



# The Lost



# **The Lost**

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## Chapter 1 - Day 1

Xander was fighting valiantly. Unfortunately, the demon appeared to be unstoppable. Xander was losing... slowly. Willow and Tara were trying to think of ways to help him. Willow remembered a spell that would banish a demon to another dimensional realm. She began to chant loudly. Tara knew this spell and joined her in the chant.

In the middle of their casting, the demon threw Xander into a wall and pulled out a green stone. It began to growl rhythmically in counter to the chant of the two witches.

Finally the chanting reached a crescendo. A blast of power ran from both Willow and Tara toward the demon. The demon held up the stone confidently and let loose one final growl after the witches spoke the last word. The power reflected off the demon and returned to the witches.

Darkness.

Falling.

\* \* \* \* \*

Yugi Mutou and Seto Kaiba were playing as a team against Bakura and Melik in a game of duel monsters in the shadow realm.

Yugi had been lured into accepting a friendly duel by Bakura before it was revealed that the Tomb Robber spirit from the Millennium Ring had possessed him. Seto had been drawn into the game by a threat against his brother, Mokuba. Melik had captured Mokuba and made him his mind-slave.

All but Seto were holders of Millennium items. All of them understood what was at stake. Should Yugi and Seto win the duel, Seto would receive his brother, free of the mind enslavement, and the Millennium Rod that possessed the power to enslave minds. Yugi would retain his Millennium Puzzle and receive the Millennium Ring that held the power to open a portal to the shadow realm.

If Yugi and Seto lost or tried to withdraw from the game, Yugi would lose the Millennium Puzzle that held the spirit of the ancient Pharaoh who shared his mind and had become his best friend. Seto would lose Mokuba. And they would both be cast into the card graveyard, where they would die.

Melik and Bakura were both focusing their attacks on Yugi. Seto had passed up obvious opportunities to shield him from some of the damage. Yugi was one turn

from losing the duel, and it was up to Seto to save him. {"Kaiba-san, It is your obligation to defend your dueling partner. We must behave as a team."}

Seto looked at Yugi with disgust and said, {"If you can't handle yourself in a duel, you deserve to lose."}

Melik played his goblin attack force card. This effectively ended the game for Yugi. If they were playing like normal people, Yugi would now withdraw from play and allow his partner to finish the duel, at a great disadvantage. However, in the shadow realm, the rules were different and the consequences were more severe.

Darkness came over Yugi and he began to fall.

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Yugi awoke in near darkness. He looked around himself and saw that he was in the card graveyard, and someone was beside him. He turned the person over to find that it was Yami. The spirit that shared his mind had a physical form in this place. {"Yami-san, wake up. We are in great danger here. We must leave."} Yugi said with fear in his voice.

Yami slowly opened his eyes and found himself looking into the face of Yugi, {"Where is this place? What has happened?"}

{"We are in the card graveyard, we must find shelter quickly. The Reaper-of-Cards will come soon. We must hide!"} Yugi said in panic.

As Yugi helped Yami to stand, there was a flash of light and three people fell from a vortex. Yugi looked at the three people and said, {"I don't know who you are, but we must leave immediately!"}

Willow gave the boy a puzzled look and shook her head, trying to convey that she didn't understand what he was saying.

{"It is not safe here, hurry!"} Yugi said louder.

Tara was gently slapping Xander's face, trying to rouse him to consciousness while Willow was trying to communicate with the boy. "We don't speak any Japanese, do you know any English?"

"Some, little." Yugi said with difficulty. "Reaper-of-Cards will come. We will die. Can not stop. We need... secret? No. Hide... We need hide now." Yugi said, trying to find the right English words. If not for the names of the cards being in English, he probably couldn't have managed that much.

"Our friend is hurt. Can you help us?" Willow asked slowly.

"WE NEED HIDE NOW!" Yugi screamed, as he looked for shelter.

Yami saw a shadowy form move in the distance. {"Aibou<sup>1</sup>, the reaper is close, to your left."} Yami said firmly but calmly.

{"Help me carry the injured one, the girls will follow or they won't."} Yugi said to Yami as he walked to take Xander's hands. Yami took Xander's feet and they began to carry him.

Willow was about to protest these two strangers grabbing Xander when she saw a hooded figure move off to her right. It looked too much like the grim reaper pictures that she had seen. Then what Yugi had said registered and she began to run.

"Come on, we're not safe here." She said to Tara, who was already following the two boys.

"If that thing comes after us, there's nothing we can do to stop it. Do you remember the defender's shield spell?" Willow asked Tara as she wove amongst the tombstones.

"Yeah, it's a fate spell. You use it on a warrior who has fallen to give him a chance of survival." Tara said, trying to keep up with the others.

"Try door there." Yugi said commandingly to the witches.

Willow saw the crypt that he was referring to and ran for it. As she reached it, the shadowy figure appeared. "Cast it on Xander." Willow screamed, then began to cast the spell.

Tara was too far away to synchronize her spell with Willow so she began her own casting of the same spell on Xander.

The shadow was getting closer as Willow and Tara's spell-casting became louder. Yami and Yugi were carrying Xander toward the crypt as quickly as they could.

As Willow uttered the last word of her spell a vortex formed. A moment later, another formed before Tara.

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<sup>1</sup> Author's Note: Aibou means partner

The fight was not going well. Magneto had attacked without warning or provocation. Bobby was still trying to get his mind around the fact that his best friend had switched sides. He looked around himself to quickly survey the situation. He saw Marie take a hard hit to the head and go down. He turned to run to her side, she was defenseless.

As he was almost upon his fallen comrade, an unexpected blast of heat hit him from behind and knocked him off balance. His arms flew out reflexively to catch his fall but hit nothing as he fell...

and fell...

\* \* \* \* \*

The Blue Ranger was fighting for all he was worth but it was not enough. The attacks on Angel Grove had been one after another for days and he was exhausted, as were the other rangers. He ducked a swift punch from a putty and swung around to deliver a killing blow. As he made contact, he saw Jason get hit full in the chest with a blast from the giant chicken... turkey... buzzard... whatever... the giant bird thing that was fighting them.

A quiver of fear ran through him as he saw Jason hit the ground and de-morph. He ran to the aid of his friend when a vortex opened right before him. And he fell...

and fell...

\* \* \* \* \*

Bobby landed on the ground with a thump. He looked around to see two boys and two girls, looking terrified at him... past him... [Oh shit]... behind him.

He turned quickly to see a figure wearing a cloak and hood, carrying a scythe. Without giving it a thought, he let loose his ice power and tried to create the biggest, most solid wall he could manage to keep this thing away. If those kids were scared, that was all he needed to know that he didn't want to face that thing.

\* \* \* \* \*

Billy landed in a crouch. He was grateful that he was still morphed because that meant he still had enhanced strength and agility. He turned in time to see a boy create a rough wall of ice, apparently to protect himself from a hooded figure that was approaching.

The hooded figure started slashing at the ice wall with his scythe and was making noticeable progress. Billy brought out his blaster and took aim. He fired at the hooded figure and made a solid hit.

The figure didn't seem to be effected by the hit at all. A moment later the figure turned and began to move toward Billy.

"Here safe. Come now." Another boy called out.

The two boys entered the crypt carrying a third. Another ice wall appeared, this one blocking the figure from getting to Billy.

"Come on, let's get under cover." The boy who produced the ice said.

Billy nodded and began to go. Then he noticed that there was a girl behind him. He motioned to her to come on and they ran to the crypt.

\* \* \* \* \*

Once the door closed there was pitch-black darkness inside the crypt. All that could be heard was the sound of rapid, nervous breathing. "Creo Ignem." A female voice clearly said and a fireball sprang into being, hovering a few inches above her hand.

As everyone's eyes adjusted to the firelight, they began to look around the crypt. "No torches or candles." The boy who made ice said.

"Not a problem." The red headed girl said and made a motion. The fireball split into four and floated up toward the ceiling.

"What was that thing out there?" The icemaker asked.

"I don't know, he called it the Reaper of Cards, whatever that means." The red-head said, indicating the young boy.

Billy realized that he was still morphed. He considered de-morphing but decided against it, too many unknowns. "Could someone possibly advise me of our situation." Billy said as calmly as he could manage, thinking of Jason.

"I'm Bobby, and I don't have any idea what's going on." The icemaker said.

"I'm Willow, that's Tara, and this is a very unconscious Xander, we just arrived and that thing started chasing us." Willow said with worry as she examined Xander for injuries.

"I am Yugi, he is Yami. I speak English not much. Yami speak English not any." Yugi said quietly.

The group looked expectantly at the blue ranger. Finally he said, "I'm Billy."

Xander began to wake up. "What happened?" He looked around and said, "Crypt, huh?"

"How did you know?" Bobby asked curiously.

"They're all decorated about the same." Xander answered cryptically. Another quick round of introductions was made for Xander's benefit, then Billy asked, "Yugi, are you familiar with our current location?"

"Or better yet, do you know how to get us out of here?" Xander cut in.

Bobby nodded in agreement with Xander.

Yugi thought about it and answered slowly, trying to get the English right. "We are in card graveyard. We do not leave. No way out."

"Oh, that's just great." Xander said sarcastically.

Hearing the tone of the comment as a threat, Yami moved slightly in front of Yugi to protect him.

Everyone noticed the protective gesture.

"Tell Yami that I'm not angry at you or him, I'm just frustrated at being trapped here." Xander said to Yugi.

{"The boy who is hurt wants you to know that he is not mad at us. Then he said something else, very quickly, something about a chair? I can't be sure."} Yugi translated to Yami.

{"Do not worry Aibou, I have observed that Americans are so fond of their own voices that they use them unnecessarily. If it is something important it will be repeated, or they will verify your understanding."} Yami said comfortingly.

Yugi looked at Xander and nodded to confirm that the message was delivered.

"How can we get past the hooded apparition that was in pursuit of us, the one Yugi called the Reaper-of-Cards?" Billy asked Yugi.



Yugi sat thinking of all the words, then when he believed he understood the question he answered, "We don't."

"That's cheerful." Xander said, with full sarcasm.

"Come on guys, if we got here, there has to be a way to get us out. I've got to get back to my friends." Bobby said, thinking of Marie.

"I must as well." Billy said thinking of Jason.

"So how did we get here?" Xander asked to the group in general.

"Tara and I cast a spell to banish a demon to the nether realm where he would be destroyed. But the demon did something, I think he cast a spell too, and we ended up here." Willow said with worry.

"So this could be the nether realm where you were going to send the demon?" Bobby asked.

"I guess so." Willow said quietly.

"That explains the arrival of the three of you. However, it does not explain the arrival of the remainder of us to this nefarious place." Billy said to Willow.

"Tara and I cast the Defender's shield spell on Xander. It was supposed to change fate so a fallen warrior would have a chance of survival." Willow said calmly.

Billy looked angrily at Willow as he made the connection of what she said to what had happened. "One of my friends was about to be attacked when I was drawn into your vortex, I could have saved him. He was a fallen warrior. Did this spell prevent me from saving him in favor of coming here? Is it your contention that the life of your companion was of more value than that of my friend? Your action prevented my intervention and may have cost me the life of Jason." Billy asked with anger in his voice.

"And Marie." Was all that Bobby could say.

