

(A Stardew Valley/Pokemon fanfiction)

Krobus and the Ghost

Life down here in the sewers was always the same. The same murky sludge would flow in from the surface. The same sounds would appear and disappear every day and night, as it accustomed to an everlasting rhythm. I did not mind the stillness of life as I lived in the darkness by myself. The local farmer would come down occasionally to purchase my wares, but they were the only company I had. They were the only being I was acquainted with, and other than them, I was alone. I was simply the lone shadow person living in the frightening, sickening sewers.

However, little did I know a small, fateful encounter would change my life forever.

It occurred during the night. The sound of footsteps from the surface would lessen until they disappeared entirely. I dared not to peek up above - even at night, my existence was at risk of getting caught - but I knew the sun had fallen asleep for now. The moon had taken its place, its soft moonlight seeping through the gates of the forest entrance and signifying its presence. All was quiet as it had its nightly reign, and I appreciated every gift it had to offer.

However, the silence would swiftly be shattered by a sudden sound. A ghastly, fearful wail echoed within the sewer walls, and I did not expect to find myself flinching. I had heard a wide variety of monster cries before, but this one was unrecognizable. Even by shadow person standards, the cry was too childish and human-like. I recalled the two children who lived in the town above, and only then did my mind begin to ponder. Why were they awake at this hour? Was it possible one of them was capable of making such a sound? If not, then what was it?

The cry reappeared, louder this time, and I began to creep toward my humble home. This corner of the sewers offered good defense, but it was not invincible - It would not be able to protect me forever. "Please help me, dear Yoba," I murmured to myself, pressing my body against the sewage-lined wall. I peered over to watch the large area of the sewers, wanting to catch just a glimpse of the unknown monster, but fear flowed throughout me nonetheless. The wail came closer and closer, amplifying as it closed in, and I could only hope my attempt to hide would not be done in vain.

The sound reached its highest volume, its echoes reverberating within the sewers, and when its true owner arrived, it was not what I expected at all. Instead of anticipating a mysterious and dangerous beast, it was but a small, strange creature. It swiftly dashed inside from the forest gates, its spectral form flying around the border of the sewers. Its saddened cries told me it was simply lost and confused, but I dared not to interact with it. At least, not yet. It was still a monster I had not seen before. As it attempted to gain its bearings to the place it had entered, I examined it from afar, wondering what in the world it was.

The creature levitated above the sea of sewage, turning its odd stump head around to take in the scene. Two branches protruded out of its sides, and its dark wisp-like body was somehow holding it up. Interestingly enough, I also sensed an air of familiarity around it. It seemed to resemble a shadow person, in a way - Was it possible it was the same species that I was? However, the thought did not live long. I swiftly remembered this being was completely unknown to me. I had never seen anything like it, whether up on the surface or in the dark.

Nonetheless, I felt inclined to help it, from one shadow to another.

With the creature's loud cries of distress now soft, sullen weeps, I silently rummaged through my wares. It was there I found my very item I was looking for: A solar essence. Resembling a miniature sun, its soft glow and pleasant warmth radiated an aura of calm. I knew it would be the perfect thing the little ghost needed to brighten its saddened mood.

I took a moment to myself before revealing both my presence and the solar essence. I presented the item to the wood-like specter, wanting to attract its attention, and much to my joy, it worked. Although it was hesitant at first, the creature gradually floated toward the light, its attention all too aware of me. Once it was close enough, its gaze shifted from me to the essence, enamored by the soothing sight. To my luck, I took this chance to have a closer look at the strange being, curiosity prickling my mind.

