

**Title:** *Endless Loop Book 4: Automatic Paranoia*  
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**Website:** [DarkMagick.net](http://DarkMagick.net), [Apollymi's Grimoire](#)  
**Length:** 10,489 words  
**Stats:** December 2006 – October 2008  
**Genre:** Fan fiction, alternate universe, supernatural, paranormal, slash  
**Pairing:** Bakura/Yami, Malik/Jounouchi/Marik, Seth/Kaiba  
**Rating:** FRM for language and violence

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Heads are going to roll.

I swear to God, I'm going to find responsible parties - or even people who look vaguely responsible - and rip them limb from limb. Whoops, bad analogy, given my current situation.

You know, it wasn't too many nights ago that Yami, the brat, Mini-Me, and I were on a couch laughing at a bootleg horror movie, with characters caught in a situation very much like the one I'm now finding myself in. And, somehow, the only thought that keeps circling through my mind is, oddly enough, I didn't think it would *smell* like this. Weird. I'm probably not too far from being torn limb from limb myself, and I'm more concerned about how the things about to kill me smell. Oh well, the brat always did say I'm the odd one, though, as I recall it, he didn't use those exact words.

"Somehow this is all your fault."

I hold back a growl - barely. "I hate you. This is *not* my fault. You were the one who got the invitation, not me. I just tagged along to be nice."

"You don't know what that word means, Bakura."

"Like you do?"

Okay, just how the hell did we get here?

"Excuse me?"

If there's one thing living in the Kaiba household for the past two years taught me, it was never taken anything, even a 'hello', at face value. I turned slowly and looked *up*. I'm not short by any means, but the burly guy in front of me with the beat puppy look might have topped Treeboy for size, not the easiest thing to do by any stretch of the imagination. He was also more built than Magnum and darker than the nutjob - and neither of these were easy feats either. And that didn't make me particularly happy. And no one could say I was a cheerful person, even on my best days, few and far between though they might be. "What?" I demanded. A polite, young Japanese boy, I would never be.

He let out the loudest, most annoying sigh of relief I'd ever heard in my life. "I've been trying to speak with you for the longest time." Great... Another basket case. Just what this house needed. Like we were running short on our quota or something. He cast me a desperate look and leaned down with imploring eyes. "Look, I just made the sandwiches! I didn't do anything to end up like this!"

It was on the tip of my tongue to ask "Like what?" when he reached down to grab my shoulder -- and I felt a distinctive familiar chill go through me. I still don't really remember jumping back, but I do distinctly recall that I howled, "Holy shit! You're dead!"

And he nodded, like it was elementary, like I should have known it from the moment he appeared before me. "Of course. Could you ask him to let me go? I just made the sandwiches! I didn't want anyone to get hurt!"

Okay, I had my suspicions already. There were only a few people in Japan who could do anything with the dead, and only one who could do such high-quality ghosts. Still, better safe than sorry. "Ask who to let you go?"

"Atemu-san."

I knew it. I fucking knew it. Only Yami could do ghosts of this caliber, that look life-like enough to fool even me. "Of course," I forced out through clenched teeth. "Who else would it be?"

Don't get me wrong. Yami was one of the best things in my life, right up there with my siblings, but there were times when stuff like this got to being too much for me to take. I was never polite under the best of circumstances, but a lack of sleep -- due to the guy I was in bed with having nightmares every night for the last week -- only made me more irritable and short-tempered. And Yami had had one of those screaming bloody murder, sheet-ripping ones the night before; that didn't help matters any at all.

"So... could you ask him?"

With a world-weary sigh, I cast around till I found the guy's signature... then frowned when I turned up a couple others. "How many of you are there?"

"Three," he admitted, sounding a little sheepish. Good! I've never liked being surprised.

"I'll do what I can, but I'm going to need some info to work with here, like how the hell did this happen? What's your name? And are you who I think you are?"

"My name is Karim. I was... one of the people involved with the Mutou kidnapping five years ago. As for how it happened, I'm not certain, but I believe... Atemu-san pulled our souls from our bodies in revenge for what happened to young Yuugi-san."

"I can't say I blame him. You guys shot his little brother right in front of him!"

"I didn't shoot anybody! I didn't even know they were planning on kill him! I just made the sandwiches."

"Yami described them as the most horrible things he'd ever eaten," I had to chip in helpfully. I always had to make things worse.

He looked so put out that it took every ounce of willpower I had not to laugh out loud in his face. "They were perfectly healthy and well-balanced."

"And you gave healthy food to fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds? What the hell were you smoking?" But I was just babbling on to kill time while I traced the bond linking all three signatures to Yami. "So if you've been following Yami around since the kidnapping.." I trailed off with a slight growl.

"We don't look at you guys having sex or anything!" Nice to know I could even get a spirit all riled up.

"Okay. I'm cutting all three of you off from Yami. It might take a little while for you to pass on or whatever, since it looks like you've still got a good bit of juice left in you. I'd give you a week, tops."

And more than likely, for that week, I'd have to deal with a hyper Yami again. It probably wouldn't be too different than that time with Mini-Me: he didn't know just how much energy he was pouring into Mini-Me, but once he suddenly wasn't, it was like this huge energy spike. He bounced off the walls for days on end. Nonetheless, I had no interest in this guy trailing me, nor any of the rest of those kidnapers, so I cut the link without another thought.

I'd been getting better at it, really. Two years of (relative) peace and quiet allowed for a good bit of time to

improve on a lot of things, not the least of which being my dealings with the dead. Still this incident was going to require a long conversation (and probably a yelling match) between myself and my boyfriend. That... wouldn't be fun, but then, it never was.

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Two years of peace and quiet, all over in a single moment. Again. And all thanks to Yami, also again. I enjoyed being with him, really I did, except in moment like these where we were screaming at each other almost loud enough to wake the dead. It was only 'almost loud enough' before none of the vampires had yet to come down and inform us we'd awakened them from their beauty sleep.

