

Mermaid AU

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/18202961) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/18202961>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Yu-Gi-Oh! Duel Monsters (Anime & Manga)
Relationships:	Bakura Ryou/Thief King Bakura , Atem/Mutou Yuugi , Marik Ishtar/Yami Marik
Characters:	Bakura Ryou , Thief King Bakura , Yami Yuugi Atem , Mutou Yuugi , Marik Ishtar , Kaiba Seto , Kaiba Mokuba , Otogi Ryuugi Duke Devlin , Rebecca Hopkins Rebecca Hawkins , Jounouchi Katsuya Joey Wheeler , Mazaki Anzu Tea Gardner , Kawai Shizuka Serenity Wheeler
Additional Tags:	yami marik is named Melvin here lol
Language:	English
Series:	Part 6 of Drafts and Ideas (I'll Most Likely Never Finish)
Stats:	Published: 2019-03-22 Words: 9,161 Chapters: 1/1

Mermaid AU

by [NyoomWrites](#)

Summary

Ryou is assigned to study the first discovery of mermaids. Things get out of hand.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

The sailors watched the dark murky clouds of the passing storm rumble as they drifted further out of it's reach, the thrumming of the boats motor inducing sighs of relief from the whole crew before they were sent back to work to check on their vessel.

One of them shouts, however, and a crowd grew on one side of the vessel as something seemed to capture their attention off of the ship.

It must have been a man overboard, as there was nothing but ocean from horizon to horizon, and when they looked over there the body was, floating in the water.

They were unresponsive, and out in the middle of the ocean hey must have been dead. They threw out a net to bring in the poor bastard, maybe see if they had a family or how they died.

But it wasn't a person, a fact that was made clear as they dumped the creature onto the deck, bruised, bleeding, and luckily for them, completely unconscious.

After calling in the mysterious creature to their higher ups, the captain was connected right to the second in command and then the very top.

"A merman?! Is it alive?"

"It appears so sir."

"Keep it netted and make for the nearest stop, I'll be sending over a jet to pick it up."

"But sir, what about our cargo?"

"You can finish your delivery after it's picked up, I'll take responsibility if it's late."

"Yes sir."

"And consider that your last trip for a while, tell the crew you're all getting a paid vacation."

"A-are you serious?"

"I'm in a good mood."

"Th-thank you! I'll be sure to tell them- thank you Mr. Kaiba!"

Ryou blinked a few times fast. "Mermaids?"

Seto was sitting back with connected fingertips and legs crossed; the very depiction of a pleased boss. "Correct."

"Like- actual, real-"

"In the flesh mer-people yes."

“And you want *me* to study them?”

“I would hope you know by now I hate repeating myself.”

“Y-yes! I’ll... do it.”

“Perfect,” Seto uncrossed his legs and leaned forward, pressing a button on his intercom. “You’ll be paired with another scientist coming all the way from Syria. He’s a big asset of mine so make a good impression, for your sake.”

“Of course...” Ryou mumbled, still a little bewildered at the sudden situation.

“Now.”

Ryou blinked again and left his thoughts as the door behind him opened and stood from his seat to meet this scientist.

The man had dark skin, wild hair and sharp eyes, sturdy aura making up for his short height and he reached his hand out for Ryou’s hand, shaking it before Ryou knew what was happening.

[See I had started to actually write there but then it goes right back to the outline]

At first Atem is assigned to study Bakura but Atem is impatient and Bakura is unresponsive while Ryou is surprised by how responsive and interactive Yugi is. When Atem and Ryou group up to talk about their data they decide to switch specimens while they were still early in the study.

Atem is pleasantly surprised by Yugi’s playfulness and comfort in the new environment (Atem’s a leo he craves attention). Yugi was captured in a tropical area and his environment is designed to match that area.

Bakura watches Ryou and Ryou spends half his time looking for Bakura. From the small glimpses he gets of Bakura he tries to draw him. A tail fin here, a bit of tail there. He posts his drawings on his board in his office and finds the slow pace more boring but tries every day to lure the merman out. He nearly slips in the tank carrying fish up the ladder to feed the merman and thinks he sees him darting around underwater. He brings his notebook up to the rafter and draws the water. Bakura was captured in the middle of the ocean unconscious and covered in gashes presumably from a fight, so they tried to match his environment to the deep sea. Ryou realises maybe he doesn’t come out because it’s too bright. He switches on the softer, blue LED lights and turns them to low as they usually are at night and low and behold, Bakura emerges. Ryou doesn’t move as he comes out and stands in front of the glass just staring. Bakura glares at him and bares his sharp fangs in aggression. Ryou is enraptured by the site of him. His fins were sharp and thick, meant for efficient maneuvering and powerful thrusts. He had one long fin along his back which flicked open and darkened in

color, another sign of aggression. He was huge, maybe 8-10 ft long. Ryou touches the glass with eyes full of wonder and they hold eye contact, wonder against steely mistrust. Bakura scowls further after the moment passes and rushes forward, slamming his tail into the glass and causing Ryou to fall in surprise and startlement. Ryou picks up his things and decides that's enough interaction for the day and leaves the room, leaving instructions to leave the lights at their current settings during the day and keep night mode.

For the next few days he draws up in the rafters after feeding and watches Bakura darting around, peeking over the edge until he disappeared again. This becomes routine until one day Bakura decides to watch him from the water as he draws, uneasy with Ryou out of his sight. Ryou doesn't notice for a while, his sketchbook filled with failed drawings of Bakura based on memory, all of which he was unhappy with. He flips the page again and tries to draw a magpie, something he's actually good at and when he glances up he finally sees Bakura. He freezes, Bakura's eyes narrow. Ryou's eyes dart around feeling awkward just being watched like that and decides to try and draw a fish Bakura might recognize.

