when I have curry."

Yuugi laughed lightly. "Me, too. It'd be neat to see it all."

"I can show you some of it!" Both boys turned around and saw Aileen and Anzu. Aileen held a box in her hands. "Here, follow me."

They followed her to a sitting room, which had a large window that showed them a dance room, a studio. Another door led to a room that Aileen dismissed as a guest room. There was a dance barre visible in the studio, as well as a wall-length mirror. There was something hanging on the bar, something Yuugi thought to be a ribbon. Anzu commented on its beauty, while Jonouchi focused on the strange table in the middle of the sitting room.
"What I have here," Aileen gestured, setting the box she was holding on the table, "is the game of Raijinhai. It's a game with a history of over 2000 years. Could you believe that wars were fought using these pieces?" She lifted one piece out of the box, one that was carved to look like a soldier.

"Really?" Jonouchi asked. "People fought with these things?"

Aileen smiled. "Raijinhai, and other games like chess and shoji, are based on war and various positions in war. Wargaming has always been a popular thing, you know."

Yuugi nodded. "Duel Monsters is a war game, too."

Aileen watched at the teens admired the pieces of her Raijinhai. She heard praises for their faces, individual and lifelike. Their paint was lovely and their clothes almost looked soft, and their armor hard and a good defense.

"Yuugi-san, would it be all right if we played a game together?" Yuugi turned to Aileen, holding onto a smaller figure that seemed to be like a woman.

Something inside of him felt excited and apprehensive.

"Sure!" Yuugi let the excitement flood him, but he quickly noticed how the apprehension - first he had thought it was his own, but he recognized it as the King's and someone else's - grew as he sat down at the strange table. Aileen praised him silently with a grin. She looked over to Anzu and Jonouchi, who weren't put off by the young woman's actions.

"Anzu-san, Jonouchi-kun, why don't you two sit down?" Yuugi turned to his friends and froze. "Their eyes!"

Their gazes were clouded, seeing off into something that Yuugi knew wasn't on the same plane as his. There was no hesitation in their actions as they went into the dance room and closed the door behind them. Yuugi could hear the lock latch into place. Through the mirror, Anzu and Jonouchi stood by the dance barre. They were taking what Yuugi had thought to be a ribbon - 'Rope?' - and tying themselves by the wrist to the barre.

Aileen smiled at his shock and Yuugi felt his apprehension turn to fear. He could feel an energy from her, similar to the King's and to the presence that his other self held before it escaped from Yuugi's consciousness as he fell asleep.

"Wh-What are you?"

"I'm someone who knows about something much older than you can imagine, boy." Aileen sighed. Her eyes changed from a deep, powerful sea, to pools of sadness. "I wish to fight the Danava."

"Danava? I don't-"

"The Demon of the Millennium Puzzle! The one who controls the Shadows and bears the Armory of the Deserts on his form!" The woman - 'This can't be Aileen-san! This can't!' - stood and Yuugi could smell spices rolling off of her in droves of scents. "You will call him out, Mutou Yuugi, or you won't be going home with your friends at all!"

He felt tired, as though sleep had been inhaled into his body and began to flood his senses. He was vaguely aware of a presence pressing against his mind, and it was not the King, who was wrapping his strong arms around Yuugi.
'Wait!' he cried out, hoping to be heard, to be acknowledged.

'... -ma?!' he heard. He didn't know if it was the Spirit he knew or the one he did not.

And all was black.

As the Danava began to seize control, he expected nothing different; just a human that thought themselves on par with a divinity like his Yuugi, his King, or a lesser one like himself. He didn't expect to see the truest light of Yuugi's soul. There was no blemish in it at all and it was truly a star. It had been protected by the Dragon's blessings during the fight with Imori, so he had not witnessed its radiance. How could a human be so lovely that their soul was perfect?

It was intoxicating.

When he opened Yuugi's eyes, he took in a lovely woman that Yuugi had met. His mind, however, was providing a different name. He imagined saving someone from a well. There was only something blocking him. There was a wealth of knowledge, he knew, at the edge of that ignorance. If only he could pass over it...

"I did not expect for Devayani to call us for a game." The Danava stared at his new opponent. Aileen, or Devayani, was glaring at them from her seat. There was fire in her eyes, fire that would burn the Danava's soul to bits if he let it. He imagined the fire in his heart and in his own eyes.

"I don't know who you are, but I'm not this 'Devayani' that you're talking about."

'Foolish one.'

"Fine. Aileen, why do you wish to meet me?"

Aileen gave him a strange smile, that that spoke of poisons and blood. "I need your help. Your Shadows, Armory - anything that you can do, but I need your help."

"You couldn't have asked?"

"I'll likely need you for an indefinite amount of time." Aileen's gaze had settled into one of determination. "It'd be better if I win the Puzzle from Yuugi, so that you will be my rightful servant."

The Danava resisted frowning at that. He would only serve Yuugi, even if he allowed others to give him orders from time to time. Aileen could have asked his Master for help and the Danava would have readily done so, if only to please his Master. She did seem sincere in whatever she was worried about.

"So, how do you play this game, Raijinhai?"

She quickly went to explain the rules, taking care to explain each piece and how the strange table, which had panels that blocked each side of the table from view. There would be no way to know how to counter against the opponent's moves, if only clever strategy and use of probability.

"How do we decide on a victor?"

"Would you like the Beginner's Version, or the Formal Rule?" Aileen felt the corner perk up slightly as the Danava chuckled in amusement. It reminded her of her task all the more.

"The Formal, if you will. I have never played this game, but it is welcoming." He picked up one piece, one that had a crown of green and beading etched into the dark stone. "What is the Formal?
Do we seize the King, like in Chess?"

"Yes. Only the Queen, who you're holding, may defeat the King, but she is killed by all others. I'm sure you can figure out the basic battles. Soldiers lose to cavalry, cavalry to elephants, elephants to shogun. The King defeats them all." Aileen pulled out one piece. It was man-shaped and held a blade to the air.

"Indra?" the Danava found himself saying. Whatever the name had meant, it meant something to both the Danava and Aileen. There was the smell of lightning in the air, and Aileen seemed confused at the fact that the Danava knew about Indra at all.

"The Thunder God - the Raijin - Indra. May Indra bless this game, that he lead us to the Real from the Unreal." There was a darkness that seemed to cover the room. The Danava smiled at the Darkness licking at his feet. They were curious, tasting his Master's flesh, his own essence. He shooed them away with a flick of the wrists. When he looked up at Aileen, he noticed the Light of her Soul and the Darkness eager to lick at its brightness, to taste it. They were curious to her orders, but they knew that the Danava had orders as well.

'She doesn't know how to control them.'

The panels of the table came up between them.

"Let us start."

Chapter End Notes

*Tim's - Tim Horton's, a chain of doughnut and coffee shops named after a famous hockey player (who died in a vehicular collision). Very large in Canada.

*Yami no Yuugi/the Danava suffered sensory deprivation and the Ganzfield Effect, leading to his difficulty in adjusting to the various degrees of stimuli that Yuugi's body can interpret.

*Devayani - Granddaughter of the Vedic god Indra, god of rain and thunderstorms. Also known as "Mastermind," she is beautiful, faithful, and trustworthy. One of her descendants is the Creator God Krishna, whose mount is the Garuda (Phoenix).

*Raijin hai - It is a guessing based game where two players use their pieces to eliminate the other's. The win conditions apparently vary, but three are presented in the show: 1) The opponent has no more pieces. (Basic) 2) The opponent has no pieces stronger than the other player's. (Formal - after the opponent's King has been taken) 3) The opponent's king has been taken. (Beginner)

Indra - invincible, but can only be used once
Queen - defeated by all but the King
King - defeats shogun, elephant, cavalry, and soldier
Shogun - defeats elephant, cavalry, soldier, and Queen
Elephant x2 - defeats cavalry, soldier, and Queen
Cavalry x2 - defeats soldier and Queen
Soldier x2 - defeated by all but Queen
- This trigram "Kan" is the symbol for water (like a log in a river :D ). This symbol comes from ancient Chinese as one of eight, combined in pairs to create 64 hexagrams, and it is one of 4 on the South Korean flag. I'm just using it to take out words when the Danava writes, so they mean nothing.

*There is so much foreshadowing in this chapter, I want to cry.*
The Danava and Devayani

Chapter Summary

My Lord’s reign:
In the Ninth-longest-month
Chrysanthemum flowers
Bloom-of a thousand years
Will they be a sign, perhaps.

- The Hôshô-ji Lay Priest and Former Grand Minister [Fujiwara no Tadamichi] (1097 – 1164)

Chapter Notes

These typographic marks (『』, 『』) for languages other than Japanese.
* I didn't mean for this game to last so long. They just seemed like good cut off points...
and I've been pretty busy with work now that I am a realised adult, so I've had time for
world building while away from the computer.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Yes, let us begin. In our Formal Game, should both Kings be lost in a double death, the player's
remaining pieces will be counted, the larger number winning. Indra and Queen are not included, as
the Queen is not meant to battle and Indra can only be used once during a game." Aileen moved
through her pieces, advising the Danava to devise a strategy. "But I warn you. You won't only lose
your Master and his friends, but you might lose something else just as important."

"There is nothing more important," the Danava countered. He looked into the room where Anzu and
Jonouchi were trapped. There was no sign of them regaining consciousness soon. He wondered, for
a moment, if they were trapped in the darkness like he had been. He turned to Aileen. "Enough talk.
Start the game," he declared, reaching for a cavalry piece and setting it down. The chevalier patted
their horse's neck as the horse licked the Danava's palm, tickling his painful flesh.

Aileen was silent as she picked her piece. She looked up to the Danava with curious eyes. They
seemed older now. "Before I open the doors, may I guess what your piece is?"

"Go ahead."

"Your piece is the cavalry."

The Danava's eyes widened slightly.

'How-?'

Aileen smiled. The doors opened at her call, and there sat the elephant piece that would defeat his
cavalry.
The chevalier let out a yell as he fell from his horse. The elephant charged forward and crushed the
horse's legs, eliciting sounds of terror and pain. The chevalier was crushed as well, the elephant's foot
stomping on their arms, legs, and finally their rib cage. There was cries of loss there, loss of their
master's pride in them. The Danava gave them both a gentle stroke on their brows and quickly
silenced the cries, taking their bodies from the center of the table.

"And look there." He looked up to where Aileen was pointing. In the room were Anzu and Jonouchi
sat, Darkness was gathering. Their voices told of ravenous hunger. The Danava's Shadows
whispered with the Darkness - not Shadows, as he had originally thought - and they spoke of having
only a recent feeding of a weak Soul. They needed more. "You have no luxury of losing pieces.
Those children, should you lose, will become food for my Shadows."

"Next battle." Aileen's voice was firm, resolution saturating every word. The doors came up and
blocked off the Danava's view of Aileen's side.

The Danava steeled himself, maintaining a calm expression on his face. He reached down for the
Shogun, who grunted in acceptance of his new commander. It held its blade with fiery determination.

'How did she do that? It isn't a coincidence. The Devayani is supposed to be a mastermind. She is
doing something.'

'Ask her things. Distract her,' the Faceless One whispered.

'Shut up.'

"You don't seem like one to want to lose companions." The Danava glared at her from across the
table. "You like Anzu and Jonouchi-kun."

Aileen did not answer, only bidding the doors to open. To the Danava's surprise, the King was
unsheathing his sword and beheading the Shogun without mercy.

"Unlike you, Sweet Danava-" Oh, she was not happy, if her mocking tone was anything to go by. "-my purpose for finding you outweighs my need for companions. Poor Shogun, curse your
incompetent commander."

'How?' the Danava wondered. He tried to ignore the Darkness curling around Anzu's arms,
Jonouchi's legs. 'She put the King out without hesitation. How can she decide to put the King in
danger at all?'

'Come on, Sweet One. You can think through this. No one can read your mind. You are far too
powerful for that.'

'Shut up.' The Danava cleared his Shogun from the table, trying to ignore the Faceless One's words.

Aileen's eyes were bright with interest and glee. "Why don't you look to your friends? The Shadows
are more eager than before."

'Why is she letting me see them? She knows how determined I must be to save them?'

'You're focusing on them, aren't you?'

'... And not on the game.'

The Danava closed his eyes. "Clever. I am better at gambling anyway."
Aileen scoffed as he blindly chose a piece. He recognized it by its texture and he accepted it without hesitation nor reluctance. It cooed in his grip, eager to serve. It mourned its comrades, but it was still willing to battle. There was a kiss against his palm. "This one will be fine."

"Are you giving up? You did lose your Shogun, after all. Are you not motivated by your friends' lives?"

"I'm letting Luck choose a piece for me. I will let Her be my Judge."

Her face was expressionless, and so the Danava invited her to pick a piece. As he watched her, he noticed the Darkness that she controlled lick at her flesh, toy with her hair... They were planning to eat her, should she lose.

'Faceless One, may I ask something of you?' The Danava felt his companion's tongue lick at his ear as he set the piece down by the doors.

'Yes, dear, sweet one.'

'Make a deal with them. There is free darkness from the game itself. They may consume all of it.'

'... You will take none for yourself? For us? For the Shadows?'

'None.'

'... As you wish.'

"Okay," Aileen said. "I have my piece."

"Before opening the doors, let me guess, 「Lady Aileen」." The title seemed to confuse her, especially as they were not in Japanese as she might have expected. They were one of her home languages, English. She also probably did not expect to hear the same mocking tone that she had used when addressing him.

"Go ahead."

"You picked the elephant."

"What'd you say?" Fear was on Aileen's face, and the Danava saw a bit of Darkness lick Aileen's cheek.

"I found your trick. You like games where you read and trick your opponent, not those based on luck."

"And what does that matter?"

"Raijinhai," the Danava explained, "is based on probability and tactics, and reading your opponent's thinking. Even if it's a basic thought, it doesn't change the main strategy. You need to limit your opponent's thinking. You have Jonouchi-kun and Anzu in my sight, and you know Mi-Nee-san, so there is the chance - a high chance, actually - that she told you about how I play."

Aileen sneered. She opened the doors. "See? I beat your soldier."

"Look, an elephant as I said," the Danava stated plainly as the elephant killed the kind soldier, stomping on their chest until the militant no longer could be recognized as having been man-shaped.
"You guessed!"

"There is a one in eight chance I pick the King. Small enough to steer you from choosing the Queen, the King, or even 「Lord Indra」. I don't have a Shogun anymore, but I do have my Elephants, two - well, now one Soldier - and one Cavalry, so you sent the Elephant."

Aileen emitted fear. There was something that bothered her. She frowned and closed her eyes, exhaling.

"You don't have the luxury of losing pieces. Look at your friends now." The Darkness was wrapping around Anzu and Jonouchi's abdomens.

The Danava exhaled softly. "I do have a strategy now. I'll read your mind-" He turned away from the mirror that allowed them to see Yuugi's friends. He saw the Darkness lick at Aileen's arms. "- and I will save you, Aileen."

"I do not need you to save me, Demon."

The doors appeared again and the Danava closed his eyes. After hearing Aileen place a piece by the doors, the Danava reached down for his decided piece and set it down. The doors opened soon after.

"You've lose another piece, Danava."

"And you've lost your Invincible Indra to the humble, mortal Soldier." The Danava smiled, his teeth showing. "From what I recall, Indra can only be called once in battle."

Aileen had no expression left on her face. What was she feeling? Was she frightened?

"I'm not cheating, nor are there any tricks," the Danava reassured her. "I don't have any power to read minds. I'm just reading probabilities and strategies. All you do is decide based on your opponent's words."

"But you don't have an established tactic," Aileen defied. "Raijinhai has tactics lasting 2000 years, and from what I've learnt, you've been away for 3000, since before this game had been created."

The Danava nodded and spoke. "Open."

The doors opened at his words, and there, facing Aileen's elephant, was the Danava's King. Aileen stood, and for a moment, it seemed that she saw the Shadows tasting her as she wiped at her arms. She shook her head and looked to the table.

"The King? Here?!"

"The origin of games, in written history, comes from ancient Egypt." The Danava allowed the King to present him the Elephant's tusks, reaching for the rest of the corpse. As he cleared the table, the Danava stared at Aileen. She was frightened, disturbed by what he - what he and the Faceless One - were.

'Perhaps I should scare her more?'

'More?'

'She should never come near my Danna-sama again. Never to harm him again.'

He let the power of the Millennium Puzzle flood through him. Light was flooding his vision, and his Shadows were curling around him. It was strange. He had never let the Shadows so close to him
before without restraining them.

They told him their names - Ran-Mei, Moselle, Lei, Aditya, Kartik - and he let them flow out from him, pushing away the Darkness from Aileen. The girl reached forward to her army. They placed more pieces by the now-closed doors. Aileen was falling apart, as was the glass that separated them from Anzu and Jonouchi.

The Danava could hear Yuugi's friends calling out to him - "Other Yuugi! What-!" -

"Open!"

There, the Danava's Queen pulled out her dagger and stabbed Aileen's King in the throat. The Queen turned to the Danava and smiled, tears streaming down her face. She searched for, and found, comfort in the Danava's hands, kissing the flesh of his palms. The smallest Shadow that the Danava controlled, - Ran-Mei - curled around the Queen and gave praise to the piece.

Suddenly, Aileen stood. She didn't respond to the noise of Anzu and Jonouchi leaving the room where they had been trapped. The Danava sighed and stood. He waved his hand.

"You played a game with Aileen-san?" Anzu shouted. There was nothing on the table but two pieces, a man and woman. She looked up to Aileen, who was standing by the window. "Aileen-san? What's wrong?"

"... I guess I've lost."

"Yes." The Danava stood, quickly checking over Jonouchi and Anzu with his Shadows. "I still wonder. You said that we would lose Jonouchi-kun and Anzu, and that I would lose my Master, if I lost. Do you lose anything?"

Aileen reached up to grip the curtains by her window. She pulled one to the side and sunlight filled the room. "Perhaps I did... I can't get them back now."

"Who?"

Aileen turned to the three, glaring at the Danava. "Why do you care? I tried to kill Jonouchi-kun and Anzu-san, and I tried to separate you, the Danava, from your Master!"

Jonouchi frowned. "You would have killed us?"

"I had no choice!"

"You stupid girl." Everyone turned to the Danava, the Other Yuugi, and were shocked by his calm expression. He had sounded furious. There had never been a wavering in his tone before, nothing for showing emotion. "I wouldn't let you kill them, and I didn't even let the Darkness come after you. I could have let you die, but I chose not to.

"You always have a choice." The Danava stepped forward, hesitating for a moment, before laying a hand over Aileen's. There was a spark of energy from the contact points, and the Danava wondered what had happened when the Light had blinded him.

"Danava..."

" Aileen... Devayani, what happened to make you want to take me away from Master Yuugi?"

Aileen sighed. She turned around, making the Danava move away to give the other space. "You
keep calling me that..."

"It seems right. Aileen, explain. Please."

Aileen was sixteen when she met the Mikoto family. The Mikoto parents had met her parents during a business trip to New York City, where Aileen was finishing up her run on Broadway. She had found it very difficult to balance her schooling and acting, so her parents and managers had agreed that she should focus on her schooling before embarking on another business journey. Perhaps she could graduate if she spent enough time there? She only had one and a half year of schooling left.

It was also one and a half year left, she thought, until she could go see her father again. Something black and crawling inside of her wanted to ruin her, she thought.

The Mikoto family invited the Rao family into their home, to a place where their daughter was not famous yet and could enjoy her schooling without being hassled by paparazzi and those that wished to invade her privacy, as young women and men seemed to invite by holding onto the attractiveness of youth in their youthful years. She had been learning Japanese since she was ten and was competent in speaking and writing the language so she would be fine for the duration of school.

The children were nice, though strangely named. The information she had on Japan and its culture delved into the Shinto belief system and she had learned that the children were named after gods. It was even stranger when she found out the reason for it; those had been their family names before being adopted by the Mikoto family, and to remember their families, they had chosen to be called by those titles. It was all the more ironic, given what the children said they were.

Adapa.

Omodaru was the eldest, and Aileen wasn’t so fond of him at first. He was nineteen and often looked at her as though she was beneath him. He was nicer to her as the first few weeks went by, and she learned that he was the one that made sure she had maple syrup for her pancakes and Jim Horton's on Sundays. He gave good advise and would drive them all from school and back when he could. Her manager said she became sweeter after those days.

Izanagi, the second eldest and two years younger than she, was sometimes erratic in his behavior, drawing and painting on whatever piece of paper he could find. He sometimes frightened her with his interests, skulls and books in strange languages all over his room. He was kind to her, however, and she learned to enjoy his company. She learned how to hold poses for long periods of time, being his model, and her legs became stronger after those days.

Izanami the Younger, the youngest and four years younger than she was, was often pouting; it made sense, for he was a boy with a womanly name. He didn't mind it though; he was more pouting in that his siblings were hovering around him constantly, and for that, Aileen let him decide what they would do when they had free time. He was fun to be around and always had a happy thought. He was kind and always had a smile to share. She always found herself having a smile after those days.

Kusanagi and Izanami the Elder, or "Mimi", were welcoming and undemanding. They were Izanagi's age, but they were very much like parents. They were stern, kind, and were attached at the hip. They held a sense of regalia that made Aileen want to latch onto them and never let go. They were beautiful and the moment that Aileen saw them, she knew that she loved them. They would play music loudly when able, and they often invited Aileen to dance. There was no order but theirs. She felt loved during and after those days.

Kusanagi was the man she could depend on, his fiery eyes frightening and protective; Mimi was the
woman that made her feel beautiful and was her true confidant. Their kisses were so different, but they felt like they came from the same mouth when they pressed against her forehead and her cheeks. They didn't love her like how she was in love with them, they said, but they had grown to love her, because their hearts were endless, like that of the Danava they told her so often about. They were angels, her own Devas.

But when her angels were injured, their wings plucked of their feathers and beaks broken in a way that made them unable to sing, Aileen realized and remembered. She could never have her Devas. When they opened their eyes, they weren't hers anymore. They weren't the Devas that she knew. They no longer sang, danced, or smiled. They were possessed by the Asuras, certainly.

She changed as well, into what she once was and would always be; however, she didn't change as much as they did. They were still so beautiful, even as they began to live up to the names they were given.

"But we're fine, Ai-chan. We still love you," they said. They learned to love their broken wings and songless voices, to fly with windy wings and sing with silent voices. They continued to love Aileen with their endless hearts, who confessed to love their attackers. "They lost sight of virtue. They've been punished for it, Aileen. Let's move beyond it."

"Is there anyone that could help you?" she had asked.

"... The Danava." The Danava, whose heart was endless and was a Dragon, one of the Great Beasts who craved Justice in all things. Aileen felt something ugly in her heart when they spoke of the older Immortal. He had not been seen in 3000 years, but they spoke of him like they had seen him recently. Even for their lifetimes, 3000 years was no short time; why did they love someone who they had mentioned only meeting once? The Danava wasn't even there for them like Aileen was!

They continued their lives, and Aileen focused on the life she had begun outside of Japan. When she left, her heart was heavy, but there had been no choice. She could focus on her loves' pain, or she could find the Danava. Any time that she had free, she searched, but to no avail. It wasn't until after Seto Kaiba's Death-T and the sound of longing that she heard in Mimi's voice when she talked about the strength and wonder that the Danava held.

"Where is he, Mimi? I want to meet the person that my best friend loves," she teased over the phone, ignoring how she almost crushed her mobile phone in the process. She ignored the black mess inside of her heart as well.

"He lives inside of the Millennium Puzzle and its master. The Danava's master is even Ku-nii's friend." Kusanagi had already met him? When Aileen heard that Kusanagi had met this "Yuugi Mutou" eight years prior, she felt herself breaking.

She had never had a chance.

"Did you meet him back then, Mimi?"

"No, but-" Mimi sounded shy, something quite rare. "I would help Kusanagi write letters to Yuugi-kun... Would it be awful if I say I loved the Danava and their danna-sama, too?"

She couldn't fall now, though.

She could, however, find the Danava and have them fix her friends.

The black things, the Darkness, that had come into her heart could help her...
All she had to do was play a game.

Aileen sighed heavily. She had been recalling everything silently in her head, trying to collect each thought before speaking. "My friends know about you. They... Mikoto Kusanagi and Mi-Nee... They know about you and your powers, your ability for wishes. I thought that if I won you from Yuugi-san, I could help them. They... They need you. They were hurt, so badly, and you need to help them." She grabbed the Danava- Yuugi's - the Other Yuugi's hands tightly.

"Please?"

Jonouchi shivered at her tone. It was unsettling to hear Aileen Rao speaking that way, like she had lost hope. Even when his sister was starting to get sick, she hadn't lost hope, and that was going on eight years now. Yuugi said that he hadn't lost sight in finishing the Millennium Puzzle either, in the eight years that it took him to finish it. Whatever horrible thing that happened to Kusanagi and Mi-Nee, it broke Aileen.

"I... I cannot."

"What do you mean?" Aileen's voice became monstrous. It was the only word that Jonouchi could use to describe it now. "You're the one that took them from me. Whatever you did to take them away from me, to make them love you and not me... They were hurt and they still waited for you! They're still waiting!" Aileen turned to the Danava, gripping the Other Yuugi's arms with claws.

"Let go now. You will do that, now." The Other Yuugi's voice became sinister. There was too much energy in the room. Jonouchi could see Anzu shivering slightly, biting her lip. She turned her head towards him, silently questioning him. Her eyes held so much fear.

'What the Hell is going on?'

Aileen's eyes, they could not have been flaring with light. They could not have been shining with fire. Was there a glow about her, one that was blood-lustful. "No! Not until-!"

"You will let go of Danna-sama right now!"

Darkness seemed to cover the room, and suddenly he was drowning. Jonouchi felt himself falling to the floor, pain erupting from his head and strange feelings crawling over his skin. They were licking at him; somehow he had understood that. They were starving things, this Darkness, and it was searching, searching for something to consume. He could hear their whispers, their ambitions...

Something wished to pierce his skin, but it suddenly curled away from him, like a cat that had begun to rub against him but had been frightened away from a noise.

There was still something heavy in his lungs, something that made it difficult to breathe.

'I'm scared.'

It was making his brain...

... fuzzier...

... somehow...

Who was he?

"Stop."
Everything grew clear.

There was a pressing against his heart, and Yuugi knew that something, something terrible, was going on outside, where Jonouchi and Anzu were in the line of fire. The King was pressing kisses to his neck, wrapping his arms around Yuugi's waist to show affection, and it's okay; he won't harm them or anyone else, sweet one. It wasn't that he was frightened of his Other Self; far from it, but his friends were scared. Of all things, he could taste their fear.

'What if-

'The Devayani is too angry right now. The Danava needs to make her sleep.' The King stroked Yuugi's belly, drawing a small whining from Yuugi's throat. His body was getting hot with innocent touches. They were fully clothed, clothes blocking the full effect that their bare skin would have on him, but Yuugi was becoming dizzy. There was a suffocating feeling in the air, Darkness crawling into his lungs and drowning him. The lack of air, it made him cling to sensation, any sensation, and the closest source of that was the King.

'Will... Un, he hurt her?

'He doesn't want to. Hopefully, he can get rid of the Darkness... They're poisoning her.'

'Poison?' Yuugi let out a moan as his vision grew dark. 'King!'

'Yes. They're harming you as well.'

Aileen was gone, and Devayani was clawing her way out. The Danava was growling at her, eating her Darkness. She cried out and lashed out, breaking away the bricks that held her captive. She didn't want to keep drowning! But Aileen's heart was still trying to recover from its wounds, that someone was able to figure out her mind like her love could. Devayani pulled Aileen out of the Darkness that threatened to consume her and continued to climb. She saw the Danava's Shadows tearing at the bricks, and she reasoned - Devayani would never say feared, as she was a Goddess - that the Shadows were meant to keep her below, in the filthy water that she had fallen into, the Darkness that she had become victim to, that drew away her lover.

Through Aileen's eyes, she saw the Darkness attacking the boy and girl that had come along with the Danava and his Master. She didn't want to harm them, and neither did Aileen. She didn't command that.

"Stop!" she heard again, and the world shook beneath them as the Danava raised his voice, calling on his serpentine voice - the voice she remembered well - to drive the Darkness to submit to him. They were bending to him, but they were still sharply defiant. She tried to reach out to them, but they nipped at her fingers, making her bleed.

Sharp claws appeared in front of her, destroying the Darkness that had harmed her. Devayani saw as the Danava consumed the Darkness, not harmed by its harshness nor its corrosive nature. She allowed herself, for a moment, to be protected.

'Lightning may come from his fingers eventually.'

She closed her eyes, Aileen's eyes, and waited for the claws to sink into her.

"Reach."
It was an order in a dragon's voice, and Devayani had the wanting to reach for the bearer of that voice, the Danava. She reached for his hand, and she smelt the Lotus and Poppy that had brought her out of the well in the first place, so many years ago.

"Reach!"

Her fingers clasped to a gentle hand, and Aileen died.

Devayani died.

What was left would be called Aileen, but she - they - were now so much more than that.

Chapter End Notes

*Deva (देव in Devanagari script) is the Sanskrit word for deity. It is used to describe (loosely) any benevolent supernatural being in Hinduism. Asuras (Sanskrit: असुर) are a group of power-seeking deities related to the more benevolent devas. Danava is the literal word for "devil" and is equated with the Asuras.

*Devayani (the granddaughter of Raijin Indra) was cursed to never marry a Deva.

*Danna-sama - broadly, a patron, a husband, a master; used as a transliteration of Sanskrit दान (dāna, “generosity, giving, donating”)

**This is the word that the Danava uses for referring to Yuugi and the King, referring to them as "Master". The suffix "-ue" is how he addresses Yuugi when using his name, as in "Master Yuugi". I will go back and fix earlier uses of "-ue" with "Master" at a future time. Should I? @ _o

*Adapa - mortal from a godly lineage, a son of Ea (Enki in Sumerian), the god of wisdom and of the ancient city of Eridu, who brought the arts of civilization to that city.
When Yuugi opened his eyes, he saw green. It was a beautiful shade, one that made him shiver with pleasure to look at. It was a similar warmth in his chest whenever he went to sleep, the sleepiness that his other self put him under.

