

Speak up, I can't hear you?

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Speak up, I can't hear you?

by [yoeyrt](#)

Summary

All the furniture in the living room has been pushed against the walls, leaving a large area in the center of the room. Arranged in a circle are pillar candles, bowls filled with various materials, and scraps of paper with strange markings drawn carefully in sharpie.

Etho knows everything is in its proper place. He's made sure of it. Exactly what he needs. Why is he so nervous?

Notes

HELLO it's me back with another addition to the team mortal series. Thanks for the support and love!! As always this au is co-created by me and may, you can find our tumblrs [@yoeyrt](#) and [@maybeanss](#) ^_^

this is part 2 of Team Mortal! You have to read part 1 to understand what's going on

It's supposed to be a lazy day. Grian and Mumbo have both retired to their rooms for the late afternoon, giving Etho free reign of the living room. There's a sort of haze lingering in the orange light, and despite it being autumn, it feels thick and groggy, each exhale sticking like syrup to tongues and throats. Nobody should be doing anything today.

Leave it to Etho to be the exception.

All the furniture in the living room has been pushed against the walls, leaving a large area in the center of the room. Arranged in a circle are pillar candles, bowls filled with various materials, and scraps of paper with strange markings drawn carefully in sharpie.

He stands back with his hands on his hips, observing his setup. He double-checks and triple-checks the list on his phone, whispering under his breath as he reads off every ingredient. Yes, he's sure he got everything this time. A couple quick trips to the pantry – thank God for Mumbo's obsession with spices – and some random pages from an old journal would serve him well.

He knows everything is in its proper place. He's made sure of it. Exactly what he needs.

Why is he so nervous?

“What's all this?”

He whips his head around suddenly, like he's been caught doing something he shouldn't be by a strict parent. Mumbo's voice had jumped up an octave and a half in surprise, completely taken aback by... whatever this is, set up in the middle of their living room.

Etho sighs, seeing it's just a friend, and lets his shoulders relax a bit. “A bonding ritual.”

“A what?”

“A bonding-”

“No, I heard you the first time.” Mumbo's pinching the bridge of his nose, his brows scrunched tightly in confusion and bewilderment. He's used to the weird ghost stuff that Etho does around the house, but it's getting annoying now.

“Just... why? Right here? Right now?”

“You have a better time in mind?” Etho asks curtly as he goes back to triple-checking his list.

“Why do you care? I thought you said you don’t believe in the stuff.”

“Well, I wanted to watch TV.” Mumbo drops his hand with a sigh, watching Etho as he adjusts some of the unlit candles and scraps of paper.

“This’ll take five minutes.”

With a mumble under his breath about that definitely being a lie, Mumbo sits in one of the chairs on the border of the room, pulling his leg up underneath him.

It’s true he doesn’t believe in this ghost nonsense – he’s honestly surprised that Etho does, he strikes him as a man of reason rather than superstition – but he can’t help but be fascinated by it.

“So, how does this work?” He asks. He hears Etho scoff. “I’m just trying to make conversation!”

“So you know how Bdubs is – theoretically is – a ghost?”

“For the sake of debate, yeah.” Mumbo smiles as Etho crosses the room to the coffee table, setting his phone down and picking up an old, worn journal and a pen instead.

He pauses, tapping the pen cap to his lips in thought. There’s really no easy way to word this without sounding insane. It’s a lot easier to explain to Grian, because at least *he* knows ghosts are real. Mumbo could stare a demon down and say it was a trick of the light.

“There’s a way for ghosts to talk to humans beyond the spirit box.” He begins to explain, turning his attention to Mumbo now, gesturing as he talks. “Or any other mode of communication. Informally, I call it a link. I’m not sure if there’s a proper term for it. Either way, a ghost can create a link with a human, and through that link they can speak clearly.”

“Speak clearly how?”

“In your head, kind of like bluetooth. So, for example, instead of Bdubs having to type out everything he wants to say in the notepad, he can just tell us. Like we’re talking right now. These kinds of things develop naturally the more time you spend with a ghost.”

“I’m not quite following.” Mumbo purses his lips. “They happen naturally?”

“Yeah. So, say you lived with one your whole life. You’d have a pretty strong link with h– with it.”

Mumbo raises an eyebrow as Etho turns his eyes back to the journal in his hands, flipping through a couple of the worn and tearing pages. He can’t quite read his expression, his brows pinching in a way that resembles either concern or as if he found something crunchy in what should have been a soft bite of food. His wrist twitches absently, shaking imaginary water off his hands. He’s strangely quiet.

“If it happens naturally, then what’s.. I mean, you said this was a bonding ritual?” Mumbo prompts, uncomfortable with the new silence and desperate to fill it.