"What I don't get is why you're so upset!" he yelled back at me. I'm not sure what I said that set him off with that, but then, we'd been yelling at each other at least a good hour, so it was really all starting to run together.

"Why? Because you knew there were a fucking merry trio of ghosts following us around all this time -- and you didn't say anything! What else am I going to find out again? What else haven't you told me about?"

"Oh, like you not telling me about having a sister?"

He *would* bring up Amane... He just could never let that drop. "Maybe because I knew you'd never let it go! And you aren't!"

"So it's all right for *you* to keep secrets, but not me?" he yelled back.

"Don't put words in my mouth, Yami," I returned in a hiss. At my side, I could feel myself clenching my hand into a fist and releasing it over and over. It was helping keep me from really losing my temper. Actually hitting him was at the bottom of my list of things to do; I'd probably never regain the privilege to have sex with him ever again. And I'd never forgive myself either, since I'd done so well dismissing the ghost of my father within me.

"It's what you said." It was probably a bad thing that he finally stopped pacing in front of me.

"Yami, I barely knew you then!"

"We'd been together two months!"

"I'd known Malik two *years* before he ever laid eyes on her!"

And that was the wrong thing to say. We'd had one of our only multi-day fights when I came clean with the fact Malik had been something of a friend with benefits back in Tokyo. We'd run together for years, and in the last year or so before I took off with the brat, we decided it'd be better to be together than chance what could happen on the street; it was safer with a friend. 'Fuck buddies' was the best term for what we were back five years ago. It's not like there was any real affection beyond our strange friendship we'd had for years and the camaraderie the gang provided between us, but Yami never seemed to get that.

I had half a second for all that to rush through my mind before there was a sharp pain throbbing on my left cheekbone and a weird ringing in my ears... and Yami standing in front of me looking as stunned as I felt. Had he just--? It was certainly far from the worst punch I'd ever received, but it *was* a bit shocking. I mean, *he* had hit *me*. Last I heard, the running bet was that, if and when our relationship would ever turn aggressive, it'd be *me* doing the knocking around on *him*. I wonder who just won this pool.

"Kura...", he floundered. "I--"

"I guess I earned that?" Even I could tell my voice was deadly quiet.

"No! I didn't mean--"

Oh God, the temptation to hit the shit out of him was so fucking strong, but that would get us nowhere, except in more trouble. Okay, I needed to clear my head, and that meant getting out of the room for a bit. I turned on my heel and started to march out of the room when he spoke up again, "Where are you going?"

"I have to get out of here and calm down." Before I wake up and find myself killing you. I glanced over my shoulder at him, and My God, he looked more miserable than I felt. "I'll be back in a while." With the look on his face, it felt a bit like kicking a puppy, but in this case, one that had already bitten me. I mean, I love him, but I spent most of my life getting the shit kicked out of me by Oyaji; I wasn't about to start taking it from anyone else and especially not someone I cared about as much as Yami.

"...You will be back though?"

"When I'm calmer." However long that might take.

The sun was down. That was fairly easy to tell immediately as I closed the door to our room and stepped into the hallway: Mokuba and Noa were out and about, they were definitely drastically active. I've never said I didn't live in a madhouse. No sign of the taller two Kaibas, though, but no surprise there. Seth and Treeboy were usually holed up in the office downstairs as soon as the sun went down; I'd have to walk right by them to go to the den to crash for a bit.

And surely enough, they were in the office, arguing loudly enough that hearing them through the walls and the closed doors wasn't really an issue, even for an almost regular human like me. Guess it was time to check up on my vamps, whether they liked it or not. As per usual, I just barged right in without bothering to knock, not that it seemed to make any difference; they seemed too far into the argument to notice me right away, so I just dropped down into a chair to sit it out.

Predictably, at least for Treeboy, it didn't take long before hard blue eyes settled on me. "What are you doing here, Bakura?" Woah, I couldn't tell if there were fangs in that, but if there weren't, then they weren't far off.

I shrugged easily. "Just checking in on my favorite vampires, seeing what all the yelling is about."

He frowned a bit, and that was how I knew just how bad half my face was starting to look. Live with Treeboy a couple of years, and you start picking out the meanings of his many varieties of frowns. This one, for instance, was annoyed with a half side of concerned. I might be a bit harder to hurt now, but that didn't always mean anything. "Nothing important." Just like that didn't mean too much coming from him.

"Bullshit." Gratifying, to see how fast he could go from perplexed back to the default stoic/pissy look. "Coming from you that means exactly two things: jack and shit. It's your standard answer when you don't want someone getting involved. Seth, what the hell's going on?"

There was a longer debate behind darker blue eyes, and for a moment or two there, I almost thought even Seth wasn't going to say anything, at which point I would have had to resort to more drastic measures, which may or may not have included beating it out of one of them. Thankfully for them, though, it seemed to be confession time. "Seto's been getting some strange letters lately."

"Weird'?" Well, that opened up a lot of possibilities when it came to people in this house. Weird could range from actual fan letters to death threats. Yami had gotten more... Not thinking about Yami. "Define 'weird'."

Wordlessly, Seth handed me over a sheet of paper. It was handwritten in a spidery script, nothing I recognized. It was good thing I'd been in this house for over two years; it made reading weird handwriting in English a less difficult, though definitely not easy. "Meet me. I have information about what happened a

year ago'?" I read aloud carefully, at least partially to be certain I was getting it correct. "The hell?"

Treeboy shrugged. "All I can guess it means is other vampires we met at Halloween." And the less said about that, the better. No one knew about the mark or the ass-kicking we received -- and frankly I think we were both happy with it staying that way. He shrugged again. "We do need to find out what caused them."

