Of Lost Swords and Shadow Magic

by dxmichelle

Summary

In his efforts to find an edge over Albus Dumbledore, Lord Voldemort seeks out a magic only known to Wizards in myth and lost to time. Now, as targets of a madman halfway across the globe, the bearers of the Millennium Items find themselves thrown into a foreign war as an ancient relic brings an unexpected third player to the field.

Notes
Cover art created by godbirdart!
Malfour Manor had never seen so many visitors come and go than in the past weeks. After the fiasco in the Department of Mysteries, the Dark Lord had been sending his followers on all sorts of information-gathering missions to little or no success.

Wormtail sighed. The Dark Lord was becoming impatient with his lack of progress. Sure there were more Death Eaters infiltrated into the Ministry of Magic each day, but there was still the matter of Harry Potter, Albus Dumbledore, and the Order of the Phoenix to deal with. Every advantage led to an even greater set-back, which led to his master sending his Death Eaters in search of anything or anyone that could provide some kind of edge to take Dumbledore by surprise. There hadn't been anything to report, and the Dark Lord was not one to tolerate failure for long. However, after spending a week on the other side of the globe, he may have something to peak his master's interest….

"I see you have finally decided to join us, Wormtail," said Voldemort. "You have missed more than one summon. I expect an explanation."

Wormtail bowed before taking a seat at the large dining room table, taking care to avoid Nagini circling the table legs. "I apologize, my Lord, but I may have finally found something to use against our enemies."

"Oh? And what would that be? We have scoured all of Britain without prevail," sneered one of the masked Death Eaters off to the left of the table.

Wormtail leaned forward in his seat. "I took a slightly different approach, Master. I had spent several days researching various forms of old magic and came across something interesting. It seems the Ancient Egyptians dabbled in something called "Shadow Games."

"Shadow Games," Voldemort repeated. "And how did you come across this information?"

Wormtail bowed his head. "Forgive me, Master, but I learned of this in a Muggle museum."

One of the Death Eaters to Voldemort's right sneered. "You learned this from Muggles? What kind of joke is this?"

Wormtail put up his hands. "I-it's no joke, my Lord! The old tome I had read did not give much insight at all about this shadow magic, but while I was trying to conduct my research I heard about a lot of strange phenomena happening in a Japanese city. The museum in that city has on display a great deal of Egyptian artifacts. I coerced one of the curators to decipher some of the text. It seems that pharaohs and their courts tapped into some kind of shadow magic to summon monsters to duel each other. It was apparently some kind of game."

"And how is this supposed to assist me with my enemies, Wormtail?" said Voldemort, "Do you expect me to sit down with Dumbledore and play a game with him? Much of the old magic from Egypt is long gone now."

"N-no, Master. Apparently these old games got out of hand, and they nearly destroyed Egypt. The Pharaoh at the time locked away the magic and the world was restored. But it seems that in excavating the tombs, a Muggle has seen the carvings from these games and produced a card game. It is quite popular."

"How is this relevant? I am getting bored of this tale," said Voldemort. "I have no intention of
indulging in petty Muggle pastimes."

"One of the tablets in the museum depicts one of the ancient battles with this shadow magic. And it appears that in this modern card game, there are two players who fit the description of the people carved on this tablet! They appear to be Muggles, but if there is a chance that one or more of these card game players have been reincarnated, they may be able to wield this mysterious shadow magic!"

"I don't see how Muggles are going to be of any use to me," said Voldemort. "Have you seen any proof of this strange magic?"

"I believe so. I was not able to witness it specifically, but the latest of their card game tournaments was somehow put on their Muggle viewing contraptions. I watched these duelists. Some of them were wearing strange artifacts that seemed to influence the matches. In one of their games, two monsters were summoned that seemed to be called "Egyptian God cards". Those cards were strong enough to destroy city walls miles away. One of those duelists wore a strange pyramid around his neck. I believe this to be how they channeled their monster's energy. There was a matching pyramid carving on one of the stone tablets in the museum."

"I see." Voldemort stood from his place at the end of the table. "I do not put much stock in what seems like Muggle foolishness, but there is a lot from the old Egyptian texts that we do not understand. If these artifacts produce the shadows like you suggest, they may prove to be just what I need to get rid of Albus Dumbledore. If not...you will be punished for wasting my time."

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Yugi Muto sat cross-legged on his bed, staring down at the three Egyptian God cards and the Millennium Items spread out in front of him. Yami phased out of the Millennium Puzzle and perched himself on the edge of Yugi's desk. He glanced at the clock next to him.

"Are you alright, Yugi? You should be asleep at this hour."

"Something hasn't been right since Marik handed over the Millennium Rod," Yugi sighed, "I didn't pay too much attention to it before since we had Dartz to deal with, but now that the world doesn't need saving anymore and we've had the chance to relax, I've felt almost a familiar presence coming out of the Millennium Rod, even though I've never used it. It's really weird. Have you noticed anything strange recently?"

"I thought I felt something peculiar yesterday, but it was very brief and I didn't dwell on it. Are you worried something is going to happen to it?"

"I'm not quite sure," said Yugi. "When Ishizu gave us the Millennium Necklace, it only activated once and that was right before our duel with Kaiba. And I thought that was just the Item's way to reassure us about Joey before we had to start Kaiba's match. The Millennium Rod has never acted up before...until now."

"If it will ease your mind, perhaps the Puzzle can lend some insight," said Yami, "And in the morning we can visit the museum and speak to Ishizu. Their family has held on to the Millennium Rod for generations. Perhaps this has happened before."

"Maybe. Marik seemed to use it just fine," said Yugi.

"That's true," said Yami, "Let me take over for a moment and I'll see if I can find out what's going on."
Yugi nodded, and in an instant, he was phased out, sitting where Yami had been on his desk.

Yami placed one hand on the Millennium Puzzle, and picked up the Millennium Rod. Closing his eyes, he tapped into the Puzzle. The light from the Millennium Puzzle blanketed the room in a golden glow.

"Well?" said Yugi.

"It's hard to explain," said Yami, grimacing. "There is definitely something going on with the Millennium Rod. Something – or someone is trying to free itself."

"Someone?" Yugi blinked, "You mean there might be a spirit inside the Millennium Rod? Could Marik's dark side be in there?"

"I don't think that's the case, Yugi," said Yami, "Remember - Marik's dark side was formed from the darkness in his heart, and not from an ancient spirit. And when we defeated Marik in Battle City, his dark side was banished to the Shadow Realm. This is something different. I can't be quite sure what it is – but I can tell that the Rod is restless."

"I guess we'll just have to see Ishizu in the morning," said Yugi, swapping places with Yami once again. He placed the Egyptian God cards back into the golden box that used to house the Millennium Puzzle, and set the Millennium Rod and Necklace next to it on his desk.

"Try to get some rest, Yugi. I'll try to keep an eye on the Millennium Rod in the meantime."

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Dumbledore watched Snape leave his office and turned to the other occupant in the room.

"Thoughts, Minerva?"

Professor McGonagall sighed. "Honestly, I'm not sure what to think, Albus. You-Know-Who looking into other forms of magic is troubling, but something that's that old with little or no information? It seems like he's grasping at straws. While the Egyptians did believe in reincarnation, that doesn't mean that it has happened."

Dumbledore nodded solemnly, "Perhaps. But it never helps to be prepared. When I speak to the Order next, we will have to send someone to Japan to look into these artifacts. If there is any truth to what Voldemort has learned, and there are modern-day individuals who can wield this power, they will need to be protected from him at all costs."

"Assuming these people exist, do you expect to be able to protect Muggles from afar and have enough forces here to fight You-Know-Who? He is only getting stronger, and his influence is growing. There are more wizards under his control in the Ministry than ever before, and it's harder and harder to tell who has been Imperiused."

"I know. We will have to consider this – but let us not get ahead of ourselves. We first need to confirm whether this magic truly exists."

McGonagall began to turn back towards the door to the office, and then paused. "One more thing – about the letter from the Ministry…"

"Ah. So that is what's troubling you. I was wondering…," said Dumbledore with a glint in his eyes.

"They can't possibly expect to put her back in that position again, said McGonagall, "Not with You-Know-Who completely out in the open now. How will this help our students? Is there truly nothing..."
that you can do?"

"There is not. I seem to be outdone by a technicality. While this appointment concerns me, I have complete faith in our students, Minerva. After all, they did quite well last year, despite this setback. And, like you said, the Ministry has finally acknowledged Voldemort's return. There may be more interest in the DA this year than the last."

"A disbanded secret club hardly seems the proper method to teach our students defensive magic, Albus."

"We will do what we must in these hard times, Minerva."
The Domino Museum was oddly quiet. Yugi had only been there a handful of times before, and each of those times he had been able to visit the Egyptian exhibits without being disturbed, but he could at least hear something from the other rooms in the building, whether it be children gawking at the displays or employees giving tours.

"I don't think it's ever been this deserted before," said Yugi, looking around. "I think we may be the only ones here."

One of the employees near the entrance looked over. "Sorry, the museum is closed."

Yugi blinked. "It is? Did something happen?"

"Someone broke in last night. They're still cataloging everything to make sure nothing was stolen or damaged, but until then, we're not open to the public right now."

"Oh," Yugi frowned. "I'm sorry. I really came to see Ishizu Ishtar. Is she here?"

The employee nodded. "She's busy with the inventory, but I can page her for you. But when you're finished I have to ask you to leave."

Yugi nodded. "I understand. I'll try not to take up too much of your time." He moved off to the side and looked around the entrance while the museum employee picked up the phone and called for Ishizu. Yugi clutched the bag slung over his shoulder a little tighter, as Yami phased out in front of him.

"I felt it again, Yami."

"Yes, I did too. The Millennium Items are restless, but I can't understand why."

The museum employee looked over to see Yugi off in the corner apparently talking to himself. Shrugging, he went back to work.

Ishizu entered the lobby a few minutes later, a clipboard in her hands. "Ah, Yugi. What brings you here?"

"I'm sorry to bother you, Ishizu. I heard there was a break-in last night. Is everything alright?"

Ishizu paused for a moment, and her eyes flickered to the worker behind the desk before going back to Yugi. "Yes. Come with me, and we'll discuss what's troubling you." She led him back towards the Egyptian exhibits.

"The owners are still looking through the security cameras to see just what triggered the alarms."

"Where did the alarm trigger?" asked Yugi.

"It first triggered in the Greek and Roman wing, but motion sensors had gone off all over the
building. So far nothing was taken or damaged, but we haven't finished examining everything," said Ishizu, "Do not fear. The stone tablets about the Pharaoh have not been harmed."

"Can we see it again?" said Yugi. "The last time I was here, the Pharaoh lifted up the God cards and our crisis with Dartz began and it crystallized the tablet!"

"Of course," said Ishizu, and she led him down the steps. "Like I said, the stone tablet is fine. But the security alert here was not why you came to visit me, am I correct?"

Yugi paused.

"I may not have the Millennium Necklace anymore, but I can still sense something is not quite right. Something powerful has infiltrated the museum, and it's unclear what those responsible were after."

The Millennium Puzzle glowed for a moment and Yami then stood before the stone tablet. "I felt it too. Hopefully your investigation will give you the answers you need. But you're right – that wasn't the reason for our visit." He removed the bag from his shoulder, reached in, and pulled out the Millennium Rod. "Yugi is worried about the Millennium Items, mainly the Millennium Rod. It has been...acting up, as of late. I tried to tap into its power last night, but I was unsuccessful. It seemed as if there was some kind of power that was trying to get out."

Ishizu shook her head, frowning. "That doesn't make any sense. I've never heard of the Millennium Items acting in such a way."

"Marik used to control the Millennium Rod. Has anything odd ever happened to him while he held the item?"

Ishizu sighed. "Unfortunately, Marik and Odion did not spend much time at home after he prematurely inherited that item. The only times I have ever witnessed the Millennium Rod act out against its owner was when...." She trailed off and looked to the ancient tablet, frowning.

Yami followed her gaze. "...when Kaiba was dueling," he said, finishing her thought. "If I am wearing the Millennium Puzzle on that tablet, would you say that Kaiba is holding the Millennium Rod? Perhaps it has been reacting to Kaiba's presence from the Battle City tournament."

"It is true that Seto Kaiba held the Millennium Rod in the past. It's possible that he may be destined to wield it in modern times, but you and I both know he will not accept it."

"It's worth a try," said Yami, "I think he might be more willing to believe in magic now than during the Battle City tournament. A lot has happened since the tournament ended."

"Be that as it may, remember that the Millennium Items test all wielders before granting their power to the user. Kaiba may have used the Millennium Rod 5,000 years ago, but he will still have to go through the trials." Ishizu paused. "I think you can guess what happens to people who fail."

Yami grimaced. "I believe I can. But don't worry, Ishizu. I have complete faith in Kaiba – even if he does not."

"I wish you luck then, my Pharaoh. If there is anything you need, please do not hesitate to find me."

"Thank you, Ishizu. Farewell." Placing the Rod back into his bag, Yami turned and walked back up the stairs towards the museum entrance. Ishizu took a final look at the ancient tablet before returning to her clipboard of items to inspect.

She did not notice one of the museum employees slip out from behind one of the pillars and apparate
"I suppose everything you have told me was also told to Voldemort," said Dumbledore. He leaned forward at his desk.

"Yes, Headmaster," said Snape, his disguise having long worn off, "While we do not know for sure if the shadow magic may still exist, from what I was able to hear, there is a reincarnation of the Pharaoh on the stone slab, and his dueling partner has been reincarnated as well. They spoke of something called 'Millennium Items' that seem to be drawn toward certain individuals."

"Hm. I wonder how many of these Millennium Items exist," said Dumbledore.

"I don't know. They spoke of a Millennium Necklace, Puzzle, and a Rod. The boy holding what I assume was the Millennium Rod also wore a pyramid of gold around his neck. They spoke of another who was supposed to wield that item…," Snape paused, "Of course…from what I heard, that individual doesn't seem interesting in using it."

"Very interesting. I wonder if these Millennium Items are the means of channeling the shadow magic if they were depicted on those tablets. Who are these wielders?"

"The one wearing the golden pyramid looked no more than a child if we go by height alone, but he spoke with the aura of someone well beyond those years. His companion was one of the museum caretakers. She called him 'Pharaoh', which I assume to be a nickname. I can't say for certain who else they were referring to, just the name 'Seto Kaiba'."

"A child?" Dumbledore mused. "Regardless, if these pharaohs have been reincarnated, Voldemort is sure to target them for the chance of wielding whatever magic they possess. And if they're only children…"

Snape blanched, "Headmaster, you can't seriously be thinking what I think you are."

Dumbledore looked up with a glint in his eye. "If they are at least of age, what better way to protect them than right here at Hogwarts?"

Yugi hesitated in front of the massive skyscraper. I hope this works.

Yami phased out and looked up towards the top of the building. "I have my doubts, but it doesn't hurt to try."

/What if he's not in?/

/Yugi, where else would Kaiba be? It's the middle of the day. You're not having second thoughts about this, are you?/

/Well, no. Not exactly. I want to find out what's going on with the Millennium Rod as much as the next person. It's…it's just that we don't know exactly if the Rod is acting out of evil intentions. What if handing it over to Kaiba turns out to be a mistake? We saw what the Millennium Rod's influence did to Marik!/

/Well, considering that whoever Kaiba may have been in the past used the Millennium Rod, I don't think the Rod has ulterior motives./
Yugi took a deep breath and pushed the front doors open. He walked inside and was almost immediately greeted by one of the receptionists near the front desk.

"Can I help you, Mr. Muto?"

"Can I see Seto Kaiba? It's...important."

The receptionist tapped a few keys at her computer and frowned. "Do you have an appointment? I'm afraid Mr. Kaiba is not having visitors today."

Yugi's shoulders slumped. "This is really important. Is there no way we can see him – or maybe Mokuba?"

The receptionist tapped a few more keys. "Mr. Kaiba is in the middle of a board meeting, but...Mokuba should be arriving from school shortly. If you are alright waiting, I can let you up to his office. He shouldn't be much longer."

Yugi nodded. "That would be great, thanks!" Mokuba has an office? Isn't he...only ten or so?

The receptionist paged for a security guard, and Yugi followed him to the elevator.

/You know, Yugi, this might work out better. If we can get Mokuba on board, it might be easier to convince Kaiba to accept his destiny./

/Let's hope so./

As they ascended the building, Yami could feel the Millennium Rod inside Yugi's bag activate again.

Mokuba's office, it turned out, looked like a combination of a working office and a living room. The desk near the window was littered with papers. Yugi could just make out a laptop poking out from under one of the stacks. Twin desktop monitors were set up off to the side. A set of couches sat across the room facing a TV mounted on the wall with a multitude of game systems.

Yugi sat down on one of the couches and set his bag down next to him.

"I just thought of something," he said.

Yami appeared at his side almost instantly. "What's wrong?"

"We may be going about this the wrong way," Yugi said, looking away from Yami and towards the bag next to him. "Besides that Kaiba doesn't want anything to do with magic, all he and Mokuba know of the Millennium Rod was the trouble it caused at the Battle City tournament."

"I would have hoped that Kaiba would have put that behind him by now," Yami frowned. He looked down the large windows that took up the entire back wall of the office. "Battle City was some time ago." He watched a sleek black car pull around to the side of the building. "But...we will soon find out. I believe Mokuba has arrived."

A few minutes later, Yugi could hear the bell indicating the elevator had stopped. Well...here goes.

The office door opened and Mokuba practically skipped in, with Roland on his heels.

"Hi Yugi!" Mokuba said energetically, "They said you were here waiting for me. I wasn't expecting to see you guys today, specially since I just got out of school." He sat down at the opposite couch and dumped his backpack next to him.
"Hey Mokuba," said Yugi. "Is this your office?"

"Kind of," said Mokuba. "I get to help out with game testing and some minor development stuff, but this space is mainly for me to do my schoolwork. I used to do it in Seto's office…but he said it's not a good place for me to focus – especially when he's in one of his moods. Sometimes it's just too loud, or he'll have meetings in there."

"And the video games?"

Mokuba shrugged. "Usually my homework is done well before Seto is done for the day. I get bored easily." He gave Yugi a puzzled look. "So…what brings you here?"

Well," Yugi said awkwardly running a hand through his hair, "We were hoping to see your brother."

"We?"

"Sorry – it's just me. And Yami."

"Well," Mokuba began, "Seto hasn't been in the greatest of moods lately. He hasn't been sleeping well and just recently he's been…I don't know, jumpy, like he's expecting something to pop out at him. I've never seen him this way before. What's this about, anyway?"

"Uh – well, I guess you can say it has to do with the Millennium Items and his relation to the past" said Yugi awkwardly.

Mokuba frowned. "You're referring to that tablet in the museum, aren't you? Ishizu said that you were the modern-day Pharaoh, and that my brother was a priest or sorcerer or something. …Is that really true?"

"What do you believe, Mokuba?"

"I think…after everything that's happened to us lately, it's possible. I mean, I've seen you duel. I know that you're…well…not you when you're up against Seto, even if he doesn't want to admit it. I think he just forces himself to believe you've got a split personality or something that only comes out when you duel. But let's face it. It wasn't just Marik that was going around calling you a Pharaoh. If this was just him, I might have just thought he was crazy."

"So what changed your mind?"

"Dartz," said Mokuba, looking down at his lap, "You know. I don't remember much about having my soul stolen in Duelist Kingdom. I mean, I know it happened only because people say it did. To me though, it kinda just felt like taking a nap without the ability to wake up. I didn't see Seto get his soul stolen because mine was already gone. But I saw Dartz take Seto's soul and stick him on that wall in that temple. I saw it leave his body like something you'd see in one of Bakura's Duel Monsters cards. You were still in the middle of that duel, but I was right next to him when that monster tossed him out of the Seal. Seto was practically dead. And there were a ton of people all over that room that looked like they were from another time. That meant the same thing happened to all of them. He called you – or Yami – Pharaoh also." He then looked back and gave Yugi a small smile. "And besides, I've always thought it was kind of cool, even if Seto didn't."

"Thank you, Mokuba," said Yami, as he took control with a quick glow of the Millennium Puzzle, "for your belief in me."

Mokuba blinked. "You're the Pharaoh, right? I can sort of tell the difference between you two." He snickered, "For one thing, you're taller."
Yami chuckled.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Roland reach into his jacket, remove his phone, and look at it for a moment before slipping it back into his pocket. "Excuse me, Mokuba, sir. There is...a matter downstairs that requires my attention."

Mokuba blinked. "O-okay." He watched Roland slip out the door and heard the ding of the elevator. "I'll let you into Seto's office. He should be out of his meeting soon, though I have got to warn you, usually he's not in a good mood when he gets out of sitting for over two hours with the board of directors."

Yami shrugged, "It's alright, Mokuba. I think I can handle it. This wouldn't be the first time your brother has been angry with me."

Mokuba opened the door for him. "Are you going to make my brother angry with you?"

Yami chuckled awkwardly, and grabbed the bag off the couch. He could feel the Rod trying to activate yet again. "Oh, I guarantee it."

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Seto stepped off of the elevator and winced as each clack of his shoes against the floor tiles felt like a hammer pounding into his skull. Meeting with the board of directors had gone about as well as he expected – only mildly terrible. He was looking forward to nothing more than finishing up his stack of paperwork, and maybe – just maybe – he would be able to leave at a somewhat reasonable hour. The constant headaches and severe lack of sleep were making him (as Mokuba continued to point out) extra irritable. For once, he wanted nothing more than to skip out on the rest of his day, go straight home, and bury himself in bed to try and sleep off his pains.

Unfortunately, he had made only two steps into his office and knew right off the bat that he would probably not be leaving work early, and his headache was just about to get worse.

"Hello, Kaiba."

Seto paused upon hearing his rival's voice. "Yugi."

"Hey, Seto."

"Mokuba it seems someone has found a loophole in my instructions. When I don't want to be disturbed, that does not mean that someone can see you knowing you'll let them in to see me."

"I know, Seto, but Yugi said it was important!"

Seto sank down in his chair behind the desk and sighed. "Mokuba –"

"And Yugi never comes here..."

"That's enough, Mokuba," said Seto, grimacing. He massaged his forehead with one hand. "Just... what is it, Yugi? I'm hardly in the mood." He closed his eyes for a moment against the brightness of the office lights.

Yami reached into his bag and grabbed the Millennium Rod. He could feel it trying to escape out of his grasp. "I have a feeling that your ailments may not be natural, Kaiba. Yugi has been feeling off and..."
"Okay, stop right there, Yugi." Seto held up his hand. "Before you start spewing about magic, or whatever the nonsense-of-the-day is, let me make this quite clear – I don't want to hear it. I've been in meetings with utter incompetence all day, and haven't slept in over five. If you're trying to tell me that my head is pounding because of some story about fate, then you might as well leave right now."

Yami stood up and walked up to the desk. He pulled the Millennium Rod out of his bag and carefully placed it down beside the laptop. "I think this is the cause of your discomfort…and if the tablet in the museum is anything to go by…"

Seto glared at the hunk of gold sitting on his desk before finally bringing his eyes up to meet Yami's.

"And how is this supposed to help me?" Seto snapped. "Are you going to cure my sleeplessness by knocking me over the head with it? Look, you want to believe you were some Pharaoh in an old fairytale? Fine. But I don't. I won't let something that might have happened 5,000 years ago shape my future."

Yami crossed his arms across his chest. "Kaiba, after all that has happened to us, you can't keep refusing to believe your relationship to the past. Are you going to continue to deny your involvement in Ancient Egypt after being shown part of our battle during Battle City? Or how about how the Millennium Rod responded to your actions during the finals and Marik had nothing to do with it."

"So he claims," Seto scoffed, "I wouldn't take his word seriously, considering his split personality tried to kill us all. Nor would I really take the word of his sister, who spoke of destiny and the future and couldn't predict her own embarrassing defeat."

"Kaiba –"

"Listen to me carefully, Yugi. I don't want it. If you're trying to find someone in your buddy circle to drop that on, go chase after Wheeler or Bakura. Someone who actually believes in that nonsense. I want nothing…to do…"

Seto slowly trailed off, returning his gaze to the Millennium Rod on the desk. It was now glowing, and if not for the laptop partially blocking its progression, it would have rolled all the way across the desk to rest against his hands. "Now what is it doing?"

"I believe it's been responding to you. It's been doing this on and off for the last couple of days, and almost nonstop since we've entered the building today. If I had to guess, I would say that since Battle City, it has been trying to find you."

"So what, it's a lost puppy trying to find its way home?" Seto rolled his eyes and stood up. "I don't need some hunk of gold to forge my path in this life, Yugi. Everything I've accomplished I've done without someone whispering in my ear that it was some kind of fate. There is no such thing. You can't let some old relic rule your life, and if you do, you're just wasting your time. I make my own destiny, and nothing you do or say is going to change that. With only his desire to get the Rod out of his sight, and with no thought to his next action, he snatched it off the desk and held it out to Yami, who, in that moment could see just how visibly exhausted the other teen was. "Spare me any more of your talk of Egypt, destiny, fate, all of it. I'm tired, Yugi. Just take this with you, and go. Please."

Yami sighed and began to reach for the Millennium Rod, and immediately froze. Out of the corner of his eye he could see Mokuba come to stand next to him, but his eyes were glued on the Item in his rival's hand – or, more precisely – that it was starting to smoke.

"What the –" Seto tried to drop it back onto the desk, but it would not let itself go. He grabbed his
wrist with his free hand as the Millennium Rod began to burn his palm. "What is it doing to me!?"
He asked through gritted teeth.

"I…I don't know," said Yami, wide-eyed. "I've never seen a Millennium Item do this!"

"Seto, your hand!" Mokuba cried.

Seto winced and staggered back against the front of his desk. The blasted thing was burning itself
into his skin and there wasn’t a damn thing he could do to get it off of him. He tried to pry it out with
his other hand, but stopped as it also began to burn as soon as it made contact with the old artifact.
The Millennium Rod began to glow once again, and a blinding light filled the office. The pounding
in his head exploded in intensity as some of the same ancient memory flashes he saw during his
tournament flew before his eyes before everything suddenly went dark.

Yami and Mokuba shielded their eyes from the brightness, and when it faded, Seto was unresponsive
on the office floor, with the Millennium Rod firmly clenched in his blistering, bleeding hand.

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Ryou Bakura looked up from the book he was reading as he felt the golden ring against his chest
begin to activate. Ever since the Battle City tournament, he had slowly become more alert of the soul
residing in his Millennium Ring. At least now, if the evil spirit took control of his body, he was much
more aware of what was going on; and when the spirit relinquished that control back to him, he no
longer had to guess where he was or how he got there. Thank goodness for that, as it saved him from
having to answer some exceptionally awkward questions from strangers on the street. Aside from
knowing that the spirit (who, of course, was also named Bakura) had a longtime grudge against Yugi
– or, at least, the spirit in the Millennium Puzzle – he really didn't understand why he was so bent on
retrieving the seven Millennium Items. Especially when – aside from the Ring and Eye – he seemed
to have no luck in acquiring them.

When he brought this up to the Dark Bakura, the spirit had scoffed and said he was setting up for the
long-term game. …Whatever *that* meant.

Today though, he was looking forward to the quiet. Yugi and his other friends had returned home
from America after dealing with some strange magic called the Orichalcos, and for once, Ryou was
glad he had missed that action. While he was not conscious for most of it, being injured, hospitalized,
and then stuck in the Shadow Realm for most of the Battle City tournament was plenty enough crazy
for him.

It seemed his other half didn't share those thoughts, however. Crazy seemed to follow him all the
time.

/Is something wrong, Thief?/

/I've felt something odd from within the Millennium Ring./ Yami Bakura phased out to stand next to
his host's armchair.

"Something bad?"

"I can't be sure. From what I can tell…a Millennium Item has changed hands, and has activated."

"How can that be?" Ryou looked down at the Ring against his shirt. "Yugi wouldn't give up the
Millennium Puzzle, and we have the Ring and the Eye. Marik and Ishizu Ishtar gave their items
away already, didn't they?"
"The Pharaoh has those now. But they haven't activated. The Necklace did briefly for him once, but supposedly it hadn't since. And we both know that fool Shadi won't part with his."

Ryou turned back to his book. "Are you sure you're not over-reacting? Maybe it was nothing."

Yami Bakura sneered. "When it comes to the Millennium Items, host, it is never nothing. Go find your shoes. We're going on a little field trip. If a Millennium Item has a new owner, it may now be easier to acquire."

Ryou sighed.

"Unless, of course, you'd like me to take over..."

Ryou did not miss the threat in that offer. Marking his page, he slipped on his sneakers and headed for the door. "You're not going to stab me again, are you?"

The spirit laughed. "Ring, point us in the direction of the Millennium Puzzle. If anyone is involved in this, it's going to be the Pharaoh."

As Ryou watched the Millennium Ring glow and begin to point towards the center of the city, he realized that Bakura never truly answered his question.
"Seto, open your eyes!" Mokuba cried as he nudged his brother's shoulder. "Seto!"

Yami knelt down next to him. "I...your brother will be fine, Mokuba."

Mokuba whirled around. "Did you know this was going to happen when you gave that to him?"

Yami put his hands up in front of him. "You have to believe me, Mokuba. I had no idea. From what I understand, the Millennium Items are drawn to their destined owners. Your brother held the Millennium Rod in the past, just as I held the Puzzle."

Mokuba frowned. "I know you had good intentions, Yugi. And I know my brother doesn't believe in any of the stuff you've been telling him. But...I thought..." he looked down, "...I thought that maybe...just maybe, if he did believe...he would lighten up a little bit, and maybe wouldn't be so hard on everyone, or himself." His eyes hardened and he glared at Yami. "But how do you know Seto will be okay? You didn't even know this was going to happen to him in the first place!"

Yami gave him a faint smile. "I believe the Millennium Rod is testing him. I think Pegasus mentioned something similar once when he received the Millennium Eye. And we both know your brother has risen above every challenge set in front of him. I don't see this being any different."

"Well he hasn't beaten you yet," said Mokuba dryly, "But as far as everything else goes...I suppose that's true." He walked around his brother to one of the filing cabinets along the wall and pulled out a first aid kit. Coming back to rest at his brother's side again, he reached for the Millennium Rod. It glowed for just an instant and Mokuba yanked his hand back as if someone had slapped it away. "Ow!"

"Mokuba! Are you alright?"

"It...zapped me!"

With one hand on the Puzzle, Yami drew the other closer to the still-smoking Millennium Rod. "I can feel the energy surrounding it, not to mention the heat. I don't think we'll be able to remove the Rod from his hand for the time being without injuring ourselves. While I'd like to help your brother, I believe he would murder me if I got you hurt as well."

Knowing he was right, Mokuba dropped the first aid kit onto the nearest chair, frustrated. "So now what do we do?"

Yami looked behind him to one of the office sofas. "Well, we can start by getting him up off of the floor..."

Mokuba pulled a face. Even with Yugi helping him, that wasn't going to be easy. "Yeah? And then what?"

Yami sighed. "We wait. There is nothing else we can do until he wakes."
Eyes slowly opened, squinting not against the harsh Egyptian sun, but the office lights running across the ceiling. As he sat up slowly from his spot stretched out on the office couch, his eyes took in the room, from the sleek furniture to the shining metropolis that was through the window. His feet found the floor and he stood, a moment on shaky legs before finding his balance.

Only once he was upright did he take in his appearance reflecting in the glass wall in front of him. Gone was the familiar weight of his headdress or the swirling robes he had worn; in its place layers of black and white that accentuated his long, slim frame. The throbbing radiating out of his right hand took his attention next, glancing for a moment at the bloodstained Millennium Rod locked in his grip.

He closed his eyes for a moment and smiled. "It's about time."

"Seto! You're awake!" He froze as someone half his height grabbed him around his middle in a tight embrace. "I'm so glad you're okay! You had us worried!"

Who is this?

When his hug was not reciprocated back, Mokuba looked up. Seto looked…for a lack of better words, downright confused. He didn't respond to his cry with any sort of recognition, and was scanning the room as if he was just seeing his office for the first time.

"Kaiba," said a voice from the other side of the room, and thank the Gods at least that one was familiar, although he hadn't the faintest idea what a 'Kaiba' was. He detached himself from the boy and turned. The new face in front him was dressed in the weirdest combination of blues and blacks, with the oddest accessories adorning his neck and wrists, but the spiky hair and golden pyramid dangling from a chain around his neck was unmistakable.

"My Pharaoh!" he cried, dropping to his knee and bowing his head. "I have returned to serve you once again."

Mokuba looked from his brother to Yami and back again. "Uh…Seto? Are you okay?"

His brother looked at him with eyes that didn't quite seem his. He opened his mouth but Yami cut him off.

"Uh – it's okay, Kaiba. You can get up now."

If Mokuba could be relieved about any of this, it was that Yami seemed just as baffled at his brother's behavior as he was.

Kaiba. Is that the name of the body I've taken…

Yami cleared his throat and looked at his rival. He looked the same…but there was something slightly off in his eyes. If he hadn't spent so much time with Kaiba saving the world and dueling, he may not have been able to notice…but his eyes seemed brighter. His height and posture…all else seemed the same. Except perhaps the hair…Yami noted that it did look a slight shade of lighter brown than his rival's.

"I'm…glad you remember me," said Yami carefully, "But I'm afraid you have me at a disadvantage. I must ask that you identify yourself, if not just for my sake, but for Mokuba." He gestured to the younger Kaiba. "It is his older brother's body you seem to have taken for your own. So tell me…are you a spirit from within the Millennium Rod?"
The man bowed his head before standing back up, and put his hand over his heart. "Of course. Your sacrifice to stop the darkness before had taken all of your memories. I had forgotten. I am Set, High Priest of your royal court and Sacred Guardian of the Millennium Rod."

A small tug at his jacket sleeve stole his attention. "Uh…Mr. Set? What happened to Seto?"

Set looked down at Mokuba. "Seto? You mean my vessel?" His eyes glazed over a moment. "He is still resting. I believe that this was his first time tapping into the power of a Millennium Item, and it seemed to have overtaxed him. He will wake soon. Do not worry."

Yami nodded. "Yugi – the boy whose body I inhabit – had a similar experience in a shadow game. I wouldn't fret, Mokuba. Kaiba will be fine, although I can't say he will be pleased when he wakes."

Mokuba grimaced.

"Oh?" said Set.

"Let's just say that Seto Kaiba, who does not believe in the power of the Millennium Items, or fate, or destiny, will not be happy to learn that everything we have been trying to tell him over the past year or so is not only true, but that he now will have to share his body with his ancient counterpart."

"Yeah," said Mokuba. "My brother is…kind of a control freak."

Set chuckled. "I see. Well then. You will have to tell me all about my descendant, and this world. It is very different than Egypt."

~~*~~

Seto groaned as he forced his eyes open. He didn't remember taking a nap on the office couch. He did remember Yugi trying to pawn off Marik's Millennium Rod onto him. He shook his head, rubbing his temples with his right hand as he sat up.

Wait.

He moved his hand back and gawked, dumbfounded. The Millennium Rod was no longer trying to disfigure him. It wasn't even in his hand, which was burn-free and looked completely fine, although he could still feel it throbbing. That certainly didn't make any sense.

The Rod wasn't on his desk either. But that couldn't possible – he could vividly remember the damn thing stuck in his grip and burning into his skin!

What is going on?

Seto looked around. In fact, the Millennium Rod wasn't even in his office. Neither were Yugi or Mokuba. Getting to his feet, he staggered around to the other side of his desk and sank into his office chair. He reached for the "KC" emblem on his suit's lapel – a duplicate of the one stitched into the collar of his white trench coat – to call for Roland, but his fingers were met with only the fabric of his jacket. Looking down, he realized his communicator was gone. It took him another moment to realize the top of his desk was completely clear. The phone and laptop were missing, and he knew that they were there when Yugi was trying once again to convince him of a destiny that didn't exist. Even the paperwork had vanished.

Maybe Mokuba led Yugi out, and he took his hunk of gold with him. But to take his phone and his computer too? Mokuba wouldn't have to do that – he has his own in the office next door. And no one in their right mind would have walked off with the various budgets and proposals waiting for his
approval.

Something wasn't right, and it was about time he got to the bottom of things.

Seto stood back up, stalked off towards the office door and threw it open. Somehow, in a nagging part of his mind, he knew the corridor he had walked down only minutes before wouldn't be there, so he wasn't sure why he was so surprised to now find a completely different hallway in its place.

He stepped out into the odd corridor and looked around. The door he just walked through looked exactly like his office door, down to the "S. Kaiba, CEO" nameplate. The wall and floor around it matched the real counterpart in Kaiba Corp.

But the other half of the hallway looked like something out of one of Ishizu Ishtar's exhibits. The floor and walls on that half were made of stone. A large door stood opposite his office. Where his had his office nameplate, this other one had the same eye that decorated all of the Millennium Items, surrounded by other strange Egyptian symbols. It was the odd sort of sight he would have expected on the wall of a tomb, not across from his office.

Even stranger, the weird corridor didn't seem to go anywhere. It just…ended.

"…You have nothing to fear, little one. I am not your enemy," Seto heard, and he put a hand on his forehead. That was his voice, but he didn't say those words.

"My role…I believe, is to aid the Pharaoh…" said Seto's voice again. "Although the Gods' plan is not quite clear to me. Many of my past memories are also clouded, and I am not quite sure why my spirit was sealed into my Millennium Rod, but I will do what I must to help you fight evil once again."

Seto narrowed his eyes. There was no way he would have said that.

His head was starting to pound again. Seto backed against the Kaiba Corp side of the wall and shut his eyes, grimacing as whatever conversation his voice was having with Yugi echoed through the corridor. Who the heck was Yugi talking to? When he opened his eyes again, he narrowed his gaze to the mysterious door. Whoever – or whatever – that was locking him in this odd space and stealing his voice had to be behind that door, and it was about time they learned that they weren't welcome.

It didn't surprise him to see this room decorated roughly the same as its half of the hallway. The chamber was made of stone. Hieroglyphic tapestries hung from the wall. A table covered in scrolls sat in the corner. A large canopied bed stood opposite a balcony overlooking an ancient city. Next to it was a small stone statue of a warrior-like monster. Seto half expected to find the large stone carving of the Blue Eyes White Dragon here, but it was nowhere to be seen.

What he did find, was the same man he kept seeing in Ishizu's visions, from his golden headdress and long blue and white robes, to the Millennium Rod in his hand. If it weren't for the tanned skin, they could have been twins.

Seto's double turned from his spot at the balcony to look at him, and folded his arms across his chest. "I see you're awake."

Seto walked into the middle of the room and mimicked the other's stance. "I don't know who you think you are, but I suggest you let me out of here before I really get angry."

The other man laughed and gestured to the two large cushions near one of the tables. "I see what they said of you is true. Come, sit. I am sure you have a great many questions, and we have much to discuss."
"My role… I believe, is to aid the Pharaoh…" said Set. "Although the Gods' plan is not quite clear to me. Many of my past memories are also clouded, and I am not quite sure why my spirit was sealed into the Millennium Rod, but I will do what I must to help you fight evil once again."

"You believe?" asked Yami. "You mean to say you don't know? Did something happen after I sealed myself away in the Millennium Puzzle?"

Set did not answer.

"Set?" Yami looked closely. Set had gone rigidly still, and his eyes had glazed over. He made no notion that he had even heard him.

"Set?" asked Mokuba. "Seto? Anyone in there?" He climbed up onto the back of the couch and tried to wave a hand in front of his brother's eyes. Still no reaction. "Freaky…"

"I wonder if this is what Yugi is like when we are talking to each other," said Yami. "Perhaps he and Kaiba are having a conversation."

Mokuba turned to look at him. "If that's the case, then maybe my brother is okay in there after all, and that's a good sign. I've noticed you space out sometimes, but usually you were in the middle of dueling and I just figured you were taking a long time to plan out your turn."

"Hm. I wonder if Yugi's friends had noticed."

Mokuba shrugged. "If they did, they don't say anything. Or they just assumed that you two are talking to each other and they let it go."

Seto suddenly blinked and backed away a step from Mokuba's waving hand. He reached for his "KC" lapel pin, and didn't even bother to hide the almost-sigh of relief to feel the cool metal under his fingertips. "Roland, cancel the rest of my appointments for the day. I am not to be disturbed, is that clear?"

"Yes, Sir. Although there is something –"

"I don't care. It can wait."

"… Of course, Mr. Kaiba." Mokuba could have sworn he could hear Roland sighing on the other end of the line. He slid off of the couch and moved to stand next to Yami. "Seto? A-are you okay?"

Seto cast a quick glance around the room, his eyes traveling over Mokuba, the laptop and phone on the desk, to the Millennium Rod still clenched in his fist, and finally to Yami. His eyes narrowed. "Muto."

Yami matched his glare. "Kaiba – hey!" Seto had grabbed his upper arm, dragged him around the room and tossed him unceremoniously into the chair behind his desk. He looked up at his rival and his next words died in his throat. Forget however irritated Seto had been with him in the past. The dueling losses of course made him angry, and he was downright livid when Raphael had beaten him and taken Yugi's soul… but today? Seto Kaiba looked murderous towering over him.

"You have a lot of explaining to do, Muto."

"Kaiba, I –"
"No. You kept coming to me ranting about fate and the past. I told you time and time again that I didn't believe in that nonsense. Despite our differences, I thought you would have respected my opinion on the subject, considering how many times I had to repeat it. But of course not, because you don't listen to anyone that isn't in your direct little circle of friends. As it is, I've had to tell you this today twice."

"I –"

"And then, because you listen so goddamn well, what's the first thing you do? Harp on the same bull that took over my Battle City tournament, and that's all I continue to hear from you since. You knew I wanted nothing to do with your little Egyptian fairytale, but I suppose what I want doesn't matter because of some old carving on a rock."

"Kaiba –"

"That must be why you decided to give me this." He waved the Millennium Rod dangerously in Yami's face, "Because letting it burn itself into my flesh is truly the way to get me to finally listen to you, since words weren't doing the trick. Or maybe you were hoping that some ancient doppelganger would do your dirty work for you?"

Yami began to speak, but paused. "…Is it my turn now?"

"If I may cut in," said a voice from the door, effectively cutting off whatever Seto was about to say. "I'm surprised at you, Pharaoh! Causing a ruckus with the Millennium Items and you didn't even invite me to watch all the fun."

Yami rolled Seto's chair back away from the angry CEO and stood up. "Bakura! What are you doing here?"

"How did you even get up here?" asked Mokuba, "wouldn't you have run into security?"

Yami Bakura laughed, "Oh, believe me, I did, but I got tired of the chase so I eluded them through the Shadow Realm. You're lucky I was in a good mood and didn't trap any of them there while I was at it." He turned to Yami, "I sensed the changing of hands with a Millennium Item. And since you have about half of them now–urk!" He suddenly found himself pinned to the wall by an angry CEO. The hidden dagger of the Millennium Rod was out and up against his throat. Bakura could see that the Rod itself was covered in blood.

"I see you too have survived after all these years," said Kaiba, and Bakura narrowed his eyes. Seto Kaiba never would have said this sort of stuff, and he certainly hadn't done anything to antagonize Kaiba, at least not yet. "Are you still up to your tricks? I may be the only Sacred Guardian here, but I will not let you obtain the other Millennium Items, or antagonize the Pharaoh any further."

Ah. So that's what's going on here, Bakura said to himself. This changes things quite a bit.

"Seto, what are you doing?" Mokuba ran over and tried to pry his brother's arm off of Bakura. "You're going to hurt him!"

Yami Bakura sneered against the dagger at his throat. "Don't bother, half pint. That's not your brother. It seems that his Highness the High Priest is in a foul mood. What's wrong, Set? Not happy to see me after all this time?"

Mokuba tugged on Set's arm again. "Let him go. Please!"

Set's eyes darted to Mokuba for an instant before turning back to Bakura. "Back off." The
Millennium Rod flashed and Mokuba was thrown into the back of the office couch.

Yami rushed around the desk as Mokuba cried out, falling to his knees and rubbing the back of his head. He helped Mokuba to his feet in time to see the Millennium Rod activate once again. One moment, Seto (or Set, it was too hard to tell which one was which from behind) looked ready to slit Bakura's throat. But once he had turned on Mokuba, his demeanor had changed just as fast as the flash of the Millennium Rod.

Seto dropped Bakura and in one fluid motion, whirled around and angrily hurled the Millennium Rod across the room, smashing it into a large art frame on the wall.

"Don't you EVER lay a hand on my brother like that again." He didn't care that he spoke it aloud instead of in his head, but so long as the spirit in his head heard him, he didn't care. The other occupants in the room by now knew better than to attack his little brother.

Mokuba hurried into Seto's side. "It's okay, Seto!" he said quickly, "I'm not hurt or anything. It's okay! I'm fine."

Seto looked down and put his clean hand reassuringly on his brother's shoulder. Now that the Millennium Rod was finally out of his grip he could finally take stock of the damage it did to his hand. It felt raw to the touch, and was completely coated in blistered burns. Some of the blood had already dried. Just thinking about how this was all done by a possessed hunk of gold was almost enough to make him sick.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Bakura get up off of the floor, rubbing his neck. "How long have you been there?"

Bakura shoved his hands into his pocket and strolled into the middle of the office, seeming completely unfazed that he almost had his throat run through by a Millennium Item. "Just long enough for a very cranky spirit to try and murder me." He shrugged. "Wouldn't have been the first time. He seems a bit twitchy; probably from being stuck inside the Millennium Rod for 5,000 years, or from having to spend about ten or so of those years listening to Marik. I'd bet on both."

Yami walked over to the other side of the office and carefully picked the Millennium Rod from the glass shards covering the floor. He started to walk back over and hand it back to Seto, but paused. Mokuba had started to dig into the first aid kit. Seto looked like he was watching Mokuba tend to him, but Yami could see his eyes looked a little glazed over. If he had to bet, the CEO was verbally abusing the spirit for turning on Mokuba. And he was also quite sure that if he handed the Rod back in this moment, Seto was likely to run him through with the dagger end of it, eternal dueling rivalry be damned.

"So," said Yami Bakura conversationally as he stopped next to him. He followed the Pharaoh's gaze to watching Kaiba. "How long has your Priest been out to play?"

"Just a few minutes. It seems that Kaiba is none too happy to have him, though I bet you and I could have guessed that would happen." Yami turned to look at the evil spirit cautiously. "Set said most of his memories are clouded too, and that makes me curious. …Do you have your memories of the ancient past?"

Bakura snorted. "I have what I need. But to answer your unasked question, I did not know that there was a spirit in the Millennium Rod. This is news to me."

"If the peanut gallery is finished over there," said Seto coldly, flexing his bandaged hand, "Then leave. I've had enough magical nonsense for one day." He walked around the desk, sat back down,
opened his laptop and proceeded to ignore everyone else in the room.

/*I think Kaiba's calmed down now. You can let me come out now, Yami. I-I don't think Kaiba is going to throw me off the roof or anything.*/

/*He'll be angry with me for a while, I'll bet, but I think you're right. I'll be here if you need me.*/

With a flash of the Millennium Puzzle, Yugi swapped places with Yami. He approached Seto slowly, ignoring the worried glances Mokuba was giving him. He reached over and slid the sheath of the Millennium Rod back over the dagger.

"Uh, Kaiba? Is your hand —"

"It'll heal. Eventually." Seto muttered. He leaned back in his chair and took the Millennium Item from Yugi. Turning it over in his hands, he stared at it, exhaustedly, but at least the hunk of gold wasn't trying to hurt him anymore. He'd have to get the blood cleaned off of it though. Finally, he turned his gaze back to both Yugi and Bakura, neither of whom had listened to him and made any move towards the door. "I suppose your items did something similar to you? Or am I just special?"

He looked over at Yugi, noticing that he had gotten a little shorter and his hair wasn't sticking up nearly as high.

/*So this is the Pharaoh's vessel. They certainly look similar….*/

Seto flinched. It was going to take time to adjust to the new voice in his head.

It wasn't Yugi who spoke, but Bakura. "The Millennium Items were born from the blood of men. It is only fitting that they form a blood bond with their destined owners." He didn't feel the need to tell him that when he bonded with Ryou, he stabbed all five points of the Millennium Ring into his chest. What a mess that was.

"Oh great," Seto muttered. "So now I'm stuck with this thing, aren't I?"

Bakura tented his fingers in front of his feral grin. "Well. You don't have to keep it, Kaiba. Sure you've got your past incarnation in your head now, but from what the Pharaoh told me, he hasn't stuck around long enough for you to be too attached to him. And if you'd really like to be rid of him, I can always take it off your hands. But, considering that there is a spirit in your Item, and you two have bonded now, I would guess if I did part you of it, he would only find its way back."

Seto watched the Millennium Ring suddenly flash, and Ryou trade places with his alter ego. He noticed Ryou's eyes were much softer brown and his hair didn't fan out from his head as much as the Ring's spirit.

"Sorry," Ryou said sheepishly. "He's been trying to acquire all of the Millennium Items for some time now. Try to ignore him."

Roland cleared his throat from his spot at the open door, drawing all eyes onto him. "My apologies for the intrusion, sir…."

"I thought I said I didn't want to be disturbed, Roland."

"Yes, but I thought you should know. These letters were just dropped off in the main lobby just minutes ago." He stepped into the room and removed two envelopes from his suit pocket.

"What's so special about getting some mail, Roland?" asked Mokuba. "…It's…not someone trying to
take us over again, right? We're still trying to recover from Dartz and the Grand Prix fiasco."

"No, sir. But the letters are addressed rather strangely. It seems whoever sent these knew that Mr. Muto would be here." He held one out to Seto. "They were also dropped off by an owl."

"An owl."

Roland reached into his suit and pulled out his cell phone. "It gave the receptionist quite a fright, all things considered. We did manage to capture a photo of it before it flew back out the front door."

"Why'd you take a picture of it?" asked Mokuba.

"Aside from seeing one flying around in broad daylight? We honestly were sure you wouldn't believe me if I told you."

Seto raised an eyebrow. "Of all the things to happen today," he muttered, taking a look at the snowy white owl that certainly wasn't native to Japan before handing the phone back. "You're right. I wouldn't have believed you. So, what nonsense is this?"

Roland turned, handed Yugi his letter, and moved to stand near the door.

Yugi looked down at his envelope and gawked. What the…

Mr. Y. Muto
Seto Kaiba's Office
Kaiba Corporation Headquarters
Domino City, Japan

"Well that certainly is specific," said Ryou, looking over Yugi's shoulder.

Mokuba walked around the desk and looked at the envelope in his brother's hand.

Mr. S. Kaiba
The Executive Office
Kaiba Corporation Headquarters
Domino City, Japan

"This has to be some sort of prank," Seto snapped and turned to Yugi. "So which of your friends was it this time?"

"I-I don't think this was a prank, at least not something Joey or Tristan would be able to pull off," said Yugi, turning the envelope over. An old-fashioned wax seal held it shut. "There's at least no possible way they could get an owl to deliver this in broad daylight. They don't even know I'm here!"

/Perhaps you should read its contents before writing this off as a trick, my host. I can sense a great deal of magic coming from this letter. I assume the Pharaoh's friends you refer to are of this modern world, and therefore would not have the means to create something like this/ said Set's voice in his ear.

With a final glare at Yugi, Seto broke the wax seal and pulled out the letter inside. It, like the envelope it arrived in, was not on normal letterhead paper. It felt heavy, and both looked and felt like something that belonged in a Middle Ages exhibit. Mokuba watched his eyes narrow more and more as he read.
Dear Mr. Kaiba,

I am writing you this letter in the hopes that you are in good health and an open mind. It is my current understanding that the idea of magic in these modern times may be foreign to you. Be that as it may, I wish to inform you that living Witches and Wizards are more than just childhood tales. Although we do not perform magic in front of those without these abilities, we do live in coexistence.

Recently, our world has entered back into war after fourteen years of peace. While I would normally not concern you with these matters, it seems that a tyrannical dark wizard has set his sights on some ancient forms of magic that we used to believe were just myth. Due to these unsettling actions by this wizard and his followers, I believe you may be in great danger.

If you would permit me, I would like to meet in person to discuss this matter. If 5:00 this evening in your office is not convenient for you, please write a new time on this letter. I will be alerted immediately to your change. There will be no need to send a reply.

I look forward to speaking with you.

Yours sincerely,
Albus Dumbledore

"I suppose yours says the same thing," said Seto.

Yugi nodded. "It does. I…I don't know what to make of this."

"Five o'clock," Mokuba read, "That's less than an hour from now. What are you going to do, Seto?"

Seto crossed his arms and glared at the parchment sitting innocently on his desk. "It's quite a coincidence isn't it? You pretty much force me to believe in your Egyptian fairytale by passing off one of your Millennium Items, which just happens to have my incarnation stuck in it, and not even an hour later I'm getting a letter delivered by an owl telling me that magic is real and some nutcase I've never met is after me."

"The only connection I can make is that this has something to do in general with the Millennium Items," said Yugi. "In the letter they said that whoever this dark wizard is, he's going after something old. And the only thing that would connect the two of us would be our past from Ancient Egypt. But..." he turned to Ryou, "I would have assumed you would get a letter too, Bakura. After all, I think you've held onto the Millennium Ring longer than either of us have had our items."

Ryou frowned. "That's true. If that is the case, would it be alright if I stayed for your meeting with this Dumbledore fellow?"

"You mean if we meet this Dumbledore," said Seto irritably, "I'm still not entirely convinced this isn't some sort of trick."

"If I may, Mr. Kaiba," said Roland, and Seto's eyes snapped up. He had forgotten Roland hadn't left the room. "In my role as your tournaments' official, I have seen quite a number of things I am still not able to understand or explain. Many of those had to do with that item there on your desk," he motioned to the Millennium Rod before returning to clasping his hands behind his back again. "There can be no way that it was a trick that half of your Battle City finalists ended up in comas."
Neither can we say that it was a trick that during the Paradius crisis, losing a card game without that Millennium Rod present also put duelists into comas. Monsters appeared all over the city, and we both know they were not from your holographic technology."

Seto began to speak, but Roland held up a hand. "If I also may say, sir, that in my role as your chief of security, I have noticed that many of the unexplainable things we have witnessed have in some part focused on you. And usually, in more than one instance, targeting you has also put young Mr. Kaiba in the line of fire as well. Now this letter may be nothing more than a prank. But, if it isn't, and there is someone else trying to get at you, it is not far off to assume they may also go after your brother in order to get to you. For this risk alone, you should see this meeting to its conclusion."

Mokuba crossed his arms, "Well, Seto? Are you going to listen to the voice of reason?"

"Ugh," Seto massaged his temples again. His headache was coming back. "This better be over with quick."
The office was eerily silent as its occupants waited for the hour to roll by. Yugi was flipping through some old magazines Mokuba had saved that featured his brother. Mokuba was seated next to him on the leather couch, a notebook propped up on his knees and a textbook beside him as he worked on his homework. Occasionally, he would side-eye read over Yugi’s shoulder. Bakura had grabbed a book off the shelf and appeared to be reading, but every so often Yugi could see his eyes phase in and out of focus, as if he was in conversation with the spirit of the Millennium Ring.

A set of footsteps made Yugi look up from his magazine. Roland had returned with a steaming mug of coffee. He placed it on the corner of his employer’s desk and then resumed his position standing between the window glass panes.

Seto didn’t seem to even notice Roland had walked in and around his desk. He was sitting ramrod straight in his office chair, looking over a stack of papers in his hand. It looked like he was concentrating on whatever was on the page, but Yugi noticed his eyes were unmoving and completely unfocused…

/Are you still angry with me?/ asked Set.

/Yes./

/I apologized for my actions against the little one. I was merely trying to keep him away from Bakura and the Millennium Ring. You don't know what he's capable of./

Seto closed his eyes and took a deep breath. When he opened them, he was still seated behind his desk, but was now in his soul room. Yugi and the others had disappeared, and Set was pacing in front of him.

"The only thing he's seemed capable of that I've seen is holding his own in a Duel Monsters match against Yugi. Whatever his motivations were 5,000 years ago, he doesn't seem to be interested in it now."

"Don't fool yourself into a false sense of security with him. Bakura is more powerful than you give him credit for. He was quite the strategist. If he is choosing not to act now, then he is still planning out his moves."

Seto scoffed. "Bakura doesn't scare me, and I think we'll have other things to worry about, if there's any truth to what this Dumbledore has written."

Set looked down at the Millennium Rod in his hands. "Yes, well, he should be here momentarily, if that shiny sundial on your wrist is anything to go by."

Seto raised an eyebrow. "You mean the watch?"

He ignored Set’s chuckle, left his soul room, and returned his gaze to the budget proposals on his desk. He wasn't sure just how long he had been seemingly staring into space, but there was a fresh
cup of coffee on his desk. Mokuba was still doing his homework, and Yugi and Ryou appeared to be reading.

The instant the clock chimed for the next hour, Yugi and Ryou looked up and towards the door. There were no sounds of footsteps in the hallway.

The silence was suddenly broken by what sounded like a cross between a gunshot and a car backfiring. Yugi, Ryou, and Mokuba rushed to the window and looked down at the street below as Roland began to reach for the handgun hidden in his suit. Everything looked calm on the ground, so where did that noise come from?

A quiet chuckle brought everyone's attention back to the office door. "It seems my arrival has startled some of you. My apologies."

Yugi turned to see someone straight out of one of his childhood books. An old man was standing in the doorway wearing long magenta robes and a matching hat. His long silver beard hung down long enough to be tucked into his belt, and warm blue eyes sat behind half-moon spectacles hanging low on his nose.

"A-are you…uh Mr. Dumbledore?" asked Yugi.

Dumbledore removed his hat and performed a sweeping bow. "Professor Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Forgive me again for my rather loud arrival. Apparating directly into someone's home – or office in this case – is something I consider to be just as rude as kicking down one's front door. I thought the end of the hallway would be far enough to not startle you, but alas, what's done is done."

Since Seto seemed to make no move to do so, Yugi gestured for him to enter. Mokuba quickly gathered his homework from where it was strewn all over the couch and made room for the odd old man to sit down.

"I see I have a larger audience than I originally expected," said Dumbledore pleasantly, taking the cleared seat next to Mokuba. "And what are you working on, young man?"

Mokuba pulled a sour face. "Math."

"Ah," said Dumbledore, "An important subject to learn. I take it you are young Mokuba Kaiba?"

Mokuba nodded, wide-eyed. "How did you know?"

"I did do a spot of research before making my journey here today. And…" Dumbledore's smiled, eyes twinkling, "It seems your brother has been trying to glare through me since I've sat down." He held up his hands in a non-threatening manner. "Fear not, Mr. Kaiba, I have no ulterior motives here today; I have come merely to talk."

Roland moved to close the office door and took up his guarding stance next to it. Yugi took a seat next to Bakura on the couch opposite Mokuba and Dumbledore and gasped upon seeing Dumbledore's hands. While his left hand looked rather normal for someone his age, his right hand and wrist was blackened and looked almost decayed.

Following Yugi's gaze, Dumbledore lowered his hands and shook the long sleeve of his robe over his right hand. "Ah. Nothing to worry yourself over, Mr. Muto. I was merely careless with a cursed artifact. Now, may I be introduced to your friend?"

"I'm Ryou Bakura, Professor. I'm not completely certain of what you've come here to tell us, but I
Dumbledore studied the white-haired teen carefully. He was wearing one of the oddest necklaces he had ever seen. It looked like it belonged in a set with the upside-down pyramid Yugi wore. He cleared his throat. "Very well. Let me begin with a question. What do you know about magic?"

"Choose your answers carefully, Yugi, until we know the angle this man is playing. While he appears to be open and friendly, it may just be a front."

"It depends on your definition of magic," said Seto, leaning back in his seat and crossing his arms over his chest. "Someone who performs parlor tricks with shaved cards or conducts high-risk escape acts with hidden keys do so under the guise of magic tricks. It's nothing but an illusion to fool their audience into thinking they can see the impossible. Others can make a wish on a star in the sky when they go to bed at night, wake up the next morning, find a pocketful of money they had forgotten about for a week and call that magic, when it's really just coincidence and pure carelessness. People as a whole tend to chalk up anything they can't adequately explain as magic."

Set chuckled in his head. /Unless they were you before today, correct?/

Dumbledore nodded thoughtfully. "Ah, yes. Well, perhaps a demonstration to be a bit more specific is in order." He took a glance around the room. "Mokuba, may I borrow your textbook? I promise to return it."

Mokuba reached into his backpack and handed him the requested item. "What are you going to do with it?"

Dumbledore placed the book on the center of the coffee table. "Nothing dangerous, I assure you." He reached into the pocket of robes and pulled out a long wand with ornate carvings running down its length. He tapped the book and it instantly vanished.

Yugi and Ryou shared wide-eyed looks. Mokuba reached over and put his hand where his book had been moments ago. "It's gone!"

"It's...here, Mokuba." Seto said, just barely hiding the surprise in his voice. Upon vanishing from the table, it had reappeared on his desk next to the Millennium Rod. That's impossible! No one had moved!

"After what you've experienced today, are you really going to believe that was a trick?"

Mokuba jumped up and retrieved it from his brother's outstretched hand. "How did it get there? None of us could have reached over that far." His eyes widened. "Woah. That's cool. What else can that stick do?"

Dumbledore chuckled and stood up. He walked closer to the desk, noticing the bloodstains on the floor, and the bandages around Seto's hand. "It appears there was an accident here. Scourgify."

Yugi watched as Dumbledore aimed his wand at the floor, and the blood spots vanished. "That's amazing!"

"Now, Mr. Kaiba, if you will allow me, may I see your hand? I'm afraid my knowledge of curative magic pales in comparison to Madame Pomfrey, but this should still do the trick." Sensing
apprehension and skepticism, he added, "This will not be damaging or painful."

"Go on, Seto!" said Mokuba excitedly. "It's ok, really! Nothing happened to my math book!"

Seto studied Dumbledore for a long moment before carefully unwrapping Mokuba's handiwork. Dumbledore took stock of the damage done by the Millennium Rod, waved his wand seemingly at nothing, and then a bowl appeared on his desk, filled about halfway with a murky looking liquid.

"Essence of murtlap," Dumbledore explained, "Which is a solution made from pickled murtlap tentacles. Soak your hand in that for a bit, and it will take the edge off and help expedite the healing process." He pushed the bowl across the gleaming hardwood surface to rest next to Seto's propped elbow.

Seto looked at the bowl, then to Dumbledore, and back again before lowering his hand into the liquid. It felt cool to the touch, and almost instantly, the throbbing seemed to mellow itself out.

Dumbledore sighed. "Now, to the matter at hand. There is much to discuss, and quite some history to tell, so I beg you indulge this old man in his tale." He took a seat in one of the chairs in front of the desk. Yugi took the other, and with another wave of his wand, created two more for Mokuba and Ryou. "Ah, that's better isn't it. Now we don't have to talk from across the room."

Settling himself, Dumbledore returned his wand to his pocket, and clasped his hands into his lap. "Let me first begin with some back story. Much of what has happened in our world did not make its way to this side of the globe, and anything that has would have been covered up by the Japanese Ministry of Magic, so you likely wouldn't have noticed anything unusual.

"Some time ago, a wizard gained a cult following and rose to power. Calling himself Lord Voldemort, he started a war against Muggles – ah, those without magical abilities – and muggle-born wizards, in favor of a pure-blooded wizarding society. He gained the support of dark creatures that had become outcast from society and many Muggles and Muggleborns were senselessly murdered."

"So what happened?" said Yugi. "How did the war end?" He gestured to his letter left on the corner of Seto's desk. "You said that there was peace in your community for years…was that all before this?"

Dumbledore nodded solemnly, "There was indeed peace, broken only a short while ago. During the war, I helped lead the fight against Voldemort. Many Aurors, or policemen, became known enemies of Voldemort and his followers. Only a select few were threatening enough that he dealt with them personally. The Potters were one of them. Sixteen years ago, he found them in hiding and murdered them, but when he also tried to kill their infant son Harry, he found himself unable. It was one of the greatest mysteries of our time. Voldemort's killing curse rebounded on himself, and his body was destroyed. With their master gone, many of his followers were either caught or feigned innocence due to being brainwashed. The war ended on Halloween night all those years ago, and we all began the quiet rebuilding of our communities.

"However, even with his body gone, Voldemort was not dead, and due to some very dark magic, had regained his body at the beginning of last summer. Young Harry Potter was witness to his revival, but aside from himself and Voldemort's own followers, no one was willing to believe him and disrupt the calm that everyone had become so accustomed. It took a year and a battle in our own Ministry of Magic for our government to finally acknowledge Voldemort had returned.

"Now, no longer working in the shadows, Voldemort has made his attacks much more open. There have been numerous attacks on Muggles and Muggle-borns, and some of the lands' darkest creatures have sided with him. The war has started once again."
Yugi frowned. "That sounds horrible…but what does he have to do with us? We've never heard of you, or this Voldemort before. As far as I can guess, we haven't done anything to get on his radar. What would bring his attention all the way here?"

"Voldemort fears death above all else, and over the years has quested for immortality. Harry Potter became his enemy the moment the curse rebounded and failed to kill him. Without even knowing how to walk or tie his own shoelaces, he had done the one thing Voldemort had been striving for: cheat death."

"That must be putting Harry Potter in danger then," said Ryou.

"Unfortunately, Mr. Potter has been the target of many threats over the years. Voldemort is still actively trying to kill him, not just to complete the task he started years ago, but as he's been growing up, Mr. Potter has thwarted Voldemort's plans on more than one occasion. He's become quite the nuisance to him. Thankfully, he is quite well protected.

"As for your involvement in this – it falls back on Voldemort's quest for immortality. Now that he is no longer working from the shadows, my spies have informed me that his search has led him to Egypt. As I'm sure you may know, one of the Ancient Egyptian customs was preparing souls for the next life after death."

Dumbledore reached into his pocket and pulled out a small stack of photographs and laid them on the edge of the desk. "While there is no proof that some kind of afterlife exists, he did uncover something else. Something called 'Shadow Games' which were played by the ancient Egyptians. Very little information exists on what the Shadow Games were like, but all of a sudden, all traces of them disappeared from history. In fact, after doing some research of my own, there is a gap in some of the old records. The Shadow Games were not mentioned from that point on. The little we do know is that battles with powerful creatures were involved."

Yugi and Ryou shared a look that did not go unnoticed by their foreign guest.

Dumbledore reached for the photographs he placed in front of them. "Last night, one of your museums was broken into. I understand your local government in investigating, but I'm afraid they won't find anything. The intruder in question was a double agent of Lord Voldemort. Nothing was damaged or stolen, thankfully, but he did take photographs. It seems whoever was looking into Shadow Games discovered some interesting footage from one of your card game tournaments, and seemed to believe that you were Shadow Dueling."

Seto narrowed his eyes. He had a sneaky suspicion he knew where this was going. "The Battle City tournament was broadcast all over the world, but we weren't the only duelists. Many of the matches that took place across half of the city were recorded."

"Be that as it may…" Dumbledore tapped his finger against the photographs. "Voldemort has seen the images of the tablet mural in the museum that depicts two figures that look remarkably like you and Mr. Muto. As the Egyptians believed in predetermined destiny and reincarnation, it is possible Voldemort believes the two of you will be able to channel Shadow Magic."

Yugi and Ryou leaned closer as Dumbledore tapped a second photograph. "One of my acquaintances is a curse breaker currently in Egypt. Some time ago, they had discovered a ruined temple that housed this carving in it. Unfortunately they did not get a very good look at it as there seemed to be some very protective magic guarding the area and they immediately retreated. However, from what we can see on this image, this rock was made to hold several artifacts, and all of them are gone."
How did these mere mortals stumble upon the Millennium Tablet?/Ryou flinched. He had been so engrossed in what Professor Dumbledore had been saying, he had forgotten he wasn't alone in his head. /If a Dark Wizard has found the Millennium Tablet, do you think they would go looking for the Items?/

/It would depend. We need to get more information out of this old man./Mokuba looked at Yugi, Ryou, and Seto. They all had unreadable expressions on their faces. "That photograph isn't very good," he admitted. "You can barely see the outlines of what those items are supposed to be. What does that have to do with my brother and Yugi?"

Dumbledore pointed back at the first image. "The pyramid up at the top here matches the one your image seems to wear, Mr. Muto. It also roughly fits the empty spot here." He paused, eyes set on Yugi. "And if I may say so, it looks just like the pyramid you're wearing around your neck. While it impossible for us to know for certain, it is not improbable to assume that Shadow Magic can be channeled through that item, or any other items that may exist."

Yugi looked down at the Puzzle and frowned. Uh oh…"And, if I may, Mr. Kaiba, this golden staff here also resembles the one depicted in your hand on that tablet."

Seto scowled.

"If Voldemort and his Death Eaters have also made that connection, they may decide to come pay you both a visit. His greed and desire for power will not let him pass up this opportunity. He may use you to either gain access to the Shadow Magic, or force you to use the magic for his own bidding. And if you do not cooperate with him, he will either force your hand or simply dispose of you and take the power for himself."

He blinked, surprised as Ryou suddenly began to laugh. When he spoke next, Dumbledore could tell this was not the same Ryou Bakura who had shyly introduced himself minutes ago. Yugi was also giving the white-haired teen a disapproving glare – but wait. He could tell Yugi looked different now too. How peculiar.

"If that's what your enemy has planned, then he has another thing coming to him," said Bakura. He crossed his arms across his chest, and Dumbledore's eyes were drawn to the Millennium Ring again.

"Bakura…" Yami growled.

"I see you also have one of these items," said Dumbledore calmly. "May I ask you a question, Mr. Bakura?"

"You may ask as many questions as you like," said Bakura, "But I won't guarantee an answer."

"I am a very good reader of people, Mr. Bakura. In this moment, I can tell you are no longer the quiet boy I just met. That interesting piece of jewelry you wear around your neck is more than just for show, is it not?"

"How do we know that you are not a spy for this Voldemort character?" said Yami in a quick attempt to change the subject. "We obviously knew nothing about your world. For all we know this could be some sort of distraction for him to attack."

"I cannot force you to believe me," said Dumbledore. "But as I said when I first arrived, I have no
ulterior motives here today. Had I been working for Voldemort, as you suggested, then you would already be trapped in his clutches."

/What do you think, Pharaoh?/

/I'm not quite sure what Bakura is doing, but I don't sense any malice from this man. I think we can trust him. There would be no sense in warning us if he was going to attack, unless it was truly to throw us off track. Somehow, I don't think that's the case. But Bakura's Millennium Ring has the power to look into someone's soul. He would already know if Dumbledore speaks the truth./

"Look, assuming everything you said is true," said Seto tiredly, drawing Dumbledore's attention away from Bakura. "What do you expect us to do about it? If this lunatic of yours truly thinks we have something he wants, it sounds like he's going to come after us no matter how much warning you give."

"Quite right. Therefore...I would like to offer you protection at my school. Despite meddling in his affairs as much as I have, Voldemort has never challenged me directly. Hogwarts has a number of protective enchantments to keep him and his followers out. You would be quite safe there."

"At a school?" asked Mokuba. "What kind of school?"

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled. "A school of magic, of course. If what I suspect is true, then your connection to shadow magic should also allow you to perform modern spells as well. This would be an excellent opportunity to learn defensive magic. Since you are of age, you would be admitted as sixth-year students in the upcoming school year. Of course, Mr. Bakura, I would also offer you an invitation as well."

"I'm not one to turn tail and run like a coward," said Seto, "After everything we've been through, this Voldemort character doesn't frighten me."

"And I can assure you, that if this dark wizard of yours tries anything, that we are fully capable of defending ourselves in our own way," said Bakura. "Your enemy seems to have just begun to dabble in powers thousands of years old. He truly does not know just what, or who, he is dealing with."

Dumbledore studied Bakura for a few moments before standing. "I see. You are certain you will not require assistance?"

"Well," said Yugi thoughtfully. "We really don't know what to expect if he does decide to attack, but we've also got a good deal of experience dealing with all sorts of...um...weird situations. You've dumped a lot of information on us in a short time. Do you think we can maybe think about this?"

Dumbledore nodded. "That is a perfectly reasonable request." He reached into one of the pockets of his robes and produced three silver coins. Pulling his wand out of his other pocket, he gave it a little wave over the coins. They emitted a green hue for a moment before returning to their normal color. Pocketing his wand again, he handed out the coins. "With Voldemort working much more openly than before, I would prefer to act sooner rather than later. I will return here at the same time next week for your answer. Now, these coins have been enchanted. If you come to a decision sooner, or find yourselves in need of assistance, simply squeeze the coins and say 'Hogwarts'. I will be alerted at once."

"Thanks," said Yugi. "Hopefully we won't need them, uh, to call for help that is."

"I will remain optimistic," said Dumbledore. He turned his attention back to Seto. "Now, Mr. Kaiba, how is your hand doing?"
Seto lifted his hand out of the bowl and shook the excess liquid off of it before turning it over. The weird goo had washed off the rest of the blood, and the burns certainly looked a lot better than when Mokuba tried to clean it.

"Ah, excellent," said Dumbledore pleasantly, taking his wand back out and vanishing the bowl. He waved it once again and a bottle of the same liquid appeared where the bowl had stood. "This is an extra bottle. Soak it once more before going to bed this evening, and it should be good as new by morning."

After vanishing the extra chairs he summoned, Dumbledore gave another sweeping bow. "Many thanks for your patience, gentlemen. I will see you in a week's time." He straightened, turned, and with a loud pop, disappeared from the office.

"I see you didn't waste any time coming up here, Minerva. I've only been back for a few minutes," said Dumbledore cheerfully.

Professor McGonagall took a seat in front of him. "How did it go?"

"About as well as I expected, in a way. While they did not specifically say so, I can confirm that there is something going on with those teenagers – and it's not just Mr. Muto and Mr. Kaiba. I met a third one today, a Mr. Bakura. He had a similar golden artifact to the other two. As he was not depicted on the stone carvings, I did not realize he would also be in danger."

"So these boys have those shadow powers that You-Know-Who will be after?"

Dumbledore nodded. "I believe so. I also believe that they are hiding something powerful in those ancient artifacts of theirs. I watched Mr. Bakura's personality shift rather drastically. His physical appearance changed a bit too. I saw the same for a moment with Mr. Muto."

"What do you think it means, Albus?" asked McGonagall.

"At the moment, I am not quite sure. The Egyptians believed in resurrection and historical repetition in addition to life after death. There is a lot about these artifacts we don't know simply because there is a lack of information on the subject. The tablets themselves are worn away, being as old as they are. Even Bill Weasley confirmed that some of the ruins that held the records of all the Pharaohs have sections that were forcibly chipped away. Without these item bearers being more forthcoming, it will be difficult to get more information on them."

"Well you can hardly blame them for not being entirely truthful," McGonagall crossed her arms. "This is the first they've ever heard of our world. You probably sounded like you were uttering nonsense to them."

"They took it rather well, considering," said Dumbledore, turning in his seat slightly to pet Fawkes. The phoenix had been reborn that morning, and the tiny baby was still covered in the ashes of its former self. "For now, they have declined my offer."

"They have?" McGonagall shot to her feet. "You know that You-Know-Who will strike if he thinks they are unprotected. How could you leave them to that kind of fate?"

"These are people living their own lives, Minerva. I cannot just spirit them away against their will. Mr. Muto offered a compromise to consider my offer. I will return in a week's time to get their answers."
"A lot can happen in one week, Albus."

"I am quite aware, and left them the means to contact us should they need the assistance. I have to abide by their wishes. If they choose to accept, I can only hope they will be more open about their involvement with these strange artifacts at that time."

"And if they choose not to accept? What will you do then?"

Dumbledore brushed off stray ashes from his fingertips. "There is nothing I can do, Minerva. Forcing aid on those boys will only make them enemies, and if it's possible that they're as powerful as Voldemort may believe them to be, then I don't wish to have to fight a war from two fronts. Unfortunately, all we can do now is wait."
"So…what do you think?" asked Mokuba. He had ushered Yugi and Ryou out of his brother's office as soon as Dumbledore left in order to give him some peace before they went home for the day. Now, they were sitting around a table in the back of the employee cafeteria. "I mean, I'm almost positive Seto is still going to say no."

"I think…I'm going to go," said Yugi. "I'll have to talk it over with Grandpa of course, and I'm sure Yami and I will have a conversation or two about this, but…." Yugi looked down at the table. "Every time we seem to catch a break, something else happens to us. And we're always the ones stuck on the defensive, and usually, one or more of our friends ends up hurt. If this threat is as real as Professor Dumbledore makes it sound, I want to get out on the offensive and stop this guy before he can harm any of us."

Yugi turned to Ryou and frowned. Ryou was staring unblinking at the table. /Blah/ Spirit to host

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"Bakura?" asked Mokuba, "Are you okay?"

Ryou jumped. "Oh! I'm sorry, were you talking to me?" Turning a bit red, he ran a hand through his hair. "I'm sorry; I was conversing with the spirit of the Ring. He…isn't too keen on going, although I think it would be fascinating."

"You're originally from England, right?" asked Mokuba, "Is that why you want to go?"

"Maybe a little," Ryou admitted, "I'm looking forward to visiting again, but while there's a lot of danger involved, it would be nice to get out and do something." He laughed sheepishly, "I've always taken a back seat to my spirit, Yugi. Even when I was following you around in Duelist Kingdom, my spirit had ulterior motives that he took over to accomplish. And during Battle City, he teamed up with Marik to try and get the Millennium Items, and I spent that time first in the hospital, and then in the Shadow Realm! Despite that someone I've never met before may be after my Millennium Ring, I guess I'm a little excited to be able to take part in this fight."

/Blah/ Host to spirit

/~*~/

"Well, there's still time to think about it," said Mokuba. "I wish I could go with you, but I don't think I have any magic powers. It sounds like your connection to the Millennium Items is what's gonna let you go, and that won't work for me."

"You may not really have to worry about it though, Mokuba," said Ryou, "Knowing your brother's
aversion to magic, he'll end up staying here. You said yourself that he probably would refuse it.

"I know…but I think learning magic would be cool! And, bad guy aside, it would probably be the least crazy thing that's happened to us."

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Ron Weasley had to duck to avoid a flying duster as he walked inside the Burrow's kitchen. "What the – Mum? What's going on?"

Molly Weasley poked her head out from around the corner. "Careful to not track dirt into the kitchen, Ron, I just swept the floor!"

"What's going on? You haven't gone on this much of a cleaning binge since last summer at Grimmauld Place. I know Hermione arrives tomorrow but you've never gone to the extremes for her before. What, is the Minister coming to stay for the summer too?"

Mrs. Weasley shook her head, waved her wand towards the sofa, and the cushions immediately started to fluff. "No, but I spoke to Dumbledore at yesterday's Order meeting. He has extended Hogwarts invitations to three foreign exchange students. If they accept, they will stay here for the remainder of the summer, and with Harry and Hermione coming too, this house will be full and I want to make sure it's spotless!"

"Wait, so you're scrubbing the air in the house and you don't even know if they're coming?"

"Just let it go, Ron," said Ginny. She was sitting on the bottom step with a book in her hand. "Mum has been at this since she got up this morning. Even though these students haven't given their answer yet, Dumbledore apparently is sure they're going to say yes, so she's going to prep the house anyway. And if they don't come...well, it'll give Fred and George something to do when they're here. They haven't blown anything up in a while."

Mrs. Weasley either didn't hear Ginny or chose to ignore her. "Ron, your room had best be cleaned. Harry will have to stay in there with you, and we might have to put up the new students in Percy's and Charlie's rooms."

"What about Fred and George? Aren't they going to stay in that apartment they've got above their shop?"

At the mention of her twin sons, Ron saw his mother stiffen. Apparently she was still a little bit sore that they did not follow in their elder brothers' footsteps and finish school, although their new joke shop was doing very well.

"No, they've told me that they're going to stay here at times, too. I don't think the house will have ever been this full before, and there's the chance Bill will be visiting in from Egypt. He's been doing some work for Dumbledore recently and will be sitting in at the next Order meetings."

"C'mon Ron, go get your broom," said Ginny. "We'll go out back and shoot some goals before you end up having to tidy half the house without magic." Making sure their mother was out of earshot, she whispered, "and I'll tell you what I overheard at last night's meeting."

Ron waited to be out of the house before speaking again, broom slung over his shoulder. "I didn't really need my broom, did I?"

Ginny shrugged. "Not unless you want to set up some goal posts. I just wanted to get out of the house before Mum found out the garden still needs to be de-gnomed again."
"Ugh, I did that last week. So, what's going on?"

Ginny sat down in the grass. "Aside from his Gringotts work, Dumbledore's been having Bill look into some of the more dangerous tombs lately. Something in Egypt has caught You-Know-Who's eye, and I think that's why Dumbledore is inviting those exchange students here. I can't see any other reason for it."

"Maybe it's something that's done in their magical school and Hogwarts got them this year," said Ron, shrugging, "Of course, the timing's terrible with You-Know-Who being back."

Ginny plucked at a blade of grass. "Yea, maybe. But I overheard McGonagall last night. Dumbledore wasn't in Egypt. He was in Japan."

Ron scrunched up his face, confused. "You've lost me there. I thought these guys were from Egypt? Geez, how many places has he visited? Man sure gets around, doesn't he?"

"Yeah," said Ginny. "But we don't know what's going on with these foreign students until the end of the week. McGonagall said they weren't ready to just come on out here, so I think we'll hear something then. …But that's not all I overheard..." She sighed and looked her brother in the eyes. "Apparently the professors are not happy over the new Defense and Against the Dark Arts posting this year."

"Why?" Ron asked. "Who is it?"

Ginny shook her head. "They didn't say, but apparently Dumbledore had no say in the matter."

Ron scowled. "Sounds like last year all over again. Still...can't be worse than Umbridge."

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Seto sank back against his pillows and stared up at the ceiling in his bedroom. For the first time in a long while, he had escaped to bed well before midnight. For him, this was ungodly early, though he suspected the lack of sleep he had gotten over the past several days was finally catching up to him.

"I seem to have put you out today. I apologize," said Set. He phased out of the Millennium Rod and perched himself on the edge of the bed next to his host. "I did not realize that you would be so... averse to receiving our Millennium Rod, or that my search to find you would be so hazardous to your health."

Seto waved his hand dismissively, "I've gone without sleep before, and the feelings of migraines are nothing new when you have to deal with ineptitude on a daily basis."

"Be that as it may...at least that old man's remedy seems to do wonders for you, even more effective than the herbs and balms we created millennia ago. Your hand should not scar at all."

"Hn," Seto murmured, rubbing his left thumb along his opposite palm. The extra bottle of murtlap had helped enough that he didn't have to bandage it up again. It was perhaps the one good thing that had come out of today.

Set looked down at the Millennium Rod. "This was not how I envisioned our first meeting to go, but alas, there is nothing to be done about it now. I imagine you must have questions for me. You were not in the right mindset to try this earlier."

Seto looked over at Set. "I might. I'm also still trying to wrap my mind around the fact that I'll have you whispering in my ear all day. It's very distracting."
"This is an adjustment for me as well. For the past 5,000 years I have been alone, sealed within the Millennium Rod, waiting for not only the Pharaoh's return, but for my destined counterpart to wield my Item and assist him in this modern world. Though, I did not anticipate your strong dislike towards the Pharaoh and his vessel."

"Yugi I can tolerate. We have…a mutual respect towards one another. It's his pals and their insistence of friendship and togetherness, and that those beliefs alone will solve their problems is what drives me up the wall…that and the Pharaoh preaching about destiny every damn day. I don't know much about his friend Bakura. I've never formally met him, but I've seen enough of his spirit to know that he's no ray of sunshine."

"Having only been released from my solitude for less than a day, I cannot speak much for the boy that Bakura possesses. He seems to be kind-hearted, but it is the spirit from within the Millennium Ring that you must watch for, Seto. If he is still questing for all of the Millennium Items, it will only be a matter of time before he comes for this one."

"What happens if he does collect them all?"

Set thought back, and began pacing the room. "In the past, he wanted all seven items to unlock a great evil, and he succeeded, clouding all of Egypt in darkness. But the Pharaoh sealed away the monster, and his own memories, within the Millennium Puzzle. I cannot say for certain if collecting all of the items together in this day and age will release the same beast. If it does, and he is successful in doing so, we may be unable to defeat him this time. The key to its defeat is buried within the Pharaoh's lost memories."

Seto raised an eyebrow. "What about you?"

Set stopped. "What?"

Seto gestured. "You're here, and not some figment of my imagination. Obviously you survived whatever happened to know that this Pharaoh saved the day. You don't remember what it was if necessary to do it again?"

Set frowned. "It appears that when the Pharaoh locked away the great beast and sacrificed himself, all of my memories of the battle were also lost. It is a safe guard against the monster rising again. I can remember bits and pieces, but only of trivial events. Anything that may have occurred afterward the Pharaoh sacrificed himself is also clouded."

"Wouldn't it make sense then that the other Bakura's memories are also gone?"

"That would be the best case scenario, but it is no guarantee. He won't know the secret to defeating the ancient monster, at least. That knowledge was thoroughly removed from everyone and everything. But he may remember all or none of his past life. And I doubt he would be willing to share anything he does recall. From what I do remember, he very much enjoyed toying with all of us. I imagine time will not have changed that."

Set sighed. "What I know is this: Bakura cannot be allowed to get control of all seven Millennium Items. I know he attempted to barter for mine while it was in the care of the Ishtar clan, but he was unsuccessful in obtaining it."

"Obviously," Seto said. "Did you possess that nutcase Marik too?"

Set shook his head. "No. While the Millennium Necklace and Rod were in his family's care for generations, and his families' study of some of the ancient scriptures allowed them to use the powers
of the Items, I was unable to access the boy's mind, and with good reason. His strong resentment for his family's guided path created a strong darkness in his heart. Even if I were able to share a link with the boy's mind, I would not have, for fear of influencing that darkness. You saw yourself how dangerous he had become."

Seto reached over and took the Millennium Rod off of his bedside table, and turned it over in his hands. The item glistened off of the warm lamp light, having been cleaned up not long after entering the mansion. "The other Items. Who has them?"

Set waved a hand towards the window. "I do not know what happened to the other items after my time. The Millennium Rod and the Necklace were passed down through a sect of tomb keepers, which led them to the Ishtar's custody. Now, of course, the Necklace is in the Pharaoh's possession. I imagine the other items were handed down through other tomb keeper families until their present-day counterparts came to claim them. The Eye, Key, and Scales could be anywhere."

Set scoffed. "I think I know who has the Millennium Eye."

Set looked back to Seto. "I saw through some of your memories when we bonded. That Pegasus man...is he still an enemy?"

"Not in the same sense that he was back during his Duelist Kingdom tournament." Seto yawned. It had been a while since he felt this exhausted. "He's...mellowed out to be nothing more than an annoying business partner now."

"You must sleep." Set said, "Sealing the bond with a Millennium Item has tired you. I will not keep you up any longer. We will talk more in the morning once you have rested."

"First thing's first," Seto propped himself up against his headboard, placed the Rod next to his alarm clock, and leveled as much of a stern gaze with his ancient self as his tired eyes would allow. "Inheriting that thing wasn't my choice, but it seems it's too late to do anything about it now. It looks like you and I are stuck with each other. As much as I hate to say it, I can learn to tolerate...whatever this is that we have here." Seto gestured between them and then crossed his arms over his chest. "But I can't have you wrestling control from me while I'm in a meeting or terrifying my little brother. So we need to set some ground rules."

Set matched his gaze. "Very well...and what are these conditions?"

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"It figures it was only a matter of time before things got weird again," said Tristan. Yugi and Ryou had gathered their friends into the Muto's living room two days later. "I didn't think it was possible for someone else to be after the Millennium Items."

"It's more of a precaution," said Yugi, "We – and Kaiba – were invited to go to this school to learn how to fight this guy on their terms. Hopefully we won't be caught off guard so easily like we have been before."

"It's too bad we can't go with you," said Téa, "But we'll support you even from the other side of the world."

"Even worse - it's too bad that you'll have to put up with Kaiba," said Joey, "Try not to pull all your hair out by the second day."

"I can't believe he was invited in the first place. You know how he reacts to anything magic-related," said Tristan.
"Mokuba is pretty certain that Kaiba will decline the offer," said Ryou, "But we're going to go back and see him tomorrow, and then try to make contact with Dumbledore again."

"I hope you boys remember to be careful," said Grandpa Muto, "You might be painting targets on your backs just by going."

"We can't always play on the safe side though, Grandpa," said Yugi sadly. "Too many people have gotten hurt. I don't want to leave you guys either, but by going away, we might take their eyes off of you completely. It'll be safer for everyone if we go. And, like Bakura said earlier, aside from the saving the world bit, this is a chance of a lifetime to go and learn about a completely different culture! It's not like Domino High would given us this chance for even a normal exchange school."

Grandpa nodded. "That's true. But still, I imagine with this kind of threat, this Dumbledore fellow will want to send you both off immediately. I'd pack a few bags ahead of time. There's no telling how often you'll be able to come home and visit."

"Are you sure you'll be okay all alone, Grandpa?" Yugi asked. "I feel bad leaving the shop all to you."

"Don't sweat it, Yug'," said Joey, "We'll give Gramps a hand, won't we guys!"

"That's right!" said Tristan.

"Take your phone with you, Yugi, and let us know how you're doing at your new school," said Téa. "The next school year will seem so empty without you."

"Ugh," Joey groaned and elbowed Tristan in the arm, "Without Yugi to go around adventuring and saving the world, we'll have no excuse to ditch class anymore!"

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"I see we will need to get that painting framed again, sir."

Seto glanced over to where Roland was looking. The shattered glass had been cleaned off of the floor by the overnight cleaning crew. "I didn't aim for it…this time."

Roland silently chuckled to himself. It wouldn't be the first – or even the second time – that he had to have a wall decoration removed and either restored or replaced due to his employer's temper. The last time this had happened, Dartz had been in the middle of his corporate takeover. He watched Seto's rage get closer to its tipping point as Pegasus got on the video-call to claim he was behind it all. Of course, they didn't find out until later that Pegasus had nothing to do with it, but it didn't stop Seto from taking the first item he could grab and hurl it angrily into the wall.

"May I?" Roland gestured to the now-empty chair in front of his boss's desk.

Taking the barely-heard murmur as a yes, he sat and watched his charge through his dark sunglasses. "You look…troubled, sir."

Seto looked up from staring at the weird coin Dumbledore had left him two days ago in one hand, and the miraculous healing his other hand had accomplished just by sitting in what looked like nothing more than dirty water. "I look troubled," he repeated. "Gee, I can't imagine why. It can't be because after all this time of believing magic did not exist, I had that turned on its head not once, but twice this week. Of course, Yugi knew better than to rant in my face again, so the only way he could possibly get me to agree with him is to sic some old hunk of gold on me. Because I can't be in control of my own destiny unless some spirit who looks just like me from 5,000 years ago is
muttering in my head. And now, because of all that, some tyrant on another continent takes one look at an ancient rock and decides that his own brand of magic – which by all accounts shouldn't exist in the first place – isn't enough for him and he's going to have to want this too. But no, I'm not troubled at all."

Roland sat back and watched his employer vent. This wasn't the first time he had listened to him rant about Yugi's insistence of destiny, and he was sure it wouldn't be the last. Though with the Millennium Rod now in his boss's possession, he was sure the outbursts would start slowing down. When Seto had finally finished, he spoke. "It makes you wonder what a normal, mundane life is truly like, doesn't it, sir?"

"Apparently, if you breathe just once in the same space as Yugi Muto, your life will never be normal. I'll get used to Set, in time. At least he's agreed not to intentionally drive me up the wall, but magic - outside of the Millennium Items, being real?" He turned the coin Dumbledore left him over in his hands. "I shouldn't be considering this, Roland."

"I understand it is a lot to take in, sir. From what I heard, Mokuba believes you're to turn down the invitation."

"For my own sanity, I should," Seto snapped irritably, "Anything to do with Yugi lately has left me with nothing but trouble. We had just gotten over the fiasco with Paradius. I'm getting sick and tired of it. The old man and his letter was just icing on the cake."

"If Professor Dumbledore arrived last week, you would have thrown him out of the building and not spared a second thought to any of this," said Roland. "But I believe when Mr. Muto handed that Millennium Item to you, it was...a step in admitting that there have been a lot of supernatural...incidents occurring lately. Not everything can be easily explained by science, although I know you try your best."

"Hn." Seto scowled. "Even so, it seems whether or not I choose to accept Dumbledore's offer, this Voldemort character is going to come eventually. It'll only be a matter of time before he connects me to that tablet."

"From the conversation you all had, that's what I gathered as well, sir."

Seto looked at Roland curiously for a moment, before leaning back in his chair. He fiddled with the coin again. "If you were me in this scenario, what would you do?"

Roland looked taken back at the seemingly out-of-the-blue question. "If I were you..." he said, mulling this over, "I would, of course, be weighing my options. Speaking as myself and not you in this moment, I have witnessed a lot of weird magic coming from these items." He tapped the edge of the Millennium Rod. "Now, I know they are powerful, but I don't know how they work, and having just gotten one yourself, neither really do you. If I were you, in this scenario, and I chose to decline the Professor's offer for protection, I would probably try to learn more about this item, and how to use its magic, if for nothing more than mere safety. This, of course, would mean you would have to spend time with those who know about these items, so Mr. Muto or Mr. Bakura, and as I say this, I realize how riveting that concept is for you. Because when this Voldemort comes to pay you a visit, he will probably use his magic to try and get his way. You will want to have something similar in kind to use against him."

Sensing Seto's upcoming objection at potentially spending time with his rival, he added, "I am more than willing to do whatever is necessary to protect you and Mokuba, Mr. Kaiba. However, since this man and his followers have such a vendetta against us mere normal folk, I doubt they will be intimidated or stopped by bullets."
Seto was certain that a bullet would travel faster than however long it took some idiot with a stick to spit out a spell, but Roland had a point. Wizards probably had some defense against non-magical attacks. Seto's scowl faded, and it was replaced by his usual unreadable mask. "…And if I accepted?"

Roland leaned back in his seat. "While accepting this offer would also go against everything you had previously believed in, it would put you on a much more even playing field for when that time comes. I take it if you went to this school as a student, you would learn magic to defend yourself against these dark wizards. You would be able to fight them on even terms, which might throw them off guard. …And to be frank, sir, you are one of the most intelligent people I have ever met, having watched over you since you were adopted. I doubt you would do any less than excel at this school. Your drive to be the best in everything you do, despite having led you into a bit of trouble where Mr. Muto is concerned, would probably be useful here. You'll probably pick up and master that stuff quicker than students who have been at the school from the very beginning."

"So you're suggesting I agree to this?"

"I would suggest you do both. For better or worse, you've got that Millennium Rod now, so you might as well figure out how to use it, if not from Mr. Muto then from the spirit of your ancestor. And then, yes, you should go to that school and learn whatever it is you can, not just about waving a magic stick and hoping something happens, but it seems going into the heart of this man's territory is the only way you're going to get any information about Voldemort. And you and I both know that like any obstacle, you're going to study it, find its weakness, and then destroy it."

Seto grimaced. "When did you start thinking like me?"

Roland stood up and headed towards the door. With his hand on the handle, he turned back. "I know none of these options are particularly ideal to you, sir, but it's not just you that you have to think about. Again, we both know that it will only be a matter of time before someone targets Mokuba."

One last thought popped into his head. "And…" he began with a sly grin that looked foreign on the man's normally blank face, "To end on a positive note, sir... if Mr. Muto also chooses to take Dumbledore up on his offer, you will have something else to excel and one-up him in."

Roland could have sworn he saw a ghost of a smile on his boss's face as he returned to his own office.

Seto turned the coin over in his hand again before dropping it into his desk drawer. "I can't believe I'm going to do this," he muttered to himself.

"It is not an easy decision to make, Seto. There are dangers to both going and staying here. Perhaps you should converse with the Pharaoh and Bakura. They might be able to help you reach a decision."

"Knowing Yugi, he probably already accepted Dumbledore's offer. He can't help but play the hero in everything he does."

"I wouldn't be too sure. There is a lot at stake for the Pharaoh and his vessel. I'm sure there are people here that they care about as well. Their wellbeing may mean as much to him as your brother to you. You two may have more in common than you think."

"Hn." Seto withdrew from his soul corridor to the ringing on his office phone. "What is it?"

"Mr. Kaiba, there is a Mr. Muto and a Mr. Bakura here to see you. They say it's urgent."
Seto rolled his eyes. That was certainly quick. "They're only saying that because they don't think they'll make it past the lobby."

"Should I turn them away?"

Seto sighed. "No. I think I know why they're here. Send them up."

He drummed his fingers across the desk and returned to focusing on the new development budget proposal for the next duel disk.

Yugi finally poked his head around the doorway to the office. "Um…Kaiba?" he asked nervously. "Can we come in?"

"If you're worried that I'll toss you down an elevator shaft – or whatever gruesome fate your mind has made up - for the stunt your Pharaoh friend pulled the other day, then you're mistaken," said Seto, without bothering to look up from his laptop. "I may be bitter, but I'm not stupid."

Visibly relieved, Yugi chuckled awkwardly and ran a hand through his spiky hair. "So…Mokuba says you were going to refuse Professor Dumbledore's offer. Is that still true?"

Seto looked up from his computer screen. "When did he tell you that?"

"Right after he ushered us out of here that day," said Ryou.

"That was several days ago," said Seto. "There's been time to evaluate Dumbledore's offer, and quite frankly, there are some matters that would need to be addressed before I drop everything and jump halfway across the globe."

"Well, I'm a little surprised, but glad you're considering it! Yami and I talked about it for a while last night," said Yugi, "I've essentially come to my decision, but I've got some concerns too."

"Well…we don't have to wait for the week to be up," said Ryou. He pulled Dumbledore's odd coin out of his pocket. "We can contact him now, remember?"

"Then let's get this over with," said Seto. "I need to be at the R&D lab in two hours."

Ryou nodded, closing his fist around the coin. "Hogwarts!"
Debate

/Text/ Spirit to host

/Text/ Host to spirit

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It hadn't taken long for Dumbledore to arrive after Ryou activated the coin. Roland had escorted the eccentric old man into the office and resumed the same guarded stance by the door as the last time Dumbledore had visited.

"Thank you for contacting me in such short time," said Dumbledore, pleasantly. He took a seat beside Ryou with Yugi and Seto facing him from over on the opposite couch. "Ah, excellent, I see the murtlap I left you has gone to good use, Mr. Kaiba. Now…is it safe to assume a decision has been made?"

"Just about," said Yugi. "I think the general consensus is that we're going to go to this school and help you fight Voldemort. But we have some concerns that need to be addressed before we truly accept your offer."

"I see," said Dumbledore, "Please, continue. Let us get all of our worries off our chest while there is still time to do so."

"Well," said Yugi, frowning, "I don't know how much you know about some of the…uh… adventures my friends and I have been on lately, but we're no stranger to having some madman after us for one reason or another. I think, overall, that we handled each of these threats pretty well."

Yugi looked down at the Puzzle hanging from his neck and then at his hands clasped in his lap. "But a lot of those times, they always struck first, throwing us off guard. And they always went after my friends just to mess with me. I've had my best friend brainwashed to try and kill me before, and fighting him was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. It was only by a small miracle that we both made it safely out of that situation."

"But the one good thing, I guess, of all of that happening, is that I was usually close by for my friends when they needed help. So…I guess what I'm trying to get to, Professor, is how can I protect my friends if I'm halfway across the world?"

Dumbledore nodded pensively. "Do your friends possess the same magical abilities or artifacts?"

Ryou shook his head. "No, they don't."

"The fact of the matter is that this Voldemort has seen footage of the Battle City tournament," said Seto, "Therefore, he would have seen Wheeler out with the rest of Yugi's friends while Yugi and I were tag dueling. And then all of them were gathered during the finals on the blimp. It wouldn't be rocket science to find out that Yugi's weakness is his circle of cheerleaders."

"I see," said Dumbledore. "You are certain they will need protection?"

"I would say so," said Ryou, "Joey and Tristan are pretty street smart, but I don't think any of our friends will stand a chance against these wizards if they're going to fight with magic."

"I just want to be sure that Voldemort won't be able to target them while I'm away. I can't help fight a
battle from two sides," said Yugi. "My friends have been through enough. In order for me to be on board with this…I have to know that my grandfather and the others are safe."

"When we are finished here, I can arrange for wards to be placed upon your homes, and the homes of your friends, so the Death Eaters will not be able to target them," said Dumbledore. "Would that be satisfactory?"

"Surely you can't expect them to stay home all the time," said Ryou, "We're all still in high school. I imagine when the Death Eaters find out that they can't get to us from home, they will just wait for an opening…and we all congregate in the same place every day!"

"I can arrange for wards to be placed at your school as well," said Dumbledore. "While powerful, the enchantments are not difficult to cast." He turned his gaze to Seto. "You've been fairly quiet so far, Mr. Kaiba. What do you have to say about all of this?"

Seto crossed his arms over his chest. "Honestly, if Yugi's so intent on continuing to protect his friends all the time, they'll never stand up and fight for themselves, and instead will just wait for him - and by extension, me - to bail them out of trouble again. But I also understand his reasoning for it, since I would do no different for Mokuba. With what you're proposing, some spell protecting the building isn't going to do much good if no one's in it. Yugi's friends aren't wizards. They can't just disappear and reappear at whim. If someone decided to pay them a visit, what are they supposed to do? Wheeler's loud mouth won't do him any favors against someone casting spells."

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled. "Ah. And before I commit to anything further, I suppose you have qualms of your own to address?"

"I do." Seto leveled an even gaze at Dumbledore. "We all can't just go at the drop of a hat. I imagine if Yugi and Bakura decide to leave with you, it'll just be written off as some kind of student exchange program. The only responsibilities they have are to school, helping out in Solomon Muto's shop, or the occasional Duel Monsters game in their buddy circle. Good for them. I, however, am Mokuba's legal guardian. I have him to care of and run this company. I won't leave him here to be targeted by another rampaging lunatic."

"I understand that you are responsible for a great many individuals here. We will of course place wards around your home, and this magnificent building you have."

"That might seem acceptable to Yugi, but not to me. The last time I was separated from Mokuba, he was kidnapped. Putting a bubble on our home or even his school won't take away the fact that he'll still end up as bait when Voldemort comes for us. He's been through too much already for someone his age."

"I think I know where you may be headed, Mr. Kaiba," said Dumbledore. "I have already been in contact with the Japanese Ministry and the headmistress of the Himato Academy. Magical children are added to the schools' lists at birth and once they are of age, receive invitation letters to their respective schools. None of you, your younger brother included, are listed on any current or future admissions list. Unfortunately, that means I cannot admit him into Hogwarts."

"What about us?" asked Ryou. "You invited us to your school."

"I believe I mentioned on our last visit that the magic from your strange artifacts should be a sufficient channel to let you perform modern magic. Bringing you three to Hogwarts had to go through our Ministry of Magic, and it took quite some convincing. Bartering for one more admission would not be wise at this point in time."
"Regardless, Mokuba's eleven," said Seto, "He'll be out of school within the next few days. I can't expect him to sit on house arrest all summer. He has a life to live too."

Dumbledore held up his withered hand. "I believe I have a solution."

"What would that be?" asked Ryou. He could feel Bakura growing restless from within his soul room.

"Obviously I cannot expect your friends and family to sit and thumb twiddle for months on end. I will of course have protective enchantments placed on your homes, and place of business," said Dumbledore, "But, if it will ease your mind further, I can have an associate or two of mine stationed here to help keep an eye on things. They would be discreet and would not meddle in your friends' affairs. If a situation arose, someone would be there to handle it until additional help could arrive."

"If I'm supposed to leave my brother in this stranger's care, I want to meet him before I leave town," said Seto.

"Certainly!" said Dumbledore, "I will make the necessary arrangements when I leave here today. Are those your only concerns?"

"I'll need to be able to return to Japan every so often for work," said Seto. "This is non-negotiable. I just went through two hostile takeover attempts within the last three years. I won't let something else happen here simply because I went gallivanting off to learn magic tricks."

Dumbledore stroked his beard thoughtfully. "How often will you need to return for business?"

"A few days a month. Most of the work can be done remotely, but there are some matters that I would need to be in attendance. You will have plenty of advance notice, and in return I expect my travel arrangements to be honored."

"I see," said Dumbledore. "Would you be willing to travel with a…chaperone of sorts? For your protection, of course."

Seto huffed. "I'm more than capable of taking care of myself, but if you find it necessary, then I suppose I'll have to agree to it."

Dumbledore nodded. "Very well. Is there anything else?"

"Uh, when are we supposed to leave?" asked Yugi.

"Ideally, as soon as possible, but I understand that arrangements across time zones will – why, hello again, Mokuba."

Mokuba froze, turning beet red as the four occupants of the room turned to look at him. Roland closed the door after him. The younger Kaiba dropped his school bag at the foot of the couch and grabbed a seat next to his brother. "Um…hello, Professor."

"And how are you on this fine day? Your brother has mentioned that you will be out of school soon. I take it you're excited for the summer?"

"Uh, yea. I suppose so?" He looked quizzically up at his brother, but Seto did not return his gaze.

Dumbledore turned back to the others. "As I was saying, I will return to England and make arrangements for a few of my associates to be stationed here. When we return, if you could take us to any specific locations that need wards, we will do so at that time."
"Where are we supposed to stay?" asked Ryou.

"A wizarding family has agreed to lodge you until the start of term. Your official Hogwarts letters stating your school equipment lists will arrive sometime in July."

"How are we going to pay for our school supplies?" said Ryou, "I don't think the yen will do us much good, and I imagine we can't buy our school books in any normal store."

"Hogwarts has special accounts at Gringotts Bank to help students purchase their equipment. Of course, you may also bring your own funds to exchange into wizard currency. Your host family will take you to get all of the supplies you need at that time. On my return home this evening, I will stop at the bank and get the most current exchange-rate tables for you."

"Well," Yugi said after a brief pause, glancing up at Seto next to him before looking back to Dumbledore. "I guess…I guess that covers everything."

Dumbledore clasped his hands in front of him. "Very good. Now, as it seems I have addressed your concerns, perhaps you can reciprocate with one of mine."

Yugi blinked. "What kind of concern?"

"Well, as you, Mr. Kaiba, have a responsibility to your brother and those in your employ, I have a similar duty to all of the teachers and students in my school. Now, however brief our last meeting may have been, I have noticed something."

Dumbledore looked at them over the top of his half-moon spectacles. "I have not seen the supposed shadow magic that Voldemort is seeking. But I have seen possession in you, Mr. Bakura. I believe I asked a question that did not go answered on my last visit, that I believe I know the answer to. Your necklace is not just trendy jewelry, and there is magic within it, correct?"

Ryou looked down at the Ring.

"I am not asking merely for my own knowledge. If you agree to come to my school, I will offer you as much aid and protection against Voldemort as I can. But I also have an obligation to protect my students and staff. If your items are dangerous and have the potential to harm others, I must be made aware. Now, it is obvious that you three know more about shadow magic and the like than I. I am not asking for a comprehensive lesson on your magic. In my previous visit, I have tried to give you a basic understanding of what the dangers are in our world. Today, I am merely requesting the same in return."

"It's…hard to find a place to begin," said Yugi. "Since you've already seen Bakura, I guess that's where we'll have to start."

Dumbledore held up his hands. "I ask only for honesty."

"...They're called Millennium Items," said Ryou. "They come from Egypt, and are about 5,000 years old. This is the Millennium Ring. Yugi has the Millennium Puzzle, and…" he looked around curiously. "...Kaiba has the Millennium Rod…wherever it is."

Seto rolled his eyes. "I moved it to the briefcase under my desk. It's not like I'm going to leave it out for the secretaries to gawk over. Unfortunately – or fortunately, depending on your point of view – I got stuck with the hunk of gold that can't be worn around my neck."

Dumbledore cleared his throat. "Are these the only Millennium Items?" He watched curiously as the Millennium Ring activated and Ryou switched places with his spirit.
"No," said Bakura. "There are others. But since you came here the last time with photographs from the tombs, I believe you already knew that answer."

"Merely seeking confirmation of my theory. And may I ask your name? I can clearly see you are not Ryou Bakura."

Yami Bakura gave a low chuckle. "I am the spirit from within the Millennium Ring. My name is Bakura."

Mokuba raised an eyebrow. "Seriously?" At his brother's sharp look, he shrank back against the edge of the sofa.

"...And does the Millennium Puzzle or the Millennium Rod also contain some sort of spirit?"

Yugi glanced up to Seto, but his rival did not meet his gaze. "...Yes. I...my spirit goes by Yami."

Dumbledore looked at the Millennium Puzzle. "If I may, Mr. Muto, is Yami the figure depicted on the tablet in the museum?"

Yugi nodded. There was no point hiding this from him. "He's a Pharaoh from over 5,000 years ago."

"Fascinating," said Dumbledore, and he turned to Seto. "May I also assume you have some sort of spirit from the Millennium Rod, and that is the other figure depicted on the tablet?"

Seto gave a slight nod, glaring down at Yugi, who seemed to be unconsciously fidgeting with the Puzzle.

"If these Millennium Items contained spirits of those who held them in the past, I would deduce then that the Shadow Magic is in there with them. But I must ask - are these Millennium Item spirits and their Shadow Games putting you in any danger?"

Seto rolled his eyes. "Wearing that Millennium Puzzle has essentially turned Yugi into a danger magnet. But if you're asking if his split personality is going to murder him in his sleep, then no."

"We have been sealed in these Items for thousands of years, waiting for our destinies to be fulfilled. Until then, we are bound to our hosts," said Bakura, "Harming our reincarnations would be counterproductive."

From within his mind, Ryou decided not to point out the complete irony in his statement, and rubbed at the faint scar along his arm.

"I see...and what would that destiny be, if I may ask?"

"That," Bakura snapped, "Is none of your concern, old man."

Yugi frowned at Bakura's dark half. "I think what he means to say, Professor, is that it's best for fewer people to know the secrets of the Millennium Items. It's caused a lot of trouble over the years, and for your own safety, we want to keep that close."

"Thank you for being honest thus far. I understand your desire to not tell me everything. To confirm my suspicions, I hazard a guess that the shadow magic that Voldemort is seeking is only channeled through your Millennium Items. Is that not correct?"

Bakura narrowed his eyes. "The Millennium Items do have the power to call on the Shadows, but not just anyone can wield them. Their destinies were predetermined thousands of years ago. If
Voldemort is not one of those chosen few, these items will be useless to him. He will be thoroughly disappointed, and honestly, I hope I'm there to witness it."

There was a quick flash of gold. "Bakura!"

The tomb robber feigned shock at Yami's sudden outburst. "I don't see why you're so offended, Pharaoh. Over time, my Ring has caused at the very least insanity to countless who were not worthy to control it. Your Millennium Puzzle might have done the same if it hadn't been smashed in a box until your runt of a vessel put it back together."

Dumbledore watched the other Yugi jump up angrily off the couch – or, he would have, if Seto hadn't grabbed the back of his jacket to keep him in his seat. Clearing his throat, he began again. "Are there any other Millennium Item bearers I should know about? It is not far off to assume that Voldemort will seek them out once he realizes that you three are out of his reach."

"There is only one other Millennium Item wielder, and I can assure you, he is safer from Voldemort than any of us," said Bakura irritably, "He comes and goes as he wishes, and is impossible to find. He will not need your protection."

Seto glanced at Bakura for a moment. Only one other? I suppose Pegasus really doesn't have the Millennium Eye anymore.

"I see," said Dumbledore. "Now that we have established that Shadow Magic does indeed exist, will it be a danger to my students and staff?"

"Kaiba's spirit hasn't been out to play long enough to have a reason to summon the Shadows. The Pharaoh hasn't tapped into it in ages. They're too high-and-mighty to just up and casually use it."

Dumbledore studied Bakura carefully. "That doesn't quite answer my question, but I take it that this is something you have done before?"

Bakura shrugged. "The Shadows are a realm of darkness where souls are sent for eternal suffering after losing a Shadow Game. I've sent many fools there over the centuries I've spent trapped in the Millennium Ring. Being sent to the Shadows can be considered a fate worse than death. While I...enjoy tapping into its power, it is not something done lightly."

Dumbledore was silent for a moment. When he spoke again, it was in a no-nonsense voice that seemed more natural coming from Kaiba. "I must make it quite clear that if you are to attend Hogwarts, I cannot have you performing Shadow Games or taking the souls of anyone in the castle."

Bakura squared a hard look back at Dumbledore. "My host has already agreed to attend your school, against my judgment. While I am perfectly capable of handling any threat your kind will send his way, I will abide by his wish. And only for my host's sake, I will abide by yours and will not submit anyone under your watch to the Shadow Realm. But let me make this quite clear, old man. I need Bakura in order to survive in this world. If these Death Eaters target him, I will do whatever is necessary to protect him, and if that means summoning the Shadows to keep him safe, then I will do so, with or without your approval."

"What he means, Professor," Yami said quickly, glaring again at Bakura, "Is that we're grateful for your offer of protection while we deal with Voldemort, and will not do anything to jeopardize your trust like that. Shadow Magic will be considered an absolute last resort and will not be used against anyone in the school."

"Thank you," said Dumbledore, rising from his seat. "In response to your concerns earlier, I will
return to England, and make arrangements for associates of mine to keep watch over your friends and family. We will place the necessary wards upon our arrival, and then I will take you to the Weasley household for the remainder of the summer. I will send an owl to each of you prior to our arrival, but please be ready to leave for that time."

Yugi, having taken control back from the Pharaoh, felt Seto tense up next to him as he nodded. "Okay."

Seto looked down at Mokuba and frowned. "I'm going to guess shipping us out to England as soon as possible – other than to keep an easier eye on us – is so we adjust to adjust to whatever culture shock we would face by going to Hogwarts. That's all well and good, but there is no way I'll be able to stop everything and leave today or even tomorrow. Yugi and Bakura maybe, but I have commitments here that need to be taken care of before I go. One of your people is going to be here anyway babysitting Mokuba so it's not like Voldemort's Death Eaters are going to jump me the moment Yugi leaves."

"Very well," said Dumbledore. "I do realize that I am asking a lot of all of you. When you have your affairs in order, just let my associate know and we will arrange your transport."

Seto gave a slight nod.

"On that matter, will you two be alright going on such short notice, or will you need additional time?"

Yugi and Ryou looked at each other. "I think...we'll be okay. So long as we can maybe have one last group gathering with our friends before we leave?"

Dumbledore nodded. "Perfectly acceptable. Now, I believe that will do it for today, gentlemen. Please look for my owl, and do not hesitate to use the coins I gave you if you think of anything else or require aid."

Once Dumbledore had apparated away, Mokuba turned to his older brother with widened eyes. "...Are...are you actually going, Seto?"

Seto returned to his seat behind his desk. "I must be out of my mind," he muttered, opening his laptop.

"Well...we ought to go home and start to get our stuff together," said Ryou, nodding Yugi towards the door. "I'm sure you want to spend some time with your Grandpa before we leave, right Yugi?"

"Uh, yeah," said Yugi. He turned back towards Seto. "I suppose we'll see you in England, Kaiba."

Taking the slight mutter as an acknowledgement, he left the room with Ryou.

"Mokuba, can you go down to Lab 1 and have the technicians set up the Duel Simulator? Let them know I'll be on my way shortly."

Mokuba frowned. "Sure... Uh...are you alright, Seto?"

"I'm fine. I just need to finish this up and then I'll be down."

Mokuba watched his brother begin to type something in his usual lightning-fire pace and turned to Roland, but he didn't speak or move from his spot by the door. Sighing, Mokuba trudged out of the office. He'd weasel whatever was bugging him out of Roland later.

Once the door was closed, Roland walked forward and stood in front of the desk. "I'm surprised you
agreed to go."

Seto raised an eyebrow and continued to work without looking up. "If I recall correctly, you were the one encouraging me to leave in the first place."

"Yes…but that was also before finding out that Mokuba would not be able to accompany you."

"As much as I would prefer to stay here, I won't wait around for this madman to find me. I need to be able to fight this, and if I have to travel across the world to do it, then so be it."

"And Kaiba Corp, sir?"

"Once I end up at that school, I'm leaving you in charge of the day-to-day operations and I'll check in remotely as my new schedule will allow. I'll return for a few days every so often for the meetings and development updates that I can't avoid. We'll arrange some sort of timetable before I leave for England."

"What about Mokuba?"

"Mokuba is to go to school, hang out with his friends, and continue to live as normal a life as he can. I do not want him taking over for me while I'm gone. An eleven-year old doesn't need to deal with my workload."

"Of course, Mr. Kaiba."

Seto stopped typing and straightened in his chair. "Dumbledore may trust the lackeys he posts out here, but I don't. If anything seems wrong…." 

Roland held up a hand. "With or without these wizards, I won't let anything happen to Mokuba in your absence."

"I know," Seto sighed. "You're the only other person I trust to keep him out of trouble."

Roland raised an eyebrow. "What about Yugi's friends?"

Seto's gaze turned icy. "No thanks. He likes them, and if he wants to hang out with Wheeler and the others, then I won't stop him. But trouble follows them as much as it does us. Wheeler is just as much a bait target as Mokuba. He and his buddy Taylor have street credit, but I still wouldn't trust them to protect him."

The following day passed in a blur. Owls arrived promptly at noon at both Ryou's apartment and the Kame Game Shop, and Dumbledore had made his appearance not an hour later, with three wizards that would be rotating on duty: Emmeline Vance, Sturgis Podmore, and Hestia Jones. They had spent the better part of the afternoon on a tour throughout Domino, making sure protective wards were placed, ending their day back at the Game Shop where his friends had gathered to see them off.

Yugi was surprised that Mokuba had come, though his brother did not make an appearance, and Yami reminded him that Mokuba was just as much a friend to them as Joey or Téa, and would also miss them when they departed. He hadn't expected the younger Kaiba to pull him and Ryou aside from the festivities in his living room and into the closed shop.

"This is for you guys," Mokuba had said, placing a shiny new phone into Yugi's hand. "Seto built it from scratch, and the signal runs through our satellites and not a normal cell carrier, so you don't
have to worry about being near a tower. There's one for your grandfather too, plus one for the gang. I gave that one to Joey. Phone numbers are auto-programmed into it. All of your friends are in there, and so is mine, in case you want to say hi or something and Seto's not around."

Yugi stared down at the device in his hand, mouth hung open. "Thanks, Mokuba! This is...well, uh...unexpected. When did he have the time to do this?"

Mokuba shrugged. "Seto was up late last night at the lab, but I have a feeling he had been working on them since that Dumbledore guy's first visit. I think he knew all along that you were going to go. I guess he figured you would want to be able to stay in touch with the gang here. And, well...he didn't want Joey to end up getting his number so his cell phone would be out of the question."

Yugi heard Ryou snicker next to him. "I could hear him saying that."

Mokuba hesitated for a moment, and then threw his arms around Yugi. "I'm gonna miss you," he said sadly. "It's gonna be so quiet around here."

"Oh, Mokuba, it'll be alright," said Ryou. He patted Mokuba's shoulder. "I'm sure we'll be back home before you know it."

Mokuba drew back and wiped a stray tear from his eye. "You'll...um...can you try to promise me something?"

Yugi nodded. "Of course."

"Well...it won't be easy. But can you try to make sure Seto...well...takes care of himself over there?"

Yugi and Ryou exchanged worried glances. "Is he alright?" Yugi asked.

Mokuba looked down at his sneakers. "He's not sick or anything...but I remember what happened with our step-father years ago. Seto still sometimes thinks he can get away with a diet of only coffee and two hours of sleep. At his desk. I'm not gonna ask for a miracle or anything, but just look out for him?"

Yugi put his hand reassuringly on Mokuba's shoulder. "No problem, Mokuba. I'm sure the spirit in the Millennium Rod will help us out too."

Mokuba nodded thoughtfully. "Yeah...if some voice in his head nags him enough to go to bed, he just might! Good idea!" He laughed, "I guess we should return to your party before they send out the search for us."

Mokuba's ride home an hour later seemed to signal the end of the party. He waved goodbye from the car window as the vehicle sped away. Once Yugi dragged his packed bags down towards the front door, he went off to look for Joey. There was one thing he had left to do before they met with Hestia Jones.

"Yami has a favor to ask." he said.

Joey leaned against the door separating the house from the shop. "Sure thing, pal. What's up?"

Yugi put a hand on the Puzzle, and after a brief flash of golden light, Yami took over. "Keep an eye out on things. We trusted Dumbledore's word, but we don't know anything about this world we're going into. It would help put me – and especially Yugi – at ease to know you all are doing okay."

"Leaving ain't easy for him, I suppose. It's no picnic for us either, but we'll manage. Sure, school will
be quiet, and it'll be downright boring without you to duel or Kaiba to bother, but hey, a little bit of peace and quiet is good every once in a while."

"You'll let us know if anything seems out of the ordinary? Mokuba left a phone with Grandpa to contact us."

"You bet, Yug'. I got one too. Now go out there and do what you gotta do. I'm sure you'll kick that creep's butt so hard he won't know what hit him."

Yami lowered his head, smiling. "Thank you, Joey." He touched the Puzzle again and returned control to Yugi.

"Anytime. Now go find Bakura. Those guys outside are waitin' for you!"

Dragging a suitcase each behind them, Yugi and Ryou left the house. Dumbledore was waiting patiently on the other side of the street.

"Where are the others?" asked Ryou. "I thought Miss Jones was meeting us out here today. Something didn't happen already, did it?"

"Nothing that drastic, I assure you," said Dumbledore. "While you were inside, I set up Mr. Podmore and Miss Jones in a house centrally located between here and your friends' homes. Miss Vance is currently with Mr. Kaiba and his security chief. As Mr. Kaiba's home and business are a bit further out of the way, he as agreed to put her up in his home."

"Wow," said Yugi. That's...rather nice of him...

"Did Kaiba say when he was going to be joining us?" asked Ryou.

"Ah, not quite," said Dumbledore. "It's only been a day, of course, but he expressed quite clearly that he would be staying here at home through the beginning of July for young Mokuba's birthday, and then would make the journey. I offered to give him transportation home during the summer to see his brother, but he was quite adamant at staying here through that entire period of time."

"That's just a few weeks though," said Yugi. He looked back towards the front door of his house where Grandpa and his friends had gathered. Téa waved. Yugi waved back.

"Well...I think I'm ready," said Ryou. He waved back as well, and tightened his grip on the handle of his suitcase.

"Very good. Mr. Muto?"

Yugi gave one last look back at his home before turning to Dumbledore. "I'm ready."

"Excellent." Dumbledore reached into one of the long pockets of his robes and produced a tattered old sock. "This may look like an ordinary sock, but it has been enchanted into a Portkey. It allows us to travel to a specific location instantly. It will go off in the next few moments, so be sure to keep a grip on it, and above all else, do not let go once we depart."

With one hand gripping their luggage, they each grabbed hold of the sock. After a few seconds, Yugi felt a jerk around his navel as they spun off...

…and landed in a grassy field. Neither Yugi nor Ryou were upright after being dropped by the portkey, Yugi landing flat on his back and Ryou wobbling a few steps before dropping to his knees, gasping for breath.
Ryou didn't stand up until his head had stopped spinning. "Ugh…"

"Where are we?" Yugi asked, still sprawled on the ground.

"We are at the Burrow, or at least in the field around the house. The Burrow is home to the Weasleys and is very well protected."

"Is that it over there?" Ryou pointed to the strangest building he had ever seen. It was about seven stories high with multiple chimneys. Each floor from the second up looked like it was built with whatever spare parts may have been found at the time. The different levels were not even, and if Ryou had to guess, the house had to be reinforced with some kind of magic to keep it from collapsing.

"It is," said Dumbledore, reaching over to help Yugi to his feet. "Are you alright, Mr. Muto?"

"I think so," said Yugi, "That's going to take some getting used to."

"Portkeys are an uncomfortable way to travel, I admit," said Dumbledore, "But side-along apparition is not without its side effects either. Now, shall we be off? Molly will be expecting us."

Yugi was thankful that he and Ryou had rolling suitcases as they crossed the field. The closer they got to the lopsided house; he could also make out what looked like a chicken coop and a garage, though he couldn't see a car anywhere. There was a garden and an orchard around the side.

Dumbledore led them around the house to the back and rapped on the door.

They could hear shuffling on the other side of the door before a woman called out in a shaky voice. "Who is it?"

"It is I, Big Beard, bringing the Spike Brothers."

Yugi and Ryou looked at each other. *Spike Brothers?*

Dumbledore leaned down to them. "Codenames," he said softly. "To be sure visitors are who they claim to be, and not dark wizards in disguise."

The door opened to reveal a short, motherly-looking woman with fiery red curls. "Hello boys," she said, smiling, "I'm Molly Weasley. Now, don't just stand there in the doorway, come in, and we'll get you all settled." She stepped aside to let them pass and turned back to Dumbledore. "Will you be staying as well, Professor?"

"Afraid not, Molly. I have to meet with the Hogwarts staff to prepare the school for the next year."

"Of course," she nodded, and turned to look at Yugi and Ryou, who were taking in as much of her kitchen as possible, noticing that they seemed to be enthralled with the dishes that were cleaning themselves, and the grocery list that was being written without any writing utensil. "Weren't there supposed to be three of them?"

"Yes," said Dumbledore calmly, "Mr. Kaiba has some matters to take care of at home and will be joining at a later date this summer. Once he arrives, I will send along their equipment lists. Ah – don't fret, Molly. Order members are stationed in Domino and we put up wards before departing. He will be just fine. Now, I must be off. I will be in contact again in a few days."

Mrs. Weasley closed the door once he departed and turned to her two new charges. "Well, boys, welcome to the Burrow!"
Mrs. Weasley smiled warmly at them once introductions were made. "Are either of you hungry? I can fix something up for you while you unpack."

Yugi shook his head, "Thanks, Mrs. Weasley, but we ate before leaving home. Japan is eight hours ahead of your time."

Mrs. Weasley slapped a hand to her forehead. "Of course, I'm so used to Harry and Hermione visiting that I forgot you're not from around here. Come, let me take you to your room. I hope you boys don't mind sharing. It's going to be a crowded house this summer."

She led them up the winding staircase and stopped at a door on the second floor. On the way up, Ryou gawked at a set of knitting needles on an armchair making some sort of sweater by themselves. "You'll be in Percy's room. I hope it's comfortable enough. Now you boys settle in and let me know if you need anything."

"Percy won't mind?" asked Ryou.

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Weasley, and Ryou thought he detected sadness in her voice. "Percy moved out of the house into a London flat last year. We...well...he doesn't visit."

Judging by Mrs. Weasley's sudden mood change, there was a story behind that, but Ryou didn't think it right to ask. "Thank you, Mrs. Weasley. I'm sure this will be fine. It was very kind of you to take us in for the summer."

Mrs. Weasley waved a hand dismissively. "Think nothing of it, dears. I'll be downstairs prepping for dinner if you need me."

"Will you need help?"

"Thank you for offering, Ryou dear, but I'll be fine."

"Can I ask you something, Mrs. Weasley?" Yugi asked. "Professor Dumbledore told us that there were wards protecting your house. How far out do they go?"

"Ah! Of course, you won't want to spend all summer in the house." Mrs. Weasley nodded knowingly, and pointed out the window. "You see the tree line out the window there? Not the orchard, but past the field. Yes, that one. That's the boundary line. So long as you don't leave the field around the house you'll be fine."

Yugi and Ryou took a look around the room once Mrs. Weasley turned to go back downstairs. It was small. There was only one bed meant to be in the room, but a second one was shoved under the window on the opposite wall, leaving little room to walk around. A few books sat on the shelves along the wall, but other than that, it was devoid of any other decoration.

"It's been a while since I've shared a room," said Ryou. He hoisted his suitcase onto the bed under
the window and began to look for a place to unpack his clothes.

"It'll be the first time for me," said Yugi, "Being an only child and all…but I suppose now is as good a time to get used to it as any, since I guess we'll share a room with other people at Hogwarts."

"You're probably right," said Ryou. Sliding his empty suitcase under the bed, he flopped down and fluffed up the pillow behind his head. Grinning, he twisted around to look at his roommate. "...You don't...snore, do you?"

Yugi chucked his pillow at him as someone knocked on the open door. Standing in the doorway were four teenagers. Two had to Mrs. Weasley's children, as they both had the same shade of red hair. The other boy in the group had untidy black hair and round-rimmed glasses, and following in the rear was a bushy-haired brunette.

"Uh, hi," said the red-haired boy, gawking at Yugi – mainly, Yugi's hair. "Sorry, didn't mean to scare you. Mum didn't tell us you were arriving today..." he trailed off, eyes resting on the top of Yugi's head. "...Wow. Now that is a hairdo."

The red-haired girl rolled her eyes. "Way to introduce yourself, Ron. Hi, I'm Ginny, and this dunderhead here is my older brother Ron."

The brunet held out her hand. "I'm Hermione Granger."

The boy with glasses nodded. "Harry Potter."

/That is the boy Dumbledore told us about, Yugi. I didn't realize we would meet him this quickly./

/They must be friends./

Yugi shyly returned the handshakes. "I'm Yugi Muto, and this is Ryou Bakura. It's nice to meet you."

"Yugi Muto..." said Harry, "I've heard that name before...probably from something Dudley got into once..."

"Oh! It's from Duel Monsters," said Hermione, "You're the world champion!"

Yugi laughed nervously. "Wow. I didn't realize I was known out here."

"I've never heard of you before. What's Duel Monsters?" asked Ginny.

"It's a Muggle card game. My cousin Dudley got into it once, but, like everything he got for his birthday, it kept his interest for three days before the cards got forgotten in the trash," said Harry. "It hasn't gotten a lot of interest out here, but I hear it's the game to play over in Japan. At least that's what Dudley's said."

Ryou laughed. "I suppose that's true."

"And Yugi is the titled 'King of Games', which the highest ranked spot in the world," said Hermione matter-of-factly, "You defeated Seto Kaiba to take the World Championship crown!"

Yugi awkwardly scratched behind his ear. He really didn't expect wizards to know who he was.

"Don't let him hear you say that."

"Don't mind her," said Ron, "Hermione researches everything. Now that she knows who you are, she'll probably know your entire life story by the end of the day tomorrow."
Hermione huffed. "It does not hurt to be a little knowledgeable about what's going on in the world, Ron."

Ginny rolled her eyes at both of them before focusing on her new house mates. "That's an interesting necklace you've got, Yugi. Egyptian?"

Yugi nodded. He really wished he could hide the Puzzle under his shirt like Ryou had with his Ring. "It's um…a family heirloom. How did you know it was Egyptian?"

Ginny pointed to the eye on the front of the Puzzle. "A few years ago we visited our older brother Bill in Egypt. He works there as a curse breaker for their wizard bank. He toured us around some of the pyramids and I remember seeing a few similar symbols inscribed on some of the walls."

/Perhaps this brother of theirs was the one who found the Millennium Tablet./ Bakura crossed his arms from his soul room. /That stone tablet is protected by magic these fools could only dream of. It's impossible for the enchantments to be broken by some nobody with a fancy stick./

"Interesting," said Ryou. It was hard to listen to his spirit and not appear spaced out. "…Does your brother work in the tombs too?"

Ron shrugged. "Not normally, but Dumbledore's been sending him on – ow!" He rubbed his arm where Ginny had jabbed him.

Yugi and Ryou exchanged confused glances.

Hermione cleared her throat. "So…what school are you guys transferring from?"

"Well…uh…you've never heard of it," Ryou sighed, "We…didn't go to a magical school before. Just a normal high school."

Ron blinked. "You guys are Muggles? How'd Dumbledore manage to get you into Hogwarts then?"

Ryou paled. This was not the time to get into how their magic worked. He felt Bakura stiffen in his mind. /You will not tell them anything, Landlord. The Millennium Items are none of their business./

Harry watched the two. Yugi looked nervous and Ryou seemed to go as white as his hair at Ron's question. Whatever the details were, they didn't look like they wanted to go into it, and he couldn't blame them. They had just met, and the reasons might have personal or painful to share. "I'm sure Dumbledore has sound reasons. You know he doesn't give details away if he could avoid it."

Yugi blinked. "What do you mean?"

Harry shook his head. It wasn't as if they knew everything about what had gone on the last few years at Hogwarts. "Don't worry about it."

"You must have some sort of magic, otherwise you won't be able to even see the school," said Hermione. "Muggles just see a condemned hazardous building when they approach the grounds. It's one of the protective measures to make sure they don't accidentally stumble upon it. But if you're not coming from a different magical school, I suppose Professor Dumbledore is starting you off with the first-year class, even though you're technically much too old."

"Well, not exactly," said Ryou, "I think he said we were going into the sixth year class."

"Sixth year!" Hermione gasped, "That's our year! But that can't be! There's no way Dumbledore would let you jump that far ahead without practicing magic before!"
Yugi shrugged. "That's what he said. Maybe he wanted us to be in classes with people our own age."

Before anyone could comment further, Mrs. Weasley called them down for dinner.

"We'll be out in the garden. There are just too many people to squeeze around the kitchen table."

"Are you sure you don't need any help?" asked Yugi once he reached the bottom step.

"Oh no, dear. Everything is outside already."

"Fred and George here?" asked Ron.

"They arrived about ten minutes ago. Unfortunately, your father is doing Order work this evening and won't be joining us. Now, come on dears! Out to the garden!"

Ron started to lead the group outside and paused on the kitchen door. "Just a warning you two – Fred and George take some getting used to."

Fred and George, Yugi found out, were tall red-headed twins identical down to the last freckle. He wasn't sure just how to tell them apart – if there even was a way. After assuring them that yes, in fact his hair was not styled by magic and was 100% natural, he didn't know what a Canary Cream or a Ton-Tongue Toffee was, but after seeing the looks both Hermione and Mrs. Weasley gave the pair, he really didn't want to find out.

He tried to tune back into the nearest conversation, which was Harry asking how the twins' shop was doing.

"Harry here fronted the money so we could get our dream off the ground," said maybe-Fred, noticing Yugi's puzzled look, but speaking low enough that their mother didn't hear.

"If it was anything like the shop my grandfather owns, then that must have been expensive to do, and a lot of work. It's great that your shop seems to be doing well!"

"It was expensive, but we funded it with winnings from the Tri-Wizard tournament," said Harry, "It technically wasn't my own money."

"What kind of shop do you guys run?"

"Joke shop," maybe-George grinned, "We were experimenting with products while at Hogwarts last year, but after deciding that finishing school was not in our cards…"

"…We decided to just open up shop with the tournament winnings Harry gave us," said maybe-Fred. "It wasn't like we were gonna learn anything new by staying at school anyways."

Yugi was confused. Wouldn't they want to learn as much as they can if they were going to run an magic joke store, especially in a wartime? "Why didn't you want to finish school? Was it boring?"

Fred and George shared a quick glance with Harry. "Not quite," said one of the twins.

"I'm not sure how much you know about our world yet, Yugi, but there's this dark wizard who came back last summer…."

"Dumbledore told us a little," said Yugi. "Apparently we're arriving in the middle of a war."

"Okay, he probably told you the basics then." Harry nodded. "Voldemort – " he ignored the twins'
flinches, “—came back at the end of the Tri-Wizard tournament, but no one believed me that he had returned. The Ministry of Magic was trying to discredit me and Dumbledore, and since no one wanted to take up the Defense Against the Dark Arts posting at Hogwarts—"

"Why not?" Yugi asked. "Sorry—it didn’t mean to interrupt, but why would the job be so hard to fill? Did someone retire?"

Maybe-Fred laughed nervously. "Not quite."

George tallied off with his fingers. "No one has ever filled the post for more than one year. Let’s count back to the last couple. One was a Death Eater in disguise hiding the real professor in his trunk, another was a werewolf—he was actually pretty good, but resigned once everyone found out about his condition, the one before him was a fraud who got his own memory wiped…."

Harry grimaced. "And the one before that was actually being possessed by Voldemort through the back of his head."

Yugi’s eyes widened. "What?"

"It’s true," said Harry. "Voldemort hardly had any power, so he had to hide under Quirrell’s turban in order to survive. But anyway, after the track record Hogwarts had with the post, the Ministry put Professor Umbridge in charge."

"She was one of the ones who didn’t believe You-Know-Who was back, so instead of actually learning defensive magic, we ended up reading the textbook all year. Fred and I had enough since we learned more from Harry during the DA than in actual class, so we left our usual mark on the school and departed."

"Leaving as much destruction in our wake as possible," George added proudly. "Supposedly part of the swamp is still there somewhere."

"What’s the DA?"

"It stood for Dumbledore’s Army," said Harry, running a hand through his hair. "Professor Umbridge cracked down on us, and since we weren’t learning to defend ourselves, we started a secret club to do just that. We got caught but Dumbledore took the fall, which led to her becoming the temporary Headmistress."

"Wow…” said Yugi. "It’s a good thing that this Defense Against the Dark Arts job only seems to keep teachers for one year."

/Indeed. After all, that’s one of the reasons we’re going to this school. If we weren’t going to learn how to defend ourselves from the wizards, we might as well go back home and just wait them out./

/Yeah. Although, if what they said was true, Harry was teaching them magic, and he’s just our age! Maybe in a worse-case scenario, he could help us out too!/"…no way she would be back at school again," Yugi heard Ron say, "Remember at the end of last term? Dumbledore had to go rescue her from the centaurs? She’s probably back in her cushy Ministry job, thankful she doesn’t have to deal with us troublemakers anymore."

Harry laughed, "Yeah." He turned to Yugi. "Umbridge has a superiority complex with half-bred creatures like centaurs, werewolves, and merfolk. She thinks they’re inferior to wizards. Last term, she tried to get the Care of Magical Creatures professor and Groundskeeper, Hagrid, sacked all year because he was half-giant. And when she did fire the Divination professor, she was furious to find
the position replaced with a centaur."

Yugi almost choked on his drink. "T-that's horrible!"

Harry's eyes wandered to the fading 'I will not tell lies' scars on the back of his hand. "She was a real piece of work. But, at least she won't be teaching us this year. No one has held the post for more than one full year."

"I suppose that's a good thing," said Yugi. "After a year like that, whoever comes in this year, would have to be better, wouldn't it?"

"I would think so," said Ron. "The Ministry finally acknowledged You-Know-Who's return, so they can't put another quack at the school. Parents would probably throw a fit."

A squeal from the other end of the table drew their attention. Ron rolled his eyes. "Uh oh. I think they're talking about Hogwarts classes over there. Hermione's gonna yammer Ryou's ears off."

"…Surely they'll let you pick your elective classes once you arrive," Hermione was saying, "There are your regular classes like Transfiguration, Charms, and Potions; but then there's usually room in your schedule for a few extra, like Divination, Care of Magical Creatures, or Ancient Runes."

"Well, what are good classes to take?" asked Ryou.

"Depends on what you're interested in," said Ginny. "Care of Magical Creatures is a required class until I think sixth year – which is where you'll be. If animals are your thing, there's that…though you have to be careful – Hagrid likes to bring in the more dangerous ones to class."

/Dangerous creatures? Ha. I'm sure I can summon something more lethal than whatever some schoolteacher could produce./

/Quiet, Spirit, I'm trying to listen!/ "What kind of dangerous creatures?"

"Well," Hermione began, "In his first lesson he taught us about hippogriffs, which don't attack unless they're insulted or provoked…but you have to understand, from Hagrid's point of view, they're harmless creatures. It helps that he's half giant."

"To put things in a little perspective," said Ginny, leaning back, "The first textbook he had us use was called 'The Monster Book of Monsters'. The book bit me."

Ryou's eyes widened as he ignored Bakura snickering in the back of his mind. "I think I'll pass on that class. "…what other classes are there to take?"

"Well, there's Ancient Runes," said Hermione, "If deciphering old texts and different languages interest you."

"Hm," Ryou nodded, "I think I might like that one. My father is an archaeologist."

"Muggle Studies is also a good class to take, although in your case it may not be necessary," said Mrs. Weasley. "It was my husband Arthur's favorite subject at Hogwarts, and it helped guide him into the Muggle Affairs division of the Ministry of Magic. He led the 'Misuse of Muggle Artifacts' office."

"Really? What does he do?"
"Normally he would help sort out situations where Muggles learned of our world. Sometimes they stumble upon us by accident, or they're the victim of dark wizards or pranksters and Muggle Affairs has to go in, clean up the mess, and modify a few memories. That shed over there is full of all sorts of Muggle knick-knackery that Arthur's collected over the years. ...Although with the war going on now, he now works in confiscating counterfeit defensive spells and objects. You would be surprised how many people play on the fears of others and black market protective amulets that are really cursed." She sighed. "If someone really wanted a protective amulet – as much as I'd hate to say this – they'd be better off buying one of Fred or George's Shield Hats."

"What was that?" said one of the twins from across the table. "Did I just hear Mum compliment our shop?"

"You know I think she did," said the other twin, "We'll have to remember this moment for all time. I don't think this will ever happen again."

Hermione shook her head before turning back to Ryou. "Anyway, if you're into numbers, then there's Arithmancy – that's my favorite of all of them, and definitely the most challenging."

"The only other elective is Divination. Most people take it because the professor's off her rocker most of the time, but since it's about predicting the future, you can practically make it up anything and pass the class," said Ginny.

Ryou's eyes perked. "Divination? I like the sound of that."

Ginny raised an eyebrow. "Really? Most people can't stand it."

Ryou shrugged. "I've got a set of tarot cards back home, and have done some readings before with them, and with Duel Monster cards. I guess I've always had an interest in the occult."

"Sounds like between that and Ancient Runes, you might have your schedule all padded out," said Mrs. Weasley. "What about you, Yugi dear? What classes might you want to take?"

"Ancient Runes sounds cool," said Yugi, trying to hold back a yawn. "My grandfather was also an archaeologist, but he stopped a while ago to open his game shop. As for the other class, I'm not quite sure. Magical Creatures sounds pretty neat, and maybe Divination too, but I don't think I could decide just yet."

"Well you still have time to think it over," Mrs. Weasley smiled and looked around the garden. Night had already fallen and the lights around the table had automatically lit once the sun had set. "Goodness, I didn't realize how late it was. You two must be exhausted."

Yugi ran a hand through his hair. "A little bit."

Mrs. Weasley got up and waved her wand. The dishes immediately rose from the table and drifted off towards the kitchen. "Off to bed, you two. There will be plenty of time to get acquainted and discuss Hogwarts once you're rested."

Yugi smiled and got up from the table. "Thanks for dinner, Mrs. Weasley. Sorry I couldn't stay up later, but the time difference is going to take getting used to."

"Was it really that long?" asked Ron. "It was already night when we left Japan," Ryou explained, "So after being up for an entire day, we ended up redoing our entire afternoon. And speaking of...." He yawned as well, "I think I might turn in as well. Thanks again for taking us in and for a welcoming first day."
After waving goodnight, they headed upstairs. Ryou closed the bedroom door behind them. "So? What do you think?"

Yugi climbed into bed and pulled his knees up to his chest. "Harry and his friends seem…nice. They can definitely tell us all about Hogwarts."

"You can say that again," said Ryou. "Hermione was very, uh, animated when we started to talk about school."

"Harry and the twins were telling me about what happened at the school last year. Apparently when Voldemort came back, no one believed him. They stuck some horrible woman in a teaching position to basically spy on Dumbledore and keep them from learning anything useful. But it seems that particular teaching position hasn't kept anyone for more than a year, so that professor won't be there anymore."

"Well, that's a relief," said Ryou. "I hope none of the other teachers at Hogwarts are like that." He looked down at the Millennium Ring now sitting over his shirt. "You know what my spirit is like. I'd like to avoid getting suspended and sent home on my first day."

"Do you think something is weird about them?" asked Ron.

Harry shrugged. "I don't know." He followed Ron upstairs to his room. "I mean, they remind me a bit of me when I first found out I was a wizard. I didn't know what I was getting into, and neither do they, it seems. Not to mention we sort of interrogated them once we said hello. Not very welcoming of us, was it?"

"Huh. I guess not."

"It was nice to be introduced to someone who didn't read about me in a book somewhere though."

Ron laughed. "Yeah, I bet it was. They probably didn't think we knew who they were though."

"Well, if it weren't for the few cards Dudley got that one time, I wouldn't have. And Hermione's closer to her own family than I am with mine. If anyone would know who they were, she would have."

Ron tossed him a spare pillow. "Yeah, but you gotta figure – this is Hermione we're talking about. She's always gotta know everything about, well, everything, in case its useful down the road. But seriously – how did Dumbledore manage to get them into Hogwarts? They've never had foreign students before, except for the Tri-wizard Tournament, but that didn't really count."

"You think it has something to do with You-Know-Who?"

"It's possible…," Harry shook his head, "But you saw how panicked they were when we asked. There's no way Dumbledore would bring them to Hogwarts if they were dangerous or sided with You-Know-Who, but that doesn't mean they're not hiding anything."

"Don't see what's so secret about magic. Either you got it or you don't, and if Dumbledore's letting them enter sixth year instead of first, then they can't truly be Muggles, can they?"

"Well, no, but it doesn't make any sense to start someone in our year when they haven't learned any
spells before. I bet Dumbledore thinks they can help the fight somehow, so he's making sure they end up around us as much as possible."

Ron leaned up against his pillow. "There's one problem with your theory, mate. They have to be sorted, and what if they end up in Slytherin?"

"Not all Slytherins are bad. Yugi and Ryou don't come from Pureblood or Death Eater families. They won't have the prejudices that Malfoy and the others would have." Harry sighed. "Look, we just met them. They probably don't trust us too much either. Maybe after a few days they'll be more open with us."

"Let's hope so..."
Harry walked downstairs the next morning to find Yugi sitting in the corner of the living room, talking on what looked like a custom-built phone. He had seen the latest models, as it was all Dudley talked about getting until he was picked up for the summer, and they looked nothing like the gleaming silver device in his hand.

Not wanting to intrude on his conversation, Harry moved into the kitchen and grabbed a roll from the basket on the table. Mrs. Weasley was directing the extra dishes from last night back into their cupboards.

"Oh, good morning, Harry. You're certainly up early today. Ron still asleep?"

He nodded.

"I think Ryou is too. Yugi was up before even me today, on his...oh, dear, I forget what it's called..."

"The cell phone?"

"Yes, that's it. He wanted to get a call in to his grandfather before it was too late in the day, to make sure everything was alright back home."

"How long has he been there? I thought I was up early today."

Mrs. Weasley looked him over carefully, "Are you feeling alright, Harry? You normally aren't up this soon. Sleep alright?"

Harry shrugged. "I think so."

"Hm. Well, he had a small bite about ten minutes or so ago, and has been on his call since. Poor dear must be homesick already."

Harry frowned. He felt for Yugi, and Ryou. Leaving home for a strange place couldn't be easy, but he would never really know the feeling of homesickness, since he never had enough good memories of Privet Drive to really miss it there. Each summer he looked forward to the date he would end up either at the Burrow or even the Leaky Cauldron.

"Mrs. Weasley," Harry began, "Do...do you know why Dumbledore invited them to Hogwarts this year? I didn't think Hogwarts ever invited foreign exchange students before. Aside from the Tri-Wizard Tournament."

Mrs. Weasley frowned, and then shook her head, nudging a basket into his hands and off towards the chicken coop. "Never you mind, Harry. Now, come. You can help me get breakfast ready for the others."

Harry numbly followed her outside. She didn't deny it. Mrs. Weasley did know something, but her
silence really didn't surprise him. She was leery to let him, or even Ron and Hermione, listen in on Order business. He knew she was just trying to protect him, but this was getting a little old.

**Wait.** He stopped at one of the trees. If Yugi and Ryou's admission to Hogwarts was considered Order business, then somehow, Voldemort must be involved. But why would Voldemort gain interest in a few Japanese teenagers? What could they possibly have that would interest him? As far as he could tell, neither Yugi nor Ryou had attended a magical school before. Unless their magic was undetected, they were basically Muggles. Voldemort and the Death Eaters shouldn't have spared them a second glance.

Although, the terrorized looks that they got when asked about their admittance to Hogwarts was rather suspicious. They wouldn't have been so scared if the reasoning was something as simple as being overlooked for their own country's magical academy. If they were traditional wizards, and just didn't get into their own school, getting them into Hogwarts shouldn't be considered Order business. Wouldn't that fall between the British and Japanese Ministries of Magic?

**No,** Harry shook his head. There was something about them that made them stand out enough to get Voldemort's attention from across the globe. They must have something that Voldemort wanted. Or…they were dangerous themselves. But that didn't make much sense either. Dumbledore wouldn't purposely bring something dangerous into the school…would he?

There wasn't a way for him to know. Not unless one of them spoke up. Or…he thought grimly, *we'll just have to spy—*

"Harry? Are you okay?"

Harry broke out of his thoughts to see Yugi standing in front of him. "Sorry, just thinking. How long were you standing there?"

Yugi shrugged. "I just got off the phone, and followed you outside. It was only maybe a minute or so."

Harry held out the basket for Mrs. Weasley so she can collect any eggs. "I uh…wanted to apologize."

"Apologize?" Yugi asked, blinking owlishly up at him. "For what?"

"Yesterday," said Harry, "We came on you kind of strong, and I think it made you guys uncomfortable."

"Oh," Yugi laughed, "That's okay. I guess…that's something you're used to, isn't it? People probably make a big deal about you when they meet you for the first time, don't they?"

Harry blinked. "How did you know?"

Yugi ran a hand through his spiky hair. "Professor Dumbledore told us a little about you, that you survived the killing curse when you were a baby. Since that's apparently never happened before, I can imagine it turned you into kind of a celebrity."

Harry exhaled loudly. "You have no idea."

Yugi put a hand on the top of his strange necklace and looked down at it for a moment before speaking again. "I'm…kind of the same way. In just one Duel Monsters match I had unseated the reigning World Champion, and then everyone was whispering about me. I got invited to an upcoming tournament, and all of a sudden, I was known as 'that guy who beat Seto Kaiba'."
"How was that?"

"Weird. The next thing I knew, I was being challenged left and right for my Pu-uh, dueling title."

They slowly followed Mrs. Weasley back into the kitchen. Hermione and Ryou were up, sitting in the living room and looking through one of her old textbooks. Neither of them noticed them return to the house.

Harry started to move to join them, but Yugi reached out and grabbed his arm. "Wait."

Harry turned back around. Yugi's gaze was set on his necklace again, but this time his eyes looked a bit unfocused, as if he was either deep in thought or plain up spacing out. It was slightly unnerving. "What's up?"

He watched Yugi shake himself out of his stupor and immediately let go of his arm. "Can I ask you something?"

"Sure."

Yugi looked over at Ryou before turning back to Harry. "Professor Dumbledore told us about your fight with Voldemort over the years. Not a lot, I mean, he didn't go into a lot of details or anything, but he's said enough to make it seem like you've been getting in his way plenty of times now."

"You could say that," said Harry. He wished Yugi would come out and say whatever it was he wanted to say.

"How dangerous is he?"

"Very. He's been trying to rebuild his army from the last war. Last year, we thought he was after some kind of weapon that he didn't have the first time around."

"Did he get it?"

"No." Harry shook his head. He had been trying not to think about the Department of Mysteries. It only reminded him of Sirius. "There was a battle at the Ministry of Magic last month. He didn't get what he was looking for. The last thing he needed was to relive that night again in his mind. Sure, Voldemort hadn't gotten the prophecy, but they suffered losses as well. Ron had nearly been suffocated by a brain, Dolohov had nearly killed Hermione, and he put most of the Order in danger. If he had just gone to Dumbledore or Professor McGonagall instead of rushing recklessly to London, Sirius wouldn't have been anywhere near the Department of Mysteries. The whole battle may have been avoided.

…Or would it have been? Voldemort was trying to get at the prophecy. It would probably been only a matter of time before either he made his way to the Ministry to get it himself, or he would have kept putting visions in his head to lead him there.

"Harry?"

"Sorry." Harry rubbed at his arms, "Just a lot of regrets. I…I lost my godfather, Sirius, trying to stop Voldemort. After my parents…he was the only family I had left."

Yugi looked down at his shoes. "I-I'm sorry. I didn't mean to bring up any bad memories. It's…it's just that we're coming here based on Dumbledore's words alone. We had never heard of Voldemort before…. I left my friends and family behind to help fight an enemy I didn't even know existed."
Harry paused. There was something hidden in Yugi's words. "Are you saying…that Voldemort is after you too?"

Yugi bit his lip. *Uh oh.* "Uh, yeah. Dumbledore didn't quite tell us why, but he was able to convince us enough of magic to admit us into Hogwarts. He said it would be safe there."

"Hogwarts *is* considered to be one of the safest places in Britain. But in this war…" Harry sighed. He noticed that Yugi still skirted around the reasoning for Voldemort's sudden interest in them. "No place is truly safe. Don't get me wrong, as long as Dumbledore is headmaster, Hogwarts is safe from Voldemort and the Death Eaters, but if they can find out your weaknesses, they'll exploit them. It doesn't matter if you're at Hogwarts or at home."

Yugi bit his lip. That wasn't very reassuring. But at least he had the feeling that they wouldn't be fighting this battle alone. "Whatever you need, I'm sure we'll find a way to help," said Yugi. "I'm sure that was probably the reason Dumbledore put us in the same year." He laughed awkwardly. "Otherwise it doesn't make much sense. We're not going to know anything, and you've had five years-worth of magic classes already. We're going to be the odd ones out."

"Yeah," Harry ran a hand through his messy hair. "C'mon, let's go rescue Ryou before he gets buried under Hermione's old books."

~~*~~

Yugi sank down under one of the shadier trees in the garden. "Ugh."

Ryou plopped down next to him. "So that's what you meant by de-gnoming the garden. Oooh, I feel like I just ran an Olympic event."

Ron laughed. "It gets easier the longer you do it. Though, Ryou, you must have tossed that one at least a hundred feet!"

Ryou scowled and nursed his finger. "What do you expect? That thing *bit* me!" *Part of that toss was the Spirit's doing...*

"Normally, all you have to do is make them dizzy and drop over the other side of the garden wall," said Ginny. "But apparently when Fred and George were little they made it into a game to see who can chuck them the farthest, and it's pretty much turned into a tradition."

Yugi tucked his hands behind his head and stared up at the cloudless sky. It had been over a week since they had made the journey to the Burrow. In that time, aside from helping Mrs. Weasley with housework (which she kept insisting wasn't necessary, but he and Ryou kept pretending to not hear her), they had learned how to de-gnome the garden (which, they found out, had to be done more often than they would have otherwise assumed – gnomes weren't particularly bright), skimmed through a few of Ron and Hermione's old first-year school books, and watched Ron utterly trounce Harry in chess. Apparently, in the household, Ron was an unofficial champion.

/You wanted to challenge him, didn't you?/

Yami chuckled from their soul corridor. /A bit. Ron is very confident in his playing abilities. I can see why none of his other family members usually offer to play. It would be a joy to battle Ron, but I can sense a feeling of jealousy from him. It's not strong, but it's there./

/Jealousy?/

/From what we've learned over the past week, Ron is the youngest of five sons. He has a lot to live
up to. It seems all of his older brothers have had some sort of prestige in their lives, from either school achievements or just being well off in their careers. Even Percy, who had a falling out in the family, managed to find success in their Ministry of Magic./

/That's true…/

/Don't forget that while Harry may be unwanting of his fame, he is still a celebrity himself. I can sense that on more than one occasion, Harry may have unwillingly upstaged him in their successes. While they are very close, probably on par with our relationship with Joey or Téa, I imagine it can and is quite difficult to always be in someone's shadow like that. Chess is one of the few things that Ron can openly excel in. I wouldn't want to take that from him./

/I guess if you're really itching for a game, you can always try to duel Bakura…so long as his spirit doesn't try to summon the Shadow Realm again. We've managed to keep the Millennium Items quiet for now, but I can tell Harry's pushing./

/I know. I can sense it from all of them. They seem to enjoy being nosy, but for now, it is safer to keep them in the dark. If the dark spirit within the Millennium Ring can keep out, dueling Bakura may not be such a terrible idea. The Weasleys have been very hospitable about adapting us to their world so far. We can always return the favor by showing them something from ours./

/You would have to let me duel, Yami. I don't want activating the Puzzle to draw their attention./

/Of course, Yugi. I'm sure Bakura will do the same, although Bakura does have it a bit easier since the Millennium Ring isn't nearly as chunky as the Puzzle. I don't think any of them know that he has a Millennium Item at all./

/That's true. But…um…/

Yami chuckled. /You didn't pack your duel disk, did you?/

Yugi looked ashamed. /I brought my deck. But I didn't really have room in my suitcase for the duel disk. To be honest, I didn't think we would have enough spare time on our hands for a lot of dueling./

/Well, if you're able to get in contact with Kaiba, he might bring it with him. Or…if you catch him on a good day, he might mail it out to us ahead of time. In the meantime, we can still duel traditionally./

Yugi got up and reached into his pocket for his phone. He would have to charge it before calling, though he had to commend his rival. He called home to his grandfather once every day, and yesterday he also spoke to Joey and the others as well for upwards of two hours. It took just over a week for the battery to finally start to need a charge. That was loads better than any traditional cell phone would have lasted. *Kaiba certainly doesn't mess around with his technology…*. 

"Where are you going, Yugi?" asked Hermione, looking up from her book.

"I need to call home. Hey Ron, where can I charge my phone?"

Ron blinked. "Charge your what?"

"My phone?" Yugi held it up. "Do you have a power outlet somewhere I can borrow?"

Harry noticed the confused looks Ron and Ginny were giving him. He cleared his throat. "Uh, Yugi,
I hate to break this to you, but the Weasleys don't have electricity. No outlets, light switches, or anything like that. I'm surprised your phone even works out here. There aren't any towers nearby."

"…Oh." Yugi and Ryou shared a glance. "Well, Kaiba built the phone for us to run directly through his satellites. It doesn't pass through any traditional phone towers." Yugi looked down at the device in his hand. Would it really be useless after another day or so?

"Maybe Kaiba can send you an extra battery for it?" said Ryou. "You have enough left on it for at least another call, don't you?"

"It's good for a little while longer, so long as I watch how long I'm on it," said Yugi. He headed back towards the house.

Ron called after him. "Oy, Yugi! When you come back, Harry and I were going to shoot some Quidditch hoops before dinner. Want to learn how to play?"

"Uh, sure! I'll be back in a few minutes!"

Yugi jogged back across the garden path and into the house. He could hear Mrs. Weasley in the room around the back of the kitchen doing laundry.

On his way into the living room, he glanced up at the odd clock on the wall. Sitting across from the traditional one on the opposite wall, this one did not have two hands rotating around numbers. Each hand had a face for the members of the Weasley family. Instead of the hours, there were different labels going around the frame. Yugi noticed that while some of the family was home, Mr. Weasley was no doubt at work for the Ministry, and Fred and George at their shop, all nine hands pointed towards 'Mortal Peril'.

Yugi took a seat on the sofa next to Mrs. Weasley's knitting. It was at work again, creating something long and maroon-colored, probably a scarf. He scrolled through his contacts, but before selecting one, glanced behind him at the time-telling clock on the wall. It's going to be late at home.

/I wouldn't call Mokuba. I don't know what kind of hours he keeps over the summer, but it would not do to get on Kaiba's bad side by waking him if he were asleep. Especially if you want him to expedite your duel disk./

/Kaiba's number isn't in here. I'm both surprised…and not surprised. It's either Mokuba or nothing. Here goes…./

The call rang twice before a voice that was neither Mokuba nor Seto Kaiba picked up. "Mr. Muto, do you realize how late it is?"

Yugi blinked. He certainly wasn't expecting that person to answer the phone. "R-Roland? I thought I dialed Mokuba's phone? I'm sorry, I must have dialed the wrong number. I'm sorry...again; I didn't mean to disturb you..."