He ends up drawing a shark, glancing up every once in a while to find Bakura still watching him. Was it just him or was it getting closer? As he sketches he shakes his hand out, making the merman flinch back in surprise, but Ryou doesn't notice, now enraptured by his art. When he finishes he turns the book around to show the merman but he's gone. He looks around and flinches when he sees Bakura trying to grab at the bucket of fish a few feet away from him. Bakura snatches the bucket and drags it underwater when he sees Ryou notice him and Ryou hurries down the steps to watch him eat. Bakura easily drags the bucket into his artificial lair where he knows Ryou can't see him and Ryou pouts. Smart merman. Eventually Bakura peeks out from the lair and Ryou shows him the shark he drew, prompting Bakura to come closer. Ryou's face ebbs from excitement to disappointment and flicks through the sketch book looking for something else the merman might understand. He finds a picture of a dolphin he'd drawn a while ago and flinches when he sees Bakura close up to the glass, hands on the glass, claws holding him in place, white irises piercing his soul. If it weren't for the glass, they would have been but a few inches apart with nothing between them. Ryou presses the picture of the dolphins up against the glass and Bakura studies the picture, his long nails trailing the lines. Ryou studies his features up close while the merman is preoccupied, taking note of all the scars and the large scar down his right eye, unconsciously getting closer to the glass bit by bit. Bakura looked up and they stared into each other's eyes for a long moment before Bakura retrieved the bucket, threw it up onto the rafter and retreated back to his lair.

Another week passes and Atem and Ryou share their findings. Ryou is jealous of all the activity Yugi is expressing, but is glad they switched anyway. Atem managed to get a bunch of scales from Yugi's tail, easily as Yugi was picking them out of his tail and they nabbed them as they got caught in the filter, which was changed regularly. The scale was a beautiful shade of glittering gold and violet and since Atem is constantly taking info on Yugi he asks Ryou to study them. Ryou studies the scales thoroughly, making sure they weren't carrying any diseases or anything, and ultimately determine them like normal fish scales. He turns one of the scales into a necklace since it was thick enough and Bakura is more cautious around him because of it.

Ryou comes in after an all nighter studying the scales which isn't different from usual as he usually only got 5 hours maximum of sleep. It's a normal day with next to 0 activity from Bakura and is drawing. He decides to listen to music and eventually falls asleep. When he falls over he startles awake and hears a small splash. He looks over the edge of the rafters in time to see Bakura disappear into his lair. He rushes out to look at the camera footage and finds Bakura had crept up onto the rafters as he was sleeping and was messing with him. Touching his hair, flipping through his sketchbook, touching his bare skin with a sharp nail tip, looking at his ears, etc. He also spent a few straight minutes just looking at his legs. Ryou is mortified as he takes notes and as he comes in the next day. It was *so close*. It could've killed him right then and there. So why didn't It? Do they not eat humans?

He forgets then that Marik was coming in to take a look at the specimen. Marik is all over him as usual. They have an affectionate, brotherly relationship since Marik is very attention starved and Ryou doesn't mind. Bakura is jealous as Marik hugs him from behind as he takes notes, holds their hands together, and they talk constantly. Marik gets a notice and leaves after a few hours and Bakura finally emerges. Ryou had a few drawings of Marik in his sketchbook since Bakura refused to come out and left it on the rafter. While he's writing, Bakura jumps up and snatches the book, and Ryou yells at him as he takes it to the other side of the tank and rips out the drawings of Marik before throwing it back at him and going back to his lair.

Ryou talks to Atem and Atem believes the mermaids are imprinting on them and are getting jealous as Yugi is less active with other people around. So it was jealous? Ryou is worried and decides to not let Marik come by too often, as if he already was going to what with it being a private study.

Ryou decides to take a chance and dangles his bare legs and feet over the rafters as he draws. Ryou looks around for Bakura and stiffens when he realizes the merman was right under the rafters and started touching his legs. The tips of his claws trailed along his skin and he grows nervously aroused at the sensation. Bakura's hands are slick and cold from the water and when Bakura's hands start tickling his feet he fails to hold in a laugh and Bakura retreats. Ryou is disappointed but also happy with their once a day interaction, this one being their first touching interaction. He freezes though when Bakura jumps up onto the rafters, a clawed hand on either side of him as he leans back from the sudden terrifyingly close proximity. Bakura's tail dips into the water as they stare, Ryou in fear and Bakura with curiosity. Ryou is too scared to scurry away from him and Bakura notices his fear and tries to show he's not a threat by not moving, which is what mer people did in the ocean but Ryou doesn't know that custom and starts to feel awkward with the merman just looming over him.

“Uh...” Ryou makes a noise and Bakura's ears twitch.

“Uh... I... p-please don't hurt me... or anything...” Bakura growls and imitates his words perfectly in his voice. This surprises Ryou so much his curiosity overcomes his fear and he

keeps talking.

“Oh wow... uhm... do you understand me?” Bakura repeats.

“So no...” Bakura repeats. “I’m Ryou,” he says pointing to himself. “Ryou.”

“Im Ryou, Ryou.” Bakura repeats.

“Ryou.”

“Ryou.”

“Ry-ou.”