"How can you rationalize the sacrifice of my friend that I might become the rescuer of yours? What gave you the right?" Billy asked, becoming more angry.

"I didn't mean for it to work that way. I just wanted to save Xander. I didn't want to hurt anyone." Willow said with tearful eyes.

Billy was silent, but his body language spoke loudly enough, saying that he was not happy.

{ "The red haired girl is a witch, she cast a spell that brought her, the blonde girl, and the injured boy here. Then, when she was scared by the Reaper-of-Cards, she cast another spell that brought the other two boys to save her friend's life, preventing them from saving their own friend's lives." } Yugi said to Yami quietly.

"What about you two, how did you get here?" Bobby asked Yugi.

"We lost a game. Penalty for losing is death." Yugi said haltingly.

"You shouldn't play games like that." Xander said seriously.

Yugi nodded in response.

"So what do we do now? We're in this despicable place, be it the card graveyard or nether realm. We have neither food nor water, and seem to be trapped by that apparition. Options?" Billy asked logically.

"I could do a spell..." Willow began.

"No. Due to your indiscriminate use of magic, you have caused us to become trapped in this tomb. And as a further consequence, likely caused the death, or at the very least, prevented the rescue of my best friend..." Billy said before walking to the far corner of the crypt.

Bobby watched, knowing just what Billy was feeling. "I agree. Magic is a last resort." He said, glaring at the red headed witch.

Xander tried to get to his feet. Yugi automatically went to his side to offer help.

"Thanks." Xander said when he finally was fully standing.

"Xander, you be well?" Yugi asked with concern.

"Yeah, I'll be fine. I get knocked out a few times a month. I should be used to it by now." Xander said with a self-deprecating smirk.

Yugi nodded his understanding and thought, {[Yami was right, they talk much and say little.]}

"So is there any way out of here? I mean, has anyone ever escaped?" Xander asked Yugi with concern.

"Yes, Bakura-kun. With magic." Yugi said sadly.

"So, magic seems to be the way." Xander said with worry.

"No." Billy said, still facing the wall.

Bobby went to Billy's side and said quietly, "Unless you know of another way out, it's all we have."

Billy nodded and turned to look at Bobby. He thought for a moment, [What good will it do to protect my identity from these people when we're all trapped here?] "Power down." He said and the uniform flashed away.

Everyone turned at the blue flash to see the very ordinary looking boy standing before them.

"You are correct Bobby. Let's listen to her plans, perhaps we can minimize the risk." Billy said sadly.

"Come on." Bobby said and took Billy by the elbow to lead him back to the others.

"Right, magic it is. What are our choices?" Bobby asked with false enthusiasm.

"Well, without any supplies or books... I don't know. I mean we can try some stuff, but I don't know how it will work." Willow said in a near mumble.

"Great!" Bobby said and threw up his hands as he walked away.

Billy went to retrieve Bobby. Xander asked Yugi, "Do you know what magic Bakooracon used to get out of here?"

Yugi kept his smile to himself at the butchering of Bakura's name and shook his head.

"Does that mean you don't know, or don't understand what I'm asking?" Xander asked softly.

"I do not know of magic." Yugi answered.

Willow and Tara were whispering together. One by one the boys noticed the excitement that they were expressing.

"Have you got something?" Xander asked hopefully.

"We think we can get us out of here, the only problem is... we don't know where we'll end up." Willow said with an unsure look.

"Is there any way to remedy that situation?" Billy asked shortly.

"Not really. Without magic books, we're doing good to be able to create an interdimensional vortex." Willow said defensively.

"Interdimensional?" Billy asked with worry.

"Yeah, this is a whole other dimension from the one we came from. I don't know what other dimension we'll land in, but if it has magic books, we'll be able to use them to go back to our dimension." Willow said with certainty.

"Good, the other rangers are going to be worried about me." Billy said with irritation.

"Rangers? Is that what you are?" Bobby asked, truly curious.

"Yes, power rangers, defenders of the earth..." Billy said, getting a sinking feeling.

"Sorry, never heard of them." Bobby said with real regret in his voice.

Billy looked around the room and everyone but Yamishook their heads 'no'.

"So we're not from the same dimension." Billy said, resigned.

"It looks that way." Bobby said, then hesitantly asked, "Do any of you have mutants on your world?"

Another round of headshaking and Bobby's spirits sank.

"Duel Monsters?" Yugi asked, surprising most of the people in the room.

"What's that?" Billy asked.

"Game I play, I lose." Yugi said sadly, knowing that they were not from his world.

"I guess you don't have demons, vampires, witches, werewolves and stuff in your worlds, huh?" Xander asked, already knowing the answer.

"I put forth the supposition that we are from disparate and dissimilar dimensions. I am reluctant to ask but, what effect, if any, does this have on the probability of all of us being successfully returned to our points of origin?" Billy asked, turning to Willow.

"It doesn't look good." Willow said seriously.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hours had passed. The witches kept to themselves, drawing symbols in the dust on the floor and trying to work out the best way to proceed. Billy had tried to use his morpher to transport out, but it didn't work. Bobby had opened the door of the crypt a crack to see the reaper very up-close and personal. Xander, Yugi and Yami were sitting quietly, not really having much to say.

"We're ready." Willow said seriously.

"How is this going to work?" Billy asked, wanting to know as much about the process as possible.

"We've worked the spell out so that we'll end up somewhere else, but we don't know where. But we've been able to make sure that it isn't some hell dimension or underwater or anything like that. Beyond that... it's anyone's guess as to what we're going to find." Willow said seriously.

"I can't say that's the most reassuring talk I've ever had before a trip." Xander quipped.

"It's all I've got." Willow said wryly.

"So let's do it." Bobby said, without enthusiasm.

"You might wanna do that blue flashy thingy just in case." Xander said to Billy.

Billy nodded and said, "It's morphin time." And became the blue power ranger.

Willow and Tara cast a circle and began to chant. The words got louder and seemed to echo in the small room. After nearly a half an hour a swirling mist developed. As the chanting continued, the swirling formed into a definite vortex.

Finally the witches stopped and said, "Here we go." And walked into the swirling mist and disappeared. Each person followed in turn, hoping they would not be worse off in their new dimension.

\* \* \* \* \*

They found themselves in a clearing in a wooded area. All of them looked around at each other to see that everyone was alright.

"Yami! Where is Yami?" Yugi asked with worry.

The group looked around but there was no trace of Yami anywhere.

After long minutes of fruitless searching Yugi sat on the ground and began to cry. Moments later he felt a hand on his shoulder and Xander's voice said, {"Do not worry Aibou, I am here."}

Yugi turned to Xander and said, {"Yami? Are you in there?"}

{"Yes, when we arrived in this place I had no body, I was drawn into this one."}  
Xander/Yami said soothingly.

The others just watched, stunned.

Yugi noticed the others watching and said, "Yami is spirit, no body. He is in Xander."

Willow asked, "If Yami didn't have a body, who were we with in the crypt?"

"In card graveyard Yami have body, here no body." Yugi said with frustration, having difficulty explaining with his limited English.

"What he's trying to say is that I am a spirit, I was sharing Yugi's body with him by using the Millennium Puzzle, which we lost. When we were defeated in the duel we were cast into the graveyard where I had my own body, but only there. When we came here, I needed a body. For some reason I was able to inhabit Xander's body but not Yugi's." Xander/Yami said reasonably.

"You speak English now?" Billy asked, confused.

"Yes, I can use Xander's English, just as I have used Yugi's Japanese in the past." Xander/Yami said calmly.

"So you're not Japanese?" Willow asked.

"No, I am Egyptian. I am the spirit of a Pharaoh, though I don't remember my past." Xander/Yami answered.

"Anyone have any idea where we are?" Bobby asked, looking around.

"No, we'll have to start walking and hope that we can find someone." Willow said tiredly.

"And we can look for food while we walk." Xander/Yami said in a more familiar Xander way.

"Xander?" Willow asked.

"Yeah?" Xander/Yami replied.

"Is that you?" Willow asked, still not sure.

"Yeah, we're both in here. Yami isn't possessing me the way things usually do, he steps forward when he wants to and nudges me but doesn't force me, then he moves back when he's finished. He's the most considerate spirit I've ever been possessed by. It's kinda cool, actually." Xander/Yami said with a goofy smile.

"The way things usually do? You've been possessed before?" Billy asked incredulously.

"Yeah, he gets possessed all the time." Willow said with a teasing tone.

"Only twice before, Wills. Don't make these guys think I'm strange or something." Xander/Yami said, then looked at the blue ranger guy, the ice making guy and the kid who was possessed with this same spirit. "Never mind."

\* \* \* \* \*

The group tramped off toward the north, it seemed as good a direction as any and they could use the position of the sun to maintain their direction. Billy had demorphed and the group had all been looking for food along their way. Eventually they had found some fruit trees. It began to get dark when Xander/Yami stopped suddenly.

"Shhh. There are people ahead." Xander/Yami whispered.

"Where?" Billy asked in confusion, seeing nothing.

Xander/Yami took a deep inhale and considered. "Ahead of us, there are three of them... and a horse." Xander/Yami said with certainty.

"If there's a problem, I think we can handle three people." Bobby said and continued to walk.

"I hope he's right." Xander/Yami said as he followed.

The rest followed in turn as they approached the camp of strangers.

\* \* \* \* \*

Xena, Gabrielle and Joxer were sitting by the campfire. Gabrielle was cooking the fish that they had caught earlier and Joxer was regaling them with a tale of his

latest exploits. Xena kept her snickers to herself and Gabrielle rolled her eyes occasionally at the highly unlikely tale the wannabe warrior was telling.

Suddenly Xena straightened and motioned for everyone to be silent.

She drew her sword and turned toward the approaching people.

A skinny boy entered the camp with no weapons drawn, and he was wearing unfamiliar clothing. "What are you doing here?" Xena asked anxiously.

The boy answered her, but the language he used was unfamiliar to her. She motioned for Gabrielle to join her. Another boy followed, then another. There were two girls and finally a child.

Gabrielle tried the smattering of Norse that she had learned but that got no response. Xena tried the phrases that she had picked up in Gaul, but to no avail. The children were obviously trying to communicate, but they had no common language. The smallest one spoke something that sounded akin to the language of Chin, but it wasn't. Finally the largest of the boys said something and Joxer responded.

{"Did you just speak in Egyptian?"} Joxer asked excitedly.

{"Yes. Thank the gods. I thought we would find no common language."} Xander/Yami said in relief.

"What do you want me to ask them?" Joxer asked of Xena.

"First, which language is that?" Xena asked curiously.

"Egyptian. My grandmother taught me when I was growing up." Joxer said happily.

"Ask them where they are from." Xena said, considering what she wanted to know.

{"Where are you from?"} Joxer asked Xander/Yami.

After a moment of discussion amongst the group, Xander/Yami replied, "We are from different places. Could you tell us where we are?"}

{"You're in Greece. I'm Joxer, this is Xena and that is Gabrielle."} Joxer said with a smile.

"What did they say?" Xena asked curiously.



"They said they are all from different places. They wanted to know where they are, so I told them." Joxer answered.

"Ask them where they are heading." Xena said, still not ready to trust them.

{"Where are you going?"} Joxer asked kindly.

