1461 Encore

Pursued by an army of dead giants, Sunny and Nightmare flew through the mist. The shambling corpses were tearing through the forest like an avalanche, uprooting countless ancient pines and turning them into splinters. The thunderous clamor of it all spread far and wide, making it seem as if the entire island was falling apart.

If that would not attract the attention of the Nightmare Creature hiding in the fog, Sunny did not know what would.

'Almost there...'

He was not just running blindly. Instead, Sunny was leading his skeletal followers along the southern edge of the island, aiming to pull them to Undying Slaughter's hunting grounds, or even further west. The map of the island was shimmering in his mind, with various Nightmare Creatures moving across it according to where they were supposed to be at the moment.

It would be good to attract as many abominations as possible — the chain reaction of them abandoning the usual routes and habits was going to clear the northern part of the island, where all of the cohort's goals were, to a large degree. But Sunny was going to be happy as long as the harrowing mist wraith got implicated by the appearance of the undead stampede.

These ancient skeletons he had risen were not truly alive, and thus possessed neither souls nor soul essence. They were the worst possible enemy Undying Slaughter could meet, considering that she would not be able to replenish whatever essence she spent to destroy the murderous corpses.

...It was a bit ironic, really.

'Above us!'

His heart skipped a beat.

The dead giants had obliterated a large swath of the misty forest already, which meant that nothing hid them from the merciless gaze of the sky anymore. As Sunny watched, unnerved, long tendrils descended from somewhere high above, stretching toward the rampaging bone golems.

Before the Harvester could catch them, however, a vast shadow suddenly passed over the mass of dead giants. A moment later, the corpse of the Hollow Butterfly ascended into the sky, disappearing in the direction where the tendrils had come from.

Sunny grinned darkly.

'Godspeed!'

The creatures he had brought back to life were powerful... but, of course, not nearly as powerful as when they had been alive. The corpse of the monstrous butterfly did not possess the terrifying might of the original Great Monster... that said, it did possess the supreme body of a Great Monster.

In some senses, it was even more durable than a living Dark Butterfly would have been — the animated corpse was not alive, after all, and was thus impervious to wounds that would kill a living being.

Sunny had no hope that the Harvester would be defeated, but it definitely would be preoccupied for a while.

Now... what he had to worry about was his own survival.

Nightmare was fast, and the staggering skeletons were not the most agile of creatures. And yet, they were gaining on the galloping steed due to their sheer size. Sunny could dive into the shadows and escape at any moment, but that would defeat the purpose of leading the dead giants on a chase across the island.

A massive skeletal claw fell on him from above, missing Nightmare's side by a mere meter. The black stallion almost lost his footing when the claw slammed into the ground, making it quake and throwing a cloud of dust into the air.

'This... this is... just like that damned desert!'

The risen corpses were nowhere near as powerful as the harrowing warriors of the Nightmare Desert, but it was all the same for Sunny. It did not matter if the thing that killed him was three times more powerful than him, or three hundred times more powerful. He would end up dead either way.

Nevertheless, he kept a cool head, tracked the movements of the dead giants with shadow sense to evade the sporadic blows, and kept an eye on the misty forest ahead.

That was how Sunny managed to survive the dreadful pursuit.

Not long after the Hollow Butterfly dove into the mist above to battle the Harvester, he felt a subtle movement ahead and commanded Nightmare to dodge left. It was just in time — in the next moment, the familiar decaying shape of a giant leopard lunged forward from the fog, missing Sunny and colliding with one of the pursuing corpses.

Bits of shattered bones shot through the air like bullets, and a gurgling roar sent Sunny into a momentary daze. Then, something boomed behind him, and he sensed several massive shadows converge on the terrifying shadow of the Great Beast.

A moment later, the furious confrontation was far behind him. But it was only the start.

As the dead army chased after the swift rider, more and more Nightmare Creatures arrived, attracted by the deafening noise of the pursuit. Sunny had calculated which abominations would arrive first, and when — as a result, he managed to evade all of them.

He saw the black octopus-like creature envelop the horrid skeleton of a crawling leviathan with its tentacles, the black acidic slime secreted by them biting into the ancient bones.

Devouring Beast made the whole island shake by landing from a high jump, her fist turning one of the dead giants into a pile of broken bones. As it was completely obliterated, the rate at which Sunny's essence was consumed decreased a little.

A Nightmare Creature that was like a rotting tree tried to get in the way of the risen corpses, as well, but was flattened and torn apart in a matter of seconds.

There were other abominations, as well... some of them had killed Sunny before, some hadn't. Now, all of them became entangled with the murderous dead, as if receiving divine retribution for all the deaths they had visited upon him.

Undying Slaughter was among them, as well.

'I'd say... it's a success.'

By the time the abandoned port of Aletheia's Island appeared from the mist, Sunny was only followed by a few most persistent corpses. The rest had been left in the dust, fighting the various horrors of this cursed place.

Throwing one last glance at the murderous dead giants, Sunny smiled and dissolved into the shadows.

His job here was done. Now, he had to rush to the other side of the island to find Effie.

'Really, now...'

Gliding through the darkness, Sunny sighed.

'Was there a need for such a reaction? Surely, my musical talent is not that terrible...'