/Yugi! You're panicking for no reason. Slow down before no one can understand you on the other end of the line./

"Calm down, Mr. Muto. Mokuba was charging his phone in my office before he forgot it here and went to bed. Is everything alright?"

"Uh, yeah. Things are fine. I didn't mean to call so late, but is Kaiba still up? I was hoping to catch him and, well, when Mokuba gave us this phone, he didn't program his brother's number into it."
"Mr. Kaiba put all the numbers he deemed necessary for you into that phone himself. He's probably still awake. Stay on the line a moment."

Yugi heard shuffling in the background, along with a few muffled voices before the phone was picked up again.

"Mr. Muto, Mr. Kaiba is going to call you directly. I'm going to hang up now."

"Okay, uh, thanks, Roland."

Yami phased out of the Puzzle as Yugi dropped the phone into his lap. "That was weird."

The Pharaoh chuckled. "I don't think you've ever said more than two words to Kaiba's right hand man before. You had more interaction with Croquet in Duelist Kingdom and you spent less time with him."

"Ugh, yeah."

The phone suddenly began to vibrate in his lap, and Yugi quickly swiped over to start the call. He noticed that the caller ID didn't list a name or a number. "Hello?"

"You do realize it's past eleven here, don't you?"

Hello to you too, Kaiba. "I didn't wake anyone up, did I?"

"Mokuba, if he took his phone back to his bedroom, which, lucky for you, he did not. You relieved Roland of five minutes of staring at security cameras, so he said to send his thanks."

Yugi wasn't sure what to make of that, if that was a sense of humor, or not. He didn't bother asking why Kaiba was still awake. As far as he knew, his rival never slept.

"...So what's so important it can't wait?"

"Well..." Yugi looked over at Yami. "I was wondering if you could bring an extra duel disk when you make it over here."

"Bakura didn't think to bring his?"

"Uh...well, no. I didn't bring mine. It didn't fit in my bag, and I didn't want to have to take another one just for that. I have my cards though...I just...miss dueling."

"Considering I'm halfway across the world, Bakura doesn't make for much of a challenge, does he?"

"That's not the point, Kaiba." Yami said, but Yugi knew his rival wouldn't hear him.

"Bakura and I haven't dueled at all," Yugi said, "We've been spending the time doing...other things. The Weasleys have some school-aged kids that are going to be in the year Dumbledore's putting us. They're also friends with Harry Potter. They've been showing us some of their old school books to try and get us acquainted with magic."

"Hn. Well, Mokuba will be over with your friends Sunday afternoon. I'll have him pick up your duel disk, and I'll bring it with me when I arrive next week."

"What day are you arriving?"
"If nothing changes, I'll be flying out July 8th."

Yugi blinked. "You're going to fly? Wizards aren't going to just transport you over like they did with us?"

"I don't trust these people that much, Yugi. Until I'm...adjusted to all this, I will arrange my own transport to and from England. Emmeline Vance tried to convince me of using some Portkey, but unless I'm setting that up myself, I refuse to use it. They could tell me it'll go right to Hogwarts, and for all I know, it'll end up landing me right in the hands of that lunatic Voldemort."

"Kaiba has a point," said Yami.

"Was there anything else you needed?" Yugi could hear him tapping away on a keyboard through the phone. "You haven't decided that those wizards are too much to handle and need a ride home, do you?"

"Very funny," said Yugi. "But I did never get a chance to thank you properly for the phone you made for us. It works great, and it was really generous of you to have one made for Grandpa and my friends."

"It was easier than having you use mine. ...Which, I suppose, I can give you the number to. I don't want you calling Mokuba in the middle of the night again."

"Really?"

"Honestly, I didn't expect you to try calling this late at night. It's only for a week or so anyways that you'll ever really have a use for it. Once I'm out there, I don't see you needing to contact my brother, and I could care less if you want to keep Wheeler up at all hours of the night. But let me make this quite clear to you, Yugi. No one in your little circle of friends is to have it."

Yugi nodded. That was fair, he guessed. Kaiba's contact information was not his to share.

"Understood. Um, but I did come across something you should know about before coming out here. With the phones...and other things. It's actually the main reason I called."

"And what's that?"

"The phone has lasted really well, but it's been over a week and now it finally needs to charge..."

"Mokuba should have given you the phone charger."

"He did...but this house doesn't run on electricity. It's a wizard home. No outlets, no wires, or Internet – well, the phone runs through your network, so I can get online through that, but you know what I meant."

There was a pause on the other end of the line. The typing had even stopped. For a moment, Yugi thought he had hung up and had to check to make sure the call hadn't dropped. "Please tell me you're joking."

"Nope. I asked the Weasleys. They didn't know what I was talking about when I asked where I could charge the phone."

Yugi and Yami shared a look as it sounded like Seto swore on the other side of the line. "...Alright. That's another thing I need to add to my to-do list before flying out. There's no way I'm going to go an entire year without checking in at Kaiba Corp. The board of directors and the division heads are already throwing fits once they were told I was leaving."
"What did you tell them?"

"I've enrolled in a University Exchange program at some quiet British school for the upcoming year. Not that I need any more education, but it's under the guise of being a good role model to Mokuba, so he doesn't get the idea that because I didn't continue education past high school, that the same would be allowed of him." Seto sighed on the other end of the line. "For now, I'll have to see about sending you a power bank or two for the phone. I'll be in touch."

The line clicked. A few moments later, he saw the phone automatically open the list of contacts and add two new additions without him touching the screen: 'Seto Kaiba' and 'Roland: For Emergencies Only'. Yugi laid the phone in his lap and looked at Yami. "That went surprisingly well."

"Yes," said Yami. "I would have expected him to be much more upset about his technology."

"Well, it all still works, we just can't keep it from dying," said Yugi. "I'm sure he'll think of something."

"Well, in the meantime," said Yami, "I believe your new friends wanted to teach you something called Quidditch?"

~~*~~

Mokuba sat on the edge of Seto's bed, swinging his legs back and forth and twiddling with the 'It's my Birthday!' button that one of the house staff had given him that morning. Seto had followed through with the extremely rare feat of taking the entire day off, and gave his phone to Roland to intercept all the calls so he wouldn't get distracted with any Kaiba Corporation nonsense. He just wished that while Seto had in fact spent the entire day with him and seemed entirely alert while doing so, he had at least slept the night before, and the night before that instead of working in the labs until upwards towards three in the morning. But an entire day of his brother paying attention to only him was not something that came around often (not even on his last birthday), so he took what he could get. He knew Seto was stressed about leaving for England tomorrow, and because of that, the chief officers at Kaiba Corp were definitely not making things easy for him.

"How do you know what you'll need to pack? What would you even need at a magic school, anyways?"

He watched Seto walk in and out of his closet, draping clothes next to him on the bed.

"I haven't a clue. Supposedly Dumbledore was supposed to send out an equipment list, but that'll be after I arrive at wherever Yugi is. Someplace he called 'The Burrow'. The Weasleys live there, and they're hosting us the rest of the summer."

"The Burrow? Sounds like a name for a home an owl would make up in a tree somewhere."

Seto shook his head. "For all I know, maybe it is." He draped a set of slacks onto the pile and walked back into the closet.

Mokuba looked down at his brother's selections. "You don't have any jeans?"

"Mokuba, when have you known me to wear anything that casual?"

Mokuba shrugged. The most laid back he had seen his brother was the tshirt and athletic pants he wore to the gym in the basement. But that barely counted since he didn't wear that out of the house. "Fair enough. Are you taking your trench coats too?"
"Maybe one of them. I haven't decided yet, though they would be more comfortable to wear when
dueling. Speaking of, where did you put Yugi's duel disk?"

"It's right here." Mokuba patted the bag next to him. Along with the duel disk, Yugi's friends had
made him and Bakura a care package to send along with his brother. He watched Seto reach for the
suitcase. "You gonna have enough room in there?"

"It's bigger than it looks, and after that last run of conventions in America, I've mastered packing
light."

"Hm." Mokuba looked over to the Millennium Rod on the bedside table. "Is that gonna burn me if I
touch it?"

"He knows better," said Seto, without looking up, "And if it turns out he doesn't, possessed magic
item be damned, I'll melt it down into a doorknob."

Mokuba reached over and picked up the Rod. "It's heavier than I expected." He looked over across
the room. Seto was back in the closet, riffling through the hangers, and draping shirts over his arm as
he went. Mokuba looked back at the Millennium Rod. "I know you're out here somewhere, or
maybe just in Seto's head right now. I dunno. I can't see you. This whole thing is still a little weird to
me. I know we didn't really have a good first meeting, and I haven't really seen you since that day,
but can you promise me something?"

He glanced back. Seto was still in the closet.

"Can you..." Mokuba began softly, "...keep an eye on him for me? He won't show it, but this hard
on him too. We've never been willingly apart for this long before. It would make me feel better if he
had someone looking out for him, even if you guys are sharing the same body and all. I asked Yugi,
but in the end, Seto probably won't listen to him."

"Your brother worries about you as well. This will not be easy for him either."

He nearly dropped the Millennium Rod as it began to glow, but only for an instant. "Uh...Seto? This
just, um...did something?"

Satisfied he had enough in his arms, Seto walked back out and deposited his clothes next to the
suitcase. He walked around the side of the bed and stood in front of his brother. "Are you alright,
Mokuba?"

"Yeah. Why?" He carefully placed the Rod back where had found it.

"Set is looking concerned. He's sitting right next to you." He gestured to his brother's left.

"Oh," Mokuba ran a hand through his hair, laughing nervously. "I, um, can't see him. Can I talk to
him? Just for a minute?"

Seto sighed and picked up the Millennium Rod, letting it activate, and allowing his spirit control of
his body.

Set knelt down to be closer to Mokuba's eye level. "I heard you, young one. You have nothing to
fear. I will, of course, keep watch over Seto."

"I'm gonna miss him," said Mokuba sadly, "And I'm scared for him."

"Your brother worries about you as well. This will not be easy for him either."

"It's not just that we won't be able to handle being apart for so long," Mokuba sniffed, "It's just that
bad things tend to happen when we're separated. People have tried to take over Kaiba Corp, I've gotten kidnapped, Seto got trapped in one of his games...although that doesn't really count since I was there for that, souls were stolen, I got kidnapped again, the list kind of goes on and on."

Set put a hand reassuringly on Mokuba's shoulder. "That may be, but you two are not alone anymore. You have friends to help guide and look after you. Seto places a great deal of trust in his right hand. He will not let anything happen to you."

"Roland is good and all, but are we going to do against magic?"

"He and your brother have put some kind of protocol in place if something should happen, though I do not know the specifics of it. And I will of course be there for Seto. And, if he is in one of those moods and refuses to listen to me, the Pharaoh and his vessel and Ryou Bakura will be there to help. In an environment full of strangers, we will all have to look out for each other. Whether we all get along is irrelevant. We are all connected by the Millennium Items and will need to work together in this upcoming fight."

Mokuba sniffed and hopped off the bed, reaching around to hug Set. "Thanks. I know Seto is tough, and you guys will be okay...just make sure he eats and sleeps, okay?"

Set chuckled. "Of course." He paused. "He isn't happy I shoved him into his soul room. I'll be switching back now."

Mokuba drew back and hopped back onto the bed. "Okay."

Seto blinked and looked down at the light fading from the Millennium Rod. "What was that all about?"

Mokuba looked up at him innocently. "What was what? I just asked him to make sure you remember to eat once you end up over there. And sleep, sleep is important too."

"Hn. Was that all? He hardly needed to lock me out for that."

Once everything was in his suitcase, Seto lifted it off the bed and set it beside the bedroom door. "I think it's time someone headed off to sleep, don't you think?"

"No! It's still my birthday!"

"For all of..." Seto glanced down at his watch, "...ten more minutes."

"That's ten more minutes that I can do what I want to do!"

"Mokuba, you're going to Muto's in the morning. What are Yugi's friends going to think when you show up barely able to keep your eyes open? They're going to start questioning my parenting."

Mokuba snorted. "Like you care what they think anyways. They know this is the last time I'm going to see you for like a month!"

"Three weeks."

"Close enough!"

Roland appeared in the doorway, holding up Seto's phone, and knocked his fist against the door frame to get their attention. "Apologies for the intrusion, but I wanted to give this back to you before retiring for the night."
"Thanks. How much did I miss today?"

"Well - and you're not going to like this - I would plan to spend the day in the office tomorrow. The board of directors had scheduled a last meeting, and the representative for Industrial Illusions will be in to go over the next wave of card releases to be implemented into the duel disks. I think they all knew you weren't flying commercially, and therefore could postpone your flight until they were finished. All of these meetings were penned in this morning. The, ah, representative from Industrial Illusions was adamant you be present for this meeting, and not, as he put it, 'one of the unimaginative lab boys'. That is scheduled in the afternoon."

"Oh goody," said Seto, crossing his arms, "So now not only is my flight going to be delayed, but I get to spend my day listening to the newest complaints from the Board…and Pegasus."

"I'm sorry, sir."

"Look on the bright side, Seto. After tomorrow, you won't have to see any of them for weeks, maybe months at a time! And since you'll still be here, I can stop by and bring you dinner and see you off at the airport!"

"Hn. Not if you don't go to bed, you won't." Seto tapped his watch. "Birthday's over." He knelt down and gave his brother a tight squeeze. "I'll see you in the morning."

Seto closed the door behind them, and sank down on his bed.

Set phased out and sat next to him. "You are worried about tomorrow."

"Not so much worried as I am annoyed. I can't sleep on flights. Never could. The idea was to get up in the morning and immediately fly out, not work an entire day and then sit awake on a plane for over twelve hours."

"You could take Miss Vance's offer for that Portkey. Then you would avoid the trip."

"No thanks."

"Then you ought to get as much rest in now, and then again when we reach the Weasley house. Have you packed everything?"

"Everything that I can here. Tomorrow I'll gather what I need from Kaiba Corp before I leave, and Yugi's duel disk is packed with mine in the briefcase by the door."

"As much as I can sense your irritation at tomorrow's new calendar, at least you will get to spend one last bit of time with Mokuba before you depart."

"The one good thing about it," Seto muttered. He shot off a quick text to Yugi about his arrival time change, and slipped into bed. Set disappeared back into the Millennium Rod as he closed his eyes, attempting to will himself to sleep before finally doing so, far later than he would have liked.
Yugi unplugged the phone from its power bank and descended into the kitchen. Mrs. Weasley was fussing over a kettle, and Mr. Weasley was sitting at the table, looking over at the *Daily Prophet*.

"Another arrest," he said. "I'm not sure who is worse: Fudge or this new one."

"Uh, excuse me, Mr. Weasley?" Yugi sat down across from him at the table, and looked across at the back of the page Mr. Weasley was currently reading. Seeing the photographs move took some getting used to, in comparison to the static photos of the Domino City Journal. A few copies of his home paper sat on the opposite end of the kitchen table. Kaiba had forwarded some along a few days after their arrival, when they contained something of interest to them. One covered a sneak on the next generation of duel disks, one commemorated the one-year anniversary of the Duelist Kingdom tournament, and the third had an article about a game release, with his grandfather's shop holding a small release-party to cover it. Joey and Mokuba were there to help promote the game's release and a photo of them all beaming behind the counter gazed up at him from the table.

"Yes, Yugi. What can I do for you?"

"I got a message from Kaiba. His flight should be arriving at London airport soon. I wasn't sure if Professor Dumbledore was aware of the change in time, so I wanted to let you know."

"I'll pass along the message," said Mr. Weasley. "But I suspect Dumbledore already knows. Nothing gets by him."

"Thanks." Yugi looked at the newspaper again. "Do you mind if I take a look at it? If there's anything you're done with, that is."

"Oh, absolutely, here you go. I assume newspapers back home are similar to ours?"

Yugi took one of the discarded pages. "Pretty much. I didn't read too much of them back home, but I think it's important to know what my friends and I are getting into here."

"A good philosophy to have." He ignored the look his wife was giving him. "Where are the others?"

"I think they're still outside teaching Ryou how to fly."

"You best go join them," said Mrs. Weasley, "Fred and George will be by once they close up shop for the day. You might have enough for two makeshift teams. Let them know dinner will be late this evening."

"Okay," Yugi shrugged. "Will you set the paper aside for me later then? I'd still like to read it."

"Of course," said Mr. Weasley. He waited for Yugi to leave the kitchen before turning back to his wife. "You can't keep that up forever, you know."

"Don't you think they have enough on their shoulders without having to worry about what else is
"You won't be able to protect them like this, Molly. They're not your children, and ours are old enough now and have fought enough that even they have seats at Order meetings." He cut her off as she tried to speak. "And you know perfectly well that Ginny's been eavesdropping at Order meetings all summer, so you might as well just let her sit at them."

"You know she's not of age—"

"Ron isn't either, but he sat in at Grimmauld Place, and both of them held their own at the Department of Mysteries."

"Where they never should have been in the first place!"

Arthur sighed. "But they were, and fought just as well, if not better, at times than other members of the Order. They're just as much a part of this fight as you and me. And the more you keep them in the dark, the more they're just going to go around your back and find out the news anyway."

Molly sank down in the seat next to her husband. "Are you suggesting I let them in on this evening's meeting?"

"If they ask, I don't see why not," said Arthur, "Keeping them all in the dark last year is what led them into so much trouble in the first place. And it might do Yugi and Ryou some good to have a better idea of what they're up against."

Molly sighed. "I'm not going to win this, am I?"

"Not in the slightest," said Arthur, "But, if it is any sort of relief, Dumbledore is supposed to be at this meeting, and you know nothing will get out that he doesn't want out."

Molly looked out the window. Fred and George had arrived and had gone into the shed for spare broomsticks. It looked like they were going over broom basics with Yugi, with Harry and Ron in mid-air next to him, helping to keep him from falling off. "Maybe if I'm lucky they'll stay outside for the entire meeting."

"That ties the match," said Harry. They had split into teams. Harry, Ryou, George, and Hermione were on one, and Yugi, Fred, Ron, and Ginny on the other team. The twins charmed a few tree branches into goal posts, and a rock into a quaffle, and everyone took turns playing Keeper as the others kept trying to score.

"Ugh, that's not fair," said Ryou, "I couldn't tell which twin was which."

Fred snickered.

"You're at least better in the air now than you were yesterday," said Ron, "How do you like flying?"

"I think I prefer to be on the ground, honestly."

/Flying without the aid of a Shadow Realm monster is exhilarating; you just have no stamina for this. Now, if you let me take over, we wouldn't be losing to the Pharaoh's team./

/I don't think so, Spirit. I don't want to risk you being noticed…and if you don't mind, I would rather not have to worry about falling to my death./
"What about you, Yugi?" asked Ginny.

"This takes some getting used to... but it's not bad," he said, "Is Quidditch played at Hogwarts too?"

"Yeah," said Harry, "Each of the four Hogwarts houses has a team, and they compete for the yearly cup. If you're good enough, some people get signed on professionally when they graduate."

"So it's just like non-wizard sports then," said Ryou, "Do you guys play on the house teams?"

"We did," said Fred. "George and I were beaters."

Yugi racked his brain, trying to remember what he was told when they introduced him to a broomstick. "So you were trying to knock the other team off their brooms, right?"

"Yep," said George, "Such fond memories they were too."

"Too bad Umbridge banned us off the team in our last year," said George, "Though we did get her with all the Wildfire Whiz-bangs we set off..."

Fred thought back, reminiscing on the chaos they had left behind. "Don't forget the portable swamp we left right outside her office!"

"Ahh. Memories."

"Harry and I are seekers, or he still is, at least. I took over when Umbridge banned him from the team last year, but I think this year I might try out as a chaser," said Ginny.

"The seekers are the ones that go after that little golden ball, right?" asked Ryou, "And the chasers are what we were essentially doing today, right? They're the ones that score?"

Ron nodded. "Yep. And the keepers defend the goals."

Yugi leaned forward and touched back down in the grass as the phone buzzed in his pocket.

Ryou landed and walked up next to him. "Everything all right, Yugi?"

"It's a message from Kaiba," said Yugi, and he looked up towards the house. "He's... here already. That's sooner than I expected."

"What's he doing here?" asked Harry.

"Kaiba was supposed to join us when we got here," said Yugi, "But he had business to take care of at home first."

"So... oh!" Ginny smacked a hand to her forehead. "Mum did say there were going to be three exchange students."

Hermione's eyes widened. "Wait. Seto Kaiba is the third exchange student?"

Ron looked from Hermione to Yugi. "Who's Seto Kaiba and what's so special about him that's got you all in a funk?"

"He's one of the most successful men in the world, Ron! He inherited his father's company
and rebuilt it from the ground up when he was only fifteen, was the reigning Duel Monsters champion...here, just look." She walked over to where she had left her book under a tree to play their makeshift Quidditch game, and pulled out a newspaper article she had stuck in it.

"Where'd you get that?" asked Ron.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Honestly, Ron, they've been on your kitchen table for almost two weeks. Yugi's friends sent these. See here? He's our age, and has already invented all these devices for that Duel Monsters game."

She pointed to the duel disk article. A photo depicted Seto drawing a card from his duel disk. He had replaced his suit for his Battle City attire for the shot and the way he was photographed: mid-swing with his white coat dramatically flared out behind him and the smug look of determination on his face, he could have been dueling right in front of him and Yugi wouldn't have been able to tell the difference.

Fred and George gathered up the broomsticks and headed towards the shed. Ron started skimming the article as they moved back towards the house. Yugi and Harry looked over every few seconds every time Ron muttered something. Yugi could have sworn he heard a 'Victor Krum' as they walked into the house.

Harry stopped short once they entered the kitchen. "Professor Dumbledore?"

"Ah, good evening, Harry."

Yugi noted that there were a number of other wizards around the kitchen table that he had never met before. Among them was a tall man in shabby looking robes that Harry greeted as 'Professor Lupin', a witch with the most vibrant shade of blue hair that he had ever seen, and an older wizard that was giving him and Ryou an uncomfortably sharp look, but that may have been due to the magic eye that was darting between himself and his friend.

Dumbledore rose to greet them. "Hello to you as well, Mr. Muto, Mr. Bakura. If you are looking for Mr. Kaiba, he was calling home to let his brother know he had arrived. Molly took him up to his room."

"Are we having an Order meeting?" asked Fred as he and his twin walked into the house.

"Looks like it," said George. He took a seat next to Lupin and Tonks.

"We'll start when Molly comes back," said Dumbledore taking his seat again. "You two are of course welcome to join us. As is Mr. Kaiba if he wants to come back downstairs."

"I'll go see," said Yugi.

"He's in Charlie's old room," said Mr. Weasley, "One floor above you."

"Thanks."

Yugi climbed the steps and then knocked on the door.

/He didn't answer. This is the right room, isn't it?/

/There's only two bedrooms on this floor. The other one is empty/ Yugi knocked again and then quietly pushed the door open.
"Kaiba?" The dim candle lamps that Mrs. Weasley had lit were still going in the quiet room. The familiar steel bullet-proof briefcase that Yugi knew housed his extra cards and duel disk was against the wall under the window, next to his suitcase and what looked to be a large laptop bag.

Seto was half-slumped against the headboard, eyes closed. He looked as if he had come straight out of the office. He had removed his jacket and laid it on the edge of the bed, but his tie was still knotted against his collar. His arm had dropped down to his side, his phone resting in his hand. Seto's normally expressionless mask was gone, and for once his face looked relaxed.

Yami phased out of the Puzzle. "While he doesn't look comfortable in the slightest, I don't think we should wake him, Yugi. Look at the circles under his eyes. We can relay the information from the meeting to him when he's up. If that text he sent yesterday was anything to go on, he's had a long day."

"Yeah, I was thinking so too." Yugi quietly closed the door behind him and walked downstairs. Extra chairs had been magicked around the table to include everyone, with two empty ones near the steps that he assumed were for him and Seto. Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Ginny were squashed up next to the twins, with Ron and Ginny looking fairly pleased with themselves for managing seats at the table. Mrs. Weasley was frowning next to her husband.

"Did I miss something?"

Ryou leaned over. "Not much," he said quietly, "Mrs. Weasley lost the argument to have everyone underage leave for the meeting."

"I see Mr. Kaiba won't be joining us?" asked Dumbledore.

"No," Yugi shook his head, "He's, uh, asleep."

Fred and George snickered, and then stopped upon seeing the hard look their mother gave them. "Stop that, you two. The poor boy looked exhausted when he got here."

"Well, then let us begin," said Dumbledore. "Remus?"

The man in the shabby robes sighed. "It is going to be much harder to sway the werewolves than we initially thought. Many of them had been around for the previous war, and while not all of them sided with You-Know-Who before, a lot of them have been threatened by Fenrir Greyback."

"I take it he has gathered followers for Voldemort," said Dumbledore.

"Unfortunately. It doesn't help that the Ministry continues to make it difficult for them to find work, so they are choosing allegiance with Him, claiming that he'll provide for them. He had already gathered support from the giants."

"I remember. Alastor?"

"The new minister is already doing a fine job," said Moody, his magical eye still occasionally flicking between Yugi and Ryou. "He's sent two more wizards to Azkaban under false accusations. Last one was the kid who ran the Knight Bus. Made a crude joke in the Leaky Cauldron near two Ministry officials and that was it for him."

"You mean, Stan Shunpike? They arrested him?" asked Harry.

"'Fraid so," said Moody. "Anyone with a half a brain in their head could see he's no dark wizard, but these are the times we're living in. At this point, there will be more wrongfully imprisoned wizards in
Azkaban than actual Death Eaters."

"What about the Dementors?" asked Ron. "They're still there, aren't they?"

One of the other wizards at the table, a tall black man that Ryou would later learn was called Kingsley Shacklebolt, nodded. "For now. But we fear it is only going to be a matter of time before they defect and join You-Know-Who's side as they did in the last war."

"I'm sorry to interrupt," Ryou said meekly, "But what is a dementor?"

"Dementors are beings that guard the wizard prison Azkaban," said Lupin, "They're of the darkest creatures that have ever lived on this earth. They revel in despair, sucking all of the happiness and joy out of the prisoners until there's nothing left but your worst memories and experiences. A dementor's kiss is considered a fate worse than death. It takes the living soul right out of you, leaving you an empty shell. Because of this, normally no one ever escapes Azkaban. Most go mad or die in prison."

/Sounds like my kind of creature,/ said Bakura.

Ryou ignored him.

"As of now, they still work for the Ministry," said Dumbledore, "But like Kingsley has stated, it will only be a matter of time before they break away to join Voldemort."

"But if they leave, who will guard the jail?" asked Yugi.

"We'll have to," said Kingsley. "Not us specifically, but Aurors, the dark wizard catchers. Of course, the only problem is, if we're stuck guarding the jail, there won't be anyone out to fight You-Know-Who. Which I'm betting is what he's banking on. He'll wait for the right time, and control the Ministry of Magic. The Dementors are under Ministry control, so they'll naturally just switch sides."

"While he may be only a few hairs smarter than Fudge, Scrimgeour was an Auror before taking the Minister of Magic job," said Moody, "And a damn good one, too. He won't go down easily."

"It may be coming sooner than we think," said Dumbledore. "We have all read the papers. There are more reports of wizards under the influence of the Imperius curse than ever before. If and when Voldemort decides to take the Ministry of Magic, he will not do so directly. He will use subordinates in order to keep the community in fear. It is possible that he has already planted someone within the Ministry, and if so, finding them will not be easy."

"...Now I would like to shift the focus a bit," Dumbledore continued after a moment's pause. "I would like to introduce you to Yugi Muto and Ryou Bakura, who, along with Mr. Kaiba who you've met briefly upon our arrival this evening, will be joining in the sixth year class of Hogwarts this year."

"Um, hello," said Yugi, waving shyly at the group. The blue-haired witch must have sensed his nervousness, smiled warmly, and her hairstyle immediately changed to match his own, only in a bright, shocking pink.

"Tonks," she said, "I'm a Metamorphmagus, meaning I can change my appearance at will."

Ginny leaned over to Yugi and Ryou. "She does great animal faces."

Tonks winked at them. "Catch me after the meeting. I do requests!"
"...I'm afraid we will not see much of Mr. Podmore, Miss Jones, or Miss Vance this year, as they have agreed to station in Japan to keep an eye on their families while they attend Hogwarts. They will continue to keep me updated on the war from that front. Other than that, however, there is not much else to discuss. I had hoped we would have more news from the werewolves, but I admit I underestimated Voldemort's continued allegiance with Greyback. Our continued talks with the Giants continue to lead nowhere, and I fear that has become a lost cause."

"We'll keep an eye out at the Ministry, Dumbledore," said Kingsley, rising from the table.

"Anyone staying for dinner?" asked Mrs. Weasley. Kingsley and Moody shook their heads.

"Afraid not, Molly. I have some matters at Hogwarts that need attention," said Dumbledore.

"Remus and I will stay," said Tonks.

Kingsley left the house, heading towards the edge of the barrier to apparate away. Moody made his way around the table after him, but paused at Harry's seat to whisper something quietly in his ear. Harry frowned, but nodded to him.

Dumbledore stopped in front of Yugi and Ryou. "Before I leave you to Nymphadora--" he ignored her glare at his use of her given name, "–May I have a word with the two of you?"

Yugi looked at Ryou. "Uh, sure."

"Perhaps someplace where we won't be overhead," said Dumbledore, seeing Fred and George talking with Harry and Ron out of the corner of his eye.

"We can go out to the garden," said Ryou. "I don't think dinner is going to be quite ready yet."

"Very well." He followed them outside and then waved his wand at the door. "A spell to stop eavesdroppers. I had hoped Mr. Kaiba would join us, but I trust you will fill him in. I have already discussed this with the other Order members, but I felt you would not want Harry and his friends to hear what I have to share. That is, unless you've told them about the magic of your Millennium Items."

"We didn't," said Yugi.

"I see. I was correct in my assumptions." He gestured to the chairs around the garden table.

"So what's going on?" asked Yugi.

"There has been increased activity of dark wizards in Egypt, especially near the site that the Millennium Item tablet was found."

"Has anyone disturbed the tablet?" asked Ryou.

"No. It seems there is a great deal of old magic protecting that sanctuary. But, a few artifacts were found near a newly discovered tomb and taken to the Cairo museum. I imagine they won't hold much interest to Voldemort or his followers, but they were found near where they were looking."

"What are they looking for?" asked Yugi.

"I believe they may be searching for anything related to the Millennium Items, even Items themselves. It would appear that they do not know how many there are and who may possess them all."
"That's...good, I guess," said Ryou, "It helps protect anyone else associated with the Items." He paused. "Even if the only other one wielding a Millennium Item is a prickly ghost."

"There is something else," said Dumbledore gravely. "It appears Voldemort is taking additional interest in the tablet in the Domino Museum. One of the museum curators was questioned into translating the hieroglyphics upon it, but, thankfully, the employee did not have a chance to do so. It appears the poor man had no knowledge on how to read Ancient Egyptian texts. The museum was mercifully busy that day, and the Death Eater in question did not linger."

Yugi looked at Ryou. "If that's the case, wouldn't they try again? What if they find someone who can read it? You don't think they would force them to translate it, do you?"

"I cannot say, but if Voldemort is going through the effort to send his men overseas, it is not under the realm of impossibility. Is there someone in the museum who can translate the text on the tablet?"

Yugi nodded. "Ishizu Ishtar brought the tablet to the Domino Museum. She knows more about it than anyone...and her family guarded some of the Millennium Items for generations. They also kept the secrets to the Pharaoh's return. If Voldemort found this out, the Ishtars would be in serious danger."

"I see. I will have to take this matter into consideration." Dumbledore rose from the table. "One of my teachers will be by soon to finalize your school subjects for the upcoming year. I am sure by now Miss Granger may have gone into some detail of the various classes taught at Hogwarts. Aside from your standard fare that all students take, you will have room for up to two elective courses. My colleague will take down your choices at that time and deliver your equipment lists."

"Professor," Ryou began, "Where do we buy our books and such for Hogwarts? I imagine we won't find them in any store."

"Ah. Worry not, Mr. Bakura, there are a line of shops in Diagon Alley in London for you to get your school supplies. It will become much clearer then. Now, I won't keep you from your dinner any longer. I wouldn't want you to keep Molly waiting. Good evening, gentlemen."

Dumbledore turned on his heel, and with a faint 'pop!', he was gone.

"I thought he had to leave the field to disappear like that," said Ryou.

"Maybe he's just special," said Yugi.

Mrs. Weasley poked her head out the kitchen door. "Come back in, boys. We'll have dinner inside tonight." She closed the door behind them and gestured for the two empty seats next to Lupin at the crowded table.

"So what did Dumbledore want?" asked Ron, grabbing a roll from the center of the table.

Mrs. Weasley smacked Ron's shoulder. "Ronald!"

"He was giving us an update on how things were going at home," said Ryou cautiously. "And that someone would be by to help us finalize our school schedules in the next couple of days."

"Oooh, I wonder if that means we're going to get our Hogwarts letters soon," said Hermione eagerly, "And our O.W.L results! I've been waiting for those since term ended!"

"O.W.L?" asked Yugi. "What's that?"
"Fifth-year exams," said Ginny. "Stands for 'Ordinary Wizarding Levels'. I'll be taking them this year. It's like one big test covering everything you've learned at Hogwarts up to that point. Your sixth and seventh year classes can depend on how well you place in your exams."

"Fifth year students also get career advice on what they would like to do when they leave school," said Mrs. Weasley, "Each career has certain score minimums that have to be met before you can take N.E.W.T level classes. N.E.W.T classes are much more advanced and will help prepare for your seventh-year exams, which you need to pass to graduate and enter your desired field."

"What does N.E.W.T. stand for?" asked Ryou.

"Nastily Exhausting Wizarding Tests."

"They're named that way for a reason," said Lupin, "Those two are the only cumulative exams given at Hogwarts and they are exceptionally difficult. You can't hope to pass them on one night of studying."

"Unless you're Hermione," said Ron through a mouthful of potato.

Hermione bristled at his comment. "Honestly, Ron, you know perfectly well that I had been studying all last year for those exams. I just hope I didn't mess up the Arithmancy and Ancient Runes ones too terribly."

Ron rolled his eyes and swallowed. "I don't see why you're worrying. You know you're going to get straight 'Outstanding' on everything."

"I guess that's a good grade?" asked Yugi.

"The highest one you can have," said Tonks. "It goes 'O' for 'Outstanding', then 'E' for 'Exceeds Expectations', and 'A' for 'Acceptable'. Those are the passing grades. So long as you get an 'O' or an 'E', you can continue in that subject for the next year. Sometimes an 'A' will do, but it depends on the professor as the classes get so much more difficult in N.E.W.T. level. Then, of course, your failing grades are 'P' for 'Poor', 'D' for Dreadful, and lastly, 'T' for 'Troll'."

Yugi blinked. "Really? 'Troll'?"

Tonks nodded. "Totally serious."

Mrs. Weasley grabbed a spare plate and began to fill it with a bit of everything from the table. "Do you think Seto would be up for a bite? He looks like he needs a proper meal."

Yugi shared a glance with Ryou. "Uh," said Yugi, "Maybe? He was out when I went up earlier."

"Well, I'll go check on him," said Mrs. Weasley, heading towards the stairs. "And Ron – save some of that salad for everyone else!"

"So are there any books you want to look through tomorrow?" asked Hermione, "I think you've read through most of 'Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them'."

"Actually," said Yugi, "We were thinking of something different. Would you guys like to learn how to play Duel Monsters?"

"I'm game," said Harry, "I saw a few of Dudley's cards once, but never paid much attention to it before. You fight with monsters to take out your opponent, right?"
Ryou nodded. "That's the simplest description of it, yes. You back up your monsters with magic and traps too."

"We don't have any cards," said Ron.

"We'll use our decks," said Yugi, "And Kaiba brought his too. He usually keeps extra cards on him. Maybe he'll let us use those."

/He might, so long as you catch him in a decent mood./

~~*~~

Hermione pulled Harry and Ron aside once Yugi and Ryou had gone up to bed.

"What did Moody tell you before he left?" asked Hermione. "You didn't look all that well afterwards for a bit."

"He said to be careful of Yugi and Ryou, that they're both hiding something dangerous."

"Like what?" asked Ron. "And how would he know?"

"I don't know," said Harry, "I'll bet Dumbledore was talking to them before arrived for the meeting. But whatever it is, I'm going to bet that's why Voldemort is targeting them."

"That's not really a whole lot to go on," said Hermione. "Did he say anything else?"

"He didn't have a lot of time to whisper in my ear," Harry nodded. "But his magical eye? It saw that Ryou's got one of those weird Egyptian artifacts too."

"He does?"

"Yeah, Moody saw it with his eye. Whatever those weird items are? He said to keep an eye on them. They're not what they seem to be."

"The two of them aren't very forthcoming about much of anything," said Hermione, "But can you blame them? They know us as well as we do them. I know first appearances can be deceiving, but they don't seem like the kind of people to end up as dark wizards. You'll have to give it a little more time for them to want to open up to us."

Harry and Ron exchanged glances.

Hermione sighed and slapped a hand to her forehead. "You've already started spying on them, haven't you? Why am I not surprised. Ugh, I want to find out what's going on as much as you do, but maybe, just once, I want to find something out the normal way. Don't come crying to me when friendships become ruined when you get caught."
"So trap cards are used to counter your opponents spells and monsters," said Harry, "Spell cards can do the same thing, but also are support cards for monsters, right?"

"That's right," Ryou nodded, "See, you're getting the hang of this!"

Gathered under the shade of the garden trees, Ryou sat across the table from Harry and Ron, his deck spread out in front of him. Hermione sat on the opposite end of the table, rereading Ron's fifth year Transfiguration textbook.

"For review," she had said when Ron questioned her, "You have to expect our classes this coming year to be even more difficult once we get our O.W.L results!"

After that she had ignored them and kept her head in the book.

Yugi sat nearby, having moved away from teaching Harry and Ron Duel Monsters to take Mokuba's video call.

"I think this is a new record," said Mokuba, "I was wondering why Seto didn't call me this morning like he said he would."

"Is he affected by jet lag?" asked Yugi, "By the time I saw him yesterday, he had fallen asleep. I wouldn't normally bother you with this kind of thing, but Mrs. Weasley is…really concerned since he hasn't risen yet. She's kind of a …protective mother hen in a way. When she first when to check on him and saw how he fell asleep, she apparently laid him down and tucked him in."

"Are you serious?"

"Yup. I went up this morning to see if he wanted breakfast, and he was still completely out, but buried under a few blankets this time."

"Hm…well that'll be a change for him. He hasn't had any care like that for years. But to get back on track, no, Seto doesn't really get jet lag. Not much anymore at least. If he's still asleep, it's because he was being stupid and worked himself to the point where his body gave out. …It wouldn't be the first time, but I guess I was hoping that after it happened before, he wouldn't be dumb enough to let it happen again."

"Oh."

Mokuba sighed. "The last time, Roland had to reschedule a dozen appointments because Seto worked all week preparing for a convention he attended that he literally collapsed on the sofa in his office once he finally got home. He was knocked out for two straight days."
"Then what was he doing this time?"

Mokuba frowned into the phone. "Do you remember when you called and said that there was no electricity in wizard houses, and Seto sent over those power supplies? Ever since that day, when he wasn't in the office, Seto has spent all of his time down in the lab. And I really mean all of his time. I think he was trying to come up with a more permanent solution. I mean, those banks are going to run out of power eventually, and then he'd be back at square one."

Yugi blinked. "I'm sorry I brought it up. I didn't realize this would be something he'd go into so much trouble over…..

Mokuba shrugged. "Better he found out now than after he left and unable to do something about it." He frowned as a notification appeared over Yugi's face on his screen. Then his eyes lit up. "Hey, Yugi, I gotta run. It looks like Seto's up now and he's trying to call. I'm probably gonna head to sleep afterwards, so I'll catch up with you later. Say hi to Ryou for me!"

Yugi smiled. "Will do, Mokuba, and please give my regards to the gang. I couldn't get a hold of Joey earlier today."

"Sure thing!"

Yugi pocketed his phone and turned his attention back to the mock Duel Monsters game. Ryou had split his deck and given half to Harry and half to Ron. Both of their hands were face up in front of them, and he was helping them both with their turns.

"So, you can use Earl of Demise to take out Headless Knight," said Ryou, from his seat between both of them. "Harry won't take any damage because Headless Knight was in defensive mode."

"Then I won't have any monsters left," said Harry, moving the monster to the graveyard pile. "And the only monster in my hand can't be used because it needs a sacrifice."

Ryou nodded. "That's right. But Earl of Demise is Ron's only monster out on the field, so he can't do anything else this turn. You might be able to draw something to help on your turn."

"How goes the match?" asked Yugi. He took a seat next to Ron.

"It's going," said Ryou, "They're both about equally matched, at least card-wise. Ron is currently leading by a few hundred points."

"What's this card? Dark Necrofear?" asked Harry, drawing his card and showing it to Ryou, "How does this work?"

"You summon it by removing three Fiend-type monsters from play," said Ryou, "And when it's destroyed, you can take control of the monster that was used to destroy it. But, there are only two Fiend-type monsters in your graveyard right now, so at the moment there's nothing you can do."

"So I have to end my turn," said Harry.

"Yep."

Ron laughed. "I don't even need to draw a card. The Earl of Demise has enough points to take you to zero without anything else. Guess I win!"

"Guess I lose," said Harry. He gathered up his cards and Ron's and combined them back into one deck.
"Not bad for first-timers," said Ryou, "Although not all the cards got distributed very evenly. I think you got the better half of the deck, Ron."

"No complaints there," said Ron.

"If you want to try again, I'll split the deck back up," said Ryou, "And I promise to shuffle it better this time."

They were halfway through a second game when a shadow quickly passed over them. Hermione looked up from her book in time to see an owl fly in through the kitchen window with several envelopes tied to its leg. Scrambling up, she darted towards the house, leaving her companions to stare blankly at her retreating back.

Yugi watched her disappear through the kitchen door. "What was that all about?"

Ron and Harry shared a look. "I hope that's not what I think it is…"

"What would it be?" asked Ryou. With their attention completely diverted, he put away his cards.

"Hermione's been waiting for our O.W.L results since the last day of term," said Harry, "And I think they might have finally arrived."

"Well, that's a good thing, right? You'll know how well you did."

"Yeah…" said Harry, "But our classes for this upcoming year depend on our O.W.L results. Sixth and seventh year classes are supposed to gear you towards the career you want to pursue when you leave school. If we didn't pass a necessary subject, we'll have to either take a remedial class, or choose a different career field."

"That's tough," said Ryou, "So I'm guessing you're in no hurry to find out how you did?"

Ron shrugged. "We all know Hermione will have passed everything with flying colors. Probably got straight 'O's' on everything."

Yugi started to follow them back towards the house. "Are there any subjects you're concerned over?"

"Potions, probably, since Snape's had it out for me since first year," said Harry, "But he wasn't proctoring the exam, and he's also not the one who graded it, so I might have a shot of getting a decent grade."

When they finally walked back into the kitchen, they found Hermione sitting at the table, a sheet of parchment clutched tightly in her hand.

"Well?" asked Ron.


Ron peered over her shoulder. "Oh, look, she got one Exceeds Expectations in Defense Against the Dark Arts."

"Here are your letters," said Mrs. Weasley, handing him and Harry thick envelopes. "And Yugi? Ryou? Professor McGonagall arrived just a short bit ago. She's waiting for you in the living room with Seto."

/I guess we're going to pick our classes today, Yami./
Yes, I’ve gathered that as well. Although, I didn’t think you would be this excited over it…/

Well…despite the reasons for why we’re here in the first place, I want to make the most of this experience. Harry, Ron, and Hermione seem nice, and they’ve talked plenty about Hogwarts already. I’m glad I’ll be able to pick a subject or two that will interest me!

They are…but I can also sense a bit of distrust, even from them. We'll have to be careful around them if we want to keep the Millennium Items a secret. I have a feeling sneaking around is commonplace for them./

/Right./

Seto was seated in an armchair, skimming through a textbook with one hand, and a tall mug of steaming liquid in the other. Even with the top button of his dress shirt undone and sleeves rolled back to his elbows, he still looked ready to walk into the office, despite not having to go back home for several weeks. If it weren't for the fact that his clothes had changed colors, Yugi would have guessed that he had just rolled out of bed, ditched the tie and walked out of his room.

/I guess Kaiba doesn't wear casual clothes./

/You know, Yugi, you really can't be one to judge. After all, you wore your school uniform everywhere/ Yami snickered.

/I know...I'm just used to seeing him in those coats all the time. He looks...normal?/

/As do we, I suppose, since you've left much of your belts and buckles home as well./

Sitting across from him in an identical armchair was a severe-looking woman in emerald-green robes Yugi had to guess was Professor McGonagall. She had several books stacked neatly on her lap, and after a few moments Seto finished skimming the book in his hand, handed it to her, and she passed him a different one.

"Well, well," drawled Bakura, and Yugi nearly jumped. He didn't realize the dark spirit of the Ring had taken over. He quickly turned around to make sure Harry, Ron, and Hermione weren't anywhere in earshot. Thankfully they were still huddled around the table in the kitchen. "Sleeping Beauty finally decided to grace us with his presence."

/Spirit, please leave me in control before you get me into trouble. You were the one who wanted to keep the others oblivious, remember?/

/Look, I can only harass the Pharaoh so much without drawing attention. Pushing the Priest's buttons never gets old, and I haven't had the chance to do it in weeks./

/Ugh./ There was a faint glimmer of golden light from under Ryou's shirt as he wrestled control back from his cackling counterpart.

Seto shot Bakura a glare before taking another sip of his drink, grimacing, and returning to the book in his hand.

The woman placed the books onto the nearest table and stood to greet them. "Mr. Muto, Mr. Bakura. I'm Professor McGonagall, Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts and Head of Gryffindor House. Please, sit."

"Hello, Professor," said Yugi, sitting next to Bakura on the couch.
McGonagall sat back down as well. "While you were outside, Mr. Kaiba and I have been discussing coursework. How much do you know about the classes you'll take at Hogwarts?"

"Hermione told us a little bit. Aside from mandatory classes there are some electives that we get to pick. They gave us at least a brief description of some of the classes," said Ryou.

"The standard subjects are Potions, Charms, Defense Against the Dark Arts, Herbology, History of Magic, Astronomy, and Transfiguration. All students take these courses, and can only drop them should their O.W.L results not be high enough to allow them to continue in the N.E.W.T. level."

Seto finished skimming through his book and placed it on the pile with the others.

"Professor, there's been something we've been wondering about. How do you expect us to keep up with our classes when we've never attended a magical school before?" asked Yugi.

"Professor Dumbledore seems to believe you will be able to keep up with the sixth year workload. However, after some debate on the subject, the other heads of house and I will give additional lessons outside of your normal schedule to get you up to speed. The lessons will continue as long as they're needed."

"What kind of lessons will they be?" asked Ryou.

"Your additional lessons will be in Potions, Transfiguration, Herbology, Charms, and Defense Against the Dark Arts. You will not receive written homework for these classes, but we will test you on your retention. I expect you to treat them with the same seriousness you would any other class." She reached to the table, picked the books back up, and split them between Yugi and Ryou. "As I'm sure Miss Granger has probably made you aware, there are also elective courses you may take while at Hogwarts. At most, I would choose no more than two courses. Those are books from each subject field. Now...in order for you to keep up with your workload, you will not be required to take History of Magic or Astronomy as a core subject, but you may choose them as one or both of your electives."

Yugi tallied off on his fingers. "So...Potions, Transfiguration, Charms, Herbology, Defense Against the Dark Arts...and then whatever we want to take?"

"Correct. Your electives to choose from, aside from Astronomy or History of Magic, are Arithmancy, Ancient Runes, Muggle Studies, Care of Magical Creatures, and Divination. Or, you may choose to take none, and would have more open periods to catch up on your other studies. The choice is yours."

Ryou looked down at the Divination book in his hand, and the Ancient Runes text that Yugi was flipping through. "What are you going to take, Kaiba?"

"Arithmancy." Seto took another small sip of his drink and pulled another slight sour face at the taste of it. Whatever he was drinking, Yugi figured it wasn't coffee.

"You're only going to take one class?" asked Yugi. "I would have thought you would pick more."

"I still have a company to run, even if it is halfway across the globe. And you certainly wouldn't catch me in a Divination classroom."

Ryou chuckled. "That's true. But I think I'll take that class, and then let you know just how much fun you'll be missing."

"Hn. You do that."
"I think I'll take…Ancient Runes," said Yugi. "Might be interesting."

"You were thinking of Care of Magical Creatures, weren't you?" asked Ryou.

"I was, for a little bit," said Yugi, "But then after lunch the other day, Ron was telling me stories of some of the…more interesting creatures that Professor Hagrid brought to class…and, well…” Yugi laughed awkwardly. "I got scared." He scowled at Ryou – or was it Bakura? – snickering behind his hand. "Hey, I heard the stories about Blast-Ended Skrewts!"

McGonagall tapped her wand against a few sheets of parchment. "Are those your final choices? One subject each?" After waiting for three confirmations, she stood up, waved her wand, and all of the books vanished. "These are your supply lists. I've updated them to reflect your subject choices. The Weasleys will take you before term begins to purchase your books and equipment."

"When does school start?" asked Ryou.

"Friday, September 1st," said Professor McGonagall, "The Hogwarts Express leaves Kings Cross Station at 11am sharp. Upon your arrival to Hogwarts, you'll be sorted into one of the four houses. Classes begin on the following Monday. I would recommend looking through some of Mr. Weasley's old school books in the meantime. You cannot actively practice magic outside of school unless you're seventeen, but you can still mimic wand movements or read up on the magical theory behind your subjects. I'm sure Miss Granger would be more than willing to help you get as caught up as possible before the start of term."

"Thank you, Professor," said Yugi, accepting his equipment list.

Professor McGonagall nodded. "If there is nothing else, I must be off. Enjoy the remainder of your summer."

Yugi looked down at his list. "This list is a lot bigger than I thought it was going to be."

"We apparently have five years-worth of catching up to do," said Ryou. "I suppose we'll use the other books in those extra lessons she was talking about."

Yugi turned to Seto. "So how was your trip over, Kaiba?"

Seto started to answer when Hermione walked into the living room, beaming as if Christmas had come early. Harry and Ron trailed behind her.

"I saw Professor McGonagall just left. Did she deliver your Hogwarts letters too?"

"Yup," said Yugi, passing her his school list. "Is that what was came before for you guys?"

"Yeah," said Harry, "And our O.W.L. results."

"Good scores, I hope," said Ryou.

"Good enough that we'll be able to take the N.E.W.T. classes to become an Auror," said Harry, "Hermione got straight O's on everything except Defense Against the Dark Arts."

"You were always better in that subject than me," said Hermione, looking down at the parchment in front of her. "Yugi, we'll be taking Ancient Runes together!"

"I guess I'll have a study buddy then," Yugi smiled. He turned to his rival. "Kaiba, this is Harry Potter, Ron Weasley, and Hermione Granger," he said, gesturing to them as he spoke, "They're
going to be in our year at Hogwarts. Guys, this is Seto Kaiba."

Seto nodded at the introductions and took another sip from his mug. The trio shuffled closer into the room and took seats around the living room table.

Ron, who ended up sitting almost right next to him, wrinkled his nose. "Whoa, mate, whatever you're drinking sure doesn't smell pleasant."

"It's something your mother made," said Seto, irritably, "It's supposed to keep me awake, and I can assure you, the taste leaves much to be desired."

Harry blinked. "Weren't you asleep for over an entire day?" At the least?

"If by asleep you mean lying down with my eyes closed, then yes," said Seto. "If you meant getting actual rest, then no, I wasn't." He gave Yugi a sideways glance as he took another sip.

/I think he wants to talk to us privately, Yugi/

/You can tell that from a one-second glance?/

/Call it a hunch./

"Is that normal? To be out for so long or to get so little sleep?" asked Hermione.

"I don't see how my sleeping habits are any of your business."

Ryou cleared his throat. "Mokuba said you were working down in the lab for a while. Did you at least finish what you were working on?"

Seto nodded. "I modified the power banks I brought with me to run on solar energy, so they'll charge themselves so long as they're not in a pitch-dark environment, but I had to build a whole new compatible battery and external power source for my laptop from scratch."

"On solar power?" Yugi's jaw dropped. "How long did that take to develop?"

Seto leaned his head back against the back of the armchair and closed his eyes. "We've already developed the technology, Yugi. Indoor dueling stations never had a problem, but think of Duelist Kingdom. Pegasus had dueling arenas set up all over his island, and I guarantee you he didn't have power outlets hiding on trees in the woods. All of those outdoor arenas charged via solar panels embedded in between the duelist platforms."

He gave Yugi a half-amused look. "You never wondered why your duel disk never required an external power source? The idea of dueling anywhere at any time is ruined if you suddenly find yourself with a dead battery. What would have happened if your duel disk shut down in the middle of the Battle City finals? That's why there are solar emitters under the card recognizer slots."

"You invented all of that, and went to school, and ran a company…and you're just our age?" Hermione said, wide-eyed. "T-that's amazing!"

Ron snorted. "Hermione just can't believe there's someone out there who actually accomplished all the stuff they're famous for. The last one she got in such a huff over was a fraud."

Seto raised an eyebrow.

"Our second-year Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, Professor Lockhart, was a famous wizard who wrote all these books on his travels and encounters with all sorts of dark creatures. But what he
really did was interview the people who actually did those things, wipe their memories clean, and then take credit for it. He ended up accidentally erasing his own memory, and now he’s dealing with the fallout of permanent spell damage,” said Harry.

~~#~~

When he was told later that day that they would be traveling by Floo Powder to Diagon Alley, Ryou wasn’t quite sure what to make of it. They were told it was much more pleasant than being whisked around via Portkey, but he wasn’t sure he liked tumbling out of a fireplace covered in soot any better. At least Mrs. Weasley cleaned all the dirt away once she arrived, looking relieved that they had all popped out of the same grate. Which made him worry over where he might have ended up if the wrong chimney spit him out.

Of course, his darker spirit enjoyed the travel just as much as Portkeying. He had to have been a crazy daredevil in his past life.

What he found most surprising were the lack of shoppers bustling through Diagon Alley. Being the main shopping district for wizards – especially Hogwarts students – the crowds were shockingly thin.

"No one is hanging around anymore," said Mr. Weasley, "It's too dangerous now with You-Know-Who back. Stick together, everyone, and watch out for any suspicious-looking street vendors. A lot are popping up selling cursed amulets these days."

Ryou could see Gringotts Bank towering over all of the other buildings at the end of the street. The large white-marbled bank stood out drastically from the rest of the alley made of wood and stone.

/I wish we could see what this alley normally looked like. Everyone is so afraid now. A lot of shops have closed, and look at all the wanted posters everywhere!/ 

/As if anyone is going to turn in information about someone so dangerous. They're not going to risk retaliation against their families if word got out. Although, the moving photographs are a nice touch. It certainly adds to their image. I almost wish I had one of my own./

/You didn't have some sort of…wanted sign, Spirit?/

/Hardly. Although…when I made my move thousands of years ago, events had escalated quite quickly. There wouldn't have been time to waste scratching my handsome mug into papyrus for the village to gawk at./

He nearly plowed into Mrs. Weasley, who had stopped in front of a rather new-looking shop in comparison to the condition of the rest of the street. The bright orange lettering over the door stated 'Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes'. When he looked back down towards the window, he saw what had the Weasley matriarch so fixated. It was a sign in bright flashing letters.

'WHY ARE YOU WORRYING ABOUT YOU-KNOW-WHO? YOU SHOULD BE WORRYING ABOUT U-NO-POO: THE CONSTIPATION SENSATION THAT'S GRIPPING THE NATION!'

Bakura started cackling in his soul room. /I knew I liked those two for a reason./

"They'll be murdered in their beds," Mrs. Weasley muttered, horrified. Seeing Harry, Ron, Ginny, and Hermione's interested looks towards the shop, she sighed. "Alright, Arthur, I'll take these four into the shop, if you could get Yugi, Ryou, and Seto started? We'll catch up with you in a bit."
Gringotts looked much more impressive once they were standing right in front of it. "This is our wizarding bank," said Mr. Weasley, "Just, try not to stare too much inside. Goblins are used to it from Muggle-born families visiting to exchange funds for the first time, but we don't want to draw too much attention." He glanced around before walking inside.

Ryou didn't realize just what he was talking about until they walked into the bank.

/Aha! I didn't think it was possible for anyone to be shorter than that shrimp you call a friend, but here we are. Small world./

/Quiet, Spirit!/

"Hey Ryou," Yugi said softly, pointing to a posting next to the front doors. "I would make sure your other half sees this…"

'Enter stranger, but take heed
Of what awaits the sin of greed.
For those who take, but do not earn,
Must pay most dearly in their turn.
So if you seek beneath our floors
A treasure that was never yours,
Thief, you have been warned, beware
Of finding more than treasure there.'

/Hm. That sounds like a challenge!/

/Don't you dare try anything funny./

"…The banks are run by goblins," said Mr. Weasley to Seto as they walked through the bank, "They can't be bribed, and thankfully do not take sides in wartime. Gringotts is one of the most, if not the most secure location in Britain. All of the vaults are protected by countless enchantments, and only the goblins themselves truly know all of the tunnels and passages that run under the building. Thieves would have to have a death wish to try and steal something out of here."

They approached the nearest counter. "You can exchange your regular currency here, but if you need it, Professor Dumbledore has funded accounts set up for you." Mr. Weasley looked around the bank for the second time.

"We brought our own money with us," said Yugi. He frowned. The counter was taller than he was. Looking around, he saw that all of the desks in the bank were just as high. It must be terrible to be a short wizard.

"Are you looking for someone?" Yugi asked Mr. Weasley, watching him glance quickly around the vast room as Seto took a wad of bills from his wallet and passed them to the goblin.

"Lupin and Tonks are going to help with getting your supplies," said Mr. Weasley, "Harry and the others won't have as many items to purchase. Some things, such as a trunk, or a cauldron you only buy once unless it's in need of being replaced. Since you haven't attended Hogwarts, you'll have your sixth year supplies along with everything first years will need going in."

Exchanging their money didn't take as long as Yugi thought it might, though he didn't really take much part in it. Both he and Ryou handed their money to Seto and he dealt with transferring it over to the different wizarding coins.
"We'll get you to Madam Malkin's first," said Mr. Weasley, "That way she can make adjustments to your robes while you get the rest of your shopping done."

Madam Malkin, a short, smiling witch, greeted them as soon as they entered the boutique. It was small, with various robes on racks along the walls.

"Hello, dears! I haven't seen you in here before? What can I do for you?"

"We need robes for school. We'll be attending Hogwarts this year," said Yugi. "Exchange students."

"Of course, of course. What year will you be entering? All the same I imagine…"

"Sixth," said Ryou.

"Very good," she said conversationally. "I can set one up in the back at the moment while I finish up with a classmate of yours." She looked amongst the three of them before looping an arm around Seto's. "You're first, handsome. Come on back, and up on the stool."

She turned to Yugi and Ryou. "You boys can come along as well. I have some seats along the edge for you while you wait your turn."

There were two fitting spots in the back area. She gestured Seto up onto the empty stool in front of a trio of mirrors, across from a blonde boy in the process of getting fitted. "I just have a few more things to finish up, and then I'll be back. I'll get your measurements in the meantime. Just keep your arms up – yes, just like that, until the measuring tape sits itself back down."

Yugi and Ryou took seats along the side of the room. On the opposite end, a woman, most likely the blonde's mother, sat while her son's robes were hemmed.

"Haven't seen you before," said the blonde boy. "Bit old for Hogwarts, aren't you?"

"Exchange students," said Seto. The measuring tape was stretched from his shoulder to shoulder. A sheet of parchment and quill floated alongside it, taking notes.

The blonde boy looked from Seto to Yugi and then back to his mother. "Huh. Where from? Durmstrang?"

"No."

"Pity. What brings you to Hogwarts this ye –ow! Watch where you put those pins, woman!"

"I'm so sorry, dear, but I'm just trying to adjust your sleeve."

Yugi watched as Madam Malkin shifted a pin on the boy's left sleeve. But when she tried to roll it up, he slapped her hand away.

"Ow!" He pulled the sleeve back down and yanked the robes off, scattering pins all over the floor. "Mother, I don't think I want to be seen in these rags."

"Quite right," she said, "We'll go to Twilfitt and Tatting's. Their robes are of much higher quality, and you won't have to deal with the riff-raff that shop here." She side-eyed the front of the shop, where Harry, Ron, and Hermione had just entered. They stalked past them and out the door.

"Well I never," said Madam Malkin, crossing her arms. "Quite uncalled for." She waved her wand and the discarded robes hung themselves onto a nearby rack. Gesturing Ryou onto the now empty stool, the measuring tape, quill and parchment began taking measurements while she worked on the
hem of Seto's robes.

"What was that all about?" asked Harry.

"I don't know," said Yugi. "That guy was fine until she was working on his left arm. He got mad, and stormed off."

Harry looked at Ron and Hermione. "Malfoy's been branded. Come on!"

Yugi watched as Harry withdrew what looked like a silvery cloak from his bag, and the three of them darted out of the shop.

Ryou twisted around so he wasn't watching through the mirrors. "What just happened?"

"I have no idea," said Yugi, pointing to the window. "But whatever that fancy cloak was that Harry pulled out of his bag made him disappear. At least, I think he disappeared."

Madam Malkin stepped back from pinning one of Seto's hems. "Ah, there we go. I'll have these ready for you in a jiffy. I just have one more type of fitting to do for you, and then you'll be done." She carefully removed the robes and set them along her side table.

"What else is there?"

"Dress robes, of course! Fourth years and up are required to have them in case of special functions at school, like the Yule Ball a few years back. Unlike your official Hogwarts robes, these are more particular to whatever style and color suits you best. I have a book here for you to choose from. Take a look through that, and when I finish pinning your friends' regular robes, we'll get you all squared away. I'll let you three go about the rest of your shopping, so when you come back they'll all be ready for you."

She handed Seto a thick book and went back to pinning Ryou's school robes. The measuring tape, having long finished taking Yugi's measurements, was now checking to see which of Yugi's hair spikes was the longest while he watched through the mirror.

It felt like the entire day was gone by the time the three of them walked out of Madam Malkin's shop so she could finish up their selections. Arthur Weasley was waiting for them.

"I thought that was going to be the easiest shop to get out of the way," said Yugi, "Her measuring tape kept getting caught in my hair!"

"At least she could reach you to do all of her pinning," said Ryou, snickering quietly. "For some of us, she had to get up on a chair after we stepped off her work stool."

Seto rolled his eyes. "Laugh it up. At least I didn't get turned into a pin cushion."

Ryou crossed his arms. "I couldn't help it. Bakura was getting fidgety."

Lupin and Tonks met them outside Flourish and Blotts. "We're going to help you get your books," said Mr. Weasley, "Harry and the others have finished their shopping already. They're with Molly in the Leaky Cauldron." He pointed back down the alley to the pub they used to Floo into London. "There's a side shop inside the bookstore with trunks. You'll want to get one of those as well."

It seemed the reason why there was no one out on the streets was because everyone was buying up what they could in the book store. The Defense Against the Dark Arts sections of the shop were particularly bare. Most of the shelves in that corner of the store were empty, except for the one book
"No one seems to care about *Defensive Magical Theory* … for both volumes," said Ryou.

"Well, we need the second volume, but I guess we ought to get the first one too, to help catch up," said Yugi, "Even though last year, Harry and his friends didn't seem to learn much from it."

"We might as well split up," said Seto, "There's too many people around to stay clustered together. I say we meet by the entrance when we're done." Without giving them a word in, he stalked off through the crowd.

Yugi compared his school list with Ryou. "I guess it's easier if we go down the list. That way we don't miss any."

"I'll help you navigate through this place," said Tonks, looking where Lupin had wandered off to follow Seto. "We'll catch up with your friend eventually."

Yugi shrugged. "Eventually."

They had to nearly fight a couple over their copies of *Advanced Transfiguration*, and there were thankfully plenty of copies of *Advanced Potion Making*. By the time they weaved their way through the gaggle of students huddled around second grade spell books – and to the other end of the store and picked out a trunk, the crowds had somewhat thinned.

They found Lupin and Seto right outside the shop, the latter leaning against the wall between two Wanted posters tapping away on his phone.

"Ready to move on?" asked Lupin.

"Yep," said Yugi, "I didn't think we were going to make it out of there."

"The rest of your supplies will be much easier, trust me. There are never runs like that on the Apothecary or the stationary store." Mr. Weasley waved his wand and levitated their trunks. "I'm going to take these back to the Leaky Cauldron. Drop by and leave your purchases with us if you get too weighed down. Remus and Tonks will help you get the rest of what you need."

Picking out quills and ink, as well as their potions equipment had been the most straightforward of any of their purchases that day.

"We're going to take these back to your trunks," said Tonks, once they walked out of Potage's Cauldron Shop. "The only thing left besides picking up your robes are wands. Ollivanders is right up there, across from the Magical Menagerie. If you're interested in getting a pet to take with you to Hogwarts, that's your spot. Only real useful ones are owls though, since they carry your mail. But they're optional. Once you finish up here, come on back to the Leaky Cauldron, and we'll all have a bite to eat before heading back to the Burrow."

"You're not going in with us?" asked Yugi.

"Ollivanders is pretty small up front. There's not a whole lot of room for guests. Besides," she winked, "Bet you want to have a little bit of time unsupervised, right?"

Ollivanders was indeed a narrow storefront. There was only one item in the window display: a single wand on a faded cushion. The bell above the door jingled when they stepped foot inside.

Tonks hadn't been joking: it was cramped inside. Every surface other than the small counter was
piled high with wands. Stacks of all sorts of narrow boxes went as far as they could see into the back areas of the dimly lit store.

"Ah," said an older man coming out from one of the stacks. "I see I have some interesting guests today."

"What makes you say that?" asked Seto.

"I remember every wand I have ever sold. You three are obviously too old to be first-year students, so unless you have previously purchased wands from another location, your magical ability has developed much later than most. Not impossible, but certainly not common.

"Now, wands are delicate things. They choose their wizard, not the other way around. There is likely more magic here in this shop than along all of Diagon Alley. The wands can sense magic radiating from you, a different kind of magic certainly, but all the same in the end. And magic has a way of reacting to itself."

Mr. Ollivander waved his own wand, and a similar measuring tape to the one Madam Malkin used began to circle the three of them, calculating Yugi's total height, Ryou's hair from the top of his head down to the middle of his back, and the width of Seto's shoes.

"Now, now, cut that out. One at a time," said Mr. Ollivander. The tape finally decided to start with Ryou.

"Alright, young man, what is your name?"

"Uh, Ryou Bakura." Ryou nearly went cross-eyed as the tape went from measuring his arms to finding out how far apart his eyes were.

"Well, Mr. Bakura, which is your wand arm – or your dominate arm?"

"I'm right-handed."

"Very good, very good," said Mr. Ollivander, "Now let me think…" He disappeared into the back area of the shop and returned with a long, narrow box. Setting it upon the counter, he opened it up and held the wand, handle out, towards Ryou.

"While I specialize in wand cores containing a dragon heartstring, phoenix tail feather, and unicorn hair, there are some of my family's older creations stacked amongst us. Try this one: holly and kelpie hair, 9 inches."

Ryou took it in his hand. "What do I do with it?"

Mr. Ollivander gestured around the room, "Well give it a wave."

Ryou bit his lip and waved the wand towards the counter, feeling a bit foolish as he did so. The ink well sitting on top immediately exploded. "Oh my – I'm so sorry!"

Mr. Ollivander snatched the wand back, waved his own, and cleaned up the mess. "Not the right fit of course. Try this one."

The second wand had barely touched Ryou's fingers before Mr. Ollivander whisked it away and started moving towards the back stacks again.

After covering the counter in discarded wand boxes (with the pile spreading across the floor), Mr.
Ollivander had nearly given up on Ryou alone and started passing wands down the line for Yugi and Seto to try as well before grabbing more boxes from the back. Yugi's first attempt at his wand nearly set his hair on fire, and Seto's third wand shattered the shop's windows, sending the few nearby shoppers scattering away from the shards of glass.

"Here," said Mr. Ollivander, handing a reddish wand to Seto. "Cherry and dragon heartstring, 9 inches."

Seto sighed, and the moment his arm raised to wave the wand, it shot out of his grip and propelled itself onto a high stack of wand boxes piled nearly up to the ceiling.

Mr. Ollivander watched it disappear above them. "…Nope. Definitely not."

He paused, looking around at the attempted wand pile and complete disarray of his shop. "Perhaps I am not going about this the right way." He began pacing across the little bit of spare floor that was left, muttering to himself. "There is a great deal of magic here. It's different and yet the same. At odds with itself. Hmm…." He looked around the room at the ceiling stacks. "I wonder….

Yugi looked over at Seto and Ryou and shrugged as Mr. Ollivander scampered into the back of the shop again. "At this rate, I think we've tried everything. Maybe this is where our Hogwarts adventure ends – before it even started because none of the wands here liked us."

Mr. Ollivander returned a few minutes later, with a handful of wand boxes, each one looking like they were coated in over an inch of dust.

"These are some of the most peculiar wands ever crafted. Unlike most of the ones here, these were forged abroad, from creatures that were not native to this area. As you can see…" He turned away and blew the dust off of one box, "…They're also quite old. Some of the cores in these wands were obtained by the first Ollivander wand-makers. These are also unique in that they contain two cores, not one."

He handed Ryou the first wand. "Try this."

Ryou carefully picked up the wand and gave a little wave. Seto immediately ducked as the light over his head exploded.

"Sorry, Kaiba!"

"We'll just set this one aside," said Mr. Ollivander. He wiped the dust off a second box and held it out to Ryou.

The moment he touched it, Ryou felt both a surge of cold and warmth flood through him. It was different than all of the other wands he had tried, and felt pleasant in an odd sort of way.

"Aha, there we go. Willow, with unicorn and thestral hair, 11 inches. A rather unique and rare combination. There are very few wands in existence that use thestral hair, and even less that work well with unicorn hair. Excellent in performing nonverbal spells, but also produces consistent results with all other forms of magic."

Ryou placed the wand gingerly in its box, and stepped away from the counter so the others had a bit more room.

"Alright, your turn," said Mr. Ollivander, gesturing to Yugi. "And your name?"

"Yugi Muto."
"Alright, Mr. Muto, try this one. Ash, with a unicorn hair and phoenix tail feather, 9 inches."

Yugi took the wand in his hand, gave it a wave, and jumped back, startled, as a line of boxes flew off of a piece of shelving.

Mr. Ollivander chuckled. "Quite a destructive group I have today."

"Will you need help putting the shop back together?" asked Ryou nervously. At this rate, it would take all day to repair the damage they caused.

"Oh no, don't you worry about that. I'm used to cleaning up after difficult customers. Yesterday a young girl was getting her first wand for Hogwarts, and nearly took the entire store down with her on her first attempt. This is not the worst I've seen my shop."

He blew dust off of another box. "Another curious combination. Perhaps this will be your lucky one?"

Yugi took the wand in his hand. He was immediately hit with a rush of energy, triggering the Millennium Puzzle to glow.

/What was that?/

/I'm not quite sure...something in your wand found a connection to the Millennium Puzzle. That's very interesting./

"What kind of wand is this, Mr. Ollivander?"

"Cedar, combination of an Egyptian phoenix tail feather and a thunderbird tail feather, 10 inches. It's capable of learning most varieties of magic, takes a specialty to transfiguration, and very choosy of their owners. It is unlikely another wizard would be able to use your wand."

Yugi nodded slowly. *Egyptian phoenix, huh?* "You're up, Kaiba," he said, sitting down next to Ryou. He held his open wand box on his lap and looked it over carefully.

"Alright then, Mr. Kaiba, last but not least, let's see if one of these finicky wands will be yours today. Elm, with two different phoenix tail feathers, 10 inches."

Seto gave the wand a lazy flick. The wall panels over the blown-out windows crumbled, raining dust down over Yugi and Ryou. "Guess that isn't it then."

"No, it isn't." Mr. Ollivander opened up another dusty box. "Try this."

The next wand set a pile of papers on fire.

"Perhaps this..." Mr. Ollivander mused, blowing away another spot of dust. He handed out another wand.

Reaching out, Seto felt a sudden calming sensation even before the wooden handle met his palm, which intensified once he had closed his fingers around the handle.

"Excellent, excellent! I did not think these wands would choose anyone, for how long they have been sitting in this shop. That one is a walnut wood, with a dragon heartstring and Egyptian phoenix tail feather, 12 inches. Very powerful, spells are learned easy, but will only commit to someone of sufficient brilliance, otherwise it may commit to a different owner."

Mr. Ollivander waved his wand, and the shop began repairing itself. The discarded wands slid back
to their homes on the stacks and shelves all over the store. The glass fitted itself back into the windows, and the dust and dirt from the broken fixtures and furniture disappeared.

Once they each paid their seven galleons for their wands, Mr. Ollivander bowed at the entrance to the shop. "It has been a pleasure to give you your first wands, gentlemen. I have a feeling we will see great things from the three of you."

Chapter End Notes

Included below is information about Yugi, Ryou, and Seto's wands, for anyone interested. A lot of information came from the Harry Potter Wikia. While I did take liberties on a few of the wand cores chosen, (since Mr. Ollivander specifically only focused on using dragon heartstring, unicorn hair, and phoenix tail feather), I wanted to find a combination for each that suited both the user and their ancient counterpart.

**Ryou Bakura: Willow, with unicorn and thestral hair, 11 inches:**
Willow wands have healing abilities, and usually find owners that may have (potentially unwarranted) insecurities. They are also known for producing advanced nonverbal magic, and find those of great potential. Wands with unicorn hair bond strongly to their first user and produce consistent magic, although thestral hair could have a tendency to have no allegiance to its owner. Wands with thestral hair can only connect to wizards who have mastered death.

Ryou is a shy character, who kept a bit of a distance from his friends in the beginning because of his fear of Yami Bakura. Most of his action in the series is done through his dark half, and Ryou rarely gets his time to shine….

Considering Ryou is nearly the polar opposite of Bakura, I wanted to find cores on both ends of the spectrum. I imagine a thestral-cored wand would not choose an owner who hasn't at least seen death at least once. The Millennium Ring has caused enough murder and mayhem over the years that while they may not be 'masters of death', Yami Bakura has witnessed the murder of his entire village, and Ryou may have been present when his mother and Amane died.

If a thestral is considered one of the world's darkest creatures, considering its connection to death, then the unicorn would be its opposite. Unlike thestrals, unicorns are creatures of beauty and purity, and both its horn and blood can be used to sustain life: drinking its blood will keep someone alive on the brink of death (with its consequences, of course), and its horn has been used to create antidotes to poisons.

**Yugi Muto: Cedar, Egyptian phoenix tail feather and a thunderbird tail feather, 10 inches:**
Cedar wands choose those that are perceptive, and also those who have the potential to be underestimated. A wand with a phoenix tail feather core produces a variety of magic, but they are also very choosy of their owners. The thunderbird tail feather is powerful, hard to master, but is excellent for transfiguration work. They can also cast spells on their own and have a knack for sensing danger.
It should go without saying that Yugi is one of the most underestimated characters of the entire series. Considering Yami jumps into most of the battles in his place, it can be easy to forget that Yugi has a fight all his own, and his opponents would do well to remember that!

As for wand cores, Yugi and Yami aren't nearly as opposite as Ryou and his spirit. As Yami was a Pharaoh in his past life and commands the three Egyptian Gods, I went with cores that would reflect them. You could say the thunderbird and phoenix represent Slifer and Ra, respectively. And, considering Yugi's penchant for getting himself into trouble, it seems only right that Yami isn't the only one (or thing) looking out for him.

Seto Kaiba: Walnut, dragon heartstring and Egyptian phoenix tail feather, 12 inches:
Walnut wands seem to have high standards when it comes to brilliance, and seek out the innovators and inventors. When they are mastered, they form a type of bond with their owner and can perform any desired magic. In the wrong hands, it can become a powerful, lethal weapon, as the wand and wizard feed from each other in a rather unhealthy sort of relationship. As for cores, dragon heartstrings make for powerful wands. It is easy for them to learn spells, but the wand can easily commit to another wizard. Phoenix tail feathers, on the other hand, while capable of learning the most variety of magic, do not change hands easily.

Seto's wand choices are probably the easiest to decipher. A walnut wand fits Seto's accomplishments perfectly, and Set also rose from nothing to a high position in the Pharaoh's court. As Set also became a Pharaoh, it is quite possible that the Egyptian phoenix feather in his wand may also be a representation of Ra, which would make his and Yugi's wand cousins (I would say brothers, but there's no way of knowing if both feathers are from the same phoenix). The heartstring likely would have come from an Antipodean Opaleye, as that is probably the closest modern representation of Kisara's dragon form.
Ryou and Yugi went looking for Harry once they got back to the Leaky Cauldron. "What was that all about in the robe shop this afternoon?"

Harry looked around the pub before leaning in closer to the exchange students. "We think Malfoy was branded with the Dark Mark and has become a Death Eater."

"Harry, Harry thinks Draco Malfoy was branded with the Dark Mark," Hermione corrected him, "Honestly, it's not like you saw it or anything."

"His family is full of them, Hermione, and if he was sensitive about Madam Malkin touching his left arm, it has to be because the brand was there and he didn't want her to see it. Why else would he put up such a fuss? So we followed him to Knockturn Alley, which is where most of the Dark Arts shops are. He went into Borgin and Burkes and was arguing to the shopkeeper about something, but we didn't get to find out what."

"Is this Malfoy dangerous?" asked Yugi.

"He's a bully, but he's hardly dangerous. His family thrived on their wealth and pureblood status and they used their influence to blackmail and gain favor in the Ministry," said Ron. "But...after the Department of Mysteries battle, Malfoy's father was caught and sent to Azkaban, but considering You-Know-Who is out in the open again, he probably has been broken out by now."

"Well...I guess we'll just have to be careful when we're at Hogwarts," said Ryou. "If this classmate of yours really did join Voldemort-- why do you flinch like that every time someone says his name?"

"It's from before the war ended the first time," said Ron, "He instilled so much fear in the world that people were afraid to talk about him in public. His name sort of became taboo."

"Which is ridiculous, it's just a name," said Harry.

"Well..." Ryou started again, "If he has become a Death Eater, he's seen us. Voldemort will know that we're going to be at Hogwarts this year."

"You'll be safe at Hogwarts though, so long as Dumbledore still runs the school," said Ron, "But why is that such a worry. What'd you do to piss off You-Know-Who?"

/Be careful what you say. We don't need these busybodies asking about the Millennium Items./

/I'm sorry, Spirit, it's just very difficult for me to keep lying all the time./

"I really don't know," said Ryou, running a hand through his hair, "We followed Dumbledore on, well, blind faith. I'm just worried that if he knows we're someplace he can't get to, he might find a way to draw us out. I mean, isn't that something he's done before?"

"Yeah," said Harry, looking down at the floor. "Last term at the Department of Mysteries. ...And
during the Tri-Wizard tournament the year before. It was rigged for me to enter, and the trophy was a Portkey that led me straight to Voldemort."

"If we've learned anything from the last couple of years, it's to not jump to conclusions," said Hermione, giving Harry a quick side-glance. "If something isn't right or looks suspicious, we just need to check with Dumbledore or another member of the Order at Hogwarts. They'll be able to help."

Harry nodded glumly.

Upon their return to the Burrow, Seto beckoned Yugi upstairs while Ron began to show Ryou how to play Exploding Snap.

"What's up, Kaiba?" he asked as they entered Seto's room. "Oh – I wanted to ask before, but got interrupted, how was your trip?"

"Exhausting," said Seto. "There were malfunctions with the new battery pack I built that needed to be dealt with, and I had to spend half the day at the office listening to Pegasus. It would have been nice if Professor McGonagall came tomorrow – I could have used the extra sleep."

"Is that why you were drinking that stuff Mrs. Weasley made?"

Seto nodded, "It's a poor excuse for coffee." He yawned. "I might just go back to bed once dinner is over, and so long as I get through the night, I should be back to a regular routine tomorrow."

Yugi thought back to their brief conversation earlier in the day. "Were you not sleeping before? You know, Mrs. Weasley thought you were seriously ill when you went right to sleep once you got here and then when you didn't get up the next morning."

Seto shook his head. "It's what I wanted to talk to you about. But first, I have something for you."

He knelt down and opened his briefcase. "Your duel disk."

"Oh! Thank you! I hope it wasn't too much trouble to bring over."

"It wasn't. But since I had to pick that up, your friends put together something else for you. It's in here," Seto reached back into the briefcase and pulled out a thick envelope. "They've written you letters, and Mokuba included a photograph from a local event held at your grandfather's shop. Apparently one of those Auror babysitters offered to have it mailed by owl, but your grandfather wasn't sure it would make the journey flying halfway around the world."

"Thank you," Yugi hugged the envelope close to his chest. "I'll read them later. So…what's bothering you?"

Seto sighed tiredly. "This is in some way directed towards your…Pharaoh friend. Do you share dreams?"

Yugi tilted his head. "What do you mean?"

"Does he dream of his past life, and if he does, do you see what he sees?"

Yugi frowned. "I don't think…but I'll let him come out and answer this."

The Millennium Puzzle bathed the bedroom in a golden hue as Yugi swapped places with Yami.

"What's wrong, Kaiba? I haven't seen you this concerned in quite some time."
Seto sank down onto the edge of the bed and looked Yami straight in the eyes. "This past life you keep claiming to have – have you dreamt of it?"

Yami shook his head. "I have no memories of my past. They were all locked away. The only glimpses I have ever seen of it since awakening from the Millennium Puzzle had come from an outside influence. I saw a few flashes once while dueling Dartz in his temple, but that was about it, aside from our duel during the Battle City finals. Since I'm merely a spirit now, like Set, I also don't need sleep, and therefore don't dream."

"Well, aside from our battle, the only flashes of Set's past life that I had ever seen before was during my duel with Ishizu Ishtar. From what I was told, the Millennium Rod activated by itself and that's what changed my mind on how to win that duel. I hadn't seen those flashes since…until now."

"You're getting memory flashes? Set's memories?"

"I don't know. He apparently can't see them, but I keep getting the same ones over and over again. And it's not like you go to sleep and dream some whimsical fantasy like a normal person. They feel intrusive, like these memories aren't supposed to be there, and they're actually interrupting the sleep I do get at night."

"Well, what do you see?"

"Most of them are the same. I'm – or Set is, I suppose – kneeling in front of a stone tablet depicting the Blue Eyes White Dragon. There's a woman in my arms, but I don't know who she is. A few other times I'm dueling you. Not a modern duel, but the one that happened on that tablet. Another one I've had, I had drawn a sword and had stabbed someone, but I don't know who it was, and that dream has only come around once."

Yami crossed his arms. "Have you talked to Set about them?"

"He's just as much an amnesiac as you are."

Yami frowned. "I'm afraid I'm not much help. I don't think we've ever experienced what you're describing. Try to remember as much as you can the next time they come around. Maybe there's something these wizards know about dreams that can help you. They seem to have magical solutions for almost everything else."

"Except for making decent coffee."

Yami chuckled. "Except that. We were going to play another round of mock Quidditch before dinner. It's a wizard sport played on broomsticks in the air. Yugi seems to enjoy spending the time up in the air, although he isn't very good at the sport, at least not yet. Would you like to join us?"

Seto shook his head. "While I would normally get a kick out of watching you make a fool of yourself, I'm just going to lie down before dinner."

Yami took a step forward. "Are you sure you'll alright?"

"Yugi, I haven't slept properly in over a week. This is my body trying to recover from being ridiculously overtaxed. If Mrs. Weasley hadn't woken me up when Professor McGonagall arrived and I was able to get up naturally, I would have been fine. One uninterrupted, decent night's sleep is all I need, and then I'll be the usual bundle of cheer you're used to again."

Yami chuckled. "Alright, if the sarcasm is coming back, I suppose you're okay. I'll leave you to get some rest, and I'll come get you for dinner. If you skip another meal, neither of us will hear the end
Yami watched Seto lean back against his pillows and close his eyes before leaving the room, closing the door quietly behind him.

Yugi took control again as he walked back downstairs. *Yami, why would the Millennium Rod be forcing Set's memories on Kaiba without the spirit's knowledge?*

*I don't know, Yugi. And they're the same memories too. They must have some importance, other than showing Kaiba his favorite monster in stone./*

*I've never heard of a Millennium Item doing something like that before. The Puzzle certainly hasn't shown us anything related to your past./*

*Perhaps we should ask Bakura if the Millennium Ring has ever shown him visions of the past before.../*

*Bakura's spirit seems to know the most about the Millennium Items. I just hope he has an answer for us..../*

*Me too, Yugi.* said Yami worriedly. *Me too..../*

~~*~~

It turned out that Bakura couldn't offer any insight into why Set was unknowingly projecting his forgotten memories into his dreams. This was fine overall as the dreams hadn't returned since his talk with Yugi. He had too much to do to have to worry about losing sleep over memory flashes.

Seto woke the next day feeling back to his usual self. He rose earlier than everyone else in the house, set up a workstation at the far end of the kitchen table, made himself a cup of tea, and checked into Kaiba Corp, staying online and working right up through to Mrs. Weasley making lunch.

After his daily call home to his brother, he spent his afternoons either in the living room or under one of the shadier trees outside reading through his textbooks, ignoring Ron's jests that even Hermione didn't keep her nose in books the entire time between terms. It wasn't like *he* was on summer vacation; he graduated Domino High a year ahead of Yugi and his friends.

After dinner, he retreated from the others and went back to reading in his room. Set was beginning to get put out that he never went anywhere around the house holding onto the Millennium Rod and wasn't pleased at the prospect of being trapped in the Item for long periods again.

Seto rolled his eyes. "I'm not giving them something else to gawk over. It'll be easier to conceal the Rod at Hogwarts under my robes."

"And until then?" asked Set, phasing out of the Rod from its resting place next to Seto on the bed. "Am I going to count the seconds until you leave for school?"

"Is the range of this thing so limited that if I'm not holding it, or sitting next to it, that you can't get out?"

*I could, but it requires concentration on both of our parts. We haven't quite formed the same bond that the Pharaoh and Bakura's vessels have with their Millennium Items. I could train you to be able to reach out to the Rod from a greater distance, but it will require effort on your part. I cannot force you to do this. You have to want tap into the Millennium Rod's power.*"
Sighing, Seto found his evening transitioning from studying wand movements to trying to activate the Rod from longer distances.

….The continued routine passed the days by in a blur. Before any of them knew it, it was the end of August. With Seto back in Japan on business for their last week before school, it felt like the beginning of June all over again.

"Make sure you get to bed at a reasonable hour," said Mr. Weasley. "The Hogwarts Express won't wait if you can't get out of bed on time."

"Have you heard from Seto, Yugi?" asked Hermione. "He won't miss the train, will he?"

Yugi shook his head. "His flight arrives overnight. He's going to stay over in a hotel in London, so we'll meet him on the train."

"Why doesn't he use a Portkey?" asked Ron. "So much faster."

Yugi shrugged. "He doesn't trust them."

"How exactly are we getting to Kings Cross Station?" asked Ryou. "I can't imagine we're going to Floo our way in…are we?"

"Not quite," said Mrs. Weasley, "We'll Floo into London, and the Ministry is providing cars to take us to the station."

"The Ministry of Magic uses cars? I didn't think they would do something so…" Yugi struggled to find the right words. "…Ordinary."

"Believe it or not," said Mr. Weasley, "Wizards are not completely out of touch with what goes on in the Muggle world."

"Are we allowed to do magic on the train, or is completely forbidden unless we're at the school?" asked Yugi.

"Magic is allowed on the train," said Hermione, "Which is odd, but I've cast spells on the ride up without having ever stepped into the castle, and I've never gotten into trouble. I know other underage students have as well. I think the Hogwarts Express, and the village of Hogsmeade, are considered extensions of the school, and are therefore protected from the underage wizard laws."

"That means we can practice a few spells before getting to Hogwarts! Finally!" Yugi looked over excitedly at Bakura, but frowned. Ryou was looking down at the table, but his eyes seemed unfocused. To the others, he would just seem spaced out, but Yugi knew better.

He tapped Ryou on the shoulder. "Hey, you there?"

Ryou jumped to attention. "Oh, sorry, Yugi, I guess I was a bit more tired than I thought. I think I'm going to turn in. I'll see you all in the morning."

"Is he okay?" asked Harry, watching Ryou climb the steps and disappear from sight.

"Yeah," said Yugi. "I guess he didn't get as much sleep as he thought last night. I'll probably head up soon too. But I'm good for a little bit if you want to play a game or something….

"Well it's too late to go outside for Quidditch," said Ron, "But I'm good for a chess game. What do you say, Harry? Yugi?"
"I haven't played much chess," said Yugi, "So you'll probably beat me. But I'll give it a shot."

"Let's find out then!" Ron disappeared into the living room and came back with the board and pieces. "White or black?"

"Um…no preference, you decide."

"Okay then, you can be white." Ron set up the board and sat back. "Your go."

Harry sat between them and watched the match. Ron appeared to control the board, and every so many moves, Yugi would pause, rethink his move, and switch to a different piece. It seemed like Yugi wasn't sure of himself in his game, as opposed to Ron, who made his moves with confidence.

But, after focusing more on Yugi during the game, he suddenly saw something different. Each of Yugi's almost-moves would have left him wide open, but each piece he did move worked to push Ron onto the defensive. *Is…is he pretending to be a lousy player?*

Ron leaned back in his chair and looked at the board. The only pieces remaining were their kings. "Not bad, Yugi. You were getting better as the game went on."

"Thanks," Yugi laughed awkwardly, "Card games are more my thing." /You didn't have to help me out, Yami./

/I'm sorry, Yugi. You didn't want to lose…or win too easily. At least you drew the match this way./

/I know. You've been itching for a good game for a while now./

"I think I'm going to head upstairs too," said Yugi. "I want to be ready to go for Hogwarts tomorrow."

"You best be on up as well, Harry, Ron," said Mrs. Weasley. "I do not want a repeat of last year."

"Why?" Yugi turned around from the staircase. "What happened last year?"

"Running to the train like a group of ninnies. You're lucky you all made it on board. It seems someone didn't like getting out of bed," said Mrs. Weasley.

"No need to beat around the bush, Mum, we all know it was Fred and George," said Ron.

Harry snorted. "Sure it was, Ron." They followed Yugi upstairs, paused for a minute outside their closed door, and then continued up to the top floor to Ron's room.

"Got any extendable ears, handy?" asked Harry. "I want to hear what they're talking about in there."

The crept to the landing over Yugi and Ryou's and lowered the ears towards the door.

~~*~~

"Everything okay?" Yugi asked. "You seemed a bit preoccupied tonight."

"He's restless today," said Ryou, "Something happened, and it's making him uneasy."

"Yami hasn't felt anything," said Yugi.

The Millennium Ring flashed from under Ryou's shirt. "Switch places," said Bakura, crossing his arms.
"Hello to you too, Bakura," said Yami, taking control from Yugi. "So what's this all about?"

"The Shadows are uneasy," said Bakura, looking towards the window. "Something isn't right."

"How can you tell?" said Yami.

Bakura gave him a pointed look. "When you've spent as much time in the Shadow Realm as I have, you pick up on certain things. You can sense when something – or someone – goes in, and when things manage to escape."

"So did something get out? How would that be possible? I thought only a Millennium Item is capable of summoning the Shadow Realm, and therefore one of us would have to be behind it."

Bakura huffed. "You can bet it wasn't your holier-than-thou Priest. As far as I'm aware, Kaiba hasn't dabbled in the Millennium Rod's power since you gave it to him. And the only other person currently connected to the Items other than the two of us is Shadi, and you know he wasn't behind it. All he does is show up whenever trouble has already risen and deliver some cryptic nonsense…and sometimes rearrange a few soul rooms if he's in that sort of mood."

The dark spirit of the Ring scowled. "Whatever got out of the Shadow Realm had help from something or someone on the outside, and without a Millennium Item."

Yami frowned, trying to think of who might have been able to get out. "The only person I know of in the Shadow Realm…is Marik's dark half. But I don't see how he would be able to get out without Marik himself interfering."

Bakura shook his head. "While I would say to contact the Ishtars to be certain, I don't think that is the case."

"How can you tell?"

Bakura rolled his eyes. "Unlike some, I didn't spend five millennia in a box. I've been around the block, Pharaoh. I was aware of every mortal that has touched the Millennium Ring before ending up in Ryou's hands. Whatever – or whomever – escaped, had magical help. Modern magic."

"Death Eaters then?" Yami asked. "That should be impossible, even for someone powerful like Voldemort."

Yami paused. "Could it be possible that nothing went in or out?"

Bakura shrugged. "Sure. But if it wasn't us, or Shadi interfering, then we have bigger things to worry about than this Voldemort character. There are some things buried deep in the Shadow Realm that aren't meant to come out – yet."

Bakura grabbed Ryou's toiletries bag and headed towards the door. "The only way we're going to find out is to keep on these wizards. I don't know who the old man's spies are, but he has at least one of them in Egypt, checking in on those Death Eaters that keep poking their sticks where they don't belong. Those fools are meddling in ancient powers they don't understand, and if they're not careful, they will doom us all."

He switched back to Ryou the moment he opened their bedroom door, and phased out of the Millennium Ring as Ryou made his way to the bathroom to brush his teeth. He floated alongside him, but stopped, hearing a creak on the landing upstairs. The spirit narrowed his eyes and looked up, but there was no one there.
Flooding to London wasn't nearly as scary this time, now that they've done it once before. Considering they were a group of eight to the train station, Yugi was surprised the Ministry only had one car waiting for them outside of the Leaky Cauldron.

"How are six trunks, two owl cages, and all of us supposed to fit in there?" he asked. "Our stuff alone would take up the entire car!"

He watched the driver start to load the vehicle's trunk, adding luggage piece after piece. By now it had to be full, but the driver kept loading items into it, as if the cargo area had no end.

"Like almost everything, it's bewitched to fit everything," said Harry, "I wondered that too the first time I rode in one of these cars."

"I just hope that there are enough carts when we get there," said Mrs. Weasley once the car had pulled away. "Finding enough for everyone last year was a right mess."

"I'm sure we'll manage," said Mr. Weasley, looking about the car. "Oh, look! They've upgraded their fleet since we've ridden last. I wonder what these buttons do...."

Ryou had never seen anyone so fascinated with the automatic window controls in his life.

"I don't think we'll have to worry about finding luggage trolleys, Mrs. Weasley," said Harry as they pulled around to the front of the station. "I don't think I've ever seen the parking area so... empty."

"It's because of the Death Eater attacks yesterday," said Hermione quietly. "Did you see what they did to those bridges in this morning's Prophet? I heard Mrs. Weasley was downright worried because Seto spent the night here in London without any sort of magical protection."

"Of course I was!" Mrs. Weasley gasped, and Hermione turned red at being overheard. "London was practically a warzone these last few days. With all the damage the Death Eaters did to those bridges and monuments, he could have been killed! And I'm sure you heard what happened in Diagon Alley yesterday."

Ron shook his head as they exited the car. "What happened?"

"Ollivanders was attacked," said Mr. Weasley, "He's missing – the Death Eaters took him."

"He was kidnapped? But why?" asked Ryou.

"When wizards are arrested and sent to Azkaban, their wands are confiscated," said Mr. Weasley, "If You-Know-Who is breaking his forces out of prison, they're going to need wands. Using a stolen wand will only go so far, so he has to be forcing the poor man to make new ones."

Yugi looked worriedly at Ryou. They had only met Mr. Ollivander once, but he couldn't imagine what it must be like to be in Voldemort's clutches.

"I didn't think the Platforms had such a weird numbering system," said Ryou, looking down at his ticket. "Do they really go by fraction?"

"Not for Muggles," said Ron, pushing his cart through the doors. "You'll see."

Seto was pacing back and forth between Platforms 9 and 10 when they approached the tracks, talking angrily into the phone against his ear, with a large travel mug in his other hand. Upon seeing
Yugi and the others approaching, he lowered his voice and quickly finished his call. He had barely enough time to slip his phone back into his suit before Mrs. Weasley wrapped him in a bone-crushing hug and then immediately looked him over for injuries that weren't there.

"Oh, thank goodness you're all right. How close were you to the attacks?"

Seto managed to detach himself. The amounts of mothering that Mrs. Weasley treated him with were becoming a bit uncomfortable, but he ignored it for the most part since she seemed to treat everyone that way, not just her own children. "I'm fine. The attacks didn't come close to my hotel, and I had my own security detail last night."

Annoyed, he held up his train ticket. "I've paced between these two tracks for the last ten minutes. I suppose, like most everything you wizards have, there's a magical entrance to get on the platform?"

"There is," Mrs. Weasley nodded, "This way."

The Weasleys led them up to one of the brick barriers between platforms 9 and 10.

Ryou looked around. "Is something supposed to be here?"

"It's the wall," said Harry. "You need to just push your cart right at it."

"That's a brick wall," said Yugi, "We'd crash right into it!"

"Best do it in a run if you're nervous," said Ginny, "That's how I got in on my first trip to Hogwarts."

"We really just have to run into the wall?" asked Ryou. "That's it?"

"That's it. Ginny, why don't you show them how it's done," said Mr. Weasley. "Let's go."

Ginny nodded, and moved her cart so she was lined up with the platform barrier. "See you on the other side!" she called, breaking into a jog.

Yugi closed his eyes, waiting for the inevitable sound of a trolley crashing into the wall, but after a few seconds, he didn't hear anything, not even the sound of the trolley wheels on the platform. When he opened his eyes, she was gone.

"What happened?" he asked Ryou.

"She disappeared through the wall!"

"Come on, you'll go through in pairs," said Mrs. Weasley. "Yugi, why don't you go through with Hermione. We'll follow after you."

Yugi gulped.

/There's nothing to fear, Yugi. The Weasleys have been nothing but kind and upfront this entire time. They wouldn't force us to do anything dangerous. Just run through it!/"

"Ready?" Hermione asked.

Yugi nodded. "I think so."

They broke into a run together. While he didn't hear Ginny crash at the barrier, he still expected to ram right into it and fall flat on his face.
But that moment never came. Instead of causing a scene by slamming into a wall at running speed, he passed right through it as if the bricks were made of smoke, and came to a stop on an identical looking platform. The sign attached to the other side of the barrier read '9 ¾'. A scarlet engine with the words 'Hogwarts Express' stood in front of him.

A few moments later, Seto and Ron passed through the barrier, with Harry, Ryou, and Mrs. Weasley bringing up the rear. Mr. Weasley and Ginny were over towards the throng of wizard families seeing their children off onto the train.

"Go on in," said Mr. Weasley, "If you all want to get seats together you'd best hurry before the compartments are all full."

Yugi, being the first one in the group to make it onto the train, had to drag his trunk all the way down the train to find an empty compartment that would fit the six of them. Ginny broke off from the group to sit with a gaggle of girls in her own year.

Seto stashed their trunks in the overhead bin, took a seat by the window, and set his laptop on the small fold-out table.

"You're much more alert this time after traveling," said Hermione.

"I slept before my flight yesterday," said Seto, checking his phone for messages before sitting it next to his computer on the little table.

"So, um, did you, uh...find something to cure that insomnia you were having?" asked Yugi.

That time, Seto did look up at Yugi, who sat directly across from him. "No," he said bitterly, before looking back down. "I did not."

"I'm sure Madame Pomfrey, the school nurse, probably has something for that," said Hermione, "The last thing you want to be doing is fall asleep in class."

Seto shook his head. "I'm used to it. I'll be fine."

"So..." Ryou began, eager to change the subject. "How long is the train ride to Hogwarts?"

"We won't arrive at the school until after dark, so most of the day," said Ron, "There's a food trolley that passes by every so often with sweets and such if you get hungry."

The first leg of the ride was in pseudo-silence, other than the consistent click-clack of fingers flying across the keyboard. Yugi was reading through a couple of the first-year textbooks he had picked up at Flourish and Blotts and Ryou was dueling with Ron. Hermione was reading through a copy of the Quibbler that Luna Lovegood had passed out on her way through the train.

"Why do you keep looking over at the hallway?" asked Ryou suddenly. "Are you expecting someone?"

Harry sighed. "It sounds stupid, but I was expecting Malfoy to show up. He usually barges in here at least once on every ride up to school."

"Maybe he's grown past that," said Ryou.

Ron snorted. "Once a bully, always a bully. Just you wait; it'll only be a matter of time."

Hermione suddenly jumped up. "Oh – Ron, we have to go to the prefects' carriage and attend our
"meeting with the Head Boy and Girl," said Hermione.

"Prefect?" asked Yugi. "What's that?"

"Two fifth years and up are chosen from each house to be prefects," said Harry, "Usually chosen by having good grades, or other good work for the school. They're kind of like hall monitors in a muggle school. They can't give detentions or things like that, but they can report wrongdoing to the Heads of House, and can take away house points as a way of disciplining people."

"Oh, I see," said Yugi, "We had hall monitors back at our high school, so it sounds about the same, just without magic."

"The meeting shouldn't take up the whole journey," said Hermione, "We'll be back. C'mon, Ron."

Harry scooted over in the compartment once Ron and Hermione had left and looked over to Seto typing away at his computer. Despite what he and Ron had overheard the previous night (which he still needed to get Hermione's insight over), he didn't know much of anything about their rather distant friend, other than what was printed in magazines. He knew only a few constants: Seto dressed extremely well, and kept his nose either in a book or his computers. Amongst all of them (not including Yugi and Ryou), he socialized the most with Hermione – and only because they talked Hogwarts, books, and a few other things Harry had tuned out, then stayed in his room after dinner. When he had asked Yugi about it, he had shrugged and said Seto checked in at home in the evenings.

But, Japan was eight hours ahead of their time. Calling home would be disturbing someone in the early hours of the morning. It's possible that's what he did, considering Seto didn't seem to sleep too much, but Harry also knew Seto spent every day after lunch taking his brother's phone call. Was he that paranoid that he needed to make sure things were okay that often?

Until his overheard conversation last night, he would have written Seto off as having nothing to do with Yugi and Ryou's random odd bits of behavior, but they mentioned Seto's name with having to do with a Millennium Item, whatever that was. Was it related to Yugi's pyramid necklace, and whatever Moody saw that Ryou kept hidden under his clothes?

"What are you working on?" Harry asked.

"Catching up on emails," said Seto. "Plus, three budgets to approve, six projects that need review, and if I'm lucky..." he glanced at his watch, "I'll catch Roland in the office before he takes Mokuba home for the day."

A quiet buzzing sound made Seto pause in his email. He looked to his phone, and disconnected it from his computer. "If you'll excuse me."

Harry watched him get up and head out of the compartment. He heard a 'Hey kid' as the door closed behind him.

"He talks to his brother every day?"

"Every day," said Yugi, looking up from *A Beginner's Guide to Transfiguration*. "It was a struggle for him to come with us and leave his brother behind."

"Fancy a game of Duel Monsters, Harry?" asked Ryou. "We've got the time."

Harry shrugged. "Sure...but if you're going to split your deck again, I want to pick the half I use."
Ryou laughed. "That's fair."

After two rounds of playing half of a deck (Harry won once), Yugi looked up from his seat against the window to see Seto pacing in front of the compartment. He suddenly stopped, pulling the phone from his ear and looking at it, before shoving open the compartment door and making his way back to his seat.

"Everything okay?" Yugi asked.

"Phone just shut off," Seto said irritably, "That battery should have been fine for at least another week." He opened his laptop back up, but it did not boot back up from going to sleep.

"What the –" Seto jammed his finger into the power button. Still nothing. "This is impossible. There's no way both of these would be dead."

Ryou glanced over. "Maybe it's the magic on the train?"

"It's been several hours now. If the train itself was the cause, neither of these would have worked from the moment I stepped on board."

"Bet Hermione would know the answer," said Harry, "She's one of the only people I know who have actually read *Hogwarts: A History*, so I'm sure the answer is there somewhere."

Seto leaned back against the headrest on his seat. "I'm guessing you haven't."

"Nope. But, if I know Hermione, it's in her trunk."

Seto eyed the trunks on the rack over Yugi and Ryou's heads. "I'm not going to rifle through her belongings to find out." He sighed, pocketed his phone and tucked the laptop back into its case.

"Want one of the books?" Yugi held up *The Standard Book of Spells: Grade 2* as the compartment door opened, admitting Ron and Hermione. Seto huffed and went to looking out the window.

"How was your meeting?" Ryou asked.

"About the same as it was last year, although there's a new prefect for Slytherin House," said Hermione, "Malfoy wasn't there."

That got Harry's attention. "Malfoy gave up being a prefect? That's not like him at all. He enjoyed the power trip it gave him last year."

"Something must have changed," said Ron, "You know his dad was arrested at the Department of Mysteries. Rich snot's not so high-and-mighty with dear old Dad stuck in Azkaban."

"That makes sense," said Harry, "His father's out of the picture, so Malfoy was branded a Death Eater. That's why he's given up his favorite job of bullying first years and making our lives miserable. I bet you he's been given a mission by Voldemort and has other things to worry about."

"Oh, come on, Harry," Hermione rolled her eyes. "Even if Malfoy has been branded, that doesn't mean he's up to something. What could he possibly get away with at Hogwarts?"

"You saw him just as well as I did at Borgin and Burkes, Hermione. He –"

"You saw as much as we did, Harry," said Hermione, "Nothing. He looked at a cabinet. And the blinds were shut. *Looking* doesn't make one a Death Eater."
Frustrated, Harry got up and retrieved the same silvery cloak Yugi saw him with at Madam Malkin's.

"Where are you going?" asked Ron.

"To get some fresh air."

They watched him storm off. "Did we say something…?" asked Yugi.

Hermione shook her head. "No…Harry's just jumping off to conclusions. It'll probably land him in trouble again. …Have you been playing that Duel Monsters game this entire time?"

"We were…" said Ryou, "Until you guys came back, at least."

"Well, Harry'll get over it. Takes him a while because he's thick-headed, but he'll come around." Ron. He looked over towards Seto. "What's got him in a funk?"

"His tech stopped working," said Yugi. "Is that normal for non-wizard stuff the closer you get to Hogwarts?"

Hermione nodded, "Muggle electronics don't work at Hogwarts. They clash with the enchantments around the school. It's part of what keeps the school undetected."

"Great," Seto muttered, "Just great. Anything else I should know about this school before we get there?"

Hermione reached for her trunk. "It's in Hogwarts: A History. Ooh, I forget the section though."

Seto sighed and held out a hand. "May I?"

Ron's eyes widened. "You're actually going to read it?"

Seto raised an eyebrow. "What else am I going to do with it? As it stands, I can't complete any actual work, and I've read through everything else we have."

"Everything?" Yugi looked up from his book. "All of our new textbooks? Even the beginner ones?"

Seto flipped open Hogwarts: A History and took a sip from his mug. "All of them."

Ron sat back, impressed. "He's more of a bookworm than you, Hermione!"

Hermione rolled her eyes. "I can't grasp how hard it is for you to believe there are people out there that open books when not at school, Ron."

Set chuckled. /You seem to have landed with a true group of intellectuals, Seto./

/Tell me about it./ Seto turned the page and tuned out the rest of Ron and Hermione's bickering.

~~*~~

The lights in the train turned on as the sun began to set.

"We're almost there," said Hermione. She got up, dug into her trunk, and pulled out her uniform. "Best to go change into robes."

By the time Hermione had returned to the compartment, the train had pulled into Hogsmeade station. Harry still hadn't returned.
"Shouldn't we wait for him?" asked Yugi as they filed out of the train.

"He'll follow. Don't worry," said Ron.

"What about our stuff?" asked Ryou.

"I'll all make its way to your dorm, wherever you guys end up," said Ron. "Everything gets up to the castle during the opening feast."

"First years and transfer students! This way!"

"I guess that's us," said Yugi.

At the end of the platform, herding all of the first-year students together was the largest man Yugi had ever seen. He had to crane his neck to look up.

/That is a very tall man./

/I think this might be the Hagrid that Harry and others referred to. I believe they said he was half-giant./

/Forget half, he's plenty-giant to someone like me, Yami!/ 

"Alright," said Hagrid, once everyone was together. "This way to the boats!"

They climbed into one of the small boats, ignoring the stares of all of the eleven year-old students around them. Once everyone was settled, the boats set off from the edge of the lake and moved towards the huge castle settled high on the rocks above them.

"Hogwarts is a lot bigger than I thought it was going to be," said Ryou, wide-eyed. "I hope they give us a map or something to help get us around to all of our classes."

"Knowing our luck? We'll be expected to remember," said Yugi.

"Assuming we have classes with the rest of the students our age, I imagine we'll just follow them everywhere," said Seto.

/Hm. There are creatures in the lake./

Ryou looked down at the dark waters. /How can you even see them?/

/I've gotten quite used to traveling in the dark./

/Well, don't think highly of making any friends with whatever's down there. I don't want to end up with pneumonia before my first day, thank you very much!/ 

One of the other first-year students wasn't as lucky, and Hagrid's boat had to break off from its lead of the group to fish the boy out of the water.

"Looks like you've got some troublemakers on yer boat," said Hagrid lightly. "Don' worry, we'll be up at the castle soon. The professors will dry you out before the sortin' ceremony."

Yugi, Seto, and Ryou strayed towards the end of the group as they exited the boats on the other end of the lake. Hagrid led them up the path, past his hut, and up the stone steps to the large front doors to the castle, where Professor McGonagall was waiting for them.
"Good evening," she said as all of the new students gathered in the Entrance Hall, "Welcome to Hogwarts. In a few moments you will pass through those doors and join your new classmates in the Great Hall for the Opening Feast, but first you will be sorted into one of the four houses: Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin. While you are here at Hogwarts, your house will be your family. Good behavior will earn your house points, and rule-breaking will lose points. The House Cup will be awarded at the end of the year to whichever house raises the most points."

Both Seto and Yugi gave Ryou a sideways glance.

/You see that, Spirit? It's not really me they're looking at. Don't go getting me into trouble!/ 
/Pfft. Please, if there is any rule-breaking to be done around here, you certainly won't get caught doing it./ 
/Ugh./

"Single file please, and fan out around the Sorting Hat once we get to the other end of the hall," said Professor McGonagall. The double-doors to the Great Hall opened and she led them inside through the aisle between the Gryffindor and Hufflepuff tables.

Ryou looked around as they progressed through the room. It seemed each house had their own table in the room, illuminated by floating candles high above the tabletops and large torches alongside the windows. Another table sat on a raised area of the Great Hall, with all of its occupants sitting facing the rest of the hall. I guess those are our teachers.

Ryou's gaze wandered upwards and he gasped. "Oh, look up!” he whispered.

Yugi's eyes widened in amazement. "There's no ceiling!"

"It's enchanted to mimic the weather outside,” said Seto, glancing up to see the dark, starry sky. The ceiling rafters were barely visible.

"How'd you know that?" asked Yugi.

"It's in Hogwarts: A History."

Professor McGonagall gathered them all around a three-legged stool in front of the teacher's table. Upon it sat a very old, tattered hat. After a few seconds, the rip along its brim opened up into a mouth the hat broke into song, reciting bits about the houses and staying unified before settling itself back down into silence.

"This year, we also have three transfer students entering the sixth year class. Please welcome them to our school as you would any of our newer students," said Professor McGonagall, unrolling the scroll of parchment sitting next to the hat. "Please come forth when I call your name."

Ryou suddenly panicked as she began calling out names. "Oh no, they're alphabetical."

"Don't be nervous, Ryou. It's just a hat," said Yugi, as a Millie Azeles shuffled off to the Ravenclaw table.

"Bakura, Ryou!"

Ryou gulped and made his way through the clump of first years to sit on the rickety stool, trying to block out the various whispers echoing throughout the hall. He nearly jumped off the stool when he heard the extra voice in his ear.
"Well, well, this is new. It's not often I find a second mind in here...and polar opposites to boot."

/What is that supposed to mean, Hat?/

"Aaaah, I see. You're an old soul – no, older than I am. You just take residence in the boy, don't you?" The hat seemed to detect Ryō's nervousness. "Don't worry, Mr. Bakura, the only bit everyone else out there can hear is what house I send you off to."

/Which house would that be?/

"That's a tough one. You, dear boy, could belong to any of the four houses. You have a strong sense of loyalty and a kind soul – good qualities of a Hufflepuff, but you're just coming out of your shell, aren't you? I see some Gryffindor in you as well. There's some eagerness to learn and a good bit of cleverness in there as well. I could put you in Ravenclaw. Now the friend you've got in here, he is a true example of a Slytherin...so where to put you?"

/You leave my thoughts out of this, Hat/ Bakura spat, /It is Ryō Bakura you are sorting today, not me. I'm just along for the ride./

"Very well. Better be...GRYFFINDOR!"

"Excellent," said Ron, clapping Ryō on the back as he sat down next to him. "The hat was so quiet for a while, I thought it wasn't gonna be able to make a decision."

Ryō paled. "Is that...normal?"

Hermione shrugged. "Sometimes the hat can instantly place someone before it's even on their head, and sometimes it has to think it over for a few moments. It's not common for it to take a long, long time, but it's happened before."

The table next to them broke into applause as Thomas Cook joined the Hufflepuffs.

Yugi watched as Bridgette Jackson was sorted into Slytherin. "She doesn't look like she's eleven," he whispered. "Look how small she is!"

Seto raised an eyebrow and looked down at his rival. "And? You don't even look like a sixteen-year old."

"Touché, Kaiba."

"Kaiba, Seto!"

There were just as many whispers, if not more, as Seto made his way up to the Sorting Hat.

"Ah, I see I have another double-minded fellow to sort today."

/Oh goody – something else talking in my head. Just what I've always wanted./

/At least the hat isn't a permanent resident,/ Set said reassuringly.

"Hm...your minds are much more alike than the other boy. I can definitely see that you are no Hufflepuff. You're much more a leader than a follower. The other three houses, though, that is up for some debate. You seek power and achievement, and certainly have an ambitious mind to match. Speaking of which...that is quite a mind you have as well. We seem to have another genius in our midst. You would certainly do well in both Slytherin and Ravenclaw, though I can only put you in
"You said three houses, but only mentioned two."

"Now, now, have a little patience. I am a thinking cap after all. You've got quite a bit going on in here. Deep down, hiding in that calculating mind is something I didn't see before. You seem to be placing much on faith and trust these days, facing a fear perhaps? It takes a great deal of bravery to put aside your long-held beliefs and take the plunge into the unknown…I see you would also make a fine Gryffindor, so where to put you…"

/I didn't think Seto would be such a difficult choice./

/If I have any say in this whatsoever, I'd prefer to end up with Bakura, and Yugi – once he's sorted, at least. I have a feeling I know where he'll end up, and to be honest, it would probably be easier on the school if I was lumped in with them, if anything to keep them out of trouble./

"Are you sure? You would also make an excellent Ravenclaw or Slytherin."

/Positive./

"Very well then, GRYFFINDOR!"

"That's two of the three," said Ron, as Seto headed down the line to sit across from Ryou at their table. "Think we'll get Yugi too?"

Ryou nodded. "Probably. The hat must have been divided for you too, Kaiba."

Seto shrugged. "It was getting chatty."

"Yours was longer than Ryou's," said Hermione, "But the hat never stalls out. It sorts everyone, no matter how long it has to sit there."

Eloise Marks joined the small cluster of new Gryffindors at the end of the table.

"Muto, Yugi!"

There was another round of whispers echoing through the hall as Yugi made his way up to the stool.

"Ack! Watch where you point that hair!"

/Oh, um, sorry. It's naturally that way…/

"Oho, I see you're just like the others. What an interesting year this will be – three students with two minds!"

/You're a very old hat. You must have been doing this for many years. Are we the first you've come across with two minds?/

"Today would be the first, my equally old friend. I see you have a case of missing identity."

/Partially. I know what I was, just not who I was./

"Very curious. However, it is not your mind I'm here to explore today. Though it shouldn't matter much, both of your minds are similar, like the last one."

/You mean Kaiba?/
"Yes. But we're not here to talk about him. Let's see what you've got going on in your head, shall we? Hmm... you're another quiet one, but you're certainly not afraid to get your hands dirty to stand up for your beliefs, are you? The both of you have been through some adventures – to put that mildly. Of the three of you, I daresay you may be the easiest!"

"Really? I...um...was worried that with the length of time it took you to decide for Ryou and Kaiba, that it would take just as long for me."

"Oh, no. Everyone is different. While your mysterious friend has shown some leanings towards Slytherin House, I believe you do not belong there. I have a different home in mind for you. You belong in GRYFFINDOR!"

Yugi sat down next to Seto. "How awesome – we all ended up in the same house. How about that!"

"The hat may have sensed if you wanted to be kept together, since you're all out of your element here," said Hermione. "It takes choices into account when picking your houses."

"Really?" asked Ryou. "I just thought it probed your brain a little and then sent you on your way."

"Harry's a good example of it," said Ron, "He asked the hat not to be placed in Slytherin."

"Speaking of... where is Harry?" asked Yugi, craning his neck to look up and down the table. "I still don't see him anywhere."

"I can't see why he would get held up," said Hermione. She took a look around as well. "I mean, I saw Tonks near the gates when we arrived, but he can't be there just talking. He would have known to get inside for the feast."

"I'm sure he has a good reason to be missing," said Ryou, "Maybe he's not feeling well and went right up to bed?"

"Can't, mate," said Ron, "The passwords to the dormitories were given out at the Prefect meeting. Harry wouldn't know the code to get through. Besides, he'd be missing the feast, and after sitting on the train all day with nothing but pumpkin pastries and licorice wands to eat, he'd be downright starving! ...I know I am."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Only you can think of food at a time like this."
Professor Dumbledore approached the podium in front of the teacher's table once the sorting had ended and Professor McGonagall returned to her seat.

"Good evening! To our new students, welcome! And to our returning, welcome back! While I know there are a great number of rumbling stomachs here in the Great Hall, there are a few start-of-term notices I wish to announce before we get too saddled down with roast and pudding.

"First off, our caretaker, Mr. Filch, has updated the list of banned items. The comprehensive post is just outside his office, and now includes nearly all items from Weasley's Wizard Wheezes. Also, as always, the Dark Forest is forbidden to all students without exception.

"As you may have all noticed, there are a number of Aurors patrolling the grounds this year. Your luggage this evening has been checked for dark magical objects before making its way onto the grounds. If you find that something has been confiscated unfairly, please reach out to your Head of House, and the matter will be looked into. In addition, after sunset, no student will be allowed outside the castle unless accompanied by a teacher or Auror. The curfew this year will be strictly enforced, so please be sure to return to your dormitories by 9pm each evening.

"Finally, I wish to make an announcement regarding staffing this year. First, let us welcome back Professor Hagrid, who will return to his position teaching Care of Magical Creatures…" There was a fair amount of applause around the room, except from the Slytherin table.

"Next, let us welcome back Professor Dolores Jane Umbridge, who has decided to remain on staff for Defense Against the Dark Arts this year."

If the whispers and half-hearted applause were considered noisy before, it was nothing compared to the initial stunned silence before the deafening level of protest heard from across the Great Hall.

Hermione's eyes scanned over the teachers sitting up at the front table, and sure enough, in her bright pink cardigan was Professor Umbridge, not looking nearly as smug as she did at the start of term the previous year. Considering her last act at Hogwarts was being carried off by centaurs in the forest, and then driven out of the castle by Peeves, Hermione couldn't blame her. But...hadn't she been fired?

"This doesn't make any sense," she hissed. "There's no way Dumbledore would have let her come back after last year."

Seto glanced up at the faculty table. "Aside from her crime of clashing shades of bring pink, what did she do?"

"Nothing, and that's the problem," said Hermione. "She didn't teach us anything."
"Remember the secret club they formed that I told you about over the summer?" asked Yugi, "That was to fight back against her."

"So if she's back, are we going to go through the same song and dance as last year?" asked Ron.

"I hope not, but I suppose we'll have the DA to fall back on if she does."

"…and now? Dinner!" said Dumbledore, stepping back from the podium and returning to the teacher's table.

Yugi's eyes widened as food suddenly appeared on the table. He had never seen so many dishes together on one table in his life!

"Are meals like this…all the time?" asked Ryou. "I don't know where to begin!"

"Just feasts," said Ron, shoveling drumsticks onto his plate. "Usually there's four: the Welcome feast, Halloween, Christmas for those who don't go home, and the end of the year feast."

The doors to the Great Hall suddenly swung open, catching everyone's attention. It was Harry.

/Judging by all the blood on his face, it looks like your friend was in a fight,/ said Bakura. /Wonder what the other guy looks like…../

Ryou handed Harry a spare napkin as he sat down next to him, ignoring all the curious eyes on him from around the Great Hall. "Are you alright? Your nose is bleeding."

"Thanks. And I'm fine. Tonks already straightened my nose back out."

"Where have you been?" Hermione hissed at him, "You missed the sorting, and Dumbledore's announcement that Umbridge is back again this year!"

"What?" Harry twisted around to look up at the teacher's table. Professor Umbridge was quietly conversing with Professor Vector, who did not look pleased in the slightest to be seated next to her.

"I know, mate," said Ron, "Dumbledore must be out of his mind."

"I'm sure he has his reasons," said Yugi. "Although, since you've never had a professor for that position more than once, I was kind of expecting someone new."

"Me too," said Harry.

"Does this mean we'll be starting the DA up again this year, Harry?" asked Ron. Harry shrugged. "I don't know yet. We'll wait and see what her first class is like. If she's just like last year, we'll send out the coins again."

"So…Harry," said Yugi, "Where were you all this time?"

"I was tailing Malfoy – and don't give me that look, Hermione! I found out some interesting news on the train."

"If you're still trying to convince us that Malfoy's been branded with the Dark Mark…"

"Look, I didn't have to see the Dark Mark. He admitted it to his friends that he became a Death Eater. He was given some sort of special assignment."
"What was it?" asked Ron.

"I don't know, but if succeeds at whatever it is, he won't return for school next year."

"A year without Malfoy? Doesn't sound too bad," said Ron.

"I'll bet anything it has to do with his trip to Borgen and Burkes," said Harry, "Malfoy was pretty interested in that cabinet."

"For the last time, Harry," Hermione sighed, "You don't know what he was doing there. We couldn't see anything. His mother could have been looking for furniture."

Harry shook his head. "It doesn't matter. I'm going to find out what he's up to."

Hermione rolled her eyes. Letting the subject drop, they returned to their dinner.

Finally, after his third helping, Yugi pushed his plate away. "Oooh, I think I ate too much."

Ryou smiled. "All that heavy food will do that to you."

"This is the kind of event you need Joey for," said Yugi. "He and Tristan would love this."

"Friends back home I imagine?" asked Hermione.

Yugi nodded. "They have bottomless stomachs."

"Ah – they're like Ron, then." Hermione looked over at her friend, who was still shoveling food onto his plate.

When the dishes finally cleared themselves from the house tables, Dumbledore sent them on their way.

"Come, Gryffindor Tower is this way," said Harry. "Older students usually get a head start, and then the first years get their own tour back to the common room by the prefects to help them learn the way."

"Shouldn't we be in that group then?" asked Ryou.

"Probably," said Harry, "But there's less staring this way. You're all heads taller than those kids." He and Ron led them through the clusters of students leaving the Great Hall, up a staircase, down another corridor, and through another set of double doors to a chamber that was several stories high. Various staircases lined the walls.

"Gryffindor Tower is on the seventh floor," said Ron, "Up this way."

They passed the second floor landing when the staircase suddenly broke off from the wall and floated up to a different landing on the fifth floor, catching Yugi off balance and nearly toppling him backwards into Seto.

"Oh, yeah, careful. The staircases like to change on you," said Harry "If you're not paying attention, you'll end up on the completely wrong end of the castle."

"Thanks for the warning."

As they floated up, Ryou took the time to look around the hall. Portraits lined the entirety of the walls. Some witches and wizards waved at them as they passed, others pointed and made snickering
"Do all of the pictures in the castle move?"

"Well, yeah," said Ron, "Can't expect them to hang around all day."

"Wait, aren't you a prefect?" asked Yugi. "Don't you have to help out Hermione with the first-year students?"

Ron shook his head. "Hermione's got that down. We take turns patrolling the corridors and things like that. She always enjoys blurt ing Hogwarts trivia to the new ones anyway. 'Did you know' this and 'Actually this portrait' that. No thanks."

"Maybe it wouldn't seem that way if there was someone else she knew that actually took an interest in the history of their school," said Seto. "You two have really never thought to read something outside of your own textbooks?"

He wasn't surprised when Harry and Ron both shook their heads at him.

Harry led them to the end of one of the halls on the seventh floor, stopping in front of The Fat Lady's Portrait. "This is the entrance to the Gryffindor Common Room. If you don't know the password, she won't let you in."

Ron turned to the painting. "Abstinence."

"Correct," said the Fat Lady. The portrait swung open, revealing a passageway. On the other end was a large, round room decorated in red and gold. Squashy armchairs and sofas were scattered about the room. There were several bookshelves along the walls. Above a roaring fireplace was a large tapestry of a lion. Along the far wall were two staircases going up into the tower.

"Boys staircase is on the left," said Harry, "The different dorms are labeled on the doors. I imagine you'll either be in ours, which is for 'Sixth Year' or there will be a specific one for you, since it'll be hard to cram eight beds in one room."

"I wouldn't mind finding out," Yugi yawned, "I think dinner did me in."

"Me too," said Ryou, turning towards the staircase. "How early should we be downstairs tomorrow?"

"Well, good news this year is that tomorrow's Saturday, so there won't be classes until Monday. Classes start at 9am but on the weekends you can get breakfast through I think 10am."

"Okay, thanks," Yugi smiled. "See you guys in the morning."

The dorms seemed to be labeled so the first-year students were at the bottom of the staircase, and the higher their year, the closer they would be to the top of the tower. Their room was labeled "Exchange Students" and was sandwiched between the doors for the fifth and sixth years.

Their dormitory was round, and their trunks sat at the foot of each four-poster bed in the room. Beside each sat a bedside table and a tall, skinny cabinet to hang up their robes.

Yami phased out of the Puzzle and looked around the room. "Looks comfortable."

Ryou and Seto glanced up from unpacking their trunks. Yugi was in control…but did they just hear the Pharaoh?
"Kaiba…” Ryou began hesitantly, "Do you see what I see?"

"I see two Yugi’s."

Yugi looked from his companions, to Yami, and back. "What do you mean? You've never been able to see the Pharaoh before when he's come out of the Puzzle."

"I wonder if it's the magic in the castle," said Ryou. "Come out, Spirit. Let's see if you can be seen too."

Bakura sighed and came out of the Ring, crossing his arms over his chest. "Happy?"

Set also appeared. "This shouldn't be possible. No one, aside from those we've bonded with, should be able to see us."

Yami shrugged and perched himself on the edge of Yugi's bed. "Well, this does make sharing information easier."

Bakura turned to Set and Seto, "Speaking of…did anything strange happen to you last night?"

Set tilted his head, "Like what?"

"Something reached out to the Millennium Ring last night. The Shadow Realm was stirring. I couldn't tell if something or someone entered or left the Shadow Realm, but that would be the least of our worries."

"Why's that?" Seto leaned against the bedpost. "Wouldn't it be problem if something managed to escape from it?"

"You're still quite new to this, Kaiba, so let me fill you in on a little tidbit about the Shadow Realm," said Bakura, bitterly, "It can only be summoned by way of a Millennium Item. Between the three of us, we have five of those items, and the other two are safe with that blasted ghost. He's as likely to summon the Shadows on his own as the Pharaoh is to smash his Puzzle and hand me the pieces."

"So if one of us didn't do it, then someone else has the power to summon the Shadow Realm," said Seto. "…I wonder if whoever is behind this is also the reason I keep having those memory flashes."

"Did you have another one?" asked Yugi.

Seto nodded. "Last night. It was the same three as before, but there was also a brief glimpse of another one. I – well, Set anyway, was chipping away at something, but it went by so fast I couldn't see anything else about it."

"It doesn't make any sense why you're the only one having glimpses of the past return," said Bakura. "If anyone was going to have this happen, I expected it to be the Pharaoh."

"Maybe we should write to Ishizu," said Yugi, "Her family knows more about the secrets to Yami's past than any of us. She might be able to tell us what's going on."

Seto scowled. "Until I get my tech working again, you're going to have to send it by owl."

"It'll have to wait until morning then," said Yugi. "I just hope she can help us."

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"Don't tell me you're still spying on them," Hermione shook her head, and then looked up and down
the breakfast table. There was no sign of their new friends.

"Look, Ron and I heard some things the night before Hogwarts that were just odd," said Harry. "For one thing, they seemed to be talking about themselves almost in third person, which I've never heard them do before. And something about Millennium Items."

"They also mentioned something called a Shadow Realm, and that something may have escaped from it. Dunno what that is though. Ever heard of it?" said Ron.

"No," said Hermione, "And did it ever occur to you that they would tell us when they're ready?"

"They could be dangerous, Hermione. Bakura was talking that night, and it was as if he was a completely different person – and Yugi too! Their voices had changed, and some of the things they were speaking about – it was as if they were from a different time!"

"Even if they are truly up to something, do you think they would be any less dangerous if they found out you two have been listening in on them?" Hermione waved her fork angrily at them, "I want to know as much as you do, but this isn't the time to be snooping around. Do you really think Dumbledore would let in anyone dangerous with You-Know-Who so out in the open now?"

"He let Umbridge back. Obviously his judgement isn't all there," Harry countered. "Between them and Malfoy, something isn't right around here, and I'm going to find out what."

"Speaking of…" said Ron quietly, "Here they come."

"Morning," said Yugi, dropping into a seat next to Hermione. "Kaiba's not here? By the time we got up, he was gone."

Hermione shook her head. "No. We haven't seen him. But I'm sure if we catch any of the giggly Hufflepuffs that were eyeing him up last night, they'd be able to tell us."

Ryou blinked. "Giggly Hufflepuffs?"

"You were on the wrong side of the table last night to see," said Hermione, "Although, there were a couple of Gryffindors that had their eye on you too, Ryou."

Ryou's cheeks turned pink and he busied himself with buttering some toast. "Oh my…"

"Um, I have a question, Harry," said Yugi. "Is there a place here in the castle that we could send a message back home? Or would we have had to get an owl from Diagon Alley?"

"There's an Owlery," said Harry. "Not everyone has or could afford an owl, so there's a tower full of them here. I can show you after breakfast."

"That would be great!" Yugi beamed.

"Would you mind giving me a little tour of the school?" asked Ryou, "If you don't have any plans for the day, that is. I'm sure we'll explore on our own, but I'd like to know where our classes are going to be ahead of time."

Hermione nodded. "I'd be happy to! I have to run back to the common room for a moment, but I'll meet you down in the Entrance Hall when you finish breakfast."

They caught up with her as she was coming back down the steps outside the Great Hall.

"I suppose we'll start at the Owlery, since you wanted to go there anyways," said Harry. "It's this
The Owlery was its own tower accessed around the side of the castle near the Herbology gardens. "You want to watch your step here on the stairs," said Harry, "It gets icy in the winter."

"Does it matter what owl I use?" asked Yugi, looking around.

"I usually just hold out my arm and use the first one that comes down to me," said Hermione. "Usually an owl like Hedwig or Pigwidgeon that belongs to a specific student won't fly down to anyone but their owner."

A tawny barn owl flew down to Yugi's outstretched arm and he tied his letter to its leg. "Will it know where to go?"

"Somehow, they always know where they're going," said Harry, "Yours might just take a while to get there."

"Take this to Ishizu Ishtar, please?" said Yugi, "I'm not sure where she lives, but she works at the museum in Domino City, Japan."

The owl gave a hoot, ruffled its wings, and took off through the window.

/Well, that's one thing out of the way./

They pointed out the gardens and the Herbology classroom, and the path leading to Hagrid's Hut, with the promise of taking them to meet Hagrid properly in the upcoming days. Ron pointed out the Forbidden Forest off in the distance behind Hagrid's house, and Harry showed them the Quidditch pitch on their way back up to the school.

"Either of you interested in trying out for the team?"

"While it was fun this summer, I don't think high-flying adventures with broomsticks are my thing," said Ryou, "I think I'll stay on the ground, but I'll at least come to all of the matches and cheer you on!"

Yugi shrugged. "I haven't decided."

"You'd probably make a good chaser," said Harry, "You're a small guy, so it makes you less of a target for bludgers or other players. So long as you can catch and have a decent throwing arm, you're all set."

"When are tryouts?" asked Ron.

"As soon as I can reserve the space, probably after the first week of classes or so," said Harry, then frowned. "That is…if Umbridge's ban still isn't in place."

"I think it might have been lifted," said Hermione, "All of those Educational Decrees that she put into effect seem to be gone."

/You know, Yugi, if we want a large-enough open space to duel, the Quidditch field is perfect!/ 

/I was thinking that too, Yami. We'll have to tell Kaiba about this place./

/I would wait until after he gets the duel disks working again./
"But electronic devices don't work here."

"That's true. But I'm sure we'll think of something. Have a little faith."

"Yugi?" asked Hermione. "Are you alright?"

"Oh – sorry," Yugi laughed, ignoring the curious looks Harry and Ron were giving him. "I was just thinking, that this field would be a great place to play Duel Monsters – the way we do back home, with the duel disks. It's definitely large enough."

"Yeah," said Ryou, "After the summer of playing on tabletop, I kind of miss it too."

"Those machines won't work though," said Hermione, "Remember?"

Yugi frowned. "I know. It was a nice dream though."

By the time they had made it back up to the castle and toured the first floor, which consisted of mainly unused classrooms and the trophy room, it was time for lunch.

"You got an award for services to the school!" said Yugi, as he grabbed a sandwich from the tray in front of him. "What for?"

"The Chamber of Secrets was opened in our second year," said Ron, "You-Know-Who was behind it. He was attacking muggle-born students, and long story short, we saved the school from having to close down."

"That's a huge achievement considering you were only what, twelve years old?" said Ryou, "Amazing!"

"Hiya, Harry!" said a voice behind them. There was a sudden gasp. "Yugi Muto!"

Yugi turned around and was immediately blinded by a bright flash of light.

Harry sighed. "Hi Colin."

Yugi blinked, trying to get his vision back to normal. The boy named Colin was a grinning blonde holding a large, rather old-looking camera. "Uh, hello."

"I'm Colin Creevey," said Colin, "I'm so excited to meet you. Wait till I show this to my brother Dennis! He's a big fan of you and Seto Kaiba!"

"Oh, really?" Yugi turned back to Harry and mouthed 'help!', but Harry was grinning, enjoying the moment that Colin wasn't snapping pictures of *him* for a change.

"Say, do you think you could autograph this for me?" He pulled out two magazine photos. One was from the duel disk article he had read back at the Burrow, and Yugi could see Seto's neat signature near the bottom of the photograph. The other photo was from the Kaiba Corp Grand Championship Tournament, taken right before his match with Leon.

"Uh, sure," Yugi took the offered pen and scribbled his name down next to his photograph. "Say… did you get Kaiba's signature today?"

"Sure did – just got it in fact!"

"Where is he? I haven't seen him all day," said Yugi.
"He's in the library, but oh boy was he not happy to have his photo taken…" said Colin.

Yugi rubbed his eyes to get the last of the bright spots out of his vision. "I can't imagine why."

"I didn't think he was gonna sign my article, but he was a good sport about it. Anyways, thanks for the autograph. See you around!"

"Thanks," Yugi mumbled. He glared at Harry. "You were enjoying that."

Harry grinned. "Absolutely. He followed me around all second-year. You can't separate him from his camera."

"Seto's in the library?" Hermione wondered, "Classes haven't even begun yet."

"Probably needs someplace quiet to finish that tome you gave him," Ron snickered.

"Honestly, I'm glad there's someone else in this school with similar interests," said Hermione, "It's a good light read if you need a change of pace from studying all the time. There's so much to learn about Hogwarts in that book if you would just take the time to read it."

Yugi looked back towards the door to the Great Hall, where students were filing in and out. "Will the librarian jinx me on sight if I brought food into the library? I have a feeling Kaiba hasn't eaten since dinner last night."

"Yes," said Hermione, "Madame Pince is very protective of her books."

As they continued through the castle, Harry, Ron, and Hermione pointed out their classrooms. "Transfiguration is there, and across the way and down that hall is Charms," said Ron. "Don't be late to Transfiguration or McGonagall will pile on the homework."

"That goes for Potions too," said Harry, "Although Snape will just take away house points and pile on the homework just because he doesn't like me."

"You're his least favorite student?" asked Yugi.

"That's an understatement," said Harry, "I'm the spitting image of my dad, and, well, he and Snape didn't get along while they were at Hogwarts, so he's projecting his hate onto me."

"That's not very fair," said Ryou. "You're not your father."

"Tell that to Snape," said Harry. "Here's the library, by the way."

Yugi had almost given up on looking for Seto in the library, when they finally found him at a table tucked between sections on Magical Law and Legilimency. There were a stack of books on the edge of the table, and by looking at the spine of the one open in front of him, they were all advanced spellbooks. His travel mug from the train was next to the stack. Yugi wondered how he managed to smuggle a drink in.

"How did you know I was back here?" Seto asked without looking up from his book. Yugi could see he had gone through several sheets of parchment taking notes.

"Colin Creevey sold you out," said Harry.

"Figures. Did he blind you too?"

Yugi nodded. "Unfortunately. We came looking when we didn't see you at breakfast…or lunch."
"I'll eat later."

"Have you been sitting back here all day?" asked Ryou. "Don't you want to explore the castle a bit?"

"I had plenty of exploration to do this morning, believe me," said Seto. He leaned back in his seat, glowering. "Let's see. First, I had to visit Professor McGonagall's office and have my laptop equipment returned because the Aurors flagged it last night. And our duel disks. They're all back in the dorm. You're welcome. Then it was the Owlery, the Kitchens, and then I arrived here."

"You found the Kitchens, and you haven't been here an entire day yet?" Ron's jaw dropped. "It took us four years to do that. How'd you manage to find it so quickly?"

Seto raised an eyebrow, reached across the table, and handed Hermione back her copy of *Hogwarts: A History*. "I read a book. In any case, that house elf who sings your praises, Harry, knows how to make decent coffee now."

"So what is all this?" asked Yugi, gesturing to the pile of books.

"Research on spell crafting."

Hermione gasped. "Creating spells is advanced magic, Seto. So many things can go horribly wrong during the inventing process, not to mention this is incredibly ambitious for someone new to magic in the first place! Don't you think this is a bit…" She struggled to find her words.

"Too difficult?" Seto finished for her. "Hardly. The school's enchantment prohibiting the use of electronics is merely a barrier that needs breached."

"I don't know." Hermione crossed her arms, "Even if you did, the magic protecting the school is extremely powerful. It's not just about having your phone turn on; it also prevents Muggles from finding the school too."

"Yet I saw a radio in the common room last night," Seto countered, "Which is an electronic device invented by Muggles. You're going to tell me *that* will work, but my tech won't? Look, I'm not going to tear down the magic walls around the school, but I *will* find a way around them."

Hermione opened her mouth to argue again, but Yugi tugged her sleeve. "Come on, he's busy, so let's just finish our tour." He turned back to Seto. "We'll see you at dinner, right?"

Seto nodded, waved them off, and returned to his book.

Ron shook his head as they walked out of the library. "Two sickles he gives up."

"I'll take that bet," said Ryou, with a glint in his eye that would be more natural on his darker half.

"You're pretty confident," said Harry as they walked back into the staircase hall.

Yugi shrugged. "You don't know him like we do. I hope you weren't saving those coins for anything special."

~~*~~

Monday rolled around faster than any of them had anticipated. Breakfast was a bustle of activity between students waking up and trying to grab something to eat, and the Heads of Houses walking up and down their house tables delivering schedules.

"Potter," said Professor McGonagall, "Professor Dumbledore wishes to see you in his office after
Harry swallowed his pumpkin juice. "What for?"

"He didn't say, but I assume it is of some importance," said McGonagall, handing him his schedule. She turned to the exchange students. "Please see me in my office after dinner this evening to schedule your additional lessons."

"Extra lessons?" Ron asked once McGonagall had continued her way down the table. "What for?"

"Catch-up classes," said Ryou. "To help us adjust. They won't be for the entirety of the year…at least I hope not."

Seto pushed the Daily Prophet he was reading aside and took a look at his schedule. "Advanced Arithmancy and then a break, followed by Herbology and then double Defense against the Dark Arts and Transfiguration this afternoon."

Hermione glanced over at his schedule. "Aside from my Ancient Runes class, our schedules are identical. What about you guys?"

Yugi compared his schedule with hers. "Looks like our regular classes are all the same. I don't have Advanced Arithmancy though, but I do have double Ancient Runes with you tomorrow."

"Looks like I'll be faring Divination alone," said Ryou, stealing a peek at Ron's timetable.

"Yeah, sorry mate," said Ron, "Harry and I are glad to finally be rid of that class, although it was good for sneaking in naps – that room is always stifling."

Harry pushed his plate away and groaned. "Double Umbridge today? Ugh."

Ron looked back at his schedule. "Well…if there's one silver lining? At least we don't have Snape and Umbridge today. And it looks like we have two free periods before break. Our first class isn't until Herbology at noon!"

"Those free periods are going to be a blessing for you once they start piling on the homework," said Hermione. "You should be so lucky that you have so many of them."

"I can't wait to get back to the common room," said Yugi, looking around the Great Hall, "Those girls over there keep staring. And giggling."

"Ignore them," said Seto, taking a final bite of his toast before getting up from the table. He positioned his laptop bag (currently doubling as his school bag) over his shoulder and took a last sip of his coffee. "If you don't give them any attention, they'll eventually give up."

"Did that work back home?" asked Harry.

"Well enough."

"I suppose we'll see you in Herbology," said Hermione, grabbing her bag. "Enjoy your three hours of doing nothing."

"Oh, we will," Ron grinned.

Harry frowned as the two walked off, earning quite a few glares from some of the Hufflepuff girls as they exited the Hall. But it wasn't the popularity his new classmates seemed to gather that bothered him. When Seto stood up, his robes had parted enough that he could see a glint of something golden.
tucked into one of his belt loops. The only jewelry Seto seemed to wear was the Duel Monsters card he once glimpsed hiding underneath his shirt, but that wasn't anything flashy at all. Was he hiding something?

"So...we have two free periods too before Herbology," said Ron, "Anyone fancy some Exploding Snap back at the common room?"

"Sure," said Ryou, "If Hermione's right, we might as well enjoy the free time while it lasts."

"Where have you been?" asked Ron as Hermione and Seto made their way across the grounds to meet them in the greenhouses. "We thought you would have been back in the common room ages ago."

"We got a head start on Professor Vector's assignments in the library," said Hermione, "She swamped us with work and it was quieter there than in the common room."

"Bet you wish you had all those free periods," Ron snickered.

"We just had one," said Hermione, "And I'm fine with the extra workload this year. The only thing I'm dreading is what we're going to tell Hagrid when he realizes we dropped his class."

"Can't exactly tell him we didn't enjoy his class, can we?" said Harry.

"He's your friend, isn't he?" asked Ryou. "Why not just tell him the truth?"

Harry didn't quite have an answer to that.

They quieted down as Professor Sprout walked up to the front of the greenhouse.

"Welcome back, sixth years!" she said, "We'll be collecting Snargaluff pods today." She gestured to what looked like a stump covered in vines on the table in front of her. "You'll want to work either in pairs or groups on this one. Snargaluffs are very protective of their pods and their vines will attack you, which is why it's best that at least one person keeps the branches at bay. There's an opening in the center, that's where the vines will be concentrated. That's also where the pods will be. There are thorns on the vines, so make sure you wear gloves."

Harry, Ron, and Hermione formed their own trio around one greenhouse bench full of the Snargaluffs. Yugi looked around the room and then back to Ryou and Seto at the nearest table. "I guess these are ours."

Ryou looked down at the first stump. "So...it doesn't look very violent."

"We haven't angered it yet," said Yugi, "So who wants to battle with the branches, and who wants to get the pods out?"

Seto rolled his eyes, slipped on his dragonhide gloves, and shoved his hands into the thickest concentration of vines. Yugi and Ryou scrambled back as the branches came to life, twisting up around Seto's arms and aiming for his face.

Seto tilted his head away from the angry vines and glared at his partners. "I can reach the pods, but someone is going to have to keep this thing busy or I won't be able to get my arms back out."

Ryou ducked under a flailing branch and started grabbing the ones wrapped around Seto's arms.
"How are we supposed to stop them all?"

Yugi stole a quick look at the tables nearest them. Harry, Ron, and Hermione weren't having much luck with theirs either. They were all trying to get at the center of the Snargaluff and avoid the branches as much as possible. Hermione had managed to free one hand from its grip with a pod in hand. But most of the other tables were having similar trouble. However, one of the Slytherin groups gave him an idea.

"Here," he grabbed a few of the loose, flailing branches and tied them together. "Try knotting them so they can't take our eyes out."

It took several minutes of wrestling with the enraged vines before Seto was able to free his arms, grasping a pod in his hand. The branches immediately stopped their attack and shrank back inside the stump.

"You okay?" Yugi asked as Seto dropped the pod unceremoniously into the bowl beside the stump and rubbed at his wrists.

"Fine."

"Very good, boys!" said Professor Sprout cheerfully, and she dropped a second stump onto another table. "Keep going!"

Seto looked at the new, mellow stump in front of them and then to his companions. "Next one's yours."

They had extracted five pods by the time the bell rang, signaling the end of class. Ryou was glad it was over – his spirit was all too eager to banish his stump to the Shadow Realm after one of the thorns flew out far enough to nick his cheek.

"Wonder what's for lunch," said Ron, as they climbed the steps leading back up and into the castle, "I'm starving."

"I can't believe you're ready to eat again. Aside from Herbology, we haven't done anything to work up another appetite yet," said Yugi.

"Again, Ron is always hungry," said Hermione.

Ron shrugged as they brushed past a group of third year Slytherins and into the Great Hall, "Better enjoy the free time while we have it. We've got double Umbridge next. Two hours of taking notes will only get so interesting."

"She'll have it out for all of us after that stunt in the forest," said Harry.

"Maybe things have changed," said Ryou optimistically, "After what you've told us about her class last year, I don't think Professor Dumbledore would let her continue in exactly the same way. At least give the first class a chance?"

Harry swallowed a bit of his sandwich, "I won't make promises."

Professor Umbridge was seated at the table in the front of the room, looking over a series of papers as the class filed in. The desks were arranged in pairs. Harry and Ron grabbed seats as far from Umbridge's front table as possible, with Ryou and Seto across the aisle next to him and Yugi and Hermione in front. Only when everyone had found seats did she look out at the room and get up from the table.
"Good afternoon, students," she said. Harry was glad the false sugary voice she had used at the start of term last year was gone. "Welcome back. How lovely it is to see all of your smiling faces again."

Yugi took a quick glance around the room. Only Umbridge was smiling, and it really didn't seem like a genuine one at that. Aside from a few Slytherin students, most of his classmates were frowning or putting out various shades of disgust.

"All of you will remember following the strict, Ministry-approved course last term," Umbridge continued, pacing up and down the aisles, "After recent events at the Ministry of Magic, the curriculum has been adjusted. The Minister has approved a new theoretical and practical curriculum. Now…we have three sessions a week: a double class today and a single block on Friday. We will spend one block on theoretical approaches, and one on practical, and then the third will bring us all back to speed on your rather previous subpar education in this course. Are there any questions?"

No one missed the irony to her statement considering their shoddy learning last year.

"So we're actually going to use magic this year?" said Ron.

"Students will raise their hands to speak in my classroom," said Umbridge sharply.

Ron sighed and muttered to Harry, "Well that hasn't changed."

Ryou looked over at Ron across the aisle before slowly raising his hand.

"Yes?" asked Umbridge sweetly.

"What kind of magic will we be learning?" asked Ryou.

"And what is your name?"

"Ryou Bakura, Professor."

"Well, Mr. Bakura, the sixth year curriculum covers nonverbal spells. We will also cover dark creatures and the Unforgivable Curses."

Yugi noticed she seemed much less pleased about teaching them magic than just having them read through their textbooks.

Professor Umbridge returned to the front of the room and tapped her wand against the blackboard next to her front desk. "For the first part of today's lesson, please open your books and begin reading and notating Chapter One. There will be no need to talk."

There was a collective sigh from around the room as inkwells and parchment were set out and books opened. Professor Umbridge continued to pace the room, enjoying the sounds of quills scratching against parchment in the otherwise silent classroom. She rounded the corner by the back of the classroom and came to a stop in front of one of the desks.

"Hem, hem."

Ryou looked up. "Professor?" Next to him, Seto gave her a quick glance before returning to his book.

"After class, please see me in my office. You as well, dear," said Professor Umbridge, tapping her wand against the edge of Seto's book before moving on to speak quietly to Yugi. When she moved back to the front of the room, Yugi turned back to them and shrugged.
The rest of their first period of Defense Against the Dark Arts went without much incident – reading and taking notes could only get so interesting. Finally, Professor Umbridge tapped her wand against the blackboard, clearing away the writing and replacing it with "Nonverbal Magic".

"Thankfully, your education in other subjects has been much more consistent," said Umbridge, "For the last five years, you have learned quite a number of spells that you've been reciting verbally. While this is a perfectly acceptable, it is time you learned to perform your spells nonverbally. Can anyone tell me the advantage of using spells nonverbally?"

Hermione's hand, as usual, soared into the air. Looking around, Yugi noticed that no one else had made a move to answer Professor Umbridge.

"Anyone at all?" said Umbridge; pointedly ignoring Hermione's outstretched hand. No one else seemed interested enough to bother raising their hands. After a few moments, it became clear that Umbridge wasn't going to pick Hermione, so Yugi slowly raised his hand into the air.

"Yes, Mr. Muto?"

"Well…if you're fighting someone…they won't know what spell you're trying to cast, so they won't have a chance to defend against it, right?"

"Correct!" said Umbridge, "Nonverbal magic takes quite a bit of practice, concentration, and mental discipline. It is very unlikely that any of you will master it today. But we will start simple with an easy incantation. I trust you all remember levitation charms from your first year lessons?"

Harry and Ron exchanged glances. Of course they remembered – it was one of the first spells they learned and mastered, having used it to knock out a mountain troll with its own club in the girls' bathroom.

Professor Umbridge waved her wand and a stack of feathers made their way up the aisle to each desk. "Today you will attempt to levitate these feathers without speaking the incantation. I will award twenty house points to the first one to successfully charm their feather."

She sat down at the table in the front of the room and watched the group turn their wands on their feathers. Several Ravenclaws looked almost pained as their faces scrunched up in concentration, yet their feathers did not move from their resting place. A few whispers of 'Wingardium Leviosa' were uttered throughout the classroom.

"Do you know the spell?" asked Hermione quietly.

Yugi nodded, "I remember seeing it in your old books, but I've never actually practiced the spell."

"Nonverbal spells, children. There should be no talking!"

Yugi looked behind him to Ryou and Seto's desk. They didn't seem to have any luck raising their feather either.

Umbridge tutted as the bell finally rang, signaling the end of class. "When we next meet, I expect you to be able to lift those feathers without uttering an incantation. In addition, please have Chapter One and Two studied. You will be tested on Friday."

"We'll see you in Transfiguration," said Ryou to Harry, "Professor Umbridge wanted to speak to us."

Harry glanced up to the entrance to Umbridge's office. He wondered if the walls were still pink, but
didn't really want to have to find out first-hand. "Good luck, and don't touch her quills. If she ever makes you write lines in there, use your own. Trust me."

Professor Umbridge was already at the top of the steps before her office when Yugi, Ryou, and Seto finished gathering their books. "In here, you three." She sat behind her desk and gestured to the seats in front. "Please."

Yugi took a moment to look around. All of the surfaces were covered in lace. It reminded him of something someone's great-grandmother would keep in their living room. The vases on the little tables scattered around the room all contained fake flowers.

A quiet meow stole their attention. Expecting to find a kitten hiding away in the office, Yugi was surprised to hear it coming from a technicolor cat etched onto a plate hanging on the wall. The kitten mewed again before curling up in its basket. Upon a second look, he noticed there were a great many kitten plates mounted on the wall.

/This place is...kind of creepy./

"Would you like some tea?" she asked sweetly. "No? Very well then." Umbridge looked across her desk at her three new students. Yugi and Ryou, while looking a little nervous, sat relaxed, if not curious to her summon. Seto, however, sat ramrod straight in his seat, his icy blue eyes boring holes right into her. It made looking his way rather unsettling, and she wondered if he did so on purpose.

"I hope your first day of classes has been going well today," said Umbridge, "Unlike all of the other sixth year students, I did not have the pleasure of getting to know you as I have the others. I hope that we will come to be good friends this year."

She didn't miss the looks Yugi and Ryou shared. "Something you'd like to share, dear?"

Ryou bit his lip. Harry and his friends told them all about Umbridge and their previous year at Hogwarts before even getting to school. He wasn't sure exactly what to say without possibly getting her angry.

Thankfully, he didn't have to. Seto beat him to it. He looked down at his watch. "There's just under thirty minutes until our next class. You and I both know you have no desire to befriend us, so you can continue the false pleasantries, or we can get down to the point."

"Watch your tone, Mr. Kaiba, or I will have to put you in detention," said Umbridge, "This is not your company. This is my office, and you will show the proper respect."

Judging by the look on Seto's face, Yugi thought he was about to talk back to her when he suddenly stopped mid-word. His jaw clenched and he broke his eye contact from her to glance down at his side for a moment before he glared back and said icily, "Yes, Professor."

"Very good," said Umbridge, smiling, "Before term started, Professor Dumbledore alerted all of the staff to your unusual acceptance into Hogwarts this year, and I am curious, why did you choose to come all the way to Hogwarts instead of a magical academy much closer to home?"

"Well," said Ryou carefully, "Professor Dumbledore believed we would be safe here."

"I see. As I'm sure you may know already, the Ministry of Magic is actively trying to thwart You-Know-Who. Knowing the reason behind his sudden interest in you could help turn the tide of the war."

"Professor, I'm not sure what you want us to tell you. We know as much as you do...which isn't
much," said Yugi.

"I know you have spoken to Professor Dumbledore on more than one occasion," said Umbridge, "As your Defense Against the Dark Arts professor, I ask you to bring me any new information, for it would not only help keep you safe, but help stop You-Know-Who."

"I'm sure Professor Dumbledore shared everything he knew with you," said Seto, "If not, perhaps he doesn't trust you after all of the damage you did here last year."

Umbridge stiffened. "Excuse me?"

"We may not have attended this school last year, but people talked. You were put here by your government to discredit Dumbledore and keep everyone from learning how to defend themselves."

Umbridge sighed. "Of course, you are given a story from a rather biased point of view. From the view of the Ministry, there was no proof at the time of You-Know-Who's return."

Yugi looked at Ryou. "...Wasn't the Defense against the Dark Arts professor that year a dark wizard in disguise? Wouldn't that have been proof enough?"

"The only word at the time of You-Know-Who's return was Harry Potter's. After competing in the rigorous trials of the Tri-Wizard Tournament and dealing with the accident that was Cedric Diggory's death, one could not trust his testimony alone. And as for Mr. Crouch, when we learned there was an escaped convict in the school, he was handed over immediately to the Dementors." Umbridge bristled. "What's done is done. The Ministry acted in the people's best interest then. Now, circumstances have of course changed. The new Minister of Magic acknowledges a need for a practical approach in the classroom. You, as well as your classmates are the future of our Wizarding society. Without the ability to defend or fight back against You-Know-Who, our way of life would cease to exist."

She watched them for a few more moments before getting up and walking around to the front of her desk. Smiling, she held her hands out non-confrontationally. "I think I have gone about this the wrong way. There will of course be chatter amongst the other students about me. That is inevitable. But I don't wish to start us off on the wrong foot. Take some time to adjust to Hogwarts. I'd like for you to be able to form your own opinions without being influenced by the others. We'll continue this in the upcoming weeks. Now off you get, I don't want you to be late for Professor McGonagall's class."

Umbridge walked them out of the classroom and stood in the doorway as they made their way down the hall. Once they turned the corner and were out of sight, she returned to her office, and waved her wand at her rose-tinted quill. It immediately sprang up and began dictating a letter.

Attn: Pius Thicknesse
Department of Magical Law Enforcement
Ministry of Magic
Professor McGonagall spent her first sixth-year class reviewing Vanishing Charms.

"I understand you came from Defense Against the Dark Arts, and that Professor Umbridge has attempted to begin to teach nonverbal spellwork," said Professor McGonagall. "I hope you all plan to master that skill quickly. Outside of learning the verbal incantations, I will expect all casting in this class to be done nonverbally. We will practice today on the mice in front of you. Who can tell me the incantation?"

Like in their Defense Against the Dark Arts class, Ryou watched as Hermione's hand was the first in the air. But unlike before, a few other hands also rose from around the room and Professor McGonagall called on one of the Ravenclaw students.

"Today, you may practice the spell verbally," said Professor McGonagall. "However, there are twenty house points available if anyone can do so silently."

Yugi aimed his wand at the mouse snoozing on his desk. "Evanesco."

The mouse didn't vanish.

Ryou frowned at his own mouse. "Maybe we're not waving our wands correctly?"

"You're looking foolish enough to me," Bakura snickered. "You might as well be conducting a band the way you're swinging your stick around."

Yugi sighed. "Our first spell and we're already having trouble."

"Don't be discouraged, Yugi. This is a spell that your friends have learned last year. It will take time and patience, but you will master it as well."

Yugi looked to his other side in time to see Seto vanish his mouse. "Kaiba sure got the hang of that quick."

Ryou shrugged. "He did spend most of the summer reading everything he bought at Diagon Alley. I just think it's ironic that he's submerged himself so much into learning magic, and he was the most opposed to it from the start."

Yugi felt Yami chuckle in agreement from inside their link. "Yeah, funny isn't it?"

Professor McGonagall paused in her rounds around the room at their desk. "Have you two tried yet?"

"Yes, Professor," said Ryou, "We haven't quite gotten it yet."
Professor McGonagall watched him try to vanish his mouse again. "Ah – there's your problem. There's no need to wave your wand about like that. Just aiming will do. Be sure to speak your incantation clearly. Correct pronunciation can make a huge difference, as does proper concentration. 'Ev-an-ES-ko'."

Ryou nodded. "Evanesco." They watched as the mouse disappeared off of the desk.

"Very good, Mr. Bakura. Keep practicing. You'll both get the hang of the spells in time." She gave Yugi's shoulder a brief pat before returning to the front of the room to address the class. "I am at least pleased that you haven't forgotten all you've learned over the summer, but the number of you that still haven't performed an adequate Vanishing Charm is quite unacceptable for a N.E.W.T. level course."

She waved her wand at her desk, and rolls of parchment were distributed to each student. "By our next class I expect you all to perform a decent Vanishing Spell, in addition to having that parchment filled in completely. Consider it your only review. We will be moving forward from here on out. Class dismissed."

"We got off light, wouldn't you say?" said Ron as they made their way back up to the seventh floor. "I mean, a review sheet? I thought she was going to load us down with essays like last year."

"The year just started. I'm sure we'll be buried in homework before the week is out," said Harry.

"How did you fare with the mice, Yugi? Ryou?" asked Hermione curiously, "Seto managed his on the first try!"

"Wasn't that your first spell cast?" asked Ron, barely hiding his jealousy.

Seto ignored him and stopped in front of the Fat Lady's portrait. "Abstinence."

Yugi and Ryou followed him through the portrait hole. "I didn't manage to get it," said Yugi, "Ryou did just before class ended. Turns out we were a bit...animated with our wand waving when we really didn't have to be."