While watching the solar essence's yellow glow, the ghost-like creature's red, beady eyes were fixed upon the item. They stayed within the borders of two circular hollows carved where its eye sockets would have been. They reminded me of haunted skulls, an occasionally rare monster I had seen in the mines, but the sight of movement brought me back down to earth. I barely noticed it while examining the creature, but its short, nubby hands were reaching up to the solar essence. It then came closer ever so slightly, as if acting like a child attracted to something they wanted. I should have been surprised, but a brief memory came into mind - I recalled the cries and wails from before. They sounded higher-pitched with adolescent tones. They were reminiscent of the two human children, whose squeals were easy to point out within their older counterparts. Could it be this strange monster, the same creature whose noise frightened a shadow person like me, was really that young?

To test out my hypothesis, I quickly brought the solar essence to myself. Its golden glow now rested close to my chest, and looking at the specter before me, I noticed its expression had changed. Instead of being mesmerized by the item, it moved its gaze to stare straight at mine, pleading with its small, red eyes. It continued for as long as it could, refusing to look anywhere else. Its little nubs were still aimed toward my item, wanting to grab and hold on to its soft light, and that was when I came to my conclusion: It *did* want the solar essence. The creature wanted what I took from it, just like how a child would act.

With my thoughts confirmed, I returned the light to the little ghost. I brought out my hand, the solar essence resting within my open palm, and the creature grabbed it with one swift snatch. The moment it had the object back, I could tell its emotions were now vastly different. It was no longer crying in fear and sniffing in sorrow. Instead, a cheerful smile stretched across its face, clutching onto its golden glow as it twirled around in joy. The little wisp was as happy as ever, and before I knew it, I was happy as well. Even if I had no clue what it really was, it did not matter. All that mattered was that the little shadow deserved happiness, and as long as I was with that fact, I was content.

As the young specter's moment of glee died down, an ingenious idea popped into my head. This little fellow could cry and wail - What if it was capable of speech as well? Yes, it was merely a child, but even young shadow children were capable of some form of communication. This ghost-like child could surely be no different.

"H-Hello," I began, wanting to introduce myself with something simple. "Do you understand me?"

The creature turned its attention to me, and to my surprise, it gave me what looked like a small nod. It *did* understand me! Using this to my advantage, I took my chance to ask it more questions. Hopefully, I would be able to learn more details about its true identity.

“Do you have a name?”

Unlike its last response, the little ghost seemed hesitant to reply. It merely floated in the air, holding on to its sunny glow as it avoided my eyes and looked at the ground. Perhaps its meek nature had returned; Its cries from before imply it had been through something horrendous. However, it appeared I earned its trust by gifting it the small light that was the solar essence. The creature looked back at me, and soon enough, I would receive the answer I wished to have.

“Phantump.”

“Phan... tump? Is Phantump your name?”

Another nod would be all I would get as a reply, but that was all I needed. Phantump. The name felt much too strange on my tongue. It felt otherworldly yet familiar at the same time, as if it was similar to my own language. It was an odd title for an odd creature, but I suppose I was accustomed to it. Being a shadow person *did* come with its strange little quirks.

Remembering my situation, I brought out more questions, wanting more knowledge about the little ghost. “Where did you come from?” I asked, my tone tinged with curiosity.

Unfortunately, I would be unable to get the answers I wanted. “Phantump, phan” was the specter’s response. Upon hearing it, I immediately became baffled. Phantump must have been incapable of proper speech after all. It was only able to babble its own name, just like what a small child would do. I assumed it was truly that young, but then a new idea sprouted in my head. What if Phantump was trying to communicate in its own language? If it was, I was unable

to translate it. Albeit similar, its words were still different from the language of the shadow people. I had no idea what it would be saying, and confusion racked my mind because of it. However, I would be relieved by a sliver of hope appearing before me: Our communication must have been one-way! Even if I did not understand Phantump, Phantump understood me. It would be a tad unorthodox to get my message across to the little ghost without a proper response, but at this point, I was alright with anything.

I thought it better to reveal this information than to keep quiet. “Okay, Phantump,” I said, “we need to get one important fact cleared between the two of us.”

“Phant?”

“I can’t understand you and I have no idea what you’re trying to say.”