'Hello, there... Master Yuugi.'

'What? Who are you?' The eyes that were gazing back at him seemed to light up with joy. When the other being pulled away, Yuugi was enraptured by the image, the countenance. It was not frightening but beautiful. Green eyes stared back at him, a sea foam colour that looked at him with unending delight. Hands, soft and womanly but calloused like a man's with slightly broader knuckles, came to cradle his face and shift his bangs around. He felt like a play-toy for a moment, but he let himself be toyed with.

He felt safe.

'Master Yuugi, darling Danna-sama, you are safe. Did you want to see how your friends are? Your «droogs» are safe, darling Danna-sama.' Kisses, unwelcome but not bothersome nor uncomfortable, were pressed against his forehead. Yuugi found himself leaning up towards the touch, but he was held down. He turned slowly and saw the King there on the bed next to him, a dark-skinned arm held fast around Yuugi's waist.

Bubble-like feelings remained in his heart then. He wanted to touch the other, to make him feel safe beneath him.
'He'll be safe here, Danna-sama. The King will rest here. Go attend to your friends... They seem frightened.' Yuugi nodded, moving to sit up in bed and letting the foreign lips leave his skin. He let this strange person, this spirit, lead him to the open door, to the hallway. He saw a metal door with an eye on its surface.

'Is... Are you my other self?'

'I am called the Faceless One, child.' He smiled to Yuugi, teeth showing and mirth in his green eyes. 'The one you call your other self, he is waiting for you to awaken, and he will then go to sleep.'

'I can't meet him yet?'

'In due time, Danna-sama.'

Yuugi felt more energy run through him and he felt himself begin to wake up. He reached out for the Faceless One, but he couldn't grasp the pale hand. Yuugi wanted... He wanted to meet his other self, this person that had been fighting his battles, protecting him and his friends.

'Wait! Please!'

He almost shrieked at the embrace that he felt, pulling him upwards. Yuugi saw no one and felt the warmth of Shadows, the same warmth that he felt when he would go to sleep and his other self would wake up.

'Other me?'

He received no answer but a gentle squeeze about him.

He felt safe.

“... gi! Yuugi!” Yuugi opened his eyes and saw Jonouchi looking at him. His eyes were full of shock and fright. There was desperation there as well, and concern.

“Jonouchi... -kun?”

Yuugi bit on the inside of his lips for in thought, trying to process the trickle of memories that were coming through. His other self had allowed him access to memories and saw that the Shadows, his other self's Shadows, had torn through the room, eating any Darkness there. The Darkness had not been tamed at all, but they had been living in the Raijinhai game, turning it into a game of Darkness, just like the Dragon Cards. It had infected Aileen, much like what happened to Imori as well.

Anzu was sitting up slowly. Yuugi could see some glimmers in her hair, probably from the broken magic mirror. Jonouchi was standing already and reached down to help her up.

'What else happened?'

Yuugi tried to stand, but a hand prevented him from doing so. He turned and saw Aileen gripping tightly at his hand, their fingers intertwined.

"Aileen-san?"

Aileen raised her head and Yuugi shivered at the sight. Her eyes were the same dark grey, but they were glowing an eerie golden light around the edges, as if the iris of her eyes had a light behind it.

"Yuugi-kun." She smiled. "The Danava is sleeping now, isn't he?"
"Danava? You mean my other self?"

She nodded. She helped him stand upright, Yuugi hesitant in moving. Jonouchi stepped forward, pushing Aileen away and Yuugi behind him.

"Tell me what the Hell is going on! How do you know about the other Yuugi?"

Aileen nodded, sighing. "We are called Adapa. We named ourselves for the son of Ea, who was mortal from God." She turned and walked to forward, past the two boys and to the painting on the wall. There, was a painting of Amaterasu coming to see the Dancing Goddess. "The Danava is one who was quite close to the Beginning. He, one so old and wise, saved me from the bottom of a well... like saving me from the darkness of a cave."

Yuugi saw her raise her fingers to the edges of the canvas. She seemed enamored by the picture, the Goddess of Dawn surely her own analogous representation to the Danava that she knew, to the other Yuugi that he knew.

"Aileen-san." Anzu stepped forward, some glass falling from her hair. "Are you... and the other Yuugi Gods?"

"No. We've never known what we were, are, or will be." Aileen turned to them, sadness in her eyes. "We just exist upon the Earth. Perhaps we were granted humanity for a reason, but we have never figured that reason. When we find each other, we try to stay together. It's only so long until the Wheel of Life takes us again and we must begin all over again. Imagine my surprise when I see that the person that saved me from the well those millennia ago is the same Sweet Creature that has saved us from the Darkness.

"But who even knows if Aileen just created me?"

Jonouchi stepped forward. "Where did you come from then?"

"The Darkness itself. The same Darkness that created the Puzzle."

Jonouchi glared at her. "Whatever you are, stay away."

Aileen nodded and moved towards another room, closing the door behind her.

"Jonouchi," Anzu said, quiet. She placed a hand on Yuugi's shoulder, starting to lead him away. "Let's go."

"Anzu, are you all right?"

Anzu smiled down at Yuugi. "I'll be okay. I'm not hurt, just... in shock, I guess."

"And take the Puzzle with you."

Yuugi looked up to his friend, to Jonouchi. "Jonouchi-kun? What..?"

Jonouchi turned around to face his friend. He bent down slightly to better have Yuugi's gaze, to have his friend's full attention. "Yuugi. I owe you a lot. You're my friend, the first one I've had that hasn't been a jerk to anybody and doesn't prove anything with his fists. But, that... Adapa, whatever, that's there. Yuugi, where did your other self come from? When did all of this with your other self start?"

"F-From the moment I finished the Puzzle," Yuugi answered. What did that matter? Here was so much praise for Yuugi that Jonouchi was letting spill from his lips, but there was hesitation when
even mentioning his other self, this Danava. His other self had never hurt Jonouchi nor Anzu; if anything, he'd protected them time and time again without ever asking for anything in return. He could feel Jonouchi's fingers against his shoulders now, tightening their hold of him. He felt the shivering of those same fingers, trembling movements spreading through him.

"Yuugi, I think that you need to get rid of the Puzzle."

'... What?'

"What? Why..?"

"Yuugi, this isn't another version of you. You heard Aileen; this has to be some kind of trick from the Puzzle, having someone inside that will try and get your trust by protecting you." Jonouchi's frown became heavier set. "Why was he put into the Puzzle in the first place if he really is there? It can't have been because he was a hero-"

"But he's not like that!" Yuugi pushed Jonouchi away.

"Yuugi!"

"He's not bad! He's only protected you and Anzu! Why don't you trust him?" Yuugi couldn't... He wouldn't believe this. His friends were understanding, patient. Why wouldn't they at least try to listen to what he was saying? Did they want to hear him? Could they even hear him? A concern was pressing against his mind, one that wasn't his. He felt something else against his mind, an urging to calm. The King's calm attitude attempted to placate Yuugi and the other presence, but there was nothing to calm Yuugi now. He had only one thought now.

*Why don't you trust me?*

"Yuugi, we don't know who he is at all." Jonouchi grit his teeth together and sighed heavily. "Do you even know what he's done? To Ushio, Sozoji, or even to Kaiba?"

*Why don't you trust me?*

"What do you think happened to that convict?! He was on fire! Yuugi, this is crazy!"

"Jonouchi! Calm down!"

*You're crazy!*

Yuugi ran out, his eyes burning. He didn't turn back to the shouts of his friends' voices.

*I'm not crazy!*

He kept on running.

*Am...*

*I'm not!*

Sugoroku sighed as he heard the door to Yuugi's room slam shut. Tears had been running down his grandson's cheeks, eyes full of pain. He had thought that this may happen when the boy's other self, whatever name it had, became apparent and closer to Yuugi's life, as Yuugi had tearfully explained. He did not expect, however, for Jonouchi to be so adamantly fierce and loyal to the Yuugi that he had met. The boys had only been friends for about three months, yet Jonouchi knew that something
wasa misset the friend that he knew and was determined to be rid of the offender.

Perhaps too determined. The other's behavior began to remind him of the boy that had he had found in the park so many years ago.

Sugoroku sighed, raising a hand to his eyes. He pinched the bridge of his nose.

'Iza...

Iza had been kind. He had shown Yuugi a few one-player games. He showed him how to play Patience, Ladybird, Draughts, and Reversi. There was no questioning that Iza had seemed rather lonely as well. He spoke kindly of his brothers, the oldest of which was the one they had met, but there was a lost feeling to him. As much as the boy could tell stories and display emotion, when alone and unknowing of Sugoroku watching him, he would stare at nothing, eyes reflecting nothing but the emptiness of space. They had written letters, Iza and Yuugi, for so many years and this Jonouchi boy had to ruin the one happiness that Yuugi had had since Sugoroku had begun to intercept these letters.

It was only _that_ letter that had bothered him, but Jonouchi was reminding him of it.

Sugoroku pulled out the letter that Iza had sent so long ago, trying to discern whether or not it should be passed along after all these years.

_Dear Yuugi,

-It's been a while since you got a letter from your friend. Many things have happened since your previous letter. I regret to inform you, dear little friend, that your friend has died.

-I'm here now.

-I'll keep you safe from the frightening things of the world. I'll make sure that no one dares to come near the kindness that you present to the world. For you are like the Sun amongst the small stars of Humanity, bright enough to outshine them all and to make their glow only visible when you are not present.

-Dear one, if your Chitoha disapprove, I may do away with them if you wish. They can stay away in a happy place where they won't make you sad anymore, and you'll be there with your grandfather who seems so nice. He is truly a good man. Your Chitoha are also nice, but sometimes they seem mean.

-I will do whatever it takes to keep you safe, and happy, and beautiful from the wickedness of the world. Nothing filthy shall caress your cheeks like I would; nothing dark will embrace your body like I would; and you are thirteen soon, so you are of the age where your being will change, but I can make it so that it proceeds more gently, with my support if you wish, with gentle hands, words, and caresses.

-I eagerly await your reply.

-Your dear friend, sincerely.

"..."

Yuugi threw himself into his Soul's Room, something not difficult to do, he found. The more time he spent in his Soul's Room, the easier he could take himself to it. The bedclothes beneath him were so
and welcoming, and they had no voice with which to be suspect of him, which he found necessary at
the moment. There was a movement in the back of his mind, and somehow he knew that his body
was moving, going to comfort his grandfather.

'Why would Jonouchi-kun say all of those things? Since when has my other self posed such a threat
to them? When I fought Imori for the Puzzle, I saw Jonouchi-kun there but he wasn't hurt by Imori,
the Dragons, nor my other self?'

The experience in the Dragon shin tsuen fu hadn't been too frightening, besides, if only for the Water
Dragon that licked his forehead in compassion and told him a story to calm him.

'I wonder what that story even meant, a Garuda or whatever it was... The Water Dragon had said
that I'd go through what the Garuda had, what it always goes through.'

'Yuugi?' The teenager looked up from his pillow. The King stood in the doorway, his toes by the
threshold. He wore a black tunic, a belt going around his waist which made Yuugi realize that the
other boy was indeed older than him but was still a boy nonetheless - the small waist still seemed
larger than his own. The tunic came over-

'You're not wearing trousers.'

'I was deciding how to appear to you when you came.' The King waved a hand downwards, and
soon a pair of black trousers and black slippers came to cover the other boy. A frown adorned his
face. 'But, feeling your heart, made it seem like less of a priority.'

Yuugi lay with his stomach to the bed, watching as the King came to sit close to him. For a moment,
all he thought of was his forehead so close to the other's thigh. He heard the King ask what was
wrong, and he could hear his own voice tell him of the words that his friend had said, the words that
had hurt him so deeply that it made him feel as lonely as he had back before the school year had
started. His face was warm but his voice was getting cold because of the gasps he was constantly
taking, because the sobbing was coming out more than his words.

'Yuugi, it's all right.' Yuugi buried his face in the other's tunic, which seemed soft and warm against
his cheeks. His breath and tears were making the fabric wet, but the King kissed his forehead and
made their eyes meet. 'It will be all right.'

'How do you know that?'

'Because you are so strong, and don't shake your head like that. You are the Sun, and so kind that it's
hard to believe that you come from the same species that causes war and grief.' The King pressed a
kiss towards Yuugi's cheek, but Yuugi kept his face close, his hand cupping the other's cheek and
holding him there. 'You are a Kindness uninfluenced by greed, jealousy, or even envy.'

'Will... will you ever-

Lips pressed against his, drawing out a moan from Yuugi that seemed to want to jump from his lungs
the moment that he had seen the King's bare legs, those knees closer together than he had seen them
before, as though the other boy had been shy.

He seemed so shy, but he's always been so strong for me.

He pushed the King onto the mattress and the King was letting himself be pushed down. Their legs
were moving and soon, that black tunic was disappearing, fingertips the only thing to go over the
darker skin beneath them. The belt was undone and trapped beneath the King, his hips trapped under
Yuugi's.
'Never.'

'Eh?' Yuugi let himself come back, back to his senses that told him that he was sitting on the King, holding him down, already pressing kisses to the other's collarbone.

'I will never leave you because you're changing into a new you, one that feels more brave than before.'

Yuugi learned how to draw more moans out from the other's throat, hands wandering and his hands being guided by the King's own. There was praise for good touches and gentle change of direction when there was a spot touched that made the moans less honest. Eventually, a mouth began to make trails of hot saliva on warm flesh that became a wet map that connected sensitive spot to sensitive spot.

The King was writhing underneath him, shows of passion evident with the light sweat on his skin, rapid breathing, and dilated pupils. The King looked at him for a moment, their eyes meeting, and Yuugi found himself being lowered gracefully to the bed, his clothes being pushed away to reveal his pale skin, skin that was oversensitive against the bare chest of the King.

He was being hushed gently as the same map was traced on his skin, first with fingers and then with lips.

'Please...'

'Please... Yuugi, what's wrong?'

*Don't leave.*

Yuugi was seven years old when he met the person that he called Iza, and he had made this special friendship on his seventh birthday. Now that he recalled further, he remembered the name Kusanagi.

The almost nine-year-old was in the park, his grandfather had said, sitting on a swing in the rain. When he came inside, Yuugi saw that the boy’s clothes didn't fit him right at all. His eyes were bright, but Yuugi forgot about the color. He couldn't remember if they were blue, green, or something completely different.

Iza had introduced himself as Izanami Kusanagi. He said it was his family names, but his first name was something different.

"What is your real name, then?" Yuugi had asked.

"Well, it'd be confusing if I said it," was the answer that he received.

Yuugi learnt so many things from Iza that day. He learnt many games and stories, his favorite being that of a knight that fell in love with a goddess and had twin children as a symbol of their love. Yuugi asked to reenact the whole story after they had cut into his cake and Yuugi had opened his presents, and his mother even let them borrow an old robe of hers so that Kusanagi could be the goddess and Yuugi was the valiant knight.

"I swear upon stars and seas, that you are the only one for me," Yuugi declared and he fought off an imaginary demon that was easily vanquished by his spatula-sword.

"And I will always wait for you, and I will try to be worthy of you," Kusanagi sang out, slipping out of the invisible chains that the demon had put him in and hurried to Yuugi so that they could raise
their hands up and make two more stars to shine in the sky, the two new gods.

When they were done playing, Yuugi told Kusanagi to come whenever he wanted. Then, they could always play together and make up more stories. When it came time for Kusanagi to leave, he gave Yuugi an address.

"Let's write letters to each other. That way, we'll stay close, even if it takes a long time for us to meet again. I live too far away to come a lot."

Through his disappointment, Yuugi smiled. A letter friend! "Every two weeks, we'll send letters, okay?!"

"Yeah!"

It had been three years now since Yuugi had received a letter from his friend, the last days being the beginning of July three years ago. For six years, without fail, he had received a letter every two weeks. Suddenly, it was gone.

'My poor Yuugi... ' The King pressed kisses to Yuugi's face and jaw, hushing his love's worrisome and longing memories from his lips. Yuugi leaned into the touches, trying to forget the person that had left him behind. Even when he was young, he had known that Anzu was busy with dancing and so much with her family. Here had been a friend that had been so faithful and constant that having his presence disappear so suddenly, without warning or reason.

'Why did he leave?'

'I don't know. I don't know why someone would leave such a person as you.' The King whispered sweetness against Yuugi's skin, suckling gently on the pale skin of his collarbone. The pressure was escalating gradually, never painful and still so concerned with hurting Yuugi that it almost drew tears from his eyes. His head was getting cloudy, unable to discern anything other than the sensations on his chest and the small sounds of breathing that came from the both of them, soft and wanting. Words were being whispered against his skin, Yuugi noticed, almost too late, and he made himself try to interpret the sounds as words, the words as meaningful. '... don't want to leave you, ever. I'd fight the Gods if I must.'

'King... ' Yuugi reached up, burying his fingers in the other's dark tresses. It was soft under his fingers but thicker than he had ever felt or seen. As he felt it more, he found it was coarser than Asian hair and it held its shape much better than his did, as he could feel his own hair sinking to the bedclothes and wanting to stay there. It fit the image of the King; it was the body of a foreign king, smelling of incense and spices and the raw sweetness of plants. 'King.'

'Yuugi.'

'Stay with me. I barely know you, but I want you to stay here with me.'

The King pulled away and sighed, a smile still prominent on his face. 'I am a spirit that has been in this Puzzle. I don't know how long I have been here, only that I awoke after your other self, the Danava, who aided me in bringing me into your precious, healing light. I have no memories other than a vague copy of yours and how to survive in this world.'

'No... memories?'

'I remember nothing,' the King confirmed. He chuckled. 'But I do know some things for certain. You are far kinder than I. Younger than I, and you are far the wiser. I would have hurt Kaiba for my own
benefit and vengeance in your name. I may fight because it is right, but if you are in the cross-fire, I'd never move until you are safe. I'd die for you.'

Yuugi saw the other moving closer, and he closed his eyes, humming at soft lips against his eyelids. 'You're so kind, something I admire. I would have waited in so many events where you quickly grew furious, not thinking of your safety, but of others. You didn't even want to kill Kaiba, when he could have killed your grandfather and friend. How does someone like you exist? How could I exist next to you?

'Keep me here forever.'

The Danava sighed, smiling slightly at the words that wandered into his own consciousness. The King and Yuugi were truly enamored with each other. Though the King had acted to protect Yuugi in all things, the boy provided the King with stability and a purpose, one that their lacking of memories did not interfere with. They were completing each other by merely existing.

He had had a fun time trying to calm down Sugoroku. It was as though Jonouchi and Iza had planned to break Yuugi's heart from the beginning, with how sweet their words were and how jealous they could be. The Danava reassured the elder, however, that it would change, that both would return to his grandson. He ushered the man to bed and went to Yuugi's room to sit upon the bed, going to his own Soul's Room.

He sat upon his throne, an imitation of a memory that he could not recall, as he kept watch on his Masters from afar. This was something he was familiar with, he found. The carnal touch of humanity against humanity's flesh, the eager tasting with tongues that sought to devour, and bodies that trembled like drowning serpents in a cold sea that continued to tremble until there was nothing on their minds and no breath in their lungs.

'King...'

'Do you like this?'

The Danava nodded, sending a thought to the King to be more gentle with his touch; tracing the tips of fingernails could more effective in drawing out the deeper, more guttural moans that Yuugi had hidden inside of him.

He wondered what else the little star held inside, though. It was an innocent thought.

'The King heard a string of laughter in his head, pressing his lips to Yuugi's navel at the Danava's suggestion. Yuugi's thighs were tightening against him, trying to hold him closer, but their souls were already so close, that the King found himself burying his tongue into the small space, appreciating the gasps and fingers in his scalp that followed.

'King... Hah... I can't...' It must be strange, the King thought, leaving a kiss on the boy's lower belly. From Yuugi's memory, he saw that the boy had only thought about women in a sexual manner. He could feel the tension under the other male's skin, twitching whenever the King sought to devour too much too quickly. Even the hardness between the other's legs threatened to soften when there was too much stimulation. The King moved down lower, just at the edge of the other's trousers.

'May I...' The King pushed up off of the bed, wanting to catch the other's eyes. He was caught off guard by the wanting and apprehension in Yuugi's eyes. 'Yuugi?'

'I- You're so handsome. That's so easy to say to you, and I can't even tell a girl how pretty she is.'
Yuugi sat up slowly, allowing the King to move back as well. 'You make my heart beat so fast, and, well-' he turned his head away for a moment, cheeks red with embarrassment, '- you can see what else you do to me. It's so many things to feel at once.'

The King nodded. 'Even more so, it is our souls together now.' He reached for Yuugi's hand and found himself mesmerized by the pulse he found there, throbbing under his touch. 'Our bodies here are what we think of ourselves. The light of your soul is touching the darkness of mine, and I know not of anything, nothing in what I know of souls, closer than this.'

Yuugi nodded and leaned forward, resting his forehead on the King's shoulder.

'... I like how your soul feels against mine, then.'

The King shivered. 'I feel the same way.'

Yuugi pressed a cheek to the other's neck. 'Can you show me how much? Just keep talking to me.'

He couldn't shake the feeling that someone was watching them both. He didn't mind it though.

The Danava shivered on his throne, and he gave a smile at the sensation. This was passion, and it was familiar to him. The warmth in his belly was growing, and he found himself restless upon his seat. He closed his eyes, enraptured by the sensations of it all. The Shadows eating away at his flesh did not bother him, so long as the King kept touching Yuugi that way-

'Hah!' The suction around Yuugi's manhood was greater than before, hot and sweet and Yuugi kept goading the King on, the taste of sweet and pale flesh ravishing the Danava's tongue. The Danava thought how filthy the act was, the physical one anyway, and how a King was actually doing this. It wasn't degrading at all, not to him, but the physical union seemed repugnant to him. Yet he couldn't understand how something so filthy could feel so wonderful.

One of the Shadows was wrapping around his neck, and he could feel the crunch of his vertebrae as it squeezed more and more tightly, the stiff cartilage of this false windpipe giving way and breaking. Again the suction on Yuugi's cock grew stronger and the King clicked his tongue. The pleasure was outweighing the pain, a minor pain compared to the three thousand years of darkness that the Danava had suffered at the Puzzle's Will, and his mind was only getting hazier, pushing away all other thoughts and pushing his focus onto the wet warmth that made his lower belly turn joyous flips.

Suddenly, the warmth left him, left Yuugi's body, and the pain came forward. The Danava let out a small gasp, feeling finally that his neck had been broken, held at an angle that would kill any mortal human.

'...'

'Child, you made the Shadows angry. Your Link to the Masters of the Puzzle infuriated them.' The Faceless One was laughing slightly, though the Danava could see lust evident in its green eyes.

'...'

'We are not certain as to their anger. Why not enjoy it?'

The Danava dared not move to question as he could feel the shifting and snapping of his bones coming back to proper alignment, his windpipe restructuring itself so it was not the jagged pathway that the Shadows had turned it into. He shivered as the Shadows returned, along with the King's touch, turning him onto his back. His chest was rising and lowering faster as he closed his eyes and...
Yuugi felt that watching presence even more strongly now, and it made him nervous. He could even go as far as to say that he was excited by it. The King pressed kisses to his inner thighs and the feeling made him want to open up more. He thrust his hips upwards slightly at a certain nip by his knee, one that sent shocks of light through his blood. He didn't know how he could stand any more pleasure, after feeling such sweet heat around his cock.

'King...' he murmured, trembling as the older boy came to stay over him on his hands and knees, staring down at Yuugi with hungry eyes.

'I want to have you now, Yuugi.' The King traced his thumb under Yuugi's lower lip, drawing out a soft moan from the younger boy. It was a strange sort of moan that Yuugi couldn't even understand. He wanted to completely surrender to the other's advances - one did not just do that with their tongue and profess love with such purity without having some effect. There, however, was still something inside of Yuugi's heart that made him hesitant. He could see the walls of his Soul's Room gain a bit of yellow on the walls, and he felt the King pull away.

'Wha-?'

'Are you frightened?'

Yuugi opened his mouth, hesitant to make a sound, before nodding slowly. 'Nervous...'

The King pressed a gentle kiss to Yuugi's mouth, licking his way inside to tangle their tongues together. Their bodies were pressed together and suddenly, their very Souls were connecting. Light and electricity were dancing through their veins, through their mouths and setting the deepest parts of them alight with passion. They were stars and gemstones, precious and sweet and why do anything else when they were together just like this? Nothing was more wonderful than this.

There was pain running along their spines. Perhaps it was because they were pressing so hard against each other, their stiff cocks pressing and sliding against each other roughly, but it felt so good, they saw no reason to stop. Perhaps it was because they had visions of being torn into, heat and pain and so good down at another hole.

Their skin was being torn apart and their inner being exposed. They were giants among Humanity, and they were Sky.

They were Angels, flying.

The Danava was moaning, his broken neck and throat paining from his voice. There was nothing beneath him, as he floated in the Sky with his Masters. The thought of flight both frightened him and gave him thrills. His body was stretched apart by the Shadows that were claiming his body in absolute rage.

'Power!' they claimed they wanted to take from him, and the Danava understood. The power of any nation was the ability to produce the next generation, and it was the reason that those that would carry the Seed of Life inside of them should be cherished. For a moment, the Danava had the thought of a child, in the broken and inappropriate body that his Mind had conjured for his appearance. Growing, stretching his belly, and ripping him open to greet the Universe that had granted its survival.
The Shadows tempted him with the thought, but it wouldn't be granted. Of course not.

'Why do you believe that?'

'A-ah?' His throat was healing slowly, but it was soon cut horizontally and he was forced to wait again, focusing on the horrible pleasure that was being forced into him but welcomed, if he could only forget for a few moments.

'Why could you not have a child?'

The Danava thought.

Why not?

A knife, it felt like, was rammed into his nether regions, and he knew that the Shadows were not doing it. The damage had already been done before-

Before-

'No children, the King said, will be granted to you, for having refused me.'

The King? No, it couldn't be. Not this sweet one that cared for his Master that had solved the Puzzle and had freed him. The King was kind and assertive, helping him care for his Master. He was also the King's Property.

'Why do you think that?'

Flesh had been ripped away from him, and for saying no, he would never have children.

The Danava closed his eyes, focusing on how Yuugi and the King felt. They had been rocking back and forth, a black hole created by two Stars that continued to sink together.

'You are no angel, demon. That is what your name means.'

But I make my Masters happy, the Danava thought. They are not thinking of Jonouchi, Anzu, or Aileen. They think only of each other and they makes them happy.

I care for nothing else.

'We care for nothing else.'

With a hedonistic smile, the Danava let everything be taken from him, not understanding the wetness on his face. He focused on the White Light that came from the black hole that Yuugi and the King had created. Everything was fire and ice and sweetness and there was only one Light when the two Souls were merging, endless and gone in an instant both.

The Danava was happy, left in a pool of black blood and with broken bones and strengthened spirit. He watched the two boys sleep, and he was happy.

Chapter End Notes
Eros: Also known as Cupid, the son of Venus/Aphrodite. Upon seeing Psyche, he pricked himself with his Love Arrow and was besotted with love for her.

Psyche: Psyche, the lover of Eros. They laid together in the dark, and when Psyche finally saw Eros, she also fell victim to the Love Arrow and she went on many perilous journeys to finally be with him. At the end of her journeys, she is allowed to drink the immortal ambrosia and marry Eros.

Adonis: Lover and surrogate son of Venus/Aphrodite. Taken by the young Adonis, possibly due to a Love Arrow, Aphrodite secures custody of the man for 1/3 of the year while he spends time with Persephone 1/3 of the year. Adonis chooses to spend the other 1/3 with Aphrodite and they spent their time always together. When he dies due a hunting accident, Aphrodite pleads that he be allowed to have time with her. Zeus allows Adonis to be with Aphrodite for 1/2 of the year while being dead for the other half.

*Danna-sama - broadly, a patron, a husband, a master; used as a transliteration of Sanskrit दान (dāna, “generosity, giving, donating”)
**This is the word that the Danava uses for referring to Yuugi and the King, referring to them as "Master". The suffix "-ue" is how he addresses Yuugi when using his name, as in "Master Yuugi".

*Chitoha - Father and Mother; this is derived the Nadsat language from the book "A Clockwork Orange," and is a combination of "chichi" meaning father, "to" meaning and, and "haha" meaning mother. In story, this is written in katakana, which is used for foreign words.

*Hedone/Voluptas - Daughter of Eros and Psyche, goddess of pleasure, enjoyment, and delight.
Antigone and Jocasta

Chapter Summary

To be abandoned
Is my fate
I know so well;
Uncomprehending
Do my tears fall.

- Sei Shônagon (c. 966 - 1017/1025)

Chapter Notes

This chapter will explain some things, and may bring up more questions than anticipated.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Sugoroku found himself looking through the other letters that his son had received from Iza-kun. Other than that one letter, all of the letters expressed innocent friendship. Some even expressed admiration and wanting to be like Yuugi, for his kindness.

It was raining outside now, and Yuugi had stopped crying upstairs about an hour ago. He decided to let the boy sleep, only for a while longer. It wouldn't do good for him to sleep through dinner.

He had checked up on him half an hour ago, seeing the boy's room clean and the boy in bed. He saw some scattered books in a shelf corner, along with his games. Sugoroku wanted to cry at the memory of them. Where did his happy grandson go, who believed in dragons, wishes, and the goodness of everybody? It was almost to a fault, as Yuugi seemed to forgive everybody who had wronged him, though he would learn from the experiences afterward.

Why did Iza-kun frighten the adults with his words?

A knock sounded at the store door.