"Well, hopefully with the extra lessons the professors are going to give you, you'll be able to catch up to our speed soon," said Harry, "But I guess you'll find out what's going on with those after dinner." He made his way towards the steps leading up to their rooms. "Why don't we drop our books off and meet back down in a few minutes? No point in dragging all this stuff to eat when there's no classes right afterwards."

"Don't forget that Professor Dumbledore wanted to see you after dinner as well, Harry," said Ryou.

Harry nodded. "I wonder what it's about…"

Someone roughly brushed past Yugi and knocked him into Harry on their way into the Great Hall. Harry had to do a double take to see who it was as he righted his shorter friend.

"…Dinner just started," he said, "So where is Malfoy going?"

"Maybe he's not hungry," Ryou shrugged.

"Hm…"

Hermione sighed and grabbed Harry by the arm. "Ugh. Come on, Harry, you're blocking the way."
Harry found the others gathered around one of the tables in the common room when he returned later that evening. "So…" he said, "How did your meeting go with Professor McGonagall?"

"It was…informative," said Seto, without looking up from his book. Yugi looked over and noticed he was back to leafing through one of the books he had found in the library.

"She laid out all of our schedules to come up with a plan for our extra lessons," said Ryou. "They'll start tomorrow. I guess the good news is that since Professor Umbridge is building 'catch up lessons' into her regular class, we only have to have four extra lessons a week instead of five."

"We'll have an extra Charms class at 5:00 tomorrow, then Transfiguration after dinner. Then it'll be Herbology after dinner on Wednesday and Potions at 5:00 on Thursday," said Yugi.

Harry sank down next to Yugi and peered across the table. "Still on that mission of yours, huh Seto?"

"Hn," was the only response Seto gave him.

Ron looked up from his Transfiguration homework. "You don't seem like the type to put something like that above your homework. How long are you gonna keep your nose in those books before you give up? Hermione said those phone things aren't going to work here."

Seto turned the page of his book. "If you're so certain that I'm going to fail at this, you obviously don't know me very well. This is about restoring fast communication back home, so yes, it is more important than any homework assignment."

"So, Harry," said Hermione put her quill down, eager to change the subject. "What did Dumbledore want?"

"He didn't go into too much today," said Harry, "Something about giving me lessons."


"Something about fighting Voldemort, I'd assume. We didn't go into too much today. He said he had some errands to run and items to collect before we met again."

He didn't tell them that Dumbledore also wanted him to carry his Invisibility Cloak on him all the time. Not until he knew more about Yugi and his friends. Harry sighed. Between classes, spying on Malfoy, keeping an eye on his new friends, being Quidditch captain and now having to attend regular evening meetings with Dumbledore, he was going to have his hands full this year.

Yugi put away his finished homework in his bag and looked over to Seto next to him. "How's it going?" he asked quietly.

Seto closed the book and leaned back with a sigh. "I have to be missing something…"

"You just started researching," said Yugi, "Maybe this is something that just takes time."

"Like it takes time for an owl to fly all the way home and back just to find out how Mokuba's first day of school went, or how your grandfather is managing his shop without you," said Seto bitterly, "Those owls are going to take days, and you and I both know that patience is not one of my strong suits."
"No," Yugi agreed, "You're right. Have those books helped at all?"

"A bit…but not enough," said Seto. He looked around the emptying common room as a lot of the younger students began to head up to their dormitories. His eyes fell on the wireless radio sitting unused across the room. "Unless I need to go about this differently….

Seto got up, crossed the room, and turned the radio over in his hands.

/What are you thinking about?/ asked Set.

/Somehow, this radio works here, unaffected by the school's enchantments. If I can figure out how this loophole works, I can use it on my technology too./

/And how are you going to do that?/

/I have a few ideas…/ Seto dropped the radio onto their table and stalked off towards their dorm.

"Where are you going?" asked Ryou.

"To get something," said Seto, and he started up the steps. "I'll be back."

Ron sighed and pushed his assignment away. "How can we just forget so much in one summer? Ugh…" He held up his hand as Hermione began to say something. "No – nope, I know what you're going to say. 'Maybe if you looked reviewed what you've learned like I did, you'd remember'."

Hermione raised an eyebrow and gave him a pointed look. "Well?"

"Sorry, but I don't think that's a habit that's gonna start now, although…." Ron looked over to Seto's abandoned bag on the edge of the table.

"Ron, don't…." said Yugi, looking towards the boys' staircase. "If he finds out you copied his answers, he'll be mad."

"I'm not going to do that, relax," said Ron, "I'm just taking a peek. …Not that it matters, his handwriting's too neat to read. Looks almost like yours, Hermione, with your fancy scripting."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "I guess I won't have to worry about you copying my homework this year then, either." She grabbed the pilfered assignment and put it back where Ron found it. "Maybe if you didn't spend half the evening beating most of the common room at chess you would have your homework finished by now too."

Seto returned with a small box of different sized tools and began to take apart the radio the instant he sat down.

"Why are you dissecting the radio?" asked Harry.

"To find out how it works here."

"Aren't you worried that you won't be able to put it back together properly?" asked Hermione.

Seto twisted one of the screws out of the back of the radio, "No. By the time I'm finished with it, it'll work better than it had before."

Harry grabbed his bag from next to the table. "Well, I'm going to head off to sleep. I'll see you all in the morning."
Bidding them goodnight, he made his way upstairs. Seamus, Dean, and Neville were already asleep. Harry quietly changed into his pajamas and climbed into bed. He was about to close the curtains around his bed when his eyes fell on the Marauder's Map sticking out of the drawer of his bedside table. It almost didn't seem worth it to unfold the thing and look for Malfoy, but he found himself reaching for it anyway.

"I solemnly swear that I am up to no good," he whispered.

He scanned the pages and as he expected, the little dot on the map representing Draco Malfoy was down in the dungeons. The Slytherin dormitories were not specifically labeled, but after sneaking inside in his second year, Harry could tell that's where he was, flanked by Crabbe and Goyle. Professor Umbridge was in her living quarters off from her office, and Dumbledore was pacing in his study. The castle was hunkering down for the night and nothing seemed out of place.

He heard Ron enter the room and climb into bed, but he didn't pay much attention to it – something else caught his eye right as he was about to fold up the map.

Yugi and Ryou's spots on the Map had divided into two, and new labels were appearing beside them. '??' appeared next to Yugi and 'Bakura' next to Ryou's name.

That couldn't be – Bakura was just Ryou's last name. How could Ryou have two spots on the map? And what about the question marks representing the other dot? The map never failed to identify a person, or even a ghost in the castle before. Harry removed his glasses and rubbed at his eyes. When he put them back on and looked again, both of the additional dots were gone, leaving Yugi and Ryou alone in their dormitory. Not even Seto's dot looked out of the ordinary all by itself in the common room.

Those two dots were there for only a few moments. He kept watching the map to see if they returned, but nothing changed. He must have sat, staring at the map for far longer than he expected after that, because eventually even Seto's dot moved out of the common room and up towards his room. The ?? and Ryou's duplicate dots did not come back.

Did he just imagine them?

~~*~~

The radio was put back together by the time Harry and Ron descended the dormitory steps into the common room the following morning.

"You think he put it back together properly?" asked Ron. "Imagine the gloom in the evenings if those second-years can't get their fix of the Weird Sisters before bed. You and I both know that there's no way he's going to get around the school's enchantments. They've been up for years."

"There's no loose parts anywhere," said Harry.

"Of course it works," said Ryou, from his seat in one of the squishy armchairs by the fireplace. "You really shouldn't underestimate him."

"You're so sure you're going to win that bet, aren't you?" asked Ron.

Ryou nodded and returned to his Divination book.

/We could be exploring the school, you know. This place is full of secrets. Instead, we're peering through a book on how to read and understand the mush left behind in a teacup./
"Don't go ruining Divination for me, Spirit! I happen to like this subject, and it doesn't hurt to read up on what I'll be learning, since I'm three years behind. There is no 'catch up' lesson for this class."

"Did you have breakfast already?" asked Harry. "We're on our way out if you want to join us."

Ryou smiled. "No thanks. I had breakfast with Yugi and Hermione before they went off to Ancient Runes."

"Oh, that's right. I forgot you guys have classes today," said Ron, "Lucky for me and Harry – we haven't any!"

"Just think of all the time you'll have to write all those essays you're dreading to get," said Ryou cheerfully. "He glanced over at the common room window to see an owl tapping against the glass."

"Bit late for mail, isn't it?" said Harry.

Ryou jumped up and bolted to the window. "The poor bird looks like its struggling to stay up. … And with good reason."

The owl had quite a think envelope tied to its leg. After Ryou untied it, the owl ruffled its feathers and flew back out the open window towards the Owlery.

"Did you send out for a book or something?" asked Ron, "That parcel looks heavy."

Ryou shook his head and looked down at the envelope. "This is from the Kaiba Corporation."

"I'm guessing that he's in the library again," said Harry. "He held out his hand. "I'll take it to him."

Ron gave his best friend a look. "You are gonna go the library?"

Harry snorted. "You act as if going there is the worst thing that can happen. The books aren't going to kill me. And besides, someone has to see if you're going to end up owing Ryou those sickles."

Ron shrugged and pulled out his unfinished Transfiguration homework. "Have fun. Chess when you get back from being a delivery boy?"

Harry nodded. "Sure."

With the envelope under his arm, Harry set off for the library. It was still fairly deserted being there had been only one full day of classes. Harry wandered the stacks until, like the last time they had gone looking, he found Seto at the same hidden table tucked away behind a stack of books.

"Any progress?" asked Harry.

"Some," said Seto. "He turned his cell phone over in his hand. "So far I've managed to break this three times, and when it did manage to turn on, it nearly caught fire."

Harry blinked. "That didn't sound much like progress. "You know Madame Pince will beat you over the head with a flying stack of encyclopedias if she catches you performing magic here in the library," said Harry.

Seto gestured around him. "Why do you think I'm hiding away in the most secluded corner of the library?" He eyed the envelope in Harry's hand. "What's that?"

"Oh – an owl tried to deliver this in the common room. Ryou said it's for you."
Seto put down his quill and flipped through the contents. Whatever they were, Harry noticed it seemed to be a much higher priority than Seto's desire to get electronics to work, which was saying something considering he had spent every moment out of class either here in the library or in the common room dissecting their radio.

"What is all of that?" he asked curiously.

"Aside from Mokuba's letter? Licensing contracts, a few departmental reports, R&D statements, and..." he glossed over a page full of numbers. "...Last quarter's earnings statement."

"So this is the same sort of stuff you would be doing...if your computer worked," said Harry.

"It will work. But, in the meantime, if this is how I have to run my company, then so be it." After a minute of scanning down the page full of numbers, he looked up. "Was there something else?"

"Oh, uh, no. I'll leave you to it." Harry headed back towards the entrance to the library when he stopped, and turned to look back towards the towering aisles.

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**Domino City**

"Sir, there is a call for you on line one," said the secretary over the intercom, "It's a Mr. Muto. Shall I have him patched through?"

Mokuba looked up from the couch in his own office. "How can Yugi be calling? We just got Seto's messenger bird telling us that the phones weren't even working!"

"Perhaps that has been fixed." Roland hit the button on the intercom. "Which Muto is it?"

"Solomon Muto, sir. Should I tell him you're busy?"

Mokuba got up and moved around to the other side of the desk. "No, it's okay. We'll take the call here." He gave Roland a concerned glance. "You don't think Mr. Muto is hurt or something, do you?"

"Somehow I imagine we would not be the first on Mr. Muto's call list if that were the case."

Mokuba put the call through on speaker. "Hi, Mr. Muto. It's Mokuba."

"Good afternoon, Mokuba," said Mr. Muto, "I hope I'm not interrupting anything."

"Nothing major," said Mokuba. School had just begun again, and he hadn't been drowned in assignments – not yet, anyways. "Is everything okay?"

"Well...yes, for the most part. This is a bit awkward to try and explain over the phone. Could we meet sometime today?"

Mokuba shrugged. "I'm not busy. Should I come to you, or do you want to come here?"

Mr. Muto sighed on the other end of the phone. "Not here. There is a café up the road from my shop. I know you've been there with Yugi and his friends once or twice. Might we meet there in a few hours? I'll be closing up the shop at four today."

"That's fine, Mr. Muto," said Mokuba, "...Um, are you sure you're okay?"
"I'm fine," said Mr. Muto, "I will see you in a few hours."

Once the line clicked, Mokuba turned to Roland. "He didn't sound very convincing to me." He took out his phone and sent a text to Joey. "Maybe Yugi's friends know what's going on...."

"Not to jump to conclusions, sir, but something might have happened if Mr. Muto is not comfortable meeting in his home, or even speaking over the phone."

"Do you think it has to do with Yugi and Seto?" asked Mokuba, "Maybe he's worried that Yugi hasn't called him. He might not know that Seto's phones aren't working over in that school."

"It's possible," said Roland. "But we'll find out later."

Mokuba returned to the couch. "We?"

Roland raised an eyebrow. "I'm not about to let you run around the city by yourself."

"I've done it before...."

Roland didn't look up from the report on the desk. "If I recall correctly, that ended up disastrous. I'm afraid I don't have the dueling prowess to barter for your freedom atop a high-rise building should something happen to you."

Mokuba pulled a face. "That was different...."

"The answer is still no."

"Ugh."

Roland gathered up the papers on the desk and moved toward the door. "I have a meeting with the Industrial Illusions representative to go over marketing for their new video game. It shouldn't go more than one hour."

Mokuba perked up. "It's for the new Duel Monsters PVP game, right? Ooh, can I come?"

Roland paused. "Mr. Kaiba was very adamant about which functions you were not to attend."

Mokuba froze. "Pegasus is in town, isn't he?"

"I don't know for certain, sir."

"It's not like I'll be alone," Mokuba countered back, "You'll be with me. It's not like someone's going to kidnap me right in front of you. Duelist Kingdom was a long time ago. Seto needs to put that aside."

"Forgiveness does not come as easily to some. Another time, perhaps."

"Can I at least go down to the development lab and try out the current beta for our own projects?" said Mokuba, "Or do you want me to stay here?"

"You're not on office arrest, sir. Please just stay somewhere in the building. I'll find you when I'm finished."

When the door closed behind after him, Mokuba sighed, pushed his homework away, and reached for the TV remote. Rather than try out one of their games in development, he remained slouched lazily on the office sofa until Roland reappeared nearly two hours later.
"So much for that one hour meeting," Mokuba mumbled. "I bet it was boring."

"Mr. Pegasus is very particular on what he wants," said Roland, "He also talks quite a bit. I can see why, in part, Mr. Kaiba loathes meeting with him on a regular basis."

"I'm almost glad I didn't go then," said Mokuba, grabbing his school bag from the table. "I don't think I'd be able to sit still for that long."

The café was quiet, having long passed the morning and the lunch rush for the day. Mokuba was surprised to see Joey sitting next to Solomon Muto in the back corner of the small restaurant.

"I didn't know you were going to be here, Joey," said Mokuba.

"I was the one who told Gramps to call you in the first place," said Joey. "Didn't know you were bringing your right hand spook with you."

Roland raised an eyebrow.

"Roland doesn't trust me be out by myself," said Mokuba, crossing his arms and pouting. "He thinks I'll get kidnapped."

"Ya gotta admit, though, Mokuba, your track record ain't too good," said Joey.

Mokuba glared at him.

Grandpa Muto shook his head. "Mokuba," he began, "Have you noticed anything strange at home?"

Mokuba tilted his head. "Strange? Like what?"

"You know Bakura lives alone, right?" said Joey, "Well, me and Tristan would take turns headin' to his place every other day or so to pick up his mail and whatnot since he's off with Yug'. But the other day, when we went over there, the door was open."

"His father's still alive, though, right? Maybe he came back home," said Mokuba.

"Nah. Neighbors haven't seen him in months. Bakura told us before he left that his dad was off in South America on a dig."

"Maybe the landlord?"

Joey shrugged. "Landlords shouldn't be snoopin' through his things though. Bakura kept his place neat. Like really clean. Puts even Téa's place to all sorts of shame. But I could tell when I dropped off his mail that someone had been looking around."

"Could someone have broken in?" asked Mokuba, "Bakura hasn't been home for months. Maybe someone noticed that no one was ever home and tried to make a quick cash grab of stuff."

Joey shrugged. "Might've, though they left his TV and his custom RPG figures behind. Gotta figure those are worth somethin'."

"I thought it might have been a thief too," said Grandpa, "But I think someone was rifling through Yugi's things as well. I was down in the shop yesterday when I heard a noise coming from upstairs. There shouldn't have been anyone in the house, but when I went to check, I found Yugi's door ajar and his desk opened. He certainly didn't leave his room like that when he left because I put some of his things away from around the house and closed the door myself."

"Nuthin's happened to me, but if anyone tried to get into my place, they'd have to get past my dad laying around the house all the time," said Joey bitterly. "And I talked with Tristan and Téa. They haven't noticed anything…but we're still all here."

Mokuba frowned and looked behind him to Roland. "I don't think anything's happened. Not at Kaiba Corp, at least. As far as I know everything at home is fine."

"Trist' and I think that maybe one of those wizard guys that old professor put here may be getting' nosy," said Joey.

"I don't know," said Mokuba, "Professor Dumbledore sent people that he trusted. I don't think they would do anything to betray that."

Joey scowled. "After all we've been through, with all them crazy adventures Yug' and I have been on, you can't rule out that maybe this Dumbledore guy's got more than one agenda."

"I'm just asking to keep an eye out on anything that may seem a little weird," said Grandpa, "You're still in contact with your brother, aren't you?"

"Sort of," said Mokuba, "We used Miss Vance's owl to send some company stuff out, and we just got Seto's letter that he sent days ago, so we're playing bird tag right now. It's going to take a while to send messages if he can't use his phone. Has Yugi sent you an owl too?"

Grandpa nodded. "It arrived this morning. I'll send it back tomorrow, after it's given a chance to rest a little."

Joey and Grandpa shared a look before the young duelist got up from the table. "I'm gonna go order a snack. Want something, Mokuba?"

"Uh…."

"C'mon," Joey practically pulled Mokuba out of the booth. "I'm buyin'. And…" he waited until they were out of earshot of the table. "I think Gramps wanted to talk to your shadow."

Mokuba turned back towards the table, where Roland had taken his vacated seat and was speaking quietly to Mr. Muto. "With Roland? About what?"

Joey shrugged. "Somethin' about not being able to turn off bein' a grandpa. I'll bet he wants to make sure you're eatin' your veggies and goin' to bed on time." They stopped in front of the menu board on the wall. "So…what d'you want to eat?"

… "It's Roland, right?" said Grandpa once Joey and Mokuba had walked off. "We haven't really been introduced." He gestured for him to sit.

"I remember you from Mr. Kaiba's Grand Championship tournament, sir." He clasped his hands in front of him on the table. "Is there something I can do for you?"

"Hopefully just alleviate some concerns of mine," Grandpa sighed. "Please tell me poor Mokuba isn't in that big house all by himself. I didn't realize when Kaiba left that his brother would be left behind."

"Mokuba is fine. He is never home by himself."

"But," Grandpa started cautiously. It wasn't exactly his place to delve into the Kaibas' business, but he found himself worrying for him as if he was also a grandson. "Who is looking after him? With his
brother away, he doesn't have a guardian –"

"I am, sir."

Grandpa blinked. "Oh." That wasn't quite the answer he expected. "You must wear a lot of hats then."

"A few," said Roland, "This would not make the first time I have assumed temporary guardianship over the Kaiba's. Aside from a brief pause in my employment, I have...in no official capacity...watched over the Kaiba brothers since they were adopted."

Grandpa sighed with relief. "That is good, knowing he has someone." He chuckled awkwardly, "I was trying to work up the courage to see if Mokuba wanted to stay at the shop with me, so we both wouldn't be on our own, but I suppose that isn't needed."

"I assure you, Mr. Muto, that won't be necessary."

Grandpa nodded. "But I still can't get past this feeling that something isn't right. It's a terrible thing to dwell on, but ever since Yugi solved that Millennium Puzzle, he has never been able to catch a break. To think that the people that are here to put his mind at ease while he's away may be up to no good..."

"Do you ever see the two other wizards that are here?"

Grandpa shrugged. "Once or twice. They enjoy looking around the shop when I get a new shipment. I think they're trying to blend in to the area. Mr. Podmore even asked about the basics of Duel Monsters, though I don't think he has any true desire to play."

"Did you bring these break-ins up to them?"

Grandpa shook his head. "I thought about it, but I couldn't be sure it wasn't one of them behind it. What about the one staying in Kaiba's house?"

"Miss Vance keeps to herself for the most part, but then again, I don't see her for most of the day. However, both the mansion and the office are fully staffed by my security team. If she was up to something, it would appear on camera and I would be notified."

"Hm."

Roland looked down at his hands for a moment before taking a deep breath. "Before he left, Mr. Kaiba spoke of having a...contingency of sorts put into place. Perhaps he was thinking over-cautiously, but if there is a chance one or all of these Aurors is up to something, it's best to be prepared."

"What kind of contingency plan?"

Roland frowned. "To be honest, I haven't quite figured that out yet. He left me to fine-tune the details. It would probably be some sort of safe house that the wizards don't know of...but I haven't decided on a location yet. I've considered looking at real estate in Tokyo or Osaka, even abroad to America."

"To protect Mokuba."

Roland nodded, looking off to where Joey and Mokuba had taken up refuge at a separate table covered in snacks. "I will have to look over the house when I return later. In the meantime...I would
speak to Mr. Muto's friends. Should we have more instances like these occur, we may want to have some sort of back-up plan that doesn't involve the wizards."

"You think whatever they're mixed up in over there will make its way here?"

"We're talking about your grandson and my employer. Trouble follows them everywhere. It's not necessarily if but a matter of time." Roland stood up from the table and gave a slight bow. "I'll be in touch, Mr. Muto. I have to rescue my charge before Mr. Wheeler lets him eat his body weight in fried sugar. If you need anything, my number is on that phone Mokuba gave you."

Joey sauntered back over once Mokuba left the restaurant. "So what'd he say?"

"To keep an eye out," said Grandpa, "And he will do the same."

… "Joey said that Mr. Muto wanted to make sure I was eating my veggies," said Mokuba once Roland started the car. "Is that true?"

"He wanted to make sure you were being taken care of. You should eat more of your vegetables though, unless you want to grow only to Mr. Muto's height."

"But if I do that, then Seto won't recognize me when he comes home!"

"Mr. Kaiba will be traveling back in three weeks. No one grows that fast."

Mokuba leaned over to peer at Roland through the rearview mirror. "Are you worried about what Mr. Muto said?"

"Don't worry about what Mr. Muto said," said Roland. "It will be taken care of."

Mokuba pulled another face. "You're starting to sound like Seto. Wonder where you picked that up."

"Haven't the slightest idea, sir."

Roland was later sitting in the security office at the mansion looking through the cameras when there was a knock on the door.

"You're filling in for Seto, you know," said Mokuba sleepily, "Someone else can look at the cameras. You don't have to hide down here."

"Old habits."

"What are you looking for?" asked Mokuba.

"Hopefully, nothing. I've been spot checking the cameras in the upstairs hallway and Mr. Kaiba's office. As far as I can tell, nothing has been disturbed in those rooms since Mr. Kaiba departed for England."

"Then maybe it was just coincidence that someone snuck into Yugi and Bakura's places," Mokuba yawned.

"It's possible," said Roland, though he didn't quite believe it. "You should head to sleep, Mokuba."

"Ugh," Mokuba rubbed at his eyes. "Do I really have to? Seto's not going to know."

Roland looked at him over the top of his glasses. "Do I have to walk you there?"
"I'm not six years old anymore. I think I can make it to my bedroom."

"Even so, I should make the rounds before I turn in for the evening." He grabbed the tablet sitting on the desk and led the younger Kaiba upstairs from the office. "Good night, sir."

"Night, Roland."

The security chief stopped outside Seto's bedroom door. *If* wizards had rummaged through Yugi's and Bakura's things, the two likely places someone would try that here would be his boss's bedroom or home office. Considering that the elder Kaiba usually fell asleep either at his desk or on the couch in his office, the probability of someone snooping through his bedroom was rather slim. The cameras hadn't shown anything to suggest someone had poked their nose where it didn't belong.

Continuing down the hall, he pulled up the camera feeds on the tablet. Emmeline Vance was watching television in one of the guest rooms. Security was patrolling the grounds, and Fuguta had taken over keeping watch in the security office. Mr. Kaiba's office appeared undisturbed.

Everything appeared as it should, but it did not quell the uneasy feeling in his gut.

Chapter End Notes

In case anyone is curious, here is the sixth year class schedule I made when writing out their Hogwarts lessons. There are 15 minutes between each class for students to travel around the castle and get where they need to go. Breaks between lessons are 30 minutes. For classes any one student is not taking, they have a free period. All single lesson blocks are 1 hour.

Monday: Advanced Arithmancy (Hermione, Seto), History of Magic (none are taking), break, Herbology (all), Lunch, double DADA (all), break, Transfiguration (all), Dinner, free period until curfew.

Tuesday: double Ancient Runes (Hermione, Yugi), break, Muggle Studies (none are taking), Lunch, Divination (Ryou), Care of Magical Creatures (none are taking), break, free period/extra Charms lessons (Yugi, Ryou, Seto), Dinner, free period until curfew/extra Transfiguration lesson (Yugi, Ryou, Seto).

Wednesday: Advanced Arithmancy (Hermione, Seto), History of Magic (none taking), break, Herbology (all), Lunch, double Potions (all), break, Transfiguration (all), Dinner, free period until curfew/extra Herbology lesson (Yugi, Ryou, Seto).

Thursday: double Charms (all), break, Muggle Studies (none), Lunch, Divination (Ryou), Care of Magical Creatures (none), break, free period/extra Potions lessons (Yugi, Ryou, Seto), Dinner, free period until curfew.

Friday: Charms (all), History of Magic (none), break, Herbology (all), Lunch, Potions (all), DADA (all), break, Transfiguration (all), Dinner, free period until curfew.
The morning started along just like the last two. The Great Hall was a bustle of activity as their fellow classmates rushed in and out to grab a bite of breakfast, finish any last-minute touches to their homework, and read any mail that dropped from the flurry of owls swooping throughout the room. Yugi was suddenly glad he had shifted his bowl over a bit to read upside-down from Seto's copy of the *Daily Prophet* as two envelopes were dropped right where his cereal had sat moment ago.

"I've got mail!" he said excitedly, tearing open the first letter.

**Yugi –**

Thank you for writing. I was quite surprised to find an owl waiting for me at the museum until I read your letter. I trust you are adapting well to your new surroundings. Your grandfather visited me here yesterday to see the new exhibits and explained a bit more on what has happened. I'm sure you are taking all of the necessary precautions against this new threat, so you won't need me to tell you to be careful. Your friends are very much looking forward to your next trip home.

As to your concerns, I have been in touch with my contacts in Egypt, as well as Marik and Odion, who have returned home with several family artifacts that we have swapped out at the museum. The resting place of the Millennium Items is quite safe. It is very hard to explain, but we can all sense the ancient magic protecting the area. It is unlikely that anyone with ill intent will be able to get close enough to damage it.

The tablet of the Pharaoh and Kaiba has had many visitors here in the museum. I cannot say for certain who it was that you described in your letter that was pushing for a translation, but I was not the one the individual met that day. There are only a handful of people that can translate the tablet, and aside from myself, they are all fellow tomb keepers in Egypt. Without better knowing who came in asking about a translation, it will be very difficult to tell them apart from the other guests. It is not uncommon for visitors to request translations on the ancient writings while on tour.

On a related note, I take it you have told your wizard contact about my family's connection with the Millennium Items. A most peculiar man named Dumbledore payed me a visit two weeks ago. He too inquired a bit about the tablet, but it was nothing particularly invasive. It seems the threat that took you to England is quite a valid one. He has been in touch with what I must assume is the wizard government in Egypt, and some sort of protective enchantment is in place on our home.

In addition, I seem to have a new 'assistant' here at the museum – a wizard to help keep an eye out on the museum (and myself, I imagine) in case these dark wizards return. His name is Bill Weasley. He claims to have a younger brother attending your school, perhaps you have met him?

Also, archaeologists have uncovered some interesting artifacts near one of their dig sites. It is nowhere near any of the shrines or temples that depicted the Millennium Items or Duel Monster tablets, so I doubt any of them will attract magical attention. Marik is heading to the site to inspect...
them, and will send photographs along. I will forward them to you when I know more if you are interested.

Stay safe,
-Ishizu

Yugi put down the first letter and reached for the second, instantly recognizing his grandfather's handwriting on the envelope.

Yugi,

I can't begin to tell you how relieved we were to get your owl. We've been trying to get in touch with you for days, but the calls wouldn't connect. I assume Mokuba was having the same issue with his brother, and that was why he was feeling down the past few days. He was noticeably better yesterday, so I guess he was able to make contact with Kaiba. I suppose we'll have to use the owls to talk instead of the phones, so try to send regular letters home so we know how you're doing. I hope you are adjusting well to Hogwarts and able to make some new friends.

It has been relatively quiet here at home. Sturgis and Hestia pop by the shop now and then to see what's new. Sturgis has even inquired about Duel Monsters! I don't think he's going to actually learn how to play completely, but it is interesting that they want to blend into their surroundings a bit. They're just as out of their element as you are.

The shop is doing quite well. Joey, Tristan, and Téa come around to help on the weekends during the busy period, though that might slow down as school started. It's only been a few days, but Joey is already complaining that with you, Bakura, and Kaiba gone their classes have gotten rather dull. You have all been off on so many adventures that he probably doesn't remember staying put for one whole year. Hopefully this is a nice change of pace for everyone.

I saw Ishizu yesterday as the museum had some new Egyptian artifacts on display. Nothing quite as "interesting" as some of the things we've seen before, but it certainly brought back memories of wandering the deserts with Arthur Hawkins! I'm not sure when your school breaks are, but if you're able to manage a trip home; they are quite a sight to see!

Keep in touch!
-Grandpa

Yugi put the letters down next to his bowl of cereal. "Seems like everyone's doing alright at home."

"That's good," said Ryou, "That bottom letter – is that the one from Ishizu? May I read it?"

"Sure," said Yugi.

"Who's Ishizu?" asked Harry.

Yugi swallowed his breakfast. "She's a friend of ours that works in the museum back home."

Seto sipped his coffee and turned the page of the Daily Prophet. "Looks like there was another attack last night."

"Where?" asked Harry. "Anyone we know involved?" He then immediately felt foolish for asking – it wasn't as if Seto would recognize any names that would appear in the Daily Prophet.

Hermione peered at the article from across the table. "Oh no, Amelia Bones was murdered!"
Harry nearly choked on his pumpkin juice.

"Amelia Bones?" asked Ryou. "Would she be related to the Susan Bones that's in Hufflepuff?"

"Her mother, I think," said Harry, "She worked in the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, and was at my hearing last summer."

"She was well liked, from what I heard," said Ron, "And she was the head of the department too. I imagine it wasn't easy to take her out."

"I'm sure all of the Death Eaters she helped put away are celebrating," said Hermione bitterly. "There aren't a lot of good and devoted witches and wizards like Madame Bones left."

"Who do you think will take over the department then?" asked Yugi.

"Hopefully someone competent, like Kingsley or Mad-Eye," said Harry.

"If Voldemort was behind Amelia Bones's death, this would be a perfect opportunity for him to sneak in one of his stooges and try to undermine the government – assuming he hasn't already done that," said Seto, pushing the paper away.

Hermione turned it around and finished skimming the article, "It looks like her replacement hasn't been announced yet, but the rumor is that someone called Pius Thicknesse is likely to replace her."

Harry shrugged. "I've never heard of him." He turned to Ron. "Does your dad know him from work?"

Ron shook his head, unsure. "He's never mentioned him before, but Dad doesn't know everyone in every department at the Ministry."

Seto got up and swung his laptop bag over his shoulder. "For the Ministry's sake, we'd better hope her replacement is at least somewhat competent. I'll see you in Herbology."

Harry looked down at his watch. "There's plenty of time before your Arithmancy class," he said to Hermione, "Where's he going?"

Hermione shrugged. "The library, I'd guess. Where else?"

Harry turned to Yugi. "Have you thought any more about trying out for the Quidditch team? I'm going to try and reserve space on the pitch for tryouts either this weekend or next after breakfast."

"Maybe," said Yugi, "I haven't played a whole lot though – just around the house over the summer. Are you sure I'll be good enough?"

"It never hurts to try out," said Harry, "The worst thing that can happen is that you don't make the team. Angelina, Fred, and George have all left, so I have plenty of spots to fill."

"I don't have a broom though," said Yugi.

"You can use one of the school brooms, and if you can get through the tryouts on one of those, you'll be fine. If you make the team, then we can check out the shops in Hogsmeade or write to Quality Quidditch Supplies in Diagon Alley to get you a broom of your own," said Harry.

"You did say you liked being up in the air," said Ryou, "I think you should go for it."

/I hear you snickering back there, Spirit/ Ryou said.
Yugi thought about it. "Do you think the flying instructor would let me borrow one of the school brooms to practice for a little bit before tryouts?"

"We can go ask her," said Harry, "There should be enough time to ask Madame Hooch and book the Quidditch Pitch before the first years have their flying lesson."

Yugi nodded. "Okay!"

Hermione watched them hurry out of the Great Hall. "Do you think Yugi will be able to make the team?"

Ryou shrugged. "I don't know. I guess it depends who else wants to join. I'm sure there are a lot of talented players here, but you can't count him out. You could say Yugi's got a penchant for come-from-behind victories."

"It's much darker down here than I thought it would be," said Yugi, as Hermione led them down into the dungeons after lunch for their first Potions class of the year. "Is this class always so...dim?"

"Yeah," said Harry, "Fits Snape's mood perfectly."

The tables in the class didn't have enough room for the six of them to set up their cauldrons together, so Harry, Ron, and Hermione branched off to one table, leaving Yugi, Seto, and Ryou to grab the one next to them.

"It's best we don't sit at the same table," said Harry, "Usually Snape finds something about me to criticize every class. I wouldn't want him to treat you all badly at your first lesson just because we're near each other."

"It's that bad?" asked Ryou.

"He only favors the Slytherin students, so yes," said Ron, "Just wait, you'll see. Even the Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws have it tough."

As the rest of the class filed in and gathered around the other small, circular tables, Yugi took a look throughout the room. A cauldron was set up in the front of the room, sitting on an unlit burner. Shelves full of jars of all shapes and sizes lined one wall, and a cabinet with old potions textbooks stood on the other side of the room. Behind the front cauldron was a large, blank blackboard. An open door off to the left seemed to lead to a storeroom for extra ingredients. Another door was near the book cupboard, leading to Snape's office.

The classroom door slammed shut the instant the bell rang to signal the start of class. Professor Snape stormed up the aisle and up to the front of the room, his robes billowing menacingly behind him with each step. Ryou swallowed nervously. This was the class that Harry had talked about dreading all summer, he already felt intimidated, and Professor Snape hadn't even said a word yet. Ryou looked over at his teamates. Yugi looked a bit nervous, gripping his stool a little tightly, but Kaiba's face was its usual expressionless mask.

"I honestly am surprised that some of you have managed to worm your way into my N.E.W.T. level class," said Professor Snape once he reached the front of the room. His eyes fell on Harry and Ron for a moment before scanning the rest of the dimly lit dungeon. "There will be no more hand-
holding. If you are unable to keep up in this class, you might as well begin thinking of a new career field, or plan to stay behind and retake fifth-year Potions with your fellow underclassmen."

He tapped his wand against the blackboard, and a list of ingredients and instructions appeared. "You may recall that in the summer between your second and third year, you were given an essay on Shrinking Solutions, and that your first lesson the following year was to brew them. The new third-year class has also been given this assignment."

Yugi and Ryou exchanged looks, not quite sure where this was going.

Snape aimed his wand behind him and three bottles floated from the place on one of the empty desks to the cauldron in the front of the room. "They have been made aware that their potions will be tested at random in this class. If these samples were brewed correctly, they will have all passed on their exam, regardless of their individual results. However…" Snape sneered, "The likelihood of them producing a passable Shrinking Solution is rather unlikely. As I recall, none of you were able to brew the potion correctly."

Yugi thought he saw Hermione stiffen over at the next table from Snape's comment. Maybe one person was able to finish it correctly, but Snape either forgot or didn't want to give her credit for it. He was thinking the latter.

Snape pointed to the board. "Which is what you will all be accomplishing in today's class. This potion will take 90 minutes to complete. After that time I will choose three of you at random to test these three potions. Instructions are both on the board, and on page 8 of your books. There will be no talking, and no assisting anyone else at your table. All of the ingredients you require are in the front cabinet. Begin."

With their arms full of ingredients, the class returned to their tables and opened their books.

Ryou looked at the first step.

/What the hell is a Shrivelfig?/

/I think it's this/ Ryou picked up one of the purplish-looking figs. He carefully drained the juice from it and added it to his cauldron, turning the burner on to a low heat. Once he added his daisy roots, he turned to his tablemates. Yugi and Kaiba were at a similar state with their potions.

"Your potions should be emitting a yellow hue," said Snape, circling the room. "If any of your cauldrons are emitting green gasses, then you have errored and your potions have now become highly poisonous. By now you should know the proper spell to clear your mess and begin again, and if you're lucky, you might have enough time to finish before the end of today's class."

Yugi looked up and around the room. Most of the cauldrons he could see were somewhere on the yellow side. He couldn't see Hermione's cauldron, but Harry and Ron's looked somewhere between green and yellow. I hope they're doing okay. He saw Snape make it to their table and look in Harry's cauldron.

"It is lucky for you and the rest of this class that we will not be testing your potion, Potter," Snape sneered, "If it was any greener, it could probably kill someone."

Yugi turned back to his work and began to quickly stir his potion. He hadn't been too keen on touching the still-wriggling caterpillars, but it was nothing compared to the look of disgust currently on his rival's face.

/You're having so much fun, aren't you?/ Set chuckled.
/This is disgusting./

/We used leeches for medicinal purposes, you know…./

/Gee, I wonder why they're not used anymore/ Seto thought dryly as he juiced his second leech.

/Advances in healing medicines, I understand. But look! Only two more to go! And then…you get to touch a rat spleen – how exciting! I bet you would have never imagined that this would be how you would be spending your Wednesday afternoons./

/You can be quiet now./

Snape finally reached their table and took long looks at each of their cauldrons.

Yugi finished juicing his first leech. He bit his lip. "Professor? …Is something wrong?"

"No, Mr. Muto. It would appear your previous Muggle education has given you an edge over your peers and it seems you three are doing more than a passable job at your first potion. However, do not let this simple assignment give you a false sense of confidence."

Ryou looked up from his cauldron. "Sir?"

"All of the potions we will brew after this will be much more difficult, and equally more dangerous. Professor Dumbledore may be under the notion that the three of you will be able to run blind in N.E.W.T. level subjects without any prior magical knowledge, but I am not. You three may be the Headmaster's pet project, but should you fail to keep up in this course, I will not hesitate to drop you into an additional Remedial Potions class to join the sorry sixth years that are forced to repeat their last year. Expect no special treatment."

"Of course not," said Seto, dropping the rat spleen unceremoniously into his cauldron. "That would be an insult."

Snape gave the three of them a hard look before returning to the front of the room. "Your potions should be finishing up within the next several minutes. Once completed, they need to be bottled, labeled, and on my desk or you will not receive credit for today's class."

Ryou placed his bottled sample next to his cauldron and pointed his wand to the remainder of his draft. "Evanesco."

/It worked!/ 

/Of course it did – you got that vanishing magic to work in your other class. Have you no faith in yourself?/

/Of course I do, Spirit – it's just that I hadn't the chance to practice very much. I wasn't able to get it the entire time in the common room, remember?/

Snape watched the last of the bottles reach his desk before moving to the three samples from his third-year students. "Your potions will be graded for Friday. In the meantime…I said we were going to test these samples. I will choose three of you at random. If these potions have been brewed correctly, none of you will end up poisoned. However, should that be the case..." he gestured to the front cauldron. It didn't take the smartest person in the room to understand that the potion Snape had on display the entire time was an antidote for whatever side-effects may occur.

/If you don't end up poisoned, depending on the state of completion, you will either de-age, or
merely shrink in size."

Snape took one of the bottles and began to wander the room. "Now…who will be first?"

~~*~~

/Ugh, please be quiet, Spirit/ Ryou mentally pleaded, /How long can you keep doing that?/

/That image will never leave me, thank you very much!/ Bakura cackled gleefully.

/It really wasn't all that funny. Yugi might've been poisoned!/ Ryou adjusted his hold on his cauldron as he stopped in front of the portrait hole. "Abstinence!"

/You know as well as I that the shrimp was in no real danger. But seeing him so tiny…/

Ryou sighed as Bakura practically rolled around in his soul room and set off for his dormitory to trade out his potions equipment.

"I knew he was going to pick on me," said Harry bitterly, "I told you he had it out for me."

"It could have been worse," said Hermione, "Either of you could have ended up poisoned, even if it would have only been for a moment or two."

"Those third-years are truly lucky that all of those were decent enough potions that the whole class passed. Especially since none of your year was able to pull it off when you had that lesson," said Ryou once he returned to the common room.

Ron dropped into one of the common room armchairs. "I think he was banking on a bunch of dud potions. Did you see the look on his face when they all passed? That was priceless – almost like watching Snape go through Umbridge's inspection last year."

"Yeah, he was so happy he couldn't fail any poor thirteen year-olds that he gave us two rolls of parchment on the Drought of Living Death," said Harry.

"Well, considering you don't have any classes after Transfiguration and nothing after Charms first thing tomorrow, you should have no problem knocking that out," said Seto, leaning against the bookcase. He crossed his arms over his chest and looked out towards the window.

As the rest of them sat around the common room fire and talked about their last class, Harry's eyes darted to Seto every so often. He hadn't moved from his spot at the bookcase, and was still looking out the window. After a few seconds, he would tap his fingers against the crook of his elbow, but there was something off about him that Harry couldn't quite put a finger on. Sure Seto wasn't always the most social of their group, but to see him not moving…or even blinking…it was unnerving. Harry peered out the window to see what he was looking at, but didn't find anything of interest. Did he just...blink out?

After a while, Yugi glanced up at the clock on the wall. "We better get going if we're going to make it to Transfiguration on time."

"Let me grab my book, I'll be right down," said Hermione, jumping from the couch and hurrying up the girls' staircase.

Yugi checked his bag for his supplies and looked at his rival. Seto still hadn't moved.

"Kaiba? Ready to go?" Yugi exchanged a glance with Ryou. "Kaiba?"
"He's in his own world, mate," said Ron.

Ryou hesitantly walked over and tapped Seto's arm. "Kaiba? Are you okay?"

Seto suddenly blinked and flinched away from Ryou's hand.

"Did you hear us before? We're heading down to Transfiguration. Do you need to change out your books or anything?" asked Yugi. "You were pretty spaced off, everything okay?"

"I heard you. I was…thinking about my tech problem." He grabbed his bag and stalked off towards the portrait hole.

"What's with him?" asked Ron as Hermione came back down the girls' staircase.

"I don't know," Yugi shrugged. "He's just not in a good mood today, I guess. It's not like it would be the first time." Yugi swung his bag over his shoulder and followed the others out of the common room.

/It looked like he was talking to Set. I've never seen him get so deep into his mind link before that he spaces out so openly though./

/I know. From what I've seen before, he hides it under the guise of his work. Do you think something was bothering him?/

/I don't know, Yami…he said he was thinking about his computer problem./

/Yugi, you and I both know that was just a story. Kaiba was struck off guard at being caught talking to Set, and he wouldn't do it so blatantly in the open unless something was wrong./

/You really think he would tell us though?/

"Yugi!" Hermione suddenly grabbed Yugi by the arm, "Careful – the staircases move remember?"

"Yeah, right…sorry," Yugi gripped the railing. "I was just trying to remember if I left my homework in my trunk."

Ryou looked over. "You didn't put it in your bag before we left?"

Yugi rubbed a hand through his wild hair, laughing nervously. "I'm…pretty sure I did?"

"You'd best hope so. Professor McGonagall won't accept late assignments," said Harry. "We…learned that the hard way."

"By that, he means he and Ronald," said Hermione matter-of-factly, "Don't lump me in with them."

They were some of the last to arrive to Transfiguration. Yugi sat down next to Ryou and rifled through his bag for his homework.

"Were you really thinking about your homework?" Ryou whispered.

Yugi shook his head.

"Were you…talking to him?" asked Ryou.

Yugi nodded, looking over at Harry and Ron across the aisle. The two were speaking quietly, so the odds of them overhearing wasn't all that good.
"Yeah," said Yugi, "I guess I lost track of where I was going."

"I'll say," said Ryou. "You nearly fell down a few floors – and let me tell you, he was none too happy that you didn't go splat."

"Did you give him a good verbal abusing?"

Ryou rolled his eyes. "As good as it was going to be. You know how he is."

"Quiet down!" said Professor McGonagall as she made her way up the aisle and to the front of the room. She gave her wand a quick wave, and the parchment rolls she had assigned from their last class lifted themselves from all of the desks and formed a neat pile on the front table. Turning, she pointed her wand at the board, and a symbol drew itself in the center.

"Today we will be conjuring birds. Before we learn the incantation, we need to practice the wand movement. Arc your wands in this shape here. Notice how the symbol resembles a bird, or at least a wide 'm'. Casting will be like writing the letter with your wand."

She watched the class wave their wands about for a moment before holding her hand up. "And now, the incantation: Avis. Like before, there are twenty house points in it for anyone who can nonverbally cast their spell."

Professor McGonagall walked down the three steps from the front of the room and began to round the class as they went to work. "Don't dally on the wand movement. One syllable for each half of the casting symbol."

As she corrected one of the Slytherin students, a flutter of birds could be heard from the other side of the room. A few students paused in their attempts to look over and see a flock of canaries circling above Seto's head, with Hermione looking up at them in stunned disbelief.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione looked up as their newest friends returned to the common room later that evening. Ryou sank down at the table next to Ron as Seto brushed past them and up the staircase to the dormitories without a word to any of them.

"How was Herbology?" asked Harry.

"It was…interesting," said Ryou. "We learned how to re-pot Mandrakes."

"I remember that," said Ron, "We had to do that second year. Neville fainted in the middle of class."

"Well," Ryou massaged the back of his neck, "We didn't fare so well either."

/Speak for yourself, I enjoyed it immensely./ Bakura crossed his arms smugly. /I haven't seen anyone…or anything get a drop on his Insufferable Holiness in ages. It was long overdue./

"What happened?" asked Hermione.

"Well…" Yugi said, "I might have gotten a little too eager to start…"

"We hadn't all gotten our earmuffs on yet," said Ryou, "And…well…"

"It was totally an accident!" Yugi laughed.

"He knocked Kaiba out cold for the whole first part of class," said Ryou.
"Is that why he stormed up without a word?" asked Hermione. "Is he alright?"

"Bruised ego aside, he's fine," said Yugi. "But he's been in a weird mood since we left Potions today."

"He did well enough in McGonagall's class. He summoned his birds before you, Hermione," said Harry.

Hermione bristled before returning to her essay, dragging her quill along the parchment with much more force than necessary. "Beginner's luck, nothing more."

Two hours passed before Yugi threw down his quill and leaned his head back. "Ugh. I can't think anymore. How does Professor Snape expect us to fill two rolls of parchment on this one subject?"

Harry grimaced. "Welcome to Potions class."

"Well...I think I'm going to head up for the night." Yugi gathered his things and stuffed them into his bag. "I can't think anymore. I'll see you guys in the morning."

Ryou yawned. "I think I'm going to finish my last few paragraphs on this section, and then I'll be up. G'nite, Yugi."

"See you at breakfast, Yugi," said Hermione.

Yugi climbed the steps and stopped short once he entered his dormitory. "Set?"

The spirit was pacing next to Seto's bed. The curtains were drawn, so Yugi had to assume he was asleep. Considering his rival never came back downstairs after they all returned from Herbology, there was nowhere else he could be.

"Pharaoh – no, you're Yugi. My apologies."

Yugi closed the door and dropped his bag on his bed. "Everything okay?"

Set shook his head, and paused in his pacing. "I cannot do anything."

Yugi tilted his head as Yami phased out of the Puzzle. "What do you mean?"

Set dropped down on his knee. "My Pharaoh." He turned back to the curtains. "Seto has told you about the dreams; the glimpses of my past that he shouldn't even be having in the first place. He does not sleep well enough in the first place, and then these memories invade his mind like a parasite and there is nothing I can do except wait for them to pass."

"You can't wake him out of them?" asked Yugi.

"You think by now I haven't tried?" said Set angrily, "Every time this happens I am blocked out, and..." he punched the curtains to Seto's bed, watching as his fist went right through the scarlet fabric. "It's not like I can do much good like this."

"They're happening now?" Yugi asked. "Is there anything we can do?"

Set shrugged. "I don't know. Before we arrived at the Weasley home, his brother tried to wake him once – he thought Seto was having a nightmare, but that didn't work either. These memories disappear, in time, but it is the worst feeling to have to sit by and allow this to happen, without knowing why he is going through this in the first place."
Yugi looked to the Pharaoh. "We've never experienced this, and Bakura hasn't either. This doesn't add up."

"There must be an influence outside of the Millennium Items doing this to him, though it can't be a coincidence that this didn't start until after we gave Kaiba the Millennium Rod," said Yami. "Question is…who would have knowledge of events 5,000 years ago?"

Set sighed and looked back to his host. "The dreams are fading out now. I can ease him back to a deeper sleep, but we need to find out what is causing this, and soon."

Long after Yugi and Ryou had gone to bed, Set reappeared out of the Millennium Rod, and was surprised to see he wasn't the only restless spirit in the dormitory.

"I'm surprised to see you awake…not that we need sleep."

"I've been worried," said Yami, "Is he alright?"

"Seto is fine now, though he will not be in a good mood in the morning."

"Well, that wouldn't be anything new." Yami gestured to the door. "I wanted to ask you something, but let's go outside. I don't want to wake anyone."

"What is it?"

"What were you talking about earlier with Kaiba, when we were back in the common room after Potions class?"

Set frowned. "Seto was not very good at hiding that this time. I think he was over-analyzing."

Yami sat down on the steps outside their door. "Over-analyzing? About what?"

Set sat beside him. "Something Professor Snape said. He –"

The sound of one of the other dormitory doors above them caught their attention. Yami glanced at his High Priest. "I know our hosts can see the three of us…but you don't think any of the others…"

"I don't know, and I don't particularly wish to find out," Set hissed, "We'll get back to this in the morning."

Yami nodded as the two spirits disappeared just in time for Harry to descend the tower steps, his wand and Marauders Map in hand. He stopped outside the exchange students' door and looked back to the map. The strange '??' was back, along with a new figure, labeled 'Set', but just like the last time he had seen the peculiar figures on the map, they didn't last.

Now I know I didn't imagine them, Harry thought to himself as he returned upstairs. If they're not ghosts, and you can't apparate in and out of school, then who keeps showing up on the map…and why are they always near this room?
The house was dark, save for the light coming from the roaring fireplace in the upstairs study. Most of the windows were coated with a thick sheet of dust, having been sealed shut for decades. A large python lay curled by the lone armchair in the middle of the room, its occupant leafing through an old tome on ancient runes.

The python raised its head and flicked its tongue towards the door. The man in the chair did not look up from his book.

"Ah – someone approaches. You may soon have your dinner after all," he said.

The python unwound itself and circled around the armchair as a cloaked figure knocked on the doorframe to the study.

"Apologies for the intrusion, My Lord…but I have returned from my travel."

"That is obvious, Macnair," said the chair's occupant, his voice high and cold. "Have you something of importance to say, or are you volunteering to become Nagini's next meal?"

The visitor paled. "We have brought this back from Egypt, My Lord. It set off our detectors, though we are not sure why."

The book was set aside. "Very well…what is it that you've brought?"

The man called Macnair moved to the front of the armchair and presented something long and skinny wrapped up in a cloth...

Harry woke with a start and propped himself up on his elbows, breathing heavily. He hadn't meant to inadvertently connect with Voldemort, not since the last time had gotten Sirius killed.

Harry drew his knees up to his chest and rubbed at his eyes. He recognized the room as the same one from the summer before fourth year – when Barty Crouch Jr had met with Voldemort just before the Quidditch World Cup. But what did Macnair give to him? And why was he in Egypt of all places?

Reaching through the scarlet curtains, Harry grabbed his glasses and sat up against his headboard. Ripping himself out of Voldemort's mind left him wide awake. There was no way he would be able to fall back asleep now. He peered through the gap in the curtains. It was still dark outside and he could hear Ron snoring in the next bunk over.

Sighing, Harry reached for the Marauders Map again. Would the mysterious figures be back, or was he setting himself up for another wild goose chase? At this hour, no one would be wandering the castle except for the ghosts, or maybe Filch and Mrs. Norris. But maybe watching the castle would help him fall back to sleep.
"Lumos," Harry whispered. "I solemnly swear that I am up to no good."

He didn't waste time perusing the whole map first, and went looking immediately for Yugi's dorm room. The ‘?’ and Bakura were still missing off of the map, but he saw 'Set' right next to 'Seto Kaiba', and this time, no one was disappearing.

Did Seto bring a pet to Hogwarts, and he just missed it around the school? Perhaps he brought a toad, like Neville had. It wasn't as if Trevor stayed put in Gryffindor Tower all the time. Over the years, they've found him all over the grounds.

Harry frowned. Seto didn't seem the type to get a toad for a pet. If anything, he would have gotten an owl for practicality, but they all went shopping in Diagon Alley at the same time. None of the new students had purchased animals. Harry quickly moved his lit wand around the map, looking for the Owlery. Set couldn't be an animal – Hedwig and Pigwidgeon didn't even show up there.

Could Set be like Peter Pettigrew was and be disguised hiding in the school? Was he a Death Eater? He gripped his wand tightly – if that was the case, everyone in that dorm could be in danger.

He twisted around to reach under his pillow where he kept his Invisibility Cloak. Harry looked for his shoes in the dark, but decided that it would be quieter to sneak downstairs in his socks. Halfway down the staircase to the next door he stopped and looked back down at the map. Set hadn't moved.

With a quick-placed silencing charm on the door, he pushed it open and crept inside.

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"Something is definitely going on with those three," said Harry the next morning. "Okay, I know you're tired of listening to this, Hermione, but hear me out. I've been overhearing things about Millennium Items – I've even done research in the library, but haven't found anything. Whatever information is out there for those items, if it's in the library, it's in the restricted section."

"Good luck getting past Madame Pince for that," said Ron, "None of the teachers are going to give you a pass to go on a wild hunt."

"I'll worry about that," said Harry, "But there's more. I woke up in the middle of the night and couldn't fall back to sleep, so I went looking at the Marauders Map."

"In the middle of the night?" asked Hermione, "What were you expecting to find? Everyone would have been asleep."

"Ever since term started, I've been seeing extra people on the Map. A 'Set', 'Bakura', and someone with only question marks for a name."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "You do realize Bakura is Ryou's last name, don't you?"

"Yeah, but these are in addition to Yugi, Seto, and Ryou. I mean, I saw Ryou, and then someone else named Bakura. But here's the weird part – aside from these three people randomly showing up, they just vanish without a trace."

"Maybe they move around the castle. Could they be pets? Just think of how many times we've helped Neville look for his toad," said Hermione.

Harry shook his head. "Pets don't appear on the Map, only people."

"Then who are they?" asked Ron.
Harry sighed. He didn't have an answer for him. Not yet, anyways. "So like I said, when I woke up last night, I checked the map. I saw someone named Set in Yugi's dorm last night, and I went to check." He saw the look Hermione gave him. "Don't give me that look, I used the cloak. No one saw me go in and out, but what I saw was…"

Harry looked up and down the Great Hall. None of the other Gryffindor students were within earshot, and there was no sign of Yugi or his friends yet. "Where Set was on the map? It was Seto, only…he was a ghost."

"What are you talking about? Seto can't be a ghost." Hermione pushed away her toast. "We saw him last night; he was moody, but fine. Are you saying he died?"

"No, and that's the weird part," said Harry. "Seto was in bed, asleep, but he was thrashing around, as if he was having a nightmare or something. And then there was a ghost that looked just like him standing over him, with his hand on his living self's forehead. He was muttering something, but I couldn't tell what it was."

"That makes no sense," said Ron, "How can someone be both alive and dead at the same time?"

"I don't know. But I think the map might be damaged. How can it not identify someone in the castle? All of the other ghosts are labeled, so who could possibly be the question mark guy – and why do they only show up in Yugi's dorm?" said Harry.

Hermione leaned forward, "And I've told you before what will happen when you're caught meddling. You have to think from their perspective, Harry. You're going to cross a line you can't come back from. Once trust is broken, it can't easily be won back."

Harry nodded, hardly listening. This wasn't the first time Hermione's gone off on him on this subject.

"Look alive, mate, here they come," said Ron.

"Morning," said Ryou, taking a seat next to Harry. Yugi gave a little wave in greeting before dishing some fruit onto his plate.

"So…Charms is the only class we haven't had yet this week. Should we be worried?" asked Yugi.

"Nah," said Ron, "Flitwick's alright. So long as you give an honest effort in class, you're fine."

"Isn't Seto going to come down?" asked Hermione, giving Harry a side-eye glare. "He's going to miss breakfast."

"I don't think so," said Yugi, looking over at Ryou. "Normally, he's the first out of our room in the mornings, but today he was still asleep when we got up. I don't think he had a good night."

"We'll check on him before class starts. We won't let him miss out on Charms, don't worry," Ryou gave them a small smile.

/I hope, by that, you mean that task will not be left up to me/ said Bakura. /I'm not the Priest's keeper./

/Of course not, Spirit. You must not have been paying attention when Yugi and I spoke with Set this morning. Set will make sure he gets up for class today. And Yugi has already agreed to make a run to the dorm as well, just in case./

/Good./
"Are you going to come and watch Quidditch tryouts?" asked Harry, "I signed out the Pitch for next Saturday."

"I will," said Ryou, nudging Yugi's arm. "Someone has to be on your cheer squad, right?"

Yugi laughed, "Yeah. I'm just glad Madame Hooch was okay lending me a broom for tryouts."

"I was meaning to ask," said Ryou, "What is there to do on the weekends?"

Ron snorted, "Besides homework, not much. Every so many weeks there's a trip to Hogsmeade, or there will be a Quidditch match, but otherwise, do whatever you want."

"The time is yours, so long as you don't do anything to get on Umbridge's radar," said Hermione, "Unless she's completely reformed her ways, she'll revoke any of your privileges without batting an eyelash."

Yugi stole a look up at the teachers table. "She's not there."

"Maybe she's off plotting with the Ministry again," said Harry, "What I wouldn't do to find out what brought her back in the first place."

"We probably won't know unless we search her office. And after what happened last year when we tried to do that, she's probably going to expect it," said Hermione, "If you're going to try and snoop, you'll need a new strategy."

Yugi blinked. "I thought you were done with that, after it got you in trouble last year."

Hermione poked at her toast. "Some habits are just too hard for some people to break."

Ryou looked up towards the ceiling as they got up from the table. "Are you going out to practice after classes today, Yugi? Looks like a good day outside for Quidditch."

"I think so. There should be plenty of time between Charms and Potions today so long as Madame Hooch is okay with it. I don't want to short any of her classes."

He paused at the end of the hallway. "I'll meet you in class," said Yugi, turning back towards the staircase. "I'm gonna make sure Kaiba got himself up."

/Ugh, it would be easier if we didn't have to make stories up like this./

/I know, Yugi. But leaving them in the dark keeps them safe. The trouble with the Millennium Items, the Shadow Realm, everything we've faced since the Puzzle was put together…Harry and his friends don't need to worry about that as well./

/Harry's had his fair share of crazy over the years too. We could probably be helping each other instead of sneaking around like this. We already know Harry was being a little nosy with his questions once before. The others probably won't agree, but opening up to Harry and the others might prompt them to do the same with anything they're keeping from us./

/I suppose you could always try to dig up whatever information you can on your own…but your peers clearly have the home field advantage here. If they wanted to keep anything from us, they can hide something anyplace in this castle and we would never find it. We can't say the same about the Millennium Items. Bakura and Kaiba may be able to hide their Items, but the Puzzle is out in clear sight./
Yugi hurried down the corridor to reach the portrait hole. /I suppose the good news is that the Millennium Items have been kept such a secret that there's no real written information about them anywhere. The wizards can look, but they won't find anything./

/Exactly – and it seems that the stone tablets in Egypt are protected enough that it's very hard to get close to them. Try to let things be for now. I'd rather avoid making Harry, Ron, and Hermione even more of a target for Voldemort just for knowing about us. We'll just have to watch how we communicate while out in the open./

Upon giving the password, Yugi stepped up through the portrait hole and towards the boy's staircase. It was eerie to see Gryffindor Tower so empty, but then again, he had just left the rest of the school at breakfast.

"Ten minutes 'till class," Yugi muttered, "I hope he's up."

/I'm sure Set would have woken him in time for class, Yugi. He might already be there./

/Which would have made this a wasted journey./

Yami chuckled. /Exercise is always important, Yugi!/ 

Yugi pushed open the door to their room and sighed. /Well…I could have had another slice of toast this morning./

/At least you won't have to worry about Kaiba being a grump because he missed class./

Yugi shook his head, unsure of why he was smiling as he walked back out of the common room. /He's going to be grumpy anyway./

"Sorry, mate," said Ron, once Yugi made it to the classroom. "He was already here when we got here."

Yugi squeezed down the long row to sit between Seto and Ryou. "How long have you been here?"

"Just a few minutes before everyone else arrived," said Seto, turning the page of his library book.

/You were right, Yugi…he does seem to be grumpy this morning./

"You were right, Yugi…he does seem to be grumpy this morning./

Ryou leaned closer. "Are you feeling…better?"

Seto snapped his book shut and reached for his coffee mug. "Depends on your definition of better." He took a quick side-eyed glance to see Harry, Ron, and Hermione talking quietly amongst them before looking back to Yugi and Ryou. "Twice last night."

"Have they ever come more than once before?" asked Ryou.

Seto shook his head and rubbed at the circles under his eyes as Professor Flitwick climbed up onto the stack of books he was using as a podium to address the class.

After a few minutes of lecturing, he set the class onto their task.

"What use is there for turning vinegar into wine?" asked Ron, "It doesn't seem so difficult. I mean, Seamus managed to turn his water to rum first year."

"And then it promptly exploded in his face," said Hermione, "I imagine this would do the same if we
do it wrong."

The small boom heard on the other side of the room drew everyone's attention, and nearly startled Professor Flitwick enough to knock him off of his books. The goblets in front of Seamus and Neville were smoking.

A few more glasses exploded before Flitwick sagged his shoulders, dismayed at the lack of progress around the room.

"Oh dear, keep trying. We are trying to create wine, not have a goblet-shattering contest!"

Harry's attempt froze his goblet solid. He sighed, and looked over to see Hermione's face screwed up in concentration as she made her attempts.

"What's with her?" he whispered to Ron.

"Remember how she was outdone in Transfiguration yesterday? I don't think she can take not being the smartest or most gifted person in the room." Ron looked over to his other side where the three exchange students were sitting. "Though it doesn't look like anyone else in here is gonna come close. The only other person who's gotten close before was Seto, and he doesn't look any closer to getting this done than we do."

Yugi watched as Seto slammed his wand down on the desk with more force than necessary. "It's okay if you don't get it on the first shot, you know."

The glare he then received certainly told him otherwise. Yugi sighed.

"I know I can do it – that's not the issue," said Seto bitterly, "I can't focus."

Ryou leaned around Yugi. "Is it because of last night?"

Seto reached for his coffee. "This isn't the time or place."

Ryou nodded. The long rows were too close together to have a good conversation. "Yugi and Harry are going out to try and get some Quidditch practice in before tryouts next weekend. The stands will be empty." He paused for a second. "And he says Yugi looks ridiculous on a broomstick."

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Seto dropped down onto one of the benches in the stands.

"It's huge, isn't it?" asked Ryou, taking a seat next to him. "I bet the games themselves are a sight to see."

"Probably are," Seto muttered. He watched Yugi and Harry kick off from the ground and begin to do slow laps around the edge of the Pitch.

"Bet it would be neat to duel in here, huh?" asked Ryou.

"One day," Seto sighed, taking another sip from his mug. He was glad he not only stopped by the kitchens for a second coffee run on his way outside, but grabbed his cloak and gloves. The wind was particularly biting today.

Ryou raised an eyebrow. "You don't seem particularly eager for that. I'm surprised."

Seto looked tiredly over at him. "If all we were going to do is talk about my lack of energy, we could
have done this back in the castle where it was warm."

Bakura phased out of the Millennium Ring. "Considering your normally icy exterior, I didn't think
the cold bothered you, Kaiba."

Set phased angrily out of the Millennium Rod as Seto glared at the spirit of the Ring. "The only thing
in me today is coffee – of course I'm cold out here. And if you're just going to throw barbs at me,
then I'm going back inside."

Bakura and Ryou shared a glance before the spirit crossed his arms. "You're really not in the mood
today, are you?"

Seto sighed as Yugi finished his lap around the field and joined Harry back on the ground. "No."

Ryou frowned, "You've been hit with these dreams before…but last night was different from the
other times, wasn't it? What happened last night?"

"The dreams started not long after I went to bed," said Seto, "They were, for lack of a better word,
routine as all of the others. I woke up a few hours later, did some reading, and fell back asleep.
Sometime afterwards, I was hit again…it was a lot more intrusive – almost violent."

"It lasted for far longer than the normal ones," said Set, "It took a great deal of effort to repress the
second attack."

"But they were the same dreams, weren't they?" asked Ryou. "More flashes of Set's past?"

Seto shook his head. "No. The memories were mine." Sighing, he looked down at the mug in his
hands. Sharing personal details was not something he really wanted to be doing with Bakura of all
people. "I've had difficulty sleeping before, but this time? It was as if someone was searching for a
memory - something very specific."

"Like what?"

Seto gave Bakura a hard look and set his mug on the bench next to him. He reached into his cloak
and removed the Millennium Rod from his belt loop. "Take a guess."

Bakura looked down at the Millennium Rod. "I think it's safe to say at this point that these dreams
you're having aren't coming from one of the Items. Someone is doing this to you. And what's
troubling is that it's only you."

Seto turned his Item over in his hands. "If someone is probing for information on the Millennium
Items, I don't get why they would target me. Up until this summer I had nothing to do with them."

Bakura chuckled darkly, "Oh, you've always had something to do with them, Kaiba. Whoever this
person is, they either waited for you to claim the Rod, or just lucked out on timing. Whatever it is
their searching for can't be found in the Priest's limited memory, so that's why they've moved on to
yours."

"Aside from turning my tournament into a magical circus, I don't know anything about these Items.
This person would have better luck looking at you or Yugi."

"That's just it – whatever this person seeks, they must believe you have it," said Bakura. "What we
need to find out is who is behind this. Voldemort didn't get a translation of the tablet in the museum,
so aside from his curiosity, I doubt he is the one doing this to you. Someone else with a connection to
the Items is in play, and we don't know who they're working for…or if they act alone."
"Well that's just great," Seto muttered.

"There's something else," said Bakura, "Someone was in our dorm last night."

"What?" asked Ryou. "How…who was it? When was it?"

"Late in the night. Everyone was asleep." Bakura looked over at Seto. "Well, almost everyone. His High Holiness was too preoccupied with you to notice. I saw the door open and close twice in the dark, but I didn't see anyone come or go."

Ryou furrowed his brow and scratched his ear. "Did…did you take control last night?"

"Only for a little while, and it's not as if I went anywhere – you never left your bed," said Bakura, "But the door is heavy enough that it shouldn't open and close on its own. Especially without a sound, so whoever it was knew to be stealthy about it."

"Well without seeing someone walk in or out, how are you going to prove someone was there?" asked Set.

No one had an answer for that.

They sat in silence for the next few minutes, watching Yugi attempt to throw a quaffle into one of the goal posts.

"Diagon Alley," Seto said suddenly.

"What?" asked Ryou.

"In the robes shop," said Seto, turning to look at him, "When the Malfoys walked out, Harry and his friends chased after him. Yugi thought he saw Harry disappear under the cloak he brought with him. What if he really did?"

Bakura grinned wildly and turned to Ryou. "Well, Landlord, are you up for a little adventure?"

Set narrowed his eyes. "What are you up to?"

Bakura rubbed his semi-transparent hands together. "Nothing dangerous. If Harry is going to snoop through our room, I think it's only right I can return the favor. And if he doesn't have this magical turn-me-invisible cloak at his disposal, then we'll know it wasn't him that broke in last night."

"This is probably going to end badly," said Set.

"Have a little faith," Bakura snapped, "I've broken into much more secure locations without getting caught. This is the perfect opportunity while he's out there in the air with the Pharaoh. Kaiba, you stay here and fill in the shrimp when he decides he can't play this ridiculous sport."

"It'll be fine," said Ryou, reassuringly, "I'll have to go back to the common room at some point today to get my things for Divination anyhow. It'll give me a reason to get up the staircase without any questions."

Everyone turned to look at Ryou as if he was mad.

Ryou blinked. "Did I say something?"

Bakura pretended to wipe a tear from his eye. "Oh look, I've corrupted him!"
The remainder of the week passed without incident. Harry kept a close eye on the Marauder's Map, but he was unable to see any of the strange figures. After two days without seeing Set or Bakura, he returned to watching Malfoy, but his Slytherin rival also hadn't done anything to warrant special attention.

It was rather infuriating. He had to be up to something…but what? Perhaps keeping an eye on the map in the late evenings was no longer the answer. But he couldn't just as well take it out and look it over while in class – that would be a one-way ticket for the map back to Filch's office, and probably a good deal of detentions if it was Snape or Umbridge who had caught him.

By the time they knew it, the second Saturday of term had rolled around. Seto walked into the Great Hall that morning to see Ron uncharacteristically picking at his breakfast.

"Nerves," said Hermione as he sat down. "I don't see why you're so nervous, Ronald. You were on the team last year, and Gryffindor won the cup."

"It's him," said Ron, nodding down the table. "You see him? Cormac McLaggen? He's been bragging about his Quidditch expertise all morning."

Yugi shrugged, and took a bite of his toast. "So?"

"He's tryin' out for Keeper too, like me," said Ron, "Against some hotshot like him, what chance do I have?"

"If you're going to think like that Ron, you've already lost," said Harry.

"Are you going to watch the tryouts too?" Hermione asked Seto.

Seto nodded glumly, "I was going to spend the day in the library, but it seems my quiet corner has been compromised."

"It's just for one day," said Yugi, "And not even the whole one at that. You can work on getting your tech to work afterwards."

Seto huffed and spooned some eggs onto his plate.

"Do you think you're ready?" asked Ryou.

Yugi nodded. "I think so. I mean, I'm a little nervous, but I'll still be happy if I don't make the team. I'm just glad that you guys were so helpful in getting me some practice time."

Harry nodded. "No problem. We'll see if it pays off – just don't eat too much though. I need to return your broom in the same condition that it was borrowed."

One of the other Gryffindor girls in their year skipped up energetically and patted Ron on the shoulder on the walk outside. "Good luck today, Ron! I know you'll be brilliant!" With a wink and a smile, she rejoined her friends.

Hermione glared at her as they followed them up and into the stands.

"Look at the turnout," said Ryou, "I didn't think that many people would sign up for the team."

Hermione snorted and pointed down where a group of girls were huddled near the field's entrance. "Look – those there aren't even Gryffindors."
Ryou leaned against the front wall of the stands. "It's hard to hear what they're saying down there. I think we went up too high."

"I think they're doing beater tryouts first," said Hermione, pointing down to the locked box. "The bludgers are in there. Just be careful in case they decide to fly off and into the stands."

Ryou paled. "Those are the balls that try to knock people out, right? Do they...normally attack the spectators?"

"Well, no, but there was a rogue bludger in our second year that tried to kill Harry."

Beater tryouts were fairly simple. Harry released the bludgers into the air and blew the whistle. The four Gryffindors trying out for the position flew into the air and attempted to hit as many bludgers as they could at their competitors before the whistle was blown again.

"I imagine the beaters have the easiest job," said Ryou, watching the players zoom past, "They just have to knock those things around at the other team."

Seto leaned forward and propped his arms against the rail. "None of them seem to be doing a decent job at it."

"I don't think anyone is going to be able to replace Fred and George," said Hermione, "But...I just wish most of the people trying out for the team had some...actual interest in it." She pointed down to where a cluster of students were gathered along the wall, holding what looked like school brooms. "Look – I'm pretty sure those are first year students. Technically, they're not even allowed to join the team except in special circumstances, and I'm positive none of them have done anything to earn that."

"At least they look like they can get on their brooms, unlike those girls." Ryou pointed to one of the girls who was ogling Harry, fell off of her broomstick and started giggling nonstop.

Hermione shook her head. "That's Romilda Vane, I think she's in Ginny's year. She's been crushing on Harry since the term began, and I've seen her look at you two as well." She sighed. "Watch out for her – back in Diagon Alley, when Ron's dad took you to Gringotts, she was in Fred and George's shop stocking up on love potions. I wouldn't take anything she offers you."

Ryou blinked. "Good to know."

The whistle blew again, and everyone touched back down. Harry announced the new beaters to be Jimmy Peakes and Ritchie Coote.

"I suppose they were the best of the bunch...even if they did miss most of their shots," said Ryou. "That doesn't say a whole lot for the team though."

"There's Yugi!" Hermione pointed to the other end of the Pitch. Yugi was standing, a ragged-looking broom in his hand, talking with Ginny. She was tossing the quaffle up and down while they waited for Chaser tryouts to begin.

"Do you recognize anyone else trying out on the team?" asked Ryou.

"Well, Ginny, of course," said Hermione, "Over there by the ball crate is Katie Bell, she's a seventh year, and has been a Chaser for as long as I can remember. And Ron is..." she scanned the field and found him talking to a large blond boy. Ron didn't look too pleased to be near him. The blond boy looked up at the stands and met her gaze, raising eyebrows suggestively at her. She scowled and looked away. "...with Cormac McLaggen."
"That's the guy Ron was worried about?" asked Ryou. "He's huge – doesn't seem like the kind of guy to be a goal keeper."

Hermione snorted. "All he's been talking about to anyone within earshot of him the past few days at meals is how great he is on a broomstick."

Seto looked down at him as Cormac and Ron joined Harry and the other students on the field. "Looks like Quidditch isn't his only interest."

Hermione glared at him.

Ryou nudged both of their shoulders. "Look – they're starting Keeper tryouts. They're both going up in the air."

Harry turned to the huddle of people hovering around him. "Normally we would do chaser tryouts first, but I don't have a Keeper to defend the goal posts, and I'll tell you guys right now, I would make a terrible one. So we're going to start with Keepers. Ron, Cormac – you're the only two trying for that position so you'll each take a goal post. Everyone trying for Chaser, I want you to split off into two groups. Each group is going to have a goal side to try and score. Ron, Cormac – you guys need to defend the goals. First to make five saves gets the position. Or, if you both each make the first five, then whoever breaks the tie wins. Then we'll run Chaser tryouts with the new Keeper. Okay? Great, let's split off."

Hermione rubbed at her arms as the chaser hopefuls formed teams and lined up around the center of the field. Ginny and Yugi sided on the same team, and took positions near Cormac's side. They would have to get their goals past him. She watched Harry toss the quaffle into the air and the players scattered.

Ginny passed one the quaffle to one of the other girls on their makeshift team, but it was intercepted. Katie Bell received it and she zoomed towards Ron's goal posts. The quaffle was tossed…and caught. Barely.

Yugi nearly dropped the quaffle when it was passed to him and tried to make a scoring pass on Cormac's left post, but it was easily caught and tossed back to Katie.

Hermione sighed. Ron was obviously nervous, and was fumbling to make his saves – the last one he barely stopped and that was because it bounced off of his head. She looked over to the other side of the field as the chasers regrouped to the center, waiting for Harry to release the quaffle again. Cormac was radiating confidence…and was looking right at her.

"Come on Ron! You can do it!" screamed a girl a little ways down in the stands. It was the same girl that wished him good luck back in the Great Hall.

"Lavender certainly is vocal today," said Ryou.

Hermione broke her gaze away from Cormac, who was still staring at her, and turned towards Lavender. "She's never bothered to show interest in him before," she said, barely hiding the bitterness in her voice. She stepped back from the front wall and sat down on the bench, using Seto and Ryou to shield her from Cormac's ogling view.

/Heh. Someone certainly is jealous./ Bakura snickered. /Teenagers. /

/I'm a teenager, Spirit./

/You don't have an issue with girls here, Landlord – it's the opposite. These little witches are
infatuated with your too-innocent face. Heed your friend's warning about those 'love potions'. If you stupidly fall for a thirteen-year old, I won't guarantee her safety while I snap you out of it./

/…Understood…/

He returned to focusing on the tryouts as Lavender let out another encouraging shout. Both Ron and Cormac had both made four consecutive saves. The quaffle went to one of the girls on Katie's team, and when it was hurled towards the goal post, Ron managed to grab it before it could sail through the center hoop.

The quaffle was passed off to Yugi and he zoomed off to the other end of the field.

"If Cormac makes this, then they keep going for a tie," said Ryou, nervously.

Yugi passed the quaffle to Ginny. She lined up her throw and threw the ball.

"ACHOO!"

Ryou and Seto whirled around as Hermione stashed her hand back into her jacket pocket. "That was some sneeze," said Ryou, "Are you alright?"

Hermione nodded sheepishly, "Yeah, sorry."

At the same time, there was a series of "Oooh's" from the field.

"Oh no, I missed it, what happened?" asked Hermione, jumping up from the bench and returning to the front wall.

"Ron did it!" Lavender said brightly, "Cormac shot in the wrong direction completely and missed the save."

They watched Cormac hover at the goal post, a look of pure confusion on his face as Ron landed on the ground, grinning from ear to ear.

Yugi patted his back, "Well done, Ron!"

"Thanks, mate. It's your turn now. Good luck!"

"Each chaser on trial is going to make 10 passes at the hoops. The three who score the most will make the team," said Harry.

Seto crossed his arms and looked at Ryou. "I thought you said Yugi was going to make a fool of himself in the air," he said quietly, "I haven't seen it yet. In fact, I'm starting to think you just wanted me out of the library."

Ryou laughed sheepishly, "I suppose Yugi and I didn't want you to become a hermit."

Seto rolled his eyes as Yugi took the quaffle and made a pass around the field. His first throw bounced off of the rim of the left goal post. His next four passes went through easily, but as he was lining up the following throw, he lost his balance and dropped the quaffle in favor of grabbing onto his broomstick.

"Oh no, I hope that won't count against him too much," said Ryou.

"It might have been the school broom," said Hermione, "A lot of them are old and have developed a mind of their own."
"He's only missed one so far," said Seto as Yugi made his seventh shot.
"That's good, so far he's doing great," said Hermione, "He just needs to keep it up."
"Come on Yugi!" Ryou called, "You've got this!"
Harry greeted Yugi on the ground once he made his final throw. "Eight out of ten, not bad, Yugi."
"Thanks!" Yugi dropped down onto the grass and watched Ginny grab the quaffle and kick off into the air.
/I think, considering we had no prior broomstick-training until this summer, eight out of ten is an excellent score!/
/Thanks, Pharaoh! I'm surprised you're not bitter about missing those two./
/Well...this isn't a high-stakes game, at least not like dueling. And we didn't lose to Kaiba, so we don't have to worry about this being rubbed in our faces./
/He might do it anyway if we don't make the team./
/True...but considering he didn't participate, he may not care. He probably doesn't hold this sport in as high a regard as Duel Monsters./
Ron dropped down next to him. "Good run, mate. You only missed two – seems like a sure-in for the team."
"Thanks," Yugi smiled, "Do you feel better now that your tryouts are over?"
"Yeah," said Ron, "Though I can't figure out why Cormac went the complete other way on that last shot. He was ready for that save, I know it. I dunno what came over him."
Yugi shrugged. "Maybe his broom acted up."
"I mean, it's possible, but that was no school broom he was using."
Harry gathered his chasers together. "You guys did great, but I can only have three chasers, so Ginny, Demelza, and Katie are it. Yugi, you did really well, but you just missed the cut. Would you be willing to stay on as a relief chaser?"
Yugi nodded. "Sure! Thanks, Harry!"

~~*~~
Ryou tugged at his tie as he entered the library. The Divination tower classroom was especially stuffy today. While it was his favorite subject, it was rather hard to concentrate when he was feeling ready to pass out for a nap the entire time. He moved to the table tucked away between Magical Law and Legilimency and sank down in the seat next to Yugi. "How's this going?"
Yugi shrugged. "I'm here to help look through these books...but mainly to keep an eye and ear out for Madame Pince so he doesn't get bludgeoned to death with A Comprehensive History of the Goblin Wars."
Ryou blinked. "Is that really a thing?"
"Yes," said Seto without looking up from the notes he was writing. His phone was next to his
parchment, still giving off a faint smoky odor. "And no, before you ask, I haven't been hit with it."

"Sorry we couldn't really talk before," said Ryou, "It was too busy in the Great Hall."

"Did you find anything this time?" asked Seto.

Ryou shook his head. "The spirit looked through everything... again. He still didn't find any sort of special invisibility cloak."

"Well someone came in last week," said Yugi. "Maybe the spirits can take turns keeping an eye out at night."

"It shouldn't be too difficult seeing as my spirit has wanted to sneak off around the castle at night as it is," said Ryou.

"I wouldn't," said Seto, looking up from his parchment. "It's not just our own counterparts we can see here. If I can see Yugi's insufferable other self, it's more than possible that other people in the castle can as well. Set was out and in the room that night. Whoever came inside would have seen him, and if the thief that's in your Ring hadn't taken over your body, he might have been noticed too. We don't need the rest of the population here wondering why we seem to be both alive and dead at the same time."

Yugi nodded. "Kaiba's right. If they're going to come out, it should be where they won't be spotted by anyone else."

"So the dorm, essentially," said Ryou.

"For now, yeah... at least until we figure out who came in, or find a way to keep them out."

"That's not difficult. Just cast a spell on the door," said Seto.

"And I suppose you know what it is?" asked Ryou.

Seto rolled up his notes and put them into his bag. "It's in one of the books in my trunk. I don't remember it being incredibly difficult to learn." He got up and sideways glanced down towards the end of the aisle. "I'm heading back to the common room to dissect my phone again."

"Already?" Yugi looked at the clock on the wall. "We haven't been here for very long."

Seto tilted his head towards where he was glancing before. "I really don't want to be stalked by the gaggle of Ravenclaws on the other side of the library any more than I already have been this week. The girls in our own house are bad enough."

Ryou grimaced. "I was hoping Hermione was wrong about that when she said we were being watched."

"Well..." Yugi gathered his things. "At least it's not Colin Creevey and his camera!"

"Honestly, there are times I'd rather have that thing burning my retinas," Seto muttered.

They were halfway up one of the moving staircases when Yugi grabbed Seto's sleeve. "Wait. While there's no one else around -- what made you so uptight after the first Potions class? I've been meaning to ask, but...."

Seto leaned back against the railing and looked down at the other two a few steps below him. "It was something Snape said -- that we were Dumbledore's pet project."
Yugi looked at Ryou. "Well…I guess it's a weird way to put it…but Dumbledore did invite us here. He's just looking after us."

"Are you sure you're not reading too much into it?" asked Ryou.

Seto shook his head. "No, but…" he trailed off as the stairs reached their destination and a few students stood waiting at the opposite end. Brushing past, he found the door to an empty classroom and ushered the two inside.

"Look – could I be overreacting? Sure," Seto crossed his arms, "But the fact is that Dumbledore brought us here for a reason."

"He wanted to keep us safe," said Yugi. "We already knew that."

"Okay, fine. Assume that was his only reason," said Seto. "He claimed to be in contact with the Japanese Ministry of Magic at least once. Why couldn't they keep an eye on us? It would be a hell of a lot more discreet than uprooting us halfway around the world."

"What about him saying that Voldemort was going to come after us anyway? We were going to be safer here in the school versus out in the open back home," said Ryou.

"Yet people can come and go around the school without being seen," said Seto. "And to be honest, there has been no proof so far that Voldemort is even interested in us."

"We've only been here for a few weeks…you don't think you're jumping the gun a bit?" asked Yugi.

"I don't know what to think, or believe," said Seto, "I said back when the summer first started that it seemed highly coincidental that I got the Millennium Rod the same day that Dumbledore sent us that first letter. Hiding behind that calm façade was a push to get us out of Domino. He was fine with me staying behind for almost a month only because I pushed for it. Why did you two have to leave right away?"


"He had planned to plant his wizard guardians in Domino to look after Mokuba and your friends anyway. You could have stayed behind and flown out with me in July."

"I don't know, Kaiba…," said Yugi.

"And, he had three British wizards come all the way out to Domino when he could have had the Japanese Ministry assign someone, anyone, and they wouldn't stick out like those three do in Japan."

"Well, he knows them, and he trusts them over a stranger," said Ryou, "Would you trust a stranger with Mokuba?"

Seto glared at him. "Look. I could be out of my mind…but my instincts are screaming that something isn't right. Tomorrow I'm heading home for a few days. You don't have to believe me, but just…keep an eye out while I'm gone."
"Remus!" Harry exclaimed, hurrying down the staircase in the Entrance Hall, "What are you doing here?"

"Acting as an escort," said Remus, "Professor Dumbledore has asked me to accompany Mr. Kaiba to London so he can make his flight home."

"Why doesn't he just use a portkey or the Floo Network?"

"Connecting a fireplace in Japan to our network would raise too many flags at the Ministry. As for portkeys, Professor Dumbledore offered to create one for him, but he refused, insisting on using his own transportation. Believe it or not, the fireplaces in the school are still being monitored by the Ministry, so we're avoiding them as well. We'll travel to Hogsmeade, and pick up the Knight Bus to London."

Harry nodded. He supposed that made sense. "Okay. When are you leaving?"

Remus looked up past him towards the staircase in the chance his charge was on his way down. "Soon. I'm afraid I'm dreadfully early this morning."

"Well…while you're here, I've got a question for you," said Harry. He pulled the Marauders Map from his bag. "I think there might be something wrong with the Map. I know you've said it never lies, but I've been seeing things on it that don't make any sense."

Remus tilted his head. "Like what?"

"Well…for one thing, Ryou Bakura showed up twice. I saw the dot labeled Ryou Bakura, and then there was a separate dot just labeled 'Bakura'."

Remus frowned. "That's…interesting. Was that all?"

Harry shook his head. "No. There was another dot on the map, but it was only labeled by a question mark. I've never seen that happen before. And these people – whoever they are, they just come and vanish all the time. But how can they if you can't apparate in and out of Hogwarts?"

"Apparating in the school is impossible," said Remus. "Have you seen these people before?"

Harry shook his head. "Not them, but there was a third one, called Set. I saw him last week. He looked like Seto Kaiba, only he was a ghost. And Seto is obviously alive, so that doesn't make sense either."

Remus looked around the Entrance Hall. "I can't say anything for the ghost, but the Map doesn't make mistakes. If there are two labels, then there must be a second person as well. If someone is not labeled, it is because their name is unknown."
"But it never had an issue identifying someone before, even people who normally didn't stay at the school," said Harry, "It knew Scabbers was Peter Pettigrew."

"Well, that was different. Peter Pettigrew was just choosing to remain in his rat form. What I mean to say, is that the individual in question may not have a name, or does not know it. Therefore, the Map cannot identify them."

"How does someone not know their own name?" asked Harry.

"Amnesia, perhaps," said Remus, "Though, if that were the case, the Map would probably still recognize them. The only thing I can think of is that whoever that person is, they must not have a name."

Harry gave him a look. How was that even possible – who isn't given a name at birth?

"O-okay…..." Harry still couldn't wrap his head around this, "But the only place I ever see them is in Yugi's dorm. It's usually only at night. I don't get it."

"I'm guessing, as a concerned friend, you've asked Yugi and the others about this?" The silence was all he needed to hear. "Perhaps instead of jumping to conclusions, there is a perfectly good explanation waiting for you. Working on partial truths only leads to trouble, Harry. You know that better than anyone else."

Remus sighed. "Yugi and his friends don't have a lot to go on. They're here on faith that they will be protected. They don't know anyone here, and it makes it hard to know who they can trust. You, Ron, and Hermione have offered your friendship, and they've taken it. If you are suspecting something, I beg you to be open and honest with them, especially if you want them to do the same in return."

"Yeah, I've already heard this from Hermione," said Harry.

Remus smiled and looked past him as Seto descended the stairs. "You should listen to her." He patted Harry's shoulder. "I'll be in touch."

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"I didn't think we would be spending so much time in the library considering Kaiba's been home all this week," said Ryou, "But...here we are."

"I know," said Yugi, looking down another stack. "But this is the last place left to look for Harry. He's not in the common room or the Great Hall, and there's no Quidditch practice today. He and Ron aren't in class either."

"What do you think he would be looking for in here? We don't have any major essays to write right now," said Ryou, "We just finished the one on vampires for Friday's class."

Yugi shrugged. "No idea. He's probably not even – oh, look there." He paused and pointed to the far end of the library. Harry was hunched over a huge tome that looked like it hadn't been opened before in years. They could just make out the dust cloud sparkling through the light from the windows.

"Harry?" Yugi asked, "What are you doing?"

Harry jumped and slammed shut the book he was reading. "Sorry," said Ryou, "We didn't mean to startle you."
Harry shook his head. "No, it's fine. What's up?"

"Well..." Yugi looked at his companion. "Ryou and I were wondering...is it possible for someone to become invisible?"

"Like vanishing? We've learned how to do that in McGonagall's class, but I don't know if it works on people."

"No...I mean actually invisible."

Harry swallowed nervously. "Why do you ask?"

"The other night, I thought I saw the door to our room open and close on its own. We thought maybe someone was sneaking around the school," said Ryou. "We were worried that the security in the school might have been compromised."

"That would be pretty hard for an outsider to do," said Harry. "The tower is locked through the Fat Lady's portrait, remember? Only Professor McGonagall and anyone in Gryffindor House can get in. And besides, with all of the Aurors patrolling the school and all of the protective enchantments in place, it's highly unlikely someone was sneaking around."

Yugi's shoulders slumped as he looked at Ryou, "That's true..."

"Maybe it was a Gryffindor," said Ryou.

"Why would someone want to sneak around the dorms though?" asked Harry. "You guys are new here and haven't made any enemies or anything. Why would someone want to poke through your room?"

Ryou shrugged.

Harry tapped his fingers against the crook of his arm. He had an idea that just might draw their attention away. "Maybe it was the house elves. They can become invisible if they wanted to. They do a lot of cleaning at night after everyone goes to bed and probably figured you wouldn't notice them come and go. I bet you they were probably returning laundry or something."

Yugi sighed in relief, "Oh! I didn't think about that all!" He turned to Ryou, smiling, "I bet that's what it was."

Ryou nodded slowly, "It does explain how our robes are always cleaned without us worrying about it. And remember when I spilled my ink bottle while writing Snape's essay the other night? By morning, the stain on the rug was gone!"

"That was probably the house elves too," said Harry. "I've seen Dobby clean the common room really late at night before when I had trouble sleeping. I really wouldn't dwell too much on it."

"Okay," said Yugi, grabbing Ryou by the arm, "We'll let you get back to your studying. Thanks, Harry!" He dragged Ryou out of the library and waited to duck into the nearest empty classroom before letting him go.

"Do you believe him?" asked Yugi.

Ryou shrugged again. "I don't know. We haven't found anything to prove it was him. The spirit hasn't found any kind of invisibility cloak yet. He's determined to find it, but honestly, I don't think there is one, and he's looked so many times already!"
"Even if it wasn't him, Harry did have a point though - no one but Gryffindors could be snooping around the tower," said Yugi. "I suppose it could be the house elves, like he said. I really didn't think about that as a possible answer."

Ryou sighed. "Neither did I, and it would make sense for the elves to come around when they're sure that they won't be seen."

"We'll check with Kaiba when he comes back," said Yugi, "He's interacted with the house elves before."

They climbed the next set of stairs and moved back down the seventh floor corridor. "Did you see the book Harry was looking through?" asked Ryou.

"I didn't get a good look at the cover," said Yugi, "Sure looked old though. All that dust was beginning to make my nose itch."

"The spine had a picture of what looked like runes or hieroglyphs," said Ryou, "But Harry isn't taking Ancient Runes with you and Hermione, so why would he be looking through that?"

Yugi frowned. Why indeed? Their raven-haired friend had always been a bit curious about them. Perhaps he still was. But without some kind of invisible power, there was no way Harry was the one coming and going from their room late at night.

Unless the invisibility cloak was, of course, invisible, but then how would anyone find it - Harry included?

"Do you think he overheard us talking about the spirits, or the Millennium Items?" asked Yugi.

Ryou bit his lip. "I mean…there's always a chance. Even if it wasn't here, we were all at Ron's house over the summer. But just to try and find that out may give away too much anyhow."

Yugi slumped against the wall. "It's not like we can send Yami or your spirit on a recon mission to his room. We can't risk them being seen. It's bad enough Set may have been noticed that first night. I'm just hoping that if they only saw him once, whoever it was may write it off as a figment of their imagination."

"We can't even be sure it was Harry," said Ryou, "We don't want to accuse him of something without cause. But…Harry has his next meeting with Professor Dumbledore tonight. He wants to snoop again tonight, but I'm not sure if he'll find anything."

Yugi blinked. "Won't he get caught?"

Ryou raised an eyebrow and leveled him a look that said, 'Really? Him?'

Yugi rolled his eyes. "Right. Stupid question."

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Hermione reached for Thursday morning's Daily Prophet the instant the owl dropped it beside her on the table.

"I thought you cancelled your subscription last year," said Harry. "Since it was printing nothing but lies."

Hermione turned red. "I did…these, um, are Seto's papers. I've been saving them for him for when
he gets back."

"Should be later today, right?" asked Ryou.

Yugi shook his head. "I think he said Friday. He's hoping his flight arrives in London on schedule and he makes it back in time for Charms first thing in the morning."

Hermione took a look at one of the headlines on the global news page and nearly spit out her pumpkin juice. "There was another Death Eater attack!"

Harry and Ron looked up from trying to finish up their Charms essays. "What? Where?"

Hermione kept skimming the article. "Nowhere here. Reports of masked wizards disrupted a dig site in the middle of Egypt. Two Muggles were killed, and one is missing. So far there isn't a lot of information, but Aurors from both our Ministry and the Egyptian one are baffled to why You-Know-Who would take an interest there."

Yugi bit his lip. "Did it say who was killed or missing? My grandpa has friends who are archaeologists. I hope it wasn't anyone we knew."

Hermione passed him the article. "It doesn't say. There aren't any photographs either."

Ryou nibbled at his toast, appetite gone. "I know someone we could have asked, if we had the means to."

Yugi nodded. "Yeah. Ishizu. I'll have to send her a message once we get out of Charms. I just hope her brothers are alright."

Harry turned back to his homework when something caught his eye. Malfoy was hurrying out of the Great Hall. There was still plenty of time before Charms, so where would he be going? Back to the Slytherin dormitories in the dungeons to grab his books for the day? Or was he up to something else?

Harry looked up and down the Gryffindor table. Ron had joined Yugi, Ryou and Hermione in looking at the Prophet, and the nearest student on his other side was several feet away. Seamus was trying to change his juice into alcohol again while Neville and Dean watched from a safe distance.

Once he was certain no one was watching, Harry lifted up his Charms book and pulled out the Marauders Map from its hiding spot, scanning up and down the folded sheets, looking for Malfoy's set of footprints. The dungeons would make the most obvious choice, but he couldn't find him anywhere near the lower half of the castle.

It took a good minute of searching before he finally found him in the large staircase chamber, moving his way up towards the sixth floor. Why would he be going that way? That's nowhere near the Charms classroom..."

"Harry?" Hermione asked, breaking his concentration. Harry quickly stuffed the map into the back of his book. "Are you still writing that essay?"

"Almost finished," said Harry. He waited for Hermione to turn back to the conversation she was having with Yugi and Ryou before stealing another peek at his map. Malfoy had made it to the seventh floor when he got interrupted. There were only so many places he could go to on that floor. Finally...let's see what you've been up to!

Harry unfolded out the pages on the map showing the upper castle, but instead of finding his rival's footprints, all that remained were empty corridors. He quickly laid out another section, in case he had
started back downstairs, but no such luck.

Malfoy had vanished without a trace.

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Harry didn't get another chance to look at the Marauder's Map until they had sat down in Charms. There wasn't any point to it, as Malfoy entered the class and sat down on the opposite end of the room only a few minutes after he did.

He tried to keep an eye on Malfoy with the map as the day went on, but for the rest of the day, the Slytherin student was either in class with him, or in his own common room down in the dungeons. The mysterious "?" and "Bakura" appeared again on the map that evening, but he didn't venture into their dorm to investigate. Yugi and Ryou had become suspicious of him sneaking into their room. He could only hope that suggesting that it was the house elves would throw their thoughts off track.

Harry was beginning to think his goose-chase into the Millennium Items was dead-ending. He had gone through as many books on ancient artifacts and any other kind of similar magic, but turned up nothing. Aside from the few snippets of overheard conversation between the two exchange students, he didn't have much to go on, and there hadn't been a lot of peculiar activity going on between them recently. If he was still going by what little he knew over the summer, he would have let it go a long time ago.

But the Marauder's Map had picked up extra people in Yugi's dorm. Seto had a ghostly doppelganger of himself. Did that mean that the elusive Bakura was Ryou's double? And what about the one that was only question marks – was that supposed to be Yugi's? Or were those completely different?

He continued to mull it over that Friday morning, as he sat in the Great Hall scribbling out the remainder of his Potions essay in between bites of toast. The weird ghosts only come out at night, and he was only able to see the one called Set while Seto was asleep. 'Ghost Seto' had his hand on Seto's forehead, whispering something in a language he didn't recognize while Seto seemed to twitch uncomfortably. Was the ghost hurting him? Maybe it was trying to possess him, and that's why he looked to be in pain.

Harry took a bite of his breakfast and brushed away a few stray crumbs from the parchment. If Yugi and Bakura also had weird ghostly shadows of themselves...were they even aware of their existence? Considering they only came out after hours, he was willing to bet they weren't. What if those two were also dangerous? Yugi and Ryou could be in trouble, and they wouldn't even know it.

However, there was only so much more snooping he could do without getting caught. Somehow, he had been heard at least once, and would have to be more careful if he was going to sneak back into the room. Perhaps he would have to talk to Dumbledore about it. He would surely need to know if there was something evil in the school. Maybe...maybe it was time he brought this up to his new friends...

His concentration was broken as Yugi and Ryou sat down next to him, greeting him good morning.

"You're not still writing your essays, are you, Harry?" asked Ryou, "You could have had that one finished ages ago."

Harry shrugged. "I procrastinated."

Hermione shook her head. "That's an understatement. This is the second day in a row. I know our
classes have gotten a lot more difficult as opposed to last year, but you've never had to finish this close to class before."

"Yeah, mate, even I got mine done yesterday," said Ron.

Harry gave him a look. "Yeah, but how much of it did Hermione write for you?"

His two friends turned beet red. "That's not –" Ron stammered.

Hermione glared at both of them. "Only the introduction, and I told him it was the last time I would do it, too."

Harry rolled up his parchment and shoved it back down inside his bag. "Well, I didn't spend a whole lot of time in the common room last night, remember?"

"Dumbledore's meeting," said Hermione, knowingly, "How did it go?"

Harry glanced down the table. Yugi and Ryou were perusing Seto's next copy of the Daily Prophet for any more news on the attack in Egypt. "He wants to show me memories."

"Memories? Whose memories?" asked Ron.

"Dumbledore's mostly, though there are some from other people too. They're all about Voldemort. Dumbledore thinks they key to defeating him may be in those memories."

"Hey you guys," said Yugi, looking up from the newspaper. "They decided on a new head of Magical Law Enforcement. It's that Pius Thicknesse guy the Prophet predicted in that one other article."

"I don't know too much about him," said Hermione. "We can only hope he will do a good job."

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"Why is everyone outside the classroom?" asked Harry. There has never been a roadblock in the corridors leading around to the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom before. Could Peeves be up to his old tricks again? Perhaps he was still following Fred and George's orders to give Umbridge the worst possible time at Hogwarts. He could only hope that was the case.

Neville moved through the throng of students gathered around the door. "The door is locked. I've been waiting here for the last ten minutes. There's been no sign of Professor Umbridge all afternoon."

"She's never locked the classroom before," said Ryou.

"I wonder if she's conspiring with her Ministry of Magic friends," said Harry. "Why else would she be here?"

Hermione rolled her eyes, shaking her head.

"Line up, children!" said Professor Umbridge loudly as she walked down the hall. "We'll be spending today's review in one of the empty classrooms on the fourth floor today."

Yugi was glad that he wasn't the only one confused in the crowd. They followed Umbridge up the stairs and into an empty room where the desks were pushed up against one wall.

"Leave your bags along the wall there and gather around here. You don't need anything but your
wands today.”

Yugi and Ryou shuffled along with the class to the wall to leave their bags. Yugi turned to stand next to Ron, noticing out of the corner of his eye that Ryou was taking his sweet time to join the group, hanging in the back and dropping his bag right next to Harry's.

Professor Umbridge stood in the middle of the room. It was cleared out, save for a cabinet against the front wall.

"The Ministry was pleased to note that at least one of your unqualified professors in this subject has introduced you to dark creatures," said Umbridge. The usual lift in her voice that she normally used in her regular classes was gone. Clearly, she was not looking forward to having a hands-on lesson.

"Today we will review boggarts. Can anyone tell me what a boggart is?" Umbridge clasped her hands in front of her and scanned the room. As usual, Hermione's hand darted into the air…and that was it. She sighed, hating to continuously acknowledge Harry's know-it-all friend. "Anyone? I know all of you had participated in this exact class three years ago."

When it was clear that no one else was going to bother participating, she gestured to Hermione. "Yes, Miss Granger?"

"A boggart is a shape-shifting non-human being that takes the form of its victim's worst fear," said Hermione.

Umbridge nodded. "Correct. The best way to help defeat a boggart is to have a group of people, can anyone tell me why?"

She folded her arms and tapped her stubby fingers against the crook of her elbow, not bothering to hide her annoyance. 

You would think these kids would be ecstatic to use magic in the classroom. There has to be someone here who will answer my questions. Someone other than Miss Granger."

Neville slowly raised his hand and was immediately called upon. "Because it'll get confused and not know what to turn into."

"That's right," said Umbridge flatly, "And who can tell me the proper spell to repel a boggart?"

A few mumbles of 'Riddikulus' resounded around the room.

"I'm glad to know you've retained some knowledge," said Umbridge. She aimed her wand at the doors to the cabinet. "Form a line, please."

Yugi wedged himself next to Ryou and Harry. "What happens when a boggart comes out?"

"It takes the form of your worst fear and feeds on it. To repel it, concentrate on something to make that fear humorous," Hermione said quietly, "Laughter is your best defense."

Yugi and Ryou shared nervous glances.

/I don't think I want everyone to see what my greatest fear is, Pharaoh…or yours either. What if the boggart senses you too and has to choose between us?/

From their soul corridor, Yami hugged his arms against his chest tightly and turned away towards the door to his labyrinth room. The last thing he wanted was for Yugi – or anyone else in the room – to see him at his darkest moment. The temptation of power he had succumbed to only a short time ago was still on the forefront of his mind and he couldn't bear to relive those moments of Yugi sacrificing
himself for his sake again.

/I don't know, Yugi. All you can do is stay towards the back, and hope we don't get to the front of the line./

Yugi took a look around. He wasn't at the beginning of the line, but he wished there were a few extra people in front of him. Ron was the unlucky one to be stuck at the very front.

Umbridge aimed her wand at the cabinet. "I expect you to be able to repel the boggart *silently*. Prepare yourselves."

Yugi and Ryou peered at from the middle of the line as the lock on cabinet turned. A long, hairy leg forced its way out, then another, until the group was staring down a huge spider. Everyone shrank back a step as it advanced on Ron.

Ron gulped, raising his wand with a trembling hand. He hadn't mastered nonverbal spellwork yet, and he could almost swear the spider was getting bigger with each terrified glance he gave it.

"Come on Ron!" shouted one of the girls towards the back of the line. Lavender, he thought it was. Umbridge watched as Ron furrowed his brow, trying to concentrate (at least, she hoped that's what he was trying to do), and finally, after several attempts to silently cast his spell, blurted out a rushed "Riddikulus!"

The spider's legs suddenly were held up by skates as it tried to keep its footing before its legs gave out and it crashed to the floor with a loud thud. The legs then fell off and the spider harmlessly rolled back and forth.

Umbridge tutted and began scribbling on her clipboard. "Nonverbally, children. Next!"

Parvati was next. The boggart spider stopped rolling around legless on the floor and began to transform into a rotting husk covered in bloody bandages. It stayed in the front of the room for only a moment before a quickly-cast spell caused it to trip over its wrappings, sending it stumbling.

Susan Bones' became a pair of hooded figures in masks with wands drawn. It took her four tries to stammer out a 'Riddikulus' before she hurried to the back of the room, wiping tears from her eyes.

Umbridge continued to make notes on her clipboard as the class took turns defending them from the boggart. She wasn't surprised in the slightest that Hermione was one of the handfuls of students that could perform the spell silently. Another unexpected twist was Harry's boggart. She would have certainly pegged him to be afraid of You-Know-Who, but the boggart instead transformed itself into a dementor. Abandoning the line they had made, the class instantly backed away towards the door.

The fake dementor rounded on the class rather quickly, and Umbridge watched as Harry stood fast in front of his peers and pushed it back with a rather powerful Patronus charm. She scribbled another note as Harry then remembered what he was supposed to be doing and cast the proper incantation, although he didn't do so silently.

Umbridge glanced to the clock on the wall and put down her notes. "Alright, children, the time is almost up, so gather your–"

She stopped, mid-sentence, as she noticed most of the class was fixated on the boggart. After being weakened by both of Harry's spells, it had begun to retreat towards the wardrobe again, but something made it stop. It began to grow again, shifting its features once more. Umbridge looked about at her students, and noticed that when Harry had stepped back towards his friends, he had left
one person a few steps in front of the rest of the group.

The boggart became a monstrous shadow, taking up nearly the entire height of the room. It looked to shape itself into some sort of demon before it's feature's suddenly shrunk, fleshing out into a near double of Ryou Bakura, a slightly taller form with spikier white hair and cold reddish-brown eyes. A large golden necklace formed itself on top of its blue and white-striped shirt. Harry noted that the symbol on the center of the necklace matched the one on the upside-down pyramid Yugi wore everywhere.

Yugi looked at Ryou nervously. Should he intervene, or would Ryou be able to handle this on his own?

Harry exchanged confused glances with Ron and Hermione. Was Ryou's worst fear…of himself?

The boggart's eyes locked onto Ryou and he started forward, drawing a knife from his pocket.

"Well, well," said the boggart, "I see you've made some new friends, Landlord. How unfortunate that your game board isn't here for you all to play together. The last Monster World campaign went so well, didn't it?"

Oh no. Yugi made to move to intercept the boggart, to get it to switch its focus to him instead. Anything but Ryou's spirit…

"...And you're still choosing the Pharaoh's vessel for company," said the boggart, shaking his head, a malice gleam in his eye. "Perhaps I've extended your leash too far…."  

"No…" Ryou whispered, hugging his arms, "Stop, please." The pounding in his mind was getting worse.

"Look at yourself," the boggart snapped, "Nothing has changed. You're still weak."  

"No," Ryou whispered, hugging his arms, "Stop, please."  

The boggart laughed, waving the dagger lazily about. "You use the Pharaoh and his friends like a shield. As if they could truly protect you from me. Did you really think you would be rid of me just because our Ring was thrown from the top of Pegasus's castle? Or perhaps you were wishing that I would be left in the Shadow Realm following the Pharaoh's duel over Marik?"

Ryou covered his ears, "No…" he whispered, "Stop!" The pounding in his mind was getting worse.

The boggart dropped down to his knee in front of Ryou. "I think you need a reminder of just how our relationship works, Host." He forced Ryou's chin up to look at him with one hand, and with his other grabbed the Millennium Ring from around his neck and shoved it right into Ryou's line of sight. "Perhaps I should sink these spikes back where they belong, and then you won't go disobeying
me again."

"NO!" Ryou cried, wrenching out of the monster's grasp and stumbling back a step. "Not again… please…"

The boggart advanced again, holding up the dagger, but before he could do anything, there were two golden flashes of light in the classroom. The Millennium Ring gleamed, appearing overtop of Ryou's robes while Yami switched places with Yugi and hurried to Ryou's side.

Bakura rose angrily and darted out a hand to stop Yami from coming any closer. "Back off," he barked. "This one is mine."

Yami watched warily as the room slowly became enveloped in a dark shadow. "Bakura…" he growled, "Stop."

Bakura ignored him, the Millennium Ring still glowing in the dark.

/Spirit, stop! You promised!/ Ryou cried, and pounded on the door to his room, trying to get out, but when his other half had taken control, he had shut him inside. This is just like in the beginning… /Let me out!/ 

/quiet./

/The Shadow Realm – you promised you wouldn't summon it. Please, don't do this!/ 

/This creature has caused you enough suffering, don't you think?/ 

/Please, not this way…/ 

Bakura disregarded Ryou's pleas, and with another flash of the Millennium Ring, the Shadows dissipated, returning everyone back to the classroom. The boggart and the cabinet it had emerged from were both gone. With a glare at the Pharaoh next to him, Bakura released control back to Ryou.

Ryou staggered back, breathing heavily. Everyone in the room was staring at him, no doubt heavily confused to what they had all just witnessed. Even Umbridge just stood there, jaw dropped. Ryou reached down and snatched his wand from where he had dropped it and bolted from the room, not bothering to find his belongings from where he left them along the wall. He had to go – to get away from the questioning looks, the prying eyes, and more importantly, away from his other self.

He heard Yugi call out from the doorway to the classroom, but he didn't stop running all the way back to the Gryffindor common room.
I hope Professor McGonagall won't be too mad at me for skipping her class today, Yugi thought to himself as he climbed through the entrance to Gryffindor Tower.

/I think she'll understand, Yugi. At this moment, we need to be sure Bakura is alright./

/Yeah…I suppose I can get the notes from Hermione later./

Yugi pushed open the door to their room. "Bakura?"

"Yugi?" Ryou poked his head around the gap in the bed curtains. He wiped his eyes. "What are you doing here? You should be in Transfiguration."

Yugi dropped Ryou's bag next to his bed. "I had to make sure you were okay."

Ryou leaned back against his headboard and brought his knees up against his chest, "I'll be okay... I...I just had to get away from everyone. And from him."

Yugi looked around the room. "The Ring...is it...?"

Ryou shook his head, and tugged at the Ring's cord, still around his neck. "I'm still wearing it. He's...in his room, not speaking to me. Which is fine, because I don't want to talk to him either."

Ryou turned red. "I tried to hide the Ring in your trunk, so I wouldn't have to see it everyday, but it wouldn't let me. I'm sorry I rummaged through your things a little. Honestly, even if I managed to get it off and hide it away, it would just come back, so I don't know why I even tried." Realizing he was starting to babble, Ryou dropped his head to rest on his knees.

"It's okay." Yugi frowned, and sat on the edge of Ryou's bed. "Are you sure you'll be alright?"

Ryou shrugged. "Yes...no. I don't know. That thing...it brought up everything I didn't want to remember. The things he had done and what he was truly like in the beginning, before I had really met you and the others. You weren't the first people he had trapped in my Monster World figures you know..."

Ryou sniffled. "And then, in front of everyone, he went off and summoned the Shadow Realm of all things. I know I was afraid, and hurt, but he knew better. We made a promise to Professor Dumbledore, and he went off and broke it. I...I just don't want to make things difficult – or more difficult – for you because the other me can't control himself."

"We'll figure it out," said Yugi, "Don't worry about it."

Ryou sighed. "Harry and his friends...they're going to have a lot of questions now."

Yugi nodded. "Like I said, we'll figure it out. They were gonna find out about us eventually. Maybe
It's a sign that now is the time…"

Ryou picked up his head from resting on his knees and looked at Yugi. "I guess. The day wasn't a total loss though," he said. "The Spirit found the invisibility cloak in Harry's bag."

Yugi hung his head. "I was truly hoping we would be wrong about that."

~~#~~

They didn't see Ryou or Yugi for the rest of the day. Yugi had grabbed his and Ryou's bags and chased after him the first moment he could, and neither of them showed up to their last class of the week, or even dinner that evening.

"What do you suppose that was all about," said Harry, "It looked like Ryou had some sort of split personality or something. The boggart looked just like him."

"I don't know," said Hermione, "But whatever it truly was made him so upset. Did you see how he just ran from the classroom?"

"Who didn't see that?" Ron snorted.

"I hope he's alright," said Hermione, worriedly, as they began to head back to the common room.

"Did you guys also notice…that he had the same weird necklace that the boggart had, and he seemed to transform into like some other person right there at the end. And what did he do to the classroom? It got all dark and I could almost swear I saw something move in the distance…and then it was all gone," said Harry.

"He had to have done something to the boggart," said Ron, "It was gone when the darkness left."

"But how did he make the lights go out and everything? It felt so cold," said Hermione, shuddering.

"Somehow I don't think he's going to tell us," said Ron. "Abstinence."

"Hey Ginny," said Harry, once they were through the portrait hole, "Have you seen Yugi or Ryou?"

Ginny shook her head. "Nope. The last I saw either of them was this morning."

"I saw Yugi briefly," said Dean, looking over from his chess game with Seamus. "I think he's up in his room."

"You think they're okay?" asked Neville. "They were both pretty shaken up after Umbridge's class."

"It was wild," said Seamus. "I don't know what came over Ryou, but did you see Yugi? His bangs shot straight up as if someone put his finger in a wall socket!"

Ron blinked. "Huh?"

Harry shook his head. "Muggle thing. You wouldn't get it."

"Oh."

"And Ryou – I dunno what finally snapped him out of his funk but he had this crazy look in his eyes when he went after that boggart," said Seamus, "And don't forget Umbridge's face when it was all over."
Ron nodded. "Her jaw could have snapped and she wouldn't have known it."

"That's not good," said Hermione. "Yugi and Ryou were obviously spooked, and Umbridge was clearly unnerved by the magic they performed. I hope nothing bad will happen to them."

"Making the room go all dark and scary like that – that's no normal magic," said Ron, "I want to know how they did it."

"Perhaps it was involuntary, like a reflex," said Hermione, "Like how you said you accidentally set a snake on your cousin at the zoo."

"Yeah, but that was a minor thing," said Ron, "To completely snuff out the light in the room and make it get all cold like that – as well as destroy that boggart, that has to be some pretty powerful magic!"

Harry sank down on one of the sofas by the fire, vaguely hearing the portrait swing open to admit another student as Ron sat beside him. "Do you believe me now? I've said something was up with them….

"Harry…." Hermione sighed, giving up. "Fine. Okay? Fine. We've all seen it now, you can let it go."

"I can't!" said Harry. "I think…that the second Bakura I've been seeing on the Marauder's Map was like that boggart. And if that's the case, I think Ryou is in trouble. That thing looked like it was going to stab him with that knife. And even if it wasn't, it's clear Ryou is terrified of him."

"You don't know that," said Hermione, "The boggart is a representative of your worst fear, not an embodiment of a second personality. I don't think people with a dissociative identity disorder are aware of the other self…but I'm not an expert in the subject to know for sure."

"Well…Yugi had a personality shift too, though it was much more subtle," said Ron. "Didn't see it for too long though before it switched back. He seemed back to normal when he left out of the classroom."

Hermione looked past them and her face paled. "Harry…"

Harry either didn't hear her or chose to ignore her. "…And what about the other Seto I saw that night? They're all involved somehow. I'll bet you anything he's got one of those funky necklaces too."

"Harry…" Hermione said again. She shrank back in her seat, suddenly looking very uncomfortable.

"…What if all of their other identities are harmful, Hermione. Seto's looked just like him. For all we know, we may have never even met the real Seto Kaiba. Think of it – if all that shadowy magic was a reflex action, could you imagine if they meant to create that, how much stronger it would be? Dumbledore may not know what he got into inviting them here. If they're involved in something dangerous, don't they owe us an explanation?"

"Harry, please –"

"And all this talk about shadows and Pharaohs…what does that mean?"

"Harry!"

"What?" said Harry, irritated. "What are you going to say that you haven't already said at least
twice?"

Hermione sighed and slumped down in her seat, covering her face with her palm.

"What she was going to say..." said a cold voice from behind Harry's seat, and he and Ron whirled around to see Seto towering over them, coffee mug in one hand, and a slim metal briefcase in the other. "...Is that you should watch how loud your voice gets. Someone might hear you."

Ron bit his lip. "How long have you been standing there?"

"Long enough," Seto snapped. He swept an icy glare over the three of them. "I don't know what it is you've seen or heard, but let me get one thing straight. We don't owe you anything. Our lives are our concern. Not yours."

"It is when they become a danger to us or the school!" Harry shot back. "Harry..." Hermione's jaw dropped.

"Is that what you think?" Seto asked darkly, "Who do you think we are – spies for Voldemort?"

"You said it, not me," Harry shot back. He stood up and matched Seto's frozen stare, though it was difficult to match the intimidation level being at least a good head shorter than the businessman in front of him. "What am I supposed to think, when you're all discussing rearranging souls, and some place called the Shadow Realm – not to mention that Bakura sent us to some creepy dark world during Defense Against the Dark Arts today. And let's not forget about the weird Millennium Items I keep hearing about..."

"Just how many private conversations have you been eavesdropping?" said Seto, narrowing his eyes down at Harry. "None of us have done anything to warrant your behavior. You've already admitted to these two that you've been sneaking in and out of my dorm in the middle of the night. What else have you been doing behind our backs?"

He didn't bother to wait for Harry to respond before continuing, "Don't think I haven't noticed your sudden intellectual interests. You've been spending nearly as much time in the library as I have, and considering your work ethic runs similar to yours...", Seto's eyes shifted onto Ron for a split second before returning their cold gaze to Harry. "...that's saying a lot. Despite not taken a single Ancient Runes class in your entire education here, you've been buried in a good deal of those books."

"So? I can check out whatever books I want," Harry retorted, "Didn't stop you from nearly cleaning out the Magical Law section."

Seto forced himself not to roll his eyes. "Okay, so it's light reading now? Fine. Humor me. If you're so engrossed in the conspiracy your brain has cooked up, then enlighten me on all that you've found. The evidence must be astounding since you've been trying to convince your two friends that Yugi and I are deceptively evil people."

Harry opened his mouth but paused. Seto didn't lump Ryou in that statement. So was it a slip of the tongue...or was he aware of Ryou's other personality? Or even his own ghostly self?

Seto hissed. "I'm waiting."

"Kaiba," Yugi said quietly from his place at the bottom of the stairs. Harry, Ron and Hermione jumped, having not heard him come down the dormitory steps. How long had Yugi been listening to them?
"It's okay." He stepped around his seething rival so he could face Harry and the others. "Harry…we saw your magic cloak in your bag during Defense Against the Dark Arts. Bakura and I put the pieces together. We know you've been breaking into our room at night. You didn't hide it too well when we asked about it in the library today."

Harry sank back onto the couch and rubbed the back of his neck. Getting into a glowering contest was Seto wasn't worth it for the newfound crick in his neck.

Yugi sighed. "Bakura and I have been talking. We're really hurt that you've decided to spy on us instead of…well…asking us directly if something was wrong."

Ron gave him a look. "If Harry came up to you and asked what a Millennium Item was or why there was a ghost of Seto in your room, would you have answered truthfully?"

"I…uh…" Yugi paused, looking to Seto, and then looked down at his socks. "It's complicated."

"So no, you wouldn't have," said Harry angrily.

"Regardless, that does not justify breaking into our room, listening in on conversations that had nothing to do with you, and then feel obligated to get answers from us," Seto said, placing his coffee on the table beside them and crossing his arms. "If there is anyone that needs to answer for their actions, it's you for violating the level of friendship and trust Yugi and Bakura have given you."

"But not yours?" asked Ron.

Seto snorted. "Please. Unlike them, I don't trust easily."

Yugi cleared his throat. "Anyway…um, like I said, Bakura and I have been talking since this afternoon. We're not happy with what you've done…but we also sort of understand why you did it." He glanced up at Seto again for a moment before turning back to the trio. "We agreed to come clean to you, if you do the same with us. We'll call it honesty hour…or hours. We'll find a quiet place where we won't be overheard, and just…answer questions, I guess. I think we all did things to make us wary of each other and it's best if we start fresh."

"I agree," Hermione said quickly, shooting Harry a look that clearly said 'sit there and be quiet!', "And I'm sorry things have escalated the way they did."

"Me too," said Yugi, yawning. "How about tomorrow morning, after breakfast, in our dorm? For however long it takes. Let's get things back on the right foot."

After the quiet murmurs of agreement, Yugi headed back upstairs. Seto grabbed his briefcase from where he had put it down next to the couch and set it none too gently onto one of the tables. He was clearly still angry.

"Isn't it a bit late to start picking apart your devices?" asked Hermione nervously. " Aren't you tired after your trip?"

"I'm wide awake," said Seto, "And if you don't mind, I have work to complete." The malice in his voice from earlier had disappeared somewhat, to their relief.

"You're chasing a fantasy," said Ron, "The wards –"

"Prevent electronics from working. I know."

Seto removed his suit jacket and draped it across his chair. "If you're still so sure, now that nearly a month has passed, then why don't we make a little wager ourselves? If I recall correctly, you bet two sickles with Bakura that I'd give up on this
venture. If I get my tech to work by the end of breakfast *tomorrow morning*, you owe Bakura double your original bet."

Ron grinned, "And if I win…not only will he pay double of his part, *you* have to cough up double Ryou's share."

"Ron!" said Hermione, "That's not a fair wager. Ryou's not even here to agree to this!"

"Deal," said Seto, and he then promptly turned away from them and began digging into his briefcase. Hermione gaped at the both of them, then threw her hands up in the air and marched up the girls' staircase.

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"Feeling better this morning?" asked Yugi. He was glad to see that Ryou looked happy to leave his bed after withdrawing behind the scarlet curtains for the remainder of yesterday.

Ryou slipped on his sneakers. "Yeah. I think so. At the very least, I'm hungry."

Yugi didn't blame him for that – he hadn't eaten dinner either. "Are you still not talking to him?"

Ryou shrugged. "Sort of. When you went downstairs last night, I had a conversation with him. He has...reluctantly agreed to not use the Shadow Realm here at the school anymore, regardless of the conditions. Although...I'm still nervous. I'm sure Professor Dumbledore isn't going to be happy with me…but in the end, no one was hurt. Just the boggart."

He looked to the other side of the room. "Did Kaiba come back yet?"

Yugi followed his gaze. The third bed in the room looked the same as it did all week. It was clear no one had slept there for some time. "He was in the common room berating Harry and the others last night."

"Oh my…I feel sorry for them."

Yugi slipped the Puzzle around his neck. "I did too…for a little bit. But Harry had it coming for a while now. I could tell Kaiba wasn't in agreement when I said we'd answer Harry and the others' questions, but he hasn't been here all week and was therefore overruled."

Ryou nodded. "Yep. And it's not like he has all that much to worry about. He and *his* spirit are so close in appearance that you could be talking to the wrong one and not know it."

Yugi thought back to when the Millennium Rod was handed off at the beginning of the summer. "You're right. Lucky him, I suppose."

They found Harry, Ron, and Hermione in their familiar seats by the dying fire when they entered the common room. Ron had an oddly triumphant look on his face.

"You're in a good mood today," said Ryou, "Did something happen?"

"You bet something happened!" said Ron, "I'm about to claim twelve sickles – four from you and eight from Seto when he admits he couldn't get his stuff to work! He's probably hiding in the library to avoid having to pay up."

Yugi and Ryou exchanged glances. "I thought it was only two sickles," said Ryou. "And I'm pretty sure the library isn't even open this early."
Hermione rolled her eyes. "Ronald made a foolish bet with Seto last night to amend the winnings. If you win, Ryou, you'll get an extra two sickles, and if not, you'll have to pay an extra two sickles, and Seto has to pay him double of your share."

Ryou pulled a sour face. "I'm certainly glad I agreed to this, then."

"Are you feeling better today?" asked Hermione, nervously.

Ryou nodded. "I am, thanks. I'm sorry I made you all worry so much. …That boggart really caught me off guard."

Harry forced himself to smile. "Don't worry about it. We've all had prior training with boggarts and knew what to expect."

Yugi rubbed at his arms. "Well…let's get breakfast over with. Today is…going to be, um…interesting, so let's just not put it off any further."

"Isn't Seto joining us?" asked Hermione.

Yugi shrugged. "I don't think he went to sleep last night. His bed was just as neat as it was the morning he left for home. To be honest…I was expecting to see him here."

"I was down here first thing, and haven't seen him," said Harry as they exited the portrait hole.

"Heh. I wouldn't be too sure of that."

"Hm? Do you know something I don't, Spirit?"

"Only that Kaiba is the type to show off his victory in the most embarrassing way he can find. He will likely prove the Weasley kid wrong in front of everyone."

"Well, he wasn't in the common room."

"Oooh, no, Landlord. The small clusters of Gryffindors would be far too small for the audience he would go searching for. Kaiba may have traded in those ridiculous coats for his fancy suits, but he is still a drama king."

"Are you sure? He's seemed pretty mellow lately to me…"

Bakura snorted. "Trust me on this, Host. The end result is going to be priceless."

They found Seto sitting at the Gryffindor table, reading the Daily Prophet. To his surprise and disappointment, Ryou didn't see a laptop or a cell phone anywhere. "Maybe I've lost the bet after all….

Yugi sat down next to him. "Morning, Kaiba."

"Hn." Seto turned the page and took another drink of coffee.

"Did you stay up all night?" asked Hermione. "Just to try and swindle Ron out of some money?"

Seto scoffed. "Please, he was more than willing to agree to that wager, but swiping a few coins was the least of my concerns. I have an appointment to keep in…" He adjusted the sleeve of his dress shirt to look at his watch. "…less than five minutes."
"Yeah? How's that going to work? Are you going to Floo the office and stick your head in the fireplace?" asked Ron smugly.

Seto rolled his eyes. "No."

"I don't see any working phones anywhere, so it looks like I won the bet! Better cough up!" said Ron triumphantly.

Seto ignored him and turned the page of the newspaper.

Ryou sighed. "I hate to say it, but you win, Ron."

/Heheh. He did it. He's stringing Weasley along./

/Are you sure?/

/Come on, Host. This is Seto Kaiba. First of all, he's a sore loser at everything, so if he lost his little wager, he wouldn't be taking this so calmly. And because he's a sore loser, he makes sure he doesn't lose at anything...unless it's against the Pharaoh. You can bet that he got his little toys to work sometime last night, and he's just playing Weasley along./

/Hm. Well...I guess I'll play along then, too./

Ryou began to dig into his jeans pocket for change when a faint but brief buzzing sound was heard at the table for a second or two, and then suddenly stopped. He looked up to the baffled expression on Harry, Ron, and Hermione's faces. Yugi was trying to hide a grin behind his fist as the brief buzzing noise began again.

Seto picked up the newspaper completely from the table to reveal his phone vibrating against the polished wood surface. Yugi could see Mokuba's name flashing on the screen.

"Huh...I wonder how that happened," said Seto, "After all, electronics don't work at Hogwarts."

With a smirk, he swung his legs around and got up from the table, grabbing his phone and accepting the call. "If you'll excuse me...."

They watched him lift the phone to his ear and greet his brother as he walked out of the Great Hall, catching the attention of half of the Ravenclaws at the next table over as he went.

"How did he manage to do that?" asked Hermione, "T-that's...that should be impossible!"

"Impossible doesn't exist in Kaiba's dictionary," said Yugi, piling scrambled eggs onto his plate.

Ryou grinned. "Though that doesn't really matter, does it?" he said, and Harry could have sworn that Ryou's eyes had shifted a bit, and became slightly narrower, glinting with mischief. "I believe you owe me now. How did you put it so eloquently? Ah yes – pay up."

Ron scowled and began digging through his pockets. Harry watched as Ron forked over his coins, and then when the money changed hands, Ryou's eyes returned to what he could only assume to be their 'normal' size.

"Oh, no," he said, his voice much lighter than it was half a second ago, and pushed some of the sickles back to Ron. "Just what we agreed to."

"But I made that other bet..." said Ron, "They're yours."
Ryou shook his head. "Please, I insist. I didn't agree on the other bet."

Ron shrugged and happily took his money back. "Works for me!"

Hermione was still staring at the entrance to the Great Hall. Both Yugi and Harry could practically see the gears smoking in her head.

"Hermione, please, we could feel your mind trying to figure that out. Unless he chooses to tell you, you're never going to know how he managed it," said Yugi.

"But—"

"Hermione," said Yugi, "Please put things in perspective. We know you're the smartest witch we've met and all, but within the first week of class, Kaiba was performing magic just as well as you were." Sometimes better, even! "It took him an entire month to figure out how to circumvent the spells around the school. He's spent every free moment with his nose in half of the books in the library, and he probably took enough notes to even fill one. There has to be so many layers of work in there, I don't know if he'd be able to explain it, or even do it again."

"Come now, Yugi. This is Kaiba we're talking about. Of course he's probably memorized the process, but to explain it so we understand it? There's no chance of that. Though…I imagine he won't fix our duel disk or phone for free. I would expect some sort of favor in exchange for his service, though outside of a duel, I can't imagine what it would be."

"Yeah. That's what I'm afraid of."

Hermione huffed and turned to return to her breakfast, but out of the corner of her eye caught Umbridge up at the High Table looking exactly where Seto had disappeared through the Great Hall doors.

*What is she going to sink her claws into this time?*

~~*~~

Seto readjusted the pillow behind his back as he leaned against his headboard. "There's not much to see in here. It's a communal bedroom." He reversed the camera on his phone back around so Mokuba was facing him again.

"How's sharing it with Yugi and Bakura?" Mokuba snickered. "You haven't had to share a room with someone in years."

Seto shrugged. "They don't snore. At least there's that."

"Are you gonna show me the rest of the castle someday?"

Seto chuckled. "You would need most of the day to see the castle this way. It would be a lot easier for you to see it for yourself…assuming you had a reason to come here."

"Well…you're there. Isn't that a good enough reason?"

"No. I won't bring you into a warzone."

Mokuba pouted through the phone. "That didn't stop you though," he mumbled.

Seto looked up as the door to the room opened, admitting Yugi and the others.
"What's that noise? Is someone there with you?"

"Yugi and his friends are back from breakfast."

Mokuba attempted to give him some version of his own icy glare. "Did you eat breakfast today, big brother?"

Seto rolled his eyes. "Yes."

Mokuba's face brightened. "Good! Can I say hi to Yugi?"

Seto sighed, watching as Hermione began conjuring chairs for herself, Harry, and Ron in the middle of the room. "I thought you wanted to talk with me today."

Mokuba laughed. "I did! And I was! But you know I'm at Mr. Muto's today, and he would love to say hello."

Seto sighed. "I'm going to have to go now though, kiddo. I'll call you later, and you can talk to Yugi then."

"Okay! Bye, Seto!" Mokuba waved before ending their call. Seto placed the phone on his bedside table and reached for his laptop, opening it up and began going through all of the emails that accumulated in his inbox since leaving Japan yesterday morning.

"Uh, Kaiba?" Yugi asked from his seat at the end of his own bed. "Were you going to join us over here?"

"No," said Seto shortly, "I, for one, don't see the reason for laying my private life bare to someone just because they couldn't sate their curiosity in a level-headed manner, and quite frankly, I don't see what I have to offer in that conversation that you or Bakura couldn't."

Ryou shook his head. Why did he have to be so frustrating most of the time? "You're in this just as much as the two of us, you know."

"Only because of someone's insufferable persistence," said Seto. He waved them off to go ahead, and returned to typing out his message. "I can still hear. If you truly need me to chime in, then fine. But playing twenty questions this morning wasn't my idea, it was yours. I'd prefer to participate as little as possible."

Yugi shrugged. "Okay." He turned to Ryou, and laughed nervously, "I'm...not quite sure where to start."

Ryou sat down next to Yugi and looked at Harry, Ron, and Hermione, "Well...you three are the nosy ones. Shoot."

Yugi scratched at the back of his head. "Maybe try with something easy to start with? It might help us figure out how to explain stuff."

"Okay..." Hermione looked from Harry to Ron, and then back to Yugi. "I'm not sure what to you is considered easy, but...your necklace. Can you please tell us about it?"

Yugi looked down and rested his hands around the sides of the Puzzle. "Okay...uh..." He frowned at Ryou. "I don't think any of this is going to be easy, is it?"

"Nope."
"Right. Um, alright. This is the Millennium Puzzle. It's an artifact my grandfather found when he was still an archaeologist in Egypt. It's been with me ever since I put it together."

"So what, like a good luck charm?" asked Ron.

Yugi heard Yami chuckle from their corridor. "Uh, sure. Something like that."

"Is it magical?" asked Hermione, "It was glowing in Umbridge's class yesterday."

Yugi exchanged a glance again with Ryou. "...Yes."

Harry could tell there was obviously more to tell than that, but for now, it could slide. He looked at Ryou. "You've got one of those magic items, too, right?"

Ryou nodded. "I wonder..." he said to Yugi, "If this would be any easier if they came out?"

"They?" said Hermione. "Who's 'they'?"

"I mean, they'll have to at some point, but for now...maybe not," said Yugi.

"Okay," Ryou sighed, and turned back to Harry, "Yes...I have one too." He hesitated a minute, then reached under his sweater and produced the Millennium Ring from its hiding place.

"That's the same thing the boggart was wearing," said Ron.

Ryou nodded.

"How many of these magic items are there? These two look like they're from a set or something," said Ron.

Yugi paused. "I mean, I know we said we would answer questions and everything, but do you really want to jump down this rabbit hole? Some of the knowledge we have...it has gotten people hurt."

He glanced at Ryou's Ring and frowned. "A lot of people have gotten hurt. I don't want to put you guys in any more danger."

Harry snorted. "Please. If anyone's a danger magnet in this school, it's me. I think I can handle it."

"O-okay," said Yugi. "Um, yeah. That's the Millennium Ring. They're part of a set of seven artifacts from Ancient Egypt. They all have different powers to them."

"How many do you have?" asked Harry.

"Between the three of us, we have five of them," said Ryou, "An elusive spirit called Shadi has the last two."

"Spirit?" asked Hermione, "What do you mean?"

"Technically, he's a ghost," said a voice off to the side, "Seeing as I killed him years ago."

Hermione shrieked and nearly jumped out of her seat.

"It's the boggart!" said Ron.

Yugi looked over at Yami Bakura's semi-transparent form. "Right...uh, this is where things sort of get complicated. Some of the Millennium Items are inhabited by spirits from 5,000 years ago."
Harry pulled the Marauder's Map from his jacket pocket and started unfolding it on his lap. "So…you're the Bakura I've been seeing this whole time?"

"So you're not the boggart?" asked Ron.

Bakura rolled his eyes. "Catches on quick, that one."

"This is Bakura," said Ryou nervously, "He's an ancient spirit that lives in my Millennium Ring."

"But the boggart took on this form," said Hermione. "So…is he your greatest fear as well?"

Ryou could feel almost all of the eyes in the room on him – Bakura's included. He bowed his head and hugged his arms to his chest. "Um…can we talk about something else please?"

"Well…okay…" said Harry cautiously. The way that the ghostly Bakura was looking at him was unnerving. "…Um…the boggart version mentioned something about a 'Pharaoh'. Is…is that one of the other spirits?"

"Yeah," said Yugi, glancing down at the Millennium Puzzle. They watched it activate, and then a slightly taller, spikey-banged version of Yugi ghosted out of the Puzzle to stand next to him. "This is the spirit of the Millennium Puzzle. He's a Pharaoh from 5,000 years ago…I assume the same time as Bakura. He goes by Yami, or Pharaoh."

Harry looked down at the Map. "You're the one without a name."

Yami tipped his head. "How do you know that?"

Harry paused. Yugi and the others agreed to answer their questions, and expected the same in return. "It's this map," he said finally, "It's of Hogwarts. It shows everyone in the castle." He pointed out Gryffindor Tower. "See, we're all in this spot."

Yami peered at the Map over his shoulder. "Fascinating. I take it this is a one-of-a-kind item? In the wrong hands, this could be a very dangerous piece of parchment."

_Well, he certainly hit the nail on the head there…"_Yeah…there's only one," said Harry.

Ryou frowned. "Is that why you were sneaking into our room at night? You saw the spirits appear on the map, didn't you?"

Harry hung his head, the answer obvious.

Ron took a look at the map. "So if you're Yami, why doesn't it show this way on the Marauder's Map?"

"That isn't my real name," said Yami, "I have no memories of my past life, and therefore do not know what my name is."

"Then how do you know that you were a Pharaoh?" asked Hermione.

"Well, we've managed to put some pieces together," said Yugi, "Our friend Ishizu and her family are tomb keepers, so they had some knowledge about Yami's past."

"So…the reason you two look so similar to your spirits…" Ron began. "Are you guys…descendants or something? I mean, 5,000 years was a long time ago."

"It would be too hard to date ancestry back that far," said Hermione, "You're probably
reincarnations."

Yugi nodded.

"So..." Hermione looked back towards the other side of the room. "Does Seto have a Millennium Item and a spirit too?"

Seto didn't bother to look up from his screen. "Unfortunately."

Ron craned his neck to look around the room. "Don't see your fancy gold artifact anywhere."

"The Millennium Rod isn't like the Puzzle or the Ring," said Yugi, "You can't really wear it around your neck. But...uh, Kaiba was very...resistant to accepting it, so don't be surprised if you don't see the Millennium Rod very much, if at all."

"So Set is his ancient counterpart?" said Harry, although he already knew the answer. A lot of what Yugi and Ryou had said so far matched what he had already witnessed between the spirits and seeing the Millennium Item activate, and that left only one main question on his mind. Why were they here?

"That is correct," said Set, appearing next to Seto's bedside table. He had his arms crossed over his chest, with the Millennium Rod in his hand. He looked to Harry. "I understand it was I you saw that first night."

Harry nodded numbly, "I, err...thought you were hurting him."

Set chuckled. "Seto and I have a...we'll call it an understanding, and while I seem to aggravate him to no end, the last thing I would willingly want is to do him harm. I'm bound to the Millennium Rod, and can only interact with this modern world through him."

Hermione looked from Set semi-transparent form to Seto. "You two look nearly identical – more so than Yugi and Ryou to their spirits."

"Like it was said, the ancestry would be too difficult to trace back down that far without the help of several tomb keepers," said Set, sparing a glance at his counterpart before turning back to the others in the room. "It is possible that Seto is a descendant of mine."

"How are we supposed to tell the difference between you two?" asked Ron, "I mean, I can tell Yugi and Yami, and Ryou and Bakura apart, but..."

"It should be obvious," Seto looked up from his laptop briefly, "Seeing how he's a ghost."

"In some small capacity, I am still considered a parasite on his mind," Set explained, ignoring the shooting glare Seto aimed his way from the bed beside him, "I think, in the four months since my release from the Millennium Rod, I have been allowed possession of his body once, and that was only for perhaps a minute."

Ron snickered. "Someone doesn't like to share." The intensity of the icy look he was leveled with from the other side of the room made him shrink back in his seat. "Uh...never mind then."

"Who were you guys? In the past I mean, since Yami was a Pharaoh," said Harry.

"I was the Pharaoh's High Priest, one of the six Sacred Guardians of the Millennium Items, and bearer of the Millennium Rod." said Set. "As for him," he glared at Bakura, who evenly matched his gaze from across the room, "He is nothing more than a thief."
"The term you're looking for is tomb robber," said Bakura snidely, "And you can throw 'stealer of souls' in there with it. That's been a…recent hobby."

"I take it you're not a good person then," said Harry.

"Depends on your point of view, now doesn't it?" Bakura huffed. "If you ally yourself with the Pharaoh and his guard dog over there, then no, I'm not. But I wouldn't say that I side with your enemies either. I am not on anyone's side here. Ryou has aligned himself to you and your cause, and that's where I will stay because I have no choice. I am only here to keep him from harm. My interests are my own, and I will see them to their end, regardless of who I must pass on my way."

"In other words, you can't and shouldn't trust him," said Set. "You must watch what you say and do with him."

"Like you really remember anything relevant from the past, Priest."

Set's eyes narrowed dangerously. "I remember you well enough to keep a safe distance. Your host has obviously experienced enough of your inflicted trauma that he can't bear to have it brought up again."

Hermione closed her eyes a moment and rubbed at her forehead. "Okay, please, I think we're getting off track. Before we go any further…I just want to make sure I've got this right…" She gestured to the three spirits. "You three are 5,000 versions of Yugi, Ryou, and Seto…from Ancient Egypt, residing each in magical artifacts that are part of a set of seven, called Millennium Items. Respectively, a king, a thief, and a priest. You two," she gestured to Set and Yami, "Seem open and 'good', but we should be wary of Bakura because he could turn tail on us at any time?"

"Yep," said Yugi, "That's the gist of it..."

"How did you even get trapped in the Items to begin with?" she asked. "Yami's I can understand, but what about you two?"

"I am unsure," said Set, drumming his fingers against the Millennium Rod, "I don't recall placing my soul, or, at least a piece of my soul into the Millennium Rod, but here I am."

Hermione thought back to something previously said, and tried to steer the conversation back on track. "Do…any of you have your memories of the past? I know you said yours were gone, Yami…"

"I have memories of small bits and pieces of my life. I remember parts of my growing up, I remember the Pharaoh, and I certainly recall him," Set nodded towards Bakura, "but as for the events that led to the Pharaoh locking himself away into the Millennium Puzzle are clouded, as if an outside force is blocking them from me," Set explained, "My memories, if any, of after these events are clouded as well."

"From what we've gathered, something happened 5,000 years ago that threatened the world," said Yami, "It couldn't be stopped, so that's why I locked it and myself away until I could find a way to defeat it again. Sealing it away erased my memories, so they must be a key to either reviving the threat, or stopping it."

"So Yami and Set have no memories… or only partial memories," said Ron. He turned to Bakura. "What about you?"

"I have what I need," Bakura said, and he didn't offer up anything else. He crossed his arms and
leaned back against one of Yugi's bed posts, even though he couldn't feel the wooden post against his back.

"That's the same thing he told us when Set was first released" said Yugi. "That could mean anything! I wonder how much he really does remember?"

"I don't know, Yugi. He seems to be...behaving well enough for Ryou's sake, but we have to be careful around him."

"Right."

"O-okay," said Harry. "Is there a way to get your memories back?"

"Well..." Yugi exchanged glances with Yami, "We're not really sure yet. But we think it at least involves gathering all of the Millennium Items together."

"It's something we're working on," said Yami, "Although coming here has sidetracked us a bit."

"So...why did Dumbledore invite you to Hogwarts then? I know you've known the truth since you arrived at the Burrow," said Harry.

"Professor Dumbledore thought that Voldemort was going to go after the Millennium Items," said Yugi, "And invited us here for protection against him."

"But why would he have an interest in them?" asked Harry, "What can they do? I've tried to do research in the library, but I haven't found out anything about Millennium Items."

"You wouldn't have," said Set, "How they were created was lost to time, but they were used by the Pharaoh's Sacred Guardians to protect the kingdom and put criminals on trial."

"Each Millennium Item has a unique ability to it," said Yugi, "A lot of people have been after my Puzzle because it contains the Pharaoh's soul. The Millennium Rod seems to have the power of mind control. We've seen it used against our friends before – before Kaiba inherited it. They become mindless beings answering only to the will of the wielder."

"That sounds just like the Imperius Curse," said Harry.

"Have you used that ability?" asked Ron.

"What, to turn people into puppets? No, though maybe if I had, Kaiba Corp wouldn't be run by incompetent fools," Seto muttered.

"You would have to first return to our lessons, Seto," Set laughed, "You haven't yet truly embraced the Rod's power."

Seto rolled his eyes and returned to his work.

"What about the Millennium Ring?" asked Hermione nervously. If the boggart was an extreme version of Ryou spirit (he didn't seem so dangerous at the moment, but she couldn't ignore the animosity between Set and Bakura, and the warning to be cautious), then she could only imagine the Ring had dark powers to it, considering Ryou's reaction to its appearance in class.

"The Ring has many uses," said Bakura, "For one, it's a compass to whatever I seek, whether I search for another Millennium Item or my host's shoes."
"What else –"

"Stop!" Ryou scrunched up on Yugi's bed, hugging his knees to his chest. "Please, just move on."

"Don't be like that, Landlord," Bakura scoffed, "Playing show-and-tell was partly your idea."

Harry, Ron, and Hermione exchanged worried looks. "...If the boggart yesterday was any example...I take it the Ring is dangerous?" asked Harry.

Ryou nodded. "I know we promised," he said softly, "But...but some things are better left alone."

"...Anyway..." said Yugi, after an awkward silence filled the room. "The main takeaway is that the Millennium Items all have certain abilities that can make them dangerous, but I think the one they all have in common is the ability to summon the Shadow Realm."

Ron frowned. "Is that the weird place we ended up in during Umbridge's class? What is it, exactly?"

"Think of it like your equivalent to Hell...only it's worse," said Bakura. Harry noted the wicked gleam in his eyes had returned. "It's a place of your worst nightmares and fears, of monsters and lost souls, and unlike Hell, you'll still be alive while you're there. And once you're trapped in it, there's no way out unless you fulfill the terms of your punishment..." He rolled his eyes over at Yami, "...Or until the Pharaoh wins your freedom like he does with everything else."

Seeing Harry and his friends' confused faces he slapped a hand to his forehead and sighed. "Most people trap themselves there by foolishly challenging or are challenged to a Shadow Game, where the loser pays a pre-determined penalty."

"So the Shadow Realm, Shadow Games...and the powers of the Millennium Items...that's what Voldemort wants?" Harry asked. It sounded like something he would have been interested in; Shadow Games sounded dangerous as all get-up.

"We think so," said Yugi, "But we're not really sure what put it on his radar. Aside from those individuals with insider knowledge to everything that happened 5,000 years ago, there's really no information here in Britain that he could get his hands on."

"The card game we've been showing you how to play, Duel Monsters?" Ryou began, "It's based on Shadow Games from back in Ancient Egypt. Archaeologists discovered stone tablets depicting monsters and battles. One of them found a carving that had the Pharaoh and Set battling each other. It's on loan at the Domino Museum back home."

"Voldemort must have seen the tablet. Dumbledore was worried he would connect Kaiba and me to it, and offered us protection," said Yugi, "Bakura was with us at the time, and since he also has a Millennium Item, it made sense to let him come as well."

"What can he do with it?" asked Hermione, "Assume he found a Millennium Item, what happens then?"

Bakura snorted. "Nothing. The Millennium Items don't work for just anyone. You have to be chosen to be allowed an Item's power. Usually if you're not one of the lucky few, you pay a penalty game."

Ron swallowed. "And what would a penalty game end up being?"

"Madness or death, usually. Sometimes both," said Bakura, "He is truly no threat to us, unless he quests to gather all seven. He'll have to get in line for that."
That may not be so bad then, Harry thought to himself. Voldemort's greed might do him in in the end, though that cancels out the prophecy between the two of us. Hm...

"Well, if there's no knowledge about the Millennium Items out there…then he won't know to do that," said Ron.

"There is knowledge," Bakura rolled his eyes. "You just have to know where to find it."

Hermione gasped. "The attack in Egypt – didn't someone go missing?"

Yugi nodded. "Yeah…only certain families had knowledge of the Pharaoh and the Millennium Items. We're hoping whoever that was didn't know anything. Even if he didn't have any insider information on the Items himself, he may have known someone who did. And that would put them in even greater danger."

"So…as long as that person didn't know anything, you guys are alright," said Harry.

"In theory, I suppose," said Yugi, "But nothing has ever been easy with us. The Millennium Items have put so many people in danger over the years…"

"I see why Dumbledore would offer you protection then," said Hermione, "It's not just to keep Voldemort from the Millennium Items themselves. Once he finds out he can't use them, he'll just look for someone who can and force them to do his bidding."

Yugi looked apologetically at his new friends. "You see why we weren't deliberately trying to hide anything from you guys…we're just trying to protect ourselves, as well as you too. The less people that get involved with 'our problems', the better."

"Maybe we can help each other," said Hermione suddenly, and nearly everyone in the room turned to her. "What – come on now, Harry. Yugi, Ryou, and Seto are new to our world, and therefore have different perspectives on things. They might be able to help us fight Voldemort. And while we may not have Millennium Items, we can help you prepare in case the time comes where you need to fight him."

"So what, like the DA all over again?" asked Harry, "Only on a much smaller scale?"

"Well…something like that," said Hermione.

"The Millennium Items themselves offer us a bit of…uh, protection," said Ryou, "But if we were ever separated from them, I do think we should know more defensive magic."

"…and despite having a session dedicated to practical learning, I don't really think Umbridge is going to teach us all that much," said Yugi. "That's what it seems like so far, anyways."

"I'm surprised she's gone over some of the things she has," Harry admitted, "But you're right. We can't depend on her alone."

"Would we be able to start up the DA again in the castle after what happened last year?" asked Ron.

"I don't know," Harry frowned, "But I taught you guys all I knew last year. I wouldn't want to start the whole thing up all over again. It might be too risky. But for you guys, I'm sure we could figure something out."

Yugi smiled. "Great." He looked around to Ryou, and then to Seto, who had set the laptop next to him and was reading through a thick packet of official-looking documents. It seems he had gone
back to ignoring them again. "So…um…that's essentially our story."

"Knowing what was going on now, I feel a little better," said Harry. "And – I'm sorry. Spying on you guys wasn't right, despite my reasons for doing it. And then gossiping about it only made things worse. I'm sorry I didn't come forward and then blew things out of proportion."

"They probably wouldn't have told you the truth anyway," said Bakura.

Yugi sighed, and turned to Harry. "We all started on the wrong feet before, so let's have a complete do-over. Honesty from this point forward?"

Harry nodded, "Agreed."

"Great!" Yugi laughed, and extended his hand. "Hi, I'm Yugi Muto. Nice to meet you!"
Darkness. A chill wound its way through the tomb guardian's light clothing and seeped down to his very bones. He had been alone for what seemed like days, though it couldn't have been more than a few hours. The lack of window in the room to indicate the passage of time made it hard to tell just how long he had been here. The strange hooded men would come and go – but through what door, he wasn't sure. There was no light from an outside room or corridor to indicate any exit. Did they disappear and reappear, like magicians? The idea was ludicrous, even though he had spent his entire life, as did his ancestors, protecting golden artifacts that once nearly destroyed the planet.

"The Dark Lord grows impatient," said a voice from behind, and he jumped. How long had that man been in the room with him? He could barely see two feet in front of him, let alone twist around and look behind. His wrists were bound to the arms of the chair he sat in, positioned at the end of a table. He knew that much only because his foot kicked it by accident when he first woke here.

"If you will not share the secrets the Dark Lord desires…" said the man from behind, and he could hear him walking around the room, though he still couldn't see them. "Then there is no reason why we should return you to your family."

He hung his head, but stayed silent. Knowledge of the Millennium Items was not allowed to get out. As tomb keepers and guardians over two of the Millennium Items (that had since gone on to find their proper modern-day owners), he was tasked with waiting for the Pharaoh's return. And he had. The Ring had been a testy one to protect, but he had heard it had found its way to a white-haired youth. He could only pray that the boy was strong enough to take on the darkness inside, lest he fall victim like all of the others. And he had watched their leader pass on the Eye to a young man desperate enough to hold onto a dream that could never come true.

Knowing the Items were out in the wind was fine, as long as they all didn't return to their sacred shine together. Not without the Pharaoh. Many stories had been passed down on what could occur once the Pharaoh was released, and the Items could not be brought forth together until he had completed his 5,000 year-old destiny. Above all, the stories of the Millennium Items could not fall into the wrong hands...

Thankfully, two other Millennium Items were watched over by a neighboring clan, or, at least they were the last he had spoken to them. Their daughter had inherited the Necklace and the last he heard, she traveled with one of their most precious and guarded artifacts to Japan. He had questioned why, until whispers of a boy resembling their lost King spread across the desert.

"Your thoughts betray you, Tomb Guardian," said a high, cold voice – a different one than the other man in the room. Probably another someone in a mask. He had seen that much of his captors once. They all wore long black robes that looked well out of place for the hot, Egyptian weather. Though…perhaps he was no longer in Egypt…it would explain why he was so cold.

"I wish nothing more than to return you home, safe and sound," said the new voice again. It was low
enough to almost be a whisper. "But you must do something for me, first. I already know you have the answers I seek."

Suddenly, out of nowhere, there was light in the room. Not bright enough to be blinding, but after being in the dark, he had to close his eyes against it until they could adjust.

The room was actually much bigger than he imagined it to be. A chair sat across the table opposite his, though it was unoccupied. There were three hooded men in the room. Two by the door he didn't think was even there, and the third was standing at the end of the table, with a stick in his hand. Was that supposed to be a weapon? Being hardly longer than a twig, it didn't give off the appearance of anything remotely intimidating.

The man who had spoken last to him walked around from behind his chair and now, with the lights in the room, he could truly see his captor. And he suddenly wished the lights were still off, for the face looking down at him hardly resembled much of a man anymore, with slits for nostrils and cold, red eyes. It was almost snake-like. His skin was deathly pale, near white. He didn't even want to know how someone could become so disfigured. Perhaps that was why the others wore masks. He tried not to think about it.

The snake-man tilted his head, as if considering something, then waved a stick of his own, and the ropes binding him to the chair vanished without a trace. "It has been some time since you have eaten, or drank," he said, "I cannot have you perish prematurely." He waved his strange stick again and a goblet appeared, with what looked like water inside. "My Death Eaters tell me you have so far been uncooperative. However, their means of persuasion could very well leave you permanently damaged." He sat down in the seat across the table.

No longer held down, the tomb guardian rubbed at his arms, his eyes locked onto the goblet. It was easier to look at that than the man before him. And the water was tempting.

"...And we can't have that, now can we?" Voldemort continued, "After going through all of the effort to collect you, it would be a waste to have your mind damaged before I can gather what I need."

"Please," Voldemort watched the tomb keeper squirm in his seat. "I don't know any –"

His laugh, loud and cold silenced his guest. "Now, now. Don't sell yourself short, my friend. After all, you and others like you have been tasked with secrets of the highest honor. You needn't worry about your family, your fellow guardians. I am not here to threaten their lives. Keeping such information guarded after all these years tends to take its toll. I am merely here to relieve you of the burden."

"I-I can't," the guardian whispered. Somehow, just the intensity of the man's gaze upon him was throwing him off. He had never had such an issue protecting the Pharaoh's secrets before. He couldn't let himself become loose-lipped. Even at the cost of seeing his sons again.

"You can," said Voldemort, "And you will. My servants have already shown you what they are capable of by means of persuasion…." He didn't miss the shudder that the tomb guardian involuntarily let out. "I will be much more direct. This is your last chance, and my final offer." He didn't gesture to the goblet of Veritaserum. Let the man believe it was water. "You can tell me what I wish to know willingly, or I will force it from you."

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Domino City
Monday evening

"Is this it?" asked Roland. After Mokuba's insistence for the thousandth time, Roland set up his computer in Seto's home office, keeping an eye on the rotating camera feeds while he swept a glance over the form handed to him.

"Yep," said Mokuba. "It's supposed to be signed by my guardian, so I can go on the class trip next week. It's due tomorrow."

Roland looked down at the form. "Are you asking me to forge your brother's signature?"

Mokuba shook his head, "I don't know…I mean, I don't want to get in trouble for having that done…but Seto's not home. I was so caught up in Seto being around last week that I forgot to give it to him to sign. Aren't you technically my temporary guardian?"

"Not legally."

"Well, we won't be able to get it to Seto and back before its due. I don't know if they'll accept your signature." Mokuba stared down at his socks. "I really wanted to go, too."

"What would you have done if Mr. Kaiba was away at a conference for several days?"

Mokuba frowned. "I don't know…that's never happened before. He's always taken me with him. That's better than a school trip!"

"Well, if your teacher has a problem, she can contact me," Roland reached across the desk for a pen and signed the bottom of the form as the phone buzzed.

"Sir, there's a representative on the line from one of the legal divisions for Mr. Kaiba."

"Mr. Kaiba is currently out of the country," said Roland to the housekeeper on the other end of the phone. "Legal knows this."

"I'm sorry sir, but they said it was urgent. They're on line 2."

Roland sighed. "I'll take it." He looked over at Mokuba, and then to his watch. "Go ahead and finish your homework. You need to be in bed in a few hours."

Mokuba made a mock salute before tossing his backpack onto the couch in the office. "Aye, Captain." He pulled out his workbooks and dug around for a pencil. He stole looks across the room. Roland didn't say too much to whoever was on the other end, but his fingers drummed along the desktop, which he knew he only did when he was deep in thought over something. He watched the frown on the man's face deepen. Something must have happened, but a lot of the legal company matters went right over his head, so he doubted Roland would tell him what it was.

He looked up from his homework again at the sound of a cell phone vibrating along the top of the desk. Before he could ask what was wrong when the first call was hung, Roland had grabbed the cell and put it to his ear.

"Yes? …What happened?" Mokuba watched as he asked the caller, positioning the cell against his ear with his shoulder and typing into the computer. Homework abandoned, Mokuba got up and walked around the desk.

"I'm tracking back on my end," said Roland to whoever was on the other end. "How long ago was it?"
Mokuba frowned. They were looking at camera feeds. But they weren't of the mansion or Kaiba Corp. It was to a house that they barely used; a property they inherited from their days with Gozaburo. Seto spent some time there once, when he needed to 'find himself' after his first duel with Yugi, but after being thrown into the mess that was Duelist Kingdom, the house hadn't been visited since. There was a caretaker that lived in their own home on the property that maintained the house and a minimal security detail, but that was it. Did someone break in? The stream of the feeds wasn't very good, and it was hard to make shapes out in the dark.

Mokuba wasn't sure exactly what he was looking to find until Roland ended the call. "What's going on?"

"There was a security breach at the other house," said Roland. "Pack a bag. I'm taking you to Mr. Muto's while I head there."

Mokuba blinked. "Won't I be safer with you? Or even here with all the guards? What kind of breach?"

"Security was compromised," said Roland shaking his head. "Fuguta is going to watch over you and Mr. Muto at the Game Shop tonight, and he will take you to school in the morning."

"What kind of breach?" Mokuba repeated. This was troubling. Roland never usually let him too far from his sight when he was entrusted to his care. He found it annoying, but his vigilance did stop more than one kidnapping attempt while they were in America. If Roland didn't want him with him, something serious must have happened.

"I don't know yet, that's why I'm going to the house to look at the feeds on site. It's too hard to tell over this connection. You are going to Mr. Muto's while I investigate. Please, sir, go upstairs and pack an overnight bag."

Mokuba sighed and gathered his homework back up. "What about the first call?"

"Don't worry about that. Go get your things together." He waited for Mokuba to leave the office before switching the feeds back to the mansion, and running through the last hour. Emmeline Vance spent the evening in the library with one of the other wizards – Podmore, by the looks of it. It wasn't the first time that one of the other two wizards visited the mansion, but it never left him with a good feeling. Weren't they supposed to watch over Yugi Muto's friends? It seemed rather taxing to leave it all for one person.

After password-protecting both computers, he stepped out of the office and locked it. Roland took three steps towards the library where he knew the wizards to be, and stopped. If the person on the end of the phone at the second house was to be believed, then he may not want to involve them. This could be a freak-out over nothing. But at the same time, Mr. Muto's home was much less secure than the mansion, even with Fuguta keeping guard. Would he be putting Mokuba in danger by alerting them that they were leaving for the night?