“Yeah. Well, it’s dependent on the ghost’s power. For someone weak like Bdubs, we’re talking maybe a year, two years here.” He closes the journal and sets it down gently on the cluttered coffee table. His phone, open beside it, types out a few words of protest. “This just speeds up the process.”

Mumbo watches Etho as he scoffs at the messages from Bdubs, stuffing it back into his pocket as he looks for a lighter amongst the mess.

“What happens if you screw up?” Mumbo asks, tilting his head.

“I die.”

“No you don’t.”

“I do.”

He narrows his eyes at him, trying to see if he’s joking or not. Etho’s not giving him any hints. “Right. How do you know so much about this stuff, anyway?”

He shrugs, and that seems to be the end of the conversation.

Mumbo drills his fingers absently against his leg. It's crazy that he's even allowing this to take place in their home. A ritual where a botched result ends in death? How would he even explain that to the cops? Mumbo's pretty sure Etho's lying about it, anyway. Though, the way his shoulders tense and his fingers shake as he checks and re-checks the ritual setup seems to indicate otherwise.

Eventually, Etho lets out a huff of breath he's been holding and steps back. He glances at his phone, then at Mumbo.

"Alright. Ritual's set up, Bdubs is ready, Mumbo, you sure you wanna watch?"

"Am I in danger?" Mumbo asks with a nervous laugh.

"Shouldn't be." He shrugs nonchalantly. "Though I've never done it with other people in the room."

Mumbo considers moving, seriously, before he shakes his head to clear the thought. It's not a *real* ritual. There's no *actual* chance of death. He was being silly. They'd both be fine.

"Suit yourself."

Etho takes a deep breath as he lights the pillar candles around the circle, careful that the wax doesn't drip onto their shaggy carpet. Mumbo is watching very closely from the safety of his chair, his knee tucked into his chest. He definitely doesn't miss the slight shake of his hand as he lights the last candle and steps inside the circle.

Etho sits, cross-legged between the candles, paper, and bowls. He sets his phone out in front of him, the screen turned on and opened to the notes app, where Mumbo could barely see typed replies from Bdubs. Etho steadies his breathing the best he can manage, closing his eyes in concentration, and waits.

It's silent. It lasts a minute. It feels like an eternity. Mumbo wants to speak, to ask if he's doing it right, if the ritual is working, but he doesn't know if he should interrupt. What if he interrupts and the ritual fails and Etho dies?

... Yeah, because that's definitely something that could happen. He kicks himself in the head again as he gets rid of that thought.

After another eternity of silence, he decides to say something.

"Is it working?"

Etho cracks open his scarred eye and shoots a chilling glare at Mumbo. That shuts him up instantly.

"Sorry." He mouths as Etho closes his eyes again.

Back to just watching nothing happen in silence, Mumbo supposes. He's drilling his fingers into his leg, tapping out an absent rhythm as he waits for *something*. He could reach the remote from where he's sitting, he could turn on the TV now and get his show set up, but he had a feeling that Etho wouldn't be particularly fond of that move.

He watches Etho instead, studying his hair, his eyes, the way his mask billows with every soft breath from his nose. He's doing a remarkable job at keeping his expression still. Mumbo barely notices the brief flicker of fear that ripples across his brow. He almost says something. Etho's eyes fly open before he can.

"It worked." He's *beaming*, he can see the crinkle of his eyes and the way his cheeks pull under his mask. He laughs softly to himself, running a tense hand through his hair, pulling it flat against my head. "Oh – oh my gosh. Yeah, yeah, I know, you can stop – just – stop talking, I *know*, I can hear you."

Mumbo bites the inside of his cheek, watching Etho have his giddy one-way conversation. Oh, so he's completely lost it now.

"Mumbo." Etho is suddenly standing in front of him, gripping his arms. Was that him shaking or Mumbo?

"Hey." Mumbo bares his teeth in an anxious smile. "Uh, how's... how'd it go?"

“It worked. It worked perfectly.” The joy he has is almost infectious enough to worm its way past Mumbo’s anxiety. “I can - I can hear him now. Crystal clear. It’s – man, it’s kind of overwhelming. Yes, yeah, I know. Grian’s next. Or-” He stops. His eyes are boring holes through Mumbo’s forehead.

“*ME?*” Mumbo jams his index finger into his chest. Etho’s grin is answer enough.

He yanks Mumbo to his feet, off the chair, and tugs him into the ritual circle. Mumbo stumbles along, ungraciously, protesting the entire way.

“I wouldn’t– Look, Etho, I don’t think I *should* –”

“What’s the harm in it?” Etho pushes on Mumbo’s shoulder, trying to get him to sit in the circle. “If it’s all a load of crap, anyway. Just humor me on this one.”

“I don’t know about this.” Mumbo finds himself sitting in the circle anyway, his legs crossed, careful not to be too close to the candles.