"Are you fucking mental?" If looks could kill, I think Treeboy would have just planted me. "I know what you're thinking, and you are *not* going alone. We just got you broken in. I don't want to have to train a new Master of the City."

Mister Smooth-as-hell Seth jumped in right then. "Why don't you go with him then?" I'm pretty sure my eyes nearly fell out of my head when I goggled like that at the man. Apparently Treeboy's better than I realized at only giving the bare bones of a description. It's either that or Seth was sending us out to off us both. "The two of you did pretty well with that situation last year, and as you said, Seto doesn't need to go alone."

Well, it was not like he didn't have a point, and there wasn't any way to argue it without revealing what happened last year. Treeboy didn't look any happier about the matter than I felt, so it wasn't like I wasn't going to get a chance to make someone fucking miserable. "Fine. I suppose Treeboy does need a keeper after all."

Damn, I must have been slipping; all I got was an eyeroll. "Whatever. Let's get out of here." I got a half-hearted push towards the door. "Come on. It'll do you good to get out of the house." Which, given the glare he sent upstairs as we headed out the front door, I was guessing to be Treeboy-speak for I needed to spend some Yami-free time. Great, one little mark and he starts to think he could run my life.

Oh yeah, guessing who was definitely going to get lectured on the car ride to... Where were we going anyway? "Do you even have any idea where you're supposed to meet this guy?"

Rather than deign himself to give a real answer, he thrust a slip of paper at me. I caught it reflexively and glanced down at the address on it. No building name or anything, and it was an area of town I didn't recognize. "This was in the envelope with the note."

This would *not* go well. "Okay, but if it's a trap, don't blame me."

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You know, somehow I didn't realize Treeboy knew how to drive. I always figured, you know, he sat down in the car and one of the drivers just showed up. A weird thought, I know, but somehow it made sense in my head at the time. But the blue, an idiot could have guessed that. Obsession much?

He didn't say a word, which somehow was what struck me as really odd, though. Weird, huh? Treeboy was never been a big talker, but when you were waiting to catch crap... Well, it could go either way, which would be worse: the waiting or the actual conversation (read: argument) that was inevitably going to ensue. Really, it was just as well I had no intention of letting him give me the other marks: if I were his human servant, I'd have to kill him within a few months.

We were out of the gates and pulled onto the main road before he finally opened his mouth. "You realize Rebecca just won the bet."

Talk about unexpected. The idea that Treeboy even *knew* about the betting pool was actually kind of amusing; I didn't think he lowered himself to keep up with little things like that. "She was the only one who bet on Yami?" He nodded, and I smirked for a second before realizing it hurt too much to bother. "She must have cleared a fair share then."

"Over fifteen hundred American." Wow. I'd be impressed if it weren't for the fact I knew they were betting

my temper would snap first. And I couldn't deny it came close a few times. But there was no way I was taking a swing at anyone, at any of my people, not after Oyaji. I'd seen what happens once you start hitting people close to you -- I'd lived it and I had seen its consequences; that's why I could hold myself back.

And I remembered the way I'd blacked out once I started hitting Oyaji with that fireplace poker. I couldn't hit him because I didn't know if I'd be able to stop.

"Who all betted?" Not that I was plotting revenge or anything. Perish the thought. Who would ever think I'd want revenge?

"All the wolves, most of the cats, Varon, Mokuba, Noa." He made a turn that felt like ninety degrees; holy shit, did he learn to drive from Akito? I just found myself a lot more interested in buckling in and finding something to hold on to. "Ishtars One and Two couldn't decide which weapon you were going to use, so they didn't bet. I believe Yuugi bet double."

"The midget's in for it," I managed to grit out between clenched teeth, pretty sure there would be impressions of my fingers on the arm rest for all time. "I can't believe he'd bet on his brother getting his lights punched out."

He shrugged. "You aren't known for your self-restraint or thinking things out before you do or say them." And then my teeth were clenched to keep from growling, and I was holding on to the arm rest to keep from grabbing him, shaking him, and demanding to know what the fuck that was supposed to mean. And who said I had no self-restraint? "Or will Kisara find a body upstairs?"

"Asshole."

"Which I'm assuming means no." I released the arm rest long enough to flip him off. He didn't seem to notice, which meant he was concentrating hard on the road -- which probably meant he was about to do something he didn't want to -- which would probably be the lecture we both knew was coming. "So what brought it on?"

"The fight? He's had some ghosts following him around since the kidnapping that he never bothered to mention."

And that got me Kaiba Frown Number Three (so named because many of the Kaibas use them): confusion. "Did he know about them?"

I shot him one of the deadliest glares in my arsenal, which happened to be improving the longer I spent around the Kaibas, the masters of the deadly glare. But that also apparently meant they were immune to them because it rolled right off him. "Yes, he knew."

"So that's what started the fight." Shifting slightly was the only indication he gave of this being an... uncomfortable conversation for him. Otherwise he was a rock, and God damn it, it made me want to hit him even more. But moving at all meant he really didn't want to be doing the 'personal' talk, which any other time would have made me want to antagonize him the details... if it wasn't my life we were discussing. "So what led to the punch?"

"Nothing that's any of your damn business." Great, I'd been kidnapped to talk about my relationship. If I hadn't been in fear for my life with the way he drives, I might have been tempted to let him have it. As it was, I just wanted to survive the ride. "He brought up Amane, why he hadn't know about her." And why the hell was my mouth moving without my brain? "I told him that I didn't tell Malik about her till I'd known him two years."

"And *that's* what set him off?" I couldn't help but think that Yami's IQ just went down about twenty points in Treeboy's book. Not that he thought too highly of Yami's intelligence anyway. "Why?"

"The nutjob and I had a thing together, back before I left Tokyo. Five years ago," I added for clarification. Like he didn't already know. As anal as Treeboy was, he probably had dossiers on us to put the Tokyo police, the military, and the American FBI to shame. "I told Yami about it a few months ago." I turned my attention out the window at to the scenery whipping by. "To say he took it badly would be an understatement."

