Yuu and Sebek's Bogus Journey

Posted originally on the fanfiction.lol at https://fanfiction.lol/works/111.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	General (non relationship-focused)
Fandom:	Twisted Wonderland (Video Game)
Relationships:	Yuu | Player & Sebek Zigvolt, Malleus Draconia & Yuu | Player, Azul Ashengrotto & Floyd Leech & Jade Leech, Azul Ashengrotto & Yuu | Player, Kalim Al-Asim & Jamil Viper, Kalim Al-Asim & Yuu | Player
Characters:	Yuu | Player (Twisted Wonderland), Malleus Draconia, Sebek Zigvolt, Kalim Al-Asim, Jamil Viper, Azul Ashengrotto, Jade Leech, Floyd Leech, Grim (Twisted Wonderland)
Additional Tags:	Humor, Canon Divergence, Set During Book 4: Schemer of the Scalding Sands, Nonbinary Yuu | Player (Twisted Wonderland), Canon-Typical Violence, you can interpret the octotrios whole deal as shippy, especially since i was inspired by twistedthorn's work
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of Much Ado About Yuu
Stats:	Published: 2022-07-05 Completed: 2023-09-01 Words: 14,942 Chapters: 9/9

Yuu and Sebek's Bogus Journey

by GloriousBookwyrm

Summary

Sebek agreed to do a favor for Malleus without asking what, so now he needs to protect Yuu while they investigate the goings-on of Scarabia dorm. If only that foolhardy human didn't insist on being difficult!
(Sequel to The Importance of Being Malleus)

Notes

Note from Present Me:
I figured out where to find chapter post dates! I'm not going back to fix The Importance of Being Malleus, but this fic and all the other fics I'm crossposting to here will have the correct chapter-by-chapter dates. My original author's notes have all been preserved.
Note from Past Me:
If you haven't read my other twst work, this is a direct sequel to that, so it's got a lot of important context. Also it's one of my favorite pieces of writing, so go read it!
If you have read it; I have returned! I also had my birthday recently and was gifted a lovely moodboard based on it!
The creator of that board, TwistedThorn, is also beta-ing this fic, big round of applause for them, also they write really good creepy Leechcest if you're into that.

Chapter 1: The Favor

This was definitely all Yuu's fault.

It started when Lord Malleus had approached him and Silver halfway through winter break, asking if one of them could do him a favor. Obviously Sebek had agreed, shouting his acceptance before Silver could shake off his perpetual grogginess to process the question. He didn't need to know what, exactly the favor was, just that he could be of service to Lord Malleus!

Then the favor turned out to be to accompany that lowly, unmagical human who'd had the *gall* to threaten him to dinner at Scarabia. Apparently they had noticed something amiss with how the students refused to talk about why they were staying over break, and how insistent Jamil had been that they come over, and while they didn't have enough sense not to walk into an obvious trap, they at least wanted to bring some extra firepower.

"I would accompany them myself, but my presence would put everyone on their guard, which would impede any investigation. Thank you for agreeing to this, I can be at ease knowing that you'll keep them safe, and I'm sure Yuu will feel the same."

Perhaps Sebek should have given Silver the chance to volunteer first, but there was no backing out now, not when Lord Malleus was putting his faith in him! Besides, surely Yuu would object as soon as they knew he was the one to agree.

"Wait *Sebek* volunteered? Really? Er, I'll be honest, he didn't exactly make a great first impression. Or a second one. And he ain't acing this one either, what with all the glaring. But," they turned toward Sebek, "If you're really willing to come along, then I'm willing to give you a chance."

They looked him straight in the eye, as if daring him to back down. As if! He had sworn to aid Lord Malleus in any and every way he could, there was no way he could refuse this task! If this human refused to send him away, then he had no choice but to protect them with all his might, whether they liked it or not!

Lord Malleus smiled slightly, and Sebek knew he had made the right choice. Then he immediately regretted it again when Yuu seized his liege's arm and manhandled him up the stairs to help them prepare, as if he were their servant! He had half a mind to march up there and give them a piece of his mind, if he didn't remember the last time so well.

After an agonizing 15 minutes, they returned downstairs with Lord Malleus and Grim.Yuu was wearing pretty much the same school uniform they had gone upstairs in, but had ditched the blazer and waistcoat, and had done their tie correctly for once. They had also attempted to tame their hair and tie it back, but it wasn't quite long enough for that and a few strands were already springing free.

"Thanks for helping with the tie, Hornton. I'll text you when we get back to Ramshackle, ok?"

Lord Malleus nodded, said his farewells to Yuu and Sebek, and disappeared in a cloud of little green lights. As soon as he was gone, Yuu turned toward Sebek. “So, does Malleus know about the, ah, *incident* ?”

Sebek scoffed, “Since Lord Malleus appears to enjoy your company, and you show no motivation to attack him, I elected to let it slide, especially since I may have been slightly at fault in that case.”

“In other words, you don’t want Malleus to know a sick human got the drop on you”

“Shut up!”

“Relax, I won’t be the first to tell him. And I promise not to pull a knife on you again. Well, I’ll tell you my boundaries with words *before* I pull the knife out, anyway. That aside, we should get our story straight before we get to Scarabia. What’s a reason you would voluntarily go to dinner with me without Malleus asking?”

Chapter 2: The Feast

Chapter Summary

Jamil really wishes people would tell him when they're bringing extra dinner guests.

Chapter Notes

Note from Present Me:
I edited the following note to remove a request for people to tell me if they think a tag applies. I'm more experienced with fic culture now, and know what tags apply to this fic.
Note from Past Me:
Jamil's voice took forever to nail down, but I really think this chapters works best from his POV. Also writing worst-faith interpretations of the protags was fun.

Also, there's fake dating shenanigans going on, but this is a purely platonic fic, and also they stop bothering with the ruse partway through the next chapter, so I didn't tag for it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jamil stared at Yuu, Grim, and their impromptu plus-one, trying to keep the disbelief off his face. "Let me get this straight, you just started dating in the five hours between texting me that you were coming tonight and now, so you decided to bring him with you, with no prior notice?"

"That is correct."

"Sorry I forgot to tell you."

They both looked impressively straight-faced given how ridiculous their story was. Besides the, well, everything, there was one big thing that was bothering him. "Weren't you dating Malleus?"

"What? No, we're-"

"THEY ABSOLUTELY WERE NOT!"

Or perhaps their story was true, if Sebek was that insecure about Yuu's friendship with the fae prince. Not that Jamil didn't understand. Even if he had the time for romance, he definitely wouldn't date anyone who was also friends with Kalim. Though admittedly that would be

more because of what it'd say about his partner's taste. Speaking of, Kalim had just arrived, throwing any chance of convincing Yuu that they just couldn't accommodate another guest on such short notice out the window.

"Yuu! We all missed you at the last housewarden meeting! How've you been? Oh, is that Sebek? It's kinda weird to see you without Silver!"

"Hi, Kalim! Been doing a lot better lately. Also I'm dating Sebek now! I hope inviting him along isn't too much of an inconvenience."

"Congratulations! And don't worry, Jamil always makes a ton of food, it'll be fine!"

Kalim and Yuu started chattering up a storm, and Jamil left to get an extra place setting. He had, in fact, cooked extra, but the presumption still grated. At least he would be done with Kalim soon. Yuu's "date," if that was really what he was, complicated things, but not beyond recovery. Not yet, at least. As he finished preparing the feast, he kept an eye on the group and listened in on their conversation.

Kalim was incredibly eager to hear all the details of Yuu's new-found love life as soon as humanly possible. Yuu and Sebek did their best to deflect and keep the conversation on Kalim and his decision to stay on campus over break, but they couldn't last forever. "C'mon, you gotta tell me *something* ! Like, how did you two meet?"

"He broke into my room and I threatened him with a knife."

Sebek spluttered, "That was-there were circumstances-it's not what it sounds like!"

"Yeah, for starters he was looking for Malleus."

Even Kalim was starting to look skeptical, "And why did you start dating again?"

"I admire his dedication to protecting those he cares about," Yuu replied with the cadence of someone reciting from memory.

"They were very insistent." Sebek, at least, sounded sincere.

Jamil chose then to announce that everything was ready for dinner, taking Yuu's audible sigh of relief as a point in his favor. Kalim was initially disappointed at the interruption, but quickly pivoted to bragging about Jamil's cooking. As if that, too, belonged to Kalim. *Ugh.* He caught Yuu looking at him with an expression of slightly quizzical concern, and quickly smoothed his expression out, back to its usual placidity. It didn't seem to stop their concern, but then Sebek accidentally served himself the chicken Jamil had prepared for the Scarabia students, not the less spicy one for the guests, and started yelling, and Yuu was distracted laughing at him. Despite the mockery, they did get him extra milk to wash down his throat. And then he served himself more of the Scarabia chicken, on purpose this time.

This time when Yuu asked about Kalim's winter break, he answered eagerly, telling them all about their recent defeats in Spelldrive and exams, and the training camp he was running. Jamil mostly just let him talk, only interjecting to clarify a few points and to play the role of

the devoted but long-suffering servant. Yuu and Sebek bought it completely, based on their expressions. They were both utter fools, and deeply insufferable ones at that, albeit in different ways.

First off, Sebek just. Would. Not. Shut. Up about duty and loyalty and all that crap. Every time he opened his mouth, it was about how praise-worthy his devotion to Kalim was, or how he wished he had accompanied his own master from birth the way Jamil did. And the worst part was how completely *sincere* he was about it. The idiot honestly thought that spending one's whole life under another's heel was somehow aspirational. Jamil had thought his parents, who couldn't conceive of a life free of their bond to the Asim family, lacked vision, but the loudmouthed freshman couldn't even see the chains of his own servitude to Malleus for what they were!