The group conferred in their own language for a few minutes then Xander/Yami said, {"We are trying to find a town with a library, we must find a way to get back to our home."}

{"Only the wealthy have collections of scrolls. If you do not know how to speak Greek, can you read it?"} Joxer asked.

{"No, we hadn't thought of that... I don't know where we're going. We are far from home and lost."} Xander/Yami said, realizing that it wasn't going to be as easy as they first thought.

"They are far from their homes, lost, and don't know where to go to next. They were hoping to find someone with a collection of scrolls that they could study to find their way back. But since they don't read Greek, it wouldn't do any good even if they could find someone willing to share their scrolls." Joxer said sadly.

"You think we should take them with us to the next town." Xena said as a statement rather than a question.

Joxer waited as Xena thought about what to do.

"I suppose that we can invite them to camp with us tonight. And they can come with us to Corinth. After that, they're on their own." Xena said reluctantly.

{"Xena has invited you to share our camp and we'll see you safely to Corinth. Maybe there you'll find some answers."} Joxer said with a friendly smile.

The group talked again, but it was obvious that they were going to agree long before Xander/Yami said, {"Tell her 'thank you' for the hospitality. And we will try not to be a burden on the journey. How far is it to Corinth?"}

{"About five days walk from here. What are your names?"} Joxer asked curiously.

Xander/Yami introduced each of his group and told his group who Joxer, Xena and Gabrielle were.

\* \* \* \* \*

Xena, Gabrielle and Joxer settled on one side of the fire and watched as the group of children sat on the other side and began to talk.

"So what were you guys doing before you went to the graveyard? I mean, you said you were fighting a demon, but why?" Bobby asked Willow.

"Me and Xander and Tara were helping Buffy to patrol. Buffy is the vampire slayer, kind of a demon hunter. Anyway, we ran into a group of demons and began to fight. Somehow, we got separated from Buffy during the fight and Xander was facing this big demon all alone. He kept hitting it with his axe, but it wasn't doing any damage so Tara and I decided to do a spell that would get rid of the demon before it hurt Xander." Willow said sadly.

"He looked pretty hurt when I got there." Bobby said, off handedly.

"While we were casting, the demon threw Xander into the wall of a mausoleum and knocked him out. Then we finished the spell... and you know the rest. What about you?" Willow asked Bobby in return.

"I was fighting to defend my home, the school where I live. Me and my friends and the teachers were all trying to stop Magneto from getting into the school. My best friend, John was fighting on Magneto's side..." Bobby trailed off.

"That had to hurt." Billy said absently.

"Yeah, it hurt a lot. Then Marie got hit, I think she was unconscious. I ran to help her and ended up in the graveyard." Bobby said, then looked away.

"I was fighting to defend my home town, Angel Grove. An evil sorceress had sent these warriors made of clay to attack us while her big bird monster tried to destroy the town. I was fighting and saw my best friend Jason go down. He de-morphed and was completely vulnerable. I ran to help him and then I was in the graveyard with you." Billy said, equally as sad as Bobby.

"We were tricked into accepting a duel with Bakura, a friend. We didn't know that he had been possessed by an ancient, evil spirit. Bakura was working with Melik, someone who has been trying to get all the Millennium items for himself. When the game began, Bakura sent us to the shadow realm, where the game becomes real life. According to the rules of Millennium Magic, an item cannot be stolen, it becomes inert. It has to be won in a duel. My partner in the duel wouldn't work with me. Both our opponents attacked me and I couldn't defend against a two on one attack repeatedly. If Seto had defended me, we could have won the duel but since he didn't... I... we lost. That's how we ended up in the graveyard." Xander/Yami said quietly.

"How are you here without the puzzle then?" Billy asked Xander/Yami.

"I don't know." Xander/Yami replied.

{"Aibou, the blue one asks a good question. How am I with you when we do not have the puzzle?"} Xander/Yami asked Yugi.

{"I do not understand, perhaps the treachery of Bakura-kun caused the magic of the puzzle to flee the item."} Yugi answered speculatively.

{"If that were the case, why could I not share your mind as before?"} Xander/Yami spoke the question rhetorically.

{"Whether we are correct or not, it does not change our situation. We are here and whether I have the magic of the puzzle or not, I cannot change that fact."} Yugi said reasonably.

Xander/Yami nodded his agreement. {"Don't worry Yugi, Willow and Tara won't let anyone stay stuck where they don't belong."} Xander/Yami said with a goofy smile.

"Xander?" Yugi asked in confirmation.

{"Yeah, Yami thought you needed to know that it's not just you two against all of this. We will all work to fix this problem... somehow."} Xander/Yami said comfortingly.

{"Thank you Aibou, thank you Xander, if my Yami had to be moved to another, I am glad it was one who is good and understanding like you. I know he is safe with you."} Yugi said seriously.

{"I may be in Xander now, but you are still my hikari as I am your Yami. That has not changed."} Xander/Yami said soothingly.

Yugi smiled and nodded as he laid down to try and sleep. Xander/Yami automatically laid beside Yugi and held him gently and protectively.

The rest of the group noticed the actions of Xander/Yami and Yugi and decided that it was time for some sleep. Willow and Tara laid together in each others arms. Bobby looked at Billy with a sarcastic 'yeah, right.' look before laying down and turning away from the group. Billy gave a little laugh at the idea and laid down facing the opposite way.

Xena and Gabrielle stared in awe at the two girls, barely women, holding each other so tenderly. The boys seemed to be like brothers, the older holding the younger in

comfort and protection. The two others didn't seem to have any affiliation with the others.

Before long, Xena, Gabrielle and Joxer had also laid down on their side of the camp.

Author's Note: Hikari means light. Yami means darkness

## Chapter 2 - Day 2

Joxer woke Xander/Yami carefully so not to also wake Yugi. {"It is time for us to break camp and be on our way. I thought you would like to wake the others, since you speak their language."} Joxer said quietly in Egyptian.

{"Yes, thank you Joxer. That was very considerate of you."} Xander/Yami said equally as quiet.

{"Aibou, it is time for us to awaken. We must begin our travel toward the city of Corinth."} Xander/Yami said quietly in Japanese as he gently shook the shoulder of Yugi.

{"Five more minutes, Grandpa"} Yugi said in his sleep.

{"No Aibou, your Grandpa isn't here and you must awaken"} Xander/Yami said insistently.

Finally Yugi came awake. Xander/Yami went from one to another of the group until they had all been awakened.

{"We'll look for fruit trees and game as we walk, when we find food for all of us, we will stop and break our fast."} Joxer said to Xander/Yami.

Walking back to the sleepy group, Xander/Yami passed on Joxer's message and within minutes they were all ready for travel.

Xena led the way on Argo as the others followed behind. Occasionally they chatted about inconsequential things but for the most part, the group was walking quietly. Each member of the group was reevaluating their situation from their own unique perspective.

When nearly an hour had passed, they found some fruit trees and stopped for a few moments to gather some, there wasn't nearly enough to feed the entire group, so they continued.

A few minutes out on the road Xander/Yami stopped and looked around. Xena had stopped Argo at the motion and looked to see what had spooked him.

"We're surrounded by bandits in the trees. Billy do the flash thing and defend our back, Xena has our front, Bobby go left, I'll go right. Witches give aid where needed. Yugi, stay with Joxer." {"Joxer, we are surrounded by bandits, protect Yugi."} Xander/Yami said as he moved into fighting posture, sorely missing his axe.

Xena now detected the bandits and was impressed that one of these barely adult children had the skill to detect them. She heard the tall one giving orders to the group as a warlord would. One didn't need to know the language to recognize the tone of a warrior leader.

The bandits began to close in from all directions. They were confident in their superiority and were surprised when Xena backflipped off Argo and landed square on the chest of one of their men. At that motion, Xander/Yami sprang into action. In three quick moves he had disarmed a man and had a decent sword to use.

Billy decided that he didn't need to morph just yet. He was a skilled fighter and used his extensive martial arts training to take on two armed men... and dispatch them in under a minute.

Bobby saw six men approaching him and decided that he would rather not face them at once, so he made a glare of ice form before their feet. A moment later, all six of them were flat on their backs. He could deal with them at his leisure while they were fighting for balance. He'd been trained for days like this one.

Willow saw a group of bandits coming from between Bobby and Billy's positions. Both of them were too busy to deal with them. She drew on her witchcraft and called forth a fireball with the words, "Creo Ignem." She was surprised to see her fireball formed as the size of a melon. She concentrated and threw the fireball at the approaching group of men. She carefully directed it to split into separate fireballs and attack each man individually. Seeking them if they dodged.

Tara saw a group coming between Xander and Xena. She thought quickly and remembered a spell. She mumbled the words quickly and when the last word was spoken she focused on her target. Simultaneously eight men began to scream and wander aimlessly.

Gabrielle had her quarter-staff drawn and was backing up Xena, as was her position for many years. She quickly turned to assess the situation behind her and stopped in shock at the sight. Bobby had formed an ice cage over a group of men on the ground. Billy was in the process of fighting a group of five warriors, and was flipping and spinning like she had only ever seen Xena do before. Xander was fighting with the ferocity of a wild animal. The red headed girl was throwing fire at warriors who were approaching. But the one who sent a shiver of fear up her spine was the blonde girl. If the screams of the warriors was to be believed, she was striking them blind.

A fresh wave of bandits approached, and Gabrielle renewed her position at Xena's side. Three men made it into the middle of their circle of protection. On impulse, Yugi grabbed his dueling deck and drew the top card. He didn't need to look to know which card he had drawn. In a clear voice he called, {"I summon the Dark

Magician."} The sennu eye, an Egyptian third eye symbol, appeared on Yugi's forehead in a golden glow.

One moment he was wearing his blue pants and shirt, the next he was dressed in purple robes and a hat and carrying a staff. {"Dark Magic Attack!"} Yugi said in a deeper version of his own child voice. A purple glow flew out of his staff and the three men were on the ground, unmoving.

In less time than it took to tell of it, the fight was over. Xena looked back and noticed the carnage. She had been aware of the fighting, but didn't know the numbers of fighters that these children had defeated.

{"Game over"} Yugi said quietly and returned to his normal form.

Bobby completed his last bars of a very confining ice cage and turned back to the group.

Willow stopped her fire attacks and Tara stopped casting her blindness spells.

Xander/Yami was the last to stop fighting. He turned to the group and said with a smile, "Was that all? I expected it to be a little harder than that."

"Yeah, I get scarier stuff than that in my breakfast cereal." Bobby said with a grin.

"Just another day for me." Billy said matter-of-factly.

"They didn't have fangs or scales or anything. What fun is that?" Willow said, obviously feeling an adrenaline high.

"Y... Yeah. No problem." Tara said shyly before casting her eyes down as was normal for her.

{"Yami, did you see what I did?"} Yugi asked excitedly.

{"Yes Aibou, it seems that the Millennium magic left the puzzle and came to you. Use it wisely."} Xander/Yami said sagely.

{"Yami! That was really cool. I don't need a lecture on responsibility right now."} Yugi said gruffly, which was absolutely cute coming from the little boy.

{"Yes Yugi, that was absolutely cool."} Xander/Yami said with a smile.

"Joxer, tell them we need to talk. I want to know just what they are and how they can do that." Xena said irritably.