“Ryou...” his voice lowers and he speaks softer and Ryou startles when the merman easily holds himself up on one arm and raises the other to touch his face, making his face heat in nervous embarrassment. The touch was light and Ryou is amazed at the merman’s soft expression, seeming so human like.

“Ryou!” Malik decides then is the best time to visit and he and the merman turn their heads to the entrance where Malik is frozen, staring at them fearfully. Bakura falls back in the tank and retreats to his lair and Ryou chastises Malik for interrupting the study.

“You could have been killed!”

“He’s imprinting on me though. I don’t think he’ll attack without being provoked.”

Malik says another merman was caught and he was going to be assigned to it. Atem and him were to come at once. Ryou looks back at the tank and then follows Malik to see the new merman.

“I’m gonna name him Malik!”

“You’re naming him after yourself?”

“Well doesn’t he look like me?”

“I mean... barely... but that’ll be confusing.”

“Then I’ll name him... Melvin!”

“Really?”

“Like yours is so much better.”

“Mine isn’t called anything.”

“Why not?”

Ryou wonders if they have their own names.

Ryou returns the next day with an assortment of different fish to see what the merman will and won't eat. Yugi was introduced to fruits and nuts, which were reachable in his environment and he loved them. Ryou would be introducing deep sea fish, even shark.

Bakura refuses to come out for a while but appears suddenly behind him while he's organising the fish, making him shiver with how quiet he was. Ryou shoves the box of fish towards him and Bakura looks at it suspiciously. He sniffs and feels the fish before eating them and eats nearly everything, leaving out the eel, which was known to be poisonous, and especially liking the shark. Ryou marks it all down along with some observations like how some scales were showing signs of molt as Bakura picked at one of them.

Bakura stares at his legs which were bare from wearing rolled up pants and no shoes. Ryou wiggled his toes when he sees Bakura staring and notices his ears twitch and eyes widen for a moment. Ryou brings his legs up in front of Bakura and wiggled his toes and Bakura takes his foot, staring and touching it, tracing the line of his calf bone up his leg. Ryou realizes it probably wasn't a good idea to be flaunting his bare skin in front of such a sharp toothed, dangerous, literal animal. He squeaks in alarm when the merman licks a strip up his leg with a slimy, long tongue and pulls his leg back with a red face. Bakura stares at him with an almost knowing look and Ryou pouts fiercely when he actually SMIRKS at him! Ryou gathers up the materials he'd brought and starts shoving them in his satchel to distract himself. While he does that the merman slithers his entire body up onto the rafter and it keens with the weight. Ryou is so distracted with his packing that his alarm is delayed as the merman hugs him from behind and wraps its tail around them like a nest, forcing Ryou's legs up to his chest as they were pressed together.

Ryou sat stunned and nervous. Obviously the merman wasn't attacking or aggravated- hopefully at least- but was this really the result of simple familiar imprinting? It seemed a little too... affectionate. Maybe cuddling would be typical for a more social specimen like the tropical mermaid, but this deep sea lone creature would be considered far from cuddly. Even so, they stayed like that until he noticed that the vibrating on his back and right next to his ear was less like a growl and more like a content purr which caused him to slowly release the tension in his shoulders and tentatively run his hand along the white scales along its snakelike tail.

He wondered again if the merman had its own name. Most likely not, since from what he'd seen they were only able to mimic sounds and language, extremely well, but did he understand any of it? Maybe he should ask? At best he'd get an answer, at worst the merman wouldn't understand and kill him from frustration.

"Do you have a name?" He asked quietly, tracing the scales on its tail soothingly. The merman was much larger than him, engulfing nearly his whole form draped over his back, clawed hands crossed over his chest and holding his sensitive sides firmly but non threateningly and surrounding them with another layer of tail.

The purring wavered in consistency at his words but the creature didn't answer. Ryou expected as much and felt like he might just fall asleep then and there. His usual five hours of sleep wasn't cutting it with the private study and Malik's insistence on hanging out nearly

everyday. Despite his clothes being damp from the water the merman's tail trailed up, the creature was extremely warm suddenly, which didn't make sense as his environment was at the bottom of the frigid ocean.

He fought the heaviness in his eyelids but it was in vain. His last thought before he dozed off in the dangerous creature's arms was if the merman could regulate its body temperature.

When he wakes up he's still with the merman on the rafter but his position changed so he was curled up in the tail on his side with the merman still hugging him from behind. He pushed himself up and noticed the night mode lights had activated. Oh no... what time was it? He couldn't see the time on his watch since it was so dark so he stretched over the thick tail and tried to get to his phone in his satchel but was pulled back into the living nest with a thick growl. The merman pulled him so they were chest to chest and rolled over so Ryou's feet were wrapped securely with his tail so he was unable to move.

He wasn't paid 100\$ an hour assigned on a private study to cuddle with the specimen, Kaiba would surely kill him for losing precious data collecting time. He struggled weakly, not wanting to aggravate the merman but also very urgently wanting to leave but he was only squeezed further into the creature's chest for his efforts. He felt a little too hot and sticky in the mouth from his most likely very long, very regretful nap and tried again to push at the firm chest he was pressed against but it's grip was as firm as steel. He tried anyway and eventually the creature relented with a disappointed sounding growl and he bolted for his satchel, digging out his phone and shining a light on his watch. 8:47. He swore out loud.