Yuu, on the other hand, was thankfully much quieter, but that just made them more unnerving. It wasn't obvious at first. From the way they engaged with Kalim, with the other Scarabia students, and with Jamil himself, as if they were all equals, he thought they were simply oblivious in the same way Kalim was. The way that came from having such privilege that one couldn't see the hierarchy they sat on top of. Except, there was the staring. Every time Jamil said anything, they would look straight at him, as if in that moment he had their pure, undivided attention. As someone with an eye-contact based signature spell, he never thought he'd ever meet someone who stared *too much* . And it wasn't just Jamil, they stared at everyone. Whenever anyone spoke, they would stare straight at that person and only look away when someone else picked up the conversation. It added another layer to their casual affect that took Jamil a minute to place. Approaching everyone informally was one thing, but they looked at everyone the same too, in a way that was difficult to fake.

They didn't seem to come from a rich background either. For instance, the seam on their left shoulder had been repaired by hand. Not well, but much better than he would have expected Kalim to manage on his own. In addition, when Kalim brought everyone to the treasury, he could practically hear their eyes pop out of their sockets, and caught them muttering to Grim about how a particular tapestry was probably worth twice as much as their childhood home. So, it wasn't that they were never taught that some people were above them, they were just too stupid to care. Somehow, that offended Jamil even more than Kalim's casual obliviousness.

As they returned to the lounge, Jamil thought over his plan. Both Yuu and Sebek seemed to be picking up on at least some of the hints he was laying down, but they were easily distracted, and kept halting conversation to argue. Maybe if he found a way to shut one of them up, and deliver some extra exposition to the other? He would have preferred to deliver it over several days, to make it seem more natural, but it had taken longer than he expected to convince Yuu to visit, and time was running out. His mind made up, he pulled Kalim aside.

"A moment, please."

"Hm? What's up, Jamil?"

"The one you behold is your master. When I ask you a question you will answer. When I give you a command you will assent. Snake Charmer."

Even with alterations, his plan was foolproof. By the time those idiots realized what was truly happening, it would be far too late.

Chapter End Notes

Next time, those two idiots realize what’s truly going on.

Chapter 3: The Plot

Chapter Summary

Sebek and Yuu start to put the pieces together.

Chapter Notes

Note from Past Me:
I've been trying to remember to write Grim more like a character and not a vaguely cat-shaped prop that Yuu only occasionally remembers exists, so he gets to contribute more this chapter

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sebek watched Jamil and Kalim drop back to talk to each other, and Yuu waited until they were out of line of sight before tapping his shoulder and pointing to a shadowed alcove. He followed them, keeping his eyes peeled for anyone who might be listening in. As soon as he was sure they were alone, he said, in a rather loud approximation of a whisper, "I hate this. I hate you. Why did I agree to pretend to date you!?"

"I don't like this either, but you vetoed all my other ideas, and *your* cover stories were completely ridiculous. Where would we even have gotten enough dalmations to pull your plan off!?"

"Hey, like I said before, if you need to fake-date *someone* from Ramshackle, and my hench-human isn't up to your standards, I could-"

"And I just remembered why I agreed with Yuu. Thank you Grim."

Yuu cleared their throat, "What I *actually* pulled you in here for was to compare notes on Kalim."

Grim blinked in confusion, "What's there to discuss? He seems the same as he does at housewarden meetings."

Sebek thought about what he'd seen, and hazarded a guess. "He does, but it's how everyone else is acting that's off, isn't it? The whole dorm seems tense."

“Exactly,” Yuu nodded, “Everyone’s walking on eggshells around Kalim, like they’re waiting for the other shoe to drop. And when I ran into Jamil in the kitchens the other day, everyone was acting like staying over break was some kind of punishment, not voluntary extra study time. Kalim’s acting just like he does at school, but the rest of the dorm is behaving like he could turn into someone completely different at any moment.”

It was an astute observation, especially for a human who seemed to think that deliberately walking into a potential trap constituted “investigation.” Unfortunately, if Kalim’s cheerful demeanor was an act he was putting on for his guests, he wasn’t going to drop it while they were present. “Let’s get back to the lounge and try to question people without Kalim present. If it becomes necessary, we’ll stay behind secretly to catch him in the act.”

“‘We’ll?’ You’re the least stealthy person I know, except maybe Jack. *I* will stay behind, and you’ll go back and tell Malleus what’s going on.”

“Absolutely not! I have sworn a solemn oath to Lord Malleus, and he has commanded me to protect you in your investigation! I cannot allow you to place yourself in danger without me there to guard you! Either I go with you or or you-!”

Yuu shoved a hand over his mouth, and worriedly peered around the corridor for potential listeners. “Shh! Look, let’s just get back to the lounge, and continue this discussion if and when it comes to that, ok?” There was nothing left to discuss, since Sebek was right, but he nodded anyway and Yuu removed their hand. Hopefully they’d get everything they needed questioning the Scarabia students, and this whole discussion would be moot.

The bad news was that they never got an opportunity to talk to anyone without Kalim, since he and Jamil beat Yuu and Sebek back to the lounge. The good news was they didn’t need to spy on Kalim to see why everyone was so nervous around him, since it was immediately apparent as soon as he saw them.

“There you are! What kind of guest makes their host wait like this? All of you into the courtyard now, you’ve held up our training exercises enough as is.” Kalim glared up at them, arms crossed and finger tapping impatiently against his elbow. Sebek glanced at Jamil, who was standing behind Kalim’s right shoulder with his head bowed, looking back up at him as if saying he should go along with Kalim’s whims. Yuu looked at Kalim, then looked at Sebek and shrugged, scooping Grim up in their arms and following their hosts outside.

The Scarabia students were all grouped into teams of five, arranged into two neat lines facing each other. Jamil bowed to Kalim and stepped into the closest team, readying his wand. One of the lines had one extra team with no opponent. Sebek wondered why they didn’t just split the team in two, or change how many people were on every team, until Kalim waved an imperious hand at the empty space. “Well, what are you three waiting for? Get into place so we can start!”

Sebek spluttered angrily. “All three of us!? But Yuu doesn’t even have magic, they can’t possibly-!”

“Well they should have thought of that before keeping me waiting.”

Sebek opened his mouth to retort, but Yuu stepped forward, letting Grim down as they spoke. “I’ve been in plenty of fights before, I’ll be fine!”

“Yes, you will be, because I promised Ma- er, myself that I would not allow my…partner to come to any harm! Stand back, and I will handle this battle!”

“If you insist,” Yuu rolled their eyes, but walked to the back of the area designated for the training match anyway. Grim stood up on his hind legs next to Sebek, waving his forepaws threateningly.

“Everyone in position? Begin on my mark, losing teams have to clean the lounge or do the night patrol. Three…two…one…Mark!”

At once, the opposing team sprang into action, two members stepping forward to send a spray of fireballs toward them. Sebek threw up a shield, and out of the corner of his eye he saw Grim returning fire.

His temporary charge and the cat did admittedly make a good team. Grim would scamper about the field and Yuu would watch the battle around him, shouting out which direction his next opponent was in. They were also watching what Sebek was doing, and though they knew better then to distract him or attempt to give him orders, he would occasionally spot someone starting to cast a spell he didn’t have a good counter for prepared, only for a spurt of blue flame to hit their hand or arm and disrupt the spell. However, for all that steely focus they had when it came to tracking the movements of Grim, Sebek, and anyone attacking the two of them, they had absolutely no awareness of anything targeting them specifically. They just stood in place, making no attempt to not be a sitting duck.

At one point, someone figured out how to send a shot in a wide arc around Sebek’s shield, and he had to drop it to run and deflect it before it could hit them. And when Yuu saw what was happening, did they move back? Dodge in case Sebek failed to block the spell in time? Perhaps finally realize that standing absolutely stock still while a fight happens around them is probably exactly how they got hospitalized by Azul? No, that would be too sensible. Instead, they had Grim cover Sebek’s flank while he ran, as if *he* was the one that needed defending. He did, in fact, successfully stop the spell that nearly hit Yuu in its tracks, because how could he shame Lord Malleus by failing? But their apparent inability to defend themself, when not ten minutes ago they were insisting that they didn’t need protection was still infuriating.

Finally, Kalim called time, and everyone stopped casting. He took a cursory glance at each pair of teams, declaring whichever ones looked less beaten-up to be the winner. Naturally, between Sebek’s iron-clad defense and Grim’s…something, their team had won, and were spared from cleanup. There was definitely enough evidence that something seriously wrong with Kalim, but he was too tired to be effective in a second fight so soon. Was this Kalim’s plan? To wear them out so that they couldn't offer any meaningful resistance? In that case, it’d be wiser to make their excuses, leave, and regroup. As much as retreating to gather reinforcements stung his pride, Yuu’s safety was his priority. He explained as much to them, and although they were clearly just as displeased as he was, they nodded and agreed to make their excuses and leave.

Before they could go to Kalim, Jamil stepped toward them. “Well, Yuu? Now that you’ve seen what we’re dealing with, what do you think?”

“Kalim seems way different than at the housewarden meetings, what happened to him!?”

“I believe the stress of his position is getting to him, it truly breaks my heart to see. We can discuss this tomorrow though, I hope?”

“Oh definitely! Actually, can you do us a favor and tell Kalim goodbye for us? We’re heading back to Ramshackle for tonight.”

“But it’s so late, and you must be exhausted! Please, stay the night here in Scarabia, I insist.”

Yuu fidgeted uncomfortably. “It’s not that far a walk, I don’t want to impose…”

“Oh it’s no trouble at all, I promise! We have plenty of spare rooms to put you up in.”

“Well that would’ve been nice to know when Azul took my dorm.” Yuu muttered, not quite quietly enough to not be heard, before speaking up, “But Sebek said he wants to return to Malleus, and if I’m walking him out, I might as well return home.”

At this, Jamil turned toward Sebek. “Is that so? Surely you can stay one night? I seriously doubt anything can happen to Malleus in such a short time.”