{"Xena wants us to talk, she wants to know about who and what you are to be able to do such things."} Joxer said to Xander/Yami in Egyptian.

{"We should leave this place now. These men will recover from their injuries soon."} Xander/Yami said seriously in return.

Joxer relayed the words and received agreement. The group gathered their things and were on the road again quickly.

\* \* \* \* \*

Just after noon the group left the path, led by Xena. After an hour of traveling off trail, they came to a serene little lake.

They got comfortable and prepared for the questions.

"What are they? Gods?" Xena asked Joxer with concern.

{"Xena wants to know what all of you are. Are you gods?"} Joxer asked Xander/Yami seriously.

{"We are people, we just have abilities that others don't. We are not gods. I would tell you what we are, but it wouldn't matter because you don't have words to describe us."} Xander/Yugi answered as carefully as he could.

"He says that they are not gods. They have abilities that others don't and there isn't a word for what they are." Joxer said to Xena.

"Fine. If he can't tell me about all of them, how about the girl. How does she throw fire?" Xena asked suspiciously.

{"She wants to know about the girl who throws fire."} Joxer relayed.

{"Her name is Willow, she is a witch as is her girlfriend Tara."} Xander/Yami answered shortly.

"He says the two girls are witches." Joxer said to Xena with worry.

"Are they priestesses of Hecate? Where does their power come from." Xena asked with worry.

{"What is the source of their power? Are they priestesses or followers of Hecate?"} Joxer asked Xander/Yugi.



"She wants to know if you follow Hecate, are you priestesses and where does your power come from?" Xander/Yugi asked Willow.

"My power is from different places depending on the spell I'm using. If it's a nature spell, it's from the earth. If it's a demony type spell, it comes from the underworld, and like that. And I have called on Hecate a few times to add power to my spells." Willow said, trying to keep her answer simple enough for a novice.

{"She said her power is from different places for different actions. She has called on Hecate a few times in the past."} Xander/Yami paraphrased.

"She said her power is from different places depending on what she wants it for. And she has called Hecate once or twice." Joxer said, paraphrasing more.

...And so it went on into the afternoon. Xena asked Joxer, Joxer asked Xander/Yami, Xander/Yami asked a member of the group and the answer would make it's way back through the route. And at the end, Xena knew no more than when she had sat down.

"Enough. This is getting us nowhere. The best way to know someone is to fight them. I will fight each of them in turn to determine their abilities." Xena said, disgusted with the waste of time.

{"She wishes to fight each of you in turn so she can understand your abilities. She feels it will be faster than asking for descriptions that none of us understand."} Joxer said to Xander/Yami warily.

"Xena wants to fight us each in turn, one on one to understand our abilities. Does anyone have any problem with that?" Xander/Yami asked the group.

"She won't hurt us, I mean really hurt us will she?" Willow asked timidly.

"No, we'll agree that this will be a sparring match. No lethal attacks from either side." Xander/Yami said with assurance.

The group seemed to agree. Yugi began to go through his cards and Willow and Tara started whispering furiously to each other.

{"We agree, on the condition that no lethal attacks be used by anyone. This is a sparring match only."} Xander/Yami said in Egyptian to Joxer.

"They agree as long as no one tries to kill each other. This is a spar." Joxer relayed to Xena.

"Agreed." She said and nodded to Xander/Yami.

She took up a fighting stance and Xander/Yami crouched and curled his fingers like claws. His eyes flashed green for a moment then he lunged with the speed and ferocity of a wild animal.

Xena was thrown off guard by the swiftness of the attack and his willingness to use his hands, head, teeth and elbows to exact blow after blow to her body. Finally she saw an opening and was able to get one good punch to connect with his chin and knocked him down.

He got to his feet immediately then calmness fell over him as he bowed to her with respect. Then he motioned for her to attack him. She cautiously moved toward him, weaving and maintaining perfect balance. This time his fighting style was completely different. He was using his fists and bobbing and weaving to avoid her punches. He landed a few good punches on her but she finally got the best of him by doing a combination uppercut move that was a thing of beauty. He sat up and gestured surrender by raising his hands, palms out.

Xena relaxed and turned to the group to see who would be her next opponent. She expected one of the older boys to be next but the smallest of them came forward. She didn't think this was going to be a fair fight but got into her fighting stance. Yugi pulled a card out and said, "Gaia the Fierce Knight."

In the space between one second and the next the small boy was replaced by a seven foot tall warrior dressed in full armor. She was barely able to avoid the fist that thrust out to hit her face. She dodged and was able to get behind him where she tried to punch him in the kidneys. But every part of his body was covered in the armor. Her hardest hits weren't being acknowledged. After a few minutes of her trying to hit him hard enough to feel and him trying to make a punch connect, he finally caught her backhanded and knocked her to the ground.

She laid there dazed for a moment. When she stood back up. The little boy was standing there watching her sheepishly. She decided that she wanted another try at him so she moved to attack. He held up a card and said, "Dark Magician." And became the purple robed mage with the staff. "Dark Magic Attack." Was the last thing she heard before finding herself waking up on the ground.

Yugi had moved to the back of the group and Billy had moved to the front. Xena shook her head a few times and moved around to ready herself for another fight. Billy looked at her preparation and said, "It's morphin time."

For the first time, she saw Billy in his power ranger uniform. The suit that he wore didn't look like armor, but it covered every inch of his body. He seemed to be most disconcerting because she couldn't see his eyes at all. As she made to approach him, he did a back flip and landed gracefully a few feet back. A moment later he vaulted into a combination flip and twist that had him standing behind her. Before

she could turn, he began to punch. She countered his moves well but when she thought she had him cornered, he would flip, somersault, vault, or some other move that would put him out of her reach. At one point he had jumped twenty feet straight up into the air and landed in the tree they were fighting under. Finally Xena threw up her hands in surrender. This boy was faster and more agile than she was and there was no way that she was going to hit him if he didn't want her to.

Billy de-morphed and stepped aside as Willow nervously made her way to the front of the group. Xena thought that this was going to be a quick and easy win. She had seen the fireballs and knew that she could easily dodge them.

Willow had been preparing a spell to make Xena become so heavy that she couldn't move, as if her entire body were made of lead. She had drawn the power up within herself and was ready to release it with the words of the spell when Xena started moving toward her. She meant to say the right words but her mind was not focusing on what it should be so she instead said, "Mamari Enorme."

Xena was expecting a fireball to emerge and to have to dodge it. What she didn't expect was for the bodice of her armor to pop open and for her breasts to fall free. To her further surprise, they were growing. Everyone watched in stunned silence for long moments until finally... she tipped over.

As the group watched Xena struggle with the weight of her ever expanding breasts Willow finally shook herself back to reason and said, "Undo the spell."

In a flash of magic, Xena was back to normal.

She looked at Willow to find a scarlet blush creeping up her face.

Xena turned at a movement and saw Tara approaching with a look of hurt and fury in her eyes.

She didn't have time to move a muscle before Tara started speaking a spell and she was frozen in place.

*"One grain from the sands of time,  
Just the one before the last,  
Withered, wretched, racked with pain,  
Behold the Crone, my spell be cast."*

Xena cried out as every joint in her body simultaneously ignited in agony. Her vision went blurry and hearing became muffled. Her spine twisted into an impossible curve and she couldn't help but hunch over. Through her blurred vision she could barely make out the image of her withered hands, skeleton thin with paper thin flesh draped over it in blotched wrinkles.

The others watched as Xena's hair became gray and frizzy. Her skin wrinkled and her body became thin and frail.

"Do you still want to look at her breasts?" Tara said to Willow with disgust and walked away.

"You can't leave her like that." Xander/Yami said as he watched Tara hurry away.

{ "I call upon the magic of the card, de-spell." } Yugi said, holding out a card.

The glowing image of a lock and key appeared, then key entered the lock and began to turn.

The image glowed more brightly, then vanished as the effect of the spell seemed to stop, then reverse.

Xena felt her strength return and the ache subside.

"That was... thank Yugi for me. That was the most horrible thing I've ever felt." Xena said between deep breaths.

{ Tell Yugi that Xena thanks him. } Joxer said with a smile of gratitude directed at Yugi.

{ You did well Aibou, Xena thanks you, and I thank you as well. } Xander/Yami said with pride for his young counterpart.

{ Her attack was dishonorable. Her goal was not to win the spar, it was to cause pain. } Yugi said with a look of concern directed at Xena who was back to herself.

A flash of power drew everyone's attention.

"What in the name of all the gods is going on down here?" A beautiful woman asked as she appeared in a flourish of sparkles and rose petals.

"Hello Aphrodite." Joxer said shyly.

"Hi'ya Joxy. I just felt ungodly amounts of energy coming from down here. What's going on?" Aphrodite asked as she walked closer to Joxer.

"These people," Joxer began, pointing to the group, "They're lost and we were taking them to Corinth so maybe they could find some help to get home."

"Where are you heading?" Aphrodite asked pleasantly.

All the young adults looked at each other and Xander/Yami finally said, {Please tell her we don't understand.}

"They don't understand our language. Xander and I can talk in Egyptian, but that's the only language any of us have in common." Joxer explained.

"No prob." Aphrodite said and waived her hand in the general direction of the group.

"Okay guys, now can you tell me what's going on?" Aphrodite asked as she crossed her arms and began tapping her toe impatiently.

"Um, yes. Thank you... We're kind of lost. We don't know where or when we are. Willow... um... she's around here somewhere... she cast a spell to get us out of the last place we were lost in and kind of brought us all here." Xander/Yami said reluctantly.

"Back up stud. First of all, I want to know about the power that's been zinging around here. Who did that? We'll sort out the rest in a minute." Aphrodite said firmly.

"Um... I guess all of us were using some kind of power or another. Yugi, would you like to show this beautiful woman your power?" Xander/Yami asked with a blush.

"I summon the power of the Rogue Doll." Yugi said in an uncertain voice.

Before Yugi a small figure appeared which looked like a puppet holding a staff.

"Oh, how cute." Aphrodite cooed as she looked at the doll.

"Please be careful, the Rogue Doll can be quite dangerous." Yugi said with concern.

"So this is what you were doing to create all that energy? Making toys?" Aphrodite asked as she turned her attention back to the boys.

"No. We were sparring with Xena so she could understand our abilities. The language barrier proved to be quite debilitating." Billy said seriously.

"Oh, so you're fighters? I guess I should let you talk to Ar then." Aphrodite with a little frown.

"No, that's okay. Maybe you can help us. Can you find a way that we can get home? We really need to get back." Bobby asked desperately.

Aphrodite looked curiously at him, then at Billy.

"Maybe it is me that you need to talk to. What's happened to your loved ones? I can feel your concern through my godhood." Aphrodite said with concern.

"We both got pulled out of our battles just as our friends were hurt, we need to get back to them." Bobby said, focusing again on his last sight of Marie.

"Come here and let me take a peek in your mind. I think it will be a lot faster than me asking the wrong questions and you giving the wrong answers." Aphrodite said and walked to Bobby.

Bobby nodded nervously, knowing that nothing bad had happened when Professor Xavier had scanned his mind.

A long minute later Aphrodite opened her eyes and looked around the group with new understanding.