He'd started the day at 6 as usual, been at the facility at 8, and had been with the merman for maybe 5 hours before he fell asleep. So he'd slept for... four or five hours? He swore again and turned to glare at the merman only to find the creature completely missing. He hadn't even heard the water splash. He gathered up his things and flew down the stepping ladder to the aquarium floor and was halfway to the door before stopping in his tracks. He looked back at the tank to find two shining irises staring at him from the lair. He waved goodbye as usual to the ominous pair of floating orbs which blinked at him before flying out the door and to his car so he could get home. He would look at the footage tomorrow, or access them from his computer in case he didn't fall asleep that night now that his sleep schedule was altered.

He got home and decided to take a shower, putting some water to boil for tea and letting the water run.

As he stripped off his clothes a blotch of dark skin caught his eye and he ran a hand along his neck shocked. The side of his neck was covered with one large, dark, pulsating... *hickey!* That thing had given him a hickey!

His face and chest flushed red with embarrassment, shock and horror. That creature had been sucking on his neck in his sleep and he hadn't startled at all! *Imprinting?* Oh this was *imprinting* Atem? *Imprinting?!* Did the tropical mermaid and Atem cuddle and give each other hickies as a result of simple *imprinting*? He shivered, not knowing how to feel about it other than disturbed and confused. He took a thorough shower, maybe too long of a shower, and got out in a hurry when he heard the teapot whistle.

He got dressed for bed and pulled out leftovers from the other nights dinner since it was long past the appropriate time for him to make anything and ate quickly before taking his tea to the bedroom and setting his laptop on his lap after getting under the covers. He logged into the private study database and reviewed Atem's findings which were prosperous as always. Next he read over Malik's first report as today was his first day with the new merman, Melvin.

It was a male from the Mexican coastline with darker skin, sandy colored hair and a dusty gold tail, reflective, Malik described, so as it could blend in with sand to catch its prey, most likely. It was very interesting, not as outgoing as the tropical merman and not as private as the deep sea one. He wasn't interested in the people but had quite the mischievous personality as he'd already jumped up and stolen the fish bucket when Malik was feeding him and pulled everything he could reach on the rafters into his tank, nearly even Malik himself. Malik had even gotten a picture of him. Ryou was kind of jealous that they both had so much information while his was still a mystery personality-wise. He was saved by the deep sea food experiment, however, making his report twice as long as usual.

He skipped to the part where he fell asleep and sped up the footage, watching as the merman shifted their positions after a quarter hour and then an hour later started licking and nibbling his neck contentedly. He watched this happen for another quarter hour before it switched to petting his hair and holding him closer. Then the next few hours were nothing but napping until Ryou got up again.

Ryou was aghast but decided to add the long period spent out of water to his report as well as the ability to regulate temperature which he'd noted before he dozed off and logged out of the study site, throwing his laptop to the side and hiding under the covers, tea long forgotten.

He needed to talk with Atem and Malik as soon as possible. This was much stranger and much deeper than simple *imprinting*.

Ryou talks with Atem and Malik about their relationships and Atem admits he and Yugi have gotten into physical contact such as cuddling, petting and the tail nest thing. Malik has only had his for a week while Ryou and Atem have had theirs for nearly two months so he doesn't have much to add. Ryou doesn't show them the hickey and wears a turtleneck but does ask if Yugi bites him at all. Atem shows them some bruises along his arms similar to Ryou's bruise and they're flabbergasted. Atem was alarmed at first because he thought Yugi was trying to eat him, but then he realised Yugi was marking him in visible places most likely to mark his territory.

Fic is supposed to be first person POV but this is mostly first draft so it switches a lot :/

A week later, Seto figures that since Ryou's merman is the most inactive that it might be because Ryou is incompetent and decides to switch out all the researchers for a few weeks, like an experiment, also to test the imprinting/ territory theory that Atem presented.

“Oh... hello Mr. Kaiba, Mokuba.”

“Hey Ryou!”

“Touzokuo.” I gulped.

“What brings you all the way down here today?”

“I’ve noticed that your reports have given the least amount of information of the three. Even the new one gives twice as much info than yours does in a week.” I didn’t dare glance away from him to see if the merman was watching or out of his lair. “To test whether it’s due to it being more private than the others or just because you’re incompetent in your research, I’ve decided to replace all the researchers for two weeks for a fresh new perspective.”

“B...but...!”

“I’m not ignorant to the imprinting theory Atem presented either, so this will also be testing that theory. Like an experiment. This means you will have no contact with the specimens until the two weeks are up. I advise you to spend the next hour preparing information and a routine for your replacement who will be coming to the facility tonight. That’s all I came to say.” Seto turned and walked out of the room but Mokuba was still pressed to the glass.

“We also wanted to come see the mermaids, the other two looked so cool! But this one we haven’t seen tail or fin of.”

“Let’s go, Mokuba!” Seto called and Mokuba tore himself from the glass to chase after his brother.

“Promise we aren’t taking you off for good, it’s just temporary! See ya later Ryou!” The doors slid shut with a beep after him and I stared at the door, thinking. This was bound to happen, a fresh new perspective would be great to reflect on the information already accumulated and it was a great opportunity to test relationships and behavior around new humans, but instead of feeling excited or relieved for finally getting a break after nearly two months of constant observation, I wasn’t either. I felt... kind of sad.

A tapping sound from behind caused me to turn and there was the merman, face irritable as always but seemed to harden even further when he looked at me. I sniffed, realising that I had been tearing up and quickly wiped at my eyes. I didn’t know I was this attached to the creature. It was only two weeks and a vacation would be good for me.

The merman swims to the top of the tank but swims back down when I don’t follow. I just stare at him for a while. I had to go get my information ready, I couldn’t stay. This would be the last time we would see each other for a few weeks. I stared at his scars and his pure white slithering tail, waving from side to side to keep himself in place. His narrow violet eyes softening with growing anxiety. I had to go...