“Phan...” Even with my inability to understand it, I knew Phantump pouted at what I just said. Its sadness was swiftly returning, but I had the exact words that would quickly cheer it up.

“There is good news, though.”

“Tump?”

“*You* can understand *me*. As long as one of us can understand the other, we’ll be able to communicate with each other.”

“Phantump.” I had a feeling Phantump knew what I meant, and I was grateful for that. However, like the child it was, it strayed away from this serious understanding. The little specter brought its solar essence out, showing me the very present I gave to it. “Phantump, phan!”

I gave out a small chuckle, amused by Phantump’s childish nature. “That’s a nice light you have there. It’s all golden and glowy, just like the sun.”

“Phant!” It slightly urged the item toward me, and this time, I had a greater feeling I knew what it was trying to say. “Phantump, phantump!”

“You want me to have it back?”

“Tump!”

“No thanks, Phantump. You keep it. I have more in stock anyway. Plus, I’m not a big fan of bright stuff like solar essences. That’s why I sell my wares down here in the sewers.”

“Phan... tump.”

Upon bringing up the sewers, I noticed Phantump turned its head toward the forest entrance. Pale moonlight continued to gleam through the gates. It was still night and they were still locked, but the little ghost must have been thinking of something more. That was the entrance it came in from, all fearful and scared. There must have been something out there that caused it so much distress, to make it cry and wail in sadness. Before I knew it familiar memories resurfaced and emotions stirred within me. I had been scared before. With my life as a runaway shadow person, I had no idea if I would live, and yet, I did. I had survived very similar situations Phantump had been through, and I would not want the little shadow to live the same tormented life I once had.

However, as much as I wanted to put my grand, unthinkable idea into motion, there was one last thing I needed to do. “By the way, I’m Krobus,” I finally revealed, bringing Phantump’s attention back to me. “It means ‘bridge-crosser’ in my language. Isn’t that interesting?”

“Phant.”

Phantump's reply was neutral, but I knew I at least attracted its curiosity. "I don't know why I was named a 'bridge-crosser,' but I think it has something to do with the life I'm living now."

"Phant?"

"I wasn't a sewer-born shadow person, Phantump. I left my people, and it wasn't easy. It didn't help that there were so many different monsters and enemies in the world. If the dwarves knew I lived down here, they'd send an assassin after me!" There was a brief pause when I noticed the silent yet frightened look on Phantump's face. I then prompted myself to quickly change the outlook of the topic. "Oh, but there are good ones out there as well! Sometimes the local farmer comes down here to buy my goods. There are also the other human townsfolk up above, but they don't do anything bad. That's why I live in these sewers. It provides good shelter, I'm safe from harm, and the darkness reminds me of... home."

I felt tempted to reminisce about the past, but I would quickly return to the present. Phantump's reply of "Tump, phantump, tump" was still undecipherable, but I sensed a hint of intrigue within its words. There was something the specter liked about being safe. Despite how ghost-like it appeared, it was still a child. It wanted nothing more than to be protected, and I knew exactly how to incorporate my idea into its wishes.

It was about time I crossed another important bridge.

"Hey Phantump," I said, "you're a shadow being, just like me."

"Antump."

"What do you say to living down here in the sewers with me?"

“Phantump?!” I was not surprised to hear the astonished tone in its voice. After all, the thought of two entirely different monsters being together sounded strange and unorthodox, yet completely possible. Luckily, there was more I wanted to say.

“You don’t have to say yes,” I added. “I just thought you might like to be safe from all the evil dangers out there. It’s alright if you’d like to leave.”

I hoped Phantump knew there was nothing behind my words as it pondered about my offer. I did not expect it to say yes, nor did I expect it to say no - The choice was all up to it. After a moment, Phantump looked at me, clutched on to its little golden glow, and gave me a nod, a clear indication of “Yes.”

I couldn’t help but make a small smile when I saw the little specter’s response. “I think we’ll get along pretty well, Phantump.”