"I don't know guys. Honestly, this is a little out of my league. Why don't you come with me and I'll feed you lunch while I check on a few things." Aphrodite said in thought.

"Lunch sounds great." Xander/Yami said happily.

"Do you mind if I come along?" Joxer asked timidly.

"No prob Joxy. What about you Xena? Gabrielle?" Aphrodite asked casually.

"Thank you, no." Xena said firmly and immediately.

Gabrielle just shook her head.

"Go and find the girls while I ask the big guy for permission to take you upstairs." Aphrodite said, then got a distant look in her eyes.

The boys looked curiously at each other, then Bobby and Xander/Yami went to find Willow and Tara.

"It's cool with Big Z, he'll probably be showing up while we eat. Don't get freaked by him, he's just a big ole teddy bear." Aphrodite said with a bounce.

"Big Z? As in Zeus?" Billy asked in confirmation.

"Yeah, you heard of him?" Aphrodite asked as she turned her attention completely to Billy.

"I should say. I've always been fascinated by ancient mythology. This is the opportunity of a lifetime." Billy said with excitement, then an image of Jason, laying unconscious, flashed before Billy's mind and his excitement fell into despair.

"Don't worry, I promise that I'll do everything I can to get you back with your honey." Aphrodite said in sympathy.

"He's not. We're best friends, that's all." Billy said hurriedly.

"Hello? Goddess of Love here. I know what's in your heart... even if you've never said the words to anyone." Aphrodite said seriously.

Billy blushed as he nodded and looked at the ground.

Aphrodite felt a tug in her godhood and turned to see Yugi looking up at her with wide desperate eyes.

"I never could resist puppy eyes... what can I do for you?" Aphrodite asked with a tender smile.

"Can you help me? I've never told him... Yami... if you're the goddess of love, maybe you can find some way that... I mean... if he even feels that way about me at all." Yugi stammered.

"Hold on studling, Let me just peek in your mind to fill in the blanks." Aphrodite said and put her hand on his forehead.

She began to laugh and said, "You sure don't ask for much. You just want to be able to physically express your love for the spirit of a five thousand year old Egyptian Pharaoh."

"Sorry." Yugi mumbled.

Aphrodite sobered quickly and said, "Don't worry sweetie. I didn't say it was impossible, and I enjoy a challenge every now and again. But I'm going to need some expert advice, when it comes to spirits, there's only one god to ask."

Bobby and Xander came back to the group leading Willow and Tara who were obviously still angry.

Aphrodite looked at the two and said, "Okay, let's go, I see I'm going to have my work cut out for me today."

Aphrodite waved her hand and a doorway formed.

"Okay boys and girls, follow me and lunch will be served in just a few minutes."  
Aphrodite said and led the way through the door.



### Chapter 3 - And So On...

As each of the group stepped out of the misty doorway hanging open in mid air, they stopped and marveled at the beauty that surrounded them.

The gardens of Mount Olympus enjoyed eternal springtime and were filled with flowers of every color and variety known to be.

"Right this way. I'm sure you're hungry." Aphrodite said with a bounce as she led them toward an enormous marble temple.

One by one, the group overcame their wonder at the sheer beauty that surrounded them and eventually followed.

A booming crash of thunder caused everyone to jump and stop in their tracks.

"I wish you wouldn't do that." Aphrodite said with a petulant look upward.

Movement drew their attention and they watched in silence as a supremely confident and authoritative man walked toward them from the temple they were approaching.

"This is Zeus, the King of the Gods of Olympus." Aphrodite said formally.

"Bow." Billy whispered to his comrades urgently as he demonstrated.

Everyone followed Billy's example except Tara, who gave her best estimation of a curtsy.

"Aphrodite tells me that you are all far from home. Come inside and tell me your story so we can decide what is to be done." Zeus said in a tone that was friendly on the surface, but was nothing short of a command.

\* \* \* \* \*

The group walked into a huge room with a long and ornate table in the center.

With a waive of her hand, Aphrodite produced a banquet in the center of the table.

All of them looked at the lavish display of foods laid out before them with wonder at the power Aphrodite commanded so casually.

Once they were finally seated, Billy hesitantly said, "Lord Zeus..." then trailed off uncertainly.

Zeus nodded that the title was adequate.

"From the evidence at hand, I have concluded that we come from different dimensions and from a time some two thousand or more years in your future." Billy said carefully, trying to keep it simple.

"I see. And how did you come to be here?" Zeus asked in thought as he looked over the strange collection of young adults and children.

"By way of magic. Willow and Tara worked a spell to get us out of an unfortunate situation which resulted in our relocation to this time and place." Billy said carefully.

"Yes. I also sense that one of you harbors a spirit. Tell me of that." Zeus said as he turned his attention to Xander/Yami.

"Yugi solved the Millennium Puzzle and released my spirit which had been housed within it for five thousand years. I have shared his body for some time now, but when we entered your world, my spirit came to inhabit Xander instead of Yugi... we don't know why." Xander/Yami said in thought.

"The use of Millennium magic suggests that you are Egyptian. Is that correct?" Zeus asked with interest.

"Yes. But I know very little about my past." Xander/Yami said regretfully.

"It seems we have many questions and few answers. I suppose the best way to sort this out would be to summon the god who has dominion over the dimensional pathways." Zeus said to the group, then looked to his left and said, "Janus, I bid thee attend me."

In a gradual glow of power, a mysterious form appeared. The power wasn't the pure joyous light that Aphrodite had displayed. Janus' power was malevolent, malignant, and caused all the visitors to wince in disgust.

This god, Janus, had an aura of menace surrounding him and half his face was hidden by his long, jet black hair.

"Summoned, I come." Janus said in a cold, harsh voice that was difficult to listen to. Although his words were respectful, his tone revealed barely restrained defiance.

"These young ones claim to be from other times and other worlds. Before we begin to sort the other matters, it must be known if the fabric of time in their own worlds has been disturbed by their absence... and if it will be disturbed by their return." Zeus said, seemingly unbothered by Janus' insolent tone.

"As you command." Janus said in a hiss, then turned his attention to those around the table.

Billy seemed to be on the verge of saying something, but before he could, Janus said, "I must search for the answers you seek in the halls of time."

"Go then, and be quick about it. I must consult the fates about their presence." Zeus said with little more than an irritated glance in Janus' direction.

"You needn't bother. These lost ones are no part of the great tapestry. Their presence is a disruption. The longer they remain, the nearer the twilight comes." Janus said in a low hiss.

"Then go and find where they do belong so we can restore things to working order." Zeus said, and seemed to be losing his patience.

Janus gave a slight bow and seemed to be ready to leave, but then he raised one of his arms and his sleeve slid back to reveal a bone thin hand which was pointing at Xander.

"The displaced spirit will need his own body to traverse the vortex back to the proper universe. Such a thing is outside my purview." Janus said in a voice that sounded like nails raking down a blackboard.

"Yes. Yes. I'm not feeble minded. I just wanted to get you on task before I attended to that." Zeus said in a tone that suggested that Janus might have overstepped his bounds.

Janus nodded again, then a putrid swell of power engulfed him, making all those around the table shudder at the sight.

"So much for dinner." Aphrodite said casually as she waived her arm and the banquet before them disappeared.

Though the move was a surprise, none of those around the table could dispute that food was now the furthest thing from their minds.

"Right then... on to other business." Zeus said as he looked around the table again.

His gaze stopped on Xander/Yami, then he absently said, "Hades, my brother. I bid thee attend me."

There was a collective feeling of dread around the table as they realized that they were about to meet the god of the underworld.

Since the relatively unknown god, Janus, had been so disgusting, then it seemed to stand to reason that Hades, master of the Greek underworld, would be even more so.

A wisp of midnight black power flared, then receded. When it was gone, it revealed a fairly common looking man in it's wake.

He was very nearly handsome and regal in his own way.

"How may I be of aid to you, my brother?" Hades asked in an obligatory tone.

"We have a visitor from another time and dimension. Given his circumstance, I thought you could sort him out." Zeus said frankly.

Hades looked around the table, then his gaze fixed on Xander/Yami.

Everyone watched in cautious silence as Hades walked to Xander/Yami, then leaned close to sniff him.

"Egyptian." Hades said, obviously confirming his own suspicion.

"Yes. We surmised as much. Can you restore him to a living, breathing form?" Zeus asked simply.

Hades seemed to consider, then shook his head as he said, "No. He must have his own original body."

Zeus looked at Hades curiously, waiting for more, but when it was not forthcoming, Zeus reluctantly asked, "Does that mean that his body still exists?"

Hades nodded, and something in his eyes suggested that he was reluctant to speak all that he knew.

"Who keeps his body then? Is it Isis?" Zeus asked cautiously.

Hades slowly shook his head, 'no'.

"Anubis?" Zeus asked in a guarded tone.

Hades again shook his head, 'no'.

Zeus was obviously casting about for any name other than one.

"Set?" Zeus asked, sounding almost hopeful at the prospect.

Hades shook his head, 'no' again, looking almost regretful.

Zeus finally gave a sigh of resignation and said, "It's Sobek, isn't it."

Hades nodded, and the guests around the table noticed that he seemed to be trying to hide a smile.

Zeus looked upward and called, "You can wipe that smile off your face Moira. It isn't funny."

A faint chuckle echoed through the room.

"Moira is the mother of the fates." Tara whispered to those at the table.

Billy nodded his agreement to her explanation as the others puzzled over who 'the fates' were.

"Ares, God of War, attend me." Zeus called out, drawing all attention back to him.

In a burst of power that was truly awe inspiring, Ares appeared.

His aura nearly crackled with strength and the honor of war.

When his gaze turned toward Zeus, the effect was spoiled as his expression changed from being a brave warrior to that of a petulant child.

"I was busy Father. Orchestrating the war that YOU felt we needed to cull the disruptive influences in the West." Ares said combatively.

"Yes. Yes. You can attend to that later. This is of paramount importance." Zeus said dismissively.

Ares looked around the room, only just noticing the others present.

"This young mortal holds a dislocated spirit. I need you to go to Sobek and ask for his aid in retrieving the spirit's body." Zeus said frankly.

"Can't Uncle Hades just magic one up for him?" Ares asked as he turned to look at his uncle curiously.

"No I can't. For the same reason that I wouldn't be able to 'magic up' a new body for you if the need arose." Hades said frankly.

Ares blinked, then hesitantly asked, "He's a god?"

"Yes and no. If you'll recall, the Egyptians do things a bit differently. The spirit we have here is that of a Pharaoh. If his body were dead, he would ascend to become a full god, yet here he is. Disembodied, and mortal. Someone has found an ingenious way to prevent him from gaining his godhead. The Pharaoh's spirit has been forced from his living body, then the body was preserved in such a way to prevent him from dying." Hades said as he turned his gaze on Xander/Yami.

"Which Pharaoh is he?" Ares asked curiously.

"Unless I miss my guess, I believe that this is the legendary lost Pharaoh, Tutmariahmihn."

\* \* \* \* \*

Only a short amount of time had passed, and yet it seemed like hours to the group around the table, sitting under the watchful eyes of Zeus.

Some nervous glances had been exchanged around the table, but no one dared to speak a word.

Finally, Zeus turned and looked on with dread at the appearance of the crocodile headed man beside his son.