When the lights came on, Yuugi blinked against them, trying to stay asleep for a longer period of time. The song of birds was whistling through his ears, along with a small wind that was curling around him. The sound of a drizzle provided accompaniment.

"Yuugi?"

Yuugi opened his eyes, sitting up. His clock read 7:00. He was still in his clothes from the day before. His grandfather was in front of him, looking down on him with a concerned expression.

"Jii-chan? What time is it?"
"It's seven at night... You've been asleep since you've come home."

'Oh... I've not slept to the next day, then.' Yuugi looked to his window, seeing that it was indeed getting darker outside with the rain. He stretched, his joints popping a bit. He felt a pain radiating from the meeting of his thighs, in his embarrassment. He could still feel the King's body against his, bodies sliding against each other, and the pleasure that came with it.

"Oh, you've got a visitor. Mi-Nee-san."

Yuugi nodded slowly. Mi-Nee, who Aileen loved, was in love with; did she know that Aileen was going to play that horrible game with him? It didn't seem like her at all.

"Okay. Um..."

"Is it okay if she comes up here?"

Yuugi jerked at that. He didn't feel calm enough to see her, but the thought of her coming up to his room was welcome enough to his heart. The King pushed a gentle suggestion towards Yuugi, pressing a kiss to his forehead.

"Yeah."

When Yuugi saw Mi-Nee enter through his doorway, his heart felt lighter. She gave him a smile and lifted up a small box for him to see. It was white with a logo that he couldn't really identify.

"Yuugi-kun..."

"Mi-Nee-san, come sit down," Yuugi welcomed. He quickly gestured over to his desk chair. It wasn't too comfortable by any means, but it was the one chair in the room that he did have. The young heiress sat down, almost slumping down in the seat. It was interesting to see someone that was usually so formal act so casually.

"Here," she said, offering the small box to him. "And you can call me 'Mimi,' Yuugi-kun."

He took the box, smelling a sweetness of the nearby patisserie. Opening the package, he found manju buns. He smiled, looking up to her. He noticed now that her hair was the black it had been at Death-T. Her eyes, however, were familiar and frightening.

They were red.

"Um... Thank you, Mimi-san."

"Mimi," she stressed. "You're thinking about something. Is it my eyes?"

Yuugi felt his face grow warm. "Is it obvious?"

Mimi nodded, giggling softly. "The Danava has always been inspiration to me. A God of Death and Truth, one that could hold Life under his control. That's something I strive for. Control, that is, so I try to emulate him."

She looked down to the floor, and Yuugi saw that her smile was gone.

"Why do you need that? You're from a good family and you can do so many things, in control of so many things. You're in college already-" He was cut off with a laugh.

"No. We were all adopted, actually." Mimi nodded to the manju buns. "Those buns... I couldn't have
dreamed of having them ten years ago. We were eating out of dumpsters and scavenging for the leftovers that they throw away in the back of restaurants.

"If we didn't control the situation, we'd control everything else. The food we could find, the things we could steal; we'd control those things." Mimi ran her fingers through the ends of her hair. "Even my hair and eyes are something I control... Black, brown, red; green, brown, blue, red. I can work with all of them to be who I want, when I want.

"I..." Mimi looked up to meet Yuugi's eyes. "I don't know if Aileen was looking for that. To control my brother and me; if getting the Danava from you would give her control, it wouldn't surprise me that she decided to play that game with you. She didn't have the kind of life that we had, but she was certainly controlled most of her life; it's the life of a diva that wants to get what she wants. I'm sorry."

"Did you know that she would play that with us?"

Mimi shook her head. "Games of Darkness are terrible things. I wouldn't wish them on my enemies."

Yuugi pulled out a manju bun and offered her one. She took it almost eagerly. "You know about the Games?"

"They are in the Letters from Duta, the ones that were found in the Egyptian tomb that we found in April. There are Games of Darkness, with several levels, mentioned there. They're supposed to be for judging criminals, deciding the fates of souls." Mimi bit into the bun.

"Is the Puzzle a Game... of Darkness?"

The girl finished what was in her mouth before answering. "It's powered by Darkness but, no, it's not a Game of Darkness."

Yuugi stared down at his manju bun. Some of the stickiness of the bun was staying on his hands. It reminded him of the stickiness that stayed on his lower belly and thighs after he and the King had...

"There's Darkness and two others, right?"

"Yes, there's Light and Shadows." Mimi bit into the bun once more.

"Is there any Shadows that could be in the Puzzle? Are they controlled by the King, too?"

"No, that'd be the Danava that controls them." Mimi kept hold of her bun, her shoulders tensing. "In the legend from the Duta's Letters, the Danava is the reflection of Light. When you reflect Light from a mirror, you create Shadows, not Darkness. That'd be the one that you call the Other Yuugi."

"What about the King? And the Faceless One?"

Mimi stared at him in confusion. "The Faceless One... I'll look into this for you. I've never heard of a 'Faceless One' in the Puzzle. Have you met them?"

Wait. No Faceless One had been documented then. Mimi had done the translations of the Duta's letters, had found information on the Danava, but there was nothing about the Faceless One? Then why was it there? Why were any of them there? Not that he was going to complain over having found passion with the King, but why were there any spirits locked away in the Puzzle? Was it a punishment or some kind of contract? What if they had sold their souls to a demon and Yuugi was now possessed, just like Jonouchi seemed to think he was. It would explain the anger he could feel more often in his heart than before, why he was able to let it out and why he had continued to let his Other Self do so many things, like punish the Bomber and also hurt Aileen Rao.
"Y-Yeah," Yuugi managed to stutter out. "He seemed... polite. I haven't met the Danava."

"He wouldn't introduce himself to you." Mimi sighed and smiled a faint sort of smile. "I met him for a few moments. He thinks himself unworthy of you. He... He loves you, like you are the Sun and you are his Danna-sama, his Master."

Yuugi looked down at his sock-covered toes. That wasn't the wish he had made on the Puzzle, he told Mimi. He had wished for friends, friends that were loyal to him and that he could be loyal to. He didn't want to be in class everyday wondering what it was like not to feel lonely. He had even thought of just going out to look for Iza-kun, or maybe it was Kusanagi now... He didn't want to die lonely for sure. He wanted his mom and dad around. He wanted the King to be with him forever. He wanted his friends back.

Mimi sat on the bed as her friend set his forehead on his knees. He looked like he wanted to get lost in the fabric of his trousers.

"I'm sorry... Ku-ni... He's always thought of you. You were his first friend that he found on his own. Everybody else, we met by chance, but they were looking for Yaya-nii-sama or our little brother. O-aniki has always tried to bring his friends close, but they weren't ours. He's older than us by, like, five years anyway. I have my girl friends, but Ku-nii just had you." She hesitated for a moment, finally deciding to let her twitching fingers settle on the back of Yuugi's head. "I'll tell him to come see you. We work a lot, the whole lot of us, but I'll take his hours and work if it would mean that he can come see you... He's worked hard, hoping that he'd see you again."

"I-If you're sure," Yuugi nodded slowly. To see his friend again, but see his new friend less; it'd be something that Yuugi would be grateful and sad for. "Is he in college, like you?"

"Yeah," she answered, smiling. "He has a small family, too. A son and a daughter, and he's thinking of having more kids. He tries hard to be there for them, but... We're all young still." Mimi finally frowned at that.

Yuugi noticed the frown, but he said nothing of it. He knew having a child was a big responsibility. He wondered why his friend would have started a family now, rather than later, but Yuugi did so privately.

Instead, he smiled. "Thank you, Mimi, and you can call me 'Yuugi.'"

Mimi brightened at that, red eyes twinkling with joy, and Yuugi wondered if he'd ever see such an expression on his other self's face.

"Is there anything you want me to tell him now? I have to leave, but I can come back, or I can give you his phone number?"

Yuugi felt something jump inside of him. His heart began an excited tattoo. He had only met Iza... Kusanagi one time, but that one time was enough for him to attach himself to the other. They had played, and although the memory for the story of the Two Gods was the most prominent thing in his memory, he also remembered that they had watched Dragon Ball and play-fought for a little while before his birthday cake had tempted them long enough.

"I can call him, Mimi. You're busy all day, right? With your classes and your work?"

Mimi let out a soft exhale, similar to the noise of a giggle, and quickly found something to write down her brother's phone number.

"I think he gets out around 10 o'clock tomorrow morning from his class. Some statistics course."
"Thank you," Yuugi gushed, taking the slip of paper from the girl.

"You're welcome," Mimi responded. "And... don't worry about your friends. Anzu's known you for a long time, and Jonouchi-san is going to come around. He knows you're strong in your heart; he's got to. You wouldn't change for just anybody, and you're all growing up. Change is going to happen."

Yuugi hummed in slight agreement, only to be caught in a hug. He reached his arms up slowly, caught up in the scent of flowers coming off of the older girl. When he placed his arms around her proper, he found himself relaxing. The hold that he was keeping on himself, over his fears, loneliness, and worries, finally let go and he found himself crying into his friend's jacket, soaking a small patch of denim fabric and Mimi was rubbing a small circle over his shoulder blades. She murmured to him small bouts of encouragement, and she told him that he was young, he was changing, and that was all right. He didn't feel lonely there, in his room and embraced. He felt warm.

It had been raining on Yuugi's seventh birthday.

His grandfather had offered to take him to the park while it was still sunny, but by the time they had arrived, the families had all gone home, and only one child sat on the swings. When the rain began to fall, Yuugi pointed over to the swings, where the child sat, the rain soaking his clothes. When they walked over, the child paid them no mind. Sugoroku asked where his family was, and the child responded with a shrug.

"Aniki is getting a job. He's at a meeting."

Yuugi frowned, and he offered to take the boy home to get warm and dry. Sugoroku agreed.

The child did not speak much, introducing himself as Iza and not saying anything further. He took a bath and wore some of Yuugi's clothes which had fit him well enough.

Yuugi had showed him some toys, but Iza was content in watching the stories that Yuugi made with some of his action figures. He opened up slowly, grabbing one figure and taking the role. Soon, they created so many stories that Yuugi would never remember them all. They played out one of Iza's stories, and then it was time for cake and presents.

They watched some TV shows, and at that point, police officers had arrived with a black hat-wearing teenager in tow. The teenager had gone to Mr. Police to find his brother, and Sugoroku had called to report a found child.

For the few hours they were together, Yuugi and Iza had become close. Every letter exchange made them closer.

Yuugi dialed the phone number at 10:01 the next morning. It rang once, twice... thrice...

A small click answered him.

「Hello, this is Kusanagi.」 The voice was definitely that of a young man, and it sounded so sure and professional that Yuugi could hear the years of experience behind it. It was different than the one that he knew, but it was still Iza's voice... It still sounded musical.

"Eh... This is Mutou Yuugi."

「...」
Dang it...

「Sorry... I just haven't heard your voice in a long time. How are you doing, Yuugi-kun?」

Chapter End Notes

Antigone - Daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta, name meaning "Worthy of One's Parents." In the Sophocles version that I read and enjoyed, she is charged with giving her brother Polynices a proper funeral against the orders of the new King Creon. She maintains that it is against the will of the Gods to not give a man who died in battle a funeral. After burying her brother twice and being tried as guilty, she is sentenced to die in a cave. Creon suffers a change of heart, but Antigone has used her own clothes to fashion a noose and hang herself. His son Haimon, who was engaged to Antigone, kills himself after, followed by his mother Queen Eurydice.

Jocasta - Mother of Oedipus, as well as mother and grandmother to Antigone. Told by the Oracle of Delphi to never have a child with her husband Laius King of Thebes, her husband gets drunk and begets her with child. The Oracle tells them that the son they bore will kill his father and marry his mother, which is to be vengeance from the Gods for Laius' rape of the nymph of Chrysippus. The child Oedipus is taken to another childless couple who raise him. The Oracle repeats her prophecy, after which Oedipus leaves his second family, thinking them to be the only family he's ever had.

On his way to Thebes, he kills Laius over who gets to cross a road first. In Thebes, he defeats the Sphinx that has been terrorizing the city. He solves its riddle, killing it, and ends up marrying Jocasta, bearing her four children: girls Antigone, Ismene, and boys Eteocles and Polynices.

"Mimi" (御御) - In Japanese, the suffixes or "honorifics" display the relationship between individuals.
*The Other Yuugi calls Yuugi "Yuugi-ue" which means "Most High/Master Yuugi."
*Sama is a rough equivalent "Esteemed Sir/Madam."
*San is analogous to "Mister/Mrs./Miss/Ms."
*Chan addresses familiarity, a female, or a child.
*Kun is used when referring to young men/boys and when addressing/referring to those of junior status.

Mi-Nee allowing Yuugi to not only use a nickname, which is used in more intimate relationships (an example being me calling my sister "Bee" when her name is nothing close to that), but also having no honorific shows complete comfort with Yuugi. Doing this without permission is extremely disrespectful and presumptuous of intimacy in a relationship.

*Nii-sama: roughly translated to "honorable older brother." Yaya (生生) is a nickname, showing closeness.
*O-aniki: "O" in front of a word, such as o-kaasan (mother) and o-tosan (Father), gives a more formal presentation in reference to one's own parents or others, as kaasan and tosan are more casual form to address one's own parents. Aniki is "older brother" or "senior" (male), so Mimi referencing someone as "o-aniki" shows much respect coming from her.
If you've noticed my story list, I've gotten into Dragon Ball. However, in the first chapter of Yu-Gi-Oh!, Dragon Ball is mentioned (as Yuugi believes that the Puzzle will grant him a wish), which almost seems strange as Yuugi states that he doesn't like fighting and he watches a show that almost all about fighting (like... 90%), but it is logical that he could just want to be the one that everyone had a connection and strong devotion towards, as well as being strong (you know... he's been bullied quite a bit).

- As this is my fic, I have made Yuugi's favorite character be Yamucha, then Goku. After Dragon Ball Z, it is Goku or Future Trunks.
The Star Bridge

Chapter Summary

In idleness
Days and months I've spent:
I feel nothing for them.
A life spent blossom-viewing
In springtime is too short, indeed.

- Fujiwara no Okikaze

Chapter Notes

I feel weird having Mimi and her family come up now. I get hate messages about her, but I know when I get to /that/ point, she'll probably get even more. I hope I don't get any for Kusanagi ;-; I like him

Yuugi felt himself dying and waking inside. It was just like before, that voice. It had aged, but it was still so warm and nice.

"H-How have you been, Iza-kun? Erm, I mean Kusanagi-"

「You can call me Iza if you want, Yuugi-kun.」 A chuckle accompanied the sentence, and Yuugi found himself laughing softly as well. He could hear people in the background, probably other students. 「I've been well. Dealing with school, work, and my family. How have you been? My sister told me that she had met you and gave you my number.」

"Yeah," Yuugi replied. "I've been doing well. I'm in my first year at Domino High, and I've...

He couldn't very well say now that he had friends, since Jonouchi and Anzu made it clear that they were not going to accept his other self. They surely would not accept the King.

"I've been well."

「...」 There was an uneasy silence from his friend that sent a chill down Yuugi's spine. He could hear the intercom - 'Is he on a train? A bus?' - signaling for passengers to sit down. 「Wait. Let me sit - Excuse me, sir - down. Okay. Sorry, I gotta head over to Domino today, actually. I have a meeting with a potential customer. Yuugi-kun, why don't I feel that you're telling the truth?」

"Erm... That is..." Yuugi sighed. "I made some friends when I started school. Do you remember Anzu at all? I don't remember if I had told you about her or wrote about her."

「She's the ballerina, right? That one that gave you stuff on Valentine's Day once?」

Yuugi smiled. "Hip hop, now, actually. Well, anyway, something happened. Mimi-san knows about
it, the Danava?"

「I know some about them, yes.」

"The Danava met my friends, defended them, saved all of us, and now they want me to throw the Danava and the King away, just because they're scared of him... of me." He rubbed furiously at his eyes. Why wouldn't he stop crying?! He couldn't keep crying just because he was having a fight with his friends. He was fine without friends before-

「Are you at home?」

"Huh?" Yuugi sat up, confused. "Yes. Why?"

「I'm on my way to Domino right now. I have that meeting, but I can skip that.」 Yuugi stammered as he heard Iza mumbling to himself. 「I'll call my secretary to reschedule that... Or Aniki can go. I'll call him in a little bit.」

"Wait. Why are you not going to the meeting?" Yuugi frowned, confused.

「You sound like you need someone right now, Yuugi-kun. I haven't seen you in years, haven't heard from you in years, and now that I have the chance to, I'm going to see you.」

'Why didn't you come before?' he thought, exasperated. He repeated the question in his thoughts and hardly noticed that he asked the same question out loud.

「I... was in the hospital for a while. After the accident - which is a story for another day - I didn't want to see anybody. I couldn't even leave my house. I ended up making lots of dumb decisions, but I won't call them mistakes. I'm taking responsibility for them... I didn't want you to get wrapped up in that. Can you believe that this is seventh time this year that I've left my house? It's almost autumn!」

There was an awkward laugh that accompanied the last word and Yuugi found himself smiling. 「You... You have every right to be angry with me. I shouldn't have let it get to me, let it stop me from seeing you.」

"..."

「...」

"Iza-kun?"

「Yes?」 The question sounded eager but fearful, anxious for the words that would answer.

"Do you want to see a movie today, if you can?"

「... That would be great. I get off the train and I'll go home, get some things. I'll get to Domino in about... Two hours?」

"Okay. I'll go get the movie times. Um, can I still talk to you?"

A laugh responded to his question. 「About what? Better question, why do you need to ask that? Tell me everything, anything you want. Just know that I'm on a train and that there's a woman that keeps looking over here like I'm crazy.」

Yuugi found a giggle in his throat that soon became a full and healthy laugh. "Okay! I'm in high school now, and I still live with my grandpa."

「I remember him. Does he still play poker?」
Soon, it was like they had never been separated at all.

Within two hours, Yuugi had rearranged his room several times, changed twice, and he had also looked through all of the movie listings that he could find a movie that the two of them could enjoy.

But who was this person that he was going to meet? What did he enjoy? They had changed so much in these three years of no communication. Mimi had probably told Iza about how he had changed, but now Yuugi knew nothing of Iza. A young father, he knew about the older boy being. He was in University, and he was part of the company that his family had run and created. Mikoto Corporation did not only medical, he found out while online. There was also music, collection of visual art, technology, and there was also a section of the company dedicated culinary arts as well.

What part did Iza manage? Did he like what he did for his job? Why was he still in University otherwise? What were his children like? Did they like games like Iza did? He remembered playing Ladybug and so many games that Iza had told him about through the letters. Did he teach his children of those?

The call from his grandfather of a guest sent shocks down his spine, his stomach now feeling queasy. He stood up from the desk of his father's study, shutting off the monitor of the computer. He rubbed the dryness of his eyes from staring at the screen for so long.

"Shit..." His muttering filled the quiet study.

As he left the room, Yuugi smoothed down his shirt and took a long deep breath.

'Oh, God. Not even the King made me this nervous!' He set his path down the steps, his heart beating at twice the speed of his steps. His breathing was shallow and he was growing dizzy.

"Yuugi-kun?"

Yuugi looked up - he must have been looking down at the steps so he didn't damn well trip - and saw green eyes looking into his.

'The same green as the Faceless One.'

"Iza-kun... Kusanagi."

The young man nodded. Yuugi found a strange passion in those eyes that drew him in. They were full of a longing that he understood, one that his heart echoed back. He felt his body propelling him forward, crashing into the other, slightly taller body and trying to find that same embrace that was the signal of separation from them so many years ago. He felt those same arms - longer, a bit thicker with muscle but still warm - holding him with the same ferocity as nine years ago. He didn't know where the sound came from, a choking sound that barely seemed louder than the ticking of a clock, but it broke the tension for Yuugi and he let himself cry, just a little bit.

"I missed you."

The arms around him squeezed him more so.

"Very much, I missed you as well, Yuugi-kun."

There was the distant sound of rain, and he heard his grandfather in the kitchen mentioning that he could make some drinks for them both.
"Did you want something to drink, Iza-kun?" Yuugi pulled away and tried to wipe his eyes in a hurry. Green eyes looked back at him.

"... Would hot chocolate be okay?"

"Sure!"

"So you're way over Anzu now, huh?" Iza-kun kept swirling his spoon in his mug as he and Yuugi spoke. It was strange, trying to catch up on about three years of information lost, but it wasn't too terrible.

"Yeah..." Yuugi sipped at his drink, lost in his thoughts terribly so the taste was lost to him. "She never really noticed. I think, if she did, she never wanted things to be awkward between us. I'm not going to be chasing after something hopeless. After what happened with... Aileen, I can't anymore."

He set his head down on his folded arms. The Shadows had never hurt him, but he had seen them. He had seen them lurking outside his door of the Soul Room. The fear in his friends' eyes had surely been from that same sensation that he felt when the Shadows searched for nourishment.

They hadn't felt the King's power, though. They had never felt protected by Shadow nor Darkness, and he had experienced both.

He had felt cared for, and he had felt loved.

"I apologize for what Aileen did." Yuugi looked up to Iza-kun, who finally took the spoon out of his mug. "I... I know that she held affection for me, and my sister, but we thought so much of the strangest legend we'd ever heard of. We thought of the Danava, and then when my sister met you, we only got more obsessed..."

Yuugi hummed softly. He let his head turn to the side, focusing on his friend. Iza-kun was biting his lip, and he almost looked guilty, if conflicted. He let out the one question that was now on his mind now that they kept talking about his other self.

"Is that the only reason you came to see me? Because of the Danava?"

He closed his eyes for a moment. There was no answer, and Yuugi knew that he had just ruined the only friendship that he had left. He heard the chair legs squeak across the floor.

'I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I just... I don't want to be cared for as something I'm not.'

Yuugi felt a hand on his shoulder. He lifted his head, his eyes still closed.

"Iza-kun, I-"

Arms wrapped around him, and Yuugi was held tightly. He was whispered things that his heart needed to hear. Self-worth, mostly, was affected, but Iza-kun kept holding him and told him of everything that he had written about his those letters so many years ago.

He was reminded of each birthday that they had missed together; there were so many episodes of different anime that they missed, especially *Dragon Ball Z*; and every year, Iza-kun sent another tape of music to Yuugi. There were even the things that he had forgotten, like the music that they had shown each other, the stories they wrote to each other, and there were so many days that they had missed together. Yuugi missed the stories of Iza-kun's birthdays, everything that he learnt and the stories that he would write.
The older boy was almost shivering with the sincerity of his speech, and like every letter, Iza-kun had eagerly waited for a reply-

"Yuugi... I came for you. You've always been kind and selfless. You're the reason that I'm here right now. How can anyone not want you?"

- as he seemed to now.

Yuugi lifted his arms and wrapped Iza-kun in the same ferocious hug, shivering in kind.

"I really... I really missed you, Iza-kun! I'm sorry!"

"It's okay-"

"I'm so scared! I don't want to be hurt anymore, and we've been apart for years, but you've always been so important to me!" Yuugi had his eyes closed and his face buried in the other's shoulder. He was hiding, he knew, but his heart was bare.

He trusted Kusanagi with it, though. A hand that wandered to pet his head almost made Yuugi feel vulnerable, but it still felt safe.

It felt warm, and the feeling of strength made itself apparent against Yuugi's mind. It wasn't the King's, though; it was his own.

"Yuugi..?"

"Yeah."

"What should we do now?"

"We can still go to the movie, if that's okay. I think I need some popcorn right now." Yuugi pushed himself from his friend, laughing softly. "Is that okay?"

Iza-kun smiled and nodded. "What movie is it?"

"This movie? I read the book."

"Um, do you like it? We could see another one."

"It doesn't look like we have a lot of choices anyway." Iza turned to Yuugi and smiled. "If you wanna sit through a war drama, I'm game."

Yuugi laughed. "Sure," he replied. Turning to the woman at the counter, he held up two fingers. "Two for 「Chichi to Kuraseba」, please."

The woman stared at them in confusion before stating the price, which Iza paid for - "Trust me. This is nothing." - and handing over the tickets. "It will be in theater 4."

They bought their concessions - Yuugi paid for the drinks and popcorn this time - and made their way to the theater, sitting the farthest they could from the exit; for the immersion, Yuugi said.

"What is the story about?" he whispered. "I didn't get to read a lot on the movie when I looked it up."

"It's about a girl and her father who survived the bombing of Hiroshima, and the girl trying to
Iza-kun took a sip of the mix of Coca-Cola and lemon soda that he had made in his cup. "It's also a love story."

The film began, and as the young woman on screen began sort the books on the shelves of the library, Yuugi looked over to Kusanagi. Was it so strange to invite a friend to a romantic-war drama? He looked to the popcorn and grabbed some kernels, stuffing them gently into his mouth.

Yuugi felt amusement, sincerity, and affection from the King. He smiled at the feeling.

This was okay, seeing a movie with a friend; this friend had no strong expectation from him to act a certain way. He just wanted to get to know Yuugi again.

He enjoyed the movie.

Chapter End Notes

The Face of Jizo (父と暮せば Chichi to Kuraseba) is a 2004 Japanese war drama film directed by Kazuo Kuroki and is based on the play of the same name by Hisashi Inoue. It was filmed as the 3rd and concluding volume of Kazuo Kuroki's "Trilogy works for War Requiem". The story follows a young woman, a survivor of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, and her attempts to forge a relationship with a young man while mourning the death of her father in the atomic bombing.

- To let people know, this story is being told in somewhat real-time. It is currently August 2004.

*This chapter was so hard to write. It's been forever since I've worked on it, due to school and work. I'm also having some personal issues to work through, ones similar to what some characters are trying to work through. Ugh...
Urashima Tarō and Otohime

Chapter Summary

On a keepsake of me
Gaze and think of me;
Fresh-jewelled as
The years' long thread
Will my thoughts follow you.

- Lady Kasa (poet of the early 8th century) to Lord Ōtomo no Yakamochi (c. 718 – October 5, 785)

Chapter Notes

To explain, as this question has begun to drive people crazy since the third chapter or so, how many spirits are in the Puzzle?

Answer: 3; In the original story, there were 2.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"That was... sad."

"It was."

Yuugi sipped on his cola as they left the cinema. The movie was rather good, but he found himself occasionally looking over to his friend. Iza-kun seemed to be enjoying the film well enough, but he looked distracted. Every once in a while, he would be clenching his fists. When Mitsué spoke with her father, Iza-kun would visibly tense up. What had happened in the other's life that the realm beyond their own - which Yuugi didn't think of too often, save for O-bon - bothered him? Or was it one of the characters?

"Then again," Iza-kun interjected. "It ended up kind of happy, I guess."

"Yeah..."

The older boy tossed his empty cup into a trash can.

"What do you want to do now?" Yuugi looked down at the ground as Iza-kun turned back to face him.

"Did you want to go back home? Or shopping?" Yuugi saw the other's shoes come closer to him; they were dark and of canvas. "Yuugi-kun?"

"It's nothing," Yuugi protested gently, smiling up at his friend.

He didn't want his friend to notice the glances that Yuugi was taking when he wasn't looking. The
smooth, pale neck that led to collarbones only just exposed by the lower cut neck of the other boy's shirt; did Iza-kun know that he and his sister held their shoulders the same way, like they had nothing to lose? It was different in how they walked as well, as Iza-kun actually carried a cane around; the older boy had mentioned having an accident years ago.

His eyes were soft and feminine, but they were still angular in a way that made Yuugi feel vulnerable underneath their gaze. They almost looked...

"Are you and Mimi twins?"

Iza-kun paused for a moment. "... What Mimi and I are... it's complicated."

Yuugi felt affronted.

"What does that mean?" It was really easy to answer. Someone is either a twin, or not. Yuugi heard something just at the edge of his range of hearing, but he ignored it. "Triplets? You have a brother the same age as you, right?"

"No."

Iza-kun threw his bag of popcorn into the trash can.

How were they related then?

"... I'll tell you, eventually. I promise."

"Okay," Yuugi submitted. This wasn't sitting well with him at all, but at least Iza-kun was acknowledging it. "Did you want to go shopping?"

"Not terribly."

Yuugi smiled. "You wanna go to my place and play video games?"

"Of course."

Maybe it wasn't a big deal at all.

'But then again, Jonouchi and Anzu were a big deal.'

Yuugi was just hoping that this doubtful voice in his head would just quiet down.

---

Jonouchi was on his route again. It was Sunday, a good day to sleep, but his father had finally come home after ten days, and it was better to stay out of his way. He had hidden the lighters that his father was prone to dropping when lighting cigarettes, as well as the matches.

He got off his bicycle - rented, of course, from his boss - and began to walk it towards the small delivery shop where he was employed. The cake he had delivered looked delicious and it reminded him of one his mother had made when she had stressed that birthday parties were important.

"That was... sad," he heard a familiar voice say. Jonouchi turned and saw Yuugi with a cup of soda in his hand. He was dressed in clothes that Jonouchi didn't even know his friend owned. They were casual - a tee shirt and black jeans - but there was something in how Yuugi held himself that reminded him of the shy Yuugi that he had become friends with back in April.

"Oy, Yuu-!" he began to shout. Then, he saw the person next to Yuugi.
"Isn't that..?" he mumbled to himself. The person was throwing away their drink in a way that just seemed too familiar. It reminded him of the day of Death T, of someone that he'd seen.

Brown hair.

"How old is the Game Cube? I think this was actually one that my grandfather was going to toss out, but I wanted it so much!"

"I think I got one of these after my third paycheck or fourth from my job at the library." Iza and Yuugi traded stories back and forth as their Sims began to move around their digital house. Iza named his woman character "Ophelia" because it seemed right, so Yuugi named his "Hamlet."

Hamlet and Ophelia were off at work, and their roommate Kio was arranging the house, skillfully controlled by Yuugi and Iza when they could afford to do so.

"You were working? That was like... three years ago? You had to work?"