Sebek bristled, and opened his mouth, readying a lecture on the importance of his duty, but as his eyes met Jamil’s it caught in his throat. There was just something about those storm-grey eyes he couldn’t tear himself away from, even as he distantly felt his throat working to produce words he could not hear, and his feet carrying him away, all he could think about was that searing gaze. After what felt like both a few seconds and countless hours he managed to force himself to blink, and when he opened his eyes he was no longer in the lounge. He shook his head to clear it, and immediately heard Yuu somewhere behind him.

“Oh good, you’re back. There’s only one bed in here, and I’m not sharing it, but it felt wrong to make you sleep on the floor while you were all zombified.”

Sebek blinked, and the room gradually came into focus as his eyes adjusted to the darkness relative to the lounge. It seemed to be a bedroom, though it contained only the barest essentials of furniture and no decoration. A spare then. He had been maneuvered into a sitting position on the bed, and Grim was on his lap, asleep. He twisted around, and saw Yuu sitting on the other side of the bed, looking at him with concern that they quickly covered with irritation. “What happened? The last thing I remember is talking to Jamil.”

“Short version; Jamil’s planning a coup. Long version; You went all weird and blank faced and agreed to stay overnight. Then while Jamil was showing us here he kept hinting that Kalim got the housewarden job through nepotism and that he’s probably cracking under the pressure. The other Scarabia students with us were practically eating out of his hand, suggesting that Jamil would make a way better housewarden practically on cue! Based on what happened to you, I’m almost positive that he has some kind of brainwashing signature spell. He’s been using it on Kalim to make him act like a massive tool, and setting himself up

as the voice of reason who gets all the real work done. By now, the whole dorm's practically a powder keg, and when they blow, Kalim'll be lucky if they just run him out of Scarabia. The only thing I don't get is *why?* "

"I know exactly what you mean!" Sebek shouted, startling Grim out of his lap, "How can such a devoted aid as Jamil possibly plan such treachery!? Why would he betray a master as earnest and noble as his!?"

"Er, I actually meant 'why go to all that trouble?' If he wanted to be housewarden, he could just challenge Kalim. He's obviously the stronger mage, and even though Kalim was more popular prior to this whole debacle, the part about Jamil doing all the real work is true. If he just challenged Kalim for the spot, then made him the new vice, people would recognize his skill pretty quickly, and he'd get to benefit from Kalim's charisma by association. He really, *really* doesn't need to do all this cloak and dagger stuff, and that makes me worry that he's aiming for something a little more important than being prefect of a school dormitory."

"What could possibly be more important? The housewardens are the most respected in the entire student body, paling only next to the great Lord Malleus!"

"'Uh-huh…Speaking of, I tried to text Hornton to come help us, but it failed to deliver. I have plenty of service though, I could text Ace and Deuce just fine."

"Lord Malleus' power is so overwhelming, that pitiful human technology cannot stand up to his might! Many a cell phone had been laid low by the lighting that sparks from his fingers! That he was able to keep a single phone intact for the entire past week is a feat of incredible restraint and control!"

Yuu blinked, clearly needing a moment to process the sheer majesty of someone they so carelessly nicknamed. In the end, they elected to lean over to check on Grim. "You awake?"

"Ugh, how can I not be, what with all the yelling? You got any ideas for getting us outta here yet? Cuz I heard someone talk about a 10 km walk through the desert tomorrow morning, and I ain't doing that for all the fresh tuna in Twisted Wonderland!"

"If we can't get ahold of Malleus, then the only people still on campus to help are Azul and the twins. I doubt that they'll just let us walk out the mirror, but I saw something in the treasury that might help. Grim helped me time the patrols outside the hall while you were still out, Sebek, so we'll wait for the best time to try and sneak out. Grim and I take point, Sebek covers us from behind, if we're lucky we can get there without needing to fight. That sound like a plan?"

Chapter End Notes

Noted from Past Me:
Grim/Sebek Fake Dating AU 4.3k words

Next time; Azul receives some unexpected guests.

Also, I had an idea for a LilIdia fic, so I might write a chapter of that before the next chapter of this. Still haven’t decided yet, but don’t be surprised if ch 4 takes longer.

Chapter 4: The Disturbance

Chapter Summary

> Azul was just trying to relax on a bad night when Yuu and company crashed in with a group of other students in hot pursuit.

Chapter Notes

> Note from Past Me:
> Thorn has been talking about their faves to me so much I now have Fish Mafia Opinions

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Azul wasn't sure why he was up this late. Well, that wasn't quite true. He knew why he was up, driven awake by visions of writhing tentacles, and the need to take and take, and a shooting pain in a limb he didn't have in this form. What he didn't get was why he was here in the Octavinelle student lounge, with Floyd and Jade on either side of him, Jade reading some mycology guide and Floyd playing a rather hazardous looking game with a dinner knife. It did help though, the phantom burning fading back into the usual sense of something missing, and details of the dream fading away. Idly, he wondered if the twins knew how much their easy presence helped him on these nights, if perhaps his presence might help them the same way.

No, they almost certainly didn't. Both Leeches had made it abundantly clear that they would leave as soon as Azul ceased to be interesting (and quite possibly kill and eat him too, if Floyd's comments about octopus balls were meant to be taken literally), and there was no way they'd find his regret anything but pitiful and boring. And the idea that they might simply want his company on a bad night the way he sought out theirs was ridiculous, even ignoring how if they had bad nights it was because he tried to kill them. So instead he came to the lounge every few nights, and the twins would already be there, and they would all do their own thing in silence, and Azul would not break it by asking why.

And then Yuu, Grim, and a Diasomnia student he recalled selling detergent to once came crashing in on an honest-to-Seven magic carpet, pursued by half a dozen angry Scarabia students.

"Henchhuman! Watch where you steer that thing!"

"Owwww…Sebek can you move?"

“Yes, I am mostly uninjured.”

“Great. Get offa me.”

Sebek got up sheepishly, and Yuu started stretching. “Geez, are you part statue or what? I swear I’m gonna have bruises shaped like your pecs!”

“There’s no escape for you now, surrender quickly!”

Well, that sounded like the best cue Azul was going to get. “What’s all the commotion at this hour?” As he stood up, so did Floyd and Jade, falling behind him in perfect lockstep. It had taken ages to learn how to match their paces just right when they first came on land, but damn if it didn’t pay off. The Scarabia students paled slightly, and Yuu started to reach for something behind their back before they caught themself and relaxed.

“Azul Ashengrotto!” The shout came from one of the Scarabia students, but he couldn’t be bothered to distinguish them.

“Hey Azul, sorry for crashing in on such short notice.”

“Would any of you care to explain what is going on?”

One of the pursuants, likely the leader of the group, spoke up first. “It’s none of Octavinelle’s business. Just hand them and the item they stole over quietly.”

“It’s a kinda long story, but pattern recognition tells me that Jamil’s probably gonna try to kill me, and then you won’t have anyone to play board games with until your club comes back from break.”

“Jamil is *not* going to kill you, not when you’re under my protection- Ow!”

Yuu elbowed Sebek in the ribs, hissing something like *Not. Helping.* under their breath.

Azul elected to ignore this, instead raising a wry eyebrow at them. “Well you’ve certainly gotten better at establishing a bargaining position since last time you burst into my lounge. Only slightly, but still.”

At this, the Scarabia students looked at each other uneasily, and their leader stepped forward. “I-if you refuse to hand them over, you’ll be party to their wrongdoing as well!”

At this, Floyd stepped out around Azul’s left shoulder, Jade following suit on his right. “Hey, are you yankin’ my tail? You barge in at 2 in the morning and start givin’ *us* orders? You’re practically begging for a good squeeze!”

“It’d be wise to leave now. Fights are not permitted in the Mostro Lounge, and Floyd is known to forget his strength when removing offenders.”

The intruders looked at Floyd’s murderous glare, then at Jade’s sharp smile, and, almost in unison, turn tail and run back out the mirror. Yuu and Grim immediately breathed a sigh of relief, and Sebek unstiffened incrementally.

With that out of the way, Azul stepped back as Yuu and Sebek briefly competed to help each other up, then spoke. “So, I’m sure there’s a fascinating story here, how about I put some tea on, and you pay me back for helping out by explaining it.”

It was, in fact, a *fascinating* story. He had always known there was more to his lab partner than meets the eye, and to hear Yuu plainly lay out so many of Jamil’s hidden facets was beyond invaluable. If only Azul could convince him to sign on with him and the twins, they could take Sage Island, no, Twisted Wonderland by storm. Alas, every advance so far had been met by deflection and suspicion. Eventually, Yuu got up to the escape, and gulped down the rest of their tea. “…And then we crashed in here, and saw you, and you know the rest.”

“I see. Well, Jade, Floyd, I’m sure you know what we must do.”

“Of course. When another dorm is experiencing such strife, it is our duty to lend a hand.”

“Can I bring my shovel? I didn’t get to use it at all last time!”

Yuu raised an eyebrow at this. “ *Your* shovel? Do you mean the one you ‘borrowed’ from the gardening supply shed on the day Hornton- Wait a minute,” they turned back to Azul, “Did you try to give Hornton a shovel talk!?”

Azul tried to follow that train of thought over the sound of Sebek squawking in indignation and Grim cackling, before giving up. “I did not, I don’t even know what that means!” Mercifully, Yuu decided to drop the issue in favor of more important matters.

“Whatever. Listen, I seriously doubt you’re doing this with altruism in mind-” Jade gasped in mock hurt. “-but I appreciate the help anyway. You got a whiteboard or something? Let’s get a plan together for tomorrow.”

Chapter End Notes

Note from Past Me:
Btw, I’ve posted the first chapter of that Lilidia fic I got inspired to do, and I’ll probably post the second one before I post another chapter of this. Both of my WIPs might be delayed though, because Splatoon 3 comes out this week aaaaaaaaaa

Chapter 5: The Plan

Chapter Summary

The plan goes into motion, and is abruptly derailed. Also, Grim POV!