I took a step back and tore my eyes from him, making my way for the door. He would be fine. He wasn’t going anywhere. A second perspective would be good for the study. It wasn’t forever. I hurried out of the room trying to ignore the pounding on the glass.

Rebecca replaces Atem to study Yugi, Mai replaces Malik and Duke replaces Ryou.

Ryou decides to go down to the beach with Malik and feels like they're being watched. He makes sure to wear a collared shirt and keep his hair down even though it's summer to cover his bruise. He ends up sitting alone at the end of the docks drawing and when he looks up he's startled to find two mermaids watching him (Anzu and Serenity). He can't see their tails but their ears are the same long and colorful types that Yugi has. Another mermaid (Joey) jumps onto the dock and snatches the scale necklace from around his neck and he stands in alarm. It takes it back to the other mermaids and they share looks at the color before jumping forward and dragging Ryou into the water, leaving only his sketchbook behind, pages flipping in the breeze.

Ryou tries not to panic as the mermaids drag him through the water for a nearly unbearable amount of time and then he's thrown out of the water and onto some wooden boards and he hacks and coughs, breathing in the air thankfully. They brought him to a boat house, the tide high enough for them to easily climb up onto the boards out of the water and surround him, two of the three looking malicious. He backs up against the boat house wall as they get closer. Their tails glimmer with teal, gold and scarlet before he shuts his eyes tight with fear.

"Stop! He fears you!" Ryou's eyes pop open when he hears one of them talk and sees one of the mermaids pulling on one of the other's ear. His face heats as he realises it's a female from her bare chest covered in long auburn hair, the color complimenting her gold and scarlet tipped tail and hazel eyes. The mer *man*, who's ear she was pulling, had shaggy blond hair and brown eyes, a complete contrast to his teal and gold tipped tail, and pulled his ear out from her grasp with a vexed expression. The third mermaid with strangely shorter brown hair and striking blue eyes contrasting her scarlet and gold tipped tail, pushed herself back a bit to give him space, a regretful look on her face. Ryou let out a breath he hadn't known he was holding and panted a bit, looking between the three of them, frightened.

The one who pulled on the other merman's ear gave him an apologetic look.

"Sorry," she said. "We not hurt you. You smell like us and have this," she held up the necklace with the scale. "So we wanted to talk but not in open." Her words were clear and concise despite her bad grammar and Ryou's eyes were wide with astonishment. So they *could* talk!

"Do you have names?" The blonde sat back on his tail and crossed his arms, pointed nails digging lightly into his muscled arms.

"We not here to give names. We want know where you got this!" He snatches the necklace and waves it around angrily.

"I'm Anzu," the mermaid on the left said, shooting the merman an exasperated look. "He Jounouchi."

“Hey!” The merman, Jounouchi, snarled at her but she simply ignored him while the mermaid in the middle gave me a soft smile.

“And I’m Shizuka.”

“Shi!” Jounouchi whined, giving her a betrayed look.

“That my fool brother.”

“ *Shiiii!* ”

“We want know where you get this scale,” Anzu continued, snatching the necklace from Jounouchi and presenting it to me in a webbed and clawed hand. I picked it up tentatively, sitting with crossed legs.

“Do you know the mermaid it belongs to?” I asked and Jounouchi slammed his fists on the boards, startling me again.

“Yes, we know him! We want know where he is!” He exclaimed, but reeled back when Shizuka pulled on his ear again.

“He our friend,” Anzu said. “You know him?” I nodded shakily.

“Yeah, he’s one of our specimens.” The mers gave me different looks of worry. “Don’t worry,” I rushed to say. “He’s completely fine. We aren’t doing anything to him, we’re just studying him.”

“Stud-y-ing?” Shizuka sounded out.

“We’re... looking at him and what he does. What he eats and his behavior.” The three mers seemed to breathe a sigh of relief, even Jounouchi. “He’s... part of your pod, you said?”

“Yes, he our pod. He taken when caught in net.” Ah yes, the merman was said to have been caught in a fishing net and bought by Kaiba for the project. Merfolk were a concept debated over millennia, depicted only in myth and history, but the discovery of this creature was undeniable proof that the species existed.

When Kaiba got wind of the discovery he did everything in his power to make it so he was responsible for the research, making him even more rich and popular. Contrary to popular belief, Kaiba had no other intentions than to do research and unknown to most people, he was actually very enamoured with mythical and legendary creatures. Now that the line between possible and impossible was being blurred with the discovery of mermaids, he wanted to explore all he could, and that was that.

“You just study him then you let him go?” Ryou paled. The discovery and research of mermaids was a once in a lifetime opportunity and he had no idea when Kaiba planned to release them. What if he planned to keep them until they died to test their lifespan? The study was planned to be simple research and study, but when was the next time they would find a merfolk?

“I don’t know...” The three mermaid’s expressions fell. “I’d have to talk to the others... I’m not sure when... or even *if* they’ll be let go...”

“They?” Anzu questioned, a pensive look on her face now.

“There are three, including the merman.”

“Yugi.”

“What?”

“His name Yugi.” Jounouchi said and I blinked. What a fitting name.

“He... won’t be let go?” Shizuka’s eyes shone with sadness and I sighed.