"Elder god Sobek." Zeus said formally as he stood, then seemed to choke out, "You are welcomed here."

The strange combination of reptile and human let out a hissing growl that drew looks of concern from everyone around the table.

One by one they realized that the strange, wheezy sound was actually Sobek's laughter.

"It appears that you are unaware of my further ascension, King Zeus. I have left all our old arguments and animosity behind." Sobek finally said.

Before Zeus could ask, Ares hurried to say, "Uncle Sobek and the other elder gods recently performed a ceremony that will enable them to survive the twilight."

Zeus tried to hide the cringe at his son calling this foreign god, 'Uncle'. Then what Ares had said registered and he looked at Sobek with interest.

"As was foretold, the twilight of the gods is at hand. The elder gods, our 'Titans' if you will, merged into one perfectly balanced being, the all powerful Amun-Ra. The incarnation of Amun-Ra that stands before you is the divine form of Sobek-Ra."

Zeus considered Sobek-Ra's words and how this information might be useful to the Greek gods in the coming twilight.

Silence fell over the room until it was broken by Aphrodite saying, "So, Daddy Zeus says that you, um, like, have this stud muffin's body hidden somewhere."

"Yes." Sobek-Ra said with an amused look at Aphrodite.

Zeus flashed a disapproving glance at Aphrodite, then said to Sobek-Ra, "These travelers cannot remain here, they do not belong in this place and time. But we cannot send your lost Pharaoh home without his own body."

Sobek-Ra looked at the group appraisingly for a moment, then said, "Since our merging, balance has been achieved, so the ascension of the Pharaoh is no longer a threat to our pantheon. He willingly sacrificed his rightful place amongst us to preserve us all. But all is finally in readiness so I may restore him to his body."

"Very good. Then we can see to the rest." Zeus said with a nod.

"The restoration of the Pharaoh will require a willing sacrifice." Sobek-Ra said cautiously.

"I can summon one of my warlords. They would be honored to die for me." Ares said without concern.

"You should know, that if the sacrifice somehow survives the transfer of power, then he will also be imbued with god powers." Sobek-Ra said with calm dignity, speaking so that all in the room could clearly hear his words.

"Then you'd better not use one of those mouth breathing, knuckle dragging warlords of yours." Aphrodite said frankly.

"My warlords are, without exception, power-hungry bastards. That's why they're warlords." Ares said with a nod.

"It would be easy enough to find a priest of mine who wasn't power-hungry, but my priests probably wouldn't do well in the self-sacrifice department." Aphrodite said with apology.

"We can just find a loyal father and promise his family long happy lives if he'll give it up for the cause. Problem solved." Ares said with a smile of accomplishment.

"Then we have him to deal with for all eternity, if he survives." Zeus said frankly.

"We can find some hind's blood or throw him into the pit with the Titans when we're through with him." Ares said with a shrug, then glanced at Joxer and said, "We could let Xena have a crack at him, she's always wanted to kill a god. It might be enough to get her back into my service."

"That seems like such a waste." Aphrodite said with regret.

"Lord Ares. I would like to be the willing sacrifice." Joxer said in a shaky voice.

"You?" Ares asked with a chuckle of derision, then continued, "You're one of Xena's tag-alongs. Why in Zeus' name would you want to do anything to help us?"

"Lord Ares, I tag along with Xena because I believe in being a hero and helping the people who can't help themselves. If I sacrifice myself, then I'm saving a father from having to choose to leave his family. I'm saving a family from losing their father. I may even be saving a newly made god from being killed or imprisoned for eternity." Joxer said as his voice sounded increasingly assured. Ares noticed that Joxer had left out any reference to Xena in his reasons for wanting to sacrifice himself.

"Joxer, think about what you're talking about doing. There's no turning back from this." Willow said in a whisper.

"That's right Joxer. You have a lot to live for. You don't need to do this." Yugi said as his large, soulful eyes began to fill with tears.

"When I was a baby, I was dedicated to Lord Ares. He is my god. If I can be of service to him and he wishes me to do so. I will sacrifice myself." Joxer said, finally sounding completely sure of what he was doing.

Joxer then turned to look at Ares and continued, "He's never needed me for anything before. This could be my only chance to serve my god."

The group around the table looked at Joxer with sad, imploring eyes, knowing that his decision had been made.

"Well, that was easy enough." Ares said with cheer, then noticed the disapproving looks from most of the people in the room.

"The least you could do is to thank Joxy for offering his life." Aphrodite said sternly.

"No Dite. The *\*least\** I could do is what I've already done... now can we get on with it?" Ares asked as he looked around the group, finally settling his gaze on Sobek-Ra.



The crocodile headed god seemed to be amused by the child-like antics of the Greek gods.

When he noticed that all eyes were on him, he gestured for Joxer to stand before him.

"Wait." Xander/Yami said firmly, then continued, "I will not allow another to sacrifice himself so that I may regain my own body."

"Listen up sweet-cheeks. That body you're in right there, it's not going to survive the trip back to your time with you in him. Got it? If Joxy lives, both of you die. If Joxy dies, then both of you live." Aphrodite said with uncharacteristic seriousness.

"Please, Goddess Aphrodite, is there no other way?" Xander/Yami asked desperately.

"Fraid not. I know it sucks, but sometimes things just work out that way." Aphrodite said with a look of regret.

"Come. Stand over here so we can dispense with this. Your presence is damaging the fabric that guides the destiny of Greece." Sobek-Ra said with regal authority.

Xander/Yami slowly stood and walked to stand beside Joxer, trying with all his might not to look at the clumsy, wanna-be warrior.

Sobek-Ra held his hands out, nearly touching Joxer's shoulders, then said, "Millennium power, accept this token, release the body, the seal be broken."

A burst of golden light surrounded Joxer's body. It was so intense, that all the mortals in the room had to turn away.

Even the gods were surprised by the intensity of the power and were forced to avert their eyes.

When the golden light finally faded, the Pharaoh Tutmariahmihn was standing, unmoving, where Joxer had been.

"Did it work?" Yugi asked as he stared at the Pharaoh who looked like a slightly older version of himself.

"Where is Joxer?" Tara asked in a small, timid voice.

The Pharaoh Tutmariahmihn opened his large, lavender eyes and looked at the group, seeming to be dazed.

"Yami?" Yugi asked hesitantly.

"Come Aibou." Tutmariahmihn said softly as he held out his hand, "Time is our enemy."

Yugi cautiously walked to the taller boy and took his hand in a firm grip.

A lavender flash of light surprised all in the room, and when it faded, both the Pharaoh and Yugi were gone.

\* \* \* \* \*

"King Zeus, I will take my leave and bid thee well." Sobek-Ra said formally.

"Yes. Yes. And please feel free to ask if you ever have need of my assistance." Zeus said regally.

Sobek-Ra looked at Zeus appraisingly for a moment, then said, "Unlikely, but I will remember the gesture."

Before Zeus could make any response to that, Sobek-Ra vanished in a blinding flash of light.

\* \* \* \* \*

"What about Joxer?" Tara asked again, still sounding quiet and timid.

Before anyone could answer, the Pharaoh appeared with Joxer laying lifeless in his arms and Yugi standing at his side.

"Is he dead?" Billy asked cautiously.

"Yes. But he is not beyond our reach. There is still a chance to save him." the Pharaoh said firmly as he looked at Ares.

"Do it then. Save him." Bobby said quickly.

"When Joxer was dedicated, a bond was formed between him and his god. Only his god has the ability to summon him through that bond and save his life." the Pharaoh said, then looked at Ares expectantly.

"But then he'll be a god." Ares said in a slight whine.

"Joxy will be a good god. If you don't want him, I'd be proud to have him in the house of love." Aphrodite said firmly.

"Sorry Dite, Father won't allow it." Ares said quickly, then looked to his father with imploring eyes and asked, "Will you?"

"The young one sacrificed himself to save the life of a god. A foreign god, but a god, none the less. If you choose to empower him through your bond, I will raise no objection." Zeus said carefully.

"Come on Arry." Aphrodite began to say, then a look of mischief came into her eyes as she continued, "You know how Xena hates the gods. Just think about how much it will piss her off when one of her little tag alongs becomes one."

Ares rolled his eyes, then in a voice of resignation he said, "Okay. I'll do it... But only to piss off Xena."

As everyone watched, Ares walked to the Pharaoh and took Joxer's lifeless body into his arms.

"Father, you'll need to see that the war doesn't move toward Corinth. I'm going to be out of action for a few days." Ares said to his father frankly.

"I'll attend to it. Go on, before it's too late." Zeus said, trying to restrain a smile.

Ares looked down at Joxer's still face for a moment, then flashed out of the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Are you guys ready to eat yet?" Aphrodite asked cheerfully.

Everyone had their attention focused on the Pharaoh and didn't seem to hear her.

After a moment of silence, Aphrodite looked over at Zeus with question.

"Let's leave them be until Janus has finished his work. There is little else for us to do here and I would like to investigate what Sobek mentioned about surviving the twilight." Zeus said quietly.

"Sounds serious." Aphrodite said with a crinkled nose.

"Most serious. But if you will play hostess for our guests, I will attend to that." Zeus said with a small smile.

"Hostess? I can do that!" Aphrodite said happily, then to prove it, she waived her arm and the table was once again filled with food.

\* \* \* \* \*

Aphrodite threw up her hands as no one seemed to have noticed her grand and very generous gesture.

Finally she looked around the table and said, "You." As she pointed at Willow. "And you." She said as she pointed at Tara.

"Come with me." Aphrodite said firmly.

"I don't..." Willow began to say.

"That wasn't a question. You move or I move you." Aphrodite said sternly.

Willow glanced at Tara with irritation, then reluctantly walked to Aphrodite's side.

Tara shyly got up and slowly walked to Aphrodite's other side.

"You guys go on. It looks like we're in desperate need of some 'girl talk'." Aphrodite said as she led the two girls out of the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

The group of boys had automatically moved around the Pharaoh, all seeming to be filled with questions, but reluctant to speak.

After a long moment of silence, the Pharaoh quietly said, "Xander."

"Yeah?" Xander responded as he met the Pharaoh's eyes.

"Thank you." the Pharaoh said sincerely.

Xander was about to ask 'what for' when he realized that the Pharaoh was grateful that Xander had accepted his disembodied spirit.

"Yeah. No problem." Xander finally said with a grin.

"Pharaoh. Did you die and become a god?" Billy asked cautiously.

Bobby looked at Billy with surprise, not having thought about how the god powers had been bestowed.

"Please, all of you may call me Yami. I have become accustomed to it." the Pharaoh said quietly, then continued, "And yes. I did die in a way. Joxer provided the taste of death needed to activate my god power. But the body that stands here before you is my own, living body."

"Well, I'm glad that you're alright. I hope Joxer is going to be okay. He's nice."  
Bobby said hesitantly.

Yami nodded his agreement, but didn't have any words of encouragement to offer.

"Well, since you're a god, maybe you can explain what's going to happen to us."  
Yugi said as he looked up at Yami hopefully.

"I'm sorry Aibou, my memory is only just beginning to awaken. I know little more than you do." Yami said with regret, then looked around the gathering and said,  
"Until Janus returns, all we can do is wait."

"And eat." Xander said as he walked back to the table and took a seat.