Chapter Notes

Note from Past Me:
I know this took way longer than normal, but I resumed college back in September and that's been eating up all the brain juice I need for creative pursuits. On the one hand, I've been getting back into the swing of things so I might be able to write more again, but on the other I have a calc midterm in like a week so that might wipe me out again.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next morning (or to be more accurate, about 6 hours later), Grim woke Yuu up to feed him breakfast. Despite having refused to go to sleep in the first place until Grim declared the plan to be as good as it was ever gonna get and started swiping at anyone who tried to pick up a marker to make another revision, they were reluctant to get up. They didn't stop complaining from the moment Grim shook them awake until they had handed him his food and made themself some coffee. As punishment, he decided that they were not going to be the one to carry him around today, and instead climbed up onto Sebek's shoulders. The loudmouth had way more shoulder than Yuu anyway.

Sebek did not, however, seem to see this as a privilege, and immediately started trying to remove him. "Foul cat! I am not your shelf! You'll shed all over my uniform!"

"First off, I'm not a cat! Ya know, when I'm the greatest mage in Twisted Wonderland, it'll be an honor to say you were my transport!"

"You will never be the greatest mage, for that is and will always be Lord Malleus!"

He puffed up, but before he could retort Yuu shoved a mug of what looked like warm milk tinged ever so slightly brown-ish into Sebek's hands. "Hey. It's too early to be yelling at each other. Sebek, here's your milk with a dash of coffee, if you want any sugar I already put it all in my cup, so too bad. Grim, don't provoke him until we're all awake, okay?"

Grim let out a small *hmph* but settled down. He didn't want that jerk blowing out his vocal cords this early in the morning anyway. From what he understood of the plan he was gonna

need them later.

Soon enough everyone was breakfasted and caffeinated, and they made their way to Scarabia together. The first half of the plan actually went pretty smoothly, and it was fun to watch Azul and the twins do their thing to someone else for once. That said, Jamil seemed to be unnerved by Yuu's Look At People When They Talk stare as much as by anything the mermafia was doing.

The Stare looked like this; they would look straight into the eyes of whoever was talking to them, blinking as little as physically possible, and venting all of their constant motion into a single finger, tapping rapidly and hidden from view, so that to their conversational partner it looked as though they were completely still. Yuu *claimed* that this showed they were paying attention to people, but to Grim they always looked like they were about to shove an expensive and sentimental vase off the table, and wanted you to know. Grim wasn't sure how Jamil saw it, except that he clearly hated it, and seemed to be cracking even faster than Azul had predicted under it.

So that whole part of the plan worked great. Jamil eventually cracked, gloated about his plan to a seemingly brainwashed Azul, and was confronted by Kalim. As blot started to drip down Jamil's arms Jade and Sebek corralled everyone to be close enough for Azul to shield them all with Bind the Heart.

And then it turned out Azul hadn't actually figured out how to use Floyd's signature spell for anything besides resisting enchantments yet, and they all went flying.

At first, Grim wasn't quite sure what was happening. All he could see was the desert spinning away from him, all he could feel was wind, rushing past him, howling in his ears, pushing against his chest as he flew through it, so he couldn't draw enough breath to scream.

And then he reached the top of his arc, and the pressure abated enough to see the dazzling clouds below him. For a single moment, he felt suspended in the air, looking down on the world below him, as was his rightful place. And then he started falling.

"GRIM!" A hand grabbed the ribbon around his neck, and he twisted around to see Yuu, flushed and teary. "Grim! I sorry, I couldn't- I didn't-" Wordlessly, he let himself be pulled in, curling up against their chest as they picked up speed. But eventually he realized they weren't falling any faster, at least, not as much as they should be, and extricated himself enough to see what was happening.

"Hey! Yuu! Look up!"

Blinking, they obeyed, and saw what Grim had. Sebek was gripping their shoulder with one hand, the other pointing his pen straight down, its gem glowing brilliantly from the magic channeled through it.

He yelled something that Grim couldn't hear over the wind (they were falling slower now, so why was it so much louder?) but Yuu nodded quickly, and said something about air resistance into his ear. After making sure Grim's claws were firmly latched on to their shirt (and possibly also their skin, based on the wince), they unbuttoned their jacket, letting it flap, and

spread their limbs to catch as much of the wind as possible. Still disoriented, Grim focused on the wind magic pouring from Sebek's wand until he put together how he was using it to push them up and slow their fall. Focusing, Grim's own magestone sparked to life as he tried casting the same spell himself, and they all slowed further.

Now that they weren't all hurtling to their deaths, Yuu started looking around for the others, so Grim helped, his sharper vision easily picking out the telltale purpleish glow of several Octavinelle stones all clustered together above them, and a single red pinprick roughly level with them.

They all slowly fell, through gray, wet clouds, towards the dark wasteland below them. Unlike the soft, sandy dunes he'd gotten used to seeing, the ground below them looked hard and rocky, pockmarked with cracks. He could see an empty riverbed, which looked like it must have sprung up out of nowhere, since this place couldn't possibly have ever seen water. But the worst part was no matter how hard Grim searched the horizon, even if he could almost convince himself he could see dunes on the horizon, he couldn't spot the dorm at all.

Chapter End Notes

Note from Past Me:
Next time: Floyd's idea of a pep talk

Also, there was originally gonna be a version of the mancala scene before I realized it couldn't fit anywhere in the alternate timeline. If you wanna read it, Yuu's Toxic Trait is on my tumblr

Chapter 6: The Fight pt1

Chapter Summary

The gang picks themselves back up, and returns to face Jamil

Chapter Notes

Note from Past Me:
Happy Holidays! Your present this year is the longest chapter yet! Also mermafia opinions that you can blame on my wonderful beta, Thorn!
This is Floyd POV, so the narration is using his usual nicknames. If you need to check, they're in the end notes, in order of appearance.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Floyd, Jade, and Azul landed last, touching gently down several minutes after Shrimpie, Croc, and Baby Seal's significantly less smooth landing, and Sea Otter's borderline crash. Floyd took a moment to stretch and check for any injuries from the disastrous fight with Sea Snake. Nothing seemed broken, he had some soreness in his muscles, but since none of it was worse than the ever-present ache in his legs, it was probably no big deal. Even the shovel was unharmed. Jade was doing the same check next to him, taking extra care with his fingers after gripping his wand so tightly for their entire descent, and Azul was mostly just shivering. Both of them looked like Coach Lobster had decided to make them stay after flight class until they could get some real height. He leaned over to give Azul a hand up, "Aw, what's the matter, Azul? Scared of heights?"

"I am not! I just- need to catch my breath a little, that's all!" Despite his words, Floyd could see some of the tension at being offered help bleed out of his shoulders at the mockery. Also, the look on his face when Floyd spoke was priceless. He seemed to have been getting used to his new voice by the time they confronted Sea Snake, but the time falling and not speaking must have been just long enough to startle him all over again. Even Jade's mask-like smile seemed to strain at the sound. Unfortunately, before Floyd could really get going, the sound of sobbing drew their attention.

"I- He just- How could he-?" Sea Otter didn't finish the thought, instead breaking into inarticulate wails occasionally punctuated by gasps and hiccups. These were somewhat muffled by Shrimpie's left sleeve, which had been torn badly enough in the disastrous confrontation with Sea Snake that they had given up on trying to keep it attached, and just given to Sea Otter as a makeshift handkerchief. Baby Seal had retreated back up onto

Crocodile's shoulders, clearly not eager to get sobbed on. Jade and Azul sidled up to the group, their faces a picture of carefully calculated sympathy, and Floyd followed. After a couple minutes, Sea Otter managed to speak coherently again. "I just- I never thought he would do something like this! He's always been there for me, and he always helps me when I need him, and, and- He's always been my best friend!"

Jade and Azul stepped in then, offering platitudes and encouraging him to be angry, but something was bothering Floyd about what Sea Otter had said. He opened his mouth to interject, realizing at the same time the thought formed that this was probably not the right thing to say in this situation, and he was definitely about to make the crying even louder and messier. Fortunately, he was saved from putting his foot in his mouth when Shrimpie beat him to the punch.

"Look, this sucks, get revenge, no objections there, but that thing you just said? That's definitely part of the problem." Fortunately, Sea Otter didn't actually start wailing again, and just stared at them, apparently shocked into silence. Floyd took the opportunity to continue that line of thought.

"Yeah, like, Sea Snake works for you, right? Or at least, his folks work for yours? So what happens if he decides he doesn't actually wanna go along with what you want?" Halfway through, Azul groaned in frustration somewhere behind him and Floyd heard the sound of tearing paper as his voice returned to its normal pitch. A shame, but nothing lasts forever.

Sea Otter blinked, confused, "We do something else?"

Azul caught on first, likely because of how much time he spent talking at Sea Snake in Alchemy. "Has that ever happened, though? Jamil said he didn't want to throw a party, or redecorate the lounge or something, and you agreed not to?"

"Well, no, but-"

"But he doesn't ask, he just quietly grumbles and then goes along with it?" Sea Otter looked defensive, but before Azul could press his point further, Crocodile butted in.

"Of course not! What kind of loyal retainer would he be if he rejected the wishes of his lord!"

Shrimpie raised an eyebrow, "I mean, we just established that he's *not* , but that is almost the point I was trying to make, so thank you." Croc started yelling something about Shrimpie's tone, but they just plowed on, "Kalim, Floyd asked what would happen if Jamil didn't want to do what you want to do, but I think the more pertinent question is what he *thinks* would happen. If, as your servant, Jamil cannot refuse to do what you want, then can he really be there for you as your friend?"

Sea Otter frowned. "That's not- He-" he stopped, as if something had hit him, and started again. "I just remembered, when we were little, he always used to beat me at this board game, mancala. But one time, his parents overheard him gloating and got really upset, and started apologizing, and made him say sorry too. Except, I was confused because they seemed to be apologizing for him winning more than for the gloating. Anyway, a while after that I finally started getting better and winning more, and I forgot the whole thing." He looked down,

worrying at Shrimpie's ripped sleeve, "He never forgot, did he? And I didn't actually get that much better."