“It’s complicated. We had no idea that your kind existed and this is a once in a lifetime opportunity to record as much about you as we can, but I don’t know if we’re planning to keep them in captivity for life or just until we get all the information we need...” The three mermaids stared at me with shared expressions of hopelessness and I glanced between them and the scale resting in my hand. “I’m sure at the very least he won’t be released for another few months... but maybe if he answers our questions and cooperates, the study will go quicker and he’ll be released sooner,” I thought out loud and the mers expressions lifted.

“If he cooperate he be released?” Shizuka asked and I nodded, still thinking.

“If he helps with the research, eventually we won’t need him anymore and he should be released back to where we found him.”

“If tell him we here, he definitely cooperate!” Anzu exclaimed and the other mers nodded in agreement, newfound hope lifting their expressions. I just hoped it wasn’t mislead.

I agreed with the mermaids to come back to the boat house the next day. The small shack was well hidden behind brambles and trees in the side of the beach and abandoned from the lack of upkeep and water craft. It wasn’t far from the docks they dragged me from, thankfully, as I travelled down an overgrown path and back to the beach. I grabbed my sketchbook from the dock I had been sitting on and hurried back home to message Atem and Malik to go out to talk the next day.

Atem has been trying to at least visit Yugi but Rebecca remorsefully keeps denying him, saying it will disturb the results. They will be back to the normal routine in just another week though, so they begrudgingly decide to bear with it and wait patiently. It wasn’t permanent. Malik has tried too but was denied with the same response. Although Mai did ask him a bit of behavioral questions before sending him on his way again. Ryou had obediently not tried to see his merman again what with the lack of information making him already ‘incompetent’ and expendable.

Ryou asks them how long they think the study will go for and when they think the mermaids will be released. Malik has no clue, he still had a lot to go over. Atem thinks that his research

is very fruitful but even so it would be a year at least until the mer was released. Ryou sighs.

They ask him why he wants to know and Ryou takes notice of Atem's scarlet collared shirt covering the bruises on his arm. 'Marking his territory...' Ryou would have to ask the mers about that. He also decided he would keep the others in the dark about the other mers looking for 'Yugi' until he had gotten to know both parties more, mostly the mers. He'd need to know how they felt about being exposed to humans, or even humanity in general.

"You said... I smelled like one of you." I was back at the boat house with a new composition book and pencil ready. Shizuka and Anzu had appeared soon after I'd arrived, most likely waiting for me and had gotten settled for our chat.

"Yep," Shizuka said, sitting patiently while Anzu braided her long brown red hair.

"You distinguish each other by scent?" I inquired.

"When out of water yes."

"So you have scent glands?" Shizuka hummed.

"It was your smell that attracted us, then we saw the scale. We thought you must have Yugi and if not then we just eat you," she said nonchalantly and I swallowed nervously.

"So you eat humans?"

"No."

"Then... why would you have eaten me?"

"We don't like humans. We seen what they do to other creatures, even their own kind. We decide to stay hidden." That was fair.

"How do you know how to speak then? If you would stay away from human kind?"

"Our pod around humans a lot. We learned their language and taught it to each other."

"So not all mermaids can speak then?"

"Mermaids?"

"That's what we call you."

"Ooh. Pretty."

"Do you call yourselves something different?"

"We don't have language, but I like that."

“Me too.” Anzu tied the end of Shizuka’s long braid into a knot so it would stay and then they switched so Shizuka started braiding Anzu’s hair.

“How do you know how to braid?” I asked.

“Helps keep hair out of way when hunting.”

“And cutting it?” Anzu looked away and Shizuka answered.

“Cutting hair... unliked... for females,” she fought to describe her thoughts with her limited vocabulary and I thought about it.

“...It’s taboo?” Shizuka tilted her head at me. “It describes something that goes against custom.” Shizuka nods.

“Yes. Taboo. But Anzu not like long hair. She best hunter either way.” Anzu smiled softly down at her tail and I smiled slightly too, noting some things in my notebook.

“Is males having shorter hair normal then?”

“Oh no. Short hair taboo for both.”

“But Jounouchi has shorter hair too?”

“Yes, but our pod don’t mind.”

“How many are there in your pod?”

“Mmm... not many.” I figured they didn’t know the human numbering system and let that question slide. “I want to ask question.” I lifted my eyes from my notes to look at her.

“Oh, okay.”

“Are you male or female?” I blinked at her completely serious and innocent expression and sighed.

“Male.”

“Really?” If I hadn’t just found out that both males and females normally had long hair I still wouldn’t be offended as I actually got asked this question more times than I’d like to admit.

“Yes, really.”

“Very strange,” she said and I tilted my head.

“Why’s that?”

“Males do not scent mark other males.”

“I don’t follow.” Shizuka finished braiding and tying together the two braids along each side of Anzu’s head and they both turned to give me matching looks as if I was missing something

obvious.

“It’s faint now, but you still smell like *mermaid*,” she spoke the word tentatively, still getting used to the name. “It unusual for males to scent mark males.” Oh. They meant my assigned merman. My face heated with embarrassment.

“Oh... i-is it?”

“Male scent mark *female* when they mate. That why it strange.”

“W-wait, what? Mate?”

“Yes. Mermaid scent mark when they want mate.” When they mate? What?

“It... it wants to *mate* with me?!” My notebook fell out of my lap as I held my face in my hands in shock. Both mermaids stared at me like I had grown a second head.

“You don’t know?”

“Of course not! I don’t smell anything!” I felt around the fading bruise on the back of my neck, my face on fire with mixed feelings of embarrassment and horror. It wanted to mate with me? But males don’t mate with males? Did it not know I was male? Did it think I was female? And even then, I’m human, so...?