Roland shook his head. Dumbledore had obviously put high trust in the three wizards he left here to keep an eye on things. Hestia, Sturgis, and Emmeline were probably very good people and capable magicians. But Mr. Kaiba's concerns from his visit home, while seemingly unwarranted, could not be ignored. He was told the intruder seemed to vanish without a trace. Surely not one of those three, but….

Mind made up, he spun around on his heel and went upstairs, dialing the Game Shop as he moved toward Mokuba's bedroom.
Monday morning

The notice for the first Hogsmeade trip of the year went up on the common room message board first thing that morning. Harry and Ron descended the dormitory steps to see Yugi and Ryou amongst the gaggle of excited third years reading the post.

"Is it this weekend?" asked Harry. He wasn't going to try to maneuver through the crowd to find out, not when there was someone over there who could read it for him.

"Next," said Ryou. "What does this mean here – that a signed permission slip is needed to go to the village?"

Yugi looked at them, puzzled. "I don't remember getting a permission form with the Hogwarts letters."

"I'm surprised you didn't get one," said Harry, "We only had to get it signed once, and then it's on file somewhere. If you don't have permission to go, they don't let you off the grounds."

"I'm surprised that they're even allowing the Hogsmeade trips, considering You-Know-Who's out in the open and all," said Ron.

"Well, Hogsmeade has some of the same protections as the castle," said Hermione, "The main difference though is that you can apparate in and out."

"I was really looking forward to going and getting away from the castle, too," said Yugi, sadly, "Even if we get a hold of the form, it may not make it back in time."

"We can try though," said Ryou, "Even if we don't make it this time, there will be others, right?"

"Of course," said Hermione, "But honestly, there's only so much we're allowed to do there. Sometimes it loses its appeal after a few goes."

"But you've been able to go for years now," said Yugi, "It'll be the first time for us! And you know... there's only so much to do on the weekends if we're all caught up with our homework. Kaiba's just going to hide in an empty classroom and work the entire weekend away anyhow, and Ryou's tired of losing at Duel Monsters."

"I don't mind it, really," said Ryou sheepishly as they headed down to breakfast. "He won't stop putting up a fuss when we lose. You know how he is."

"Sore loser, huh?" said Ron.

Yugi took a quick glance around them. "The Spirit of the Ring has been trying to defeat the Pharaoh in a Shadow Game for as long as we've known him."

"Usually for him, losing is a ticket to the Shadow Realm," said Ryou, "Though he always seems to find his own way out. Recently though, I've been able to hear him swear up a storm every time Yugi wins."

"Is that why you two play instead of the spirits?" asked Harry, "To avoid Shadow Games?"

"There are a couple of reasons behind it," said Yugi, "We don't want people noticing that I get taller or Bakura's hair just kind of fluffs out. And you're right – if they're out playing, Bakura will more
than likely summon a Shadow Game, which brings up all sorts of awkward questions for anyone who might stumble upon it. More importantly though, we made a promise to Professor Dumbledore that we wouldn't summon the Shadow Realm except in an extreme emergency."

"Which is now broken," Ryou sighed, "I don't even want to think of the trouble I'll end up in right now."

"I'm sure Professor Dumbledore will understand when he knows the whole story of what happened," said Hermione, "I mean…the spirit did it to protect you."

"I know," said Ryou miserably, "But I don't know if Professor Umbridge will see it that way." He went through his day dreading her class. Would Umbridge call him out in front of the entire room? Or would he be marched out to Dumbledore's office and then promptly kicked out of the school for his spirit's behavior?

/I don't see why you're so worried. It's not like you need a magical education/ Bakura crossed his arms. /We both know that I am more than capable of getting you out of any mess./

Ryou didn't feel it wise to remind him that while he was powerful and extremely dangerous, the spirit certainly did not do well enough in a fight against the Pharaoh – and Marik's darker half to back up that claim. That reassurance wasn't helping at all.

He sat down nervously in Defense Against the Dark Arts next to Seto, realizing that this was the first they had seen of the young executive all day. He stole a glance to his right. Seto was reading something off of his phone, with a frown deepening as his eyes scanned down the lines of text.

/I wonder where he was, earlier today?/

/Why are you so concerned with what the Priest does? It's no skin off your nose./

/Aside from the week he spent at home, he's never missed a class. It's just not like him./

Bakura rolled his eyes. /I'm sure he'll be flattered of your concern./

"Wands away, children!" said Professor Umbridge, closing the classroom door behind her with a loud click. "We will be having a quiet class today. Please open your books to read and notate Chapter 4, which covers Dementors and Inferi. There will be no need to talk."

Like the rest of the class, Ryou let out a small sigh and flipped his book open. Today was going to be another boring class, but if that was all they got out of Professor Umbridge for the day, he would take it. Umbridge seated herself at her desk and merely watched the class go about their note taking. How anyone can sit still and watch a group of teenagers read for an hour seemed like a boring way to pass the time, but Ryou tried not to think too much about it.

He didn't realize how much he had gotten engrossed in the section about Dementors to notice that Umbridge had gotten up and was now wandering the room. He briefly heard her chastise a pair of Hufflepuffs for not reading efficiently or taking notes.

/He was off on Harry and the others Friday when he returned from Japan./
Bakura shrugged. /Yes, but little Yugi stepped in on that one. He's been avoiding them for most of the weekend. And honestly, if / lash out at anything, it's bound to get you into…more trouble. And you know Yugi won't complain about anything and make it worthwhile entertainment. So I'll have to settle for Kaiba going mad from the complete monotony of this class. You can't tell me that you are not tired of sitting in here every Monday reading about utter trash./

Ryou sighed and glanced to his right to see what his darker half was referring to. Seto's quill was back in its inkwell, and he was lazily paging through the book in a manner reminiscent of a patient sitting idly in a doctor's waiting room. He peeked at the page number and then flipped to the same spot in his own book.

/How is he three chapters ahead already?/

/Maybe he's 'reading efficiently' Bakura emphasized with air quotes.

Ryou ignored him and flipped back to his original spot in the book as Umbridge approached Dean and Neville, peering at their notes before nodding in approval and moving on to the next table.

His concentration was broken by the familiar yet muffled buzz from beside him. Ryou looked over at Seto, who froze turning the page of his book and reached into an inner pocket of his robes.

"They know you're in class, right?" Ryou whispered.

Seto pulled out his phone, still quietly vibrating, but now easily heard out in the open. He nodded; the boredom on his face replaced by a mixture of puzzlement and fear at the name displayed on the screen. "Roland knows my schedule. But it's near midnight there. He'd only call if it were an emergency."

Ryou saw Umbridge make her way up the row towards them as Seto got up and slipped out of the classroom.

"What was that?" she asked. "Where does he think he's going?"

Ryou swallowed. "He got a call from home."

"A call? What are you talking about?" said Umbridge. "What was that thing in his hand?"

"A phone," said Ryou, as if it was obvious. He had to remind himself that wizards and Muggle technology didn't mix, because explaining what a phone did felt rather foolish. "So he can keep in contact with his brother and company."

"Not in my classroom," she huffed. "This is a school, not a boardroom. It's about time he kept his education separate from his home life." She stormed through the rest of the aisle towards the door. "Keep reading. There should be no talking while I'm gone." Angrily, she threw the door open with much more force than necessary and stalked into the hallway.

"What just happened?" asked Harry, twisting around to look out the open door, as if either of them were going to walk back in at any moment.

"I don't know," said Yugi. "I didn't think he kept his phone on him while in class."

"I didn't either," said Ryou, "But he thinks it might have been an emergency. It's the middle of the night back home."
A few students crept towards the door as they heard Umbridge's voice rise from out in the hall.

"Seto Kaiba," they heard Umbridge shout, "We are in the middle of a lesson. I will not have you interrupting my class with this nonsense."

They couldn't hear his response to that at all, but it must not have been what Umbridge wanted to hear, because they could hear her sputtering from all the way down the hall.

The few students that had crept closer to the door bolted back to their seats upon hearing her hurried footsteps coming closer. Harry could have sworn he heard something about detention thrown out during one of Umbridge's outbursts.

Seto swept back into the room and gathered up his books, ignoring the curious stares from around the class as well as Umbridge's seething purple-faced rage.

"This is ridiculous," said Umbridge, "There are rules here, Mr. Kaiba. Against my judgement, you have already been allowed to return home for more than your estimated allowance that was agreed upon over the summer. Your work is being handled by others. This is where you belong."

"Where I belong?" Seto shot back, "Last week, two students went home due to Death Eater attacks. In that time of need, they belonged with their family. The only thing ridiculous here is that I have an emergency at my home, but I am not allowed clearance to leave and check up on my twelve year-old brother."

"Is Mokuba okay?" asked Yugi worriedly, getting up from his seat. "What happened?"

"Yugi Muto, sit down and return to your books," Umbridge snapped, and she addressed the room. "That goes for all of you! Turn back around, right now, or I will have all of you joining him in detention." Standing in the doorway, she crossed her arms and held her ground. "You need permission to leave, Mr. Kaiba. You are not in control here, I am. And right now, you are going to sit in this classroom, and continue today's lesson with the rest of your peers."

Seto finished jamming the stopper back on his ink and threw his laptop bag over his shoulder. "It's a good thing you don't handle my travel arrangements then. If I don't have your permission to leave, then I'll take this up with the Headmaster, who takes the safety and security of mine and my peers' families rather seriously." Stepping towards the door, he glowered down at Umbridge. "If you expect me to choose staying here over the welfare of my only living family, then you're horribly mistaken. But go ahead, give me detention, if it makes you feel better. I'll serve it when I get back." Angrily, Seto brushed past her and out the classroom door, slamming it shut behind him.

No one moved.

Umbridge slowly made her way back to the front of the room, flexing her chubby fingers in and out of fists as she tried to control her breathing and calm herself down again. She was quite aware that none of the students had listened to her, and for an instant, couldn't blame them for watching the complete outburst that had broken the usual calm and quiet of her class. How dare that boy go up and beyond her authority like that!

No matter, she thought to herself as she reclaimed her seat at the front of the room, he will soon learn not to do that again.

The bell tolled signaling the end of the first hour block by the time the class finally returned to their books. Umbridge sighed, one more hour….

The murmurs of students moving through the halls broke through the silence of the classroom.
Normally, Umbridge would give them a brief break from the class and resume once the bell tolled again, but Harry noted that was unlikely to happen today. He wasn't the only one puzzled in the room either. Some of the Hufflepuffs on the other side of the room looked unsure if they should keep their quills and ink out or put them away. The second half of their double class usually involved some sort of hands-on lesson.

"Wands away, please," said Umbridge irritably, "For the rest of this class, finish your work on the current chapter, and then move to the section on the Unforgivable Curses. Read the bit on the Imperius Curse and copy the text three times for maximum retention. There is no need to talk."

Yugi watched her grab a sheet of parchment and begin to scribble something frantically across the surface. Sighing, he flipped the pages of his book back to the table of contents and searched for the passages on Unforgivable Curses. The rest of the class seemed to share in his lack of excitement for this task. Even Hermione, who normally would be reading and writing at furious speeds, was taking her sweet time getting to the correct page. It seemed no one was relishing the thought of wasting more of their parchment today.

"Do we really have to write all this down three times?" he whispered to Hermione.

She nodded glumly, "If she doesn't think we're working hard enough, she'll even collect and grade the notes."

Yugi hung his head. You've got to be kidding.

"No talking!"

Yugi quickly dipped his quill back into his inkwell and began to write.

/This Imperius Curse really does sound similar to the effects of the Millennium Rod./

/Yeah. It's kind of eerie. Check this part out, Pharaoh – 'the curse may allow the victim whatever skills necessary to complete their directed task, such as allow them to cast spells beyond their regular knowledge or increased physical strength.'/

/That seems like a blessing and a downfall with this curse./

/How so?/

/Think about it, Yugi. I imagine if someone wanted to be discreet about who was under this curse, they couldn't task the person to do something out of their scope because it would give it away something was wrong./

/Hm. It does say though that a strong-willed individual could resist the effects, but I bet that would take a ton of mental stamina to do, especially if it was a strong casting. Otherwise the castor could cause serious mental damage to the victim. …And this is the least dangerous of the three curses?/

"Hem, hem."

Yugi jumped and nearly spilled his ink bottle. "Professor?" He didn't realize Umbridge had left her station at the front of the room again, let alone come this way.

"You're not writing, Mr. Muto. Is something wrong?" Her sugary-sweet voice was back, as if she hadn't turned into a purple-faced screaming machine only thirty minutes ago. It made Yugi wonder if
she had an internal switch to flip the false-sweetness on and off.

Yugi shook his head quickly. "No, Professor. I'm sorry, I was just caught up in reading, I guess."

"Hm." Umbridge didn't sound too convinced. She held out a slip of paper to him. "Please take this to Professor McGonagall after today's lesson. I expect to see you and Mr. Bakura with the Headmaster this evening."

Yugi swallowed. He had a feeling she was going to want an explanation for what happened with the Boggart, and he knew Ryou was dreading exactly that all day. "Yes, Professor."

"And watch what you're doing, Mr. Muto, or you'll drip ink over your notes. We wouldn't want you to have to write everything all over again, now would we?"

"No, ma'am."

"Good." Umbridge nodded and moved across the way, taking a look at Malfoy and Crabbe's progress.

Yugi looked down at the envelope in his hand. It was sealed shut, so he couldn't open and read it.

Umbridge finally made her way back up to the front of the room as the bell chimed the end of their class. "I expect a complete essay on the effects of and resistance to the Imperius Curse by our next class. No less than two feet of parchment."

There was a series of groans around the room as books were collected and the class filed out.

"What was that all about?" asked Ron.

Ryou shook his head. "I've never seen anyone go as red-faced as she did today. It seemed very silly if you ask me."

"Seto had a point though," asked Hermione as they climbed the steps, "Umbridge really had no right to try and keep him in class if there was truly an emergency at home with his little brother."

"I wonder what her angle is," said Harry, "We still don't know why she's here in the first place. Considering she doesn't want to teach us anything at all."

"She's been watching us," said Hermione, "For what, I don't know. I don't know if she was truly trying to keep you guys in the school or not. Maybe she was more upset that his phone went off and caused a disruption. It's not like she's ever heard of a cell phone before."

"Then I would think she just would have tried to confiscate it," said Ron. "And I wouldn't see that going over well either, seeing how long it took him to get the thing working."

Yugi shrugged and paused as their staircase moved into place at the end of the corridor. "I have to take this letter to Professor McGonagall."

"Might as well go back to the common room and swap out the books first. We don't know how long we'll be in her office and I don't want to be unprepared for her class."

"Me neither."

After entering the portrait hole, Harry and his friends crashed into empty seats by the fire. Yugi made his way across the room towards the dormitory steps and up to his room.
Seto had changed back into one of his suits and was knotting his tie in front of the full-size mirror in the room when Yugi walked in.

"Kaiba, I thought you had left already," said Yugi, "Is everything okay? What happened at home?"

"I'm leaving now," said Seto, glancing at his watch, "Dumbledore is escorting me back after his meeting with the Minister." He glanced at Ryou walking through the doorway before continuing. "Roland was alerted to a security breach at one of my properties. It looked like a wizard apparated and disapparated from the site."

"Maybe it was Sturgis or one of the other two people Dumbledore left behind to watch Grandpa and the others?" said Yugi. "Could they be worrying over nothing?"

Seto shook his head, adjusted his jacket and grabbed his phone off of the bed. "No. This wasn't my house or Kaiba Corp, but another property I inherited through Gozaburo. Aside from the security and grounds staff, no one lives there. We didn't even tell the wizards about it."

Ryou tilted his head. "So why were wizards there?"

"That's what I'm going to find out."

"Wait," Yugi reached for Seto's arm before he was completely out the door. "I don't know how long you'll be there...but, will you check on Grandpa for me? I won't push for Joey or the others, though I'm worried about them too, but..."

"I'll stop by," said Seto, glaring down at the hand clutching his arm, and giving it a slight shake. "Mokuba's staying there anyway."

Yugi nodded and let go. "Thank you."

"You took side-along apparition well for your first time," said Dumbledore lightly, "Most people get dizzy or vomit."

Seto rolled his eyes. "I'm not like most people."

"No," Dumbledore chuckled, "You are not." They made their way down the garden path leading up to the mansion in the dark. Despite no one living in the house, all of the lights were on. The guards for the property were no doubt searching the place inside and out for any intruder still lingering behind.

"I take it you will want to search for your bodyguard," said Dumbledore, illuminating the path with his wand. "If I may, I'll walk the grounds and see if anything was left behind." He pulled a strange looking object from his pocket. "This is a sort of dark detector. It can find concealed magic and dark objects. I'd rather not have anything dangerous left here."

Seto nodded once and headed inside, moving to where he knew the camera playback system was located. It had been a long time since he had stepped foot in this house. He had meant to sell it a long time ago. It stood as one of the last reminders of the days under Gozaburo, although he last stayed here after the old man disappeared. Now the last memories of this place were of defeat, attempted murder, and betrayal.

Seto shook his thoughts aside as Roland looked up from the triple-monitors in front of him.
"Mr. Kaiba," Roland stood up, "I hope I didn't interrupt anything important."

Seto snorted. "This outweighs anything I could have been doing over there. Is Mokuba…?"

"He's fine, sir. Worried and shaken up, but safe. Fuguta is at the Game Shop with them."

Seto nodded. "Did you find out who it was?"

"Yes, and no," Roland typed something into the computer and turned one of the monitors around. "It's too dark to make out faces, but…" he hit the button to begin playback of the video. "In this feed here, someone clearly appears out of nowhere. They make it halfway across the way to the house before tripping the motion sensor. In a minute or so, security starts investigating and – there. That's when they disappear."

"They didn't expect to be seen," said Seto. "They don't fight, don't cast magic, they just go…." Why? He massaged his forehead. None of this made sense. "Why here? How did they even find this place? I didn't mention this house to Dumbledore or any of the wizards when they first arrived. I would have expected this sort of thing from the main house, or Kaiba Corp."

"But they can't get to those places," said Roland. He paused. "I may have an answer, but you're not going to like it."

Seto scowled. "I already don't like it."

Roland pushed a steaming mug across the desk. "You'll want to sit down for this, sir."

Seto accepted the coffee. "How much trouble are we in?"

"Legal called this evening. It looked like someone was trying to make a payday by getting at some of your financial data. It didn't work, of course, but when we dug back into it, whoever was responsible was probing into all sorts of information. Kaiba Corp's history and profits, real estate ventures, everything." Roland reached into the desk, pulled out a sheet of paper with their search results, and slid it across the surface. "We didn't find the exact person who did it, but we traced it all the way back to the United Kingdom."

"That can't be a coincidence," said Seto.

"No, sir."

"What about Yugi's grandfather and the others?"

"I spoke to Mr. Muto this evening before dropping off Mokuba," said Roland, "So far nothing out of the ordinary, but they probably don't have a team set up to prevent breaches in privacy."

"Hn," Seto tilted his head back against the wall he was propped against and stared up at the ceiling. "They didn't get into the house. Or even across the lawn. Assuming these were the Death Eaters, they could have taken security out with ease, but they didn't. Actually, it doesn't have to be Voldemort and his followers – any wizard could have gotten past security if they caught them enough off guard. But nothing was gained here. I don't get it."

Roland hesitated a moment and reached back into the desk drawer. "There's more."

Seto frowned and looked at the next sheet of paper. "I thought you said they dug into my private life. This is a report on you."
"I know." Roland stiffened. "We're being watched, and I can't say for certain if it is or isn't the three wizards that are supposed to be protecting us. This house? It was supposed to be the backup plan, in case the Death Eaters arrived. It's secure – at least, by our standards – and we didn't tell any wizards about it, so unless they literally followed us here, it wouldn't be found."

Seto thumped his head against the wall again. "That's not going to work anymore." He looked down at the paper in his hands. "You're going to have to be much more discreet about this."

Roland raised an eyebrow. "I don't know how much more discreet I can be, considering I didn't speak of this specific plan to anyone, not even Mokuba."

Seto crossed his arms and drummed his fingers against the crook of his elbow, letting the gears in his head turn. When he finally spoke, he turned and looked his most trusted employee in the eyes. "Listen to me very carefully. There is a deposit box in the main branch of the Domino First Bank. I created it right after Duelist Kingdom, a few weeks before you were reinstated. The idea was an untraceable exit, to protect Mokuba. The box isn't linked to my name and I can count how many people know about it on one hand."

"Sir?"

Seto reached under his collar and tugged at the card locket around his neck. Popping it open, he carefully removed the photo of his little brother to reveal a small key taped to the locket backing. "Box 713."

Roland looked down as the key was pressed into his hand. "I don't understand."

Seto shook his head, replaced the locket around his neck, and set the mug down on the desk. "This was a test, Roland, and we played right into their hands. Do we know who it was? No, it doesn't matter, but for the sake of argument, assume it was Voldemort. He doesn't know anything about us, not personally. But somehow, they're able to spoof background checks on both of us. So they not only know everything associated to my name, but they've been spying around long enough here to know that you've got the only reason I would leave the security of Hogwarts and come back here."

Roland nodded slowly, glancing over at the camera feeds. Dumbledore had finished circling the perimeter of the grounds and was slowly heading back towards the house, probably looking for Mr. Kaiba. "And because of the protection placed around the mansion, they choose a different place, out of the way to see what you would do if your security was breached."

"I came running," said Seto, scowling. "Imagine what would have happened if there was a trap waiting here for me."

"You didn't come alone."

Seto shook his head, "No. Not this time. Even if tonight was baited, I doubt Voldemort – assuming he was behind this – would have tried anything with Dumbledore here. But of the three of us, I'm the easiest target. It doesn't matter if I use magical means or not, but I have scheduled trips back for work. If we're being watched here, who's to say there's no one keeping a watchful eye out at Hogwarts, too? I disappear from school for a week at a time. Someone is bound to notice a pattern as time goes on."

"He only has to get one of us to break, and then everything we'll have tried to prevent by going to that school in the first place would have been for nothing," said Seto, "So you take that key, and use anything and everything from that box that you need to, however you need to, to keep Mokuba safe." He closed his eyes and hit his head against the wall again, much harder this time than before.
"And you might as well lump Yugi's Dream Team in there, too."

Roland's eyes snapped up. That was the last thing he expected from his boss's mouth. "W-what?"

Seto let out a huge exhale. "We can't assume it was just us being watched. All it'll take is for something to happen to Wheeler or any of the others and Yugi's going to cave to any demands made. They won't have the means to get off the grid like we do. Plan for the worst-case scenario you can think of, and build a new contingency plan." He pushed himself off of the wall and headed towards the door. "Just don't tell me about it."

"S-sir?"

"After all of the magical nonsense both of us have witnessed from these damn magical items alone, I won't put it past the wizards to be able to do some sort of mind-probe. Some of their illegal spells involve mind control. IF something were to happen to me, Mokuba would be the most obvious form of leverage they could find. I won't be the one to lead them right to him."

"…Understood."

Seto sighed. "Good. Now if we're done here...we might as well find Dumbledore. I doubt our trespasser left anything behind, and I want to check in on Mokuba before I go back."

Roland furrowed his brow and looked down at his watch. "Sir, it's nearly two in the morning. He does have school tomorrow. We can check in with Fuguta, but Mr. Muto should have sent Mokuba to bed already. He's probably also asleep. It's too late to call on them now."

"I told Yugi I would check on his grandfather before coming back. I suppose I'll be staying the night then."

"Ah! There you are," said Dumbledore, knocking on the open door. "A rather cross gentleman upstairs told me I would find you here."

"Professor," Roland nodded. "Good evening, Mr...Roland, was it? A pleasure to see you again, though I wish we could do so under better circumstances." He turned to Seto. "There was nothing left behind, though I expect that was not the intruder's intention."

"It was a test, then," said Seto.

"I see we've come to the same conclusion," Dumbledore nodded, "If I had known this house existed, we could have put the protections here as well, and this trouble may have been avoided."

"Mokuba and I don't live here, so I didn't see the reason behind it," said Seto, "I own a lot of properties. It would be a waste of time and effort to have you cast spells on all of them, especially when they don't get used. My home, company, and Mokuba's school was enough."

"I see," said Dumbledore, "I plan to see my colleagues before we return to Hogwarts. We will have to be more vigilant in the future. I trust that won't interfere with any plans of your own."

Seto followed him back out of the room and up the stairs towards the ground level. "That's fine. I want to check in with Mokuba, though we'll both have to wait until morning."

"Ah, yes, I've forgotten about the jump in time," said Dumbledore, "There were matters I needed to discuss with you and Mr. Muto and Bakura back at Hogwarts this evening, but that may wait until
tomorrow. By the time we return to Hogwarts, it will be too late. I'll send a message to Minerva about our change in plans." He eyed Seto over his half-moon spectacles, "Do not stray too far. The wizards that spooked your alarm may have gone from here, but it's possible others may still be in the area."

"You don't have to treat me like a child," said Seto, his frown deepening. "I am fully capable of taking care of myself."

"Of which I have no doubts, but alas, I am an obsessive worrywart," said Dumbledore casually, "Please indulge me just tonight."

"Will you be…disappearing back to Domino?" asked Roland, for lack of a better word.

Dumbledore shook his head. "While you took it rather admirably, Mr. Kaiba, I can tell you did not enjoy side-along apparition. It would take some time for you to travel by your conventional means back to town, and I don't wish to be too far from you, just in case. If you don't mind the company…it has been quite some time since I've ridden in an automobile…."
"It would appear that Professor Umbridge has requested a sit down with the Headmaster this evening to go over some...behavioral issues she's noticed in her class." Professor McGonagall put down the note handed to her and looked across her desk to Yugi and Ryou. "I'm certain I've heard a rather skewed recount, so why don't you two tell me what's happened?"

Ryou scratched at his ear. "Well...what did she say?"

Professor McGonagall raised an eyebrow. "That you two not only are the victims of a personality disorder and quite possibly dangers to the school, but you also performed a good bit of dark magic and obliterated the subject of her lesson Friday afternoon."

"That's...sort of right," said Ryou, looking down at his lap.

Professor McGonagall sighed. "Professor Dumbledore has made me aware of your unique situations. I'm sure he will have words for you this evening when he returns with Mr. Kaiba."

"Yugi had nothing to do with this – it was all my fault," said Ryou, "Please don't punish him too."

"Relax, Mr. Bakura," said Professor McGonagall, "Neither of you are in trouble with me. Not today. But let me offer a bit of –"

Yugi and Ryou looked up at hearing her pause, and followed her gaze to the ghostly phoenix that suddenly appeared in the room. It flew around the desk before disappearing, leaving a small sheet of parchment behind.

Professor McGonagall unfolded it to read its contents and then sighed. "It would appear Professor Dumbledore will not be returning at a reasonable hour this evening. He will speak to you tomorrow after dinner."

"What about our Transfiguration lesson?" asked Yugi, "We have that with you after dinner tomorrow."

Professor McGonagall shook her head. "Don't concern too much over it. Assuming Dolores Umbridge doesn't keep you all hostage in his office all evening, come to class once you are finished, and I will escort you back to Gryffindor Tower afterwards."

She cleared her throat. "As I was saying...Professor Dumbledore may have prepared the staff of your unique situation before your arrival at school, but he was also rather selective on the information he gave and to whom. Sufficed to say, Professor Umbridge does not know the entire story."

"Won't that make for awkward questions down the road? Maybe if he told her from the beginning, we wouldn't be in this situation today," said Yugi.
"Well, we can't go back in time, so dwelling on what could have been is pointless," said Professor McGonagall. "I'm sure by now you've heard accounts of what Professor Umbridge had gotten up to while here at Hogwarts last year. Despite the change in leadership at the Ministry, some things remain the same. Professor Dumbledore did not appeal to have her return this year – that was a Ministry decision. And I can assure you without question that she is just as untrustworthy as before."

Ryou blinked and bit his lip. "Professor?"

"I'm quite aware of the meetings she has tried to have with the two of you and Mr. Kaiba. Her little sit-down at the start of term? She's fishing for information. Professor Dumbledore and I have attempted to quell all the little office chats she has tried to summon you to since the start of September."

"I think we can handle nosy questions," said Ryou, "We're kind of used to people gawking and asking about our Millennium Items." He looked down at his chest, where the Ring was hiding under his vest. "That's why I've kept to hiding it."

Yugi gave off an awkwardly jealous chuckle. "Lucky for you that the Ring is pretty thin, huh?"

Professor McGonagall held up a hand to silence them. "I am telling you this to be on your guard. The Professor Umbridge of last term would be seeking information to feed back to the Minister of Magic, in a way similar to how she usurped Professor Dumbledore's position. But we have a new administration at the Ministry now, and quite frankly, we can't figure out why she's back either. It goes against most of Minister Scrimgeour's ideals to place someone so inept at teaching into the Defense Against the Dark Arts post. Her motives are not just out of plain curiosity."

Yugi and Ryou looked at each other. "Why are you telling us this, Professor?"

Professor McGonagall sighed uncomfortably. "For better or for worse, you have been dragged into a war that is not yours to deal. It is certainly not black and white. There are no clear enemies here. I am telling – advising – you, to be careful, and watch what you say around Professor Umbridge, or anyone outside of this school."

"Is it really that bad out there?" asked Yugi.

"The previous Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge spent so long closing his eyes to You-Know-Who's return, it paved way for the Death Eaters and You-Know-Who's supporters to bleed their way into the Ministry without being noticed. While he moves openly now, it is near impossible to find everyone he staged in positions of power. I know you all see the news in the Prophet, things are getting worse." She looked them both in the eyes, "That is why it is that much more important to keep your friends close. I know you've hit it off with Potter and his friends – aside from their knack of getting into trouble, they have enough 'real-world' experience dealing with Death Eaters and deceit to be very good allies. You can trust them."

She glanced up as a figure walking up the aisle towards her desk caught her eye. She sighed. "Is there something I can do for you, Dolores?"

Yugi and Ryou whirled around in their seats. Ryou visibly paled.

"Yes," said Umbridge. She was clearly still agitated over the outburst in her classroom; her face tried to hide it, but the aggravation was clearly evident in her voice. Her sugary voice was only 'half-there'. "I was expecting to see these two and Mr. Kaiba with the Headmaster this evening, and I seem to find myself locked off from Professor Dumbledore's office."
"Professor Dumbledore has not yet returned with Mr. Kaiba, and, on top of that, they will be delayed," said Professor McGonagall stiffly, "I received word from him a few moments ago. He will reschedule that meeting for tomorrow."

"This is the second time the Headmaster has disregarded my concerns. This is of utmost importance, Minerva. The safety and security of this school –"

"–Has not changed," Professor McGonagall finished for her. "No one is in any danger here at Hogwarts."

"Certainly, once you read the note I left, you will see my point of view, Minerva. Dark magic has been performed within these castle walls!"

"I have read your letter, Dolores," said Professor McGonagall. "I fail to see any true danger that has occurred here. No students were harmed from use of this accidental magic. There will be no punishment coming from me today. If that upsets you, by all means, take it up with Professor Dumbledore. I understand that this is a pressing issue for you, but he did not specify when he would be returning with Mr. Kaiba to the castle, so unless you plan to wait for him at the Entrance Hall steps all evening, this will have to wait until tomorrow."

Umbridge opened her mouth to speak, but paused. After a moment, she looked up, and smiled almost apologetically. "You're quiet right, Minerva. I'm sure everything will get explained thoroughly when the Headmaster returns. The truth will get out."

Ryou watched her leave the office and turned back to his head of house. "That was…odd."

"Even if she's acting in her own self-interests, be very careful around her," said Professor McGonagall. "We don't need the Ministry interfering at Hogwarts again."

~~*~~

Their arrival just outside the gate was not quite as graceful as the return to Domino. Having landed on an uneven patch of ground, Seto wobbled a step before righting himself.

"I am quite impressed," said Dumbledore pleasantly as they walked across the grounds. "That cup didn't spill a drop."

"I charmed it – it's the only reason Madame Pince lets it into the library."

"Very impressive," said Dumbledore. They climbed the steps leading to the front doors of the castle. "I take it this trip will have no bearing on your scheduled return in three weeks, despite the events that have occurred this evening?"

Seto eyed the Auror posted outside as he passed. "That is correct."

"I see. Do you still wish to use your own transportation, or would you prefer a Portkey or side-along apparation? They are much faster than your aircraft, and you would have more time to spend with your brother."

"Portkeys are unreliable, and I don't care for side-along apparation."

Dumbledore sighed. "As you wish, so long as you are at least accompanied by a member of the Order. Voldemort has seen how you will react when confronted with danger at home, and there is a very good chance he will act on it. I cannot have you lost to his clutches."
If *it was even him*, Seto thought, side-eye glaring at him, "And I told you that I am no damsel in distress. I can handle myself just fine. I don't want nor need to be chaperoned like a child."

"Do not think that Voldemort is the *only* interested party interested in you and your friends. His spies are also in the Ministry of Magic, and it should go without saying that they will be curious of your abilities as well," said Dumbledore.

/Interesting. It was *he* who introduced us to this world, and touted Voldemort as the danger. Now he says the government is involved as well?/

/Probably from Professor Umbridge./

/Hm. I'll have to meditate on this while you sleep tonight./

"*Hem, hem.*"

Seto's grip tightened on his coffee mug as he stopped, one foot on the Entrance Hall steps. Professor Umbridge was standing in the open doorway to the Great Hall.

"Good evening, Dolores," said Dumbledore, pleasantly, "It's quite late to be up wandering the halls, isn't it?"

"Not at all, Headmaster," said Umbridge in her falsely sugary voice. "I was just taking a walk around the school. It does wonders to clear one's head."

"That it does," Dumbledore agreed as the clock chimed midnight. "I hope you were not waiting for our return. I did send word to Minerva about our delay."

"Yes, yes, I was made aware. However, Mr. Kaiba and I have an appointment to keep."

Seto froze. "What?"

"Oh dear, have you forgotten already? You have a detention to serve, which you agreed to upon your return."

/You've got to be kidding me./

/You *did* say she could give you detention and that you *would* attend./

/I know what I said. Any reasonable person would schedule it for tomorrow...at a reasonable hour./

"Now?" said Dumbledore, puzzled. "Surely this can wait for a more appropriate time."

"I don't think so, Headmaster. My time was interrupted, and it is only fitting that this is returned in kind."

"Dolores, I insist –"

Seto held up his hand. He didn't particularly want to spend *any* time in her company, but it wasn't like he was tired anyway. "*It's* fine. You're taking my parting words *very* literally, but whatever."

/Are you sure about this? It *is* rather late.../

/Only extra Charms and Transfiguration classes tomorrow. I can sleep all day if I want. One
stupid detention isn't going to ruin anything. And it's not like she's going to let up, so I might as well get it over with./

"Good," Umbridge smiled nastily, "Come along then. Good evening, Headmaster."

Seto sighed and followed Professor Umbridge back towards her office. The lamps bathed the room in a disturbingly pink glow. How anyone could coat an entire room with the color and not get sick of it was beyond him. He took a look around the office before taking a seat in front of her desk, noticing that all of the kittens plated on the wall were curled up asleep, probably dreaming of chasing mice or playing with laser pointers. The doilies on the tables around him were lined up so perfectly that he had an urge to shift them when Umbridge wasn't looking. Instead, his eyes followed Umbridge as she closed the door, moved across the room, and sat at her desk, studying him.

"You are out of uniform, Mr. Kaiba."

Seto's eyes flicked down to his suit before looking up incredulously at her. "Really? I just came back from Japan. Unless you'd like me to strut around as a walking advertisement for Gryffindor House amongst Japanese Muggles, I don't see why you're nitpicking on something so incredibly trivial, especially since I was ambushed three steps through the front door."

"Detentions are to be carried out in robes, Mr. Kaiba. I will let it slide this time considering you just returned to the castle, but...call it advice for the next time."

He stared at her. She was assuming there was going to be a next time, but there was no possible way he was going to sit in this room for more than absolutely necessary. That alone was enough punishment.

She clasped her hands on the desk. "Now, do you know why you're here?"

"You gave me detention. I thought that much was obvious."

She chose to ignore the attitude behind his answer. "Yes, but do you know why you were given detention this afternoon?"

Seto crossed his arms over his chest. Getting disciplined for worrying about Mokuba was just as ludicrous as her so-called lessons, but rather than voice that opinion, he stayed quiet. He assumed his anger in class was probably part of what landed him here in the first place. The sooner he could leave the pink pit stop on the way to hell, the better.

"You – and your friends – have caused too much disruption in my classroom. Their little outburst of dark magic will be addressed when we sit down with the Headmaster tomorrow, but you are here for blatant disobedience in my classroom."

Seto raised an eyebrow. "I had a family emergency. In any normal educational institution, that is a perfectly acceptable reason to leave class, and that has held true for other students at this school. I fail to see why my circumstances are any different than theirs."

"You, Mr. Kaiba, require an escort to be allowed home, which is a drain on our –"

"Your what, resources? Manpower? I don't think so. Professor Dumbledore forces those chaperones on me whenever I go anywhere. I don't ask for them, and quite frankly, I'd rather be without them. Furthermore, all of my trips are scheduled in advance, so it's not a drain on anyone. Today? Professor Dumbledore agreed to take me home without question once he was finished with his own work. If it was such a burden, he would have said no." He tilted his head up so even while sitting, he
"...Quite right," said Umbridge, getting up. "Your refusal to accept my authority is what landed you here tonight." She began to circle the room. "You seem to forget rather quickly that this is not your office, and you are not in command here. I am. While you are in my classroom, you will follow my directions to the letter. I will not tolerate disobedience during my lessons. Failure to do so will result in punishment as I see fit. Is that understood?" She gripped the edge of the chair he sat in, and gloated seeing him immediately tense in his seat. It was about time something made him uncomfortable.

After keeping an eye on him and the other two new students, she knew Seto Kaiba would be the hardest one to break into her 'perfect little student' mold. Yugi Muto was a bright-eyed, friendly student who didn't seem to have much a backbone. And quiet Ryou Bakura didn't seem the sort to hurt a fly. Being that none of them had attended Hogwarts with her previously, they wouldn't have a reason to act out like the rest of the sixth year class while in her company. At least, until she set the boggart on them, and that completely warped her perception of them both. But Seto Kaiba hadn't been there for that class for her to see if he also had some freaky split personality. He was distant, much more so than the other two. How he fell into good graces with Potter and his friends she will never know, but it didn't surprise her at all that the first Hogwarts student he formed any sort of friendship with was Miss Know-It-All Granger – the brainy ones always stick together.

He didn't answer her. Frowning, Umbridge walked around his chair to look him head on, and tilted her head, puzzled. His eyes seemed glazed out, like he was staring off into some middle distance and was no longer here in the room with her. Hm. Perhaps there was an oddity about him, like the others. Dumbledore just had to go off and find the weird ones.

"Hem, hem."

She had to say it twice more before he broke out of whatever trance he had placed himself in, blinking angrily at her as if his momentary freak-out was all her fault. "I hope your little trip home hasn't tired you," she said smugly, "Because I expect you won't be going back to Gryffindor Tower for quite some time. Now, do we have an understanding?"

A sigh and his answer had to practically be forced from his lips. "Yes."

"Good," she said with a vicious smile, and returned to her desk.

Seto drummed his fingers along his opposite arm. "So what is it you're going to have me do for the next...hour?"

"Oh, it will probably be longer than that, dear boy," said Umbridge. "You disrupted my time earlier today, so I will return the favor this evening."

"I missed the second half of class. If we're treating this as an eye for an eye, then this should only last for the same duration, which was one hour."

Umbridge flashed him her sugary-sweet smile. "Dear me, it sounds like you are challenging my decisions again. For someone as bright as yourself, I thought after the conversation we just had, that this would be behind us."

She clasped her fingers together on the desk. The one good thing about him arriving back at Hogwarts so late was the time to think up his detention. Lines was always the fallback, and she was honestly surprised that her use of the black quill last year was not brought up when she received
word to return to the school. There were a couple of different things she could force him to write until the sun came up, and she truly considered it. After spending all that time in Japan in the dark of night, he had to be exhausted. After all, one of her favorite memories of the previous year was keeping Harry Potter writing 'I must not tell lies' until the early hours, watching gleefully while he struggled to stay awake. For someone as seemingly busy as the teenager sitting before her, bed would be most welcome after the long day. What a shame he won't get it.

However…writing lines would be at least a partial waste of the valuable time that she wouldn't normally have. All of her previous attempts to wrangle a chat with her new students have ended up disastrous. But Minerva wasn't around to distract her this time. Here, she could attack his defensive barriers all she wanted, under the sweet guise of a friendly conversation. He certainly wouldn't see that coming.

While he seethed, she reached for the pot on the other side of the desk. "You know…" she began sweetly, "I do think I may have overreacted, just a little."

"You think?"

"Yes. In times like these, we must take care of family. I trust all is well at home now?"

"I wouldn't have come back otherwise."

"Professor Dumbledore would not be able to watch over you in Japan for long periods. He has a responsibility to the school."

Seto had to resist the urge to roll his eyes. "I never asked him to."

"Well," said Umbridge, adding a fourth spoonful of sugar to her tea – ignoring Seto's near-visible shudder that even the sugar crystals were the same shade of pink as everything else in the room – and brought the cup to her lips. "It was quite lucky that someone at home was able to get a hold of you so quickly."

/…She's fishing. She pulled you from returning to Gryffindor Tower to talk?/

Seto scowled. "Is this my detention?"

Umbridge paused. "Excuse me?"

"This...chat. Or is just keeping me in here in this pink monstrosity my punishment?"

Umbridge forced out a smile and put down her teacup. "My, my. You don't hold back your tongue, do you?" Something would have to be done about that.

"I don't like having my time wasted. Just admit what it is you want from me so we can both get this over with. If you're going to have me write lines, say so."

Umbridge let out a high-pitched giggle. "What makes you think that you'll be writing lines this evening?"

"Because they're just as ineffective as your classes. Be honest, Professor," he practically spat out her title, "What is writing a sentence or two a hundred – even a thousand times going to prove?"

If her fingers were wrapped any tighter around the handle of her teacup, it would have cracked under her grip. Yes, his voice was beginning to rise, but how did he continue to sit there so seemingly calm while riling her up at the same time? She could feel her face turning red, but nothing seemed to get
past his mask. "They serve as a reminder, and therefore a deterrent to deviant behavior," she said, almost through gritted teeth.

Seto leveled a look of utter disbelief. "That worked so well for you last year, didn't it? The truth you and your puppet master at the Ministry didn't want getting out published for the world to see in an offbeat magazine, and a secret organization founded right under your nose to undermine your efforts."

"ENOUGH!" Umbridge shot to her feet. She closed her eyes and took several deep breaths to calm herself.

Seto unfolded his arms to look at his watch, and then went back to drumming his fingers along the edge of her desk.

/Now you've done it. I thought you weren't trying to end up in here more than once./

/I won't be intimidated into silence by her, of all people. She can come up with whatever laughable punishment she wants, but it isn't going to change anything./

Set slapped his hand to his forehead. /I hope you're looking forward to more of these. You two have been baiting each other this entire time. She has been trying to rile you up just to punish you out of spite, though I still don't quite understand why she is going to such extremes over something so trivial. It's not like you wasted her time, she still had lessons to teach. Imagine if that little chat was your punishment, Seto. Bear with her questions for a few hours, and then you could be off to bed. Instead, you have thrown that out the window by insulting her methods./

/She doesn't have teaching methods. The only thing any of us have learned so far in her classes is how to tire our wrists from writing theoretical nonsense day in and out. In her practical class, she set a monster loose without even reviewing how the counter spell works. I'm with Harry on this – how did she get a returning position at this place?/

"Hem, hem."

Seto looked up. He didn't remember her saying anything.

"What's wrong, dear? Nothing left to say? The box," she repeated. "The thing you were speaking into in the corridor this afternoon. What is it?"

"The phone?" Seto rolled his eyes. "It's to keep in contact with my brother and company. I thought that was self-explanatory."

"That is a Muggle electronic, and therefore should be unable to work within the castle grounds."

"Well it obviously does, or we wouldn't be sitting here."

"I need you to hand it over."

What?!

"That device needs to be confiscated and thoroughly inspected to be certain that both our world remains safe from Muggle eyes, and that this device hasn't broken the protective wards around the castle."

"No."
"That wasn't a request, Mr. Kaiba. If you don't give it to me, I'll take it."

"All of my technology was confiscated when I first arrived, and then cleared to be returned. I will not give up the only practical means I have of contacting my brother." He crossed his arms over his chest again. Let her try to take it.

"All it takes is a flick of a wand," said Umbridge, but she refused to rise to his bait. Unlike some of her colleagues, she had done proper research on their three new students before the start of term. He may not have the dark magic that seemed to come from Yugi Muto and Ryou Bakura, but that didn't make him any less dangerous. Fine – let him keep his little toy, for now. "That will have to be one of the many things discussed with the Headmaster tomorrow evening. You and your friends have been given too much leniency around this school, and I will see that punishment is being given where deserved."

"And what about where it isn't?" Seto countered. "We're sitting here arguing in circles all because I rushed home to make sure my brother wasn't killed in a possible attack. You can't tell me you wouldn't hesitate to do the same for a member of your own family. I'm just being punished for calling you out on your ridiculous, over-the-top behavior. You can't be judge and jury when confronted with something you don't like or want to hear."

"Very well," said Umbridge stiffly, "You can protest your next session with the Headmaster. Oh yes, don't think I will just sit and take this petty squabble lightly. It is clear that your blatant disregard for my authority will not be treated in just one night. Clearly this will take time."

She waved her wand and a large roll of parchment appeared in front of him. Walking around the desk, she placed a sharply-pointed quill in front of him. "'I will show respect'."

"Really? Lines?" He shook his head. "We could have skipped the word-slinging if you just started me on this when I first sat down."

Umbridge smiled wickedly. "I had hoped that your little outburst earlier was just a reaction to an emergency, in which case I could have had you cozy in bed by now. But it seems that attitudes must be changed. So here we are. 'I will show respect', until the message sinks."

Seto looked at the quill. He vaguely remembered Harry warning him and the others about having to write lines in this office and using certain quills, but having come from home and not Gryffindor Tower, he didn't have his bag with him to use his own quill and ink. Although...there was no inkwell on the desk, so the sharpened quill must use its own magical supply to write, which didn't seem quite like a terrible thing. ...But if Harry felt the need to warn them about it, there must be something going on behind the scenes. It didn't leave him with a good feeling.

"No ink?"

"You won't need it," said Umbridge smugly, as she sat back down and reached for her tea.

Seto sighed, lifted the quill to the edge of the parchment, and began to write. The quill did use its own ink, one that was dark red in color.

Umbridge watched gleefully, hiding a victorious smile behind her teacup as the back of his opposite hand began to redden, and the words spelling themselves out on the parchment also began to carve out into his flesh, only to disappear as the hand started to heal. Surprisingly, he didn't seem to notice until a few lines later, and froze, watching his neat script disappear from his hand, leaving it red but free of any scar or other indication that there were once words there. His eyes darted from the back of his hand to the parchment a few times, as he began to put the pieces together.
He looked up at her with the coldest of ice in his eyes. Umbridge set down her cup, and leveled him an equally intense gaze. "Is something the matter, dear?"

"You expect me to write lines with my own blood?"

"Like I said before, Mr. Kaiba," said Umbridge, "Lines serve as a reminder and a deterrent. Keep going, I did not give you permission to stop."

"This is torture."

"This is your detention, Mr. Kaiba. The time for civil discourse has passed. You will write lines, with that quill, until I deem the message sufficiently understood. Unless, of course, you decide to reconsider and hand over any working Muggle technology of yours on the grounds for review by the Ministry of Magic. The choice is yours."

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Yugi woke the following morning to the sun starting to stream into the dormitory, Ryou still sleeping quietly in the bed next to him, and Set pacing back and forth across the center of the room.

Rubbing the sleep from his eyes, he crept out of bed, careful not to wake Ryou. "Set?"

Set stopped pacing and nodded at him. "Yugi Muto. Did you sleep well?"

Yugi shrugged. "Sure, well enough. We've –" He glanced over to where Ryou kept the Ring at night. "I've been worried. We figured you would have come back last night."

"We did," said Set, and he sighed, "though it appeared there were other plans for us upon our return to the castle. Professor Umbridge sunk her claws into him the moment we stepped through the front doors, insisting he sit for the detention she didn't quite officially give him back at class."

"Uh oh. I take it that didn't go very well."

Set snorted. "My host was either blind to the constant baiting she was doing, or refused to back down to her. What could have been a rather – dare I say, mundane – evening turned into a battle of words and will that lasted until only an hour or so ago."

Yugi frowned. "What did she have him do?"

"Lines," said Set angrily, "Because he refused to hand over his technology. If he was capable of putting aside his dislike for her altogether when he first set foot in her garish office, both of those choices may have been avoided."

"Lines? That was it? That doesn't sound so bad."

Set pointed to his opposite hand. "Her quill forces the writer to use blood instead of ink, carving the words written onto the back of their hand. The words fade and the wound healed, but then once the quill is used for the next line, the cycle begins anew. Luckily, even though he sat in that room for hours, his hand is only red from irritation. The final writing of the lines did not scar."

Yugi's jaw dropped. That was an allowable punishment? "And he...just put up with it?"

Set threw his hands up. "He forced her hand into an ultimatum. There was no way he would have given up his phone or his computer, so that was his only option. If he would have just put aside his arrogance and contempt for just one evening, this could have all been avoided."
"Professor McGonagall believes she has been trying to get information out of us since the school year began," said Yugi.

"It makes sense. She seemed like she was asking probing questions under false sweetness and concern, but you know how stubborn Seto is." Set crossed his arms and glared at his host.

"Yeah…"

"When Seto wakes, I'm sure he will go over the details of the journey home. But for now, put your mind at ease. Your grandfather is fine, as are your friends."

Yugi let out a relieved exhale. "Oh, good!"

Set nodded. "Seto called on your grandfather once the sun rose this morning. Well, over in Japan at any rate. They discussed something technical that I didn't quite understand, so you will have to ask him about it. He did say that he was going to work on your phone this week, as well as your diadhank."

Yugi blinked. "My what?"

Set gestured to his arm. "Apologies. The contraption you use to duel. In my time, they were called diadhanks, and they called forth monsters from the ancient stones to do battle."

"Oh, duel disks," Yugi laughed quietly. "That would be great."

"He has been itching for a match with you for some time now, but he has been having trouble getting the dia – ahem, duel disks to work here at the castle."

"I wonder why that is…” Yugi mused. "The phone and the laptop seemed to be okay."

Set shook his head. "That is all well beyond my scope of expertise. If you are curious, Seto should be up by midday."

"That's okay," said Yugi. He grabbed his toothbrush as Ryou began to stir. "A duel with duel disks sounds amazing. We haven't done that in so long. It's been weird getting used to tabletop play again.” He peered around Set and frowned. "…He wasn't having more nightmares, was he?"

"Seto? No," said Set. "But I did, in a sense, put him under for a few hours; otherwise he would never get any rest. The evening had him wound too tightly for him to fall asleep on his own. If it was up to him, he would probably work himself straight through the day without any sleep. And after staying awake through the night in Japan, and then again through the same time here, it was about time he went to bed himself. We both know what he is like when his steam finally runs out."

Yugi nodded and moved towards their bathroom. "And I did make that promise to Mokuba…"

"As did I," said Set.

Set had disappeared back into the Millennium Rod by the time Yugi finished readying himself for the day. Without a class until Divination that afternoon, it seemed Ryou decided to stay in bed this morning as well. Closing the door quietly behind him, he made his way down to the common room where he found Harry and Hermione sitting at one of the tables near the dying fire. Harry was looking over his map of the school, and Hermione was mixing a few liquids together to pour into a bowl.

"Morning," said Harry.
"Hi," said Yugi. "You're up early."

Harry shrugged. "I've been trying to tail Malfoy on the Map. He seems to wander off around breakfast and dinner, but I haven't caught him yet."

Hermione shook her head. "Honestly, you should just give it up, Harry."

"I know he's up to something, Hermione. I can feel it. And I am going to find out what it is, even if I have to stay up all night."

"Oh, don't do that," Yugi grimaced. "You'll turn into Kaiba."

Hermione sighed. "One grump among us is plenty."

/If I didn't know better…/ Yami mused. /That potion she's mixing together looks familiar to the stuff Dumbledore had when he first visited us back in Domino…/

/Yeah…kind of…/

"It is," said Hermione brightly when Yugi asked her about it, "After you went to bed last night, I was sitting up finishing that Charms essay, and Harry saw Seto return on the Map with Professor Dumbledore."

"So you know he had detention with Professor Umbridge too?"

They nodded. "I assumed she gave him lines," said Hermione, "It's all she seems to dish out, and Harry knows more than anyone the nightmare of using that hellish quill of hers. I made this for him last year, too. I just wasn't sure if Seto would want or need it, so I'm making a batch just in case."

Yugi thought back. "I saw Set briefly this morning. He said Kaiba's hand didn't scar or anything, so I take that as a good sign?"

"Oh, good." Hermione said, relieved. "Then once this is mixed, I can store it away for another time…unless he still wants it for pain. After all, it's probably only a matter of time before Harry ends up in detention this year. It's a miracle he hasn't antagonized anyone yet."

"It's weird…I wasn't really worried about that meeting with Dumbledore before, but now I'm sort of nervous about the whole thing," said Yugi, plucking a piece of fuzz off of his sleeve.

"Why?" asked Harry.

Yugi shrugged. "I think it's just from how easily Professor Umbridge just grabbed hold of Kaiba last night and had him sit for a detention he shouldn't have had in the first place. What if she's at that meeting tonight? Professor McGonagall made it seem like Umbridge doesn't know the truth about us. And…that's not really something I want her to know about. What if she still has ties to the Ministry, and they think we're too dangerous, just because of that one freak-out in her classroom."

"Well, she does have ties to the Ministry, but I don't think she has the sway with the current Minister as she did when Fudge was still in power," said Hermione, "That's why we're all a bit confused as to why she's here since it goes against Scrimgeour's agenda."

"She's gotta still be playing spy for someone, it's just that much more worrisome because we don't know who it is," said Harry. "If I was hauled off by centaurs and chased out of the school by the resident poltergeist, I wouldn't want to come back, either. And we all know how she hates teaching us anything useful."
"I really don't want her getting nosy about the Puzzle. Or any of the Millennium Items," said Yugi. "Set said she tried to take his phone away, and that's how got to writing lines instead."

"She tried to take his phone?" said Harry, "Why?"

Yugi shrugged. "Set didn't say. I would assume because it went off in class, and she was trying to set some kind of example – to who, I haven't a clue, since he's the only one who would carry one on him, but I guess that's Professor Umbridge for you."

"I can see why he wouldn't give that up," said Hermione.

"Yeah…but if she wanted to punish him that way, what's to say she won't go for the Puzzle, or Ryou's Ring? There's no telling who she might be involved with in the Ministry of Magic," said Yugi worriedly, "What if one of the Millennium Items falls into the wrong hands? I don't know if we would be able to keep her from getting them if a situation escalated."

"I'm sure Professor Dumbledore will be on your side," said Harry, "After everything last year, I'm pretty sure he doesn't have too much love for the government."

"I hope," said Yugi. He glanced up at the clock on the wall. "So…breakfast?"

Hermione nodded. "Let me put the murtlap away and then I'll go down with you."

Harry shook his head. "I'm gonna wait for Ron. Oh, Yugi – don't forget, we're doing Quidditch practice this Saturday. Make sure you okay it with Madame Hooch to sign out a school broom before then."

Yugi smiled. "Right."

"I'm surprised Ryou isn't up yet," said Hermione as they exited the portrait hole. "He's usually an early riser."

"Yeah, I know," said Yugi, "But he doesn't have class until after lunch today, and can sleep in, unlike the rest of us. And Kaiba just went to bed, so who knows when he'll get up. Worst case, I'll see him in our remedial Charms class this afternoon. At least Set told me that Grandpa and the others are okay, so I don't have to worry about that all day."

"Oh, that's great news," said Hermione. "I suppose you'll have to wait to get the whole story though."

Yugi nodded. "Yep." The descended the steps from the fourth floor when Yugi pointed to someone on one of the floating staircases moving upwards. "Hey…isn't that Malfoy?"

"Yes," said Hermione. "Oh, Yugi – please don't tell me you're going to turn into Harry on this. We were going to review our Ancient Runes notes before class began."

"I know…I just figured maybe Harry would let it go if he knew where Malfoy went."

Hermione sighed loudly. "Harry was looking at the Marauders Map when we left. He probably is already watching him. Please, Yugi. One Harry is bad enough."

"Okay, okay. I'm coming."

~~*~~

"You gotta eat, mate," said Ron, watching Ryou push his fork around his plate.
"I'm really not hungry," said Ryou, "I'm just…a mess."

"Yugi was nerves this morning too," said Hermione. "You just need to get your mind off it – you're just going to make yourself sick over it."

"I can't – you don't know him," said Ryou, "It took years for him to treat me like a…a person, and not just a vessel for his spirit. And frankly, I don't know if he's really changed all that much. All she has to do is say something, anything, and he's going to go all Shadow Realm on her, I just know it."

"We'll be there to support you," said Yugi, "He won't do it again."

Ryou pushed his dinner plate away. "What's to stop him, hm? What could you possibly use as a deterrent so I don't get kicked out of Hogwarts?"

"I would offer to leave the Ring with Set, considering the two's history, but that wouldn't be fair on Set, Kaiba wouldn't take the Ring in the first place, and it would just find its way back to around your neck anyways," said Yugi. "So…in the end…I got nothing."

"Exactly."

Seto didn't look up from the lab development report he was reading as he sat down next to them. "Remind him that any punishment with Professor Umbridge involves sitting in her ill-decorated office for the majority of the night, surrounded by an overabundance of lace-covered surfaces, pink walls and annoying kitten plates."

Yugi pushed a plate towards him. "I was wondering when you would surface today, outside of Charms. Have you been in the library all day?"

"I've been working."

"Your hand isn't sore anymore, is it?" asked Harry. Just thinking back to all of his detentions from the previous year made the scar on the back of his hand itch.

Seto turned the page. Despite the words slicing into his skin all night long, it didn't faze him as much as he expected it to. Perhaps there was one thing from his harsh education under Gozaburo that he could be thankful for. "I have a high pain tolerance."

"So…Set gave me the abbreviated version, but is everything okay at home?"

"For the most part. Dumbledore agrees with me that this was a probably a test to see how I would react. Whoever apparated onto the property didn't stay long enough to do anything, and they left before security could reach them."

"But you don't know who it was?" asked Ryou.

Seto shook his head. "Security cameras couldn't get a clear picture in the dark."

Harry frowned. "Didn't they make it so no one could just apparate to your homes?"

"This was a house I barely visit. I never told Dumbledore about it."

"Then how did those wizards find it?" said Hermione, "That doesn't make any sense."

"Someone was digging into my affairs," said Seto, thinking back to the report Roland had given him the previous night. "It's the only way they would have found out about that address, and the probe
originated somewhere in Britain."

He looked up from his report and over to Yugi. "I spoke to your grandfather this morning. He's fine, if not concerned. Give me your phone when we get back to the common room and I'll have it working again."

Yugi's eyes lit up. "Really? Just like that?"

"It's no use the way it is, unless you like having a useless paperweight." Seto said. "I haven't had the opportunity to get it running yet. Duel disks are going to take some more time. For some reason, I can get it to activate, but it won't project the holograms. I'm going to need to work on the emitters. Don't expect to do any hardcore dueling until after my next scheduled visit home."

"O-okay." Yugi bit his lip. "You didn't happen to see Joey or the others, have you?"

"No. But after tomorrow, you can check up on them yourself."

"Hem, hem."

Hermione jumped – Umbridge had appeared right behind her. "Professor?" The others looked surprised as well – how did she manage to get the drop on all of them?

"Oh, I'm sorry dear, I didn't mean to startle you," said Umbridge sweetly, patting her shoulder, though the smug look on her face told otherwise. Sneaking up on them while they were all huddled together was exactly what she had been going for.

"Um, is there something you needed, Professor?" asked Yugi.

"I'm here to gather you three for our little meeting with the Headmaster," said Umbridge. "Or have you forgotten already?"

"Well, no," said Yugi, "But I thought dinner would have finished first."

"I'm afraid the Headmaster has a great many things to do this evening, as do I. And I expect you in my office afterwards, Mr. Kaiba, for our next little session."

"But we have Transfiguration after dinner, Professor," said Ryou, "Professor McGonagall is expecting us after the meeting."

"Yes, yes, and I've already informed her of his absence. The messages I am trying to relay will not truly be understood without proper repetition, now will they?"

Seto sighed and massaged his temples. This was going to be a long night.

"Come along children. The sooner we finish with the Headmaster, the sooner I can return you to Professor McGonagall."

//Stay calm. Try not to lose your temper at her again.// Set chided. //Or you're never going to have your evenings back.//

//She's doing this on purpose, in case Dumbledore doesn't side with her. It doesn't matter that I had nothing to do with what happened in her class on Friday. She's going take her frustration out on me instead.//

//Yes I know…but if you can make it through tonight without getting another detention, perhaps she'll
get off all of our backs for a while. / 

/Was that supposed to be optimism? Because none of those things are probably going to happen./ 

Set crossed his arms. /Just sit there and write her lines. The wounds will heal. If you can't go one evening without antagonizing her, then perhaps I'll sit for that detention. It's not as if she could tell the difference between us, and it would keep you out of her office./ 

/Absolutely not./ 

Set sighed and walked back into his soul room. /Will there ever be a time you relinquish control to me?/ 

/So long as I have a say – no./ 

Ryou nudged Seto's arm as they walked down the third floor corridor. "He's wondering if you're absolutely sure he can't use the Shadow Realm," he whispered, "Just for her." 

Seto rolled his eyes. 

"Hm? Anything you'd like to share, Mr. Bakura?" asked Umbridge. 

"Huh – oh, no Professor," said Ryou, turning red. "I just told him I would take a set of notes down for him since he'll miss Transfiguration."

"Ah." She stopped them in front of a stone gargoyle at the end of the hallway. "Cockroach clusters!"

They watched as the gargoyle leapt aside revealing a winding staircase leading upwards. A set of heavy doors sat at the top. "In you go, boys."

Professor Dumbledore was seated behind his desk. How he managed to beat them to his office when he had been in the Great Hall when they left, Yugi will never understand. Maybe, being the Headmaster, he knew a sneaky path up to his office. Or, like most things – the answer was simply magic!

"Good evening, gentlemen. Dolores." Dumbledore nodded at them. "Please, have a seat."

Umbridge magicked her own (pink) armchair off to the side of his desk as the three students took seats in front of it.

Dumbledore clasped his hands together casually in his lap. "I do apologize it has taken several days for us to gather, and that this is the first I have checked in with you upon your arrival. Have you adjusted well to the school?"

Yugi looked both at Seto and Ryou before nodding. "I think so."

"Very good! I understand it that you have made the Gryffindor Quidditch Team, Mr. Muto. Well done."

"Thank you," said Yugi, "But I'm just an on-call player. I don't think I'll end up in one of the games."

"Do not sell yourself short, my friend," said Dumbledore, "To make the team in such a short time is exemplary!" His eyes twinkled. "I am sure you will do wonders out on the Pitch."
He turned to Seto. "I have heard from your professors that you are excelling splendidly in your classes, Mr. Kaiba, Transfiguration and Arithmancy in particular. For one so new and resistant to magic, that is quite an achievement for such difficult subjects. Bravo."

Dumbledore smiled at Ryou, "Mr. Bakura, Professor Trelawney tells me you are quite a gifted student at Divination. Is there a particular part of the subject that interests you the most?"

Ryou tilted his head thoughtfully. "Cartomancy, I think. I've held a deck before coming to Hogwarts."

"Ah, excellent." Dumbledore's smile faltered a bit. "Unfortunately, we are not gathered here to discuss your varying successes here. Professor Umbridge has made me aware of an incident that occurred in her classroom Friday afternoon concerning a boggart. I have already heard her recollection of events, and now I would like your story. Who would like to share?"

Seto leaned back in his seat and looked over at Yugi and Ryou. The only part the story he had heard was that the Shadow Realm had been summoned during Umbridge's class. Having already been in a terrible mood upon returning from Japan, dealing with Harry the moment he stepped foot in the common room, and getting his phone turned back on consumed all of his time over the weekend. He had never bothered to get the full account from Yugi or Ryou. This should be interesting.

Ryou looked down at his lap. Already upset over the incident landing them here in the first place, bringing up the memory of it in his mind – and by extension, the memory of the Spirit when he was first released, was making him more upset than he realized. How many times would have to relive this over and over?

Yugi cleared his throat. "Well…like I'm sure Professor Umbridge told you, we were supposed to review repelling boggarts. We were all in a line and one by one had to fight it with the 'Riddikulus' charm. Harry went right before us and it turned into this big, ghostly…" he trailed off, not sure how to really describe the Dementor.

"A Dementor," said Dumbledore, "I am aware of Mr. Potter's boggart. Please, continue."

"Okay, well, he cast some other spell at it, and that nearly drove it back into its cabinet. But Bakura was one step too far in front of everyone else and the thing turned to him and changed form right when Professor Umbridge was going to wrap up the class."

Yugi looked to Ryou. Would Ryou pick up the tale, or should he continue to narrate?

"Mr. Bakura?" Dumbledore said gently, "Might you share what happened?"

"I already told you what happened in the classroom, Headmaster," said Umbridge. If the boy wasn't going to speak up, it time she made her voice heard. "The boy is clearly afraid of some inner demon, and he summoned some dark cloud that swallowed the entire room – and the boggart – before returning us back to the classroom. It came from those gaudy gold artifacts they wear."

"It was an accident," said Ryou, looking nervously at Umbridge before turning back to Dumbledore. "He – I – didn't mean to."

"Ah." Dumbledore turned to Umbridge. "Dolores, would you mind leaving the room for a moment?"

"Headmaster?"

Dumbledore gestured to the door. "Just for a moment," he repeated, "I would like Ryou to feel
comfortable sharing what has happened. I fear your presence is making him feel otherwise. Rest assured I will listen openly and impartially."

"I – but –"

Dumbledore held up a hand to cease her stuttering, "Mr. Bakura has shared something most private with me once before, and I will uphold that security. Please." He led her out and closed the door behind her, casting a silent charm on the door.

"Rest assured she will not be able to hear our conversation," said Dumbledore to the three students. "I'm afraid with continued ties to the Ministry; Professor Umbridge still may not be trustworthy."

"Then why is she here?" said Seto.

"A story for another day, I'm afraid," said Dumbledore once he was settled back behind his desk. "Now, Mr. Bakura. Are you able to tell me what transpired in your class?"

"My boggart…was him," Ryou sniffed. "Only it was a different version of him, the way he was when I first bonded with the Millennium Ring – or when the Ring bonded with me. I – I had tried so hard to forget…"

Bakura phased out of the Millennium Ring next to his host, arms crossed, and glared at Dumbledore. 
"I summoned the Shadow Realm, not my host."

Dumbledore blinked. He was staring at both the spirit and Ryou at the same time. This didn't seem possible back when he had met the three in Japan. Perhaps it was the magic of the school that allowed this. Interesting.

"Please, Professor, he did it to protect me," said Ryou, "I had lost it… I was scared, and he – It – was coming at me with a knife, and I forgot what I was supposed to do…"

"In his defense, Professor," said Yugi, "Professor Umbridge really didn't give us time to practice the counter spell. She just verified we all knew what it was and sent the creature loose on us."

"And what happened afterwards? When the Shadows were summoned?" said Dumbledore.

"I banished the monster into it and took us back," Bakura snapped, "In all it was less than a minute. I didn't leave anyone there, if that's what you're wondering. No students were harmed."

"I begged for him not to do it," said Ryou.

"Quiet." Bakura snapped at him before turning back to Dumbledore. "I was protecting my host," he said angrily, "And I would do it again if necessary. This mess could have been avoided if your instructors knew how to teach."

Dumbledore sighed. "There are always alternatives. Perhaps another student could have jumped in to distract it, or assisted with the proper spell. However, the damage has been done. Professor Umbridge will not take this lightly, regardless of how I choose to treat this situation."

"That thing could have killed him, and everyone else in the room would have just stood there and watched," Bakura snarled.

Dumbledore loudly cleared his throat. "Alternatives, Mr. Bakura. I understand your gut reflex is to deal with these situations as you are normally accustomed, but I have made it quite clear that the Shadow Realm is not to be used here in the castle. I understand that no one was harmed by their brief
visit to that realm, but it cannot continue. I was given your word that this would not happen. I will not dole out any punishment today, but I will not be forgiving next time. The damage is already done."

Ryou looked up. "Professor?"

"Dolores Umbridge has seen both the Shadow Realm, and your alternate selves. I have tried to keep her from finding the truth, in case she is in league with anyone in the Ministry with other ulterior motives, but what's done is done. She will demand answers, and the last thing any of us need is for the Ministry of Magic to get involved."

"Why?" Yugi asked.

"Minister Scrimgeour is about placating the people. The more arrests, the more it seems we are turning the tide in the war. Depending who has Professor Umbridge's ear in the Ministry, they may either treat your Millennium Items and powers as a godsend for their war effort, or a danger to us all."

"So he's making himself look better than the last leader by jailing anyone and everyone? How is that right?" said Yugi. How was that right in the slightest!?

"Whether or not we're truly dangerous is beside the matter now, isn't it? Didn't our admittance here have to go through your government?" said Seto. "If they thought we were going to be just as troublesome as Voldemort, they never should have allowed us here in the first place."

"You are correct, in part. But they were not truly aware of your abilities at the time. Therefore I must advise you to proceed with caution. We cannot undo what Dolores or any of the other students have seen, but we can prevent this from happening again. If the Ministry interferes at Hogwarts again, there will be only so much I can do to protect you. Now, I will ask again, and only once more, before I let Dolores back into the room. Do I have your word, all of you, that outside of anything that may come up in this office this evening that this Shadow Realm and banishing of creatures will not happen again?"

He waited for them all to agree before standing up. "Very good." With a quick wand wave at the door, he readmitted Professor Umbridge as Bakura disappeared back into the Millennium Ring. "Thank you for your patience, Dolores. I believe I have heard everything I needed."

"So you agree that these two put us all in danger. Their strange golden jewelry are cursed, full of dark magic that puts us all at risk!"

"Now, now," said Dumbledore. "Do not jump to conclusions." He turned to Yugi and Bakura. "This Shadow Realm, how do you summon it?"

Yugi blinked. "Professor?"

"In order to truly understand the depths of Dolores accusations, and your insistence that it was in defense, I would like to see this realm for myself. Can you summon it in the same manner as the previous time?"

Ryou swallowed nervously and nodded.

/Stop. Let me do it./

Yugi watched as the Ring activated against Ryou's chest and the room darkened, bathed in shadow.
"Yes, this is exactly what it was," said Umbridge, rubbing at her arms. It certainly got cold in this place.

"There aren't any monsters here," said Yugi. Not now, at least. "The boggart...is here somewhere, I think."

"You think?" said Umbridge. "You don't know?"

"The Shadow Realm is what the caster makes of it," said Yugi, "This is just for show, so there isn't anything here except the shadows themselves."

Dumbledore looked around before holding up his withered hand. "Alright, that is quite enough."

"Where does this Shadow Realm come from?" said Umbridge as the room returned to normal, "Is it that necklace? How did that get past the search at the start of term?"

"I was wearing it, just like Yugi wears his. They're old relics passed down. They're not dangerous...most of the time." Ryou hugged his arms to his chest. "I'm sorry if I scared you in class, Professor. It was an accident. I wasn't prepared to fight the boggart. Yugi was only trying to help me."

Umbridge scowled. "Professor Dumbledore, I insist we confiscate these strange relics immediately. This may have been an accidental use of what seems to be dangerous magic, but what's to say the next time won't be an accident? These items and their mysterious power could pose a threat to the school. I'm sure the Unspeakables in the Department of Mysteries would have a right time diving into the secrets of these artifacts."

Yugi visibly paled. The last time he was parted from the Millennium Puzzle, it ended up shattered in a burning warehouse.

"That won't be necessary," said Dumbledore, "I can attest to the security of these Items, and the safety of the school. I have given these students my word that they can keep them, under the strict knowledge that Shadow Magic was not to be used. And it would appear that they were not the only ones at fault that day, Dolores. I cannot force you to teach your classes any certain way, but may I advise review of counter spells and jinxes before subjecting the students to any more dark creatures. That should help prevent another occurrence in the future."

Umbridge opened her mouth to speak again, but Dumbledore silenced her with a stern look. "That is my final say on this matter. Mr. Muto, Mr. Bakura, you two are free to go to your Transfiguration lesson – or what would remain of it. There is another matter Professor Umbridge and I need to discuss with Mr. Kaiba."

"Thanks," said Yugi, getting up. "Oh – I have a question. I don't know if I should ask you or Professor McGonagall...but are we allowed to visit Hogsmeade Village? We never got permission slips to get signed."

"Ah," said Dumbledore with a smile. "Seeing as only one of you truly lives with a parent or guardian, I have waived that little snag. Headmaster's privilege."

Umbridge's jaw dropped.

Ryou's eyes lit up. He had been worried all this time that he would have to track down his father in who-knows-where to get a permission slip signed before the end of next week, so not having to do that was a huge relief off his shoulders. "Really?"
"Yes," said Dumbledore, ignoring the perplexed look Umbridge was giving him. "So long as you do not abuse that privilege, I will allow you to go without a form."

"Thank you, Professor!"

"You are welcome," said Dumbledore. "Now, off you get."

Yugi whispered to Ryou as the door closed behind them. "I think we got off super lucky."

Ryou nodded, wide-eyed. "I think you're right. Umbridge isn't getting her way at all."

Yugi shook his head as they exited the entrance to the Headmaster's Office and hurried towards the Transfiguration classroom. "I think you're right. Umbridge isn't getting her way at all."

Yugi shook his head as they exited the entrance to the Headmaster's Office and hurried towards the Transfiguration classroom. "But I have a feeling she's going to make the rest of Kaiba's night a nightmare instead."

"Now, Mr. Kaiba," said Dumbledore, calmly, "If I understand correctly, you have taken up a rather large endeavor over the past month."

Seto stiffened in his seat. "You could say that."

"Electronics simply do not work on the grounds."

"There are radios in the common room. Explain that."

"Those radios broadcast to the Wizarding Wireless Network."

Seto looked at Umbridge. "And your point? It's built like a Muggle radio, but it obviously can't work like one. So why is it so hard to believe that a different piece of Muggle technology is working here?"

"The radios in the common room are not the same as the Muggle invention," Dumbledore explained, "They merely look the part. They are run entirely on magic. Electronics simply are not capable of working here at Hogwarts. There is simply too much interference."

Seto raised an eyebrow and pulled his phone from his pocket. He pressed the button on the side to wake it up and turned the screen towards both of his professors. "I can assure you that this works perfectly."

Dumbledore leaned forward, intrigued. "How did you manage that? Not that anyone previously had a reason to make Muggle technology work on the grounds, but that is supposed to be impossible."

"It wasn't an impossibility," said Seto, "It was a challenge."

"Regardless of what it was or wasn't," said Umbridge, "Working technology on the castle grounds disrupts the protective enchantments around the school, keeping it hidden from Muggle detection. Just how many of the wards did you knock down to get your little toys working?"

"None," said Seto coolly. "I didn't break down any of them. I worked around them – and no, you don't get to know how I did it."

"Can the school's security be compromised by your working technology?"

Seto shook his head. "No. The only way that would be possible is if someone used global positioning to find my exact location and knew that the school was here. There's only one person who would have a need to do that, and that's my brother. That's a moot point anyway, because he already knows where I am. He wouldn't need to use Muggle technology to come find me, he could..."
arrange visitation with the wizards stationed at home."

Seto sighed and crossed his arms. "I read the laws before doing any of this. Nothing was broken, no wards were breached."

"Can we really trust that the Statute of Secrecy isn't being broken?" said Umbridge loudly, "Perhaps your devices need to be thoroughly examined. You are a new wizard, Mr. Kaiba, so it is highly unlikely you thought of everything in your little project."

Seto narrowed his eyes. "And I told you last night that there was no way you were getting your hands on any of it. This phone, my computer, any of it. They're not toys. I brought them to keep in contact with my brother and run my company."

"Which you can also do through conventional methods," said Umbridge.

"Please, your ideas of conventional methods are outdated. There's a reason why we stopped using carrier pigeons to send messages. Did you know it takes days to get an owl to fly to Japan? My brother is twelve. I can't check up on him by waiting a week for a message to get home and back, if I'm lucky." He tapped his fingers against his arm. "Portkeys are just as unreliable as birds, and I'm not setting up my fireplace to your Floo Network. Asking me to hand over my equipment is nearly equivalent of me asking you to give me your wands and still expect you to function in your society. Give it up."

He fixed his eyes on Dumbledore. "I may not be running the daily operations of my own company while I'm here, but you can't expect me to not check in on it. There are still matters that involve my attention wherever I happen to be. And it would look suspicious to the board of directors if I seemingly dropped off the face of the earth. As it is, I'm at some 'remote, unknown university' because I can't tell them I hopped on a plane to learn magic. If I broke all contact with them, there would be panic, and then, yes, someone would probably come looking for me."

"But –"

"And, like I told you last night, Professor McGonagall cleared my equipment when the year began. If she thought that they would bring Muggles down on your doorstep, she wouldn't have given any of it back to me."

"None of it was working at the time," said Umbridge, "She probably didn't know what any of it was."

"Alright, Dolores," said Dumbledore, sighing, "I'm afraid this has gone on long enough. I know very well that the protective magic around the school has not been broken, and so long as his equipment is not posing a disruption in class, I will not allow it to be taken." He turned to Seto. "I expect from this point forward that your devices will not intrude on any class, whether it be Defense Against the Dark Arts, or Herbology. I understand the need to keep contact in a dire situation, but for all other times, please keep it off or in your dormitory when in class. Otherwise, Professor Umbridge will have my authority for confiscation."

"Very well."

"And Dolores – please accept my humblest apologies. I should have made you and the rest of the staff aware of my agreement with Mr. Kaiba about his work prior to the start of term. Moving forward, I expect no punishment to be given on this matter unless it causes a clear distraction in your classroom." Dumbledore gazed at her over the top of his half-moon spectacles. "Do not let the matter linger."
Umbridge looked like she swallowed a lemon. "Yes, Headmaster."

"Well then," said Dumbledore, getting up and gesturing to the door. "We must let Mr. Kaiba return to what may be left of his Transfiguration lesson before the curfew sets in for the evening."

"On the contrary," said Umbridge, "Mr. Kaiba has detention with me this evening for his verbal lashing out in my classroom."

"Ah. I was made aware of that. Perhaps the delivery was not executed well, but his reasons were quite valid. In these times, I will not refuse any student their right to call upon their loved ones in a crisis. Put the matter to bed, Dolores. Tonight is the last to dwell on this topic. And in future, please do not schedule detentions during anyone's class. It would not do for any student to fall behind in a catching-up course."

Umbridge smiled sweetly at Dumbledore. "Of course." However, once her back was turned, the sugary smile instantly vanished. She led Seto out of Dumbledore's office and back towards her own.

"She certainly is pounding her feet against the floor isn't she? Set mused.

"She's mad for losing both of her complaints against us in Dumbledore's office."

"She's just going to take it out on you. Try not to rile her up any further this time."

"Hn."

"I am surprised you did not bring up the wizard break-in in Dumbledore's office."

"Of course I didn't. For all I know he had a hand in it."

"Alright, Mr. Kaiba, have a seat," said Umbridge, once they reached her office. She slammed the door shut behind them and sat behind her desk.

"How long am I supposed to write lines this time?" Seto said, dropping his laptop bag down next to him.

"That is up to you," said Professor Umbridge. She waved her wand and a new roll of parchment appeared in front of him, along with the black quill. "Seeing as I only have you for one more evening (for this offense, she said to herself), things are going to be done a little differently this time. We're going to play a little game. Now, now – don't give me that look, I understand you're quite good at them. Winning should come naturally to you."

Seto narrowed his eyes, guarded. "What kind of game?"

Umbridge gestured to the desk. "In front of you is a new sheet of parchment. I am going to ask you a series of questions. I expect you to answer them for me. For every upfront, honest answer, that parchment will shorten in size. If you refuse to answer at any time, do not answer satisfactorily, or lay upon me one of your quick-witted verbal attacks, the end of the parchment will grow. I will ask the questions only once. When I am finished, you will write lines across whatever parchment remains until the sheet is full."

"What happens if I answer all of your questions?"

Umbridge's smile widened. "You win the game. The parchment will disappear, and you will be free to go about your evening. It's that simple!"
"And…if I refuse the terms of your game?"

Umbridge let out a high-pitched giggle. "Oh my, you are a glutton for punishment, aren't you?" She tapped her wand against the sheet of parchment and it more than quadrupled in size. "You will write lines on that until the words sink so deep that you don't ever forget them, or it will be time for your first morning class, whichever comes first."

/It looks like you don't have much of a choice. It's either lines...or more lines./

Sighing, Seto laid his arms on the rests of the chair and stretched his legs out in front of him. "Very well," he grumbled, "…start your game."

"See, things are so much easier when you are agreeable," said Umbridge, returning the parchment to its original size. She smiled warmly. "Would you like tea before we begin?"

"No."

"Alright." She poured herself a cup and scooped some of her hideous pink sugar crystals into it. "Let's ease into things. I will start simple." She held her wand over the parchment. "Your brother's name?"

"Mokuba. Why is that important?"

Umbridge shrugged. "It isn't. I'm giving you easy points, be grateful." She tapped her wand, and the parchment shortened up about an inch. "How long have you been in control of your company?"

"Over two years."

"Good, good," said Umbridge, scribbling down notes, "Quite an accomplishment considering your age. And your birthday?"

Seto pinched the bridge of his nose. "Is there a point to this line of questioning?"

Umbridge raised an eyebrow and moved her wand closer to the parchment. "Is that a refusal to answer? And on something so simple, tut tut."

He glared at her. "October 25th."

"See, that wasn't so difficult. Mind that temper or you're never going to win this game. I take it you'll be seventeen in a few weeks?"

"Yes."

"Good, very good," said Umbridge, watching as the parchment got a little smaller. "Any romantic interests?"

That was so out of left field that if Seto had been drinking, he would have spat it out. "Excuse me?"

"Many of the female students here seem infatuated with you. Look at yourself; as a tall, good-looking young man, you must have no trouble at all finding a date."

"I have no time nor desire for romantic entanglements," said Seto stiffly. "Not that this is any of your business."

"No…" Umbridge said, making more notes on her own parchment. "I suppose not."
"Ask about something else."

Umbridge pouted dramatically. "Did I touch a sore spot?"

"My private life is my concern, not yours. Move on."

"As you wish." She put down her quill, clasped her hands on the desk next to it. "You're doing so well, Seto." She smirked as he stiffened at her use of his given name. "What an improvement you've made over last night!"

Seto drummed his fingers against the arm rest.

"Now…" Umbridge leaned forward. "Tell me about Mr. Muto's necklace."
Yugi and Hermione, still sitting in the common translating sheets of runes from their morning class, were surprised to see Seto return to the tower before they had all gone to bed. He stormed through the portrait hole, and if it hadn't been for Yugi calling out his name, he would have crossed the common room and disappeared up to the dormitory without speaking to anyone.

"Kaiba," Yugi repeated, and held out some parchment. "These are the notes we took and a practice assignment from Professor McGonagall."

Seto looked them over; giving a slight nod that Yugi took as the closest he would get to a thank you.

Hermione smiled meekly and pushed across the table a prepared bowl of murtlap essence. "It looks like you need it."

Seto closed his eyes, sighed, and sank down in the chair opposite Yugi. He rolled his shirt sleeve up before sinking his hand down into the murky liquid, feeling the immediate soothing relief to his irritated skin.

"Why didn't you say anything to Professor McGonagall or Professor Dumbledore? You just let her do this to you?" asked Hermione, "They wouldn't let this continue."

Set phased out of the Millennium Rod, arms crossed beside his host. "It's a matter of pride. Seto is unfortunately too strong-willed to ask anyone for help. This was a battle of wits, and there was no way he was going to show any vulnerability to anyone – least of all her."

With his left hand still submerged in the bowl, Seto reached down with the other and pulled his Charms assignment from his bag. "Believe what you wish about me," said Seto coldly, glaring at the spirit from the corner of his eye. "You don't know anything."

Hermione watched them. There was something going on behind the scenes that she and Yugi weren't quite privy to. Did Seto and Set still not get along? "She didn't give you another one, did she?"

"No."

"I don't understand what giving you lines is going to prove, to be honest," said Yugi, "It's not like you get on her bad side on purpose, all the time."

Seto shook his head and dropped his quill onto the desk. "You don't get it. None of you," he added, turning angrily to Set. "Like the last time, I had a choice. I could sit there and write lines until my fingers fell off, or I could play her ridiculous game of Twenty Questions to find out her angle. "He leaned forward and narrowed his eyes at Yugi. "Do you want to know why she's been taking her wrath out on me? For something so incredibly minor it's laughable? Face it; you and Bakura caused
more mayhem with that boggart than I did with that one phone call. Did she give either of you detention for that? No. Haven't you wondered why that was?"

Yami phased out of the Puzzle behind Yugi. "Why?"

Seto focused his glare at the Pharaoh. "You. And the pest living in the Millennium Ring. The majority of the questions she asked me were about you two. Maybe if you didn't freak her out with your little spook show she would have gone after her answers directly. But she doesn't think I have the same...problems as you and therefore safe to interrogate to her heart's content."

Yami nodded thoughtfully. "The Millennium Rod – she doesn't know you have it, or Set. She probably has you pegged as an entitled rich snob used to getting his way all the time."

Seto rolled his eyes. "I didn't realize you thought such nice things about me."

Hermione cleared her throat nervously. "So...how much information did she get?"

"She didn't get anything," Seto snapped, "And unless she gets over her fear of Yugi and Bakura's Items, she won't by grilling me."

Yami chuckled. "She obviously had no idea how much of an iron will you have."

Seto lifted his hand out of the bowl and twisted it around so Yami could see how red it still was. "I didn't put up with torturing myself just to be difficult. This isn't just about my pride. This is about survival. You can't trust Umbridge with knowing about the Millennium Items any more than any other adult in this school. She knows now she can't get information out of me, so unless she sits you down in her office, she's going to have to be a lot more tactful with how she investigates."

He glowered at Set. "You think I didn't say anything because this was a battle of wills? You don't know what sort of damage she might have caused just by knowing what those Items do. Quite frankly, it may have been a mistake to even come here in the first place."

Hermione's jaw dropped. "What? How can you say that – Professor Dumbledore is offering you protection!"

Yami thought back to their original encounters with Dumbledore. "He wanted to protect us...while giving us the chance to fight wizards on their own terms."

"Look how well that's going so far. In one month, how much protective magic have we actually learned. And don't pull the whole 'new student' garbage," he said, more to Hermione than anyone else. "Professor Umbridge isn't going to teach us anything of value. She's doing more or less everything you said she did last year – only now she's added to throwing dark creatures at you under the expectation that you can fight them off. It's nothing new, technically, since you've seen them all before."

"You're right...but it's hard to imagine her doing anything else," said Hermione.

"Dumbledore's not a perfect saint either," said Seto, "Despite not giving us a reasonable way for us to learn defensive magic, he's also prohibiting us from using the magic we already know. What's the point of us coming here to be able to protect ourselves if we're cut off from all the ways to do it? We could have stayed home and would have been no worse off than we are now."

"So what do you expect we do?" said Yugi.

Yami pointed towards Yugi's wand, sitting beside his Ancient Runes homework. "Perhaps Harry
will still be willing to teach us. We'll just have to find a suitable time and place where we won't get interrupted."

"Then ask him in the morning," said Seto irritably. He stood up from the table and gathered his things together. After a quick nod of thanks to Hermione for the bowl of murtlap, he stalked upstairs.

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Professor Umbridge didn't bother them for the remainder of the week, something Ryou was quite thankful for. She wasn't anywhere to be found at the breakfast table Saturday morning, so hopefully that meant she wouldn't be sneaking up on them again. It didn't stop him from sitting angled slightly so that the main entrance to the Great Hall would be in his sights.

"I don't see why you're so nervous," said Ryou, to Yugi, as they ate, "The hard part is done – you've made the Quidditch team…well, sort of."

"I know," said Yugi, "But it's the first practice of the year. What if I'm complete trash?"

"You did alright in tryouts though," said Ron, "And just remember – you're a relief. Harry's letting you in on practices, but you probably won't make it to the first game of the season – not unless one of the chasers either bows out or gets hurt. There usually aren't any substitutions while a match is in progress, so if someone gets hit by a bludger and they go down, the team will just be a man short."

Yugi frowned around his toast. "Maybe I would feel better if I wasn't using one of the old brooms. They really do seem to have a mind of their own…and I don't think they like me very much."

"Eh, they didn't like me either," said Ron, "I remember my first year's first flying lesson. The broom just rolled over on the ground before it finally jumped up and almost broke my nose."

"Maybe you can buy one next weekend at Hogsmeade," said Hermione. "I think there's a broom shop there. Harry and Ron could probably point out what are the better brands to get."

Yugi nodded. "I'm looking forward to going. Maybe there will be something there I can send home to Joey and the others." He turned to Ryou. "Are you going to come out and watch the practice?"

Ryou blinked. "Am I allowed?"

Harry nodded. "I can't seem to keep the Giggle Squad away, so you won't be an issue." He sighed over at the group of fifth-year Gryffindors a little ways down the table. "So long as you stay up in the stands, you should be safe."

Ryou nodded, glanced to the side and then leaned forward a bit to whisper to the others. "Does it seem like those girls are hanging around a bit too much recently?"

Hermione sighed. "That one there, with the brown curls? That's Romilda Vane. Ginny's been telling me she's got massive crushes, and that she's got a decent supply of love potions stashed in her trunk, courtesy of Fred and George. Remember? I told you about her during Quidditch tryouts."

Ron snorted. "Who's she got the hots for?"

"Originally? Harry. Although…there are rumors she has her eyes on you and your friends, Ryou," said Hermione. "Best to avoid them altogether."

Ryou bit his lip. "I don't think I want to be alone out on the Quidditch Pitch then, if they're going to follow me out there."
Bakura snorted. /Don't tell me you're afraid of a few girls. I remember this foolishness happened back at home, too. Why does this worry you?/

/The ones at Domino High only got so dangerous – but these girls? They have magic at their disposal! What if they drug my food or something when I'm not looking, or jinx me in the corridor?/

Bakura rolled his eyes. /Do you really think I would let something like that happen to you?/

Ryou tilted his head, thoughtfully. /I don't know, Spirit... I think you would find that quite funny./

/I would, don't get me wrong, but I have no intention of letting you make a fool of yourself that way. Why don't you go bug his High Holiness to sit out there with you, so the two of you can suffer together?/

/I couldn't ask that of him, Spirit, that wouldn't be fair. Kaiba surely has other things to do./

/Fine. Sit out there all alone, with your collection of stalkers down the row. I'll just sit back and watch with no interference./

"Why don't you ask Kaiba to join you outside?" asked Harry, as if he had read Ryou's mind. "That way you won't be alone."

"I'm sure he has his own agenda for the day," said Ryou, "Wherever he is."

"I could use the Map to find him before we go out," said Harry.

Hermione looked scandalized. "Harry!"

"What?"

"Perhaps he disappears all the time to the library or unused classrooms because he wants to be by himself. And you're just using that as an excuse to stalk Malfoy – who, by the way, is sitting over there at the Slytherin table. For once, why don't you just leave that Map back in the dormitory?"

"It's ok, really," said Ryou quickly. "You don't have to do that, Harry. If I wanted to find Kaiba, I could use the Ring and track down the Millennium Rod."


Yugi nodded and downed the rest of his pumpkin juice. "I think so. Catch you later, Hermione!"

"Bye," she smiled. "Have a good time at practice."

Ryou turned to her. "So what are you going to spend the time doing?"

"Professor Vector gave us a ton of Arithmancy homework this week, so I want to get a head start on that before our Transfiguration essays. I'll probably spend my day in the library."

Ryou grimaced. "That doesn't sound too much fun."

Hermione shrugged. "At least the subjects are enjoyable. If you get tired of watching their practice, come find me, and we can work on McGonagall's assignments."
"I thought you didn't like Ron asking you for help with the essays."

Hermione laughed, shaking her head. "No, Ron abuses my help. If you or Yugi, or even Seto asked for my assistance, I'd gladly give it, because I know you three won't ask me to write the essay in your stead. Ron's been cut off."

Ryou laughed and got up with her. "Oh, I see. Well, I'll know where to find you."

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Set phased out of the Millennium Rod and looked around the newest unused classroom Seto had chosen to hide away this time. His other half had set himself up at the table at the front of the room, far enough away from the door on the side that the noise from the corridors was muted out.

"What was wrong with the last room? The chairs looked more comfortable than the one you're sitting in."

Seto barely spared him a moment's glance as he looked over documents from a packet received in yesterday's owl post. "I didn't want to be found. Unless someone looks in every classroom on this wing of the castle, no one would know I'm here."

"No one knew you were in the last classroom either," said Set, "And if someone truly wanted to find us, all they would need is Bakura's Millennium Ring to track us down."

Seto twirled his pen between his fingers and turned the page of his report.

Set rolled his eyes. "Are you worried someone is looking for you – or watching you? Is that why you change your hiding place every day?"

Seto huffed, "I don't like being predictable."

Set snorted. "Predictable? You, my dear host, are such a creature of habit, that if someone opened a lexicon looking for the word 'predictable', your photo would appear next to it."

Seto put the papers down and shot Set a dark look. "Is there something you actually needed, or are you just bent on annoying me this morning?"

Set shook his head. "No, nothing in particular, though, I do wonder when you will pick up our lessons again. You haven't tapped into the Rod's power since the summer at the Weasley's home."

"I've chosen not to," said Seto, returning to his work, "And it's not like we're allowed to do anything related to the Millennium Items under this roof anyways. We're allowed out of the school so infrequently, there's almost no point to continue."

"You're not allowed to summon the Shadow Realm on a person," Set corrected, "And to be honest, you wouldn't have a reason to in any normal circumstance. Just being in the realm itself becomes a drain on your stamina if you aren't accustomed to it. Even Yugi Muto was deeply affected by his first trips into it."

Seto looked up. "How would you know that?"

"You don't think I twiddle my thumbs all night while you sleep, do you? The Pharaoh and I talk quite a bit. I had been curious of some of the adventures he had been on before our minds linked; of who else he had met with Millennium Items besides Bakura."
"Why?"

Set opened his mouth to speak, but paused. He closed his eyes briefly instead and then looked down at the floor. "You will think it ridiculous, but I was looking for the others."

"Who are the others?"

Set smiled sadly and held up his transparent version of the Millennium Rod. "The other Sacred Guardians. The Pharaoh locked away his soul to stop the darkness from destroying the lands millennia ago, and with it went his memories. I don't know why my soul, or at least a piece of it, was kept inside the Millennium Rod, but it has to be because the Pharaoh will need my help to keep the darkness from returning."

"You don't remember though."

Set shook his head. "No, I don't. I assume my memories are blocked to protect the same secrets the Pharaoh sealed away, but unless they return, I have no way of knowing for certain. But…there were six of us all those years ago. And..." He sighed. "If the Pharaoh had to seal himself away because it was the only way to stop the darkness – to stop Bakura – then obviously our combined efforts were not enough. How can we be expected to stop him again if I am the only Guardian to aid him, aligned with a host that won't even use his Millennium Item, or at the very least, grant me the ability to do so in his stead?"

"You still seem sure that Ryou's spirit is going to turn on all of us," Seto leaned back in his seat and put his papers down. He really didn't know what kind of run-in Set had with him in the past, and perhaps it was because Bakura didn't hang around Yugi as much as Joey Wheeler and the other cheerleaders, but the Spirit in the Millennium Ring hardly seemed to be as extremely dangerous as Set kept making him out to be.

"And I've said before, do not underestimate him. As he has said on more than one occasion, he is here purely for his host's benefit. We have no way of knowing just how much he remembers of his past life. Just by his reactions to the Pharaoh and myself, it is clear he remembers some things, as do I. But if he remembers everything, then he will be continuing his quest for the Millennium Items as he had done once before."

Set snorted. "I've told you more than once - I'm not afraid of him, and could probably take him with relative ease." When it came down to it, Ryou wasn't nearly as tall as he was, and he definitely wasn't built for a fight like his friends Wheeler and Taylor.

Set moved to stand right in front of Seto's desk. "In our current state, Bakura would overpower you in a heartbeat. He will fight dirty, and unless you know how to use our Millennium Rod to fight back against him, you might as well make things easy and painless and just hand it over to him once he comes for it, and he will come for it. It is only a matter of when."

"So your push for me to play your part as a modern Guardian isn't just to kick Voldemort to the curb."

The spirit gestured to Seto's wand sitting idly beside the open briefcase. "Your extreme proficiency with learning this type of magic will be fine against Voldemort, I'd imagine," said Set, "Despite our differences, I do agree with Bakura's statements that even if this Dark Lord of Britain managed to obtain a Millennium Item, he could hold no power over it. The Millennium Items had found their modern counterparts. My insistence on this subject is purely for the inevitable standoff with Bakura."

Set curled his hand into a fist before releasing it. "And…while he may seem surprised at the events
like we all are…I believe he is truly the one behind your nightmares."

At this, Seto narrowed his eyes and leaned forward, clasping his hands on the table. "What makes you say that?"

"It is the only logical explanation," said Set, "If it were just your memories brought to the surface in your dreams, we could accuse some wayward wizard to being behind it. But you are seeing flashes of my own as well, and on more than one occasion at that. Whoever is behind it is obviously is searching for something, what I don't know. But the only one with anything to gain from doing that is Bakura."

"Not Yugi's alter ego?"

"By now, the Pharaoh is aware that unlocking his memories and completing his destiny involves the three Egyptian God cards and the stone tablet. He would have no reason to attack you. Bakura must remember enough of his past that there is something he is missing, and believes that we hold the key to what he seeks. Whatever it is, we need to protect it at all costs."

"And you expect to do that by lecturing me on how the Millennium Items work," Seto said, scowling.

Set leveled his reincarnation an identical frown. "The only way to fight a Millennium Item is with a Millennium Item. If you were more open, more accepting of your ancient heritage, then you would be able to stop these attacks as they happen. You can type on that computer without looking to see if your fingers hit the correct buttons because it is second nature to you. I need you to treat the Millennium Rod the same way."

Seto glared at him.

"I'm not asking you to use it all day," said Set, "But when the time comes, I need you to be prepared, or the Pharaoh has no chance of winning his fight."

Seto groaned and rubbed at his temples.

"I know this isn't what you want, but it will be necessary."

"Fine," Seto snapped. "When do you expect me to start this up again?"

Set shrugged. "The sooner the better, of course, but I dare not rob you of your previous engagements. I know your coursework and company come first. We will have to make time around them."

Set then fidgeted. "Eventually, we will have to continue during your weeks spent at home. You will have to become adjusted to the Shadow Realm, and I dare not risk summoning it here where someone might discover it."

"If you're going to wait for that, then this is never going to go anywhere," said Seto. "Half of the rooms in this castle go unused all the time. There has to be someplace we can hide away where Dumbledore or Umbridge won't notice."

"And how do you expect to find it? You may trick Umbridge, but it seems the Headmaster knows everything that goes on under this roof."

"I'll ask the experts," said Seto, glancing over to the window. An owl was sitting on the outside sill, tapping its beak against the glass.
"Experts?" said Set. "You mean Harry Potter and his friends?"

Seto shook his head and made his way to the window. The owl hopped inside a step and dropped an envelope into his outstretched hand before flying off towards the Owlery.

"Who is the letter from?" asked Set.

"Ishizu Ishtar," said Seto, frowning. He ran his thumb under flap of the envelope and yanked the letter out.

Yugi and company–

I apologize for the shortness of this letter, but I fear this method of communication can no longer be trusted. The owl arrived safely, but somewhere between your school and the museum; the message had been intercepted and read. The envelope had clearly been opened before reaching my desk.

I was able to find more information for you, but I dare not include it here. I understand that Seto Kaiba returns home semi-frequently. I can relay the news to him personally if he is scheduled to travel back soon and willing to come see me. Otherwise, we must visit an alternate method of communication where there will be no prying eyes or ears. The details are quite sensitive.

Please contact me at the museum to make arrangements.

Stay safe,
-Ishizu

"That's not good at all," said Set.

"The phones work now, so we don't have to rely on owl post anymore," said Seto. He returned to the table and began packing his paperwork back into the briefcase. "But I have a bad feeling about all of this."

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The man – if he could still be called one – sat in his chair by the glow of the fireplace, looking in amusement at the piece of a sword that was brought to him weeks ago. It sat suspended, rotating in the air in front of him. It was only a fraction of the blade; the rest of it was missing, still probably lost in the desert sand. He gazed curiously at it. Why, of all things, was this brought to him? What could be so special about a broken weapon, dulled by time and exposure in the harsh elements?

Voldemort leaned forward in his seat. The Death Eaters that brought it back from Egypt had said they detected magic within it, but it looked so…so ordinary. There was no decoration along what was left of this piece of the blade, nor did it seem to be made of any special metal. It was just a broken relic.

Of course, that didn't stop him from sending those same Death Eaters back to the desert to scope for the rest of the pieces. Perhaps if there was truly magic in these fragments, they needed to be brought together. Maybe this was just a puzzle, waiting to be solved.

Voldemort reached out and finally plucked the blade from the air and turned it over in his hands. It looked just as unremarkable in his hands as it did in the air, although he raised it closer to his eyes. Was that dried blood on the end of it? It looked almost fresh – or, relatively fresh, considering its age.

The blade itself was no longer its initial metal color, having been buried in the sand for who knows how long, but the dark reddish stain on the one end looked as though it was preserved in time from the moment it dried there. Interesting.
He had turned it for examination for the third time when it suddenly began to glow a dark reddish-purple hue, despite the color not appearing on any part of it, and Voldemort immediately let it drop from his grasp onto his lap.

The dark glow began to drag itself off, away from the blade and into a shape before Voldemort's armchair. It seemed to take the rough outline of a person, though one much taller than the average man. It would have towered over him, had he been standing. Its features did not fill out, so the figure remained a complete shadow, except for the one golden eye that appeared out of the void where the head seemed to be.

*After 5,000 years… I am free at last…*

Voldemort sat frozen in his seat, eyes darting between the still-glowing sword fragment resting on his legs and the looming figure in front of him. This shadow, that seemed to have no face or any other descriptive features may appear to be tall and intimidating, but he has spent years among all manner of dark and dangerous creatures. He would not let himself become afraid of this… thing, especially of something with only a harsh voice but no physical presence.

"What are you?" Voldemort clasped his hands together. "You are not a ghost, at least not in the traditional sense. You seem like a shadow, but I cannot see through you."

What am I? I should ask you the same, for you appear just as human as I. It would appear we have much in common.

Voldemort tilted his head and stared up at the figure. It was hard to focus on it since there wasn't really a face, so he kept his gaze on the golden eye. "And just what do you know about me?"

Our souls have both been violently shattered to the winds, though our causes could not be more different.

Voldemort narrowed his eyes. "You know nothing about me."

I know much about you, TOM MARVOLO RIDDLE."

Voldemort stiffened. "I am Lord Voldemort."

Ah, yes. The chosen name, one that strikes the utmost fear to the people of this region. I have read your mind, and peered deep into what remains of your soul. You are not the first to quest for power and control over a region's people. Mankind has been doing so for thousands of years. I have watched as empires rose and fell to the tyrants of the day. You will be no different.

"I know of the people and events of this day and age," said Voldemort, "I will not fail. The war has only just begun, and I am already winning." Who did this shadow think he was? No one has been able to breach his mind before, and his 'treasure hunting' over the decades all but assured he would not fail in this war – not again.

Your thoughts do not stay hidden, Lord Voldemort. Your feeble mental defenses are no match for me. I have been trapped, with one half lost in the Shadows, and the other as broken as the blade in your possession, watching… waiting… and growing in power for thousands of years. The magic you possess is powerful, yes, but does not stand up against the same kind gifted to me by The Dark One himself.

Voldemort rose from his seat and slowly began to circle the shadow. "If you are so powerful, then
why did you only appear to me now?"

_I have been preoccupied with other tasks that require much focus to complete. To come before you now takes a great deal of energy. I needed a conduit powerful enough to draw power from – alone I could not manage this. I have been drawing from _you_ this entire time, though not enough that you would feel anything hazardous to your health._

Voldemort paused. "You are using me as a leech."

_If you wish to think it that way, then yes. It is a temporary solution, until your subordinates find the rest of me._

Voldemort continued to pace until he was facing the golden eye again. "I take it the 'rest of you' are the remaining fragments of this sword. What happens _if_ they find it?"

_I will be one step closer to regaining a body of my own, and then our work will begin._

"Our?" Voldemort said curiously, "It seems you are in need of me, not the reverse. What need would I have for you?"

_For a brief time, I held the power to glimpse the future. I saw the events of today 5,000 years ago in a temple that now stands as more or less a ruin. Your quest for the destruction of your enemies and control over this land will end in failure._

Voldemort waved a hand dismissively, "The future can be changed."

_Yet there is that prophecy your mind continues to cling to. I have seen your rise to power, and I have also seen the fall. But…as you say, the future can be changed. Restore me, and your demise at Harry Potter's hands can be avoided completely._

"What would you have me do?"

_While one piece of my soul escaped the Shadows where I had been trapped, the rest remains scattered amongst the other fragments of this sword. Only upon restoring it will I be able to escape. In return, I will provide your effort with the powers granted unto me by the Great Evil God, Zorc Necrophades._

"What's to guarantee you will hold up your end of this agreement once you obtain your body?" said Voldemort suspiciously, "What is to keep you here?"

_It would appear your interests align with my ultimate goal. You seek the seven Millennium Items to give you an insurmountable advantage in your game of war. I seek them as well. While you are new to the stories of the Millennium Items and Shadows, I have already been once touched by them. I can find them for you with relative ease. We are better allied than as enemies._

"What do you seek them for?" asked Voldemort.

_I wish to continue the path I started to forge in life, only to be thwarted in death by the Pharaoh. He walks this land again, as will I. He will not best me a second time._

"Harry Potter's death at my hands is only a matter of time," said Voldemort, "With or without the Millennium Items. But I do wish to see the Items' power for myself. Very well. If you are to help me find the Millennium Items, I will return your body to you."
A wise move.

Voldemort returned to his chair. "You already knew my name. What am I to call you?"

I am the High Priest of Darkness, also known as the Great Shadow Magus. But you may call me Aknadin.
"Do you think this is enough?" asked Mokuba, pushing another chair from the kitchen into the Muto's already crammed living room.

"Well," said Grandpa Muto, and he began to tally along his fingers. "There's you and me, and then Joey, Tristan and Téa, Miss Ishtar, and…" he glanced behind him back towards the front door where Roland was pacing the entryway, speaking quietly on his cell phone. "Roland, if he wishes to join us."

"I imagine he will. He's been taking everything so seriously lately," said Mokuba. "You know, he stopped at Domino First Bank the other day on his lunch hour? Before then, in the morning, he was fine. When he came back to Kaiba Corp, his mood had dropped. Like, it plummeted, as if he heard news that someone died. He won't tell me what's up either."

"He's taken on a very important position," said Grandpa, "It can't be easy to fill into your brother's shoes."

Mokuba shrugged. "He's handled all that stuff before while keeping an eye on me. This is different. He knows something the rest of us don't."

Grandpa put a reassuring hand on Mokuba's shoulder. "The world is a bit different now though. Even with Yugi gone, I can sense unease in the air, and usually that would radiate from Yugi's puzzle when they were in the middle of a crisis. But the battle they've fallen into isn't anywhere near here, which is why everyone is so troubled."

Mokuba looked around at all of the empty chairs in the room. "When is everyone going to show up?"

Grandpa looked at the clock on the wall over the television. "Soon, I hope."

"I know Fuguta went to pick up Ishizu," said Mokuba, "Part of me wants to get this done and over with, because the anticipation is making me nervous. But…"

Grandpa gave him a small, understanding smile. "You're worried about just what the news is. I know. I am as well."

The sound of an engine cutting off outside grabbed the younger Kaiba's attention and he rushed to the window. "Oh! The car is back!"

"Oh good," said Grandpa, "Now it's just up to Joey and the others."

Mokuba pouted. "How much do you want to bet Joey is going to be late?"
"Tristan is giving him a ride, so I imagine he would be here on time," said Grandpa. He got up and joined him at the window. "Well. I best not be a rude host and let them inside."

Roland stepped away from the front door, pocketing his phone as Ishizu was let inside.

"Mr. Muto," said Ishizu, bowing slightly in greeting. "Thank you for allowing me to come. I'm sorry we are intruding on your home like this."

"Think nothing of it. It'll be a little tight in the living room, but we'll be able to manage."

"They're ready on their end," said Roland, "The call will be set up once the others arrive."

Ishizu nodded. "Alright. If I may ask, who else are we expecting?"

"Joey, Tristan, and Téa," said Grandpa, "That's all. Would you like something to drink before we begin?"

"Tea would be lovely, thank you," said Ishizu. She walked into the living room. "Hello, Mokuba."

"Hi, Ishizu."

"I trust you are well, despite your brother's long absences?"

Mokuba shrugged. "Doing well enough. It's hard when he's home because I know it's only for a few days. Saying goodbye again is always tough."

"Then his upcoming return is always something to look forward to," said Ishizu, "And then you cherish the moments you have together." With Marik and Odion back in Egypt, she felt the same way about her own brothers. They got online to video chat a couple of times a week, but it just wasn't the same as being in the same room.

They sat in silence for the next minute, when Grandpa returned to the room with a steaming mug in his hands. Mokuba clutched at the fabric of his jeans. He really didn't know what to say to Ishizu. It wasn't as if he had spent a whole lot of time with her. All of their previous interactions were at the Battle City tournament, and even that wasn't saying too much. She was absent for most of the duels on the blimp, and only watched the true final match between Yugi and Marik.

At first, he had thought the tournament was Seto's idea as a comeback from his defeat against Yugi, and in response to Duelist Kingdom. He had been shocked to find out that wasn't the case at all, and that Ishizu had orchestrated the entire event, even giving Seto one of the most powerful cards in existence – all to settle a family feud. It just so happened that in the process, everyone else got put in danger of either being brainwashed or comatose.

Mokuba frowned. The quiet was awkward. Ishizu didn't look in his direction at all, just sat on the other side of the room. He wasn't sure if Seto still held some sort of grudge for the Ishtars' upstaging of his tournament, but he didn't. Ishizu was just trying to save her brother, however extreme her go-about was. Would he do any less for Seto if their roles were reversed? He already knew Seto would burn the world down twice over if he was in trouble.

Perhaps Ishizu was uncomfortable being around almost everyone from Battle City, considering what her brother had done to them all at the time. Well, it was time to put that to rest.

Mokuba left his seat and hopped up next to Ishizu on the opposite couch. "So…" he began, conversationally, "How is Marik doing?"
Ishizu blinked, taken back. "H-he is well. Odion is with him in Egypt. They sometimes help out in the museum there, but mostly spend their time near the Valley of the Kings, helping with restoration work." She paused. "I didn't think you were interested in what happened to Marik after…well…"

Mokuba shrugged. "You were just trying to save your brother. I don't have any hard feelings from Battle City, Ishizu."

Ishizu raised an eyebrow. "Marik had you kidnapped to force your brother into a duel to win back Obelisk the Tormentor. Your brother claims we upstaged his tournament, and in a way, we did."

Mokuba scratched at the back of his head. "Yeah…I know. But Marik was sort of corrupted already at that point, wasn't he? I mean, his freaky evil side wasn't out full force, but he believed Yugi was to blame for everything bad that happened to him, right? He wasn't in a good place. We've all been through something like that before. Marik's was just…really crazy. And…well…it wouldn't be the first time I've gotten kidnapped to get something from my big brother." He looked up at her, smiling, "I'm not mad at you. Really."

Ishizu let out a breath she didn't even realize was being held in. "I had been…concerned that I would be met with some hostility today. Yugi I know has put my family's past actions to rest, but I cannot say the same for your friends. And I wasn't too sure how close you might mirror your brother."

Mokuba shook his head as he heard new voices from the entryway. Joey and the others had arrived. "Seto holds the grudges. Not me."

"Perhaps not for Battle City," said Ishizu, slowly, "But what about more recently?"

Mokuba tilted his head quizzically. "What do you mean?"

Ishizu clutched her tea tightly. "Your brother couldn't have been pleased to be presented with the Millennium Rod."

Mokuba's smile faltered slightly. "Oh. That." He shrugged. "Honestly, everything that happened that day, or more like that week was such a rush that I didn't have time to think too much into it. I think…if Priest Set wasn't in the Millennium Rod, then there would have been a lot more outrage over it. Seto took it all rather well, now that I think about it."

Ishizu froze. "There was a spirit in the Millennium Rod?" That was certainly news to her - Yugi didn't mention anything of the sort in his letters.

"Yeah…a priest from the Pharaoh's court or something like that. I think he was part of what got Seto to finally accept the whole magic thing."

Ishizu nodded thoughtfully. "He was quite adverse to anything magical from what I recall." News of a spirit inside the Rod was new to her, but it suddenly made sense considering the Item's actions during the Battle City tournament. Everyone saw how just after it activated, Kaiba had changed his dueling strategy, as if the Millennium Rod had pointed him in the right direction to win their match. And it had activated once again during Kaiba's duel with Yugi atop the Duel Tower, showing them a glimpse of the past as the Egyptian Gods clashed.

Mokuba nodded. "Yeah. That same day triggered all of the other magic with that letter Professor Dumbledore sent us. But my brother finally got down like the rest of us and came to grips that magic was in front of his face the entire time, even though you'll never hear him openly admit it."

"Hey, Mokuba," said Téa, as she entered the living room, "Hi Ishizu." Joey and Tristan followed in after her.
Ishizu smiled, nodding to them. "Hello Téa."

"Looks like we were the last ones," said Joey, "I said you should have driven faster."

Tristan rolled his eyes. "Whatever, Joey."

"Well, let's gather around and get this started," said Grandpa, taking a seat in one of the kitchen chairs.

"Are we going to see Yugi? Will this be a face chat?" asked Téa.

Grandpa shook his head. "I'm afraid my computer may be too old to keep a good connection for something like that."

"It's okay, Mr. Muto. It might be too hard to get everyone within the camera window anyway. We can try that another time with my computer," said Mokuba, "It might be easier to connect to Seto's laptop that way because he doesn't use traditional video chatting programs."

Roland stepped away from his spot along the wall and moved into the middle of the room, connecting his phone to the charger as he dialed. After speaking a few words into it, he placed the phone onto the external speaker on the table. "Mr. Kaiba, you're on speaker now."

"Hi Seto!" said Mokuba excitedly, before anyone else in the room could get a word in.

"Hey, kid."

"Hey, Rich Boy – we're not just stuck with you all night, right?" said Joey, snickering. "Who else is there with you?"

There was a laugh on the other end of the phone. "Relax, Joey," said Yugi, "Bakura and I are here too…and then some."

"And then some?" asked Téa.

"I'm here as well," said Yami, and then after a pause he spoke again, quieter, as if he had turned away from the phone to talk more or less just to those in the room with him. "Do you think they heard that?"

"Pharaoh?" said Joey, looking at his friends, puzzled. "Are you swappin' with Yug'?" Things were going to get mighty confusing if Yugi and the Pharaoh kept jumping back and forth the entire time. How were they supposed to know who they were talking to?

"Not quite," said Ryou, "The magic in the school allows the Spirits to come out of the Millennium Items so we can talk and interact with them without them having to take control. So…my counterpart is here too."

"How is everything there?" asked Yami, "It's good to hear your voices."

"Goin' okay here," said Joey, "School's boring as all getups, and it's weird having no world to save for once."

Yugi laughed. "I bet. Let me tell you, there is more than enough excitement going on here."

Trisan frowned, and leaned closer to the speaker. "The Spirit of the Ring isn't giving you a hard time, is he, Bakura?"
"Why must everyone assume when something happens, I am the cause?" Bakura snapped.

"Because that's what they're used to," said Ryou. It wasn't as if he gave them anything else to believe. "No, Tristan, the Spirit is...fairly well behaved."

"So... what are you actually learning over there?" asked Tristan, changing the subject. Hearing their friend Bakura speak to the other Bakura so calmly was weird, since they always remembered the Spirit forcing control most of the time. "How to pull rabbits out of hats?"

Joey was certain Kaiba eye-rolled at that, but it was Ryou who spoke. "No. Actual magic. There are no fancy card tricks here. We were introduced to a dark creature the other week and had to fight it off. We've also learned some more common spells and how to brew potions. It's all quite interesting! We'll have to show you some of our books when we come home."

"When will that be?" asked Grandpa, "Sometime before Christmas, I hope."

"From what we've been told, it looks like students only leave for Christmas and Easter holidays," said Yugi, "But maybe we can swing a ride back with Kaiba on one of his next visits home."

"Hn."

"We're allowed out to visit the village next to the school though," said Ryou, "Our first trip out is this weekend. We'll have to send something home. I've heard the chocolate shop is excellent!"

"Mm, wizard chocolate. I can get down for some of that," said Joey.

Téa rolled her eyes. "Of course you can, because the first thing in your head is always food."

Joey pulled a face at her as he heard a noise through the phone. "Hey is this connection good? Sounds like static in the background."

"Oh," said Yami, "That's Kaiba. The phone is connected into his computer, and he's working while on the call."

"Seriously? We all got together for this chat and you're gonna sit there and do that? Your company can wait for five minutes," said Joey. "It's called multitasking, Wheeler. I realize the word is more than two-syllables so you may not have heard of it before. Besides, it's not like you are really going on about anything important."

Mokuba snickered.

"So...um, are we waiting on Ishizu?" asked Yugi, "Or is everyone there?"

"I am here," said Ishizu, "But you were catching up with your friends, and I didn't want to intrude."

"Sorry, Ishizu, we didn't mean to put you out," said Yugi, "How are things at the museum?"

"The museum is doing well. Marik and I are starting to make arrangements for the Pharaoh's tablet to be moved back to Egypt. This will of course not be for some time, but we have to get everything in order with the museum here and my contacts in Egypt to assure its safe journey."

"Why is it leaving?" asked Tristan.

"I cycle all of the Egyptian artifacts on loan here," said Ishizu, "The Pharaoh's tablet and the
accompanying stone depicting Duel Monsters have served their purposes here, and, having remained far longer than any of the other antiques in the collection, it is time they returned home. They will also be much more secure there."

"Despite the attacks?" asked Ryou.

"Yes. The final home of these tablets is quite safe."

"Speaking of attacks..." said Seto, "You have information for us."

"Yes." Ishizu took a deep breath. "Are you able to be overheard?"

"No," said Yugi, "We're in an empty room in a secluded part of the castle, and Kaiba put some charm on the door so no one can barge in on us."

Ishizu nodded and began. "The information you requested took quite some digging. Long before Marik originally was tempted by darkness, the tomb keepers bearing the secrets of the Pharaoh and the Millennium Items kept in contact with each other, in case a proper owner for the Items was found. After one of the keepers was murdered years ago, they all decided to keep to themselves, to help protect the others.

"Suffice to say, there are very few individuals outside of the tomb keepers who know of the Nameless Pharaoh and the Millennium Items, and I believe they are government officials. You heard of the attack because of the wizard involvement, but most of the news was kept a secret."

"Wait," said Tristan, "I don't remember hearing about an attack in Egypt."

Ishizu nodded. "My point exactly. The Egyptians kept the story as close as possible, but the same cannot be said for the British wizards that were involved."

"So what happened exactly?" asked Téa.

"An excavation site was attacked," said Ishizu, "By cloaked men in masks. A few workers were killed, and one of the tomb keepers disappeared. The local authorities believe it was the work of tomb robbers, but Marik and Odion have confirmed that there are still many artifacts of value left at the tomb that could have easily been stolen. We believe the men came for the tomb guardian." She sighed. "He was one of the keepers of the Millennium Items. His clan had been trusted with protecting the Millennium Ring and the Eye."

"...But the tomb keepers don't have those items," said Bakura.

"And Pegasus was given the Millennium Eye," said Yugi, "What could they possibly gain from taking someone who doesn't have the Millennium Items anymore?"

"As guardians of the Items and keepers of the Pharaoh's secrets, it is our sworn duty to protect that information at all cost," said Ishizu. "To reveal anything, even under duress, is considered a betrayal of the highest order. It has been passed down that if any of the guardians were to be captured; death is always the preferred alternative to revealing anything, and is attempted as soon as possible if there are no means of escape." She sighed. "It was also part of the reason why we lived in such seclusion."

"Was the tomb keeper that was murdered your father?" asked Téa.

Ishizu shook her head. "No, that incident took place well before Marik's time. The guardian that was killed was from a different clan."
"So...the bad wizards captured someone who doesn't have any Millennium Items. What does that mean for us?" asked Grandpa.

Ishizu leaned forward and set her mug onto the table. "The tomb guardian may no longer have the Items themselves, but if he would turn on his clan and the rest of us, his knowledge could help locate any of the others."

"Not only that, but if he had the Millennium Eye, he was probably present when it was given to Pegasus," said Yami, "And if they go looking for Pegasus, that could lead them right to all of us."

Roland stiffened from his spot at the wall near the doorway.

"But Pegasus doesn't have the Eye anymore," said Téa, "So he would be safe, wouldn't he?"

"Pegasus interacted with everyone present at one point or another with that Eye in his head," said Seto bitterly, "If they manage to extract information from this tomb keeper that leads them straight to Pegasus, what makes you think they'll stop there? Everyone on this call is in danger just by association with him, and he's not even a player in this war."

"So what are you suggesting – that we're all in even more danger?" asked Téa. "Those wizards that hang around here put up some sort of protection to keep us safe. Wouldn't that stop an attack even if the tomb keeper talked?"

"It should," said Grandpa, stealing a quick glance to Mokuba's bodyguard, but the man was stone-faced.

"What can we do?" asked Joey.

"There isn't a lot you can do," Ryō sighed. "As it stands, you all are protected by the wizards in Domino. I think that a leak from the tomb keeper or anyone else would lead the Death Eaters more to us than anyone. It's not like you guys have any of the Millennium Items. And we're safe while at Hogwarts, just like you are there. We just need to be more careful."

They could hear Seto say something quietly on the other end, away from the phone, before Yugi's voice came out clear again. "Ugh. I hate to cut this short, everyone, but we have a class soon. We're going to have to get off so we can get back to the dorm and grab our books."

"Ooh, which one?" asked Mokuba.

"Herbology," said Seto, "And then Potions after the lunch hour."

"We have an exam on Snargaluff pods today," said Yugi, "And I have no idea what we'll be doing in Potions. Hopefully not testing the work of the underclassmen again."

"Well, good luck on your examination," said Grandpa, "And do try to keep in touch. We all miss you here."

"Yugi's phone is working now, so it'll be easier for him to stay in contact with you," said Seto, "Until he sends you a copy of his schedule, do not call him. At least one of the professors here is looking for any excuse to confiscate our technology, so don't go giving them any openings. Wait for him to contact you."

"Okay," said Téa, nodding.

"And please remember that you're about eight hours ahead of us," said Ryō, "If you try to call us in
the morning, it'll still be the middle of the night here. And while it may be night time there right now, we're still in the middle of the day attending class."

"Gotcha," said Joey.

"I'll send you guys a text when we get our lunch break," said Yugi, "Grandpa – will you give Ishizu my contact number in case she needs it?"

Grandpa nodded. "Sure."

"Are you still gonna video chat on your lunch break, Seto?" Mokuba asked hopefully.

"Of course."

"We have to head off now. Bye everyone!" said Yugi.

After a chorus of farewells from around the living room, the phone disconnected with a loud click.

Téa rubbed at her arms. "I'm so worried for them."

"We all are, Téa," said Joey, "But we gotta be strong for 'em."

"I've just had such a bad feeling lately, like something terrible is going to happen," said Téa. "Maybe it's just from being around all of the Shadow Realm magic and always in danger all the time, but I'm just…scared."

"The news I've shared I'm sure didn't help that at all," said Ishizu, "But we are affected by the attack in Egypt just as much as they are. The more we know of what is going on in this strange war, the better prepared we are in case it arrives in Domino."

"But we can we do, really, if someone came after us? How are we going to be expected to fight people with magic?" said Tristan.

"You aren't expected to fight anyone," said Roland, as most of the room's occupants turned to face him. "That role falls to Mr. Kaiba and the others. You just need to stay out of the line of fire."

"But we're already doin' that," said Joey.

"Yes, and we're all aware that's through wizard involvement. But their protection may or may not have been compromised."

Téa paled.

"What d'you mean, compromised?" said Tristan.

Roland pushed himself off of the wall and took the only abandoned seat in the room. "Did you not already have an instance where you worried someone broke into Mr. Bakura's home?"

Joey nodded. "Yeah…but we figured it was his landlord. The one time it happened after we told you about it, there was a letter from the apartment company on the table. Tris' and I figured we just missed the letter the last time."

"...and there was the time I thought someone had been snooping through Yugi's room when I was down in the shop," said Grandpa.

Mokuba sank back into the couch and drew his knees closer again. "What about the time you
dropped me off here in the middle of the night…”

Roland nodded. "We traced a breach on Mr. Kaiba's personal and financial data to the United Kingdom, and on that same day, wizards had been found on the grounds of one of his other properties. It was not a location that Mr. Kaiba escorted Professor Dumbledore or any of the three wizards stationed here to protect."

"So what, were they just wanderin' around?" asked Joey.

"We don't know. Mr. Kaiba believes it was a test to see how we would react. You can't be any more certain it was a landlord or a figment of your imagination on those other occurrences than it being a wizard."

Ishizu frowned thoughtfully. "Although…it was my understanding that some of the protections placed on your homes would prevent someone from just appearing and disappearing at will."

"How do you know that?" asked Mokuba.

"There is a wizard with me at the museum as well," said Ishizu, "One who has spent time in Egypt. He assists me with my work while acting as a guard for both myself and the artifacts in my charge."

"That's mighty convenient," said Tristan, "Since some of your artifacts have to do with Yugi and Kaiba – and that's what got them into this mess in the first place."

"Who stationed him there?" asked Roland.

"Professor Dumbledore," said Ishizu, "He came to pay me a visit just before the end of the summer. He claimed that Yugi was worried that my family's knowledge of the Millennium Items and the Pharaoh's tablet would put us in danger."

"He staged the others here as well," said Grandpa.

"Okay, so back up a second," said Joey, turning to Roland, "Why does that mean things might be compromised here?"

"Mr. Kaiba is under the impression that these wizards are not to be trusted, and to be honest, I am inclined to agree. The wards they claim to have placed on your homes? You can't see them. We have taken Professor Dumbledore's word that they have been set, but we have no way of knowing that. On the other hand, perhaps they have – but we have no way of knowing when they may get taken down. Despite how they may appear around us, we don't know them, or Professor Dumbledore. And for a school that is supposed to be teaching Mr. Kaiba and the others proper defensive magic to fight in this war, I hear they are learning quite little of it."

"So Kaiba doesn't trust Dumbledore. Okay," said Tristan, "You'll forgive us for taking that with a grain of salt, since he doesn't trust anyone."

"Very well." Roland reached for the briefcase he left on the table beside their external speaker. "Let's try this instead." He pulled out a thick file folder. "Mr. Kaiba was not the only one to have his personal information compromised in a security breach. He dropped the folder unceremoniously onto the table and gestured for them to open it.

Joey gave it a funny look before reaching for it. Téa and Tristan peered over his shoulder as he flipped through the contents. "What the –"

Téa gasped. "There's information on all of us in here."
"How did you find all of this?" asked Tristan.

"We used the same method to track Mr. Kaiba's breach and broadened our search. All of those checks originated in Britain."

"This is stupid thorough," Joey said, his eyes scanning down the page with his own name on it. "How did these people know my dad's been out o' work for so long? Or that I own a bicycle? That's not on any public record...unless..."

"...Unless we were being watched," said Grandpa gravely. "And there's no way of knowing who is behind it."

"It does seem too good that this all originated in Britain and that's where those wizard guys are from though," said Tristan.

"I agree. I'm not so certain we can trust these people to have our backs, no matter how friendly they appear," said Grandpa.

"Then what are we gonna do?" asked Mokuba quietly. This entire conversation was starting to freak him out. Emmeline Vance was staying in the mansion – was she spying on him and Roland while Seto was away? What if she was snooping through the house at this moment? And if they were ever attacked, would she fight to help keep them safe from the Death Eaters he heard Dumbledore mention, or would she stand aside and let them get hurt? He didn't want to think about that – Emmeline had been so nice thus far. And that went for Hestia and Sturgis as well. They all seemed like pretty cool people, at least to him.

Roland cleared his throat. "This is, of course, a worst-case scenario, but in the case of an attack here in Domino, we need to have a plan in place that does not involve the wizards."

"Like what?" asked Téa, "If what you guys think is true, and that we're being watched, how can we do anything in secret?"

Roland held up a hand. "Let me worry about that."

Mokuba looked at him quizzically.

Joey snorted. "You want us to believe that Kaiba of all people is gonna look out for us? He hates us." A thought came to his mind and he crossed his arms. "You said that Kaiba's life story was busted into, just like the rest of us. And let's face it – everything he's got has his name plastered all over it. How're you gonna do anything for that jerk without bein' noticed?"

Mokuba straightened in his seat. "Seto left something behind, didn't he? That's why you were so moody when you got back from the bank that day."

"Huh? What's at the bank?" asked Joey.

Roland removed his dark glasses and leveled his grey eyes onto Yugi's friends. "A contingency plan. Shortly after Duelist Kingdom, Mr. Kaiba began a plan to make an escape with Mokuba, if a crisis ever became so extreme that they would need to disappear to survive." He ignored Mokuba's jaw-dropped look. "It is by no means a completed plan, just a collection of resources. I have been given blank check access to those funds to do absolutely anything necessary to ensure Mokuba's protection...and yours as well."

Joey, Tristan, and Téa exchanged bewildered looks.
"Okay, now I know you've been chuggin' the Kaiba Corp coffee for too long," said Tristan. "We all know Kaiba doesn't care what happens to us."

Roland glared at him. "He may not, but Yugi Muto does, and so long as you are in harm's way, you are a liability. If something were to happen to Yugi Muto, and he had to make a choice to either save his friends or stubbornly hold onto whatever items or information the other side wanted, what do you honestly think he would choose? Mr. Kaiba recognizes you are just as much leverage to Yugi as Mokuba is to him."

Grandpa shifted in his seat. "So…what is the escape plan?"

Roland sighed. "There isn't one in place yet. I am still considering details. Like all of you, my affairs have also been under scrutiny, so each move must be made with extreme caution." He cast his eyes around the room again. "What would help is to know just how many people I need to include in this. I will not force anything from any of you. If you choose not to be a part of this contingency plan, that is fine, but the knowledge of this conversation cannot leave this room."

The room was silent for a few minutes. Mokuba looked around at Yugi's friends, and could practically see the gears turning in Joey's head before the blond nodded. "Alright. If it helps keep Yug' safe too, then I'm in."

"Me too," said Téa. "After all we've been through, how can we not?"

"You're right," said Tristan, "I just can't get over that Kaiba's helping us out."

"It was his idea, not mine," said Roland.

"What about you, Ishizu?" asked Mokuba.

"I will, but only while I stay here in Domino. Once transportation for the Pharaoh's tablet has been arranged and we return to Egypt, I will go to ground with my brothers."

"Very well," Roland nodded. "Mr. Muto has already agreed prior to your arrival this evening. I will contact you all once there are more details in place."

Téa rubbed at her arms. "Is there anything we can do in the meantime?"

"Prepare a go bag in case you need to leave on short notice, and continue to act as if nothing we've spoken of tonight has happened. Let them think nothing is wrong."

They all said their goodbyes not long after. The drive back to the Kaiba mansion was in silence. Every few minutes Roland's eyes would flit up to the rearview mirror. Mokuba was scrolling through something on his phone, but worry was evident on his face. The younger Kaiba was not nearly as skilled at hiding his emotions as his brother.

Roland sighed. It wasn't his intention to scare Mokuba this evening, but he was bound to find out something was wrong eventually.

Before the meeting at the Muto house that evening, he had tried to come up with several different means of escape, but kept falling back on blanks. The ridiculous sum of cash that Mr. Kaiba had in the deposit box may not be able to be traced back to anything related to the Kaiba name, but anyone he would have paid for any service in this escapade would know his face. He may not be as incredibly recognizable as either of the Kaiba brothers, or even Yugi Muto, but he had appeared on television before during company-sponsored Duel Monster tournaments. However small the chance, it could still lead back to the Kaiba brothers and that was what he needed to avoid.
"What about Pegasus?" said Mokuba quietly, wrenching his driver out of his thoughts.

"Sir?"

"He'll be in danger too, right, cuz of the Millennium Eye?"

Roland turned onto the main road heading to the northern end of Domino. "Possibly. More than likely."

"Were you gonna include him in your plan?"

Roland scowled at the steering wheel. He really didn't want to include Pegasus in anything. Quite frankly, the only reason no one decided to retaliate against Pegasus for his role in kidnapping, torture, and corporate espionage was because the Big 5 immediately tried to off Mr. Kaiba the moment he returned home. He had just as many good feelings about the head of Industrial Illusions as his boss, and he hadn't even been involved in the Duelist Kingdom fiasco.

"I would rather not."

Mokuba frowned. "Is that because you don't like him? He's not the same person he was back then, you know."

"Mr. Pegasus has the means to take a step back and disappear from the public eye if need be. Yugi's friends do not have that luxury."

"Well, yeah, but at least we all know what's going on. He doesn't. And...I'm pretty sure letting those Death Eater guys get to him just because he once had the Millennium Eye isn't really fair. We should at least warn him."

Roland eyed Mokuba again through the mirror. "When did you become such a champion for Maximillion Pegasus?"

Mokuba rubbed at his arms and looked out the window again. "Because it all comes back to the Millennium Items, doesn't it? And I don't think anyone who was touched by one of those things got them because they actually wanted it."
"It is quite remarkable really," said Voldemort, settling back into his armchair that evening. Nagini slithered across the floor and up the side of the chair to rest across the arm. "The mental strength of these tomb guardians..."

The familiar golden eye gleamed from the shadow that appeared across the room next to the broken sword.

"It is curious how these Muggles have managed a basic form of Occlumency," Voldemort continued. "I was not aware that Muggles even had the ability to shield their minds." Of course, in any other circumstance, he wouldn't have cared enough to find that out.

You should not underestimate the chosen guardians to the seven Millennium Items. They would more willingly die than to let their secrets out.

"And how would you know this?"

The creation of the Millennium Items was a closely guarded secret. I was the only survivor of that plot. The use of those Items nearly brought doom upon the world.

Voldemort stroked the back of Nagini's head and stared curiously at the shadow. "Is that your mission? To gather them all again and cause chaos once more?"

It is only by returning all seven Items to their stone tablet can the Dark One be revived. The world was nearly burned once, and it took a great sacrifice to stop it. Imagine having that power at your disposal. This Dumbledore that you are so against will not be able to thwart your plans, and your defeat at Harry Potter's hands could be avoided completely. No man on earth is powerful enough to stop him. Why set your sights on control over this small island, when you can have the entire globe at your feet?

Voldemort paused. "Without knowing where the Items are at this moment, that task seems a touch difficult."

Have you truly gained nothing from the tomb keeper? Even with a heightened mental defense, I find it quite hard to believe he has bested the likes of you.

Voldemort waved a hand dismissively, "He has either shown great resistance to the Veritaserum, or he does not truly know who the Eye was given to." He studied Aknadin's shadow. "It was the Eye you sought first, wasn't it?"

We will, of course, require all of the Millennium Items in due time, but yes – the Eye was mine while I was alive. That guardian was responsible for keeping the Eye safe. He should have been
present when it was handed off to its modern-day wielder.

"From what little they have been able to probe from him, the guardian witnessed a man with silver hair be forcibly given a golden eye by someone with a turban. But no names. A man with silver hair could be almost anyone, and there are plenty of individuals wearing turbans out in the desert."

A man with silver hair…may be all the information that we need.

Nagini hissed quietly.

"How so?" asked Voldemort.

If you recall, I revealed myself to you so long after you received the sword fragment was because I had been...preoccupied.

"I remember."

Prior to my banishment, I forged a connection – however brief – with one of the other Sacred Guardians of the Millennium Items. While incredibly weak, I have been able to reopen that bond.

Voldemort leaned forward, intrigued. "Oh? And who would that be?"

Like the Pharaoh himself, it appears that his High Priest – the one depicted on that image of the stone slab – has also returned to this world. I have been making attempts to search their minds for the remaining Items.

How interesting, Voldemort mused. Perhaps they wouldn't need the stubborn guardian after all, if this High Priest of Darkness could find the information out elsewhere. "Have you been successful?"

Not quite. My powers are still broken, and the connection forged to the Priest is poor. It takes a great deal of energy to project into the boy's mind, and in my current state, I cannot stay for long. But now…I have something specific to seek.

"What would make this search easier?"

The distance between us is quite great. Having him close would allow me to reallocate my energy into finding what I seek rather than simply attempt the journey, but your enemy keeps him and the Pharaoh too well guarded.

"Worry not about that," Voldemort shook his head. "Moves are already being made to breach the castle."

Then finding the other half of this sword should be a higher priority. The Priest and his reincarnation possess the Millennium Rod, and in the very brief flicks of memory that I have been able to access, the boy has been in contact with the others. If this tomb guardian will not share the locations of the other Millennium Items, then we will force the information from elsewhere.

Voldemort narrowed his eyes. "I already told you that I have men scouring the desert. The other half of that sword could be anywhere."

You must hurry. I have gone mostly undetected so far. The Priest is aware of my probes, but not who I am. Not only does attacking Seto Kaiba's mind take a great deal of strength, but I must also keep the spirit of the Priest at bay so I am not forced out prematurely. I can already sense the
unease in the Priest's mind. It will not be long before he attempts to lock me out of his host completely. We cannot allow that to happen.

"Surely, if that were to occur, there are others that know of the Millennium Items."

And how will you find them? You have held that man in the cellar for weeks, and all you have been able to wrangle from him is that the wielder of the Eye has silver hair. The other guardians will be just as difficult to read, if they can even be found. By now, news of this one's disappearance will have sent the others to hiding.

Voldemort frowned. "So this Priest – or at the least, his host – is our best bet to finding the other six Millennium Items."

And so much more. Alone, the Millennium Items are not enough to return Zorc the Dark One to this world. Another key is required. Additionally, restoring this sword is not enough to grant me a new body. An ancient spell will need to be performed. The casting requirements hail from a forbidden text – the same one used to forge the Millennium Items, but I am sure that by now the book has been long gone.

Voldemort raised an eyebrow and got up to pace the length of the room. "If this text is lost, how do you expect to have your body restored? It would seem you would lose out on this little agreement of ours."

Not quite. I have committed much of the text to memory. However…there is one ingredient in particular we would need to gather. In the current state of affairs, it is unavailable to us, but that is something that can be collected later. For now, I must conserve power. Midnight draws near, and the mind is always the weakest when in rest.

"I am surprised that you choose not to peer through the Pharaoh's mind. What could this Priest offer you that the Pharaoh himself couldn't?"

He couldn't see it, but, by the tone of the reply, he would almost bet that Aknadin's shadow had smiled.

Everything.

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"You should get some sleep or else you will be too tired to explore Hogsmeade in the morning," said Yami, perched on the chair next to Yugi's bedside.

"I think I'm too excited to sleep," said Yugi. "We haven't been able to leave the castle since we arrived. I was beginning to develop cabin fever."

"Do you think we'll find something for everyone back home?" asked Ryou. He sat propped against his headboard with his Divination book in his lap. "I hear there's a joke shop in the village. I'm sure Joey and Tristan will get a kick out of the things there."

"I'm not quite sure what Téa or Grandpa would like," said Yugi, drawing his blanket around his legs.

"Your grandfather was once an archaeologist, right?" said Ryou. "A lot of things they use here have
that medieval feel to them."

Yugi laughed quietly, "Are you saying I should get him a quill and some ink?"

Ryou chuckled. "I didn't mean that."

"I know what you meant," said Yugi, grinning. "Although, he would probably get a kick out of using a quill to write with…I could see him balancing the shop's ledgers with it."

Ryou tapped his chin thoughtfully. "What about a book, like Hogwarts: A History? I bet he would love to read about the school."

"Oh, that might work," said Yugi. "That thing's enormous though. I don't know if an owl would be able to carry it that far."

"Why don't you wait until Seto's next visit home?" asked Set from his vigil at Seto's bedside. "Your grandfather and the others will have to wait about a week or so longer than having owls take your gifts, but at least you know they will arrive safely."

"We can ask tomorrow," Ryou shrugged. "Worst case is he says no."

Yugi nodded, and looked across the room. Seto had mentioned something about a headache and had gone to bed uncharacteristically early. Usually he was the last to leave the common room at night, but tonight he had left the others well before any of them had finished their homework. When he and Ryou eventually made it upstairs, the curtains around Seto's bed had been drawn, and Set hovered nearby, eyes down, focused on the transparent Millennium Rod he slowly twirled around his fingers.

"It was just a headache, Set," said Yami reassuringly. "You look as if you're about to fight something."

Set sighed and crossed his arms. "I expect to. The last time he retired early from something like this, he was attacked twice in the same night."

"That doesn't mean it will happen every time," said Yugi. "Maybe it was a coincidence."

"Even so…"

"It's happened more than once this way, hasn't it?" asked Yami.

"Seto normally works his way through his ailments," said Set, "But any time something has bothered him to the point that he actually stopped to rest, he was attacked. What's the point of trying to catch up on sleep if he's not going to get it?"

"There's truly nothing you can do to prevent that from happening?" asked Ryou.

"Their bond is weak," said Bakura as he phased out of the Millennium Ring. "And whoever is behind the attack is taking advantage of it."

Set narrowed his eyes as he looked back down at the Millennium Rod. It wouldn't be you, would it?"

"Seto has grudgingly agreed to work on strengthening it. But it will take time," Set said.

"Will you need help?" asked Yugi. "I don't know what it would entail, but if you want it…"

Set shook his head. "Seto will downright refuse it, but I—" He paused, hearing what sounded like a sharp, pained intake of breath from the bed.
Yugi frowned. "But what?"

Set held up a hand and stared off at the scarlet curtains as if he was seeing right through them. "No, no, no…." He jumped to his feet instantly, activated the Millennium Rod from the nightstand, and immediately disappeared.

Yugi and Yami exchanged worried glances. They had never been present when one of the weird attacks began. Yugi pulled his blankets back, padded across the room and pulled back one of the bed curtains. He raised an arm, hesitated and then shook his rival's shoulder lightly. "Kaiba?"

The Rod pulsed again, drawing a wince from Seto's otherwise blank face. He shifted, turning his head to the side, but didn't wake.

Yugi shook his shoulder again with a little more force. "Kaiba!"

A moment later Set was thrown back out, phasing right through Yugi to land in the center of the room.

"What happened?" asked Ryou, climbing out of bed to stand beside Yugi. Bakura stayed back by the window, arms crossed.

Set sighed angrily. "I've been locked out. Again. Although… I did catch a bare glimpse of the… the thing doing this."

"Really?" asked Ryou. "Who was it?"

Set shook his head. "I don't know. You could hardly call it a person. It was tall without any sort of physical features. But I think I can say that without actually meeting him, it was not Voldemort behind the attack."

"What makes you say that?" said Yami.

"Because the only distinguishing thing in that hulking shape was what appeared to be a Millennium Eye."

Bakura's eyes narrowed.

"There has to be something we can do," said Yugi. "Maybe you can't stop him on your own, but perhaps we can help!" He turned to Yami, "Remember during the Battle City finals, you were able to breach Marik's hold on Mai's mind, even for a little bit during their duel?"

Yami nodded. "Maybe together, we can force the assailant out." He shared a look with Yugi, and with a quick gleam of the Millennium Puzzle, switched places. He reached for the Millennium Rod, but froze when it activated on its own, pulsating for a few seconds before dying out again. He watched Seto's face wrinkle in pain as he twitched in his sleep before going slack again.

Set looked down at the Rod. "That… that wasn't me that time."

"We better hurry," said Yami. He placed one hand on the Puzzle, and the other reached for the Rod again.

There was a flash of golden light from the three Millennium Items in the room. Yami closed his eyes against it, and when he opened them again, he found himself in a familiar, yet different corridor.

"It would appear that all of our hallway halves look exactly the same. Interesting."
Set whirled around to glare at Bakura. "What are you doing here?"

Bakura pretended to look offended. "I'm sorry. If you didn't want my help, you should have said so. I thought you were fed up with these attacks on Kaiba."

"I didn't think you would be willing to help, considering you two don't get along," said Yami.

Bakura looked around Seto and Set's corridor. "Discovering the culprit will also keep my host safe; otherwise I could care less what happens to Kaiba."

Yami looked about the corridor. Set's door did look the same as his own. And while Yugi's half of their corridor seemed warmer and more inviting (down to the always-open door showing a room full of toys and games), it didn't surprise him in the least that Kaiba's half was a carbon copy of his company, down to the nameplate and the polished floor that contrasted heavily with the ancient stone on the other side. However, the office door itself was shrouded in a dark purple mist.

Frowning, Yami reached for the door handle, but was thrown back. "I take it this is normal?"

"Unfortunately," said Set, "All of my attempts to break through that door have failed."

"There are three of us this time," said Yami, but seeing the look Bakura gave him, corrected himself, "Alright, two and someone to stand back and laugh at us if we fail."

Bakura didn't respond to Yami's baiting, instead just stared curiously at the shadowy mist blocking the door.

"Then we will try and force our way through at the same time," said Set. He clutched the Millennium Rod tightly in his fist.

The Millennium Items lit the corridor with their magic, but it did little to remove the mist.

/Pharaoh, what just happened?/

/Spirit – what did you just do? Are you hurting Kaiba on purpose?/

Bakura rolled his eyes. /I did nothing, Landlord, that was the Pharaoh and his Priest./

Yami frowned. /We hurt him just now?/

Yugi's voice came through his link. /Yeah...he reacted pretty violently that time, but it was only for a moment. Did something happen?/

/Set and I just tried to breach into his room, but there is a barrier in place. We were unsuccessful./

Bakura suddenly stepped forward, as if the light bulb over his head had flipped on. "You both are pathetic. It's the Shadow Realm."

"The Shadow Realm?" Yami turned to him incredulously. "Within someone's mind?"

"It makes sense," Bakura shrugged. "Shadow Games cannot be interrupted once they're started, assuming that's what is going on here. Don't you remember, Pharaoh, how you tried to interfere with my little gambit against Marik atop Kaiba's blimp? You didn't get very far, did you?"

Yami paused. Bakura had already lost the duel by the time he was able to confront Marik. "How did you know about that?"
Bakura ignored his question and stepped closer to the mist. He reached out for the door, and ignored Set's gasp when his hand went right through to grasp the handle.

"H-how?" Set stammered, before throwing the Thief back up against the opposite wall. He drew the blade out from the Millennium Rod and held it out against Bakura's throat. "It was you, wasn't it?" He asked darkly, "Admit, you are the one doing this – how else would you be able to pass through the barrier, and the two of us cannot?"

Bakura snorted, and shoved the blade away. "What reason would I have to snoop through his mind? He doesn't have absolutely anything I would want. Even if it was me, and this was truly about the Millennium Items, don't you think I would go after someone who actually knows something about them? Someone who, I don't know… possessed it for more than a few measly months and didn't spend most of his time denying their existence?"

"He has a point," said Yami. "Kaiba would know the least out of all of us." He paused. "But that doesn't explain how you can get through that mist."

Bakura scowled. Neither of them really needed to know the truth – not now. The only reason he had been able to put his hand through the Shadows was because it seemed to recognize him as the caster. It wasn't him, of course, but that didn't leave a good feeling in his mind. The Shadow Realm usually warped and listened to only the one who summoned it, so why did he recognize him? He had never stepped foot in Kaiba's mind before. But it wasn't as if the Priest would believe him. Set wouldn't waste any opportunity to run him through with the bladed end of the Millennium Rod.

This turn of events was stumping him, leaving a feeling of foreboding in the back of his mind.

The tomb robber pushed himself off of the wall, sidestepped the angry Priest, and sauntered over to the other side of the corridor. He jabbed a thumb towards the door. "I think you're forgetting the reason behind our little field trip. Which is it going to be – are you going to interrogate me, or save Kaiba?"

"This isn't over, Bakura," Set growled.

"Yes, yes, continue your thinly-veiled threats," said Bakura, unfazed. He raised the Millennium Ring from its resting place against his chest and held it up to the barrier to the door. The Ring began to emit a golden hue, before taking the same color as the Shadow Realm itself. The barrier seemed to respond to the Ring, but it did not disappear.

"I cannot dissipate the Shadow Realm completely," said Bakura, frowning, "But it should let us all pass."

Yami nodded and held a hand out hesitantly. Unlike before, where he would have rebounded off of the shadowy wall, it continued on. "Alright… let's go."

"If Seto finds out that we also invaded his mind, he will not be pleased. I wouldn't be surprised if he goes off on you again," said Set, more so to Yami.

Bakura clapped his hands together. "Oh – well, in that case…” With an almost giddy expression on his face, he strode confidently through the barrier and threw open the door to Seto's room, disappearing inside.

"If it helps him wake up, I'm sure he'll get over it," said Yami, and followed Bakura inside.

Yami wasn't quite sure what to expect – would they see Seto asleep in his soul room? Would he be awake yet unable to fight the assault on his mind? Would they see the perpetrator outright? Would
they have to find him?

He didn't expect to land right into one of Seto's memories, standing off to the side as if he had been a witness to the original events in person. They had been dumped into the top floor office at Kaiba Corp, with Seto behind the desk, fingers pounding relentlessly into his keyboard.

Yami barely had time to look around before the scenario they had dropped into seemed to fade away into the obvious purple darkness of the Shadow Realm. A new scene unraveled before them, as if they were stuck in the middle of a living slide show.

Yami blinked and studied their new surroundings. They were in the museum, where Ishizu kept the tablets depicting the early days of Duel Monsters.

"These carvings look like Duel Monster cards." Yami turned around to see Seto and Ishizu standing by the headlining artifacts in the room.

"Indeed – in ancient times, the monsters were real, summoned by sorcerers to do their bidding," said Ishizu. "Eventually, the monsters became too powerful to control, and were sealed into the stone tablets to prevent them from causing any more destruction. However…evil sorcerers found ways to release the monsters from stone and used them to wage war against the Pharaoh."

Ishizu walked down the room a few steps and stood before the second enormous carving. "Come here, Kaiba, for this is the reason why I called you here tonight. It depicts the Pharaoh himself, and his greatest opponent."

"I realize you want to watch the show," said Bakura, looking around the room with narrowed eyes, "And that none of were actually here at the time, but it's possible whoever is attacking Kaiba is also here with us."

"And how would we find him?" asked Yami.

"We don't belong here," said Set, "And neither would they. Something must look out of place somewhere." He shook his head. "I have never been to this museum. Have you?"

Yami nodded as they heard Seto gasp in front of the tablet. ("T-that looks just like Yugi!") "I have, but…" he took a quick look around. "I don't see anything yet…"

"…and that looks like his Dark Magician."

"It's true that the Pharaoh's loyal servant was the Dark Magician," said Ishizu, "But look there. Across from the Pharaoh stands his greatest opponent, and his loyal monster."

Set gasped and furrowed his brow. Were the stories true? …How did he become enemies with the Pharaoh, when all that he could remember was standing and fighting alongside him?

"What the –"

"That's right, Kaiba – that sorcerer is you, and his loyal monster is none other than the Blue Eyes White Dragon!" said Ishizu, "The legends state that the sorcerer challenged the Pharaoh to a duel with the fate of the entire world at stake. The Pharaoh of course accepted the challenge, and their epic battle began. No one knows the true conclusion to that battle, but it continues on, after 5,000 years." She pointed to an area near the bottom of the tablet, under the figure of the Pharaoh. "The victor of the battle may have been recorded here, but it has been since worn away."

At Ishizu's mention of the Blue Eyes, Yami could have sworn he heard a low growl in the room, as
if it had come from the dragon itself. But that was ridiculous, there were obviously no dragons in sight, and Kaiba's duel disk wasn't active, let alone even in the room. …So where did it come from?

He didn't have time to ponder, before the memory faded away completely, going from the dark interiors of the Domino Museum to the sunny poolside of an extravagantly large mansion. At first, Yami thought it was Kaiba's until he saw someone get up off of one of the lounge chairs with a glass of wine in his hand. The long white mane was unmistakable.

"Ah, can it be? My dear friend Kaiba-boy!"

Yami watched Seto visibly stiffen. "Spare me the pleasantries. You and I have never been friends, so let's not start pretending that we are."

"Oh my, it sounds like someone needs a hug."

Bakura snorted.

Yami noticed Set looked uncomfortable watching Seto banter back and forth. He may not have been around during Duelist Kingdom, but it appears he found out about Pegasus one way or another.

"…I've come in search of a card powerful enough to beat Yugi's three Egyptian God Cards."

Yami nodded slowly, and looked around the bright landscape, for anything that would appear it didn't belong. So this was how Kaiba got the upgrade to his Blue Eyes Ultimate Dragon…. That entire drama that led to the destruction of the original Kaiba Dome was not something he really wanted to remember. He and Yugi were almost killed by a dark Egyptian spirit that had taken control of Kaiba for the majority of the duel. He was honestly surprised that none of them were crushed when the Dome's ceiling collapsed around them – especially Kaiba, who had ended up injured and unconscious when that entity cast him aside in favor of trying to do them in himself.

"…Oh very well, I confess, I have one card, that would help, but you can't have it!"

Seto glowered at him. "What!?"

Pegasus practically giggled. "I'm sorry, Kaiba-boy, but I don't think you deserve it. I may not see as well as I once did..." He put his hand up towards where the Eye used to be and moved his hair away from his face. Seto visibly shuddered. After a few seconds, Pegasus smugly moved his hair back to cover the empty socket. "...but to be honest, it doesn't take a magic eye to see just how thoroughly Yugi has trounced you again and again. If you ask me, it's downright embarrassing!"

Seto scowled at him and crossed his arms. "Well, in that case, you should have no problem defeating me in a duel."

Pegasus snorted. "And why would I duel you?"

Seto reached into the inner pocket of his white trench coat and pulled out his dueling deck. He didn't have to leaf through it, drawing only the top three cards and showing them out to Pegasus.

"Because if you'll put up the card I need to beat Yugi, I'll wager these."

As Dream Kaiba held up his three prized Blue Eyes White Dragons, the three spirits looked up and around the patio together as that same roar was heard again. It was slightly louder this time, but there was still nothing nearby to indicate where it had originated.

"I know I wasn't the only one who heard that," said Bakura.
Set shook his head. It sounded familiar, as if he had heard it before, but not while in Seto's mind.

The scene suddenly changed, and Yami found himself up in the familiar balcony area of Duelist Kingdom, standing beside Joey and the others as they watched Seto's duel against Pegasus in the arena below.

"I don't know how you're cheating, Pegasus, but this has gone on long enough." He placed his entire hand down and crossed his arms over his chest. "If you can see my cards, then I won't use them."

"That's a really gutsy move," said Yugi.

"How do you figure?" asked Tristan.

"There's gotta be a hidden camera or something around here," said Joey, looking around. "I wouldn't put anything past that sleaze. But now that Kaiba's not even lookin' at his cards, he's gotta put his trust in the heart of the cards, if he's gonna have any chance of savin' Mokuba."

They watched as Seto closed his eyes, his hand hovering near his deck at the start of his next turn, and hesitated.

"I have to put all my faith in this one card..." Seto muttered. He quickly drew it and placed it in attack mode on the dueling arena, summoning a Blue Eyes White Dragon in a shower of light and color. Once it was fully visible in the arena, it lifted its head and gave its unmistakable roar.

The same roar that Yami could have sworn he heard twice already this night.

Yami wasn't even listening to the gasps of surprise from his friends beside him. His eyes were fixated on the dragon. Somehow...it seemed different than what he remembered from this duel. More...real. Part of him wanted to dismiss the idea, since this was Seto's memory of a holographic monster, and maybe Seto felt the dragon was more real to him than it actually was...but something in this memory felt more off than the others they had witnessed.

Set felt something twist in his gut. Ishizu Ishtar had said this monster was his loyal servant...but that couldn't be. His personal monster spirit was the warrior Duos. Where did the dragon come from, and why did he feel so connected to it?

Bakura narrowed his eyes and turned to the two spirits beside him. "Can you feel it?"

"Something isn't right here," said Yami. "I can't tell what it is, though." He watched Seto direct the dragon to attack the Toon monsters on the other side of the field, and sighed as the attack failed with the cartoon version of the Blue Eyes dodging out of the way easily.

Bakura turned away from the duel and gazed about the chamber. That same familiar feeling he had out in the corridor was back – but aside from the Shadows seeming to cycle through Kaiba's memories, he couldn't see it invading the memory itself. So where was it coming from?

Gripping the Ring tightly, he looked down at the five golden pointers. "Show me."

The dangling spikes raised themselves up and began to wave around blindly before freezing in place. Bakura scowled. That wasn't helpful at all. One was pointing directly at him, one at Pegasus, one at the Pharaoh (but not the memory's version of Yugi, which he found quite interesting), and one at Ryou, but the last one went wildly into the air. He looked up, but there was nothing to see but the next balcony up, and there was no one standing on it.
But why would the Ring point to himself…and Pegasus…and the Pharaoh's spirit, but not the memory of Yugi, when the Pharaoh himself was already in Yugi's body? What was missing? If the answer were the Millennium Items, it should have also pointed to little Yugi, because the Millennium Puzzle was as much around the shrimp's neck as the Pharaoh's spirit beside him. What was the common connection?

Yami watched as Pegasus played the Dragon Capture Jar, and the Blue Eyes began to disappear into the Jar. His jaw dropped. It looked as if part of the Blue Eyes phased out from itself and went into the jar, but the dragon still stood on the field. The memory continued to play out as if the Blue Eyes had completely left, but there it was, plain as day.

"It's the Blue Eyes," said Yami. "That has to be it. I think we have been hearing it roar this entire time."

Set scoffed. "Are you saying the dragon is giving Seto nightmares?"

"No," said Yami, "But it is unaffected by the environment. It was supposed to go into that Jar. And there it is."

They watched as the Blue Eyes that should have vanished rear up its head and open its mouth. Yami recognized the beginning of a lightning attack on the way.

"I don't know how real that is…but maybe we should move."

The dragon roared louder and aimed at the balcony above them.

NO!

The three spirits jumped at the voice – it seemed to echo throughout the entire room.

"Who was that?" Set asked, glancing around.

"I think we found our suspect," said Bakura. He craned his neck to look up at the exact spot the last spike on the Millennium Ring was indicating. "The Ring says it's up there."

"There's no one there," said Yami, but he gasped as the White Lightning attack flew past them and seemed to make contact with its intended target. There was the briefest glimpse of a monstrous shadow before the room seemed to tremor, as if Seto himself was shuddering in his sleep, maybe even in pain, before Duelist Kingdom faded away completely and they finally found themselves in Seto's soul room.

But they weren't alone.