Jade made a pitying sigh, "Yuu put that a little harsher than I would've, but yes, that is likely the case, and their point is sound. Let's use Floyd's and my business partnership with Azul as a healthier example." Shrimpie started choking on their own spit until Crocodile thumped them on the back a couple times. "Azul can ask quite a bit of us at times, but it's because we know there will always be suitable recompense, and if a task were truly unbearable, we can always refuse. Similarly, we don't expect him to inconvenience himself too much on our sake unless he's expecting something in return. It works because we all have the same expectations of each other, but while you've been carrying expectations of friendship, Jamil has been taught to expect an employer/employee dynamic. A friend makes for a terrible boss, and so resentment has festered." He made a shrugging motion and heaved another dramatic sigh.

Sea Otter looked up, teary and confused, "But didn't Floyd basically just *give* Azul his signature spell? A funny voice isn't anywhere near equal to that!"

"Hey, I decide what it's worth, and I wanted a deep voice!" He decided not to add that he knew Azul would never have kept Bind the Heart anyway. Shrimpie looked like they would never in a million years buy that it was only because the price he picked was that annoying, so better not to draw their attention to it.

"And I suppose you guys were just chilling out together in the Octavinelle lounge at 2 in the morning for business reasons?" Baby Seal chimed in skeptically.

"We choose to maintain this partnership because his schemes are endlessly entertaining, his ambition and cunning seem to know no bounds, and we enjoy watching him in action. What then, is 'chilling out,' except our payment?"

"Ok, but choosing to hang out with someone and do things for them because they have qualities you admire and you like having them around just sounds like-" Floyd tried to convey to Shrimpie with just his eyes that their whole "saying all the quiet bits out loud' thing was only funny when they did it to other people, and he could tell Jade was doing the same. One of them must have gotten through, because they swallowed and finished the sentence with, "-like a completely normal, professional business partnership."

Sea Otter looked back and forth between Shrimpie and Jade, "I'm more confused now than I was before…"

"Okay, so personally I'd ignore everything about the mermafia here being a positive example, but the bit about mismatched expectations is probably correct."

"Excuse me?" Jade's smile didn't move an inch, but everyone next to Shrimpie scooted away.

"What, I said you were right! And Sebek's right about how someone like Jamil wouldn't be able to air his grievances directly to someone like you."

"But that's awful!"

“It is the duty of a loyal servant! I for one would never *dream* of acting as that treacherous snake has-!”

“And you’re right. Er, you as in Kalim, not you, Sebek. And it’s awful especially because of those mismatched expectations Jade mentioned. You’re expecting that if Jamil needed a break, or really didn’t want to arrange a party, he would tell you. But Jamil is expecting that if he tries to do things the way he wants he’ll get punished, and apparently he has been, even if not directly by you. So you get everything you want, and he gets no breaks, ever.” Crocodile opened his mouth. “-And don’t say truly capable servants don’t need breaks, I know for a fact that Malleus and Lilia give you and Silver mandatory vacation days, Sebek.”

Sea Otter looked like he was about to break into sobs again, so Azul cut in. “Don’t blame yourself too much though, I’m classmates with Jamil, and even when he forgets to hide his personality and wit, he’s just not very straightforward. You’re very open, and to be honest, a bit of a goody two-shoes. To twisted- I mean, *cunning* individuals like Jamil or myself, such seeming obliviousness can be incredibly grating. The different approaches to your relationship are certainly the root of this issue, but it’s likely festered this long in part due to your different dispositions.”

Sea Otter looked to Shrimpie as if for confirmation, but they just shrugged. “Maybe? The constant sunniness *was* kinda annoying at first until I realized you were being sincere, to be honest. Anyway, we gotta get back and kick his ass before you can confirm any of this, so anyone got any ideas on how to do that?”

It took a bit of back-and-forth, but eventually it turned out Sea Otter could fill a nearby dry riverbed, so Jade and Floyd could carry everyone back quickly. Sea Otter lifted his scepter, pointed it towards where the river’s source should be and chanted.

“Respite in the scalding sands, a never-ending party. Dance! Sing! Oasis Maker!”

The end of his scepter glowed, and Floyd sensed a massive flow of water magic swirling around the group, just before he felt the change in air pressure and humidity. Droplets of water condensed out of the atmosphere onto his skin and hair, washing away the awful dry feeling that Scarabia dorm’s desert always brought on. Near him, Azul breathed a sigh of relief, and even Jade’s grin widened, displaying his teeth. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Shrimpie’s hair almost instantly frizz up, and Crocodile anxiously patting at the gel that was probably the only thing stopping his from doing the same.

And then the deluge started, and hundreds of gallons of water crashed into the ravine before them, sweeping through its turns at a speed even Floyd would hesitate to swim against. Closest to the source, the new river churned, sending freezing water splashing over the banks and spraying the group. The current roared in Floyd’s ears, drowning out all conversation for several minutes, until the riverbed was full and it started to slow.

“Geez, Sea Otter, I thought you said your spell wasn’t that powerful!?”

“Well, we need to get back quickly, and Oasis Maker summons a lot of water, but not enough to fill this entire thing fast enough. I figured if it summons a lot of water for a small amount of magic, if I gave it a lot of magic…”

Shrimpie nodded, “Good idea, but alas, fluid dynamics is the bane of us all.”

Floyd wasn’t sure why “lots of water entering a narrow space is a Bad Idea” needed a fancy name besides just “common sense,” but land dwellers lacked a lot of the latter, so maybe that explained it. In any case, the river had finally slowed to something that might actually be manageable with two other people clinging to him, so he shed his human form and dove into the water just as Azul was insisting they test the current before just jumping in.

Ok, so maybe it was still a *little* too fast, and he was slammed against the rocky riverbed a couple times while trying to dig his fingers into the banks before he could be swept away. Azul was definitely going to lecture him about this the whole trip, but he definitely wasn’t going to wait around in human form any longer while there was deep water right in front of him.

Floyd liked land, in that he liked the strange foods, and alien cultures, and all the interesting humans he had met since coming to the surface. He did *not* like feeling gravity constantly trying to drag him down, or having to be wrapped up in fabrics all the time, or the persistent, dull ache in his legs. Trying to walk had been so painful at first, like he was trying to balance on knives, but over time he had gotten used to it, and the soles of his feet had calloused. He wouldn’t give up all the new experiences, the pretty clothes, the sports that just wouldn’t work underwater for anything, but he was definitely eager to get to stretch his tail out a bit.

Jade obviously felt the same, though he still tried to be more dignified and wait until Azul had decided the current was actually safe to get in. Floyd splashed him with his tail. “Ah, c’mon, Jade, the water’s great! I’m having such a nice time in- Whoa!” The rock he was gripping loosened, and he scrabbled at the banks for a few seconds while his traitorous brother just chuckled. He did manage to get a better grip without Jade’s help, however, and it wasn’t too long after that that Azul finally declared the river safe enough for the rest of the group. Jade jumped in with an audible sigh of relief, and then everyone else started carefully clambering down the banks to hold onto either him or Floyd.

Shrimpie, for some reason known only to them, had decided that they trusted Jade not to try and drown them even less than Floyd, and Baby Seal and Croc both insisted on sticking close to them, so that left Jade with Sea Otter and Azul. The land-dwellers were all confused about why Azul didn’t adopt his merform as well, and to be fair so was Floyd, even if he was used to Azul’s eccentricities by now. Everything else aside, being compacted from 3 meters long down to just 191 centimeters sucked, and Azul’s true form was even bigger, proportionately. Or maybe being compacted was a plus for him, he did always like cramming himself into small spaces.

Either way, Floyd got to avoid the lecture he was sure Azul was going to give him a little longer, since he was too busy clinging to Jade’s back to list any coherent points about not diving into a raging current, and then they were back at the dorm building. Floyd let his passengers get off, then pulled himself somewhat reluctantly back up onto dry land. He stretched, and then balanced his shovel across his shoulders, ignoring Shrimpie and Azul’s incredulous questions.

Almost before even the dorm itself was visible, they could see a churning black storm on the horizon. As they got closer they could see it was centered on one of Scarabia’s open-air

courtyards, and when entered its bounds, it felt like swimming a bit too deep, and feeling the pressure around him start to push against him, his body urging him to return somewhere more habitable. He ignored the feeling, and the way the thick blot energy clinging to him like a film of oil made him think of a destroyed lounge and a terrible cry. Was this how every Overblot felt?

He turned to look at Shrimpie, who was staring straight ahead, ignoring how Baby Seal, now returned to their shoulders, dug his claws into them. They put on a good brave face, but Floyd had felt their heart pounding hard and fast against his back the whole trip over, and he doubted it had calmed any. Crocodile strode in front of them, close enough to quickly leap to their defense, while insisting it was only because “Lord Malleus had charged him with this duty!” Jade and Floyd moved to flank Azul, who had on the unphased, slightly smug smile he used with angry clients. Still, he caught his brother’s eye over his head, and they moved in a little closer, enough to replicate the tight spaces that Azul liked, without being obvious about it or tripping each other up.

As they approached the courtyard, Sea Snake was gloating as the students under his control served him and sang his praises. It was simple enough to sidle in closer while imitating them, he didn’t even notice the group shouldn’t have been there until they were standing directly across from him, Floyd already preparing Bind the Heart as the others readied offensive spells. As soon as he did notice, though, and finished yelling at Kalim, he waved his hand, and the whole horde of Scarabia students pulled their own wands out and began bombarding them.