"My brothers and I were adopted in middle school, but we were still used to being on our own. After my accident, I went back to my aunt's old apartment. I worked in translation at Osaka Municipal and Nakanoshima even when I was really little because my aunt taught me English."

Yuugi pondered over the names for a moment. 'Municipal..? Nakanoshima...'

"I wonder if Kio needs a cat..."

"You mean the libraries?"

Iza nodded. "Yep. It was my school, if you could think of it like that. School got boring after a while." Iza turned to him and winked. "I would read ahead and I got too far in academics. I'd go take the tests in the nurse's office."

Yuugi nodded. "That makes sense, especially if you had that accident... Could... I ask what happened?"

Iza bit his lip. Yuugi was going to retract his request; what kind of person that finally meets a lost friend just asks them questions about, what sounded to be, a life-changing event?

"I guess I ruined the reputation of a person in high school. I found out something... rather private." Iza sighed and rubbed the back of his head. "I didn't mention anything about it, but they felt that I ruined that reputation by finding out.. Apparently, I shouldn't have survived the fall. I 'accidentally fell' down two flights of steps." Iza put his hand up in the air, held up his first two fingers, and curled them during the emphasized words, making Yuugi think that the 'accidentally' was the story that was given to cover up...

"Somebody pushed you?"

Iza-kun nodded. "I'm okay now, though. I finished rehab years ago and I'm working now, along with going to school."

Yuugi looked down at his controller, ignoring that his Sim began to cook an omelette and now the stove was broken.

"Yuugi-kun? Are you okay?"

"Did Mimi help you out?"
"... She did. She was always there," Iza answered. Yuugi frowned and set down his controller.

"Why did you tell me anything about your accident?"

Iza offered not reply for a short while. He set down his remote as well after pausing their game, and now Ophelia was frozen in a frame of her walking through the door, home from work, to Hamlet setting fire to the stove.

"I didn't want to worry you, and... I just became a different person after the whole experience. I didn't trust people anymore... and I never wanted to think that you would have the capability of hurting me. You're not that kind of person." Iza bent his knees to meet his chest, his arms crossing there on his knee-caps, and stared at the game controller. Yuugi thought about that word "controller". Mimi had talked about control before...

Was that Iza wanted, too? Iza had two children, went to school, worked... Yuugi glanced at the other's eyes, and he saw that bright green. It was... an unnatural green. Were they contacts? Was it something for him to control? He couldn't control Yuugi's reaction to this accident, so he kept the younger man away, a way to control Yuugi's effect on him.

"I would have been there, Iza-kun... I would have."

Iza blinked at him, confusion in his eyes and Yuugi felt sorry for the dark feeling curling inside of his chest. It was an ugly thing, doubt, and it was crawling inside of him. Why would his friend, his very first and very best friend, not tell him anything? This was the young boy that wrote beautiful stories for him, that told him that it was okay to be shy because if he was uncomfortable with crowds, he only had to try a bit at a time and he'd bloom into a socially-comfortable person one day. He had written to Iza about how Anzu wasn't just "nice-looking" anymore and how he found himself looking at her chest when they were in middle school, and Iza told him about how it was a normal thing, but to be careful was to be wise, to not let those feelings get ahead of his mind.

If he thought about it, how old were Iza's children? He had a son and daughter. Mimi didn't mention twins. He had missed what seemed like a wonderful period of time in his friend's life, after the accident and high school, and he thought about it all.

'It's not fair! I waited for such a long time to hear from you! I thought that we told each other the truth all the time and I didn't know about your sister, or that you had your accident. I waited so long for you, and you never came!' So many feelings were rushing out of Yuugi now, and when he heard himself mention Jonouchi and Anzu, he knew that he was getting hysterical, but he found himself justified. 'Too many people said that they were going to be there for me, and now all I have left is a spirit in a puzzle that led to the deaths and pain of so many people! Too many people have lied to me - have tried to wrongly reason with me - and I'm stuck with something that may as well be in my head!'

He didn't know if he was screaming any of this or if his throat was just hurting because he was finally crying. He didn't even know what he was doing. He didn't know if he was imagining strong, slender arms around him, giving a force that made him want to pull away because he didn't want this false comfort. He tried to push away, resisting the strange explanations from a teenager, one far better off than he. He didn't know if he wanted to believe stories about orphanages and living on the street and finding jobs underage for the sake of food for the rest of the week, a goal sometimes unreachable and left to 'enough food to keep alive'. Yuugi didn't know if any of this was real any more.

Everything was hurting by the time that he realized that, yes, Iza was holding him, and yes, his throat was super dry, and yes... he had been crying.
"Yuugi..." Iza's voice was soft and it sounded a bit higher pitched than it had been. "Yuugi..."

Why was just the sound of his name from Iza so comforting? Yuugi sighed.

"That's all I... had to say."

"I know, Yuugi," Iza assured him. "I know that you were lonely, and now it all seems like a lie, but it wasn't. I didn't have a home when I met you. The librarian let me use their address. Every two weeks, because that's when the mail was delivered to the library from further districts, I'd get your letter and send one back to you. I thought that you weren't writing back."

"I wrote so much at first," Yuugi explained, coherent to the conversation until the last sentence came past his friend's lips. "You didn't write back-

"I would have, no matter what. And I did! I wrote back every two weeks." Iza had desperation in his voice, and he sounded like Aileen had when she had realized that she would not have his Puzzle. The look in his eyes was that of a desperate hunger, starvation for a wish that ran with the risk of not being granted. "I just don't know why you didn't write back!"

Yuugi tried to go over everything. He didn't have the letters, but Iza said that he had written them. It was logical to assume that Iza was lying, but that pain-filled tone told him otherwise. He tried to go over how the letters could have been lost.

'Or intercepted.'

Who had been the one to hand him every letter?

Every lonely, wish-filled letter had always been handed to him by...

"Iza-kun."

Iza and Yuugi looked up to see Sugoroku, Yuugi's grandfather, in the doorway of the living room. Yuugi found himself almost hiding in Iza's embrace, scared at what he had come to reason.

"Grandpa..?"

Sugoroku stepped forward and Yuugi saw a bundle in his grasp.

Envelopes, that had all been opened, were tied together in a small kitchen storage box, like how his parents sent letters to each other and kept them safe.

"Iza-kun, you sent a letter once that frightened my family," Sugoroku explained.

Iza was silent.

"You wrote about how Yuugi would have been unhappy that you had died, and you said that you did."

Iza let Yuugi slip from his arms. "I had to give up everything I was to get here, to be part of a family that wanted my other siblings. Not me. I got in an accident that the public and my own family tried to cover up! I had to leave my home, had to change who I was, and I died that day... I didn't want Yuugi-kun to hate me..."

Yuugi looked at Iza, who sighed heavily, exasperated-scared-anxious-tired. The older boy was sweating, Yuugi could see, sweat beading up on a well-groomed brow. Iza looked down to the carpeted floor of Yuugi's room after the thick silence was broken by Sugoroku frowning and sighing
heavily.

Iza stared back at him, his eyes fierce and so pained that Yuugi's heart was twisting in his chest. "I... I'm sorry. I can leave. I lied, and I know you don't like people that lie."

Yuugi stared with his mouth wide open, staring as his friend stood up, slender hand grabbing the similarly built walking stick by the round, engraved end of it. His voice was shaking so much as he tried to whisper out a plea.

'Don't leave...'

He saw his friend head towards the door, and his grandfather came close to him, trying to console him.

'I don't want to be alone!' There was a fire in his heart, one that Yuugi recognized just from the day before. It wasn't quite like what he experienced with the King, but it was something similar. It was something that ignited in his belly when he had first heard his friend's voice on the telephone, like something had woken up inside of him.

"Iza, please stay!"

The King pressed the feeling closer to Yuugi's conscious mind. It was a strange thing, loneliness, as he'd only been awake since the late springtime to be aware of the emotion. It was also saddening to think that this was much of what Yuugi was composed of in his interpersonal self. He was terribly lonely and he only countered it by trying to be a happy boy and enjoying his games; even when Jonouchi and Honda were bullying him - because the King couldn't think of it as anything else - Yuugi had taken that attention given as something he could grow from and could be happy about later.

Yearning; it was something that Yuugi tended to ignore in order to protect his heart. It was logical for someone his age, it was something that the King would certainly do, and he was older (?) than Yuugi.

'You want him to talk with Iza still?'

The King nodded, not trusting himself to answer the Danava. The creature's red eyes were like knives that would see into his heart upon contact, tearing him open.

'... I have a good feeling about that. I support you in this.'

The pressure that the King felt from the Yearning pushing against him suddenly lessened, the brunt of the force now being pushed by the Danava's shadows. It was a violent support, a violent pushing of that Yearning towards Yuugi, one that the King regretted finding and reviving.

Now the bigger worry on the King's mind was why the Danava supported this interaction.

Sugoroku stood in the living room, stuck with the kitchen container of letters in his hands and staring at his grandson and the stranger in his house.
Iza was being held fiercely in Yuugi's embrace, the younger boy shaking and Sugoroku's heart was bleeding. Yuugi hadn't cried like that in years, not since his father told him about that extended trip in which the young man, to his even younger son, had explained that he'd be living in America from then on.

"Yuu-" He heard Iza begin to say Yuugi's name, but the sound was cut off by what sounded like a choking animal. Yuugi had set out the noise, the shaking now accompanied by soft sobbing, and Sugoroku - and Iza - felt something break inside of them, the strange grudge that had developed between them from the hidden letters.

"D-Don't le-leave, I-Iza..."

"Yuugi!" The old man set down the container and walked towards them. Yuugi thrust his head up and turned around to face his grandfather.

"You didn't have right to keep my letters!" Yuugi then turned to face Iza, who was still trapped by the smaller boy's embrace on his wrists. "And you knew where I lived! Why didn't you come to see me?"

"I couldn't leave my house without being scared, Yuugi." Iza's eyes were growing watery. "It's not an excuse, I know, but I was trying to recover from my accident and then I had my son when I was fifteen..."

"You were fifteen... when did your accident happen?"

"I was fourteen. I think it was when I was recovering at home that I wrote the letter that your grandfather is talking about." Iza's eyes focused on Sugoroku's violet ones. "I.. I hated my parents for a while. They were worried more about their reputation than my being able to walk. I left my family when I could, and all I wanted to do was make sure that Yuugi wasn't affected by any of it. He was the only friend I could talk to about anything... and I thought that he just stopped writing back, but you kept the letters!"

Sugoroku stared back and his heart became like stone against the tide.

"You like my grandson, don't you?"

Iza and Yuugi both blinked back at him.

"Of course, Yuugi-kun is my friend."

"No, you're an adult. You know what I mean."

Yuugi blinked again, his face wet with tears, and Iza blinked, his ears and cheeks growing red progressively, respectively.

"What does that have to do with this?"

"In that letter..." Sugoroku sighed. He looked over the young men and wondered how things had grown so complicated over a friendship that had become longing on both sides, both sides longing for companionship; whether one was more carnal over the other, it was something for them to figure out.

"Grandfather?" Yuugi's voice was curious and innocent, finalizing how different Sugoroku's grandson was from the young man with the strangest imitation green eyes that he had ever seen.
"... Here. All the letters. I won't interfere any more."

With that, the old man left the two young men in the living room.

The Danava was smiling.

The King, off-put, pushed the demon out of Yuugi's soul room, shutting the door and almost collapsing to the floor.

The Danava was smiling.

The door was pushing against his foot, the King jumping in surprise at the almost gentle but insistent force.

The Danava is still smiling, the King saw, and the demon snaked his hand through the space between the door and the doorframe.

'Please?'

The King grabbed that pale hand, surprised by the fierce grip on his own hand. Oh, the Danava's hand was shaking.

'Thank you.'

The only thanks the King truly has realized to be heartfelt was the only that the Danava has just given to him.

'Danava, what's wrong?'

'I... I need...'

The panting from the other side of the door was soft, and it was a vulnerable kind of breathing.

'Gods... learn of each other early.'

'Yes?'

'That one is called Kusanagi, yes? Iza-san?'

The King thought back into Yuugi's memories. 'Kusanagi is a sword, isn't it?'

'A sword...'

'What's wrong?'

The Danava let out a small laugh. 'No... I'm just thinking of the irony. That boy is named after a sword, and that Mimi is named after the Goddess of Death. That girl spoke to me.'

'What?'

'In Death-T, on the elevator.'

The King felt a flame of irritation rise. 'And you didn't mention it to me?'
'She mentioned something that interested me and I needed to think about. She mentioned that I protect Yuugi-ue-sama, Kaiba protects his brother, and she protects her brothers, but what does this God-Sword protect? Yuugi-ue-sama? No Adapa - yes, we Gods on Earth are called so - would leave their charge so long unless there was another protector present... or-'

'Or what, damn you?!' The King’s heart was furious now, at how he could not have known this information. Why didn't he know about any of this?

'... Two years without communication... The Adapa could be maturing into its fuller form, into a human with the memories of the Adapa that they are.'

'So Iza could have re-acquired his memories of being the God Kusanagi?'

'Yes, but the Gods of Japan are recorded in only the books of Japan, that Kojiki, which is as old as the 8th or 9th centuries. There could be bias from the Chinese conquistadors.'

'... Meaning?'

'This Kusanagi is much older. You can smell it, the age of Death on him, and yet he is named after a younger God.'

'Could Kusanagi be the name that this God chose it when it arrived in Japan?'

'Possibly.'

The King glared at the floor. Why didn't he know these things? Then a thought occurred to him.

'How did you know Aileen... Devayani?'

'I am from Egypt, child, but I remember a few things before that time. I was in China, and before that, India. I saved a girl from falling into a well, that Devayani, and we were in wedlock for a short while. Then I left for... reasons that I no longer remember.'

'I'm sorry,' was his immediate response.

'Why?'

'I don't like not knowing things, and I'm sure that you're the same way.'

'What makes you so certain?'

The King didn't have an answer.

They stayed holding their hands, fingers intertwined.

Iza - Kusanagi - spent the afternoon going through the letters that Yuugi never received, showing him each one, along with the cassette tapes and pictures that accompanied some of them.

Yuugi praised the boy named Keiu and the girl named Kagami that his friend had as his dear children. Keiu was going to be three years old, while Kagami wasn't yet a year old. Keiu was in martial arts, still in the first belt ranking, but he was getting better with every training session and every practice at home.
The older boy's siblings were rather... extreme. The oldest, Omodaru, was a chef of all things. The second oldest, two shared the same age with Kusanagi and Mimi, was a painter who had many strange interests and models; there were a few photos of the art pieces, and Yuugi was somewhat surprised at the amount of nude portraits that had no face in the frame but had plants and other objects around the model.

The youngest was also a painter but also engaged in sports, especially baseball. Iza spoke a lot about him like he was his most precious thing, besides his children.

"Wow... Your little brother has been with you since he was born?"

"Yep, uncle and aunt adopted me, and then they had Jiji when I was almost two years old."

"And his name is Jiji."

Iza let out a bright laugh that made Yuugi smile. "No, but when we wrote his name down once in Romaji, it has the letters G and I next to each other. I remembered this book that we read as little kids, about these little girls that live in a house with a nun and... Anyway! The smallest girl has a dog named Genevieve."

"Jenoubiibu?"

"Yeah, and we shortened that to the nickname of Genevieve, which is G-I-G-I, but pronounced 'Jiji' because it's French."

Yuugi tilted his head and smiled. "It's like a word game!"

Iza nodded. "So Nii-sama is Yaya, we have Mimi, and my younger brother is called Jiji."

Yuugi smiled. "What's your nickname?"

Iza smiled. "Iza... It's the one that you gave me."

With those words, Yuugi's heart lifted itself up, the years of pain lifted from his shoulders. It was like returning to those younger years, when he waited patiently every two weeks for the next letter to arrive from his special friend.

"Do you have a nickname for me?"

Iza's face turned pink again. "Um... How about Yuu?"

Yuugi smiled. "Iza and Yuu."

The two were happy in that living room where the years were rewinding themselves, the stories of children and life replaying between them and their voices jubilant, music in the air.

Chapter End Notes

*Urashima Tarō and Otohime - One day, a young fisherman by name of Urashima Taro saves a small turtle from the abuse of small children. Later, a large turtle comes to him, telling him that the small sea turtle is the daughter of the Emperor of the Sea, and for this heroism, he is invited to stay at the Palace of the Dragon God. He is given gills and
spends time with the King and his daughter, the now lovely princess Otohime. After three days, Urashima Taro wishes to return to see his aging mother. Otohime sadly allows it, giving Urashima Taro a box that she warns never to open. He arrives on land and discovers that no one knows him, as he has spent 300 years under the sea. In despair, he opens the box, and ages 300 years, as Otohime later explains is due to his old age being kept in the box.

**This is the inspiration for Muten Roshi :D**

*Nakanoshima and Municipal - Libraries are important in my life. It's where my family and I have learnt so much about the world around us. When I was eight years old, I discovered that the world was large. When I was twelve, I realized the difference between YuGiOh! in the United States versus YuGiOh! in Japan. I now know some German, Japanese, and ASL from my time at the library, as well as fiction, which I was rarely allowed to read when I was growing up. For Iza, libraries are important because they expanded the knowledge base he had, got him a means of income, and -[html. erro.r]*

*I wrote a paper in high school about how Ophelia is most likely erotomaniac and Hamlet has major depressive disorder. Welp.*

*I have fallen down stairs before... It is not fun.*

*I DO NOT OWN MADELINE. OR HER DOG GENEVIEVE.*

*NAMES. The name "Yuu", as in tomodachi/ friends). "Iza", now with kanji, is 意座, in which 意 (I) means feelings/thoughts/intention and 座 (Za) means "place/seat/position/status" and is also a counter for theatres, deities, Buddhist images, tall mountains, and satokagura songs.*

**Sato kagura(里神楽), or village kagura, is a popular form of kagura that presents ritualized dance-dramas reenacting mythological themes.**
Chapter Summary

The mount of death:
Oh, that you’d come from there,
Cuckoo.
Then of my darling boy,
You could give me news.

- Lady Ise (c. 875 – c. 938)

Chapter Notes

And now for something completely different, and for answers.

August 15, 2004

Iza and Yuugi were waking up from having their sleepover over breakfast, both teenagers still pretty
tired and more mumbling back and forth to each other. It was amazing to have time together again;
with the letters going back and forth again, they had seemed to catch up with each other completely.

Iza had brought some old tapes that he had made for them to listen to this time. Yuugi found himself
humming a few songs while he and Iza made pancakes.

"I like these blueberries."

"I like the little chocolate bits," Yuugi noted, pouring chocolate chips into his own bowl of pancake
batter. The smell of oil on the skillet was sharp but delicious on his nose, reminding him of when his
grandmother would make pancakes. He popped some chocolates into his mouth and looked over to
Iza, who was popping a few blueberries into his mouth.

Those lips seemed to eagerly devour whatever lay in reach. Last week, when Iza had come to visit
the second time, he’d brought many snacks that he has gotten on his trip to Chicago a few weeks
prior, kept almost fresh by the icebox at his house. Kit-Kats were familiar, but not so much the
Pudding Bites. Tamarind candy was tart and salty on his tongue, definitely not one he’d have too
often, but the Churittos were spicy, making his eyes water in a really amazing way. His throat on
fire, he found himself reaching for more.

"I should make you chili next time," Iza commented, offering Yuugi a small glass of milk. He went
on to describe a recipe for wonderfully spicy chili, mentioning maize bread and cider.

Yuugi remembered seeing another bag of Churittos, empty, along with the forlorn box of tamarind
candy. The Pudding Bites were halfway gone, Iza reaching for another.
Here, as they made their pancakes, Yuugi noticed that only a handful or so of those little berries remained. They disappeared into the pancake batter, soon to be cooked over the hot stove.

"You seem hungry all the time, Iza-kun."

The older boy looked at him at that. He looked Yuugi in the eye, and then he glanced down at his batter bowl.

"I kind of am..." Iza turned back to Yuugi. "I feel like my body's almost out of energy, so I eat. Usually, eating with someone helps me eat a bit less."

"Really?" Yuugi flipped his pancake. He had one more to make to have five; three for him and two for his grandfather. Iza was making his fourth and final one. Well, it'd be a pretty big final pancake.

"Yeah. If we're talking, eating slowly, it passes time. My mami says it helps the stomach realize how much it's eating." Iza smiled at Yuugi, a gesture that caught the younger boy's attention and found himself returning.

'Mami?'

The pancakes soon finished, and they began to eat.

It was times like this, when Iza did things that were so domestic, that Yuugi noticed little things about the older man. First, it was how he ate, like food could be snatched away from him. Then, it was his eyes. His eyes tried to capture everything around him whenever a stranger approached. He never did it when he and Yuugi were alone. When Sugoroku walked into the room to greet them and dine with them, his eyes seemed to follow his grandfather right away, warily watching every movement. Always wary, Iza never set cups down in the same spot twice, always a bit off, paranoid of... something.

It was also at times like this that Yuugi noticed something else.

Iza liked to stare at him.

It was always a faint thing, like the flutter of a butterfly's wing or a bubble; there was never enough to prove that Iza looked at him, but it never escaped his notice. It was like Iza took pictures of his motions with his eyes, but it never seemed like it was something malicious...

It was more like Iza really liked him, and it wasn't something that he minded anyway; they were best friends after all.

And why would he stare at Yuugi anyway, when Iza was much-

"I wanted to ask you something, Yuu-kun?"

"Unn?"

"You were staring at the calendar earlier? Did I come over at a bad time?"

Yuugi looked to the calendar, where he had circled a date months ago. It was the day after the incident at the Burger World, where he had realised that something was so sadistic - or at the least, violent - in whatever made him so tired and feel out of place. He realised that he could have lost his friend, his friend since childhood.

"Ah, it's going to be Anzu's birthday soon."
"That's good!" Iza smiled and leaned to get his cup of milk coffee, reaching and gaining purchase. After a sip, his lips reformed that smile from before. "Is she throwing a party? Are you going?"

"..."

Iza's smile faded. "I see... Have you called her at all?"

"Should I? After what happened?" Yuugi bit his lip and set down his fork, pancake on the end. "After I left with the Puzzle, I haven't spoken to any of my friends."

"It's only been a bit over a week-"

"But I ran away from them... For someone that only exists in the Puzzle... Maybe it's all in my head."

Yuugi pushed away his plate, head against the table now. "I'm going crazy, aren't I?"

"You're talking about the Danava."

Yuugi nodded against the table.

"What do they look like?" The question was eager, excited. Yuugi lifted his head in wonder, and he met the wondering face of his friend. In silence, Iza was observing him, for the first time, like something to be curious about.

"I've never seen him. What... What do you know about him? And the Puzzle?"

Iza took a drink from his coffee. "There are stories surrounding it, you know. Egypt is such a mysterious country for its age. The Sennen Puzzle is the most mysterious item that I've heard about. Mimi said that the Puzzle came from a grave, and it was designed in a way that only the person that worked on it for years or knew how it looked in the end could solve it. There was a decline in the prosperity from around the time the grave was built, so it could be that the Puzzle was a memorandum or protection piece for the buried."

"'Protection'?" Yuugi looked down at the Puzzle and held it up. It was strange; he didn't feel any different when he wore the Puzzle.

'Wait. That's a lie... I feel cared for.' He closed his eyes for a moment, and he could feel the King curling against his mind and letting him feel a small fraction of that Oneness that they had shared over a week ago. Yuugi let a small smile form on his lips.

"Yes. That eye on it-" Iza took a sip of coffee, continuing, "Is the Eye of Wadjet. It'd have to be, if the spirit associated with it is who I heard it was."

"You mean the Danava?"

"I believe so." Iza set down his mug. "The stories that my sister told me mentioned that the Danava is a being that can be identified with many gods and demons, a really common idea really. Gods like Yamana, Izanami, Innana, Kali, and Isis - from all around Asia and Africa - reflect passion, battle, games, and a connection to the dead. The Danava also shares a connection to snakes and dragons. The Eye of Wadjet on your Puzzle is often paired with a cobra, the divine protector of the Egyptian royal family."

Yuugi blinked slowly.

"A protector spirit? Why would he be so violent?"
"Well, in regards to that," Iza began, "the Danava is regarded as a vengeful and jealous god. It cares so much about its charge at that time that it can be violent. Imagine a mother bear seeing its baby being taken away, or even your own mother if you were being taken away or hurt; the ideal mother will fight tooth and nail, even turn the world upside down."

Yuugi hummed at that. A mother... A protector. And even when fighting Aileen - Devayani, he thought - the Danava had never hurt her. He had certainly scared the older girl, and he had discovered the reason for Aileen's Shadow Games. Aileen had said that the Danava had saved her thousands of years ago...

"... That's kind of scary."

"It is... Call her, that Anzu."

Yuugi froze, and he began to nod slowly. "What do I tell her?"

A sound of a chair against the floor rang in the air, and Yuugi watched as Iza came close to him. Hands touched his shoulders, seeking permission, and Yuugi lifted his arms in kind, letting his friend’s arms wrap around him. Their embrace was warm and it felt so accepting of the fear that was threatening to break Yuugi’s bones. In the corner of his consciousness, he felt the King offering comfort, unconditional and overwhelming with love.

"Whatever you're feeling."

"What about the other spirit?"

"What's his name?"

"I call him the King."

"Heh, maybe you found a Pharaoh."

"Should I tell Anzu that too?"

"Tell her whatever you want. If you're truthful with your friends, maybe they'll see that you need them."

"... I think I have a better idea than just calling her. Can you help me though?"

"Of course. With that?"

August 18, 2004

Anzu, Jonouchi and Honda were sitting in her kitchen on her birthday. They were eating a little bit of cake with her favorite frosting and strawberries. Anzu toyed with the little keychain that Honda had gotten for her. It was a little plastic picture holder, and she had immediately gone to put in a picture of the four of them when they had gone to the mall one day and messed around in a photo booth.

It was at the moment when she pulled out one of the little photos that she caught her first sight of the Millennium Puzzle for the first time in two weeks. There, Yuugi was holding the Puzzle with one hand and leaning against his other arm, close to Anzu.

How close had they been to danger?
'But the Danava has never hurt us. He didn't even hurt Aileen!' 

Then what had happened to Ushio? Sozoji? Hirutani and his gang? They were all hurt in some way or another; insanity and electrocution were still dangerous things that threatened them. 

'Yuugi didn't tell us anything until Death-T. He was scared!' 

Then why did he wait so long to tell Anzu, his friend since elementary school? Anzu bit her lip. It wasn't fair! How was she supposed to help if he never said anything to her?! 

'Maybe he doesn't want help. Maybe he wanted support. Maybe he-' 

"Anzu-chan!" 

The adolescent lifted her head at the voice of her mother. She quickly stood, keeping whatever was in her hand and hurrying to her mother. She sounded so excited. 

As she descended the stairs, Anzu's eyes caught sight of the doorway and the visitor there. 

"Yuugi?" 

He stood with a boy at his side, but Yuugi definitely caught her attention all the more. He had a gift in his hands, a decorated box. His eyes were full of determination and the same brightness that had always gotten in his heart when he was confident. It was such a rare and beautiful thing, and she always loved to see it. They were a brightness that was always so strong in her memory from elementary school. 

It almost outshone the Puzzle that hung around Yuugi's neck. 

"Happy birthday, Anzu." 

She felt like an observer as her mother welcomed Yuugi and his companion inside, to go towards the dining room with Jonouchi and Honda. She followed as her mother waved her hand to invite her daughter back to her own party. 

"Anzu-chan, is something wrong?" her mother whispered as she walked past. 

"No..." 

And her mother left at that. 

Yuugi sat down with Iza next to him. Jonouchi and Honda sat across from them. Yuugi's gift sat in the middle of the table. There were slices of cake already cut and ready to be passed to Yuugi and Iza, but they were not yet moved from their spots. 

Yuugi stared just over Jonouchi's forehead, trying to follow the advice that Iza had given him. If he just stared at somebody's hairline, it would be like looking them in the eye. 

'It's a special power. You can see into someone's soul that way.' 

"Jonouchi-kun, Honda-kun. How have you guys been?" 

The physical startle was something that surprised Yuugi, but he didn't let it show. 

'Act like you know everything that will be said, that will be done. You'll start to notice everything and
We've been good."

Honda nodded. "How've you been, Yuugi? I heard from Jonouchi that you guys met that Aileen Rao, right? Was she hot?"

Yuugi blinked, but he settled on smiling. "She was really pretty." He turned to Iza, who smiled back. "Iza-kun knows her personally."

Iza nodded. "If you'd like, I can get her phone number for you; though, she gets really busy with her work."

Honda let out a laugh. "S-Sure, maybe we could hang out."

"No way." Yuugi turned to Jonouchi again. His eyes were fierce and fiery.

And somehow, Yuugi found himself staring back into those eyes.

'This is important. Understand that you don't have power over anything. You may be disappointed, frightened, or hurt; but when you understand this, you will learn to rebound and overcome those setbacks.'

"Your friend Aileen almost killed us. Me, Anzu; Yuugi, are you going to forget all of that?!" Jonouchi's fist was probably twisting under the table as he shouted at Yuugi. "All for that Kusanagi-guy that she likes?"

"Actually," Iza interrupted, "I'm Kusanagi."

Jonouchi growled. "Who keeps friends like that?"

"Someone that wants a friend." Iza smiled. "You and Honda-san are friends; how'd you become friends with Anzu-san?"

Yuugi recognized that smile; it was a smile that seemed to know everything under the sun. It was one that he had practiced, but it still felt so artificial on his face. He wondered how Iza had learnt that smile, who had taught him all of that, and why he needed to do all of that in the first place...

"Anzu isn't crazy or possessed like Aileen was!"

"What?" Everyone turned to the voice, Anzu standing in the doorway. "Why are we talking about Aileen Rao?"

Jonouchi stood - "Stay on the same level as them if they feel uncomfortable. If they feel threatened and rise above you, stay low." - and focused on Anzu now. "This is Mikoto Kusanagi. This is the guy that Aileen is obsessed over, the reason that she tried to kill us!"