Another sharp turn, and I was officially in areas of town I wasn't familiar with. And damn it, I was *not* getting a bad feeling about this! There was no way... Well, no, fuck, there were plenty of ways this could all go wrong, but thinking about them just tended to make the whole situation worse, and it was bad enough as is.

"Why do you stay with him?"

I didn't have to look at him to know he wasn't looking at me. He would have his eyes locked on the road. He probably hadn't meant to say that out loud, but it was out -- and I'd be damned if it didn't need an answer.

"Because you so enjoy his presence. I'd hate to deprive you of that."

"Bakura..." And that had been growled. Score one for me; I made the Ice Prince lose his cool. "If you didn't have the first mark, we'd probably be taking you to the hospital right now."

"That's pushing it a bit, Treeboy. Yami's human. There's no way he could hit me that hard."

"Nonetheless, you have the first mark and therefore are harder to hurt, and he still managed to do that to you." He reached over with one hand and flipped the visor down. A mirror was there, believe it or not. There weren't any at all in the house, so I didn't think there would be any in the car short of the rear view. "Take a look."

"Okay!" It was all I could do not to scream the words. "Just put both of your hands back on the wheel!"

Once he'd complied, I did look, and okay, yes, it did look pretty bad. But it was far from the worst bruise I'd ever had -- and it had only been one punch. Oyaji had usually doled them out in sets of ten or more. Not that the number of hits discounted the fact he'd hit me at all, and I was still steamed about that. Even more so, since it was Treeboy giving me the lecture. Still, it was a fairly bad bruise: it was already turning weird colors and starting to swell. It probably wasn't going to be bad enough to impair my vision, but I was definitely going to be uncomfortable the next few days. Maybe Treeboy did have a bit of a point: ordinarily, I'd have been at least knocked out by this. And if this was *with* the first mark in place, how bad would it have been without it?

New rule: Yami could punch like a son of a bitch, so if there was something I needed to tell him that I thought he wouldn't like, I wouldn't tell him. Not too big a deal; it was not like my life was an open book for him or anybody to read. I still had secrets no one, not even the brat or Malik knew, not the least of which being the real story about what happened last Halloween.

And he caught me staring at the mirror. "So why do you stay with him, Bakura? I can have him thrown out in half a minute."

Was that a Treeboy-ish offer to help out? How... interesting. I guess he deserved an honest, non-joking answer after that. "Most of the time, I enjoy the fighting, at least when punches aren't being thrown. It's fun because we're such total opposites. I like making up after the fights. And..." How to put this? "He makes the voices stop."

It was a damn good thing no one else was on the road this time of night: he skidded across the road when he whipped his head around to stare at me, from what I was catching out of the corner of my eye.

Well, that was odd. There should still be people out, walking if not driving, this close to the sun going down, but the streets were utterly deserted. Maybe this part of Domino actually shut down at night? Every window we passed, whether it was a shop or a home, was black. If the streetlights weren't on, I'd have wondered if there was a power outage, but with them still functioning...

"Voices?" For all his surprised turn to stare at me and the road skid, his voice was amazingly calm. Had no one told him, though? I certainly didn't recall it if we had. In fact, the only conversation I could remember Treeboy being present for was Kitty's extremely abbreviated one two years ago, before we'd known he was Master of Domino, and that was just that I could sense ghosts. Nothing about all the fun extras. "What voices?"

"Ghosts, mostly. Spirits, that sort of thing."

"I thought you just sensed them." He paused to shudder very slightly, almost imperceptibly. "And using them to tear things apart."

I snorted. "Just sensed them? Yeah, right. They do everything but knock on the front door when they want to be noticed." In fact, a few of them had even done that, but there was no reason for him to know that. "I can see them, hear them, and you already know I can call them." I laughed, completely humorlessly, and he stared at me like I'd gone over the deep end. "I can even tell you exactly how many people have died in your house."

If vampires could go white, he probably would have then. "Would I want to know?"

"Probably not." The number was almost definitely higher than he'd be comfortable with, even with the laws against hunting humans that had been passed about four years ago.

He straightened the car onto the correct side of the road again, his entire demeanor relaxing. Damn, now that would be a neat talent: the ability to look completely calm no matter what. Probably one of those useful Kaiba talents they'd never share, though. "So you can hear, see, and summon these ghosts?" I nodded. "Those are the voices Yami stops?" Another nod, but a bit more hesitant than the last. I couldn't really decide if I should tell him about The Voice, as I still thought of it even knowing its name, or not. Somehow he caught the hesitancy and asked, "What else?"

"It's mostly the ghosts, but," I had to take a deep breath before I could say it, it sounded so outlandish, "there is one other voice. I just don't hear it as often, only when something bad is happening. Sometimes I can stop it myself, but sometimes Yami is the only one who can." There was no point in telling him the only times I'd controlled it myself, I'd either rode it out till something (like Mini-Me suddenly being alive) surprised me or I'd been rendered unconscious.

"What kind of a voice?"

I shook my head. "I don't really know. I first felt it the first time I summoned all those ghosts at Pegasus', when we found out about you being the Master, then when Cynthia was shot. Then I heard it a lot louder when I... took care of Oyaji. The worst, though, was last Halloween."

That caught his attention. "You heard it then too?"

"Right before I got bit." And as I recalled it, the only thing that shut The Voice up that time was my head hitting a wall at high speed, not an experience I'd like to repeat any time soon. I didn't think he really wanted to hear that either.

And damn it, I refused to start having a bad feeling! Because I wasn't! Not a snowflake's chance in hell. There was no way I was going to have a bad feeling before he even parked the car.

