2285 Legion of Death  
  
The Burned Forest sprawled under an ashen sky like a dark and desolate reminder of total devastation. Here and there, the charred trunks of titanic trees rose into the sky like crumbled towers, their branches gone, their leaves long turned to ash. Below them, an impenetrable maze of blackened deadfall rose hundreds of meters above the ground, obscuring it completely.  
  
Sunny was standing atop one of the few burned trees that had stubbornly remained upright even in death, looking down at the vast expanse of charred tangle from a great height - two of him, really, one clad in a beautiful suit of black jade armor, the other wearing easy garments of dark cloth. The one in the armor glanced down with an arrogant expression.  
'I think we are going to lose again.'  
  
The one in the easy clothes smiled faintly, a naughty glint in his eyes. 'Don't sell our legion short.'  
  
Below them, an alarming battle was taking place. The charred tangle had come alive, frothing with a glistening black substance. That substance was myriads of hideous millipedes, ranging from several to dozens of meters in length, their bodies covered in glossy black chitin. The millipedes crawled from the depths of the fallen forest, flowing to the surface like a frenzied tide. Each was a Corrupted Beast, at least, and some even of the Great Rank. There were eerie champions among them, as well - Monsters, Demons, and Devils, the latter defending the vague shapes of the swarm's elusive Tyrants. Some had carapaces that stood out against the black tide with vibrant colors and dreadful patterns, drawing attention to their sinister forms.  
  
The sight of the hideous vermin was a bit frightening even for someone like Sunny. 'And away… we… go…'  
  
There was another army facing the tide of loathsome millipedes, surrounding the towering tree he was standing upon like a wall - just as tenebrous, but much more eerie. This one consisted of silent shadows who faced the frightening tidal wave of abominations without showing any sign of fear, doubt, or hesitation.  
  
Just then, the first rows of the Shadow Legion moved forward to meet the adversary and breaк its momentum. In a morbid twist of fate, this vanguard consisted of the same grotesque millipedes - they were the shadows of Nightmare Creatures slain by Sunny and his legion here in the Burned Forest.  
  
Despite his great power, Sunny and his undying army were not nearly fearsome enough yet to invade the charred remains of the Heart Realm. In the first months of his insolent invasion, he could barely set foot into the Burned Forest without having to retreat. After all, most of the shades under his command belonged to beings of lower Ranks. There were only a few hundгed Great Nightmare Creatures among them, and although the silent shadows could not be destroyed, they could be sent back to his Soul Sea to repair themselves. The restoration was not instantaneous, either, taking longer the more powerful a shade was. So, in the early days, the Shadow Legion had been easily wiped out by the Nightmare Creatures populating the outskirts of the Burned Forest - their sheer number was enough to overwhelm the undying army of the newly risen Sovereign. Once most оf his shades were vanquished, Sunny had no choice but to escape. Progress was not just slow, it was almost non-existent.  
  
However…  
  
There was an insidious quality to the Legion of Death. With each battle, even the ones they lost… Sunny and his Domain were only growing stronger. Every Nightmare Creature slain by him or his minions in these hopeless battles joined the ranks of silent shadows. At first, there were a dozen shadow millipedes fighting for him. Then, a hundred. Аs days passed, their number swelled to thousands, and the Shadow Legion began to advance into the depths of the Burned Forest, gaining ground meter after meter.  
  
Now, a year later, he had ventured far enough to draw close to the nests of the grotesque millipede tribe. That was why their elusive Tyrants were showing up on the battlefield in person now. Sunny's goal was to locate and destroy the nests. Once thе nearby nests were conquered and destroyed, the outskirts of the Burned Forest - in the south, at least - would fall into his hands. He even had a faint hope that one of them would reveal a hidden Citadel.  
  
Naturally, these were merely the outer reaches of the Heart God's fallen realm. Deeper into the harrowing land, beings far more alarming than the hideous millipedes dwelled… so, it would take Sunny years to subjugate the Death Zone completely, if he could manage that astounding feat at all.  
  
But that was alright. Conquering the Burned Forest was not his primary goal, after all. The primary goal was to make the ranks of his Shadow Legion swell with powerful shades, and in that regard, he was doing quite well.  
  
Down below, the tide of millipedes collided with the shadows of their fallen brethren. An ear-piercing cacophony of chitinous scraping and inhuman screeches washed over the charred wasteland, and the ground shook slightly. Sunny had never thought that he would one day command a force of thousands of Corrupted Nightmare Creatures - or rather, Transcendent shadows of thousands of slain Nightmare Creatures. And yet, today… that same force was swallowed by the terrifying flood of his adversary in less than a minute, disappearing without a trace.  
  
The shades of the millipedes returned to his Soul Sea, obliterated.  
  
'Almost a full minute today. Not bad.'  
  
His armored incarnation looked at the smiling one and scoffed. 'Not good, either.'  
  
Still, the shadow swarm of grotesque millipedes had done its job - they had served as a sacrifice to break the momentum of the terrifying flood, inflict heavy casualties on it, and gain him a few hundred new shades. Now, it was time for the cavalry to honor their sacrifice and crush more enemies.  
  
The armored incarnation smiled darkly. 'There she is.'  
  
Far below, a graceful knight in fearsome onyx armor nudged her harrowing steed forward. Her sword cut the air, and the Shadow Legion stirred, coming alive in a dreadful veil of dead silence. Even if they lost again today, they would triumph eventually. Death was patient, after all.  
  
And above all else, it was inevitable.