"Jonouchi!" Anzu shook at the memories of the Darkness, but that was not what had frightened her that day. "I-I don't think that she tried to do all of that!"

"Then what?" Jonouchi turned to Honda, who sighed.

"Anzu, it does sound crazy." Honda turned to face Yuugi. "What do you think happened, Yuugi?"

"Honda!" Jonouchi's fists were quivering with the force of how tightly they were held. "Don't you believe me?!!"
"Hold it!" Honda rose to one knee, and somehow, Yuugi knew that if he moved any further, there was going to be a fight in Anzu's house. However, cool brown eyes turned back to Yuugi. "That day, Jonouchi told me that there's another you in the Puzzle and you didn't give it to Aileen when she wanted you to give it to her."

"But, the Other Yuugi said that he couldn't give Aileen what she wanted," Anzu interjected. "She didn't want the Puzzle after that... Jonouchi, you told Yuugi to give it to her."

"Why?!" Jonouchi turned back to Yuugi. "You knew that she could hurt us, and she was talking about that spirit in the Puzzle! Honda, I told you about that! That spirit in the Puzzle that Yuugi had been talking about at Death-T, that guy."

"He saved you."

All eyes stayed on Yuugi, even Anzu's who had been trying to look away.

"Be clear, concise, and use words that they know."

"Aileen's Darkness could have killed us, but the Other Me ate the Darkness. He got rid of it and saved everybody, including Aileen." Yuugi struggled for a moment to keep breathing evenly, relaxed. "You want me to give up the Puzzle? I won't, because it means so much to me, and it should mean as much to you. This is a symbol of our friendship. You supported the Other Me when he fought Shadi, remember? The Puzzle means 'unity'."

"But Yuugi-" Jonouchi's voice wavered. "This isn't easy, I know, but this is a spirit that could hurt us. You saw how it hurt Ushio, Sozoji."

"Yeah, Jonouchi, but Ushio beat the three of us, and Anzu almost got killed there in the Burger World; the Other Me had nothing to do with those, but he still saved us!" Yuugi felt part of his composure breaking down - "It'll be hard, but even if you can't follow the other advice, just stay true to who you are." - but he continued. "He didn't hurt you or Anzu at all!"

"Kaiba's in a coma because of him!"

"And Mokuba can stop seeing his brother go crazy!" Yuugi lowered his head, eyes burning and the faint wetness of tears in his eyes. "That must have been awful for Mokuba! He watched Kaiba-kun lose who he used to be, and from how their step-father sounded and what Kaiba-kun did, Kaiba-kun was turning into that man. That man hurt them, Kaiba-kun almost killed us, but the Other Me stopped all of that! Ushio is in a hospital, and probably so is every other person that the Other Me fought! But look at Hanazaki! The Other Me saved him, I know it! And Anzu from Kokurano-kun, and you, Jonouchi-kun, from the Dragon Cards that Imori-kun had found. I'm not strong like that, so why do I need to get rid of something that finally makes me feel safe?"

The room was silent, the air tense and quivering with Yuugi's shoulders. Iza was holding onto Yuugi's arm, trying to offer some support. After a time, the older boy spoke.

"It took a lot of courage from Yuugi-kun to come. In his stead, I thank you."

Jonouchi turned and glared at him, eyes misty. "Your girlfriend held us hostage."

"She's not my girlfriend, but she wants to be." Iza sighed, removing his hand from Yuugi's arm and rubbing the back of his head awkwardly. "I've told her 'no' before, but she doesn't understand that we can never be together... unless we go Dutch."

"What the hell does that mean?"
"Never mind. My point is, why are you going to punish me for Aileen's mistakes? Are you going to keep punishing Yuugi-kun for the Danava's mistakes? The Other Yuugi's mistakes?"

Jonouchi stopped at that, his body frozen. Yuugi watched Jonouchi's eyes interpret what Iza had just said, his eyes unfocused. What could be going through his friend's mind that it caused such silence? Yuugi found himself realizing that this was the world that his friend saw; always cautious, as if the world was going to attack at anytime, and Yuugi contemplated the fact that Iza had to learn these things, things that Jonouchi seemed to have learned as well but decided ignore them in favor of fighting back against the world that had wounded him so badly. Jonouchi's father, people at school that continually have harassed him because of his looks or previous history...

"Yuugi..." Jonouchi's voice sounded strained, a decision inside of him dividing him greatly. "That... thing. It isn't you."

"It's not," Yuugi reassured his friend. "I can't ask for your friendship back, not like how it was before, but can't we try? I'm the one asking you, not the Other Me."

Jonouchi looked to Honda and Anzu, who both remained silent. They were the ones that didn't vocalize great offense to his Other Self, though they still exercised caution. Something passed through their gazes that Yuugi didn't understand, something he rarely saw. He saw it in Iza's eyes whenever they did something that Yuugi preferred and Iza didn't. It was something as simple as choosing what kind of pancakes to have, but it was something far more amazing.

Acceptance.

"Fine... But next time we see him, Yuugi."

"I can control him now, I think." Yuugi sighed. "He's in the Puzzle, yes, along with someone else."

Anzu moved closer to the table. "Who's that?"

Yuugi smiled and began to explain everything, the King and his kindness. His friends seemed more open to this spirit, this strange one that they had not yet seen evidence of, but Yuugi reported only good things about him, which lessened their fear. He couldn't be sure of their acceptance or fear of the spirits in his Puzzle. All Yuugi was certain of now was so happy that he didn't have to use the last pieces of advice that Iza gave him.

"Fight or run. Both leave you bleeding, both leave you out of breath."

August 28, 2004

「Have you relocated all right? It's okay?」

"Yeah, it's amazing." He was looking around the new apartment that his friend had procured for him. The kitchenette was small enough that it didn't seem too spacious, but it wasn't at all crowded. The living room was like that of a house that he had seen in the suburbs of Seattle when his father was curating there; it had a view of the large towers in the middle of Domino City, and it wasn't too far from his new school.

Bakura Ryou sighed. Another school, and this was the sixth city he had moved to since the whole experience began. There was nothing but the fresh start that truly pleased him, and it was already looking brighter, especially now that his friend was keeping in contact with him more. It was horrid to be away from Japan for so long. It was only too bad that the first three cities they had been in were...
"Are you all right, Ryou?"

"Yes... I'm going to rest a while. You're coming tomorrow, right?"

"Of course. I'll let you rest. Call me if you need anything, Ryou."

"Yeah. Bye-bye," Ryou sighed, hearing the click on his telephone. He let himself fall against his couch, the cool leather a balm to his skin. It was too damn hot out, only making him a bit more irritable than when he was dealing with the moving company.

He heard his father talking on the phone again, something about a project in the north. Ah, it had been about some artifacts from the Jōmon period. The man's call ended and Ryou stared up at his new ceiling - it was an off-white with speckles that wouldn't threaten to blind him when light would shine on it. He stared up while his father spoke to him about how long he'd be gone - "It'll only take a couple of months, Ryou" - and it seemed that he didn't blink until his father closed the door on his way out.

He felt his stomach growl, and at this point, Ryou could identify every bump in the couch cushions and their coordinating speckle on the ceiling. He sat up and got up to the kitchenette. There, in the fridge, was some leftover noodles with vegetables, chips, and a carton of milk. He knew there was a box- There on the counter was a box of eggs. They didn't seem to have spoiled.

When he turned on the television, Ryou switched from channel to channel until he found the new anime that he'd been trying to keep up with, along with the manga. Edward was yelling on screen again, and if Ryou was right, this was definitely going to end differently from the ending of the Fullmetal Alchemist manga. It'd be something cool, at least, something different that he couldn't predict.

Maybe that's why Omodaru had to come tomorrow; it was just to do something different with Ryou.

After that, Ryou went to his room to sleep.

It was 8:00 PM.

The first thing he did when he woke up was take a shower to scrub the grime off of his body. It felt strange not taking a bath last night, but he didn't have the motivation to last night.

The second thing was to call Omodaru.

"Good morning, Ryou!" Ryou smiled and thought of how something as simple as a phone call could make him feel so much brighter.

"Good morning, Momo." The other's laugh was bright, too, at the mention of the nickname that he had given to the older man in his childhood. A simple mistake, just mishearing a name, and it was immortalized whenever Ryou spoke to him.

"We'll be there in about an hour. Is that okay?"

"Yeah. Are your niece and nephew coming?" Ryou ruffled his hair with his towel, not wanting to get his shirt too wet.

"Yep. They wanted to see you and see the friend I've always told them about. My siblings are coming along to make sure their kids behave."
Ryou felt his face heat up at the words. "I'll go to the store really quickly. I don't have any snacks."

「Sure, if you want to. We could pick up something on the way-」

"I can't have you do that! You'll be my guests!"

「... Okay, if you're so insistent.」 Ryou could hear a little bit of happy squealing in the background, and he knew that it was the youngest of the whole family that was expressing her delight. Wow, Momo's niece had to be only a few months old!

"I'll hurry to put my shoes on and get some things. Any requests? Kitto-katsu for you?"

「Of course,」 Momo confirmed, his voice jovial. 「You know me too well!」

Ryou felt his heart skip.

---

Ryou had some small pastries, fruits and vegetables cut up before his guests arrived. A small offering of candy bars sat on the table. He had music playing, some American band that he knew Momo's siblings liked.

"Holiday..."

A sharp rapping on the door alerted him that he wasn't going to be alone in the apartment any-more, and the thought delighted him. Ryou hurried to the door, putting down whatever was in his hands.

"Omodaru-san!"

The man addressed turned his face to Ryou, warm red-brown eyes locking onto Ryou's and communicating a feeling that only told Ryou of how much they missed each other when they were apart. Omodaru might have been older than Ryou by seven years, but it had never really been hard for them to speak or connect with each other. Ryou reached forward and hugged his friend tightly; this had never been a problem for them either.

"Ryou-kun, how are you?"

Ryou pulled back from Omodaru and turned to Izanami the Elder. She was holding her daughter tightly, bouncing the child on her hip. The daughter, only a few months old, was named Kagami, he learnt, and she was every bit as beautiful as her mother.

"I'm doing wonderfully, Mimi-san." Ryou responded well to the hug that she gave him, careful not to make her drop her baby. He gave a small "oof" when he felt little arms clamp down on his leg. Ryou smiled down at the little boy, the son of Izanami the Elder. "And how are you, Keiu?"

"Keiu's happy to see Ryou-san!" Keiu was almost three years old, and it was amazing to see this little boy grow up. Pictures, over the phone; Keiu seemed to progress so rapidly compared to other kids or how Ryou remembered being. Those bright red eyes took the whole world in and collected knowledge from it all. Ryou picked up the little boy, who gave him the same treatment that a baby koala would to its mother up in a eucalyptus tree, and invited everybody in.

"Aren't Izanami and Izanagi coming as well?"

"They went to the store to get drinks," Mimi explained. Kagami was set down on her belly, the blanket underneath her one that Ryou remembered giving to Mimi when her first child was born. "I heard the music, Ryou-kun. Listening to Green Day?"
Ryou nodded. "I bought their single in Seattle, and a few other ones. That group from Chicago... I got their CD somewhere but I misplaced it."

"Oh, Fall Out Boy?"

"That's the one."

Omodaru hummed. "Did you misplace it when you moved?"

Ryou nodded and let Keiu clap his hands together. "I know I had it with my Gackt and Yo-Yo Ma CDs."

Omodaru blinked slowly at him. "Who puts Gackt and classical music together?"

"Omodaru-san, who puts salad dressing on cheese and eats it just like that?" Ryou smiled at his friend's face. That whole incident had occurred after going to church together and ending up in a small café. It was all the man had ordered, and under the name "Momo".

The elder man glared at Ryou, pouting. "I have cravings."

"You have no excuse, sir," Mimi teased, letting Kagami have a bit of cucumber. The baby, Ryou saw, eagerly sucked on the chewed fruit that her mother gave her. His attention was caught by her raising her head to look up at Mimi.

"What?"

"I asked what those little figurines were."

Ryou turned around and saw little figurines, dolls almost, and his spine became a wire for shocks to rack his body. They were beautifully carved, wonderful likenesses of himself and several others. Their attire was something he could easily change with the vinyl clothes that he had made for the rest of his figurines and had available for whenever he had time to play with them.

"They're from a new TRPG." Ryou stood and walked to the table, ice in his bones. He picked up one of the figures and admired its violet eyes, pale skin. It looked to be a half-elf of some kind, but that would be decided should he ever play again.

"Maybe we'll play sometime," Mimi offered. "You haven't played a good game with us in a long time."

"... Maybe." Ryou shuddered, trying to hold in the nausea as a voice licked over his mind, promising a game in the future.

Chapter End Notes

* Omodaru and Ayakasikone - The first pair of male and female deities that came from Umashiashikabihihoji, the Heavenly Deity. It was he that came from the ancient waters and grew reeds of his own flesh, the reeds branching out and creating 6 pairs of male and female deities, the last being Izanagi and Izanami. Omodaru means beautiful face, and Ayakasikone means terrible face.

*The advice that Iza gave to Yuugi is all advice that I gave myself in nursing school in
order to learn to talk to people. Patients, family, physicians, managers; pretend enough, and you'll become it.

** The Kanji for Iza = 威座

* Kitto katsu - a Japanese name for Kit Kats :D; in Japanese, this phrase also means "You will surely win!" which makes it a popular treat for test days.

* Keiu is written 恵雨. Kagami is written 佳雅美. Respectively, the names, including the meanings of the kanji, mean "Welcoming rain" and "Beautiful, graceful mirror".

*To give a mindset on how old every one is right now:
  Omodaru (Momo) is 23.
  Izanami (Mimi) and Izanagi (Yaya) are 18.
  Izanami (Gigi) is 16.
  Anzu is now 16, her birthday August 18th.
  Ryuu is 15. His birthday is September 2nd.
  Keiu (I love him...) is 3 and his birthday is in October.
  Kagami was born in April.

The joke here is that Momo, Mimi, Yaya, Gigi... are all girl names.

* This is why I was concerned for Mi-Nee/Mimi and Kusanagi/Iza, and their acceptance of character by the reader. Well, one reason.
Chapter Summary

Every three thousand years,
’ Tis said, the peach bears fruit;
And in this year
It blossomed with the spring:
That’s what we have chanced across.

- (Ōshikōchi no) Mitsune (躬恒) of the Heian Japanese Court (in 859–925)

Hi, guys! I missed you all! New characters, getting back to the Yugioh plot, and me recalling my old fandoms that inspired this story in the first place.

Demons have demons, too.

Kyou - Japanese honorific meaning "lord" or "lady"; higher than "dono" and higher than "sama"

26 January 2017 - I'M GOING TO FINISH THIS DAMN IT! My father broke his leg a few days ago, the day after I posted my first Yuri!!! on Ice fic. I'm in school again. I AM DETERMINED!!!!!!

Chapter Notes

One last character introduction during this story. The character list for [Creation Myth] is as follows:

Humans:
Mutou Yuugi
Mutou Sugoroku
Mutou Karuta

Mazaki Anzu
Jonouchi Katsuya
Honda Hiroto
Hanasaki Tomoya
Bakura Ryou
Kaiba Seto
Kaiba Mokuba

Mikoto Omodaru
Mikoto Izanagi
Mikoto Kusanagi
Mikoto Izanami

Professor Yoshimori

Ishtar Shadi
Dear Cas,

I hope this plan of Johnny's is gonna work. I have international minutes now. Send me your cell number. This is mine: XXX XXX XXXX

Love, Pepito

August 30, 2004

When Yuugi woke up the day that they would return to school, his heart was racing. He stood and began to get dressed, the feeling of apprehension and excitement in his chest. He felt the protective feeling of the King curl against his heart, and he smiled.

"It's been two weeks. Anzu called me yesterday, and we talked about what to do today after class since she doesn't have work anymore." His voice was soft, as he whispered what he wanted to say to his companion.

It would be two, but the Danava never spoke to him.

Was it due to something he did, or was the Danava a silent spirit? He knew that the Danava could be kind to him and his friends - his actions and the Faceless One's actions - had proven that. However, Yuugi couldn't shake the thought that it would be very good for them to meet. No; they needed to meet!

The King sent him emotions of comfort and happiness against his heart, assuring him that all would be well if he was patient. A complicated emotion came as well; it was thoughtful, hopeful, and longing for... touch?

"Will I ever get to meet you? I've heard stories of ghosts that haunt objects that come to meet people in the physical world."

Maybe he could call that divining lady... Yuugi headed downstairs to breakfast, still surprised, at the bottom, when he saw his mother with omelettes, rice, and juice.

"Good morning, okaa-san. I was wondering," he greeted as he made his way to his seat.

"About what, Yuugi?"
"What was the name of that woman that Jii-chan met twenty years ago? De-something?"

Karuta hummed. "Woman from twenty years ago? I remember that night that your grandfather called us to move in with him, saying that a woman that could divine the future said that we should come live with him, but her name..."

She placed a finger on her chin, her face pensive. Yuugi did the same thing, a habit of thought he had inherited from her.

"We'll ask your grandfather when he comes down, okay?" Karuta offered, "He went to his room to change after cleaning up outside. The porch hasn't been swept in a while."

Yuugi nodded, the King embracing him with the feeling of love, and began to eat.

Kyou Devigado, which was the name that she had created for herself in Japan, awoke with the sunrise. That didn't mean that she didn't nap several times a day. This morning was a strange one, one that had her stomach churning in anticipation. She had a toast with some scrambled eggs, Valentina hot sauce staining the broken eggs. She hummed as she kicked her feet; in her thirties and she could still find enjoyment in kicking her legs in the air from her perch on her tall kitchen seat.

When Lady Devigado heard the man's voice, she had realized how close her visions, the dreams that haunted her, had haunted her since her childhood, were to destroying any life that she was finally establishing. She held her sobs back, because fate wouldn't let her escape this. His words blended together and became a fog that brought her back to a world of loneliness, sadness, and feeling so angry.

She had escaped insanity, murder, and crime, but this was something unavoidable.

「Devigado-kyou？」

"Sugoroku-san, have your grandson come to see me."

She told him her address, when and where she would meet this boy, this Mutou Yuugi, and she prayed that this day would never come.

'God, I have only gotten an answer from You one time, twenty years ago. Please let this day go by without issues, let me survive this day.'

"Devi?"

"Theodore." She turned to the man that lived with her, her friend from so many years ago. She thought to the phone call that she had received only minutes ago. "Do you think you can pick up someone this weekend from the train station?"

Theodore hummed. Devigado smiled as he reached for the mug of hot chocolate that she had made for him. She thought to the day that they met, to the time that he had gotten lost in their school and she had led him to the office, lost herself but knowing only the office. She thought of how their hands fit in a way that she hadn't understood and didn't care to, truly; what kind of eighteen-year-old was put into a sophomore science class?

He was tall, thin, and carried around a teddy bear of all things. Devigado held his hand tightly as they walked to class, led by their teacher. They sat together. They communicated with doodles and drabbles of words in the back of the classroom. They were holding hands underneath the table. Later that week, they were kissing behind the bleachers after school, forgetting about their chemistry
homework among the religious way that their bodies were connecting.

"Devi?" They were in Japan again, and they were having breakfast and they were holding hands again. He said her name again and she pressed her lips to his sweetly.

They were in her room again, talking about their dreams; they'd travel, she'd have her paintings in museums, and he'd write stories that would make people think about things that he thought about. She was holding his teddy bear and listening to them talk to each other.

His hands put themselves on her waist and pushed her away, pouting.

"Devi, why are you kissing me? What about..?"

Her husband had left a few days ago, just telling them to have fun and... What did he say?

'Don't do anything illegal. Don't do anything that I wouldn't do.'

"He went to Napa, it's okay." Devi pressed another kiss to Todd's forehead. "You think you can pick someone up, then?"

"Who?"

"Yuugi Mutou, the grandson of that guy in Domino City."

Theodore nodded. Devi sighed; her mouth still tasted of chocolate.

"Do you hate me?"

"No. You're my best friend." Theodore smiled, the way that she remembered; he was still eighteen years old, even at the age of forty-two. Devi looked to his hip, and there was his teddy bear, attentive and watchful.

"Okay."

"I'll pick him up. Is he coming with anyone?"

"I don't imagine that King Solomon would let his grandson come alone." Devigado whined in her throat, frustration evident. No, that wise man that they had met twenty years ago would not let his grandchild come alone, not after their disastrous meeting all those years ago. His eyes had held more understanding and wisdom than any of them had ever had the pleasure of experiencing.

"I'll be there for them, then."

"This is our unit's opening question. In the mythological story of the ten'nin, can anyone tell me what a hagoromo is?"

"... A kimono, right?"

"Yes, Nosaka-san. Can anyone explain further?"

"The hagoromo is the kimono that the ten'nin wears. Without the kimono, the ten'nin can't return to heaven."

"Very good, Hanasaki-kun. Now, we open with mythologies of Asia, then into Western mythologies. Turn to page 54 and we will start with the creation myth of Japan and our first
Yuugi opened his book and looked down at the images in his book. Heavenly figures, figures that his grandfather encouraged knowledge of without restricting his mother's more Buddhist preferences, graced the pages of his textbook. He looked down at Izanami and Izanagi and smiled. He closed his eyes and thought to his friends, to Kusanagi and Izanami.

'Iza... and Mimi...' They were interesting siblings; he surmised that their other siblings were just as interesting and that Iza's children were just as amazing. That Iza and Mimi knew so much about the Puzzle was astounding, but it didn't sit completely with him, that they knew of this legend that had only been uncovered since June.

He thought again to the Divination woman and wondered if she knew about the Danava.

She had known about Yuugi's parents, his grandmother's death, and Yuugi's birth. Sugoroku always spoke of her politely when Yuugi, as a child, would ask about her.

The Lady of Divination named Devigado, his grandfather had said, lived for one purpose; the Mutou family had part in her purpose, and she'd lend them a hand if necessary. Yuugi wanted to laugh because he had seen her name before: in his textbooks.

"M-!"

If he could meet the King and learn why he was in the Puzzle in the first place, it would alleviate much of Yuugi's worries.

"Yuugi!" The harsh whisper brought him out of his thoughts, and he turned to Jonouchi who had called to him. Looking around quickly, Yuugi blushed as the teacher looked down at him, disappointed.

"Mutou-san, as I have repeated twice for you, I will do it once more. What are different methods that spirits could have come to Earth in Japanese mythology?"

"Eh, objects can create souls inside of themselves, and so can animals, sir!"

"Thank you, Mutou-san." The teacher sighed. "Examine the painting on page 58, and see how the hierarchy in spiritual beings is formed."

Yuugi was quite surprised at how beautiful the picture was, but he shouldn't have been; Lady Devigado had painted it.

A knock came at the door, and the teacher was called away for a moment. Yuugi admired the painting, seeing that the style held that foreign element that existed in all of Lady Devigado's art. He noticed an accompanying caption underneath the image:

"In all religions and mythologies, there is imperfection and orders meant to correct it. In this way, for her love for her brother, Izanami gave birth to deformed children. This is punishment for the woman speaking first; after Izanagi correctly speaks first, we have the births of the islands, Sun, Moon, and the other Gods. This puts Izanagi in a more powerful position over his wife and sister. In this way, we can see that males have been in power over females since long ago. We have a cultural norms set by the Gods, or is it a cultural norm shaping a legend?"

It was an interesting thought.
Bakura Ryou sighed, a smile still holding on his face. As he stood in the hallway outside of what would be his new classroom, he wondered what people he'd meet. Mimi had mentioned some very nice-sounding students, and he'd hoped to be with them in class.

"Tell me if you do want to be with them. I can pull some strings when I'm back at Hitobashira, if you want."

He shook his head. Mimi was a powerful woman, but wanting to be with some of her friends would be a wasteful use of her power; he had told Momo this, who had shrugged.

"We'd do whatever you want, Ryou. It's nothing for us, but it can be everything to you."

"Are you ready, Bakura-san?"

Ryou lifted his head and saw his new teacher for... History? He nodded in anticipation, following his teacher inside. As he looked around, he saw so many new faces, and he saw one that looked familiar. Maybe from a photo that Mimi had shown him once?

"Class, this is our new student, Bakura Ryou."

"It's nice to meet you all," he greeted. He looked at the boy that Mimi had shown him the picture of. Yuugi certainly seemed nice; he had a smile to show it. He could see now how Mimi could care for him and how Kusanagi would obsess over him.

"Let's see, there's a seat by Jonouchi-san."

"Over here!" A blond boy raised his hand, his eyes wide and cheerful. Ryou wondered how he could be so, his uniform unkempt; perhaps this was why. He made his way to his new seat, ignoring the words around him.

"Watch out, Bakura-san!"

"Jonouchi is a rotten egg around here!"

"Pleased to meet you, Jonouchi-san."

"Likewise!" Jonouchi smiled brightly, somehow more brightly than before. Hazel eyes and blond hair; it was a beautiful and rare thing to see. Ryou felt his heart flutter softly. "Let's get along, eh, Bakura?"

"Let me introduce you to some of my friends." Jonouchi stood right next to Bakura's desk after their history lesson was over.

"Sure!"

Ryou was quickly introduced to Mutou Yuugi, Mazaki Anzu, and Honda Hiroto.

"It's nice to meet you, Bakura-kun. Do you have any hobbies?" Anzu asked, smiling with an air of sincerity.

"Oh, I enjoy games. I like board games, especially. Right now, I'm playing one called Monster World."

"Oh! My grandfather is selling that one at our store right now!" Yuugi exclaimed, excited. "It's selling more than our 'Dungeons and Dragons' sets."
"What kind of game is it?" Jonouchi frowned in confusion.

Yuugi began to explain the concept of a role-playing game, those on tabletops and video games. Monster World was a tabletop RPG, much like a board game, with the players going against the game master or "Dark Master". The board is set up with many piece that can connect and were interchangeable, giving the possibility of many different landscapes to play on.

"Wow, do you have a game, Bakura-kun?"

"Y-Yeah."

Jonouchi smiled at that. "We should all play it sometime!"

"S-Sure!" Bakura responded, but he returned to being subdued and quiet again, pain reflecting over his eyes.

Yuugi bit his tongue, not to continue the thought. 'Bakura-kun doesn't seem too happy with that.'

"There's something I've been meaning to ask you, Yuugi-kun." The boy looked up and saw interest in Bakura's eyes. "About your pendant."

Yuugi looked down, seeing only his Puzzle. "Oh, my Sennen Puzzle? It was found in a pharaoh's tomb in Egypt. Did you want to see it?"

Bakura held the Puzzle tenderly in his hands, as though he were uncertain in its stability. He mumbled something, something of his own, before he gripped his chest.

"Bakura-kun?"

"I'm okay... I'm okay."

Some girls managed to take Bakura from them, with Yuugi and his friends bidding him to give them the chance and to hang out some time.

---

September 5, 2004

Sunday came, excitement curling in Yuugi's blood. On the train, Yuugi held the Puzzle close to him, Anzu chatting away about the different stores in Kokuri that they could visit. Jonouchi stared out the window at something distant, mumbling about visiting someone while in town.

"Who are you going to visit, Jonouchi-kun?"

"Oh, no one. I was just thinking about visiting a relative next vacation that we have."

Yuugi only smiled in return, waiting for the smile to be reflected on Jonouchi’s face. When it did, Yuugi felt more confident that this friendship would hold true.

"Kokuri Station. Kokuri Station." The announcement of their stop jolted Yuugi from his thoughts, the King poking him back into complete awareness. As the train came to a halt, Yuugi felt his heart skip slightly; the person that they would meet, Lady Devigado, knew about the Puzzle, as did his grandfather's colleagues, but she held a different knowledge, one that could mean that he would meet the King. His face was almost splitting with joy.

"So we have money for a taxi, right?" Anzu asked, grabbing her bag and standing to leave the compartment. Yuugi nodded.
“Devigado-kyou sent me enough that we would be able to take a taxi to her home and even go back home if we need to. She said it wouldn't be necessary, though.”

“Aren't the train tickets round-trip anyway?” Jonouchi asked. He hummed at the idea of not paying a single yen on this trip. He wasn't going to go shopping at all, but he didn't want to go with Anzu and Yuugi if he couldn't even have some cash on his person.

As they stepped off, they began to look for the exit

“Excuse me. Are you Lady Devigado's guests?”

The three turned to the noise, the voice that seemed so shy, and they looked at a man that was entirely non-threatening and held the air of nervousness about him. His hair was a dark red, one that was too bright to be natural, and it was tied back into a ponytail. His eyes were interesting; they were shaped more like that of a foreigner's but still had a similarity to Yuugi's own.

"Yes, we are. I'm Mutou Yuugi. It is nice to meet you." Yuugi observed the bow that the other gave, deeper than the ones that they had given him.

"Lady Devigado had a meeting to attend to, and we apologize for this inconvenience. I took it upon myself to bring you to her home where you will all meet, if that is to your liking."

"Eh, thank you very much," Yuugi offered. "Thank you, erm..."

"Call me Casil."

"Ka-si-ru?"

"Yep." Casil turned around and gestured to a black car. "Mutou-san and guests, Lady Devigado asked me to take you to meet with her."

Yuugi blinked. "Are you Theodore Casil?"

The words were foreign, and his pronunciation wasn't as good as Anzu's English, but Casil still nodded.

"How'd you guess?"

"You and Devigado-kyou work together. Your writing is in our textbooks."

Casil stared for a second at the trio; his eyes were young, Yuugi thought, younger than the adult he seemed to be. "How old are you guys anyway?"

"I'm fifteen," Jonouchi offered. "These two are both sixteen already. It might be hard to believe, but this guy-" He pointed at Yuugi, smiling. "Yuugi is the oldest."

Casil smiled. "I'm forty-two, so I might be the oldest."

Yuugi smiled as they walked to a black car. He was rather nice.