“But I’m human!”

“Mermaid and human mate sometimes.”

“They *do*?” I stare at them, completely dumbfounded and they nod indifferently.

“It very rare. Need many trust and time. Usually male human mate with female mermaid.” That would explain the stories of sirens and men disappearing out at sea. Sirens and such were at the back of my mind however as I realised this merman... wanted to *mate* with me. I didn’t know if he even knew how to talk! If he had a name!

As I walked into the room the first thing I noticed was that it was much too bright. I was sure Duke had read my notes and precautions. Maybe the system had rebooted and he didn’t reset the settings. Duke’s information was refreshing from a new perspective but still just as short on his reports which I took guilty pleasure from as it should now be clear the merman was a tough subject to study. I turned down the lights and peered around the tank as I headed towards the step ladder, but the tank looked empty. I chewed my lip anxiously as I climbed the ladder and looked down into the shimmering water.

Maybe he was asleep, I reasoned. Or maybe he was more comfortable with Duke and didn’t even recognize me. That’d solve my attraction issue, but might hinder my research for a while. I set my satchel down and sat with my legs crossed. I pulled out my sketchbook and flicked through the sketches.

I'd been drawing since middle school through highschool and had debated between marine biology and being an artist. When I was found out I could draw my research during a dissection I accepted that drawing would be more of a hobby, but biology was my passion and ticket to a fruitful and comfortable life.

I didn't draw any of the mermaids at the boat house, but I did think of them a lot. I promised I would check in on Yugi and visit them at the docks any time I could. Their pod had decided to stay nearby until Yugi was released.

I put down my sketchbook and took off my glasses to wipe them with my microfiber cloth. This was all turning into much more than a study, I didn't know how to feel. I wished things could be easy and simple like before mermaids were discovered.

I put my glasses back on and looked up again only to find myself face to face with the merman in question, expression pensive and near furious enough to make me squeal in fear as he tackled me onto the rafter. In just a few moments I was once again surrounded by that scaled living nest and wrists pinned by a webbed iron grip, a hot mouth and pointed canines digging into the side of my throat; *possessive*. I couldn't help but whimper at the sensations, but as his manhandling didn't let up I knew I had to put a stop to it before things became too amorous.

"W-wait..." I mumbled, suddenly out of breath. I struggled to pull my hands out of his grasp but he ignored me in favor of biting down on my collar bone. I'd thought maybe I should wear a turtleneck but in the event something like this happened I didn't want to go home with a torn shirt. My blood pressure skyrocketed and face heated terribly when he sucked hard on my pulse right beneath my jaw and I pulled a bit harder against his wrists, raising my voice.

"W-wait! Just a second!" The merman finally backed off to look at me, flushed and hazy eyed from the assault. His expression was still one of chagrin and frustration, but it seemed to soften as he looked down at me. I shook my head to clear my mind and when I pulled my wrists again he let them go in place of hugging me around the middle and burying his face in my neck again. "O-oh come on. You can't have missed me this much." The merman's growl reverberated through both our bodies and I huffed, letting him do as he pleased.

"Duke couldn't have been that bad." I thought for a moment as the merman rubbed his face into my shirt, something I'd never expected to see in my life. "Or do you smell Anzu and Shizuka?" I said thoughtfully. The merman tensed at my words. "Maybe their smell rubbed off on me." I noticed him sniffing my shirt with a growl and scoffed. Unbelievable. "They nearly drowned me at the docks, but then they just wanted to talk. Scared me half to death though." His growl intensified to a snarl as he tightened his grip on me and I chuckled in his stifling hold. "Oh come on I know you understand me!"

His snarling lulled into a quiet grumbling but he did nothing further and I thought maybe he could understand language but not speak it. I still wanted to know his name. "What's your name?" I asked quietly once he'd settled down, just laying draped over me. Once again he stayed silent. "Do you not have a name?" Growling and the sounds of lapping water filled the room and I sighed. I wondered how Atem and Yugi were getting along with their reunion. Or Malik and Melvin.

I made sure to get six hours at least of sleep that night, with no intention of falling asleep on the job again, but his body temperature was rising once again making me sleepy once more, and his grip was inescapable. Was this my job now? Would I have to stay off the rafters for the rest of the study to keep this creature from cuddling me to sleep each time? Was this a siren's curse? "Noooo..." I groaned tiredly. "I can't keep falling asleep. Get off of me please." I tried to sit up but he was a dead weight on top of me. "If all I do is sleep Kaiba's going to throw me off the study for good." He growled, annoyed, but relented and released me from his hold. I crawled out of the nest for good measure and he watched me carefully as I fixed my hair and straightened my clothes, before laying over his own tail languidly.

"Okay," I started, sitting cross legged across from him. I was going to get something out of him, even if it was him copying me. "First of all..." I glanced at the camera, remembering that there was no sound along with the footage, and the merman's eyes watched me carefully. "I'm male... not a female..." The merman's expression didn't waver. "And I met with some mermaids- that's what we call your kind -during my suspension who told me this-" I gestured between him and my neck. "-is what your kind does when you want to... mate." My eyes darted down at the word, my face heating. I couldn't believe I was trying to tell this merman to back off. "And I'm male, not to mention *human*, so that won't work. So... no more of... whatever this was." I pointed at my neck again. I look up again to find the merman staring at me almost bored, his chin resting in a slick palm and tail waving over the waters surface rhythmically. I pout at the creature. "*Secondly*..." I pressed.