The three spirits were left standing by the door as if they had all just entered. The shadow they had spotted for only an instant back in Pegasus's castle was thrown back violently from his spot standing over Seto's prone form on the office couch and into the opposite wall. The Blue Eyes White Dragon, who had managed to escape Seto's memories with the rest of them, landed in a low crouch that shook the room, forming a guarded stance over its master.

YOU WILL NOT BEST ME AGAIN.

The shadow that Set could only assume was a rather large person got up. It clenched its claw-like fist as if to make another attack, and the same purplish aura that had surrounded them in the memories – and the outside of Seto's door was back, outlining both the monster and Seto, as if it were trying to go back and attempt another round in the CEO's memories.
The dragon raised its head again for another burst as Yami stepped forward, raising the Millennium Puzzle in front of him. He couldn't let this thing hurt Kaiba any more than it already has, even though he hadn't a clue what to do against it. "STOP!"

Set moved to stand next to him and raised the Millennium Rod in a battle stance. "Begone, intruder! Leave Seto's mind at once!"

Bakura stayed to the side and took in the form of the shadow, from its irregularly tall stature to the only feature visible in the dark mass: the golden eye, and narrowed his own eyes, deep in thought. There was something familiar about it…

The purple aura around the shadow faltered for just a moment as it noticed the three spirits for the first time, giving the Blue Eyes its opening to unleash another lightning attack.

**Our fight has not even begun, Pharaoh. We will meet again.**

The attack hit the shadow head on, and this time, it completely disappeared, taking the remaining bits of the Shadow Realm with it. But the dragon wasn't done quite done yet, and turned its gaze on the three spirits. Another bright flash of light blinded them all as the force of the final White Lightning attack forced them from the room.

Yugi and Ryou's spirit forms scrambled from Seto's side as Yami and Bakura were violently thrown back, their link through the Millennium Rod cut off as Seto eyes shot open and he bolted upright in bed.

Meanwhile, miles from the school, the glow of a broken sword died out, leaving the otherwise empty room in total darkness.

~~*~~

It wasn't uncommon for Seto's bed to be empty when they got up in the morning, but considering the events of last night, Yugi almost expected Set to force him into one of those deeper sleeps to make up for the rest that none of them really got.

"I haven't seen him," said Harry, at breakfast. "But if he doesn't show soon, he's going to miss the trip to Hogsmeade."

"Last night wasn't all that good," said Yugi, rubbing his eyes.

"Yeah," Ryou yawned. "We…uh, heard him tossing in his sleep a lot." He had to remind himself that Harry and the others were still just under the assumption that Seto was a restless sleeper, and that they were completely oblivious to the magical attacks that had been coming and going over the past few months. They had promised to be more open with them, but would that be their story to tell, or Kaiba's? Because if it were up to him, they would never hear about it.

Hermione frowned. "Madame Pomfrey could probably create some sort of tonic for that, especially if it's also keeping you two up at night."

Yugi shook his head. "I don't think he would take it, so it wouldn't really matter."

Ron shrugged. "I can't wait to see what new stuff Zonko's got in this time. You think they've got any of Fred and George's stuff in there?"

"They're probably competitors, so probably not," said Harry. He glanced past his best friend to see Romilda Vane and her friends just a short ways down the Gryffindor table. "Which might be a good
thing. Less love potions around the school." He grimaced. "I had to avoid two cauldron cakes from a third-year on Wednesday. I don't get it – no one ever thought to give me this much attention here before."

Hermione sighed. "It's because everyone realized that the Ministry was wrong last year and you're not the nutter they believed you to be."

"Sometimes I wish we'd go back to that," said Harry miserably, "between all the 'Chosen One' bull in the newspapers and the adoring looks I keep getting here, I wish I could be left alone."

Yugi smiled grimly, "The price of being famous…unfortunately."

To their dismay, the windows to Zonko's joke shop had been boarded up when they finally made their way down the village road.

Ron's shoulder's slumped. "So much for this."

"Hey – Ron, aren't those guys your brothers?" asked Ryou. He pointed down a ways where two red-headed individuals had left Scrivenshaft's Quill Shop.

"Yeah. Oi – what are you two doing here?" said Ron loudly.

"Well hello to you too," said Fred as he and his twin came over to join them.

"Fancy meeting you here," said George.

"What are you guys up to?" asked Harry, "I would have thought you would be in Diagon Alley today."

"Lee's running things down at the shop," said Fred, "George and I were contemplating buying Zonko's property and turning it into an outlet store."

"What happened to Zonko's anyway?" asked Hermione.

George shrugged. "Same thing as what happened to almost half the shops in Diagon Alley. People are afraid to stay open and are hiding with their families."

"I was looking forward to checking out the place too," said Yugi. "Ryou and I were hoping to send something funny back home to our friends."

"Well then," said Fred, "The next time you're in Diagon Alley, stop by and we'll set you up."

George noticed Hermione's reproachful look and quickly added. "Nothing dangerous, of course, all the mild, safe stuff that'll give your friends a good laugh."

"Better yet," said Fred, "How 'bout we send you a pamphlet or something of some of our goodies, and you can order what you want right from the comfort of the Gryffindor common room?"

"We'll even mail it home for you, no charge, just for being chums with our brother here," said George, playfully punching Ron in the shoulder. Ron scowled at him.

"That would be great," Ryou smiled. "Though…we won't get in trouble for giving nonwizards magical items, right?"

"Naah," said Fred, "What do you think happens to the Muggleborn students that go home each holiday? Now, I don't know what Japan's laws are like or anything, but if your friends are discreet
about magic, there shouldn't really be an issue."

"Well, we gotta run," said George, grabbing Fred by the arm and hauling him down towards the post office. "Have fun, and don't do anything we wouldn't do!"

Hermione rolled her eyes.

"So…where to first?" asked Ryou, "Since Zonko's is out of the question."

Yugi looked up and down the main street and frowned. "I don't see a Quidditch supply store here. That's a bit of a bummer."

"It's a long shot..." Hermione pointed to a shop a few doors down. "But Dervish and Banges might have brooms. They're usually a repair shop for magical instruments, but they have a few different kinds of things for sale."

Dervish and Banges, it turned out, didn't sell broomsticks, but they did have a great number of Sneakoscopes in all different sizes.

"They're dark detectors," said Harry, "When someone is doing something untrustworthy nearby, they spin and light up like an alert."

/Hm. I wonder if they work on spirits./ Ryou mentally smirked.

/Why don't you buy one and find out?/

/Do you plan on acting out anytime soon?/

Bakura sniffed. /Playing nice is getting old. Kaiba needs to get his blasted duel disks working because I have been itching for a good Shadow Game for some time..../

/SPIRIT!/

/Ugh. Fine. I'll wait until Christmas. Happy?/

Yugi purchased a small sneakoscope. "I wonder if it will help Grandpa in the shop. And it would fit right in, since it looks like a spinning top toy."

"So long as no one tries to buy it," said Ryou.

Yugi shook his head. "Nah, he can keep it behind the counter, or in the house. It may help him have peace of mind with all the weird stuff going on at home."

The next shop down the line was Gladrag's Wizardwear. "They specialize in ridiculous socks," said Harry, grinning. "We enjoyed finding gifts for Dobby the House Elf a few years ago here."

"I'm sure you could find a good gag gift for your friend Joey here," said Ron, "It's not Zonko's but I don't think they would expect their footwear to start berating them if it got too smelly."

"Really?" Yugi laughed. "That's awesome!"

They left the clothing store with fairly heavy bags. Yugi didn't really expect to gift his friends all socks, but surprisingly there was something for everyone in there, from self-warming socks that heat your toes when they get cold (for Téa), to ones that get quite vocal if they hadn't been washed in a long time (for Joey and Tristan, knowing they would find them hilarious).
The Tomes and Scrolls bookstore didn't have anything that caught their attention outright, but Ryou found it fascinating to peruse the shelves. This shop had much more in the way of wizard fiction than Flourish and Blotts, where mainly textbooks were sold.

At Scrivenshaft's Quill Shop, they found inks in every shade under the sun (and some that were multi-pigmented, allowing the writer to write in an ever-changing rainbow of color), and a wide assortment of quills and other writing supplies.

"Do you think Kaiba needs a new quill or any restock on his ink or parchment?" asked Yugi.

Ryou shrugged. "Why don't you call him?"

Yugi shook his head. "Phone's in my trunk." He looked down the line of ink bottles and picked up two bottles – black, and one that was a dark navy, with a handsome black and silver quill to partner with them. "He's not here to pick out anything for himself if he wanted, so we'll call it a gift."

"I never would have guessed you would be buying Kaiba of all people a present," said Ryou.

Yugi shrugged. "I'm just surprised he hasn't broken the one he's using. We've all seen how frustrated he was when he was trying to figure out his tech problem. His current quill's been through a war and back."

Ryou picked up a few extra stacks of parchment. When he saw the wide-eyed looks Harry, Ron, and Hermione gave him, he blinked. "What? I have a feeling our homework load is only going to increase, and I don't want to run out of supplies."

Ron snorted. "That'll be plenty, mate. Gonna share that haul with the rest of us?"

Ryou smiled slyly. "Maybe."

Bakura huffed. /You should sell it and make a profit./

/No, Spirit. I don't need to try and win any coins off anyone at every opportunity. There are such things as sharing, you know./

"There will be other visits to Hogsmeade throughout the year," said Hermione. "For now, I would save your money and cut that amount down in half. You really don't need that much, even with the homework dump we seem to get this year."

"How often are the Hogsmeade trips?" asked Ryou.

"There's usually about one every one to two months," said Harry. "It's the end of October now, so the next one will probably be right before the Christmas Holidays, or right afterwards."

"Hm," Ryou mused, and put a couple of rolls back. "You're probably right."

After paying for their new purchases, they joined the throng of students out in the street. "It's a lot busier on this end of the village," said Yugi.

"The Three Broomsticks is down this way, along with Madam Puddifoot's Tea Shop," said Harry, "The Three Broomsticks is a popular hangout. We'll head there after you finish emptying all the stores on the strip. And you have to try butterbeer."

Yugi blinked. "Butterbeer?"
Harry nodded. "It's great, believe me. But stay clear of Madam Puddifoot's. It's the hangout for couples," he said, remembering the botched date he had with Cho Chang the previous year.

Hermione nodded. "Unless you want any more adoration from the female student body, I'd avoid that place like the plague."

Ryou laughed nervously. "Good idea."

They fought the crowd past the post office, and Yugi pointed between the buildings to a rundown-looking shack up on a hill between the village and the school. "What's that place?"

"That's the Shrieking Shack," said Ron, "It's considered the most haunted place in Britain because the villagers used to hear all sorts of moans and howls from the place."

"Really?"

"Turns out it was a werewolf using the shack to hide away during the full moon. It's not really haunted," said Harry.

Ron snorted. "Way to spoil the secret, Harry."

Harry blinked. "What? It's true though."

Ryou pointed to The Three Broomsticks. "Are we going to be able to find a table in there? It looks crowded."

"We can stop in Honeydukes first," said Hermione, "It's the last shop on the strip. Don't get me wrong, it'll get crowded there too, but maybe the rush at the pub will die off in a little bit."

They walked through the colorful doors into the chocolate shop and Yugi's jaw dropped. There were more sweets in this tiny little shop than he had ever seen in his entire life. The walls were covered in shelves of chocolate bars and Droobles Best Blowing Gum ("The bubbles won't pop for days," said Ron, grabbing a handful), and cauldron cakes. Barrels were set up at the end of the aisles full of Bertie Botts Every Flavor Beans. There were sugar quills along the front counter, licorice wands, and so much more that Yugi wasn't sure just where to start.

Hermione didn't bother to hide the amused look on her face.

"I…don't know where to begin? There's so much stuff in here!"

"On one side of the room is usually good," said Ron, grinning as he grabbed a box of chocolate frogs.

Yugi leaned over to Ryou, eyes wide. "This place is dangerous."

Ryou grinned. "Only if you brought money."

Yugi held up his pouch with the remainder of his wizard money and shook it, hearing the coins clatter together in the bustling shop. "But I have money!"

Ryou laughed and dragged his friend over to the chocolate bars. "Here, start with something tame."

"You're not going to buy anything?" Harry asked.

Hermione shook her head from her spot by the door. "No…watching them ogle everything like five-year olds is enough for me."
Harry purchased a chocolate wand and nibbled on it, waiting for them to make it back outside.

"Do you guys have any money left?" asked Ron, when Yugi and Ryou finally left the checkout counter.

Yugi laughed, his arms weighed down by his purchases. "A little bit."

Hermione gaped at the size of their bags. "Did you leave anything in the store?"

Ryou snickered. "Just a little bit."

The Three Broomsticks was just as busy as it looked from the outside. Somehow, Hermione managed to score a large enough table in the back, while Harry and Ron went to grab butterbeers for everyone. Eventually, they returned with five frothy mugs. Harry had to sidestep Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle on their way to the table.

"Mmm, tastes like butterscotch," said Ryou, after taking a sip. "Not bad."

"Tastes like sugary ale. I'm not impressed."

"Of course you're not. I think it's tasty!"

"Ugh," said a voice from the table next to them. Hermione glanced over to see one of the seventh year Hufflepuffs (Leanne, she thought), fiddling with the straw of her drink, bored out of her mind. "What is taking her so long?"

"Are you waiting for someone?" asked Hermione.

"Katie Bell," said Leanne, "She went to the bathroom, but that seemed like it was ages ago."

"Did you try to go looking for her?" asked Ryou.

Leanne nodded numbly. "Yeah, but it's so busy in here I didn't want to lose our table."

"You want us to hold your table for you?" asked Yugi. "Maybe she's not feeling well."

Leanne frowned. "She seemed okay earlier today."

Harry looked around the pub. "Isn't that her over there?"

Leanne looked over her shoulder. "Oh – yes, thanks Harry. I'll see you around."

They watched her cross the crowded bar. "Katie, where the heck have you been!?"

After the two girls left the pub, Yugi leaned back in his seat. "Do we really have to go back to the school? It's been so nice to get away from everything, at least for a little while."

"We've been out longer than you think," said Harry, glancing up at the clock behind the bar. "We don't have to leave this second, but we should head back out soon. The last thing we all need is to be the last ones back at the castle and for Umbridge to come down on all of us for being late."

Ryou blinked. "But it's the weekend."

Ron polished off his butterbeer. "Doesn't matter, mate, or do you really want to risk getting on her bad side?"
Yugi frowned. "Not particularly."

The crowds out in the street had diminished somewhat by the time Yugi and the others left The Three Broomsticks' cozy atmosphere. Hermione started to lead them back the way they had come towards the castle when Ryou stopped and peered down a side alleyway. "What's down there?"

"The Hog's Head," said Hermione, "It's another pub, but it's definitely not as nice as the Three Broomsticks. It's very dark and sort of dirty. You could say it attracts a lot of unsavory characters."

/Hm./ Ryou sighed as he heard the spirit in his ear. /We should check that place out, then./

/I think I'll pass./

"It looks like there might be another shop down there, too." Yugi ran forward a few steps and craned his neck upwards to look at the sign over the door. "Oh! A sporting goods place – and there are brooms in the window! Let's check it out!"

Harry frowned. "We really should be heading back up to the school…"

Yugi pouted. "Ugh…if we only we found this place sooner. What about a quick peek?"

"Once you start looking, you're going to want to buy something," said Ron, "Brooms have a way of influencing your wallet. Especially the shiny new ones."

Yugi shook his head. "I remember some of the racing brooms in Diagon Alley, and I know I don't have nearly enough money on me today to buy one. But I just want to see!"

"We should have enough time if we make a quick look around," said Hermione, "But then we're going to have to book it back up to the school to make sure we're back in time for dinner."

Yugi nodded eagerly. "I'll be quick, I promise!"

He was halfway down the alley when a blood-curdling scream tore through the air.
Yugi froze in mid step. "What was that?"

"Sounds like someone is in trouble!" said Ryou, looking around. "I think it came from there." He pointed to one of the other side streets. "The road by the Shrieking Shack?"

"Well, let's go," said Harry. "Whoever it is might need help."

Most of the student traffic had already started moving back towards the school, leaving the main street in Hogsmeade much more maneuverable than before. It hadn't taken long to find the source of the screams.

Hermione gasped and rushed forward. "Look – it's Katie!"

Leanne was sobbing as she ran up to them. "I told her not to touch it," she wailed, "She wouldn't listen to me!"

Katie was spread-eagled and twitching with her mouth wide open as if a scream had been stolen from her lungs. Next to her on the ground was an opal necklace still partially contained in its packaging.

Yugi ran over to her. "Katie?"

Once he got close enough to touch her arm, Katie shot to the side as if dragged by an invisible rope. The screaming continued as she was magically hoisted up and suspended in the air. Both Leanne and Ron tried to reach to pull her back down, but she wouldn't budge an inch.

"Wha's goin' on here?" boomed a loud voice from behind them.

Harry whirled around. "Hagrid! We need help!"

"She touched the necklace," Leanne sobbed, "And all of a sudden she started shaking and screaming!"

As if mentioning what had happened would break the spell, Katie suddenly plummeted to the snow, still screaming, still twitching, until finally she stopped moving altogether.

"Get back to th' castle, the lot o' you," said Hagrid sternly, "'Specially you, Harry." He scooped Katie up in his arms and stopped Ryou from making another move. "Don't touch it," he said. "D'you understand? Only the wrappings."

Ryou nodded and used his wand to poke it back into its package before he carried the necklace back up to the school. They followed Hagrid quietly up the path towards the castle, the silence broken only by the snow crunching under their feet and Leanne's quiet sniffles. Finally, Hagrid stopped
them in the grand staircase chamber.

"Professor McGonagall will be expecting you in her office. I'll be taking Katie up to th' Hospital Wing." He looked down at them. "Go right there, understand?"

Harry nodded. "Okay."

Hagrid moved up a few steps and turned back. "Oh, and Harry?"

"Yes, Hagrid?"

"Try to go one year without getting' yourselves into trouble, yeah?"

Harry chuckled despite the situation they were in. "I'll try."

They hurried down the corridor to McGonagall's office, and Harry was surprised to also find Professor Snape waiting for them.

"Professor Hagrid has sent word that there was an incident," said Professor McGonagall, "But why is it, whenever something happens, it is always you three?"

"Honestly, Professor," said Ron, "Sometimes I wonder the same thing."

Ryou placed the necklace on her desk and took a seat next to his friends.

Snape stepped forward and lifted his wand. The necklace lifted itself from its packaging and slowly spun around, suspended in the air.

McGonagall looked from the necklace to Snape, worriedly. "What do you think, Severus?"

Professor Snape twirled the necklace around again, studying it carefully. He tapped his wand against the opal stone, and a small smoky skull appeared out of it before dissipating into the air. "I think… Miss Bell is lucky to be alive. The necklace is cursed. I imagine if she decided to wear it, it would have killed her."

McGonagall closed her eyes a moment before turning to the students seated before her desk. "Alright…how did this happen?"

Leanne sniffled and took in a deep breath as Hermione put a hand reassuringly on her shoulder. "We were in The Three Broomsticks. I went to get us drinks and a table and Kate said she had to go to the toilet. Harry and his friends were at the next table over and we talked for a bit. I mentioned that Katie was taking a long time…and when we finally spotted her, she was on the other side of the pub. I thought maybe she couldn't find our table so I went off to get her."

Leanne frowned. "But when I got there, she was acting all strange. She kept mumbling how important it was that she delivers this package."

"And then what happened?" asked McGonagall.

"We were going to go to Honeydukes afterwards, but she just took off towards the school and kept going on about the package," said Leanne, and then she suddenly froze in horror. "Oh no – what if she had been Imperiused and I didn't notice? She had never acted this way before until she went to the toilet in the pub. And I didn't know anything about a package she had to deliver. We never went to the post office."

She rubbed at her arms. "…We argued over it a bit, and I tried to take it from her, to see what the
fuss was about, you know? When I tried to open it, she grabbed it back, and I suppose that's when she must have touched it...she started screaming and twitching...and..." She looked to Harry and the others. "That's when Harry and the rest found us."

Leanne sniffled loudly again before adding, "If only I didn't try and open it, this never would have happened."

"Did she purchase the necklace in Hogsmeade?" asked McGonagall.

Leanne shook her head.

"Did she have it on her person before going to the village?"

Leanne shook her head again.

"Then someone gave it to her in The Three Broomsticks?" Yugi guessed, looking to his friends. "It could have happened anywhere, anytime we were there. The place was really busy."

Harry frowned. "Professor, I know Katie from on and off the Quidditch Pitch. She wouldn't willingly hurt anyone." He took a deep breath, thinking back to the people he did remember seeing in the bar. "I think Draco Malfoy was behind it."

If it wasn't for the dead seriousness in Harry's voice, the number of reactions going around the room was almost laughable. Yugi and Ryou shared confused looks with each other. Ron sighed, not looking Harry's direction at all, and Hermione slapped a hand to her forehead and mumbled something incoherent under her breath.

McGonagall narrowed her eyes. "That is a very serious accusation, Potter. Do you have any evidence to back up your claim?"

"Indeed," said Snape, looking up from his place next to the desk. The necklace floated back down to its wrappings as he moved to stand next to Professor McGonagall. "Present your proof, Potter."

"I just know." Somehow...calling out Malfoy sounded much more impressive in his head.

Snape sneered. "You just know. Once again you've astonished us with gifts, Potter. Gifts mere mortals can only dream of possessing."

McGonagall ignored the scathing look Harry sent back towards her colleague and turned to Leanne. "That is not proof, Potter. I would refrain from any more soundless accusations towards any other student unless you have sufficient reason to think otherwise. Now...did Katie say as to whom the package was intended?"

Leanne bit her lip. "She said it was for—"

"AHA! I was wondering where this lot had ended up," said Umbridge, striding into the room. "I should have been made aware of the attack the instant these children returned to the school." She looked to the students lined up before McGonagall's desk. "And as usual, it seems Potter is right in the thick of it."

"Mr. Potter and his friends have done nothing wrong, Dolores," said McGonagall, "And you were not immediately summoned because your presence was not required."

"Not required?" Umbridge spluttered. "As Defense Against the Dark Arts professor, I should have been notified straight away!"
"Then by all means," Snape drawled and stepped to the side. "Examine the necklace for yourself. I'm sure we'll be eagerly waiting your conclusions."

Umbridge looked at the cursed necklace on the desk. After a minute, she cleared her throat. "The Ministry will intend to run a full inquiry on what has transpired here today. No doubt all future visits to Hogsmeade should be immediately cancelled for the safety of the students."

"That is not for you to decide, Dolores," said McGonagall, "But you are correct – the safety and security of the students and staff is a valid concern. Rest assured I will take it under advisement with the Headmaster." She turned back to Leanne. "Now – who was Katie trying to give the package to?"

"Professor Dumbledore."

~~*~~

Hours ago…

Seto was not happy to find both Yami and Bakura standing over him as if he was on his deathbed, even less so to find the spirited silhouettes of Yugi and Ryou right behind them.

They scrambled back as he got regained his bearings and slowed his breathing down to a more normal level, then grabbed his phone and laptop, slipped on a robe over his pajamas, and retreated to the empty common room without a word to any of them.

"They were only trying to help," said Set after a while, as the usual workstation was set up by the slowly dying fire. He sighed as Seto continued to ignore him as he pounded away at the keys, because of course his host would compartmentalize everything that had just transpired and bury himself in the one comfort he was allowed here: his work. "It was only with their help that we were able to banish the demon from your mind."

"Which will only come back," Seto snapped, "If I never let you into my room, what made it okay to send those two?"

"Is that what you're upset about? Because we breached the private sanctuary of your soul room? Would you rather I let that…that thing assault you while your body slept?" Set scowled, "Because that would have been the only alternative."

Seto glared at him before returning his gaze to the computer. "I hope you made the trip worthwhile because you will not be doing that again. Any of you. My mind is my own, and you're not welcome in it."

Set shook his head incredulously. How could his host be so brilliant…yet so stupid at the same time?

"If it wasn't for their involvement (and that dragon's, he said to himself), you would still be held hostage in your own nightmares. Or perhaps that what you would prefer?" he said hotly, "The next time I will let you writhe alone to the demons of your past. What will be the next time, hmm? Will you be forced to watch your brother's soul captured in front of you all over again? That was one of them that you were forced to watch the last time, wasn't it? Perhaps the monster will go back even further to the days of your youth. I understand the memories of your adopted father were always so pleasant. If you're lucky, you can watch your scars born all over again."

"ENOUGH!" Seto shot to his feet and in one fluid motion grabbed the first thing at his disposal (someone's Charms book) and hurled it right at the spirit. It sailed right through him, of course, but it did smash the vase on the other side of the common room. "Get. Out."
Set laughed darkly. "We've bonded, remember? You can't dismiss me like one of your employees. I am just as much a part of you as the Pharaoh and the Thief are to their vessels."

Seto shook his head, and slowly sat back down. He returned to tapping away at the keyboard, even though he truly wasn't typing anything legible on his blank document. His mind was purposefully in their corridor, so he put up an illusion of working for his spirit to see. "So you've reminded me," he said with as much venom in his voice as he could muster, "Over and over again."

"The Pharaoh and the others worry about you," Set continued, completely oblivious to Seto's lack of concentration to his task. "If you would stop being so stubborn all the time, maybe –!"

The spirit suddenly disappeared into the Rod as Seto slammed Set's door shut with enough force to make him visibly wince. The pounding in his head hadn't quite gone away yet, and that didn't help.

Seto sat back down, propped his chin up with his fist and went back to reading through his emails. Finally, some peace.

Unfortunately, the quiet he had wanted so badly allowed him to stew in his thoughts and those were just as distracting as the second voice stuck in his head. Or…even the third, the one that belonged to his attacker.

Despite what Set may have thought, he was in a way grateful that Yugi and the others somehow managed to rouse him from sleep. The intrusions had only gotten worse since the school year began, and he was never able to get himself to wake up on his own.

He was vividly aware of almost everything that had happened, at least up until he had truly blacked out, right as Set (later learning with the other spirits' help) attempted to bust their way inside his mind.

He sighed, and thought back to the events that led to sitting in the empty common room well after hours, attempting to respond to emails he was in no mental state to read…

…The attack had started out as routine as the others: it began with a pounding headache that he assumed came from being around the fumes in Potions class. The common room had been too noisy for him to concentrate on anything, so he had gone up to the dormitory remarkably early.

He normally wouldn't escape to his soul room to try and fall asleep, but it was a slight step better than trying to conk out in the bedroom alone. For one thing, in his soul room, he wouldn't be able to hear Yugi or Bakura when they would eventually come up for bed, but it also kept Set out of his hair.

Additionally, the replica of his office was reminiscent of home, and helped him to relax.

Having been staring out at the facsimile of nighttime Domino, he had seen the reflection of the hulking shadow in the window. It was the first time he had ever seen his intruder before. It didn't seem human, with its bulky form that was even a few heads taller than himself. It didn't make a move since his eyes locked onto it. Maybe it realized it was spotted. If glaring through the glass at it would get it to leave, then fine. This wouldn't be the first staring contest he's had (and won), so he would intimidate this thing as long as it took.

Unfortunately, the shadow being didn't make a move to either come closer or leave. Sighing, he got up from his seat behind the desk. "I don't know who you are," he had said, "But you wore out your welcome after the first one."

The instant he walked around the desk, the shadow vanished.

Seto blinked from his spot in the middle of the room. Unless he was stupid lucky (which only seemed
to happen on a consistent basis to Joey Wheeler), there was no way that it would just up and leave because he snapped at it.

Although...during the other attacks, he was actually asleep – physically and mentally. Today, his body may have been at rest, but his mind was still whirring. Perhaps the shadow was caught off guard. Would it come back later, or did he spook it for good?

He didn’t have to wait long for an answer, for before he turned to go back to the chair behind the desk, a large claw-like hand appeared out of nowhere, grabbed hold of his throat and shoved him against the nearest wall. Before Seto could begin to fathom how a shadow had a physical presence, the rest of it rematerialized, tightened its remarkably strong grip on his neck, and easily raised him up off the floor so his head was level with the glowing golden eye on its otherwise featureless forehead.

Seto gasped, and raised his arms to try and pry the claw off of him. "I thought I told you to leave."

The shadow gave a raspy chuckle that sent shivers right through him. **Your feeble demands mean nothing, boy.** It shook him slightly, and Seto felt his feet dangle against the wall. **You cannot stop me.**

"I beg to differ," Seto snapped. He kicked out, still surprised there was something they made contact with, and the Shadow was forced back, although just a tiny bit. However, it was enough of the opening he needed to pry off the hand on his windpipe. He dropped down and staggered away from the shadow.

**You are strong…** The dark form disappeared again with an echoing laugh that sounded almost...playful. Was it...having fun?

Seto whirled around looking for any sign of it. It was too hard to place exactly where the laugh was coming from in the room. Now that he had a 'face' to give his attacker, he wasn't going to let it go so easily.

The dark laughter returned. **...But I am stronger!**

Without warning, Seto was struck from the side of the room. He stumbled backwards, until his ankles hit the edge of the office couch, and he toppled down onto it. Before he could regain any sort of balance or right himself, the shadow reappeared again practically on top of him as its hand clamped down over his mouth and nose, pressing his head roughly backwards into the cushion.

**Struggling is pointless,** laughed the shadow, pressing Seto’s head further into the cushion. If his neck was bent at any more of an odd angle, and if this wasn't just a projection of himself in his own head, Seto was certain it was going to snap.

Ah, ah...I don’t think so. It chuckled again, raising its other hand. It glowed a purplish color with a mist that seemed to radiate out towards him, and Seto suddenly found his arms and legs frozen in place from trying to push the shadow monster off of him.

**Why do you continue to resist?** It asked, in a strangely conversational tone. **Even if you could call for help, no one will come to your aid. This is your mind, not the waking world.** It moved its glowing hand closer to Seto’s forehead.

Between the crushing grip keeping his head in place, and the purple mist somehow keeping his limbs frozen, Seto couldn’t move an inch, and could only glare up at it. The only way he could think of fighting back at this point was to mentally 'will' the monster out, but how likely was that to even
Now that I have your attention, hold nice and still and show me the others.

The purple-misted hand pressed a finger to his forehead. Pain seared behind his eyes as his only vantage point (the office ceiling) disappeared away into more of the mist. Seto wasn't sure who the 'others' were that this shadow wanted to see, but he'd be damned if it got what it wanted without some sort of resistance.

The throbbing in his head intensified as a memory started to take form around them. The shadowy mist faded away, transforming into the dueling arena on top of his blimp. Seto squeezed his eyes shut. Before the scene could complete itself and show the duelists in play, the surroundings suddenly disappeared again. When he finally reopened his eyes, despite being still painfully held down as he was, he reveled that they were back in his soul room office.

The golden eye flared as the grip on his head tightened, and Seto drew in a raspy breath. Avoiding looking at the eye altogether and keeping his mind focused was getting much more difficult, especially since the eye was literally right there in his face. And if the hand squeezed down any further, he was going to have even more trouble breathing...but...that didn't make sense. Wasn't this all in his head? No one was really crushing him in a chokehold, or magically immobilizing his body to his bed. ...So why couldn't he get out?

Still you struggle against me. What did I tell you about fighting back? It said darkly, and cackled again. It adjusted its grip and leaned closer. Try as you might, it is a wasted effort. Your thoughts are mine. I would have thought, after all of the different versions you have been in witness, that you would recognize a Shadow Game when you see one.

The Shadow tilted its head, almost thoughtfully. Although, you have never participated in one, have you?

Seto still couldn't speak, so he assumed that was a rhetorical question.

...Then let me share this – in my Shadow Game, pain is real. I warned you to stop your petty struggles. And I can also sense the fear you try to suppress. So let me give you the solace of knowing you will wake from this night, Seto Kaiba. Let the marks you will soon bear serve as a reminder of what happens if you continue to fight on my next visit.

If there is a next visit, Seto said to himself.

Of course, I will be back, It said, humored. We have only so much time to share together in one night's time, and you are wasting it. It tilted Seto's head from the smidge he was able to angle it away from the golden eye, forcing Seto's eyes back on it again. You could make this so much easier on yourself if you show me what I seek. I could have you alone, in peaceful dreams of being home with your brother in an instant. But so long as you continue to resist, I will be forced to continue. Now...let's try this again....

The Shadow growled as once again it was subverted to a memory of 'another day at the office'. You are trying my patience. It pushed down harder on Seto's head. But I can also feel you tiring. It has been quite a time mentally sparring with you, but I think it's time someone went to sleep, don't you?

The glowing hand was brought forward again, and Seto felt the pounding in his head worsen,
forcing him to visibly wince again. But it was strange, the pain didn't seem to come from the Shadow's meddling. It felt off in the distance, as if it came from Set's side of his mind.

The Shadow suddenly withdrew its hand back to its side, and the hold on his neck faltered, but only slightly. Something else was also at play, for that painful surge was someone else's doing.

The golden eye turned towards the door. **It would appear your other half is trying to barge through the door…and he's enlisted some help.** The eye flared and turned back. **No matter…**

It brought the glowing hand back up. **I've already ensured we have our privacy. And their attempts to breach the barrier I've put in place are exhausting your stamina. We both know that you can only fight back so long as you are alert. All I have to do is wait it out; but since my own time here is short, let's expedite things.**

Two shadowed fingers were pressed against Seto's forehead. Agonizing pain shot through his head again, taking the rest of the fight from him as his eyes slipped shut, and feeling and seeing nothing else until the sounds of a roaring dragon tossed him back to reality.

After about ten minutes of just staring at the screen, not truly reading the words across it, Seto sighed and leaned back. He stretched, frowning as a sharp ache began to settle in both his neck and jawline. He didn't remember sleeping funny to get his neck to hurt like it was. That only left one explanation.

'**Let the marks you will soon bear serve as a reminder of what happens if you continue to fight on my next visit**' it had said.

Grabbing his phone off of the table, he switched on and reversed the camera function. Lifting it as if it were a mirror, his eyes widened as the formations of a large bruise already began to appear roughly in the spots where he had been held down.

'*In my Shadow Game, pain is real*' he remembered the monster saying. Seto scowled and massaged his neck, ignoring the sensitive throb when he touched a tender area. **Well, that didn't take long.**

Set reappeared, in the middle of the common room, and looked to his host worriedly. "…I felt that too just now. What happened? Are you hurt?"

Seto snapped at him. "What does it look like?" Why couldn't the Priest just stay in his room for a change? He thought slamming the door (literally) on their conversation was enough of a clue that he didn't want to be bothered?

Set gasped. "How – did…did that monster do that to you?"

Seto stared icily at Set before setting the phone back down. "No, I just enjoy asphyxiation. **Who else would have done this, Set!?**"

"But…" Set stammered, "H-how? This has never happened before…"

"I've never been awake before to see that freak. Apparently I put up too much of a fight for him. It. Whatever that thing was."

Set blinked. "You saw him? Did he say who he was?"

Seto shook his head. "No. He was more or less a shadow. Larger than any normal person." He massaged his jaw. "A lot stronger than one, too."

"He wasn't truly here though," said Set, "You shouldn't have been physically harmed."
Seto sighed, and repeated the words still echoing through his head. "Pain is real in a Shadow Game."

Set's eyes widened. "You were in a Shadow Game? What did he want from you?"

Seto grimaced against the pain in his jaw. "He didn't give much opportunity to chat." At this rate, he wouldn't be surprised if his jaw bruised also or if his neck completely stiffened up by daybreak. "He...it...said it wanted to see the others."

Seto then narrowed his eyes. "You said something similar, come to think of it."

"I was referring to the other Sacred Guardians," said Set.

"You may not be the only one looking for them," said Seto, "...which might be a sign that the three of us aren't the only ones with spirits running around."

Set watched him attempt to focus back on his work. Would he explain what had gone on before he intervened with the Pharaoh? Did that mean, somewhere deep in his mind, that Seto knew who they all were? ...But, did that also mean that the attacker also got away with that information? "What happened exactly?" he asked softly. "Before we broke through the wall it put up?"

Seto barely spared the spirit an annoyed glance, and clicked through to another message in his inbox. "What's to tell? It forced its way in, failed to look at anything useful, and got kicked out by...you, I imagine. I blacked out right around the time you all were trying to force your way inside."

Set froze. The dark shadow saw much more than nothing, but Seto didn't have any recollection of it. "Then you don't know about the visions...or the dragon?"

Seto paused. He remembered hearing what sounded oddly similar to his Blue Eyes' roar, right before he was forced awake, but nothing else. It went right from the gleaming golden eye and the purple shadow mist holding his attention, to the dragon's roar in the darkness, and then he was sitting up in bed, Yugi and the others gathered worriedly around him. He told Set so, and then eyed the spirit suspiciously. "Why? What did he see?"

Set sighed heavily. "Our problems may now go beyond the dangers of having that tomb keeper in Voldemort's clutches. We're going to need to start your lessons earlier than expected. Much earlier."

Seto rolled his eyes. "Like when, tomorrow?" He sighed, and seeing the look on Set's face, rubbed at his temples and closed the laptop. There was no way he was going to get any work done now.

"Seto Kaiba! Seto Kaiba, sir!" squeaked a voice from the end of the table. Set immediately disappeared back into the Millennium Rod.

Seto looked down. Dobby was holding a steaming cup in his hands, which were covered in mismatched mittens, while balancing an array of oddly-shaped wool hats on his head.

"Dobby. What are you doing here?"

"Cleaning, sir!" Dobby said. "The other house elves refuse to clean Gryffindor Tower on account of Harry Potter's friend, for she leaves clothes hiding around the common room for the other house elves to find."

"...I take it they don't like them?"

"'Tis a sign of freedom, sir! The other elves are happy to work and service the school. They don't
wish to be free!"

Seto gestured to the stack of hats on Dobby's head. "You obviously don't mind them."

"Dobby is already a free elf, sir!" said Dobby proudly. "Harry Potter helped free Dobby from the Malfoys' servitude, and now Dobby works with the other elves in the kitchens!" He held out the mug. "Does Seto Kaiba need more coffee?"

Seto shook his head. "No, I don't think I'll be up for much longer…but there may be something else you can help me with…"

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Voldemort was accustomed to seeing the unique purple haze of magic whenever the Dark Priest was around. However, he was not used to seeing it fly like a dart from the window back to the sword fragment with enough force to knock it down from its place on the table.

"You are back early," said Voldemort, waving his wand to send the sword back to the table. Nagini slithered her way across the chair to rest in his lap.

This evening did not go as planned.

Voldemort noted that, unlike the other times he would converse with the mysterious spirit, Aknadin did not summon himself in his shadowed form. Instead, his voice radiated through the room similar to their very first meeting.

I have been cut off from the boy's mind before my power had run out.

Voldemort leaned forward in his chair. "How?" he asked curiously. This had never happened before. Aknadin said on more than one occasion that inserting himself into Seto Kaiba's mind was a relatively simple task.

I did not anticipate him still in a state of alertness. His mental defenses were still quite high, despite my attempts to weaken him ahead of time.

"I see," said Voldemort flatly. "So what happened?"

He put up quite a fight, and it took more power than I would have wanted to finally subdue him. The challenge was quite refreshing, but in the end, the Pharaoh and his Priest found a way to intrude and stop me before I could finish my task.

"I thought breaching the mind after you went into it was impossible."

It should have been, but someone else was there with them. Somehow they managed to get through the Shadows I had placed, and forced me from the boy's memories. To add insult, they managed to summon her."

Voldemort paused. "'Her'?"

The White Dragon. Somehow, the soul of the Priest's guardian dragon managed to cross into Seto Kaiba's mind. I am not certain quiet yet as to how that was accomplished. She banished me from my position, and severely weakened me at the same time. I may not have the ability to travel such a distance and make another attempt in some time.
"The Priest is protected by a dragon?" Voldemort mused. "He sounds more powerful than you originally made him out to be."

The White Dragon has a power grand enough to rival that of the great Egyptian Gods.

Voldemort settled back and resumed petting his snake. "Can we take advantage of this power?"

That is a great undertaking. If the dragon is a part of both of their minds, then controlling him will be difficult. It will take a great deal of effort to break through and subdue their mental defenses, and then keep it that way. It was how I failed the first time.

"Then you must try again."

I cannot. In my weakened position, the travel is far too great. I do not know how the White Dragon was summoned this time and not the others, but she will no doubt be guarding them carefully from this point forward. If I am to return to the boy's mind, in my current state, I will require time to recover my strength. …Or, you will need to bring him to me, which has already been ruled out as a solution.

"No," said Voldemort, "Dumbledore has his hooks in too deep for that. For now, we will focus our efforts in Egypt." He sighed. "Did you at least find out anything of use, or was this night a waste of time and energy?"

As a matter of fact, I did. When I am able to travel next, I believe a change in scenery is in order….

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"Are you sure this is the right section of the castle?" asked Set, phasing out of the Rod as Seto turned down another corridor.

"This is where Dobby said it was," said Seto, barely giving the spirit a glance. "And disappear back into the Rod before someone sees you."

Set rolled his eyes. "There's no one around. Everyone is off visiting the village. Quit being so paranoid."

"Says the one who wants to get this started as soon as possible," Seto muttered. "You are just as sure that I'll get attacked the next time I close my eyes as I am about you being seen."

He stopped in front of the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy and turned to the opposite wall.

"There's no door," said Set.

"Thanks for that, Captain Obvious. You have to will it to appear, otherwise it won't."

"Ah – that's right. I do remember the elf saying something of that sort last night."

Seto crossed his arms. "So besides the obvious 'no interference' clause, is there anything else I should know before we…summon the room?"

Set shook his head. "I would think not. If you have never experienced a Shadow Game, or the Realm in general firsthand, I can't guarantee the reaction you may have. You might want something to rest on if you have too many adverse effects."
"I've watched Marik's psycho personality summon the Shadow Realm in all of his duels."

Set shook his head. "No – being witness to someone else's Shadow Game is nothing like being a true participant."

Seto sighed. "Alright…" He walked across the stretch of corridor in front of the tapestry, turned on his heel, and walked back. After the third pass, he heard Set gasp and looked to the empty wall.

A door had appeared.

Striding forward, he opened the door and slipped inside. Once it closed behind him, the door vanished.

Turning back around, Seto glanced about. Warm torchlights lined the walls. The only furniture in sight was the two large plush cushion piles on either side of the center of the room. Seto shrugged out of his jacket, pulled the Rod from his belt loop and moved to the middle of the open space.

Set floated beside him, and frowned, looking at the bruises along Seto's neck. "Are you sure you are up to this? I'm worried you haven't rested enough."

Seto leveled him a look of utter disbelief. "You're kidding."

Set held up his hands. "You only slept for two hours, and that was before you were subjected to the Shadows." While his host had eventually made his way back up to bed afterwards, he never did truly fall back to sleep.

"I've managed under less before," Seto said dismissively. "Let's just get this over with."

Set frowned. Their exercises weren't something that could be rushed by any means, but he wasn't about to tell that to him.

"Alright…what do you know about Shadow Games…or the Shadow Realm."

"I know that Bakura's and Marik's crazy other selves used it at every opportunity."

Set nodded. "Anything else?"

"Losing a duel sends your soul to the Shadow Realm for an undetermined period of time…until Yugi plays hero to get you out."

Set chuckled. "Why do you say that?"

Seto looped the Rod back onto his belt and shoved his hands into the pockets of his slacks. "Which – that you lose your soul at the end of a Shadow Game, or that Yugi plays savior all the time, because both of them are true."

"The first."

"What else is there? Spirit Bakura apparently has been trying to banish Yugi's Pharaoh since they were reintroduced to each other…sometime around the Duelist Kingdom fiasco. And Marik went after him because of some nonsense about rejecting his family's heritage."

Set tilted his head. "But not all of Marik's victims were sent to the Shadow Realm, were they?"

Seto wasn't amused. "What are you getting at?"
Set held up his transparent Millennium Rod. "Shadow Games aren't just about sending the loser to the Shadow Realm. If you recall, each game that you witnessed was unique in its own right. It is up to the caster of the Realm to dictate the terms of each Game. When he fought against that Valentine woman, taking damage resulted in the loss of her memories. And when the Pharaoh finally faced him, not only was his soul on the line, but so was Yugi's."

Seto thought back. "But he also dueled against Wheeler, and won. But that third-rate duelist didn't end up in the Shadow Realm when he lost."

"From what I remember, being trapped in the Rod at the time," said Set, "Marik invoked physical pain as a penalty to taking damage in that duel. After barely surviving Ra's attack, the boy nearly slipped into a coma. And last night..." He gestured to Seto's neck. "Your punishment for fighting back, I imagine. If you think about it, the two games played similarly to each other, since both inflicted physical punishment."

"I suppose..." said Seto, "Though mine took place in my mind, not the real world. My body shouldn't be reeling from something it wasn't able to feel."

"The intruder clearly wasn't expecting you to be conscious for its visit," said Set, "Hence the severity of its attack versus the other times. It needed to weaken you in order to get what it wanted."

Seto scowled. If the shadow was truly just trying to knock him out so it could go on a rampage through his head, it probably could have done it easily. He was nowhere near strong enough to stop it no matter how hard he tried. No doubt it could have completely incapacitated him before he realized it was even there, so there wasn't a need to toy with him as it did. The thought of knowing the shadow may have been enjoying it made his jaw twitch.

"So what are we doing here, exactly?" Seto finally said, "What exactly are these 'lessons' going to include?"

"I wouldn't consider them lessons. More like exercises," said Set. "I need to see how the Shadow Realm affects you. Yugi could not survive in his first Shadow Game without the Pharaoh's influence, and I fear you are the same."

Seto huffed. "That's because the Pharaoh fights all of Yugi's battles for him." He leveled the spirit a hard look. "I trust you won't be doing that to me."

"Oh, no," Set reassured him, "You fight your own battles. I will not insult you in such a way. ... Though there is no shame in asking for help in fights you cannot win alone, Seto."

Seto, nodded, apparently satisfied with that answer. "How is this going to work?"

Set gestured to the Rod at Seto's side. "I'm going to have to take control, for just a moment or two to summon the Shadow Realm, and then we're going to play a Shadow Game. And I assure you – no one will be trapped here by the end of it."

Seto crossed his arms over his chest. "Won't that be difficult if there's only one body between us?" He then had a fleeting memory of Yugi's Shadow Game versus Marik, where both Yugi's were completely visible at the start of the duel, and wondered if Set was planning something similar.

"Don't worry about that," said Set. "Are you ready to begin?"

"As ready as I'll ever be," said Seto, grabbing hold of the Millennium Rod.

Set disappeared from sight, and Seto felt himself gently pushed back into their corridor as control
over his body slipped away. He immediately felt a dull ache in his head, similar to the pain he began to have yesterday afternoon, but not nearly as intense, as Set gave his body back.

"How do you feel?"

Seto blinked and looked around. The dark purple shadowy mist had completely consumed the room, and rather than appear before him as a ghostly spirit, Set stood before him completely solid. The Millennium Rod had switched to his hand.

Set studied him closely. "Before you downplay anything, this is not the time to put on a front. I'll need you to be honest with what you are experiencing while here."

"I've got another headache, just started."

"The same sort as the one you had yesterday?" Set waited for the nod. "Okay. So it began its assault well before you went to bed. Interesting."

"So what is this game we're supposed to play?" asked Seto. He understood Set's paranoia about protecting his mind from outside influences, and he agreed with it – a decent night's sleep more than twice a week sounded heavenly (especially since he wasn't solely focused full-time on running the day-to-day at Kaiba Corp), but there were still a good number of things he was hoping to do this weekend. He didn't really want to spend all of it shut away in the Room of Requirement.

Set raised a hand and a large clock appeared out of the shadows. "This is not as much a game as it is a test of endurance. The Shadow Realm is going to weaken your defenses. I need you to see how long you are able to last here."

"What am I supposed to do?"

"Be honest with me. I asked the Pharaoh about Yugi's first experiences in the Shadow Realm. I am more or less curious to how you are affected here. If you can make it through the first hour without needing my intervention – and I will know if it gets to the point where I must step in – then you win this pseudo-game. If not, you'll play some sort of penalty."

"I'm just going to stand here for an hour?"

"We can play an actual game, if you prefer," said Set. "But it isn't necessary. Splitting your focus between resisting the Shadows and doing something else may be more of a detriment to your health, but it would be more consistent with a true experience here. If that's your wish, I will let you choose the activity."

"I take it if I do choose something, whether I win or lose has no bearing on this overall game?"

"That's right. Your game is merely to pass the time."

Seto tapped his fingers against his opposite elbow. "What happens if I win...or lose your little exercise?"

"If you can successfully remain cognizant for one hour, then the rest of the day is yours. There may still be time to visit the village before everyone else returns to the school, or if you want to hide away in the common room and tend to your company, that is fine. I will not interfere."

"And if I don't?"

"Then we continue again."
Seto blinked. "Doing this all over again is my 'penalty game'?"

Set shrugged. "This isn't meant to be life-threatening dangerous. Keeping you here for another round seems fair enough. We both know you don't really want to be here."

"Alright..." Seto looked down at his left hand for a solid minute. Finally, he exhaled loudly. "I need you to drop the Shadow Realm for a minute. Apparently I can't use the Room to summon a book here."

Set chuckled. "Ah. I didn't think about that. Are you going to do your homework?" That seemed like a weird thing to want do here of all places, but if that's what Seto wanted....

"Something like that. Umbridge's written exam is on Monday, so I might as well get a head start on the next section."

Set laughed and rolled his eyes. "You're seven chapters ahead of the rest of the class already. I'm surprised you haven't finished the book yet."

"Look, are you going to let me read, or not?"

"Alright, alright. But think up anything else you need before I take us back," said Set, dropping the Shadow Realm around them. "Once I re-summon the Realm, we're going to start." He waited for Seto to settle himself down in an armchair summoned by the Room with a heavy book in his lap. "You don't want the seating I prepared for you?" he asked in a mockingly hurt voice. "They were the height of comfort back home."

"I don't care how plush those cushions are," said Seto, "being flopped on the floor is not my idea of comfortable." He opened his book and waved a hand dismissively, "Go ahead."

"Alright..." said Set, "Let me know when this becomes too much for you."

Set watched from his seat on one of the cushions. Occasionally, he would see Seto's hands flex in and out of fists or a twitch in his jaw, but otherwise, he appeared fine.

"How is your head?"

"It hurts."

"About the same as before?"

Seto shook his head and turned the page. "No, it's increasing in intensity. It's nothing I can't handle, although the temperature drop here doesn't help."

Set frowned. "Anything else?"

"Nothing at the moment, but it's only been a few minutes."

"The Pharaoh made it seem that Yugi had a terrible time adjusting to the Shadow Realm."

"Well, I'm not Yugi," Seto said dully, "You could say I've been...conditioned to handle situations like this."

The corner of Set's mouth ticked upwards. "You've been trained to resist the Shadow Realm before? Why didn't you say so? This entire day could have been avoided."

"Very funny. I'm talking about pain. Stress. Difficult people....spirits included."
"Yes, yes, I am sure I annoy you to no end. You're telling me that in your…" he paused. Anything to do with the stepfather was always a sore point. "…youth, you've undergone such a transformation that it's turned you into a machine."

Seto barely looked up. "If that's what you want to believe, then so be it."

After a few more minutes, the pain in his head suddenly worsened. Seto leaned back into the back of the chair and closed his eyes.

"Are you alright?"

"Hnnn…"

Set shifted in his seat. "That doesn't sound very convincing."

"It's getting harder to concentrate."

"From the headache?"

"…Partially. There's also pressure in my chest."

Set made to get up. "That's what Yugi felt before it became too much for him. The stress of their run with the Shadow Realm caused him to black out."

"Yugi was also fighting in a strenuous duel to win back his grandfather's soul," said Seto, wheezing slightly. "I'm sitting here doing nothing. The two are hardly comparable."

"Still…" said Set worriedly, "We can stop if it's too much…"

"NO," Seto snapped, and glared at him ferociously. After a long blink and a sigh, he said, quietly, "No. It's – it's fine. Just…just give me a minute."

"You don't have to prove anything to me," said Set, "It's alright. We're going to work on improving your resistance to the Shadow Realm in case that intruder comes back. But you can't expect it to happen all at once. This will take time."

"I'm fine," Seto repeated, and tried to even out his breathing again. "I felt something push at my mind. It was…similar to what happened last night, but the instant you started panicking, it stopped."

"Ah…" Set looked down. "That was me. The goal of this is to see how long you can resist a mind purge. I am…in a way, controlling the Shadow Realm in this game. And it will adapt when it realizes it cannot get through one way."

Seto flexed his fist, and regarded the spirit with narrowed eyes. "I thought you said this wasn't going to be dangerous. You're essentially doing the same thing as the assailant."

"I'm not doing this to purposefully cause you pain," said Set, "I never said this would be easy. If you don't want to continue this route, I'm sure I can try to come up with some other way to stop the Shadow, but how long are you going to let it rampage through your mind before that happens?"

Seto sighed, propped his elbow up on the arm of the chair and rubbed at his eyes.

"Do you feel like you've repelled anything?"

"I don't know," Seto muttered, "I thought I might have, but that was just you flipping out." He shuddered a bit as it seemed like the temperature dropped another couple of degrees. "Just…keep
going. We're over halfway through your allotted hour anyhow."

Set glanced over to the floating clock. "As you wish." He watched Seto lean back against the chair, eyes closed, the book forgotten in his lap. While he tried to distance himself from his connection to Seto while in the Shadow Realm, he could still feel the shadows probe at his host's mind again before they were pushed back, without any influence on his part.

Relieved, Set allowed himself to relax back onto the cushion. Perhaps Seto had more of a handle on his mind than he initially thought. He had pegged him to have needed to return to the Room of Requirement by now.

His concentration was momentarily broken when the Millennium Rod suddenly began to activate in his hand. Set frowned. He didn't do that. And Seto avoided mostly everything that had to do with the Rod's power, but did he tap into it without realizing?

"Seto, are you trying to use the Millennium Rod?"

"...No..." Seto opened his eyes and looked down at it. "What is it doing?" He brought a hand up and tugged at the collar of his shirt. Despite the top two buttons being undone, it felt oddly tight against his throat. Maybe that was just a residual ache from the night before....

"It started on its own," said Set.

Seto scowled. "Are you sure you're not se--"

Set tore his gaze from his Millennium item and looked to his host as he was interrupted. One of his hands was clutching the arm of the chair so tightly that his knuckles had turned white. The other was clutching his forehead. "Seto?" As he started to rise from his cushion again, he barely noticed the Rod flare again.

The pounding in his skull increased again, and Seto pitched forward, clutching the arm of the chair tightly. There was no possible way that Set was going this far with their little exercise. He gasped as a black shadow came seemingly out of nowhere, formed a silhouette similar to the hulking mass that attacked him the previous night, and grabbed at him in the exact same spot as before, hauling him up and dangling him in the air.

WELL, WELL... The golden eye materialized on the shadow and turned to Set. LOOK WHO MADE MY TASK EASIER...

~~w~~

Despite no longer having a physical presence, Set was certain that if able, he would have paced his way through the floor to the rooms below them. The Shadow Realm had long since disappeared, and with it went the shadow monster. The Room of Requirement was silent, save for the ticking of the clock hanging on the far wall. Set frowned. It didn't appear that Seto was going to make it to Hogsmeade with the rest of the students today – assuming he had any intention of even going. He suspected that if there was anything he pulled Seto from today; it was just his company work and his daily conversation with his brother.

Seto stirred, his eyes slowly opening to see the Room of Requirement's ceiling. He propped himself up on an elbow against the cushions he had been sprawled upon and rubbed at his eyes.

"How do you feel?" asked Set.

Seto blinked a few times to get his bearings. "Headache's gone. And...despite nearly being strangled
a second time in 24 hours, I feel fine."

Set nodded, smiling slightly. "Good." He gestured to the low table beside him that Seto didn't remember seeing before their trip into the Shadow Realm. On it was a fruit basket, a small plate of sandwiches, and a pitcher of water. "I called upon your elf friend after we returned. You need to get some strength back in you."

"Hn…." Seto stared at the food. "I take it I lost the game."

Set looked down at the floor. "I must apologize. I didn't mean for it to get that…intense."

"Wasn't the whole point to see how long I would last?"

"Well, yes," Set admitted, "But I did not expect the Shadow Realm to warp into that creature. It adapted to its failure to probe into your mind directly by resorting to what it knew had worked before – physical pain. I…I thought the monster was really in the room with us."

"Was it?"

"No," said Set quickly. "It was a facsimile created by the Shadow Realm. At least, I think that's what it was. It did not appear with us until the Millennium Rod seemed to act out on its own, and it resisted my first attempts to banish it. I pulled us from the Realm when you lost consciousness. That was…several hours ago."

Seto frowned and looked down at his watch. Dinner would be ending within the half hour. "Have I been out all afternoon?"

"Mostly," said Set, suddenly looking guilty. "You were not fit enough to return to the Shadow Realm in such a short time. I shouldn't have rushed you. …You'll forgive me that I wanted you to rest."

"I take it we're going back once you force some food into me?"

Set quickly shook his head. "No. Frankly, I have some concerns, but it's nothing for you to worry over. We'll work on something else, but not today." He looked to the fruit basket and then back to Seto, pleadingly. "Please eat."

Seto sighed. He twisted a grape off of the bunch, held it up for the spirit to see, and then popped it into his mouth. "Happy?"

"It's a start." He waited for Seto to make it through half of a sandwich before he continued. "May I ask you something?"

Seto poured himself a glass of water. "You're going to ask it anyway, so I don't see why you're seeking permission."

Set bit his lip. "What is so special about the dragon?"

Set froze with the goblet halfway to his lips. He raised an eyebrow. "What dragon?"

"There is a dragon deep in your mind. Last night it protected you from the shadow monster, and I heard it roar again today, before we left the Shadow Realm. Do you remember any of that?"

Seto shook his head slowly. "No. I don't remember seeing a dragon when I was attacked last night, and I definitely don't remember hearing one today." He had a suspicion he knew what dragon Set
was referring to, but asked anyway. "What did it look like?"

"It looked like one of your card dragons."

"My deck has a lot of dragons in it, Set. You're going to have to be more specific."

Set thought back. "Large, white scales, blue eyes."

"The Blue Eyes White Dragon? Are you saying there's a Duel Monster in my head with you too?"

Set drummed his fingers along his arm. "I don't think so. But that is the only monster I ever see. You must have a very strong connection to it for it to appear in your mind with such strength."

Seto rested his hands on the table. "And you don't?"

Set tilted his head. "I don't follow."

Seto swallowed. "I've always been drawn to the Blue Eyes White Dragon cards. But, ever since inheriting that," he eyed the Rod on the table next to the fruit basket. "I assumed it was because it was your monster in the past. Ishizu told me that you were the keeper of the Blue Eyes." There were also the visions he witnessed during Ishizu's duel atop his blimp, where Set had kneeled down before the dragon's stone tablet with a woman in his arms. But he wasn't sure if admitting that to the spirit was wise, considering he didn't seem to remember parts of his past. Would he even remember whoever the woman was?

"My personal guardian spirit is the mighty warrior, Duos. If I became the wielder of such a mighty creature…I certainly don't remember it."

Seto crossed his arms. "Clearly it was a huge event because it's a Blue Eyes White Dragon that's over your caricature on the tablet at the Domino Museum, not a warrior. And the Pharaoh clearly is fighting with a Dark Magician, which is his favorite monster today. Do you really not have any memory of that?"

"I don't."

"It must have been important enough for someone to carve it out on a giant rock," said Seto. "I won't be able to go on the next trip to Domino, but at the next opportunity, we should head to the museum."

Set's jaw dropped. "A-are you serious?"

"I'd rather not have to go there," said Seto, "But I have a feeling that the more we can discover about your past, then it might become clear why you were sealed in the Rod in the first place."

"Ahh, I understand," said Set. "And once that is figured out, I'll be out of your head, and you'll be back to the peace and quiet you've craved for the last six months."

Seto shrugged and got up. "I won't lie. That's part of it. You don't belong here, Set. You lived thousands of years ago. Your soul should be in whatever afterlife you believe in, not some gaudy hunk of gold."

He disappeared back into the Rod as Seto willed the door to appear again. /I think…that is the nicest thing you've said to me since our sous were bonded together./

/Must be from spending most of the last 24 hours unconscious in the Shadow Realm. Don't get
used to it./

/Wouldn't dream of it./

The halls were surprisingly empty, even for a weekend where most people spent their time out and about around the grounds. Dinner was ending, so a few straggling students were making their way back to the dormitories after their meals, but for the most part, the castle seemed deserted.

/Did we miss something…?/

/I wouldn't know. We spent the entire day in the Room of Requirement. The only thing that happened today was that Hogsmeade visit./

/Hn. I had promised Mokuba I would send him something./

/I'm sorry I occupied you the entire day…but in my defense, I didn't use my magic to keep you in a sleeping state like some of the other times. Your body needed the time to recover./

/It's fine. I can pick something up for him in London. It's not like he'll know where it came from. And there will be other trips to Hogsmeade./

Yugi and the others were gathered around the fireplace when he made it through the portrait hole. "Kaiba!" the shorter duelist called. "Over here!" He jumped up from his spot in one of the armchairs, giving it up as he joined Ryou and Ron on the sofa.

"Where have you been all day?" asked Ryou. "We didn't see you after…uh…well, last night. You missed the trip to the village."

Seto shrugged. "I'm sure I'll make it the next time."

"I'm not so sure there's going to be another trip," said Harry. Before he could explain what had transpired, Hermione cut him off with a loud gasp.

"Oh my gosh – were you attacked?"

Seto grimaced. He had spent all day away from everyone that he forgot that parts of his neck had turned several shades of purple, and that his shirt wasn't buttoned high enough to cover the marks. "Something like that."

Ron's eyebrows skyrocketed. "Bloody hell, I wonder what the other guy looks like."

Hermione looked scandalized. "Honestly, Ronald." She turned to Seto and her expression softened. "Hang on, I've got something for that." She bolted from the couch she was sharing with Harry and disappeared up the girls' staircase, missing the sulking looks Ron flitted between Seto and herself as she left.

"Are you okay?" asked Yugi. "That looks painful."

"I'll live," Seto muttered. He turned to Harry, "Why won't there be another trip to Hogsmeade?"

He sat back and listened to the stories of the day leading up to the group ending up in Professor McGonagall's office.

"Why would someone want to curse Professor Dumbledore?" asked Ryou.
"Hogwarts is one of the only safe-havens from Voldemort," said Harry, "and Dumbledore is the only wizard Voldemort fears. The world would probably fall to pieces if he fell."

Hermione returned a moment later, with a small jar in her hand that Harry recognized from Fred and George's shop. "It's bruise cream," she said quietly, to not interrupt everyone else's conversation. "The twins gave it to me after one of their joke items left behind at the Burrow gave me a black eye. If you put it on before bed, no one will be any wiser in the morning."

"Do you think they targeted Katie on purpose?" asked Yugi, once Hermione had sat back down. Ron shook his head. "Without knowing who was behind it ("Don't start, Harry," Hermione warned), it's hard to say."

"What if they just needed to give the necklace to anyone in the bar?" said Yugi, "And then it didn't matter who they used, so long as it would make its way back up to the school?"

"That's frightening," said Ryou, "Because they wouldn't care who got hurt, so long as the necklace got where it needed to go."

"But it wasn't thought out very well," said Seto, "You would think whoever was behind it would choose someone that would have a reason to deliver a package to Dumbledore. If you think about it, how many students really get a chance to walk up to him and strike up a conversation on a daily basis?"

"That's true," said Harry, and he sighed. "It's freaky to think that someone could have offed Dumbledore from right under our noses. Hogsmeade does have secret passages that lead into the school."

"I'm sure those entrances are monitored just like the gates," said Ryou, "I mean, there are Aurors all over the place. It wouldn't make sense to watch the front door and leave the back and side entrances wide open."

"Got a point there," said Ron. "I just hope Katie is okay."

"Me too," said a shaky voice from the table behind them. Ron, Yugi, and Ryou turned around. Lavender Brown was sitting with Parvati Patil. "We tried to visit her in the hospital wing," said Parvati, "But we weren't allowed in. Madame Pomfrey was a right mess with Professor Snape trying to find a counter for whatever curse was on that necklace."

"Snape was there?" Harry asked.

"It makes sense," Hermione shrugged. "Out of all of the teachers, save maybe Dumbledore, he knows the most about the Dark Arts, doesn't he? And it's not like Umbridge would have been any help. You saw how she clammed up once Snape told her to examine the necklace."

Lavender rubbed at her arms. "We overheard them talking about transferring her to St. Mungo's in the morning if they couldn't fix whatever caused it."

"It's so scary," said Parvati, "What if whoever did this is in the school right now? Maybe it was an Auror under the Imperius curse themselves, and they picked Katie at random?"

"I don't want to even think about that," Lavender shuddered, and got up from the table. "I'm gonna head upstairs, so I'll see you all tomorrow." She picked up her things and gave a slight wave, cheeks turning a shade of pink as her eyes locked with Ron's for a moment longer than the others around the fire.
"What's St. Mungo's?" asked Yugi, once they turned back to the rest of the group.

"Wizard hospital," said Ron, "My dad was there last year after he suffered a snake bite. The healers there treat curses and spell damage. Kinda like a Muggle hospital, only they don't cut people up and stitch 'em back together."

Seto's phone gave a quiet buzz from his pocket. He reached for it and began reading the message that popped up in his inbox.

"So…are you going to tell us who tried to throttle you?" said Harry, trying to change the subject. He knew Malfoy had something to do with Katie's attack, he had to have. But without proof, Hermione would only give him another earful, and eventually Yugi and the others would stop listening. There had to be something he was missing to tie him to the necklace. It even looked familiar. So while the gears turned in his head, he'd focus on something else. "Did you get into a fight with another student? We didn't hear any report of one, and no one's lost any house points in a while, so unless you didn't get caught…."

"It wasn't Umbridge again, was it?" asked Hermione, "I mean, she did a number on your hand already, even though you couldn't tell now. Maybe she's moved on from that quill of hers."

Seto snorted but didn't bother to look up from his phone. This really wasn't a conversation he wanted to have with Harry and his friends. His problems with the Shadow were just that – his problem, one that they didn't have any business to. Yugi and Ryou may have decided to be forthcoming about the Millennium Items, their spirits, and the absolute insanity all of it has brought their lives, but that didn't mean he had to. "Don't be ridiculous. She couldn't even reach my neck, let alone get her stubby fingers around it."

"But if you were attacked here in the school, you should tell someone," said Hermione, "Especially now that Katie's been cursed. The two events might be related."

"They aren't," said Set, materializing to the right of Seto's chair. "Unless the perpetrator has been using something similar to a Millennium Item to control your classmate and send them after the Headmaster. The odds of that though are fairly nonexistent."

"What are you talking about?" said Ron.

Set turned to Seto. "Are you going to answer them, or should I?"

Yugi watched Seto lift his eyes up from his phone. The murderous glare sent back towards the spirit would have had the first year students bolting for either the portrait hole or the stairs to the dormitories above, if they were around to witness it. Neither of them said anything or moved – or even blinked – for the next several minutes, and he wondered if they were mentally arguing with each other (with the look on Seto's face, they couldn't be doing anything else). He watched Seto's fist clench around his phone and wondered if his grip was strong enough to crush it. Finally, the hold slackened, and he saw Seto sigh deeply, and stare up at the ceiling. I guess he lost the argument.

"This will only help you in the long run, Seto," said Set encouragingly. That only earned him another gaze of death before the frigid blue eyes returned to looking up at nothing.

"It's the dreams, or lack thereof," Seto said finally.

"They're getting worse," said Yugi, nodding, "We kind of figured that. But it doesn't explain the bruises."

Ron cleared his throat. "You want to fill in the rest of the class, mate?"
"Every so often, Kaiba's been getting these...well, for lack of a better word, nightmares," said Yugi, before Seto could say anything. Although, the CEO was still adamantly staring up, avoiding all of them in the room, so maybe this was Kaiba's way of both being in and then distancing himself from the conversation he knew he didn't want to have. "...It's why he hasn't been sleeping well."

"There are potions for that," said Hermione, "To let you sleep without dreams. I remember seeing it in one of my books. I'm sure I could look it up, or maybe Madame Pomfrey can create a batch for you."

Seto merely sighed, annoyed, and kept up the glaring contest with the ceiling, and began drumming his fingers against the arm of the chair.

"I'm sure he appreciates the offer," said Set, shaking his head, "But I'm afraid this cannot be solved with mere potions. You remember how we explained the powers of the Millennium Items and the Shadow Realm." He didn't wait for them to respond before continuing, "These night terrors are not so much nightmares as they are attacks."

"Is it Voldemort?" said Harry.

"I don't think so," said Yugi, "At least, the Pharaoh and I don't think so. Not unless he learned how to use the Shadow Realm, but he would need a Millennium Item for that, and we're pretty sure he hasn't got one."

"He doesn't," said Bakura, appearing next to Ryou. "I can sense every time an Item changes hands, and unless he acquired it the exact moment Kaiba received the Millennium Rod, someone else is behind it."

"We saw the attacker last night for the first time," said Set, "It looked more or less a shadow, but it had the power to break through Seto's mind using the Shadow Realm. But it didn't anticipate him fighting back this time and..." he gestured to his neck, "it punished him in a Shadow Game until we were able to break him out of it."

"But the shadow – or whoever it was – wasn't really here in the castle," said Harry, "So how did it manage to do that?"

Bakura nodded slowly in understanding. "Because those were the terms of the game. It couldn't mentally subdue him, so it resorted to physical violence instead. And in a Shadow Game, even one that takes place in the mind, the penalties can be quite real."

"Why was it doing this in the first place," asked Hermione, "What was it after?"

"Something related the Millennium Items, no doubt," said Set, "It searched through his memories - though why it chose Seto over the Pharaoh or Bakura, whose vessels both are much more knowledgeable about the Items, is beyond me. But now the attacks are going beyond mere terrors and sleepless nights and are affecting his health."

"Is there anything you can do to stop it?" asked Harry. This all sounded fairly similar to the dreams and visions Voldemort plagued him with last year, and it left a bad feeling in his mind.

"That's what we were doing today," said Set, "The goal was to gauge how long he could resist an attack through the Shadow Realm so we can work on strengthening his mind against it. Hopefully, that would prevent being attacked in the future."

"Wait," said Ron, "You summoned that creepy fog in the school, and Dumbledore and Umbridge didn't get on your heels for it? I thought you guys weren't allowed to do that stuff here in the castle."
"We're not," said Yugi, and looked to Set curiously. "Where did you go?"

"A house elf, Dobby – I think was his name, told us of a room that is summoned based on will," said Set, "We brought it forth with the intention of practicing undetected. It worked, though the exercise didn't go quite as well as I would have liked."

Harry frowned. A room summoned on will?

"Why? What happened?" asked Ryou.

Set felt Seto's eyes boring holes right through him again, and sighed. "We'll just say that I pushed a little too far and leave it there."

"Oh! Of course!" Harry exclaimed suddenly. "The Room of Requirement!"

Yugi could see the metaphorical light bulb blinking excitedly over Harry's head. "What?"

Harry pulled the Marauder's Map from his pocket (did he ever not carry it on him, Ryou thought), and unfold it over his lap. "It makes so much sense now – that's where Malfoy keeps disappearing to!"

Seto lowered his head back down and raised an eyebrow. Thank goodness they finally found something else to talk about. "What are you talking about?"

"I've been tracking Malfoy this entire year so far," said Harry, "And every now and then he just disappears off of it, and I could never figure out why. Due to the nature of the room, the Room of Requirement is unplottable and doesn't show up on the Map. That's why Dumbledore wouldn't ever know about you messing around in the Shadow Realm: if you don't want anyone to barge in on you, the room will keep it from happening."

"But how does that tie Malfoy with the necklace?" asked Yugi.

Harry thought hard. "I'm still working that out. But it explains where he keeps vanishing to. I just need to find out why."

"No, you don't, Harry," said Hermione, "For once, can't you let something be, and stay out of trouble?"

"He's a Death Eater, now, remember? What if Voldemort did this on purpose, huh? Voldemort's been trying to break into the school for ages. Think of how much easier it might be now that he has someone on the inside to do his dirty work for him."

"You don't honestly believe that he would leave something as important as killing Dumbledore to a seventeen year-old, do you?" said Hermione, "Especially after his father butchered the last important mission and got almost the entire lot of them thrown into Azkaban."

"Which they've been broken out from," said Ron.

"Maybe this is punishment," said Bakura, and everyone turned to him. "The father screwed up, so the son is being forced to complete an impossible task, and will probably pay a hefty price if he fails. Maybe they all will."

"Look," said Hermione, "Just because someone has the Dark Mark on their arm, it doesn't mean they're up to something all the time. What could Voldemort really expect out of someone who hasn't even finished school?"
"And still, it doesn’t mean he was behind what happened to Katie,” said Ryou.

"Well…Malfoy was in the pub with us, and Katie. He could have used the Imperius curse at any time, and with all those witches and wizards around, it would be too difficult to pinpoint down who cast the spell."

Hermione sighed and shook her head. Getting through Harry's thick skull was impossible at this point.

"Alright, let's *assume* you're right, Harry. Where would he have gotten the necklace in the first place?" asked Ron.

Harry shook his head, unsure. "I've seen the necklace before though, I know it. If I can just remember where…"

"Maybe from one of those creepy peddlers in Diagon Alley that your dad warned us about?"

*Diagon Alley?* Harry mused, and then shook the notion from his head. The wizards running those little stands were selling much smaller trinkets. The odds of one of them pawning off something as fancy as that opal necklace were pretty slim. While elegant, it seemed to have an air about it that was dark and foreboding. Like something someone would have found in the dregs of –

"Borgin and Burkes!" he exclaimed suddenly. "That's where I remember seeing it!" He turned, excitedly, to Ron. "Remember the first time I used floo powder at your house? I ended up in Knockturn Alley, in Borgin and Burke's shop. The necklace was on display there, and I know the Malfoys have been there before. We saw them there this summer, and when I ended up coming out of the shop's fireplace, Mr. Malfoy was trying to sell some dark artifacts. Malfoy purchased the necklace over the summer, brought it to school with him, and used the crowds in Hogsmeade as a cover so it didn't look like the attack came from someone in the school!"

He looked around at his friends, triumphantly. "What do you say about *that*, Hermione?"

Hermione closed her eyes, sighing again. "Harry…I don't know. That's a pretty farfetched idea."

"But it *is* a possibility!"

"Except that it isn't," Seto crossed his arms. "Everything that came off the Hogwarts Express was thoroughly inspected by the Aurors upon entering the grounds. My tech was held in McGonagall's office, remember? That necklace would have been confiscated in a heartbeat."

Harry frowned.

"What about the post office?" asked Ryou.

Harry blinked, and his eyes widened. "Of course! Ryou, you're a genius! If Malfoy had the necklace the entire time, this whole incident could have happened at *any* time. But it happened today of all days. Malfoy couldn't have the necklace brought into the school, so he had the shop send it to the post office in Hogsmeade. Malfoy could have picked up the necklace there and then jinxed Katie while they were all in the Three Broomsticks."


"But a sound one!"

"You're really adamant it was Malfoy, aren't you?" said Yugi.
"He's completely broken pattern," said Harry, "If nothing had happened at all, he would still be on the Slytherin Quidditch team, still overreaching his authority as a Slytherin prefect and bullying all the underclassmen, and would be trying to make our lives miserable at any given opportunity." He looked to Ron and Hermione. "How many times has Malfoy said anything antagonistic to either of you this term?"

Ron shrugged. "I don't think he's said two words to us."

"Exactly!" Harry slammed his fist into his opposite palm. "He's been marked, and now is completely withdrawn from everyone except maybe Crabbe and Goyle, and seems to spend his time hiding in the Room of Requirement."

He glanced at Hermione's look of pure disapproval. "I can't prove it was Malfoy in Hogsmeade today, but I trust my gut. Whatever he's up to this year isn't good. He's acting on Voldemort's orders, and something in the Room of Requirement is the key. I just need to find out what it is, and trust me on this – I will figure it out. Whatever Malfoy is planning, he won't get away with it. Not again."
The notice board in the common room had been updated by morning, confirming Harry's suspicion. All future Hogsmeade trips had been canceled following the incident with the cursed necklace. To add to everyone's concerns, Katie Bell had to be transferred to St. Mungo's Hospital and everyone was forced to spend the remainder of that weekend shut inside the castle.

If the war itself hadn't dampened the mood in the school, the prospect of being trapped indoors certainly did the trick. To compound everyone's misery, November arrived, and brought a surprise snowstorm that buried the grounds in a white abyss.

The sudden surge of bad weather almost threatened one of the only enjoyable activities left: Quidditch. The first match of the season, Slytherin vs Hufflepuff, had to already be postponed once before due to a rainstorm so heavy it flooded out the Pitch. This time, the match was officially canceled after the blizzard winds sent three students off their brooms during the final practice session before the big game.

The week dragged onwards. The most excitement anyone could say they had recently was the accidental lettings-loose of the magical creatures in Hagrid's class. Both Care of Magical Creatures and Herbology had to be moved to the first floor, which meant both professors had to be a bit more selective on the breeds of dangerous creatures and plants that made up their lessons. Occasionally, someone would be able to hear the cries of a poor third year's *Monster Book of Monsters* as it ate its own pages and fought with another classmate's edition. For the sixth years, Herbology ran solely out of the textbook while the storms raged outside.

After a while, even Harry was starting to get cabin fever. With everyone stuck inside, the common room was more jam packed than he had ever seen it before. Rather than spend their time huddled in 'their spot' around the Gryffindor fire (which they would currently have to fight the second or fourth year students for, depending on the time of day), Yugi led the group upstairs to their dorm for some peace and quiet, and Hermione placed one of her blue flame jars in the middle of the room.

Ryou had to do a double take the first day they all decided to hide away in the dorm. He wasn't used to Hermione being able to climb the boys' staircase, even though they all had spent an entire afternoon together explaining away the Millennium Items. Honestly, he was surprised his trailing fan club hadn't decided to park right outside their bedroom door. It seemed many more were giving him more dreamy eyes lately (even the younger ones!). Now, if only they weren't able to get up here… that would be a lot better. He wasn't sure just what had come over all these people all of a sudden, but he didn't like it. Someone must have been bulk ordering all those love potions and supplies from Fred and George's shop and sharing it around the school.

With even the unused classrooms used as sanctuaries against the crowded common areas like the library and dormitory towers, Yugi was glad that Kaiba managed to escape to Domino the day before the first snowfall. All of Kaiba's usual hiding places were filling up around the school,
and he really didn't want to deal with his rival when he couldn't work in peace.

It was at breakfast the following day when the monotony had finally broken. Yugi was halfway through buttering his toast when Professor Umbridge stood up and made her way to Dumbledore's podium, which was used at best only twice a year.

"Hem, hem."

Normally, the students wouldn't bother to give her the time of day. Now though, it broke up the boredom of the week. Only about a third of the room bothered to turn to acknowledge her – the rest continued their breakfast as if she hadn't gotten up at all.

"Hem, hem," she said, louder this time, and a few more heads grudgingly turned towards the High Table. "The staff and I have noticed the overall lack in morale these past few weeks, and we recognize it is at least in part due to the cancellation of several of your beloved recreational activities."

There were very few murmurs of agreement scattered about the Great Hall.

"Being cooped up inside has not helped, of course," said Umbridge, "But we cannot control the weather. We can, however, boost the overall atmosphere around us. In our last staff meeting, we addressed ways to bring back all of the cheery little faces we have missed recently."

Umbridge cleared her throat. "Our third years and older will remember the Tri-Wizard Tournament, held here at Hogwarts throughout the academic year. The delegations from Durmstrang and Beauxbatons brought fresh faces and the opportunity to make new friends. And while you all watched from the sidelines, eagerly cheering on our champion – ah, champions, there was one event almost all were able to participate – the Yule Ball, held on Christmas Night. Never before in the recent history of the school had so many of you chosen to remain behind at Hogwarts instead of leaving for holiday, to come together and enjoy yourselves in unified merriment, regardless of house or our own standing in the tournament."

Upon seeing the confused looks around, Umbridge held up her arms. "While the Yule Ball is a tradition to the Tri-Wizard tournament, we have decided to throw a formal of our own, to be held on December 22nd, the final night of term before holiday begins."

Yugi and Ryou looked around the hall. It seemed most of the school perked up at her announcement. Somehow, it didn't surprise them that most of them were girls. The room suddenly became a buzz of excitement at the news.

"What's the matter, Ryou?" asked Hermione, "You look like you've swallowed something horrid."

Ryou swallowed the rest of his breakfast nervously and turned in his seat to look around the hall. "I...I think I want to hide in the dormitory for the next month."

Umbridge held up her hands again, and the noise level throughout the Hall quieted down a little. "Unlike when the Yule Ball was held, this occasion will be open to all students, regardless of age. Dress robes will be required. However – any student can be barred from attending, if any rule-breaking is committed. More information will be sent to the common room notice boards in the upcoming days. Let us end the first half of the year merrily, and return for the second term eagerly and bright-eyed."

Ron snickered. "They're still staring at you, mate," he said as Umbridge returned to her seat. "What'd you do to get the eyes of all those people here?"
Ryou put his head in his hands. "I didn't do anything."

"It's the innocent look," said Yugi, "Girls in our school back home were all over him too."

"Having admirers is nothing to be ashamed about," said Hermione.

Ryou shook his head against the table. "These are worse – they have magic! Next thing I know the Gryffindors will be stalking me outside my bedroom."

"That's a bit extreme, don't you think?" asked Yugi.

Harry thought back to the days of the Tri-Wizard tournament. "Not really." He turned to Ron and Hermione. "Remember how all the girls here treated Victor Krum?"

"Like desperate animals if you ask me," said Hermione, looking at Ryou, "They're treating you and Seto the same way."

"Ugggh," Ryou moaned. "That's why this feels so much worse. They can't use Kaiba as eye candy, so they're all over me instead. I thought Domino High School was bad."

/You're exaggerating./

/What would you know, Spirit? You're not the one who has to deal with this!/ 

/Hah! I've been here watching the entire time. You can't expect me to take you seriously, if you cannot handle a few desperate teenagers. After all we've been through together, they are what frighten you the most?/ 

/Yes. You barge in on everything legitimately dangerous – or are the cause of it. Girls are just obsessively scary. …And what's this about taking me seriously – if I may ask, when did you ever?/ 

/Touché, Landlord. Although, I must say, you have been growing quite a spine since arriving at this school. I quite like it./ 

Ryou tuned out Bakura and went back to the others' conversation as he pushed away his half-eaten plate.

"Wonder what they see in him?" Harry said about Seto, "It's not like he's a bucket of sunshine."

"Nowhere close to being a bringer of sunshine," said Ron, snickering, "Although…some of them act all lovesick towards you."

Harry rolled his eyes. "It can't be because the Daily Prophet keeps writing about me being the Chosen One," he said sarcastically, "They just want a hero to worship."

"Well, Kaiba's no hero," said Ron, grabbing another muffin. "Plenty of better guys out here to worship than him."

"Surely it can't be for almost the same reason Romilda Vane and her friends keep trying to find ways to slip Harry a love potion," said Hermione, rolling her eyes. "Look at him – he's just as famous and successful in his own world as Harry is here, and being tall and attractive doesn't hurt either. They did the same to Viktor when he was here for the tournament."

"Viktor?" said Ron, narrowing his eyes, "Since when do you call him that?"
Hermione raised an eyebrow. "It's his name, Ronald. And we've been writing back and forth since last summer."

Ron scowled and muttered something almost incoherent under his breath.

Yugi watched them, frowning. Their bickering was slowly getting more and more intense these days. Hermione must have heard whatever he had said, because she glared at him for a moment before gathering her things.

"Yugi's just as famous back home though," said Ryou, "Don't see everyone fawning over him."

"Don't give them ideas!" Yugi smacked Ryou's arm lightly with his hand. "I like being under the radar."

/HAH! Excellent word choice!/ Ryou sighed. "Bakura agrees with you being under the radar."

Yugi frowned, thought back to his words, and slapped a hand to his forehead. "I caught myself in a height joke again, didn't I?"

"Yep."

"I'll see you all later," said Hermione hotly, "I have to get to Arithmancy."

"Bye Hermione," Yugi waved. "Are we going to look at our Ancient Rune translations during morning break?"

Hermione's attitude suddenly shifted to a smile. "Sure. I'll meet you in the library?"

Yugi nodded. "I'll try to get there early and find a table."

Hermione beamed at him, though it looked a little forced. "Sounds good." Without a look to anyone else at the table, she got up and bolted from the Great Hall.

"I should have known this would happen," Ron said darkly, when he and Harry were later back in the common room after Yugi and Ryou headed off for the library. "It's Victor Krum all over again. She's just as glossy-eyed as the others. What's he got that I don't? – Don't answer that," he snapped at Harry. "They just like him because he's something new and shiny to fawn over. Look at me, Harry. Everyone here knows what you've done with You-Know-Who and all, but what about me? I've helped save this school every year since we started. Who went down the trap door and fought McGonagall's chess set just so we could stop Quirrell from getting the Sorcerer's Stone? And the next year – it was the two of us alone that went down into the Chamber of Secrets and saved everyone. And let's not even get into everything that happened last year."

Harry dropped into an empty chair and sighed. "What about Ryou? You don't seem too miffed about him getting a whole lot of attention."

Ron shrugged. "I don't know…his doesn't bother me too much for some reason. Maybe because he's always so embarrassed by it."

Harry pulled a face. Seto wasn't embarrassed by the attention he constantly got. If anything, he seemed to treat it as any other annoyance and downright ignored it. It wasn't like he went off seeking popularity. Ryou didn't either. "You don't think you're taking things a little…extreme, do you?"
Ron flailed his arms about. "Look, Harry, I saw the signs. She was all interested in Kaiba before he even arrived at my house. Remember all those newspaper clippings that Yugi's friends sent him over the summer? Which was the only one she kept stuck in her book like a page marker, huh? Don't think I haven't missed all those looks she gives him, or the way she dotes on him all the time. She was like this with Krum too. All 'Viktor this' and 'Viktor that',"

Harry frowned. He wasn't sure just what Ron was going on about – he certainly didn't remember Hermione worshiping Krum like Ron described. In fact, if he remembered correctly, it was the other way around. Krum was attracted to Hermione in the library because he liked to watch her work, and she was perhaps one of the only female Hogwarts students not fawning over him at every possible moment. Like Ryou and Seto, he also had a large gaggle of fans. But only Krum's followed him relentlessly around the castle. Ryou's sort of held back and ogled him like he was something tasty. And he wasn't sure about Seto – he was always off hiding somewhere so no one could find him.

But Hermione didn't seem to be acting…well…doting at all. Sure, she used one of the articles about Seto as a placeholder, but she had read all of the news clippings from Domino with great interest. And she had been curious about all of the new students prior to their arrival, not just Seto. Color him blind, but he would hardly lump her actions in like the other girls crushing around the school. Especially considering she didn't seem to treat their new friends that way at all.

Harry sighed. "I'd hardly call it that. She gave him bruise cream. Which he needed, because those marks looked terrible."

Ron slumped down low on the sofa. "You ever see them in the library? They were always off disappearing the first couple of weeks into term."

_You've got to be kidding me._ Harry shook his head. "Yeah. They did homework. I've stolen peeks at Hermione's Arithmancy stuff before – it all went straight over my head. And if you've even paid a shred of attention to the common room, you'll know it's way too noisy here to work on that stuff. If they're going to hold up camp someplace quiet to do schoolwork, then who cares? And don't forget – the first month or so, he spent every possible minute buried under the Law section in the library to work on his computer stuff. There was nothing going on that you're describing."

Ron grumbled something under his breath, but Harry couldn't make it out. When he raised an eyebrow, Ron huffed and pointed to the back of his hand. "She made him the murtlap stuff after those detentions he had with Umbridge."

Harry gave him a look that clearly said 'duh!', "News flash, Ron – she made me that stuff all last year. I didn't see you getting all pissy from that. She's being helpful because that's who she is."

Harry tilted his head. He had never seen Ron act so bitter before – not even during the Tri-Wizard Tournament. "…Why are you so up in a funk anyway? Were – you're not thinking of asking her to the dance, are you? Is that why you're so…" he struggled for the right words. "…so…angry? You worried she's going to turn you down or something?"

"No," Ron quickly said. Perhaps a little too quickly.

Harry shook his head. "Ron, I think you're blowing this way out of proportion."

Ron glared at him. "Am I now?"

Harry nodded. "Seriously. You're paying so much attention to her – have you even watched him? Like actually see the two of them when she's 'fawning' as you put it."
Ron crossed his arms over his chest and glowered.

Harry sighed. "Really, the only thing I think they have in common is that they're both brilliant and scary in their own right. He's not interested in her – definitely not the way you think she is to him. Look, Ron – he barely gives Yugi and Ryou the time of day – and they're supposed to be his friends. All of us get the cold shoulder the majority of the time, Hermione included. Any of us are lucky to spend five minutes with him outside of class. I'm pretty certain he's not into anyone here."

Ron mulled over his words. He was still pouting with his arms crossed, but at least he didn't look like he was going to bore holes in the couch cushions anymore. "You think?"

Harry nodded. "I think."

After a good two minutes, Ron let out a loud exhale. ".I guess…I guess you've got a point."

Harry nudged his shoulder. "Besides, you really want to go to that dance? It's not like we really had all that great a time at the Yule Ball."

Ron did chuckle at that. "That's true. You dance worse than Percy," he said, "Although...don't have those ancient dress robes anymore though – that's somethin', right?"

Harry laughed. "Yeah. What ever happened to those?"

"I hid 'em up in the attic with the ghoul," said Ron, "Though it doesn't much matter now, they wouldn't fit me anymore anyways."

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**Domino City**

Mokuba pouted and slumped down in his seat as the sleek black car pulled into the drop off circle at the airport. Seto glanced over at him and chuckled. "You're really going to see me off with that face?"

"I don't want you to leave," Mokuba mumbled, before turning to face his brother. "Can't you just stay home this time?"

"Unfortunately not, but this will be the last time I go back until Christmas, and then I'll be home for two weeks."

Mokuba perked up. "Really? Fourteen days – not five?"

"Not five."

Mokuba slumped down again. "Seems almost too good to be true. How many of those days are you actually going to spend in the office?"

Seto raised an eyebrow and didn't bother to hide the amused expression on his face. "I didn't think you were going to let me spend all two weeks at work."

Mokuba snorted. "I'm not. I got plans!"

Seto smirked and ruffled Mokuba's hair. "Something to look forward to then." Straightening out his suit, he stepped out of the car. Both Roland and Fuguta exited the vehicle; Roland moved to the trunk and retrieved two briefcases, and Fuguta switched sides of the car to stand by the driver's seat.
Mokuba scooted over in his seat and jumped out of the car, grabbing Seto tightly around the middle. "I'm gonna miss you."

"I'll miss you too, but it'll be next month before you know it," said Seto, patting his head. He knelt down to Mokuba's eye level. "I'll call when the plane lands, so long as it isn't too late."

"…Okay." He eyed his brother suspiciously. "You'll remember this time?"

"Of course."

Mokuba pouted again. "Last time, you didn't, and you promised. I waited up forever."

Seto sighed. "The last time I was ambushed two steps through the castle door, or I would have."

"You're not gonna get ambushed tonight, right?"

"No," said Seto firmly. "I purposely didn't antagonize anyone before I left."

Mokuba nodded and eyed one of the briefcases in Roland's hands. "Are you gonna finally duel Yugi?"

"That's the plan – but not if I don't get back." He clutched his brother tightly in another hug before ruffling his hair as he stood back up. "Just another couple of weeks, little brother. You can make it."

"It's going to feel like ages," Mokuba whined.

"Versus the last few months? The time will fly."

Mokuba stuck out his tongue playfully, but let go of his brother and moved back a step, waving animatedly. "Bye, Seto!"

Seto waited for the car to pull away from the curb before turning to Roland. "Are you escorting me all the way to the England?"

"Not quite," said Roland, following his employer through the airport to their designated gate. "Rather than take a separate plane, we'll be dropping you off in London, refueling, and then I'll be traveling to the States."

"Hn. Regional office in New York?"

"Ah, no, sir. San Francisco. Mr. Pegasus has finally come to terms that you won't be attending your status meetings on the VR project, and has therefore decided that we'll have to come to him." He bit his lip, thankful to be walking half a step behind so the bout of nervousness wouldn't be caught on his face. He was going to Industrial Illusions headquarters for a project meeting, but...that was also something they could have done over a video call, on the meeting's scheduled date next week. He had a much different reason for going, one that Mr. Kaiba definitely would not approve of – but thankfully, he didn't have to tell him about it. He would most certainly be in hot water if Mr. Kaiba ever found out what the meeting was truly about, but he would deal with that explosion if and when it happens.

Seto shook his head as they boarded the plane. "Sounds like you're going to have so much fun."

Roland scowled behind his sunglasses. "I believe we both gain the same level of enjoyment from the man's company."

"So none whatsoever."
"Yes."

Once the plane took off from the runway, Roland lifted one of the briefcases onto the plane's conference table and opened it. "I think this is the most office work we'll both get done in quite some time."

"We've got all day," said Seto. "Without a single staff meeting."

"Thankfully, that is Fuguta's responsibility today," said Roland. "So…development updates first or budget reports?"

The weather finally managed to improve after another few days, increasing the general mood in the school. Finally, after being shut in for so long, they could go back outside. The common room had emptied out, at least a little bit, but not even the good weather could keep Ryou's newfound giggling stalkers away from them, so they kept up their afternoon and evening habit of working on homework in Yugi's dorm.

"I heard from one of the Hufflepuffs that the Quidditch Pitch thawed out enough that we can start practicing there again," said Harry, after Yugi and Ryou returned from their remedial Potions class, "I'm hoping to book it for us in the next couple of weeks."

"Awesome!" Yugi was already beaming when they walked into the room, but that only helped to boost his mood. "I could use all the practice I can get."

"You're not as bad as you think on a broom, Yugi," said Hermione, "I don't think you're giving yourself enough credit."

Yugi sighed. "I know, but I originally didn't make the team. And with Katie still in the hospital…I just don't want to let everyone down."

"It'll be fine," said Harry, "How about if I reserve some extra Pitch time for you when I set up the team practice?"

Yugi nodded. "That'll work. I just wish I had a better broom."

"You could borrow mine, at least for practice," said Ron.

Yugi shook his head, "Thanks Ron. But that'll only work if I'm practicing on my own. We both can't be using your broom for team practice or the games. I just wish we were able to get to the broom shop in Hogsmeade."

"You can write to Quality Quidditch Supplies in Diagon Alley," said Ron, "You might be able to order one."

Yugi nodded his head thoughtfully. "That…might work."

"It's not the same as trying a broom out in person though," said Harry.

Ron snorted. "What would you know, Harry? The only brooms you had were gifted to you."

Harry opened his mouth to retort, paused, and then shrugged. "…Fair enough." He turned to Yugi. "Forget what I just said."

The door opened, admitting Seto, carrying a thicker briefcase than usual with one hand, and a small,
skinny box tucked under his other arm. He took one look at the group huddled around a glowing blue fire in the middle of the room and scowled.

"Is the common room not good enough anymore?"

"Hi Kaiba," said Yugi, "Welcome back."

"Hn."

"We've been snowed in for the last few days," said Ryou, "And it's been too rowdy in the common room to hang out."

"And..." Hermione glanced at Ryou with a trace of amusement splayed across her face. "Ryou's hiding from his adoring fans."

Seto raised an eyebrow and set his briefcase down onto his bed. "And why would this be any different than the last three months?"

"There's going to be a dance the night before term ends for the Christmas holiday," said Harry, "I think they're all trying for a date with him."

Seto rolled his eyes and tossed the small skinny box to Ryou. "That would explain the random gift sitting outside the door."

Ryou caught the box and looked it over. "I...I think it's chocolate."

"Uh oh," Ron snickered, "Someone's admirers are getting bold."

Ryou flipped the box over again. "There's not even a note or any indication of who sent it."

"Then it's probably spiked," said Hermione, "Once you eat some of it, you'd just get infatuated with whoever left it for you."

Ryou pulled a face and tossed the box onto his bedside table. "Well, so much for that."

"If they're so interested, then why don't they come up and say hello?" asked Yugi. "It would probably save a lot of hassle."

"No one ever said they were intelligent," Seto muttered.

Yugi tapped the feather end of his quill against his cheek. "I wonder if wizard dances are like the ones back home."

"Music, dancing, partying teenagers," Harry shrugged. "A time of misery if you don't have a date."

"So, yes, just like ones at home," said Yugi flatly. "You didn't have a good time at the Yule Ball?"

"I had to go," said Harry, "Since I was representing the school as one of the two champions. But I didn't necessarily want to."

Ron snickered. "Harry can't dance."

"Neither can you!" Harry shot back.

Ron held up his hands. "Woah – difference there, mate. You had to dance to open the ball. And we all saw you step all over Parvati's feet. I didn't have to dance, so no one will know just how good or
bad I can waltz."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Don't listen to them. It was a lot of fun. I had a good time. Harry and Ron just waited until the absolute last minute to get dates. Their partners ended up finding others to dance with after they got there."

"Thinking of going?" asked Ron. "You got plenty of admirers to choose from for dates."

Yugi shrugged. "Going just for the experience sounds fun." He pointed to the skinny wardrobe next to his bed. "And, I mean…we were fitted for dress robes…so might as well use 'em."

Ryou glanced over at the discarded candy. "It's been one day. So far I've been visually stalked and left potentially hazardous chocolate. And we have how long until this is over?"

"Over a month," said Ron.

Ryou pouted and looked over to Seto's side of the room. "Any chance you could let me hide wherever you go in the castle?"

Seto dug through his briefcase. "Not a chance. I disappear for a reason."

Yugi watched him pull some sort of device out of the briefcase along with a box of tools. "What's that?"

Seto shrugged out of his suit jacket, settled back against his headboard and began to dismantle the hunk of metal. "This is a holographic projector."

Yugi craned his neck to get a closer look at it. "It looks like part of our duel disks."

"That's because it is."

"Is it broken?" asked Ryou.

"Not quite." Seto sighed and reached for his own duel disk on the chair beside the bed. "I got my disk working the other week. It turns on, but the holograms won't project properly."

"They don't?" asked Yugi. "That's odd."

"Magic is supporting the disk itself, like everything else, but for some reason the holograms themselves won't stay out. So this should amplify the power source."

Yugi's eyes lit up excitedly, "Does this mean…we're going to duel soon?"

"I'm certainly not doing this for the hell of it."

"You and Ryou would play your card game on the tabletop though," said Hermione, "It's not like you've been deprived of it this entire time."

Ryou smiled. "You wouldn't understand, Hermione."

Yugi laughed. "Once you start playing with the high-tech duel disks, and get used to doing it that way for so long, it's hard to settle back to the old-fashion way of playing Duel Monsters."

Yugi's eyes glazed over for just a moment before he put down his quill, homework completely abandoned in hopes of dueling. "So…when do you think everything will be up and working? An eager spirit wants to know."
"In time for Saturday's duel."

"Saturday? *This* Saturday?" Yugi exclaimed, jumping up and bolting to his trunk. "I didn't think it would be *that* soon."

Seto didn't look up from his task, but he was clearly smirking. "I was being considerate. Three days is *plenty* of advance notice. Certainly a duelist of your caliber hasn't lost their touch already."

Yami phased out of the Puzzle as Yugi tore through his trunk for his duel disk, which of course was *all* the way on the bottom, having gone unused since it was packed away. "I hope *you're* ready, Kaiba. Yugi and I have been playing periodically since the summer came and gone. I haven't seen *you* touch your deck since your Grand Prix Tournament."

Seto scoffed. "I don't *need* to look over my deck to know what strategies to use."

"Where are you guys planning to duel?" asked Ryou, "Someplace open, I hope."

Seto twisted another screw out of the small projector. "I already booked the Quidditch Pitch for the entire day."

Yami blinked. "You're not going to post all over the school about it, are you?" The Pitch had the chance of turning back into the coliseum that Kaiba had generated during his Battle City tournament, and he wasn't sure if that would be a good thing here or not.

"No," said Seto, with more bite in his voice than Yugi or the Pharaoh expected. "I chose the Pitch specifically not just because it's a large, open space – it's also far enough from the school that we shouldn't be interrupted. I escaped having my phone and laptop confiscated. I'd rather not have to fight for the duel disks too. Without the Hogsmeade visits for the rest of the year, the weekends are going to get excruciatingly dull if there's literally nothing to do except homework."

"Can we come see?" asked Harry. "I really want to see how you guys normally play Duel Monsters."

Yugi smiled. "Sure!" He triumphantly hoisted his duel disk out of his trunk and placed it carefully on Seto's nightstand.

"Don't broadcast it around the school," said Seto, "The idea is to not draw the wrong attention." He locked eyes with Yami, still hovering behind Yugi's spot on the floor in the center of the room.

"10am – don't be late."

~~*~~

San Francisco

"I must say, I was surprised to see that the team from Kaiba Corp has monopolized my schedule for the day," said Pegasus, "I didn't realize it would be just *you* paying me a visit, on a *Saturday*, no less. I suppose you're going to take your little notes back to Kaiba-boy and I'll get some sort of call later with all the things he doesn't like?"

"No," said Roland. "I'm not here about the VR project – not *really*, in any case. That excuse was for Mr. Kaiba's benefit; the VR follow up isn't for at least another week."

Pegasus leaned back in his seat. "Ooh, so you're here on your own then, hmm? Oh dear, I hope Kaiba hasn't thrown you out. I hear he still has quite a temper." He turned to Croquet standing off to the side behind his desk. "Tell me, Croquet," he said mockingly, "Do we have a position open for
Roland glared at them both. "I'm not here for a job, and even if I would choose to leave Mr. Kaiba's employ, this would be the last place I would look."

Pegasus waved a hand dismissively and swiveled back around in his chair so he was facing front again. "Oh, very well, but think of all of the fun you would be missing!"

Roland's eye twitched. "I requested this meeting in private." He looked to Croquet. "Without your lackey."

Pegasus chuckled and turned, humored, to Croquet. "Says Kaiba-boy's own errand-boy." He looked back to the man standing rigidly from the other side of his desk. "No, I don't think so. We both know very well that our dear Kaiba still holds quite a grudge against me, and that our dear partnership is the only thing keeping me from being tossed off the top of his tower when I visit. I have not the pleasure of getting to know you, my dear Roland, but it doesn't take a genius to see that you are just as resentful as your employer – though I can't fathom why. We don't quite share the same rich history as dear Kaiba-boy."

Roland's eyes narrowed. True, Pegasus may not have ever met him face-to-face until well after the Duelist Kingdom Tournament, but he was still directly affected by the cascade of events that took place both before and after that debacle. "If that's why you thought I was here, you would have never let me into the building."

Pegasus shrugged. "What can I say – I'm curious."

Roland didn't make a move to sit down in front of the desk. "Regardless of what your opinion is of me or my official positions under Mr. Kaiba, I am currently the head of his company in his absence and request at least the respect that title is due. Knowing your history with Mr. Kaiba, I realize that is asking quite a bit, so I'll settle for half. But don't you dare compare me to the statue you have behind you; I am not Mr. Kaiba's 'errand-boy'. "

"Oh, very well," said Pegasus, shrugging nonchalantly again. "Now my interest is peaked. I know Kaiba-boy has gone off the map to school; at least that's the official story. But if you're running his dear empire, what's happened to little Mokuba? Surely he hasn't also dropped off the face of the earth."

Roland deadpanned. "Mokuba is twelve. His current responsibilities do not include maintaining his brother's company."

"He is still the vice president."

"In title only," Roland spat, "But I never would expect you to understand, since he was abducted in a corporate espionage plot that you spearheaded when he was only ten."

"Oho!" Pegasus clapped his hands together, and twisted back around in his seat to look at Croquet again. "Now we get to the crux of our issue, Croquet. I've always wondered why he held such disdain for me." He swiveled back, looking almost giddy. "Is that it? Do you resent me for my actions back in Duelist Kingdom? You weren't even a player in that venture."

"If I were, I assure you that the events you seem to have taken much pleasure in would not have happened," Roland snarled.

"Hm. I suppose that's possible, but we'll never know now, will we?" said Pegasus, leaning back lazily in his chair. "I suppose saying I'm a changed man now will do little to change your mind."
Duelist Kingdom was a long time ago, my friend. The brothers Kaiba have put it to rest, perhaps you should too."

"One of the brothers may have put it aside, but some grudges run too deep to be forgiven or forgotten. For what you pulled, you should be in prison."

Pegasus laughed. "And who would believe the claims against me? That a magical eye captured the soul of Yugi-boy's grandfather through his television, or put our favorite orphaned brothers into comas, only to be awakened by a defeat at my own game by someone who went from a novice nobody to an overnight name by conquering the world champion in an unofficial match? The Big 5 fled to who-knows-where, probably hiding from dear Kaiba's wrath. And speaking of – if Kaiba-boy truly wanted me punished for my hand in kidnapping his brother and trying to take his company, he would have done so, even after the little mishap the Big 5 laid out for him with his first VR game."

Pegasus clasped his hands together at his desk. "So…if all we're going to do is share the intricate memories of days long-gone by, I'm sorry to say that the day will be wasted. Kaiba-boy hasn't fired you; you're not here for our next project development meeting, so please regale me with the reason for your visit today."

Roland crossed his arms. "It actually has everything to do with your hand in Duelist Kingdom. And the only reason I am here, is because the same twelve year-old that you had kidnapped and tortured, not only had the heart to forgive you, but now worries that you will befall some terrible fate, all because you once had a hunk of gold jammed in your eye socket."

Pegasus blinked. "Is he now? Little Mokuba didn't want to send his wishes himself?"

Roland sighed, resisting the urge to heavily roll his eyes. "Despite the lifetime ago that it seemed some events took place, I wouldn't let him anywhere near you."

"Of course not, you're the ever faithful guard dog. Are those orders from Kaiba-boy himself?"

"No, that's the judgement of a guardian trying to keep a child away from the men who abducted and chained him up in a dungeon."

Despite the seriousness, Pegasus looked amused again. "Oh, so you're not only acting-Seto Kaiba the Kaiba Corporation President, but Mokuba's dear father, too? I wouldn't think Kaiba-boy would relinquish that title to anyone."

"In this case, I am acting in both of their best interests."

"Ah, ah," Pegasus tutted and waggled a finger, "That can hardly be true – you said so yourself that dear Seto doesn't know you're here, and we both know that he wants nothing more than the bare minimum to do with me most days."

Roland sighed again and rubbed at his temples. "He may not know the extent to why I'm here, but just the same, I am following his orders."

"Ooooh," Pegasus leaned forward, intrigued. "Do tell then. I love a good secret. You said this has to do with the Millennium Eye, hmm? Perhaps I've forgotten, but I thought Kaiba didn't believe in anything supernatural? Even if it slapped him right across the nose."

"…That mindset has been…swayed."

"Kaiba hasn't believed in magic for ages," said Pegasus, and the tone of his voice was now all business, the mocking cheeriness gone. "Whatever happened must have been quite a game-changer..."
"It was." He took a deep breath. "Mr. Kaiba has acquired a Millennium Item."

Pegasus froze. He stared at Roland's stone-cold face for several minutes, to gauge whether or not the man was joking. "Surely you jest."

Roland eyed the man across the desk before reaching down and setting his thin briefcase on the desk. He opened it, removed a photo and slid it across the wooden surface.

Pegasus picked it up. The timestamp on the image was from June. "This is Kaiba's office. A very clear image for security footage, I might add. He surely doesn't waste any expense when it comes to his technology."

"No, he doesn't. And because of that, you can very clearly see the item in his hand."

Pegasus sighed and looked at the image again. Kaiba was standing in front of his desk, holding the Millennium Rod out to Yugi. "Just because he holds one doesn't deem him a bearer."

This time, Roland did roll his eyes. "I didn't peg you to be a skeptic, all things considered."

"I just find it hard to believe that Seto Kaiba inherited a Millennium Item after all this time."

Roland drew another photo and held it in the air in front of Pegasus. "Yugi Muto put it down in front of him, and then they argued over it. Mr. Kaiba picked it up off the desk to give it back, and immediately suffered second-degree burns as it took him over." With his hand holding the picture in the air, he gestured with one finger towards the empty socket hidden behind silver hair. "Are you going to tell me you just woke up one day and there was a golden eye where your own was supposed to be?"

Pegasus inwardly shuddered. He hadn't had the Millennium Eye for a long time now, and it was even longer from the day he first received it. Like other things, it was a time he tried hard to forget, but there was no banishing the memory of the pain of losing his left eye. But Seto Kaiba obtaining one of these Items? It hardly seemed possible, and he had trouble wrapping his head around the notion.

He mulled over Roland's words for a moment. "Your protectiveness over little Mokuba and Kaiba-boy's long absence…this Item hasn't, well, possessed him, has it? We're not going to have to go saving the land from him, right? Or Kaiba-boy from himself?"

Roland paused. Mr. Kaiba was already going to tear him out over this meeting. The less he gave out about the Millennium Rod, the safer he would probably be in the end. "No."

Pegasus sighed, obviously relieved. "Oh, good. I'd hate to see what a mind-hoaxed Kaiba would be like. We're lucky that this past incident with Dartz and Atlantis didn't take him over. I heard even Yugi-boy noble ways faltered a bit in that mess."

Roland nodded. He had also heard from Mokuba hanging out with Yugi's friends how the small duelist had been tempted by the evil magic. The last thing he would have wanted was Mr. Kaiba to be controlled, his own negative emotions from having the company seized to be tempted dangerously by the Orichalcos. Thankfully that was avoided.

Pegasus gestured to the seat again, and was pleased that Roland actually took it this time. He twisted around to look at his assistant and raised the empty mug that had been on the desk since yesterday. "Start a pot, Croquet. I have a feeling we're going to be here for a while."
Yugi entered the Great Hall to a wide assortment of looks as he passed by half of the student body to take a seat next to his friends at the Gryffindor table. Pulling a plate close, he began spooning scrambled eggs and sausage onto it. After a few bites, he finally looked up to the looks Harry and Ron were giving him, or, more precisely – his clothes.

"Yugi, mate," said Ron, "What...are you wearing?"

Yugi looked down at his outfit. It felt good to be back in his usual dueling attire, from the Millennium Puzzle hanging easily around his neck to the leather and buckles down to the deck box hanging off the second belt on his hip.

"What's wrong with what I'm wearing?" Yugi asked innocently.

"It's..." Harry swallowed a bite of his breakfast. "...different. I don't remember you dressing like that over the summer at Ron's place."

"Oh," Yugi laughed. "No...I guess I didn't. But this is what I normally would wear back home, for dueling, and stuff."

Ryou snickered. "If you think that's weird, wait 'till you see Kaiba."

Harry raised an eyebrow. "Why?"

"Three words," said Ryou, raising that many fingers. He tallied off one by one. "Gravity. Defying. Coat."

To his and Yugi's amusement, Harry and Ron exchanged baffled looks.

"Where's your duel disk thing," asked Hermione, "Won't you need that?"

Yugi nodded. "Kaiba still has it. Since he wasn't in the dorm when we got up, I imagine he's already out on the Pitch, probably setting up those amplifier things he brought with him from home."

"Do you think you'll be ready for your game?" asked Ron. "I'm pretty excited to see one of these matches in person. You've been hyping it up for a while now."

"Duels against Kaiba are as challenging as they get," said Yugi, "We push ourselves to the limit every time. It's like an adrenaline rush!"

"He's probably the only person who can square up to you though, right?" asked Harry, "Since you're the King of Games and all."

"I've fought a lot of tough opponents," said Yugi, and nudged Ryou's arm. "Like Bakura! But as far as squaring up to each other, I'm the only person who's been able to defeat Kaiba in a fair fight."

"I'd hardly call our duel a fair fight," said Ryou, pushing Yugi's arm away. "My spirit hardly plays that way."

Yugi shrugged. "They were both really difficult games. And you're not a bad duelist yourself, when he's not butting in. You need to have more faith in yourself."

"I'm more surprised Kaiba didn't invite the entire school," said Ryou. "You know how much he loves being the center of attention."
Yugi nodded. "Yeah, or he did, at least. But he had a point. The last thing he wants is for someone to try and take the duel disks from us because of the monsters, even though they're harmless. We saw how he had to defend his phone, and that was just to keep in contact with his brother."

"So, Yugi," asked Hermione, "Which of you are going to duel?"

"The Pharaoh," said Yugi, smiling. "He's been itching for this fight for a long time."

Once they had finished eating, Harry led them outside towards the Quidditch Pitch. The sun was peeking in and out of the puffy clouds, but thankfully there didn't seem to be any inclement weather in sight; which was a relief, because Yugi was sure that rain or shine, Kaiba would have dragged them out to the Pitch for the match, even if they had to spend the week bedridden and ill from getting soaked to the bone. And that made Yugi suddenly curious – were the duel disks waterproof? He never tried to play in bad weather before. That would be an experience; though he wasn't sure he wanted to get his cards ruined just to retain a dueling title.

They passed by Hagrid's hut on the way, and Ryou stopped short, pointing off towards the pumpkin patch. "W-what are those?"

Yugi followed his gaze. The only thing in the pumpkin patch was the scarecrow hanging on the post. "What are you looking at?"

Ryou looked around to the others. "You don't see it?"

Ron and Hermione looked at each other. "Scarecrow?"

"No," Harry shook his head, and gestured to the odd-looking creatures. "Those are thestrals."

Yugi frowned. "I still don't see anything."

"Most people can't," said Harry, "Unless you've witnessed death."

Ryou took a step towards one, before turning back to the others. "They're not…dangerous, right?"

Harry shook his head. "No, those are tame. They're gentle, and won't attack unless they're seriously provoked."

"So you can see them," said Ryou.

Harry nodded glumly. "Yeah…"

Ryou took another cautious step towards the thestrals. They looked like a cross between a reptile and a winged horse. Its coat was thin enough that he could clearly see the shapes of its bones. Overall, it looked like something that would be on one of his occult-based Duel Monsters cards.

He held out a hand and carefully stroked the nearest one's head. "Have they always been here at the school?"

"I think so," said Harry. "I've just never seen them until recently. They pull the carriages to and from the train at the beginning and end of term. They've also got an incredible sense of direction. We used them to go to the Ministry of Magic last year, and having never been there from the school before – they knew exactly where to go, and got us there faster than relying on even the quickest broomstick."

"Huh – interesting," said Ryou. He gave it another pet before returning to the group. "I bet they get a lot of flak for being scary-looking."
"Sometimes," said Hermione, "People say they're unlucky because of the grim circumstances involved in order to see one."

"Can you all see them? Or just me and Harry?" Ryou asked as they continued towards the Pitch.

"I think between the three of us, only Harry can," said Ron, "It made getting to the Ministry really weird, clinging to a beast that we couldn't even see."

/Interesting./ Bakura said from his room.

Ryou tilted his head up slightly. /What is interesting, Spirit?/

/That for all the old man's protections around this place, you could just get on one of those things and fly off. They're not even penned in./

Ryou mentally frowned. /You're not going to take me over one day and just escape the school... are you?/

/No/ Bakura said, and Ryou was surprise at the level of snap to his voice, considering he asked that in jest. /I'm merely commenting on the lack of foresight to keep people in this school./

/Maybe no one expects anybody to just jump on one and get away./

/Hm./

Yugi walked out onto the Quidditch field as the clock tower back at the school chimed on the hour. As he expected, Seto was standing in the center of the field, with the calm breeze catching the tails of his stark-white coat.

"I've been waiting for you, Yugi."

Yugi put a hand to the Millennium Puzzle, allowing Yami control as he joined his rival in the center of the field. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Ryou lead Harry and the others off to the side, away from the Pitch's center. Hermione waved her wand, conjuring chairs for them to sit.

"You did say 10am, Kaiba."

Seto knelt down to the briefcase at his feet and tossed over Yugi's duel disk, which Yami caught one-handed.

Yami looked it over. "What's this?" he asked, indicating a small chip secured near the underside of the monster card zone. "I don't remember that being there before."

"It's to connect to the amplifier," said Seto, pointing down to the device off to the side, near his open briefcase. Another was situated a bit farther off, and Yami guessed that's where he was to take up his spot to duel.

Yami nodded. "Alright." He eyed Seto suspiciously. "I take it this isn't a high-stakes duel."

Seto shook his head irritably. "If you're referring to the God Cards, then no."

Yami looked amused. "No? Have you lost your touch? Seto Kaiba isn't after the three most powerful Duel Monsters cards? I think I must be hallucinating!"

"Don't be an idiot," Seto snapped, "Of course I want the God Cards. But when I win them from you,
and I will, it will be after I defeat them all in battle, and that's not going to happen today."

Yami blinked. That wasn't quite the answer he was expecting at all. "It's not?"

Upon seeing the udder befuddlement on the Pharaoh's face, Seto sighed. "I suppose I have to break things down to Wheeler's intelligence level. Surely you remember what happened the last time the Gods clashed in one of our duels."

"Of course," said Yami, "They linked us back to a vision of the ancient past. But they were fighting against each other that time. I have them all here, so I don't see something like that happening today."

"That's not quite what I was getting at," said Seto. "I already told you that the holograms were having difficulty staying out here. The technology, which is now running on magic, is acting alongside all of the concentrated magic surrounding the school. But Obelisk, Slifer, and Ra have a power all their own to it – probably having to do with the Millennium Items."

Seto drummed his fingers against the crook of his arm. "I haven't tested what monsters with that much power will do to the amplifier – or your duel disk – in this setting. Think about it – they fried televisions in mainland Domino City, and we were in the middle of nowhere atop the Duel Tower. Do you really want to find out how much damage they could do to the castle if they react badly to the magic around Hogwarts?"

Yami looked down to the deck in his hands. "I suppose you've got a point." He shuffled through his cards, pulled the three monsters, held them up for Seto to see, and placed them back into the deck box hanging on his hip. "Are you sure that our other cards won't break the system?"

Seto snorted. "Considering my deck is stronger than yours anyway, that's a moot point, don't you think?"

"You haven't managed to beat me yet."

Seto glowered as he slipped on his own duel disk over the metal bracer around his wrist. "Your win in Battle City, like most others, was reliant on luck. We both know that if that Anubis freak hadn't crashed the party during our last rematch, I would have been the victor."

Yami tauntingly waggled a finger at him. "You don't know that, Kaiba."

"Face it," Seto activated his disk and set his deck into the slot. "My strategies outshine yours by a long shot. Your days as a champion are numbered."

Yami moved to stand next to his amplifier. "Then I hope you've counted fairly high, Kaiba, because I have no plans on being dethroned today."

Ron leaned back, looking around Harry to nudge Ryou's shoulder. "Is the trash talk normal?"

Ryou nodded. "It's part of their routine. You get used to it."

"...If you're so certain you're going to win," Seto snarled, as his trench coat flared dramatically in the air behind him, "Then prove it."

"I shall," Yami pronounced, slipping on his own duel disk.

"DUEL!"
Please note for the upcoming duel, some of the card effects used may not necessarily reflect the actual text on the real life cards. Some anime-specific abilities will be in play.

Yugi and Kaiba's decks are based somewhere between the Battle City and Orichalcos arcs, despite the story taking place after the KC Grand Championship arc.

"I'll start things off," said Yami, drawing his cards. "I summon Queen's Knight in defense mode; place two cards face down, and end my turn."

The holographic emitter whirred to life, and the art of Yami's opening monster appeared out on the field between the duelists as if she were an actual person. Kneeling down onto a larger-than-life image of her own card, she held her sword in front of her, keeping the tip of the blade angled towards the ground.

Hermione gasped. "It's so real! This is how you play back home?"

Ryou nodded.

Ron couldn't hide his amazement either. "I could see why you wouldn't want to go back to playing on a tabletop now."

"A predictable first move," Seto snapped, drawing his card. "I place four cards face down and summon Blade Knight in attack mode."

"Our monsters are evenly matched," said Yami. "Your knight's attack is equal to mine's defense."

Seto snorted. "That's where you're mistaken. Since I only have one card left in my hand, Blade Knight gains an additional 400 attack points, making it strong enough to take on Queen's Knight."

Yami glared across the field. "Well, then. If you're so confident that you can, go ahead."

Harry glanced over at Ron. "Seto's monster reminds me of one of McGonagall's giant chess pieces that we fought."

Ron nodded. "Yeah. I was thinking the same thing, though those hurt a lot more than that thing will, I bet."

"The holograms won't hurt you in these duels, unless they turn the safety mechanisms down," said Ryou, "It changes the intensity of the impact felt from attacks and such, but usually it stays at the default place in the center of the meter. I assume that's what they're playing on now, but I wouldn't put it past Kaiba to change the settings for his duels with Yugi."

"Unless it was a Shadow Game," said Bakura, and the others turned to see his ghostly silhouette next
to Ryou. "The monsters could then be real, and so would any punishments suffered throughout the duel." He shrugged at the horrified looks Harry and his friends sent his way. "That, of course, depends on the terms of the Shadow Games. Some are quite tame."

"What are yours like?" asked Ron nervously.

"As you lose life points, your body slowly starts to submit to the Shadows, until there's nothing left of you. And when you lose, the price of failure is to be sent to the Shadow Realm, forever."

"Surely they're not…still there?" said Hermione. "That's a long time…."

Bakura grinned maliciously. "You might want to tell that to a few old friends of mine that I found in a graveyard once. Unless the Pharaoh swindled some deal I was unaware of, they should still be there."

Hermione swallowed nervously and turned back to the duel in time to see Blade Knight surge across the field to attack.

"I activate Magical Hats!"

Harry nearly jumped out of his seat as four huge top hats appeared overtop of Queen's Knight, and then shuffled around the field, coming very close to where they were sitting as they jumbled themselves back and forth.

"Now if you want to take out my knight, you'll have to choose the correct hat," said Yami smugly, "Of course, I have a few surprises in store if you choose the wrong one."

Seto rolled his eyes. "Oh please, you use that strategy in every duel."

Yami tilted his head, trying hard not to laugh. "That's rich coming from you, Kaiba. Have you gone one duel without summoning your Blue Eyes White Dragons?"

Seto narrowed his eyes. "Says the one just as reliant on his magicians. Blade Knight, attack the far left hat!"

Yami smirked and tapped a button on the side of his duel disk. "Too bad, Kaiba, you've triggered Spellbinding Circle!"

Seto scowled as the green rune appeared from out of the selected hat, and surrounded his knight, freezing it in place. He watched its attack drop down to 1300 points. "An early lead doesn't decide the match, Yugi. I end my turn."

"Very well, I draw!" Yami looked through his hand thoughtfully. "I place a facedown card, and summon King's Knight!"

Seto crossed his arms.

Ryou blinked. "Yugi's getting ahead quickly here. It's only his second turn, and Kaiba is going to be down almost half of his life points if Yugi can get all of his attacks to hit!"

Harry turned to him. "How do you figure?"

Ryou smiled. "Some monsters have special abilities, remember? Just watch…."

"…And as you know, when King's Knight is summoned with Queen's Knight already out on the field, I am allowed to special summon Jack's Knight!" Yami declared, splaying his arm out
dramatically at the field as the third arcana warrior appeared. "Now all of my warriors can take out your monster with ease, and then some on your life points! Go – King's Knight, attack Blade Knight!"

Seto smirked, uncrossing his arms. "Predictable."

Yami watched as King's Knight crossed the field, but when it swung its sword to take out Kaiba's monster, it was met with a swirling storm that flew across the Quidditch Pitch to the holo image of his own trap card. Blade Knight swung back in retaliation, and then his own monster shattered into fading shards of light. "What!? How could that be? My monster had more attack points!"

"I told you, you need to work on your strategies," Seto sneered. "I activated Mystical Space Typhoon, destroying your Spellbinding Circle, bringing my monster's attack points back to its original boosted 2000. Your knight just went on a suicide mission."

Yami growled as his life points dropped to 3600.

"Looks like I have the strongest monster in play now," said Seto. "My draw."

/We walked into that one./

/Yeah/ Yugi frowned from his soul corridor. /Kaiba placed four facedown cards. They could have been anything./

/Yes…and now he still has a monster out on the field. If he starts sacrificing early, he'll have a clear run of the field. We don't have any monsters waiting in the wings if he decides to haul out his Blue Eyes White Dragons this soon into the duel./

/We'll just have to believe in the heart of the cards, Pharaoh! Even if we lose one of them, we'll still have one knight left over to use if we draw a more powerful card./

/That's true. We'll have to wait and see…/\n
Seto drummed his fingers against the edge of his duel disk. Now that he knew there was a second voice in Yugi's head, it was easy to see when he was talking with the Pharaoh through their link. It was hard to believe that hardly six months ago he would have chalked up Yugi's behavior to be overly-thoughtful with his turns, or just plain indecisive of what cards to play. It only took him getting a nagging mental roommate of his own to truly see the difference.

"If you two are done strategizing…" Seto sighed, "I summon Spear Dragon in attack mode!"

"Bloody hell!" Ron's jaw dropped as the emitters activated again with an array of colored lights, "That's the oddest dragon I've ever seen – and it's so…small, well, at least to the real ones that we're used to." Of course, the only dragons he had seen up close were the ones from the Tri-Wizard tournament, and he had been a good safe distance away…and baby Norbert. But his brother has worked with dragons for a while now, and even though he never let Ron get near any of them, Charlie had described enough in detail to know that many didn't have heads shaped like a spear.

"Speak for yourself," said Hermione, "To me, that dragon is huge!"

Ryou glanced over. With its long snout and the shape of its wings, the dragon could have passed for part-dinosaur. "Well…Spear Dragon isn't all that impressive of a dragon, if you compare it to some of the other ones in Kaiba's deck."

"So Seto's deck is based on dragons, and Yugi has sorcerers?" asked Hermione. She thought she
heard Seto correctly when he taunted Yugi’s alter ego for his deck archetype.

"Yugi has a mix of monsters in his deck, as does Kaiba, but they rely on their magicians and dragons the most."

They watched as the dragon flew across the way and took out one of the middle hats, but there was nothing underneath. *Queen's Knight* remained safe. Upon returning to Seto's side of the field, the blue dragon drew into its wings and sat on its card.

"I thought he was using it to attack," said Harry, "Why is it defending?"

"Spear Dragon's ability," Ryou explained, "After attacking, it is switched to defense mode until Kaiba's next turn where he can switch its battle position, assuming it survives. It doesn't have any defense points, so now it's an easy target."

"As is the *Jack's Knight*," said Harry, as it was taken out by *Blade Knight*, and Yugi's life points decreased by another hundred.

Seto smirked triumphantly. "What was it you were saying about an early lead?"

"You may have the upper hand now, Kaiba," said Yami, drawing his next card, "But we both know it only takes a single card to turn the tide of the duel."

"Then stop stalling and make your move."

~~*~~

*San Francisco*

"So let me get this straight," said Pegasus, after what seemed like an eternity of storytelling. "The next foe on dear Yugi-boy's docket isn't *anyone* related to the Millennium Items, just some nobody on a power grab?"

The dark shades long since removed, Roland reached up and rubbed at his eyes for what seemed like the twentieth time that day. "Essentially."

"And the only reason anyone is fretting over this, is because there is magic out there – *real* magic, and combining the two is a terrible idea."

"It sounds completely ludicrous, I agree," Roland reached for the briefcase (now discarded to the floor next to him), and retrieved several old copies of *The Daily Prophet*. "They're their own society, complete with a separate government, living alongside us common people. If the United Kingdom has it, I imagine there are other magical societies in almost every country around the globe."

Pegasus leaned back in his chair and tented his fingers together. "If I didn't spend several years wearing a magical artifact myself, I would have called you a lunatic. It seems our young friends are never going to catch a break at this rate. How did this even begin in the first place?"

"If you're referring to this Voldemort character learning about the Millennium Items, I haven't the slightest idea," said Roland, "But it seemed like quite a coincidence when Professor Dumbledore arrived the exact same day that Mr. Kaiba received the Millennium Rod."

"Coincidence or not, it seems the threat is very real, if there are people snooping through your affairs and trespassing on property they shouldn't even know exist." Pegasus gestured out the office windows to the cityscape behind him. "Although…I haven't been in the magical spotlight for quite
some time. I don't see why these nefarious wizards would come after me."

Roland passed an article of *The Daily Prophet* across the desk. "Mr. Kaiba brought this back with him. It's a copy of one of their newspapers."

Pegasus took the offered page and raised an eyebrow. "Oooh, complete with moving photographs. How fancy!" His eye skimmed down the page. "An attack in Egypt? That's nothing new – tomb robbers have been making trouble in the desert for years."

Roland took the clipping back. "Cloaked men in masks – that follows the description of Voldemort followers – attacked and made off with a tomb guardian. The Ishtars confirmed that the abducted man not only knew about the Millennium Items, but he was one of the ones who guarded the Millennium Eye."

Pegasus stiffened. "…I see..." he said after a good moment's silence. "Even without the Eye, it seems it'll still cause me grief. I think I understand what would cause little Mokuba so much worry. He thinks I'm in danger just because I *used* to wield it."

"To be fair, we don't know how much information they already have," said Roland.

Pegasus frowned thoughtfully. "I would say, considering these people haven't lived here from...we'll say Duelist Kingdom onwards, any knowledge that they have to do with ownership of a Millennium Item is probably grossly outdated. There were quite a few men in the tomb where I was given the Eye, but I highly doubt any of them kept tabs on me since then to know that it was taken from me after my duel with Yugi-boy. *That*, in fact, isn't really known to much of anyone, come to think of it."

"Regardless, that puts anyone who has had anything to do with those items in Voldemort's radar," said Roland.

"So, I take it your little adventure across the globe was merely just to warn me? I'm surprised you bothered to come all this way for something we may have done over the phone – or even one of those fancy video-chats."

Roland paused. "I felt this was better done in person. How well do you really think this conversation would have gone over the phone?"

"Mmm," Pegasus mused, "I will give you that. Although we've all already experienced Millennium Item magic before so it's not like this is *completely* new. Magic is magic; this kind just doesn't hail from a collection of ancient artifacts."

Roland fidgeted uneasily in his seat before closing the briefcase. He could see his boss's livid explosion play out in his head. "There is more."

Pegasus laughed darkly. "Of course there is."

"It is not just these 'evil' wizards that we are on edge about," Roland's hands kept flexing in and out fists before he settled them against the arms of his chair. "It could also very well be the ones that Professor Dumbledore assigned for protection back home, or someone in their own government. Someone has been looking into Mr. Kaiba's background and holdings, and trespassing onto his various properties."

"You can't trust anyone, can you?" said Pegasus, "Is that why you were so uptight during our last meeting? Dear me – Kaiba-boy doesn't have a spy in his ranks does he?"
Roland rolled his eyes. "I doubt it, but neither of us are very trusting of any wizard right now."

"We all know how well Kaiba takes betrayal," said Pegasus, "The Big 5 are a perfect example – just how many years have they been missing now? But I'm surprised that little Mokuba hasn't made the glorious trek to be with his big brother. Surely he would want him close if he doesn't hold much faith in these wizards."

It was hard keeping his stone-cold poker face. "That is none of your concern".

"All right, all right," Pegasus held up his hands, "I can tell I toed into the wrong topic of discussion." He settled back against the back of his chair. "I imagine Kaiba hasn't taken this privacy violation of his well."

"As well as to be expected."

Pegasus noticed that his guest had stopped drumming his fingers against the arm of the chair and was back to fidgeting again. During the entire meeting thus far, he had watched the man settle into this tic each time he went into something personal or relatively uncomfortable about either of the Kaiba brothers. He already knew that Roland didn't want to be here – the man showed clear contempt for him at every opportunity.

But something brought him here other to warn him of a thinly veiled threat, even for Mokuba's sake. And the elder Kaiba wasn't even aware this little gathering was taking place, so something drastic must have happened for his most loyal employee to go behind his back like this. Ooh, he couldn't wait to find out what it was.

"...But whatever has transpired has not been severe enough that you need to keep Mokuba on a close leash, or he would be here with you. Although, you're sneaking around Seto's ever-watchful eye, so perhaps I'm mistaken."

Pegasus tilted his head. "There is more to tell, clearly. More coffee? Or tea perhaps? The little café downstairs does wonders for the taste buds."

Roland shook his head.

Pegasus clasped his hands together on his desk and watched the other man's fists flex in and out again. It was so close to the tip of his tongue, he could almost sense words ready to burst from Roland's mouth, but the man was at odds with himself. Whatever was to come out had to be worth risking Kaiba's wrath. He couldn't wait to hold it over the young businessman's head later and to even see Kaiba-boy's face – Christmas might even come early!

After a minute, Pegasus turned to Croquet standing dutifully behind him. "Alright, Croquet. Could you leave us? I'm sure there are some interns downstairs that could use rescuing for a little while."

He peered across his desk to the time on the office phone. "Ooo! Better yet, place the usual reservation for lunch. With the lovely weather, I'm sure they'll be packed, and we both know how patient I am when famished."

"Yes, sir," came the older man's raspy voice.

Pegasus didn't turn back to Roland until the door had clicked shut. "Alright. I've conceded to your initial request. I am so piqued to know what the absolute secret is about that you won't speak of it in my own right hand's presence."

"I didn't want him to hear any of it – quite frankly it's not his business. Or your own, but since both of you have lived or dealt with magic before, I doubt he's going to run into the streets and let the
world know how Yugi Muto and Mr. Kaiba are essentially wizards."

Pegasus chuckled. "Hardly. His voice wouldn't be able to handle it."

Roland huffed, but finally stopped fidgeting against the chair and crossed his arms, choosing to drum his fingers against his elbow instead. He took a deep breath before looking Pegasus dead in the eye. "As I said, Mr. Kaiba is not very trusting of these wizards. From what he's seen and experienced abroad, he doesn't put much stock in their government."

"As you've said," Pegasus agreed. "But if I know Kaiba, he's already a step ahead of things, isn't he?"

"...Yes," Roland said. "Because he doesn't believe in the ability of these people to keep Mokuba safe while he's away...he has instructed the creation of a contingency."

"...In case things go south," said Pegasus nodding. "Of course, and now everything fits perfectly into place. Let me guess. Despite the danger to anyone who has ever breathed near a Millennium Item, Kaiba-boy could care less what happens to me, and that's why you're here, placating the whims of poor Mokuba with his heart of gold."

Roland scowled at him. "Not quite. It's true that I would rather be anywhere but here, and that Mokuba did share concern for you, but I am under no orders to keep the information from you." He paused, closed his eyes and took another deep breath. He had been at odds with himself the entire flight over. Would this really be the best course of action? Scenarios had played in his head, weighing the possible consequences of going this route to complete the task Mr. Kaiba set upon him. But in the end, it always came back to this. Now that he had already begun to tell his story, there was no going back.

Roland knew he was going to regret his next words the moment they left his mouth. "I'm here because I need your help."

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Seto raised an arm to block his face from the shockwave impact as Dark Magician Girl, with The Book of Secret Arts in hand, used her staff to obliterate Blade Knight in a small explosion, putting a dent in his life points for the very first time. When the meter stopped at 3300 and the artificial blast faded, he straightened up. "It's about time you mounted a weak comeback."

"I'd watch what you say, Kaiba," Yami taunted, "This duel is still far from over. It may have taken a few turns to finally hit your life points, but I'm far from done."

"Could have fooled me," Seto jabbed back. He looked at the card he pulled from the top of his deck and grinned. "I hope you didn't plan on keeping your little magician out for too long. I summon Lord of Dragons!"

Ron pulled a face as the new warrior's stats appeared briefly above its head. "Wait. Is he nuts? Yugi's girly magician has so many more points than that thing. It's toast!"

Yami gestured to the field. "You called me predictable. We both know you wouldn't summon that particular monster unless you had one of your flutes waiting in the wings."
Seto laughed. "That's where you're wrong. I place one card facedown, an end my turn."

Yami paused and surveyed the field. Dark Magician Girl could wipe out the Lord of Dragons with ease, but there was something about his rival's line of facedown cards that unnerved him. One of them had been there since the very first turn. /What would he be planning from the very start?/

/Perhaps it's one of his virus cards. They always struck us at the worst possible times in the past./

Memories of their duel in the original Duel Dome came to mind, and Yami shuddered. He had nearly decked out trying to keep himself afloat in that match, and that was without Anubis draining his life force away. It was the most intense Shadow Game he had played in a long time, and both he and Kaiba had come close to losing everything that day.

Yami drew his next card. Kaiba had placed his monster in attack mode, and hadn't even used The Flute of Summoning Dragon to bring out his arsenal. It seemed a rather odd time to summon it, with no dragons on the field to benefit from Lord of Dragons' ability.

/It looks like he's baiting us to attack it. If we do, and it is truly a trap, we could lose Dark Magician Girl, leaving us wide open for a counter attack next turn. But if we don't, and his monster stays out on the field, that will give him a chance to either sacrifice it for something stronger, or draw one of his flutes./

/But do we spring the trap? Or play on the defensive?/

Seto cleared his throat loudly. "I'd like to defeat you before the sun sets today, Yugi."

"Good moves take time, Kaiba," Yami shot back. He looked to his hand. A few magic cards, but only one monster. If he played this right, he could have something to defend against Kaiba's dragons before they made it back onto the field. "I summon Skilled White Magician in defense mode, and then play Pot of Greed to draw two more cards, and that will do it for me this turn." He looked back down at his hand to his new additions: Polymerization and Gazelle the King of Mythical Beasts.

"Too afraid to attack? Pathetic," Seto sneered, and drew his next card.

"Wait," Harry held up a hand and pointed to the field. "What's that thing above Skilled White Magician's head?"

"A counter," said Bakura, bored. "It gets one each time a spell card is played. Once it gets three, the Pharaoh can sacrifice the monster and summon a very powerful card. It may be one of the few things that can stand up to Kaiba's Blue Eyes White Dragons."

"Those dragons aren't out yet though, so he still has time," said Ron.

"Don't be so sure," the tomb robber snapped, "With that look on Kaiba's face, something big is coming, and soon."

"You should have made your move when you had the chance, because it'll soon be game over, Yugi!" Seto activated one of the facedown cards on his side of the field.

Yami's eyes widened. /That wasn't nearly the card I was expecting./

/He set that on the first turn? But why?/

/If I had to guess...it was just to raise the attack of his Blade Knight./
"I activate White Dragon Ritual," said Seto, as the second circle appeared over Skilled White Magician's head. "By discarding Vampire Lord to my graveyard, I can summon Paladin of White Dragon!"

"That dragon is a lot smaller than I thought it would be," said Hermione, gazing up at it, and it's white-armored paladin rider, "It's smaller than the Spear Dragon!"

"Yeah, but just wait," said Ryou, "I hope Yugi has a plan to turn this duel around, and soon!"

"Paladin of White Dragon, attack Skilled White Magician!" Seto smirked, watching as the paladin's lance shattered the magician into shards of light. "You won't be summoning your Buster Blader that easily."

"I'm surprised he didn't just sacrifice it to summon one of his Blue Eyes White Dragons.../

"Yes...although, if he did that, and we managed to get Buster Blader out next turn, the Blue Eyes on the field, plus the two dragons already in his graveyard would make our monster stronger than his./

"You may have stalled out that way, Kaiba, but there is more than one way to summon him," said Yami. Although having him – or my Dark Magician would certainly help... "But don't think I will let you summon your dragon just as easily. Your paladin's attack still pales under that of my Dark Magician Girl!"

Seto shrugged. "Then attack it."

Yami frowned. Dark Magician Girl could take out Paladin of White Dragon, therefore keeping Kaiba from easily pulling out a Blue Eyes the next turn...but if he does that, there was still the chance of one of his rival's two Flute of Summoning Dragon cards being drawn. But those only summoned from his hand. There was no guarantee of any of those cards being in his hand right now.

And then there were those two face-down cards still on the field....

"I think you're just itching to activate one of those facedown cards," said Yami.

"And I think you're too chicken to take a chance. Has nearly being beaten by a child during my last tournament softened you, Yugi?"

"What!?"

"Face it; you've been playing safe this entire time. Where's the Pharaoh fighting for his dueling title with everything he's got? Just because we're not battling for the God cards doesn't mean you get to slack off."

"I can assure you, Kaiba, that I am not slacking," Yami said. "I summon Skilled Dark Magician, and place one card facedown. Now, Dark Magician Girl, attack his Paladin of White Dragon! Dark burning attack!"

"Activate trap card!"

Yami glowered. Of course....

"Ring of Destruction allows me to destroy one face up monster, and then you take damage equal to its attack, and I choose your Skilled Dark Magician."
Yami frowned. "You take damage as well, unless…"

"That's right, Yugi. I also activate Ring of Defense. My life points are safe."

"Urgh…" Yami watched as his life points plummeted down to 2650. "Very well, but that didn't stop Dark Magician Girl's attack. Your paladin is still gone, and you will take damage from that."

Seto glanced to his disk as the life points recalculated down to 2900. "Are you done?"

"I think so. Your move, Kaiba."

Harry turned to look at the other side of the field in time to see Seto draw his card and then start laughing. "Uh oh… that doesn't look good for Yugi if he's cackling like that."

Ryou shook his head. "Nope."

Bakura threw his hands up in the air. "Finally. Something interesting is going to happen."

"Well? Are you going to laugh at your cards or play them?" said Yami.

"You'll regret those words, Yugi. First I switch Lord of Dragons to defense mode. Then, I play Silent Doom to raise my Paladin of White Dragon back from the graveyard. But he won't be back for long. I now sacrifice him to summon my Blue Eyes White Dragon from my deck!"

No matter how large or small Harry and his friends thought the previous two dragons to be, nothing so far compared to the size of Seto's new monster. It flew down from the sky and landed behind her master. Lifting its head towards Yami, it let out a roar with enough force to shake the foundation of the Quidditch Pitch.

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"You need my help?" Pegasus said, flabbergasted. "With that calculating mind of his, Kaiba-boy stays two steps ahead of everyone. What could possibly have happened that he has to turn to me for assistance?" He tilted his head thoughtfully. "What sort of contingency are we talking about?"

"At the very least – an escape for Mokuba. We both know that Mr. Kaiba and Mr. Muto's affinity for getting themselves into some sort of magical danger is exceptionally high. Mr. Kaiba needs assurance that if these Death Eaters came to call while he was abroad, that his brother would not be in danger. That safety net has also extended to include Yugi Muto's friends."

Pegasus nodded. "Not that I can see Kaiba-boy eagerly springing up for young Joseph Wheeler, but the idea is sound. Yugi-boy's friends are his strength, and also his greatest weakness. The same for little Mokuba." He eyed Roland curiously. "But… no matter the circumstance, I cannot see that invitation offered to me. No matter how far I've returned to the side of good."

"Mr. Kaiba isn't offering. I am."

Pegasus blinked. "You? Despite your precise disdain for me, that also comes as a surprise. Be honest, my friend – are you really doing this out of the goodness of your heart?"

"Not particularly," Roland grumbled. "But if all of the Millennium wielders, both past and present, are in danger, you are a liability should something happen. From what Mr. Kaiba has heard and relayed back to me, these wizards don't necessarily play fair. We are better off united."

"Hmm…" Pegasus mulled the words over. "I ask again – what kind of contingency plan do you
have? Even if it only included little Mokuba, taking the boy and fleeing will only go so far. The brothers are household names and faces for any duelist, and not just in Japan and America. And with Yugi-boy’s little pep squad in tow, it’ll be harder to smuggle a bunch of teenagers around.” He drummed his fingers against the edge of his desk. "…or is that why you’re coming to me for help?"

"Mr. Kaiba left considerable means to put something together. However…” Roland sighed. "My life and accounts have been probed as well. Despite the ‘friendly’ wizard presence in Domino, I feel my moves are also being monitored."

"Ahh," said Pegasus, "You need me to do your work for you, because I'm not on someone's bully list."

"Whatever the cost, you would be fully compensated. I, unfortunately, cannot appear to have hands in whatever is decided upon."

Crossing his arms, Pegasus leaned back in his chair. "Why should I, hmm? The Kaiba brothers hold no love for me, and even Yugi’s cheeriest cheerleaders have their doubts. I'm sure they would much happier off if I butted out of their business."

Roland blinked. Was Pegasus trying to play off his doubts about coming here in the first place? Perhaps everyone would be happier if the Duel Monsters creator was left out of their plot, but from a security standpoint, happiness was far from a priority.

He glared across the desk. If Pegasus was going to give him a hard time, he would push right back. It seemed too long that his past actions were glossed over and unaccounted for, and he was tired of it.

Roland got to his feet, planted his palms on the desk, and leaned over it. "I would think," he growled, "that after all this time, if you were truly the changed man you claim to be, you would see this as an opportunity to mend the bridges you've burned. Even indirectly, you've helped throw those kids' lives into absolute chaos on more than one occasion."

"I've also given the assistance necessary to overcome almost all of it," Pegasus snapped. "Forget Duelist Kingdom – who was it that gave Kaiba-boy that one dragon he needed to overcome that Anubis character?"

Roland gave him a look of utter disbelief, and gestured wildly to the framed sketches of various card designs on the office walls. "Where do you think he even got that Pyramid of Light card in the first place!?"

Pegasus shot to his feet, just as angered as the man across his desk. "Ooooh no, don't pin that disaster on me! I didn't give him that card. We bartered over dragons. Anubis must have planted the card himself, because I sure as hell didn't create it. Let's not forget that it was I that also helped pull Yugi's friends – and Mokuba – from the wreckage of Kaiba's shiny new stadium when their duel tore the place apart. And it was I that helped keep the roof stable over all their heads while Yugi and Kaiba were standing off against Anubis himself."

Before Roland could retort back, Pegasus continued, "And let's not forget something more recent, hmm? When I realized just who we were up against during the Paradius crisis, it was I that shared that information with Yugi, and created the Legend of Heart card so they would have some leverage against Dartz and his crew. But I suppose Kaiba-boy also lays blame on me for initiating Kaiba Corp's buyout during that little episode? Even though my soul was already gone at that point. Everyone is so quick to forget that I was just as much a victim there as all of you!"

The two men continued to glare at each other, not speaking, as the hour chimed from the ornate
grandfather clock in Pegasus's office. It was a good several minutes later that, after sizing each other up, Pegasus sighed, shook his head sadly, and sank back down. "But I suppose it doesn't much matter does it," he said softly. "First impressions are always the most important, isn't that what they always say? And despite my good-faith attempts to help since then, it will always come back to Duelist Kingdom, won't it?"

Roland merely stood, arms clasped behind him.

Pegasus slouched lower in his chair and rubbed at his temples. He spoke again, and his voice sounded quiet and tired, to Roland it was more so like his own employer's after a three day stint without a proper night's rest. "You are Kaiba-boy's confidant. I understand your bias against me, and I don't hold it against you. I had been making plans with the Big 5 well before Duelist Kingdom, not long after Kaiba's state-of-the-art holographic technology was first unveiled. I know exactly what the Big 5 did to you during that entire time…"

Roland narrowed his eyes further and scowled.

"…and if I were the man I was then, I would have called it a necessary evil in order to grasp hold of Kaiba Corp."

Pegasus lowered his hand and glanced back up. Roland was still staring at him, stone-faced. "But I'm not that man anymore. You don't have to believe me, I honestly don't expect you to, but those Millennium Items…they change people. I was not the power-hungry king, lording over the common duelist up in my castle, eager to smite the losers of my beloved games before I took on the Millennium Eye. It wasn't even something I inherited by choice. I was fresh from a tragedy, drunk with love and wanting, and following a dream. Duel Monsters hadn't even been created yet!

"Tell me, Roland, if someone had appeared before you, just after losing a loved one, and told you that you would be able to see that person again, would you follow them, for the chance of it being true?"

Roland raised his eyebrows. "As much as I would probably want to believe it, there is no coming back from death."

Pegasus smiled slightly and let out a heavy sigh. "A realist, like dear Kaiba. I suppose the dreamer in me was just gullible all those years ago."

They were silent again for another minute before Pegasus pointed to Roland's briefcase where the photograph of Kaiba holding the Rod had been kept. "I wasn't joking when I asked if Kaiba-boy had gotten possessed or turned to the dark side. We both know how damaged a soul he is – you were there the entire time, and, well, I saw through him with the Eye. He's toned down his hate and anger quite a bit these days. But if he ever succumbed to the dark whispers from a Millennium Item, I daresay we may all be doomed."

Roland paused a moment. "I assure you, Mr. Kaiba has a handle on his Millennium Item."

"That's good. I'm sure his extreme stubbornness is a virtue here. But it's quite scary to think… however these Millennium Items were created, it wasn't done lightly. There is a great dark magic at work, I can tell the difference in myself now that I'm rid of the thing. I can assure you, that if I knew just what would happen by following that man into that tomb, I can say with certainty I would have run the other way."

"That's rather easy to say now, isn't it?"
Pegasus shrugged. "I suppose. The Eye was forced on me, for seeing too much. Reflecting on it now, I don't think I was meant to wear it. Do I regret the pain I've caused others just by using the Eye? Absolutely. There are even times I wish I never discovered the origins of my card game, seeing how much devastation it's caused over the years. But then, at the same time, I think of all the fun and joy it has brought to so many…"

"I've made peace with what I've done," said Pegasus, "But I suppose my apologies came a little too late, at least to the brothers. Yugi-boy has always been a little more of an open-minded fellow. Despite the constant teasing — it is so easy with Kaiba — I have been trying to make amends."

"Then why not take this as a peace offering? You want to be redeemed, even a shred in Mr. Kaiba's eyes? Help me."

Pegasus shifted in his seat and regarded Roland closely. "You're not going to guilt trip me into this, are you?"

Roland shook his head. "No. But the way I see it, whether you were supposed to wear that Eye or not, it now made you a target, and you're enough of a flamboyant figure that these people will probably find you with relative ease if they so wished. I'm not here to leech your resources. If you don't wish to be a part of this, then I'll leave and this meeting will have never happened."

"I won't be signing your death warrant should Kaiba-boy find out about this, will I? Despite my good-naturedness, he still can't stand me."

"By the time he would find out about this, if he found out, it will hopefully be too late to do anything about it. He specifically didn't want to be told on the specifics of the plan, and I don't intend to disobey that. So unless you tell him…"

Pegasus nodded slowly. "I see…give me the afternoon to think. Enjoy San Francisco, Roland. I'll have an answer for you by the end of the day.

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"…and I think crystal chandeliers in the Great Hall instead of the traditional candles will look lovely, don't you Filius?"

Upon hearing his name, Professor Flitwick snapped to attention. "Oh, yes," he squeaked, "Crystal is fine!"

Professor Umbridge had assembled members of the staff together into what she called the 'Christmas Ball committee'. He wasn't sure why she even bothered. Sitting around the large table with Professors Sprout, Vector, Sinistra, Madame Pince, and Madame Pomfrey, Umbridge was spearheading the discussion. Even if any one of them got a word in edgewise, their opinions were bulldozed in favor of Umbridge's designs for the upcoming event.

At least she hadn't decided to tint the Great Hall in shades of pink. Thank goodness this was taking place right before the end of the first term and not at Valentine's Day.

It was as Professor McGonagall was passing the staffroom that Umbridge stopped rambling about table patterns. "Ah – Minerva! You must come and hear what we've come up with for the winter formal!"

Professor Sprout turned to Madame Pince. "I don't think we've said a word in this entire time."

Madame Pince rolled her eyes once Umbridge's back was turned. "I'm not sure where the 'we' came
from. All these ideas are hers, and they're not even original. Most of the décor she mentioned was used during the Tri-Wizard Tournament."

Professor Flitwick sighed, bored, and tapped his wand against one of the sheets of parchment that they were supposed to be taking notes with, and turned it into a paper bird that began to flutter around the room.

Umbridge was halfway back into the room, attempting to pull Professor McGonagall in to go over what was already decided upon, when a loud roar was heard over the grounds, shaking the windows in their frames.

"What was that?" asked Madame Pomfrey once the slight tremor had passed.

"That half-giant again, I bet," Umbridge snapped, "Just what manner of dangerous creature has he brought to the grounds this time!?" Reaching for her wand, she rushed for the door.

Professor Sprout grinned. "Does this mean the meeting is over? Thank goodness."

"I agree," Professor Flitwick sighed, "I was more looking forward to grading essays this weekend."

"I feel for Minerva though," said Professor Sinistra, pointing down the hall. Despite the extreme height disparity, Umbridge was doing a fairly good job at dragging her down the corridor towards the entrance hall.

"Do you think we should rescue her?" asked Professor Vector.

"I'm sure she will be fine on her own," said Professor Flitwick. "If Hagrid was bringing in something new for his classes though, I feel sorry for him. Unless, of course, it eats Umbridge."

"Then I'd feel sorry for the animal," muttered Madame Pince.

The roar sounded again as Umbridge made her way down the steps just outside the main doors to the castle. "What on earth – that couldn't have been an approved monster for the Care of Magical Creatures curriculum. Just what sort of contraband has he smuggled to the castle?"

"Now, Dolores," said McGonagall, annoyed, "I'm sure there is a perfectly good explanation."

"Hmph," said Umbridge, trotting off towards Hagrid's hut.

Professor McGonagall paused and listened to what sounded like a small explosion. "Ah – I do believe it is coming from this way."

"Don't be ridiculous," said Umbridge, "Only the Quidditch Pitch is out that way, and there are no matches today. Team practice wouldn't even make those noises."

"That is true. Perhaps someone has signed out use of the Pitch today." She turned and headed off towards the courtyard and Madame Hooch's office.

Sighing, Umbridge set off after her, and didn't hesitate to snatch the sign-out-clipboard from its hook just outside the flying instructor's door.

"...Why has Seto Kaiba booked the stadium for the entire day?" she said loudly. "I don't remember him joining the Gryffindor team!"

Another blast sounded off from the direction of the Pitch.
"There had better be a good reason for this," she muttered, stalking off again, with the head of Gryffindor House in tow.

Umbridge was huffing and puffing as she entered the team locker room area, now remembering why she despised going to the school matches in the previous year. Too much energy to stalk up and down the hilly grounds just to watch a cluster of misfits on broomsticks!

The closer they got to the entrance to the field itself, they could hear the clinking of weapons and angry shouts.

"What on earth is going on in there?"

"Go, Dark Magician – attack Lord of Dragons! Dark magic attack!"

Umbridge stopped short. "Professor Dumbledore? What are you doing?"

Dumbledore turned from his spot at the entrance to the field. "Ah, good morning, Minerva, Dolores. I was just watching the game. It is quite fascinating, the wonders of Muggle technology."

"Game? What game?" Umbridge peered around him in time to see the large purple-clad magician take out the warrior in dragon armor across the playing field. "Did that man just die?"

"Lord of Dragons may be gone, but you still have my Blue Eyes to contend with, and neither of your magicians have enough firepower to take it down, Yugi!" Seto said, gloatingly. To add emphasis to his intimidation, the dragon hovering behind him opened its jaws and let out another roar.

Umbridge staggered back and nearly trampled over McGonagall's robes. "What is a dragon doing here?! The closest free roam dragons were supposed to be in Romania!"

"I switch Dark Magician Girl to defense mode, and end my turn."

McGonagall blinked. "So that's what those devices were used for?"

Umbridge rounded on her. "You knew about these dangerous things?"

"Mr. Kaiba did explain what they were for, but at the start of term, they were inoperable and returned to him without incident."

"Well that one," Umbridge gestured wildly to the arena, "In the weird purple dress just exploded a man! Those weird things on their arms are dangerous!"

She crossed her arms over her chest and watched the next few turns pass by without much incident. A few counter moves from each side seemed to keep both Yugi Muto and Seto Kaiba's creatures from obliterating each other. If it weren't for the fact that Dumbledore had been watching this for some undetermined amount of time and hadn't felt the need to intervene, she would have. And at this point, seeing Harry Potter and his friends hanging around as if this was some grand spectator sport didn't surprise her in the slightest. Potter brought trouble anywhere and everywhere he went.

The entire display in front of her had an air of ridiculousness about it. Where could she possibly start? On one part of the Pitch, Yugi was wearing an unhealthy amount of leather and buckles, with his strange golden pyramid showing off proudly around his neck. A navy jacket was draped over his shoulders like a cape, and he wore one of those funny devices on his arm. She certainly didn't remember his bangs standing straight up like that. In front of him were the oddest people she had ever seen. One was a scantily-clad blonde in a ridiculous hat kneeling down on what looked to be a mega-sized version of one of their cards. Its companion was a tall man in purple robes, holding a
large green staff menacingly at the white dragon opposite him.

Not that Kaiba looked any less odd over there. His slim-fitting black turtleneck and slacks made him seem even taller, and forget the jacket/cape that Yugi wore – the white-studded coat over the taller teen's shoulders must have been altered with magic for it to flare out like that. And while he didn't have the same affinity for buckles and chains that Yugi did, he had his own strange accessories, plus another of those weird disks that they placed their cards upon. Long metal bracers were on each wrist…and…were those belts on each arm and leg?

Muggles sure dressed funny.

Her eyes were suddenly drawn to the smaller devices on the ground beside the two students. What on earth were those things? They seemed to come to life every time either of the two students played one of their little cards. Another of his strange electronics? How in Merlin's name was he getting all these trinkets to work on the grounds?

"It looks like this duel is going to be over sooner than you think," Seto snapped, looking at his newest card.

/That's your third dragon…/

Seto hesitated from playing the magic card in his hand. Set had been quiet the entire time, and he had been so wrapped up in the duel that he forgot the spirit was even there.

/It is,/ He had drawn the second Blue Eyes White Dragon several turns ago, but all of his other monsters, save for his first dragon already out on the field, had been picked off by Yugi's magicians.

Set frowned. /I don't wish to distract you from your match…/

/Yet, that is exactly what you are doing. Does this have a conclusion, or can I go back to trouncing Yugi?/

/You keep calling him Yugi…you are dueling the Pharaoh, Seto. By now, after seeing them side-by-side in the castle, you should know the differences between the two./

/Whatever. Listen, make your point or I'm going to go back to ignoring you./

Set rolled his eyes. /Do you not feel it?/

/Feel what?/

/The pull, the tug at your heart each time you draw or play one of your White Dragons./

Seto sighed. /No. I don't. I don't feel any supernatural nonsense when I play it, not now or even before you started renting headspace. It's a playing card. Yugi -/

/Pharaoh./

/…The Pharaoh doesn't make any mention of emotional turmoil when he summons his Dark Magicians, and he's just as connected to those. It's all in your head. Now if you don't mind…/

"And you harassed me for taking too long to play a card," Yami teased. "What are you doing over there?"

Seto glared across the field. "Setting up my victory, what else would I be doing?" He jammed the
magic card into the slot with way more force than he intended, and felt the card bend. Hm – that one is going to have to be replaced out with the spare in his briefcase.

"I play Polymerization!"

Yami staggered back. Oh no….

"And you know what that means," Seto gloated. "I hope you've made your last move wisely!"

As the magic card activated, the other two dragons in his hand appeared in the sky above the one already standing on the ground. The first one beat its wings to join the others, and in a swirl of light, they began to fuse together.

"What's going on?" asked Ron, "Where did the other dragons come from – they were all the same!"

Ryou looked around. "I think we're too close to the field."

"Too close?" said Harry, "We're already by the wall!"

Ryou grimaced. "He's fusing his dragons together, to make a new one. It's going to be big."

"The other one was big," Ron countered, "And I've seen some dragons, let me tell you."

Ryou suddenly felt Bakura disappear from beside him. /We have company. Dumbledore, Umbridge, and McGonagall, at the entrance to the Pitch./

/Huh? …Oh dear./

"Guys, we're not alone," Ryou said, "And I have a feeling something bad is going to happen…." 

"What are you talking- BLOODY HELL!" Ron scrambled backwards off his seat, the others following suit, as Blue Eyes Ultimate Dragon materialized, hovering behind her master. The beat of her wings created wind gusts strong enough to move some of the sand covering the grounds of the field, and Harry and the others had to throw up arms to shield their faces from the spray.