Lights and colors sparked against Floyd’s signature spell as it redirected wave after wave of magic into the surrounding courtyard. None of it stood any chance of getting through, but everyone within the shield was having trouble returning fire with all the smoke and dust blocking their vision. He could see Shrimpie out the corner of his eye, pacing within the confines of his spell, trying to see through the mess from different angles, and Croc tailing them, pulling them back whenever they got too close to the edge.

“Hey, Shrimpie, can you hurry up whatever it is you’re doing? I’m gonna get bored of just standing here eventually, ya know?”

“Uh-huh…” they hummed thoughtfully, and then looked back toward him. “Hey, can you choose what direction to redirect spells?”

“Ehh, kinda, but I gotta focus real hard, and you probably don’t want me to stop concentrating on blocking the rest of this.”

“Yeah, no.”

Jade nodded, “It’s as we said before, during that regrettable incident concerning the finals. He can redirect any and all magic, but only as long as he can keep his focus.”

Shrimpie nodded absentmindedly. Their eyes were locked onto something in the crowd. Floyd tried to follow their gaze, but all he saw was some smallfry picking up a piece of floor tile that must have been broken up by one of the attacks. Whatever it was that Shrimpie saw

must have spooked them though, as they immediately turned around to shout, “Floyd! Duck!”

“Jeez Shrimpie, relax. Whatever magic you saw can’t get through here, we just explained how that work–”

And then Azul was shoving him out of the way, as a completely unmagical chunk of stone sailed over the crowd, straight through Bind the Heart, and into Azul’s head.

Chapter End Notes

Note from Past Me:
Floyd’s nicknames:
Shrimpie: Yuu
Croc/Crocodile: Sebek
Baby Seal: Grim
Sea Otter: Kalim
Sea Snake: Jamil
Lobster: Vargas

I’ve figured out the most likely total number of chapters, and updated the count to reflect that, though if the next one winds up also being a monster, I’ll probably just split it up instead of posting another 3k+ word chapter.

Also, Floyd’s perspective on adapting to land is based partially on various vignettes, especially his Beanfest card, and partially on the original H.C. Anderson story, which I highly recommend, it’s completely batshit.

Chapter 7: The Fight pt2

Chapter Summary

Jamil is increasingly confused by these insolent bugs.

Chapter Notes

Note from Past Me:
Ok, so I increased the total chapters thing again, because while I was editing this chapter I realized I was basically looking at two complete chapters, so I might as separate them. I'm gonna post what used to be the second half of this chapter in a few minutes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jamil watched as the chunk of tile launched by one of his minions shot across the battlefield in a beautiful, clean arc, which ended in the damn thing hitting the *wrong person* . He supposed he couldn't blame the thrower too much, no one in their right mind could have predicted *Azul* of all people taking a hit for someone like that, but he almost wanted to fling a small fire shot at the minion anyway. He didn't, though, because in the next instant Bind the Heart collapsed anyway and Jamil needed to focus his attacks on the interlopers as they dove for cover. Because apparently, not only did Azul put his skin on the line for an unruly lackey, but said lackey actually seemed distressed enough to stop focusing on his signature spell. Or maybe he was just that shocked that anything had gotten through the shield in the first place, his expression was too difficult to read at this distance with all the smoke. Either way, if that minion wasn't currently incapable of independent thought, he probably would've breathed a sigh of relief at escaping Jamil's wrath.

When the group scattered, Sebek and Floyd hauled Azul behind an overturned table in one direction, while Yuu and Jade pulled Kalim behind some frankly remarkably sturdy pillars in the other direction. Sebek seemed irritated about being separated from Yuu (were they actually telling the truth earlier? It seemed ridiculous, but so did everything else that had happened today. He supposed it didn't really matter, except for whether he could rub it in the face of whoever he killed second), but buckled down and started applying magical first aid to Azul. He had always been unusually sensitive to the presence and build-up of magic, but now it was impossible to ignore, even that simple healing spell seeming to make the ink coating his arms itch and burn. He could feel a presence behind him (His instincts? His anger? His magic?) screaming to quash the caster now, to feel only his own power singing in his veins, but he ignored it for now. His real priority was to destroy Kalim, the rest of the bugs could be crushed after.

Bind the Heart briefly sprang back into existence, the shield buzzing uncomfortably in Jamil's ears and dissipating a forest strike, but it quickly flickered out again as Floyd craned his neck to get a look at Azul, who had started to stir. Unfortunately, the prefect managed to drag him and Kalim behind the pillars as soon as it did, though the act did also interrupt their attempts at a counterattack, only the monster cat on their shoulders managing a single, easily blocked burst of blue fire.

After the scramble back behind cover, and the hasty check to make sure that no one else had gotten too badly hurt, Yuu started trying to yell something at Sebek. They weren't being quite loud enough for Jamil to hear what they said over the sounds of the battle, but whatever it was was accompanied by some very animated gesticulations. Sebek looked very confused despite apparently understanding the message, since he kicked a shovel across the floor toward Yuu, who shoved it at one of their companions sitting behind them. The two continued to yell back and forth, and Jamil wished he could hear what they were saying, though it couldn't have been nearly as funny as the equal parts baffled and offended face Sebek was making out of context.

After a few minutes of back-and-forth, Jamil felt the buzz of Bind the Heart again, as Sebek stood up from behind the table where he'd been attending to Azul. He readied himself for whatever new plan of attack the group had come up with, but oddly enough Sebek faced toward the prefect instead, and barked at them, loudly enough for Jamil to hear across the battlefield, "This is all your fault, you know, *human* !"

Jamil was clearly not the only one shocked by this, as the prefect stepped out from behind their pillar to yell back at him, only the continuing presence of Floyd's signature spell keeping Jamil from just striking both the idiots down. " *My* fault? How is this my fault!? We'd be doing fine if you all just followed my plan!"

"Your 'plan' relied on being able to fight Jamil while Azul still had Bind the Heart! That got thrown to the winds when we all did!"

"That was just Plan A! We're on, like, Plan D now, so you need to quit standing around and get to it!"

Grim looked up, confused. "I thought we were on Plan F?"

"No, no," came Kalim's voice from behind a pillar, "Plan F was the one where I died. Azul is Plan E- uh! I mean, I'm sure Azul's gonna be fine Floyd! It's just, he can't really participate so the closest workable plan is-!"

Jade tsked from where he was still crouched over Azul (For his part, Azul was trying to sit up, failing, and generally not doing much to counter any assertions about his ability to participate). "Kalim is right about most of that, but we tried Plan E 5 minutes ago. We're on Plan H now."

"None of you foolish humans even know what plan we're supposed to be doing! If Lord Malleus were here-!"

Yuu rolled their eyes, “Oh stuff a can in it, Sebek! Don’t you ever have anything to say that isn’t about ‘Lord Malleus?’ No wonder Hornton wanted to ditch you for an evening!”

“How DARE you! I came here because my lord wanted me to keep you safe, even though you never afford him so much as an ounce of the respect he is due!”

Jamil’s eyebrows raised at the admission of the pretense around Sebek’s presence, straight to his face, no less, but he was too engrossed in the sheer, hilarious stupidity unfolding in front of him to interrupt.

“Of course I respect him, I’m just not constantly bending over to lick his boots like you!”

“Really? How do you show him *any* respect, when you’re always calling him that infantile nickname!”

“I agreed to bring you! *I* thought I could manage just fine without some loudmouthed idiot who won’t stop insulting my entire species, but Hornton was worried, and I know he’s *been* worried ever since I got hurt at Octavinelle, so I agreed anyway because he’s my friend!”

The arguing pair glared at each other for a long moment, but Sebek looked away first, his ashamed gaze flicking down…toward an index card poorly concealed in the cuff of his jacket sleeve. All of a sudden, Jamil realized several things.

1. He could no longer feel the buzz of Bind the Heart. In fact, he couldn’t remember exactly when the shield had dropped, being too engrossed in the idiots’ petty squabble. He raised his scepter to finally wipe out the whole group before Floyd refocused when he noticed
2. Floyd was nowhere to be seen. He had completely lost track of the shock of turquoise hair occasionally peeking out between pillars. He might have used the argument as a distraction to jump across to where his brother and Azul were hidden, but that didn’t seem quite right. And furthermore,
3. Kalim kept flicking concerned glances between the bickering duo and Jamil. But for the first time in their lives, he wasn’t looking Jamil straight on, but avoiding his gaze. But no, Jamil realized, he wasn’t just avoiding eye contact, he was focusing on a specific point over Jamil’s left shoulder. The same point every time. Jamil’s eyes narrowed, and he watched as Yuu briefly stopped glaring at Sebek to glance at him. Or more accurately, over his left shoulder.

Jamil whirled around in panic, just a little too slow to catch more than a brief glimpse of a massive, dark shadow looming over him, and of Floyd Leech bringing a rusty shovel down hard on the monster’s head.

Chapter End Notes

Note from Past Me:
IMO, Floyd’s Shovel deserves its own character tag.

Note from Present Me:
Honestly kinda tempted to make "Shovel-kun (Twisted Wonderland)" a canonical tag on fanfiction.lol. Probably shouldn't though.

Chapter 8: The Conversation.

Chapter Summary

Jamil wakes up to Kalim fussing over him.

Chapter Notes

Note from Past Me:
Ok, so I just realized after posting ch. 7 that this fic really should have had a canon-typical violence tag for both that and ch. 6, so that's been added.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jamil gradually woke up, and then immediately regretted it. His head felt stuffed full of cotton, his throat was too dry, and when he cautiously cracked his eyes open the light was too bright. The room was all white and sterile, completely the opposite of both Scarabia dorm and his home. He was in a hospital, most likely. The conclusion was further supported by the cool, almost pleasant tingle of healing magic along his skin. So he knew where he was, the next question was *why* . He opened his eyes fully to look for a nurse or someone who might answer his questions.