"How can you think of food at a time like this?" Billy asked with astonishment.

"Because I'm hungry." Xander said as he dragged a large chunk of meat onto his plate.

"Come to think of it, so am I." Bobby said, then walked to the table to also take a seat.

Within a minute, the rest of the group had joined him.

\* \* \* \* \*

Aphrodite walked back into the hall and smiled when she found that her guests were eating and casually chatting.

Willow and Tara returned to the room more slowly, snuggled together and giggling like schoolgirls.

All the boys around the table looked at Aphrodite with surprise and question at the abrupt change.

Aphrodite gave a self-satisfied smile to the boys, but didn't offer any explanation of what she had done.

Willow and Tara eventually made their way back to the table, but they might as well have been alone in the room, since their attention seemed to be focused only on each other.

\* \* \* \* \*

A smudge of power drew everyone's attention toward the head of the table.

Before them stood Janus, looking positively malevolent with a self-satisfied grin on his half-hidden face.

"Can you send us home?" Yami asked, seemingly unfazed by Janus' disturbing presence.

"I can. But there are choices that must be made." Janus said seriously.

"Then tell us what they are so things can be decided and we can be on our way." Yami said firmly, not only affirming that he was a god, but also a born Pharaoh. A leader.

"As you like. I'll explain it to you, then let you explain it to your 'mortals'." Janus said with a glance at the others surrounding the table.

None present could tell if the strange god was teasing or actually thought that mortals were exceedingly inferior to the gods.

Yami didn't dignify the words with a response other than to quirk an eyebrow.

"Now and again, errors occur in the great pattern of destiny. When those errors occur, there is a mechanism in place to repair the inadvertent damage to the timeline." Janus said seriously.

"If you had a point to make, you could get to it any time now." Xander said with an irritating smirk.

"Be insolent if you like. Joke and be merry. I've seen your destiny, young one. It's written and sealed. Joke whilst you can." Janus said, seemingly taking delight in what lay ahead of Xander.

"What choices?" Yami asked with irritation, trying to draw Janus back to the point.

"Blue Ranger, know this. Whether you return to your time or not, Jason and Kimberly will get married. It is destined. Jason will NEVER love you the way that you love him." Janus said in a voice of absolute certainty.

Billy froze at the words.

His most secret desire had just been spoken aloud for all to hear.

As everyone watched, Billy finally came back to himself enough to ask, "But if I don't go back, won't it give Rita the advantage? Don't they need me to be there? For the team?"

"No." Janus said frankly, "If you go back, Jason's rejection of you will force you to move to Aquitar to escape the constant reminders of what you have always wanted and could never have. You'll end up in a relationship of convenience with an Aquitian woman and eventually marry her. It will be a loveless marriage and before very long, the only thing that will keep you together is your mutual sense of duty and obligation to the vows that you took. Your death, when it comes, will be welcomed."

"Oh." Billy said distantly, then looked at Janus and asked, "So what happens if I don't go back?"

"The green ranger takes your place on the team until he can find new power. Nothing else of significance changes." Janus said simply.

"So what you're saying is, my existence doesn't matter?" Billy asked quietly.

"Yes. If you want to look at it that way." Janus said in a casual tone that seemed completely inappropriate.

"But if I don't go back, what happens to me?" Billy asked helplessly.

"That will be entirely up to you. Your fate has been magically altered. No future is written for you in any timeline but your own." Janus said as he looked Billy in the eyes.

"So, no matter what I choose, Jason gets to have love and a family... and I don't?" Billy asked in a small, wounded tone.

"Jason's future and fate are already assured. He and Kimberly will have two children, Duke and Collinetta. There is a common belief that all children are beautiful but Duke and Collinetta disprove that belief. They will be, by far, the most butt ugly and disobedient children of their generation. Jason will get fat and go bald from stress, and Kimberly will age horribly in a very short period of time." Janus said frankly.

After a moment to consider, Billy hesitantly said, "I can't believe how horrible this sounds of me. But it helps me to know that."

\* \* \* \* \*

"I guess I'll be next." Bobby said as he walked to Billy's side, then asked, "What happens if I go back?"

"Oh, some complicated drama with that girl, Marie. You chase, she leads you on, you can't touch, and so on and so on. Until after a few years, she absorbs enough

of Wolverine's power to permanently gain his healing factor. That essentially makes her ageless, she and Wolverine become a loving couple and live many hundred years together... happily ever after." Janus said, then quickly added, "Oh, and your friend John, will die."

"And if I don't go back?" Bobby asked hesitantly.

"Same thing, minus the drama and John lives and returns to the Xmen because he feels guilty about your apparent death." Janus said, beginning to sound bored.

"Not much of a choice." Bobby said frankly.

Billy cautiously put a hand on Bobby's shoulder and gave a gentle squeeze.

Bobby slowly turned and gave Billy a weak smile of gratitude for the show of support.

Janus gave an unconcerned shrug, then turned to face Willow, Tara and Xander.

\* \* \* \* \*

"You three have sealed fates. You have to go back. End of story." Janus said firmly.

"Hey, that's no fair. They get to choose." Xander said in a whiny tone.

"Tough tittie." Janus said, then turned to look at Yugi and Yami.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I suppose you have a choice for me as well." Yami said calmly.

"No Pharaoh. The destiny that was set out before you is no longer possible. You were destined to face Yugi in battle and be defeated by him, then your spirit would have moved to the afterlife and Millennium magic would have been lost forever." Janus said carefully.

"And now?" Yami asked cautiously as he absently put an arm around Yugi, pulling him into a half-hug of comfort.

"You will return to the time and place when Millennium magic was used to break the rules of the shadow games. That signaled the end of the millennium and fractured destiny. It was the trigger for everything that followed. You will return, and cast judgment on the holders of the Millennium items." Janus said seriously.

"What about me?" Yugi asked in a small voice from Yami's side.



"You help him." Janus said with a gentle smile at the younger boy.

Yami slowly nodded, then glanced to his other side and asked, "What of them, would they be allowed to come with me?"

"Yes. If they choose to do so." Janus said consideringly.

Billy and Bobby shared a look, then Bobby finally said, "Sure, why not?"

"It appears that I have no other obligations." Billy said in a desperate, ironic chuckle.

\* \* \* \* \*

Janus relocated the group to a large room with a countless number of archways that seemed to lead to nowhere.

"We cannot delay." Janus said as he gestured to one of the arches and a mist started to form.

"Guys, I'm sorry about dragging you all here." Willow said in front of the swirling vortex.

"You heard Janus, you didn't cause this Willow, you were just part of the mechanism to repair something that went wrong. Now you three need to go and fulfill your destinies." Yami said, trying to keep a smile in place for their benefit.

Xander slowly turned and said, "It was good getting to know you Yami. If you ever find yourself out-of-body and needing a place to stay..."

"...I'll look you up. Thank you Xander." Yami finished with a nod.

The rest of the group watched as Xander, Willow and Tara walked into the swirling mist and eventually out of sight.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Is there anything we need to know about your world?" Bobby asked cautiously.

Before Yami or Yugi could answer, Billy asked, "Should we, perhaps, learn how to speak Japanese?"

"You do know how to speak Japanese." Janus said from behind them.

Bobby and Billy looked at Janus with question.

"Aphrodite already gave you all the languages that you could possibly need." Janus explained patiently.

"Then I suppose there's no putting off what must be done." Yami said as he looked at the swirling doorway with trepidation.

"Pharaoh. When you have done what needs to be done, please remember, you are still a god." Janus said seriously.

"I'll keep that in mind." Yami said as he puzzled over the cryptic words.

"And I'll remind him." Yugi said with a shy smile.

"Be well my young friend." Janus said as he placed one of his wretchedly thin hands on Yugi's shoulder and gave it a squeeze.

"Time." Yami said, then started to walk.

Bobby, Billy and Yugi walked side by side to follow.

\* \* \* \* \*

"If you can't handle yourself in a duel, you deserve to lose." Seto said with disgust.

Melik played his 'Goblin Attack Force' card and wiped out the last of Yugi's life points.

Yugi, Yami, Billy and Bobby watched as Yugi dropped through a dark vortex in the floor.

"Yield the game to me, mind slave." Melik said to Seto with delight.

Before Seto could respond, Yugi automatically pulled out his deck and found the card that he wanted.

"Mind crush." Yugi said in a clear voice as he held the card out.

Seto stared at Yugi incomprehendingly for a moment, then clutched his head as if in severe pain.

"You can't win a shadow game by stealing the will of your opponent." Yami said firmly.

Melik and Bakura looked from Yugi to Yami with surprise.

"It looks like you guys just screwed up. Big time." Bobby said frankly.

"You can't be in here. This shadow game is sealed." Bakura said cautiously.

"The game is over tomb robber. It is time for judgment." Yami said, then in a lavender flash of light he relocated to the other side of the playing field and held the Millennium ring in his hands.

"Tomb Robber, your thievery ends here. By conspiring with Melik to use Millennium magic to cheat, you have invalidated this game. And in doing so, you have invalidated all shadow games. You have marked the end of the millennium and broken the seal that binds the magic. I stand now in judgment. You are to be cast into the card graveyard to live eternally as the new reaper of cards." Yami said in a firm, clear voice.

"No. You can't. Melik, stop him." Bakura pleaded.

"He has his own problems." Yami said, then took firm hold of the Millennium ring and continued, "Vile spirit. I cast you out!"

A vague, uncomprehending look filled Bakura's eyes, then he fell to the ground.

Yugi ran to Bakura's side to be sure that his timid, sometimes friend, wasn't hurt and was resting in a comfortable position.

"Melik Ishtar, your family was charged with protecting the Millennium items from those who would try to use their power unwisely. You have used the power of the Millennium rod to enslave the souls of others for your own enrichment." Yami said coldly.

"You have been corrupted and I judge that you are well past the possibility for any sort of redemption." Yami said sadly.

Melik stood, frozen with fear as Yami took the Millennium rod out of his hand.

"Melik Ishtar, you have caused so much pain and suffering in your quest for power. I condemn you to eternal torment in the underworld." Yami said, feeling no joy in the words.

"You can't..." Melik tried to say before he disappeared into a swirling red vortex in the floor.

"It would appear that he can." Billy said frankly.

"Would you guys mind taking care of Seto and his brother?" Yami asked hopefully as he handed the Millennium rod and ring to Yugi.

"Where is his brother?" Bobby asked as he looked around curiously, just noticing their surroundings.

"There." Yami said as he pointed to a vague outline embedded in the wall of force that contained them.

"How do I?..." Bobby asked as he slowly walked to the frozen boy.

"Just get ready to catch him." Yami said, then looked at Yugi and asked, "Do you want to do it, Aibou?"

"Yeah." Yugi said timidly, then started looking through his cards.

"De-spell." Yugi said firmly as he held out the card.

The faint image of a lock and key appeared before Yugi, then as the key turned, the walls of force surrounding them began to melt away.

"I've got him." Bobby said as he caught the young boy.

"We have other Millennium items to collect, and I have other judgments to make. But I think I will bring the next item holder to us." Yami said, then pointed to a spot on the ground right in front of him.

\* \* \* \* \*

The beautiful woman looked at Yami with surprise for a moment, then, without a word, took the necklace from around her neck and held it out to Yami as she went down on one knee.