Etho brushes off his concerns with a scoff as he relights those that have gone out, his hands trembling with excitement. He’s mumbling something Mumbo can’t quite hear under his breath.

He shouldn’t be worried. This ghost thing, this ritual – it’s all a load of made-up crap. There’s no way it could hurt him or affect him in any serious capacity.

Still, he can’t help but shiver.

“Alright, I’ll guide you through on what you need to do.” Etho pockets the lighter and holds his hands out helpfully. “You need to relax.”

“Easier said than done!” Mumbo barks. “Do you know how stressed out you’re making me?”

“Okay, well...” Etho seems to lose himself in thought for a second. “Yeah, okay, right. I’ll just

explain what's going to happen. So," He focuses back on Mumbo. "What you're going to want to do is relax and try to clear your mind. Don't think about anything. The less you can think about the better. Once you've got that, Bdubs is gonna try to talk to you. If you start hearing someone yell, that's Bdubs, and you've gotta stop thinking about nothing and start thinking about his voice. The longer you can focus on it, the better." He clasps his hands together. "Any questions?"

"Yeah. A lot of them." Mumbo mutters, but Etho has already moved on.

"Great. Now you just have to close your eyes..."

Mumbo follows Etho's guidance and gently closes his eyes. It's stupid. This is stupid. He shouldn't be doing this, it's *silly*. Do you know how hard it is to think about nothing at all? He tries to focus on his breathing, even, square breaths, holding it in and letting it out in rhythm. It's not too hard. He can do that, over and over. Eventually, he's not thinking about Etho anymore, or how silly everything is, just the sound and rhythm of his breathing.

Then, very faintly, he hears his name being called out to him. It's echoey and distant, like in a dream. He strains to hear it, to pick it out over the noise of his own heartbeat.

"*Mumbo! Hey, Mumbo! Can you hear me? Is this thing on?*"

Mumbo's eyes fly open and he swings his head around at the unfamiliar voice, his hand over his heart in shock. That sounds real. That sounds like someone is standing next to him and talking in his ear. That is—

"It worked!" Etho grins, his hands clasped together.

"*Yeah it did!*" There's that voice again, clear as ever.

"My word." Mumbo mumbles to himself, looking for the source of the voice. This had to be some kind of a joke, there's no way there's a *ghost* in his brain. That's *absurd*.

"What's going on?"

Etho and Mumbo both turn to look up at Grian, standing in the hallway and rubbing his eyes. He looks like he had just crawled out of bed, his hair messy and clothes disheveled. He's a bit more awake now, seeing the setup of the living room and the candles on the floor.

"Oh, perfect, you're awake." Etho gets up, his steps light as he walks over to Grian.

Mumbo looks back down at his hands, at the ritual set up around him. He can't hear that voice anymore, but maybe that's just because he's not saying anything. He doesn't quite know what to make of the whole experience; on one hand, it shatters his skepticism and proves to him that spirits and the otherworldly are real, and that they can communicate and affect humans in the real world. On the other hand, though, that's just simply not the case. Ghosts aren't *real*. He doesn't quite understand who or where this new voice is coming from, but it's certainly not a ghost.

Yeah. That's the one he's going with. He packs up the other thought and shoves it aside to unpack never.

When he refocuses again, Grian is now sitting in the center of the circle and performing the ritual. It's the exact same as it was for Etho and Mumbo; close your eyes, think of nothing, establish a connection. Mumbo ignores the voice calling out to Grian and heads to the kitchen to make some food.

"I hear him." Grian's eyes blow wide in a mix of fear and astonishment. "Etho, I can hear him."

"I know." Etho hasn't stopped grinning since his own ritual.

"That's incredible."

"Yeah it is!" Bdubs chimes in happily. "Now I get to talk to you guys! Man, this is so much easier than typing everything out. I can speak so much faster now. I can tell you all the jokes I never got to say because stupid Etho wasn't looking at his phone. Okay, first of all—"

"Is there a way I can tune him out?" Grian asks hopefully.

"HEY!!"

“Nope.” Etho giggles to himself as he gathers up the components. “It’s a permanent thing.”

“Wait,” Mumbo looks over from the kitchen. “Permanent?”

“Well, yeah.” He says with a shrug. “I figured since we’re keeping Bdubs around, it’s a lot easier if we can talk to him instead of–.”

“Since when did we decide we’re keeping it!?”

“Oh.” Etho purses his lips under his mask, glancing at Grian. “I might have forgotten to mention that to Mumbo.” He just offers a sympathetic shrug in response. Mumbo mumbles something under his breath, but drops the topic.

“*Mumbo’s so rude.*” Bdubs complains as Etho and Grian start to move the furniture back into its original spot. “*You know I can hear you!?*”

“He just doesn’t get it.” Etho says as he dusts his hands on his jeans. “He’ll come around. Maybe.”

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