"Any ideas on what it is?" So he wasn't even going to bother asking if I was a few more steps around the



bend than usual? Well, that was refreshing. I could get spoiled on non-reactions... which would be why I hadn't mentioned The Voice to Kitty and begged Mai not to mention it to the other wolves. Non-reactions were pretty much an exception to the rule where Weres were concerned.

"Not really. That first, the ghosts reached for it because of how powerful it is -- and I think it was in Tokyo, somewhere underground. It's coming knocking on my mind here in Domino every time since then. It said a name last Halloween, but..."

He waited a moment before prompting, "But?" I kept my gaze fixed on what I could make out of the scenery rushing by. There were fewer and fewer buildings, all of them dark. That just couldn't be good. And the flickering streetlights just cast an even more ominous feeling.

"It told me to say its name and it would destroy all those creatures. I don't think saying its name would be a good thing. Do you know where the hell we are?"

"There's a church a few blocks from here. I believe that's where we're supposed to meet this person. If I could find a way to block the voices--"

"Kaiba." I think he blinked; I know he swerved slightly. "Yeah, I can call you by name. I know you mean well and all, but lay the hell off." From the look on his face, I had to guess no one had ever said anything like that to him before. And he'd dated Kitty how long? "I'm pissed at Yami, but I'm also rather attached to the little asshole Pharaoh. Yes, you have a mark on me, and I appreciate you saving me the weeks of healing and putting up with Varon's shit it would have taken otherwise. But that doesn't put you in charge of my sex life. And if you try to pull Master of the City rank, I *will* yank the tree out of your ass and stake you with it."

Well, that actually felt pretty good. He looked stunned for all of a minute, then the expression slowly graduated to pissed off, not that it was a huge difference between the two unless one knew what to look for -- and I did. You couldn't go by the face because that rarely changed; it was all in the eyes, now I could meet them at least. The thought briefly struck me that I was sitting in a very small enclosed space with a master vampire who I was doing a rather thorough job of cheesing off, but I let it pass right on by. Pissing off said master vampire and *not* getting snapped in half like a twig was one of the perks of being among said master vampire's people; we might annoy the shit out of him sometimes, but he'd sooner walk out in the sunlight than betray one of us. I knew the feeling; I was much the same way.

No, what concerned me was that the angry expression changed again, this time to something more indefinable, something I couldn't recall ever seeing cross his eyes before, and he started slowing the car, finally bringing it to a halt at the mouth of a thin street between two abandoned-looking buildings. Metal piping that might have once been bicycle racks in a better life stood between us and the alley; if I were the poetic sort, I'd have said they were like sentinels standing guard.

He opened the door, and that was when it hit me like a metaphysical punch in the gut: death, old, recent, and fresh all clamoring for attention at once. In fact, one of them seemed so fresh that Treeboy must have caught the scent of the blood... because even I could almost smell it. The feeling I was picking up, the death, it was so strong that it was almost overwhelming. Someone -- or more probably several someones -- had died painfully here in the last few nights.

To my own surprise, I didn't want to find out. Hell, I didn't even want to follow Treeboy out of the car, but at the same time, I had to know. I damn sure didn't want to so much as contemplate reaching for the souls that had to be nearby (it's a rare ghost that leaves the scene of its murder), but it wasn't like the Ice Prince was going to turn it up on his own. So I reached -- then froze.

I guess I was standing there in shell shock a few seconds too long because Treeboy prompted, "Bakura?" That snapped me back out of it.

"Several people died near here."

He nodded, looking away, down that dark alley that oddly seemed like something from a nightmare to me. "I can tell that much."

"They died... but there's no souls left."

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And that's how I ended up here. We just had to be curious, had to find out what was going on. And no, I'm not whining. See how happy you are when you just a few moments - at best - from death, more rotting zombies than even Treeboy can count (makes me glad for mortal vision, because if there are more beyond the thirty or so I spotted earlier, I don't want to see them) all trying to get in here for a snack, and oh yeah, stuck in here with Treeboy, of all people! My night just keeps getting better and better.

I think the sight is going to be burned into my eyes for the rest of my life... however short that might be at this point. Another ten, twenty minutes? Half an hour, if I'm really lucky? I'm not sure if that implies good luck or bad. If it's good, then given how my life tends to go the exact opposite, we're screwed and they'll tear their way in here any minute; but if it's bad, then we may have a few minutes' breathing room to formulate something like an escape plan. Well, a few minutes' breathing room for the one of us who breathes.

*//You will call me.//* It sounds so damn certain that I can almost resist it. It makes resisting it a little easier, anyway. *//Call my name. Summon my power, and I will destroy all that stands against you.//*

I thump the back of my head against the door I'm pressed against, trying my best to block it out while I'm still breathing and can. I can't hit it as hard as I'd like, hard enough to knock me out: for one, I stand a pretty good chance of being eaten alive if I'm unconscious; for a second point, there's no guarantee that would help; thirdly, Treeboy might eat me if I'm not helping with this door; and finally, the wood would probably splinter if I hit my head any harder. It wasn't exactly sturdy even before the legions of the undead... dead... how does one describe zombies anyway? Or would they be ghouls? Not that I'm going to stop and ask, of course.

For that matter, what were the odds that Treeboy would get called out to the one cemetery in Domino with enough people in the ground for someone to attempt a half-decent -- okay, very decent and completely effective -- zombie raising. I may not be able to raise a zombie myself, but I've read up on it, mostly so I could answer any and all the questions Treeboy and the other Kaibas kept pestering me with, and I've been working on a theory on what we're doing stuck with this many (and I'm not asking *how* many) zombies.

If anyone ever gets a chance to investigate this, if there's anyone left in Domino after this (and I'm not being frantic or anything -- it's just that there are so many of them!), they're going to find someone made a heavy-duty sacrifice to make this cemetery sit up. Someone planned this out to the exact detail: they knew how to get Treeboy here, they knew what to say to get me here as well, and they knew what to do to raise an entire cemetery.

