

[Spoilers for Starstruck Crushaders (ZZBA Part 3)]

“That’s the thing. I don’t know if you can. She’s far too powerful at this point, the goal might be to instead try to trick her into defeating herself. I’ll try to distract her as best as I can. After all, her current objective is to destroy me. If I give her what she wants—myself—that could buy you enough time to figure something out. I’m glad to meet you all, and I’m sad it has to end like this. Farewell.”

Mysteo’s dream ghost returned to Heavenly Grimnoire, who had already begun to drain the universe’s lifeforce. Although she knew the inevitable fate that was to come to her, a part of her still wanted to try and change the monster that her other had become. “Heh—Let me guess. You haven’t learned your lesson one bit, and you still want to try and help me. Is that correct? Because I thought you would have taken the hint by now.” Grimnoire taunted. The brave little dream ghost sighed, as it was time to accept her fate.

“Actually, I did learn something. At this point, you are too far gone to be saved. The only way to save everyone is no longer to bring you back, but to bring you down,” Mysteo said.

“Really? What kind of foolish fool do you take me for? You? Bringing ME down? Ha! I didn’t think you had it in you. In fact, I DON’T think you have it in you. Or are you just trying to soften me up before the real heroes swoop in to save the day? Either way, your outcome is looking rather grim. Surely you would have seen this coming, or are you just an even stupider bitch than I had first thought?”

"No tricks. You want me gone, because I'm the last piece of your past. I've served my purpose. I couldn't bring you back. I've... *sniff* I've failed you. I'm sorry. Despite all that, I still cling onto that last ray of hope. The 'heroes' you mentioned will either redeem you or destroy you. Either way, they will be victorious. I believe in them."

"You really are the stupidest bitch in the universe, huh? What is a ray of hope to a Witch of Doom? Well, regardless, it seems you've finally accepted your fate. Heh heh heh. You have no idea how much JOY this will bring me. I've been looking forward to this moment since my first ascension!"

Grimnoire conjured pure darkness and aimed it at Mysteo, who—despite being filled with fear—merely closed her eyes and accepted her fate. The darkness shifted into a bolt as it darted toward Mysteo. In an instant, the ghost had vanished. Though confused, Grimnoire felt relieved. "Finally, that thorn in my side HAS BEEN REMOVED NOW!"

"A LITTLE SHALL I BE CONSUMED."

Mysteo opened her eyes, finding herself in the Dream Bubbles. Though she had been there a few times, being the victim of a game of tug of war between the universe itself and a fallen Angel who can't quite let go of the past, she was still quite confused. Why was she there? It was her understanding that ghosts don't get second chances when they die. *Perhaps it was a miracle from the universe,* Mysteo thought, *but if that were the case, then my friends better pray that the universe has more where that came from.*

Mysteo wandered aimlessly for a while. This was the longest she had stayed in the Dream Bubbles for. Perhaps she could even meet with an old friend she'd been wanting to see for a long time. And so she did. After wandering for a little bit, she found that very friend, TC Strider, sulking in the memory of his room. "Hey, kid. Why so glum?" she greeted.

"Mysteo?! Wha— When— How—" TC was speechless. Had his friend been redeemed?

"Listen. I'm not who you think I am. I'm what remains of the Mysteo you used to know. The Mysteo that killed you is still alive."

"I don't care! You're back, and I've been dying to see you again! Literally, that's both how and why I died to begin with." Tears welled up in TC's eyes. "There's so much we need to catch up on. Oh, where do I begin? Well, my girlfriend and I traveled across space and time to save the Fourth Wall from being corrupted..."

"TC—"

"...and then there was this climactic battle where she died and I avenged her, but then I helped bring her back to life because I guess she's God or something..."

"Hey, I know you've missed me, but—"

"...so we went back in time because she got new windy time travel powers or something, then we met up with Romy and my sister before setting off on a journey to restore the whole universe..."

"Please, just listen to—"

"Oh! And then we found this new universe where things are kind of the same but also not really, and I met a girl version of me who I think was also technically my mom or something? I don't know. And also I reunited with my old best friend from before I met you and—"

“Our friends are in danger.”

“How... Much?”

“I... I don’t really know. It’s safe to assume that the other Mysteo—Grimnoire, as she’s come to call herself now—has already surpassed cosmic threat status. Our world—nay, ALL worlds—are in danger! I don’t...” Mysteo began to cry at the thought of just how futile the situation truly is. “I don’t know what to do anymore. I’ve tried everything, but it didn’t work. I’ve failed us all, TC.”

“That’s no way to think. Isn’t there at least one tiny ray of hope out there?”

“Oh? Y-yeah, actually. I forgot about it. Our friends are the last key to finishing this once and for all. If they fail, then... Then all is lost...”

“Damn, even your rays of hope are depressing? I still stand by what I said, you need to look at things from a different perspective.”

“It can’t be helped. I embody the Doom aspect, remember?”

“Who cares? I embody the Mind aspect, and I’m still an idiot sometimes.”

“Pffft, true! Hahaha!”

“...okay, I think you laughed a little too hard at that. In any case, what exactly have you tried?”

“Well, I... I just tried reasoning with her. I hoped that somehow my words would reach her heart since, you know, I’m her.”

“You mean to tell me you only had one strategy, and you just kept trying until it inevitably worked? That’s something I would do. Don’t do that. Instead, do the same thing but tweak it a little so that it actually works this time. You know, like—”

“Operation Misery Business? The plan I knew would end in total failure, leading me to make my own contingency plan to override yours?”

“Exactl— Wait, you knew I was gonna fail? I mean I kinda already knew you knew, but the official confirmation still kinda hurts. Okay then, new strategy. Do what Mysteo would do.”

Mysteo was confused. Had she not been doing what she would do this whole time? Isn’t that what got everyone in this whole mess to begin with? “Elaborate.”

“Mind if I offer you a bit of constructive criticism? Don’t bother answering that, it was rhetorical. Anyway, you’ve gotten kind of soft since you became my best friend. No offense.”

“None taken. I had a feeling that was the case.”

“It seems in an attempt to change your image, you’ve become too much like me. And although I’m quite flattered, the fact of the matter is there’s only room for one ‘me’ in this story. Or two. Or three hey mind if I get back on track here? My point is, don’t be TC. Be Mysteo.”

“But—”

“No buts! I want to see the grand return of that gaslighting, gatekeeping, girlbossing delinquent I used to know!”

“Yessir!”

“No! That’s too polite! Try again!”

“Fine! Now beat it, before I give your hand the Giving Tree treatment!”

“That’s my girl!!!”

Mysteo could feel it. She was about to return to the waking world. But with the help of her best friend, she finally felt like she had a chance, and so she had a change of plans. She was going to try to reach Grimnoire’s heart one final time, but this time from a different perspective.

TC taught her once again how to be Mysteo, and in order for her to be Mysteo in this last ditch effort, she had to be TC. Literally. The Ultimate Gaslight. "Okay, this is my final moment of softness before I leave this place. I just wanted to remind you of something."

"Oh?"

"You're my best friend. I don't want you to ever forget that. If you do, there will be dire consequences. You got it?"

"I'd never forget you."

"Well, sorry to leave you in your solitude once again. And also sorry my other half killed you. But I've got a universe to save."

Mysteo faded away, as TC began to cry again, this time tears of joy. His friend was finally back to how she used to be, and there may be hope for the universe yet. Although he was kind of baffled as to why it looked like her appearance shifted into his for just a split second before she faded. Regardless, overcome with emotion, TC felt like the only thing left for him to do was to sing his heart's melody.