1460 Dead March

The [Sepulcher Song] was an active enchantment that consumed as much essence as the number and power of the corpses stirred into a murderous rage by its power was. An Ascended could wreak a lot of havoc with its help...

But not nearly as much havoc as Sunny, an Ascended Tyrant whose soul was augmented by Neph's flame, could.

Influenced by the angry melody he was playing, most of the bone orchard was already in motion. Some of the giant skeletal remains were too severely damaged to assemble into the semblance of a whole creature... but there were plenty of dead abominations who could.

Some of them had clearly been aquatic abominations in the past. Nevertheless, they slithered and crawled forward in the throes of bloodlust. Some of them seemed to had been able to walk on land. Those were moving much faster to kill something, as quickly and as cruelly as possible.

Slowly, towering figures rose from the ground in a cacophony of groaning bones. The terrifying bloodlust and murderous rage emanated by them were almost palpable.

'Crap, crap, crap...'

Both of Sunny's hands were busy with the flute, and he obviously could not speak. Aloud, that was.

[Go now.]

Sending the mental message with the help of the Shroud of Dusk, Sunny glanced at the dark entrance to the caverns that had been revealed when the dead creature obscuring it moved closer to him.

Sparing him one last glance, his companions rushed away and dove into the welcoming darkness. Nephis lingered on the edge for a few moments, then gritted her teeth and jumped down. Saint and Fiend followed right behind her, leaving Sunny and Nightmare alone with the army of risen abominations.

The towering corpses, meanwhile... were staggering toward them with a clear intent to rip the flute player and his steed apart.

'Now, for the next part...'

Sunny slowly rose... or rather, was pushed off when the piece of bone he had been sitting on suddenly flew up. Somehow managing to keep the melody, he regained his balance and continued to play the Bone Singer while awkwardly jumping into the saddle.

Judging that every skeleton he could have brought back to life had already risen, Sunny stopped for a moment and took a deep breath.

Then, as Nightmare cautiously backed away, he started to play a different melody.

If the previous one was fast and angry, then this one was calm and soothing. It was meant to bring the murderous corpses under his control. Sunny had succeeded in his experiments to play the second movement of the Sepulcher Song a couple of times — on a way lesser scale, though — so he knew that he could do it.

'Any moment now...'

But despite the fact that he was trying his best to play the melody perfectly... the shambling bone giants were still approaching him with a clear intent to rip him to shreds and bathe in his blood.

'That doesn't even make sense. I'm so much smaller than them, what are they going to be bathing in?! It's more like I'll be smeared across the phalanx of one of these monstrosities!'

Even worse...

The Hollow Butterfly which had been motionless before suddenly moved, as well.

The Bone Singer did not really return the dead to live... it simply turned corpses into murderous bone golems. Or flesh golems — the sinister Memory paid no attention to the state of the corpse. Which meant that it did not need the dead creature to have had a soul in order to animate it.

The Hollow Butterfly was coming to a perverse semblance of life, too. As it did, the drain on Sunny's essence increased.

'Curses!'

It seemed that he was not going to put this army of dead monstrosities under his command.

Well... that was fine, too. Sunny had accounted for such a possibility, as well.

After all, he did not really need the risen corpses to listen to him — he just needed them to create as much havoc as possible on Aletheia's Island, temporarily stealing the attention of all the Nightmare Creatures imprisoned on it.

Now that the dead giants of the bone orchard had been brought back to life, they would remain so until Sunny's essence ran out, or until they were completely destroyed. There was plenty of time for them to clash with the prisoners of the island.

That way, he would be able to reach Effie and travel to the blood lake much faster. Cassie and her team would be able to reach the overgrown shrine without meeting much danger, too.

'Plan B, then!'

Giving up on soothing the murderous corpses with a pleasant melody, Sunny lowered the Bone Singer... and commanded Nightmare to run as fast as the black stallion could.

A moment later, the two of them were already flying between the staggering skeletons, heading for the forest.

An army of dead giants pursued. Even the Hollow Butterfly took to the sky, one flap of its mighty wigs sending a hurricane gale across the bone orchard... or rather, the former bone orchard. Left without the Great Monster's care, its eggs were cracking and bursting open, the corpses of revolting maggots crawling out of them while burning with bloodlust.

'Great... go fight the Harvester, you ugly bug... gods, I hate butterflies!'

Sunny dove under the protection of the ancient pines, only to hear them snap and shatter a few moments later. The dead leviathans he had risen might not have been as enormous as Devouring Beast, but they were giant and powerful enough to bulldoze through the misty forest.

Now, he only hoped that they would be sturdy and powerful enough to last awhile against the harrowing prisoners of Aletheia's Island. And that his essence would last long enough.

And that they would not catch up to him and Nightmare before getting distracted by some unfortunate abomination.

'Faster!'

Gritting his teeth, Sunny flew through the mist.

Effie was waiting for him on the other side of the island...