Pegasus visits the facility with intent to buy one of the creatures but Kaiba promptly refuses. Pegasus was once saved by a mermaid, named Cecilia, and has been obsessed with mermaids ever since she died.

He sends people to follow the scientists who report to Seto that they are getting followed. Seto says he'll have the study moved to a private facility and they all agree to go. Ryou asks where the facility is and Seto says they'll be leaving the very next day, sending Ryou into a tiny panic because he doesn't know if the pod will be able to follow.

He goes down to the boat house, not knowing how to tell the mermaids that they were leaving and he didn't know where or for how long, but the men follow him and capture Jounouchi, the other girls getting away.

Jounouchi senses danger and drags Ryou into the water. He breaks the surface and breathes deep but the next moment the girls are dragging him out to sea. When they finally break the surface they have him under the dock a little bit away. They look around and watch as Jounouchi is netted and thrown in a white van.

"Jounouchi!" Shizuka cries but Anzu holds her back before looking over sharply at Ryou, vicious sharp teeth bared.

"What is happening?" She hissed.

“It’s... Pegasus’s men... they followed me here- o-oh no I-I’m so sorry,” Ryou stuttered and Shizuka sobbed, struggling more and distracting Anzu from Ryou’s shaking form.

They watched the orange light of sunset bath the van and beach in orange as Jounouchi was driven away.

“Mokuba?” Ryou’s shivering voice crackled through Mokuba’s earpiece and he greeted back worriedly.

“Ryou? What’s up, you sound off,” he answered.

“M-mokuba something really bad happened...” Instantly Mokuba’s computer screen had the security camera footage up but nothing appeared to be off. He pressed a button on the back of his earpiece and connected the call to Seto in his office so he could listen. It was a feature Seto added for emergencies and had come in handy a few times already.

“What happened?”

“I’ve been- there’s a lot to explain, can- can I meet with Seto? I- I need to go to the facility to make sure all the mermaids are okay-”

“They’re fine, I have the security footage up right now.”

“Are you s-sure? They’re okay?”

“I’m sure, but we can meet at the facility-”

“No, no actually they might follow me there-”

“Who?”

“Pegasus’s men, they followed me! Oh my god, Mokuba It’s all my *fault*- ”

“Okay, I’ll get Seto and you can meet us at the facility okay? It’s going to be okay.”

“Alright, I’ll g-go there now. See you.”

“Alright.”

Mokuba pressed his earpiece and ended the call before pushing out of his chair and running for Seto’s office.

“Seto?” He called as he opened the door. His brother was already brushing past him, briefcase in hand.

“If Pegasus touched any of my mermaids he’s in for a hell of a lawsuit.”

Ryou was still wet when the Kaiba brothers arrived at the facility, tracking the water trail from his soaked sneakers to his specimen's tank room and finding him pacing the floor, hand tangled in his hair when they entered.

"What happened?" Seto asked sharply and Ryou's head snapped to the side as it startled him.

"They took a mermaid," Ryou started, which was probably a bad place to start as Seto's brows creased in a starting rage.

"That *bastard*-"

"None of the ones here!" Ryou cut in before things got out of hand, and the brothers gave him different expressions of confusion and... angry confusion.

"Then which one did he take?"

"I..." Ryou took a breath. "Okay so... after I started researching my merman, I met some mermaids at the docks; they decided to reveal themselves to me because I smelled like one of them, and I had Yugi's scale."

"Who's Yugi?" Asked Mokuba.

"The tropical merman, that's his name."

"They have names?!"

"Keep explaining," Seto pressed, continuing in a dark voice. "I'd like to know why you didn't immediately tell me about these mermaids."

"I didn't because... they're intelligent! They wanted to know what happened to the tropical mermaid, because his is a part of their pod, he's their family! They wanted him back but I didn't know when the study would end, and then you said we were moving first thing in the morning so I went down to the boathouse to meet them- but Pegasus's men followed me and they took one of them! And it's all my fault..." Ryou tugged at his hair and paced a bit during his rant and Mokuba glanced up at Seto when he was done, finding his expression hard which to others would be intimidating but Mokuba could tell he was thinking.

"What do you expect me to do about it?" Ryou froze at his answer and threw his hands up, expression desperate.

"I need to get that merman back! Who knows what Pegasus will do to him, and he belongs with his pod!" Ryou looked down solemnly. "They lost Yugi, now Jounouchi and they blame me for both..."

A pounding on glass sounded behind Ryou and all three humans turned to see Ryou's assigned merman, in the flesh, floating behind the glass and looking down at Ryou with a worried expression. Without another word Ryou went up to the glass and leaned his head on the glass, the concerned merman swimming down and leaning around, trying to get a good look at his face.

This was the first time Mokuba and Seto had seen this merman, outside from Ryou's sketches, the pictures from when he was first brought in and a few blurry pictures taken from the security cameras. You'd think they'd have seen it at least once in the last few months, but deep sea creatures knew they're way with stealth.

"Seto..." Seto looked down at his brother who looked back up at him with a soft expression. "Maybe we should rescue that merman and bring him back to his pod. I mean, we know more than anyone what it feels like to have your family taken away right?" He was pulling the sensitive card but it had the effect he wanted. Seto stared down at him with a softness only he could recognize.

"Can that tropical mermaid talk?" Ryou turned back to him and nodded numbly. "Let's go have a chat with him, then I'll consider getting back that mermaid, however impossible a task it may pose to be."

[That's where it ends]

End Notes

I really like this one, it's one of the few I'd really like to finish, but this is it so far.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!