Hermione's jaw dropped. "That's…enormous!"

"That is a marvelous creature," said Dumbledore, awestruck, from the other side of the Pitch.

"I've never seen a dragon that large – and with…three heads? What sort of mutant is that thing?" said Umbridge, "Who are these students that can summon people and monsters to fight for them?"

With no more cards in his hand, Seto crossed his arms and stared Yami down smugly. "I hope you've said you're prayers, because in leaving your Dark Magician in attack mode, you're going to need a miracle to survive this turn."

A spark from his right drew his attention, and he frowned down at the emitter on the ground. Did he just see it start to smoke and spark? Great…

Seto gritted his teeth. He tested these as thoroughly as he could, and while it was the first time summoning his Ultimate Dragon on the school's grounds, it didn't have a problem with the God cards back home, and those creatures were much stronger. Perhaps one emitter wasn't strong enough to combat the magic trying to shut it down while keeping his monster on the field. Well…there wasn't a whole lot that could be done now. At least the match was almost over.

Yami watched as Seto pulled his wand from his trench coat pocket and cast something down at it.
The sparking ceased immediately. "Everything all right?"

"Fine," Seto snapped, "This duel is going to end anyway. Now, Blue Eyes Ultimate Dragon, annihilate Yugi's Dark Magician and end this duel. Neutron Blast!"

/This is it, Pharaoh…../

/I know./

Yami braced himself as the three heads charged up their attack while moving his hand to hover over his last facedown card's activation button. I'm not done just yet, Kaiba….

"Well!? Aren't any of you going to do something?" Umbridge looked haughtily to the two people beside her. "You're just going to let him obliterate Yugi Muto with that three-headed demon?"

Professor McGonagall rolled her eyes. "Dolores…" she began, but it was futile. The toad-faced woman was already marching out across the field, pulling her wand from her robes and aimed for the whirring device on the ground. Sighing, she threw her hands up in the air and stalked after her, Dumbledore casually following in tow.

"STOP THIS AT ONCE!"

Yami turned, eyes wide, just in time to see the jet of light leave her wand. "Kaiba – look out!"

But it was too late – Seto barely had time to shield his eyes and turn away as the spell hit its target, exploding the emitter at his feet in a shower of sparks and metal parts at the exact moment the triple blast left the dragons' mouths. The attack only made it halfway across the field before they fizzled out and disappeared. A few seconds later, Seto's duel disk began sparking as well and Blue Eyes Ultimate Dragon also vanished. Once the dragon had completely disappeared, the sparking ceased.

Seto whirled angrily in just enough time to grab his wand and deflect Umbridge's next spell at the last amplifier before it blew up in Yugi's face. Glaring at what remained of his technology at his feet, he stormed across the field.

"Uh oh," said Hermione. As the last to get up, she hurried to catch up with Harry, Ron, and Ryou as they crossed the ground. She turned back and vanished the seats she created as they made their way to Yugi's side as Umbridge fast approached, already red-faced.

"What do you think you're doing?" Umbridge sputtered.

"We were minding our own business," Seto snapped. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Hermione approach to stand between him and Ron, and Professors McGonagall and Dumbledore making their way across the Pitch.

"You nearly killed your friend with that demon monster of yours," Umbridge shouted, "What do you have to say for yourselves?"

"Professor, none of this was dangerous," said Yugi, quickly taking control back from Yami, "We were playing Duel Monsters, it's a card game."

"And you want to tell me that the three-headed dragon wasn't real? Or that your underdressed fairy and her purple-clad friend didn't kill that armored man from earlier?"

"You're kidding," said Ryou, slapping a hand to his forehead. "Professor, they're telling the truth – it's just a game. Yugi and Kaiba weren't in danger…or a danger to each other."
"The monsters aren't real either," said Yugi. "They're holograms."

"The three-headed dragon seemed quite real," said Dumbledore, without any trace of ill in his voice. In fact, it sounded almost amused.

"It's part of the holographic technology, to add as much realism as possible," said Seto, glaring icily down at Umbridge. "It creates the illusion of realism. But that dragon was no more real than you are tall."

Umbridge matched his glare. "Hmph! But those strange devices are clearly unsafe. Anything that can summon demonic creatures such as those should be thoroughly examined. As it stands, the thing you're wearing set off enough sparks that could have lit you ablaze."

Hermione could feel the anger rolling off of the duelist next to her in droves. If he wasn't careful, Seto was going to wind up back in Umbridge's office for another round of lines until dawn, unless she stopped him before he said something stupid. He had his arms crossed, and his hands were gripping his arms tightly enough that his knuckles were white.

When he began to retort something back, she lightly smacked his arm, and held her ground as his dark glare turned on her long enough to see her shake her head slightly at him. Hopefully he would see reason and not explode like Harry did during last year's Defense Against the Dark Arts lessons.

When Seto turned back to the professors, he held back a sigh. It was a good thing he was closing off the circulation in his arms. If his hands were free, he likely would have throttled someone. "It was sparking because someone destroyed the amplifier to its power source."

"Well," Umbridge huffed, and aimed her wand, "What's left of these items must be taken and examined by the Ministry of Magic. Anything that has the ability to summon these monstrous creatures can have the capacity to be altered for ulterior motives. Accio."

The last amplifier emitter zoomed up from the ground, but a hand shot out and caught it before it could reach her arms. "No."

"We are not doing this again," Umbridge snapped. "Surely you have learned your lesson the last time."

"No, you will not," said Professor McGonagall before any of the other students could get a word in edgewise. "Dolores. You already tried this once, so let me remind you something. You were told to let your fight with Kaiba and his technology go, and that is what Professor Dumbledore and I expect you to do. You are not to confiscate, and certainly not to destroy this property as if it were a cursed artifact."

"And if you need more proof," said Ryou — or was it Bakura, Harry mused, for the voice sounded gruff enough to be the darker spirit in control of Ryou's body. The white-haired teen reached down, picked up a large stone from the ground, and hurled it through the air. They watched it sail through both of Yugi's magicians to settle on the ground. "They're. Not. Real."

"Well, I for one found this game to be quite a fascinating thrill," said Dumbledore, "I'm sorry that we will be unable to see its conclusion." He turned to the still-seething Kaiba. "I hope your curious device has not been damaged beyond repair."

Seto pulled his cards from his duel disk and pocketed them back in his trench coat. He looked down at his disk. "I won't know until I go back home again. As for that," he gestured back to where he had stood dueling. "I doubt there are enough remains to even bother. Dueling emitters are a dime a dozen
back at the development labs."

"Shame," said Ron, "You were about to win too."

Ryou winced. *Oh, he shouldn't have said that.*

Seto fixed Ron the same deadly gaze he had leveled on Umbridge before aiming his wand behind him to summon his discarded briefcase. Sliding his disk and spare emitter back away, he stormed off the Pitch without a word.

~~*~~

"Ah – there you are," said Pegasus, smiling slightly. "I thought I was going to have to have Croquet go off looking for you."

Roland sighed. "I take it you have an answer for me."

Pegasus nodded. "I do. I have thought long and hard over this…and despite what Yugi or Kaiba-boy may think, I *will* help you."

Roland clasped his hands behind him. "I see. I take it details will have to be decided, more likely during regular business hours?"

Pegasus gestured back to the empty chair in front of his desk. "Oh, no, my friend. We can at least cover the basics now. After waiting this long, I doubt this sort of project should be delayed any further."

Roland nodded slowly. "All right…." There was something off about the man's expression. He had worked alongside Seto Kaiba for years now. The man had a perfect poker face. Pegasus? Not so much. "What aren't you telling me?"

Pegasus smirked. "I said I would help you, but it won't come without my own set of conditions."

Roland groaned. *I knew it.* "And what are these conditions?"

Pegasus merely grinned.
"You think he's still mad?" asked Harry, when they returned to the common room after dinner that evening.

After leaving the Pitch, Seto had disappeared for the remainder of the day. The only way Yugi knew he was still somewhere on the grounds was that his dueling briefcase and trench coat was left on his bed. The thinner one he used for Kaiba Corp? That one was nowhere to be found, so that meant he was off taking his frustration out on his work in some corner of the castle.

Not that Yugi and the others stuck around on the Pitch much longer than the bitter CEO. The less time they stayed in Umbridge's company, the better. So they slowly trudged their way up to the castle, with Yugi more than a little put out that they couldn't finish their duel.

"Well, we didn't see him at dinner, so I would take that as a yes," said Yugi. "He can hold grudges for a long time. To make it worse, he seemed certain he was going to win that duel and we never got to finish. So he's probably brooding over that too."

"Would he have won?" asked Harry.

Yugi shrugged. "I did have a counter card ready to go, but we'll never know now how it would have ended."

"You think he's gonna repair the thing Umbridge decimated to dust or what?" said Ron. "Because then you two could go at it again!"

Yugi frowned sadly. "There wasn't really anything left when it exploded, and it seemed like his monster was pushing the limits of the emitters, so even without Umbridge's interference, we may have had to stop anyway. I'm more surprised he didn't pull some sort of jab of having her pay for it."

Ryou chuckled quietly while Ron looked confused.

Yugi ran a hand through his hair, "Sorry – it's a non-wizard saying. 'If you break it, you buy it'."

"Oh," Ron shrugged. "It's not like she'd pay up anyway. She could destroy half the castle and get away with it. Meanwhile, we can be two steps from getting through the portrait hole when the hour chimes for curfew and get detention."

Ryou tilted his head. "Aren't you a prefect though? That allows you to be out past that time, right?"

"It's good for an extra hour," said Hermione. "And that reminds me – it's my night to do some rounds. I'll be back in a little while." She got up from her spot at the fire, gathered her books, and moved to the girls' staircase.

Harry leaned back into the side of the couch. "So, remember how you had asked about bringing the
DA back up, at least for you guys to catch up on some defensive magic?"

Yugi nodded. "Yeah. Were you okay with it?"

Harry said, "I don't really have much of anything new to teach the other members of the DA from last year, but I can get started with you guys. That way it'll at least get you up to speed."

Ryou looked up from his book. "That would be great! When were you thinking of starting?"

Harry gestured to the pile of books around them. "Well…we could have done it tomorrow, if Umbridge, Snape, and Flitwick all didn't give us a pile of essays to do this weekend. So maybe…next Saturday? If we can make it a thing, we can meet every week."

Yugi beamed. "That would be awesome! Thanks, Harry!"

"Even if Umbridge planned to have a real lesson this year," said Ron, "I bet she'd butcher it like with the boggart."

Ryou shuddered slightly.

"What kinds of spells are we going to learn?" asked Yugi.

"Well," said Harry, "We'll start easy with things like stunning and disarming. I've got some other fighting spells we can go over, and…" he looked to Ryou, "I want to bring a boggart in, if I can."

Ryou paled. "Must you?"

"Well, proper practice with one wouldn't hurt, but mainly so I can have you guys try a hand at a Patronus Charm. It's to repel dementors."

"I remember reading about them," said Yugi thoughtfully, "It was in one of our older books, I just forget which one."

Harry nodded. "Yeah. They're one of the darkest creatures out there. But they're definitely too dangerous to bring into the castle, and by now they would have joined up with Voldemort. On the plus side, my boggart is a dementor, so we can get both kinds of spellwork in at the same time."

After a moment, he added, "Just to warn you, I don't want you to get discouraged if you can't cast a full Patronus Charm on the first or even the first couple of tries. It's a very hard spell to master. If it wasn't for Professor Lupin back in our third year, there's no way I would have mastered it."

Hermione stepped off the girls' staircase as Harry waved his arms out to catch her attention. "Hermione – was thinking of taking Ryou and the others to the Room of Requirement for some defensive magic practice. How does next Saturday sound?"

Hermione smiled in agreement and raised the book in her hand. "I'm going to be near the library. Does anyone else have something that needs turned in to Madame Pince while I'm gone?"

Yugi shook his head. "I still need the one for the Greek runes we were trying to decipher. I'll probably take it back on Tuesday after class."

Hermione nodded and turned to leave the common room.

The corridors were quieter than normal this weekend in comparison to the last time she had to complete her prefect rounds around the castle. Although…last week many of her fellow students were suffering from being shut in the castle else they ended up lost in the raging storm outside. She
had to stop two second-year students from dueling it out in the Charms corridor, and a pair of first-year Hufflepuffs got lost, trying to find their common room and relying on Peeves for advice. And while she didn't know the where the entrance to the Hufflepuff common room resided in the castle, the least she was able to do was escort them to Professor Sprout's makeshift office on the first floor for assistance.

But this week seemed to be a piece of cake. It must be exam week, she said to herself as she entered the library. Most of the tables were packed with students, nose-deep in their books. A few underclassmen she recognized from the DA as fifth years, were buried under enough tomes that they could have passed off as Seto in the first weeks of term. I don't think I even studied this hard for my O.W.L exams…and those were in the spring! I wonder how much homework they're trying to do on top of that.

Brushing the thought off, she returned her book to Madame Pince's desk and walked back out of the library. At least they were involved in something quiet.

Hermione had stepped off the staircase leading to the seventh floor in the other wing of the castle when she was met with a strange sight. Near the hidden entrance to the Room of Requirement were two Slytherin students she hadn't recognized before…although…she wasn't an expert on who belonged to each house. They were sitting along the wall, reading what looked like a Charms book and taking notes. It seemed like an odd place to study, but then again, she had just left a full library. Maybe the Slytherin common room was too crowded for these kids to do their homework.

Either way though, it was approaching curfew and they couldn't stay there.

"Hey," she said, "You two are going to have to move."

The first boy dropped his book loudly against the floor. "Why?" he snapped.

"It's nearly curfew, and you need to be heading back to your common room."

The other boy crossed his arms. "Why don't you, Mudblood?" he snapped, "We're working."

"I am a school prefect," said Hermione, "And I will not be the one serving detention or losing house points for when you're caught in the corridors after hours."

The second boy scowled, but the first one got up, and swung his bag around to his shoulder wildly enough that it slammed loudly into the wall first. "Come on," he grumbled. "It's too noisy here anyway."

Hermione watched them stalk away, muttering incoherently under their breaths. Shaking her head, she continued down the corridor to find the rest of the seventh floor deserted. The sixth one was just as empty, but when she got back onto the moving staircase to head down to the next floor, she had to stop short and stare.

Malfoy had just exited the same seventh floor corridor and was heading back down towards the dungeons.

But how was that possible? She had walked the entirety of the seventh floor…and the halls and classrooms were all empty!

Before he noticed she was staring, she quickly turned away and ducked down the fifth floor corridor as soon as the steps stopped moving.

Pushing the thoughts aside, she continued down the corridor. Malfoy might have been in the Room
of Requirement, as Harry suspected him to be, but she wasn't going to dwell on it. Harry was basing his entire suspicions on gut instinct without any sort of valid proof that their Slytherin rival did anything wrong, and she wasn't about to jump down that rabbit hole.

Focusing back on her rounds, she continued through the fifth floor. It had been a while since she had taken classes down this way – Muggle Studies and History of Magic were through this corridor, and she had dropped the elective course some time ago.

The hall came to a dead end, and she turned around to check the two classrooms on the opposite side of the corridor as she made her way back to the steps. The lights were on in one of the classrooms when she passed by before, but that didn't mean anyone was in there. Now that the first-years have learned the lighting spells, she's found them on more than one occasion running through the corridors igniting the torches in rows of unused classrooms. Somehow it had turned into a game to see how many floors they could get away with before they got caught by a prefect, Filch, or Umbridge.

"I wouldn't go in there."

Hermione stopped, mere steps from the classroom doorway, and whirled around. Set was leaning against the opposite wall, an unreadable expression on his face.

"Set? What are you –" She glanced back at the room. "Seto's in there, isn't he?"

Set casually crossed his arms and nodded. "He is. In a terrible mood, too."

Hermione frowned. "Because of what happened on the Quidditch Pitch?"

"Yes. Well, in part. Business matters are apparently frustrating him today…among other things."

"Well," Hermione reached for the doorknob, "I've faced Death Eaters. I don't think Seto's going to chew my face off."

Set shrugged, but didn't make much of a move to stop her, not that it would make much of a difference in his spirit form. "Well, you don't seem as weak-minded as the last group that paid him a visit today, but still, don't say I didn't warn you."

Hermione paused. "You're not going in with me?"

Set chuckled. "No. I'm giving you that warning for a reason. Our minds are connected, and even as a spirit, I know when to stay clear of my host." He waved her off. "But go ahead. He probably needs someone level-headed to tell him to quit working for the day."

Hermione raised an eyebrow. "You really think he'll listen to me?"

Set's expression softened and he looked out past her towards where Seto sat in the room, although all he could see was the corridor wall. He looked like he was going to say something, then stopped, seemed to rethink his words, and tried again. "We'll find out, won't we?"

Seto was seated at the classroom's front table, bent over a stack of documents, absentmindedly twirling a pen between his fingers. The laptop was off to the side of the desk, and there was a pile of something that vaguely smelled of burnt candy smoldering on one of the student desks.

She was halfway up the main aisle of the classroom when she heard him let out an irritated huff. "I don't have time for this," she heard his mutter. "Look – I'm not going to the ball."

He slammed the pen down on the desk and finally looked up, prepared to jinx holes through the lot
of whoever was foolish enough to disturb him this time...until he realized who had entered. "Take your gaggle of friends and – oh." He blinked and returned to his paperwork. "It's you. Never mind."

Hermione wasn't sure if she should be amused or offended. Stopping at the front row of desks, she placed her hands on her hips. "Just who were you expecting?"

"Someone must have seen me take refuge in here because I've been assaulted with dance requests all afternoon," said Seto bitterly without looking up from his work. I don't know how many times I have to tell these people that I'm not going before they'll get the message, tell their friends, and give up."

Hermione tilted her head. "You're not going to go to the ball?"

Seto snorted and gestured around at the table. "I have more important things to do than become eye candy for someone's evening."

Hermione sat on the edge of the desk nearest her. "You've already managed that on a daily basis."

Seto shot her a look cold enough to freeze the Black Lake.

Hermione held up her hands peacefully. "Don't curse the messenger – I'm stating a fact. We both know you're observant enough to know that most of the fourth years and above are ogling you and Ryou all the time."

He shot her another glower before going back to his pile of papers.

"Why not go? Experience something different. It's only for one night, and then we're let out for the holidays. It's not like you don't have dress robes."

Seto flipped the page over. "Just because I have them doesn't mean I have a desire to wear them."

Hermione shrugged. "You might enjoy yourself."

Seto rolled his eyes. "Now you sound like my brother. If it wasn't near impossible for you to get in contact with him, I'd say he put you up to this. I'm not going."

Hermione let it drop and looked to the cooked box. "What's this?"

"Romilda Vane tried bribery."

Hermione raised her eyebrows. "She brought you candy?"

Seto sighed. "She tried to play the 'biggest fan' card. If she knew almost everything about me, as she claimed, she would know that I don't care for chocolate."

"So you blew it up?"

"I needed to vent, and it served its purpose." He finally looked up at her and crossed his arms. "Was there something you actually needed?"

"I've been doing my rounds, and found the lights on. It's nearly curfew you know, you should probably head back to the common room before you're caught by Filch or Mrs. Norris."

Seto glanced at his watch. "I have time." Shifting in his seat, he pulled one of the documents nearer to the laptop as his fingers started to fly among the keys. After a few minutes, he glanced up. "Was there anything else?"
"One thing," Hermione got up and started to head towards the door. "Do you remember the defense group we mentioned once before?"

Seto paused in his work long enough to glance up before the typing resumed. "What about it?"

"Harry wants to start it up for you and Yugi and Ryou to learn more defensive magic," said Hermione, "He's thinking of doing it next Saturday."

Seto nodded mechanically, "Fine. So long as I make the call to my brother at midday, my schedule is free."

Hermione made it back to the classroom door before turning back. "…Okay. I suppose I'll see you back in the common room."

Taking the slightest nod that he had even heard her, she left the room. Set was still against the opposite wall.

"You're still here," he said.

Hermione mimicked his stance against wall opposite him, next to the door. "Did you really expect him to frighten me? I've dealt with Harry during his moody year last term. He wasn't as terrifying as you were making him out to be."

Set's lips tugged upwards into a slight smirk. "Ah, but you aren't sharing a mind with him. Still, the last one to stumble upon him ran from the room crying, but I suppose she should have known better than to ask for a date. Considering how quickly gossip seems to travel around this castle, news that he is not interested in anything resembling a romantic entanglement is rather slow to spread."

"I think they're trying for some sort of status symbol," Hermione huffed, "Like what some of them are doing to Harry. The newspapers keep bragging about him being the Chosen One and now he's become all interesting. Meanwhile, no one wanted to go near him last year and called him a lunatic for telling the truth about V-Voldemort. And I can't tell you how annoying it was to watch all of the girls in this school tail Viktor Krum around like he was a piece of meat for an entire year during the Tri-Wizard Tournament."

Set tilted his head thoughtfully, picking up on a snippet of what she had said. "Is he the Chosen One?"

Hermione nodded, "The prophecy he told us about seemed to indicate it."

"A prophecy?" Set frowned. "Are you saying that it is destiny for your friend to fight Voldemort?"

Hermione bit her lip. "I don't know if you would call it that…but it's not really my place to tell, it's Harry's."

Set nodded. "…I see." He looked back to the classroom. "So, did you get my stubborn host to give up his work for the evening?"

Hermione shook her head. "It didn't look like it. But I bet you knew I wasn't going to be able to anyway."

"I had been trying to refocus him ever since the end of the duel, but I think some time after changing clothes and setting up his equipment there he tuned me out. When he is in a foul mood, he is able to channel that anger so intently on his tasks I think he forgets the world continues around him – until someone manages to interrupt him."
"You can't?"

Set chuckled. "No. He's too used to me badgering him that I've become white noise. I would have to take over his body for him to stop and pay attention to me, and he was quite adamant that I give my word never to do such a thing."

"It's not quite healthy, is it?"

"For him, not in the slightest." She watched him look down at the transparent Millennium Rod in his hand before he glanced back towards where his host sat on the other side of the stone wall. "I don't think he's even eaten today. If I'm lucky, he will work himself to exhaustion and sleep the night through. However, I've stood to the side and watched him plow along for three days without rest before his body gave out, so I don't particularly have high hopes."

"Well," said Hermione looking up and down the corridor. "I'll keep fingers crossed that it works for you. But I do have to finish my rounds in the upper castle before general curfew begins. I'll see you – or at least Seto – back in the common room?"

Set nodded, but he didn't look at her. He seemed lost in thought over something, so she turned to head back down the corridor towards the staircase hall.

"Wait!"

Hermione turned back.

Set met her halfway down the hall before he stopped. He looked behind him towards Seto's classroom refuge and sighed loudly. "I heard you talking to Seto about the defensive magic classes that Harry will be running in the Room of Requirement."

"Next Saturday. Probably afternoon. We both know that Ron's not an early riser."

Set agreed. "Next Saturday, I will also be taking Seto back to the Room of Requirement, to continue his exercises with the Millennium Rod." Glancing behind him again, he suddenly looked nervous, as if his host was suddenly standing disapprovingly behind him. "I must ask a favor of you, but you cannot speak of this to Seto."

"You need me for something?"

Set nodded. "While the Pharaoh and his vessel have offered any assistance I might require, other Millennium Items will cancel out the exercise I have in mind. I need someone who has not been touched by one. You are the only one I can ask."

"Is it for those defensive lessons?" Hermione turned a slight shade of pink. "I'm flattered you thought of me, really, but I think Harry would be more suitable for this sort of thing. He's had much more practice with defensive and fighting magic."

Set shook his head. "I need someone that Seto will trust. As Item bearers, Yugi and Bakura are out of the question. And after his little stint of breaking into the dormitory at the beginning of the year, I still don't believe Seto cares for Harry Potter too much."

"He doesn't seem particularly caring towards any of us, really," said Hermione, "Seto usually never hangs out with us, even in the common room, unless someone drags him over. Yugi and Ryou are much more open and forward."

"Yes, well, my host is quite a loner. But I also know asking your other friend Ron is a terrible idea. I
can sense a great deal of disdain from him. And to be honest, whether he admits it or not, Seto does enjoy your company."

Hermione raised an eyebrow at him skeptically.

"Alright, he tolerate your presence over that of your friends," Set conceded.

"That sounds more like it," said Hermione. "Well, I'll help if I can. What sort of favor is it?"

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Seto woke from another restless night to a dark dormitory. His hand reached out blindly for his phone or watch – whichever he found first – to check the time. Late enough that curfew would be over by the time he was up and left the tower, yet early enough that the sun hadn't risen yet.

The true blessing of rising before everyone else in Gryffindor Tower – and most of the school, for that matter – was that the corridors were empty and Seto could make his way to the Great Hall, the Kitchens, anywhere he wanted with the peace of mind that he wouldn't be ambushed by his rather bold flock of newfound admirers. The amount of students that had come after him in the past two days alone was a bit troubling. Not that his roommate was having a better time. A Hufflepuff third year had run up to Ryou yesterday at breakfast and asked rather loudly if he would go to the dance with her, and without waiting for a reply, bolted back to her table to the amusement of everyone in the Great Hall. Watching the white-haired teen turn beet red had been funny, but the constant disruption to their daily routines was getting old. And fast.

But today he was determined to clear his head before ending up stuck in the Room of Requirement all day. That alone was probably going to reignite the migraine he had just gotten rid of overnight.

Having his duel interrupted last Saturday was angering enough – though a small nagging part of his brain had been telling him it was going to happen no matter how far he took the match from the watchful eyes in the castle – and he had internally stewed over it for several days. If there was anything he enjoyed, Umbridge was going to find a way to ruin it. If it hadn't been for the carefully arranged agreement with Dumbledore before the year even began, he wouldn't even have Kaiba Corp to occupy his mind.

Even the workload that Harry and his friends kept harping would drown them all hadn't even been too terribly taxing. For him, at least, but none of the others had to experience the joy of his strict education growing up. Sure, Transfiguration and Arithmancy were difficult subjects to learn, and Potions required careful detail and precision to master, but he wouldn't say the homework was overwhelming. Snape and McGonagall both seemed to give long essays to write, and he was currently five chapters ahead of Umbridge's assignments. The only class he could say he sat down and had to work through was Arithmancy, but that was more from being mathematically minded and – dare he even think it – enjoyment of the class. And even then he still managed to finish his assignments before the rest of his peers.

He dressed quietly in a dress shirt and slacks, glancing across the room as Ryou mumbled in his sleep and turned over, burying his face deeper in his pillow. Grabbing the Millennium Rod from his bedside table, he hung it through his belt loops and then tossed a grey jacket over it. Pocketing his wand and his phone into his suit pocket, he slowly slipped out of the dormitory with a practiced silence. Opening the door any faster would make the hinges shriek and he didn't really want to deal with two sleepy yet awake roommates this early on a Saturday. And an equally cranky tomb robber. He really didn't feel like listening to Set and Bakura verbally spar again for the third time this week.

The thought of being cooped up with them, plus Harry and Ron for the majority of the afternoon
would be enough grating social interaction for one day. At least he could have the morning completely to himself.

Why Set insisted on starting today's lesson earlier than usual was beyond him, but in the end, if it got everyone out his hair earlier, he could spend part of the day trying to repair the shattered dueling emitter. It had taken Set several insistences that Yugi's facedown card would probably have stopped his attack even if Umbridge hadn't sabotaged the match for him to finally admit to himself that he wouldn't have won the duel, at least not in that turn.

Fine. It wasn't like there was a way to prove it now. He would just have to fix what remained of his emitters and boost their power. His Ultimate Dragon apparently was the amplifier's breaking point while at the school, and with that knowledge now under his belt, he could account for it properly. The next time they dueled, the cards wouldn't glitch, and Yugi wouldn't narrowly avoid defeat for the umpteenth time.

The door closed quietly behind him and Seto had to roll his eyes at the small pile of perfectly-wrapped boxes sitting on the edge of their landing. Through the dim light of the stairwell, he could see them all addressed out to Ryou.

/I feel bad for him./

/IWhy?/

/All of the unwanted attention is draining on him./

Seto rolled his eyes. /If he had the backbone to tell these people he wasn't interested, they would back off./

/I'm afraid not everyone can be as intimidating as you. And even still, you are not left alone either./

Seto huffed, though he did take his wand back out from his pocket. Turning back, he uttered a quick vanishing charm, and the pile of likely-spiked chocolates disappeared. Stowing his wand back away, he headed out of the common room and towards the Great Staircase Hall.

/Look at you doing a kind deed before the sun is even up!/ 

/It was a tripping hazard./

Sure it was, Set said to himself, but he slipped back into his room. Today was already going to be a trying day without riling up his host before he's even had his morning coffee.

The house elves were bustling around in the kitchen getting breakfast prepared on the duplicate house tables from the serving chamber directly under the Great Hall, but somehow Dobby knew he was coming and the steaming coffee mug was already waiting for him. There was barely enough time to give a nod of thanks and hand over the badly-shaped wool sock he found behind the common room bookcase before the other elves surged forward and none too gently pushed him back out the door, Dobby happily waving the sock in goodbye before placing it over his hand like a mitten.

There was something therapeutic about walking the empty corridors. With the usual crowding gone, he could walk the halls and appreciate the art and architecture of the old stone castle without worrying about if he missed the staircase to his next class. It would also help him wake enough to be alert for Set's next exercise. He stepped onto the first stair, and wondered briefly how long he would last this time before the Shadow Realm eventually lobbed him into unconsciousness. He remembered
passing out for several hours on the first day, missing the only trip to Hogsmeade they would probably have that year. Last week, however, it took several attempts, but when he finally succumbed, it wasn't even for half as long. It didn't seem to him like he was doing anything different from time to time, but progress was progress.

Seto stepped off the seventh floor landing and made his way towards the section of corridor in front of the Room of Requirement, but stopped short after turning the corner.

"A bit early for prefect rounds, isn't it?" he said, and resumed his walk up to the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy.

Hermione pushed herself off of the wall. "Well, if you want to be technical about it, then yes, it's wicked early for that. But there's no point in doing those if the rest of the castle is still asleep."

Seto began pacing in front of the tapestry. "Then what are you doing here?"

Hermione paused. She had hoped Set had told him what was going on today, but apparently that wasn't the case. Gesturing to the door that appeared, she said, "I think it's obvious, isn't it?"

Set phased out next to him. "I asked her to be here. Today's exercise will require an additional person, and since I'm technically bound to the Rod and a part of your mind, it cannot be me."

The door closed with a click and disappeared behind them. Seto took a quick look around the room. It was essentially set up identical to his last visit, with the same cushions he had become accustomed to waking on when the Shadow Realm became too much to handle placed once again in the center of the room.

Seto scowled and turned to Set, "I thought you were going to throw the Shadow Realm at me again."

"Not this time," said Set, carefully, "You are making progress versus the first time we tried that, but I think today is time for a change in pace."

Seto looked from Set to Hermione and back, suspiciously, "I thought the purpose of these excursions was to make me resilient enough to last in a Shadow Game with that monster. …Is this your cryptic way of saying you want Hermione to play a Shadow Game with me?"

"No," Set said quickly. "That would be quite unfair to her."

Seto raised an eyebrow. "Then what are you here for?"

Hermione glanced at Set. "He wants you to learn how to use your Millennium Item offensively."

"This sounds like something up Yugi or Bakura's psycho self's alley," said Seto, a frown forming on his face. "Why didn't you ask one of them?"

"I couldn't," said Set, "Their Millennium Items serve as a shield against magic of its own kind. It is why Marik's darker side – or Bakura, for that matter – could not banish the Pharaoh's mind and soul outright to the Shadow Realm without first winning a Shadow Game, or why Marik had to control the minds of the Pharaoh's friends to get what he wanted."

Seto raised the mug to his lips. "So you want me to what – deflect wizard magic using a Millennium Item, or vice versa?"

Set paused. "I hadn't considered that."
Seto narrowed his eyes. "You hadn't considered that," he repeated. Then what did the spirit intend for him to do? How else was he supposed to use the Millennium Rod to fight someone? It wasn't as if he could do much else with it. He knew the sheath came apart to reveal a hidden dagger, but that would only be useful in close combat, and while he was certain Hermione was fully capable of magically defending herself, he could physically overpower her with ease. And stabbing holes into her wasn't going to be on the day's agenda.

"Then I don't understand why we're here," Seto said, annoyed, pulling the Rod from its place against his belt and glancing down at it. "The only other thing I've seen this used for is –"

Realization hit him all at once and the color drained from his face. There was no way the spirit could want him to do that. "I don't believe this. You brought her here for that?"

Set didn't say anything.

Seto rounded on Hermione. "What did he ask you to do?"

Set started forward. "Seto…"

Seto's sudden glare in his direction made him stop. "I wasn't talking to you." He turned back to Hermione. "What did he tell you?"

"He asked me to help you learn how to fight with a Millennium Item," said Hermione.

Seto set his mug down on the table that suddenly materialized out of nowhere and crossed his arms. "Really."

"Yes," Hermione said defiantly, and mimicked his stance. He wasn't going to intimidate her today. "And he made sure before I signed up to any of this that I understood what it might entail."

Seto's eye twitched. "And yet you still agreed to it."

"Yes," said Hermione, "I know the risks and –"

"Do you," Seto cut her off harshly and held up the Rod between them, "This isn't child's play. People have gone mad under the influence of this thing. Marik Ishtar, whether he blamed it on his psycho personality or not, used it to brainwash Yugi's friend to the point where they both nearly drowned over the outcome of a duel. It's left anyone unfortunate enough to lose a Shadow Game from it in comas. And that was from someone who knew how the Millennium Rod worked. And you're going to stand there and tell me you're perfectly okay with me experimenting the equivalent of an illegal curse on you."

He didn't wait for her response and turned his fury on Set. "And you. What the hell were you thinking?"

Set glared back at his host. "Seto –"

"Is this what it's come to? You know my feelings about this, but still, I have to spell it out plain as day to you?"

"I don't know, Seto, because you don't let me in on these things. How can I anticipate your feelings when you close them off from everyone – including me. What is it that you are so afraid of?"

"Why are you so insistent that I embrace this?" Seto shook the Rod angrily in Set's face. "You seem eager to forget that I'm not you. I didn't eagerly take up the Millennium Rod for you to relive your
glory days standing beside Yugi's other self."

"Whether you willingly took in the Millennium Rod no longer matters, Seto," said Set, "These are matters outside our control now. Our enemies know you have it, so it only benefits you to be able to use it properly. You will need to eventually to help carry out the Pharaoh's destiny. Strengthening your mind alone will not be enough."

Even Hermione, who knew very little about Seto's relationship with his spirit, or the intricacies on how the Millennium Items truly worked, caught rather quickly that that was very wrong thing to say. She had her own reasons for coming to help them here this morning, but butting that in now was likely the worst possible thing to do. Fury was practically rolling off of Seto, and she wondered if they even remembered she was even in the room when they began shouting at each other.

"Of course things are outside of my control – when have they not?" Seto thundered, and Set even floated back a step. "I am sick and tired of being forced down this 'destined path'. It wasn't until I took over Kaiba Corp that I had a shred of ownership over my own life. I had to step outside the shadow of my own stepfather to be able to live how I wanted. And it wasn't even a year later that I had everything ripped out from under me all over again, all because Yugi defeated me in a duel, and ever since that day, I haven't been able to do a single thing without 'destiny' or 'fate' shoved down my throat.

"I've had my soul stolen – twice, and visions forced on me for the sake of what? Bringing Yugi closer to fulfilling some sort of prophecy? Do you know how hard it is to have to rely on him of all people to bail me out of whatever ridiculous situation we've managed to land, all because everything I've tried to accomplish through conventional means of hard work and determination just weren't enough?"

"Perhaps if you opened yourself up and…"

Seto scoffed. "Really? When has putting my trust in anyone actually paid off? Don't give me that look, Set, you said so yourself that you snooped through my mind the day we met. Anyone, save maybe two people, that I've placed any sort of dependence on – even an inkling – has either tried to have me killed, or used me in some way to fulfil their own goals, and I'm getting sick of it. I defied Ishizu's expectations of destiny, and I refuse to let someone who died 5,000 years dictate how I live my life."

"I'm not trying to upend your life, Seto," said Set, exasperated. "You're overreacting." He watched Seto rub at his forehead, and could feel through their shared link the headache that was already forming. Oh yes, today was going swimmingly.

"I'm overreacting, huh? I'm not sure which is worse – the decision to keep this in the dark from me, or the thought that using one of the only people in this place that doesn't grate on my nerves would be a good idea. You had to know that I wouldn't agree to this. I don't know what made you think any of this was smart, but I won't be a part of it. You want me to strengthen my mental defenses? Fine – I'd like a decent night's sleep too. But you've crossed the line."

"Because I want you to be able to protect yourself?" Set threw up his hands. "I am only thinking of you."

Seto's eyes narrowed dangerously, "No. You're thinking of you. Once again, just like everyone else, you're using me as a tool. The Rod is only as dangerous as the person wielding it. I will not let you transform me into some sort of sick weapon to further your own agenda, whether it is against that monster, Voldemort, or Bakura. Too many people have gotten hurt over use of the Rod, and I won't add to it."
Seto spun on his heel, giving Hermione a fleeting glance before glaring back at Set. "To steal away someone's free will is one of the worst personal violations I could think of. And considering that the main reason we keep coming to this place is because that shadow creep assaulted me in my own head, I find it more than insulting that you expect me to willingly do that same thing to her. We're done here."

He stormed back towards the wall where the door would have materialized, but it never completed the summoning and disappeared again.

Seto huffed loudly. "Let me out, Set."

"No," Seto turned back, surprised, and glared at Hermione this time. "I need you to listen to me now." She took a deep breath. "Look, I'm sorry we didn't ask you about this before today, and maybe that was part of the problem, but Set is worried about you, and so is everyone else. They're just not brave enough to say it. We're just trying to help."

Seto glared darkly down at her. "I don't want nor need it."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "What you need is to hear how hypocritical you are. Okay, your Millennium Rod can control minds. The Imperius Curse is terrible and illegal, and I see why you want nothing to do with that. It's alright, really. But giving up on Set's lessons because they're dangerous? So is our magic, but I don't see you giving up on that and heading home. Are you going to turn your back on everything you've learned these last few months because of what our magic is capable of?"

Seto crossed his arms over his chest and drummed his fingers against the crook of his elbow.

Hermione matched his scowl with a matching one of her own. "There are two sides to everything, Seto. There is both good and dark magic, but we are defined with how we use it. We've fought enough dark wizards that we've picked up on a lot of terrible curses, but we know better than to use them. We use what we've learned to defend and fight against all of the evil out there."

"I don't know a lot about your magic – almost nothing, actually – but just because that Rod is capable of doing terrible things, it does not mean you will."

"Then call me a skeptic," Seto said, "I have yet to see any Millennium Item used for a genuinely good purpose. Everyone I have ever met that has used one of them has either been changed by that Item, or had become so dependent on it that it took them over. And I mean it – all of them."

"That's ridiculous," said Set, finally drawing himself back into the conversation.

"Is it?" Seto's voice was back to dripping with venom again. "Should I rattle down the list?" He began tallying off with his fingers. "Marik was so lost in his personal vendetta against Yugi that he used the Rod at any opportunity he could against us, and even on his own misguided followers. While in his control, half of the participants of my tournament ended up in comas. Plus, you were trapped in the Rod at the time, so you're well aware of just how many other people Marik tortured in total. His sister, while I will say never started a Shadow Game herself, abused the power of the Necklace to manipulate events to her advantage; meanwhile, Bakura has been physically and mentally abused by his spirit for who knows how many years."

Seto shuddered slightly, thinking back to some very unpleasant memories. "And let's not forget Pegasus, who, after trying to have me killed to take over Kaiba Corp, and then abducting and chaining Mokuba up in his dungeon, sealed both of our souls into trading cards, where we would still be to this day if Yugi didn't barter for us along with his grandfather when he faced him for the
"Perhaps you are just too biased against the man," said Set, "Yugi says he has changed. You are just unable to see that he is a good person now. People are capable of turning themselves around, Seto. Sometimes past actions need forgiven."

"He hasn't earned it," said Seto, bitterly.

Set sighed.

"I haven't even gotten started on Yugi, but I think you get my point," said Seto irritably, "After witnessing all of that, is it that hard to believe that I don't want much of anything to do with them?"

Set was quiet for a moment, before he nodded slowly. "I think I understand now. You fear the power within the Items themselves, of succumbing to the dark temptations that befell the others."

Seto exhaled loudly and looked away from both of them, tightening the grip he had on his opposite arms.

Despite the mood in the room, Set chuckled. "Honestly, Seto, you should have nothing to fear. You have a will stronger than anyone I know and are the last person I could see falling to whispers of darkness."

Seto scoffed. Set hadn't seen the worst in him, and while those dark days before his first run-in with Yugi Muto were long gone, they weren't forgotten. For his sake, and especially for Mokuba's, he couldn't risk letting himself get tempted by magic he denied existing for so long. Not when it has, and still could cause harm if not left in check.

"Regardless, I'll deal with this my own way, on my own."

Hermione hung her head. "You don't have to though – that was the whole point of these exercises, wasn't it? Because you weren't able to deflect the monster on your own, in your mind? What if that same monster was standing where I am, right now? What would you do?" When he looked away, frustrated, she continued. "Why not learn to use the Rod defensively, like you originally thought this was about?"

"There is the chance that since this being uses the Shadow Realm to fight, you will have to use the same kind of magic in return, even if it is just to block an attack," said Set.

Set scowled at him and looked back down at Hermione. "Why are you so worked up on getting me to do this? Set I could understand, but what's your stake in this?"

Hermione sighed. "I'm just trying to look out for my friends. Last year…" she shook her head sadly, "Last year Harry was having terrible visions in his sleep as well. Since V-Voldemort's return, he was able to form some sort of mental link with him. We're not quite sure exactly how it worked, but he was able to see through the eyes of his snake. It was useful – sort of – because we were able to see Ron's dad get attacked in the Ministry of Magic and get help for him in time. But Professor Dumbledore was worried about Voldemort's ability to do the same thing, and had Snape teach Harry how to close off his mind, so the visions would stop."

Seto raised an eyebrow. "Did it work?"

Hermione shook her head. "Not really. It didn't help that Snape has had it out for Harry since he arrived at Hogwarts our first year. But after a while, the lessons stopped. I had hoped Harry would take it upon himself to continue learning on his own, but he didn't, and eventually Voldemort figured
out about the link and sent Harry visions of his godfather being tortured by Death Eaters to lure him out of the castle."

"Let me guess – he acted on them."

Hermione nodded. "I tried to get him to think this through, but Harry was determined Sirius was in danger, so we all snuck out of the school to save him – and it was all a trick! Death Eaters were waiting for us, and we were terribly outnumbered. And even when the Order showed up to help, there were still casualties. Most of us got seriously hurt, and Sirius was killed."

She looked almost pleadingly up at Seto. "Please, don't make the same mistakes Harry did by not asking for help or giving up. Especially since you don't know who this threat is. If you can stop him from hurting you now, think of what might be able to be avoided later. Let us help you."

Seto pinched the bridge of his nose. Oh yes, the migraine was definitely back. "You don't even know if the Millennium Items can even deflect wand magic."

Hermione gave him a shy smile. "Then let's find out."

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*Domino City*

There were only a few people left in the museum. It was well past closing time, but one of the Greek and Roman rooms had received a plethora of new artifacts, and the heads of those exhibits were in the process of rotating out some of the new stock. But the Egyptian wing was blessedly empty, leaving Ishizu to her work. Bill Weasley had been recruited to help move some of the heavier Roman busts, so she was left alone in her office to work out some of the issues regarding moving the Pharaoh's tablet back home.

Transporting the tablet into the museum, even under the guise of the garbage trucks, had been child's play in comparison. The museum kept scoffing at the reasoning for sending it back without any suitable replacement to take up space on display. While her family had a fairly decent collection of artifacts that could be shipped to Japan, none would bring in the same number of visitors as the ones she wanted to return.

She had to thank Kaiba's Battle City Tournament for that one. Once Yugi's duel against Kaiba had been broadcast remotely throughout the entire city, and visitors pieced together that 'hey – that's cool how this guy on the rock looks like Yugi Muto', duelists had begun to flock to the museum. Hearing some of their fan theories while hosting tours had been amusing – many believed that due to the popularity of Duel Monsters in Domino, the museum actually *created* the tablet with Yugi and Kaiba's likeness on purpose to promote foot traffic.

If only that were the case, arranging its transport would be so much simpler.

But after sitting for so long, she needed to get up and stretch her legs. Perhaps see if any of her colleagues needed more help in setting the new displays.

The Greek and Roman wings were on the other side of the museum, and she needed to pass through the entirety of her own downstairs wing to get there.

A soft click was heard as she entered the large room containing the Pharaoh's tablet and she turned back around. The lights in the corridor she had just exited had switched off. *Odd*, she thought, for normally, the sensors stayed on for longer than just a second or two, but she shrugged it off. Perhaps it was on a timer. After all, normally the museum would be empty at this hour. There would only be
enough light throughout the museum for security to make their own rounds. The overrides must have been hit for the employees still working.

Ishizu crossed the room and was about to climb the steps leading to the next level when the lights completely shut off on the stairwell, leaving everything but the large chamber in complete darkness.

"Good evening, Ishizu Ishtar."

It was a voice, high and cold, and it originated from the corridor she had just left. Ishizu turned slowly around. A man in a black hooded cloak was slowly making his way across the room, stopping a respectable distance from her.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"Who I am does not matter," he said, "But I have traveled quite a way for the chance to speak with you."

"I'm sorry, but the museum has closed," said Ishizu. Slowly, she made her way to the security panel on the wall to page for help. The man's hood fell far over his face, hiding most of it from view, but the warning signs were going off in her head that something was off here. He came from the direction of the museum offices, but that was where she was, and he hadn't been there earlier. So where did he come from?

She thought she saw a flash of red from underneath the hood. Pale and bony fingers raised a long stick and the long metal gates dragged themselves across the entranceways to the room, sealing it off from anyone else still in the museum.

"My apologies, but I have come far and under a matter of great importance," said the man harshly, "Our time together is far more valuable than the lowly Muggles dragging stone across the floor."

Ishizu glanced to the metal gates blocking the path. They were the ones used to seal off the exhibits during business hours when there was work going on during the daytime, and then at night when everyone had left. They locked from the outside, so unless security was making rounds and knew she was still inside, she was trapped.

"You have nothing to fear from me, Miss Ishtar. And now that we will not be interrupted…" the man made his way across the room, and Ishizu stepped back from him. He stopped in front of the large tablet depicting various Duel Monsters, his head lifting up to take in the entire display, shifting the hood back enough for her to see part of an equally pale face.

He turned towards her and withdrew something from his cloak. "Do you know what this is?"

Keeping a relatively safe distance from the strange man, Ishizu peered at the object put before her. "That looks like one of the artifacts recovered from a dig site not far from the Valley of the Kings," she said. "How did you come across it?"

"A story for another time," said the man, "Continue."

Ishizu looked warily at him, and the old relic in his hand. "It is a sword, or at least half of one. It looks consistent with what the Egyptians used in ancient times. Although…considering the wear and damage to it, I would say it did not belong to anyone of importance."

The man tilted his head. "Oh?"

She was honestly surprised at how calm her voice was, considering this stranger had trapped her in
her own exhibit room. With magic.

"If it belonged to a Pharaoh, or any sort of high-ranking noble, it would be buried with them in their tombs. It might show wear of age, like any artifact discovered after thousands of years, but not the level of destruction this one clearly has gone through. It is lucky that any part of it has been recovered at all."

The man was silent for a moment. "Where exactly was this found, if not in a tomb?"

"Near ruins deep in the desert," said Ishizu, "But why is that of any importance?"

The laughter that followed was just as high and cold as his voice, and equally unsettling. "You could say I am a…collector of sorts." He stepped forward, closer to her. "Can you not sense the magic from it? This is no ordinary relic. Perhaps this particular item had more importance than you realize. But I'm afraid we will not truly know unless the final pieces are found. And I do intend to find them."

Ishizu moved back from his advances. To be truthful, she couldn't sense anything from the broken sword. It looked to be just that—a damaged item that managed to partly survive the test of time. And even if she could—what would come of it? None of her family's ancient scriptures made any mention to an artifact like that. "There is no telling how many more pieces there could be—you could search for years, and find nothing." She raised her head defiantly, "And I will not assist in the theft of my people's artifacts. I don't know how you got ahold of that sword, but it belongs in the Cairo museum."

"Even willing, you would be of no use to me shifting apart the desert," said the man stiffly, "But you can and will assist me in…other ways."

He finally made his way to the Pharaoh's tablet and turned to her. "There is much history behind this tablet. Tell us about it."

Us? She rubbed at her bare arms. Why did it seem like the temperature in the room was decreasing? Ishizu didn't move.

"After all, this depicts a great battle, does it not, between an all-powerful Pharaoh and his greatest enemy? That is what you have been telling the visitors here. I am afraid my…associates back home do not share the thirst for knowledge of magic's ancient roots as I do. Tell us how this tablet came to be. Like my broken treasure, I can feel power radiating from it."

"I have nothing to say about this ancient tablet," said Ishizu. The temperature continued to drop…and was it getting darker in the room? She needed to get a hold of security to get these gates open, and fast. "And it is time that you left."

The cold laugh returned again. "I don't think so. Though I must apologize, I never introduced myself to you." He removed his hood, and Ishizu gasped, staggering back at the face marred by years of practicing dark magic. "For someone to deny Lord Voldemort—even for one so important to my quest—is foolhardy. If you were any other Muggle, you would be writhing at my feet, begging for mercy that would not come…"

He held the sword out in his hands, palms up, as a dark shadow began to emerge from the old relic itself. "I hear you used to wear a Millennium Item. You will have to delight me in the tale of whatever happened to it, but for now, I wish to introduce you to my friend, for he is most interested in the origins of this tablet."
The shadows continued to expand out from the sword's jagged edge, devouring the floor in a sea of black, and in trying to side-step out away, she found herself unable to move. Was that an effect from the sword itself – which she could clearly see truly did contain some sort of magic, but how? – or from Voldemort himself?

"Do not be afraid," Voldemort said softly, circling her like vulture to its prey. Shadows began to morph off of what spread along the tiled floor and began to form into a hulking shape. "I said I would do you no harm, but I cannot say the same for my companion. He has waited quite a long time to enact vengeance, and I dare not keep us in any more suspense. Cooperate, and you will have the pleasure of knowing you can leave this museum with your mind and body intact."

Ishizu could only watch as a massive body emerged, with only one discernable feature – a golden eye.

**WELL, WELL. IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME... ISIS.**
Ron dropped his quill loudly against the table in the common room, splattering small droplets of ink onto the wood surface. "This is crazy," he whined, "How does Umbridge expect us to write two feet of parchment on the werewolf chapter? I've barely got one and I'm running out of things to say."

Yugi didn't look like he was faring much better with his own essays. "There wasn't a whole lot of information go by in the book," he said, "that's why I checked the library for some more material."

Ron grimaced. "Should have gotten Hermione to grab some books for me last night then. She only spent half her night there buried in the Defense against the Dark Arts section."

Harry flipped through his own book at a snail's pace. "I'm surprised Umbridge didn't barricade that entire section, since it's a better instructor than she is."

Ryou rolled his eyes as he put the finishing touches on his dream diary for Trelawney's class. "Speaking of…I haven't seen Hermione today? I haven't seen her all morning, and she wasn't at breakfast."

"Maybe she's still in the library," said Harry, "If she gets herself a tall enough stack to hide behind, I wouldn't be surprised if Madame Pince closed it up for the night and left her in there." He closed his potions book. "I'm sure she'll meet us later at the Room of Requirement."

Ron grumbled. "Could really use her help with these essays."

"Help writing them or have her just write it for you?" Harry snickered.

"Shut up, Harry. It's not like you never took advantage of that either."

"I thought she cut you off after one of the first assignments of the year," said Ginny as she passed through on her way to the girls' staircase.

Ron shot her a dark look.

"It can't be all that bad – remember Snape assigned us the werewolf essays in third year when he was subbing for Professor Lupin?" said Neville from the next table over. He was sitting with Lavender and Dean, working on what appeared to be Herbology essays.

"Yeah, well Lupin cancelled those essays when he got back to the class, and I hadn't started writing it anyway," said Ron, "I think only Hermione was the only one who actually wrote the thing."

"Is that Umbridge's essay you're working on?" asked Lavender, "I finished that one yesterday."

Ron's eyes widened. "Really? How long did it take you?"
Lavender shrugged. "A few hours, I guess. I wrote it in the library with Parvati."

"And you got all two feet of parchment?"

She nodded. "A little over, I think, but that was more or less just the conclusion anyways." She peered across the table to take a look at Ron's progress. "I'm surprised Hermione isn't with you," she said. "Don't you guys always do homework together?"

"We haven't seen her," said Ryou.

Dean looked around the common room. "You're missing someone else from your usual group, aren't you?"

Yugi turned the page in his book. "Well, Kaiba's not here, but that's no surprise." Spying the section he needed, he dipped his quill back into the inkwell and scribbled down some more notes.

Lavender got up and moved around to sit at the empty seat at their table next to Ron. "Well…would you like some help?"

Ron's eyes widened. She had never offered to do something like this before. In fact, she usually spent time exclusively with the Patil twins and didn't give him the time of day. The offer of assistance was odd, but not unwelcome. Getting a hold of himself, he pushed his half-finished essay over to her. "Please."

When the clock tower finally chimed noon, Yugi put down his quill and leaned back in his seat. "Well…that's half of that assignment. I'm ready for food. Anyone want to grab lunch with me?"

"I'll go," said Harry. He glanced across the table. Ron and Lavender were deep in Umbridge's essay. "Ron?"

It took two mentions of his name to get his attention.

"Huh?" Ron didn't even look up. Lavender had taken his quill and was scribbling through parts of his introduction and writing notes on the side.

"We're going to get food. Are you coming?"

"In a bit," said Ron, missing the shocked expression on his best friend's face. "I'm on a roll here, mate." He looked to Lavender's notes and began writing on a new sheet of parchment. He looked to his newfound tutor. "How'd you make that so easy?"

"It helps that I've already written this," she said, smiling brightly at him, "And your ideas weren't all that bad. You just needed to expand more on them."

Harry blinked and shrugged. "Err…okay; just don't forget we're meeting up with Hermione later. You are gonna join us, right?"

"Oh, yeah," said Ron, distractedly, "I'll be along soon." He still didn't look up, but waved Harry along, fully engrossed in his work.

"I've never seen him put anything before food," said Harry, "I don't think he's been so into doing his homework all year. …For the last couple of years, even."
"Is that because Hermione won't help him?" asked Yugi.

"Maybe," said Harry, "I think both of us got a little too used to her help over the years."

"Don't you think that maybe it's time you stopped taking advantage of her like that?" asked Ryou, "Otherwise you won't learn your lessons properly if she does all or even half of the work for you."

Harry shrugged. "Yeah, although, even though she helps us out on our stuff, it's not like we get perfect marks or anything. Snape still tries to fail me at every possible opportunity."

They grabbed seats at an empty spot along the long Gryffindor table. Yugi piled some potatoes onto his plate. "Well that's Snape."

They were halfway through their meal when Ron finally made his way through the Great Hall, and dropped down next to Harry with what the group could only describe as a dreamy expression on his face.

Yugi and Ryou exchanged befuddled looks. "Uh…." Ryou began, "Are you okay, Ron?"

"Yeah," said Yugi around a bite of his bread, "You look as if you woke up from a really good dream."

"Am I okay?" Ron grabbed the nearest serving tray and dumped a heap of food onto his plate. "You bet I am! I've seen things in a new light. Lavender really helped me out on that essay, and gave me tips that should give me better grades than when Hermione was helping out. There's no way I'm going to get anything under an 'O' on this essay."

Ginny eyed him suspiciously from where she sat with Luna Lovegood who had joined her from the Ravenclaw table. "Are you sure she didn't slip you something, too? You look like you did two years ago when Fleur and her friends were here."

Ron glared at her before diving in to his lunch. "I'm fine."

Ginny shrugged and turned back to her friends.

"So…where is Hermione, anyway?" said Ron, although it sounded more like mumbles around his mouthful of chicken. "I'm surprised she didn't surface by now. Probably still asleep or something in the library."

Yugi looked around the Great Hall, his eyes stopping on the doorway. "Oh – here she comes now."

Harry raised an eyebrow as she leaned over the table, grabbed an empty plate, and began setting up two sandwiches on it without even bothering to sit down. "You can sit you know…and stay a while."

"Oh, no, I'm heading back to the Room of Requirement," she said, "I'm just grabbing us a quick bite while he's on the phone with his brother."

Ron swallowed and looked at her suspiciously. "Hello to you too. And who's the 'us'?"

Yugi picked up on her words faster than Ron did. "You've been in the Room of Requirement with Kaiba? I didn't know he was doing lessons with Set today. That at least explains where he's been."

Ron looked her over and his face darkened. "Why do you look like you've been in a fight or something?"
Hermione brushed a wild tuft of hair behind her ear, "Oh, sorry, I thought I fixed that."

"What have you guys been doing, wrestling or something?" asked Harry, "I thought we were doing the DA stuff this afternoon."

"Sort of," Hermione said, "I've been helping Set with his defensive lesson this morning."

Ron snorted. "Yeah? What else have you been helping him with? Yugi and Ryou not good enough for the same private lessons you're giving Seto?"

Hermione froze. "And just what is that supposed to mean?"

Yugi glanced quickly at Ryou and Harry before turning to Ron. "Ron, that's not –"

Ron cut him off with an ignoring cross of his arms as he stared up at Hermione. "You know exactly what I mean. Just how long have you two been sneaking around like this?"

Hermione's jaw dropped, hurt and disbelief evident on her face. She quickly pulled herself together and reached for the plate she had prepared on the table. "You know, I don't know why I bother. Believe whatever you want, Ronald." Without even sparing a gaze to anyone else at the Gryffindor table, she spun around and stormed from the Great Hall.

Ron angrily tore a hunk from his chicken leg. "You know what she's doing, don't you?"

Yugi sighed. "She's helping with a magic lesson."

Ron rolled his eyes. "No," he snapped, taking a large swig of his pumpkin juice. "She's just doing what all these other people are doing, just a lot sneakier."

Ryou blinked. He wasn't sure he liked where this was going. "I-I don't follow."

Ron leveled him an annoyed look. "Aren't you tired of all of the presents and attention ever since Umbridge announced that stupid ball?"

"Well, yes," said Ryou, "They won't leave me alone. But I fail to see what this has to do with Hermione helping Kaiba with a defensive magic lesson. Isn't that what we're all doing later anyways?"

Ron shook her head. "She's using this as an opportunity to get a date, cuz otherwise she won't get one. I don't get why she'd otherwise volunteer for something like that." He looked between Ryou and Yugi. "Wouldn't it have made more sense to have either of you two help Kaiba with whatever his weird lesson is?"

Yugi exhaled loudly. This was getting tiring. "The Pharaoh and I offered to help with whatever they needed, but Set said we couldn't because of our Millennium Items. And, to be honest, Ron, this is getting a bit out of hand. Kaiba has said on more than one occasion that he's not going to this ball, and he's said it in Hermione's presence. She doesn't seem the type to hound him like that, and I can assure you, Kaiba wouldn't stand for it if she tried. And even if that wasn't the case, and she was trying to find someone to take her to the dance, I don't see why it's bothering you. It's not like you seemed keen on going. So unless you were planning to ask her, why don't you just do it already or get off her back?"

Ron's face turned as red as his hair. He didn't answer him, but instead became very interested in what remained of his lunch.
They ate the rest of their food in an awkward silence. Harry then led them down the corridor leading to the Room of Requirement, eager to put the latest round of Ron and Hermione's fight behind them and get onto their defensive lesson. "You guys ready?"

"I think so," said Yugi, "What are we going to learn first?"

"Disarming, probably," said Harry, "Depending on how you cast it, it can work both offensively and defensively."

They stopped in front of the proper bit of the hallway, but the door didn't summon itself after Harry paced back and forth the required number of times. "...That is...if we can get inside."

"Is something supposed to happen?" asked Ryou.

"The door always appeared before," said Ron. "I don't get it."

"It's because they're still using the Room," said Harry, "It won't reset while someone's in there, I guess. They have to either leave or let us in." He looked to Yugi and Ryou. "I assume they'll let us in on the hour, since that was when we were supposed to meet, and we are a bit early. Do either of you have a way of contacting them inside?"

Yugi dug into his jacket pocket. "I think I took the phone – yup! Here it is." Tapping the icon on the screen, he raised it to his ear, hearing the dial but no answer.

"Guess we gotta wait," said Ron, "How long do we still have?"

"Twenty minutes," said Harry, glancing down at his watch.

"Let me try again," said Yugi. "Kaiba always has his phone on him. Maybe he didn't hear it before."

It picked up after three rings to his rival sounding oddly out of breath. "I'm kind of in the middle of something, Yugi."

"I was just wondering if you could let us in. We're all outside the door."

"Well, you're going to have to – urgh!"

Yugi blinked. "Kaiba?"

There was no answer, but the door then materialized in front of them. He rushed inside just in time to see the Millennium Rod skid across the floor, and Hermione rush across the room to where Seto lay sprawled, having missed the target cushion pile by a good several feet.

"Woah – what happened in here?"

Seto propped himself up on his elbows and looked for his phone that had fallen out of his hand in the fall, checking it over for damage.

"Are you alright?" Hermione asked, and held out an arm to help him up. Seto waved it off and slowly got up on his own.

"Peachy," he muttered. He glared at the new arrivals. "Your timing, as always Yugi, is impeccable."

Yugi cringed. "Sorry. We didn't realize you two were trying to kill each other."

Seto huffed at him, though it didn't contain the level of ire that it usually did, and crossed the room to
retrieve the Millennium Rod.

"So…how did it go?"

Hermione moved to join them as Set floated over and began speaking quietly to Seto on the far side across from where the door used to be. "Okay, I think?"

"What were you doing exactly?" asked Harry.

"We were trying to see if our magic could repel…or be repelled by his Millennium Item," Hermione said carefully. Bringing up the original plan for the day seemed like a terrible idea, as did the fight between Seto and Set. "There's still a ways to go, still."

"How successful was he?" asked Yugi, "That doesn't sound like a bad idea, actually, if it works. We could all use that sort of training."

"Well," Hermione frowned, "I will give him this – he has ridiculously quick reflexes, and spent a good deal dodging the spells I was throwing at him. But he was very hesitant to use the Rod at all, at least offensively. He did manage to block one spell, though not completely. We could use another day of it…if he's willing to continue."

"So you were just sparring…all day," said Ron flatly.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Yes, Ronald." She turned to look at Seto and winced. "I think I was too hard on him though."

Ryou tilted his head slightly. "Too hard on Kaiba?"

"What makes you say that?" asked Yugi, "Usually, he won't accept anything except for your best shot."

Hermione rubbed at her arms uncomfortably. "Well…then we definitely need more padding in the room next time. I kind of tossed him around quite a bit."

Ron snorted. "Yeah. We saw the aftermath."

Harry looked from Ron to Hermione uncomfortably. "Well…" he began, "let's get started. We've got about four hours or so until dinner." He moved into the middle of the room, summoning some practice dummies and, for all of their benefit, thick floor padding. Any furniture Set had originally summoned into the room had been pushed to the edges, leaving plenty of space to practice spells back and forth.

"Okay, so, uh, I guess we'll start with the disarming charm," said Harry, "It will send the opponent's wand flying, and, depending on how aggressive you are with it, you could also knock someone back a little bit, too. Here, I'll demonstrate. Ron?"

"How did I know he was gonna choose me?" he said, but moved regardless to join his best friend in the middle of the room. "You gonna cast it, or should I?"

"You can, I guess," said Harry, shifting into a fighting stance, wand out. "It really doesn't matter. Go for it."

Ron nodded and pulled out his wand from his jeans pocket. "Expelliarmus!"

The group watched as Harry's wand shot right out of his hand, clattering to the floor a few feet away.
Ryou went to retrieve it and passed it back to him.

Harry looked amongst the group, trying to decide the next best course of action. "So….uh…we can either split off into teams or go in turns against…me, I suppose. What do you guys want to do?"

"Well, how did you teach it before?" asked Ryou.

"Well, I had a much larger group last year," said Harry, "So I could split everyone apart and walk the room. But there's only three of you this time."

"We can do turns, I suppose," said Yugi.

"Do you need the spell gone over again?" Harry gestured the wand movement a second time. "I'll let you guys use me as a dummy if you want."

Ryou pointed to the other side of the room. "What about those practice dummies?"

Harry glanced at the Death Eater-looking figures. "Oh, we'll get to those. Don't worry. There are some spells I don't want you using on me." He turned back to his three students. "So…who wants to go first?"

"I will, I suppose," said Ryou, stepping forward. Harry moved back into his fighting stance with his wand at the ready and Ryou followed suit.

"Okay, Ryou, whenever you're ready," said Harry.

Ryou nodded and focused on moving his wand correctly. "Expelliarmus!"

Harry watched his wand fly out of his hand for the second time that afternoon. "Great job!"

/Congratulations. You made a stick fly./

/Don't ruin this for me, Spirit. These lessons are important!/ 

/These people rely too much on their wands. How difficult would it be to just rush forward and pluck it from their grasp? How powerful can they truly be without it?/

/You would have to get there first./

/Landlord, I am a thief. Sneaking around and making off with other people's treasure is my specialty./

Ryou ignored him after that, returning to the Room in time to see Yugi cast his spell at Harry. His wand again went flying. Hermione waved her own to summon it back with a quickly cast 'Accio!', and did so again after Seto had his turn.

After two more practice rounds, Harry gathered everyone together again. "Okay, that seemed to go pretty well. We're going to expand now and work on the Shield Charm next. It's handy for repelling a basic attack, so for example – against the disarming charm, it would either knock it back to me, or bounce off in a different direction across the room. For this, we'll break off into pairs.

"So, the spell is called 'Protego'." He demonstrated the wand movement for them all to see. "It's like a quick flick of your wand upwards, like so. So for this, I guess that either Ron, Hermione, or myself will try to disarm you with 'Expelliarmus'. You're going to try and defend with the Shield Charm, and hopefully, if all goes well and if we're lucky there won't be a bunch of ricocheting spells going around the room."
"I'll start this one off," said Hermione, stepping into the middle of the room. "Anyone want to go first?"

Seto pushed himself off the wall he was leaning against and brushed past Yami to the center of the room. Once they were in position, Hermione wasted only a second before casting her disarming charm. Seto jerked his wand arm up so quickly that the red light beam ricocheted off and shattered the torch holder along the wall.

Ron's eyes bugged out. "Got some pent up aggressions to let out, mate?"

Yami phased out of the Puzzle to hover near Set, who happened to be directly under the broken torch.

"Why did it seem that was aimed for you?"

Set shrugged and sighed.

"Anything we should know about?" asked Yami. "Did your lesson this morning not go as planned?"

Set watched the teenagers split into three pairs and start bouncing spells back and forth. "That is one way to put it. I seem to have crossed a line, and he is quite bitter with me."

"That last bit seemed a little obvious," said Yami.

"Ooh," Yami Bakura floated over to join them as Yami successfully squeaked out a 'Protego!' at the last possible second, sending Harry's spell back at him. "Trouble in paradise?"

"Nothing you need to concern yourself over, Tomb Robber," said Set stiffly.

Bakura shrugged. "Fine. Suit yourself. But don't think I won't shove your reincarnation into the Shadow Realm if he knocks out my host throwing spells around because you pissed him off."

"So what did happen this morning?" asked Yami.

Set sighed. "I wanted Seto to learn to use the Millennium Rod offensively. To put it mildly, he was not into it."

Bakura snorted. "We're talking about the most stubborn individual on the planet, the one who absolutely detested everything to do with the Millennium Items for as long as humanly possible. Of course he wasn't going to be willing to do that."

Another spell whizzed over all of their heads. "You must have really angered Kaiba if he keeps angling his spells this way," said Bakura sourly. If that beam had been any lower, it would have gone right through his head. Although...he wasn't sure why he was acting so put out. They were spirits. Bouncing spells wouldn't do them any damage at all.

Yami looked on at the others fondly. "That was Yugi."

"~~#~~

Ryou crashed down onto a cushion pile. "Oh, I'm exhausted."

Yugi dropped down next to him on the floor. "Me too."

"You guys did great!" said Harry. He was practically beaming with pride. "For first time casting, you got those spells down pretty well."
"Thanks," said Ryou, "Although, I could still use some work on the shield one."

"Well, we're definitely going to do this again," said Harry, "There is so much more to show you."

"What's next?" asked Yugi.

"Well, since you've gotten the disarming and shielding down, at least the basics of it, we can move onto more fighting spells the next time. Stunning, freezing, that sort of thing."

"Sounds good to me," said Ryou. "Are we going to do this again next week?"

"Can't," Ron shook his head. "Next week's Quidditch!"

Yugi's eyes widened. "Uh oh."

Harry tilted his head. "What's wrong? Don't you think you're ready? It seemed like you were doing okay ever since you started attending those extra sessions with the team…."  

Yugi frowned. "Well…I am a bit nervous. I didn't think that when I became a relief player that I would end up participating in our first game of the season…but that wasn't my real cause for concern."

"Then what's wrong?" asked Hermione.

"I don't have a broom!" Yugi said. "We never got to the shop in Hogsmeade!"

Ron slapped a hand to his forehead. "Oh, that's not good. You can't use a school broom. I mean, you could, don't think that it's not allowed or anything, but even the better school brooms are pretty testy from all the use and abuse they get. The other team would plow all over you!"

Yugi shook his head. "What am I going to do?"

"Why don't you ask Professor McGonagall if it's possible for you to go to Hogsmeade to get one," Hermione suggested. "I don't think it would be that big of an issue."

"But we're not allowed off the grounds," said Ryou.

"It's a one-time circumstance," said Seto, without looking up from his phone screen. "I'm let out every three weeks to go home. I'm sure someone can escort you to the village to buy a broomstick."

"I don't know," said Yugi, "I think if your working arrangement wasn't agreed on before we got here, they wouldn't let you out."

Seto rolled his eyes and pocketed his phone. "This is a school, not a prison. They can't keep us hostage here."

Harry nudged Yugi encouragingly, "Just remind Professor McGonagall that it's in our best interests to get you a broom, unless she wants Slytherin to win the cup again."

Yugi grimaced as they left the Room of Requirement to head down to dinner. "That sounds like a super low blow."

"But…" Ron said, "If it works…"

"You know, Professor McGonagall gifted me my first broomstick when I made it onto the team," said Harry, "Not to say she's going to make a habit of it or anything, but she would probably be more
sympathetic about it than say…Snape."

"I guess I can ask her at dinner," said Yugi.

"You're going to go up there during dinner? Why not wait until we have class Monday?"

"I don't want to wait too long," said Yugi, "There's only a week left, and if anyone's going to let me out of the castle, it probably wouldn't be while we're busy with schoolwork. And I want to at least take whatever I'm going to use out for a spin before the game."

Dinner must have only just started not long before they entered the Great Hall. Most of the house tables were still fairly empty – something Yugi was grateful for, since it wasn't every day that students moved all the way to the front of the hall to mingle with their professors at the High Table during mealtime.

Thankfully, Professor McGonagall was already seated at the High Table, speaking quietly with Professor Sprout. As the rest of their group found seats along the Gryffindor table, Yugi made his way up to the front of the hall.

"Is there something I can do for you, Mr. Muto?" asked Professor McGonagall.

"Well, Professor, I was wondering if it was possible to be able to go to Hogsmeade this weekend," said Yugi.

"Unfortunately, all Hogsmeade trips have been cancelled until further notice," said Professor McGonagall, "What did you need in the village?"

Yugi rubbed at the back of his neck. "A broom."

Professor Sprout blinked. "A broomstick? I didn't realize you had joined the Gryffindor Quidditch team."

"I didn't place high enough to make the team originally," said Yugi, "But after Katie Bell was attacked –"

"Hem, hem. Is something wrong, dear?"

Yugi could have sworn he saw Professor McGonagall's eye twitch. He sighed quietly. If Umbridge was going to insert herself into the conversation, there was no way he would be let out of the castle.

"Nothing that concerns you, Dolores," said Professor McGonagall stiffly. "Why did you not procure one in Hogsmeade while you were there?"

"I would have, but we were nearby and rushed to help Katie," said Yugi.

"What have you been using up to this point?" asked Professor McGonagall.

"School brooms," said Yugi, "They're okay, and I'm not going to say I'm an expert flier in the slightest, but every so often they try to throw me off or steer me in the wrong direction. I was hoping to have something a little sturdier for the upcoming game."

"I don't see why the school brooms are not sufficient," said Umbridge, "Especially for a relief player. How many games do you see yourself playing in this year?" Upon seeing Yugi's disappointed look, she added, "Not to mention that if we allowed you to go to the village, it would open up a series of requests from other students to leave the grounds as well. I simply cannot allow it."
"I didn't think the number of games I played mattered very much, Professor," said Yugi, "I just wanted to be able to play without worrying about falling off because of a faulty broomstick. Bludgers will be worrisome enough. Otherwise the Gryffindor team will be at a disadvantage."

"Why did you not bring this up sooner?" asked Professor McGonagall.

"I had other things on my mind, I guess," said Yugi. "I'm sorry for waiting until the last minute."

"It's not up to me, of course," said Professor Sprout, "But I don't see the problem of getting you a better broomstick. In the name of fairness and sportsmanship." And with a glint of mischief in her eye, she added, "If the game had been against Slytherin, we both know Professor Snape would rather you use a school broom."

"Yes, well, Professor Snape got very used to keeping the Quidditch Cup in his office for far too long," said Professor McGonagall. "I don't see the harm in allowing you get a broomstick, Mr. Muto."

"But," Umbridge spluttered, "These privileges were taken away out of concern for the students' safety. It would be unwise to allow him to go just for a broomstick, especially when we have plenty of working ones here in the castle."

Professor McGonagall ignored her and waved him back towards the Gryffindor table. "I will look into the matter after dinner."

Yugi smiled. "Thanks, Professor!"

Professor Sprout smiled, "Although, Mr. Muto…Minerva has told me about the card game match she witnessed on the Pitch, and your gaming reputation back home. I expect nothing but your best during your game against Hufflepuff, no matter the sort of broomstick you end up using."

Yugi nodded. "Yes, Professor." He didn't stop smiling all the way back to the Gryffindor table.

Unlike the earlier half of the day, the remainder of the evening passed surprisingly well. Ron and Hermione had stopped bickering, Ryou was left alone, and Seto retreated up to the dormitory early for some peace and quiet, looking almost as worn out as he did over the summer.

The following morning, Yugi was shocked to find a note dropped off by owl during the daily delivery, thankful that it landed next to his toast and not in Ryou's cereal. The last time he received anything by owl was around two months ago. Any packages his friends sent him ended up being transported through Kaiba when he went to and from Domino.

"It's from Professor McGonagall," said Yugi, as Ryou peered over his shoulder to read the letter. "She wants me to come to her office after breakfast."

"I'm surprised she didn't just come up and say so," said Ron.

"Probably because she's not at the High Table," said Hermione. "And…neither is Professor Dumbledore."

"I haven't seen him for a few days now," said Harry, "I wonder where he's been?"

Ron shrugged. "Maybe doing something official with the Ministry."

"I don't know," Harry frowned, "Just because Fudge isn't in office anymore, doesn't mean that Dumbledore's made peace with everything that happened last year."
Hermione looked up from reading parts of Seto's copy of *The Daily Prophet*. "You haven't had one of those meetings with him in a long time, either."

Harry nodded. "Yeah. He did say he had some materials to collect for the next one. Maybe that's where he is."

"What sort of stuff do you need?" asked Ron.

Harry didn't have much of an answer for him. The few meetings he had with Dumbledore so far had been fairly cryptic. Sure, it all had to do with fighting Voldemort, but until Dumbledore was able to gather everything he was looking for, they hadn't done a whole lot. It didn't help that Dumbledore seemed to be out of the castle more often than not throughout the last several weeks. Maybe it was a sign that a new meeting would be coming up soon, once he returned for more than a day or so at a time.

They split up at the end of breakfast. As Yugi headed up towards Professor McGonagall's office, Harry turned the opposite direction and made for the Owlery as Ron led Ryou and Hermione back to the common room for a few rounds of Gobstones.

Yugi didn't manage to return until much later in the afternoon, with a long, skinny package over his arm.

"You got a broomstick!" said Ryou, "Did you end up going to Hogsmeade?"

"Yeah," said Yugi, "I didn't expect Professor McGonagall to take me though. I thought she would arrange for Remus or Tonks – or at the very least one of the Aurors here to take me, but she did instead."

"So what kind did you get?" Ron asked, excitedly, "Show us!"

Yugi set it down on the nearest table in the common room and undid the paper wrappings. "It's a Cleansweep, at least that's what I think they called it."

Ron nodded as he examined the broom. "Yep, that's the Seven. I'm surprised you didn't go for the Eleven – that's the latest model. I've got that one."

Yugi shook his head. "I couldn't afford the newest one, and to be honest, I don't *need* one that fancy. Just something that's better than the school ones, because I swear none of them like me very much."

"I'm sure this will do great," said Harry. "Now, all you need is time to get adjusted to it."

"About that," Yugi beamed, "Professor McGonagall spoke to Professor Sprout, and they agreed that I can skip my catch-up lessons Tuesday and Wednesday night so I can get some more practice time in before the game Saturday!"

"Great!" said Harry, "I'll track down the rest of the team at dinner and see if we can squeeze in a last minute practice together one of those days." He got up from one of the armchairs. "Let me make sure the Pitch is bookable, otherwise we'll go out on the training grounds where the first years have class."

Yugi watched him leave, and took one of the other empty seats. "I can't believe I'm going to be playing in our team's first game of the season."

"You'll be fine," said Ryou.
"I know…but it's really only because Katie got hurt that I got to play at all," Yugi said sadly, "I hope we're able to hear some news about her soon. I'm worried about her."

"Me too," said Hermione, "But I'm sure she's getting the best care she can at St. Mungo's. Hopefully she'll be back soon."

~~*~~

The week passed in a blur, and before any of them knew it, Saturday arrived once again. Despite feeling alright on his new broomstick, Yugi was glad he wasn't the only one nervous at breakfast that morning. Ron was also staring at the eggs on his plate as if they were the most unappetizing thing he had ever seen. He even looked a little green.

/It's just nerves, Yugi. You're going to be fine./

/I know, Pharaoh, but I've never played in front of anyone but the Gryffindor team. The entire school is going to be watching, and I'm still not perfect on a broom./

/But you were well enough that Harry believes you to be an asset for the team. We have faced harder trials than this before, and still came out on top. No matter the stakes, you were able to keep cool during our Duel Monsters matches. Try to channel that confidence here!/ 

/I'll try, but this isn't anything like Duel Monsters. I think I'd rather fight Kaiba…or even Marik at their worst right now./

"I don't see why you're so nervous," said Hermione, to Ron. "You played on the team last year."

"Yeah?" Ron glared at her, but not with any real bite, "Look how long it took me to not be garbage at it."

"Well, you're not garbage now, or you wouldn't have made the team," said Ryou.

"Look, mate, we both know that the only reason Harry chose me and not Quidditch expert superstar Mclaggen is because he weirdly shot off in the wrong direction during tryouts. His saves were way more impressive. All I have to do is foul up one game, and Harry's gonna have me replaced."

"You know that's not the case," said Harry.

"Good morning, everyone!" said a light, dreamy voice from behind them. Yugi turned and had to do a quick double-take. The girl that sometimes sat at their table from Ravenclaw was standing there, wearing the wildest hat in the shape of a lion's head. He wasn't the only one caught staring at it though – most of the Great Hall had turned heads in their direction.

"Hi, Luna," said Hermione, "Did you make that hat?"

"I did," she said, and sat down beside her, "It even roars too, but after frightening my roommates with it by accident yesterday morning, it wouldn't be wise to turn it on while everyone is trying to eat." She reached into her pocket and pulled out a folded magazine. "Quibbler?"

"Thanks," said Hermione, accepting and looking it over.

"You're welcome," said Luna. She looked to Ron, and then reached into the other pocket, pulling out a small vial, "Are you alright, Ron?"

"Peachy," Ron choked out, barely swallowing a bite of breakfast.
"Here," said Luna, passing him the bottle, "You may want that."

"What is it?" asked Ryou.

"Tonic, for nerves," said Luna, "I was going to take some myself before the match starts, but it looks like you need it more than I do."

"Why do you need it?" asked Harry, confused. They were playing Hufflepuff, not Ravenclaw, and even so - he was certain that Luna hadn't joined her house team.

"I've been asked to commentate the game today," said Luna, "So I'll be watching from the Professors' box, but wanted to show my support for Gryffindor, even though I'm supposed to be impartial."

"Oh," said Harry, simply. Sure Lee Jordan got very aggressive in the past when commentating the games, especially when it was Gryffindor vs Slytherin, and Zacharias Smith was downright vicious when it came to Gryffindor, but dream-gazed and quiet Luna Lovegood? Whose idea was that?

"Well, I like your hat," said Yugi, breaking himself out of his mini-stupor, "Very original. I'm sure Professor McGonagall will approve of it."

"I hope so," said Luna, dreamily "May I ask what product you use to get your hair to spike like that? I've been meaning to try something new, but I couldn't find the right hair potion to get the results I've wanted."

"It's natural," said Yugi. "I don't put potions or anything in. Sorry."

Luna shrugged. "Oh well," she said distantly, "I'll have to think of something else. Good luck on the game today!"

Ryou watched her return to the Ravenclaw table. "She's….interesting."

"You get used to her," said Ginny, passing by. She looked at her brother and wrinkled her nose. "You better get it together if you plan on saving anything today."

Ron shot her a dirty look and downed the tonic that Luna gave him. Shrugging, she turned to Yugi. "How are you feeling?"

"Okay, I think," said Yugi, "I think once I'm out there, I'll feel better. Just a little nervous now."

"Don't be, you're a natural," said Ginny, "Just remember to dodge the Bludgers and you'll be fine."

"Uh…thanks."

They were about to leave the Great Hall and head down to the Pitch when, out of nowhere, Lavender Brown broke off from where she had been sitting with her friends and gave Ron a quick embrace. "I know you'll be brilliant, today, Ron. I'll be cheering for you!" She skipped off just as quickly, leaving a stunned, red-faced Weasley in her wake.

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"I can't believe you dragged me out of the common room to watch this," Seto muttered, slipping on gloves and drawing his cloak a little tighter against the cold December temperatures.

"You don't want to cheer them on?" asked Ryou.
"There are a plethora of things I'd like to be doing," said Seto, "Being squashed and deafened in this stadium is not one of them."

"But you've never even seen a Quidditch game before," said Hermione as Madame Hooch blew the whistle, sending the players scattering. "It's something new to experience."

"That is the only reason I'm still here," Seto crossed his arms. "Then I can say I've been there, done that, and next time I can enjoy an empty common room to do my work."

Hermione sighed but turned back in time for Ginny to snatch the Quaffle and zoom off to the other side of the field.

"And the first save goes to Hufflepuff," Luna said calmly over the announcer's podium, "And that's Smith with the Quaffle now. Second-years and up might recall that he did the commentary last year after Lee Jordan left Hogwarts – oh! And Ginny Weasley crashed right into him. Hm, I think it was on purpose after he did quite a bit of Gryffindor bashing once before..."

Ryou lost track of them twice, and wished he asked Hermione to bring him a set of binoculars as well. She was using them to keep track of their friends and kept pointing out where they ended up around the Pitch.

"Oh, he finally dropped the Quaffle, and Ginny picked it up. I do like her, she's a very nice person...."

"Riveting commentary," Seto deadpanned.

"At least she's not insulting anyone. It's a weird break from the norm," said Hermione.

"It's rather hard to keep track of what's going on at times, isn't it?" asked Ryou.

"Sometimes," said Hermione, "But at least the weather's fair today. It would be a lot harder to find Harry and the others if we were fighting rain or snow."

"Oh – there goes Yugi!" said Ryou, pointing towards the Hufflepuff goal posts. Demelza had stolen the Quaffle from one of the other Hufflepuff chasers and had passed it along.

"...And there goes Yugi Muto with the Quaffle. He's one of the new exchange students, and I have to say is very nice, too. And he seems to do fairly well on a broomstick. It looks like he's going to line his shot up and...there's 10 points for Gryffindor. Good for them!"

"Go, Yugi!" Ryou called, "Good job!"

"...And it looks like Smith just stole the Quaffle back from Ginny Weasley, and he's heading towards the Gryffindor posts – oh my. Ron Weasley just saved that with his head. I'm sure that will bruise. Now it seems like Yugi Muto has the Quaffle again, and oh – how lovely, those clouds behind the Slytherin-decorated posts look like Nargles...."

Hermione smiled and clapped enthusiastically with the rest of the Gryffindor supporters at Ron's save, but one screaming voice in particular stood out to them.

"COME ON, RON!"

Ryou peered across the rail to the level below him. "Lavender is being very vocal today."

Hermione grumbled something under her breath, then let out a cheer that got drowned out with the
other Gryffindors around them as Yugi scored again.

"...Yugi's doing very well for his first Quidditch game. He's dodging those Bludgers very easily. I wonder what his secret is. Obviously, the Nargles haven't gotten to him...."

"It's almost like he saw that last one without even looking," said Hermione.

"I'll bet anything that Yami is helping him," said Ryou, "At least...I think he's wearing the Puzzle out there?"

Hermione moved her binoculars around. "I can see the shape of it under his robes, but that's dangerous – that could seriously injure him if he fell!"

Ryou tilted his head. "Would that be considered cheating, if Yami is helping him?"

"What are you going to tell Madame Hooch – that a dead pharaoh from 5,000 years ago was telling him how to avoid death hundreds of feet in the air?" Seto rolled his eyes.

Seto felt his phone vibrate in his pocket. Sighing, he took it out to see an unfamiliar number, silenced it, and put it back away again. He had already spoken to Mokuba today, so there was no reason for anyone to be calling him, especially on the weekend. Shaking his head slightly, he turned back to the game.

"...Oh wow, one of the Gryffindor beaters managed to hit the Bludger that time. I'm not sure what his target was, but it missed everyone in that direction...."

The phone went off again a few moments later, and like before, was cut off.

"I didn't think you got prank calls. Isn't your number hidden or something?" asked Ryou, after Seto pulled the device out for the third time within the last ten minutes.

"It was supposed to be," Seto muttered.

"Maybe it's someone from home?" Hermione suggested. "Or work?"

"No one at Kaiba Corp would be calling me on a Saturday. I haven't been in the office, so they would go up through proper channels. And Mokuba wouldn't call from an unfamiliar number, because he knows I won't answer it."

"...and that's another score for Hufflepuff, giving them a...thirty point lead over Gryffindor?"

"Twenty," they heard Professor McGonagall say in the background.

"Oh, twenty point lead, which might be a little less with Ginny moving into position to score. I wish I rode a broom as well as she does, she's very agile...."

When the phone rang again, Seto debated throwing it over the stadium wall. Squeezing past the throng of students around him, he disappeared into the stairwell in one of the towers leading back down to the ground and swiped angrily to answer. "WHAT?"

"Gee, hello to you too, Kaiba. 'Bout time you picked up."

Seto felt his eye twitch. "Wheeler, I don't know how you got this number, but hang up."

"Look, man, I don't want to talk to you either, but I haven't been able to get a hold of Yugi all day."
Seto rolled his eyes and heard the roar of the crowd go wild again. Someone must have scored. "Yugi's got his hands full right now."

"Where are you anyways – I can barely make out what you're saying."

"Sporting event," Seto snapped, "Look if you just want to shoot the breeze, I'll have Yugi call you later."

"WAIT!" Joey said quickly. "Don't hang up. This is serious."

Seto huffed. "Then get it over with."

"You're gonna have to go someplace where we can actually talk and be heard. We got ourselves a crisis here."

Seto's eyes narrowed, his mind immediately going to all the worst possible places. Was Mokuba in danger? Is that why Joey Wheeler of all people was trying to get a hold of him? Why wouldn't Roland contact him instead? It left an uneasy feeling in his gut. "What kind of crisis?"

"Ishizu was attacked at the museum."

Seto froze.

"…You still there? Hello?"

Seto closed his eyes and sighed. "…I heard you. Give me ten minutes, I'll call you back." Without waiting to hear a response, he hung up.

/I have a bad feeling about this./

/For once, I agree with you./

/If they have harmed the tablet in any way, everything could be put into jeopardy./

Seto glanced back at the door leading back into the stands before turning and heading downstairs. /If the tablet is important to them, they probably wouldn't risk damaging it. But I'll need to get back to the school and someplace quiet to figure out how much trouble we're all in. It's too noisy here./

/They're going to wonder where you've disappeared to./

/Then let them. I don't have to leave my whereabouts with them./

Set sighed from his soul room. /I guess we won't see the end of the match./

/That depends how long Wheeler decides to talk./

~~*~~

/Incoming Bludger! Duck!/ 

Yugi dived down a few feet on his chase of the two Hufflepuff chasers passing the Quaffle back and forth to each other. Ron was saving the shots – most of them, at least – but they were harrowing to watch. He was almost certain the two he saved by nearly falling off his broom were not deliberate in the slightest. It wasn't until he heard the Gryffindors cheering and Lavender screaming out his name
that his confidence seemed to climb a bit.

/Thanks, Pharaoh! That was a close one…/

Yugi passed Harry while he was on a slow sweep of the Pitch looking for the Golden Snitch. He hadn't paid much attention, being focused on avoiding the Bludgers and keeping track of the Quaffle, but as far as he could hear from Luna's very passive commentary, the Snitch hadn't been spotted yet.

"You're doing great, Yugi," he heard Harry call as he flew by.

Ginny flew alongside him. "Here – Cadwallader has the Quaffle again, flank him with me?"

Yugi nodded and followed her, appearing on his right side and Ginny his left. Ginny knocked into Cadwallader, bumping him into Yugi. He wasn't keen on hurting the Hufflepuff, but he knocked him back towards his teammate with less force than Ginny had used.

"…Oh, looks like Gryffindor is trying to force Hufflepuff to drop the Quaffle. That's not very nice, but I guess that's how Quidditch works…"

Ginny finally wrestled the red ball from Cadwallader's hands and Yugi zoomed after her towards Hufflepuff's end of the Pitch, giving her cover so she could line up her shot at the goal post. The keeper caught the ball at the last second and tossed it off to Smith, who rolled to avoid a random Bludger and then took off again towards the Gryffindor posts.

"…And there's another save by Ron Weasley. It looks like he's much more stable on his broom now, he didn't have to dangle that time. And - oh! It also looks like the Hufflepuff seeker might have seen something. What was his name again? …Stewart, Stimmons?"

"SUMMERBY," Professor McGonagall shouted into the microphone, causing half of the stadium to erupt in laughter.

"Oh, right, Summerby. He's darting around the Pitch rather fast, and it looks like he's going to barrel into one of the Gryffindor chasers."

Yugi had just enough time to turn and quickly climb to avoid Summerby crashing into him, and to his horror, the seeker followed.

/What is he doing!?/

/I don't know. The Snitch must be nearby, but I don't see it anywhere, and I don't dare phase out of the Puzzle where someone might see. For now though, just run…err, fly./

Harry flew forward, trying to figure out what had Summerby after Yugi so intently, when he saw the slightest glint of gold, keeping pace, but staying almost camouflaged near the spikes of Yugi's bangs. I don't believe this – it was hiding near his hair the entire time? How did I not see it? I flew right past him a few minutes ago!

"DIVE, YUGI!" Harry bellowed, as he surged forward on the Firebolt.

"…I think the Snitch was spotted now, Harry Potter's also chasing Summerby…who's chasing the Yugi Muto, who's abandoned trying to score in favor of staying on his broomstick. What a wild game this is!"

Thankfully, Yugi heard him and pressed himself down closer to his broom, sending him into a deep dive. Harry barely had time to give a relieved exhale before taking off after the Snitch, which
scampered off towards the Gryffindor posts. At least Yugi could help with scoring again.

Out of the corner of his eye he could see Jimmy Peakes smash a bludger towards them and he pulled up to avoid it. Unfortunately, Summerby did too, and the chase continued.

"Gryffindor scores again!"

Harry zoomed past the Slytherin bleachers where he could hear the boos and the jests. Luna didn't announce the score, but from what he was able to keep track, the game was still very close. Their two teams were pretty evenly matched, and it was really going to take catching the Snitch for there to be a clear winner.

They looped around the Gryffindor goals, and Harry had the chance to see Ron stop the Quaffle with his foot, kicked it out towards Demelza, and roar triumphantly with the cheers from the Gryffindor side of the stands.

The Snitch suddenly dived, taking refuge near the wooden planks near the base of the field. Harry weaved back and forth, and was suddenly reminiscent of another chase, four years previous, when he and Malfoy were both pursuing the Snitch and being chased by Dobby's rogue Bludger.

Harry pressed forward, easing past Summerby as the Snitch shifted upwards once again and back towards the middle of the field. He twisted into a barrel roll to avoid a well-timed Bludger from one of the Hufflepuff beaters and threw out his arm to reach for the tiny golden ball….

~~*~~

"…This happened over a week ago? Why are we just learning about this now?" Seto crossed his arms and glared through the laptop screen at Joey Wheeler.

"You think I'm any happier? I live here and we just found out yesterday. Newspapers didn't list anythin' specific, and even still, we found out on a fluke."

"Why didn't Ishizu tell anyone?"

"Somethin' about protectin' you and the Pharaoh, I dunno. You want to yell at her? We're here with her at the wizard's place."

"I want to know what happened, obviously."

Joey shrugged, and picked up the phone where he had it angled towards him on the table. "Okay, but I wouldn't chew her out too much, she still don't look too good."

The footage became shaky as the blond duelist moved through the house. Ishizu was sitting up in bed, atop the blankets, with a phone and a stack of papers alongside her. While she didn't seem to have been physically injured, she looked incredibly exhausted. Before she took the phone from him, Seto could see Téa and a red-haired man sitting off to the side. Remembering back to Ishizu's first letter sent to them at school, Seto guessed that this man was Bill Weasley.

"Hello, Kaiba," Ishizu said tiredly, "I apologize for intruding on your day like this – I had asked Joey not to contact you."

"Don't you think we would have liked to know that someone attacked the museum?"

Ishizu hung her head. "I did not want to worry you. They asked many questions about the tablet's origins. Those are secrets of the highest order."
"People have asked about the tablet before though," said Seto. "Is that why you didn't tell anyone?"

Ishizu looked off to the side, towards where Bill was seated, before turning back to the camera. "No. I was visited by Voldemort himself."

Seto leaned forward. "I thought that the whole point of the wizards there was to keep people like him out of the museum. How did he get in in the first place?"

Bill voice was heard off to the side as he joined in the conversation. "That's what Sturgis and I were trying to find out. We put enchantments up on the museum together, just as he and Hestia and Emmeline did to your homes. By all accounts, he shouldn't have been able to waltz into the museum the way he did."

Seto scowled. If these so-called wards couldn't keep the Death Eaters out, then what good were they in the first place? Just how well protected was Mokuba back home if Voldemort would be able to bypass the shields and arrive at the front door?

"He didn't apparate in," said Bill, "That much we know. Anti-apparation jinxes are still in place because we tested them. He may be the darkest wizard in the last century, but it would still be impossible for him to just pop in like that. Which means he used a different kind of magic."

Shadow magic… Set murmured, Perhaps he had help from the mysterious shadow./

"What was he after?"

Ishizu rubbed at her arms. "Information. He asked questions about the Pharaoh's tablet, which I refused to answer. But then… he brought out a relic he had, one I think was stolen from a group of artifacts found at the dig site that was attacked. It was a broken sword. He asked about that as well."

Seto paused. A sword? At least it wasn't a Millennium Item. "What kind of sword?"

Ishizu shook her head. "It didn't appear to be one of much importance. At least half of it was missing. He seemed to think it a rare and powerful item, but I told him otherwise. A quick glance could see that it was not saved for any person of high importance departing for the afterlife. It had clearly not stood the test of time. There were many cracks along it, as if it was either being pieced back together again, or ready to continue falling apart."

Maybe he was looking for the rest of the pieces/ Set mused. But why? I thought he was after Millennium Items, and that is clearly not one of them./

Seto posed the question to Ishizu, who closed her eyes and sighed. "Because it's no ordinary sword."

He was about to ask her to elaborate when loud, cheering voices could be heard from the other side of the portrait hole. Great, he said to himself, the match is over. "Everyone's going to be back from the game in about two minutes, and privacy is going to go right out the window. We will finish this conversation at another time."

"Of course," said Bill, "After Ishizu has had time to recover."

Ishizu nodded and looked to Bill again. "In person, preferably. I know the three of you will be home for the holidays soon."

"It really shouldn't wait," Seto heard Joey say off in the distance.

"It shouldn't," said Ishizu, "But I do not want any eavesdroppers. Please see me once you get home."
I assure you, I will tell the rest of the tale. And do not worry about me, Bill and his friends are keeping careful watch over both myself and the museum. I don't think Voldemort will be back."

They said goodbyes and hung up the instant the Fat Lady's portrait swung open. Yugi entered first with Ryou and Hermione, looking incredibly pleased, as most of the rest of their house followed soon after, hollering and cheering, chanting "WEASLEY! WEASLEY! WEASLEY!" over and over.

"I take it you won," said Seto, getting up from the table and pocketing his phone. The laptop made it back into its bag just in time for Dean and Seamus to cover the tabletop he had been using with a plethora of snacks hauled up from the kitchens.

"We did!" Yugi said happily, "The Snitch blew the points out of the water, but it was the closest game I've ever seen!"

Harry snorted. "It's the only game you've ever seen."

"Ron did some amazing saves towards the end when it seemed like Hufflepuff was taking a bigger lead," said Ryou, watching him and Ginny take the center of attention. "And Ginny got really aggressive in scoring too."

Yugi tilted his head. "Didn't you watch the match?"

Seto shook his head. "I had to take an important call and left early."

"It's not like I wanted to talk to Wheeler, but he couldn't get a hold of you, for obvious reasons."

Yugi gasped. "Joey called you? It must have been very important – what happened?"

Seto shook his head. "Later. After this dies off."

Yugi nodded. "Is everything okay, at least?"

Seto shrugged. "For now."

Yugi nodded, pensively. "Okay," he said quietly, and then tried to pull him into the thick of the celebrating mass. "At least celebrate our Quidditch victory with us!"

Seto shook his arm free and hung back towards the edge of the common room. "I prefer to keep my hearing intact."

"Suit yourself," Yugi shrugged, "At least have some fo –"

"WOOOOOOOOO!"

They both whirled around to where most of the Gryffindor boys were howling. In the center of the throng of celebrating students was Ron, lip-locked with Lavender Brown.

Yugi's eyes widened as the chorus chanting of 'Weasley!' continued. "…Someone is certainly happy…"

He suddenly knocked into his rival as a brown-haired blur rushed past and down a back staircase in the tower.
Yugi righted himself and looked behind him. "Was that…"

Seto took a quick glance at Ron and Lavender, and then around the room to double-check who was missing. "Mhm."

Yugi started down the stairs when Seto stopped him. "No. I'll go."

Yugi raised an eyebrow. "Are you sure? I didn't think…well…"

"…that I was capable of feeling?" Seto finished his sentence for him, with an ironic lack of emotion in his voice.

Yugi turned red. "I...uh..."

Seto shook his head dismissively and then gave his rival an odd, almost out of place smirk. "Congratulations on your first Quidditch match. Go revel in your success."

Yugi blinked and looked back down the staircase.

"Go." Seto gave him a half-push towards the crowd. "I'll handle it."

Yugi stared blankly as he watched his rival head down the back steps, and then said to no one in particular, "…did I miss something?"

Hermione was sitting near the bottom of the steps that led into an empty chamber under Gryffindor Tower. Wand in hand, she turned her head slightly to see who was coming down the staircase. Apparently, he wasn't on the jinx list, because she turned back to face forward and placed the wand down next to her. She didn't say anything, just rubbed at her arms, trembling slightly.

Seto descended the last few steps and sat down next to her, eyes darting upwards at the sound of a faint chirp. A small circle of yellow birds fluttered over their heads.

"You almost took out Yugi in your hasty escape," said Seto, stretching his legs out in front of him.

Hermione didn't look at him, just clutched her arms tighter. "I didn't mean to. I just wanted to get out of there." Her voice was shaky, as if she had been crying, but he purposely didn't make a point of staring at her face to look for tear tracks.

Another chirp from above made Hermione look up, and she then sounded almost embarrassed to be caught summoning birds in the middle of an empty room. "I was just…practicing," she said. "I've never been able to get the feathers quite right."

Seto glanced up again. "They look good."

Hermione shook her head sadly, and turned to him with a shy smile. "They're not as good as the ones you made. You summoned them perfectly on the first try."

She didn't expect Seto to pick up and hold out her wand, and turned to him quizzically. "W-what are you doing?"

Seto shrugged and gestured to the circling birds. "You said you were having trouble. Show me."

"You're going to…tutor me? Now?"

Seto moved the wand a little closer to her. "Call it returning a favor."
Hermione sniffled, but took the wand from him, and aimed it out a ways from the birds she had already conjured. "A-avis." Her voice broke mid incantation, and her hand had trembled slightly, so she wasn't surprised when nothing happened. She wasn't quite sure how she was focused enough to get them out the first time.

"I'm afraid I'm not in the right mind for it."

Seto leveled her a look of disbelief. "You seem to have summoned those without too much difficulty."

Hermione sighed. "A fluke, I assure you."

Seto studied her for a moment, before drawing his own wand from his jacket pocket. "Avis."

They watched as a second fluttering of birds erupted out of Seto's wand and joined the first flock above them. "It's not your pronunciation, it's the wand movement."

Hermione watched them circle above her, and rubbed at her arms again. "They're beautiful."

Seto didn't say anything; just simply put his wand away.

They were quiet for a few minutes, the only sounds being the chirping canaries, and the residual noise from their partying house mates above them.

"You must think I'm being silly," she said after a while, sniffling. "Getting so upset like this….

…It's not like I should care what he does," she continued, "…or who he chooses to…to….

Hermione suddenly shook her head, trying to clear the image of Ron kissing Lavender from her mind. "I had hoped he would have learned from fourth year, where he acted so ridiculously jealous over a friendship." She wiped a stray tear from her eye. "I should have known better."

Hermione turned to look at Seto. "Can you believe…I was thinking of asking him to the ball?"

Seto raised an eyebrow.

Hermione shrugged, and went back to looking in front of her again. "I…I guess I thought if I asked him, he would get over his stupid funk. …And some of the things that he said…. But then he wouldn't leave me alone about it…and she started fawning over him….

It didn't matter that she sounded like she was rambling. Seto didn't seem keen on stopping her, so she kept going. "…No one has ever paid any attention to him like that before, not like she was doing now. I've been there from the beginning, but no, he doesn't see that at all…. She just started doting on him like three days ago….

She kept talking quietly, pausing every few seconds to gather herself after a sniffle or her voice breaking, but Seto's concentration was only broken when the sounds of heavy footsteps – more than one set – began heading down the steps on the other side of the chamber.

Ron emerged from the other end, with an extremely giggly Lavender attached to his arm. They stumbled into the center of the room before noticing Hermione and Seto sitting across the way.

Hermione immediately tensed.

Lavender took a look at her distraught roommate, biting her lip before looking up at Ron. "Oops,"
she said, without an ounce of shame for walking in on them. "I think this room's taken."

Ron had stopped short, eyes darting between Hermione and Seto. Hermione's hand was back around her wand, clutching it so tightly her knuckles were turning white.

Lavender reached for Ron's arm. "There's another spot we could go," she giggled again, trying to tug him back towards the chamber's exit, but Ron pulled his arm back, still focused elsewhere. With a last look at Hermione, Lavender left the room.

Ron only barely heard her, his mind still trying to put together what his eyes were seeing. Once Lavender was out of sight, he gestured between the two sitting in front of him, a look of slight confusion on his face. "So I was right. There was something going on."

Hermione slowly got to her feet. "Go away, Ronald."

He ignored her and looked up. "What's with the birds? More private lessons?"

Seto narrowed his eyes darkly, but when he made to get up, Hermione held out her other hand slightly to stop him.

"Oppugno!"

The two sets of canaries that Ron had been watching with a mixture of jealousy and awe suddenly stopped circling the air mindlessly above them. They began forming a single file line and darted across the room, aiming right for him.

It took him a moment to realize just what was going on – he had barely noticed Hermione raise her wand in the first place – but for just a quick few seconds saw the tear-streaked eyes of his friend before the birds started gunning for him. He quickly threw up his arms to shield his face, backing away towards the chamber's exit as the canaries tried to peck away at any bit of him that they could reach. When he finally reached the door, he dared himself to look back at them one more time to see Hermione staring angrily. The birds made one final dive and he disappeared around the corner just in time for the explosion of yellow feathers as the canaries made contact with the heavy door and vanished.

Hermione let her wand clatter noisily to the floor and she reached for Seto's arm as she nearly collapsed back down on the step. She felt him immediately seize up at her touch, and wondered for the briefest moment if he was going to shake her off like she had seen him do to Yugi previously, but he surprisingly let her cling there.

Seto looked down as she clutched to his arm like a lifeline, and cried into his shoulder. He had dealt with a distraught Mokuba plenty of times in the past, but this wasn't Mokuba. He knew how to make Mokuba feel better. This was...new and very uncomfortable. He forced himself to let out some of the tension running from his neck all the way down his arm before his muscles completely locked up, and did the only thing he could think of in this situation, which was bring his other hand around to awkwardly pat one of her own.

Seto wasn't sure why he decided that he was a better option for comfort over Yugi at this point, but he didn't move, allowing her to curl in a little tighter for as long as she needed. Anything else he could think of to say didn't seem like a proper pep talk – not at this moment, at least – so he stayed quiet and resettled himself against the back of the step knowing he was going to be there for a while, and listened to the odd duality of Hermione's depressed state next to him, and the unassuming revelry upstairs.
Domino City

"Where exactly is this restaurant we're supposed to go to?" asked Roland, irritably. When he learned his schedule had been adjusted to accommodate a "working lunch" with Pegasus of all people, he had sighed and resigned himself to the fact that he would probably be eating somewhere ridiculously posh to accommodate the game designer's lavish taste, someone would end up consuming a great deal of alcohol, and no work would actually get done.

At least, that's what happened the last time.

"Why is there no location on my calendar?" he had asked Seto Kaiba's secretary that morning. "Please tell me it was cancelled and no one dropped it off the list."

Unfortunately for him, that was not the case. "They insisted on picking you up," she said, "It's someplace out of town, and I was told Mr. Pegasus wanted to go over contracts on the ride over."

This ultimately led him to sharing the backseat with a man he couldn't stand on a normal day. At least in the office, there was a desk between them. Now there was only half a seat.

Pegasus chuckled. "Oh, we're not going to a restaurant."

"Then where are we going?"

"You'll see."

Roland glanced at the road sign as they passed by. They were out of Domino now. "Is this some sort of sick abduction?"

Pegasus eyed him mischievously. "What makes you think I'm kidnapping you?"

Roland crossed his arms and sighed. "Because you have a terrible track record when it comes to those in charge of Mr. Kaiba's company."

Pegasus tapped a finger to his chin thoughtfully. "I don't recall ever abducting Kaiba-boy himself, but, like I said back in my office, that was a long time ago. I can assure you, Croquet and I will return you back to your ever-busy day job - and little Mokuba – by the end of the day."

Roland narrowed his eyes. "By the end of the day? This was supposed to be a lunch. That means an hour – 90 minutes at most."

"Hmm," Pegasus mused, "Perhaps you should call Kaiba-boy's lovely receptionist and have the rest of your day emptied. We'll be out for a while."
"How long does it take to look at contracts?"

Pegasus laughed. "Oh my, that was just a ruse. We're not doing company work today."

"Then what are we doing?"

Pegasus grinned slyly. "You'll see."

Roland sighed. At this rate, he was the one going to need alcohol by the time the day was done.

The car finally turned off of the main road and down a heavily wooded street. Roland peered out the window. There was nothing in sight but a dense line of trees. Where the hell were they?

"Enough games, there's nothing out here."

"Mm, don't be so sure," said Pegasus. He leaned around the back of Croquet's seat to look through the center of the windshield. "We're about there."

Roland shot Pegasus a dirty look from behind his dark shades, as the car eased down a narrow drive and stopped in front of a house, half-hidden still by the mass of trees in the area. It wasn't a very large house, at least not by looking at the front of it, and had a sort of strange charm to it, as if it belonged in a storybook. Only Pegasus would have found a place like this.

"Where is here?" Roland looked around as he got out of the vehicle. "We drove through nothing for a good twenty minutes."

Pegasus gestured to the house in a dramatic, grandiose fashion. "Your little secret getaway plan, of course! Why else would I drive you all the way out to an adorable little cottage in the woods?"

Roland turned back to the house. "This is it?"

Pegasus casually looped his arm around Roland's shoulder, ignoring the other man immediately tensing and dangled the key in front of him. "Shall we?"

Roland threw his arm off. "Try that again and you'll be on the ground."

Pegasus waggled a finger. "You think Croquet would let you?"

"He'll be down there right next to you."

Pegasus's eye was full of amusement, despite his pout. "Someone has no fun today."

"I was under the impression I'd only have to spend an hour at best with you. In my office. Instead, I've been hijacked to the middle of nowhere for an indefinite period of time, with no one else for company."

Pegasus pretended to grab for his heart as he moved towards the door. "You wound me."

Roland glared at him as he brushed past and into the house. The inside had just as much a storybook feel as the outside, from the edge moldings along the walls and fireplace in the sitting room to the rather fancy-looking spiral staircase leading upwards. Having made a few more steps into the house, he could see it was actually quite large inside, despite its outward appearance.

He raised an eyebrow to Pegasus. "Where did you even find this place?"

Pegasus was practically giddy. "Oh, no. I didn't find it. Well, the land, I had to find. But this gem? I
Roland fought back a huff. *Of course he did.* "...You had this entire house built from the ground up in this short of time?"

"Mm, more or less. I assembled quite an impressive team to do this, if I may say so."

"I thought this was supposed to be something kept hush. How many workers did you bring in on this?"

Pegasus waved a hand dismissively. "Oh don't get your earpiece in a tizzy. We both know that people will do marvelous things if you pay them proper money for their good work. The construction workers hired for this project were given quite a glorious payday for the extra time and effort into making this little home-away-from-home a reality."

Pegasus took another look around at the bare walls around them and then beckoned him deeper into the house. "Come, come – I'll give you the grand tour!"

"Oh…goody." Roland muttered, before following after him.

The main level of the house contained standard fare. An oversized kitchen and dining area, formal sitting room, and two other rooms Pegasus described for entertainment. "If you're going to hole up a bunch of teenagers here, you can't let them sit around bored," he had said.

"I'm surprised the place is still empty," said Roland, standing in what Pegasus called the 'game room'. "Or that you haven't filled the place with some of your incredibly archaic dueling arenas."

"Now, now, I wouldn't want to crowd this little getaway with those bulky machines, no matter how fond of them I may be. Besides, any duelist that takes temporary residence here already has one of Kaiba-boy's little marvels."

Pegasus led him back to the empty main hall and reached for the banister to head upstairs. "As for furniture...the painters still have to come through before I finish decorating them." Pegasus gestured to some of the unfinished drywall in the hallway. "Obviously, this is still a work in progress, but I expect it to be near completed by the end of tomorrow."

Roland looked around to the stark white walls. "Is excess decoration really necessary?"

"And leave such canvases blank?" Pegasus put a hand to his chest again, and this time he looked genuinely offended. "Now you *truly* wound me, my dear Roland. I've such plans for this place still."

"This is a safe house, not your private residence," said Roland sternly.

Pegasus's lip curled upward shrewdly as he waggled a finger again, tutting. "Ah, ah. Don't you forget that you came to *me* for help with this plan, remember? This little palace was procured with my own pennies, and as per *our* agreement, I may fill and decorate as I see fit. And you wouldn't have to reimburse me a *dime*. And as per our agreement, the only name on any official documentation here is *mine*, so if I choose to stay here, I can."

"I am well aware of what we settled upon," said Roland hotly, following Pegasus up the stairs. "And I had specific conditions of my own that I expect to be met."

"Yes, yes, I know, those haven't gone forgotten. Now come, there is more to show you."

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Yugi didn't manage to stay up to see what it was that Seto had intended to tell him. The party had lasted well into the night, and it got past the point where he could no longer keep his eyes open. Before heading upstairs to bed, he had descended the staircase Hermione had fled down, but neither she nor Seto were in the empty chamber at the bottom.

He woke Sunday morning to the sun shining in through the dormitory windows, bypassing the scarlet bed curtains he forgot to close, and reflecting off of the Puzzle sitting idly at his bedside, effectively blinding him. Rubbing his eyes, he sat up and looked around.

The curtains around Seto's bed were still drawn, and considering it was well after seven in the morning, that was quite impressive. But then Yugi noticed Set sitting transparently in the chair beside him, eyes closed, and he rethought his earlier observation. Maybe Kaiba had another sleepless night.

The spirit's eyes opened as Yugi got out of bed and began getting ready for the day. "Good morning," he said simply. "I am sorry we didn't get the chance to watch most of your game yesterday."

"That's alright," said Yugi, stretching as Yami phased out of the Puzzle. "Was everything okay? Kaiba said that Joey called."

Set gave a quick bow to Yami before turning back to Yugi. "The conversation was cut quite short by the rest of the house returning from the game, but it appeared that Voldemort paid a personal visit to your museum back home."

Yugi's eyes widened. "What!?"

"What happened?" said Yami, "Was anyone hurt?"

"Miss Ishtar was attacked. She seemed to be physically unharmed, but it was clear whatever happened had mentally drained her. We saw a brief glimpse of her on the call, and it was clear she still needed rest. But the museum and tablet are still relatively safe."

"Did she mention anything else?" said Bakura.

Yugi jumped. The Spirit of the Ring had been right behind him the entire time and he hadn't even noticed. "How long have you been there?"

"Long enough," Bakura snapped. "What else did Ishizu say?"

"It seemed like he was looking for information," said Set, "She began to speak about some sort of sword, but we didn't get much further than that. She wants to see us in person when the school lets out for winter holiday."

Yugi sighed. "I'm glad she's alright – sort of. I was scared when you said that the museum was attacked that Ishizu might've been taken or something."

Set shook his head. "Thankfully, that was not the case."

Bakura scowled. "A sword, huh?"

Yami turned to him. "...Is there something about our past lives that had to do with one?"

Bakura eyed him suspiciously. "Is that your cheeky way of finding out how much I actually remember?"
"What – no," said Yami, "I'm just trying to figure out why Voldemort would inquire about something that wasn't a Millennium Item."

"Hn," Bakura crossed his arms. "Well…as far as I know, there were no special swords thousands of years ago. It was Ancient Egypt. You have to figure every soldier had one, but that didn't make them impressive by any means. The Millennium Items held the true power, not the weapon of a lowly palace guard."

"That makes it all the more important that we see Ishizu as soon as possible," said Yugi, "Maybe there was an enemy that none of you can remember, and they used a magic sword or something."

Bakura rolled his eyes and scoffed. "I highly doubt that."

Yami turned to Set, curiously. "What about that creature – the one that attacked Kaiba in his sleep?"

Set's expression became guarded and he floated back from the center of the room towards Seto's bed, as if mere mentioning it would summon it into his host's head while he slept. "What about it?"

"You've seen it more than we have," said Yami, "Do you remember if it carried a sword?"

Set shook his head, trying to remember. "No…aside from its eye, it was merely a shadow. If it carried a sword, I didn't notice."

"It's Millennium Eye," said Bakura stiffly, "That can't be a coincidence."

Yugi turned to Yami, "Maybe…that thing used to hold the Millennium Eye in the past?"

Set crossed his arms. "No. Master Aknadin held the Eye."

Both Yami and Bakura's eyes locked onto the priest, one with curiosity etched across their face, the other was suspicious.

"You…remember that?" asked Yami, wide-eyed. "Did he pass it on to anyone? Or, perhaps, like the three of us, sealed himself into his Millennium Item?"

"That doesn't make much sense," said Yugi, "As chatty as he was about his Millennium Eye, Pegasus didn't seem like he was sharing headspace with anyone."

Bakura eyed Set warily as the priest stared down at the ground, trying to recall details from his clouded past.

"Set?" asked Yami, "Is there anything you can remember?"

Set shook his head, visibly frustrated. "No…I…I know that Master Aknadin held the Millennium Eye, but…it's strange. I recall it not from my time in your court, but…earlier, while undergoing the training to become a priest. Most of my memories as a priest while under your reign are blocked…yet…" he stared icily at Bakura. "I can remember you clear as day. Why is that?"

"Don't ask me," Bakura snapped. "I wasn't the one who sealed you into the Millennium Rod. If you have questions to ask that monster with the Eye, why don't you just wait until he decides to pay Kaiba another visit?" Bakura nodded towards the bed behind Set. "That is why he's still out at this hour, isn't it? Trying to use him as bait to draw out the demon?"

Set took an angry step forward. "How dare you," he snarled, his fingers itching for the Millennium Rod on the bedside table. "If anyone would know about abusing their hosts, it would be you, Tomb
"You know…" said a sleepy voice from the other side of the room. Ryou sat up in bed, stretching his arms and leveling Bakura a tired, exasperated look. "Some of us enjoyed sleeping in on a Sunday morning. If you wanted to fight the Spirit of the Rod, couldn't you have done it...I don't know, on the roof?"

Yami looked at him apologetically. "I'm sorry, Bakura, the fault was in part mine. I was eager to know how much Set might have remembered about his past, and I think things got a bit out of hand."

Ryou slipped out of bed and reached for his robe. "It's alright," he yawned, "About time I got up anyways. I'm a bit hungry."

Yami watched his fellow two spirits continue to glare each other down. Ryou quickly dressed for the day and stepped in front of Bakura, crossing his arms. "Come on, Spirit," he sighed, "You and Set can kill each other again another day."

To all of their surprise, Bakura disappeared back into the Ring without another word as Ryou placed it around his neck under his sweater and headed towards the door. "Coming, Yugi?"

Yugi nodded, "In a minute." He made a show of digging through his trunk. "I just need to brush my teeth...."

Ryou nodded and left for the common room.

Yami raised an eyebrow as Yugi quickly shut the lid on his trunk. "You already brushed your teeth."

Yugi swallowed nervously. "I...have a bad feeling that Bakura may be up to something." He paused. "Spirit of the Ring, Bakura, I mean. ...I'm gonna have to start calling Ryou by his first name -- this is getting confusing."

"What makes you say that?" asked Set.

Yugi grimaced. "I can't prove any of it...not really, but I think that the Spirit of the Ring knows more than he's willing to share. It's probably nothing."

"I have been under that impression for quite a while," said Set stiffly, "My host, unfortunately, has gotten tired of me bringing it up and has more or less ignored me on that subject."

"He was rather defensive," said Yami, "A little more than normal, I'd say. And every time our memories are brought up, he is always very careful about what he says, as if he doesn't want us to be aware that he knows more than we do."

"To suggest that I would willingly try and subject Seto another round of...torture," Set spat. "I have no doubt he's keeping something secret, even if he doesn't know who the Shadow is."

Yugi sighed. "Good Bakura hasn't seemed to pick up on his other half acting strangely, though. Or the evil spirit of the Ring is very good at keeping things from him."

Set leaned back against the wall. "It would be easier if the tomb robber's motives were clear. He just seems content with tagging alongside his host, and that is not the same villain I remember."

"Well," said Yugi, "You've said so yourself that you don't remember everything that happened thousands of years ago. Maybe things have changed."
Set fidgeted uncomfortably. "…Perhaps."

Yugi glanced at Set and peered around him to the closed scarlet curtains, a random thought coming to the forefront of his mind. "Not to be nosy…but if we woke Bakura – well, Ryou, who is a heavy sleeper, how is Kaiba still out if you two were yelling right next to him?"

Set chuckled. "Oh. Don't worry about that. He magicked the area around his bed when he settles in for the night with some sort of muffling charm. I've kept him awake one too many nights earlier in the year, talking with the Pharaoh after you've all gone to sleep."

Yugi blinked. "Oh…so…he's not sleeping in from nightmares?"

"No," said Set, "At least, not tonight. He did get in rather late though."

"I went looking for him, before going to bed, but couldn't find him," said Yugi. "You know…after he went to check on Hermione during the party."

"Ah…” Set suddenly looked both amused and ashamed at the same time. "Seto is great at many things, but being a rock of emotional support and comfort is not one of them. He eventually gave Hermione the oddest pep talk I have ever heard, and the two of them moved to the Room of Requirement so she could let out some aggression. It seemed to work, since she appeared to be in better spirits afterwards."

Yami tilted his head. "What kind of pep talk are we talking about?"

"Well…I did my best not to interfere with what seemed like a…private moment for her, so I tried not to eavesdrop, but there was a bit about taking her pain and channeling it into something else…," Set waved a hand dismissively, "Something along those lines. I believe you would call it a very Kaiba-esque thing to say. Anyway, I assume she took it to heart, because she nearly broke him in half while they were sparring."

Set gestured to Hermione's jar of bruise cream sitting next to the Rod. "He's probably going to go through all of that whenever he gets up. They didn't make it back to the Tower until well after curfew." He scowled. "I have never felt more like that scoundrel Bakura, sneaking around the castle after hours, making sure the corridors were clear so they could return without getting caught."

Yugi laughed as he bid Set goodbye and headed out of the dormitory before Ryou came back up looking for him.

Harry and Ron were already seated at the Gryffindor table when they arrived in the Great Hall. Ryou took one look at Ron and gasped. "Oh my – Ron, what happened to you?"

Ron grumbled something nearly inaudible under his breath. His face and the back of his hands were covered in scratches, some deeper than others.

Harry frowned, having heard the entirety of Ron's story when they went up to the dormitory to bed last evening. "He…uh…stumbled upon some angry birds last night."

Ryou looked to Yugi, confused, and the shorter duelist leaned over and said quietly. "I'll fill you in later."

Ryou nodded, still in the dark, but let it drop for the time being, and reached for the tray of sausages between himself and Harry.

Hermione didn't appear until the tail end of breakfast, looking bright-eyed, refreshed, and almost
glowing, taking Yugi by complete surprise. It was such a contrast from the last time he saw her, bolting from the common room in tears.

"Good morning, Hermione," said Ryou, brightly. "You look well."

"Thanks," she sat beside him, beaming. "Morning, Harry, Yugi." She paused. "Ron, you should see Madame Pomfrey about those scratches, they look dreadful."

When it was clear Ron wasn't going to reply to her and instead keep his head focused intently on his toast, Yugi jumped in on the conversation. "I'm glad you're...feeling better? After last night...."

Hermione smiled broadly. "Oh, I feel much better. I had a chance to reflect and vent last night, and I think it really did help. I'll have to thank Seto the next time I see him."

"For what?" asked Harry.

Ron's brow furrowed as he dug his fork rather violently into his eggs.

"The pep talk, mostly," said Hermione, shrugging. "Can you please pass the butter?"

Harry looked from Ron and Hermione's deliberate ignoring of each other and cleared his throat awkwardly, "So...uh...anyone got plans for the day?"

"Ginny and I are going to test out some hairstyles for the ball," said Hermione, "I can't believe that it's this Friday. Time surely flies, doesn't it?"

"Oh, yeah?" said Ron, "Who're you going with, then?"

Hermione merely smiled and returned to her breakfast.

Ron rolled his eyes. "Alright...who's Ginny going with?"

"Neville, I think," said Hermione, "Or is it Dean?" She tapped her fork pensively against the table, thoughtfully. "No, definitely Neville. Dean is going with Parvati."

"Well," said Ryou, "I for one am excited. Not for the ball exactly, since Yugi and I are sort of friending it there, but just knowing that right afterwards, we get to go home for two weeks! It's been so long since we've been in Domino that I'm not going to remember what sleeping in my own bed feels like!"

"You're going to find a date, aren't you, Harry?" asked Hermione.

"Uh...I...eh..." Harry looked to Ron. "I thought we were going to hang back, after the disastrous Yule Ball...."

Ron swallowed nervously and stared into his goblet of pumpkin juice.

Harry frowned. Their plans couldn't have changed in one night...could they?

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Hermione met up with them later that afternoon, when they all decided to take refuge once again in Yugi's dormitory. "It may seem a bit late, being only a week before the first part of term ends," said Yugi, "But does anyone have plans for the holidays?"

Harry shrugged. "Not going back to the Dursleys, if that's what you mean. I usually end up at Ron's
"They let you stay at school?" asked Ryou.

"There are always a handful of people that stay at Hogwarts over the holidays," said Hermione, "Not everyone goes home, and that's alright. Anyone who stays here gets to at least have the Christmas feast."

"Why? What are your plans?" asked Ron.

"Well..." Yugi began, "I was talking with Grandpa earlier today, and we were wondering if you guys would like to come to Domino for Christmas. We spent all summer at your house, Ron. Would you like to come visit us this time?"

"That would be awesome!" said Harry, "All of us?"

Yugi nodded. "Yeah. I told Grandpa that we would call him back and we could hash out some details together. ...Is...that okay?"

Ron nodded. "Sure, mate. I can write to Mum and tell her I won't be home this year. I'm sure she won't mind it too much."

"You sure?" said Harry, "She always threw a big to-do over the holiday and getting the family together."

Ron shrugged. "Well...it's not like she told me of any plans ahead of time."

"You'd better hurry it up if you're going to catch the Nerd Herd," said Seto, without looking up from his spot stretched out on his bed, typing away on his laptop. "Wait any later and you'll have to put it off until mid-morning break between classes."

"The 'Nerd Herd'?"

Yugi shook his head and pulled out his phone. "That's his nickname – or, one of them, anyways – for my friends."

It took two rings before the line picked up on the opposite end. "Hello?"

Yugi's eyes lit up, and put the call on speaker for them all to hear. "Hi, Grandpa!"

"Hello, Yugi! How is everything?"

"Good, not much has changed since the...few hours I spoke to you," said Yugi, "You're on speaker with Bakura, Kaiba, and our new friends: Harry, Ron, and Hermione."

"Hello, Mr. Muto," said Hermione.

"Ah, hello. I suppose I should do that here, too. Joey, Tristan, and Téa are here as well. It's been a busy day at the shop, and they all decided to stop over and give me a hand."

"Hey, Yug!" said Joey.

"Hi!" said Téa.

"Hello everyone," said Ryou.
"Did something release today?" asked Yugi, "I didn't think Sunday was a busy day for the Game Shop."

"Industrial Illusions released their new booster pack teaser today, and the mini-packs have been flying all over the place," said Grandpa, "Even Duke's shop sold out of them, and he doesn't even focus his shop on Duel Monsters!"

"I'm glad we did well today though," said Yugi, "You ought to take a day off sometime though, Grandpa."

"Oho, don't worry about me," said Grandpa, "I plan to close the shop half the time that you're home for the holidays. And speaking of which, we are very excited to get to see you again."

"When do you guys get to come home?" asked Tristan.

"Saturday," said Ryou, "We finish classes on Friday, there's a big dance in the evening, and then the next day, we'll take the train back to London."

"With the time zone difference, you won't see us until Sunday, probably," said Yugi.

"Well, we're all looking forward to it," said Téa, "There's so much to catch up on!"

"Are your new friends coming, as well?" asked Grandpa.

"Harry is," said Yugi, "And Ron too, probably." He turned to Hermione, who sat next to Ryou on his bed. "Hermione?"

Hermione frowned in Ron's direction for a minute, before smiling in Yugi's direction. "I'd love to."

"Excellent!" said Grandpa.

"Are you sure that's alright, though?" asked Hermione, "I'm sure you'd like to spend time with Yugi and the others, since it's been so long. I wouldn't want to feel like we're intruding on your family time."

Seto reached for the coffee sitting on the edge of his bedside table with one hand, and continued typing with the other, ignoring the majority of the conversation.

"Oh, think nothing of it," said Grandpa, "Yugi's friends are all family to me. Now...we just need to hash out where everyone is going to stay. I know some of you haven't been here before, but our house isn't quite sized for guests. We might be able to hold up one of you, but it may be tight."

"It's...Hermione, right?" said Téa. "You're welcome to stay at my place. My house has a guest room you can use."

"And I have extra room too," said Ryou, "My father is currently abroad, and I don't expect him home for Christmas."

"So...uh...how you guys gettin' back, anyway?" asked Joey.

"Uh...are you flying?" asked Yugi, twisting around from his spot in the middle of the dormitory to pass a glance to his rival.

Seto nodded without looking up. "I already made travel arrangements. Adding more passengers won't be difficult."
"Well, there you have it," said Yugi.

"You'll have to tell us when you're on your way, and we can roll out the welcome mat for you," said Grandpa. "But we'll have to go for now. It's getting a bit late, and I still have to clean up the shop from earlier today. So have a good final week of classes, have a great time at your dance, and we'll see you soon!"

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Hermione was more than surprised to see Harry join her in the library Tuesday evening. Aside from their little gathering in Yugi's room Sunday making holiday arrangements, she hadn't spent much time with anyone. Ron had been hauled off by Lavender at almost every opportunity when they weren't in class, and rather than make things awkward for the rest of her friends when Ron was choosing to stay with them, she just sealed herself off in the library, and if anyone wanted to find her, they would. But, as she expected, no one usually went looking.

Seto continued to avoid the library on principle, for the same group of seventh-year Ravenclaws tended to creep on him there. And since he spent such little time in Gryffindor Tower, that meant he was off in one of the numerous empty rooms in the castle.

Yugi and Ryou usually spent time in the common room, hanging out with Harry and Ron (and occasionally, Neville, when he wasn't spending extra time in the Greenhouses), but to see Harry in the library was new, especially when he wasn't trying to write an essay. She wasn't shocked that their conversation turned to the upcoming ball, and who her date was.

"Had I been under the impression that I would be going with Ron?" she said, as they walked through the aisles, returning books to the shelves. "Yes… you know…once I asked him…but ever since the Quidditch match, that obviously wasn't going to be the case anymore."

"Yeah…" he said, "I overheard Lavender talking with Parvati that he's going with her."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "I figured. But still…I had to make other arrangements."

"Other arrangements?" Harry frowned. "I…sort of thought that since you didn't have the date you wanted…that we could go together, as friends."

Hermione stared at him blankly for a few moments, as if he had spoken some sort of foreign language, before her shoulders slumped. "Why didn't I think of that?"

Harry raised an eyebrow. "Who're you going with then?"

Hermione grimaced for a second before sighing against the bookshelf. "Cormac McLaggen."

Harry wrinkled his nose. "Cormac? Why him?"

Hermione shrugged. "I thought he would annoy Ron the most. Well…" she reconsidered her words before continuing. "Seto would annoy Ronald most, but he wasn't going. And I know that Cormac's been making eyes at me for most of term, at least while I've been working here in the library, so I ran with the idea when I found him here over the weekend."

Harry bit his lip. "Are…are you sure that this is a good idea?"

Hermione grabbed the books she was no longer using and moved across the aisles to put it back. "He's perfectly able to go to the ball with whoever he likes…and so can I. Would it make things easier on the two of us if I thought of your idea? Probably, but there's nothing we can do about that
Harry picked up a discarded copy of *The Daily Prophet* and rolled it in his fingers. "Wait – easier on both of us?"

Hermione raised an eyebrow. "You're not going to sit around all alone in the common room Friday night, are you? It's not like Ron's going to be there with you."

Harry tapped the newspaper absentmindedly against the edge of the library desk. "Well…I didn't exactly plan on him ditching me…"

Hermione did a quick side-eye glance behind her before moving in front of Harry. "Look – you need to be smart about this. You can't just take anyone."

"Why do I have to take someone?" asked Harry, "It's not like Yugi or Ryou are finding dates."

"It'll get half of the student population off your back. And like I said – you can't just take anyone."

Hermione jerked her head slightly to the side. Harry followed her gaze to see a curly-haired brunette at a corner table across the way, eyeing him.

"Do you see her?" asked Hermione, "Romilda Vane? Ginny said she was trying to brew another love potion in their dormitory last night."

Harry ended up staring at Romilda for a beat too many, because Hermione raised her arm and snapped her fingers right up in front of his eyes. "Hey! She's only interested in you because she thinks you're the *Chosen One*."

"But I am the Chosen One."

Hermione narrowed her eyes. Before Harry knew what had happened, she snatched the rolled newspaper right out of his hands and beat him over the head with it.

"Okay – sorry. Kidding?"

Hermione sighed. "I'm just saying, don't let your Yule Ball experience keep you from having a good time. You don't *have* to dance or anything if you don't want to. But everyone else is going, so you might as well come and hang out, or you'll be spending the entire evening alone and miserable."

"Okay, okay, but I really wasn't planning on going," said Harry, "And how am I expected to find a date to this thing with only three days to go? Who *wouldn't* have a partner at this stage in the game?"

~~*~~

Seto placed his laptop down onto one of the empty common room tables and made himself comfortable. Harry and Ron were getting ready for the ball with Yugi and Ryou, and he was tired of Yugi's subtle attempts to get him to change his mind about not going down with them.

There would be no dinner in the Great Hall that evening, for food was going to be served at the dance. And for anyone who decided that they weren't going to attend, small platters of sandwiches and drumsticks and jugs of pumpkin juice had been sent to each of the house common rooms from the Kitchens. So after the last afternoon class, the majority of the student body had rushed back to their dormitories to clean up and prepare for the night's festivities.

It was to no one's surprise that the guys began making their way down their dormitory staircase long before the girls. There were a few first year students that Seto recognized from the sorting ceremony
sitting around with a moving chess set, apparently just as interested in attending Umbridge's social gathering as he was.

A few of the older students (relatively, they were still a good few years younger than he was) made their way down into the common room, wearing dress robes of all sorts of styles. Despite Madam Malkin's statement that any color would do, it seemed black was still the most popular color for dressy wizard wear.

A few giggles were heard across the room as a pair of seventh years exited the girls' staircase in bright, shockingly pink robes that could have rivaled Umbridge's everyday clothes. They eagerly met up with their dates near the portrait hole and exited out into the corridor.

Yugi and Ryou arrived downstairs next, the pair in similarly-cut black robes, joining Seto at the table. Ryou reached for one of the small sandwiches. "What're you working on this time?"

"Answering emails from the meeting I missed this morning," said Seto without looking up, "And making final arrangements for tomorrow."

Yugi grinned slyly. "You know…there's still time…"

"No."

Yugi turned to Ryou and shrugged. "It's not like you need to have a date to go. Bakura and I are going alone."

"You're not going to change my mind, so you might as well give up," said Seto.

Yugi shrugged. "I tried."

"Good attempt," said Ryou, patting Yugi's shoulder. "So…you ready?"

Yugi looked back towards the stairs. "I think so. Even Harry got himself a partner, and he's meeting up with her on the way, so we might as well go."

Ryou swallowed the last of his snack and brushed a few stray crumbs from his robes. "Okay. I'm ready."

The Great Hall had definitely undergone a transformation from when they had been in during lunchtime. The four long house tables had been replaced with clusters of smaller, round ones along the edge of the Hall, leaving the center of the room open. Each table had been covered in a shiny silver tablecloth. Four large Christmas trees – each one decorated in ornaments and tinsel to reflect each school house, sat in the corners.

"Oh cool!" Yugi gasped, and pointed up. In place of the usual floating candles, huge crystal chandeliers hovered high above their heads, and the ceiling portrayed a cloudless, starry night sky. Strands of fairy lights surrounded the main and side entrances to the Great Hall, and continued out into the short corridor leading to the castle courtyard.

"I wonder what that's for over there?" said Ryou, pointing up towards the High Table…or, more so where the table used to be. In its place was a large curtain, going from wall to wall, hanging right at the edge of the top step.

"Maybe it's for a band?" said Yugi. "Or the school choir or something. I remember hearing them practice the other day."
"Mm, maybe," said Ryou.

Yugi looked around the Great Hall again. "Not to channel my inner Ron – but wasn't dinner supposed to be served here too or something?"

"Uh…." Ryou glanced around the throngs of students entering into the Hall. Two of the house tables had been set up along the wall on either side of the main entrance, covered in the same silvery cloth as the round party ones set about the room. Stacks of plates and baskets of flatware sat on the ends, but the large platters covering most of the surface were still empty. "Oh – it's along the wall with the door. We just missed it when we walked in. But nothing's served yet."

"So…is this like a dinner first, then dance sort of event? Should we get a table or something?" asked Yugi. From their spot off to the side, he was able to see some familiar faces. From their own Charms class, he recognized Crabbe and Goyle, each with one of the fifth year Slytherin twins on their arm. Pansy Parkinson arrived with Draco Malfoy, who, to Yugi's surprise, didn't seem all that interested in being there.

//He looks rather put out./

Yugi nodded internally. //Yeah. Why'd he bother to find a date if wasn't going to enjoy himself here?//

It seemed that most of the student body had arrived by the time Harry made his way inside with Luna Lovegood, dressed in an oddly layered dress that gave off the air of a Christmas tree. The silver tinsel wrapped through her hair helped complete the festive ensemble.

"Hey guys," said Harry.

"I didn't know you asked Luna to the dance," said Yugi.

Harry ran a hand through his unruly hair. "It…uh…sort of came together at the last minute."

Luna smiled dreamily at them. "It was very sweet of him. I've never gone to a dance with someone before as friends." She paused thoughtfully. "Or with anyone for that matter."

There was a loud 'clink' of a spoon against china, as Professor Umbridge stepped up to the top step in front of the curtain, dressed from head to toe in dress robes of pale pink. "Good evening, children!" she said, and for once, the sugariness in her voice sounded completely genuine. "It has been a long first term. We have all had our ups and our downs. You have all worked and studied very hard to get here. And now, before we send you back to your families for winter holiday, let us rejoice in the end of your fall term. Dinner will be set along the far wall, buffet style within the hour. In the meantime, enjoy the festivities and music by…"

She frowned and turned to Professor Flitwick. "You did book the Cornish Quartet, didn't you?"

Professor Flitwick clasped his hands behind his back and smiled innocently. A few nearby students snickered.

Umbridge eyed him suspiciously before addressing the crowd. "As a few reminders, curfew will be extended until the early hours, but for those returning home, please remember that the Hogwarts Express will be leaving promptly one hour after the close of breakfast tomorrow morning. We want you to enjoy yourselves as much as possible, but the Great Hall will close at 2:00. If the crowds become too much for you, the courtyard is also open, but leaving the castle altogether is still strictly prohibited."
Professor Flitwick stepped forward suddenly, tapping his wand against his throat and drowning out Umbridge's list of banned activities. "And now – a group that needs no introduction...the Weird Sisters!"

Umbridge's jaw dropped, and any stern words of protest she could think to give to her colleague were drowned by the roar of excitement that echoed through the Great Hall. The curtain hiding the very front of the room disappeared, revealing the band, and most of the students surged forward towards the base of the steps going up to the front of the hall. Harry was grateful for the newfound breathing room.

"Well...at least I don't have to waltz this time."

"Oh, I'm sure you would be fine," said Luna, "My mother taught me when I was little."

"No, I'm being serious," said Harry, "You missed the Yule Ball, so you wouldn't have seen me crush Parvati's feet in the opening dance."

"Well, the music is catchy," said Yugi, swaying his head to the song.

Ryou listened to the lyrics. "...What is a hippogriff, anyway?"

Yugi shrugged, laughing. "Who knows!"

They stayed relatively close to the edge of the crowd, and grabbed a table once the serving platters filled up with food. There were so many more options than a normal night's dinner that it reminded Yugi of the opening feast, and he had to remind himself not to overeat like he did when they first arrived, or the rest of the evening wouldn't go over so well.

"There you are, Harry," said Ron, dropping down into a seat at their table. "I was looking around for you."

"We've been hanging out towards the back," said Ryou, "Less attention that way."

Ron nodded. "Got that right. I've been stuck in the center of the mob for a while."

Yugi looked around. "Where's Lavender? Didn't you two come together?"

Ron tilted his head towards one of the long house tables. "She's getting us both plates."

"Hey guys!" said Ginny, leading Neville out of the throng of dancing students. "Got room for two more?"

Harry beckoned to the half-empty table. "Go for it."

"This has been so much fun," said Neville, "Just like the Yule Ball. I'm surprised they haven't done something like this every year."

"The school hasn't needed a pick-me-up until last year," said Ginny, eyeing Lavender join them and giggly latch onto Ron's arm as she delivered them food.

"I imagine if Umbridge announced a party like this last year, no one would have gone," said Harry. "Considering how miserable she made everything."

Neville took a bite of his potato. "Well...it's not like a lot has changed this year. She's not making Defense Against the Dark Arts class any better. She just can't fire half of the staff this go around."
Ginny raised an eyebrow at Ron. "Have you been trying some of Lavender's makeup?"

Ron wrinkled his nose. "What? No, what are you on about?"

Ginny rolled her eyes. "It's all over you. What have you two been doing, having a face-sucking contest?"

"Go mind your own business, Ginny."

Lavender finished eating and tugged on Ron's arm. "Ready to go back?"

Ron shook his head. "Not just yet. I'm starving."

Lavender giggled and let go of his arm. "Alright – find me when you're done!"

"Finally," Ron muttered once Lavender had squeezed back into the crowd. "I thought I was gonna lose feeling in my arm."

"Why didn't you tell her to let go?"

Ron shrugged and stabbed his fork back into his piece of meat.

"Oh," said Luna, "There's Hermione and her date!"

Ron turned around in his seat, and his eyes narrowed. "Is she…with Cormac McLaggen?"

Harry swallowed nervously. "Looks like it."

Ron pushed his plate away and stalked back towards where Lavender was gathered with a few other sixth year girls.

Harry was close enough that he could hear him ask her to grab seats at a table, but his eyes widened when once Cormac's back was turned, Hermione slipped out of the Great Hall and towards the courtyard.

"Cormac…wasn't he the guy who almost became Keeper?" asked Ryou.

Yugi nodded. "Yeah. I remember him talking down at the Pitch that day. He's…uh…a little brutish, and really full of himself."

"Hardly seems like the kind of person she would want to go with," said Ryou.

Harry sighed. "Yeah."

The music began to pick up again, and Ryou nudged Yugi towards the makeshift stage. "Guess the band's done with their break."

"You two didn't find dates, did you?" asked Ginny.

Yugi shook his head. "We're friending it here."

"Well, lucky for you that Neville's taking a break, isn't that right?"

Neville blinked. "Huh?"

"Well, you're not going to waste all that food, right?" asked Ginny, pointing to his plate.
"Oh, well…"

"My point exactly," said Ginny. She got up and grabbed both Yugi and Ryō's arms. "You're not going to go this entire evening without having at least one dance with someone."

"B-but I'm a terrible dancer," Ryō protested.

Ginny snorted. "Then watch where you put your feet. It could be worse – I could have been one of the crazies trying to spike your tea all the time."

Neville paused, his fork halfway to his mouth and watched her drag Yugi and Ryō into the crowd. "Did I just lose my date?"

Harry nodded. "Yeah."

"I'll dance with you, Neville. You don't mind, do you, Harry?" said Luna.

Harry shook his head. "Not at all. And if his dance moves are anything like they were for the Yule Ball, you won't have to worry about him breaking your toes," he said. "In fact, if you guys don't mind, I'm going to head outside for a breath of fresh air for a second. I'll be right back."

"Okay," said Neville.

Harry found Hermione sitting at the edge of the courtyard fountain, trying to fix her hair in the reflection of the water, her back to the doorway leading into the castle. An abandoned tray of dragon tarter snacks sat on the opposite side of the fountain.

"Hermione?"

She jumped and whirled around. "Oh – Harry, it's only you." She sighed loudly, visibly relieved. "For a moment I thought you were Cormac."

Harry looked her over. Her hair was coming out of the sleek bun she had made, and her pale blue dress was slightly rumpled. "Are you…okay?"

"Fine," she said, dipping her hand into the water. She attempted again to fix her hair, and wipe any lipstick smudges away. "I've escaped – I mean – left Cormac, from under mistletoe."

She rubbed at her arms, "I'm almost regretting this decision entirely."

"What – asking him to the ball?"

She nodded. "He's vile. If it weren't for the fact that Ron can't stand him, I wouldn't have bothered."

Harry paused, not sure how to really ask his next question. "…All of this, the date with McLaggen, all the hanging out you do with Seto…is this all because of him and Lavender?"

Hermione glared at him for a second, and was about to retort when she heard footsteps heading their way. She peered around the side of the fountain and paled. "Oh no – here he comes." She looked at Harry fiercely. "I was not here. Got it?"

Harry nodded as she darted out of view. The instant Cormac was far enough past the courtyard entryway, she slipped past and back towards the Great Hall.

Cormac shoved his hands into the pockets of his robes and looked around the courtyard. "Huh. I thought I saw Hermione Granger out here."
Harry shook his head. "Don't think so." Looking past McLaggen, he paled slightly as he saw Snape exit the Great Hall, look his way for a moment before heading in his direction.

Cormac shrugged. "Huh. Slippery little minx, your friend." He reached for the tray and popped one of the appetizers in his mouth, chewing for a moment before making a face. "What is this, anyway?"

Harry deadpanned. "Dragon balls."

Cormac's eyes widened and he twisted to the side, spitting it out… right onto Snape's feet.

Snape scrunched his face, disgusted. "You've just bought yourself a month's detention, McLaggen, the instant you step foot back in the school next term."

Harry had never seen Cormac move so fast to get out of the courtyard, but Snape stopped him when he tried to follow.

"Not so fast, Potter."

Harry bit his lip. "Please, Professor, I should really get back to the Great Hall. I'm sure my date – "

"…Will do without you for another moment longer. I am merely delivering a message from the Headmaster."

Harry blinked. "A message, sir?"

Snape's face was sour, clearly unhappy about being a messenger. "He asked that I give you his best and that he hopes you enjoy your holiday abroad. He's traveling, and won't return until term resumes."

Harry frowned. "Traveling where?"

Snape scowled down at Harry for another moment longer before turning on his heel and heading back into the castle.

Harry sat back against the edge of the fountain. Where was Dumbledore going? He had barely been in the school for the majority of the first term. For all of the talk of these lessons, he had barely spent any time at all in Dumbledore's office, and could only guess that his long breaks from the school were to gather necessary supplies.

Looking down, Harry picked up one of the snacks off the tray and sniffed it. It smelled horrid, and probably tasted just as pleasant. No wonder the entire platter was sitting out here, completely abandoned in favor of the more delicious items inside.

He got up to head back inside. Harry was almost to the open archway when he saw Snape quickly lead Malfoy out of the Great Hall and down a side corridor, neither of them looking particularly happy.

Harry cursed himself for leaving the Invisibility Cloak upstairs in Gryffindor Tower, but crept closer anyway, choosing to hide behind one of the oversized stone gargoyles in case they walked back towards the ball.

"…Maybe I did hex that Bell girl. Maybe I didn't. What's it to you?"

Harry narrowed his eyes. He knew Malfoy had something to do with Katie being cursed!
"…You are getting sloppy. Let me assist you –"

"–NO!"

"I swore to protect you," said Snape, "I made the Unbreakable Vow…." 

Harry furrowed his brow. An unbreakable vow? What was that? And why did Snape need to protect Malfoy?

"…Then it looks like you'll have to break it," said Malfoy harshly, "Because I don't need your protection. It's my job, and I'm doing it. I've got a plan, and it'll work, it's just taking longer than I thought."

"You are afraid, Draco, despite your attempts to conceal it."

"Stop," said Malfoy, and he sounded slightly more…desperate? "Don't you see? I was chosen for this. Me, out of everyone else. I can't fail him. I won't. This is my moment, my shot for glory, and no one is going to foul this up for me."

As angry footsteps rapidly approached, Harry pressed himself closer to the stone gargoyle as Malfoy returned to the party, with Snape trailing after him a few moments later. Once he was sure they were back inside the Great Hall, Harry sagged back against the wall and let out a loud exhale.

Not only was he no closer to finding out what Malfoy was up to…now he had even more questions.
Yugi was glad he wasn't the only tired one at breakfast the following morning. Neville looked like he was going to face plant right into his oatmeal. Not that he could blame him. He and Ryou stayed in the Great Hall well past midnight, and both Neville and Ginny were still partying in the center of the Hall with some of the older students when they finally called it quits. At that point, most of the school had already gone to bed. The Weird Sisters had switched from their more upbeat rock to slower ballads considering everyone refusing to return to their dormitories was just too tired to keep up with the faster beat.

He lost track of what happened to Harry or the others, but after Luna partnered up with Neville for a few dances while Ginny had both himself and Ryou, he guessed Harry might have left the ball early. Ron spent the entire time with Lavender and some of her giggly friends, and they left shortly before he did. Hermione had slipped back into the Great Hall, but he didn't see her again for the rest of the night. And the common room was completely deserted when they made it back to Gryffindor Tower – even Seto had gone to bed before they did.

"We missed you at the party," said Yugi, to Hermione, as she sat down between him and Seto. "What happened to you last night?"

Hermione frowned and did a quick glance around them. Harry and Ron had yet to arrive. "Oh. I left early."

"I guess it wasn't what you thought it would be, huh?" asked Ryou.

Hermione shook her head and sighed, propped her chin up on one arm, and poked at her scrambled eggs with her fork. "Cormac wasn't how I thought he'd be," she muttered under her breath.

Seto gave a questioning glance her way before returning back to The Daily Prophet.

Hermione managed a small bite of her food before she looked back up again and forced herself to smile. "Did you guys at least have fun?"

Ryou nodded. "I thought, after all of the stalking and gift-giving that happened these past few weeks, that I'd be pestered for attention all night, but surprisingly that wasn't the case. We stuck around with Harry and Luna, and Ginny eventually got both of us out onto the dance floor for a good while."

"It was fun," said Yugi, "And the Weird Sisters are a pretty cool group. I've never really paid much attention to wizard music before."

"The Weird Sisters were here during the Yule Ball too," said Hermione, thinking back. "I remember some of their hits. But I'm glad you had a good time."

Yugi smiled as Harry and Ron made their way to their area of the Gryffindor table. "And now it's
pretty much smooth sailing. I'm so excited to see Grandpa and the others, and in just a few hours, too!"

Seto turned the page of *The Daily Prophet* and reached for his second cup of coffee. "It's going to be a bit longer than you think it will."

Yugi pouted. "Really?"

"What's gonna be longer than you think?" asked Harry.

Seto rolled his eyes. "Think about it. The train ride to get here took about six hours, so we're not going to make it back to London until mid-afternoon. And then there's a twelve hour flight to get back to Japan, and time will be moving against us heading home."

Ron scrunched up his face as if he swallowed something unpleasant. "So we're gonna sit around for an entire day? That stinks – what are we supposed to do for that time?"

Hermione purposely didn't look in Ron's direction, but her eyes lit up. "Oooh, think of the schoolwork we can get a head start on before the next term begins!"

Ryou groaned. "But we don't have any homework yet!"

"But there will be so much time! We all know what Umbridge is going to have us do, so we can start the next couple of chapters in that book, or start reading up on the theory behind some of the more advanced spellwork for Professor Flitwick or McGonagall."

Yugi wasn't listening, but tallying up hours off his fingers. "...So we may not see anyone...until tomorrow? We're going to miss a whole day?" The previous burst of excitement in his voice was long gone now.

"Why not use a Portkey, like how we first arrived? Think of all the time it would save," said Ryou.

Seto spared him a quick annoyed glance before returning to his newspaper. "I've already said on more than one occasion that I don't trust Portkeys. And I've been flying to and from Domino since the semester began. I can't begin to tell you how full my work schedule is once I get back. It appears that anyone and everyone has been harassing the office to find out when I would be going home, and it would look rather odd if I don't return the same way I left."

Ryou waved his fork at him, curiously. "What about us? We didn't fly to Ron's house when we left."

Seto didn't bother to look up again. "How lucky for you two that the only people who knew you left town were your quiet little circle of friends, and not corporate partners, investors, a good couple hundred employees, and some all-around nosy people."

He didn't lift his head back up until he finished reading the *Prophet*. Folding it back together, and passing it to Hermione, he leveled them all with a hard stare as he got up from the table. "You didn't have to come home with me. My travel arrangements have been set for at least a week. It's not my fault you didn't think of how long it would take to get back to Domino until now. So unless you're going to try and wrangle something else in the last hour we get to spend here, then I would bring something to do for the flight."

"What are you gonna do then?" asked Ron.

Seto snorted. "I've got work to do."
Harry watched him leave the Great Hall and turned to Yugi. "Does he ever not have work to do?"

Yugi shook his head. "Doesn't seem like it."

"I've been on long flights before," said Ryou, "Sometimes they play movies to keep you entertained, or you can bring a book to read, or even just take a nap."

Ron blinked. "What's a movie?"

Ryou scratched at the back of his head. "Oh...right, you wouldn't know what that is. Well, I'll show you when we get on the plane."

"Why don't you bring a chessboard or something?" asked Hermione. She happened to look towards the door to see Cormac walk in and meet up with some other seventh-year boys, and paled slightly.

Harry looked to Ron. "We could...."

Yugi looked to where Hermione's eyes were drawn and frowned. "Are you okay?" he asked quietly.

Hermione shook her head a little too quickly. "Fine. I just remembered I have to pack something. I'll meet up with you later."

Yugi sighed as he watched her get up and leave the Great Hall, taking the completely unnecessary route around the Ravenclaw table to do so.

/I think this rivalry between Ron and Hermione has taken a turn for the worse./

/I think so too. The only reason I could see her wanting to go with McLaggen to the ball last night was to annoy Ron. Obviously, something backfired yesterday, because she's really uncomfortable whenever he's around. I hope she's okay./

Yami leaned against his side of the wall in their corridor. /We could go after her. She may not have wanted to talk in front of the others./

/Maybe later? I don't want to feel like we're prying. Hopefully the change of scenery back home will mend some friendships. I don't want this vacation to be awkward for anyone..../

Ryou nudged Yugi's arm, oblivious to his mental conversation. "...Or we can play Duel Monsters," said Ryou. "What do you say, Yugi?"

Yugi blinked. "Uh, yeah, sure!"

"So long as you don't shuffle the deck, Ryou, that's fine with me," said Ron.

Ryou hung his head and tried to stifle a laugh. "Come on, that was months ago!"

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"I'm glad we can leave the trunks here," said Ryou, as they walked the path leading from the carriages up to the train platform. "Lugging those things stink."

"Yeah, though I was worried I wouldn't fit everything in my bag," said Ron, "Usually I'd just go home for Christmas, and all my stuff is back at the Burrow. I haven't had to pack for a two week vacation in a few years."

Yugi looked up and down the platform. "There's not a lot of students here," he said, "You don't
think we're one of the last people to get on, do you? I hope there's an empty compartment."

"I snuck a peek at the sign-up list to stay on for the holidays," said Harry, "It was fairly long, which both makes sense…and is weird at the same time. A lot of people are freaking out now, so you'd think they'd want their kids home as much as possible. But…at the same time, Hogwarts is still one of the safest places in Britain, so it also seems reasonable that they'd want them staying for Christmas." He shrugged. "Oh well. I'm just happy that I'm not going home to Privet Drive."

"Have you ever gone back to your aunt and uncle for the holidays?"

Harry quickly shook his head. "Oooh, no. Our Christmas gifts to each other are not having to go home to see them until the summer. And even then, it's just for a few weeks until I end up at Ron's place."

They found an empty compartment and shuffled inside. Hermione hurried up the aisle to join them and closed the door behind her.

"Where's Kaiba?" asked Ryou.

"I think I heard him mention a call or something on the carriage ride over," said Yugi, shrugging. "So I bet he went off looking for an empty room."

Harry was honestly surprised at the idle chatter that continued as the train started moving out of Hogsmeade Station. The last time all of his friends were able to sit around and have a casual conversation without anyone erupting into an argument felt like so long ago, and in a way it was, because Ron and Hermione's fighting had come to a boiling point once the Christmastime ball had been announced. Over a month ago. Were Ron and Hermione speaking amiably to each other now? …Not really. But they weren't fighting, so that was a plus.

But he didn't add too much to their conversation – his mind was currently elsewhere, replaying the bit of conversation he had heard between Malfoy and Snape over and over again.

"I need your thoughts on something," he said finally, drawing all their eyes to him. "So…I overheard Malfoy talking at the ball last night…." 

Hermione's shoulders slumped. "Harry…." 

Harry held up his hands. "Wait. Just, please, hear me out. I heard Malfoy and Snape talking. What's an Unbreakable Vow?"

Ron tilted his head. "An Unbreakable Vow? You're sure that's what you heard?"

Harry nodded. "Yeah. Snape made one. He didn't say what for though."

Ron shook his head. "It couldn't have been one."

Yugi looked between them, curiously. "Why not? Why couldn't it have been an Unbreakable Vow? What's so special about one, anyway?"

"Well you can't break an Unbreakable Vow," said Ron.

"I think we caught onto that, oddly enough," Ryou said. "So what happens if…"

He trailed off, looking to the compartment's door with a raised eyebrow. The others turned to see what he was looking at. Yugi and Harry both wore confused faces, Ron's somewhere between
smiling and cringing, and Hermione simply glared.

On the other side of the door, in the hallway, stood Lavender Brown. She waved to Ron and mouthed 'I miss you!'

Ron's eyes flitted to Hermione for a brief second, as he smiled uncomfortably at Lavender.

Lavender held up her hands, formed her fingers into a heart and smiled back through the door. When it seemed clear that Ron wasn't going to get up, she leaned forward and breathed heavily onto the door. Raising a finger to the foggy glass, she drew another heart, and placed an 'R + L' inside, with a few smaller hearts around it. When she was done, she breathed all over the glass again so everyone inside could see her artistic handiwork, smiled back at Ron, and allowed herself to be ushered away by some of her giggly Hufflepuff friends.

Hermione quickly got up from her seat and reached for her bag in the bin along the top of the compartment. "I think I'm going to go vomit."

Yugi cringed as she slammed the door shut behind her.

Ron slumped down into his seat and watched Lavender's artwork fade off of the door. "Not that I don't mind the affection, but lately all she wants to do is kiss and cuddle me." He leaned towards Yugi and Harry on the other side of the compartment. "See? My lips are all chapped."

Harry held up his hand to block him. "Ooo--kay, I'll take your word for it."

Ryou cleared his throat, awkwardly. "...Uh. Anyway...what happens if you break an Unbreakable Vow?"

"You die."

Harry tapped his fingers against the seat. "I wonder why Snape would make one. Sure, Malfoy's his favorite student, but still...."

"You're certain that Snape made an Unbreakable Vow?"

Harry nodded. "I heard him say so. Somehow, he's mixed up in whatever Malfoy's been plotting."

Ryou sighed. "I don't see how you're going to find out. Even with your invisibility cloak, it's not like you can stalk his movements all day long. You have classes and things to attend to."

"You think he's spilled any information of his plan to maybe Crabbe or Goyle? Or even Pansy Parkinson. They're always with him," said Yugi.

Ron snorted. "Good luck trying to weasel anything out of them."

Harry looked up thoughtfully. "There is a way...."

Yugi blinked. "How?"

Harry grinned in Ron's direction. "Remember second year with the Polyjuice Potion?"

Ron groaned and slumped back against the window. "You've got to be kidding, mate."

"Why? What's Polyjuice Potion?" asked Ryou.

"It transforms you into someone else," said Harry, "We used it to sneak into the Slytherin common
room to find out if Malfoy was the Heir of Slytherin." He suddenly looked excited. "Could always
do it again to find out what Malfoy's up to…"

Ron shook his head. "Reality check, mate. Unless you're gonna make it on your own, you're going
to need Hermione's help, and you know she's not going to brew that again."