Arriving at Lady Devigado's home, one that was small and looked rather humble, Yuugi felt welcome. Anzu commented on the garden; the "garden" filled the front of the lawn around the house, all of it fenced in and the fence itself covered with beautiful ivy. Chrysanthemums, marigolds or "cempazúchitl", lilies, and roses grew, little pieces of wood supporting the flowers that were scattered throughout the lawn. Casil mentioned in passing that they plant the cempazúchitl around the
end of October for the Mexican Day of the Dead.

"It's like O-bon in the summer. That was just last month, but we'll celebrate our own festival in October." Casil smiled and stopped to pick some of the flowers, their golden petals trembling in excitement at their chance to be chosen. "It's also Halloween time, so sometimes we go to California to see friends and watch scary movies."

"You're from America?" Anzu's voice grew louder, reached higher, in excitement. "I'm sorry if I'm assuming, but have you been to New York? Broadway?"

Casil laughed a bit, teasing the tops of his _cempazúchitl_ and getting pollen on his fingers. "I've always wanted to go. I wanted to see _Les Mis_ and _The Phantom of the Opera_, but I've only ever seen the recorded shows."

"You have a recording of _Phantom_?" Anzu's eyes sparkled with excitement. Yuugi smiled. Casil was a nice man, and an interesting one. He spoke well with all of them, and Yuugi felt safe near him. Jonouchi was teasing Anzu about Broadway, well-meaning, and Casil only stood amused at Anzu's growling at their friend.

"We actually are from a town outside Los Angeles. San Francisco is farther, but they have nice theaters and lots of students would perform shows there." Casil beckoned them to follow. "I know I saw a production of... _como se dice_... 'Four Norwegian Moods' in the early 1970's, and 'Don Juan' too."

"Don Juan?"

Casil approached the door and reached for his keys. "Don Juan is the story of a playboy that eventually pays for his sins by being denied access to divine salvation." He smiled back at Anzu as the door opened. "The Phantom in _The Phantom of the Opera_ writes his own version: _Don Juan Triumphant_."

"That's... dark."

Casil smiled and shrugged. "It's interesting."

Jonouchi stepped in front of Anzu and Yuugi. Yuugi felt a sense of trepidation up and down his spine. Jonouchi was protective, defensive, and he always decided to break our of situations before they were completed, out of safety; what was he doing now?

"What kind of person is 「Lady」Devigado?"

"Well, 「King」Solomon - that was our nickname for Sugoroku when we were younger - called her to ask for help." Casil turned to Yuugi. "You want to know about the spirits in your Puzzle, right?"

"What?" Jonouchi's hazel eyes focused on Yuugi. "I understood before, but this lady can actually help you?"

"That's what Jii-chan said."

Casil spread his arm, gesturing toward the interior. "Make yourselves at home. There are slippers right here. The living room is to the left. I'll get Devigado for you."

"This King... He's a lot nicer than your other self, right?"
Yuugi nodded. Anzu smiled at that. "He and I have talked before. My other self and I haven't talked at all."

Yuugi began to retell of the King's kindness and his strength. He mentioned their dreams that they had - not going into full detail because spirits were enough for one day; sexual interactions with a technical ghost might be a bit too much. Anzu asked about how he looked, and Jonouchi asked if he could have a good talk with him after. Yuugi sighed, but Jonouchi stuttered and reworded his comment.

"I just wanna find out more about these guys, especially your other self. Does the King know about your other self?"

"Yes... He told me that my other self wants to protect me and the rest of us." Yuugi caught Jonouchi's line of sight. "Will you trust me?"

Jonouchi sighed. He pushed back his hair from his eyes, breaking eye contact for a moment. He looked over to Yuugi again, seeing some more strength than before in his friend's eyes.

"Sure."

"Hello, Mutou Yuugi-tachi."

All three teenagers turned to the new voice that entered the room. A woman entered the room, her presence almost non-existent. She smiled at them all, especially at Yuugi.

"So this is Sugoroku's grandson?"

Yuugi stood up, bowing slightly. Anzu and Jonouchi followed. "It is good to meet you, Devigado-kyou. My name is Mutou Yuugi. My friends are Mazaki Anzu and Jonouchi Katsuya."

Lady Devigado bowed back to the three, her purple hair falling down from behind her shoulders. "Call me Devi. It's easier to say."

"Erm, okay."

The woman waved to their seats, inviting them to sit and relax. "You want to speak with the little boy-king in the Millennium Puzzle, right?"

Yuugi froze. This was real. It was happening, and another feeling arose. Excitement.

It was from him, the King, and even someone else.

The Danava sat in his Soul's Room, trying to rid himself of the unease in his mind. He had walked, he had played, he had danced, and he had tried to lay down. Nothing soothed him.

It had pleased him, when he felt the King's soul remove itself from the Puzzle, and he shivered in the pleasure that he felt from their bodies embracing, from the light touches from Anzu's curiosity, and the protective stances from Jonouchi. It was a wonderful and warm feeling, but the Danava found himself nauseated.

'Damn...' He sighed heavily, his shoulders falling forward in a show of seeming defeat. This feeling felt disgusting in his body.

'Horrible, isn't it?'
'Shut up.'

'That feeling is frightening; that sense of uselessness that tells you that you are now against a threat that threatens your very existence and what you fight for.' The Faceless One was whispering against his mind, its snake-like tongue curling over inch of him like a lost lover.

'Leave me alone...'

'I can't. We're the same person, idiot.' The Faceless One laughed in delight at the Danava's distress. 'What? Can't honor me? You pol-less demon that thinks of happiness, a real horrorshow, huh?'

The Danava growled in exasperation. What was this damn feeling inside of him, this anger and joy, that he was threatened and he was nauseous and he was disappearing?!

'You'll lose yourself in it.'

The voice! It was different, but it was familiar. The Danava stood, looking into the darkness of the labyrinth, the labyrinth that housed the souls of himself and a King. The Faceless One wrapped around him, embracing him in protective, possessive nature; the Danava shivered, pleasure racing down his spine along with his fear.

'Come out! Come out now!'

The Shadows shrieked in delight, responding to his voice. And that frightened the Danava. The Faceless One turned away from the darkness, inviting instead the thoughts of a game that they had been privy to.

Text message to: Pepito

Dear Pepito,

This is Theodore Casil.

I hope this goes okay, too.

From, T.

Chapter End Notes

Lady (卿, kyou) Devigado (1964-?): A divining woman from Los Angeles, she began painting when she was five. Child of a single parent and orphaned at seventeen, she currently lives in Kokuri, neighboring city to Domino City, preferring Japanese society. She lives with her lovers.

*Favorite singer: Raphael (Miguel Rafael Martos Sánchez)

Theodore Casil (1962-?): Casil was and is a creative writer, often writing stories of human sin and salvation; this is mostly influenced by his upbringing in an abusive household as a child. He eventually moved in with his next door neighbor. He was formally in Kokuri-Peony Residences, a habitation that offers care to those with physical
and psychological ailments. Lady Devigado and Johnathan Calloway are his emotional supports.

*Favorite companion: His teddy bear

Johnathan Calloway (1962-?): Calloway lived next to Casil for several years before eventually inviting Casil to move in with him. He worked as an artist as a young teenager and again as a young adult. At the age of 19, he met Lady Devigado and began a relationship with her that eventually fell apart. The two rekindled their affections when Calloway was 21. He brought his lover and roommate with him to Japan to seek a different life.

*Favorite food: Churritos (I actually recommend that everyone eats these, unless you have GLUTEN intolerance/ Celiac... there may be gluten in the bag.

Joseph "Pepito" Diabolo (1962-?): Diabolo went to school with Casil when they were children and later in vocational classes after Casil graduated secondary school. Casil and Diabolo have been writing letters back and forth since the move to Japan. Lady Devigado feels somewhat indifferent. Calloway wishes that Diabolo's father's religion bites him in the ass.

*Religion: "My mother is a Catholic and my father is a known Satanist. I don't hurt anybody so why is it important? I'm not like that Jones guy."

Internal twelve-year-old: IT'S THE MOOSE!!!!!!
"This is the Book of Generations..."

Chapter Summary

To the valley door
Does he return?
The warbler
Found his roost among the blooms,
Now scattering and drifting...

- Fujiwara no Kiyosuke (1104-1177)

Chapter Notes

I finally fixed the problems with the first 4 arcs of this story, and I'm getting started on my original novels... Now I just need time.

I would really appreciate any reviews for this story... Please.

* DARK SIDE OF DIMENSIONS HAS RUINED MY LIFE AND I HAVE NO REGRETS (See my Prideshipping One-Shot "Ripples")
*I would like to inform the readers that a lot of research is going towards this story. I dislike anachronisms, so Kaiba Seto's tech is crazy to me. However, everything else is appropriate to the time period, which is currently September 2004. This makes more sense a bit later when we go back to more Gakuen-style chapters. This makes it hard to put out material quickly, but I think it works better for the story that I'm trying to tell, in which the characters do reflect the time and time reflects them.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The King stood in front of Mutou Yuugi, Mazaki Anzu, and Jonouchi Katsuya. Devigado stood behind him, her arms still outstretched and reaching towards Mutou Yuugi. He was dressed in a tunic, pants, and boots that seemed to blend into his pants. A wide belt held his tunic to his body. The King had rings on his fingers, two on his left hand and another on his right. His skin was dark, like the sun shone all the time from where he was.

Jonouchi was standing, having jumped as this young man appeared in front of him. He looked to Lady Devigado, who lowered her arms and whose forehead was beading with sweat from the exertion. Anzu stood up slowly, walking over to the woman to help her sit down.

Jonouchi looked to the King, who was looking at his hands, clenching and relaxing them. His eyes were red, though not quite the color of blood; they were more like the cherry candies that his mother used to buy for him when he was little. They held a sense of wonder in them. He wondered himself of this guy could be trusted - because he didn't trust the Other Yuugi as far as he could throw him - but there was a small voice in his heart that told him that this King could be trusted.

It was just the Other Yuugi that he needed to figure out.
"You're the King, then?"

The King looked up at him, smiling gently. "That is what Yuugi calls me."

"Huh..."

"It is good to meet you," the King greeted. He bowed deeply, deeper than Jonouchi had anticipated, and the young man found himself mirroring the same bow. This guy couldn't be the one that he had met when Imori had unsealed the Dragon Cards; his presence was completely welcoming.

"King..." Yuugi stood up and came forward. His eyes were bright and eager. Jonouchi moved a bit to the side, his mouth dropping open as Yuugi leaped forward to hug the King. The King returned the gesture, holding onto Yuugi as though he were afraid of Yuugi disappearing. Jonouchi could almost say that they looked like lovers with how tightly they were holding each other.

"I can finally see you, Yuugi..."

"King, I'm very happy to see you, too."

Their embrace, long-lasting, finally ended when Lady Devigado cleared her throat.

"Now then, young boy-King who ruled over the Nile," she began, shifting in her seat. "You have a body granted to you by another Adapa. It is yours to do with as you wish."

"I humbly thank you for this gift that you have granted upon me, Devigado-kyou." The King bowed and stood straight again. "You are Adapa as well?"

"I am, with my powers given to me by a powerful demon that, perhaps, I may tell you about another day, if you wish to know everything," Devigado smiled. "You might get a headache though; it's a long story that took me a decade to really understand."

"You mean you can't give us any answers?" Anzu's voice seemed lost, small, and terribly powerful as she asked the older woman for answers. "... We wanted to know even more about the Puzzle, the King, and..."

She looked to Yuugi for the name that they had been given. The boy struggled to remember the name.

"The Danava?" The King stepped forward, eyes stern. "Yes, if we can have answers on any of these things, even my own existence, we sincerely wish for them."

The King caught Lady Devigado's line of sight. "Please."

Lady Devigado stood up, her purple hair still in its hold, but her eyes looked frantic. Her mouth formed a small frown. She looked to Anzu and then back to the King. Her violet eyes swam with emotions that held years and years of bondage, tightly kept away so that no-one could see.

The King stepped forward again, beckoning "Adapa seem to hold together, and you are a kind goddess for granting me this gift. For whatever you ask, we wish to know just why I had no body to begin with, at the very least..."

"Hah... You don't know what you are asking," Devigado replied. "But you asked a good question..."

The King blinked, and he felt out of place in front of Yuugi now. "Thank... you?"

"I hate stupid questions, and you asked a good one," Devigado replied. "I can tell you a story that I
heard before we moved to this country-

She looked to Yuugi.

"Before we came to try and solve the Sennen Puzzle ourselves."

There was once a King, who swore fealty to his land, his people, and to the Goodness of the world. When a great Evil came, the King called upon his servants, demons, to aid him. They told him of a way to fight the Evil, and humans took it upon themselves to carry out the demons' will.

The Evil was defeated, and the land entered an era of peace. A young Prince was raised in this Peace, and he was happy, knowing that he'd preserve this Peace. He inherited his father's role, becoming King and knowing his duty.

However, one day an Evil came, greater than they had ever faced, and the young King sacrificed himself for the defeat of that Evil. He was placed in a little gold box, waiting to be found again.

All looked to the King, a boy-King, that stood in the middle of the room. To think that he had sacrificed himself for the salvation of something that they didn't know anything about, a long forgotten kingdom, it was terrible. He would have been young to be called a boy-King. The King sat down on the couch, Yuugi following him, rather closely to everyone else's surprise.

"That... explains some things, I guess." The King sighed, wishing to lean against Yuugi and Yuugi inviting him. They sat on the couch together, as though there was no one else in the room.

"And the Danava?"

Lady Devigado nodded. "The Danava is one of the three demons that created the plan to save that Kingdom." She looked to Yuugi, to the Puzzle itself. "You're safe from the Danava's power, if that's what you're worried about; he wouldn't want to hurt you."

"You sure about that?" Jonouchi sighed. "I mean, I saw this demon talk with dragons and he set a man on fire. Is this... Yuugi's hands are connected to this."

Lady Devigado nodded. "And if he hadn't been there? If the Danava wasn't there to protect Yuugi and the rest of you? What would have happened?"

Ice filled Jonouchi's veins. If the Danava hadn't been there... The sound of that convict slapping Anzu, the sight of that dragon that Imori had summoned taking Yuugi's soul...

"I didn't think of that."

The woman smiled. "I know. You're young, and the Danava knows that; it's probably why he doesn't hold it against you."

Anzu nodded. Jonouchi found himself agreeing, though the thought of this demon in his friend still had him anxious.

"Is there anything else you need to know?"

Anzu shook her head, as did Jonouchi. The King looked to Yuugi, who bit his lower lip.

"The Faceless One... Are he and my Other Self the same person?"
Lady Devigado blinked. "The Faceless One and the Danava are the same aspects of the same creature. The Danava is an active demon, more like a human in appearance, and the Faceless One is a monster. In the Kojiki, Izanami supposedly transferred her soul into a human and an animal; the Danava and his siblings went through something similar. The Lord of the Unknown became the Behemoth that ravaged the Earth, the Danava became the Faceless One which is also a terrible sea monster, and the Garuda became the Phoenix."

'Earth, water, and fire...'

"And they won't harm us, right?"

Devigado shook her head. "They would not purposely do so unless they judge that you should die. You have seen what the Danava can do as a judge. Has he ever targeted children or innocent souls?"

There was no answer in affirmation or negation.

"Then you have no worries." Devigado stood. "I gave you all money for your stay here in Kokuro. I called you all early enough so that you may all converse at your leisure. You have money for your ride back."

The woman excused herself, citing a headache and fatigue from her work as reason for her own dismissal.

"Thank you, Devigado-kyou." The King bowed to her again.

Lady Devigado smiled at him.

"Child, you have a long way ahead of you, and you may just be SOL one day, so I'd rather you have a good time right now and to be kind to you. This is my gift to make your life a bit better."

"SOL?" Anzu thought to what that could mean. Lady Devigado said something that left the girl blushing.

"I can have Theodore spend some time with you all, to take you sight seeing." She looked to the King. "I might do you good to have some time in the Sun."

They wandered throughout Kokuro, walking and talking. Yuugi and the King walked close, occasionally bumping into each other. They were watched by Anzu and Jonouchi that decided not to mention anything that would be rude, but they found their friend intertwining his and the King's hands a few times for only seconds at a time.

They would see Yuugi's face, glowing in the sunlight, and the light in the King's eyes was innocent enough that Anzu could see the absolute amazement of the world about him but mature enough that she could see the stray glances to Yuugi's waist. Yuugi welcomed every touch and every glance, Jonouchi biting his lip when Anzu mentioned it.

"It wouldn't surprise me, Anzu, but I don't care if he is or not. I just want him to be happy." Jonouchi looked over to the other two boys.

The King was trying out the pinball machine in Kokuro's smallest arcade - according to the sign in the window - and Yuugi was cheering him on, the machine making wondrous chirps and whirs at the abuse it took on a daily basis. The King went from severely focused to delighted in a few minutes' time, the sound of scores being racked up in correlation to the smile blooming on the young face.
"Really?"

"Anzu, do you like Yuugi?"

Anzu blinked at that, and she never answered him.

The train ride was interesting, with the King asking various times how the transportation system worked, what "diesel" was, and why did people live so far apart from each other. Yuugi had some answers, not all, but he promised to find out for the King. The King only smiled and then quieted himself.

"Why are you here?"

The King turned to Jonouchi. "I don't know, but I do wish to stay with Yuugi, if you find it in your mercy to let me."

When they parted their ways at Domino Station, Yuugi and the King waved good-bye and did not look back.

When Yuugi led the King inside, he stopped his run of speech - "We can start helping you with Japanese and other things. We'll need clothes, because you're taller than me..." - when he saw a notebook on the kitchen table. The notebook that he had written to his other self earlier in the month was laying there.

"Yuugi?"

"It's the notebook where I was writing to the other me."

The King frowned and walked to grab the notebook. "He must have awoken during the night at one point to talk to you, but I don't know why it would be down here. I'd like to think that I'd have woken up if your body had moved."

Yuugi's face felt flushed at that, and the King's cheeks mirrored what his face must have looked like, though the blush was not as apparent on his darker skin. He walked close to the King, his body growing warmer as their bodies seemed to feed their heat into each other. He reached for the notebook, opening it to the page with the newest writing.

*Danna-sama, you are truly kind and generous.*

For the King to be given a body is truly wonderful, as he is much safer and will be happier outside of the connection of minds that were made between the Puzzle and your Soul's Room. I hope that you two may spend your time well together.

He stared at the paper. He looked then to the King and back again.

"He thanked me for you having a body, but how did he know? He said that you'd be safer here? Is it because of the Shadows?"

The King nodded. "Shadows eat whatever is around them. The Danava himself is made of Shadows, though, so you shouldn't worry."
Yuugi pondered the thought. If the Danava, his Other Self, was made of Shadows, what did he eat then?

"You can teach me what all of that says?"

Yuugi looked up to the King, who was gazing down at the paper. There were some complicated kanji here and there, some kana in places where he would've used kanji. He wondered how often his Other Self saw the symbols, enough that he could understand them and write them, more than what the King could do.

"Yeah... Let's start."

---

*September 8, 2005*

"Did you hear?"

"About Karita-sensei?"

"Yeah, he's been gone since yesterday afternoon, they said."

"I heard that he and Bakura-san got into a big fight."

"I heard that Bakura-kun..."

Yuugi hummed at the words, trying to forget them as the day went on. He remembered the cruel things that Karita-sensei had said to Bakura, how Bakura's friends had fallen into comas after paying with him. It was an awful thing for someone to think of and to keep someone afraid of losing friendships to the point of never wanting to make them.

'Are you okay, Yuugi?'

'I'm fine.'

The ways of communication were short, with sentences taking sometimes several tries before they went through. They'd have to become stronger, the King had said, but Yuugi wasn't always so patient.

He sent a flood of cautious anxiety and bravery through the Link of Souls between them.

The King responded kindly, sending reassurance and a thought of Bakura Ryou.

'Visit?'

'Good thought.'

The King wasn't going to be wondering about him coming home a bit later than expected. He sent him a thought of Bakura's address, a gentle affirmation of receiving the knowledge, and the Link faded into sleepiness.

"Oy, Yuugi!" A kind slap to his back was given, with Jonouchi's fingers leaving a small brand of forceful enthusiasm on his back. "What'cha thinking about?"

"Did you hear what everyone is saying about Bakura-kun?"

"It's cruel," Anzu said, "spreading all these rumors that Bakura-kun hurt Karita-sensei. He doesn't
"Hey, why don't we go visit? I'm sure that he's lonely, especially since he didn't come to school today." Honda's suggestion presented itself in place of Yuugi's words, but it didn't stop Yuugi from supporting the thought.

"Let's!"

"Is... is it okay if I invite the King?"

Yuugi's friends were silent. Honda, who had not yet met the King, had been told by Jonouchi about him, and he had shown no hostility towards this Spirit that he had not yet met. He nodded and turned to Anzu and Jonouchi, who agreed to it.

"Sure!"

"It might do Bakura-kun some good to meet him, especially since the King is so new to the world."

The King felt strange walking to Bakura Ryou's home. He'd been practicing his kana all day, and Yuugi had sent him small thoughts of the school's happenings and educational things all day. Though the Link of Souls was still weak, their Bond of Souls stronger through their... activities, the communication was still weak.

He listened to Yuugi and Jonouchi talk about the game that Bakura had, Monster World. Anzu talked with Honda about what else they could do for Bakura Ryou, bringing food or doing study groups.

"Study groups would be good." His own voice was strange to his ears. It was new, the sensation of the vibration of his vocal cords.

Anzu agreed with him, her voice high but not grating against his ears. Honda murmured about the days that they could all be available, such as the weekends or Sundays.

"Whatever we do," Jonouchi said, "we need to let him know that we don't care about those rumors at all!"

Yuugi nodded, looking to the King and smiling. There was a trusting sunrise there, and the King loved every minute of it, the light of Yuugi's soul warm against the darkness of his own. His fingers twitched, and Yuugi answered by grabbing his hand. There was so much kindness in those fingers, those smiles, and those eyes.

The King smiled.

The Danava waited, waited for the Baku to start the game.

Chapter End Notes

Title: Genesis 5:1
Behemoth and sea monster from the Book of Job

Link of Souls: The Mind Link that all fics have; allows for the communication between the characters of verbal and visual information
Bond of Souls: The conscious knowledge that our characters will have of another's condition; allows for knowledge of location relative to space between the characters

Monster World: Very much like an RPG
- Roles: Dark Master - Game Master who is the enemy of the players
Players can be: Humans, Faeries, Hunters, Warriors, Nomads (Gypsies in the anime)
Ten-sided die are used to decide moves. 99 is a fumble, a complete miss and may even cause harm to the player. In the lower 10%, a move is considered CRITICAL. 00 is a SUPER CRITICAL HIT, the most powerful move that a player can perform

Comments are greatly appreciated.

NEXT AND FINAL CHAPTER: Bakura-centric
Takamimusubi and Kamimusubi

Chapter Summary

My lady lives  
In the house beyond those treetops;  
As I went along,  
’ Til they were quite gone from sight  
Did I backwards turn my gaze.

- The Posthumous Grand Minister, Sugawara no Michizane (845-903)

Chapter Notes

I have posted the first chapter of The Kingdom of the Sun, which is essentially the  
Ancient Egypt/Millennium World Arc of the manga before the Pharaoh gave up his memories.

This is also the second to last chapter. Oops...

*Please keep in mind that this is an AU story. The Other Yuugi and the Pharaoh are not the same persons.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

When Ryou was small, he had loved to play with his younger sister. Amane had loved to play with her dolls in the landscapes that his parents had taught him to create. They were roleplaying before they knew what that truly entailed. They were prince and princess, warrior and mage, voyager and Empress, all within the walls of their home.

His parents told the stories of the world. His father was a museum curator and also went to expeditions to bring things back for the museum. His mother was a major in anthropology and knew many things of many cultures of the world, especially legends, but her stories of Yahweh and His chosen children were always the most amazing because they were His children, and they followed His word with every beat of their heart; it was her religion.

There was nothing that could harm them when they were home.

It was only the outside world that could harm them. It was made clear the day that his sister and mother had gone out; the car was hardly damaged, but the road was forever marked with skid marks and his family did not live. That had been when Ryou was six years old.

His father found himself engrossed with the histories of the world again, going on more excavations, looking for something "to bring back his Yona" back, as his friend Momo had said.

Momo had watched over him often, a kind babysitter that was still putting himself through school after his parents had died. Momo’s aunt had helped, buying things that Momo could show to Ryou to
alleviate his loneliness. Aunt Ameko was wonderful, but Ryou liked how she didn't make Momo live with her all of a sudden. She helped from a distance, and there she would stay until Momo couldn't survive on his own.

It was like how Ryou's father was to him; he was present when needed, but he was always stayed far away from Ryou, looking for anything... Looking for anything to bring back his broken bride.

Ten years ago, Momo had showed him how to make models. Aunt Ameko sent him with clay and vinyl blocks so that Ryou could practice on as many as he needed.

"Here; think of it like the photos that I take of my cakes." Momo showed him one cake picture. "I can make it like a cake, but you want to feel the cake. Make it like it's the real thing. My aunt said that if you can capture the spirit of something, it will never leave you. If you make the model with the spirit in mind, it won't ever fade."

Ryou made a model of his sister, and he thought so hard of her smile, her bright eyes, and her innocence. It was a small charm on his old prayer shawl, back when he use to pray.

He began to make models regularly. He never made one of Momo, because he always seemed to be there.

He remembered his father coming home one day and telling him that they would both be going to Egypt.

"Father, what are we looking for?"

His father turned to him with excited eyes. There was a ring hidden in a place of thieves, where many of his mother's people had lived due to their status in the ancient Kingdom before Pharaoh Wehnesyt. It lasted for generations, and to this day, Yona's people were disliked in many places.

"Ryou, there is a story that Pharaoh Wehnesyt had a powerful Tome, a book, that held many spells and curses. It was given to him by the younger sibling of the Lord of the Unknown."

"Isn't he a death spirit?"

"Yes," his father answered, his eyes growing cold. "But, his younger sibling is his scribe. He is charged with remembering the lives and deaths that his brother claims. He is also a keeper of knowledge and art. All three brothers love art, and the knowledge was all contained in a Tome.

"In it, there was a spell to create seven items with mystical powers. Someone mentioned the Ring to me. It's supposed to be in a crypt in Kul Elna. I want you to stay at the inn, though. I don't know what we'll find there."

They found it, but it only led to his father more distant than before and Ryou keeping the Ring. It made him feel safe somehow, like someone was always watching over him.

He had woken up to his father laying panting in bed. He had asked for some help to get his papa to the hospital, and they had spent the rest of their time in Egypt there.

When they got home, no one came over anymore. His friends started falling asleep, into comas, and no one played with him anymore.

He started having dreams, of a woman that was guiding him through the desert, telling him to go
back home and pray like a good boy. He heard some whispers at times.

"May God make you like Ephraim and Menasheh."

It kept him away from the nightmares.

Then it kept it away from his friends and his dreams.

The day that he met Mutou Yuugi, he felt a pain in his chest. There was an urge to jump- to run- to do anything but stay in the same room. Those girls from his class led him out of the classroom, clamoring on about how cute he was and how they could keep him company. He found himself running to the restroom after Karita, the physical education teacher, pulled at his long hair that reminded him so often of his mother. His heart felt so fast in his chest and the Ring around his neck, against his skin, felt like it was burning.

'Yuugi-kun's pendant... was just like my Ring.'

Ryou held his Ring in his hand. He wondered what Momo would think if he called.

As he left school, Yuugi had invited him to play games, his friends following behind. They mentioned Monster World, but he told them of his friends who had fallen into comas after meeting him and playing games with him. He saw then that none of Yuugi's friends held any fear around him.

"Please. I don't want to lose any more friends. Good-bye..."

"Bakura-kun!"

Ryou sat down to write a letter Saturday evening. Unease had crept into his bones, and he had Karita-sensei's threat of cutting his hair.

_Dear Amane_,

_How is everything at school? And with Mum and Dad? Your brother has gone for the first time to a new school and made some new friends. We are-_ 

'Heh heh...' 

'A voice?' Ryou stood up, his heart racing.

'You can finally hear me?' It wasn't a man's voice, but it certainly wasn't that of a girl.

"Who's there?!!"

'The time had come that I can communicate with my master! A glorious day!' The voice was growing more excited, almost manic. 'We should celebrate! I've finally found him, the boy with that Millennium Item...'

"Who are you?! Where is this voice coming from?!!" Ryou gripped at his body, trying to hide himself within his own embrace.

'Why, my dear host, I've been here the whole time. I'm the Other You, from the Millennium Ring!'

"This-" He keened in pain, shaking as a sharp pain pierced his chest. It spread out like fire and
needles. Ryou opened his shirt, tearing at the buttons, and stared in horror at the needles of the Ring as they dug themselves into his his torso, blood freshly oozing out of the wounds.

'We are connected forever! Thanks to you, I've found the keeper of the Puzzle after all this time! You are my eternal master!'

"Go away!" Ryou opened his eyes, looking into the darkness of space. The darkness of the Ring was around him and licking at his flesh. The voice seemed to echo, a soothing siren in the dark.

'That's not very nice... I have to confess that I'm really enjoying myself. Why so upset? I've been paying my rent, granting your wishes as collateral...'

"My wishes?"

'Don't you remember when you were small? You told your friends, 'This is great! I hope we can all play this forever!' So I granted all of your wishes, my dear host!'

"What... You don't mean..."

'You'll get it someday... But now I have the perfect chance to claim the Puzzle! Who knows when I'll get another chance like this?!

"What are these things?"

'The Millennium Items are like tombs of mighty, ancient souls, but if there must be keepers of those tombs, there must be grave-robbers!' The voice sounded young, not much older than him, surely, and it sounded like it was enjoying the time that it was spending talking with Ryou. 'Since I'm feeling this great, my landlord, I'll pay my collateral again...'

