

Spooky Semantics

By: RaddaRaem

Lording atop a moonlit hill, staff in hand, the necromancer set about his business. Baggy cloak flapping and fluttering with the motions of his hands he belted out one incantation after the next. Pebbles and flakes of dirt tumbled over the ancient grave plots within his view. Their inhabitants, long dormant, rose to his calling.

Skeletons, both pristine and broken, rose from the ground. A bitter wind kicked up, stripping bare the smattering of trees planted throughout the lonely plot of land. Leaves rustled by the figures as dirt poured forth from their empty eye sockets and coursed between their rib cages. Carried along on the breeze, the particulates clouded the land in a coarse mist. Skeletal silhouettes could be seen in the haze, their forms illuminated by the moonlight.

“Arise!” The nefarious goat bleated as he looked upon his newfound army. “Arise and do my bidding my undead warriors!”

One of the skeletons tapped at its jaw. Jingles and clunks sounded out within its hollow head. It spat out a handful of coins and rocks in response. “Undead?”

“No no no no no, we’re reanimated,” another figure interjected. Its snout long and bony, the canine jangled up and tunked its companion on the noggin with clenched fist.

Shoulders drooped, the goat tugged down his baggy hood and gestured his audience to hush. “Look, we can debate the semantics later. Right now, I need you to-”

“Why not just... dead? I mean that’s what we are, right?” The human skeleton, the first to speak, offered up its two bits. A chorus of nods and mmhmms were given in response.

“No no no no no! We were just dead!” The canine stood its ground and shook its long and pointed snoot. “Look. All I’m saying is that, good as this desecrated ground we’re standing on, breathing in this stale air-”

“We don’t got no lungs!” The human skeleton tossed out his bony arms in exasperation.

Hands clasped over his face, the necromancer sighed. “The both of you, knock it off! I did not go through all this trouble just to debate diction and you’re not even listening are you.” Some small part of him felt this was deserved for skimping on the good stuff. Really shouldn’t have settled for a plagiarized version of the Deadnomicon. First edition printing, now that was where it was at.

Hands crossed about his chest, fingers twiddling against his exposed ribcage, the canine sighed. “Yes, I can see that but-”

“Or eyes for that matter!”

Head tossed back, the goatmancer moaned in exasperation. "Stupid One and Stupid Two! Can we please just get on with oh forget it." Letting out a grumpy bleat he plunked his butt down on the hill and simply resolved to wait out the worst of it. He tugged his cloak tightly around his feeble frame and shivered.

Stupid Two exhaled angrily between clenched teeth. "That's not the point! We're not corpses or cadavers or ghastrs or ghosts or whatever else you wanna call it." Hand held out before it, the canine tapped against one bony finger after another. "I'm simply saying that, courtesy of that reanimation spell, we are no longer amongst the ranks of dead. Now if I were to choose... it's nothing fancy but skeleton works plenty fine and dandy."

Stupid One leaned back and shook its head in disbelief. "We already are dead, ya bonehead!" The human skeleton gestured at... all of itself.

"Ooooooh never heard that one before," Stupid Two sarcastically shot back while he waved his hands side to side. Its rail thin tail bristled and stood up on end.

Goatmancer tugged up at the end of his flapping cloak and started chewing on it. His jaw slid back and forth, tearing off chunks of fabric at a time. The moon had long since dipped down from its apex high in the sky. "Well. There's always next year's harvest festival," he mumbled in between mouthfuls of leather and cloth.

The discussion had only grown livelier as the skeletons sorted themselves into two distinct parties of stupid.

Shaking his head side to side, the Goatmancer rose to his hooved feet. Eyes hung low, he kicked at sprigs of grass decorating his hilltop roost and stomped on over towards the horizon. With a sulk in his step, he meandered on over towards a collection of torches flickering in the darkness.

A festive spirit filled the village air. Emptied corn husks and stalks of grain lay propped up against the sides of shacks and cottages. Each a serving as a proud display for what this year's harvest had brought each and every home.

Chimes sounded out as a door was propped open and promptly shut behind it. The owner of the establishment, a burly bear, turned his attention towards his latest guest. "Evenin' Simon."

The Goatmancer trudged on up to the tavern's bar and rested his elbows upon its polished glaze. "Hey Carl."

"Can't help but notice you're not actively conquering the town." With a snort, the bear plopped a mug down before him and topped it off with a foamy golden liquid.

Lips pulled flat, Simon reluctantly tugged drink close. "You'll see. There's always next year..." He tentatively sipped at his booze in between bouts of grump.

Brows arched, Carl took to wiping down his bar. "You've said that how many years in a row now, Simon?"

"...Every year." With a harrumph, he rested his cheek against the palm of a propped up hand.

Whistling as he worked, the bear flicked aside crumbs and lingering foam onto the floor below. "Why again are you so hellbent on taking over this podunk town?"

Simon allowed his head to slip forward. His horns tunked loudly against the wood. "I don't even remember."

The bear surveyed his empty establishment. Without fail, Simon tended to be his only customer year after year on this fateful night. What with everyone else off and actually celebrating and rejoicing at the year's bounty. "So you keep at this... why?"

"It's the principle of it! Just once though! Just once." Mouth mooshed facedown into the wood, Simon pounded his fists against the bar. "It doesn't matter why I conquer and overrun this place. Just that I can." Mug cradled close, the Goatmancer sipped at it longingly.

Carl shrugged his shoulders. It was the same old conversation year after year. If nothing else, it was a familiar and comforting routine. He turned a quizzical eye towards the window and frowned. "Simon. Is that your doing?"

"Just ignore them," the goat grumped. Outside, a steady stream of skeletons poured past. He rubbed at his temples when the grating voices of both Stupid One and Stupid Two rattled between his ears.

"I say it's cheating!" Stupid One declared. Turning to face the skeletal crowd behind him, the skeleton lifted its arms up in the air to prompt an outpouring of support from its faction. "We didn't contribute anything this year!"

Stupid Two vehemently shook its canine head side to side. A steady wave of boos slipped free from its entourage in turn. "The harvest festival is open to any current and previous landowners! Even if you didn't till the land, so long as you provided it, then you're free to partake!" Clearing his nonexistent throat, the snooty skeleton carried on. "We're not visitors. Just... prior tenants and owners."

Back inside his tavern, Carl rolled his eyes. "This spell will wear off come dawn like all the others, right?"

"Of course," Simon acknowledged in irritation. He tapped his mug against the bar loudly until it was replenished in full.