"Jamil! You're awake! Hey Yuu-!" Jamil immediately squeezed his eyes shut again as if that would block out his noisy employer. Someone (Yuu?) must have signaled him to be quieter, because Kalim cut himself off abruptly before continuing in what he probably thought was a whisper, "Jamil! I thought you might not- You were- I was so worried about you!" And then his volume almost immediately rose again, and he threw himself onto Jamil, sobbing onto his shoulder.

"Kalim, give him room to breathe!" Yuu spoke much more quietly, and in lower tones, although their voice still aggravated Jamil. He turned to eye them cautiously. For some reason they were wearing a Scarabia dorm uniform, clearly grabbed in a rush from the clean laundry. The top was a size too large, and the pants were a size too small, and they hadn't bothered to put on any of the accessories. Their left arm was covered by a spiral of misshapen sucker marks, normally hidden under long sleeves, which could have given them a more fearsome, battle-scarred appearance if Kalim hadn't switched to sobbing onto them as soon as they tried to get him off Jamil.

Eventually they urged him back into a plastic seat beside the bed, and busied themself fetching a glass of water from the nearby sink. Jamil pulled himself up into a sitting position,

waving off Kalim's attempts to help. "We're in Sage Island Hospital, in that little town at the foot of the mountain, you've only been out for a few hours, and Azul is fine, he's right across the hall. Me and Kalim can answer any other questions you have?"

Jamil accepted the proffered glass, carefully drank (again having to fend off Kalim's assistance) and put it down on the bedside table before speaking. "What even happened?"

Yuu winced, "Ah, right. Probably should have started with that. Uh, how much do you remember?"

Jamil took another sip of water while he concentrated. His plan had almost succeeded, but Azul and the twins had kept interfering. He went to confront Azul, and make him take his flunkies and leave, and… "You lot exposed my plot."

Yuu nodded, "And after that you Overblotted." They glanced at Jamil's expression and quickly added, "but it's ok! Besides you and Azul, a few other Scarabia students are getting spell-related injuries patched up, but they should all be fine, and no one died or anything!"

That hadn't quite been his concern, though now he was curious what had happened to Azul. That could wait though, instead he asked Kalim, "Why are you still here? You know exactly what I was planning to do to you!"

Kalim nodded slowly, "I know, and I'm so sorry!"

"What."

"I had no idea you felt that way! I thought we were friends but you weren't and you couldn't tell me that and I kept dragging you into things, and-!" Kalim kept blubbering more inexplicable apologies, as if Jamil hadn't tried to oust and/or kill him, but at least he hadn't tried grabbing onto him again. Jamil rested his head against the pillow and waited for him to finish. "-And that's why I want us to be equal business partners and real friends, like Azul and the twins!"

Yuu fumbled the glass they were refilling and had to scramble to catch it. "What even-? How did you reach *that* conclusion!? *Why!?* "

"Azul, Floyd, and Jade told me all about how their whole thing works. And even though Azul keeps making the Leeches do all sorts of stuff for his plans they still like hanging out together and he does stuff for them too! Like trying to save Floyd from that brick!" Jamil tried to process that. Oddly, the last part sounded vaguely familiar. "And they also said that people need space sometimes, and that you probably felt you couldn't get any because your job is to take care of me, so I'm declaring you're getting vacation days!"

"I reiterate, *what* ? Vacation days!? Equal partners!? NOT ON YOUR LIFE!" Kalim's mouth clicked shut. "You thoughtless, sloppy, idiotic, clumsy, ludicrously oblivious, arrogant, indelicate, pampered little rich boy! Why would I want to be any kind of *partner* , let alone even friends!? I don't want *vacation days* , I want you out of my life!" And then, because he had absolutely no idea what kind of lessons Kalim was apparently absorbing from Azul's little mob, he added, "And don't throw yourself in front of any bricks for me, either!"

Unfortunately, this had the opposite of the intended effect, as with that last addition, Kalim immediately leaped forward to hug him again. “Aw, you really do care!” This time Yuu did nothing to help him, and just laughed.

“Sorry dude. Also, your first break starts now, since the docs say you and Azul have to stay here overnight, and I’m sure you’d rather Kalim go back to campus instead of bugging you all night.”

“What!? No! You can’t thwart my plans to get rid of Kalim and then immediately just leave him unattended in Scarabia! It’ll undercut all your efforts-!”

“Relax, he won’t be unattended, me and Sebek will be there! Seb and Grim have been trying to contact Malleus all day with no luck, so he’s gonna be staying on campus overnight with us ‘foolish humans’ anyway!”

“Absolutely not!”

“Jade can help too, he got kicked out by the head nurse earlier for intimidating everyone who came in to check on Azul, so I’m sure he’ll be relieved to have something else to focus on!”

“No. No, no, no, no, no, no-!”

“C’mon Kalim, we shouldn’t bother him any longer. And relax, Jamil, think of it as a practice run for all those future vacation days!”

“GET BACK HERE RIGHT NOW!”

Chapter End Notes

Note from Past Me:
Next Time: Malleus finally sees his texts
Also, I just noticed that in a couple days I’ll have been writing twst fic for an entire year! I honestly never thought I’d enjoy writing anything this much, but I’ve been having loads of fun, and I hope some of that comes through in my work. I really appreciate all your wonderful comments, they really mean a lot to me!

Note from Present Me:
Over four years now, wow. Also, I still very much appreciate comments, hint hint

Chapter 9: The End

Chapter Summary

Malleus gets his phone repaired.

Chapter Notes

Note from Past Me:
Second multichap done, go me! Thanks again to all y'all for your kind comments! ^_^

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Malleus was not familiar with much of modern human culture, but he had become quickly acquainted with the only Orange store in Briar Valley, what with how often he had to get his cell phone repaired or replaced over the past three years since Lilia had suggested he bring one to NRC. He wasn't even entirely sure how he broke it this time. He had been so careful with it for the entire week since Yuu had exchanged numbers with him, but while waiting for an update on their investigation with Sebek two nights before, it had abruptly gone dark and stopped responding to anything he did to it. Lilia suggested that it had run out of electrical power, something none of his previous phones had lasted long enough to experience, and needed to be recharged, but when he tried to use his magic to refill it with lighting, it just caught fire. So here he was, hoping the local experts on human technology could reconnect him with the duo before he got so nervous he teleported straight into Scarabia and potentially interrupted a delicate situation if Yuu's suspicions were correct but they had not, in fact, tried to call for help.

After some huddled discussion among the employees, a nervous looking young man he couldn't recall seeing before with a tag on his shirt reading 'Jeff' came forward. "Er, w-welcome, how can we assist you today?"

Malleus held up the charred remains of his phone. "I require a replacement for this."

Jeff's mouth hung open for a few moments before he closed it with a click, swallowed, and opened it again to speak. "I-uh, I don't think that's covered under our warranty… You're gonna have to buy a new one–"

"That's quite alright." Malleus wasn't sure what a warranty *did* cover, since it didn't appear to include any issue he had ever had with a cell phone. He had expected to need to pay for the

replacement, and came prepared, pulling a stack of paper bills from his inside coat pocket, and quickly counted them to make sure the amount was correct.

Jeff was once again taken aback, staring at the money in Malleus' hand. "Holy- I mean, I'm not sure if we accept cash…?" Another employee, whose name tag read "Leaf," and Malleus recognized as having been working at the store the past several times he visited came forward, already holding a box with a picture of a phone on it.

"We do for this customer. Here you go, sir, and congrats on lasting a week this time." They handed him the box and took the money from him and turned to the back of the store, stopping to say to Jeff in a whisper they probably thought he couldn't hear, "I dunno whose job it is to teach the Actual Prince what a credit card is, but it's definitely not ours. Just help him log back into his account on the new phone and see him out before his guard spooks the other customers away."

Malleus looked behind him. Silver and Lilia were using one of their vacation days today for father-son time on a possibly volcanic mountain somewhere, and Sebek was with Yuu, so today he was escorted by two older fae, who glowered suspiciously at anything that emitted light from a not immediately-identifiable source, which was most of the store. Jeff caught his attention by motioning to the box, and he opened it, pulling out the sleek black slab inside and cautiously turning it on. After a moment, the screen lit up with a soft glow (to the alarm of his guards before he motioned them to stand down), and text appeared, welcoming him in several languages. Remembering the procedure, he tapped the screen once, and it changed to ask if he wanted to log into his OrangeID, create a new one, or transfer his data from a previous phone. He looked to Jeff for guidance, who glanced at the remains of said previous phone. "I don't think that's gonna turn on, let alone connect to any other phones. If you have a backup we can restore it on this device, though?"

Malleus blinked in confusion until Leaf called from the back, "We turned automatic cloud backups on last time he was here!" Jeff nodded, and walked him through the process, until the next time his screen lit up, it was with the grid of familiar squares.

A moment later it started vibrating in his hand and a little number started ticking up on the corner of one of the squares. Jeff noticed his quizzical expression and glanced at the screen. "It's just downloading your unread texts." His phone buzzed a few more times. "Wow, someone must've *really* needed to contact you since your phone broke."

Malleus quickly thanked the young man, summoned a small pile of gold as a boon for 'restoring his data,' and teleported himself and his guard back to the castle, already fiddling with his new phone to open the texts.

Two Days Ago, 19:47

"Arriving at Scarabia now.

Don't wanna look rude by texting updates during dinner

I'll msg u later"

19:48

“Understood. Stay safe.”

19:48

“Dw, Sebek’s being very enthusiastic about protecting me for you, and I’ve also got Grim, I’ll be fine”

21:37

“Jamil is insisting we stay overnight. Sebek is agreeing with him. Msg u later.”

21:53

“Jamil was looking over my shoulder for that last text. He did something to Sebek to make him agree with him. We’re locked in a guest room now, please come pick us up.”

21:58

“U there?

Ok, it’s saying undelivered. Dunno if Jamil is blocking my signal or what.”

21:59

“Texted Ace and Deuce. Only my messages to you aren’t sending.

Gonna keep sending updates in case they get through eventually.

Sebek is staring at a wall like a zombie.”