"What are you planning?"

'You don't want to be bald, do you? I serve you, my master, and that gym teacher insulted my master...'

A flash of Karita-sensei appeared in his thoughts, along with the sounds of criticism and cruel intent that came with the threat of cutting off Ryou's hair. He saw the teacher fear for his life, a light shining brightly between them before seeing the man on the ground.

"Stop..." Why was he so tired now?

'Get some rest, dear master...

As he walked outside, there was a feeling of weightlessness to him. A youthful energy was bursting inside of him, eager for his body to move.

'Not my body; my host's body.'

He was close to the school now, and no-one was there, save for the teachers that would be tending to their plans for the next day. Karita-sensei himself was in the small building, placing something on one of the shelves. The Other spirit smiled, listening to the shadows that led him towards the teacher. They were laughing, and he'd be laughing along with them soon. This teacher-

"What are you doing here?"

This teacher and authority over his own authority.
"Wait... Stop!"

This man that had abused his master, the man that had just fallen down in front of him. The Shadows curled around his body; this man wouldn't be found for a while, not until someone dared to come look for the man that was noted for his quick irritation and assurance of male power, to an almost uncomfortable degree. There was a fierceness in the man's spirit that would make him an excellent play-piece for his host's whims. Even if the boy was too kind, there could be punishment given to the man for his transgression, as his host had no sin on his person.

"You will spend the rest of your days trapped in here." The Other spirit held up the small doll that the Shadows created to hold the human soul inside, a look of neutrality on the figure's face.

Fitting.

Ryou did not go to school on Monday. He had instead called the Mikoto House, that Hotel Hitobashira, and tried to reach his friend. Omodaru was unavailable, but there was a servant to pass the message that he had called onto their master. Izanami, Elder nor Younger, nor Izanagi were there; there was nothing to do now but wait for the message to get to Momo or his siblings.

The day crept on slowly.

'Master, don't you wish to play?'

"Leave me alone!"

A knock on the door broke their connection, Ryou panting and praying to every God and his mother's God that this would end. He stood shakily. When he opened the door, he felt himself turn to salt.

Their greetings were waterlogged with kindness and good intentions, but Ryou tried to tell them to leave. His words, however, were caught in his throat, and the warnings were dredged into sleepiness.

He heard a voice, a voice without a male or female touch, lull him into the darkness.

'My master...'

'Don't hurt them,' he begged to whatever it was that possessed him, to the Creature that was going to hurt Yuugi and his friends.

He heard a voice, one he had never heard before.

'Don't worry. The time of reckoning has come, and we will protect you all.'

It was then that Ryou began to fall asleep, listening to the voice of a snake in Paradise.

Chapter End Notes

*The Baku is a mythological creature that eats nightmares; call upon it too often and it will devour your dreams as well. There is an actually very well written analysis of Bakura Ryou's name, including information on the Baku here: http://lampcatcandle.tumblr.com/post/130913614860/the-meaning-behind-ryou-bakura-s-
name

*Bakura is actually a first name in other places.
Yuugi smiled at the figure that Bakura had made of him. It was very detailed, as though it had been made by an experienced individual that had taken time to care for the figurine, someone that wanted to make the figurines last a long time.

"How do we play then?" Anzu asked, setting down her magician's apprentice figure. The apprentice looked eager.

"The best part of this game," Bakura explained, "is that within the bounds of the rules of the Dark Master - that would be me - you can essentially make up the story and the moves." There was a list of moves that each species of inhabitant of Monster World held, but the strength was determined by rolls of die.

"You are all on the adventurers' side. My job is to stop you from fulfilling your goal, which is exterminating all monsters. You win when you find and defeat the boss monster that represents me.

"The story will unfold for you. After all, this story is for all of us to enjoy." Bakura opened his laptop, on the opposite side of the table. He had no figurine to represent him, but his command over the complexly built board was evident; even as an outside presence, he was King.

"Just remember; this is a role-playing game, meaning that everyone has a role to play. The players need to be completely drawn into the fantasy world the characters are in! This is what makes the
game so interesting."

Yuugi’s King was sitting next to him, between him and Anzu. He looked over he traits of his character, smiling down at the warlock that he had chosen. The King looked up to Yuugi and just stared for a split second.

Those red eyes were perturbed for a moment, but they quickly filled with mirth. Yuugi realized then that this would be the first game that the King had ever played with him and with his friends. The thought filled him with fire, with joyous light.

Their group - consisting of Joey the Warrior, Hiroto the Hunter, Yuugi the Beast-Tamer, Anzu the Magician Apprentice, and King the Warlock - made their way to a town where they found out the identity of their villain. One of the men in the town saloon - "He looks like Karita-sensei!" Jounouchi guffawed - told them how to get to the forest to journey to the Dark Master.

"Zork? Let's get him!"

Their journey through the forest showed them how the decisions were made in the game. Ten-sided die and probability would be read by Bakura, who would follow the rules and let the players know of them as they progressed.

"You're entering an area of monsters. In this zone, you have a thirty percent chance of having an encounter with a monster! If you throw anywhere from thirty-one to ninety-nine, you have evaded the monster. The red die represents the tens-digit, the white is the ones-digit."

Bakura rolled the die, and the dice showed a twenty-one. "A level-three goblin!"

"All right! Without battles, this thing would be boring!" Jonouchi reached for the die, claiming the first move of the battle. He rolled a thirteen.

"Based on your warrior's agility and the compatibility with your weapon, you have a 40% hit-rate to damage the goblin! You attack!"

The warrior seemed to move and cut down the goblin in half.

"The closer to 00 you are, the more damage you inflict on the monster! If you throw a fumble, a ninety-nine, you receive a penalty."

As their pieces moved, Yuugi's team came upon a figure on the board.

"Suddenly, you stop as you see someone lying across your path up ahead," Bakura narrated. "You can't tell much about him without coming closer. Is he alive or is he dead? You can move on without helping him, or you can find out. What will you do?"

Anzu hummed to herself. "I feel sorry for him. Let's help!"

"But it could be a trap," the King interjected, his Warlock character pointing his staff to follow deeper into the Monster World to find Zork.

"Leave it to me!" Jonouchi said, bringing his character forward. "First, I'll poke him with my sword!"

Bakura nodded, continuing the story: "The warrior prods at the strange person with his sword. They watch- Oh... He moves slightly. It appears to be a young man. He looks at you and seems very afraid..."
The small character was stood up. A covering hid the top of his head, and a long scarf was wrapped around his neck, going down his back and covering most of his face so that only his eyes and nose showed.

"We're not you enemy! Nothing to fear!" Jonouchi reassured the figurine.

"Please help me! A monster attacked me in the forest and stole my treasure! " The figurine was shaking with passion. "I was on my way to give it to the hero of the village! That treasure is a holy sword, part of an enchanted armory! It is the only thing that can defeat Zork!"

"A sword that can beat Zork?"

"Please! I beg you! Get back that treasure!" Bakura turned to team in front of him, looking up to them. "Do you respond to the young man's request...?"

"Didn't one of the villagers tell us to stay away from the forest?"

"There's the treasure, though!"

"I don't know," Yuugi said, interrupting everyone. "Can it really be that easy to find a sword that'll defeat Zork?"

They deliberated for quite a time, Bakura mentioning that he would play music for them to enjoy during their game. He pulled out a separate laptop to play the music as they waited for their next move.

"Have you decided?"

"Take us to the forest!" Honda urged.

"Thank you very much!" the young man shouted. "I'll come with you!"

They headed into the forest, a shadowy area where Bakura explained that there was an eighty percent chance of meeting a monster. The music played on, a foreign kind of style that Anzu commented on hearing in her dance classes every once in a while.

"Are you ready, everyone?" Bakura rolled the dice and looked into his computer again. "You get a 05! Not a good roll for you all. The closer to 00, the stronger the monsters that appear!

"The statistics bring up five monsters from the trees! Straight into battle and the players attack first! Remember: roll closer to 00, the critical mark, and you inflict more damage on your enemy! Roll under the success rate or you have a miss!"

"I get the first swing!" Jonouchi grabbed the dice roughly, enthralled in the game. "Damn it! 82!"

Bakura chuckled, calling out the statistics "Jonouchi needed to roll a 30 or less to hit his opponent Beega! He trips and falls!"

"That sucks!" Jonouchi didn't bother to look at his friends behind him to see who on Earth had said it.

"Let me handle this one!" Honda blew on the dice, flipping them up into the air just over the game board. "21!"

A bullet went straight through the Beega, saving Jonouchi.
Yuugi rolled a 25 and turned one monster into an ally, a loyal little creature named Poki. The King rolled a 10, killing another and finding a potion for healing them should they suffer blows.

"I'll take it from here," Anzu cried out. The dice fell from her hand and rolled into a perfect 00.

"That's a super critical hit!" Bakura did not even bother to type into his computer as he spoke, "That means that she can use the top-level magic for an apprentice magician!"

The other two monsters were blown away in a great explosion brought on by the little magician. After cheering for their friend, the group turned their eyes back to go through the forest-

"Ha ha ha..."

"Huh?" Jonouchi stared down at their new companion. Yuugi and the King felt something rather ominous.

"You are the four heroes who would defy me... You fell for my trap and have entered the Forest of the Dead. This place will be your grave!"

Bakura raised his head, bringing the game laptop back to himself. "What's this? The young man's form changes and grows before your eye! He is none other than Dark Master Zork!"

Zork was a large creature, looking very much like an armored, rotting cadaver of a giant. A fanged mouth opened slightly, and Yuugi shivered at the sight. The game piece, easily four times taller than anyone of the other characters in the game, seemed to cackle. "Before you die, there's one thing you should know! There is no sword, no longer, in this world that can defeat me!"

"In their surprise, Zork attacks!" The figure moved forward as Bakura rolled the dice.

00.

A wave of energy, an atmosphere, flooded the room, flooding Yuugi's eyesight for just a moment and only breaking once a chair squeaked. With the feeling gone, Yuugi looked in the direction from which he had heard the noise.

The girl was slumped over onto the table and her eyes were empty, vacant of thought, but they were open. She was a creature stopped halfway, partway.

"Anzu!" Yuugi reached for her shoulder, trying to shake her awake. He cried out her name again, his heart beating faster and faster as her silence continued. The King stood quickly, putting himself between Yuugi and Bakura.

"What have you done, Bakura?"

"What's that noise?" Jonouchi mumbled, looking to Anzu and the table.

"Me?" Bakura scoffed, looking at him through interlaced fingers. "I'm following the story that would allow the game to precede. I will have you know that this is the ultimate role-play game.

"I told you that RPGs require you to become the character. You transcend reality to become a different person, a different existence, to live the story of their lives."

Jounouchi slammed a fist against the edge of the table, eyes looking for blood. "Bakura, what did you do to Anzu!"
"Calm down, she's alive-" Bakura leaned over slightly and let his gaze fall on the game board, "-in Monster World."

At that, a scream came from the table. The little Apprentice Magician was shaking and asking why everyone was so big, in the most familiar voice.

"I knew I heard something," Jounouchi hissed. "The Magician figure just screamed in Anzu's voice!"

Yuugi held Anzu's shoulders, shuddering in fear. Whatever Bakura did, Anzu was left with her vacant, syrupy-shiny eyes that were like a doll's. He moved her head slightly to see if she was hurt at all; no bruises, but her eyes stayed focused on the spot that they were left looking at when she had first fallen.

"Her fate was decided by the roll of the dice," Bakura continued to explain. "When Dark Master Zork rolls a critical hit - the double-zero - or if the player rolls a fumble - the double-nine - the player will have their soul removed from their body and they will stay in the game by the powers of Shadows and the Darkness. The only way to get her back is by defeating and killing Zork himself!"

Yuugi felt anger swell up from inside of his chest; not his own, but the Danava's anger was dwelling inside of his chest.

Jonouchi grabbed the dice, declaring an attack.

99

"Not only have you rolled the worst combination possible, Jonouchi-" Bakura growled, as though they had offended him worse; against the loss of their friend's soul, they had broken his rules, "-but so is your gaming etiquette, as it wasn't your turn! Prepare yourself!"

"Jonouchi-kun!" Yuugi cried out as Honda grabbed Jonouchi to keep their friend from hitting himself on the table. There was a sound from the table, their friend's voice and Anzu crying out in shock.

"Be careful, you guys! If all of you turn to lead figures, then there won't be anyone to roll the dice, and that's an automatic loss. You would all be trapped in this game forever, until I decide to play with you all again in the future!" Bakura's eyes were nothing like the eyes that Yuugi first saw when the shy student had been introduced to their class. "Honda's turn."

Honda grabbed the dice, his fist quivering.

"Are you frightened, Honda?" Bakura looked down at the hunter, whose gun shone with the special sealant that he had graced the fake metal with to make it look like its real-world counterpart. "Your character has been frozen in fear by Dark Master Zork. If you roll less than 70, your gunman can conquer his fear and attack. If not, Zork attacks first."

"You think I'm scared?" Honda slammed his fist against the table, the dice in his hand stabbing into his flesh with the force. "I'm angry, Bakura!"

The dice were thrown onto the table, the two pieces clattering onto the table's surface and then landing on... 94.

"This roll is stupid! I'm not afraid of Zork!"

The King reached for Yuugi as Honda fell forward, Yuugi crying out in anguish as another friend
fell to another critical hit from Zork, **00**.

"Bakura! What'd you do to the dice?" The King held Yuugi closely as he glared at the Dark Master. "Two in a row?"

"The dice don't lie."

The King looked down to Yuugi, who was trembling still but had a fire of determination in his eyes. Those violet eyes held a flame that made the King want to hear every word, thought, behind them.

"Why are you doing this?"

"You're the holder of the Puzzle and you don't know?" Bakura chuckled darkly. "Don't worry, I don't really want to fight you, little Yuugi. I want to deal with this King of yours."

"Why?" The King gripped Yuugi tightly.

Bakura just laughed. "Play the game and maybe you'll find out. But I just want to fight you, high and mighty King."

Yuugi looked up to his King.

"Can you win?" Yuugi asked.

His King looked down at him, and Yuugi saw just how young his lover was. They had to be so close in age, maybe the King just a bit older. He knew that his Other Self, the Danava, had dealt with magic, and he seemed like an ancient thing already, having spoken with Dragons and other beings, like Aileen's Other Self. Here, his King was like a boy his own age, and he didn't know if his lover had powers like the Danava did. There was a certainty in those red eyes.

"I can."

Yuugi nodded and looked to Bakura and then to his friends on the gameboard.

"Don't worry about me, okay?" Yuugi kissed the other's cheek sweetly, ignoring his friends' small sounds of confusion. "You'll have help.

"Bakura, transfer my soul to my miniature too!"

"What?" Bakura hummed. "It would be easy to grant you that wish, but the King will be my only opponent... Then again, the Game Master is supposed to be of service to the players... Very well!"

Yuugi's mind faded out, and his King's warmth dissipated into nothingness, accompanied only by a voice that was familiar in the way that a forgotten dream was.

---

The King held Yuugi's body close before settling it down in its seat, head resting carefully on the varnished table edge. He sighed, wondering if he and Yuugi thought the same thing. He knew that Yuugi was so trusting, but the King wasn't as much so, especially as this person that Yuugi had trusted had become an enemy to them.

"Well, then, King," Bakura welcomed, as though he were welcoming a guest to a party. "Grab the dice and let's get on with our game."

"Why don't you tell me why you're doing this, Bakura?" the King questioned. "Unless, you're not Bakura."
"Clever little King." The Other Bakura grabbed his own dice, smirking back at him. He unbuttoned his shirt, and Bakura revealed a ring with five attachments that dangled like pendants or pointers at its circumference. An eye identical to the eye on the Millennium Puzzle graced its surface. "You and I are similar, but we are opposite numbers. Where you have a guardian, I am the guard. Well, you are seen as a kindness, and I might be a demon. Why don't we play our game?"

The King looked down at the table, staring at the arm that was reaching across to grab the dice. He turned and saw Yuugi's body animated. Bakura's chair made a grating noise as he moved backward in shock, demanding to know what was going on.

"We are in the middle of a battle, right?" Red eyes directed themselves at the King, eyes that were too familiar now. The Danava smiled, a warm gesture that was welcomed by the King. The dice were in the palm of the Danava's hand, ready to roll as the demon turned his eyes to their opponent. "My roll for Honda-san."

The little hunter on the game board came to life, shooting at their enemy. The little figures grew alive as they saw Zork's left hand be blasted away, cheering for Honda and for the Danava, who reached for the dice to hand them over to the King, who took them with a smile.

"Thank you." The Danava blinked up at him with wide, blood-red eyes, curious and shiny-eyed.

"Of course... Teishu-sama."

The King took the dice with his fingers, trying to feel them again. There was a familiarity to how he held them like beads in his fingers, a pair of gems that were precious to him in his hand. He looked down to the Yuugi on the game board, around whom Poki, their newest little ally, was gliding around, making tinkling, questioning sounds about the new King-master, and the new vision of their Yuugi-master that appeared to take the place at the table.

The Danava smiled down at the game board, to his Danna-sama. The King could feel the feelings flowing between them; there was joy at their first meeting, eagerness to know one another, hesitance, and trust.

He looked up to the Other Bakura, saying "Well then, Nightmare-Eater, let's keep playing, or are you afraid to fight against Teishu-sama?" There was a cockiness in his voice that seemed more confident than he had ever heard it before.

"Tch..." He growled at him. "The Danava... Been a long time since I had seen you. Still serving yourself as you did before?"

The Danava frowned at that, responding with "I only live to serve my masters."

"Although Zork lost his hand when his guard was down... He looks almost uninjured! You could say that things have gotten worse for the adventurers." The hand that landed on the ground in front of them became a dragon and an eye-demon, a spherical creature that rose above them, focused on the group. Zork bid them farewell, announcing their final stage to be elsewhere.

"Zork! You coward!" Jonouchi yelled out in frustration as the monster made its way to Zork Castle. "You're going down, I tell you!"
“We’re just following his script.” Yuugi cradled his head in his hands, Poki coming close to comfort him.

‘Bakura got us involved with his game, and it was easy to be tricked!’ Yuugi shuddered at the feeling of helplessness that was curdling in his belly. Then, confidence burst through him.

‘You’re right.’

‘King?!’ The Link between them had grown stronger and speech was there, ready for them to use. Feelings more than anything powered through the Bond of Souls – concern, confidence, love, love, love – but the words were wonderful to feel, solid in his soul.

‘Yes… Bakura made Zork appear when your guard was down and then sealed your souls into the lead figures. Everything has gone according to his plan!’

‘Is there anything that we can do?’

‘There is.’

The King raised his dice, calling to Jonouchi for his turn to fight.

“**Roll, your Highness,**” Bakura sneered, using his voice of the Game Master. “But don’t forget that if you roll a fumble, that character will die!”

The King smiled and threw his dice, landing a **03**. Jonouchi quickly ran forward, slicing through one monster, its dragon companion fleeing to the side. Yuugi quickly ran forward for his turn, raising up his hands as his Danava rolled the dice for him. He targeted the dragon, the roaring beast stalking forward.

“I’m capturing you!” Yuugi declared, and he could feel his Danava’s pride and trust in his decisions from the other end of their Bond; he did his best to send courage back. “Beast Tamer Hand Power!!”

“**Until moments ago, the Zork Arm Dragon was a part of Zork! The potential to brainwash him is very low at 10%!**” Bakura narrated, warning them… threatening them.

Yuugi sent all the belief to his Danava, his Other Self. He could hear the clatter of the dice, and he heard Bakura say what he dreaded.

“**The red dice of the 10s column is an 8! There’s no way you can-**” Yuugi heard the sound of a clicking, and magic coursed through his body. Yuugi found himself loving the feeling there, the feeling of light in his veins. Power was running through his body in such a way that he wondered how his Other Self felt, how his King felt, living with this feeling of power in their bodies. Better, his Other Self was made of this, Shadows and magic.

“**Another critical?!**” he heard, but the Magic Training Hands came forward – his own magic – and captured the dragon, its body becoming smoother and kinder.

‘Yuugi?’

‘Yes?’

'It was a double hit technique.'

“Double-hit technique?” Yuugi repeated, trying to understand.
“Yuugi, what’s a double-hit?” Anzu asked.

“Yeah,” Honda said, “what are you talking about?”

The King’s figurine moved his mouth, but his voice was thrown over him, as though the figurine were a transmitter.

‘When you can spin the die on its vertex, if the numbers are all even on top, they won’t land on an odd number. There will be a weaker spin on one die, but then the stronger can hit it if the number isn’t the desired one. Just jiggling the table with your knee can vibrate the table enough to change your number as many times as you like!’

Anzu cheered happily. Jonouchi and Honda threw their weapons high, cheering at their new way to victory.

‘We cannot spin the dice now,’ the King cooed to him, reassurance flooding Yuugi, ‘but he cannot cheat anymore either… The Danava and I agree to that, but the Danava is laughing… He says he’s laughing at peaches?’

“On with the game! After taking care of Zork’s creatures, the adventurers come to the Gates of Zork Castle!”

‘Danna-sama is in a miniature, his friends are as well, and the Baku is playing with us.’ The Danava finished his small chuckles of amusement. The Other Bakura – the Baku – was starting to grow a bit discouraged at the fact that they now had an enemy and they were now enemies.

‘Perhaps… we can use this, after we beat the Baku.’

“Poki! Be careful, my master! There are traps set for you in Zork Castle!” The little creature, named Poki, burled against Yuugi.

“Okay, we’ll be careful, Poki.”

“We have the Other Yuugi and the King on our side; we can’t lose!” Jonouchi brandished his sword, ready for his turn in another three turns.

They heard the creaking of the Gate of Zork’s Castle opening, Bakura saying “Now at last, the adventurers’ goal lies before them! The drawbridge lowers, making a path into the castle!”

As they walked inside, the Castle opened, allowing the players to see them. Yuugi thought on the fact; Bakura loved games and making dioramas, so why try and hurt them? One needs players – more than one person – to play a game, or else it is just so lonely. He could tell from his own experiences that his gaming life was not as much fun as he was when he was with friends.

“You’ve come to the last stage of your quest. Somewhere in the castle waits Zork. Can the group of heroes find and slay the demon?”

“Come out, Zork!”
“Jonouchi!” Anzu shook her head, looking to Yuugi. “We need to have an advantage, right? Why is he shouting?”

“Is there any use in that, when Bakura-kun knows where we are from the game board?” Yuugi looked around, trying to spot anywhere that Zork may be hiding.

Honda did the same and spotted something suspicious.

“What about that tower?” Honda led the way, pistol ready. He pointed to the pedestal inside. As they went in, Anzu touched the markings, unable to understand them.

“What are those marks on it?” Yuugi wondered, before hearing the shriek of something. It sounded like his own voice, but braver, stronger, and it wasn’t exactly that of a man’s… Not even a woman’s…

‘Other Me?’

The sound of a chain rattled through the air. The ceiling was falling and the spikes were not entirely painful, Yuugi thought; they were just not supposed to be digging into his head.

“Poki!”

“Don’t worry, Poki,” he grated out between his teeth, looking over to Anzu, whose face was contorted in a horrible grimace.

“Not only is this heavy,” Jonouchi groaned, “we can’t move!”

Yuugi could feel the anger rolling through him from both the King and his Other Self. He tried to reassure them that he was okay, and relief and caring washed over him in waves.

“Both of you don’t need to be so mad. Instant death traps are for amateur game masters! I’ll give you a chance to save them. You’ll have three turns to save them, three rolls of the dice. This is the puzzle: to save your friends, you must create the column to support the ceiling—”

Yuugi then realized that the pedestal was actually the unfinished column “—but you must roll a certain number on the dice!”

“Roll a critical, Yuugi!” Jonouchi yelled, and Yuugi found himself smiling at the idea that his friend might be accepting his Other Self after all. Not too long after Bakura’s voice announced the three-turn chance, the sound of dice clattering echoed through their ears.

04.

They all cheered, but Bakura’s voiced cut through the air, repeating that they needed a certain number, specifically doubles. The ceiling lowered and Yuugi didn’t feel the pain, now. He even heard his friends sigh out their exhaustion.

“It’s like the pain was taken away,” Honda groaned out.

‘By what? We need another number,’ Yuugi worried.

“Is about time for a monster encounter roll to see if Zork appears. It’s a 30% chance. Judgement roll… 28! The worst possible number for our heroes!”

They cried out as Zork appeared from smoke, the scent of rotting food accompanying him. Yuugi prayed that people weren’t really dead because of this game.
“You fell into my trap, foolish children! I’ll cut you to shreds while that trap holds your corpses in place!”

There was no pain as the claws slashed through their little bodies, still in one piece, luckily, as his Other Self took the dice this time, rolling 31.

“Guys!” Anzu called out to Yuugi and Jonouchi, both who had been directly attacked by Zork. Yuugi grit his teeth through the pain.

“Believe… in the King and… my Other Self, everyone…”

Jonouchi chuckled. “O-Of course, Yuugi!”

Anzu chirped in agreement, and Honda just hummed out an affirmative sound.

A final clatter of dice, a sound that would haunt Yuugi for a while.

The ceiling rose above them, enough that Yuugi and his friends quickly moved as Zork was granted another attack.

“Zork rolls a 12. Demon Hand Blade!” They held their breaths as the attack moved over them.

“You forget, Game Master! The players have a much higher speed. They succeeded in escaping as soon as the puzzle was solved.”

‘The voice is back,’ Yuugi thought, recognizing it. As they came to gain ground behind Zork, he came to his conclusion. ‘Surely, it’s my Other Self.’

“The adventurers get a surprise attack at getting to Zork’s back! Dice roll!”

Jonouchi jumped up at the chance, slashing at Zork’s chest. The monster roared, reeling backwards before glaring down at them.

“They get extra attacks, actually, in order of their remaining HP,” they heard Bakura say, almost monotone or disinterested. “Got it? Roll the dice.”

“This doesn’t even matter to him!” Honda adjusted his grip on his pistol.

“Honda-kun…” Yuugi felt the anger from his friend.

“We agreed to play this game because he was our friend, and he turned us into this!”

The dice came down: 09.

“Thunder Grenade!” Honda cried out, followed by Anzu’s “Apprentice Death Blaze” spell. The King and Yuugi, both with 13 HP, led Poki and the Dragon forward, the King’s “Immolation Enhanced” spell intensify the fires from the two beasts.

“The players’ anger has been channeled into the dice.”

“Heh heh… Do you think that you actually have enough experience to defeat Zork? You are
still apprentices, level-one adventurers!

From where Zork fell, he stood. His jaws were open in a grin.

“Then… We can’t win at all!” Yuugi couldn’t have felt angrier than he did now.

“Are you calling me unfair, Yuugi-dono? Cowardly, perhaps?” Bakura laughed. “As the Dark Master, I made everything in this game world! I am the rules, the monsters… I am the God!”

“This game was rigged so that we couldn’t win from the start!”

“Now, continue the battle! You can at least act your deaths out gracefully!” Bakura was surely grabbing dice again, because there was a rattle in the air. “I roll!”

00.

“Zork Black Magic! Dark Catastrophe!”

Everything went dark.

He almost felt bad that it happened. It was the way of the game, however, and the players were defying God. The King and Danava had cried out for their comrades on the field, and he laughed at the thought. Cruel, perhaps for the innocents; these two, however, deserved no mercy.

“Zork’s magical attack has the power to kill characters with more than 50 Hit Points in an instant. These player characters are dead…” He shrugged at the growl that the King gave him, deciding “I’ll put all of the numbers and variables into the computer, just to be safe.”

He enjoyed the feelings of the keys underneath his fingertips. There was a sense of control under his hands, one that nothing else offered him. He began to put in the defense points, hit points, magical variables of each character and let the computer run its calculations.

‘No… Something’s wrong.’

The players were all standing back up in their little bodies.

‘No, how?’ He looked down, and there, he saw his Master’s left hand, typing away. On the monitor was a message:

I am Bakura Ryou. I won’t let you kill my friends. I’ll fight too.

‘I hid my Master away. I hid him from the Shadows of the Game. Wherever there are Shadows, the Danava will come to eat whatever is there, so it is the only way to keep my Master safe!’

“I roll for the Warrior!” The King let the dice fall from his hand, and the result was a 05, another critical. Jonouchi’s figure came up, brandishing his sword and jumping up to dig it into the soft flesh of Zork’s left eye.

He cried out at the sensation of his eye being cut into. The vision was gone, and the muscles all around were certainly on fire, the pain coursing from Zork into him. He could feel himself fragment slightly, a part of his soul separate from everything else that he was made from, and he felt sickened
by his own actions for a trace moment.

Just a moment.

He looked back down at the keyboard and the board itself. Zork was his avatar in the Game World. His Master must have awoken when his left hand had been blown off by the Hunter Hiroto.

‘MASTER?’

Why did the thought irritate some part of him? He had chosen Bakura Ryou as his Master-

‘I have no MASTER!’

-But his mind was denying that now. He pulled the computer out of the left hand’s reach.

‘If I do this, you have been left powerless.’

‘There was a miscalculation from Bakura, I know there was!’ The King held the dice in his hand, ready to pass them to the Danava. Those blood-red eyes came to gaze at him and the thought of the computer at the Game Master’s table came to mind. He passed the information to Yuugi through their Link.

“All right – The Warrior strikes a perfect hit! His short sword gouges out Zork’s left eye, only reducing Zork’s hit points by a fraction…”

“This sucks!” Jonouchi adjusted the grip on his sword. “No matter how many criticals we get, we can’t do Zork any real damage!”

“How in the world can we defeat him?” Anzu tightened the grip on her scepter.

‘First things first,’ the King’s figurine stepped in. ‘We have to restore Hit Points – Fast! My attacks are based on Darkness. The most I can do it create potions that would heal us one at a time. Anzu, you can use Healing Magic on your turn.’

“Then, I hope that I go next.” Anzu took in a deep breath. “My level’s too low for resurrection magic.”