Harry shrugged. "She might."

Yugi frowned. "I don't know, she hasn't really been into your suspicions about Malfoy so far…"

"I mean, I suppose you can ask her," said Ryou, "The worst thing that can happen is that she says
no."

"Well, I'm glad someone is in my court on this," said Harry.

"Sneaking up on people like that though is more or less something that my spirit would be into, but if
you think that Malfoy is really up to something dangerous, it would be better to find out what it is
and stop it before something bad happens to anyone else," said Ryou.

"Just one problem," said Ron. "Some of the ingredients to make that potion came from Snape's
storeroom, remember? You really think we'll make off with them again without getting caught?"

Harry nodded. "I thought about that." He turned to Yugi and Ryou. "You guys still have those extra
classes, right?"

Yugi nodded. "I think we're almost done with Herbology, but we do still have Potions."

"I can sneak in while Snape's busy with your extra class and get what we need. He won't see me
under the Invisibility Cloak."

"Yeah?" said Ron, "Are you going to brew it? For a month?"

Harry's face fell.

~~*~~

Hermione ducked into the compartment, slid the door shut, and pulled the little curtain over the door
the instant Cormac McLaggen walked past.

Seto caught the slightest glimpse of McLaggen passing by before turning back to his computer
screen. "Hiding from someone?"

Hermione sank down on the seat opposite him and curled up by the window. "He's so…ugh. I don't
think I've ever had such terrible judgement before."

"I could have told you that taking McLaggen to the ball was a terrible idea."

Hermione glared at him. "Then why didn't you?"

"He came up to me in the common room last night while waiting for you, apparently under the
impression that it was I you were trying to make jealous. Until then, I hadn't the slightest idea – or
care – to who you decided to take." He clicked to send his email off and lowered the laptop lid
slightly. "What were you thinking, anyway?"

Hermione sighed. "I was just…so tired of Ron's jealous…" She waved her arms, trying to come up
with the right words. "…Jealous fantasy that he had cooked in his head for the thousandth time that I
acted on it. He wanted to believe that I would rather go with someone who he thought was more successful or popular, or whatever than him? So I found someone that fit the bill."

Seto reached for his coffee mug. "You probably could have asked anyone and it would have been enough."

Hermione scowled. "If you weren't so opposed to going in the first place, I would have asked you."

Seto rolled his eyes and checked his watch. "Thank you for leaving me out of it."

Hermione quietly huffed and looked out the window. The cloudy sky was starting to darken. They were probably going to hit a storm before making it back to London. "Well. All he wanted to do was talk about his family's amazing relationship with Minister Scrimgeour and other high-officials in the Ministry of Magic, or how great he was at every Quidditch position, and how Harry chose Ron out of favoritism during tryouts, even though he completely butchered his last trial."

Seto crossed his arms. "You mean how confused he was?"

Hermione's eyes widened. "W-what are you talking about?"

"Are you really going to sit there and tell me that you didn't place a Confundus Charm on him for his last save?"

Hermione's gaze dropped down to her lap, and then back out the window again. Having been behind Seto and Ryou, she didn't think anyone had seen her slyly cast the spell and slip her wand back into her jacket. Well…there was no point in denying it now, and she didn't want to damage the odd friendship she made with Seto by lying to him as well. "…Are you going to tell Harry and Ron?"

Seto snorted. "Tryouts were months ago. If I was going to rat you out, I would have."

Hermione hugged her arms to her chest. "I think I was punished for it last night."

Set phased out of the Millennium Rod with a concerned look on his face. "Why? What happened?"

Hermione shook her head, noting that while Set was still visible to her on the train; his form was more translucent than back in the castle. "It's nothing."

Set tilted his head. "Obviously it is, or it would not be upsetting you."

"What did he do?" said Seto.

Hermione let out a silent snort. "You'll have to be more specific."

Set and Seto exchanged looks.

Hermione settled back into the corner of the seat and drew her knees up closer to her chest. "I should have known better, really. After the lewd-ish looks during Quidditch tryouts, and some of the overheard comments throughout the year, it would have been...a bad idea to hook up with Cormac, even if it was just for the one evening...."

"Yet you did it anyway," said Seto flatly.

"It didn't seem to have any effect on Ron at all," she said hotly, "Except maybe push him away. And Cormac..." she shuddered, "...pretty much just wanted to treat us like the entirety of Ron and Lavender's relationship."
Set narrowed his eyes dangerously and tightened his grip on his transparent Millennium Rod. "He didn't…"

Hermione rolled her eyes. "No…but the night went downhill, and I just – oof!" She had to brace her arm against the window as the train suddenly lurched to a stop. Seto threw an arm out to keep his laptop from teetering over the edge of the small foldout table as she righted herself and tried to look out the now frosted-over window.

"There's no way we're back in London," said Seto.

Hermione shook her head, got up, and poked her head out of the compartment. A few other students did the same out of their own booths, but it didn't seem like anyone was willing to leave their seats to figure out what was going on.

Eventually, an Auror that Hermione recognized as one of the Hogwarts guards, entered the car, and moved his way towards the other end of the train.

"Stay in your seats," he said gruffly. "We'll be moving again shortly."

"What happened?" asked one of the Hufflepuffs in the next compartment. "Why have we stopped?"

"Never you mind," said the Auror. "It's being handled."

"I heard there were dementors nearby," a Slytherin said loudly from the other side of their train car.

"I heard Death Eaters," said one of the second year Ravenclaws, frightened.

"Enough," said the Auror, "It's a minor delay. Back to your seats!"

"People are speculating," said Hermione, returning inside. "But the Aurors on the train aren't saying anything, probably so they don't freak everyone out."

"I doubt the train's broken down, I'm sure this thing – like everything else in your world – runs on magic, if only partly," said Seto. "And if the Aurors aren't saying anything, they either don't know… or don't want to cause panic. Both of those aren't very comforting."

Hermione shook her head, and then nearly jumped in her seat as their compartment door slid open, admitting Yugi, Ryou, Harry, and Ron.

"There you are," said Yugi to Hermione, "We came looking for you when you never came back."

"Oh…sorry," said Hermione, though she didn't quite sound it at all.

The frost on the window continued to grow, and a cold chill started working its way into the compartment. Through the glass, they could see the sky continue to darken as a few rain droplets hit the window, signaling the start of foul weather.

Ryou rubbed his hands together as the lights in the compartment flickered twice before going completely out, leaving the only artificial light in the room coming from Seto's reopened laptop. "I have a bad feeling…"

"Me too," said Harry, drawing his wand from his pocket. The temperature had considerably dropped, and his breath was visible in the air. "This was just like in our third year."

They heard the sound of glass shattering from somewhere nearby, and both Yugi and Harry moved back towards the compartment door. "I don't know about you guys, but I'm not going to sit here and
do nothing," said Harry, "Someone might need help."

Neville suddenly ran past and skidded to a stop when he spotted Harry and the others in their compartment. "Hey – I've been looking for you everywhere! We need you, Harry."

"What's going on?"

Neville pointed out the window. "Dementors were spotted nearby. Apparently they've been roaming this area since Death Eaters ravaged a nearby Muggle village, and some of them moved towards the train, so that's why we stopped. The Aurors didn't want them chasing it all the way back to London."

"Are the Aurors doing anything about it?" asked Ryou.

"Yeah, but I've been trying to rally the rest of the DA to help. We could use another couple of good Patronuses out there."

Harry nodded. "On it." He looked to Ron and Hermione. "You guys coming?"

"Of course!" said Ron. Hermione nodded.

"Can we help?" asked Yugi.

Hermione bit her lip. "We haven't gone over Patronus charms yet."

"That's the only spell you can use?" asked Ryou.

Harry nodded. "Yeah. I guess…just stay put, we'll see if we can help."

Yugi frowned, but nodded. If they weren't able to cast the spells, then he didn't want to get in the way of anyone who could. He slumped down onto the seat as Neville led Harry, Ron, and Hermione down the corridor. "I don't like being helpless like this. I wish there was something we could do."

Seto paused typing for a moment. "Can't stand not being the one to save the day for once, can you?"

Yugi sighed. "There's nothing wrong with wanting to help others."

The clatter of fingers flying back over the keys started up again. "What about helping yourself? You run headfirst into every problem, and where has that gotten you in the past?"

Yugi felt Yami scowl from within their mind link. "Not all of that was our doing. You can't say that I went looking for Marik or Pegasus or any of that. Trouble found us!"

Seto didn't respond to him.

Ryou tried to look back out the window. "It's almost impossible to see what's going on. We must be on the wrong side of the train. I hope everyone's alright."

Yugi nodded. "There were only a couple of Aurors on the train with us. I don't know how many Dementors there were, but hopefully that's enough to keep them away."

"It's chilly in here. I hope we can get moving soon." Ryou made to reach up into the luggage bin above him, but paused, frowning. He had forgotten – this wasn't the compartment they had first settled in on the train. "Oh, I left my jacket in the other booth."

Yugi shrugged and got up. "I'll go get it. I want to stretch anyways."
"Just be careful," said Ryou.

Yugi nodded and headed back down the corridor towards their original compartment. He was nearing the door leading into the next train car when he stopped and rubbed at his arms, feeling the sudden burst of cold air in the hallway. The end compartment was open and empty. The window had blown out.

"I guess that was the glass breaking that we heard before," said Yugi.

Yami agreed. /I wonder how it broke. These windows are usually pretty sturdy./

/Do you think a Dementor got onto the train?/

/I don't know. Let's just find Bakura's jacket and get back to the others./

The seats in the next car were almost just as empty. Yugi didn't remember passing by so many empty compartments when they all went looking for Hermione when the train stopped. Maybe people went off in search of their friends, or to find the conductor or the kind food trolley lady to figure out what the delay was.

Their old booth looked just how they had left it, other than the large accumulation of ice over the window. Yugi found Ryou's jacket in the top of the bin. He peered across both luggage bins for anything else that might have been left behind.

The train seemed to get colder and colder the closer he got back to where Ryou and Kaiba were waiting. Yugi reached forward for the door handle, eager to get back to the next car. But once the freezing door swung open, Yugi let out a surprised yelp and staggered backwards.

In his way was a monstrous figure, taking up the entirety of the doorway from the floor to the ceiling of the train car. Its face was hidden beneath the hood of its ragged, black, tattered cloak. It didn't seem to have much of a physical body, but its hands were greyish and scabbed, and looked almost decayed, reminding Yugi of one of the reaper cards in Duel Monsters. There didn't seem to be any feet on it, as it glided through the doorway towards him.

/Yami!/

Yugi sounded panicky. /Look – what's going on?/

Yami watched in horror as a part of him seemed to siphon itself away towards the first figure's head, disappearing under the long hood. It wasn't painful, and his body didn't disappear like in his previous Shadow Game against Marik's dark side, but it left him feeling empty, colder than before.
As the second one began gliding across the hallway, another stream phased towards that one.

He had to assume that these were the Dementors Harry and the others had spoken about. Yami remembered Harry and the others say that the Patronus Charm was the only true defense against creatures like this, and his heart fell. Unless someone knowing how to cast one came along within the next several seconds, they were effectively trapped.

He pulled out his wand and cast a quick shield charm, but it didn't seem to repel the creatures at all.

Yami gasped. As the front one came closer, he began to hear echoes in his mind. Voices, memories of some of his – and Yugi's – worst experiences.

"I'm done playing your games, Pegasus!"

"My dear, Yugi-boy, you don't have a choice! You've lost our little game, and now you'll see the full extent of my Millennium Eye!"

/Noo…/ Yugi slumped against the wall next to his soul room's door, and pressed his hands against his forehead, trying to drown out his memory of his grandfather teetering over the edge of their couch, falling soulless to the floor in their living room. /…Not this…/

/You have to fight it, Yugi!/

The first Dementor was within arm's reach now, and Yami slapped his wand down at its rotten wrist before it could grab him. Surprisingly, red sparks burst from his wand, and the Dementor backed off, only briefly.

A burst of Joey losing consciousness at the end of his duel against Marik in Battle City flashed before his eyes and tried to shake his head to clear the memories from his mind, but it was no use. The closer both of the Dementors got to him, the more he felt everything except despair and fear sucked out of his body.

Both of the Dementors reached him now, and Yami stumbled. His vision of the train car was fading out, and all he saw was the green hue of a dark magic he had tried very hard to put behind him.

"Time for you to pay up, Pharaoh."

"No! Pharaoh, I won't let this happen to you!"

Yami weakly lifted his head. The Dementors were no longer there, just Yugi, enveloped in the green glowing circle.

"Yugi?" he cried. "No!"

/Pharaoh…/

"…It only needs one of us, so I'm letting the seal take me instead."

Yami felt himself fall, and saw an odd white flash of light through the Orichalcos stealing away Yugi's soul, and everything went dark.

~~*~~

The chill that had enveloped him was gone, as were the visions of Pegasus and the Orichalcos. Yugi opened his eyes, but then shut them again against the warm light from the compartment lamps. After
wandering the train in the dark, even the glow of indirect light was blinding.

"Yugi?" asked Hermione, worriedly. Her voice sounded like it came directly above him. "Are you alright?"

Yugi's eyes fluttered open again. He was back in Seto's compartment, sprawled across one of the seats. His head lay in Hermione's lap, and she looked down worriedly at him.

"Ugh…" Yugi moaned, sitting up, rubbed at his eyes, and looked around the compartment. Since he had been spread out across one of the seats, Harry, Ron, and Ryou were on the other side of the booth. Harry and Ron had been looking over some wizarding trading cards, but had put them down when he sat up, and were observing him carefully. Ryou was sitting up, yet slumped against the corner of the bench and the window, which was no longer frosted over. He appeared to be asleep, and Yugi was surprised to see the Millennium Ring shining brightly against the lamplight. The Ring had been hidden when he had left to find Ryou's jacket. Did that mean the Dementors had found Kaiba and Bakura too?

When he had fully righted himself, he felt something slide down his shoulders and land in his lap. Yugi looked down and picked it up. It was Kaiba's suit jacket. A second quick glance around revealed that his rival wasn't there with them. Hermione was seated where Kaiba had been, the laptop was closed, and a large pile of chocolate candy had pretty much overtaken the table. Clearly the trolley lady had been by.

The train car shook slightly, and Yugi's eyes went back to the window. The train was moving again, but most importantly –the sun had set. …How long had he been unconscious?

"It's been a few hours," said Harry, before Yugi could even voice his question. "You've been out the longest. We were really worried about you."

"What happened? Yugi asked quietly. "Those creatures…those were Dementors?"

Harry nodded, picked up a large hunk of the chocolate and handed it to him. "Here, eat. Trust me, the chocolate helps."

Yugi didn't feel hungry, but nibbled on a corner of the bar anyway. "What…what did they do?"

"They're soulless beings," Harry explained, "And they take the happiness and joy out of everything. They feed on the fear and despair of others. That's probably why they were hanging around that Muggle village after that Death Eater attack. All that sorrow was like free food to them. But then they rounded on the train." He shook his head. "Anyway, some of them managed to get on board, but between all the DA members Neville managed to round up, and the Aurors, we were able to send them away."

"After the Dementors outside were repelled, we followed the Aurors back onto the train," said Ron, "They went to make sure everyone was alright, and we found Seto and Ryou unconscious, but his Ring was glowing and there were no Dementors here." said Hermione, "But since you weren't here, Harry went looking for you."


Ron nodded. "Yeah. They do that. When they suck all the joy out of you, all that's left are your worst memories before they kiss you."

Yugi's eyes widened and he dropped Seto's jacket back onto his lap. "They what?"
"The Dementor's Kiss. They suck out your soul and leave you an empty shell," said Harry. "You're not dead…but there's really nothing left to you after that."

"Ryou – well, Bakura said it was like having your mind and soul stripped to the Shadow Realm," said Ron, "Only in this case, you'd still be awake and conscious, just a vegetable."

Yugi looked from Harry to Ron to Hermione. "You three didn't seem affected all that much…in comparison to us, I guess."

Harry gave him a small smile. "Well…don't be so sure. We've dealt with them before, and are able to defend against them. But anyone who's had a lot of darkness or sadness and terrible memories in their life…gets it worse. Until I learned how to fight against them, I was clocking out all the time. They always got to me worse than Ron or Hermione."

Yugi nodded towards Ryou. "Is…is Bakura okay?"

Ron nodded. "Yeah…we think so. When he came to, Spirit of the Ring was controlling him, but neither of them was feeling too great. Ryou's just sleepin' it off now."

Yugi bit his lip. He knew Ryou had a difficult life when he was a child, and sharing headspace with the evil spirit definitely didn't help matters. But they didn't know much about the Dark Bakura. Compounded together, what kind of treat were they for the Dementors?

"Where's Kaiba?"

Ron nodded towards the compartment door. "He's pacing on that fellytone –."

"Cell phone," Harry corrected him.

"…Whatever."

Yugi twisted around to look through the window of the compartment door. Seto was leaning against the wall of the train, his phone held up to his ear in one hand, and his head was bent down, focusing on something in his hand. It was small, whatever it was, with some sort of string attached that was dangling down between his fingers, but from his vantage point, Yugi couldn't make out exactly what he held.

"Not to pry, but you three were like a feast to them," said Harry. "All of the Dementors on the train were heading this way."

Yugi shook his head. "I don't get it. Why would they all come this way? Wouldn't it make more sense for them to try and feed off as many people as possible? Why would they come for just us?"

Hermione glanced at Harry. "Well…while you were unconscious, we were discussing that….

Harry sighed. "I think someone sent them after you. I just don't get why."

Yugi blinked. "Someone…wanted those things to take our souls?"

Harry shrugged. "I don't know. I thought all of the Dementors had fled Azkaban and joined Voldemort. If Voldemort wanted to get to you – or your Millennium Items, it doesn't make sense to send Dementors. What if they took your souls before he managed to get to you? Once they take your soul, there's no getting it back."

"But who else would have the means to do something like this?" asked Ron, "If not You-Know-
Who? I doubt the Ministry still has the same hold over the Dementors as they did in the past.”

Harry slowly shook his head. "I… I don't know. I mean… Umbridge sent Dementors after me and my cousin last summer to silence me about Voldemort being back, but… that was different. Aside from Voldemort, you haven't pissed off anyone to warrant this."

Yugi frowned and turned to stare at the Millennium Ring. "Well… you said that the Dementors feed on sadness and despair? Maybe they weren't sent after us specifically… it's just that there has been so much darkness related to our Items that we became some sort of homing beacon to them?"

No one really had an answer to that.

Yugi settled back against the backrest of the seat and closed his eyes. The Pharaoh had been oddly quiet ever since he woke up. He focused himself on their link. Normally, the Pharaoh would hang out either in Yugi's room or their corridor, but he was currently nowhere to be found, and his own door was shut. After a moment's thought, that was not really a new revelation, since the Pharaoh's door was always closed.

Yugi knocked on the odd metal door and poked his head inside. "Pharaoh?"

At this point, wandering the Pharaoh’s mind was not a new concept. During the Anubis crisis, he had run through a good number of all of the staircases and random doors. Thankfully though, he only had to open four doors to find his other half, sitting on the floor against a wall in the dark.

"Pharaoh?" Yugi stepped into the room, leaving the door open so he could still see Yami in the dark. "Are you alright?"

Yami chuckled slightly. "I should be asking you that. You were unconscious for quite some time."

"I'm okay. A little spooked, all things considered, but I'll be okay. You've just been very quiet."

"I know." Yami sighed. "I just want to be by myself for a while."

"They were just memories, Pharaoh," said Yugi, "I'm still here. We're okay."

"You almost weren't," said Yami, "Those Dementors were so close to taking your soul, maybe even both of our souls. It didn't help that that's what I was also seeing at the same time."

Yugi settled down beside the Pharaoh on the floor.

Yami looked over at Yugi. "Despite trying to put that… debacle behind me, that one memory still continues to haunt me." He sighed. "It was only a memory. I know. But still, it's a reminder of what I allowed myself to be."

"You're not that person though," said Yugi.

"I know," said Yami. "I'll be alright Yugi, really. I just want some time to reflect."

"Okay." Yugi nodded. He wasn't entirely convinced that the Pharaoh ought to be alone in his misery, but he wasn't going to push it if he wasn't wanted there. If Yami desired company in his soul labyrinth – or even in Yugi's room, he would let him know.

He separated himself from their shared link as the compartment door opened back up, and Seto slipped back inside, looking both tired and paler than normal. When Hermione scooted over in her seat towards him so Seto could sit down, Yugi finally saw what he had been so focused on in the
Yugi made a point not to stare as his rival slipped the cord to his card locket over his head and tucked it back under his dress shirt, but with how much slower Kaiba was taking his work back up, he had to wonder just what it was that the Dementors forced him to see.

The remainder of the ride back to London was in near silence. As if the earlier events had never happened, Seto continued to work away at his computer. Hermione had her nose in a book, Ryou was still asleep, and Harry and Ron were back to comparing wizard cards from their haul of chocolate frogs.

The train pulled into Kings Cross Station well after their initial estimated arrival time, much to their initial dismay.

"We didn't miss our flight, did we?" asked Ryou, as he stepped off onto Platform 9 ¾, and yawned for the third time since the train had stopped.

"On a private plane? Don't be ridiculous," said Seto.

"Are you sure you don't want to Portkey?" asked Harry.

Seto glared down at him.

Harry held up his hands. "Okay, just checking."

A large number of Aurors had been waiting for the train's arrival, which after the excitement of the afternoon, didn't surprise any of them. Harry recognized some of them as ones who had helped clear the Dementors away from the train out in the middle of the countryside. But as the crowd began thinning out as more and more families left through the stone barrier to return home, Harry saw two familiar faces hanging back by the end of the platform.

"Professor Lupin! Tonks!" said Hermione, "What are you doing here?"

"I've told you before, I'm not your professor anymore," said Remus, smiling slightly, "Those days are long gone. You can call me 'Remus' like everyone else does." He looked among the group. "Are you all alright?"

"More or less," said Ryou.

"They took their first experiences with Dementors about as well as I had," Harry explained.

Remus nodded knowingly. "Ah. Have you all had any chocolate?"

"Only Yugi, and it was just a little," said Harry.

"Well, we'll get you squared away soon enough," said Tonks. "Tom is expecting all of us at the Leaky Cauldron. There's a car waiting for us."

Yugi tilted his head. "I thought we were taking Kaiba's plane home?"

"You are," said Tonks, "But your arrival was a good couple of hours behind, and we thought you might be hungry."

Ron nodded. "You thought right."

"Are you going to escort us to the airport?" asked Ryou.
"Not exactly…we're actually heading to Domino with you," said Remus. "We're replacing Sturgis and Hestia so they can spend the holidays with their families. And Emmeline already returned to London this morning."

Seto sighed and reached into his pocket for his phone. "I suppose I'll let the pilot know that there's going to be two more passengers now."

"Are you going to be staying in the house Sturgis and Hestia were using? Or did we have to make arrangements somewhere?" asked Yugi nervously. Thank goodness that his friends were stepping up to help house Harry, Ron, and Hermione. He couldn't imagine finding a place for Remus and Tonks too…assuming Kaiba didn't offer his home. But considering that he didn't mention anything of that sort when they were trying to figure out Harry and the others' accommodations, he was unlikely to do the same for Harry's Auror friends.

Remus shook his head. "Oh, don't worry about that. We're literally swapping with the Order members already in Domino."

"I was going to ask if the escort was really necessary…but we were just attacked on the Hogwarts Express," said Yugi. "So…uh…never mind about that."

Remus nodded. "Once Dumbledore found out about the Dementor attack he asked us to make sure you got home safely."

The ride to the Leaky Cauldron was mercifully short, and the pub was nearly deserted except for one or two straggling guests lingering behind at the bar. Tonks charmed two tables together as Tom brought out some bread and bowls of soup.

Ryou swirled his spoon around his bowl as if he was stirring a potion, not exactly hungry. He felt drained from the day's events, and just wanted to go back to sleep, preferably in his own bed back home.

The Dementors had taken them by surprise, throwing him back to some of the same memories and fears that the Boggart had taken form to earlier in the year. His spirit had managed to wrestle control from him and toss him back into his soul room, and he remembered him banishing one of the Dementors to the Shadow Realm before going under. He wasn't sure how long he had been out, but he woke to Ron and Hermione trying to rouse both him and Kaiba from the floor of the train.

The attack must have also had some sort of effect on the Other Bakura, because he hadn't heard a peep from him since waking up. He wasn't haunting the corner of his soul room like he used to do on occasion, so he must have retreated within his own mysterious door. But Ryou didn't dare poke his head in there -- there was an unspoken rule that the dark spirit's domain was his alone, and Ryou was certainly not welcome in it. And while there were times he was curious to what was just beyond the strange metal door, Ryou never crossed the threshold. Even after the seemingly long adjustment period with his spirit, he wondered if the reason he never peered inside was just out of respect for the spirit's wishes (even though the spirit didn't keep the same distance when it came to his own room), or fear of what was really behind the door.

Probably a bit of both.

Ryou glanced over to the other side of the table. Yugi seemed to have recovered enough that he was eating and carrying on pleasant conversation of all there was to do in Domino. Kaiba, however, seemed to share in his own lack of appetite, barely touching his bowl and speaking only when he was directly spoken to.
It was only when Remus dropped a small pouch of wizard coins onto the bar for Tom and they were back outside did Ryou's mood pick up a bit. Finally, they were on the way home, even if they had to sit by on a plane for half the day to get there.

"Woah…" Ron's eyes were as wide as saucers. "What is that?"

Seto stepped out of the vehicle behind him, and looked to Ron, eyebrow raised. "That is your ride, which will leave without you if you don't stop staring at it."

"That thing is huge!" Ron gawked. "Are all airplanes that big?"

Ryou tilted his head. "You've never been on a plane before?"

Ron shrugged. "Why should I? We use Portkeys and Floo Powder for everything."

Ryou scratched at his ear. "Oh…right."

Remus mentioned something about checking the craft over for any sign of malicious intent, and after assuring Seto that they weren't going to damage the plane while doing so, began circling it with their wands out, casting silent enchantments from wing to wing.

Yugi wasn't sure what he was expecting to see. Obviously, it wasn't the same as Kaiba's custom dragon-shaped jet because they all wouldn't fit in it, but this plane seemed smaller than the last one he had seen. Although…the last time he saw one of Kaiba's planes, it had safely crash-landed, thanks to their Legendary Dragons. It was definitely a Kaiba Corporation aircraft though, for he could clearly see the company insignia on the tail.

He remembered Mokuba's account of Kaiba's last plane adventure, and part of him wondered if he was going to be challenged to a duel hundreds of feet in the air.

That didn't seem to be the case though, for once they all got inside Seto settled down and to no one's surprise, opened his briefcase again and began working once more.

"Have you guys flown in a plane?" Ron turned to Harry and Hermione. "What's it like?"

Harry shrugged. "I've never done it. You think the Dursleys would pay for me to go anywhere? But I imagine it's like riding in your dad's flying car, only a lot steadier in the air."

The plane took off not long after they boarded, and as soon as they were able, Ryou grabbed a blanket from one of the overhead bins and reclined his seat all the way back. "Wake me when we get there," he yawned.

Hermione found a seat off by herself, kept the lights above her on, and returned to the same book she had started on the train. Harry was surprised to see it was a subject on defensive magic, but not any one of their previous texts on the subject. He shrugged – only Hermione would find a textbook to use as light reading.

Yugi had curled up in his seat under one of the blankets, phone out, and appeared to be sending messages off to someone.

"My grandfather mainly," he said when Harry asked him about it. "It's still pretty early in the morning where they are, but he'll at least see it when he gets up. That way they know when we're going to land so they can meet us at the airport."
Out of the corner of his eye, Harry caught Remus and Tonks talking quietly across the aisle. Remus caught his eye and nodded his head, as if to beckon him over.

"I received your owl," said Remus, as Harry sat down across from them, out of earshot of everyone else on the plane. "And Kingsley followed up with an agent we sent to Borgin & Burkes."

Harry's eyes widened eagerly. "What did they find out?"

"Well," said Tonks, "From what you were able to see and describe to us…I think what you all might have seen Malfoy interested in was a Vanishing Cabinet."

Harry frowned. The name sounded vaguely familiar – for some reason it rang a bell with Fred and George Weasley. Maybe they pranked someone with one? "A Vanishing Cabinet?"

Remus nodded. "They were very popular during the last war."

"You can imagine why," said Tonks, "If the Death Eaters came to your house, all you'd need is to slip inside and disappear for a few hours. But they're testy, and stop working properly if they're not regularly maintained."

"Huh…" said Harry. What use would Malfoy have for a Vanishing Cabinet? "So what happened to the one at Borgin & Burkes?"

Tonks shrugged. "Nothing. It's still there."

That struck him by surprise. "Really? He didn't buy it?"

Tonks shook her head. "Nope. No one has."

Harry sighed. "Malfoy has to be plotting something. I just know it. Maybe it doesn't have anything to do with a Vanishing Cabinet. But I know he cursed Katie Bell, and whatever he's up to has to do with Voldemort."

"Harry…." Tonks began.

Harry cut her off. "Listen – he's been given some sort of mission. I heard him talking with Snape, and Snape offered to even help him. So he has to know what's going on too."

Remus didn't appear convinced. "You-Know-Who has chosen Draco Malfoy for a mission? A boy who's not even of age?"

Harry shook his head slightly. "I know it sounds mad but –"

Remus frowned. "Has it ever occurred to you that maybe Snape was simply pretending to offer Malfoy help to find out what he may be up to?"

Harry scowled. "That's not what it sounded like. They mentioned an Unbreakable Vow."

Tonks looked pensive for a minute. "Harry may be onto something, Remus. If that's true, to make an Unbreakable Vow, after all…."

Remus shook his head. "It comes down to whether or not you trust Dumbledore's judgement. He trusts Snape, therefore, I do too."

"But Dumbledore can make mistakes," said Harry. "He's said so himself!"
"You are blinded by hatred, Harry."

"What?" Harry quickly shook his head. "No –"

"Yes, you are!" Remus's voice was sharp. "You are biased against Malfoy, and by extension Snape, and you have been for a long time now. No one is going to deny that you and Snape do not get along, but you need to be able to put your trust in the Order, and in that Dumbledore knows what he's doing."

"Dumbledore has barely been in the castle all year," Harry shot back, "Even now, he's traveling to who knows where for who knows what. And you can't tell me to sit here and trust him unconditionally. This is when we need to be learning the most defensive magic we can. If anything, you should be teaching us back at Hogwarts again, with or without your condition. But instead, we got Umbridge. And you want me to trust that Dumbledore knows what he's doing?"

Seto sent a quick glare their way before turning back to his pile of documents.

Remus leaned forward and lowered his voice. "Listen to me, Harry. People are disappearing every day. This war is different from the last one. We can only put our trust in a select handful of people, and if we start fighting within that group, we're all doomed. Dumbledore is almost always several steps ahead of everyone else, but even he can be blind sighted. None of us saw Dolores Umbridge's reappointment coming, but we have to hope that there is a plan in place to deal with it. There are only so many Order members left, and Snape is one of them. Much of our recent successes against the Death Eaters have come from his involvement. I know it's hard, but you need to put the animosity aside."

Harry glowered. "He's made my life miserable for the last five years."

"Snape and I haven't had the best relationship either," Remus reminded him, "But I owe much to him for both concealing and helping me to deal with my condition. This is a war, Harry, and we're going to all have to put aside our petty squabbles in order to survive this."
In complete contrast from the depressing mist that seemed to coat England and Scotland on their journey back to London, the plane landed in bright, sunny Japan during the morning hours.

“This place sure is busy,” said Ron, weaving around a throng of tourists to follow after the group. Having flown the most out of all of them, Seto seemed to know the building like the back of his hand and took charge in leading them through the crowds towards the exits.

“This is the Narita Airport,” said Yugi, “It’s pretty much the main international airport in Japan, and the closest one to Domino City.”

“And those planes take off all day and night?” asked Ron.

“Yep,” said Yugi, “People can travel all over the world in a matter of hours!”

“Doesn’t beat the Floo Network, or Portkeys,” said Ron, “Since you get wherever you want to go instantly, but I gotta admit – that was a pretty nice ride.”

“I can assure you that most airplane rides aren’t like that. They’re full of passengers, and there isn’t a whole lot of sitting room,” said Ryou, “And sometimes you’re squashed between nosy, noisy people. We lucked out that Kaiba was using a private plane to shuttle us back.”

“Although we probably would have used a Portkey if that wasn’t the case,” said Harry. And then they wouldn’t have lost almost an entire day of their vacation. But it seemed convincing Seto to use wizard transport was still a futile effort. Perhaps they’d manage to get Remus or Tonks to Portkey them back to school instead.

“Where are your friends, Yugi?” asked Hermione, looking around. “I thought they would have met us here somewhere.”

“Yeah,” said Yugi, “I bet they’re waiting outside where we can find them. It’s really easy to get lost in here. I’ve only been here twice – once to see Grandpa off on one of his archaeological digs when I was still really young and my mom was still staying with us, and the other time was when Pegasus flew us out to San Francisco.”

“Where is your mother now, Yugi?” asked Ryou.

“She went off to spend time with my dad. I think he’s in Australia now.” Yugi shrugged. “It’s hard to keep track.”

“What does he do?” asked Harry.

“He’s an archaeologist too, but spends a lot of time in restoration and shuttling artifacts around the world to different museums rather than spend all his days in the field like my grandfather did.”
They passed through the exit doors leading to the drop off/pick up circle. Harry had to stop short or else the small, black-haired blur that bolted right by him would have knocked him right over.

“SETO!”

Seto braced himself as his younger brother barreled right into him and caught him in the tightest hug his shorter arms could manage. “Mokuba.”

“I’m so glad you’re home!” Mokuba sniffed. “It’s been so long!”

“It’s been just over three weeks.”

Mokuba snorted and straightened himself. “Pssh. That’s like forever!”

“I didn’t think the kid could run that fast,” said an amused voice off to the side, and Yugi’s eyes lit up.

“Duke!”

Duke Devlin waved from his spot leaning against his car. “Long time no see, guys. How’s it going?”

“Great!” Yugi gestured him over. “Harry, Ron, Hermione, this is Duke Devlin, one of my friends. He owns the Black Crown game shop back in Domino.”

“Nice to meet you,” said Duke, flipping a stray lock of hair up behind his headband. He had traded in his sleeveless vest for a warmer coat, but it seemed he still wore his signature dice earring. Duke shook hands with the group, and Harry was surprised at how deeply green his eyes were.

“When did you get back into town? I thought you were in America,” said Yugi.

“Last week,” said Duke, “Thought I’d drop by and see how everyone was doing. I just didn’t expect you to not be there.”

Yugi rubbed at the back of his head. “Heh, yeah….sorry about that.”

Ryou looked around the entrance to the airport. “Are you the only one here?”

Duke nodded. “Yeah. You didn’t expect to all squeeze into your grandfather’s tiny little car, did you?”

“I’m sure we would have been able to fit,” said Ron, “Or we could expand the inside like they do with the Ministry cars.”

Yugi shook his head, slightly put out. “Well…Grandpa’s car is really small…I’m just surprised that no one else came.”

Duke waved a hand dismissively, “Nah, chin up, Yugi. They’re all waiting for you back at your place.” He suddenly frowned, realizing he had said too much, and then shrugged it off. “That was supposed to be a surprise. Oh well.” He gave Yugi a deadpanned expression. “Act surprised when we get there.”

Yugi chuckled and nodded, his mood instantly improved. “Got it.”

“Alright, so who’s ready to go?” Duke pointed to his car, parked behind Kaiba’s limousine. “I know a good couple of people who have been eagerly waiting for your flight to get in….”
Yugi looked to Kaiba and Mokuba who were talking quietly to each other. “Are you guys coming to the Game Shop too?”

Mokuba shook his head. “Nah. But I’m sure I’ll catch up with you guys later sometime, and at the very least at the Christmas party.”

Ryou blinked. He didn’t remember them talking about a party back at Hogwarts. “What Christmas party?”

Mokuba smiled mischievously. “Oh… I didn’t mention that there was gonna be a big Christmas party?”

Yugi and Ryou shook their heads.

“Oh. Well, there’s gonna be one. I planned everything.”

Seto narrowed his eyes suspiciously at Mokuba’s all-too innocent grin. “And… just where is this party of yours?”

Mokuba clasped his hands behind his back and rocked back and forth on the heels of his sneakers. “Well, it would be rather hard to fit everyone comfortably at Yugi’s place…”

Seto’s eye twitched as he sighed and stalked off towards where Fuguta stood waiting by the car. “That’s it,” he said, “I’m spending the next two weeks in the office.”

Mokuba laughed and ran after his brother, arms flailing dramatically. “But Seto – the office will be closed!”

“We’re going to check in with Hestia and Sturgis so they can get back home,” said Remus, turning back to the group. He pulled a piece of parchment from his pocket and handed it to Harry. “This is the address of the house, in case you guys need to find us.” He turned to Yugi. “We’ll check in at your grandfather’s shop in a little while.”

Yugi nodded. “Okay.”

Duke opened the front passenger side door and gestured with a sweeping overdramatic bow. “My lady, your chariot awaits.”

Hermione looked back to Harry and Yugi, the corners of her mouth upturned before sliding into the vehicle. Duke looked amongst the others. “Hm. Yugi you might be able to squeeze up front. Everyone else to the back, and we’ll be off.”

“It’s a little tight back here,” said Ryou, squished between Harry and Ron, as Duke followed Kaiba’s car out of the drop off/pick up circle and into traffic. Harry nodded, wishing they got Remus or Tonks to increase the sitting room in the vehicle before they left.

“So…,” Duke began conversationally, “I was quite surprised to find that you had up and left town, and that you left the gang behind. I hear you’re in the middle of another crisis, huh?”

“You could say that,” said Yugi.

Duke glanced at Harry and Ron in the backseat through his rear mirror. The two of them had looked at each other nervously, as if unsure of what to talk about. “It’s okay you guys. Joey and the others filled me in with what was going on. You don’t have to worry about me blowing any secrets.”
Hermione leaned forward to peer around Yugi sandwiched between her and Duke. “So…you know about magic?”

Duke snorted. “Are you kidding? I’ve been in the thick of some of Yugi’s craziest adventures – one of which having to do with a cult running around stealing people’s souls with shiny green rocks. Knowing that there were legit wizards out there was not the shocker you’d expect it to be. So don’t worry – your secret is safe with me.”

Harry leaned back in his seat and looked out the window. “How far from Domino are we?”

“Not too far. So when did all the crazy start, anyhow? I seemed to have missed quite a bit while in America.”

“The Headmaster of the school we went to came to visit us over the summer,” said Ryou, “Apparently a wizard in Britain found out about the Millennium Items and…well…you can imagine where this is going.”

Duke nodded. “Yeah. A crazy guy got greedy over a bunch of gold artifacts. I get it. So…you all went off to…learn magic? I think that’s what your grandfather mentioned.”

“Yeah, to help fight and defend against Voldemort, or as you put it – the crazy guy.”

“You’re going to have to tell me how you managed to drag Kaiba with you – unless you’ve just been using him as shuttle service.”

Yugi let out a huge exhale. “It’s a long story.”

“Gotcha. Say no more.” Duke watched the limo turn off of the highway to head towards the Domino City business district as they continued onwards. “So…new friends - how do you all feel about games?”

“What sort?” asked Hermione.

“Well, if you’re friends with Yugi, you’ve probably seen him play Duel Monsters. And while I’m a duelist as well, I’m nowhere near as good. I’ve made my own game called Dungeon Dice Monsters. If you’re interested in it, you can stop by my shop while I’m in town, and I’ll set you up for a game to see how it works.”

“That might interest them more than me,” said Hermione, nodding to Harry and Ron in the backseat. “I’d love to watch though.”

“Alright,” said Duke, “So what sorts of things are you into?”

Hermione turned pink. “Well, I spend a lot of time reading.”

Ron snorted. “That’s an understatement. You know she had her nose stuck in a textbook for light reading on the ride over.”

Hermione glared at him through the corner of her eye.

Duke shrugged. “Hey, to each their own. Just remember that Domino is a gamer’s town. Almost everyone duels or knows someone who does. But if card or dice games aren’t your thing, there’s the main arcade in the center of town, or Kaiba Land.”

Ron blinked. “Kaiba…Land?”
“It’s open?” Yugi asked. “I didn’t think the Japanese one was going to be ready for another few months.”

“That’s what Joey thought, but it seemed to be running last week,” said Duke. “They must have finished ahead of schedule or something, but I gotta say – considering this is one of Kaiba’s projects, it didn’t have nearly the amount of pomp and circumstance that I would expect. You remember the grand opening of the one in America? That was huge.”

“Have you been there yet? To the one here?” asked Ryou.

Duke shook his head. “Not yet, but we should all go sometime and see how it compares with the other one.”

“They’re probably the same, no?” asked Ryou.

“Maybe,” said Duke, “Though there was a lot more land available in the States than here. I imagine a few attractions got left out.”

“What exactly is Kaiba Land?” asked Ron.

“It’s an amusement park. Arcade, food, rides, dueling arenas,” said Yugi. “You guys don’t have something like that in the wizarding world?”

Ron shook his head. “Nah. Closest we got to huge, mainstream attractions is Quidditch.”

“What’s Quidditch?” asked Duke.

“It’s a sport played on broomsticks,” said Harry, “Even Yugi made the team!”

Duke laughed. “That doesn’t surprise me in the slightest.”

The car turned onto more familiar roads and Yugi’s eyes lit up. “There it is!”

Ron blinked. “Mate, your house is shaped…sort of like a giant turtle.”

Yugi nodded. “I know. Awesome, right?”

If it weren’t for the fact that he was sandwiched in the middle of the car, Yugi would have jumped out before the car had come to a complete stop.

Harry got out and looked around. Yugi wasn’t kidding when he said the house was small. Just from looking at the outside, it was clear that there would be no way that Yugi would have been able to hold up him and Ron and Hermione during their vacation, not while knowing that most of the ground floor area was taken up with the family shop.

The Muto kitchen had been decorated with ‘Welcome Home’ banners and balloons, and a couple of snack platters were set up on the small kitchen table. Yugi had barely stepped foot past the shop and into the house when he was bombarded in the cheers of his friends and family.

“WELCOME HOME!”

“Wow!” Ryou said, looking around. “Very nice.”

“Welcome back, Yugi!” said Grandpa, embracing his grandson in a warm hug, “And hello to all of you too! Come in, come in! Don’t be shy!”
“Grandpa, Joey, Tristan, Téa, this is Harry Potter, Ron Weasley, and Hermione Granger,” said Yugi, and he gestured back to his friends. “Guys, this is Joey Wheeler, Tristan Taylor, and Téa Gardner.”

“Hello,” said Harry.

“Nice to meet you,” said Téa. “Yugi’s told us a lot about you.”

“Uh oh…what terrible things has he been saying?” asked Harry.

“Nonsense, all good things,” said Grandpa, “I’m glad you all have helped to make him feel at home there.”

“Speaking of home…” Ryou looked to Joey and Tristan, “Please tell me you guys remembered to get my mail and check in on my apartment from time to time.”

Joey’s eyes suddenly widened in horror and he looked at Tristan as if he had just swallowed a rotten lemon. “Uh oh…Trist’, I knew we were forgetting something!”

Ryou’s face fell.

Joey’s face brightened and he clapped Ryou on the shoulder. “Aw, man you should’ve seen the look on your face! Of course we did! And I hope you didn’t mind, but we also polished off some o’ the stuff in your fridge.”

Ryou sighed. “Seriously?”

“Look man,” said Joey in all seriousness, “You probably don’t realize how quickly you just up and left. I mean…if you wanted to come home to stinky food or chunky milk that might be growin’ legs or whatever; we would’ve left it alone.”

Ryou smiled, visibly relieved. “Alright…I take it back. But…you did leave something in my apartment, right? I don’t have to go grocery shopping tonight on my way home?”

“Nah,” said Tristan, “I replaced some stuff when I was by yesterday. You should be good for a few days.”

“So…” said Grandpa, passing plates of food around the group. “How would you like to spend the next few weeks?”

“I…really don’t know,” said Yugi, “Honestly, I’m just happy to be home.”

“Me too,” said Ryou, “Though I was thinking of creating a new Monster World campaign. Once I create some more figures and plan out a new map, maybe we can all play.”

Joey gulped. “No offense…but your evil spirit won’t seal us into those figures again…right?”

Harry, Ron, and Hermione exchanged nervous looks. Harry wasn’t quite sure what Joey had meant by being sealed into a bunch of figures…and at the same time…he wasn’t sure he wanted to find out. Clearly this was something that had happened a good while ago.

Ryou blinked. “Oh…no, no. Things are….different now than when they were before. The Spirit and I have a slightly better understanding.”

“Well…if you’re sure…” Tristan said hesitantly. A ‘slightly better understanding’ didn’t sound like a whole lot of progress.
Ryou didn’t seem too fazed by his friends’ nervousness towards his campaign idea, and he couldn’t blame them. True, he had a better relationship with the Dark Bakura now versus when Yugi and his friends first played the Monster World game, but they hadn’t been around to see it the spirit as he was now. All they would remember is the spirit shoving him out of the way at every opportunity to play Duel Monsters or try to kill everyone.

“It’s alright if you don’t want to,” said Ryou, “Honestly, it is. I understand. But I’ve been meaning to create another custom board for a while now.”

“Of course I’ll come,” said Yugi, “Despite what happened the last time, playing was a lot of fun! How long does it take to put the campaign together?”

“Depends,” Ryou shrugged. “If it was just creating a new scenario with the map I already had, maybe a day. But I want to create an entirely new map and figures so…this will be a while.”

“You’re not going to shut yourself away during the whole vacation though, are you?” asked Téa.

Ryou shook his head. “I don’t think so. Was there something you wanted to do?”

“Well, I was thinking of taking a look at the new Kaiba Land park,” said Téa, “It’s technically not open yet, not officially, but Mokuba said he could get us in early if we wanted to go, and the crowds wouldn’t be nearly as bad.”

Yugi bit his lip. “There’s no tournament going on right? No ulterior Kaiba-esque motive going on?”

Téa shook her head. “Nope! Mokuba was just offering early admission and wanted to show the park off.”

“Then it’s a deal!”

“When were you thinking of going?” asked Ryou.

“I’ll get in touch with Mokuba. Apparently there’s something going on there over the next few days, so we have to wait until it’s done.”

“How big is Domino?” asked Ron. “Can we go exploring?”

“Pretty big,” said Yugi, “We’re considered to be in the more residential part, but we’re still pretty close to downtown. We walk for most things.”

“We can go on a tour if you want,” said Joey.

“Sign me up!” Harry grinned. The Dursleys never took him anywhere if they could avoid it, and even after leaving them each and every summer, he was either stuck at the Weasleys’ or Grimmauld Place, or even the Leaky Cauldron. The idea of being able to get out and do something, even to just walk around a town sounded heavenly.

The welcoming party lasted for the majority of the day, and it wasn’t until later, after dinner that everyone went their separate ways. Hermione left with Téa for the short walk back to her house. Tristan took Joey back to his dad’s house on his motorcycle, and Duke gave Ryou and Ron a ride home before going back to his apartment above the Black Crown.

Harry helped Yugi and his grandfather clean up the leftover food and then crashed in the living room. While Yugi got ready for bed, he took the lull in action to look around. Photos from Mr. Muto’s archaeological days were on the walls and end tables. The shelves on one wall were
decorated with a few odd-looking games that appeared to be a good number of years old.

A photo on a small side table by the doorway into the kitchen caught his eye and he picked it up. After being engrained with wizarding photography for so long, he had to get used to looking at normal images where the subjects didn’t move. Yugi, surrounded by his friends and family, smiled up at him.

“Ah,” said Grandpa, and Harry jumped – he didn’t realize Mr. Muto had even entered the room. Pillows and blankets were in his arms. “That was right after Yugi won the Kaiba Corp Grand Championship Duel Monsters Tournament in America. It was to help promote the park opening, but, like most things, Yugi got wrapped up in a hoot of a drama.” He pointed to one of the faces in the photograph. “Mokuba was very kind to offer us the expenses-paid trip for helping them out.”

“Seto’s not in the photo?”

Grandpa raised an eyebrow. “No,” he said. “I’m afraid you won’t see him in any of these photographs. Even without the rather… tense relationship that he has with Yugi and his friends, if you can even call it that, Kaiba spent a good deal of his time dealing with company matters. He didn’t even participate in his own tournament, to all of our surprise.”

“Huh.” Harry pointed to the only two people in the photo he didn’t recognize. “Who are these?”

“That is Professor Arthur Hawkins, an archaeologist and a dear friend of mine, and his granddaughter, Rebecca. She’s a duelist as well, and the current American Duel Monsters champion.”

Harry’s eyes widened. “She looks really young.”

Grandpa nodded. “She is quite a child prodigy. I think she’s…. eleven now? Maybe twelve, and already taking university courses!” He glanced behind him, as if looking to see if Yugi was nearby, and leaned in closer to Harry with a mischievous grin plastered on his face. “And she has quite a crush for my Yugi, too!”

Harry chuckled. It seemed not even Yugi was safe from unwanted affection. “Looks like you all had fun.”

“It was a wonderful time,” Grandpa smiled. “And I’m sure you’ll have the same when Yugi and his friends take you to the one opening here.”

Harry put down the photo. “I’m really looking forward to going.”

Grandpa set the bedding down onto the coffee table and frowned. “Are you sure you’ll be comfortable? Sometimes the couch isn’t the best for a good night’s sleep.” He stroked his beard thoughtfully. “Or that just might be my old bones….”

“It’s alright, really,” said Harry, “I spent up to my eleventh birthday living in the cupboard under the stairs. The couch is fine.”

Yugi froze halfway into the room, already in his pajamas. “You what?”

Harry blinked. He had forgotten that unlike Ron and Hermione, Yugi and his friends didn’t know anything about his early life with the Dursleys. “My aunt and uncle essentially considered me a blight on their house because of my parents being wizards, so they tried very hard to pretend I didn’t exist.”
Harry shrugged. “I didn’t get my own room in the house until I got my Hogwarts letter, and even then, it was probably only because they were afraid wizards would drop in on them or something, despite Uncle Vernon using the excuse I was growing out of the cupboard.”

Yugi cringed. “…Were you?”

“I dunno, I might have had a year or so before it really became tight in there, but seriously – the couch is more than plenty.”

Grandpa shook his head sadly, but he didn’t want to feel as if he was prying into Harry’s childhood days. “To think that they could do that to their own family…. Sighing, he moved back towards the steps. “Well, I’ll see you boys in the morning. Don’t stay up too late!”

After reassuring him that they wouldn’t keep themselves up through the wee hours of the morning, Harry turned to Yugi. “That was a really nice party your friends threw for you.”

“Yeah. It’s so great to see them again. I couldn’t believe it was almost six months since I’ve been home.”

Harry draped the blanket around the couch. “Honestly, I’m surprised you didn’t swing a visit back with Seto. He’s been home and back what – every month?”

Yugi nodded. “Just about. I had thought about it at times, but some of our schoolwork has been so intense, I think I was worried I would fall too much behind. But maybe in the spring, if things aren’t as crazy, I might be able to sneak back once or twice.”

“At the very least, there’s the Easter holiday,” said Harry, “It’s not nearly as long as this one is, but a break is a break.”

“That’s true,” Yugi mused.

“So…Christmas is tomorrow.” Harry shook his head. “That flight messed up my perception of time…but anyway, do you guys have any traditions?”

“Not really,” said Yugi, “Grandpa closes the shop of course, but that holiday isn’t as big a deal here. Joey usually comes over, and we’ll hang out, play some of Grandpa’s older, more unique games, or try out something new that’s going to the shop, but it’s pretty much a family day. Téa and Tristan usually are at home with parents.”

Yugi tapped his chin. “Although…apparently, Mokuba is throwing a party. I’ll shoot him a message in the morning to see when we should be there.”

Harry fluffed his pillow a bit before leaning back against it. “So, besides that, and the day we go to Kaiba Land…and the day that we go exploring, any ideas on how to spend the time?”

Yugi shrugged. “Not sure. Relaxing for one thing. Grandpa is going to have to open the shop back up after the holiday, so you can help out if you’d like.”

Harry nodded eagerly. “Sure!”

Yugi blinked, taken back by Harry’s sudden enthusiasm. “That’s…work.” He suddenly looked concerned. “You really don’t get to have a lot of fun, do you?”

Harry shook his head. “I mean…I got to go to the zoo once when I was ten…but that fun ended the instant I sent a python on my cousin.”
Yugi wasn’t sure if he should laugh or not. “How did you manage that?”

“I uh…let loose some magic without knowing it. I mean, I didn’t find out I had magic until I turned eleven.”

Yugi’s eyes widened. He didn’t think it was possible to let magic loose like that, but there was a lot of things about Harry’s world that he didn’t know.

“Well,” said Yugi, as he got up from his spot in his grandfather’s recliner. “I’m going to head to sleep, so I’ll see you in the morning. But believe me, Harry - you’re going to have so much fun on this vacation that you’re not going to know what to do with yourself!”

The following afternoon, Ron’s eyes nearly bugged out of his head as they made their way up the front landscaped walk to the Kaiba Mansion. He had known that Seto was wealthy from both the newspaper articles Hermione seemed to keep as bookmarks over the summer, and then from tidbits of conversation that he heard amongst Yugi and his friends yesterday during the welcome back party, but it didn’t seem to dawn much on him until he was staring up at the enormous house, and he had to wonder if this was the same sort of place that Malfoy boasted about during their first few years at Hogwarts.

“You okay, Ron?” asked Harry. He knew that the Weasley’s financial status was a sore point, and Harry always felt he had to be sure to spend as little time as possible at his own Gringotts vault when they went shopping each summer. It had gotten a little better over time, especially now that Fred and George had opened their shop to near instant success, but that still didn’t stop Ron from turning sour anytime money became a point of discussion.

“Yeah.” Ron said quietly. He shook himself out of his stupor. “…I uh…didn’t expect the large dragon statue on the fountain, is all.”

Duke snorted. “Yeah, well. It’s Kaiba. I’d be concerned if there wasn’t a huge Blue Eyes White Dragon statue somewhere on the property.”

“You’ve been here once before though, haven’t you, Yugi?” asked Téa. “It was sometime after Battle City, wasn’t it?”

“Sort of,” said Yugi. “It was right after the Anubis crisis, but I never made it past the front gates.”

“What was the Anubis crisis?” asked Hermione.

Yugi grimaced. “Ugh…long story short – Kaiba wanted a rematch for losing in the Battle City Tournament and it, uh….got a bit intense.”

Tristan snorted. “Intense is hardly the word for it. Try disastrous!”

“Okay, now you really have to tell us,” said Ron. “After all, we’ve got into so much trouble over the last five years, disaster is practically all our middle names!”

Yugi sighed. Thinking back to the day he and the Pharaoh – not to mention his friends and the Kaibas – were nearly killed was not exactly the most pleasant of memories. “Not today though…”

They didn’t have to get close enough to the front doors to hit the bell. Mokuba must have been watching them come up the walk the entire time, because he was nearly exploding with giddiness when he opened the front door.
“Hi guys!” said Mokuba energetically. He moved to the side at the entranceway and allowed the group inside. “I started setting up in the living room.” Closing the door behind them, he pointed to a large open doorway off to the left. “I’ll be there in a sec, I just gotta grab some stuff!”

Joey looked around the open foyer as Mokuba disappeared up the large staircase in the middle of the hall. “You know… I never thought I would ever step foot in this place.”

“Why’s that?” asked Harry.

Joey shook his head, chuckling. “Oh man. You guys are new to town, so you don’t know the ropes yet, and tha’s cool. But let me fill you in on a little secret that absolutely no one in Domino knows….”

Tristan rolled his eyes.

“…Me and Kaiba?” said Joey, “We don’t get along. Guy’s a royal jerk.”

“He did invite you though,” said Harry.

Joey waggled a finger. “Nah. Mokuba invited us. I’ll bet anythin’ that Kaiba probably had himself a heart attack when he found out.”

“Kaiba has changed a bit you know,” said Yugi.

“Not gonna believe it till I see it,” said Joey. He crossed the hall into the living room and whistled. “Whooo boy, Mokuba’s been busy in here.”

The rest of the group filed in after him and Harry took a look around. A large bare tree was set up in the corner of the room, with two storage tubs of decorations sitting idly beside it. Four video game controllers to a console that Harry didn’t recognize sat perfectly lined up along the coffee table, and a few poofy bean bag chairs were scattered around next to the couches, creating a half-circle of seating around the large screen television, and a side table near the entrance was covered in snacks. There was a bit of mistletoe hanging from the top of the open doorway.

“Ooookay,” Mokuba scrambled back inside, with a bag slung over his arm. A bright red Santa Claus hat was jammed over his unruly hair. “Anyone want a Santa hat?”

“Sure,” Harry reached for the bag.

“Where’s your brother, Mokuba?” asked Téa.

Mokuba shrugged. “I think there’s enough for… twenty people?”

“Don’t you think that’s a bit excessive?” asked Harry, “There’s….” He looked about the room,
“…Twelve of us?”

“Yeah, but look who it is they’re feeding,” said Hermione and Téa near simultaneously, looking towards Ron and Joey, respectively. Hermione cracked a smile and Téa giggled at their common thought.

Yugi laughed. “They’ve got a point.”

Joey feigned looking hurt. “And just what is that supposed to mean?”

“It means you’re a human garbage disposal,” said Tristan, “And everyone knows it.”

Duke smirked. “You’re not far behind him either, Tristan.”

Joey slung an arm around Ron’s shoulder. “Don’t listen to ‘em. They’re just jealous that we can turn eating into a competitive sport!”

Ron snickered and turned his attention to the corner. “I don’t mean to be offensive or anything, but that tree doesn’t look right somehow.”

Mokuba glanced at it. “Well it’s an artificial one. And it’s been hiding in the basement for a few years. That might be what it is.”

“Artificial?” Ron wrinkled his nose. “You mean you don’t use real trees for Christmas?”

“Some people do,” said Harry, “Growing up, the Dursleys would get a real tree almost every year. They’d stick it right in the window of the front room and dress it up as if it was going to win some sort of contest.” Harry shuddered. “Let me tell you – looking at that each December until I started Hogwarts was painful.”

“Well, Seto doesn’t like the mess from real trees. We normally don’t set one up anyway.” Mokuba said, “But I figured that we could all have some fun and decorate it together!”

“Oh, sure!” Yugi moved towards the boxes of decorations and began sifting through them. “Are these just ornaments?”

“There are lights in the other box,” said Mokuba. “Don’t worry; I untangled all the knots ahead of time.”

Joey grabbed a light string and began looping it around the top of the tree. “Geez, kid, your brother spoils you rotten!”

Mokuba looked up at him owlishly from his spot sitting on the floor with a strand of tinsel in hand. “What are you talking about? Seto doesn’t spoil me at all.”

“You gonna tell me that all those packages there next to you aren’t yours?”

Mokuba shook his head. “They’re not. Seto gave me my stuff already. Most of these were already here when we got up this morning.”

Harry looked curiously down at one of the wrapped packages. “Weird. Ron, isn’t that your mother’s handwriting?”

“Huh?” Ron picked it up and read the note. “Heh, yeah, you’re right. Looks like she sent her presents all the way here this time.”
Ryou looked at the squishy package in Ron’s hands and then down at the rest of the pile. “There’s quite a bit of them. …Did she give something to all of us?”

Harry counted them. “Seems so.”

Ryou’s eyes widened. “S-she didn’t have to do that!”

“That’s Mrs. Weasley for you,” said Harry. “I had only spoken to her once in my first year – and that was just asking for help so I could get to Platform 9 ¾, and I still got a knitted sweater for Christmas.”

Ron scratched at his nose. “Well…I might have had something to do with that, since you were my first friend and all….”

Joey tilted his head. “How come that one’s got my name on it? Don’t tell me Kaiba’s gone all mushy and got me a present, cuz I’d be too terrified to open it.”

Mokuba shook his head. “No…those are from Yugi and Bakura. I stopped by the Game Shop and picked them up this morning so you all wouldn’t see him lugging them here.”

Joey blinked. “Oh.”

“Yugi, you didn’t have to get us anything,” said Téa, “Having you and Bakura home, even if it’s just for these few weeks, is a present in itself!”

Ryou laughed lightly. “Well, in that case, I suppose I can return all that stuff then.”

“Nope, too late for that now, buddy,” said Joey, waggling a blue crystal ornament in his face, “My eyes laid claim to it already!”

Grandpa chuckled, plopped down onto one of the couches, and admired the tree decorating from afar. “Looking good, kids!”

Harry looked at their decorating progress and then to Yugi’s grandfather. “You don’t want to help dress it up?”

“Oh no,” Grandpa shook his head. “I’m much more content to let you youngsters go at it.”

After a while, Téa stepped back from the tree. Only a handful of baubles remained in the plastic tub, and the tree looked fairly evenly decorated from top to bottom. “I think it looks perfect. The only thing missing is a topper.”

Hermione, sitting next to Yugi and Mokuba on the floor, reached out and tugged the plastic tub towards her. “I don’t remember seeing one in there.”

“It’s here!” Mokuba reached over towards the coffee table and grabbed a small box from where it sat next to the line of game controllers.

Duke leaned over and whispered in Joey’s ear. “Ten bucks that it’s a dragon.”

Joey sniggered. “You’re on.”

Mokuba didn’t seem to hear them, and pulled a star-shaped crystal from the box.

Duke frowned as Joey held out his hand. “Pay up, bub!”
Mokuba looked over innocently as he handed it to Tristan to place on the top of the tree. “Huh?” “Just won me some change cuz that thing – surprisingly – is *not* a dragon!” said Joey.

Mokuba looked back up at the topper. “Oh. Seriously you guys? I know the Blue Eyes White Dragon is important to us, but not *everything* we own is dedicated to it.” “He’s got a *plane* shaped like one,” Duke deadpanned.

“An airplane…shaped like a dragon,” said Ron. He shook his head. “I don’t believe it.” “Oh, you better believe it, it’s totally a thing,” said Duke.

Mokuba rolled his eyes and pointed towards the light switches near the doorway. “Someone want to turn off the lights? It’s time to check out our handiwork!”

Téa got up and flipped the switch. Mokuba crawled under the lower branches to retrieve the power cord for the lights and plugged them into the wall. He heard the collective gasp from the group before he reemerged to check out the tree for himself, and already knew it was beautiful sight.

The icicle-type lights, along with the tinsel, gave the overall appearance of hanging snow, and they reminded Harry very much of the usual dozen Christmas trees that lined the Great Hall each year. A few of the ornaments themselves had lights in them, and they reflected all sorts of color against the wall. The star also had small bulbs in them, and they too projected a twinkling rainbow across the ceiling.

“I love it!” Téa clasped her hands together under her chin, “It’s so pretty – I don’t even want to turn the lights back on!” Mokuba shrugged. “We don’t *have* to.” He scrambled to his feet and skidded out into the hall, “*Seto, come see the lights!*”

It wasn’t until much later, well after the snacks set up in the room had been depleted down and the dinner buffet – as Mr. Muto put it – set out along the dining room table, that Seto finally joined them in the living room for more than four seconds at a time. Emptied plates set aside, Yugi and Ryou sat on the floor near the tree, passing packages around to their friends.

Not to Harry, Ron, or Hermione’s surprise, the gifts from Mrs. Weasley were none other than her knitted garments. Harry, Ron, and Hermione, already having once (or twice) received a fair number of Molly’s handiwork, received scarves. Yugi, Ryou, and Seto each received one of her signature sweaters, each one a different color; green for Yugi, red for Ryou, and a dark blue for Seto. Each one had their first initial in gold across the front.

“It’s official,” said Ron, draping his maroon scarf around his neck, “You’ve officially been welcomed into the family.” “It looks so warm,” said Ryou, and he pulled his over his head to wear over his t-shirt. “Oh, it *is!*” When Joey and Tristan started snickering, he raised a hand and patted at his hair. “Oh my, it went everywhere, didn’t it?” “Uh huh,” said Mokuba.

“We’ll have to send her an owl when we get back to school,” said Yugi, as Ryou straightened his hair back to a reasonable facsimile of what it was before. “This was really sweet of her.”
“Say, what are those still left there,” said Duke.

“Oh – these are our gifts for you guys,” said Yugi, passing the small neatly – wrapped gifts to his friends.

“… Socks?” said Joey, with his open package on his lap.

“I’ve got them too,” said Tristan. He looked over at Joey’s pairs. “Ours look the same.”

Ryou tried – and failed – at hiding a grin on his face. “They’re magic socks.”

“Oh, yeah?” asked Tristan. “What, will they wash themselves or something?”

Yugi bit his lip to keep himself from laughing. “Something like that… you’ll find out, I’m sure!”

“Oooh,” said Téa, hugging hers, “These feel really warm!”

“They are!” Yugi smiled. “They’ll heat your toes if they feel cold!”

Téa gasped, “Oh, how cool! Thanks, Yugi!”

“Say, Mokuba – which way to the little boy’s room,” said Joey.

Mokuba pointed down the hall opposite from the main foyer. “Down there, it’s the last door on the left.”

“Thanks,” said Joey. He got up as Grandpa was opening a quill and ink ledger set (“For the shop records, if you want,” said Yugi, “Otherwise it’s a cool aesthetic piece.”), and headed down the indicated hall. An open doorway with the light on inside caught his eye on the way back, and he paused at the door and looked inside.

It appeared to be Kaiba’s home office, and considering the CEO’s tendency to cover near everything he owned with either his company insignia or dragons, the room looked rather subdued. A bookcase on one side of the room housed various awards and certificates – of what, Joey wasn’t sure, he was too far away from the inscriptions to read them. A large screen television hung on the wall opposite a rather comfortable-looking couch. Twin desktop monitors were on one side of the desk, and a laptop sat closed nearby. But none of those things were the main cause for him to stop.

It was a rather familiar golden object, one he hadn’t seen in the flesh since the Battle City tournament.

“This is weird,” said Ron, moving his fingers along the game controller, watching his vehicle do circles on the television. “But I like it.”

Mokuba sat beside him and gave direction on how to use the different buttons. “If you use the joystick – no, the one on the right – you can turn better. Yeah, just like that! See, you’re getting the hang of it pretty quick!”

Ron turned excitedly to Harry. “Want to race?”

“Sure,” said Harry, and Grandpa passed him one of the controllers.

As Mokuba filled Harry in on how to make the car move, Tristan turned to Yugi. “Joey’s been gone a while now.”
Yugi blinked. “I thought it was just a couple of minutes.”

Mokuba turned back around as Harry and Ron began a tutorial level racetrack. “I told him where to go. I know our house is big, but it’s not a maze.”

Seto rolled his eyes from his spot in the armchair closest to the doorway. “This is Wheeler we’re talking about. Do you really expect him to be able to follow simple instructions?”

Yugi sighed. “Really, Kaiba?”

Seto ignored him.

Tristan moved to get up. “I’ll bet anything, he’ll follow the smell of all the leftover food back to the kitchen.”

Yugi watched as Seto opened his mouth, probably to let out another lashing towards Joey’s character, but he froze, quickly turned his head back towards the hallway that Joey had disappeared down, and narrowed his eyes.

Seto felt what he could only describe as a weird tingling feeling in the back of his mind. Someone had taken the Rod off his desk, and, considering only one person was missing from the group, and staff had been dismissed for the holiday, that didn’t leave a great many guesses.

“What is it?” asked Yugi.

Mokuba glanced over curiously from where he was watching Harry and Ron’s atrocious run on the racecourse.

Seto let out a resigned sigh, got up, and stalked back towards his office. To his complete lack of surprise, Joey Wheeler was inside, standing right in front of his desk with the Millennium Rod in his hands.

“Something I can do for you, Wheeler?”

Joey jumped nearly a foot in the air. “Yeah,” he said flatly, and waved the Ron up in Seto’s face. “You can tell me what you’re doin’ with this.”

Seto snatched it back out of his grip and moved around to sit behind his desk. “Keep your paws off what doesn’t belong to you.”

“It don’t belong to you either, Kaiba,” said Joey, hotly, “Marik gave that to Yugi after Battle City. What the heck are you doing with it?”

“What I believed doesn’t matter anymore does it,” Seto snapped. “And it’s no business of you or
your nosy friends."

"Well I –"

"Joey?" said Yugi, hovering at the office doorway. "We were wondering what happened to you. … And we heard you guys yelling from the party."

"Yellin’? We weren’t…” Joey trailed off at the look of absolute murder Seto was giving him from his seat. "Yugi, I think you got some explaining to do. Why the heck didn’t you tell us that you gave the Millennium Rod away….to Kaiba of all people?"

"I…didn’t think it was right," said Yugi, “It was between me – well, the Pharaoh – and Kaiba.”

"Yug’, I know – more than most – how dangerous that thing is,” said Joey, pointing at the Millennium Rod, still clenched in Kaiba’s grip. “I can’t believe you gave it away.”

“It’s not dangerous, well, not in his hands,” said Yugi. “You have to trust me. I had to give it away.”

"Why?" Joey asked.

Yugi sighed. “You’ve been to the museum, so you’ve seen the stone tablet of the Pharaoh with the God Cards…."

“Yeah,” said Joey, “So?"

“You know that’s Kaiba on the other side of the tablet. It’s got the Blue Eyes above him and the Millennium Rod in his hand.”

“Uh huh,” said Joey, “What are you tellin’ me, that Kaiba was supposed to have that thing, like you and the Puzzle, or Bakura and the Millennium Ring?”

Yugi nodded. “…Yeah.”

Joey shook his head. “I don’t believe it.” He turned to look at it again. “That thing…has caused so much damage. What it did to me an’ Téa…and Mai…how do you know it won’t happen to Kaiba too? Or that he won’t be the one behind it all?”

Seto scowled as his phone vibrated against his desk. “You really think I would allow myself to get possessed by an inanimate object? I have more than–"

Joey turned and looked back at him curiously. Seto had cut himself off, and was solely focused on the message on his phone’s screen. “You uh…gonna finish that thought?”

Seto scowled as his phone vibrated against his desk. “You really think I would allow myself to get possessed by an inanimate object? I have more than–"

Joey held up a hand, still staring at the message. A second later, he reached into a drawer of the desk and pulled out the television remote, turning it on, and flipping through channels until he found what he was looking for.

It was a news story, with the running tag line on the bottom of the screen scrolling “HOLOGRAM MISHAP?”

“…At least three people were seriously hurt after a mysterious attack on Duelist Kingdom Island, home of Maximillion Pegasus, the creator of the wildly popular card game, Duel Monsters. Security was alerted to strange light flashes on their surveillance footage, and men in masks entering the castle. This is still a developing story, and we will update more information as it comes in to us…”

“I don’t get it. What makes that a hologram mishap? I don’ see any Duel Monsters runnin’ loose,”
said Joey. “Did they think the masked people were monsters or somethin’?”

“I…think it’s that,” said Yugi, pointing to the screen. High in the sky, hovering over the castle was an enormous skull, with a serpent protruding from its open mouth.
It appeared that, as far as the weather was concerned, nature had decided that Yugi had dealt with enough rain and snow during the autumn months in Scotland and kept Domino City a continuous ray of sunshine to help counteract the unusually cooler temperatures currently across Japan. Yugi woke that morning and dressed for the day quietly. Careful not to wake Harry, still fast asleep on the sofa, Yugi reached into the closet and pulled out a lighter coat. The sun was already moving high in the cloudless sky, but it was still fairly early in the day, and he didn't want to feel frozen once he finished his fifteen minute walk to the Domino Museum.

Yugi slipped down through the door leading into the shop. Grandpa was already awake, setting up a new display for its first day of release to the public.

"You're up early this morning," said Grandpa. "Going somewhere already?"

Yugi nodded. "The museum."

Grandpa frowned. "Are you going to be long? Harry will probably be up soon, and your friends were going to be by today to take him and his friends for a tour. I thought you would be joining them."

Yugi shook his head. "I was sort of taking advantage of the fact that Harry, Ron, and Hermione would be occupied with exploring Domino."

"I see…" said Grandpa. "Are you walking? Would you like me to drop you off at the museum?"

"Nah, that's ok, Grandpa. It's a nice day, I'll walk. Besides, the shop has to open soon."

"Oh, pish posh," said Grandpa, "It's my shop; I can open it whenever I want."

"Gramps…today's release day for the new mini figure set." Yugi peered out the door to the shop. "And there's already a few people waiting. It'll be fine. I could use the fresh air anyway."

"Well, alright. But don't stay out too late. We're all meeting at that café down the road for dinner later!"

Yugi smiled and waved. "I won't forget. If you need help later, call me. I'll have the phone on."

"Will do – and give Ishizu my regards!"

"I will."

Yami phased out of the Puzzle after Yugi turned the corner from the shop, heading in the general direction of Domino's Arts District. "I hope Ishizu has recovered enough from the attack."
"Me too," said Yugi, "I just hope after this, we'll have a better idea of what we're up against."

"I, for one, want to know how Voldemort got into the museum in the first place, considering that Professor Dumbledore and his associates put protections around it. If the museum was still vulnerable, then so are our homes."

"That's what I'm worried about too," said Yugi. "I'm…just wondering if we're doing the right thing by not telling Bakura about this meeting. He's in this just as much as the rest of us, and I feel awkward keeping this a secret."

"But you were having doubts about the Spirit of the Millennium Ring," said Yami.

Yugi nodded, ignoring the odd looks a few random pedestrians gave him as he passed by, seemingly talking to himself.

"I know. It just seems like anytime the Spirit is friendly or helpful, there's another angle involved. Remember how Tristan told us that he was helping him to save Mokuba back in Duelist Kingdom, only to want to use his body as a vessel?"

"I do….He also conspired with Marik during Battle City and injured Bakura in the process – although, he did turn around to save the good Bakura from further injury during our duel on the blimp."

Yugi sighed and crossed the street as the traffic signals changed. "He shouldn't have been put in that situation to begin with. The Spirit did all that just to try and make a grab at the Millennium Items."

"He also did help us break into Kaiba's mind while he was being attacked. Without him, Kaiba may have been trapped by that demon monster for far longer, and may have suffered far worse than those bruises."

"I don't know how he managed to do that," said Yugi, "Shouldn't the powers of the Millennium Items be the same? How did he get through, but you and Set both couldn't?"

"I couldn't say, Yugi. But as you know, each Millennium Item has its own unique power."

Yugi shoved his hands into his jacket pocket. "I just…I want to believe that the Dark Bakura was being helpful…but…we just have had such a terrible track record with him, I have to think he was being friendly for a reason. And because he keeps things so secretive…I just can't trust him."

"Ryou Bakura though, has every right to know what's going on."

Yugi frowned. "I know…I'll…just have to fill him in later. I just hope he won't be too upset with me."

He finally stopped at the base of the steps leading up to the museum. "…It's hard to believe that everything that happened to us over the last couple of months…started when we came to visit Ishizu about the Millennium Rod over the summer."

"You're right, Yugi. It was from here that we went to Kaiba Corp, and received Professor Dumbledore's letters."

Yugi began the climb to the front doors. "It's like going full circle. And even the last time – there was a break-in at the museum, even though we didn't know about it at the time. I'm feeling some serious déjà vu."
"Woah, hang on there, pal," said an employee outside, sweeping the steps near the front entrance. "We're not open yet, sorry. We don't take visitors for another few hours."

"I have an appointment with Ishizu Ishtar," said Yugi, "She's expecting me."

The employee raised an eyebrow. "This early?" He sighed and reached for the small walkie hanging on his hip. "Hang on, I'll call in. If she's there and can verify, we'll have someone let you inside."

Yugi nodded. "O-okay."

/I don't remember there being such a mess to visit Ishizu in the past./

/I saw Ishizu during business hours the last time. And maybe they've upped security after she was attacked./

/Possibly./

The employee listened to his garbled reply and pocketed the walkie again. "Sorry 'bout that. I didn't realize she was taking visitors before opening hours. Someone else is here to see her too, and security had flagged 'em in already."

Yugi raised an eyebrow. He had a feeling he knew who it was, but, he felt the need to ask anyway. "Really? Who?"

"I was just arriving, so I didn't pay too much notice. Some guy in a suit. Probably rich too, since there's a limo parked in the back lot." The employee shrugged. "Probably some investor or something."

Yami had to chuckle. /I suppose Kaiba is here./

/Sounds like it./

A security guard appeared at the door and waved Yugi inside, led him down the corridor past the Egyptian exhibit, and into an employee-only area. "Last door on the right."

"Thanks."

Yugi passed through the door and down the indicated hallway. As it turned out, the security guard didn't have to tell him which door belonged to Ishizu; Roland was standing at the end of the hall, speaking quietly to someone on his phone. Upon seeing Yugi's approach, he pointed towards Ishizu's office.

Yugi nodded, knocked on the doorframe, and walked inside.

"Good morning, Yugi," said Ishizu, and she gestured to the empty seat in front of her desk next to Kaiba. "I'm glad we were finally able to meet."

"Me too," he said, "Are you alright?"

Ishizu smiled softly, "I've recovered enough from the attack, thank you." She gestured to Bill, sitting off to the side of the desk. "I didn't have the chance to speak with you on the call with Kaiba the other week, this is Bill Weasley. He has been stationed here both as an assistant to the Egyptian wing of the museum itself, and as a protector of the stone tablets."

"Nice to meet you," said Bill. "I heard you had your first Quidditch game. How did it go?"
Yugi turned a slight shade of red. "It was great! We won."

"Very good!"

Seto eyed Bill warily.

Bill took notice of the blue eyes scrutinizing him and chuckled. "You're friend doesn't like me," he said to Ishizu.

Ishizu sighed. "It is alright, Kaiba, Bill has been here for quite some time. He is aware of our situation."

Seto's eyes narrowed. "…Is he."

Yugi looked at Bill apologetically. "Kaiba…doesn't trust easily."

"That's alright." Bill didn't seem fazed at all. "I understand. But I'm here to help."

/Then where was he when Ishizu was attacked in the first place/? Set mused from their corridor.

"If we're done with pleasantries," said Seto stiffly, crossing his arms. He turned back to Ishizu. "What happened here exactly?"

"I really didn't get to hear much of anything of the attack," said Yugi. "Can you start from the beginning?"

"Of course," Ishizu sighed. She met Bill's gaze before turning back to Yugi. "I was here, working late one night, well after closing time. I had gotten up to take a walk and clear my head, when lights began just turning off on their own.

"…I thought maybe security was overriding the sensors and didn't realize I was still in this part of the building, but the next thing I knew, this man had appeared, from this same hallway. I had just walked through there, and he hadn't been there before. It was – for lack of a better term – like magic."

"What did he look like?" asked Yugi.

"He was tall, perhaps about your height, Kaiba," said Ishizu, and she closed her eyes to picture him in her mind. As if she was really able to forget anything about that night. "He called himself Lord Voldemort. His face was kept hidden most of the time, but when he removed his hood…".

She cringed visibly. "…He was so pale, almost white. And his face…he hardly resembled a man…."

When she shuddered again, Bill reached over and gave her arm a slight reassuring squeeze.

Ishizu opened her eyes again and nodded at Bill. "…His eyes were so unnaturally red, and his face so distorted, I can't imagine what might have happened to it. But he had a wand, and used it to close the security gates without even touching them."

Ishizu clasped her hands together in her lap. "We were in the exhibit room, with the stone tablets."

"Did he ask about them?" asked Yugi.

Ishizu paused. "…Not at first."

Yugi blinked. Assuming Voldemort was after the Items, like Dumbledore believed, that would have been one of the first things he would have asked about, considering the Pharaoh's Tablet had two of
them right on it.

Ishizu took a deep breath. "He produced a relic and was very inquisitive about it. It was one that was recovered from a dig near the Valley of the Kings, and had gone missing shortly after. It was also the site of the Death Eater attack, where a tomb guardian had gone missing."

"What sort of relic?" Yugi asked.

"A sword, albeit a broken one, for most of it was missing. He was quite adamant that there was something very special about it, but at the time, I couldn't see it."

"Could it have belonged to the Pharaoh?" asked Yugi.

"Unlikely," said Ishizu, "Possessions that belonged to a Pharaoh or other high-ranking official would be carefully preserved and left in the tombs, so they would be with that person when they crossed into the Afterlife. But this sword was badly damaged and was found loose in the desert. Time had clearly done its course.

"But he was determined to find the other pieces, and claimed there was magic in it." Ishizu shook her head. "It didn't make sense to me. Even despite the obvious wear, I could see it was just an ordinary sword. There was nothing ornate about it at all to suggest otherwise. I tried to make him see reason in hopes he would leave. There was no telling how many more parts to that sword there were lost in the desert. The odds of anyone finding them were so small, but he would hear none of it."

"And then what happened?" asked Yugi.

"…Voldemort moved on to the tablet, and said he could sense the magic contained inside."

"Did you tell him anything about it?" asked Yugi, nervously.

Ishizu quickly shook her head. "No…not to him."

Yugi's brow furrowed. "…I thought he was the only one there with you. Did he have Death Eaters with him?"

"No," said Ishizu, "But he was right. The sword did have magic. Dark magic." She glanced at Bill again. "It summoned the Shadow Realm."

/What? How is that possible?/ said Yami.

/I don't know…but it can't be good./

Yugi swallowed nervously, for he was almost afraid to ask the questions running through both his and Yami's minds. "Then what?"

"A figure came out of the sword. It was nothing but a shadow, but it clearly had control over the Shadow Realm," said Ishizu, looking down at her lap again. Her fists clutched to the fabric of her dress to keep her hands from fidgeting. She kept her head low, eyes closed. "That was what…"

She didn't need to say anything else, but when she lifted her head she did catch the twitch that broke through the blank mask Kaiba had worn through the entire conversation thus far when she mentioned the shadow figure. Had Kaiba been in contact with it before?

Seto studied Ishizu's pained face for a moment before turning on Bill. "And where were you during all of this? Weren't you supposed to be here to stop this sort of thing from happening?"
"I had been recruited by some of the other staff that evening in setting a new exhibit in the Greek and Roman wing. They needed help moving some of the larger pieces. I had no way of knowing something like this was going to happen," said Bill, "But we all came running when we heard her scream. It took a few minutes to get the gates open around the exhibit hall, but when we got inside, he was gone."

"I have been at the home the wizards had set up here in Domino until I was well enough to return to work," said Ishizu. "It has been a harrowing week."

Yugi turned to Seto for a moment before looking to Ishizu. "…If Voldemort summoned the Shadow Realm…what did he do? I didn't think Shadow Games were possible without a Millennium Item."

"Neither did I," said Ishizu, "And what worries me is that there is no mention of a magical sword of any kind in the ancient scriptures."

"Then where did it come from?" asked Seto.

Ishizu shook her head. "I do not know."

She raised a hand, pressed it to her forehead, closed her eyes, and made a face as if she was ill.

Bill frowned. "Are you alright? Should I fetch you something?"

"Some water perhaps," Ishizu smiled apologetically, and opened her eyes again. "I don't mean to trouble you, but I fear the headache from the last few days is coming back."

"No trouble," said Bill, getting up. He turned to Yugi and Seto. "Can I get you two something? There's water, tea and coffee in the meal room."

While looking away from the desk, Bill didn't see Ishizu slightly nod her head at Yugi and Seto. Yugi didn't notice either and politely shook his head.

Seto, however, did see the silent signal Ishizu was trying to give him. "Black coffee."

Bill nodded. "Sure."

Ishizu waited for Bill to leave the office and close the door before focusing her gaze back to her two guests. Any pain on her face instantly vanished. "The employee room is on the clear other side of the museum," she said, once Bill's footsteps were no longer audible. "So we can speak freely for a few moments."

Yugi blinked. "…Are there things about the attack that you didn't tell anyone? Are you still not feeling well?"

Ishizu nodded. "I assure you, I'm fine. Bill Weasley and his friends have done much to help protect both myself and the museum, and were very attentive whilst I was recovering, but I didn't share all of the details with them. As helpful and good their intentions, I would not trust them or anyone else with the secrets of the ancient scriptures. This is why I wanted to speak to you in person."

Seto pressed his fingers against the "KC" pin on the lapel of his jacket. "Roland."

"Yes, sir."

"Give us a warning when Bill Weasley is on his way back."

"Of course, Mr. Kaiba."
Yugi looked quizzically at Seto. "Wasn't he just on the other side of the door? You could have just spoken to him like a normal person."

Seto rolled his eyes.

Shaking his head, Yugi leaned forward in his seat. "So…what else happened that you didn't want to tell anyone else about?"

Seto cut in before Ishizu could say anything. "You also said a shadow came out of the sword. What did it look like?"

"It took the form of a man – or, rather, the general shape of one. It was much taller than an average person, with hands that seemed to be more like claws. It had no distinguishing marks."

Seto's eyes narrowed. "…Taller than myself?"

Ishizu nodded. "By quite a bit." She paused and took a breath. "But the one feature that it did have… was the Millennium Eye in its head."

/That cannot be a coincidence./ said Yami. /Ishizu just described the very creature that has been forcing its way through Kaiba's mind./

Yugi looked to Seto worriedly.

Ishizu eyed them both carefully. "By your reactions…," she said, "…you've seen this being before."

Seto muttered under his breath. "Unfortunately."

Yugi bit his lip. "Well…what did it want?"

Ishizu shuddered again, the painful memories still fresh in her mind. "It was very forceful for information on the Pharaoh's tablet and the ancient scriptures, and it seemed to push through memories to see what it wished." She paused. "And…it seemed to think I was someone else. It kept referring to me as 'Isis', though I don't know anyone by that name."

/Isis…it can't be…./ From his listening point in their corridor, Set looked down at the Millennium Rod in his hands. /

/What are you on about?/

/Do you remember when I mentioned that I was able to recall a Master Aknadin that once wore the Millennium Eye?/

/…No./

/No? It was just the other morning when – ah. Never mind. You were sleeping off your battle wounds from your night in the Room of Requirement./

"Kaiba?" Ishizu said gently. The moment she had mentioned the name 'Isis', Kaiba's face had gone blank, and his gaze remained fixated on the arm of his chair, unmoving, unblinking.

Yugi looked over. "I…I think he's conversing with the spirit in the Millennium Rod."

After a good silent minute, Seto suddenly roused himself from his stupor and returned his focus back to the conversation. He straightened up in his seat and Ishizu noticed that his eyes didn't seem quite as deep a blue than before, and even the stiffness of his posture had changed.
He bowed his head. "My apologies for starting you, Miss Ishtar. I am Set, High Priest of the Pharaoh, and Sacred Guardian of the Millennium Rod."

Ishizu blinked, obviously surprised.

Yugi's eyes widened incredulously. "Kaiba let you out?"

Set shrugged. "Seto was not favoring to share, and the information we have is important." He tilted his head lazily towards Yugi in the most unKaiba-like fashion. "You know well enough how stubborn he is."

Yugi nodded.

Ishizu studied Set curiously. "I am glad to finally make your acquaintance, High Priest," she said, "I was not aware the Millennium Rod contained a spirit until the group call we all had with Yugi's friends."

"It was a shock to us too," said Yugi.

Set took in Ishizu's appearance again, and she noted he looked almost sad. "If I may ask, while the Millennium Necklace was in your care… was there not another presence inside? Like how the Pharaoh and I are bound to our Millennium Items?"

Ishizu shook her head. "The Necklace granted me only glimpses in time, but if there was someone trapped within it, I was unaware."

Set sighed, clearly put out. "...I see."

Yugi's eyes darted to the door. "I don't know how much time we have…"

Ishizu nodded. "You are right. Please – how do you know about the Shadow?"

Set sighed. "The Shadow has been attacking Seto during the night sporadically throughout the last several months; the latest one had locked him into a crude one-sided Shadow Game while it searched through his memories." He gestured to the walls around them. "One of the visions that it saw contained the two of you here with the Pharaoh's tablet. I fear that was what made you a target for attack."

"What information would Kaiba have that you wouldn't?" asked Ishizu, looking from the Spirit of the Rod to Yugi.

Yugi sighed. "We were wondering that too. Hang on, I'll let the Pharaoh come out."

There was a brief flash of gold, and Yami emerged out of the Millennium Puzzle. "The only conclusion that Yugi and I could come up with was that it was searching for the Millennium Items."

Set shook his head. "No. I think it is more than that." He looked to Ishizu. "Forgive my staring, but you seem familiar to me. There may not have been a spirit in the Millennium Necklace, but it is possible that you are descended, or at the very least, are reincarnated from Priestess Isis, for she wore the Necklace during my lifetime."

"Do you remember her as well?" asked Yami, and he couldn't help not hiding the trace of excitement in his voice. Even with most of his memories gone, the few scattered remnants Set had were enough to give glimpses into his past. Sure he didn't know his own name, or what specifically led to him sealing himself into the Millennium Puzzle, but now he knew of three individuals who served under
him. With names.

"By name mostly," said Set, shaking his head. "But when I look at your face, I see someone I have known for quite some time, despite only having met you today. Seto and I are near identical to each other in appearance, so Miss Ishtar - I do not find it hard to believe that you may be close to a mirror's image of the Priestess."

"Then…" Yami began, "Perhaps the Shadow was looking for my allies. He did address me personally during that one instance in Kaiba's mind. The two of you have both been attacked, and we just found out that Duelist Kingdom was as well. I haven't been in touch with Pegasus in some time, but he did wear the Eye. Could he be a reincarnation of the Master Aknadin you remember?"

Set frowned. "It's possible. I would have to see the man in person. Unfortunately, I don't recall much of Master Aknadin except for his name."

"I think…that would make the most sense," Ishizu said. "It seemed to think I was someone else for quite some time, and I believe it only fled when Bill and the others tried to break back into the exhibit hall. Although…" She directed her attention to Set again. "Are you the only one of the three of you to suffer these attacks?"

Set nodded. "So far. And the only hints I can go on as to what the Shadow may have been looking for are the visions that repeat themselves."

"Which visions are those?" asked Yami. "When we tried to help that one time, memories continued to cycle around until we broke through. But they were all different."

Set shook his head. "Seto doesn't reveal much to me, but I know his first visit here, when he received Obelisk the Tormentor was one of them, as was the visions he experienced during his tournament duels. If there are others, he hasn't shared what they are."

"If I may," Ishizu began, "What were the visions he saw during the tournament?" She had a vague idea of what they might have been. During her entire duel, Kaiba had been insistent on summoning and using Obelisk to defeat her, confirmed by the brief flashes that the Millennium Necklace had given her ahead of time. It was only at the last possible moment that he had dismissed that strategy altogether and summoned his Blue Eyes White Dragon to finish her off. Clearly he had seen something strong enough to wreck an entire duel's worth of buildup.

Yami turned to Seto. He had never bothered to ask what Kaiba saw during Battle City either, though, although at the time he doubt Kaiba would have admitted to any of it. After all, the Millennium Rod had to burn him, knock him clean out and force Priest Set into his mind for him to stop dismissing the magic as a cheap trick, and that was all well after he had his soul stolen for the second time in two years.

"He saw the tablet, of course, and then a flash of my own life. From what he remembers of it, I was before the stone carving of a dragon with a woman."

"A woman?" asked Ishizu. "Who? The Priestess you mentioned?"

Set closed his eyes and shook his head. "I do not know."

"Ishizu, you know more about the ancient texts than anyone," said Yami, "…Could this Shadow be the enemy I sealed away 5,000 years ago?"

Ishizu shook her head. "I don't believe so, but unless we can find out what it is after, we'll never know for certain. But its ability to summon the Shadow Realm is especially troubling. That power
should only reside within the seven Millennium Items. But if it is, you must be very careful. That evil was supposed to be locked away, and nothing good can come of it escaping.

"And how would we go about finding that out?" asked Yami, "There is no rhyme or reason to when it decides to pay Kaiba a visit."

"It would seem the only repeating thread during these attacks that you've mentioned is the Pharaoh's tablet," said Ishizu, "I don't know what has made Kaiba's limited exposure to it so unique, but..." she trailed off and observed Set cautiously, "Have you considered trying to set a trap for it?"

Set immediately tensed.

Yami leaned forward. "Trap it how?"

"Well..." Ishizu said nervously, not taking her eyes from Set, "We know that, for whatever its reasons, it comes for Kaiba. What if you caught it in the act?"

"That's not a terrible idea," said Yami, ignoring the harsh look Set sent his way. "Perhaps like how we were able to rid Marik of his dark side by defeating him in a Shadow Game, we might be able to do the same here. After all, Shadow Game penalties are absolute. The only way someone banished to the Realm can leave – even one that's used it before – is through the terms of another game. I've already been able to interrupt a Shadow Game before, so I know I can do it again."

Set's shocked eyes darted between Yami and Ishizu, horrified and outraged more at the Pharaoh's agreement to Ishizu's suggestion than the plan itself. "Listen to yourselves! Do you realize just what you're suggesting? That we use Seto as living bait? That monster has caused enough damage to my host's mind without an open invitation."

Ishizu withdrew back in her seat. "I'm sorry – I meant to try and cordon off this Shadow before it got to that point. I didn't say that intending to cause Kaiba any harm."

"Mr. Kaiba," said Roland. His voice quietly broke through the tiny hidden speaker on the back of the pin, "Mr. Weasley is on his way back."

Yami and Set quickly retreated back into their Items, leaving a wide-eyed and concerned Yugi and a rather livid Seto in their places.

"There are three flaws in your little plan," Seto snapped. He held up his hand and tallied off on his fingers. "One – the attacks get stronger over time. It started off as little more than invasive dreams over the summer. The last one? I was literally pinned down and assaulted within my own mind, and it took the work of three spirits to get it to leave."

"Two – there is no rhyme or reason to the attacks. I haven't been visited in well over a month, and there's no way of knowing when it decides to come back until it happens."

Yugi grimaced. "What's the third problem?"

Seto side-eye glared at him. "You already know what it is. How is your Pharaoh supposed to play the hero when the Shadow doesn't physically appear? You and I both know it doesn't waltz into Gryffindor Tower in the middle of the night."

Ishizu frowned. "It doesn't?" That was interesting. The Shadow came from the sword, and Voldemort had to bring it with him. If the Shadow had the capability to enter minds on its own, why would it wait for Voldemort to pay her a visit?
"No," Seto hissed angrily. "And the invasions are gaining intensity. I was nearly strangled the last time it broke in. The next time that freak comes back, I could be left in some coma by the time anyone realized what was going on."

The door opened a moment later. Bill handed Seto a steaming cup and passed a similar one with water back around the desk to Ishizu, along with a bottle of mild pain relievers. "Tamoda said this would help."

Ishizu smiled. "Thank you, Bill. I'll take them afterwards."

Seto took a sip of the coffee and pulled a face.

Bill chuckled. "Sorry – I never said the coffee was good."

Ishizu turned back to Yugi. "I'm sorry there wasn't much more information I could give you. Whatever that Shadow was expecting to find, I don't think I had it. The probe through my mind was very painful, but I don't think it managed to see anything of special consequence."

"It's alright, Ishizu," said Yugi, getting up, "But if you find out anything, will you let us know?"

"Of course," she said, and gave Seto a long look. "And please, take care of yourselves, and stay in contact."

"We will," said Yugi, and he turned to nod to Bill. "It was nice meeting you."

"Likewise, I just wish it was under better circumstances," said Bill, "Tell Ron I said hello – I hear he's staying with you guys for Christmas break."

It wasn't until they had passed through the end of the hallway leading out of the employee offices when Yugi finally spoke. "Well…that didn't reveal much of anything new."

"No," said Seto bitterly. Clearly he wasn't thrilled with baiting out the Shadow, and Yugi couldn't blame him. "Whatever this Shadow was looking for, Ishizu didn't have it – and that makes me all the more curious to why it thinks I do."

"So…" Yugi peered up at his rival. "…Do you have a plan?"

They descended a set of steps that led into the exhibit halls. "I assure you, it's not to play the waiting game."

They had started to cross through the Egyptian wing when Seto stopped suddenly. Yugi turned back. Seto stood right in front of the Pharaoh's tablet. His eyes raked over every inch of it, and he sighed heavily.

/I think this is the first time he's actually looked at it. I mean, actually looked at it. From what we saw with him and Ishizu in the past, that didn't count./

Yami mentally agreed. /Although…he's studying it rather closely. If I didn't know any better…I'd say he was reading it./

/Reading it? You mean the hieroglyphs around the edging? Can you read it, Pharaoh?/

/No. I think that's from my memories being wiped. Remember Marik said that Kaiba had the ability to read the text on the Winged Dragon of Ra, and he admitted to having found a weakness in it, so he.../
Seto huffed and crossed his arms. "All this fuss…over a rock."

"Well," said Yugi, "it is a magic rock."

Seto raised an eyebrow and gave Yugi an annoyed look before turning back to the tablet. "Ishizu stares at this thing all day long. You've seen it how many times since you found out about the Pharaoh? I've barely paid an ounce of attention to it once, over a year ago, and yet I've somehow learned some great secret."

"The only thing I can think of, off the top of my head, is the duel itself," said Yugi, gesturing to some of the other carvings along the sides. "It looks like, other than the main monsters, you've got a Monster Reborn, and a Battle Ox, and I have a Swords of Revealing Light and… Gaia the Fierce Knight? And while we've used those monsters, I don't get anything special from it."

Seto tilted his head and stared up at the carving of the Blue Eyes White Dragon. "It's rather fitting for our signature monsters to be there, isn't it? But Set was insistent that his ace back then was some warrior called Duos."

"Maybe he doesn't remember acquiring it," Yugi shrugged, "It's not like the Pharaoh can remember if he used the Dark Magician. But…the Pharaoh told me about his…uh…intervention that night, when you were attacked last. The Blue Eyes seemed to be very prominent, and even seemed to have an existence outside of just your memories. It really wasn't the Pharaoh or Set or even the Spirit of the Ring that got rid of that Shadow from your mind – it was the dragon."

Seto scoffed. "Something tells me that Blue Eyes isn't the reason I have a target on my forehead. And it's not the God Cards, because I don't even have those."

Yugi pointed to the bottom, where most of the eroded edging was located. "And you can barely see what's down there. Maybe that's what the Shadow was looking for…"

Seto shook his head. "I've never seen the original tablet before it was taken from wherever it was found. What's missing there is just as much a mystery to me as it is you."

"Yeah…" Yugi nodded, and his eyes lit up. "But I bet Ishizu has! Her family has guarded the Pharaoh's secrets forever! And Pegasus probably saw it too – he based Duel Monsters from the tablets he saw while he was in Egypt!"

Seto crossed his arms, and narrowed his eyes at the bottom half of the tablet. "But she made it sound like it left her head empty handed. So whatever it's looking for – she didn't have the answers either, even if Ishizu saw the tablet in perfect condition back in Egypt."

Yugi let out a noisy exhale. "Then I'm out of ideas. Without trying to catch the Shadow in the act, we're just guessing in circles."

Seto shifted his sleeve to check his watch. He stared at it for a rather long time before speaking again, and the bitterness in his voice was staggering. "Considering waltzing up to Voldemort's front door to address the Shadow directly is out of the question, there really is only one alternative, isn't there?"

Yugi hung his head. The Pharaoh's suggestion to use Kaiba as bait didn't sit right with him. Yami would have shut that thought down in an instant if he was the one suffering from these attacks. Did he push for it knowing that his rival was learning to block the attacks? Or was it purely to just find out something about the Shadow? Either way, it wasn't fair. Kaiba had already suffered enough from the Shadow's advances. It wasn't right to willingly subject him to more.
Seto closed his eyes and sighed again. Turning on his heel, he stalked back off towards the museum’s exit. "What’s your day look like, Yugi?"

Kaiba sounded like he had just swallowed something horrid. Eyebrows raised, Yugi hurried to follow after him. "I, uh, was going to meet up with everyone later, after Joey and the others finished giving Harry, Ron, and Hermione the Domino City tour."

Seto rolled his eyes. "That's later. I'm talking about now."

"Oh, um, nothing, I guess?"

"Good."

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"Are you sure this is wise?" said Yami. He was standing in the middle of Kaiba's office, having essentially been ushered along with his rival the instant they left the museum. He felt like he had been arguing in circles over the last three hours. "I know I suggested this, and believe me – Yugi's chewed me out over it ever since. But we don't have to go through with it.

Seto leant against the front side of his desk and twirled the Millennium Rod slowly around his fingers. "As much as I abhor the idea, the only way we're going to make headway on this is for the Shadow to come back. And despite not wanting to give the creep a golden ticket inside my head, if we can stop him now, it'll save me in the long run."

Yami frowned. "But you said so yourself it'll come back stronger. How are we supposed to fight it off – just the two of us, when it didn't work before?"

"You also said that my Blue Eyes got rid of it. You just need to be there when it arrives, not after. Challenge it to a duel, and get rid of it when you win."

Yami had to bite back a chuckle. "I'm glad you think so highly of my dueling skills. How do you know that it'll duel with me?"

Seto gave him a deadpanned look. "Because every nut we've faced over the years ended up dueling you. Why should this be any different?"

Yami waved a hand dismissively, but then his expression turned serious. "Okay. You win that one. But I feel I should remind you – the stronger the opponent – especially one with ties to the Shadow Realm – the higher the stakes involved. Aside of risking the chance that we can't rid it from your mind, what if holds your soul over my head?"

Seto leveled him a silent 'duh'. "Then you'll just have to win, won't you? With this ridiculous track record you have of pulling victory out the dregs of defeat, I don't see why you're so worried."

"I don't take pleasure in dueling with these stakes," said Yami fiercely, "And you know it. Please, Kaiba, at least think this through before making a decision on this grand a scale."

"I have," said Seto, angrily. "The way I see things, there are two options. We can continue onward, as if nothing has changed. I will be continuously battered around in my sleep by the Shadow until I've been reduced to nothing more than a breathing vegetable, and we will be no better off in stopping it. Or, I can dangle myself out there on a rope, and we can try to subvert all of my future misery by catching the Shadow off guard. You think I want to do this? I'd rather spend the rest of this break with only Wheeler or Pegasus, hell – even Dolores Umbridge for company. The Shadow is already more powerful than at least one Millennium Item. Do you really want it getting stronger,
with no clear indication on how to stop it?"

Yami hung his head, exhaling deeply. "It isn't right. This isn't fair."

"Well," Seto deadpanned. "Neither was dumping me with the Millennium Rod after I had already
told you no twice. Yet here we are. We can't afford to wait around anymore. What other option is
there?"

The silence in the office spoke for the both of them.

A knock at the office door drew both of their attentions as Roland led Remus Lupin inside.

Roland moved around the desk to sit in Seto’s chair and opened up the laptop. "Your schedule is
cleared, sir. Though Mr. Pegasus was rather put out, as expected, and only agreed to push his
meeting until tomorrow on the insistence that you actually attend this time."

Seto rubbed at his temples. "Of course he did."

Remus set two small potion bottles down on the desk. "I'm not certain I am the best man for this
job."

Yami turned to Remus, "Why? What's going on?"

Seto said, "Look, from what Harry and his friends have said, you were the best defense professor
they had. This is a backup plan."

Remus nodded. "I'll try my best, but I have to admit, there are better Occlumens and Legilimens out
there than me. I am far from a master at these subjects."

Roland eyed the bottles suspiciously. He hadn't been able to keep track of his boss's rather heated
conversation with Yugi Muto from the museum up to the request to go fetch Remus Lupin, and from
what he was able to gather? Knocking Mr. Kaiba out in hopes that some magic monster would show
up to wreck his mind didn't seem like a good idea in the slightest, and neither did ending said attack
on the outcome of a card game. "What are in those?"

Remus gestured to each one. "The first one is a Sleeping Draught. And if necessary, the other is a
Wiggenweld Potion."

"A what?"

"A Wiggenweld Potion," said Remus, "It's a healing potion that can reverse the effect of the
Sleeping Draught."

"...I see." Roland picked up the Sleeping Draught and peered at the label over the top of his dark
sunglasses. "And how long is this meant to last?"

"I've diluted it down a bit," said Remus, "but it will still last for several hours."

"But he will wake up from it?"

Remus nodded, "I assure you, the Sleeping Draught's effects are temporary."

Roland set the bottle back down, unconvinced. "Are you certain about this, sir?"

"Unfortunately," Seto muttered. He slipped out of his suit jacket, and sat down on one of the office
sofas.
Yami reached for the chain of the Puzzle. "I entered your mind the last time by taking hold of the Rod while you slept. I think this time…." He removed the Puzzle from around his neck and held it out to his rival, "…it might work better if you wore it, and at least held onto the Rod. Try to maintain a physical connection with both Items."

Seto hesitated, clearly caught off guard. "…Why?"

"Well, it's not like you keep the Millennium Rod very close at all times. Perhaps the connection between the two of you isn't strong enough to fight the Shadow the moment it arrives. I'm wondering if keeping the Items in hand will help us fight the Shadow before it can do you any damage."

The moment the Puzzle left Yami's hands, control relinquished back to Yugi, and he failed to hide the odd smile that formed on his face, despite the seriousness of the situation. "Sorry, but you look weird wearing that."

Seto glanced down at the odd weight around his neck and back up at Yugi incredulously. "How do you stand to wear this all day?"

Yugi shrugged. "I got used to it. It's like wearing a duel disk I suppose; only that's around my neck, not my arm."

Remus took the Sleeping Draught and approached the sofa. "Now, even diluted, the potion will take effect almost instantly, so I advise you to make yourself comfortable before drinking it."

Seto nodded and stretched out, settling back against the cushions.

Yugi cringed. "It's not too late," he said anxiously. He didn't bother to mask how much he was practically begging. "You can still back out of this. We can try to come up with another safer way to find the Shadow."

Seto shook his head, gestured for the potion and propped himself up on his elbows.

Yugi sighed, but moved to the opposite couch. He watched as Remus uncorked the Sleeping Draught and poured a small amount of it into the empty mug on the coffee table. "Just to warn you – the taste isn't exactly pleasant."

Seto snorted. "Can't be worse than the museum's poor excuse for coffee."

Yugi pulled a face. "Was it really that bad?"

Seto paused just before raising the mug to his lips. "You have no idea." He quickly knocked the potion back and handed the empty cup to Remus. Settling back down with one hand holding the Millennium Rod at his side, he shifted his other to rest casually around both the chain and the top of the Puzzle as his eyelids grew heavy, and was out within seconds of his head hitting the pillow.

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Yami's eyes opened, revealing to him a corridor he had only once previously traversed. Unlike the last time he had set foot here, there was no mysterious Shadow Realm magic blocking his path, and he stepped through the open doorway into Seto's soul room.

Set glared at him from his seat in Seto's desk chair, rolled all the way over to sit adjacent to the office couch. "I can't believe you managed to make him think this was a good idea."

Yami held up his hands. "I honestly thought he would dismiss the notion altogether. But we both
know that swaying Kaiba's mind once it is made up is nigh impossible. I certainly didn't expect him
to want to do this, and in my defense, Yugi and I did try to talk him out of it."

Set drummed his fingers against the arm of the chair, unamused, as he seethed angrily. "Have you
even considered that this duel you intend to challenge the Shadow to might just end up with both of
your souls lost? What then?"

Yami sighed. "I suppose we'll have to cross that road if we get there."

Set bit out a harsh laugh. "We? I don't see how much good you will be with your mind lost to the
darkness."

"I suppose you'll just have to bail me out then," said Yami.

Set huffed. "I suppose, this will be as good a test as any to see if my lessons have done him any
good. Have you even considered that Seto's mind may fight off Shadow's attack before it makes its
way inside?"

Yami nodded. "I have. And if he manages to at least weaken the Shadow ahead of time, then that
may make it easier for us to get the information we need."

That did little to reassure Set. "I hope you know what you're doing, my Pharaoh," he said stiffly, "Or
keeping Seto safe is going to be the least of our worries."
This chapter was very hard to write, probably because of the lack of action in Domino City in comparison to the sorts of hijinks the main crew gets up to at Hogwarts. Thankfully, the next updates should not take as long moving forward. Apologies for the delay, and enjoy the great many mini-sections in this update!

(For a currency comparison later in the chapter, 100 Yen is roughly $0.88)

"All right," said Téa cheerily, "The sun is shining, it's not freezing out here, and we have the whole day ahead of us to explore Domino. Are you ready?"

"Absolutely!" Hermione waited on the sidewalk for Téa to lock their front door before allowing her guide to lead the way. "Are we going to meet up with the others?" asked Hermione. She tightened the scarf around her neck as Téa started down the street.

"Sure," Téa smiled. "But I'm sure Joey and Tristan are taking their newfound gamer friends to the arcade first. And you didn't seem like the type to enjoy spending half the day watching them try to beat a computer."

Hermione shook her head. "No, not really. So where are we going first?"

"Well, I thought we'd start downtown and branch out," said Téa, "There's a cute little café in the Arts District I thought we could visit. Duel Monsters has brought a lot of different people here recently, so there's a bit of a cultural melting pot in the center of town. It's pretty neat."

"You and Yugi are so close to a lot of things," said Hermione, as they rounded a corner, "You really walk everywhere?"

"Most of the time," Téa nodded. She pointed up the road. "Our school is there, though I gotta admit, it's crazy how much we've missed with all of Yugi's adventures and haven't gotten in serious trouble over it. I think Joey's been spreading his luck around or something."

They stopped in front of the gates. "So do you learn regular subjects at Hogwarts?" asked Téa, "Or is it all magic?"

"Regular subjects like math or science? No," said Hermione, "Spells and potions mostly. Although you could say Arithmancy is like math, or compare Potions to a chemistry class. I can't imagine what it would be like to take regular subjects again."

They started walking again. "Do you have a favorite?" Téa asked.

"It's a close tie between Arithmancy and Ancient Runes."
"Ancient Runes?" said Téa, "That sounds like Archaeology. What's Arithmancy?"

Hermione seemed giddy as they crossed the street. "It's about numerology, and the magical properties of numbers. It's such a fascinating subject!"

She turned to Téa. "What about you? What are your interests?"

"You mean besides supporting and keeping Yugi and Joey out of trouble?" Téa grinned. "I like the arts. It's my dream to become a professional dancer! If I can save up enough money, I might be able to go study in New York City!"

Hermione gasped. "I imagine schooling there is very competitive. You must be really good!"

Téa shrugged. "I'm not the best by any means, but I'm still going to send in the audition tape, just in case. It's not like I have anything to lose, right?"

"That's true," Hermione nodded. "Best of luck with the audition!"

Téa beamed. "Thanks!"

Hermione paused at the window of the third card shop they passed on their way to the main downtown. "These games are really popular here, aren't they?"

"Yeah," said Téa, "Yugi compared it to a sport he learned over there called Quidditch."

"I can see the resemblance in the hype," said Hermione, "Harry and Ron both play. I'm fine with watching. I was never well off on a broomstick."

"Hey, there's no shame with not being a gamer," said Téa, "That way they have someone to cheer them on from the sidelines!"

Hermione peered at the display again before they continued towards the square. "Do you duel?"

"I have a deck, sort of," said Téa, "It's really old, back from when Yugi first started to play. I've only used it once, and by now it's probably no good. There was another set that I used in a virtual environment that was much more put together, but it wasn't real, so I don't have a physical copy of it." She shrugged. "I've only dueled because I had to, but I'm hardly a duelist. I leave all that to Yugi and Joey."

Téa gestured around them. "Well, here we are. This is the Domino City Square!"

"It's a lot more open than I thought," said Hermione, "I sort of expected, I don't know…more buildings or something."

"Nope," said Téa, "It was revitalized…four years ago, I think? Maybe a year or so before Duel Monsters really took off. The city spruced up a lot of the downtown to make it more inviting. They made this whole block a pedestrian space, and the only vehicles allowed here now are food trucks." She glanced about. "Though I'm surprised there aren't any here today. There's a really good ramen truck I wanted to introduce you to."

"Maybe we'll find it somewhere else? Or do they all park here?"

Téa shook her head. "They vary, but there's usually at least one here. But that's okay. I'm sure Joey and Tristan are going to tour your friends across all of the food hangouts. Someone is bound to find it."
A shout, followed by a shimmer of light from across the square stole both of their attentions.

"Oh!" Hermione pointed towards the clock tower. "Those kids are dueling!"

"It's a popular place to meet up," said Téa. "Kaiba announced and started the Battle City Tournament from this spot. He pretty much turned the entire downtown into a dueling ground."

Hermione's eyes widened. "The whole downtown?"

Téa nodded. "Yeah. Even now, that tournament was one of the biggest events to ever happen here. It brought the best duelists from all over. You had to be a certain rank to enter, and at the time it was the only way to secure one of Kaiba's new duel disks."

Hermione raised an eyebrow. "The only way to get one was to qualify for the tournament? That seems like it would keep a lot of people from getting one."

"You would think so…" Téa said, "But since they were an integral part of the tournament, I guess Kaiba didn't want just anyone roaming the city with one. But afterwards, they were officially released to the public. I don't think there's any card or game shop here in town that doesn't have them somewhere. Even Duke's store – which is mostly tabletop-based games – sells them."

"We saw a duel at Hogwarts, between Seto and Yugi," said Hermione. "I mean, I saw Ryou teach Harry and Ron not long after they arrived at Ron's house over the summer, but that was just the cards on the table." She watched one of the kids summon an armor-clad elf to his side. "It was something else to see the game played out with those holograms."

"Mhm," Téa agreed. "Yugi first started playing between classes in school. His initial match against Kaiba was the first time they ever played with the holographic technology."

"It must have been exciting to see. After all, it was that game that jump started everything that's happened between them, right?"

Téa's smiled faltered. "It was…but I wasn't there to see it…A lot happened that day."

There was something she clearly didn't want to say, so Hermione let the subject drop. Yugi's friends didn't have to blurt out that they weren't friends with the elder Kaiba. The small bouts of unease that they let out by being with him during the Christmas party, whether it was intentional or not, was telling enough. As was the short yet noisy fight he and Joey had gotten into while Harry and Ron were trying to race against each other.

They passed through the square, leaving the kids to their duel. "I'm surprised Yugi didn't want to join us – or is he helping with Joey's dueling tour?" asked Hermione.

Téa shrugged. "I asked Yugi if he wanted to, but he said he had something to take care of today. He'll meet up with us at dinner though. And Bakura wanted to build his new diorama. I'm not sure if we'll see him later, but definitely at Kaiba Land!"

Téa stopped suddenly, eyes drawn up at the sign to one of the shops on the street. "Oh – I think I found the perfect place for you to check out. It's just a quick detour before we hit the Arts District."

"Oh? What's that?"

Téa grinned and pointed up. "Vintage bookstore!"

Hermione was through the door before the words finished leaving Téa's mouth.
"It's so weird," said Joey to Tristan, looking around Ryou's apartment, as if he had stepped foot in it for the first time, "Look Trist', signs of life!"

Ryou rolled his eyes from his spot on the couch with a large sheet of graphing paper and number of pencils splayed out on the lap desk before him.

Harry stole a peek at what he was sketching. "What's that?"

Ryou looked up. "I'm trying to sketch out the new diorama I want to make, for my next Monster World campaign...." He crumpled up the piece of paper he had been using and tossed it behind him, where it landed alongside four other balled up wads of paper that had missed the trashcan. "...But I can't seem to get an idea that will stick."

Ron wandered into the room, a piece of toast hanging out of his mouth as he slipped into his jacket and shoes. "Why not take a break and come with us? You've been on that couch all morning."

Ryou shook his head. "No, that's okay. Yugi going to join you guys?"

Tristan shrugged. "I don't know. Is he?"

Joey snorted. "Nah. He's ditched us."

Tristan's eyes widened. "You're kidding."

"Pssh, I wish," Joey huffed. "I thought he was comin' with us, but Gramps said he went out early this morning, and hadn't come back yet. So I guess we'll just have to show off all the great duelin' sights ourselves."

"Maybe he's with Hermione and...Téa, was it?" said Harry.

"Tried that," said Joey, "Téa hasn't seen Yug' today. She and Hermione are goin' to explore the Arts district or whatever. Boring, normal touristy stuff. Our day will be way more exciting."

"Why?" Ron asked, swallowing the last of his toast. "Where are we going?"

"You're gonna get the grand tour o' Domino in the only way that matters – Duelist style! This place was a battleground about a year ago! There are so many good memories here to share!"

Ron stopped at the door next to Harry and turned back. "You sure you don't want to come? You were in the tournament too, right?"

Ryou sighed. "My spirit entered the tournament, not me. I'm afraid I don't have anything of value to share. I was unconscious for almost the entire thing."

"Well, suit yourself," said Ron. "I'll see you later."

Ryou smiled and waved them off. "Bye!"

Once the group left, he glanced down at his recent sketch and scowled. *That looks hideous.*

Yami Bakura phased out of the Millennium Ring as another paper ball sailed past his head. "At this rate, you're not going to get anywhere."

Ryou pouted. "I don't know why this is so difficult. I remember creating the first campaign with
eve!

Bakura snorted. "Well. I remember it taking quite a time to build. Do you honestly think you're going
to get all of this done before you go back to Hogwarts?"

Ryou shrugged. "I really didn't expect to finish it...but I'd like to get at least the ideas down. I can
create the figures and the map itself once we're out of school. If I can just get the sketch down...
some sort of theme, it'll be a lot easier."

He turned quizzically to the spirit. "What about you?"

Bakura raised an eyebrow. "What about me?"

Ryou gestured to his sketchbook. "Do you have any thoughts?"

"It is your project."

Ryou slowly turned back to the discarded sketch pile. "I could use some help..."

The spirit followed his gaze. "Well...I may have some ideas..."

Ryou's face lit up. "Really?"

Bakura tilted his head. "Maybe one or two."

Ryou grabbed a blank sheet of paper and a pencil. "Well, I could use anything. I'm all ears."

With his focus on the paper, he didn't see the twisted grin form on the spirit's face.

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"...And this is where I fought Espa Roba, the ESP duelist!" said Joey, "I won Jinzo from him in my
first match in Battle City!"

"Is that your favorite monster?" asked Ron, "Like Yugi has his Dark Magician?"

"Nah, I mean, Jinzo's part of my main lineup, but my card? That's my Red Eyes Black Dragon!"

Joey reached into his pocket for his cards and shuffled through them to find his dragon card. "See?
Pretty awesome, huh?"

"Looks angry," said Harry.

"Yeah, well, I wouldn't wanna be on the receiving end of his 'Inferno Fire Blast' either," said Joey.
"But I didn't have faithful Red Eyes during Battle City. I lost it in a duel against some Rare Hunters,
but Yug' won it back. He held onto it until after the tournament had ended."

Ron looked around the town. "You dueled in the middle of the street?"

"Yep," said Joey proudly, "Kaiba had half the city shut down for his tournament. We could've been
challenged anywhere at any time!"

Tristan nodded, a sly grin on his face. "Like that time you looked so relieved that Kaiba ditched your
challenge to go off and find an Egyptian God card!"

Joey glared at him. "Well, I would've won!"
"Uh huh. *Sure.*

"You beat him later on though, didn't you?" asked Ron.

"Who, Kaiba?" said Joey, "*I wish.* We had to duke it out for the third place spot. I thought I had it in the bag, 'cuz he had just come out o' his loss against Yugi and was *stupid bitter,* but he beat me. *Again.*"

They started walking again, back towards the square. "Did you duel Yugi in the tournament?" asked Harry.

"No," said Joey. "But I did afterwards, to get my Red Eyes back. I told Yug' I didn't want him to win my battles for me. When I got Red Eyes back, it was because I *earned it.*"

"JOEY WHEELER!" a voice called from across the square. "What a surprise to catch you here this fine day!"

Joey turned. "Hey it's Mako Tsunami!" He jogged across the way to greet him. "How's it hangin', Mako?"

"I am well – and you?" said Mako, "I see you have some new friends."

"Yeah, these are Yug's new pals that he met abroad," said Joey, "We're showing them around town. Mako, this is Harry Potter and Ron Weasley. Group, Mako Tsunami the Ocean Duelist! We met him back in Duelist Kingdom, and the two of us battled it out right here at the Aquarium for my entry key to the Battle City finals!"

"And a fine match it was indeed," said Mako, "I hope you're taking good care of my Legendary Fisherman!"

"The best," said Joey, "That card has gotten me out of a number of jams."

Harry blinked. "You two dueled in an aquarium?"

"Amidst some of the most beautiful creatures of the sea - there was no better place!"

"Say, speaking o' the sea, Mako," said Joey, "I thought that you were gonna get yourself a fishing boat and go sailing the last I saw you."

"I still plan to," said Mako, "But boats are quite expensive. By this time next year, my work at the Aquarium should grant me enough for a small vessel!"

"That's great, Mako," said Tristan.

"It is indeed, my friend," said Mako, and then he turned to Harry and Ron. "So, how do you like Domino City?"

"It's pretty big," said Harry, "I love it."

"You should come by the Aquarium sometime," said Mako, "My aquatic friends are a sight to behold! And speaking of – my break is over. I will catch you all again soon!"

Joey waved. "See ya around, Mako!"

"You said you got a card from Mako? Is that a thing when you win in tournaments?" asked Ron.
"It was during Kaiba's tournament," said Tristan, "The loser of each duel had to give us his rarest card."

"That could ruin you early on though," said Harry. "Was that why you lost your Red Eyes?"

"Yeah," said Joey. "Thankfully, that was sort of before the tournament began, so I didn't lose my locator cards too."

"So how far did you place in the tournament?" asked Ron, as he and Harry were led down a side road, towards the water front.

"Fourth," said Joey, with a slight trace of bitterness to his voice. "If Marik hadn't sabotaged the duel with his freaky Shadow Game, I would've won – and made second place behind Yug'."

"So he cheated?" said Harry, "And got away with it?"

"Them Millennium Items do freaky things," said Joey, "That duel wore me out, and if I had the strength to call my last attack, I wouldn't have had to wage war on Kaiba for third place."

"Yeah, well, you still have a ways to go before you can take on Kaiba," Tristan smirked.

Joey rounded on his best friend. "Way to be my support, pal."

Tristan clapped him on the shoulder. "Anytime!"

"Where are we now?" asked Harry, looking around, "Docks?"

Tristan tilted his head. "Why'd you bring us all the way out here?"

Joey paused. "I…I dunno. I guess we just sort of wandered this way." He looked grimly up at a broken section of the pier. "Yug' and I dueled here once, during the tournament."

Harry's eyes widened. "Really? Who won?"

Ron snorted. "Yugi, obviously, since he's never been defeated."

Joey and Tristan exchanged awkward looks. "Hey, don't be too sure about that," said Tristan. "Yugi is good – really good – but he's not perfect by any means."

"Wait – he lost?" asked Ron, and his eyes bugged out as wide as Harry's.

Joey shook his head. "Not something I wanna get into here…but yeah. This duel? Marik had me brainwashed with the Millennium Rod to try and take out Yug' to steal his Millennium Puzzle and God Card. Technically, I won, but it was practically through cheating, so Yug' and I pretty much call that duel an unfair draw."

Harry's brow furrowed. "You said the Millennium Rod? Like…the one…"

"Yeah," said Joey darkly, "The same one Yug' for some reason gave to Kaiba." He scowled. "But I don't really wanna get into that either. I'm sure you heard the beginnin' of that fight on Christmas."

Ron pulled a face. "Mate, I think the whole house heard that."

Joey crossed his arms, turned away from the pier, and stalked back towards the alley between the warehouses. "Well, me and my pal Yugi still ought to have a few words about that. The last thing we need is Kaiba to have somethin' to hold over Yugi's head."
"You really think he would do something like that?" asked Harry.

Joey eyed him suspiciously. "Uh. Yeah. Don't you? You just spent the last few months stuck with the jerk!"

Harry exchanged a weird look with Ron and shrugged. "I…don't know. He kept to himself mostly."

Ron muttered something under his breath that Harry barely caught bits and pieces of, and he had to resist the urge to roll his eyes. Not that again….

"Huh. Wonder what that school did to him," said Tristan.

"Yeah…I dunno. But if he wasn't houndin' Yugi for a duel left and right for his God Cards or Yug's dueling title, then clearly we're thinking of two different people."

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Yugi nearly ran face-first into the front doors of the café in his haste to get inside. He could tell the employee by the door had seen the entire spectacle and was trying very hard not to laugh as he swung the door open and shuffled inside, this time at a much slower pace.

"Having a little trouble?"

"Sorry," Yugi rushed out, his face red from hurrying cross town, and from his own embarrassment. "I was running late."

The employee nodded his head towards the back. "Yeah. Looks like you're the only one left. Your grandpa ordered for you, too."

"Oh, thanks."

"Yug!" Joey waved energetically as Yugi turned the corner into the back room of the café. Several small tables were pushed together in the middle of the room for their group, and Yugi took the empty seat between Joey and Téa, glad to see that however late he was, at least their food hadn't arrived to the tablet yet. "Where have you been all this time?"

"Sorry, I got caught up with something," said Yugi. He looked up and down the table. Someone was missing. "Bakura didn't come?"

Téa shook her head. "We phoned his apartment, but he said he got an idea for his new campaign and didn't want to lose focus."

"Oh…alright then." He turned to Harry. "How was your tour across Domino today?"

"Fun," said Harry, "Joey and Tristan showed us all the arcades and dueling spots around town."

"Not only that, we ate our way around too," said Joey, and he clapped Ron on the shoulder. "I can't believe you've never had ramen before."

Ron shrugged. "I hadn't! But it was good!"

"Was that from Yoko's Ramen Truck?" asked Téa, "We were looking for it by the square but didn't see it."

"Yeah," Tristan nodded. "It was down by the waterfront."
"Did you duel all across the city too?" Harry asked Yugi, "Joey showed us where he earned his spot into the finals. Was there any place crazy you found yourself?"

Yugi thought back. "Well…I specifically dueled Marik's Rare Hunters," said Yugi, "And they usually tried to get me cornered somewhere. The first one was in the middle of the street, but that was just about once the tournament began. I also had a match by the waterfront, in the basement of some weird building…" He glanced at Joey and Téa briefly. "…And another on the roof of a skyscraper."

"Win any good cards?" asked Ron.

Yugi shook his head. "Aside from Slifer the Sky Dragon – one of the three God Cards – I didn't take anything but my opponents' locator cards."

"Come to think of it," said Tristan. "I don't think you took any cards except the three Egyptian God Cards."

Yugi nodded. "I think you're right. The only other duelist would have been Bakura, but he was hurt, and I wasn't about to take anything from him. It was clear he didn't enter the tournament under his own will."

Téa leaned forward. "Well, while you guys gave the dueling tour, we had a nice walk around downtown, and I had to practically drag Hermione out of the antique bookstore we found."

Hermione turned red. "Well, you were the one who pointed it out in the first place, so it's your fault, not mine."

Téa laughed. "Yeah, I know. I just feel sorry for the guy who's going to have to lug those books all the way home."

"I suppose I can send them through the regular post," Hermione mused, "I mean, it's not like I'll be going through them right away, and I won't need them at school. My parents can keep hold of them for now."

"How many books did you buy?" asked Harry.

Hermione bit her lip. "A fair few…"

"That might be a bit pricey to send," said Grandpa, "I remember mailing books and artifacts around during my archaeologist days. Shipping costs have only gone up."

"Maybe Tonks or Professor Lupin can take them back with them or something," said Hermione, "It'll be too heavy to send by owl." She shook her head. "It's no big deal. I'll worry about it later."

"Sounds like you all had fun," said Yugi.

"Yeah, well, would've been better if you were there," said Joey, "I know Gramps said you went to see Ishizu, but all day?"

Yugi leaned back in his seat as their dinner arrived. "It's…kind of a long story."

"We got time."

Yugi sighed. "I did see Ishizu this morning, but I spent the rest of the day at Kaiba Corp."

Joey's face scrunched up as if he had swallowed something incredibly inedible. "You're tellin' us…"
that you gave up a day of hangin' out with your best friends...for Kaiba."

"This got anything to do with the Millennium Rod?" asked Tristan.

Yugi nodded. "...Sort of?"

"That's not a real answer Yug'."

Yugi cringed. "I did say it's a long story."

Joey gestured around at the table. "Not like we're in a hurry. So start from the beginning, pal, and
don't leave anything out."

From the other end of the table, Harry butted in during the middle of Yugi's tale. "Wait – you're
saying that Shadow person, the one that's been going after Seto Kaiba in the night at school, attacked
someone here?"

"Ishizu and her family held a lot of information about the Pharaoh and Millennium Items for
generations," said Yugi. "Thankfully she recovered alright. But there's a lot information we don't
know. Why it's targeting certain people, what it's looking for...they're all mysteries. So...we tried to
trap it."

"Trap it?" said Grandpa. "How do you trap a shadow?"

"Ishizu proposed that if we were able to catch it in the act, we might be able to find out exactly what
it wanted," said Yugi. "It was the only thing we could think of."

Hermione's jaw dropped. "So you used her to draw it out?"

Yugi shook his head, and pulled a face. "Not quite. We used Kaiba." Upon seeing his friends'
baffled faces, and the look of horror on Hermione's, he clarified. "The Shadow only seems to attack
Kaiba while he's asleep, so after seeing Ishizu at the museum, we went back to Kaiba Corp. He
drank a sleeping potion, and the Pharaoh used the Puzzle to visit Kaiba's mind before the Shadow
would get there, so we could stop it before the attack started."

Yugi paused. "That's why I was late getting in. I had to wait for him to wake back up."

"Yugi that sounded very dangerous," said Hermione worriedly, "You know how hurt he was
the last time the Shadow attacked him."

"I know," Yugi sighed heavily, "But it was the only plan we had."

"So?" said Joey. "What happened?"

"Yeah," said Téa, "Is Kaiba alright?"

"Oh, he's fine." Yugi shrugged. "The Shadow? It didn't show up."

"You're kidding," said Harry, shoulders slumping, "After all that, nothing happened?"

"Nope. I mean, I guess there was always the chance the Shadow wouldn't come; it's not like it
arrived each and every night up to now, but I really just spent the day hanging around in Kaiba's
office while he slept."

"How long has it been since the last attack?" asked Grandpa.
"It's been a while, at least a month, I think," said Yugi. "It's odd how quiet things have been since then. In the beginning of the year, there were times that Kaiba was hit a few times a week."

"Maybe the Shadow got what it needed?" Téa suggested, "And it doesn't need to come back?"

Yugi poked at his food. "I don't know. We can only hope. But at the same time, we don't know what that thing would be. So it's still a guessing game."

"There's another possibility…" Ron said grimly, "Maybe the Shadow is just biding its time."

Several days later…

"Why did we have to meet here?" asked Ryou. He stood off to the side of the walkway in front of the Kaiba Corp building.

"Mokuba told us to," said Yugi. "We're just waiting on the girls now."

Joey looked up. "They gonna let me in? We all know I'm probably number 1 on Kaiba's 'Don't let inside' list."

Tristan raised his eyebrows. "You? Geez, Joey, I can't imagine what you did to get on Kaiba's bad side."

"Very funny, Tristan."

Yugi shook his head. "Seriously though, guys, I'm sure it'll be fine. I mean, right after I gave Kaiba the Millennium Rod, I thought he was going to drop kick me off the roof or something. That didn't happen, so I think you'll be okay."

"Besides," said Harry, "Aren't we here on his brother's invitation anyway?"

"True that, buddy," Joey clapped Harry's shoulder. "Mokuba will stick up for us!"

As if on cue, the younger Kaiba stepped out of the main entrance and skipped over to them. "Hey guys! You're a bit early…"

"We're still waiting on Hermione and Téa," said Yugi.

"Say, kid, couldn't we have met you at the park or something?" asked Joey, "Why'd you have us gather here?"

"Kaiba Land isn't open yet," Mokuba explained, "Today and tomorrow are friends and family days for the staff before the grand opening coming up, but we're going to take the employee entrance in, not the regular one."

"So friends and family – what's that mean, discounted stuff?" asked Joey.

"For most everyone, yes. For you guys? Free."

Joey's eyes bugged out of his head. "How'd you swing that one?"

"I mean technically, you guys get a traditional friends discount too," Mokuba explained, "It's just that your passes are linked to my company account. So long as you don't buy everything…" he looked plainly at Joey, "Or eat everything in sight, your bills are covered."
"Hey guys!" Téa called, as she and Hermione hurried up the plaza steps to the front of the Kaiba Corp building. "Sorry we're late."

"No problem, we haven't left yet," said Yugi.

Hermione looked around at the group. "Is Seto joining us?"

Mokuba shook his head. "No. He has meetings almost all day, but he booked dinner for everyone at the hotel restaurant, so I assume he's gonna meet up with us later. But he made the reservation sort of late in the day, so I imagine it's to gauge the firework show afterwards and give feedback before park opening."

"This is going to be so much fun," said Téa, "And it'll be a nice sendoff since you have to travel back to the UK tomorrow."

Yugi nodded as they followed Mokuba back into the lobby and was surprised that the younger Kaiba led them past the elevators and down a hall he had never been through before. "Where are we going, Mokuba?"

"The car is out this way," he said. "Fuguta was supposed to grab the passes on the way down."

To his surprise, however, it wasn't Fuguta waiting by the limousine, but Roland. "I thought you were upstairs with Seto," said Mokuba. "You're not going to be at the board meeting this afternoon?"

"I was asked to trade duties with Fuguta today. It appears he has a prior engagement early this afternoon." Roland opened the back seat doors and gestured them inside. "An odd and very last-minute request."

"Huh. I guess you got off lucky," Mokuba snickered and turned to his friends. "Board meetings suck."

"They sound dull," said Joey. "I almost feel bad for your brother."

At Tristan and Téa's funny looks sent in his direction, he said, "Almost, I said! Geezus."

"Are we all going to fit in there?" asked Ron, "I mean, your friend Duke picked us up from that airport, but there were less of us then."

"Miss Tonks was by and enlarged the seating in the car," Roland explained. "Everyone should fit comfortably."

"Say, I was wondering," said Yugi, "If the park wasn't open yet, what sort of events were going on over the last couple of days?"

"Oh," said Mokuba, "We open up the park for free for kids in orphanages during Christmastime. There aren't as many children's homes here in Japan as the States, so we sort of scheduled a bunch of days for the kids once the park was just about done. In America, we did a lottery system for the states around where we built Kaiba Land."

"That's really sweet of you guys," said Téa, "You probably made those kids' day."

Mokuba nodded. "It was a dream we had before Seto and I were adopted. I'm really glad it became something we were finally able to do."
It turned out that the Japanese Kaiba Land was built similar to the one they had visited in the United States.

"These are your passes," said Roland, passing what appeared to be plastic cards to the group. "They are used like credit cards for any food or product you wish to buy."

Ryou turned his over in his hands. It really did look like a regular payment card, but instead of a name, it simply said "VIP guest" on the front. "How much is loaded onto the cards?"

Roland raised an eyebrow. "More than any of you will likely spend in one day."

"You sure?" Téa elbowed Joey teasingly in the arm. "Because we all know how this one eats."

Joey scowled.

"So…" said Mokuba, to Harry, Ron and Hermione, "These guys have already been to the one in America. But this is your first visit! What would you like to do first?"

Ron looked about. Nothing from the rides to games or anywhere else looked to be crowded at all. A few families were wandering about, but everything looked completely open. "I don't know. What is there to do?"

Tristan snickered. "What isn't there?"

"You like Quidditch right?" said Mokuba, "That's a fast game?"

"Yeah."

"Afraid of heights?"

Ron shook his head.

"Cool." Mokuba grabbed his arm and led him down one of the paths. "We're gonna hop on a coaster. Anyone coming?"

"Roller coaster?" Hermione cringed. Memories of riding on Buckbeak came to mind. "No thanks."

Téa swung an arm around her shoulder. "We'll explore. Anyone else not want to need a barf bag before noon?"

"Me," said Ryou, and he moved to stand beside Téa. "I'm afraid speed and heights are not my thing."

/Wimp./

"How about we meet in front of the castle in two hours?" Tristan suggested. "That way we get all the fast and crazy stuff out of the way and then we can all move on together."

"I like that plan," said Harry.

"Awesome!" Mokuba made a sweeping bow. "This way, the Sky Dragon Coaster awaits!"

Joey perked up. "Wait, it's not a Blue Eyes?"

Mokuba shook his head. "Nope. The Blue Eyes White Dragon is somewhere else in the park. It's one of the differences between here and America."
"Where is it?" asked Harry.

Mokuba grinned slyly. "You'll have to find it!"

"You're telling me that your brother only stuck one of his dragons here in the park?" Joey said skeptically, "That doesn't sound like him at all."

"Well no, there are technically three," said Mokuba, "Two are names of attractions of some kind, and the third is somewhere else. It's just that the coaster isn't one of them."

Unlike the Blue Eyes Coaster in the American version of Kaiba Land, this ride was clearly designed after Slifer the Sky Dragon. The seating car was long, and shaped after its namesake. Yugi and Mokuba took seats up front, with Harry and Ron in the middle, and Joey and Tristan right behind them. A few other visitors took up some of the empty seating towards the back of the car as the ride attendant moved down the line and lowered the safety bars.

"What's this for?" asked Ron, "And why won't it lift back up?"

Mokuba twisted around. "Believe me; you'll be happy it's there in about ten seconds."

Ron craned his neck to look back at Joey. "What's he talking about?"

Tristan snickered. "You'll see – face front, dude."

The car started forward, leaving the boarding terminal and starting up on a rather large incline.

"You can see the whole park from up here!" said Harry. Ron looked down as the car continued to climb. "How high up are we?"

"High," said Harry.

Ron rolled his eyes as they started to descend again. "I figured that, but I – AHHHHH!"

Down the hill. Through a loop, into a tunnel. The car sped around the track, following the curves, tilting its occupants to the side and upside down. It rounded three more turns, and one more upside down twist before returning to the platform.

"That was a lot faster than I thought it was going to be," said Ron, "I feel like we just got on!"

"Hey man, you okay?" said Joey, as soon as they were off the ride. "You're lookin' a little green."

"I'm fine," said Tristan, though he didn't quite look it. "I wasn't expecting it to go that fast."

"It is zippier than the one in America," Mokuba admitted, "But it's also a little smaller too. How'd you two fare?"

In complete contrast, Harry and Ron were wide-eyed and beaming from ear to ear. "That. Was. Amazing!" said Ron. "I felt like I was zooming around on a broom…only I wasn't."

"Yeah," Harry nodded, "I remember doing some of those moves while trying to dodge a bludger during my second year."

Mokuba blinked. "What's a bludger?"

"It's a ball that flies around trying to knock people off their broomsticks," Yugi explained. "During
the next term, we'll have to record a match for you to see."

"So…" said Ron, "Anyone want to hop on that again?"

"Not me," said Tristan. "I think I'm going to stay on the ground for this go."

"Heck yeah!" Joey gave Ron a high five. "Let's do it, buddy!"

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"Is everything here related to Duel Monsters?" asked Hermione as they passed by a gift shop.

"Pretty sure it is," said Téa, "Though Mokuba's also into that Capsule Monster game, so I imagine there might be some things for that around here too."

The path they were traveling around the park passed by a few carnival-style stand games. "Oh, this looks fun," said Ryou, wandering over to one of the stalls.

The employee behind the counter gestured behind him. "Hello! Care to try your luck? Pop as many Kuriboh balloons as you can and win a prize!"

"Oh sure, why not," said Téa, and she held up her pass. "How much to play?"

"Well, normally, this is based on game tokens you'd buy at the beginning of the park," said the attendant. "But since you guys have VIP passes, I can just swipe those. If I remember, it comes out roughly to be 100 Yen for a play of four darts."

"Okay," said Téa, handing over her pass. "What do I get if I win?"

"Depends on how many balloons you hit," said the attendant. "You get four tries. One hit gets you these small plush critters. Going four for four lets you pick between a level four prize, or you can move on to double or nothing. You'd get four more darts, but you have to hit all four again to win the large monsters. Otherwise you walk empty handed."

"I think I'll be lucky to get one," Téa laughed. "Let's do it!"

"Alrighty," said the attendant, and he moved out of the way. "Give it your best shot!"

"They're just balloons," said Téa, "This shouldn't be too hard."

Her first shot bounced right off and onto the floor of the game stand.

"You were saying?" said Hermione.

Téa sighed.

"Here," said the attendant, and he passed her an extra dart. "Call that one a practice toss."

"Oh, thanks!" Téa angled her arm back, and tried again. Of the next four shots, she managed to pop two.

"Not bad!" the attendant smiled. "You've earned a level two prize! Anything on this wall here."

"Okay…." Téa mulled the choices over. Most of the Duel Monsters in that bracket were ones she had never seen before, but there was one that stuck out. It was a smaller prize in comparison to the others, but she knew that was the one. "I'll take the Shining Friendship keyring."
"Alrighty," said the attendant, and he took it off the wall and handed it over. "Anyone else want to go?"

"I'll try," said Ryou. He had barely taken a step forward when he felt the familiar sensation of being pushed back to his soul room. /Spirit, what are you doing?/

/Look here, if you're not going to do something exhilarating today, at least let me have some fun with this./

/At least let me have a turn before you shove me out!/

Bakura paused. /Fine. Make your turn, and then let me show you how we played these petty dart games back in Egypt./

Ryou ended up doing about as well as he expected to – none popped.

"Bummer," said the attendant. "Better luck next time."

Téa barely caught the quickest glint of gold from under Ryou's jacket as he stepped back up to the booth. "Let me try again." She couldn't tell if his hair had fluffed out like when the evil spirit was in control, but his voice sounded a bit off, as if the Dark Bakura was trying to pretend to be Ryou.

The attendant nodded and swiped the card again. "Alrighty. Four more shots."

Bakura centered himself and launched the first dart, popping a balloon in the middle of the row.

"Hey, there you go!" the attendant clapped. "But can you get the other three?"

The corner of Bakura's lip curled upwards, and three more balloons perished.

"Very good, that earlier set must have been just warm up," said the attendant, "And now the question remains, do you want to keep your current prize tier, or try for double or nothing?" He gestured to the large plush prizes along the side wall. "If you manage to get four more pops, you get one of those."

Bakura eyed the prizes, unimpressed. Nothing really appealed to him, but this wasn't about getting some knickknack that will end up on a shelf for the next six months.

"You can just settle for what you've already won," said Hermione. "You don't have to play again."

Bakura shook his head and held his hand out. "Oh no – I plan on popping all of them."

And he did.

Ryou blinked as Bakura retreated back into his soul room moments after landing the last throw.

"Alright, young man, job well done! You can pick any of these prizes!"

Apparently grand prizes at this booth were giant plush Duel Monsters.

"Oh, I'm not sure…," said Ryou, "I'm not into plush all that much." He looked around at his options. "I'll take the Magician Owl."

The owl, its wings spread wide, and with a gold and purple wizard hat flopped on its head, was actually much larger in his arms than it looked hanging on the wall of the booth.
Téa snickered. "They weren't kidding about huge prizes for getting a perfect run. That thing is enormous! What are you going to do with that?"

Ryou's face turned pink and he held it out to Hermione. "For you!"

Hermione's eyes widened. "Me? But you won it!"

Ryou smiled. "Consider it your first Duel Monster. And it looks all wizardly with its hat and little cloak!"

"It's adorable," said Hermione. She took it from its outstretched arms. "Thank you!"

"You're welcome!"

Téa reached over and gave one of the wings a little squeeze. "It's super soft too. You could practically use that as a pillow."

Hermione looked at it thoughtfully. "I think I might."

"You know," said Téa, as they started walking again, "I'm surprised there isn't more Blue Eyes merch around. This is Kaiba's park after all."

"He's been away though," said Ryou, "Maybe someone else was put in charge of picking the things to sell."

Téa shrugged. "Probably. I'm more surprised that we found some of Joey's monsters hiding around here."

"Well, despite his feelings towards him, Joey's become a fine duelist. After placing second in Duelist Kingdom and fourth at Battle City, I wouldn't be surprised if he starts getting a following too," said Ryou.

Téa laughed. "Can you imagine him in the spotlight like that? Now that's something I have to see!"

Hermione peered around. "Hey, duck around this corner for a second."

Téa frowned. "Why?"

"Is something wrong?" asked Ryou.

"No," Hermione turned pink. "It's…I want to be able pocket the owl, and I don't want to risk anyone seeing me do magic."

"Are you allowed to? We're not at Hogwarts," said Ryou worriedly, "Won't you get into trouble?"

Hermione shook her head and pulled her wand from her jacket pocket. "No. I turned seventeen in September, so I can't be traced for underage magic."

She tapped her wand against the plush owl and whispered, "Diminuendo."

With the owl shrunken down to a much more portable size, she pocketed both it and her wand, and looked eagerly to her two friends. "So, where to next?"

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"So what kind of food does this place have?" said Joey, taking a seat in the private dining area of the
"I can't believe you are hungry again," said Harry, "I mean – I know you're the resident food freak, but you just stopped at three snack bars not two hours ago."

"Didn't say I was hungry," said Joey defensively, "But I really was wondering."

"What he means is that he's not visibly starving," Tristan clarified, a sneaky grin on his face, "But he's always hungry."

"Despite its namesake, The Mystik Wok has a mix of everything to offer," said Mokuba. "There's some international flair too, if you're feeling a bit daring for something new."

"Can't wait," said Tristan. He turned to Téa, Hermione, and Ryou, "You'll never guess what happened while we were split up."

"What?" asked Téa, "Someone get sick on a roller coaster?"

"Nah," said Ron, grinning, "Harry got dunked."

"What do you mean, he got dunked?" said Hermione.

Harry laughed and scratched at the back of his head. "You know…a dunk tank. We sort of drew straws for the guinea pig, and I was it."

"It was set up like roulette," said Tristan. "Harry here sat on the chair above the water tank, and there were four Magical Hats underneath the chair. Only one of them triggered the drop though, and there was only one shot to get it."

"Well, technically there were three shots, but we took turns at it," said Yugi.

"So who dropped you into the water?" asked Téa.

Yugi laughed. "I did!"

"I'm glad they gave me clothes to change into, else I'd have been wandering the park soggy for the rest of the day," said Harry, though he didn't sound too upset had that been the case.

A quiet buzz sounded at the table, and Yugi reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone. "Oh," he said, smiling, "Grandpa is wondering if we're having fun."

"The best of fun!" said Harry excitedly, "I can't remember the last time I was out of the house – any house – for recreation like this!"

Ron frowned. "There was the Quidditch World Cup…." 

Harry shook his head, "Yeah…but then the Death Eaters terrorized the place right after. I mean stress-free from start to finish!"

"Well," Yugi said, "Grandpa can't wait to hear about it when we get back to the Game Shop."

Tristan nudged Ryou's arm. "Aren't you glad you left your artistic hermit cave to hang out with us today?"

Ryou nodded. "Oh yes. I didn't get a whole lot done on my next campaign, but at least I have an idea and a few sketches to start working off when I'm home next."
"Oh, what theme is it?" asked Yugi. "Can you share?"

"It's a secret." The grin on Ryou's was one he would have expected to see on the Spirit's face, and for a brief second, Yugi wasn't sure which Bakura had answered him.

Hermione's eyes caught the clock hanging on the wall over the doorway. "Say…that time is accurate, isn't it?"

Mokuba looked over. "Uh huh…." He reached into his pocket and checked the time against his phone. "It is."

Hermione pointed to the empty seat between her and Harry. "Shouldn't Seto be joining us?"

"Soon," said Mokuba, "We're here early, so he has a little bit of time still. I'll bet anything he got super-engrossed in whatever he's working on. I'll send a text to remind him." He tapped away at his screen, and then frowned. "…That…that's not right."

Joey leaned around Ron. "What's up, Mokuba?"

"…My phone…it's telling me our network is down." Mokuba turned to Yugi, puzzled. "Did your texts go through to your grandfather?"

Yugi blinked. "I'm pretty sure they did." He reached for his phone. "Mine did. But now it's showing that the connection is down."

"Maybe an issue with the cell carrier," suggested Tristan. "My parents are always losing their data connections."

"But this doesn't run through a cell tower," said Mokuba, "The signal comes via our satellites. That's how, aside from the magic and everything at school, you got a consistent signal over the summer."

"Maybe calls still work?" said Téa. "It's worth a shot, right?"

"Doesn't hurt, I guess." Mokuba tapped away at the phone again, placed the call on speaker, and listened for the dial tone that never came.

"Weird."

"Is there an archaic landline phone you can use?" said Joey, "You know, the old corded stuff that Gramps probably has in his shop."

"If we do, it's probably somewhere in the back." Mokuba got up, "I don't know if it's set up for calls outside the park, but we might be able to get a hold of Roland in the security office."

"Alrighty," Joey got up and stretched. "I guess we're taking a field trip before dinner! Anyone else want to follow?"

"We all might as well go," said Yugi. "Kaiba was supposed to join us for dinner anyway, so we'd have to wait anyhow."

They had barely made it three steps out of the private dining room before the lights in the restaurant cut out.

"Okay, this is getting freaky."

Ryou looked around nervously as dim emergency lights kicked in. "I have a bad feeling…."
"Maybe it's a reasonable explanation," said Téa, "Like…I don't know, a fuse blew, or a squirrel chewed on a power line."

"Yeah, well, even if that were the case, there's no explanation for our communications network to go down," said Mokuba. "Let's try to find out what's going on."

It seemed the entire hotel, not just the restaurant was in the middle of a blackout. Thankfully, the restaurant was only on the second floor and only one flight of steps needed to be traveled to get outside.

Hermione gasped. "It's not just the hotel – the entire park is out!"

"No…" Mokuba shook his head and pointed off in the distance. "We're on the eastern edge of the park. If we looked straight north from here, we would be able to see the edge of Domino City."

"Let me guess," said Tristan, "And by extension, Kaiba Corp."

"Uh huh…"

"I don't see anything," said Harry.

"That's what I'm worried about," said Yugi, "What would cause the power in an entire city to go down?"

"Bloody hell…I can think of something, or someone," said Ron, pointing towards the castle.

The tall structure looked completely eerie in the dark without the usual lights to illuminate it after sunset, and the statue of the third Blue Eyes that sat perched like a guardian along one of the upper towers was outlined in green, the light coming from the glowing skull hovering directly above it.

Chapter End Notes

'Magician Owl' is not a real card. I was googling for images of YuGiOh cards that would look cute as plush monsters, and it appeared in the search, probably as someone's custom design. Still, it was super adorable!
Téa gasped. "What is that?"

A series of loud popping noises sounded in the area, followed by brief red flashes of light around the park.

"Explanations later," said Harry quickly, looking around. "We need to get out of here."

"Mokuba," said Yugi, worriedly, "What's the best place we can get cover?"

"There should be a secret tunnel that leads back to the employee-only areas by the Virtual Arcade," Mokuba said. "It's just...we have to cross through an open area of the park to get there."

"What about a place with a landline to call for help?" said Tristan.

"Uh..."

They all jumped as a jet of red light flashed down the path, and they heard people running. Another jet of light was followed by a man screaming. Tristan held the hotel door open and they hurried back inside, standing just out of sight of anyone standing right by the door.

"We need a plan, fast," said Ron.

"First aid station!" Mokuba said suddenly, "Each first aid station has both a satellite and a regular landline connection to call for emergency services."

"Great, where's the nearest one?" asked Harry, pulling his wand from his jacket.

Mokuba bit his lip. "Across the park. It's near the monorail terminal."

"We'll have to go for it," said Joey, and he looked to Harry and his friends. "What are we up against?"

"Death Eaters," said Hermione, "You-Know-Who's followers. But...how did they find us?"

"We'll have to worry about that later," said Yugi. He drew his wand as well, as did Bakura. "We really only know two fighting spells."

"It doesn't matter," said Hermione, "You know how to disarm and produce a shield, and for now that'll be fine. Let us back you up until we can get help."

"Is there any way we can contact Tonks or Professor Lupin?" asked Ryou.

"I know the Order has used Patronuses before," said Harry, "But I don't know how to use one to send a message."
"Your Patronus is also sort of known," said Ron, "You don't want to lead the Death Eaters right to us."

"I have an idea," said Hermione, and she hurried over to the front desk of the hotel.

"What kind of light show is going on out there?" asked the employee, craning their neck to look outside. "Everything okay?"

"No," said Hermione, "Is there a phone that works?"

The employee shook her head. "Power is down. We can't get a signal."

Hermione sighed. "Okay…uh…while crews work on the blackout, just stay inside and away from the doors or windows. Do you have a piece of paper?"

"What were those light flashes then?" asked the employee, "I thought I heard a person scream."

"Power cable blew, someone might have been hurt," said Hermione. She grabbed an offered sticky note and a pen and scribbled a message onto it. "Thanks."

"What are you doing?" asked Ron as she hurried past all of them and back outside.

"Calling for help!" She hissed. Reaching into her pocket, she pulled out the little plush owl.

"Avifors."

Joey's eyes widened as the shrunken stuffed animal transformed into a small breathing owl.

"Woah…"

Hermione placed the note in its beak. "Find Tonks and Professor Lupin in Domino City. As fast as you can!"

"I have a question," said Téa, as the owl flew off, "The hotel isn't far from the entrance to the park. Couldn't we make a run for it there?"

Harry shook his head. "We probably could, but somehow, the Death Eaters knew we were here, so I would assume they would have the clear exit to this place covered. The tunnels Mokuba mentioned will probably be our best bet."

Yugi nodded. "Are we ready?"

"Let's organize a plan first," said Joey, as another jet of red light whizzed past the front of the hotel. "Mokuba, you know this place better than anyone. Even in the dark, we need you to lead us to where we need to go."

Mokuba swallowed nervously, eyes wide.

"I'll go with you," said Harry, "Don't worry." He looked to Ron, "How about after a few seconds, you come next."

"Got it," said Ron, and he looked at Joey, "Everyone else who can't do magic should stay in the middle of the herd so there's less of a chance of getting hit."

"I'll go with them," said Yugi.

"Then Ryou and I will hold up the rear," said Hermione.
"Alright…let's move," said Joey.

They moved out from the relative safety of the hotel awning and bolted towards the monorail depot on the western side of the park.

"Wait – which is actually closer?" Harry asked quietly, "That tunnel you mentioned, or the first aid station?"

"First aid, I think," said Mokuba, eyes wide, "Well…maybe not? It's a slightly different direction than the tunnel and about the same distance."

"THERE THEY ARE!"

Téa screamed as a jet of light made it very close to her head.

"Run!" Ron pushed them forward as he twisted around and sent out a stunning spell back where the light had originated.

The park soon became a frenzy of runners. Spells zigzagged back and forth between the group herding themselves down the pathway and their pursuers behind them. Other Kaiba Land employees and their guests scrambled for cover into the nearby shops and attractions.

Hermione shot two stunning spells behind her as they rounded the side of a gift shop.

Mokuba carefully peeked around the other corner. "Is it safe?" he asked worriedly.

"Nowhere is safe, kid," said Joey, "There are crazy people with sticks shooting laser lights at us!"

Mokuba shrank back against the wall.

Téa punched his arm. "Way to go, Joey."

Harry peered around this time. "It got quiet…we need to move."

"See the monorail up there?" Mokuba pointed off to the left from their current position. "The first aid station is over there. And if we go back around to the front of this shop and continue down that path, we'll eventually hit the nearest tunnel system."

Ryou jumped as two lampposts near them turned back on. "Is that…the power slowly coming back?"

"The rest of this place is still dark," said Ron.

"That could be them trying to find us," said Harry. "Let's get to the tunnels. It's probably a safe bet the Death Eaters don't know about them, and it'll probably be better than getting trapped in any one building." He looked at Mokuba and held out his hand. "Ready?"

Mokuba took it and nodded, eyes wide.

"Should we knock out the lights as we go?" asked Yugi.

"If the Death Eaters did that, it'll alert them right to us in a heartbeat," said Hermione.

A loud, high-pitched cackle could be heard from somewhere around the corner. "Ooooh children, come on out and play!"
Harry's eyes narrowed and he gripped his wand tightly. *Bellatrix*...

"We know you're there, Yugi Muto! The Dark Lord is most interested in meeting with you!" said another Death Eater, "If you surrender yourself now, we won't have to play all these little games around here with the Muggles."

Yugi shook his head and pushed himself off of the wall. "We can't let anyone else get hurt."

"Don't be thick, you can't give yourself up either," said Ron, "It would be like Harry turning himself over to You-Know-Who."

Bellatrix Lestrange's voice carried over again, "We know you're here too, Potter! Talk some sense into him. You don't want to lose another friend, do you? There's no veil here, but I'm sure we could make do."

Hermione had to grab Harry by the back of his jacket before he whirled himself around the corner and started firing off spells. *Harry! She's riling you up on purpose.*

Harry shook his head, "I know, but –"

"Come out, come out, Yugi Muto!" said a Death Eater Harry didn't recognize in a sing-song voice, "If you don't want to greet us, we'll have to settle for someone else. Should it be your friends? The shaggy blond one, maybe?"

Joey clenched his fists.

"Or, since it seems not a whole lot is happening here," said a third Death Eater, "We can go back to town and check on the old man." He added mockingly, "You think that dingy shop will have something of interest to the Dark Lord?"

The Millennium Puzzle flared and Yugi pushed Yami back into his mind. */Not this time, Pharaoh.*/

*/Yugi…*

*/I – I can't have you fight all of my battles for me./*

*/We both know it's really me they're after, not you./*

*/We're a package deal, Pharaoh. I'm not going to give them the Puzzle, so we're going to have to fight our way out of this./*

Harry looked quickly to the others. "On three we run. Wands ready?"

Ron and Hermione nodded.

Harry raised his arm. "One…"

Mokuba shrank back into the middle of the group as everyone with wands shifted to the outside.

A loud pop sounded as a man in a mask appeared almost right in front of them, but before he could utter a spell or shout to the others, a quick flick from Harry's wand sent him flying.

"Run!"

Spells started flying in all directions as they bolted from behind the building. The darkness in the park was kept constantly illuminated by the flashes of red light coming from all of their wands.
"Protego!" Yugi managed to cast as a red beam nearly hit Tristan as they ran. Hermione paused, whirled around, and shot off two silent spells in retaliation before continuing onward.

"Expelliarmus!" Harry shouted as another Death Eater apparated nearly almost in front of them, causing him to stop short and have Mokuba and Joey nearly trample right into him. The Death Eater immediately returned to his wispy disapparated form and returned to circling above them.

"There!" Mokuba pointed, "Between those buildings. There's a gate that leads to the tunnel!"

Harry nodded. "Got it!"

Ryou threw up another shield charm as two loud bangs sounded elsewhere.

"What was that?" said Ron, "That didn't sound like someone apparating around."

"Almost sounded like a gunshot," said Tristan.

Mokuba's eyes widened. "Any security in the park may be trying to fight back."

Téa gasped. "They'll just get hurt though!"

"But they might also get some of those guys off our backs," said Ron.

"It's weird though," Harry said, "Why does it seem like they're holding back? I don't think they've cast anything worse than spells any of us know."

"They're looking for me, remember?" said Yugi, nearly out of breath, "They probably can't risk hitting me with something if their job is to take me to Voldemort."

"Then Kaiba's security may have a fighting chance then," said Joey.

Harry shook his head. "We can worry about them after we get into the tunnel. If we come across anyone else, we can warn them to stay hidden, but for now we have to take advantage of them being a distraction for us."

"Speaking of," growled Yami Bakura, forcing Ryou back as they approached the gate, "Let's give them something else to chase." He held out the Ring in front of him with one hand, and a Duel Monsters card in the other. The Man-Eater Bug was instantly summoned, outlined by the dark purplish aura of the Shadow Realm. "Go. Cause some trouble."

"What is that going to do?" asked Ron, as the large insect wandered off.

Tristan shuddered, as memories of running from Pegasus's henchmen during Duelist Kingdom came to mind. "You're uh…better off not knowing."

Hermione aimed her wand at the gate, allowing it to swing open for them to run through, and then she did so again afterwards to seal it shut.

"Won't they just use magic to reopen it?" asked Téa.