*//Call me, and I will change it.//*

"Doesn't work like that." Holy fuck, now I'm talking back to it out loud. Now there's a sign of insanity. I've stepped over the deep end. With the look Treeboy's giving me, though, either he thinks it wasn't a far jump to begin with or he knows what's happening. Why the hell did I tell him anyway? Not my brightest move.

"It's talking to you?" And how the hell does he sound so cool and collected? I mean, Halloween was bad enough, but this is about a million times worse, and he sounds like this is no more troubling than a misfiled paper. Hell, maybe less so. I've seen some major Treeboy wiggling from things being out of place. Hence is why I have a little fun rearranging during the day sometimes. Keeps him on his toes.

"Nah, they're singing the latest pop hits out there. Yes, it's talking to me!" Never said I'm graceful under pressure... or nice when I'm in pain. In fact, I think I've made a point of telling it like it is: that I'm a little bastard when I'm stressed or hurting, and I'm both right now.

//NOW!//

Wood from the wall near me splinters in time to the demand. Tiny slivers hit me like miniature daggers of pain. On their own, they probably wouldn't even really sting, but with the headache I'm rapidly developing, the wrenched muscles from running to get the hell away from those things outside, the bruises from diving in what I'm guessing is a gardener's shed, the black eye and swollen cheek Yami gave me, and the cuts I'm still finding where sharp, dead fingernails managed to score on me, it's all adding up to be a world of hurt.

"Oww! Fuck!"

Heads are going to roll.

I swear to God, I'm going to find responsible parties -- or even people who look vaguely responsible -- and rip them limb from limb. Whoops, bad analogy, given my current situation.

You know, it wasn't too many nights ago that Yami, the brat, Mini-Me, and I were on a couch, laughing uncontrollably at a bootleg horror movie with characters caught in a situation very much like what I find myself in. And, somehow, the only thing that keeps circling through my mind is, oddly enough, I didn't think it would smell like this. Weird. I'm probably not too far from being torn limb from limb myself, and I'm more concerned about how the things about to kill me smell.

"Somehow this is all your fault."

I hold back a growl but only barely -- and badly. "I hate you. This is not my fault. You were the one who got the invitation. I just tagged along to be nice."

"You don't know what that word means, Bakura."

"Like you do?"

Is this really how I'm going to die? Snarking it out with Treeboy? I guess I'd been hoping for maybe something a little less... typical for how my life tends to be. Maybe even with Yami...

I'm not thinking of Yami. I'm pissed at Yami. Being pissed might get me through this. It's a little hard to concentrate, but just out of habit, I reach again for a ghost, any ghost, anything close enough to be of some help. Because of course, the cell phones don't work. Not a single bit of reception out here, and even if there was, this doesn't strike me as something we can get the wolves to come save our asses from. Magnum can come rolling in and kick all the ass he wants, but I don't see where it would be a huge help.

And damn it, I can't think how to kill ghouls. Or zombies. Well, zombies, if we could get a pretty powerful animator, we might be able to put them back in their graves, even with the sacrifice that woke them up, but these things, they seem to be people-hungry. And we don't have an animator anyway, not on staff, not on call, and the only wizard I can think of who might know how to help...

"Ideas yet?"

Again, my best glare rolls right off him. For now I'm going to attribute that to the fact a lot of his concentration is going into keeping the door closed to our uninvited guests outside, because I know *I'm* not the one with preternatural strength working wonders on it. I am doing my part, though, sitting on the

dirt-packed floor and bracing my entire weight against it.

With a growl that's a little hard to hear over all the other, more impressive ones from outside, I answer, "Not on how to stop them, but I know how they're awake."

He turns so that his back is to the door as well (Surely, there's a 'Kaibas are better than and above everyone else' metaphor here that I'm just missing) and calmly continues, "It couldn't hurt to know."

I will not rabbit punch him in the leg. I will not. I have much better restraint than that. Flip him off, on the other hand... "You saw what happened just before we got here."

He nods. "Mahaado." One word saying a million things, perfect description of a Kaiba.

"They sacrificed him -- and I guess all those other people we picked up on -- to raise them. Using a wizard's blood... I guess they either got ghouls or flesh-eating zombies."

"Difference?"

"Not a lot, unless you're an animator." Or unless you're going outside to check. I'm not. In fact, at the moment, I'm very fond of this little shed, for as long as it holds up. Another five to fifteen, at best -- and when I say 'at best', I do mean at the very best, the most generous amount of time that I possibly can give these walls. The Ice Prince here probably isn't even giving them that long. "Fact is," I pause to rebrace myself, since the door's starting to give, "I know raising an animator as a zombie makes ghouls. I have no idea what using a wizard as the 'white goat' would do. This, I guess."

"White goat?" Haha, Kaiba Frown Number Three: confused and not happy to be. Check another point in the Bakura column. One more small victory for me, again. "Tell me there's something lost in the translation, or you're not pronouncing it right, or it's a euphemism, or something."

"It's a euphemism," I answer with an eyeroll. Really, just sometimes he gets on my nerves bad enough to consider breaking in a new Master of the City. But only sometimes, because who knows who we might get next. Maybe Noa, and that'd be terrifying. "It means human sacrifice. Someone used his death, and all those other deaths, to raise these guys."

"What kills zombies?" And wow, he doesn't know. He really doesn't know. There is something Treeboy doesn't know. Amazing.

"Not a lot. Fire. They don't like being out in the sunlight. Sounds like someone else we know, doesn't it? It doesn't kill them though, unlike someone we know."

"Now is not the best time for sarcasm, Bakura--"

"It's always the best time for sarcasm, Treeboy."

"--not when we're running quickly out of options, and my gods, don't you come with an off switch?!"

So... do I get double points for making him lose his cool in the face of imminent death? "What were you just saying about sarcasm?"