“According to the initiative scores, Anzu’s magician goes next.” Bakura laughed. “However, Zork and Anzu are tied! That means they go at the same time. The first attack, then, is decided by a die roll. Is that fair enough, Devil?”

The Danava gave no answer that anyone on the game board could hear.

“The one to roll closest to 00 goes first. You might be able to save everyone’s lives, heh heh.”

The dice fell close to where the group was on the game board, and Anzu hurried over by them to see: 09.

“The game is over, Devil! Zork moves faster than Anzu-“

They all heard a laugh.
“Are you blind? Look at your own roll!”

“… 10!?”

“The dice don’t lie, remember?”

“I get to go first!” Anzu turned to her friends, eyes wide with happiness. “Healing Magic of Luona!”

The feeling of warmth and light spread over them, a cover of energy washing them clean of the damage that they had already received.

“All right, you’re healed, but compared to Zork, you’re still nothing more than micro-organisms! Zork’s next attack will turn you to dust! Zork can hit with 80% chance!”

The clatter of dice came...

“99! A fumble!” Zork bared his own claws and launched an attack on himself, the creature falling to his knees.

“What just happened?” Honda asked, before being interrupted by a shriek. Anzu pointed up, and they saw Bakura’s hand pierced through by one of the spires of Zork’s castle, accompanied by a laugh that was manic in its tone.

“How does that durable poly-resin feel, Bakura Ryou!”

‘Do I want to do this?’

‘No, but I do.’

“Did he just say ‘Bakura Ryou’?” The King took the dice from the Danava, gingerly.

“He did,” the demon confirmed. “This is certainly an adapa, but… as familiar as this one seems to me, it is not the one I remember.”

“Look at Bakura’s expression!” Anzu cried, the haze of the game’s illusion finally wearing off enough for them to see the reality above them.

“He looks terrible!” Jonouchi felt almost sorry for striking Zork in the face, if that was the reason for their former friend’s damaged eye.

‘How could this be the same Bakura?’ Yuugi wondered, thinking of the first day that they had all met. Bakura Ryou had been so kind… The thought stayed there as the illusion righted itself.

“I don’t believe it! I won’t!”

“I think so, too!” Honda agreed. “That guy’s not Bakura!”

“If Bakura-kun can move his hand now that the same hand of Zork is cut off,” Anzu chimed, “Couldn’t it be that he is trapped inside of Zork?”
“Next is Beast Tamer Yuugi. Your turn, Vessel!”

Yuugi hugged her quickly. “I’ll try and save Bakura-kun!”

He sent the thought to the King, who returned the sentiment, voicing such: “Game Master! The Beast Tamer will try his Hand Power on Zork, the Lord of Darkness!”

“What?” The Other Bakura wanted to laugh. “Your power is a magic ability that turns enemy monsters into allies. Do you honestly think that it will work on Zork?”

“I’m trying it anyway! I roll!” The King let the dice fall from his hand, his heart racing.

05.

“The training hand has appeared!”

“Fool!” Zork cackled. “You’ll need to have a level of a million before thinking of making me an ally! You’ll- What?!”

Smoke arose from the spot where Zork’s left arm had been severed.

“How… How could this be happening?” came the thought, as an image of Bakura Ryou came out of the left arm, dressed in the robes of a holy mage.

‘Let him go,’ came a voice.

The world was blurry for a moment before it focused. He knew he had a role to play, but he wanted to thank somebody…

“Bakura-kun? Are you okay?”

“Thank you, everyone… For saving me.” The little mage stood and smiled. “I’m the White Wizard Bakura! I’m an NPC, non-player character, made by Bakura Ryou and a part of his soul exists inside of me. May I join your party?”

“Of course!” Yuugi cheered. “Let’s defeat Zork together!”

“It’s still your turn!” The Other Bakura growled. “The Gunman goes next!”

“The Gunman attacks, shooting Zork!” The Danava rolled the dice, resulting in a 15 which allowed the Gunman to fire. A large part of the monster’s torso was blown away, when before it only tickled the beast.

“What going on?!” Jonouchi laughed, hope flooding his voice. “That hurt him a lot more than before!”

“As an NPC, I obey the will of the other Game Master, Bakura Ryou. I thought it would help, so I lowered Zork’s defenses with my white magic.”
‘No…’

‘He will be safe from you.’

“It is the least that I can do!” the White Mage assured them. “You save me from the darkness of Zork’s heart. Let me fight together with you this time.”

‘Damn it. How did he thwart us this much?!’ The Other Bakura glared at his opponents, a haughty little prince and a jade-dragon. ‘I’ll show you all! No matter how many of you low level characters there are, you’ll never defeat the Dark Master!’

At his will, Zork began to change, a monstrosity becoming a demon, crouching low to the ground and claws sharpened as it prepared for battle.

“This is Zork’s final form! His attack and defense both level up! It is his turn!”

“Look out, everyone!” he heard Bakura Ryou cry out. The dice of the Game Master fell on 00, and the Eye of Zork in the middle of the demon’s chest opened.

“Zork Inferno!”

The White Mage held out his scepter. “Level 13 Shining Shield!”

“How long will your magic shield last against Zork’s flames, Bakura Ryou?!” The Demon cackled and let his flames spread, the shield barely reaching beyond the edges of where the other children stood.

When the attack was finally over, they all tried to regain their bearings, the flames having burned away their regained health. Honda and Jonouchi had been left with just one HP left, Yuugi with two, and Anzu with three. The King’s Wizard was left with only two left as well, but he was helping up their White Mage. Bakura, who had stood in front of all of them, was now left with one hit point, having turned the rest of his hit points into energy for the shield.

As they helped Bakura up, they looked him over. Anzu and the King’s Wizard helped him stand. Anzu had tears in her eyes; she had almost lost a friend to her own selfishness, and she might lose a friend because of their selflessness.

“Just wait, Bakura. I’ll my healing magic on the next turn to-“

“I’m… all right… Anzu, if you have the magic points to heal me, use that… energy on your attack this turn!” Bakura looked to his friends. “I don’t have the power to protect everyone again. If we don’t finish it this turn… we will all be destroyed!”

“We understand, Bakura, but if we gotta die, we’ll do it together!” Jonouchi said, gripping onto his friend’s shoulder.

Yuugi smiled at Bakura before talking to his King. “If Zork can raise his power levels when he transforms, why didn’t he do it before?”

“It’s his last gamble. We’ve pushed him so far that he had no choice, but in return for this power, he’s exposed a weak point!” The figurine pointed to the Eye of Zork which was now started to close itself again.
“That’s the weak point?!” Honda cried. “It’ll seal up before we can strike again!”

Poki, the little creature that Yuugi had befriended, growled before jumping into the Eye’s socket, the blades that covered the opening now stuck in place.

“Poki!” Yuugi yelled.

“Poki! This is your chance, my master! Blow me away alone with him! Hurry!” The little creature didn’t know, but tears were evident in its eyes.

“We’re not going to sacrifice a friend, Poki! An evil soul isn’t worth an ounce of a friend’s life!” The voice was a strong one and Poki looked up to see that the King held the dice that would decide his face.

‘But your Majesty,’ the little Poki thought, as hard as he could to try and communicate with his Master, ‘It’s impossible to save me. I can’t get out, poki!’

“The Beast Tamer attacks!”

“I’ll save you, Poki! Just wait!” Yuugi stretched out his hands, and the magic that he loved to feel ran through his blood as his King rolled a 02. The Magic Hand transformed into a fist and ran its way right through the Eye of Zork, opening just for a moment before emerging from Zork’s back. The Other Bakura grasped onto the table, gasping for air.

The fist came back to the group of friends.

“Poki!” it chirped. The fist disappeared and Poki curled into Yuugi’s side.

“Die roll, for the Warrior!” The Danava rolled the dice for the next attack, hopefully the last.

01.

Jonouchi jumped up, yelling as his sword cut through the demon that was hurting his friends. The beast fell apart where he had sliced it, lower half going a different direction from the top half.

“We beat him!” he heard and Jonouchi hurried to his friends, joining them in their cheer.

“Not yet.”

The Danava’s voice was clear, and it cut through the air. Jonouchi turned and everyone held their breath as the top of half of Zork’s body was pushing itself up.

“Zork isn’t dead yet?!”

“Ha ha ha… I still have a card to play! The fact that you didn’t finish Zork on this turn will be your downfall! We roll for initiative again! ” The Other Bakura held up his dice, pointing defiantly at his two opponents. “This is the last die roll! We roll at the same time! Winner goes first!”

’If I win, I’ll have Zork self-destruct and take the adventurers with him! I’ll win with your deaths as my trophies!’ The Other Bakura smiled as he rolled his own dice in his hands.
‘You think you can beat us?’

‘How dare you come near us, jade-dragon?’ He laughed as the Danava gave the dice over to the little boy-king. ‘The next stage for your game is in Hell!’

‘How so?’

“Because,” he said out loud, “if we roll the same number, we both die! I’ll blow up at the same time that you attack me! I win either way!”

The Danava glared at him, feeling the anger and hope of his masters and their friends in the air. He felt it all and he placed his hand over the hand that the King held the dice in.

“Do you feel it? That faith?”

“Yes,” the King answered.

“I’ll channel it all into this hand.” He pressed his fingers as firmly as he could.

‘With the Millennium Ring, I’ll take the step I can only take once! I’ll seal a part of my own soul into these dice! I’ll call them my Doppelganger Dice! There’s no way I’ll lose!’

‘There’s no way you’ll win!’

The dice were thrown onto the table, no spinning or tricks involved save for those that humans couldn’t see.

‘Please respond… Please hear our hearts!’

Their dice read 00.

Their friends cheered, but the King and Danava held their breaths until the Dark Master’s dice fell.

“I salute your skills as gamers for their score of a super critical, but your lives will end the moment these dice hit the ground.”

00.

The Danava felt his heart freeze, and he closed his eyes as he searched anywhere, in any plane, for hope. Surprisingly, he felt it in the dice.

‘How are you here?’

“What a cruel strike for you! Two sets of double zeroes! The most dramatic ending, where everyone dies.”

‘Please! Whatever you need, please help my Danna-sama and Teishu-sama!’

“The dice are cracking!” The Danava opened his eyes as he heard his King cry out. As the dice began to crumble, they could see a vision of Bakura Ryou there.

“It’s you!” The Other Bakura stood up in shock.

“I don’t want to lose any more friends! Even if my soul should shatter!”
‘His soul was in the dice? He’ll die!’ the Danava realized, reaching out as far as he could with his Shadow magic. He was holding Bakura Ryou’s soul now, and he was pushed away by other Shadows, Shadows that hated him.

‘I have him… Take him and put him in the Mage.’

‘And you?’

‘Don’t pretend that you care.’

The Danava sent the small, bright soul into the White Mage’s hands, just as the Game Master’s dice turned to dust.

“… Attack Zork, Anzu!”

Anzu raised her wand, rising into the air above her friends.

“Final Big Bang!”

The Game Master fell as the living part of Zork was blown away. The Other Bakura fell to the table, the Millennium Ring falling to the floor. The King ran over, feeling the boy’s pulse.

There was nothing there.

“He’s dead?”

“No, Game King!” Yuugi and the others turned to White Mage, who held a small orb of light in his hands. “I have the soul of my Master inside of me and here in my hand! I owe it to my master, who gave birth unto me and let me grow through his adventures. I am a level 13 White Wizard, capable of resurrection.

“May you roll the dice for me, Great Dragon?” the little mage asked the Danava. “I cannot move without the will of a Game Master or Player. For you or the Game King to roll would be an honor!”

“I will,” the Danava said, smiling as he grabbed the dice. “I’ll be sure to roll a critical.”

Ryou opened his eyes blearily and he saw Yuugi and his friends standing across the table, relief on their faces. A warm hand was on his shoulder, and he felt safe.

"What? ... Guys, what happened?"

"Bakura Ryou-dono, what do you remember?" Ryou turned to the new voice on the other side of the table, one much like the voice of his Other Self, but it was softer. A version of Yuugi was standing there, red eyes lulling him in a way that made him wish to run away... Those eyes were just so kind, it was frightening.

"I... I sacrificed myself, and then the part of my soul in my character brought me back, right?" Ryou shivered at the thought.

"Yes, and your adapa also kept part of you safe."

The other Yuugi stood straight up, and the warm hand never let go of Ryou's shoulder. His other hand held the Ring that had once made Ryou feel less lonely; ever since he felt his Other's presence,
he wouldn't feel safe if he was alone with that thing.

Ryou looked to the new voice and he saw a different version of Yuugi. No, the one holding him, he had seen before his Other Self had hidden his consciousness. The one holding him must be the King, then. This pale, thin Yuugi might be... If Ryou's Ring carried another version of him, perhaps the different Yuugi was from the Puzzle.

"What do you mean, Danava?" Jounouchi asked the question, and the different Yuugi answered. The King helped Ryou stand.

"What do you mean that it kept him safe?"

"If Bakura Ryou-dono's soul was truly destroyed, you would not have been able to bring it back," the Other Yuugi said simply. "The Spirit of the Ring may be insane, but that only means breaking rules to follow his own. It was a way to protect Bakura Ryou-dono while following an agenda; keeping the Master of the Ring's soul out of the way during the Shadow Game would be the best."

"Other Yuugi," Anzu interjected, and Ryou was off-put by how comfortable the other teenagers seemed talking to this spirit that lived in their friend's body. "Why are you in the Puzzle? Why is the other spirit in the Ring?"

The Other Yuugi shook his head in response, and his face seemed so much sadder. "Forgive me, Anzu-san, but there is much in the world for you to fear. The Spirits in the Millennium Items are children of gods, adapa, that have long had arguments with each other. There are many like us out there, but we are seven, caught up in a long war, a game of skill and wit."

"And me?" The King came forward, letting go of Ryou and coming to the Other Yuugi. "Danava, what do I have to do with your game?"

"You should have never been involved in the first place. I know nothing but that you are the only one that is able to collect the Items to bring us to peace, and to free yourself of the Puzzle as well."

The Other Yuugi's head dropped, ashamed. "Forgive me, Teishu-sama, for not being able to tell you more."

"You tried, and that's good." The King placed a hand on the Other Yuugi's head, as though consoling him. The Other Yuugi's eyes - red, like blood or hibiscus flowers - were wide, they seemed perplexed at the gesture. Ryou could relate to the feeling of confusion that he felt from the Other Yuugi; why would they trust someone that they saw as a danger? He felt a hand on his back, and he looked up to see Honda there.

"Are you okay, Bakura?"

Ryou nodded slowly. "Thank you... I'm so sorry." His shoulders began to shake, his breath shuddering out.

"No, it's not your fault," Anzu told him, coming towards him. "If it's the Spirit of the Ring that did everything, then it's not your fault!"

"But I didn't warn you. I tried when you all first arrived, but I couldn't. He took over right away-"

"That is strange, though," the Other Yuugi said. He came close to Ryou, watching him like a fantastic specimen. "The Peach should have never tried to overtake you so violently."

"'Peach'?!" he asked, wondering what on Earth the Other Yuugi was talking about. The Other Yuugi was about to place a hand on Ryou's shoulder, possibly to comfort, when the Ring glowed brightly.
And he fell into a slight darkness, as though he was watching his body move. He saw himself, a vision of malice as his Other Self gripping the Other Yuugi by the wrist, ire in his eyes.

“You do not touch Yadonushi-sama!” The Other Bakura was holding that wrist so tightly, yet the Other Yuugi only brought his eyebrows closer together in apparent confusion.

“Hmm… The Peach wasn’t asleep then,” the Other Yuugi noted, as though what had just occurred wasn’t shocking.

“YouKing might have won sovereignty but you, Demon, cannot touch my master.” The voice was one that Ryou found himself growing cold towards, a voice that belonged to a monster under his bed or the feeling of a dead animal on one’s platter upon learning where food comes from; there was a sensation that tingled, crawling steadily up from the depths of Ryou’s soul – dread.

“I won’t do anything, Peach. I only mean to question why you harm your master.”

The Other Bakura didn’t wish to be polite, and he said as much, adding, “And allow humans to keep hurting him? They rebuke him, abandon him, and you expect me to believe that I am to let it slide. Your masters are strong enough and they have support. My master has nothing of that, and I will pay back his hosting of me in this body of his in the way that I can.”

“No more,” the Other Yuugi spoke, voice low in pitch but powerful. “Stay out of your master’s life a while, and you observe the changes in his life. They shall be wonderful,” and with that, the Other Yuugi placed a hand on his other self’s forehead; Ryou felt the warmth before the touch, back in his own body. His Other Self sank down, a foreign emotion – frustration – separate from Ryou but still felt by the young man, disappearing soon after the acknowledgement.

“Ryou-dono, your Adapa will sleep a while. He will no longer be of any harm to you, and all of your friends will wake up soon.” The Other Yuugi’s voice was warm, welcoming, and sweet. As the spirit disappeared and Ryou found himself looking at Mutou Yuugi again, sweet soul shining, Ryou couldn’t help but think that pieces were too nicely placed.

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My Other Self,

Thank you for saving Bakura-kun. I cannot thank you enough, and I trust you to keep protecting us. I only hope that I can pay you back someday; I want a friend from knowing you, nothing else. If you give more, I will do my best to give you the same.

-

Danna-sama,

We are grateful for the chance to meet you, though we were still separated by the rules of the Fruitful One’s game. Perhaps we can exchange real words one day; we can hear each other’s voices in the way that written text cannot imitate and see each other’s faces to see the expressions that we would have on them. Do not worry for payment; you have liberated us from the darkness of the Puzzle, and that is more than anything I could ask for; every day is a blessed one when you are there, and Teishu-sama also makes the day wonderful. I hope that we meet one day.

-

The day after the Monsters World Game, Yuugi had invited the spirit of his Other Self, his Danava,
to talk to him, to write something down, and the spirit had taken up the offer. He only left a short message back, but it was enough that Yuugi felt so jovial of it, holding the notebook close.

"Are you happy, Yuugi?" The teenager turned to see his King, and his grin grew wider.

"Yes… We’re all safe and the Danava is talking to me."

The King nodded and came close, laying a hand over one of Yuugi’s. "I… I never got a chance to talk to you before we came to your house."

Yuugi blinked up at him. "About what?"

Those fingers gripped more tightly to his hand, the dark skin a welcome contrast against his lighter skin. Their skin seemed to be burning, making a pleasant warmth between their flesh that had his breathing quivering in his lungs. He moved enough to set down his notebook down on the desk, standing up to meet his King face-to-face.

Their faces were close to each other, breath warm on their cheeks. The kiss that followed was warm and heated; Yuugi thought of how he had felt before, in his Soul’s Room, and the passion was not better, but different. It was physical, like the warmth of home during the winter. He brought his hands up to his King’s face, the dark hand still on his and gripping vice-like as their kiss broke for a moment, only to start again.

The King’s other hand came to Yuugi’s waist, stroking with gentle, curious fingers. Smiling at that shyness, Yuugi opened his mouth and licked at the lips that had come against his own. He felt his King shiver against him, and Yuugi found himself pulled closer, a warm, wet tongue against his.

'Warm – safe – heat.'

They were tasting each other, and if Yuugi could only trap the taste forever in his tongue; it wasn’t a taste that his tongue could receive, but his Soul was churning around inside of him, wanting to reach the Soul that he could only taste in a hot mouth. The heat so similar in his belly was growing stronger, boiling his blood.

“Hah,” he panted out as he pulled away. His King followed, pressing kisses to Yuugi’s chin. The hand on Yuugi’s waist made its way to Yuugi’s neck and tried to unbuckle the collar there. Yuugi’s hands removed themselves from his lover’s face, and soon they were disrobing each other and making their way to Yuugi’s bed, which they shared.

The King held Yuugi close, pressing his nose into the younger’s neck.

"You are beautiful, truly." He felt Yuugi's skin heat up under his mouth, and he smiled as the younger man keened softly. The King was pressing kisses all over the younger man’s body, decorating it occasionally with love bites and giving little huffs of breath to mingle with the leaving warmth Yuugi's body. His partner only responded in pleased tones, whispers of encouragement and consent; Yuugi was so generous in his love, and now that his singular love - the love that he would focus on one person in the most intimate of ways - was upon the King, the older man felt like sobbing.

They were naked against each other, and their hands and lips were their best form of communicating this dance that was engraved into their bones, spilling from their marrow. Their hearts were binding together again, just as how they had connected their Souls before. The King's hands were sliding up and down Yuugi's sides, trying to find new areas of skin that he had never touched before. Yuugi was shivering when those fingers traced over his lower ribs, almost like feathers on his skin that
traced nonsensical patterns. Lips began to make similar motions on his collarbone, accompanied by
teeth and tongue; everything was being marked, the beginning of bruises coming up on his flesh.

"King..."

"What else do you wish for, my love?" Yuugi felt a fire bloom inside of his chest, another bloom that
erupted at the word "love". He pulled the other up, seeing those red eyes curious and wide. He
almost laughed at the thought that this was something that he probably knew more about compared
to his lover above him.

"How about I show you what I want to do to you?" The King only nodded, letting Yuugi to be the
one that was peppering kisses and giving little love bites. As Yuugi progressed lower and lower, the
King began to let out little keening noises, hardly above a whisper. The tanned skin was solid, tasted
of sweat, but the emotions that Yuugi was feeling from his King - love, pleasure, affection,
excitement, trepidation - made the skin under his tongue addicting. His tongue dipped into the other
boy's belly button and they laughed together when the King jolted up, letting out a stream of giggles
amid the happy sounds of arousal. They were happy here, together in this fog of sexual heat and
emotional intimacy.

"Show me more," the King gently ordered, and Yuugi willingly complied, pressing kisses along the
other's waist. As the King lied back again, humming out his pleasure, Yuugi dared to go lower. His
mouth formed little, nonsense words against the sensitive, soft skin that had hair curling just beneath
it. The King was letting out soft, almost silent gasps as Yuugi laid kisses close to his most intimate
area, carefully avoiding the cock that was erect and now spilling in anticipation for the true pleasure
that would come soon. The King was at the younger boy's mercy, and that made Yuugi terribly
excited and somewhat frightened to make sure that he did not ruin this moment between them. His
mouth was still careful as he laid kisses to the base, the King jolting slightly and letting out an
appreciative moan that let Yuugi know that he was doing this right; the tapes that Jonouchi had lent
him before could only help him so much in this affair; and it was there that Yuugi felt more confident
in his thought to then lay kisses all over the hardened flesh of his lover's penis, skin cut and different
than his own, but it was still lovely to him because it was part of the person that was whispering out
sweet praises and showing his pleasure with gentle joy-wrought tremors.

Yuugi felt a hand in his hair, and he smiled as he prepared himself for his next idea; he kissed the tip
of his King's cock, letting his lips make contact with the head, before opening his mouth and letting
his lips come all the way around to bring the head into his mouth. The King let out a deep groaning,
red eyes glazed over with euphoria. Yuugi stayed still and the King did not push him, letting the
moment coalesce into reality. Yuugi's shy tongue made its way to taste the cock in his mouth and he
found that the taste would take to getting used to but it was skin, it was his lover's skin, and that he
shouldn't be used to it anyway.

After a few moments of getting familiar to the taste, Yuugi took a breath in through his nose and
brought himself downward, more of the King entering his mouth and the King moaning, pleased.
He let his mouth fill, just a little bit left that he couldn't fit into his mouth, and then sucked gently as
he pulled up, keeping the head in his mouth.

"Yuu-!" The King let a cry before biting his lip, groaning as Yuugi came down and repeated the
wonderful, torturous motion of sucking as he pulled away again. It continued for what seemed like
an eternity until Yuugi felt himself growing weak at the sound of his King's whimpering and now
babbling pleas for release.

"Shh..." Yuugi murmured, lifting himself from his lover's cock and kissing the King on his cheek
sweetly. "Are you okay?"
"Y-Yes... What more?" The King sounded needy, needy for more attention and pleasure, though not at the expense of Yuugi's own pleasure.

"I want to be inside of you, if... If you want." Yuugi cursed silently at his own hesitance and yet... He was so blunt and wanting, but if the King did not want that, if he wanted to be inside of Yuugi, he wouldn't mind.

He watched as his King caught his breath and looked up to him, a smirk on the lush lips that had been bitten roughly.

"Prepare me, then, Yuugi. Can you pleasure me as much from the inside as you did with your mouth?"

"E-eh..?" Yuugi's face was burning, clumsily reaching for lubricant, condoms, and a hand towel that he had once stashed away in his drawer once he had realized the embarrassment that he would face should his mother ever decide to talk to him about the workings of his body. The King was chuckling as Yuugi opened the bottle and poured some of the slick substance onto one of his hands.

Yuugi moved to sit between the King's legs, stroking one knee with his clean hand, speaking deliberately: "Just relax; breathe."

The King nodded, his body growing just a bit laxer as Yuugi let his fingers drag down over the other's entrance. He pressed gently there, leaning forward and kissing his love on the lips. The King's mouth opened and his body seemed to as well, the tip of Yuugi's index finger slipped into a warm tightness.

A small grunting came from the King when the finger came to the second knuckle, Yuugi hushing him and bringing his free hand to the King's cock again, stroking gently. Gradually, Yuugi could press his finger in all the way, and then he brought two, and then three.

He looked down at his lover, the King smiling up at him and shifting his hips.

"I'm ready."

Yuugi nodded, sighing. His own cock was hard, and he carefully pulled out his fingers from his King, looking for his hand towel. The condom, he was careful with, was lubricated generously after he slipped it on.

"Have you done this before?"

Yuugi looked at the King, whose question made him nervous. He shook his head, and the King smiled.

"I haven't, either." His King, keeping his legs open, moved to a bit more comfortable position and pulled Yuugi close, smiling up at him. Their bodies moved and soon they were taking nice, slow breaths.

They kissed slowly as Yuugi pressed himself at the lubricated, stretched opening that his King let himself relax. As Yuugi entered, he groaned into the kiss, the King bringing a hand to Yuugi's face and caressing his cheek with his smooth thumb. Their mouths were hardly touching once Yuugi was fully inside, the two of them panting at the feeling of being full or being in a tight heat.

Pleasure and heat was making Yuugi feel like this wasn't real; this was surely a dream, with his imaginary King starting to rock back and forth, Yuugi's own throat producing sounds that he had only ever heard when he was thinking of making love, of being with someone like this. Yuugi
started to move as well, the King letting out a stuttering cry of surprise and gripping onto Yuugi harder in his embrace.

Yuugi moved faster, holding onto his King as they rocked against each other. They were getting lost in their passion and as the King kissed him, whispering "love" to him, Yuugi forgot about the other person that always seemed to be watching them.

The pain from the game had caused his fantasy, caused his yearning for touch and stimulation. He closed his eyes, his breath cool against his chest as he lowered his head. His hand wandered downward, painting a heated path as he moved to touch himself. He imagined her body again and his body responded. He embraced himself with his unoccupied arm; oh, he wouldn't be lonely after everything was said and done; he'd have a child no matter what the Faceless One had said, the desire for such a thing burning his blood. He felt the belly flutter in the fantasy. He felt her name against him, clawing its way out of his throat. Her eyes were the only things that he could feel, searing into his flesh.

The expanse of her chest was pale, as was the rest of her body; she was the anomaly of beauty that combined liveliness with the paleness of mortality; an ice sculpture melting the world away. In his dreams, she had nothing alive about her as she moved, her body cold and burning against his skin. As he pulled her towards him, her skin rippled, her image waving like seaweed in the ocean. Her mouth opened and her eyes disappeared, pupils blowing out and taking over the white of her eyes. Her teeth became fangs, and he came to completion finally. He was coming into her, disappearing, and he was dying again, her body drowning him with its strength, crushing him.

He wanted to know - so much - her name, but he could never have it spill past his lips. She'd not tell, but it would eventually come from his lips and the lips of others. At that moment, she coalesced into something more beautiful and terrible than anyone could have imagined it, her form more solid and strong. Her body moved again, and he was disappearing into her; she was eating him and he came again inside of her, losing himself more and more each time he dared to think about her...

The Danava opened his eyes and smiled.

'I want to know that name... Maybe when I die.'

He closed his eyes one more time, and he saw his masters meet. There was the feeling of closeness between them, something that made him shiver with delight. Now that the idea of carnal pleasure had returned to him, he found himself craving it when the idea came in to intrude upon him.

Perhaps he could liberate it, draw the sword from its stone and sheath it in his King's chest.

'All part of the plan...' he thought, as he gazed at his Danna-sama’s face in ecstasy. ‘All part of the plan.’

Chapter End Notes

* Amenominakanushi - This god is the first god of Shintoism, from which all of the Universe came. The god exists in duality, masculine and feminine, in the deities Takamimusubi and Kamimusubi.
** (I wrote something on my own biological v. psychological v. survival views on masculinity and femininity here. Too much.)

*Album of music: The Trial of Lancelot by Heather Dale

*Doll's eyes - this is one of the tell-tale signs of a person's brain stem being intact after falling into a comatose state. If the eyes move with the head, not focusing on the tester, this is "negative doll's eyes" and the brain stem is not intact.

*Danna-sama and Teishu-sama: Both are terms for denoting someone as a master, owner, and proprietor, among other things.
**Danna-sama has been the Danava's way of addressing and talking about Yuugi since close to the beginning of the story, but now the Danava will address the King as Teishu-sama to further distinguish their own perception on the people around them. Danna-sama is his light and freedom. Teishu-sama created a sense of order and air of propriety for them to continue to emulate.
***Wait for Sata-dono >:)
****(No, it's not Japanese)

* [name]-dono: Dono is similar to "lord" but does not mean nobility. The person speaking has the same rank as but has respect towards the referred party. The Danava will use this to refer to people who hold his respect in a private setting or those that hold the Millennium Items.
**Except for Shadi. He was an asshole.

*The Danava is a Yandere. This is fact. ::evil laugh::

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