22:15:

“Working on escape plan with Grim.

Sebek still a zombie.”

22:30:

“Sebek looks like he’s maybe waking up.”

22:35:

“You regularly fry your phones????

Anyway we’re gonna try that escape plan”

22:56

“Escaped Scarabia, crash landed in Octavinelle.

Azul is helping us, not sure what he wants from this tho

If your phone's not completely dead and you see this message, meet us in the Octavinelle student lounge."

Yesterday, 02:01

"Plan for tomorrow is as good as it's gonna get.

Good night"

08:07

"Getting ready to go back to Scarabia.

Window for meeting up with us is kinda closed because of the Scheme.

I'll text updates."

09:45

"Jamil looks close to cracking ."

11:37

"Good news; no one died.

Gotta get a bunch of people to the hospital tho.

Will try again to contact you later."

11:56

"At the hospital.

Gonna stop checking my phone for a bit while I wait for Jamil and Azul to wake up, that way lies madness."

12:00

"Nvm im bored."

12:10

"Oh shoot there's a commotion over in Azul's direction."

12:13

"Jade got kicked out by the head nurse.

Gotta admit, he is not the twin I'd expect to act up like this.

Floyd just seems kinda mopey rn tho."

12:31

"Azul woke up a bit ago.

*He was on and off before but it looks like he's *awake* awake now.*

If Floyd doesn't stop hovering while the nurse is trying to do his job then he's joining his brother outside."

12:32

"Floyd actually quieted down. Must've been paying attention when they kicked out Jade."

12:37

"Nurses and doctors left Azul for a bit.

Floyd now attempting to hug and/or strangle him.

Gonna check on Kalim and Jade."

13:56

"Jamil woke up, filled him in on stuff, talked a bit.

Doctors said they want both Azul and Jamil to stay overnight, so me and Sebek are gonna stay with Kalim at Scarabia to keep him company/help plan a party for when they get back.

Sounds like keeping it from being too much for the still-recovering guests of honor is gonna be a full time job."

22:32

"That went better than I anticipated. No parade, feast limited to what Jade can do on his own before noon tomorrow, Kalim's even stopped trying to convince Grim to do tricks like some kind of weirdly shaped dog.

Gonna turn in, good night."

The last message was from the previous night, only a few hours after he'd had the thought that he could probably summon a lot more lightning power than a mere electrical outlet. He hastily typed out a message.

Just Now

"Apologies, my phone broke. I have just replaced it. You and Sebek are both all right?"

A few endless seconds later his phone buzzed.

Just Now.

“You’re back!

Yeah, we’re all good.

You were right btw, i dunno how i wouldve managed without Sebek

We would’ve called Lilia when we realized we couldn’t reach you but Sebek forgot to bring his phone, and i don’t have his number

Btw, if u haven’t read my other texts, we’re throwing a No One Died party

Ur invited, obviously”

Malleus smiled, left a quick note to his guards telling them not to panic, and teleported straight to the Hall of Mirrors, stepping through the portal to Scarabia’s dimension before the little sparks of magic faded away. The first person he asked about Yuu and Sebek pointed a shaking finger towards the student lounge, which Malleus followed.

Yuu was standing on a step ladder, winding bright yellow streamers around the chains holding up the lights. Below them, Kalim held the ladder steady until they stepped carefully down. “Okay, let’s get this over…there.” They pointed to the last lamp that didn’t have any streamers yet, and Sebek helped Kalim move the ladder under it. Grim, who was batting a piece of streamer around, looked up and noticed Malleus first.

“Hey! You better have some prime quality tuna to make up for leaving us to deal with everything on our own!”

Yuu turned their head to absentmindedly scold him. “Grim, be nicer- Hornton!” They beamed down at Malleus from the ladder, quickly winding the last of the streamer around the chain before clambering down the ladder. Sebek was already expressing his gratitude that he had finally shown up, and assuring him that Yuu had come to no harm over the past couple days (despite what he proclaimed to be their best efforts) at an escalating volume before their feet touched the floor. Kalim held the ladder carefully still until they were off, and then he too greeted Malleus.

“Hi! Today I learned that if anyone tries to climb a ladder without a spotter, Yuu will personally kill them as a lesson about safety precautions. I’m pretty sure they were joking?”

“Oh no,” said Grim, “I’ve seen how they get when Ace doesn’t wear his safety glasses in Potions. Death is getting off lightly.”

Malleus blinked at this, and decided to address Yuu and Sebek. “I am relieved you are all alright, and once again, I apologize for what happened. Am I too early for that party?”

Yuu laughed lightly, “Eh, not too much. Jade said he was almost done setting up lunch, and Floyd texted recently saying that Jamil and Azul were just about done with their exams and about to check out. C’mon, let’s sit down.” They waved him over to a sofa and plopped down. Malleus sat down next to them, and Sebek took his other side. Kalim took the seat

opposite, and Grim clambered up onto his lap, holding the piece of streamer in his teeth like a dead mouse, and they all started explaining everything that had happened. Yuu started off maintaining careful eye contact with the bridge of his nose, the way they did when they had gotten stuck doing the Serious Conversation stare but were too tired to actually keep it up, before they eventually settled down and turned away, leaning their head on his shoulder over Sebek's protests. While they were all telling the story, Jade started setting out various dishes, plus a plastic box under what looked like a fairly strong seal, by human mage standards, and added his own interjections.

By the time the recounting was wrapping up, Floyd, Azul, and Jamil were making their way in. Jamil shot a nervous look at Malleus as he sat down next to Kalim, not taking his eyes off of him even while he checked the sealed box for signs of tampering and unsealed it, passing it back to Kalim, who pulled out a single serving of his own lunch. Azul attempted to sit on Jamil's other side, but found himself flanked by the twins, who seemed oddly determined to keep him squeezed between them as much as possible. This didn't stop him from attempting to talk Jamil into some kind of business proposition, which did not relax Jamil *per se* , but he seemed content to scowl and grump at Azul's advances rather than stare at Malleus like he was waiting for the other foot to drop.

After everyone had had a chance to fill their plates and eat, Yuu and Sebek left and returned with a few tubs with hand cranks on the lid that turned out to be full of ice cream. Jade brought in the bowls and spoons, and indicated which tub had which flavor, while Sebek bragged about helping stir one of the tubs. Malleus picked that one, and scooped himself some chocolate ice cream. Yuu grinned and made a comment about the sparkle in his eye while they scooped their own bowl of mint, before settling back against his side.

Eventually Sebek gave up on trying to get Yuu to stop "crowding Lord Malleus", as they had fallen asleep, so he took the opportunity to ask how they were getting along now. Sebek looked confused by the question, so he elaborated. "I know that you had something of a quarrel recently-" he smiled lightly at Sebek's spluttering, "Of course I knew, neither of you were at all subtle. I truly didn't intend to leave you here alone for so long, but after that time working together, you at least seem to be more cooperative? At least, you're not yelling any louder than you do at Silver, and they said you were a great help."

Sebek preened a little, but before he could answer, the scrape of metal against the floor woke Yuu up. They glared at Jamil, who was pulling the stepladder back out to straighten out one of the trails of streamers until Kalim stepped up and held it steady, saying something about not wanting him to get killed. They nodded at this, and then promptly fell asleep on Malleus' shoulder again. Sebek cleared his throat and began, "Well, they're certainly… forward, and reckless, and they wouldn't know manners if they were smacked upside the head with an etiquette guide!" He caught himself before he could get properly worked up before continuing, "However, they're not unintelligent, and they are clearly motivated to defend the people they care about, and would be good at it if their situational awareness were more consistent, and… well, you are definitely one of those people, and I can't possibly fault their taste there." He smirked, and his volume started to climb again. "Truly, this is a sign of your magnificence, that even someone from a whole other world could tell how incredible you are! They would not dream of snubbing you for even as small an event as this, for they know how true you are! And how excellent a guest! And how overwhelmingly powerful!"

At some point, Sebek's speech woke Yuu up, and they blinked blearily before adding, "And how nice a pillow."

"And how nice a—wait! No! Human—!" He started spluttering and trying to backtrack without saying that there was something Malleus wasn't incredible at, and they snickered back at him. Malleus leaned back, smiling, and let the bickering continue around him, while Kalim passed him another bowl of ice cream (coconut this time). Jamil was looking at him again, but this time with an expression like he thought he knew the answer to a question, but was now more confused. Malleus met his gaze, and he looked away.

The party, such as it was, continued around him, but this time when Yuu started to nod off again, he nudged them a little and suggested they retire to Ramshackle. Azul and the twins, who were all looking a bit tired themselves, made their excuses as well, and Jamil looked relieved to see them all go. "There's only a few days left of winter break," Malleus said as he was dropping Yuu and Grim off at their dorm, "I must say, this was the first time I was invited to any kind of party over break. I quite enjoyed it."

Grim and Sebek groaned a little at that, and Yuu let out a small huff of laughter, "Well, hopefully next time you'll get invited somewhere without anyone I know nearly dying. Have a good rest of break, Hornton, Sebek."

"You too, human." Sebek responded, and Malleus voiced his agreement. They said their goodbyes, and he and Sebek teleported back to the valley, to be met with several frantic guards on Malleus' part, and about 20 missed calls from the Zigvolts on Sebek's. In his opinion, though (not Sebek's, however, based on his expression when he retrieved his forgotten phone), all of the fuss was more than worth it.

Chapter End Notes

Note from Past Me:
I have a dreamwidth now, it's linked in my profile. I'm not super active there, but I did post a joke that I cut from this chapter there a little while ago.

I'm *probably* gonna update Sleeping With the Fishes next, but another fic idea is percolating in my brain right now, so we'll see which one I wind up motivated to do first lol

Thanks again for reading!
Note from Present Me:
I did not bother to put my dreamwidth in my fanfiction.lol profile since I never use it these days, but it's still up and I guess you can hunt it down from my ao3 if you really want.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!