*//Say it, now.//*

"Fuck!" I'm not crying. My eyes may be watering from the pain (one head isn't supposed to have to contain a voice like that) and I may be almost ready to beg Treeboy for a whammy so I can at least semi-block it out, but I am most certainly not crying. I don't cry, never have. And it's only this... thing in my head that ever makes me feel like it.

//Say it and this will end.//

"Fuck fuck fuck fuck *fuck!*" Great, I'm repeating myself. And I didn't notice it till now, but apparently, my head is keeping a beat with my mouth, because I'm banging it on the door in time to the words. Come on, unconsciousness. I don't even care if I get eaten, though I will be hoping for Treeboy to eat me and not those things outside; he'll probably make it hurt less. I'm not seriously considering this, am I? "Get out of my head!"

A hand clamps down on my shoulder. For half a second, I think they've managed to get through the door at last, before it sinks in that, while it's cooler than a human's would be, even through my shirt, it's not grave cold. In fact, it's vampire cold. Have they ever figured out the relative temperature difference between vampires and humans? Why am I wondering about this now?!

I let my eyes follow it up an arm, and wow, it's attached to Treeboy. I'll be damned. Go figure. Now isn't that just a tad on the odd side? Okay, forget 'a tad'; this is extremely strange. What? Does imminent dismemberment make him actually sentimental or something? Doesn't do a thing for me, except piss me off. I rather like all my limbs exactly where they are, with no new holes or additional injuries on them.

Okay, weirdly, I can concentrate a little better now. Just a little. The voice has retreated somewhat, and all I can figure is that's thanks to the first mark. So that adds another choice for making the voice retreat, in addition to, one, Yami and two, me knocking myself unconscious. If we live through this, it means I have options. Not that hanging out with Treeboy is always an appealing one, but sometimes, like now, when Yami and I are fighting... It starts looking a bit better. I wonder what that says about Yami's and my relationship, such that it is.

Still, he's not going to be able to hold this for long, not with those things trying so hard to get in. Not to say I don't appreciate the effort, but I'd rather live another two minutes, even if I'm being driven out of my head. And frankly, I'm not used to altruism, if that's what one could call this, and I never would have pictured it coming from the Ice Prince of all people. Furthermore, it makes me nervous; what exactly is he up to? If this is more of that 'I have a mark on you so I get a say in your life' bullshit, I'm staking him, plain and simple. One mark isn't enough to take me down with him, is it? I can still kill him without suiciding myself, right? Might still have to do it either way.

Either way, it deserves something. "Thanks," I say shortly. Because the brat has succeeded a bit on driving some manners into me. Why am I always practicing them on the Ice Prince, I wonder?

He nods once in return, and that's that on the subject. "We're running short on time." I half-glance at his arm and try to read his watch upside-down, with little luck. "It'll be dawn in an hour, and it doesn't appear as though they've left the structure enough intact for me to stay here during the day."

Not a word about how they're going to get in here any minute. That's refreshing. Not that *I'm* going to quit worrying about--

A voice outside screams something very much like "Get them", and the door lurches forward. Despite every bit of my body weight, such that it is, being pressed hard against the door, I feel myself slide a few inches. The Ice Prince lets go of me to offer up a bit more of his own strength, and it slams back into place. Not that it matters too much: they'll be through the walls soon enough. They're making a new door on the wall a few feet to my right on the opposite wall. They get through that last bit of wood, and the fat lady will be striking up an aria, prima donna that she is.

Right beside me, the wood completely shatters in a fist-sized hole, and the smell quadruples. And if that's not bad enough, the hand that comes through grabs a chunk of my hair, and it apparently decides to pull me through its tiny hole by the hair, rather than wait to get in the regular way. Fuck! And I cut it after Halloween, from the small of my back up to above my shoulders. I guess that wasn't enough. I reach behind me and grab the fingers holding me in place -- and do my best to keep my stomach from rolling as they snap beneath mine. Human fingers shouldn't break that easily. Ugh, I hate zombies. I really, really

do.

I jump back up to my feet the second I'm free and put my weight back on the door. Blue eyes glance at me. It's only through living with various Kaibas for two years that I recognize that faint expression of worry hiding well behind them. Great, the Ice Prince is worried; we're doomed. We are so fucking doomed. Focus on something else, Bakura. "Sounds like a woman out there bossing them around," I note absentmindedly. "Did we forget to leave someone a tip sometime?"

Even with both of us putting our full weight on it, the door tries to move again. "Bit of an extreme reaction for that, don't you think?" Was that...? I think that was a bad attempt at humor from the Ice Prince. Amazing. Will the wonders never cease?

"I don't know. There was this one time, back in Tokyo, when some guy stiffed me for something I stole for him, and I--"

My head explodes. That's how it feels at least. I'm actually a little surprised not to see brain bits on Kaiba. I might have even screamed, but I'm not sure. A cold hand latches on to my forearm, right over where I got bitten last year. Vampire cold again, not dead cold. Doesn't make any difference. This time I know I scream, and even though it's Kaiba and I know he's trying to work the mark between us, nothing happens, and that thing's screaming in what remains of my head. I'm screaming back, and Kaiba -- Treeboy -- the Ice Prince is yelling at me as well. None of it's making any sense through the pain, but I think I know one word coming from somewhere -- nowhere -- everywhere: "Zork".

It's only when I feel what can only be spirits start to pass through me, familiar ones -- there goes Kaiba, and Mokuba, and the other vampires, Ryou, the leopards, Jounouchi, Yuugi... Yami -- belonging to people who aren't dead, not in the strictest sense of the word, and the world begins to spin into blackness, that I realize one very important thing.

I'm the one who said it.

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He awoke with a start.

For a long moment, he was uncertain as to just what woke him up. The droning voice at the front of the room seemed answer enough to that. How in the world had he managed to fall asleep in class? It had been forever since he had done that, since he left his old school in fact. Maybe that hadn't been that long ago, strictly speaking, but it might as well have been lifetimes ago.