"Probably, but it should slow them down for at least a moment," said Hermione.

"So…" Yugi looked into the tunnel. "Where does this lead?"

Mokuba shrugged. "I don't know."
"What d'you mean you don't know?" said Joey. "It's your park!"

"But it's not technically open yet," said Mokuba, "I've never been in this tunnel. But they all meet up, so eventually we'll get to somewhere recognizable."

"Well…at least the hallway is lit," said Ron. The path dipped down before leveling out again.

"Yeah," said Yugi. "I wonder if these are emergency lights, or if the power is being restored across Domino."

"Well, these are emergency lights," said Mokuba, "But if we get to say, one of the employee break rooms or offices and the lights are still gone, we'll know the power is still shot."

Yugi checked his phone. "Still no signal."

Mokuba paused and glanced at his own device. "Same here, but we're sort of underground now, so that could be affecting it too."

The tunnel led into an open chamber with at least three other branching paths splitting off of it. Mokuba moved past Harry and looked around, noting the directory map and directing arrows displayed on one of the side walls.

Ron took a quick glance behind them, in case they were being followed. "So where are we?"

"This is more or less a hub," said Mokuba, "There are two. It makes it easy for the employees and special VIP guests to get around the park and avoid crowds. We need to go…." He glanced down two of the paths before pointing to one of them. "That way."

"What's down there?" asked Harry.

"Security office," said Mokuba, "With any luck Roland's in there, and not outside looking for us."

"What if he's outside?" asked Ryou.

"There should be old school radios in the office. We can use them to get anyone outside to retreat back where it's safe," said Mokuba.

"The Death Eaters can always follow them," said Tristan, "This place wasn't protected like the Game Shop. For all we know, those masked creeps are here in the tunnels with us."

/All the more reason to find Kaiba's security/ said Yami. /If the Death Eaters are following us in here, there would also be someone chasing them…./

/Yeah/ Yugi bit his lip. /I just hope that no one got too hurt./

"I've got a question…" said Téa suddenly as they wandered the halls. "Suppose we truly gave those Death Eaters the slip. If they're really here for Yugi…what's to stop them from going to Domino to draw us out?"

Mokuba gasped suddenly and clutched onto Yugi's arm. "Oh my god – Seto! What if they went after him too?"

Yugi stopped short and exchanged worried glances with Ryou. "Well, the wards are in place. So long as Grandpa is home, he would be safe. And I know he didn't have plans to go anywhere today. And your brother was at work. Kaiba Corp was one of the protected places, remember?"
"But…" Mokuba cried, "What if he was on his way here? We can't call or do anything to check up on either of them."

"Then we need to get to the office," said Harry. "Someone might know what's going on outside the park."

There was only one person in the security office at the end of the hallway, a guard none of them recognized, and he immediately waved the group inside. "There you are! The team has been looking all over for you!" He grabbed a walkie from the desk. "Targets at home."

"Where's Roland?" asked Mokuba.

"He took a group out to look for you," said the guard, gesturing to the monitors and placing the walkie back onto the desk. "I was supposed to stay here and alert them if you showed up on the feeds. He should be back soon."

Yugi took a quick look around the office. Aside from the three desks in the room and the camera feeds all over the walls, the room was bare. Another exit door was on the opposite wall, probably a path through a different tunnel.

Harry looked at the large-screen monitors displaying camera feeds from all over the park, and noted that one of them showed the back of the shop they had taken temporary refuge behind. "How long has everyone been out looking?"

"As soon as the lights went off," said the guard, and then he paused. "These came on only a few minutes ago."

Ron pointed at one of the feeds on the corner of the screen. "Hey, what's that?"

Hermione peered over. "The tunnels? We just came from there."

"No – there," Ron pointed to the next feed over. "That's the hub, isn't it?"

"Uh huh," said Mokuba, and he immediately paled. "Uh oh. They found us!"

The guard stood passively and continued to watch the monitor.

Tristan blinked. "Uh. Dude. Aren't you going to call for back up? Those creepy guys with the laser-light weapons are on their way."

"I already did."

Mokuba crossed his arms. "When? It certainly wasn't while we were in here."

The guard reached into his pocket. "I will do so again then."

Hermione froze. The walkie was on the desk, not in his pocket. He had barely started pulling an item from his suit – something with a long, thin handle, when she surged forward, drawing her own wand and pulled Mokuba behind her. "Don't. Move."

Joey and Tristan scrambled back as the guard drew his wand as a dark laugh sounded from the doorway. "Well, it looks like our game of hide-and-seek has ended. Guess we win."

Joey moved a step closer to Mokuba as Tristan did the same to Téa. There were wands aimed all over the room. He couldn't perform magic of any kind, and his fists wouldn't do any good here, but if the magic spells started flying, he was grabbing the kid and dropping out of the way.
"What did you do to the guard?" asked Harry, "Did you Imperius him?"

Bellatrix Lestrange stepped into the room, flanked by three other Death Eaters and giggled. "We've had a spy impersonate him for quite some time. The real one has been dead for a while now."

Téa gasped. "You killed him?"

One of the Death Eaters behind Bellatrix sneered. "One less Muggle in the world."

"Well now," said Bellatrix, casually looking about at the teenagers. "Let's see who we have here. Potter, the Blood-Traitor, and the Mudblood. Why, it's like a little reunion! But no Longbottom this time, what a pity."

She laughed suddenly. "And look here, even the new ones have wands out, like they could last in a fight against us. Been teaching your little exchange friends the ropes, have we now, Potter? Did you tell them about the last time you all went looking for trouble outside of school?"

Harry's jaw tensed.

"We're not helpless," said Yugi. "And you won't be getting anything from us today."

"Oh, I'm sure four months of magic has made you dueling experts," a Death Eater snorted. "You can watch as we have fun with your little Muggle friends."

"You won't be going anywhere near our friends and family," said Yugi defiantly, "Not if I have anything to say about it."

"Well, you can come with us, and we won't have to," said the guard. "The Dark Lord has been quite eager to see you."

"Then he should have come himself and instead of sending his lackeys," said Harry, "After all, you did such a great job collecting that prophecy last year."

"You got away by the skin of your teeth, Potter," said the guard, "But we're not here for you this night."

"No, we're not," said Bellatrix, "Though I'm sure the Dark Lord would be pleased to see him as well. Imagine the look on old Dumbledore's face when his prized pupil is lost because he dared let him out of his castle on holiday. And unlike last term, Potter, there are no adults to save you."

"I wouldn't say that," said an angry voice from the other doorway.

Harry still had his wand trained on Bellatrix, but spared a brief glance over. Remus and Tonks were in the opposite doorway, wands trained on the Death Eaters in the room.

Bellatrix cackled. "Oh my. The Werewolf, and another Blood-Traitor. That is the best you can do?"

"There are more of us now," said Harry, "You're the ones outnumbered."

"Oh I don't know about that," said Bellatrix, "But the time for – what the?"

She staggered to the side as one of the Death Eaters behind her screamed and started firing spells back down the hallway they had come through.

"What are you doing?" she snapped.
Harry and Ron exchanged confused looks but didn't budge their wands. The guard lowered his wand a hair from its aim at Hermione to look towards the doorway.

"There's a demon out here!" cried the scared Death Eater, sending another spell down the hallway, but not before the Man Eater Bug leapt forward and knocking over another of the Death Eaters. Two of the Death Eaters, distracted by the huge insect, started firing spells across the room.

Harry nodded at Ron and they raised their wands towards the other Death Eaters. "STUPEFY!"

Remus and Tonks rushed forward as Hermione disarmed the guard. "Go," Remus hissed, shoving Harry towards the door they had come through. "We'll cover you."

"But -"

"Go," Tonks said, putting up a shield around Joey and Mokuba as they hurried past. "There's a friend at the end of the hall. A real one, this time."

"But - we can help," Harry said, casting another stunner towards a Death Eater.

"Harry," Remus grabbed him by his arm and all but tossed him from the room as the Man-Eater Bug continued to play its part as a distraction. "The rest of the Order is coming. GO."

"Come on, mate," Ron urged him forward.

"Are they going to be alright?" asked Ryou.

"They'll be fine," said Harry, "Especially if that creepy bug thing is working on our side."

"Who's the friend?" Téa asked as they ran down the tunnel corridor and rounded a corner.

"It's not him, that's for sure!" Joey skidded to a stop as the security guard Death Eater apparated right in front of them, his wand recovered.

"Where do you think you're going?" he sneered, then quickly dodged the stunners Harry and Hermione shot his way before firing a volley of spells back at them. Harry ducked under one and got a shield up for the second, but Hermione was struck in the chest by the third one as she was casting a spell back against the Death Eater and fell back against Tristan.

"Hermione!" Ron angrily sent a loud "Impedimenta!" towards the Death Eater but he instantly blocked it.

BANG! BANG!

Téa screamed as the Death Eater howled and fell over, clutching his legs. Roland stepped over him from behind; keeping his firearm trained on the Death Eater's face as he reached for the dropped wand, snapped it in two and tossed it harmlessly down the hall.

"I take it you're the friend Tonks mentioned," said Harry. Joey gave the Death Eater a swift kick for good measure, but Harry stopped him before anyone of them could pass by. "How do we know you're really you?"

Ryou blinked. "He just ruined both of that guy's kneecaps!"

"It could be a ruse," said Harry, "We were already fooled once today." He aimed his wand at Roland, "Prove you're you and not Imperiused or someone else in disguise."
"Tell us something only the real Roland would know," said Yugi, "Some insignificant detail…like…uh…." He trailed off, frowning. They really didn't spend a whole lot of time around Kaiba's shadow. What could they possibly use as a test?

"Our numbers," Joey cut in, "What were our assigned duelist numbers during the Battle City finals?"

Tristan snorted. "That's the test? You can barely recall what you had for breakfast yesterday, but you can remember details like that from over a year ago?"

"It's not just that," said Joey, "As far as I know, nothing on the blimp was televised, so the only people who would know would be us. So what are our numbers – and for good measure – who dueled who?"

"If you insist," Roland deadpanned, "In order from one to eight: Mr. Kaiba, you, Yugi Muto, Mai Valentine, Marik Ishtar – the real one, Ryou Bakura, Odion Ishtar, and Ishizu Ishtar. Yugi and Bakura dueled first, followed by you and Odion Ishtar, Mai Valentine and Marik Ishtar, and then Mr. Kaiba and Ishizu Ishtar."

He huffed, annoyed. "Now, if we're done proving my identity…we need to leave. Are any of you hurt?"

Tristan pocketed Hermione's wand and scooped her up. "He got her with something."

"I think it was a stunner," said Ron, worriedly. "…I hope it was just a stunner."

Roland placed two fingers along her wrist. "Pulse is fine. We'll worry about what it was after we get out of here."

Mokuba latched onto his arm, shaking slightly. "Roland – please tell me you've heard from Seto. I haven't been able to get a hold of him."

"Mr. Kaiba is fine, and hunkered down at the office." After Mokuba's shoulders sagged, visibly relieved, he continued, "The communications satellite was the last to go down, and the company lost power before the park. The plan was to gather all of you and regroup at Kaiba Corp. We relayed as much before losing the phone signal."

"Is that where we're going?" asked Téa. "Even though the power is gone?"

"No," said Roland shortly, moving to the front of the group. "Now let's go. Parking garage is this way."

"But Seto is expecting us," said Mokuba.

"Those plans changed the moment security became compromised," Roland snarled. "I made those arrangements within earshot of Death Eaters, so we're no longer going there."

"Then where are we headed?" asked Ryou.

Roland led them to the end of the hallway, and punched a code into the locked door blocking their path. The keypad lit up green and the door swung open into a near-empty garage.

Harry was almost expecting to find the limousine that brought them there, but the only car in sight was a rather mundane-looking SUV.

"This one hasn't been magicked, so you're going to have to squish inside."
Ron pulled his wand. "I know the spell."

"Make it quick," Roland said, unlocking the doors. He turned back towards the door they had just passed through, weapon raised, as if he was expecting more masked assailants to barge their way through. When just about everyone had settled themselves inside, he slipped into the driver's seat and steered the car out of the parking deck and into traffic.

"I've got a question," Harry leaned forward in his seat. "The Death Eater masquerading as one of your guys said you were with a team. What happened to everyone else? And how did you know where to find us?"

"Your wizard friends arrived while I was out with the team searching for you," said Roland, "They used some sort of compass trick with their wands to point towards the tunnels. They meant to head off the Death Eaters while I cleared the escape route." He sighed as he eased the van onto a highway. "As for the rest of my crew...assuming that they too hadn't been replaced beforehand, they will follow protocol and search and assist any employees and guests still in the park."

"Won't it seem suspicious to them that you left?" asked Téa.

"No. My genuine employees know that if trouble like this arose, my primary responsibility is to see to Mr. Kaiba and Mokuba's safety. With Mokuba in the park, they wouldn't expect me to linger."

Ron turned to look out the rear window. "But that would mean they could be following us, though… right?"

"I imagine that we would have known by now if they were following us," said Yugi. "For one, there'd be magic probably trying to run us off the road or something."

Mokuba pulled out his phone and looked at the top of the screen. The cell signal was still out. "Is Seto gonna know where we're going?"

Roland paused. "He will not. I imagine he will make his own arrangements once this mess has cleared itself out."

Harry noted the road signs as they passed. "We're not going back to Domino, are we?"

"No."

Joey frowned. "I guess there's some greater plan at work or somethin'?"

"Or something."

Ron crossed his arms. "Gonna share what that is?"

Roland sighed. "The plan, in its current state? To deliver you someplace safe, check on the status of the company satellites and communications network, and reestablish safe contact with Domino."

"This is that thing, isn't it?" asked Téa, "That you brought up when we all gathered for that phone call?"

Yugi, sitting in the middle row of the car, twisted around to look at her in the expanded seating Ron created. "What are you talking about?"

Tristan readjusted his arm from keeping Hermione upright between him and Ron. "You don't know?"
Ryou shook his head. "Know what?"

"Kaiba funded some secret getaway plan," said Joey, "You know, in case the world ended."

Yugi blinked. "H-he did? For all of us?"

"For your friends, yes," said Roland, glancing at him briefly through the rearview mirror. "Mr. Kaiba did not place a great deal of trust in the wizards after the data breach."

"Whoever it was looked into everyone," said Téa worriedly, "Roland showed us reports. It was terrifying."

"But - how are we just hearing about this now?" asked Ryou.

"We didn't want to worry you," said Téa.

"It's safer from a security standpoint as well," said Roland, as the car moved off of the freeway and onto a rural street. "Your friends can't be used as leverage against you if they can't be found."

"Does Kaiba know about this?" asked Yugi.

"He knows about it in the sense that he authorized me to create it," said Roland, "But he, like you, is unaware of the details. He provided the means for an escape route, and didn't wish to know any more about it."

"Then how is he gonna find us?" asked Mokuba.

"We'll cross that bridge when we get there."

"Maybe Remus or Tonks can bring him," said Harry.

Roland scowled at the notion as he turned onto a narrow lane lined with nothing but huge trees. The area was lit only by the car's headlamps, otherwise the drive was completely dark.

"Is this even a road?" asked Tristan.

Joey leaned over to whisper in Tristan's ear. "We sure that's the real Roland? Cuz this feels like that movie we saw last month where those kids all got attacked by zombies in a cabin in the woods."

Tristan rolled his eyes. "You were the one who used the test question, you dummy."

Joey blinked. "…Right."

"You mean a house like that?" Harry pointed towards the windshield. It was barely visible in the dark, but he could see a light from a window as they approached it.

Joey squinted at it from the dark. "Yeah…probably."

Téa glanced at the house. "It doesn't look very, well, big."

Yugi blinked as the car came to a stop. "Does it have to be?"

"Well, no," Téa admitted, "But, knowing that this was Kaiba's doing, it's weird that it's not, you know, grandiose and surrounded by dragon statues."

"How did Moneybags find this place, anyhow?" said Joey, "We're out in the middle o' nowhere!"
Roland got out, slid open the door to the backseat, and sighed at the group. "Like I said, Mr. Kaiba is unaware of its existence. This safe house was custom built by...someone else."

"Anyone we know?" said Tristan jokingly.

"Unfortunately," Roland grumbled.

"Wait, really?" said Joey, "Cuz I'm certain Tris' was just messing with you."

"I know. However, I wasn't."

"Who would have the money to custom build an entire house?" said Yugi.

"And be on good terms with Kaiba? Nobody," said Tristan. "Only person I can think of with money to burn would be Pegasus, but we know how well those two get along."

Roland glared at him before climbing into the back and checking on Hermione. "I never said it was someone on decent terms."

Mokuba's head jerked up from being glued to his phone. "You had Pegasus build this place?"

"Why?" Yugi asked, eyes wide.

"Despite whatever your feelings are towards him, his use of the Millennium Eye put a target on his back that was acted upon at Christmas. He's in as much danger as all of you."

"Kaiba can't be happy that Pegasus is in on his plan," said Tristan.

Roland pressed two fingers against the inside of Hermione's wrist. "Again, Mr. Kaiba is unaware of the details. He only knows that there is a protocol in place. And I expect all of you to keep it that way."

"Is there a catch?" Mokuba asked, guarded, "He wouldn't do all this out of the goodness of his heart."

Roland pulled Hermione from the vehicle and stepped aside for the rest of the group to get out. "He did, more or less. Contrary to his eccentric personality, his demands were rather...tame. My list of requirements was much more stringent."

Joey snorted and looked up at the house, half hidden behind the trees in the dark. "Like what?"

"Door locks, for one thing, because the man doesn't appreciate boundaries. And I hired the locksmith."

"So what did he want?"

"Artistic license. He chose to build, decorate, and furnish the entire place."

Tristan whispered to Joey. "Why do I feel like we're about to walk into one big Toon World?"

Joey nodded. "You and me both."

"How long are we going to be here?" asked Harry.

"You will still be returning to school tomorrow," said Roland as he led them up the short walk to the front door. "For the rest of us, as long as it's needed."
"What about Grandpa?" asked Yugi.

"Those two wizards – Lupin and Tonks – assured that your grandfather was fine before arriving at Kaiba Land. So long as he's willing, we'll arrange for him to make the journey after we get you settled."

Ron jiggled the handle of the front door. "It's locked."

With his arms full, Roland pointed a finger out towards the keypad next to the door. "3025."

It was clear as the door lock clicked and they wandered inside that the house was much larger than it looked from the outside. Joey was almost certain the walls were going to be covered with cartoonish paintings, but they were instead a neutral bronze color, coordinating nicely with the wood flooring and cream-colored carpets. A fancy spiral staircase went up to the second floor and past it he could see a large open sitting room with a fireplace going along the wall.

Roland set Hermione on the sitting room couch as footsteps were heard coming down the stairs. Harry turned to see a man dressed in a fancy red suit with long silver hair that was framed over his face, completely covering his left eye, enter and spread his arms wide.

"My dear Roland, if I knew you were coming and bringing guests, I would have rolled out the welcome mat!"

Mokuba shifted slightly closer to Roland as he glared back. "Domino was attacked. Communications have been down."

Pegasus's eye widened. "What?"

"You heard me," Roland snapped. "How long have you been here?"

"Since Christmas," said Pegasus, shrugging. "Clearly these people didn't keep current enough tabs on me to know that I wasn't at Duelist Kingdom over the holidays." He looked to the others as his eye lit up and a smile began to form. "Yugi-boy! It's been some time, hasn't it?"

"Uh…yeah," said Yugi, "Hi Pegasus."

"Oh, this is lovely. Not the circumstances, of course, but I can give all of you the grand tour! Ooo – I see some new faces, too! We will have to be introduced."

Mokuba pulled his phone from his pocket for the fiftieth time since leaving Kaiba Land and swiped his finger along the screen. "The signal is back!" He gasped, quickly dialed his brother's number and pressed the phone to his ear. "C'mon…" he said quietly, as the call rang out. "Pick up, pick up….

There was no answer.

~~*~~

Voldemort climbed the steps in the old house and moved towards the door at the end of the hall. Nagini slithered along beside him as he slipped into the darkened room. The Dark Priest hovered near the back of a dusty sofa that faced away from the door, and towards the unlit fireplace.

With a lazy flick of his wand, the fire roared to life and Voldemort sat at the long table on the other side of the room.

"I trust you have finished."
The golden eye practically *glittered* against the glow of the fire in the study.

*I have. Now we wait.*
Mokuba let out a panicked whine. "He's not answering..."

"Maybe he didn't hear it," said Téa, as Mokuba lowered the device from his ear, frowning.

"He keeps it on him all the time," said Mokuba, "And he keeps the vibrate on, so he'd feel it in his pocket."

"Maybe he left it on his desk or something."

Mokuba shrugged sadly. "Maybe."

Roland pulled his own phone from his jacket pocket and dialed a different number. "Odd. Fuguta is also not answering."

"Could the power still be out?" asked Ryou.

Roland dialed a different number, placed the call on speaker, and hung up as it was immediately transferred to a voicemail box. "Possibly."

Mokuba tried calling Seto's phone again as Roland turned to Pegasus. "The work is all done, correct?"

"Oh yes," Pegasus said, "Your tech boys finished days ago."

Roland swept from the room and down an adjoining hall to another locked door, Mokuba hurrying after him.

Ron looked to the rest of the group. "Uh…do we follow?"

Pegasus made a sweeping gesture. "Be my guest."

By the time they made it to the locked door, it was opened, revealing an office. Roland stood hunched over the desk typing something into the computer.

Pegasus arrived at the doorway, but unlike the others, didn't step foot into the office. "Well? Did they do a good job and hook everything up right?"

"We'll know in a minute."

"I did offer to test it for you, you know," said Pegasus.

Roland glared at him briefly. "And allow you to access the Kaiba Corp servers? No thanks."

"You can access Kaiba Corp from here?" asked Téa.
"And I can for Industrial Illusions as well," said Pegasus, "We may be hiding, but the world keeps turning, my dear, and work still needs to be done."

Roland turned to Mokuba. "Did it ring out, or go straight to his messages?"

"It rang," said Mokuba.

Roland turned back to the computer and started typing once more. "Try again."

Mokuba tapped his screen again and let the dial tone ring out in the small office. But no one picked up on the other end.

"Wait," said Yugi, "Let's try something else. Are we able to reach Grandpa?"

Mokuba frowned and tapped through his contacts to find the Game Shop. It rang twice.

"Hello? Mokuba?"

"Grandpa!" Yugi cried, "Are you alright? Are you safe?"

"Yugi! I'm fine. Sturgis and Hestia are here at the shop with me. We had quite a fright a short while ago, but it's quiet now."

Yugi sighed heavily. "Oh, thank goodness. You weren't hurt, were you?"

"No… though there were some strange lights outside. Red flashes, almost like from an ambulance or a fire truck, but no sirens. But they didn't last very long."

"Death Eaters," said Ryou, "They may have tried to get in."

"Well, it seems the protections that went up over the summer did their job. Aside from the power outage, if I hadn't looked out the window, I might not have noticed anything strange going on!"

"Are you still without power?" asked Téa.

"Our street is still dark," said Grandpa, "But I can see about two blocks down that their lights came back on. I imagine it's just a matter of time now."

"Can you see the Kaiba Corp building from your shop, Mr. Muto?" asked Mokuba, "We haven't been able to get into contact with Seto."

"I'm sorry, Mokuba, but I can't from here. But if the magic around my home worked against these Death Eater folks, then surely Kaiba Corp is protected too. The same wizards put them all up."

"That's true," said Harry, "They were all Order members."

"Are you kids alright? Where are you?"

"Safe house," Roland said, "Kaiba Land was attacked."

"We're fine," Yugi said quickly before Grandpa could start to panic over the other end of the line, "Just needed to make sure you were too."

"I'm alright. Hestia is going to stay here at the shop with me tonight, and I believe Sturgis is calling in more Order members in case something else happens before you all return to school."

"Are you going to stay home, Mr. Muto, or are you going to come here with us?" asked Tristan.

"I suppose, now that this little plan is in action, I'll have to. But I do have to take care of some things before I trek out to join you. I know we spoke about it once before...."

"I haven't forgotten," said Roland.

"...But in the meantime, I'll be alright here. I'm just sorry I won't get to see you kids before you go back to school."

Yugi's face fell. He didn't want to have to say goodbye for the next few months to his grandfather over the phone.

"...How are we getting back anyway?" said Harry curiously. "I mean, we got here in Kaiba's plane...but he doesn't know where we are. Are we going to fly back to the UK?"

"Should Remus and Tonks meet us here?" said Ryou.

"I wouldn't," said Pegasus from his spot leaning against the doorway. "That was the purpose of this little sanctuary in the first place. If we were going to invite the magical population here, then you could have stayed home."

"What are you trying to do?" asked Harry. He looked back to Roland, who was quickly typing into the desktop computer, and then opened a laptop that had been sitting idly on the desk and turned that on as well.

"Pull the cameras. If the power is truly still down, then only certain feeds will remain active remotely. If it's up, I should be able to see most of the Kaiba Corp building." Roland glanced up at large screen television mounted on the wall. "...I thought I asked for twomonitors."

Pegasus shrugged. "They said there was a wiring issue."

Roland grumbled and returned to his task as Pegasus walked away. "Sure there was...."

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Hermione sat up slowly and looked around. She was alone in a richly-decorated room, a vast change from the traveling tunnels underneath Kaiba Land. Judging by the décor in the room, she wasn't still at the park. ...Unless this was a room back in the hotel.

She got up and patted her jacket pocket to find her wand missing. That wasn't good. Was someone holding it for her – or had she been captured by the Death Eaters at the park? And if that was the case, was she even still in Domino, or back in Britain somewhere? And what of the others?

Hermione pushed aside the curtains at the window and saw nothing but trees. Well, that ruled out Kaiba Land. She also scratched the fleeting thought of capture; because if that had been the case, the odds are stronger she would not have been left in an open, inviting area of what looked like someone's house.

When she started hearing footsteps coming her way, she reached over and grabbed the closest item at her disposal – a painted vase – to defend herself. It seemed silly, seeing as any person with a wand would be able to disarm her with ease, but it was better than nothing.

Pegasus rounded the corner with a steaming mug in his hand, and froze the moment he stepped onto the sitting room carpet.
"Oh my – please put that down!"

"Where am I?"

Pegasus held out his hands non-threateningly, "In Kaiba-boy's little home away from home. But please – do put that down, I just finished work on it the other day and I'd hate to see my efforts shattered on the floor – or on me."

Hermione lowered her arm. "This – this is Seto's home?"

"Well, if we want to be extremely technical about it, we're in my home. But this is Kaiba's little back-up plan, in case your masked friends decided to pay Yugi and the others a visit." Pegasus pointed down the hall he had just come from. "If it eases your mind, your friends are down that way, playing 'I-Spy' on the Kaiba Corp cameras."

Hermione looked down briefly at the vase in her hands before gently setting it back down. "Who are you?"

Careful not to spill his mug, Pegasus performed a sweeping bow. "Maximillion Pegasus, creator of Duel Monsters and the proverbial thorn in Kaiba-boy's side, at your service." He tilted his head, "I see you're one of Yugi-boy's new friends – from that school, I gather. And you are?"

"Hermione Granger," she said, and looked out the window again. "Do you really live here in the middle of the woods?"

"No, not usually," said Pegasus lightly, "But you can say I've been making use of my little cottage ever since my castle was attacked on Christmas."

Hermione nodded, eyes wide. "…That's right – it was on the news. We saw it at Seto's home during Mokuba's Christmas party."

Pegasus's eye twinkled. "Oh my – one day you'll have to regale me with the stories of not only how our dear Kaiba threw a Christmas party, but also you ended up on a first-name basis with him." He nodded back towards the hallway and led her towards the makeshift Kaiba Corp office.

"…It's his name?" she said.

"Of course it is," said Pegasus, amused, "But the only person still alive that I know that's allowed to call him by it is little Mokuba."

Hermione wasn't really sure what he was trying to get at. "…He's never told us to not use it."

"Hmm." Pegasus mused and came to stop at the open doorway. Clearing his throat, he knocked hard on the doorframe. "I believe I've found the missing little lamb to your teenage herd."

Harry looked over as Ron let out a huge sigh, visibly relieved. "Hermione!"

"Are you alright?" asked Yugi.

She nodded. "I think so."

Tristan nodded. "That's a relief." He reached into his pocket and handed back her wand. "I think you'll need this..."

She gasped. "Thank you! I wasn't sure what had happened to it. But…what of the Death Eaters? They didn't follow us here, did they?"
"No," said Harry, "At least, it doesn't seem so. Professor Lupin said that more Order members were coming. And it turns out they had already gone after Yugi's grandfather in Domino."

"He's alright," Yugi said, before Hermione could even ask, "But it was definitely a scare. The Order is with him now."

"What about Ishizu?" Téa said suddenly, "She was already attacked once, wasn't she? What if the Death Eaters came back for her?"

"The Order has been keeping an eye on her too," said Yugi, "I think she's been staying at their base house until she goes back to Egypt with the Pharaoh's Tablets."

Roland grabbed a remote and switched on the large monitor. Instead of mainstream channels, the screen was split into eight different sections of the Kaiba Corp building. "Mr. Kaiba was in the office when the power went down," he said, pointing to the top left feed, "We need to find out what happened after that."

Hermione looked to the others. "Did something happen?"

"We can't get a hold of Kaiba," said Yugi, "So we're trying to work backwards and find out why he's not answering his phone."

"Where are those other places?" asked Ron.

"Hallways, the lobby, parking garage," said Roland, "I tried to choose the likeliest places he would have gone to should he have left his office."

"Can't we bring up the live feed and see if he's still there?" asked Tristan.

Roland shook his head. "There's a problem with the connection, I can only see the archived footage up to a certain point."

"Figures," said Joey.

"Wait!" Harry pointed to one of the hallways. "Who's that there?"

Mokuba squinted up. "Oh that's…Fuguta? I thought he had an appointment to go to." He turned to Roland. "That's why you guys swapped, wasn't it?"

"Maybe it finished early and he went back to work," said Ryou.

Mokuba shrugged. "I guess…"

Hermione bit her lip and turned back as the feeds started playing at an accelerated pace.

"So this is Kaiba in his natural habitat," said Joey, watching him work at the desk, then get up to file papers away before returning to his seat.

Téa rolled her eyes.

The feeds then blacked out, and after a few seconds came back on, but the picture was much grainier than before.

"What happened?" said Ron, "You can barely see anything."

"That's when the power dropped," said Mokuba, "There are a few emergency lights, but they won't
be as good as if everything was on. That's why the footage doesn't look so great."

Harry watched Seto pick up his phone and place a call. "I take it that's when he was calling you?"

Roland nodded.

"...It looks...like he put it in his pocket when he hung up," said Téa, "If I'm seeing that right."

"Looked like it to me," said Yugi.

"Hey, is that Fuguta again?" asked Tristan. He pointed towards one of the other feeds on the screen.

Mokuba squinted up. "I can't tell...." He clutched at the hem of his jacket. One of the bad wizards at the park was disguised as a member of security. Would that stop someone from doing the same at Kaiba Corp? Even with the magic protections in place? How difficult would it be to dress in a dark suit and shades to blend in with the other guards in the building?

"Stop!" Téa said suddenly, "I saw something on the far right one. A flash of light."

"Death Eaters?" Ryou asked nervously. "I don't see any. Maybe one of the lights blew out."

Yugi's eyes darted from one feed to the next. That light flash could have been a spell being cast, but no one appeared that fit the general Death Eater description. A few more followed after. A guard would occasionally be seen walking up and down the hallways, and Fuguta seemed to check on Kaiba at least once, but that was it.

"Wait!" Pegasus darted into the middle of the room, eye wide. "Go back – the last ten or so seconds, then pause."

Yugi frowned. "What is it? What did you see?"

But he didn't have to wait for Pegasus to answer him. He didn't notice the first time – like the others, he was looking at the corridors, to find where the light flashes had come from. But there was no hiding the odd fog that seemed to spread through Kaiba's office until nothing more could be seen.

"What the –" Joey said, "That can't be good."

There was another flash of light – not from the security footage, but within the room they were all gathered. As the glow of the Millennium Ring faded out, Yami Bakura growled.

"I'd recognize that anywhere, grainy footage be damned. That is the Shadow Realm."

Pegasus's head jerked to Yugi in an instant. "That can't be. Surely you've got a handle on all of those pesky items by now."

"...Most of them," said Yugi, "Between us, at least."

"Could he have summoned it?" asked Téa, "Since he has the Millennium Rod?"

"It doesn't much matter," said Yugi quickly, and he heard Yami utter a quick agreement through their link. "I can't see him doing that on a normal basis, but in a fight? Perhaps. But the fact that it was summoned in Kaiba Corp isn't a good sign. We need to get back there and find out what's happened."

"Yo," said Joey, "How long ago was this?"
Roland glanced at the timestamp. "About the same time that your Auror friends arrived at Kaiba Land."

"Seto could be in trouble," Mokuba cried, "We have to go help him!"

"Out of the question!" All eyes fell on Pegasus. He caught Mokuba's despaired face and held up his hands defensively. "I want to help Kaiba as much as the rest of you –"

Joey snorted loudly.

Mokuba glared at him.

Pegasus sighed. "Honest, I do. But we also have to realize that going back could be a rather elaborate trap. Those men in masks were looking for you, Yugi-boy. Rushing in to do your usual 'saving of the day' could make matters worse."

"But we can't sit by and do nothing," said Mokuba. He looked back up at the large screen in time for all of the cameras to go out.

"What happened?" asked Harry. "Is there more?"

"Doesn't look like it," said Pegasus, and he had to quickly step to the side as Roland swept past him and back out of the room. "And where are you going?"

"We've all seen first-hand how dangerous that Shadow Realm is," said Roland stiffly, pulling his firearm from his inside jacket pocket and checking the rounds still left in it. "If you think I'm going to stand idly by while my employer is locked in one of those games, then you're sorely mistaken."

"And if you think we're going to just sit here, then you are too," said Téa, hands on her hips.

Joey and Tristan turned to her, incredulously.

"She's right," said Hermione, "We're all in this together."

"If this is a trap, I'm certainly not tossing all of you in it," said Roland, and he saw Pegasus nod out of the corner of his eye. "It defeats the purpose of this entire plan in the first place."

"Then we'll go," said Harry, "If there are Death Eaters, we can fight against them."

"And so will I," said Yami, after a quick flare of the Millennium Puzzle. "You have never participated in a Shadow Game. Bakura and I have. There's no telling if Kaiba is in over his head."

"With how many times you've had to bail him out over the years?" Pegasus shrugged his shoulders. "I'm sure he is."

"You can argue semantics later," Roland snapped. "We need to leave. Now."

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"I wish we were able to do something," said Téa, "I feel so helpless."

They stayed, huddled around the desk in the makeshift Kaiba Corp office. Mokuba sat on the lone couch, ignoring them all, his gaze single-focused on the cell phone in his hand. No less than ten missed calls, spaced from their arrival at the house to minutes after half the group departed back to town.
"Sometimes staying out of the fire is better than jumping right into it," said Pegasus, tapping away at his own phone.

"What're you doin'?" asked Joey.

"Nothing of great consequence," said Pegasus mildly, "I only walked out on a conference call when you lot arrived." He lifted his head and sighed. "You know – adult things. Take it from me, kids. Don't get old."

Tristan rolled his eyes. "Says the person who lives through cartoons."

Pegasus's lone eye glimmered. "We all have our hobbies."

Téa sat down next to Mokuba. "I hope the guys are okay. We barely escaped those masked people at the park!"

"It is rather peculiar," said Pegasus, turning to look up at the monitor on the wall. Once they ran out of material to watch, the screen was turned off. "How would these Death Eaters manage to summon the Shadow Realm?"

"What's to say Kaiba didn't do it?" asked Tristan.

Pegasus raised an eyebrow, "Kaiba-boy may have been thrust face-first into a world full of magic, but do you really expect him to use that Millennium Item of his? I'm more surprised he hasn't used it as a deadly weapon yet."

"He tried," said Mokuba, the first words he had spoken since Yugi and the others left. "The day he got it. The handle thing comes off, and there's a knife underneath."

"You're kiddin'," said Joey.

Mokuba shook his head and paused, biting his lip. Somehow, Pegasus got wind of Seto obtaining a Millennium Item. Did he know about Set being inside it too? Or just that the Rod had changed hands, like Bakura knew before anyone had told him.

"He uh…almost attacked Yugi with it," Mokuba said carefully, and it wasn't a total lie. While Set was the one that tried to stake Yami Bakura with the dagger end of the Millennium Rod, Seto was probably ready to do the same thing to Yami if he was truly given the chance.

"Now that sounds more like Kaiba-boy," said Pegasus, "But I can't see him actively using a Millennium Item. Babysitting it, maybe, but not tapping into its power." He slipped around the desk, sat in front of the computers, and began tapping away at the keyboard.

Tristan pointed at him, confused before turning to Joey. "Uh…"

"Hey, uh…you supposed to be fiddlin' on Kaiba's network? Didn't that get you into a load of trouble during…you know, Duelist Kingdom?"

"Oh pish posh," said Pegasus, waving a hand flippantly, "It's not my fault that he left the computer on in his haste go on a suicide rescue mission." He gestured his arm widely at the couch. "And the company vice president is sitting over there. If he wants me out, he can say so."

"Depends," Mokuba grumbled, and leaned against Téa, sniffing loudly as she put her arm around him. "If it's not something to help the others, then get off."
"For your information, I'm going back through some of the footage that dear Roland showed all of you in hopes of a better clue. It's hard to focus on more than one place at a time."

"What else is there to see?" asked Téa, "We saw the smoke cloud, and flashes in the hallway that didn't come from any wizard."

"I just want another look," said Pegasus, "And then I'll slink off to the far end of the house and enjoy peaceful solitude."

Tristan pushed himself off of the wall and went around the desk to stand over his shoulder.

Pegasus flashed him a sly grin. "Making sure I'm not up to anything naughty, are we? Going to slap my wrist away and tattle if I click out of the screen?"

"No," Tristan shook his head, "But you said so yourself that it's hard to focus on a bunch of things at once. I thought you could use the help...and it's not like anything else is going on here."

Pegasus blinked, surprised. "...Alright." He pointed to the left side of the screen. "Watch that side."

The room slipped into an eerie silence. Joey had wandered behind the desk to watch the camera playback again, and Téa stayed on the couch where Mokuba had scrunched himself up against her, and had slightly dozed off, his hands still tightly clutching his cell phone like a lifeline.

Every few seconds, Mokuba would hit the button on the side of his phone to wake it up, see there were no messages or returned calls, and slump his shoulders. His attempts to sneak his way into the group heading back to Domino had failed miserably, though he knew Roland wasn't going to let him go. But he had to try.

Seto had once -- more than once -- risked everything to save him when he needed it. Now, situations were reversed, and all he could do was sit around and wait. It wasn't right.

"Stop."

Joey's words sliced through the quiet, and Téa lifted her head up and looked towards the desk.

"What do you see?"

Joey pointed to the screen. "Anyone see what I see?"

Tristan leaned forward and squinted at the feed from inside Kaiba's office. "Is that...gold?"

"Whatever it is, it's in the Shadow Realm cloud," said Pegasus, "And...that speck of gold is shaped almost like the symbol on all of the Millennium Items."

"Wait a second," said Téa, shifting slightly, jostling Mokuba from his not-nap. "Didn't Yugi say that he and Kaiba were trying to draw out some Shadow Monster - the thing that was going after him at school?"

"It didn't work though," said Tristan, "Remember? Yugi said it didn't show up."

"But they were using Kaiba as bait," said Téa, and Mokuba froze, eyes wide. "What if it...just arrived?"

Mokuba looked from Téa to Joey and Tristan. "...What are you talking about? My brother and Yugi were trying to summon a monster?"

Joey cringed.
Mokuba leveled a glare on him that would have made Seto proud. "Alright, Joey. What else has Seto been keeping from me?"

Pegasus looked between them both curiously.

Joey let out a huge sigh and ran a hand through his hair. "Oh, man. Uh…Yug' knows more than the rest of us…"

"Yugi is not here. So you better tell me what you know," said Mokuba. All traces of exhaustion were gone. "And don't you dare leave anything out."

"There's no Dark Mark here," said Harry, as they hurried into Kaiba Corp. "That's a good sign."

"Is the building normally this empty?" asked Ron. "And dark?"

"The only employees that should be here at this hour are the night officers," said Roland, swiping his badge along a side door at the far end of the Kaiba Corp lobby. "And Fuguta and Mr. Kaiba, since we saw them on camera. As for the lights – it seems the main power is still down, which is odd, considering lights are on in the city square. Emergency lights are still on."

"This isn't the same hallway we down before," said Harry.

"No," Roland said, his voice low. "It is not."

"What's down this way?" asked Hermione, "The lift was back in the lobby."

They passed by a staircase going up, and then another locked door that blended in so well with the wall that Harry wouldn't have even noticed his existence unless it was specifically pointed out to him.

"Express elevator. It makes only two stops, and is only meant to be used in extreme emergencies," said Roland, "It goes only to the fifteenth and thirtieth floors."

They watched as he swiped his badge again, and then moved to line up to a panel for a retina scan.

"That's a lot of security for an elevator," Yami Bakura said, crossing his arms.

"This elevator was installed by Mr. Kaiba's predecessor," Roland said stiffly as the doors opened. Once they were inside, he hit the button for the fifteenth floor. "Through the old company's manufacturing of high-grade weaponry, he also took part in a number of questionable business practices, and used his wealth and power status to his advantage. I imagine he was concerned that something would come back to haunt him. This hallway and elevator was set up to only be accessible to a select few, so no one could just hop in and ride up to Mr. Kaiba's office. It also meant that he could have a stealthy exit of the building, if he so wished."

"But that was through the old company," said Hermione, "Seto doesn't take part in making weapons anymore."

"That is correct," said Roland, "After taking control, Mr. Kaiba reset the codes and slimmed down who had access to this route."

"Let me guess – is it just you and the boss?" said Bakura.

"Fuguta does, as well as Mokuba," said Roland, "As for anyone else, unless they are highly-trusted
members of security, I doubt Mr. Kaiba gave anyone else access. Most people are unaware this route
even exists."

The elevator didn't give a faint bell announcing its arrival. When it stopped, a panel on the wall
turned on, revealing a camera's eye view of the deserted hallway on the other side of the door.

Ron's eyes were wide. "That's really what's on the other side of us?"

"Is it just me, or is Kaiba paranoid too?" said Bakura.

"Gozaburo Kaiba was paranoid, and rightfully so. The transition from weapons to gaming did not go
smoothly. After recovering from the Duelist Kingdom fallout, Mr. Kaiba had the monitors installed."

"Makes sense, I guess," said Harry, "What's the point of trying to get away if you don't know if
someone's going to be waiting for you on the other side of the door?"

"But…" Yami frowned. "Kaiba's office is on the top floor. Where are we?"

"Security office is on this floor," said Roland, pressing the button to open the door. "I'm not going
upstairs blind."

"I thought the cameras were down," said Hermione as they trailed after him. "How are we going to
be able to see?"

"The remote setup at the safe house isn't able to access everything. There are supposed to be back up
servers running in an event like this. And if not…I'm not raising hell up there with only three slugs."

Ron wrinkled his nose. "Slugs?"

Harry shook his head and pulled his wand from his jacket pocket. "He's arming up."

"Oh. You mean whatever he used to take down that guy at the park?"

Harry nodded. "Yeah."

"Huh…Muggles sure do have funny names for stuff."

/I have a really bad feeling about this, Yami./

/As do I, Yugi./

"It's strange," Bakura mused, glancing around curiously. "When your Priest was first released from
the Rod, I was able to detect the change in magic from the other side of town. But we know the
Shadow Realm was summoned above us…yet I don't feel anything."

Hermione bit her lip as they entered the security office. It was set up similar to the one in Kaiba
Land, only larger. The walls were covered in monitors showcasing various camera angles from all
over the building, and there were no less than ten desks in the room, with another locked door in the
back.

"What does that mean?"

"Nothing good, obviously," said Harry.

Bakura shook his head. He had his suspicions, of course, but he wasn't about to say them out loud.
He hadn't forgotten about the night that he and the Pharaoh jumped into Seto Kaiba's head to save
him from the Shadow. How the shadows blocking their entryway responded to him as if he had cast the magic in the first place, despite it being the opposite. It had stumped him for a good while, at least until they were forced back into Kaiba's soul room in time for a Blue Eyes White Dragon to fry the Shadow from Kaiba's mind.

And he was able to see just who the Shadow was. True, it was only a silhouette, but there weren't a great many individuals related to the Millennium Items that took that shape.

Like Set's appearance in the first place, this changed things quite a bit.

Roland moved to the locked door. "I will be back in a moment." He gestured up at the walls. "Mr. Kaiba's office should be on the middle cluster, as should the outside hall."

Harry took another look around. "I could be wrong…but…shouldn't someone be in here? Why is this place so deserted?"

"I've got a hunch, and it's not a good one," said Ron.

"Why, what is it?" asked Yami.

"Well, let's assume Death Eaters are here," said Ron, "And they're waiting for us. They could just Imperius all the guards they found along the way to be shield fodder to them. What if the trap they set isn't from them or any Millennium Item magic – but it's the Muggles?"

Yami looked down at Yugi's wand. "Would magic stop a bullet?"

Hermione looked unsure, and it did little to reassure any of them. "I-I don't know. And that's not quite a thing you want to test out." She pointed up at the monitors. "I don't even see the office here."

Roland reemerged from the back room, sliding something into the bottom of his firearm as he crossed the room. The door behind him closed and locked with a heavy click. "It's probably one of those two," he said, pointing to the only two screens portraying static. "Let's go."

"We were wondering – where is the rest of your team?" asked Yami. "I know the man in the park was a Death Eater in disguise, but shouldn't someone have been stationed here in the office?"

"Someone should have been," said Roland, gesturing to the earpiece that wasn't in place before he disappeared into the back room. "There's no chatter, so either they're just not answering, or have up and left."

There was, of course, another option, but he ground his teeth at the thought and refused to voice it.

No one spoke on the ride back to the top of the tower. When the elevator stopped, the panel on the wall turned back on, showing another deserted hallway leading up to a corner.

Roland hovered his firearm over the door release button. "Let me go first."

"Any words of advice, if your guys are around that corner waiting for us?" asked Ron.

"Yeah. Don't forget to duck, or block, or whatever it is that your magic does," said Roland. "We have routine training and evaluations throughout the year. They won't miss."

They moved slowly down the corridor up to the rounding corner. Roland gestured for them to stay back, gripped his firearm tightly in both hands, and quickly did a slight peek around the edge.

Harry could tell something was wrong even before words were said. Roland leaned back against the
wall, eyes closed for a few seconds, head hung, before regarding his charges. "It's clear – but…” he paused, and his voice was laced with sorrow, "it's not pretty."

Bakura turned the corner and felt Ryou – who had been watching from their corridor, quiet but worried nonetheless – stagger back against his wall. "Well," he said, a bit too harshly for the sight they found themselves in, as Hermione gasped and clasped her hand to her mouth in horror, "I think we found your guards."

Roland knelt down next to the closest one, pressing his fingers against the man's neck.

"Is…is he?" Hermione asked, but she couldn't finish her thought, or take her eyes off the grim sight in front of them.

Roland shook his head and got back up, surveying the scene: four of his colleagues, two of them junior officers. The guards looked to have been coming from the same direction they had – the emergency lift to Mr. Kaiba's office, and were picked off not long after rounding the corner, one by one. Did one of them discover the attack and call for back up? Which of them unknowingly sealed all of the others' fate by summoning them all to Mr. Kaiba's defense?

"Wait – this wasn't done by magic," said Ron, looking slightly sick. "If Death Eaters did this, there'd be no blood. The Killing Curse, it's not gruesome. Quick flash of light and that's it."

Roland was snapped out of his thoughts. Three of them were facing the door to Seto Kaiba's office. One faced them. All four of them had their weapons out. A few rested in lifeless hands, others were dropped. He sidestepped one of the others and checked for another pulse, only to find none.

/You don't think…/ Yugi began, hugging his arms to his chest. He felt ill. /You don't think they took each other out…do you?/

/I don't want to think so/ said Yami. /But…that's… almost what it looks like. /

Roland sidestepped one of the three clustered bodies, moved to the last one, and reached for the fallen firearm. The clip was empty.

Hermione slowly approached him, took a quick look at the guard's face before having to turn away, eyes closed, cringing.

Roland straightened up again and looked towards Kaiba's office. A large blood spray was splattered on the wall directly opposite the open doorway, but there was no body to go with it. Steeling himself, he gestured for the others to stay behind him, despite the lack of offense up to that point, raised his weapon and stepped through the doorway.

As the long occupant in the room, Fuguta lay crumpled on the office floor, his firearm resting in his outstretched hand, and his eyes wide, unseeing.

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With a pained groan, blue eyes slowly fluttered open, blinking back foggy vision until a dark ceiling came into view. He stared up, unmoving for several seconds. That was not the ceiling from his office. Or anywhere in his home, and certainly not anywhere from Kaiba Land. The vintage light fixture, though off, was coating in a good layer of dust. The only light seemed to come from the warmth of the roaring fireplace off to the side of the room.

Seto eased himself up, his elbows digging into the equally dusty sofa and tried to look around. The couch faced the fireplace, flanked by full bookcases that seemed to stretch the entirety of the wall.
An armchair sat nearer to the fire, but was empty. Clearly, this was some sort of library or makeshift study.

…Wherever here was.

He slowly got to his feet, his head pounding, and looked himself over. He didn't appear hurt, though his suit now had a fair few wrinkles in it; no doubt from sleeping off whatever drug or spell he was struck with and then brought here.

His "KC" communicator was still pinned to his lapel, but he doubted it would carry a signal to Kaiba Corp security from his current location. Sluggishly, he reached into his inner jacket pocket but the search for his phone came up empty.

"Looking for this?"

Seto whirled around, a hair too fast, and had to steady himself against the couch before he fell, disoriented. His head pounded harder. Once he had righted himself, he looked up, and his eyes narrowed as a feeling of dread washed over him.

Ishizu's description was spot-on. Sitting at the head of a long table was a man, bald and exceptionally pale, with cold red eyes, a flattened nose – if one could even call it that – and long narrow fingers.

Seto's phone sat clutched in his hand.

Voldemort gestured to the empty chair to his left at the table. "I am pleased to see you are unharmed, Seto Kaiba. Come, sit. We have much to discuss."
Fallout

Chapter Notes

/Text/ Spirit to Host
/Text/ Host to Spirit

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Time seemed to move in a blur, and Hermione could only remember a part of what had actually transpired.

Once he was reasonably assured that there were no more Death Eaters hiding about, Roland had ushered the group out of Seto's office and into the one next door while he had gone back to search for the mysterious magic coin that Dumbledore had given Yugi, Ryou and Seto on his first visit. He had returned minutes later, activated it, and the Order had followed soon after.

In a quick standoff that almost ended up with Roland shooting a cocky member of the British Ministry for getting too close to him, Dumbledore had arrived with members of the Japanese Ministry to help sort out everything. They weren't in the room, but either out in the hallway or in Seto's office, but voices got rather heated at times, and Yugi and his friends were able to hear part of conversations clear as day.

But Hermione could hardly pay any attention to what was being said. Visions of the dead security officers from the hallway kept running wild through her mind, and she felt sick.

Blood was splattered all over the one wall. Was it Seto's? It was too far away to be from any of the people left behind in the hallway. Did the other guard, Fuguta, get a shot off on a Death Eater before he was killed?

And what of Seto? Was he even alive? How long ago was this plan put into motion? There was already at least one Death Eater staged in Domino for a period of time, having impersonated a guard that was at the amusement park. Were there others?

"Point that thing at me again and you'll be casting spells out of a stump!"

Roland's outburst made her look up towards the door. That didn't sound good.

"Should we...interfere or something?" asked Yugi.

"I don't like sitting here, not knowing what's going on," said Harry, "We should be able to help. We were the ones fighting at Kaiba Land."

"Probably for the best you don't," said Yugi. "Didn't you tell us once that you got into loads of trouble last summer for doing magic outside of school?"

"Yeah but it was a life-threatening situation," said Harry, "Like tonight was. And that fiasco was another plot by the old Ministry of Magic to try and discredit me."

Ryou frowned, and sat down next to Hermione on the office couch. "Hey," he said quietly, "Are you going to be okay?"
She shook her head, staring down at her hands.

"Have you been in…other wizard fights before? Besides the Department of Mysteries?"

Hermione sighed. "No…but I was struck by a Death Eater during the Department of Mysteries, and was unconscious for the whole second half of the fight. If it weren't for Harry and Neville, I'd be dead. I can fight…I mean, I know my spells, but this…I've never seen something so ghastly before. Those people in the hallway…. My parents would sometimes watch a few crime shows on television, so I know how terrible firearm injuries and deaths can be…but it's so much worse seeing it in person than in fiction."

She shuddered. "But even still…a wizard's death, if it was by the killing curse, is quick. Painless. Those poor guards outside…I can't get it out of my mind." She turned to him. "How…how are you so calm about it?"

Ryou shook his head. "I'm not. But I've been an accomplice to everything the Ring has done while in my care. I suppose I've been desensitized to a lot of things. Or the Spirit is projecting calm onto me. I'm not quite sure."

"The Spirit of the Ring has killed people while in control of you?" she asked.

"No…not really. But I think when we first connected, I got a glimpse into some of the more violent things he had been up to before he found me. And our bonding wasn't clean in the slightest."

Hermione hugged her arms to her chest. "Your boggart…." 

"—Is a terrible reminder of who he is," said Ryou, "I just try to think that we've progressed well enough past that point that he won't regress back."

Footsteps in the hallway caught all of their attention. Tonks walked into the room.

"What's going on over there?" asked Harry, looking towards the wall dividing the two offices.

"Why was Roland yelling?" asked Yugi.

"The British Ministry wanted to try and cover up what had happened," Tonks explained. "A few statements were made that probably shouldn't have been, and it got rather tense. Although, I thought it would have been sort of funny to see that junior know-it-all Auror try and cast a Memory Charm without a wand arm." She looked around. "Are you all okay?"

"A bit shaken, but I think we'll be alright," said Ryou.

Tonks nodded. "While Dumbledore finishes up here with the Japanese Ministry, I will be taking you all back to Hogwarts. The Order is going to assist the Japanese Ministry in handling the Muggle involvement at the amusement park and all of the casualties."

"What about the Ministry?" Harry asked. "You said they were here."

"Oh, yeah," Tonks scratched at her nose, "But after they tried to essentially wipe Roland's memory and poof the bodies, the Japanese Ministry doesn't really want them here."

"I don't blame them," said Ron, "Though covering it all up does sound rather suspect doesn't it?"

Tonks shrugged. "The International Statute of Secrecy still applies," she said, "At the very least, any of the Muggles visiting the park will have to be tracked down, but at least all those guys' families will
be able to have some closure."

"You can't tell them the truth though," said Ron.

"Well...no," said Tonks, "But we'll get as close to it as possible."

"What about Seto?" asked Hermione.

Tonks's face fell. "Dumbledore will keep in contact with Roland about any news...but it doesn't look too good right now."

"Doesn't Dumbledore have his spies or whoever? They were the ones who tipped him off about us in the first place," said Ryou.

Tonks paused. "I'm not entirely sure," she said carefully. "You would have to ask him. And I'm sure he will want to sit down with you once he returns to the school and get your sides of what happened."

"You make it sound like we're in trouble or something," said Ryou.

"You're not," Tonks held up her hands defensively. "But he would like to piece the evening together, and Roland wasn't with you for the entire thing, so there's only so much he can say. And most of what's going on next door is how to handle the mess here."

She reached into her pocket and took out the miniaturized Magician Owl plush, the magic that had turned it into a real owl long-since worn off. Tapping her wand against it, Tonks restored it to its normal size before holding it out. "Ready to go?"

"No, wait!" Yugi froze. "What about Grandpa?"

"Remus and Sturgis are with your grandfather at the shop, and Hestia is still at the safe house with Ishizu Ishtar," said Tonks.

"Can I see him before we go?" Yugi said, "Please? I need to be sure he's okay."

"What about our things?" asked Harry, "We're not exactly packed to go right back to school."

"When Remus and I return to Britain, we'll take it all with us." Tonks nodded. "And we can make a pit stop at your home, but we'll have to be fast. Dumbledore is very adamant about getting you all back to Hogwarts as soon as possible."

/I wonder why that is,/ said Yami curiously. /With all of these Aurors around, we would be quite safe./

/I guess there's no telling if the Death Eaters would decide to come back. But I just have such a terrible feeling.../ Yugi sighed. /And I feel like we had a hand in this. What if this all came from that afternoon in Kaiba's office where we failed to summon the Shadow in his mind?/

/We can't think that way, Yugi. The only thing that matters is that we get Kaiba back, and fast./

"Yugi?" Hermione said softly. "You have to grab on."

Yugi broke himself out of his thoughts. He was the only one not holding onto the plush owl. He reached for it when Roland's voice from the doorway made him stop.

"Yugi Muto." Roland nodded his head towards the hallway, and Yugi hurried out to meet him.
"Is she taking you back to school?"

Yugi nodded. "We're checking on Grandpa first." He looked around the corridor. The large bloodstain on the wall in front of Kaiba's office was gone, as were the bodies in the hallway. "What's going on?"

"Dumbledore is talking with the Japanese Aurors," said Roland stiffly. "The local Ministry of Magic is in arms over this."

Yugi paused. "Why?"

"The abridged version? The British Ministry messed up and caused an international incident. But I honestly don't care half about their political agendas thrown back and forth in each other's faces. My people are dead, and what concerns me is that they get the respectful burials they deserve." Roland sighed. "Now I have the task of going back to the safe house and telling Mokuba what he most likely already knows."

Yugi cringed.

Roland sighed and picked up the slim briefcase leaning against the doorframe. "Does your phone work at the school, or is it more or less a glorified paperweight?"

"No, it works."

Roland nodded. "Good." He held out the briefcase. "Take this back with you."

Yugi set it down and opened it up. "Is this the laptop he took to Hogwarts?"

"It is. Dumbledore may not get leads right away to where Mr. Kaiba is, but we might be able to get a head start."

Yugi's eyes lit up. "Really? How?"

Roland tapped at his own "KC" lapel pin. "You may have noticed before, but Mr. Kaiba wears this pin on his suits. He had a similar one on his dueling coat. Most importantly, he wore it today."

"I've seen it before," Yugi said, "He used it when we met with Ishizu. It's like a radio, right?"

"It's more than just that," said Roland, "There's also a GPS tracker embedded inside."

/What!/? Yami's jaw dropped.

"Assuming that he's back in Britain right now, the signal isn't strong enough to encompass half the globe. But there's a chance that the laptop will pick it up while you're at school." He paused. "Assuming that technology even works wherever he is."

Yugi nodded. "I'll keep that in mind."

"Yugi?" Harry called. "Are you ready?"

"Just about!" He turned back to Roland. "Are…are you going to be okay?"

Roland rubbed at the bridge of his nose. "The fallout from this will take time. But I will be fine. Once the wizards leave here, I will pick up your grandfather and take him to the safe house."

His voice sounded strained.
Yugi hesitated a moment. "I'm sorry about Fuguta," he said. "None of this...none of this should have happened."

"Fuguta was well aware of the dangers surrounding Mr. Kaiba's leave," said Roland, "Our job, above all else, is to protect Mr. Kaiba and Mokuba. As unfair as his death may have been, all of their deaths, they were in the line of duty, and I will do whatever is needed to be done to make sure they are remembered that way."

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Hogwarts had never felt so empty before.

There were a few stragglers that stayed behind during the winter holiday, but most of the school was still on break, and not expected back for another two days. The Portkey had dropped the group off in Professor McGonagall's office and she immediately sent them to the hospital wing, despite their claims that their run-in with trouble left them unharmed.

Madame Pomfrey gave them all a quick look-over, taking extra care to be sure that the spell the Death Eater used on Hermione was truly nothing more than a stunner before giving her some sort of tonic to help bring some color back to her face and relax her enough to sleep. She disappeared up the girls' staircase without much more than a 'goodnight' to the group the instant they were back in the common room.

But the standout moment of the day had to be when the most unexpected visitor joined them after dinner in Gryffindor Tower.

"Professor Dumbledore?" Yugi's eyes were wide. "What are you doing here?"

"It's been some time since I've visited my old stomping grounds," said Dumbledore lightly, taking a seat near the roaring fire. "I wanted to check in with you without the formality of doing so in my office."

"You were in Gryffindor House?" asked Ryou.

"Indeed I was," said Dumbledore, "Like you, I sat around this very fire, studying the theories of magic and conspired a bit of mayhem against my own professors." He looked around at the group. "But I wish this visit could be under better circumstances. I trust Miss Granger is alright?"

Harry nodded. "She was hit with a sort of stunning spell while we were on the run from Death Eaters, but otherwise fine. She's...just taking this harder than the rest of us, I think."

"She and Kaiba were close," said Yugi. "Not like...romantic or anything, but they were friends. More than he was to any of us. That and everything we saw at Kaiba Corp...I think it wore her out."

"Ah," said Dumbledore. "I will try not to take too much of your time. I trust all of you must be tired after the day's events, and I'm sure you can guess why I'm here."

"It's about Seto, isn't it?" said Harry.

"Indeed," said Dumbledore. "If I may ask, how did the events of this evening transpire?"

"We were at the amusement park," said Ron, "Everything was fine during the day, but the lights went out at night, and when we went to find out what was going on, the Dark Mark had been cast, and Death Eaters had arrived."
"They were looking for me," said Yugi, "That's what it seemed like, anyway. They were trying to draw me out. But we were able to fight them off enough that we were able to take refuge in the employees-only area of the park. Mokuba took us to the security office, but we didn't realize that the guard in the room was really a Death Eater."

Dumbledore nodded thoughtfully. "And then?"

"We were cornered, but Remus and Tonks showed up to help," said Ryou. He paused, looking down at his Millennium Ring. "The Spirit created a diversion using a monster from the Shadow Realm, and Roland got us out of the park."

"When we couldn't get a hold of Kaiba, we rushed back to Kaiba Corp, but it was too late," said Yugi.

Bakura phased out of the Millennium Ring. "It seemed Kaiba was the target all along. If these Death Eaters truly wanted Yugi and the Pharaoh, they could have done so with ease. Potter even said that the masked fools weren't casting anything worse than simple stunning spells."

"That would coincide with the lack of Dark Mark over the Kaiba Corp office building," said Dumbledore.

"How did the Death Eaters get into Kaiba Corp in the first place?" asked Harry. "I thought it was said that wards were placed around it."

"They were," said Dumbledore, "And still are. All of us that arrived this evening had to arrive via Portkey. I attempted to disapparate from the office and was unsuccessful."

Yami appeared behind Yugi's chair. "We believe that the Death Eaters arrived through the Shadow Realm."

Dumbledore tilted his head. "How is that possible? I was under the impression, based on your knowledge, that Voldemort did not have a Millennium Item."

Yugi and Yami exchanged looks before Yugi sighed and turned back to Dumbledore. "...We think Voldemort might have a new ally. One with access to the Shadow Realm."

"He doesn't have a Millennium Item," said Bakura stiffly. "That much is certain."

Yugi scratched at the back of his neck. "Oooh-kay, this is going to take some explanation, isn't it?"

Ryou nodded dully.

Dumbledore's brow raised.

Yami sighed. "Not long after Kaiba received the Millennium Rod, he has been attacked while he slept. Something had managed to invade his mind without being in the room with him. We're not quite sure who it is, but we've been calling it The Shadow, since all we see is a dark shape of a person. It's been searching through Kaiba's memories on and off this entire term."

"Up until now, I would have said that the two events were a coincidence," said Yugi, "But we've seen the Shadow use the Shadow Realm before, and we saw the Realm appear on Kaiba's security cameras. If the Death Eaters got into his office without apparating in, the Shadow probably brought them."

"I was unaware the Shadow Realm could be a means of transportation."
"It is," said Bakura. "I've used it before. But to take someone – or a group – draws a great deal of stamina."

"And you've no clue to the identity of this Shadow?"

"We know it is someone related to the Millennium Items, or at the very least knows about them," said Yami, "It knew me as the Pharaoh."

"And it's motives?"

"I believe it is looking for the other Millennium Items," said Bakura. "It already found Ishizu, and while they didn't find him, Death Eaters went after Pegasus's home. None of those events happened until after the Shadow saw them in Kaiba's memories. The only thing we can pick out is that whatever this Shadow is looking for, it is certain only Kaiba has it. Neither my host or the Pharaoh's have been harmed."

Dumbledore clasped his hands together in his lap. "You think they are working together to find the Millennium Items?"

"It's the only thing I can think of," said Yugi. "That was why Voldemort was after us, wasn't it? And so far, the only memories we know Kaiba has had searched had to do with the last people to have the Millennium Necklace and Eye."

"I see," said Dumbledore, standing up. "I will have to take this up with the Order. I will see what I can do with my informants in the Ministry, but I fear finding Mr. Kaiba will be no easy task. Voldemort is likely to keep him close, and without breaking into his inner circle, discovering his location will take some time."

"That's just it though," said Yami gravely. "The Shadow severely hurt Kaiba the last time it infiltrated into Kaiba's mind, and the Shadow wasn't even physically there. If Voldemort and the Shadow are truly working together, time is something Kaiba may not have."

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Seto didn't make any move to join him at the table.

Voldemort's bony hand was still outstretched to the empty chair. "You need not be afraid, Mr. Kaiba," he said, "I will not harm you."

Seto blinked through the pounding in his skull. "You'll forgive my skepticism. Your people broke in and abducted me from my own office."

"Ah," said Voldemort, "I'm afraid it is rather hard to get a hold of you these days. Dumbledore prefers to keep his prized students close." He pushed a potion bottle across the table towards the empty seat. "Come. This will do wonders for the pain."

"No thanks," said Seto shortly.

"Oh, no," Voldemort chuckled, "I insist."

There was a shift in movement out of the corner of Seto's eye, and he turned his head slightly. A pair of broad-shouldered Death Eaters stood by the door to the study, wands in hand, but not aimed at him. The message was clear.

With a loud exhale, Seto crossed the room and sat in the offered chair. "Happy?"
"Very much so," said Voldemort calmly, and pushed the potion bottle a bit closer. "That should clear the proverbial fog. I need your mind sharp."

"Why?"

The grin on Voldemort's face was rather unsettling. "In due time. Now – I must apologize, for it seems I have pulled you from a rather important engagement." He waved Seto's phone around in his other hand. "It seems a great number of people have tried to reach you on this device."

Seto merely glared at him.

"I am sure you have a great many questions. As do I," said Voldemort, tucking the phone away out of sight. "But first, dinner. Having traveled to Japan myself, I am aware that time there is not the same as here. You have been unconscious for several hours, and must be famished. I did, after all, pull you from attending your meal with Potter and his friends."

A third Death Eater appeared – from where, Seto wasn't sure, but he produced two plates piled high with offerings Seto expected to see at a Hogwarts feast. He didn't make a move for it, instead stared at it a moment before returning his glare on Voldemort.

"…You expect me to eat that?"

Voldemort only looked amused. "Does it offend you? I can have something else prepared, if you wish."

"How do I know that's not drugged, or poisoned?"

"You don't," said Voldemort, picking up his own fork. "However, you have been in my company, asleep, for several hours. If I had wished you dead, I had plenty of opportunity to do so. But I expect you to dine with me."

Seto crossed his arms. "Do you treat all your prisoners this way?"

Voldemort laughed icily. "Oh, no. You are no prisoner of mine. Quite the opposite. You are here as my honored guest."

The way the words were spoken sent chills down Seto's spine.

Voldemort's lip curled upwards. "And, after all, I have given you quite a personal gift. I trust it is still customary to show gratitude for such things – in which case you may do so by dining and carrying on conversation with me this evening."

"The only gift you've given me," Seto snarled, his voice dripping with venom, "Is a migraine from whatever you did to knock me out."

Voldemort's eyes flared, and he continued to grin. "Is that so? Are you sure?"

"Well, it certainly wasn't whatever was in that bottle, because I didn't drink it."

Voldemort laughed. "Oh, no, not that. I Despite my offering, I did not expect you to take it. I am referring to something else. Something I know you have wanted for quite some time."

Seto's eyes narrowed. What was he on about?

Voldemort tilted his head to the side. "…Perhaps you need a hint. Think carefully."
Seto shook his head. Something he wanted for a long time? He had the means of getting whatever he wanted, so he doubted it was something physical. The only thing on him was the clothes on his back – his phone was gone, and no doubt so was the Millennium Rod –

Seto froze. He didn't notice, not at first with the pounding headache, but his mind was silent. Surely, Set would have been calling out for him by now, to make sure he wasn't hurt…but…nothing. He attempted to switch himself out with Set, to return to his soul room, or at least the corridor, but nothing happened.

"What have you done?"

"I have given you the one thing you craved most: peace," said Voldemort. "I can only imagine the relief you must feel, knowing that your mind and thoughts are your own and no one else's; that there is no extra unwanted whisper questioning your decisions at any given time."

Cold dread washed over him. Seto tensed, gripping the arms of the chair tightly. "What have you done with Set?"

"Ah, so the 'High Priest' has a name after all," said Voldemort. Seto merely glared.

Voldemort waved a hand. "As I understand it, your connection to the spirit in your Millennium Rod has been severed. The pain you are feeling is a residual effect, it will pass in time."

"You say that as if you weren't the one to do it."

Voldemort's lip curled upwards again. "As I understand it, your connection to the spirit in your Millennium Rod has been severed. The pain you are feeling is a residual effect, it will pass in time."

"You say that as if you weren't the one to do it."

Voldemort's lip curled upwards again. "I didn't. That act was done by a mutual acquaintance of ours."

"The Shadow," Seto said flatly, but he couldn't help but stare down at his right palm. The wounds suffered from sealing the bond with the Millennium Rod had long since healed, but this revelation made him feel slightly ill. He knew the Shadow was powerful enough to invade his mind and both mentally and physically torment him from however far away. But to have the power to remove Set as if he was never there?

Voldemort laughed again. "Is that what you've gone to calling him?"

"It's never given me anything else to go on," Seto crossed his arms.

"You can refer to him as the 'Great Shadow Magus'."

Seto rolled his eyes. "So Shadow for short. Doesn't kicking Set out defeat the purpose for bringing me here?"

Voldemort tilted his head, eyeing him curiously. "I'm afraid I don't quite follow."

Seto huffed. "Look, it's no secret that you've been looking for the Millennium Items. You've gone off attacking people related to them. And the first thing you after nabbing me is cut off the only link I have to one?"

"Ah," Voldemort said. "I may be searching for the Millennium Items, but that is not the sole reason for having you brought here. The Shadow, as you prefer to call him, and I have similar but separate goals. I wished to speak to you without the distraction of your spirit friend. He needed assurance that…” Voldemort paused, remembering the Dark Priest's recent failures to breach the
boy's mind. "...outside forces would not interfere with his plans. Our interests in this case were aligned."

"And what are his plans?"

Voldemort merely smirked again. "I am certain you will find out, once he has recovered his powers. Cutting you off from the Millennium Rod was a rather tedious act for someone with no true anchor in this world."

Seto stared icily.

Voldemort waved his fork again, "Though I am surprised that you believe yourself to be here on the basis of the Millennium Items alone."

When Seto didn't make a move to say anything, he continued, "In fact, I have been looking forward to this day for quite some time."

"Have you."

"Oh yes," said Voldemort, "Between yourself and Yugi Muto, I was much more invested in meeting you."

This didn't make any sense, Seto thought to himself. If this were about the Millennium Items, Yugi should have been the more sought after target. Everyone wanted something from Yugi, one way or another. Marik's freak personality went so far as wanting the Pharaoh dead. Even if Bakura was still completely off Voldemort's radar, Yugi was the greater expert on all the Millennium Item nonsense that had been going on. He's worn the Puzzle for years, versus the Rod that was in his own possession for only so many months.

"Why?"

"You're not eating."

"I'm not hungry."

"And I said you are to dine with me," said Voldemort.

"What are you going to do, point a stick between my eyes if I don't take a bite? Is that how you treat your honored guests?"

"No, not at all," said Voldemort. He placed the fork down and clasped his bony fingers together in front of him. "Let me tell you how this will work, Seto Kaiba, and then you may decide if you wish to rethink your decision.

"I have a number of visitors, so to speak, that I must equally split my attention, along with my routine matters of the day. I have decided to spend my meals here in your company. You may choose to eat and talk, which are the only two requests I have made, or you may sit and be silent. But know this – you will only be fed whilst I am here. I will not force you to dine, nor will I have one of my Death Eaters feed you. You will not receive anything while I am gone."

"If that's supposed to scare me, it doesn't."

"Very well," said Voldemort, and he held up a hand. The third Death Eater appeared again and set a dark bottle of some sort of liquid onto the table before stepping back towards the door and the other two sentries. "I am aware how long a man can live without food or water. I don't need you healthy,
just alive. And if I must take other measures to keep you that way, then so be it. By that time you will be in no state to keep up your defiance, and I will get what I want anyway."

Voldemort leaned forward. "May I also remind you that The Shadow Magus is here, and has been eager to see you for quite some time. Should you choose to weaken your mind and body by starving yourself, I am sure he will have no trouble at all paying you a visit even in his current, weakened state."

He couldn't resist adding in. "And without the Spirit of the Millennium Rod to assist you, I imagine such a visit would not be a pleasant one."

Voldemort watched with glee as the color drained a bit from Seto's face. But the dark look his way continued, and his guest stayed silent.

After a moment, Voldemort vanished his plate away and stood from the table. "I hear you are a rather bright individual, Mr. Kaiba. I trust you will think this through and come to a sound decision. For this night, you can keep your dinner. I assure you, the plate is not laced with any poisons or ill intent. But I expect you to be a bit more compliant come morning."

He was halfway to the door before he turned back. "Feel free to use the study as you see fit while I am gone attending other matters," said Voldemort. "Read the books if you wish. Rest if you so desire. The Death Eaters will not harm you so long as you make no move to leave."

Seto raised an eyebrow. "And if I did?"

"Attempting to escape will force me to move you to less comfortable accommodations," said Voldemort, "And I'd rather not have to do so to someone so special. So weigh your options carefully, Mr. Kaiba. I will return in the morning. Pleasant dreams."

And with a final curl of his lip, Voldemort disappeared from the room.

Chapter End Notes

There will be a slight hiatus after this chapter as I will be working on a new story for the YGO Big Bang project. As always, my tumblr (@dxmichelle) will have fic snippets and updates on when new chapters will be going up.
“Good morning, Mr. Kaiba.”

Seto glanced over towards the door from his spot next to one of the bookcases, and snapped shut *The Rise and Fall of a Pureblooded Society*. Two Death Eaters flanked Voldemort’s arrival, and the two that had been standing sentry at the door all night left the room. One of the new arrivals placed breakfast at the table and resumed their stance at the entrance.

“I trust you had a restful evening.”

Restful wasn’t quite the word Seto would have used. He had instead spent the better part of the evening examining *almost* every inch of the study. The books, at least the two he had binged through overnight, were nothing but social commentary on how Muggles were an inferior “species” of human in comparison to wizards, and he had to stop himself from throwing the volumes into the fireplace for how stupid they were.

There was only one large window in the study streaming in dusty rays of daylight, but it had no latches. Seto mused he *could* break it with a fair number of decorative objects in the room if he used enough force to try and escape, despite being several stories up from the ground. However, it was probably sealed with magic to prevent him from doing just that, and the two guards would have stopped him before he had the chance to even try.

He didn’t touch the dinner left for him, and there was no telling what these wizards would try to do to him if he closed his eyes and tried to sleep. The threat of the Shadow’s arrival was bad enough, though to his surprise, it did not pay him a visit last night. Seto wasn’t sure if it was because he was still awake, or if it was simply biding its time.

Despite Voldemort’s assurance that his minions wouldn’t hurt him unless he tried to escape, the Death Eaters watching him overnight got twitchy when he came too close to the front of the study (even though he was a good ways still from the door) and he really didn’t want to find out how trigger-happy they were – at least not yet – so he kept nearer to the fireplace and the table, choosing to stay in one place only so long.

The one Death Eater was clearly agitated that his charge wouldn’t just crash on the couch and take a nap (even though he didn’t say anything or tell him to stop), so Seto purposefully kept annoying him. He grabbed a book and started reading at the table, and a few chapters later moved to the couch. He switched to the armchair, paced the room with the book in hand, and then back to the table, sitting in a different spot than when Voldemort had paid him his visit.

Voldemort eyed the dinner he had left last night. “You did not eat.”

Seto glared at him from across the room. “I told you I wasn’t hungry.”
Voldemort waved his arm at the empty chair. “You must be famished by now. Sit.”

Seto crossed his arms.

“By now any side effects afflicted from your capture are gone. Let me remind you that you will only eat with me. When I leave, so does your meal.”

“Then go.” Seto waved his hand dismissively and turned back to the bookcase.

“I fail to see what you will gain by willingly starving yourself,” said Voldemort casually. “The Shadow will come whether you are healthy or on Death’s doorstep.”

Seto snorted. “You went through all the trouble to get me, so I doubt you’d just let me die.”

“May I remind you, that from your limited perspective, I have what I want. The Millennium Rod is in my hands now. The Shadow has his own desires, and he certainly does not care to what state you are in to get what he wants.”

“Then why hasn’t he?” Seto shot back, “You’ve already gloated over the fact that you took away the only defense I had against him.”

Voldemort tilted his head. “He will when he is ready. There was another, more pressing matter that he felt needed attention.”

He gestured to the empty chair again. “If I had only wanted the Millennium Rod from you, and nothing else, I could have simply taken it. But, as it stands, there are a number of subjects I wish to discuss with you, and now I have all the time in the world. Dumbledore and his ilk cannot find you here. And neither can your friend with the Millennium Ring. Our mutual friend is seeing to that.

“Now…I have given you a warm, comfortable room in which to stay, and the freedom to pass the time as you wish –”

“—So long as I don’t leave.”

Voldemort chuckled darkly. “Escape from this room is impossible. Even if you managed to get past your guards, you will not make it out the door.”

“We’ll see about that.” Seto turned away towards the warmth of the fireplace, but staggered back, startled, as Voldemort was suddenly right in front of him.

_How? _Seto glanced quickly back to the table. It was cleared, and the chair Voldemort sat in was empty.

Voldemort raised his wand and Seto felt himself freeze in place against the wall. “I could tear your mind apart with ease,” he said coldly. “Or I could give you to the Carrows, who prefer to beat the answers from their guests. The poor tomb guardian doesn’t have much left in him. I’m sure they could use someone fresh, someone stubborn.”

Voldemort backed away a step and looked Seto up and down. “My most loyal servants favor the Cruciatus Curse, of course. Bella would have a right time with you.”

He tapped his wand lightly against Seto’s forehead, lip curling upward as Seto flinched. “However, I would rather you give me what I want willingly. Do not force my hand, Seto Kaiba. You are a rather gifted individual. I would rather learn more about you from a civil discussion rather than chain you down and force it out of you.”
Seto struggled against the magic keeping him frozen in place. “Your people have already spied on me once before,” he said, “Whatever it is you’re looking for, you won’t get it.”

Voldemort paused. “Oh? Have they?”

“Don’t play dumb,” Seto snarled. “You sent Death Eaters to my property during the first Hogwarts term to see how I would respond. My people uncovered a massive data breach that came from Britain. And you’re going to stand there and tell me it wasn’t you and expect me to believe it?”

Voldemort laughed and moved towards the door, turning back once he had made it to the two Death Eaters. He waved his wand, and the invisible force keeping Seto still disappeared, and he sagged back against the wall.

“Believe what you wish, Mr. Kaiba. But there are more players with vested interest in you and your friends than just myself and Albus Dumbledore. Ponder on that while I attend to other matters. We will discuss it later.”

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“I did not expect one of these Millennium Items to become so…restless,” said Voldemort. The long-abandoned manor had a second, smaller study on the far side. It was here that he sat, watching the Millennium Rod flare in and out against the darkness of the room. The Shadow Magus’s sword was also present, but the Shadow itself was not visible.

The Priest is trying to reach out to his host.

Voldemort tilted his head. “I thought you had severed the connection between them.”

Seto Kaiba cannot tap into his connection with the Millennium Rod, or contact Priest Set. It would appear however, that Set’s spirit will not sit quietly.

“Why is that?”

Her influence, no doubt.

“The dragon you mentioned?”

She has been a thorn in my plans for far too long. But I will have a way to be rid of her.

“Oh?”

It is clear that she has a strong connection to both spirit and host. But there is only one of her, and the link between them has been damaged. She cannot protect them both at the same time.

“But that is what bested you before,” said Voldemort, “Even with them split apart, how do you expect to get by a dragon? One you said rivaled the Egyptian Gods themselves?”

Very carefully.

“Hm.” Voldemort rose from his seat and paced the room. “I am surprised you have not yet begun. After all of the planning and effort to get Seto Kaiba here, you have not once ventured to his mind.”

While you have been attending to your business, the Millennium Rod has attempted to leave this room on its own twice. Keeping it at bay was a task I did not anticipate after the separation. And without a body of my own…
Voldemort held up a hand. “I have men searching the desert ruins. That sword was broken thousands of years ago. Ishizu Ishtar could very well have been correct. It will take time to find the rest.”

**Perhaps if your minions took to the task with the same enthusiasm as they do toying with your other prisoners, the deed would be done.**

Voldemort stiffened. “There are only so many of them. Scouring the sands for sword fragments of unknown size will take time.”

**You make it seem as though you have all the time in the world, Lord Voldemort. But I would not underestimate Seto Kaiba.**

Voldemort snorted. “He is well guarded. And will be no trouble at all, should he continue to keep up his stubbornness.”

…If you insist.

The Shadow phased from the sword and raised his hand, surrounded in the glowing purplish aura of the Shadow Realm, before picking up the Millennium Rod. The Rod’s light flares instantly stopped, and a few moments later, Set appeared, looking a bit puzzled before his features turned to anger.

“So this is the High Priest Set,” Voldemort mused, stepping back towards the middle of the room again. “I have waited some time to meet you.”

Set whirled around, and instantly pulled the bladed end from his semi-transparent version of the Millennium Rod before advancing on Voldemort.

“What have you done to my host?”

Voldemort’s lip curled upwards and his eyes darted briefly to the Shadow. He regarded Set curiously. “Calm yourself, Spirit. Seto Kaiba is unharmed and quite safe in my care.”

“If he is as you say, then why can I not link with him?”

**Your link has been severed.**

Set turned and glared up at the Shadow’s golden eye. “What!”

The Shadow lifted one of its glowing claw-like hands. **Your connection with the boy is gone. But do not fret – he has not been otherwise damaged.**

Voldemort circled the spirit. “You must indulge me, Spirit,” he said, “How did you come to be sealed in the Millennium Rod for thousands of years?”

Set turned in his spot to keep an eye on Voldemort. He didn’t say anything, arms crossed over his chest.

Voldemort chuckled. “He even looks and acts like his counterpart.”

**This will not do.** The Shadow’s Eye flared as he extended his claws. Set’s clothes, identical to the slate-grey suit Seto was currently wearing, morphed back into his priestly robes.

**Much better.**

Voldemort nodded once and paced around him again. “I can see subtle differences now. Tell me,
friend, how does it feel to be back in familiar garments?"

“I don’t feel anything,” Set snarled. “You can change how I appear before you, but it will not sway me. Whatever it is you seek – you will not get it.”

“I am not here to sway you,” said Voldemort, “I am merely wondering as to how you survived all these years alone.”

“Then you should have asked him,” Set said, jerking his head towards the Shadow. “Rather than upend Seto’s life just to sate your curiosity.”

“Ah, but my interest lies here,” Voldemort said, picking up the Millennium Rod. “These Millennium Items have a great power all their own. How did you seal your mind and soul inside?”

Set merely glared.

“So stubborn,” said Voldemort, “I fail to see how you benefit from this course of action. In the end you are merely trying my patience.”

Set raised his chin up defiantly. “I may appear before you, but that is all. There is nothing for you to hold over me. My mind cannot be hijacked, and I have no body. So if I choose to float here and sulk, I shall, and you cannot do anything to me.”

_Is that so?_ The Shadow suddenly appeared at Voldemort’s side. _The Millennium Rod may not have granted you a body, Set, but it has granted you relief from spending eternity in the dark. Unless you would prefer to return to that state, I would suggest you rethink your position._

“I may not be able to lay a hand on you, Priest,” said Voldemort, “But your host is not so lucky.”

Set’s hands balled into fists. “You said he was unharmed.”

“And he is,” said Voldemort, “Currently. But I would not expect him to remain that way. His overall well-being while in my care is directly related to both of your actions.”

“How do I know you’re not lying to me?” said Set. “You already said you severed my link to him. That I can be sure you are telling the truth, as I cannot communicate with him. But how do I know you haven’t harmed him?”

_You don’t. But I did not wait thousands of years to stumble at the finish line. You – and Seto Kaiba – are here because one or both of you has something I need. And until I can have it, I need him alive._

Set snorted. “And what then, after you find this thing. What is to become of us then? Are you going to return him home with a pat on the back? I am not a fool, this will only end one way, and it is not well.”

“Why, that is up to the two of you,” said Voldemort. “I am not cruel. I help those who help me. If Seto Kaiba starts to cooperate with what I have asked of him, then I see no reason why he cannot be returned back to his scared younger brother.”

Set narrowed his eyes. “And I take it he has not been helpful.”

“Not in the slightest.”

“…What is it you’ve asked of him?”
Voldemort’s lip curled upwards. “That he took care of himself.”

Set looked wary.

Voldemort waved his hand flippantly in the air. “He has been refusing simple hospitality.”

Set rolled his eyes. “You captured us. I imagine he is well aware that whatever it is you want goes beyond whatever simple hospitality you have offered him.”

“I don’t doubt it,” said Voldemort, “But I have merely wanted to sit and have a civil discussion with him. Instead, he has refused my offering of food as his way of lashing out. But that will only work for so long.”

Set gripped his Millennium Rod tightly. “And of me?”

“As I said, I am curious as to how you became sealed in your Millennium Rod. But it is our mutual friend who has been waiting most eagerly for you. But it seems you two are not very respective of our kindness.” He stepped forward towards Set and narrowed his red eyes. “Despite what you may think, Seto Kaiba cannot find you. He cannot tap into the link you shared. Your feeble attempts to leave this room and find him are a drain on my friend’s resources.”

“Considering the circumstances, you should have anticipated us being difficult.” Set jerked his head towards the Shadow. “He’s only rampaged through Seto’s mind how many times now?”

“Regardless, take this as your only warning, Priest. If you are caught attempting to leave this room again, you will have only yourself to blame for what befalls Seto Kaiba afterwards.”

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Hermione, who had more or less kept to herself following the return to school, at least joined them for breakfast Monday morning. Yugi was glad to see that, despite the circumstances that kept them all on the moodier side, she at least didn’t look like she was going to be sick anymore and that the color had returned to her face.

“Do we have anything of his here? More than just clothes and books, I mean. Something of significance?” she had asked.

Harry shrugged. “His cards?”

Yugi shook his head. “He usually travels with them.”

Ron wrinkled his nose. “He dueled once. He keeps his dueling deck on him even when he’s not playing?”

“Well,” Ryou said around bites of his eggs, “His deck is full of rare cards, for one thing. And that’s not even counting the three Blue Eyes White Dragons, which are the only three playable ones in the world. I’m almost certain he uses his own deck for product testing at work too.”

“Think of it this way,” said Yugi, “Would you go somewhere without your wand?”

Ron shook his head. “Of course not.”

Yugi nodded. “For a duelist, our cards are like your wand.”

Hermione froze; her fork halfway to her mouth. “Does that mean V-Voldemort has them?”
Yugi frowned. “I don’t know. I guess it would depend if the cards were in his pocket, or in his briefcase with his duel disk.”

“I don’t see why that matters too much though,” said Harry, “It’s not like Voldemort’s going to slap a stack of cards onto the table and demand he play with him.”

Yugi froze and made a sour face. “…That’s a weird mental image.”

Harry nodded. “Yeah…I’m sorry I mentioned it.”

“Why do you ask?” asked Ryou.

Hermione sighed. “I…I was hoping to try a sort of locator charm. I’d probably have to research to see how far one actually works, but I thought maybe it would help.”

“What about that spell you taught me right before the Third Task in the Tri-Wizard Tournament,” said Harry. “The **Point Me** one.”

“Oh,” her face flushed, “That’s different. That was more or less a compass. It only points your wand north.”

Ryou propped his elbows up onto the table. “I’m…not sure what else he would have kept here.”

“He didn’t pack a whole lot outside of clothes,” said Yugi, “And…it’s not like he was able to bring his stuff back with him. But I do have his laptop.”

Hermione paled. “Oh. I…I didn’t want to use that.”

“Why not?” asked Harry, “That’s probably the best thing we’ll have of his to use.”

“I mean, I could,” she said hesitantly, “but that’s already been magicked once. I don’t know what Seto had already cast on it, and wouldn’t want to cause it any accidental damage.”

“If it got him out of there, I’m sure he’d forgive you.”

“It’s not just that though…” said Yugi, “Roland told me that there’s the possibility Kaiba could have something on him that could signal out where he is. If it works, we’ll need the laptop to track the signal. I wouldn’t want to risk using that for anything else.”

“We have a free period while you’re in Arithmancy,” said Ryou, “As much as I don’t want to go snooping through his things, maybe we can find something for you to practice a locator spell. Or at the very least dig up all the notes he made on getting his technology to work. Maybe if you knew how he pulled all that off, you’d feel better about using the laptop.”

“Maybe…” she said, but by the tone of her voice it didn’t sound too convincing.

“Wait…” Harry looked to Ryou. “Doesn’t your Millennium Item seek out the other ones?”

“It does,” said Ryou, “But the Spirit tried to do that last night, and it didn’t seem to work.”

“Yami’s guess is that the Shadow is behind it,” said Yugi. “I don’t think Voldemort would have the know-how to keep the Millennium Ring from finding the Rod.”

“How would the Shadow?” asked Harry. “Since it doesn’t have a Millennium Item of its own?”

Yugi shrugged. “I don’t know. But somehow it has the ability to use the Shadow Realm. Maybe
there’s a Millennium Item we don’t know about.”

/Oh no./ said Bakura. /You can assure him that is not the case./

/Are you certain, Spirit?/

/Yes. If there is anything you choose to trust me on, Landlord, let it be that. There are only seven Millennium Items./

Hermione reached for Seto’s copy of the Daily Prophet as soon as the owl dropped it onto the empty place at the table next to her.

Harry peered over at the headlines from the other side of the table as she quickly turned the pages, as if she was trying to find something specific. “What are you looking for?”

“I was hoping to see if they made any mention to what happened in Domino,” she said, disappointment evident in her voice as she got closer and closer to the last page. “They wrote about the attack in Egypt…but nothing on Seto so far.”

“I wouldn’t expect them to,” said Ron, “I think the Japanese wizards wanted this kept as quiet as possible, for the sake of the Muggles involved and everything.”

“Speaking of…” Yugi frowned. “I would have thought – knowing how much attention he’s gotten during the first half of the year – that more people would have taken notice that he’s missing.”

“They’re probably used to him being gone for random periods of time,” said Harry.

Hermione glanced up briefly towards the faculty table and frowned. “I don’t know if it’s common knowledge among the rest of the students…but I can almost guarantee that Umbridge knows.”

Harry twisted around in his seat. Umbridge was still eating breakfast, gazing out over the rest of the Great Hall, looking as smug as she did when she became the High Inquisitor.

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“Well, this certainly looks promising,” said Voldemort, striding into the study Monday evening.

“You are already sitting in wait.”

Seto glared at him from the head of the table, but said nothing.

Voldemort chuckled as the Death Eater that followed after him placed dinner onto the table. “You are in my chair.”

Seto sneered. “I didn’t see your name on it.”

“It is my study.” Voldemort sat down in the chair usually meant for Seto and regarded him curiously. “Your face seems to hide exhaustion well, but I know better. I am honestly impressed that you managed to hold out this long.”

Seto huffed and drummed his fingers against the table. “You were going to get what you wanted from me whether I was cognizant or not. Might as well get something out of this before I die.”

Voldemort tilted his head. “What makes you continuously think I’m going to kill you after going through all of the trouble to bring you here, not to mention the attempts to keep you healthy?”

“Don’t mince words,” said Seto, “You’re not going to keep me around out of the goodness of your
heart. And despite whatever you want me to hear, you’re not just going to set me loose once you’re done.”

“Is that what you think?”

Seto rolled his eyes. “That tomb keeper is still here, isn’t he?”

“Your point has been noted,” said Voldemort, picking up his fork. “Let us play a game. I know you love them so much. A back-and-forth question and answer game, if you will. Though – to be fair, I believe this activity will be much more one-sided.”

“In your favor, no doubt.”

“Oh no,” said Voldemort. “In yours.”

“I find that rather hard to believe.”

“Despite what you may think, I am not here to grill you for information this night,” said Voldemort. “But I will answer some of your questions.”

Seto narrowed his eyes. “There’s a catch.”

“Perhaps.”

“Are you going to tell me what it is?”

“I’m sure you will pick up on it rather quickly,” said Voldemort. “Let us begin. What made you choose today of all days to finally give in and sit for our evening chat?”

Seto stayed silent.

Voldemort shook his head slightly. “If you do not answer a question, you lose the chance to ask one of your own.”

“The catch, no doubt.”

“If that’s what you wish to call it,” said Voldemort. “It wouldn’t be much of a game if we did not take turns. …Were you hungry?”

“No.”

“Then what was it?”

Seto waited a beat. “…You said once before that there were more interested parties than just yourself and Dumbledore.”

Voldemort inclined his head. “Ah – that I did.”

“Care to elaborate?”

Voldemort’s lip curled upwards. “Perhaps.”

He didn’t go any further than that.

Seto raised an eyebrow and waved a hand impatiently. “…And that would be…what?”

Voldemort’s eyes darted down to the untouched food and then back up. “My answers come at a
price.”

“That wasn’t part of the rules.”

“Ah – well, let me tell you the first rule of this little game: I make the rules. And I recall upon our first meeting that the only requirement I made of you was that you eat and hold conversation. It is not a choice of one over the other. You do both, or do nothing. So if you decide to stop and stew in silence, then that is your choice. But, as you said, you will gain nothing by doing so, and all I will need is to simply wait for your strength to finally give out.”

“That could be spiked.”

“It isn’t. Like I have said many a time before, poisoning you would be most counterproductive. And if I wanted to drug you, I would not have done it under the pretense of a meal. I could have simply forced Veritaserum on you while my Death Eaters held you down.”

Seto huffed noisily. “Your bizarre interest in my well-being is unnerving, not reassuring.”

“The fact of the matter is that you are far more useful alive. I am not here to put my wand to the back of your head. If you refuse your meals – which I will say are far better than those set aside for my other guests – then that is your choice. But you have not eaten since your arrival. Another day and I will have won this little fight of yours. So what will it be?”

Seto glared, matching Voldemort’s gaze for a long minute before picking up the fork and stabbing a single pea.

Voldemort shook his head slightly, clearly amused. “It’s a start. Though, you’ll have to forgive me, but I don’t seem to remember the question.”

Seto’s eyes narrowed. “You’re doing this on purpose.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Don’t you,” said Seto flatly, putting the fork down and crossed his arms. “Why me?”

Interesting – he knew that wasn’t the question he had asked before. Voldemort tilted his head to the side thoughtfully. “Why I was more invested in you over Yugi Muto? That is easy. From what I am to understand, Yugi Muto fits the cutout of the typical hero. Someone who puts themselves in the line of fire before anyone else. To do what it is needed for the ‘greater good’. …Sound familiar?”

He didn’t bother waiting for Seto to respond before continuing. “I have no true interest in speaking with someone like that. They are too enthralled with their quest to take a step back and view the world outside their limited purview. Tell me, Seto Kaiba, how many times has Yugi Muto thrown himself at the heart of danger? Steamrolled over ideas that were perhaps much more practical in order to save the day? With his Pharaoh friend whispering in his ear, how many times have they gone after their agenda at your expense? The world is in danger, and they must save it, no matter who gets sacrificed along the way.”

Voldemort waved a hand dismissively. “He is like Harry Potter, no? You are all in Gryffindor House, correct? No doubt Potter has regaled you with his little adventures up to this point, including their foolhardy trip to the Department of Mysteries last spring. And Potter? He is nothing more than Dumbledore’s prized puppet.”

Seto raised an eyebrow. “What is that supposed to mean?”
Voldemort grinned wickedly. “More than one pea this time.” He leaned back, waiting for the dark glare and for Seto to take another bite of his dinner (two peas) before speaking again. “I have known Albus Dumbledore for a very long time. I would guess that his protection is not the true reason for seeking you out. Surely, after this mysterious breach of your property that you thought was my doing, you must also have misgivings about your arrival in our world.”

Seto was quiet for a minute. “What makes you think that I’ll be any more open to listening than Yugi would have – or that I’m not one of the hero archetypes that you hate so much?”

Voldemort’s laugh was cold. “Our mutual friend and I have been keeping an eye on you for a while now. You are not the kind to jump headfirst into danger without a solution. We both know you run on strategy, not impulse.”

Seto huffed impatiently. “Yeah? Even if I lived completely on the fly, it doesn’t mean I’d believe what you have to say.”

“You say that,” said Voldemort, “But we both know that is not the case. If you had no desire to listen to me, then you wouldn’t be sitting here. Like the last two days, you would have stayed in the other corner of the room, surrounded by the books and the evening fire, set to ignore my attempts to converse with you.”

Seto drummed his fingers along the edge of the table. “You’re running in circles and I’m getting tired of it,” he said, “We’ve already established I’m not sitting here for the food, so either answer my questions without dragging it out or go.”

Voldemort chuckled again. “Well aren’t you demanding today….” He turned slightly towards one of the two sentries at the door and held up a hand. One of the guards sidled forward and dropped a small black pouch onto Voldemort’s outstretched palm before resuming his stance at the door.

He looked back to Seto. “I trust Dumbledore told the both of you that it was I you needed protection from?”

Seto raised an eyebrow and waved a hand around at the room. “Considering where I ended up, he couldn’t have been too far off the mark.”

“You have been watched long before my spies learned of the Millennium Items. Perhaps it is not I you need to fear.”

Voldemort raised his brow, clasped his hands together around the black pouch and leaned back in his seat.

Seto’s eyes narrowed at the bag. “What is that?”

“The truth,” said Voldemort. “But I will not continue unless you finish your plate.”

“I’m not hungry.”

“A lie,” Voldemort sneered. “It’s been almost three days.”

Seto glared. “You knew I wasn’t going to eat that, and you can’t force me to do it either. What are you going to do, have one of them shove it down my throat if I just sit here?” He jerked his head towards the two guarding the door. “You already said once before that you weren’t going to hold this over me at wandpoint. And if that was actually a lie, then I have no reason to believe that anything you have said or will say is the truth.”
“I also did not expect you to pull this stunt for almost three days,” Voldemort countered. “The rules of our little game have changed.”

“What difference does it make in the end?” Seto seethed. He splayed his hands across the top of the table and shot to his feet angrily.

One of the two Death Eaters started forward, drawing his wand from his robes, but halted halfway into the room at Voldemort’s raised hand.

“What am I even doing this for?” said Seto, “If all you wanted was to talk to me, you could have gone through a lot less trouble by just showing up in Domino during one of the multiple trips home I took in the first term. You certainly didn’t have any trouble traveling to Japan to harass Ishizu Ishtar.

“It’s clear that you want something else. What are you going to do if I don’t give it to you – torture me until I give in? You’ve already threatened me once with the Shadow Magus, and he hasn’t picked his way through my brain yet. So either you’re the one holding him up, or he’s not really here.”

“Oh, the Shadow Magus is here,” said Voldemort shortly, “I imagine at this moment he is occupied with your counterpart. But if you don’t believe me, I can always summon him. Perhaps I should, it might convince you to cooperate.”

“Cooperate with what?” Seto raged. “You haven’t demanded anything.”

Voldemort stayed seated and looked up at him calmly. “Why do you think I want you healthy?”

“I have no idea,” Seto snapped, “Like the terms of this entire evening, this is all a sick game that you play to win.”

Voldemort tilted his head back. “You are a strategist, Seto Kaiba. Why aren’t you playing to win?”

“We both know there is no way for me to win this game.”

“Oh – is that so?” Voldemort gestured at the table. “Your point of view is naturally limited by your anger at me and your current position. Look at this from a different perspective.”

Seto exhaled loudly and crossed his arms.

“Yes – we are playing a game. I want you to keep yourself alive –”

“—Only until it’s convenient for you to get what you ultimately want from me.”

Voldemort narrowed his eyes. “Do not interrupt me. There are indeed a number of reasons for why you are here. I will win the game by getting them. You may choose to play in two ways. You may do what I have asked of you for the time being – to keep yourself well – or you can weaken your mind and body through starvation. How much longer do you think you can honestly hold out in this way? If I am forced to use potions to keep you off Death’s door, then I will have won, and will use magic to extract what I want from you.”

He pointed a bony finger towards the mostly-untouched plate. “What I want is to show you the big picture. This war is a game. And we are not the only players. Put the terms of this evening’s talk aside. What was the first question you had for me?”

Seto eyed Voldemort warily. “You said someone else was looking into us.”
Voldemort nodded slowly. “I did. And it is the truth. I may be holding you here against your will, Seto Kaiba, but I am not your true enemy.”

Seto snorted. “Oh, no? Kidnapping isn’t a crime in the Wizarding World? Then I suppose Dumbledore was lying when he said you were after the Millennium Items.”

Voldemort chuckled. “Those will come to me in time. But this…” he held up the small bag, “will put the war in a new light. That is what I want you to see.”

“That won’t win me this ‘game’,” said Seto, “As I see it, the only way to win is to survive – to completely defy every advance you make to get what you want, which will inevitably result in a loss, or to hold out long enough to escape.” He nodded his head towards the door. “And you already said that I won’t get out of this room.”

“Then why not learn as much as you can? Perhaps winning this game is not necessarily your escape, but taking on the fight from a new angle? After all, how did you put it? Ah – ‘I might as well get something out of this?’”

“If that’s some bastardized way of asking me to join your side, then you’re crazier than I initially thought.”

Voldemort studied him for several minutes before unfolding his hands and dropped the little velvet bag next to Seto’s food. He nodded towards the empty chair at the end of the table. “Open it.”

Seto raised an eyebrow, but didn’t make any move towards the bag. “What’s in there?”

Voldemort shook his head. “That defeats the point of finding out on your own.”

Seto looked wary. “I thought you were going to force-feed me before you revealed your so-called trump card.”

“I did,” said Voldemort, “But I have a feeling that we will soon be having a much larger discussion, and dinner this evening will end up running far later than the both of us expect.”

“I doubt that,” Seto muttered as he sat back down and picked up the bag. It was very light, but he felt something small through the fabric. Whatever it was, it would easily fit into the palm of his hand. How this was supposed to prove that there were other players in the Wizarding War was beyond him.

With a sigh, he turned the bag over and dumped the contents into his open hand.

An Orichalcos stone dropped out.
Scheming

Chapter Notes

Today (May 12, 2019) marks the original 2-yr anniversary of this fic, as it was first published on FF.net. 37 chapters later and we're only still six months into the story's timeline.
Thank you for following along thus far on the journey! Enjoy the new chapter!

/Text/ Spirit to Host
/Spirit Host to Spirit

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Seto only stared at the dulled green stone sitting idly in his palm for half a second, just enough time for his brain to compute exactly what it was he was holding before he quickly dropped it onto the table, withdrawing his arm back as if the little rock had violently injured him.

He stared at it, a million thoughts running through his mind. Was it active? How did it get here? Was there someone else here, perhaps another of Voldemort’s ‘guests’ or even an associate, that had the ability of playing a Seal? Was he going to have to fight for his soul yet again?

Voldemort reached forward and plucked the small rock from where it had landed on the table, holding it up to the light and regarded it curiously. “You seem to know what this is. Intimately, I’d say, with how quickly you were to be rid of it.”

Seto’s brow furrowed and he turned to Voldemort, keeping an eye on the Orichalcos stone. “Don’t you?”

“I know what my spies have told me, which I will admit is likely far less than the knowledge you have. I will share what I know about this little treasure, if you share what you know about it.”

“…Is this part of your game from earlier? Do I not get to ask questions about how you got it if I don’t tell you anything?”

Voldemort lifted his head haughtily. “If you choose to simply sit there and stare at me, then I suppose you’ll never know how we got a hold of it.”

“You won’t find out anything about it either.”

Voldemort sneered. “I can always force it out of you later. But you cannot do the same to me.” He turned his gaze briefly to the mostly untouched dinner. “Although…I will accept your silence if you at least eat while I talk.”

“I said I wasn’t hungry.”

“And we both know that isn’t true. Stop running this night into circles. It doesn’t benefit either of us. You don’t want to talk to me, then fine. Would you prefer me to have blanket access to your mind instead? Then by all means, skip your meal for the third day in a row.”

Seto glowered at him before picking up the fork again.
Voldemort watched, satisfied, as Seto took two small bites of his dinner before turning the Orichalcos stone over in his hands. “I’m sure you remember an incident that occurred recently, where strange creatures were spotted all over the world.”

Seto glared at him. “It’s rather hard to forget when you’re the one that everyone blamed for them showing up in the first place.”

Voldemort raised his brow innocently. “Is that so?”

Seto rolled his eyes, stabbed a piece of meat with his fork and held it up dramatically for Voldemort to see. “…Just get on with it.”

“If you insist.” Voldemort held up the stone again. “Magizoologists were, of course, confused as to where the creatures had come from. None of them were any known species of beast. Muggles assumed that it was some sort of trickery. The monsters did not linger for more than a few days, and it seemed everyone returned to their mundane lives. What a coincidence it was, that just after the mass breakout from Azkaban last spring a number of stones, just like this one, were found all over the world. No one knew where they had come from. They just appeared.”

He paused, and looked to Seto. “Anything you’d like to add?”

“Only that your story would take far less time if you would merely get to the point. You’re dragging this out on purpose.”

“Perhaps I simply want you to eat.”

Seto huffed again. This little concerned act of Voldemort’s was getting old. The man couldn’t care that much to his health. He was just holding out to get what he wanted, and then he had no doubt that Voldemort would be rid of him soon after. “Perhaps I don’t like being forced.”

“A shame,” said Voldemort flatly. “Considering the food leaves with me.” He took another bite of his own dinner. “When these stone appeared, they seemed to be much more…alive. They had a glow to them that shone brightly in the dark, and reacted to the presence of what looked like stone soldiers wandering the streets. I trust you’ve seen them before.”

He didn’t wait for Seto to make any sort of response. “In any case, with the sudden appearance of these stones and monsters, a number of people fell unconscious. The Muggles called it comas. The Ministry claimed it was the fault of the Dementors now roaming the lands, as they had just left Azkaban to join my cause. But we know that was not the case, don’t we?

“At one point, the skies turned black, and the monsters reappeared. Spies have told me that some sort of battle was waged on an uncharted island somewhere off the east coast of the United States. Muggle card game players, duelists, as they were called, were summoned by the American military to deal with the crisis. Can you imagine, the surprise – the interest – of the Ministry, that Muggles were gathered to deal with something clearly magical?”

Voldemort waved a hand dismissively. “Even still, the darkness did not last long. When the monsters disappeared, the stones dulled, and their brilliant shine never returned. The wizards that had been attacked by the stone warriors woke in St. Mungo’s, and it was clear the brief damage had not been caused by any Dementor.”

Voldemort leaned forward and placed the Orichalcos stone in the middle of the table, just beyond Seto’s plate, and watched him settle as far back in his chair as possible. He tilted his head curiously. “Why do you have such an adverse reaction to it?”
Seto was glaring again, but at the Orichalcos stone, not at him. Interesting.

“What does it do?”

Seto stayed silent. Technically, it didn’t do anything anymore, which had to be why it didn’t have the radiance that Voldemort claimed it once possessed. It was exactly what it looked like – a useless, green rock.

Clearly, Voldemort had something that he didn’t quite understand. To him, it was merely a stone that appeared at the same time that people’s souls ended up stolen. The fact that the entire crisis in the wizarding community was blamed on the dementors meant that they didn’t quite place that it was the Orichalcos that was behind it.

But Voldemort’s question made him pause. What does it do? That implied that he wasn’t quite sure what had gone on while he and Yugi had been off fighting Dartz. Voldemort was no more informed than the Ministry of Magic. But was it wise to tell him the truth about the Orichalcos stones? The terrible magic from them was long gone, but would Voldemort try and find a way to bring the Leviathan back, or revive the soul-stealing ability of the Orichalcos and cause even more havoc on the magical community? Is that what he was after all this time, and not the Millennium Items?

Yugi assured him that the Orichalcos was gone. The Seal couldn’t be activated again. But would the wizards be satisfied with that answer? And just how many of those pesky rocks did Voldemort have at his disposal? More importantly, how would Yugi know if the stupid beast would be able to come back or not?

“For the amount of thinking you are doing, there must be quite an explanation,” said Voldemort, breaking the silence at the table. He held up the little green rock. “What is so special about this?”

Seto’s jaw tensed. Answering could go one of two ways. Would Voldemort accept that the soul-stealing magic was dead and gone and…move on? It was an event that happened, can’t happen again, so he’ll focus in on whatever he wants from him at the current moment?

Or will he decide that the Orichalcos is worth looking into to cause even more havoc in this war, and seek out the rest of the stones? …Were there other surviving stones? It didn’t matter. He was currently stuck without a clear way of getting back to Hogwarts or Domino. A duelist was needed to take souls using the Orichalcos, and he was sure Voldemort would turn him into a minion at the first opportunity. It didn’t matter if his deck wasn’t here with him. Voldemort managed to squirrel him out of Kaiba Corp, one of the protected buildings in Domino. Making off with his cards didn’t seem like it would be much of a challenge for them.

Seto’s brow furrowed. Was a duelist even needed? Dartz’s stone minions didn’t seem to have much trouble harassing half of New York. But would Voldemort care? Sure, he’s been fairly defiant up to this point, but he knew this couldn’t last forever. And it would only be a matter of time before the Death Eaters found enough leverage to dangle over him to get him to comply.

That left, in his eyes, one option.

Seto put his fork down and crossed his arms.

Voldemort tilted his head. “Nothing to say?”

“You said my silence was acceptable so long as I ate.” He made a point of looking down at his plate and then back up. “I ate.”

Voldemort shook his head slightly. “What will it take for you to speak with me?”
Seto narrowed his eyes. “With the amount of effort that you put into capturing me? You wouldn’t give it to me, so the point is moot.”

Voldemort chuckled. “Your freedom? If I were you, I’d best get used to your current situation. You will not be going anywhere for quite some time.”

“Then I have nothing else to say.”

The Orichalcos stone was tucked out of sight. “A pity. I had hoped that sheer curiosity would have won out against your stubbornness by now.”

“You clearly don’t know anything about me.”

Voldemort stood up and waved his wand. The dinner plates vanished from the table. “I suppose I will take the small victories while they last. We will pick this up in the morning.”

~~*~~

“Good evening, gentlemen.”

Ryou closed the door behind him and Yugi and took up the two seats in front of Dumbledore’s desk.

“I must apologize for taking you away from your studies, but I wished to give you an update over what has transpired this weekend.”

Yugi glanced quickly to Ryou before turning to Dumbledore. “…Have you found him?”

To his dismay, Dumbledore shook his head. “I’m afraid not. However, we have some new insight over what may have led to his abduction in the first place.”

Ryou’s eyes widened. “What happened?”

“As you know, Emmeline Vance was one of the three Order members stationed in Domino to help watch over your friends and family. She stayed with Mokuba Kaiba during that time. For the holidays, Remus Lupin and Nymphadora Tonks were to swap with her, along with Sturgis Podmore and Hestia Jones so they could see their families. Perhaps you were aware – or perhaps not, but Miss Vance returned to Britain before the other two.”

Yugi bit his lip. He remembered when the Order members first arrived in Domino. Emmeline Vance set up the wards around Kaiba’s home and office. “Do you think she had something to do with it?”

Dumbledore shook his head. “Not in the way you would think. Do remember that all of the protective enchantments around the Kaiba Corporation were still intact when we arrived on the scene in Seto Kaiba’s office. But I do believe that Voldemort got to her upon her return home. The entire Vance family was found dead yesterday. Aurors believe that she may have been tortured for information.”

Yugi and Ryou’s jaws dropped.

Yami phased out of the Puzzle. “How was this possible?”

Dumbledore shook his head. “We do not know for sure. But, we know that security has been breached around Mr. Kaiba’s properties before. It is possible the Death Eaters waited for the Order members to return home before striking Domino. I imagine they must have gathered Mr. Kaiba’s itinerary at that time.”
Ryou nodded slowly. “It explains how they knew Kaiba wasn’t at the park with us.”

“What about Kaiba though?” asked Yami. “Don’t you have spies in his ranks? Isn’t that how you found out about us in the first place?”

“I’m afraid I do not have answers as to that,” said Dumbledore, as Bakura appeared next to Ryou. “As far as I am aware, the Ministry has had no luck in locating him. At the same time, I do not believe that they have been very proactive in their search.”

“Why not?” Bakura scowled. “From our perspective, the only reason he – any of us – were at this school, was because we needed protection from Voldemort. Your government gave us sanctuary here. The people in your government fouled up and got him captured. And now you’re telling us they may not even be looking for him?”

Dumbledore sighed. “There are only so many Aurors to go around. I’m afraid the war effort –”

“That is a load of bull—”

“Bakura,” Yami growled.

Bakura glared at him. “Get off your high horse, Pharaoh.” He turned angrily back to Dumbledore. "Admit it – your people have screwed us over every step of the way. You offer your protection, but the security of my host’s friends is still compromised. You want us to learn how to fight on the equal terms of these Death Eaters, yet you put someone incapable of doing so in charge of the class. You think this war is terrible now? Just wait until Voldemort extracts whatever he needs to from Kaiba.”

Dumbledore remained calm. “Do you believe Mr. Kaiba would give in to what Voldemort wants?”

“Kaiba is unbearably stubborn,” said Yami, “But even still – the Death Eaters only have to dangle the right threat over him and he’ll give in.”

“And what would that be?” asked Dumbledore.

Yugi started to open his mouth but Ryou cut him off. “It doesn’t matter, Professor. What does matter is that Kaiba had the foresight well ahead of time to plan for an emergency like this. If all goes well, the Death Eaters won’t find it.”

“Are you certain?”

Bakura snorted. “I’m certain that while we argue semantics, Kaiba is being put through the ringer over information he doesn’t even know. He might be the most stubborn soul on the planet, but I don’t expect him to hold out forever. Even if he drives Voldemort mad, that Shadow is probably having its way with him. And if you thought the Shadow Realm was dangerous for the three seconds it was out in this school, then you haven’t seen anything.”

Dumbledore regarded Bakura thoughtfully. “Why do you assume Mr. Kaiba does not know anything of what Voldemort is after?”

“Because he hasn’t bothered to learn about them,” said Bakura, “If it weren’t for the fact that the two are stuck with each other, Kaiba would have dumped the Millennium Rod – and the Priest, by extension – back on Yugi in a heartbeat.”

“What about the Japanese Ministry?” Yugi asked suddenly, “Are they doing anything?”

“From what I understand, the Japanese Ministry has taken over the damage control on the attack in
Domino City. While Mr. Kaiba is not a wizard by birth, they are naturally angered by the attack. I believe they are the primary ones putting pressure on our Ministry to expedite the search. Voldemort, however, keeps eluding our efforts. Until someone manages to catch a solid lead, I am afraid that Mr. Kaiba is lost to the wind.”

Dumbledore gave a heavy sigh. “I am sorry I do not have more information for you. I have been in near-constant contact with the Minister of Magic, and will of course forward any news I can. Is there anything I can do for you in the meantime?”

Yugi’s shoulders slumped. “I…I don’t know. I guess I was hoping you would have some sort of lead for us to follow.”

“As do I,” said Dumbledore. “As per an agreement between myself and Mokuba Kaiba’s guardian, I will be visiting in the morning to update on our progress so far.”

“Or lack of,” Bakura grumbled, and immediately after disappeared back into the Millennium Ring.

If Dumbledore had heard him, he didn’t react to it as a soft knock sounded on the office door.

“Come.”

Yugi twisted around in his seat as Harry entered the office, and stopped short when he realized he wasn’t the only guest in the room.

“Sorry,” he said quickly. “I can come back, Professor…”

Dumbledore held up his withered hand. “It is alright, Harry. I was just giving some news to Mr. Muto and Mr. Bakura.”

“Oh,” said Harry, and frowned, judging the looks on his friends’ faces. “Nothing good, I take it.”

Yugi shook his head. “Not right now, at least.”

Ryou looked from Harry to Dumbledore. “If you have an appointment, we can go…”

Yugi looked at him curiously.

“My deepest apologies,” said Dumbledore, “My mind must have lapsed for wanting to see you all so close in time. Old age, I’m sure.”

“It’s alright,” said Ryou, “There wasn’t a lot to share this time anyhow. …But you’ll keep us posted on what you find?”

Dumbledore nodded. “Of course.”

Ryou smiled. “Thank you, Professor.” He nodded Yugi towards the door.

Yugi blinked and followed after him. “See you in the common room later, Harry?”

Harry nodded, and closed the door behind them before taking up a seat in his usual chair in front of the desk.

“I take it you had a productive first day of lessons?”

Harry shrugged. “It was alright. I mean, it wasn’t bad. But…”
He trailed off, and bit his lip. He had wondered throughout the entire first term why Professor Umbridge had returned to Hogwarts. No one was really able to give him a clear cut answer. But now he had Dumbledore’s attention. He had to know why. He ran the school! But would Dumbledore give him an answer, or just plow ahead at the reason for their meeting?

Dumbledore gestured for him to continue. “Go on…”

Harry sighed. “I – we, Yugi and the others, I mean…we think Professor Umbridge is up to something.”

“Ah.”

Harry frowned. That was all the reaction he was going to get? “I can’t think of anything she’s done that was actually helpful to any of us this year.”

Dumbledore merely sat, watching him with his hands clasped together on the desk.

“I mean…what is she even doing here?” Harry continued. Might as well throw that bone out there and see if Dumbledore picked at it. “She hasn’t really taught us anything, and I can’t imagine that the Ministry would put her back here after the mess she made last year! What happened to her being sacked last June?”

“I’m afraid Dolores Umbridge’s reappointment was out of my hands,” said Dumbledore, getting up from the desk. “But let us move onto the point of our gathering. I must apologize for my lack of availability during the first term, Harry. I gave you a taste of what our evening sessions would include, and then did not follow up on them as I should have been. Do you remember our focus?”

Harry nodded. “You were going to show me things about Voldemort. Memories.”

“Correct, Harry. We will need to dive into Voldemort’s past if we are to learn how to ultimately defeat him. Most of the reason for my absence last term was that some of the memories we will venture through together were not mine and needed to be gathered. And there was one in particular that took a great deal of persuasion to acquire.”

“Why was that, Professor?”

“I’m afraid it was not a very positive memory. The wizard in question was rather ashamed of it. But it is not one we will be seeing today. There are a few, much farther back that we will be visiting this evening.”

Dumbledore crossed the room and opened the cabinet housing his Pensieve. “I trust you remember what this is.”

Harry felt his face redden slightly. He had accidently stumbled upon some of Dumbledore’s own memories once during the Tri-Wizard tournament.

“Whose memory are we going into first?”

“Bob Ogden’s,” said Dumbledore, “Who at the time was a member of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. He died a number of years ago, but not before I was able to track him down. I believe it will be wise to start our story there, with his visit of the Gaunt family.”

Harry shuffled over to the cabinet.

“Before we begin, I must ask for your confidence about the content of our lessons, Harry. Aside
from Mr. Weasley and Miss Granger, you cannot share what you will see in these memories with anyone.”

Harry paused. “Not Yugi or Ryou?”

Dumbledore gave him a hard look from over the top of his half-moon spectacles. “Do you trust them completely?”

Of course he did, Harry thought. Sure, there was the brief stint at the beginning of term when he definitely thought they were up to something, but hearing about the Millennium Items cleared up a lot. But why wouldn’t Dumbledore want him to share with Yugi and the others? That’s why they were here in the first place, right? To fight Voldemort? Why else would he go so out of his way to invite three people who didn’t know anything about magic to Hogwarts, have them stay at the Burrow over the summer, and insert them into his year?

“Yes,” said Harry.

Dumbledore nodded. “Then you may speak with them. But that is all. In confidence, Harry. I cannot stress that enough. What we will be doing and discussing must remain a complete secret. Do you understand?”

Harry nodded. “I do.”

“Very well,” said Dumbledore. “Let us begin.”

~~*~~

You are wasting time. The boy will not speak with you. I could have told you as much three days ago.

Voldemort sat in his chair by the fire in the other study. “It won’t be long now. You were right – he is stubborn. But I can see it. Curiosity will soon get the better of him.”

Did he eat the food?

“He did. Not all of it, of course, but it was a start.”

Good. Drug his morning meal.

Voldemort glared at the Shadow. “That is the third mention that I do such a thing. Why are you so insistent?”

The sword – and the golden eye on the Shadow’s head flared. The priest is holed up in the Millennium Rod, under guard by the White Dragon. I cannot get to his memories.

Voldemort sighed. “I thought you said you had a way around that problem?”

I waged a gamble that the White Dragon guarded the boy’s mind, leaving Set vulnerable. I was wrong. So now, I am stuck while you draw out this ridiculous game. Seto Kaiba will not reveal anything to you, so you might as well dump that potion down his throat and simply take what you want. How long are you going to let me wait to get what I want?

“What you want?” Voldemort hissed. “We can only search for those sword pieces so quickly.”

The Shadow laughed darkly. You think a few sword fragments are all that I’m after? These mind
games you are trying to play will not work.

Voldemort stood up abruptly and swept towards the door. “Perhaps you should concern yourself with getting past the dragon and less of what I am doing.”

You really think that little green pebble is going to make him talk?

Voldemort chuckled. “No, of course not. I must first plant seeds of doubt. Once he realizes he is nothing more than Dumbledore’s new stooge, his attitude will shift.”

The Shadow watched Voldemort leave the room and shook his head. A waste of time…

He looked to the side of the room, where Seto’s wand, phone, and the Millennium Rod sat on the oversized fireplace mantle. It’s time to expedite things…

Disappearing from view, he passed through the door as if it wasn’t even there, and moved across the silent halls of the old manor. Voldemort’s minions were quiet tonight. Perhaps most of them were on some sort of assignment.

Not that it mattered. They weren’t doing anything important. Harassing nearby villages and bribing government officials was not important. It was unnecessary. The Millennium Rod – even their own mind-bending magic did the work for them. Why some of these wealthy families insisted on throwing money around to get the lesser men do their work was beyond him.

The only thing that mattered was tapping back into the Priest’s memories, and getting the rest of his soul put together again. Acquiring the Millennium Items and reviving Zorc Necrophades. Let the world burn and be reborn from the ashes under his reign.

He was denied his throne once. Not this time.

But tapping into the Spirit’s mind was going to be harder than he initially thought. Just like all those years ago, that damn girl was protecting him. How did she end up so powerful?

His venture into the Millennium Rod revealed several things. The corridor between Set and Seto Kaiba was still intact, though the door to Seto Kaiba’s room was gone, leaving only the original wall. Set locked himself within his own half. But the White Dragon was in the corridor, blocking his path. Her magic made short work of him.

There had to be a way around her. And he was ready to bet half of his sword that Seto Kaiba knew an answer. Unfortunately, Voldemort would know if he jumped right into the boy’s mind. While there was really nothing stopping him from doing so, the agreement they had made just before Kaiba’s capture meant that Voldemort needed to get what he wanted from him first.

Too many attacks on the mind and it could be lost, or some nonsense of the kind.

That sounded like an excuse. But he needed Voldemort and his lackey army to find the rest of him, so in the meantime, he was stuck. …Or was he?

He had an idea.

Two Death Eaters were standing sentry across from the door into the larger study, where Voldemort had decided to stash Kaiba.

Aknadin materialized again directly in front of them, grinning as they jumped, startled. One was even halfway to pulling one of their sticks from a pocket.
Are you the only two guards?

The first Death Eater looked to his partner nervously. He had only heard stories of the weird shadow man that the Dark Lord had started investing time with. This had to be him. But he was more of a monster than a man.

The golden eye was definitely unnerving.

“N-no,” he said. “There are always two inside. Two out here.”

Aknadin tilted his head. How long do you stand there?

The other Death Eater spoke up this time. “A few hours. We both watch him tomorrow.”

For how long?

“All day,” scowled the first Death Eater. “Once the Dark Lord is done for the morning until he returns after sundown.”

“It’s so dull,” the second one snorted. “He just sits there and reads. And paces the room.”

“I don’t see how he lasted three days without eating more than a few crumbs,” said the first Death Eater. “I wouldn’t have made it half the day.”

“I almost wish he tried something stupid, just so we would have something to do,” said the other Death Eater, “But he’s supposed to be some rich Muggle, right? Probably doesn’t want to get his shiny shoes dirty.”

“I swear Lestrange has wanted a go at him,” said the first Death Eater. “I don’t blame her. That Egyptian isn’t any fun anymore.”

…How would you two like to have some excitement tomorrow?

Now the two looked wary. They were probably weighing how much wrath they would face for disobeying any of Voldemort’s orders in the sake of having a little fun.

“…What kind of excitement?”

They couldn’t see Aknadin’s feral grin. This will be too easy. He raised one of his hands as it became shrouded in the Shadow Realm aura. The Death Eater masks covered their foreheads, but he could make out a faint glow coming from underneath. The Eye must have appeared. Good.

Tomorrow, Lord Voldemort will be away at the other house, visiting his other prisoners. You two will be the only guards for this room. And this is what you’re going to do….

Chapter End Notes

The anime doesn’t really say where the USA Kaiba Corp office is. We know Industrial Illusions is in San Francisco, but after visiting there, Yugi and co hop a train and get derailed in the middle of nowhere. It was stated once or twice before in a throwaway line somewhere around here, but for the sake of fic canon, Seto’s USA branch is in New York City.
Seto knew before his eyes even opened that something wasn’t right. There was a chill that wormed its way through his body, and an odd pressure around his head. But the study was just as empty and dreary as it was yesterday. The sun still rose through the dusty windows at the same time, as would the changing of his guard.

He rose from the couch, not quite remembering just when he had drifted off to sleep, but it was inevitable. Without anything truly stimulating to keep him occupied, he wouldn’t be able to keep himself wide awake forever. And after the first night of poking around, none of the books on the shelf were worth reading. And if didn’t pose the risk of him getting into serious trouble, he would have pitched half of them into the fire.

They were written *that* terribly. And he thought some of the cringeworthy company reports he had to read were bad.

Seto started his morning pace across the width of the room and tried to work out the kink that formed overnight in his neck, all while keeping his usual distance from his two masked guards. The couch was not comfortable. In the slightest.

Perhaps Voldemort would attempt to use that next for bartering information. A better place for him to waste his days away in exchange for getting his barrage of questions about the Orichalcos answered.

Well, so much for that. He’d rather nap on the floor.

Seto paused in front of the window and brushed a spot of dirt off his jacket. His suit *was* in pristine condition. But after four days of pacing and sitting around, the dust and grime in the room was trying to absorb him.

With a huff, he continued his trek back and forth. He’d sleep in the armchair instead. It may be just as uncomfortable as the sofa, but it was probably *the* only spot that was relatively clean, and it was at least close to the fire. Thank goodness for that too, because despite all the layers he was wearing, he was freezing.

He reached the wall again and spun on his heel, freezing mid-turn as two Death Eaters walked in, one of them none too gently dropping a plate of food onto the table. The two Death Eaters that were stuck with him overnight left, but only one Death Eater remained behind, rather than two.

Odd.

Seto glanced at the plate. It was not nearly as full as the previous days’ meals. Perhaps whoever was preparing them finally wised up that he wasn’t eating half of it. Or maybe they were going to use food as a coercion to get what they wanted. Not that it worked in their favor before, but he wasn’t going to put it past them to try and starve him to death in order to weasel information out.

But normally there were *two* meals set out, not one.

“Your boss not coming?”

“There are other matters requiring the Dark Lord’s attention today. He will not be seeing you.”

Well, that sure changed things. Voldemort visited him *without fail* for every meal so far. What could have happened that he had to skip out *and* take some of his guards with him?
“Is that why you’re stuck on babysitting duty alone?”

The Death Eater bristled. “The Dark Lord felt it wise to be cautious. I don’t see why. It’s not as if you are getting out of this room. Two of us are not needed to keep you in here.”

Seto snorted, gave a last fleeting glance at his rather unappetizing breakfast and turned away, shoving his hands into his pockets. “Is that so.”

The Death Eater shifted irritably at his post. “Yes. Now I suggest you either sit there and eat your food, or be quiet.”

Seto suppressed the urge to visibly shudder. The air in the room felt like it dropped another degree, and he couldn’t figure out how. He looked to the fire. It was far from dying, though no one had tended to it since he first woke in captivity. It had to be enchanted somehow to not go out. But even still, at its intensity, he shouldn’t be this cold standing near to it.

He walked back to the window and stood there for a few seconds, his back to the guard. There was no draft coming from it. The sun was out – its rays coming right into the study. If anything, that should warm the room, not make it colder.

Seto turned back to the Death Eater. “Why is it so cold in here?”

No response.

Seto shook his head. It was a surprise that the guard even spoke to him at all. Usually Voldemort’s sentries merely stood there and attempted to look intimidating, only speaking out if he came too close to the door.

He moved back to stand before the fire, but even now it didn’t feel as if it was warming him, like it did in the past.

Something was definitely wrong here. It was as if the cold was artificial, like when he would train with Set in the Room of Requirement. The cold there wasn’t from the school itself – even though the castle was extremely drafty – but a creation of the –


He turned back around and gazed about the room. There was no purple mist. But that didn’t mean it wasn’t coming. He had considered himself lucky that for the entire time he was here, the Shadow Magus hadn’t visited him once. And he had to be around here somewhere.

This must be a sign his luck was running out. He wasn’t halfway across the country anymore, within the relatively safety of Hogwarts Castle. He wasn’t completely across the globe either. All of the training that Set had tried to give him was about to be tested. *And soon.*

But the last time he was attacked, it took Yugi and Bakura to get him out of it. Here? He didn’t even have Set. Even with Set’s training, he may not have a fighting chance…

He did a quick side-eye of the door. Unless he used this opportunity to get out. There was only one Death Eater. He could probably take him.

Voldemort had said that even if he managed to take out the guards in the room, he wouldn’t make it past the door. Were there others out in the hallway? Or was he bluffing?

There was only one way to find out, but he had to get past his babysitter first.
Seto looked him up and down. The long robes made it hard to tell just how large he was, but guessed about Kemo’s size. He took Kemo down with ease in Duelist Kingdom. But Kemo didn’t have a wand and an arsenal of spells at his disposal.

He needed him to lose the wand.

“What are you staring at?” snapped the Death Eater, tearing Seto from thought.

Seto moved to the middle of the room and faced the Death Eater head on. “Trying to decide how much effort it’s going to be to get past that door.”

The Death Eater laughed. “You honestly think you’ll get past me? You must be daft.”

“You don’t look like much of a challenge,” said Seto casually.

“Ha!” the Death Eater pulled his wand from his robes and tapped the tip of it against his opposite hand, drawing a few stray white sparks from the end. “Go ahead. I’ll make short work of you, and then the Dark Lord will hand you over to us. We’ll get what he wants from you in minutes.”

Seto crossed his arms. “If that were the case, he would have done that already.”

“It does not change the fact that I will have you stopped before you can reach me,” said the Death Eater.

“Because you rely on a fragile twig to solve all your problems,” Seto said, “Without it, you’re just a meathead following orders. You wouldn’t last more than two seconds in an actual fight.”

“Is that so,” drawled the Death Eater, “Look at you. I am twice your size. I’ll break you in half.”

“Can you?” Seto said, “Forget taking me down, I don’t think you can even swing a punch at me.”

“Is that a challenge?” the Death Eater snarled. He balled his hand into a fist.

“It’s a fact.”

“Not only can I, but I will,” said the Death Eater, “I don’t need magic to put you in your place. And in my opinion, the Dark Lord has been far too lenient with you. Imagine how pleasantly surprised he will be to return and find you willing to spill your secrets to him.” He shoved his wand back into his pocket. “I’ve been stuck here without any amusement for far too long. This should be fun.”

But he didn’t make any move away from the door.

“Are you afraid?” Seto taunted, waving his arms out. “Of someone half your size? Or are you just a coward who can’t do anything without pointing a stick and muttering some magic words?”

“Face it – you’re just a nobody. You exist only to take the orders of some lunatic, and for what? There’s no glory in your war. You are all a means to an end for him. You really think Voldemort will reward you for keeping me put in here, or for taking away the satisfaction he would get for interrogating me himself? He doesn’t care about you or anyone else. The instant you’re not needed, he’ll throw you away.”

Still a respectable distance from the Death Eater, Seto took one step forward. “I’m not a fool. I know there’s a timer above my head and the instant I surrender whatever it is he wants, I’m a dead man. And if all of you think for a second that I’m just going to sit around in here and wait for the end, then you’re all mistaken. One way or another, I’m going to get through that door, so you can either stand
aside or try to stop me.”

Seto sneered. “What are you waiting for? If you really think that this will get you into your boss’s good graces so you don’t have to spend the rest of your days on babysitting duty, then come on. Beat the information out of me.” He grinned. “I’ll even let you throw the first swing.”

The Death Eater hesitated before giving the door behind him a side-eye glance. The wand was removed once again from his pocket, and Seto froze. Did he goad him too far? Perhaps he planned to torture him with magic instead.

But rather than aim it at him, the Death Eater pointed the wand towards the door, and cast a muffling charm. He grinned behind his mask. “There are some in the Inner Circle who would insist on the Dark Lord’s presence before interrogating you,” he said smoothly. “I am not one of those. But I would prefer to not be interrupted. It would not do for an easy escape because some fool opened the door for you. If you want out, you have to win it.”

He stowed the wand away again, clenched his fists, and stepped forward.

Seto smirked.

~~*~~

He expected to be stunned, or hit with something stronger when he tempted fate and threw open the door to the study. But there was no one there.

*Voldemort was bluffing then*, Seto said to himself. He spared a look back at the unconscious Death Eater in the middle of the room. Turns out he *had* thrown a punch before, but that was neither here nor there. The man was actually a slightly bigger build than Kemo. And he went down just as easily.

He would have to thank Roland for all of the judo training when he got out of here.

Seto spared no time finding the Death Eater’s wand and used it tie him to one of the chairs. The last thing he needed was to be attacked from behind when the man woke back up again.

He reached for the door handle and quietly closed the door to the study, tapping the lock with the wand until he heard it click.

That should stop him, for at least a little while. Through his studies, he was more than well aware that wandless magic existed, and he didn’t really want to find out the hard way if that particular Death Eater was capable of it.

Seto looked up and down the hallway. There had to be other Death Eaters here. *Somewhere*. And he didn’t have a clue to where he was. Would this end up a blind chase through the house until he found the way out? How long until there were spells whizzing past his head to subdue him again?

He gripped the wand tighter in his fist. *They* may have a greater number of spells in their arsenal, but he had, if anything, the only two he truly needed, thanks to Harry’s defensive lesson. Disarm, and shield. So long as he didn’t get hit, it would have to do.

With a sigh, he crept down the hallway. There was no point trying any of these doors. No point in accidentally alerting anyone that he got out. But he knew just from looking through the study’s windows that he was on an upper floor, at least two stories up. A staircase had to be around here somewhere.

And there was one, at the end of the hall. Still no Death Eaters in sight.
Voldemort wouldn’t have run off for the day and only left only the one in the whole house…right?

He listened carefully for footsteps as he quietly moved downward. The chill from the study was gone, as was the pressure he felt in his head. If that was truly an effect of the Shadow Realm, wouldn’t it follow him around until the Shadow Magus made his appearance?

Unless…Seto paused as the thought flew through his mind. Unless the Shadow Magus is with Voldemort…

He reached the bottom of the stairs, which merely opened up into another hallway. This part of the house was dark, and either end of the hall could lead to another staircase or a dead end of some sort.

It wouldn’t surprise him in the slightest if Voldemort masked the front doors to this place as a precaution, just in case he got himself out of the study. He could wander this house two times over and not find the exit.

Although, he mused, he could just smash a window on the main level and jump out.

…And then what? How would he get himself back to Hogwarts?

“HEY!” Seto whirled to his left, and had half a second to throw up a shield charm before a jet of red light could hit him square in the face. He sent out a quick “Expelliarmus!” which missed its target before bolting the opposite direction of the room the Death Eater had just vacated.

“GET BACK HERE!”

There were only two doors at the end of the hall. No stairs.

“I don’t know how you got out,” the Death Eater snarled, “But you’re going back.”

“Not today,” Seto muttered. The first door was mercifully unlocked and he darted inside, mentally crossing his fingers that there weren’t more of Voldemort’s stooges in here. It was instead another hall, though there was a staircase leading down.

Seto had barely enough thought to seal the door behind him before the Death Eater could get to it and ran down the steps. It wouldn’t keep the Death Eater out for long, but hopefully the extra seconds would get him to a place he could hide, catch his breath, and think.

He landed hard on the bottom step and continued past an empty dining room that was just as dusty as the study upstairs. The furniture in the next room was covered in large white sheets. Clearly no one had lived here for some time…and it seemed to be nothing but a maze of hallways.

Just how big was this place!?

He paused in front of yet another set of stairs, these both went up and down. He could see another door just past the top step, and cast a quick spell up towards it, flinging the door wide open wildly enough that it made a noisy bang! against the wall, and ducked around the nearest corner, clutching the pillfered wand tightly in his hand.

The Death Eater bolted up the steps. “You can’t hide from us!”

Seto waited for the Death Eater’s footsteps to fade away before he sagged back against the wall. He was on the ground floor. He could just break a window, as he thought about before, and escape. He had a wand. Surely, he could Portkey back to Hogwarts, or at least to safer ground. Of course, he had never created one before, but he at least knew the incantation, and how difficult could it be,
really?

But leave the Millennium Rod behind? The Shadow Magus and Voldemort both wanted it. Leaving it here didn’t seem like a smart plan, even if he had to put himself back in the line of fire to go find it. Even if he made it out of this place without it, it would only be a matter of time before Yugi formulated some foolhardy plan to get it back, since the Pharaoh needed it in the end. And he’d be back to square one.

Might as well try and find it now while he had the other Death Eater on a wild goose chase. And cross his fingers that there weren’t more of them around.

Ugh. He reached up and pinched at the bridge of his nose, eyes shut. The headache was coming back. Naturally at the worst possible time. But…it felt different. Not the migraines or the pressure headaches that he was used to at Hogwarts right before the Shadow Magus would arrive to torment his sleep. Not the sort he’d get from staring at his laptop for too long.

This felt almost…probing. A prod in his mind that seemed to come and go and come back again. He had felt something like this once before, though it was some time ago…when Set first came out of the Millennium Rod and had poked around at his memories.

Seto froze. Voldemort had said he was cut off from Set. Was he close enough to the Millennium Rod that the spirit was trying to reach out to him? Was that even possible?

He glanced up towards the second floor. He couldn’t hear the Death Eater moving around up there. Did that staircase lead to another maze of rooms? It was doubtful he gave up searching.

But if he could find the Millennium Rod, he would have an edge in getting out of here. Could he use the Shadow Realm as transportation, like Bakura with the Ring? Assuming he found Set, it was worth a shot.

He started down the hall again, another long walk filled with doors on either side. Was this house purposely built to get people lost? Or was it, like most things in the Wizarding World, a creation of magic just meant to get him lost and unable to get out.

He was banking on the latter.

Seto took a quick glance behind him as he heard footsteps coming from somewhere up above. The Death Eater was near, and could return downstairs at any minute. The corridor he was currently in was a dead end.

With the wand more or less forgotten in his hand, he began testing doorknobs. The first two didn’t budge, but the third easily swung open and he slipped inside, closing the door as quietly as possible, leaning against it until the footsteps faded away again.

Seto’s shoulders slumped as he turned around. He was back in a study again, and it was mercifully empty. Though this one was smaller than the one upstairs. The fireplace in this room was not going, and it was not nearly as grimy as the one had been stuck inside. Clearly this room had been used.

And sitting on top of the mantle, flaring in and out frantically, was the Millennium Rod.

Seto blinked. Seriously? The search for the Millennium Rod was going to end that easily? With a cautious glance back at the door behind him, Seto crossed the room, sidestepping the armchair in the middle of the floor facing the fireplace.

Once he was standing in front of it, the Rod stopped flashing. Seto reached for it, but the instant his
hand would have grabbed around the handle, it vanished, as if it was never there in the first place.

The temperature in the room then plummeted, and a low rasp was heard right behind him.

*Looking for this?*

Seto’s fist closed around the empty air as he shut his eyes, as intense dread washed over him. It didn’t take a genius to know who was in the room with him. The last time he heard that voice, he was nearly strangled in his sleep.

There was no doubt about it now. He may have lost the Death Eaters, but he stumbled upon someone far worse.

Seto steeled himself, slowly turned around, and felt next breath catch down in his chest. The Shadow Magus, who definitely hadn’t been there four seconds ago, loomed over him, the Millennium Rod struggling to get out of his grip. He had seen the Shadow Magus before…but there was something different, more menacing about the Shadow being physically in front of him, versus a figment in his mind.

It seemed taller, its clawed hands sharper, and he was slightly more than just a black shape with a Millennium Eye on its head. He could make out what appeared to be a mask over its face with a wild mane of reddish hair fanning behind him, and was unnerved over the fact that the mask had no eyeholes.

Did he see through the Millennium Eye? Was that even possible? …and if he had a Millennium Eye, did that mean there were two of them? Wherever Pegasus’s Eye ended up, and this one? Or was this Pegasus’s Eye? The thoughts were unsettling.

Knowing what at least Pegasus was capable of with the Millennium Eye, that didn’t sit well with him either.

The Shadow Magus moved forward a step, and Seto barely had time to raise his wand before the Eye on the mask activated, spreading the Shadow Realm’s purple fog throughout the entire room.

*Thank you for coming to me this time, Seto Kaiba.* The Shadow Magus rasped, raising his hands. They were shrouded in the same mist and glowing brightly.

Seto stepped back, but the purple fog along the ground formed streaks that snaked around his legs, and then up and across to his arms, holding him in place. The wand was plucked from his hand and it fell through the mist, clattering uselessly to the floor.

*Ah, ah,* The Shadow Magus mused, gliding forward. *Leaving so soon? It’s time we had a little chat.*

Seto glared up at the Shadow Magus. “I should have known this was too easy.”

The Shadow Magus merely laughed as he came to a stop right before him, and pressed one long finger against his forehead. Pain, much stronger than anything he had experienced through the nighttime attacks, seared behind his eyes and he clenched them shut and locked his jaw to keep from screaming as he fought against the Shadow Magus’s hold.

The Shadow Magus let go of the Millennium Rod, letting it float amongst the mist as he grabbed a fistful of Seto’s hair and yanked back, applying more pressure to his forehead. *You are making this harder on yourself,* he scolded. *Stop fidgeting.*
The mist surrounding the hand on Seto’s forehead flared red for only an instant, and the last thing he heard was the Shadow Magus’s dark laughter as his legs gave out. The Shadow Magus let go of him and he was unconscious by the time he landed at the Shadow’s feet.

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The first thing he noticed as he came around was the pounding in his skull. His eyes opened to a brightly lit room, and he was sprawled out on a gleaming tile surface.

_Wait…_

He rolled onto his side and propped himself up onto his elbow. This was _not_ the study – _either_ study – in Voldemort’s convoluted lair. In fact, it was far too bright and open in this place to be _any_ part of that house. It wasn’t even his soul room.

It wasn’t until he got back onto his feet and turned around did he realize exactly where he was. On display before him were the two stone tablets.

Seto fought past the throbbing behind his eyes and scowled. _The Domino Museum?_ How did he get _here_? Surely the Shadow Magus didn’t transport him halfway around the globe. Was this another image in his mind, another memory tapped and thrown into to satisfy the Shadow’s curiosity?

But he didn’t see the Shadow Magus anywhere. Though that didn’t mean a whole lot. He didn’t see the Shadow Magus in the dark study, but that didn’t stop him from laying that trap with the Millennium Rod.

Seto did a half-turn to look behind him. The stairs leading out of the chamber and back up to the main level of the museum were right there. While doubtful, if this was the real world…what was stopping him from just leaving and making his way to safety? And if this was just a memory, and he was stuck in his own head, would he just…disappear back to his soul room? Transport to another vision?

He held his hand out in front of him, cautious, and took a step forward. And another. Three steps out and his hand hit some sort of barrier that he couldn’t see.

_You didn’t expect to just walk away, did you?_

Seto whirled back around. The Shadow Magus stood before the tablet depicting Yugi’s Pharaoh and Set, watching him with his head tilted slightly to the side. The Eye was glowing again. _Great…_

Seto narrowed his eyes. “Where did you come from?”

_I had to take care of a quick matter in the waking world_, he said. _I am sure you have gathered that we are inside your mind._ He gestured next to him. _Come._

Seto made no move to join him.

The Shadow Magus laughed. _So defiant still. I am not like the wizards. I will not sit and waste time idly gossiping matters of the day and wait for your cooperation. You will join me or I will drag you here myself. I wish to show you something._

“I can see just fine from here,” Seto glared. “And if you are really that impatient, why did you wait four days - the last _two months_ even – to start your round of breaking and entering?”

_By now you are aware that your connection to the Priest is gone._ Removing him from your mind
and keeping the Millennium Rod from returning to you on its own accord took time and a great deal of energy. Here, I do not have to worry about your other half, or even the Pharaoh interfering.

Seto looked warily at the tablet. “I vaguely recall you forcing this memory out the last time you decided to romp through my mind. And it didn’t work. I also know you harassed Ishizu at the museum. What is it you still need from here that you haven’t gotten already?”

The Shadow Magus grinned behind his mask and gestured at the tablet. **What do you see?**

Seto barely gave it a fleeting glance before focusing on the Shadow Magus again. “A chipped rock.”

To his surprise, the Shadow Magus let out a low chuckle. …**That it is, and so much more. But we need to look deeper. You cannot see from there…** He held up a curled finger and beckoned him forward. **I will not ask you again.**

Seto looked up at the tablet. He could see everything clearly from his spot, several paces away where the Shadow Magus couldn’t reach him. There was at least a three-arms-length distance between them, and that’s how he preferred it.

“…What are you going to do, try and suffocate me again if I don’t comply?” Seto snapped. “What’s the point? I can’t leave this bubble you’ve created.”

The purple mist surrounded the Shadow Magus’s hand as he snapped his fingers, and Seto was blinked to his side instantly.

Seto immediately side-stepped away from the Shadow’s glowing hand before it grabbed hold of him again.

**Do not test me,** he warned. **This will benefit both of us.**

Seto crossed his arms and backed away until he hit the invisible barrier just to the side of the stone tablet. “I think it’s been made pretty obvious that nothing that happens here is going to benefit me.”

The Shadow gestured to the tablet. **Haven’t you always wondered why this is so important? Why Set and the Pharaoh are locked in this eternal struggle? Why you are so drawn to that dragon of yours, and the Pharaoh to his pesky little mage?**

“The only thing I’ve wondered about it,” Seto said, keeping a leery eye on the Shadow Magus, “Is why you are so interested in it. It’s an old relic. Sure, Set and the Pharaoh duked it out a few thousand years ago, and someone made a carving about it. But that’s the past.”

**Yet you and the Pharaoh’s vessel are rivals.** The Shadow Magus took one step forward.

“Because some people decided to inhabit a few gaudy trinkets,” said Seto.

The Shadow Magus snorted. **We both know that is not the case. Destinies have come full circle, and everyone has a role to play. Even you.**

“IT’s clear my role is over,” Seto said moving a step away from the Shadow Magus again. “Since you ripped Set clean out of my head.”

**Perhaps. Perhaps not.** The Shadow Magus glided forward, placed his hands on Seto shoulders, and roughly turned him towards the tablet. **Now… what do you see?**
Seto shuddered under the Shadow Magus’s grip. The claws were digging in just enough that he couldn’t shake him off.

“Besides the obvious?” he huffed.

_Humor me._

Seto glanced back up at the tablet. What kind of answer was he looking for that he didn’t already have?

“The Millennium Puzzle…the three Egyptian Gods…a Blue Eyes and Yugi’s _Dark Magician,_” said Seto.

One of the Shadow Magus’s hands started drumming along his shoulder blade. _Continue._

Seto sighed. “Set, and the Pharaoh. Something that resembles…_Monster Reborn and Swords of Revealing Light._” His eyes fell towards the bottom. “I can’t tell what was supposed to be down there.”

_No…_ said the Shadow Magus, and Seto raised an eyebrow at the disappointment in his voice. Was there something he was looking for in the missing sections? _It would appear that the bottom of this tablet did not survive as well as the rest of it. A shame, considering the magic swarming this piece versus its partner in the next case. But there is more._

Seto shook his head. “You and Voldemort have a knack for making things complicated. Just spit it out what you’re looking for. The only other thing on there are the hieroglyphs around the other carvings.”

The Shadow Magus roughly patted Seto’s shoulder. _Very good,_ he said, practically whispering it into his ear, and chuckled at the visible flinch he received in response. _Read it._

_Read it?_ Seto furrowed his brow. _Why?_ “Sorry,” he said stiffly, “I don’t read rock.”

_Don’t you,_ laughed the Shadow Magus. _How quickly we forget._

He snapped his fingers and the Domino Museum around them started morphing into a completely different setting, and Seto found himself in the darkened computer room on his blimp. Mokuba was sleeping in one of the extra chairs, huddled in his stark white coat, while his own doppelganger sat the desk with a larger-than-life image of the _Winged Dragon of Ra_ on the screen.

_You are one of the few individuals in this modern world capable of reading the ancient summoning text. And I know you have. You may not remember the incantation, but your connection to Set, and to the Millennium Items, grant you that ability. This is no different._

“Surely you know what it says,” Seto scowled.

_I do. As I said, answers you have sought are right here, in front of you._ He sunk his claws in deeper as the environment switched back to the museum. _Now read it._

“What are you going to do if I don’t, slap me on the wrist?” Seto wrenched out from the Shadow Magus’s hold. “Have the Death Eaters torture me? Everyone knows that information given via duress is not reliable. And if you’re going to trap me in here until I give up and spill something, then you’ll be waiting a long time.”
I don't need to wait. I just need Voldemort to keep you alive. What I truly require lies hidden within the Millennium Rod. This is merely setting the stage so that I am not interrupted later. But if you wish to be coerced into following instruction, I am sure I can make arrangements.

To Seto’s immediate relief, the Shadow Magus didn’t reach for him again, and drifted off towards the second tablet, depicting an assortment of Duel Monsters. But the relief didn’t last long as a small piece of the museum drifted away again and reverted back to the computer lab on the blimp.

And to Mokuba.

The Shadow Magus circled the chair, his hands emitting the purple mist again as they hovered over the figment of Mokuba’s sleeping face. Unlike these Death Eaters, I can traverse where men cannot. Your wizard protectors made their shields, but you here are living proof that their little wards cannot keep me out. So turn around, and humor me, or your reunion with your brother will be much sooner than you think.

Seto’s glare turned icy, but it did little to intimidate him. I have waited thousands of years to enact revenge on the Pharaoh. My patience wears thin.

“Leave my brother out of this.”

The blimp disappeared again, and the Shadow Magus blinked out and reappeared right in front of him again. Then stop this defiance.

Seto shot the Shadow Magus another dark look. He was well aware that the Shadow Realm was used to capture him. But by now, if anything at home was going according to plan, Roland should have taken Mokuba to ground. And none of the wizards should know where. He could accept the Shadow Magus finding him by using the Millennium Rod like some sort of sick homing beacon, but there were no other Millennium Items back in Domino.

Even if the Shadow Magus could pass through magical barriers, how would he know where to find them? If Roland created some sort of contingency, he followed orders and didn’t share what it was. So the Shadow Magus couldn’t tear through his mind and find it.

But he couldn’t risk calling the Shadow’s bluff and putting Mokuba in any danger. It was bad enough that the Shadow Magus was even mentioning him. The last thing he needed was Voldemort getting the same idea and sending more Death Eaters back to Domino.

With a heavy exhale, Seto slowly turned back towards the tablet. Even now, with a clear tie to the Millennium Items, and having Set through his head, it still felt odd to be able to read the hieroglyphs as easily as the other languages he had thoroughly studied.

“The corpse sinks to the floor…the vessel becomes sand, becomes dust’,” he read as the Shadow Magus paced behind him. “Even the brightest gold, even the sharpest sword…is wrapped in the sheath of time. Woe to the Pharaoh, for his body lacks even his name…”

The Shadow Magus stopped behind him as he trailed off. Keep going.

“Time is the battlefield of souls. I cry the song of battle, the song of a friend. …To the place far away where souls meet…guide me.”

There now…was that so difficult?

“I don’t see the point of playing analytical literature,” Seto snapped. “You already knew what it
The Shadow Magus seemed to ignore him, circled around and pointed towards the bottom of the stone tablet. *Do you know what this is here?*

Seto eyed him suspiciously before looking to the indicated portion of the tablet. “A…rather worn piece of rock.”

The Eye on the mask flared again, and Seto wasn’t sure if it was out of anger or annoyance. He was fine with either. Even if the rest of his day was about to spiral out of control, he would take aggravating the Shadow Magus as a small victory.

**That is a cartouche. Any carving within one signified a royal name.**

Seto stared at the tablet. Whether it was from time, or removing the tablet from some wall in a tomb somewhere, but the bottom did not survive very well. He was lucky to see the cartouche at all. Anything that was written in it was long gone now.

The Shadow Magus seemed to pluck the thought right out of him. *The name on this cartouche had been forcibly removed. I shouldn’t have to tell you who’s name it was.*

He gestured wildly at the tablet. *This was forged sometime after the Pharaoh locked away the darkness and sealed himself into the Millennium Puzzle.*

Seto shifted back a step and crossed his arms. “Is this where you go off on why this rock is so damn important?”

*The Pharaoh sealed away the darkness because he had no ability to destroy it. In doing so, he lost all of his memories. This carving is a gateway to another world – one the Pharaoh will have to journey to recover what he lost.*

*But there is something I need as well, that is no longer here in its present condition. And in order to find it, I must see the tablet in its original form.*

Seto’s eyes narrowed as he looked over the tablet again, and his gaze lingered on the defiled cartouche. The only way for the Shadow Magus to do that…would be to go back in time. By the time even Ishizu had set eyes on the tablet, it had already been removed from wherever it was found.

*Unless…* His eyes darted back to the epitaph and he read it again, and the various puzzle pieces started clicking into place.

Why Yugi was never a target for the Shadow Magus’s barrage of mind assaults. Why Ishizu Ishtar was attacked. And why the Shadow Magus kept forcing him to see the tablet and visions of the past…Set’s past.

*Set carved the tablet.*

*You understand now. The Shadow Magus took a step closer to him. What I need is buried deep in the Priest’s mind. And you are going to help me get it.*

Seto took another step back as the Shadow Realm aura started glowing around the Magus’s hands again. “I don’t see how, since you broke apart my link to him.”

*Oh, you needn’t worry about that. I plan to –*
The Shadow Magus froze, and whirled around towards the staircase leading up to the main level of the museum. Seto turned to follow his gaze but there was nothing there. What was he looking at?

**Unbelievable**, he muttered, lowering his arm back down. *He is doing this on purpose.*

Before Seto could even question what he was on about, the same throbbing pain from when the Shadow forced himself into his mind returned with a vengeance as the Shadow Magus vanished from sight.

The museum faded out of sight, and Seto jerked awake and blinked repeatedly, trying to get his eyes to adjust. In complete contrast to the brightness of figment of the museum, he was back in a dimly lit room, sitting upright in a rather uncomfortable chair, and his wrists were thoroughly tied down to the armrests.

The Shadow Magus wasn’t anywhere in his peripheral view, but that didn’t mean he wasn’t nearby. In the meantime, there was a more pressing matter to deal with, and he looked down and tested the bindings on his wrists.

They didn’t budge.

Sighing, he took a cursory glance around. Unlike the other two studies he had been in, the walls were made of stone, and there was only one small window at the very top, near the ceiling. Was he in the basement? At the very least, a room on the lower level of the house.

It certainly was cold enough to be the basement.

His eyes lingered on the window. Even if he could find a way to get up and reach it, he wouldn’t fit through it. But aside from the single empty chair facing him, the room was empty.

He didn’t remember, or *feel* being brought in here. Did the Death Eaters haul him in while the Shadow Magus kept his mind occupied?

A door latch sounded from somewhere behind him as Voldemort stepped out in front of him, and moved to take the empty chair.

“Good evening,” he said coldly. “I was told you had quite an adventure today.”

Seto glowered at him.

“Perhaps you had forgotten,” said Voldemort, “That leaving your room would force me to be far less accommodating.” He clasped his bony hands in his lap. “I hope you are comfortable.”

Seto shrugged. “A bit dark in here.”

Voldemort chuckled briefly. “You have been unconscious for some time. Night has already fallen.”

Seto paused. Just how long had he been out? He escaped the study relatively early in the day. And there was no way he spent *hours* with the Shadow Magus in front of the stone tablet.

“Is this the part where you interrogate me over the Orichalcos stone?”

Voldemort tilted his head curiously. “Ah, is *that* what it’s called? I had wondered. But, *no*. It is time you returned the gesture of my hospitality.”

“You locked me up and tied me down. It’s going to be rather hard for me to give you anything at this point.”
Voldemort leaned forward slightly in his seat. “I think you can manage.”

He withdrew his wand from a pocket in his robes and waved it in the air between them. To Seto’s surprise his phone appeared, levitating beside Voldemort’s chair.

“I have been examining this device of yours,” said Voldemort casually. “I understand you use it for communication in your rather primitive Muggle world.”

Despite his situation, Seto laughed. “What’s primitive is just about everything you all live by. Light by candles and torches, quills and ink? Mail by owl? There is a reason that we stopped using carrier pigeons to send letters years ago.”

Voldemort waved a hand dismissively. “I have also been told, that you caused quite a stir in the beginning of term, regarding this and other items.”

Seto narrowed his eyes. How would he know anything about that?

“As I’m sure you were told, or at the very least found out rather quickly,” said Voldemort, “These devices are incapable of working on the Hogwarts grounds.”

“Yet here we are.”

Voldemort’s smile was eerie. “Indeed. To have working electronics at the school means that the wards around the school have been removed.” He eyed Seto. “Or that they have been bypassed.”

Seto glared at him.

“How did you accomplish such a feat?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” Seto snarled. “I didn’t give that information out to Dumbledore when he asked, not to Umbridge when she forced a blood quill into my hand, and I’m certainly not going to divulge that information to you.”

“Is that so?”

Seto pulled at the ropes again. “You may have replaced one cell for another, but that doesn’t change the fact that I won’t tell you anything.”

“On the contrary, you are going to sing, even if we must break you first. I want to know every detail on how you managed the impossible.”

Voldemort’s grin widened, and Seto felt his blood run cold. He did not like where this was going at all, and froze, struggles halted as he felt the Shadow Magus, despite not having any sort of physical body, dig his nails into his shoulders again.

Seto stared at his phone, floating innocently beside Voldemort. The wizards had no need, no want, for technology. Which meant his tech was merely symbolic of something else.

He gritted his teeth as the Shadow Magus tightened his grip. “What do you want?”

“What I want,” said Voldemort, “Is Hogwarts. And you are going to get me inside.”

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