"Isis Ishtar, your family was charged with the protection of the millennium items. You have used the power of the Millennium torc well and sought to fulfill your vow. I am pleased." Yami said gently.

"Thank you Pharaoh Tutmariahmihn." Isis said reverently.

"In the coming days, as it becomes publicly known that I have returned, I am going to need a high priestess to teach my new followers about the old ways. Would you be interested?" Yami asked with a gentle smile.

"It would be a great honor and privilege, my Pharaoh." Isis said as she kept her eyes averted.

"Good. Then arise Isis Ishtar, high priestess of the Pharaoh Tutmariahmihn. Get your affairs in order, then join me in Domino City. There will be much to do." Yami said with a full smile.

"I knew the time was near. I will return in a matter of days." Isis said, then rushed away.

"Are these guys going to be okay?" Bobby asked quietly as he held the young boy, Mokuba, in his arms.

"Yes. They just need to sleep off the mind-slave effect of the Millennium rod." Yami said, then continued, "But it would be best if you moved Mokuba to be beside his brother before they awaken. They are completely devoted to each other."

Bobby nodded that he understood, then gently carried Mokuba so he could wake up beside Seto.

"Remain here. There are other items to retrieve and other carriers to judge. I will return shortly." Yami said seriously.

Bobby and Billy both nodded, then turned their attention back to the sleeping brothers.

"Can I... I mean may I go with you?" Yugi asked hopefully.

"Yes Aibou. I would feel incomplete without you." Yami said, then in a flash of lavender light, they were gone.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I thought we got all the Millennium items. Where are we now?" Yugi asked in a whisper as he looked around the endless darkness.

Yami produced a ball of light in the palm of his hand, then held it out in front of them.

Yugi followed the movement, then saw that they were standing beside a huge stone door.

"Help me Aibou." Yami whispered, then placed the Millennium eye into an indentation in the stone table before them.

When Yugi understood what Yami was doing, he took the Millennium rod that he had been carrying and fitted it into its proper place.

They placed each of the items into the indentations until Yugi was left holding the Millennium puzzle.

"Once we do this Aibou, it cannot be undone." Yami said as he put his hand over Yugi's.

"What will it do?" Yugi asked cautiously.

Yami looked away as he said, "I've come to know of your world. Since you've never lived in a world with gods, you may not understand just how chaotic it is here. You have the rich exploiting the poor. Nations are going to war to make their corporate masters rich. Terrorism... Left as it is, I can see nothing but turmoil for your people."

Yugi reluctantly nodded that he understood what Yami was saying.

"If we do this, it will change everything." Yami said frankly.

Yugi guided Yami to put the puzzle into place. They pressed on the puzzle with their joined hands until it was embedded into its place in the stone table.

A loud scraping sound started, then the stone doors began to open.

Light spilled into the room, light that was too bright to see past.

A form stepped out of the light and it took a few minutes for them to see that it was a man, a monstrously huge man.

"Tutmariahmihn, we knew that you would one day return." the man said gently.

Yugi looked at the man curiously. He felt like he knew him, but also knew that they had never met before.

"You may call me Amun-Ra." the god said in a joyful and benevolent tone.

"Thank you. I'm Yugi."

"Now that you have come and opened the vault. The twilight of the gods is over. Now we can begin the new day of the gods." Amun-Ra said as he stretched and flexed his glorious power in an aura that wrapped all around him and filled the room.

"This was what you planned all along." Yugi said speculatively.

Amun-Ra looked at Yugi curiously for a moment, then smiled and said, "Yes young one. The Pharaoh was suspended between life and death so that he could survive the twilight outside the protection of the seal. We were depending on him to release us."

"What of the Greek gods?" Yugi asked hesitantly.

"If they took my warning, then perhaps they survived and are just waiting to be released as well." A new voice said.

Yugi and Yami watched as Sobek-Ra stepped out of the massive form of Amun-Ra.

"Sobek-Ra. It's good to see you." Yami said with uncharacteristic happiness.

"Yes. It is good to see you as well, but you should be going if you want to release our Greek counterparts so they can share in this glorious day." Sobek-Ra said in a voice of ultimate peace and tranquility.

"Yeah. Let's go Yami." Yugi said with a note of urgency.

"Yes Aibou. We will seek out the Greek gods, but then we must return to Domino City. Billy and Bobby don't know anyone there." Yami said carefully.

"Oh yeah. We'd better hurry back to them." Yugi said quickly.

"Come Aibou." Yami said as he put out his hand.

Yugi took the offered hand and they vanished in a burst of lavender light.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Are you sure?" Yugi asked in a whisper as they walked through a long, deserted cave.

"Yes Aibou, I can sense immense power coming from just ahead. It must be the Greek twilight chamber." Yami said then smiled when he turned the corner.

"What the?..." Yugi said as he stared at the sleeping figure in front of them.

"That is just SO Greek." Yami said with a chuckle.

At Yugi's inquiring look, Yami continued, "They come up with such creative ways to do the simplest things. Rather than just creating a door with a seal, they leave a massive stone giant asleep in front of the entrance."

"What do you want to do about him?" Yugi asked cautiously.

"I think you have the answer to that." Yami said honestly.

Yugi thought for a moment, then smiled as he realized what Yami meant.

After ruffling through his cards, Yugi found the one he wanted and triumphantly said, "Magical Hats."

Yami laughed aloud as three gigantic hats appeared before them, one of them covering the sleeping stone giant.

"Are you sure you're not part Greek, Aibou?" Yami asked as Yugi ran to the hat that was blocking the door.

"You could think of an easier way?" Yugi asked as he struggled to tip over the massive hat.

"Three or four, actually. But as long as it works..." Yami said, then broke into a full smile as Yugi finally managed to move the hat out of the way to reveal the entrance to a great cavern.

Before either of them could enter, a strong voice called out, "Who goes there?"

Yugi and Yami shared a look of recognition, then Yugi carefully called, "Lord Ares?"

"No. That's who I am. Who are you?" Ares called forcefully.

"Yugi Mutou and the Pharaoh Tutmariahmihn." Yami called out indulgently.

"It is." A quieter voice whispered, then the sound of scurrying feet could be heard.

"Ooof." sounded, as whoever was running, had obviously fallen.

"Two thousand years and you still can't manage to put one foot in front of the other." Ares said with exasperation as he finally stepped out of the cavern.

"It really is you." Ares said, then looked around the outside of the cave.

"Ares? Is it safe?" A timid voice called.

"Yes. It's them." Ares called over his shoulder.

Joxer ran over and hugged Yami happily, then Yugi.



"I'm glad to see that you're alright." Yugi said with a chuckle from the hug.

"Is it over?" Joxer asked hopefully.

"Yes." Yami said with a smile, "The twilight of the gods is over. You've survived."

"Thank you! Thank you!" Joxer screamed into the great cavern, then ran to Ares and gave him a joyful kiss... and it was obvious that it wasn't their first.

The sound of a snort, then a low rhythmic snore came from under a large hat beside them.

"We need to be going, just let everyone know that it's over. The Egyptian gods are released as well." Yami said seriously.

Joxer finally released Ares, who was blushing, then walked up to Yami and said, "Thank you for my life."

"Yes. And thank you as well." Yami said, then put his hand out to Yugi.

As Yugi took his hand, a lavender flash of light erupted around them.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I was beginning to get worried about you two." Bobby said as he looked at Yami and Yugi with concern.

"We just had a few extra stops to make. How are they doing?" Yami asked as he knelt beside Seto.

"That Bakura guy woke up and ran off a few minutes ago. I thought this guy was about to wake up, but then he didn't. Any minute now I think." Bobby said frankly.

"They both appear to have had sufficient rest. I would guess from their more agitated sleep, that they should awaken momentarily." Billy said professionally.

"That's what I just said." Bobby said with a chuckle.

Billy seemed to be replaying Bobby's words in his mind, then he slowly said, "Yes. You did."

"Five more minutes." Seto mumbled incoherently.

"Seto, it's time to wake up." Yami said gently as he placed his hand on Seto's shoulder.

Seto's eyes snapped open and he looked at Yami with challenge.

"The duel is over, both you and your brother are well." Yami said carefully.

Seto had a look of confusion, then he asked, "Was I dueling with you or against you?"

"Some of both, actually. But that's all over now." Yami said, then gripped Seto's shoulder as he helped him to sit up.

"What's wrong with Mokuba?" Seto asked in panic at the sight of his younger brother passed out on the floor beside him.

"He's sleeping, just like you were... you'll both be fine." Yami said assuringly.

Seto looked around at the strangers, then asked, "What happened?"

"Mind control. But you don't have to worry about that anymore. I will see to it that no mortals will ever have access to the Millennium items again. No more mind control, no more shadow games." Yami said firmly.

Seto looked curiously at Yami, not knowing what to believe.

"It's a new world Seto. Things are going to be different from here on." Yami said with a smile.

"A new world? That sounds like a challenge to me." Seto said as he came more awake.

"Yes. There will be many challenges in the coming days. But I think they'll be good ones." Yami said with a smile.

Seto blinked his stark blue eyes as he stared at Yami, then turned to look at his brother with concern.

"We'll leave you alone to wake Mokuba." Yami said as he slowly stood.

"I'm glad Mokuba is going to be alright." Yugi said quickly.

Seto seemed surprised by the sincere sentiment, but finally said, "Thank you. It's good to know that we have... friends... who'll look out for us when we need it."

"Always Seto. Always." Yami said, then motioned for Yugi to come with him.

\* \* \* \* \*

As the group of four walked down the street toward the Turtle game shop, Billy finally asked, "What are we going to do here?"

"I've seen both of you fight and I was impressed. I thought that if you would be willing, you could move into my main temple as my personal guards, and advisors." Yami said frankly.

Bobby and Billy exchanged uncertain looks.

"Today is the beginning of a new age. An age of gods. Change, even good change, is frightening. Just think about the position you'll be in to help people who really need it." Yami said seriously.

Bobby slowly nodded while Billy seemed to be considering.

"There's no need to worry about it tonight. Right now just focus on adjusting to this new world. I know it took a while for me to get used to it." Yami said with a fond smile of remembrance.

"What about me?" Yugi asked Yami hopefully.

"What about you?" Yami asked in return as they continued to walk the familiar route to the game shop where Yugi's grandfather lived.

"What is my job going to be?" Yugi asked hopefully.

"You will be my King of Games." Yami said gently.

"No. Seriously. We've been together for so long..." Yugi trailed off nervously, then finally summoned the courage to continue, "Are we going to be together now?"

Yami realized just how serious Yugi was with his question and exactly what he was asking.

In his most gentle voice, Yami responded, "I love you Aibou. You are my Hikari as I am your Yami... but our feelings for each other have never been the passion of lovers. It was the pure love of closest friends."

"But... but... when we shared my body... I know you have those kinds of feelings." Yugi choked out past his tears.

"Yes Aibou. But I have those feelings for only one person. I believe it is a challenge worthy of a god."

Yugi looked up at Yami with his large violet eyes, filled with unshed tears.

"You'll see Aibou, in time I'll have my Seto, and you'll have..." Yami trailed off, then pointed at someone approaching.

Yugi quickly wiped his eyes and said, "Hey Joey."

"What's up Yug?"

***The End***