Absently, he groped against his chest, breathing a little more easily as he felt the cool gold of the Sennen Ring beneath his uniform. It had reappeared shortly after Yuugi and the others had left his apartment from the debacle that was the Monster World game. */Are you there?/*

It should feel a little weird talking to a voice in his head, especially one that had so very recently put him through hell again and again and again. But it was reassuring too in a weird way. In an entirely too frightening way, it had been nice to have all his friends with him at all times. It had been nice to have someone to play with - and the voice in his head had given him that. And now that they were gone, well, at least the voice would be with him forever.

*/As long as you have the Ring, baka yadonushi,/* it returned snidely. */Only as long as you hold the Ring. Good job on not letting them take it./*

It was probably bad to beam under praise like that, but it was hard not to. In his life, praise had been all too rarely dealt out. In fact, he could barely remember a kind word from his father; those had been

restricted to Amane, while he and his twin brother were lucky if their father ignored them completely. But at least his father was dead, Amane was safe in Tokyo with her mother, and Bakura...

No, wait, that wasn't right. Amane was dead, not his father. His father was alive and well in Tokyo, if still ignoring him completely. And he had never had a brother, let alone a twin. Where had that come from? He may have had some days where his brain didn't want to process things quite correctly, but this was beyond the pale even for him. Maybe it was that he wanted a brother, wanted Amane back, wanted not to be alone anymore.

*/Are you going to keep whining all day long? If you are, I'm going back to sleep./*

And that was where the voice of the Spirit of the Sennen Ring came in: it was always going to be with him as long as he held the Ring. It might not be family, not for real, but it possessed a permanence that family sometimes failed to provide.

*/Do you ever dream?/* He just barely held back a wince, completely unable to believe he had dared to ask the Spirit that.

If a disembodied spirit could roll its eyes, he was pretty sure the one living in his head would have right there. */Yadonushi, what are you on?/*

*/I was just curious. I had a weird dream just now, and I wondered if you ever dreamed./*

*/Weirder than your life? That's pretty damn weird, brat./*

He nearly started in his seat. How strange that the Spirit would chose to call him that. The brother he had in the dream called him that. He couldn't remember if the Spirit had ever called him that before; he was almost positive that it hadn't. It had always been *yadonushi* or nothing.

*/I dreamed I lived in a world where vampires and shapeshifters existed. I had an older twin brother who could call ghosts and spirits. Kaiba-san was a vampire - the Master of Domino even!/* He resisted the urge to look at what he had found out was Kaiba Seto's empty seat. The CEO had been in some sort of waking coma for weeks now; he had overheard from some of the girls in the room that it had started at or just after something called Death-T.

It snorted, sounding terribly amused at the description. */Mister President Kaiba would be something like that. What about the fucking Pharaoh? And his little midget?/*

*/The other Yuugi was in it. I think he was involved with my brother./*

*/Gross./*

He bit back a grin that wouldn't be a bit appropriate for school. The Spirit had made no bones about disliking the Spirit of the Sennen Puzzle. In fact, he had gone to great lengths to explain - in very vivid terms - exactly how he felt about the other Spirit; the usage of crowbars and acid had been included in that rather impressive rant.

*/I think the other Yuugi could also see spirits and stuff like that,/* he paused as the Spirit snorted its laughter, */but his power seemed to be more about binding spirits to him than calling them. Niisan - I mean, my brother in the dream could make them do what he wanted. Hmm... Jounouchi-kun was also in it./* He hazarded a glance over his shoulder at his blond classmate. It looked like he was asleep or at least completely uncaring about what was going on in the classroom around him. */He was a shapeshifter, a wereleopard, I think. And there was someone in it who was something called a soul eater./*

*/An ahmet,/*the Spirit provided. It seemed puzzled that it had provided that tidbit of information to him, if the confused sound it made that was ringing around his head was any indication.

He decided to take pity on the Spirit and not inquire too heavily into how it knew such a random detail from his dream. It didn't mean he wasn't curious, but he was starting to learn when it was pointless to push and when he could get away with trying to find out more information. This was not one of the latter times. */Yes, that was it. Anyway, at the end of the dream, niisan - my niisan in the dream - had a fight with the other Yuugi and went off somewhere with dream got weird there. It was like I started feeling cold, and I knew he was in trouble. I remember trying to get to him to help him wherever he was, but then there was this searing pain and then darkness - and then I woke up./*

*/You dream fucked up, yadonushi. You do know that, right?/* the Spirit commented.

*/It just seemed so real - I mean, really real, like it was the reality and this was the dream./*

It snorted in his mind. He really didn't need its commentary on his mental state. He wasn't taking psych evals from the voice in his head. It was probably a biased source, after all.

It was sort of weird, though. Up until just now, he hadn't given too much thought about what the Spirit that lived in his head looked like. He had had an image in his head of the Spirit ever since the first time he heard its voice, but he hadn't put too much into it; he just needed a face to go with the voice, so he had made one up. Or had he? He always pictured someone who looked almost exactly like him, just a little taller, with much spikier but somewhat shorter hair. He imagined its eyes would be wilder by miles. For some reason, he had also always seen it with a scar on its face: a wicked line neatly bisecting the right side of its face from forehead nearly to chin. Two smaller lines cut through it just below its right eye, so that it looked like a badly drawn kana for "ki".

No, now that he thought about it, he had been picturing the Spirit of the Sennen Ring looking exactly as his brother in his dream looked. They could be doppelgangers. How strange...

*/That would be a nice dream now, wouldn't it?/* it interrupted his thoughts with. */That's not the world we're stuck with though. We have to live in the world we're in, and it fucking sucks. Now listen. What's that they're talking about Pegasus?/*

He made himself tune into what was being discussed around him: some sort of Duel Kingdom.