

**The Twelfth Century**  
by  
**The Dark Lord Insidious**  
(just call me Sid)

**A New Beginning:  
Zombies  
&  
Skeletons  
&  
Not So Elvin Princesses,  
Oh my!**

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**### Chapter 5 ###  
### Kick the Can ###**

No need to say, 'Action!' for they are kids and are already at play... but best of all, Wally and Abby's spell has taken a wide foothold, causing all of Adam's Children to believe they are living way back when.

Which means, they don't see the ruins. Not as I see them. Not as you would see them if you were standing right here... or if we cut back through, revealing the layers. So as such, rather than standing on a stone Diaz in what is likely (and undoubtedly) the oldest part of the ruins (the ruins that were ruins before the rest of the place became ruins, if you know what I mean); anyhow, rather than standing on the Diaz, Ned believes that he is standing on the flat concrete roof of a derelict water tank deep in the woods. And then, at the bottom of the hill, down by the

stream, rather than seeing the crumbled and moss covered remains of what was once a waterwheel and its housing, Ned sees a simple storage pond and water outflow pipe: rusted and dented, but big enough to hide in, the safety grate long since removed.

Needless to say, in both worlds this place has been abandoned. Can you name but one of the gods of old? Whose countless victims and sacrifices met their fate on the stone Diaz? In the times before Lorien'thral and Gra'g walked the Earth (and who, no doubt, made the later look like a sissy)? I know, I can't. I'd have to look their names up in a book (perhaps even pausing to find the name of the proper book in yet another). And although I know these woods are haunted by Spirits and Sylphs and things best unnamed that slither and go bump in the night, I also know that after all these thousands upon thousands of years, for the most, causing a slight breeze or the rustling a small leaf is all they manage at this point. Their will is gone. I suppose if the sacrifices were to start again... but not today, not today. If that is to be, if that is the way it must be, it will come later (much-much later), only after ALL other avenues have been exhausted.

So, after having said all that (and given the overlay), I can say that it all matters not. For, we have not come here for what the place is or even what it once was; but rather (and precisely) because it has now become forgotten, abandoned; and therefore, available (anew) for our present purposes... the playing of a game.

# # #

Ned is playing Kick the Can with his human friends. He stands on the flat roof of the aforementioned concrete water tank, which set in the hill as it is, has served as many things over the years in the children's imaginations: a German Pill Box, a bunker, a machine gun nest; Dr What's His Name's secret hideout; a lifeboat set adrift in the middle of the ocean; Huck Finn's raft floating down the Mighty Mississippi; a medieval fortress, a tower, a keep; a camp in the desert, an oasis; a rocket or derelict spaceship floating endlessly adrift in space.

I'm sure I could go on. But right now Ned's concentration is elsewhere. Even as we speak, his friends are trying to sneak up on him, return from where they have been hiding, and jump up onto the low

platform that is the roof or the Diaz (depending upon your point of view) before he can call out their names as if they were following some ancient rite or ritual... or practicing for an upcoming battle with demons, where the naming of things is important; but then, rest assured, I would be ashamed to have something like that happen on my watch; but then again, one never knows...

“Billy, at the base of the transmission tower.”

“Dave, behind that oak.”

“Bruce, down by the creek.”

“Larry, trying to sneak up behind me.”

“Tom, Brian, and... and... you, the new girl, can't remember your name, but I see you.” That would be Nicki (in former times, a Ninja). And rushing all at once, they had been hoping to close the final distance before Ned could name them all, but alas, their gambit foiled (that girl being close enough in this case, good thing she's not a demon).

And then, the round complete (and Ned having won), it is his choice whether he stays at 'Home Base', which is what the bunker is called in this game, or whether he goes out into the wild, hides amongst the trees, and tries to make his way back without anyone seeing him.

“The mosquitos are killing me,” Bruce announces, easily explaining why no one else was down by the creek and why defending Home Base is easier than it might at first seem: there are only so many (reasonable) avenues of attack.

But then, the pertinent point in all that is that it is much more comfortable to be standing in the clearing on the ledge: the moon is full, what stars there are twinkle and shine, and a cool breeze blows, which feels nice after the long hot afternoon.

So, it is not very difficult for Ned to make his decision, “I'll stay here, again.” And with that, he starts to count, “One, two, three...” And as per the unwritten rules of the game, the other boys (and girls, though at the present, I think Nicki is the only one) take that as their cue to scatter to the wind and drift away; some in triples, some in pairs; to talk, to smoke, to drink, to do whatever it is that young boys without girlfriends do alone in the woods together; nestling down in a crack or a wedge between two rocks, behind a pile of pipes, in an old transformer

housing (some old ruin, in point of fact, I think it once was a shrine), in a clump of weeds or low grown bushes (hope it isn't poison ivy), or up in a tree, because at some point, if Ned cannot see them from his perch, he's supposed to go out looking for them (and then beat them back to Home Base after calling out their name); but then (in truth), that hardly ever happens.

'Where'd you guys go last night?'

'Oh, we decided to leave.'

So, why go looking for someone who's probably not even there?

Besides you know (just know) once your attention is distracted and you go walking three feet in one direction, someone is just going to come in from the other, shouting, 'I win!' And then, you're going to have to go out and deal with the insects and mosquitoes and the dirt and the grime and skinning your toes on broken glass and stepping on rusted barbed wire and all the other hazards of the wild. So really, best to leave the edges and corners of the world to the ghosts of the night; and if they want to reclaim their glory, let them come to you.

(You want foreshadowing for the long haul? I've got you covered. But that's the long haul and not tonight... nor even this tome -- and that's what I mean by the long haul. Oh, you're old? Let me tell you about old...)

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But tonight, Ned simply counts to silently to himself and then calls out at the end of it all, "One hundred!" followed by the optional, "Ready or not! Here I come!" and the game is on.

Sort of...

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"Where are you going?" Abby asks, having suddenly appeared on the water tank's roof from seemingly out of nowhere, a question she asks on account of her being quite literal nature (this being part of her

training in battling demons and devils and so forth, got to parse your words carefully with that lot).

But in truth, none of that applies to Ned (he's no demon), so rather than answering her question, he asks one of his own (as I've come to find Human, Orcs, and Goblins are prone to do -- yes, horde creatures, the lot, in my opinion), "Where'd you come from?"

"Over there, down the path," Abby replies easily; but then, maybe a little disappointedly. She'd forgotten how, um, tiresome? Boorish? No. Uninspired, humans can be at times.

But then, Ned can be inspired, or at least, he would like to be inspired; and since his last question hadn't gotten him the information he desires, he rephrases it slightly, asking, "No, why are you here?"

"In theory, to find my cat," Abby answers, once again, easily enough, perhaps unhelpfully, but definitely showing off the literal minded ways of her training.

Of course, Ned can be just as literal. And to prove the point, he asks matter-of-factly, "What does your cat look like?"

"I don't know. I haven't found him yet," Abby surmises. And, um, not to be redundant, but that means she's just summed up the situation nicely (because as I have been told, those Goblins that can read -- few and far between -- are often tripped up by the smallest of details). Anyway, after the merest of pauses (that I have handily utilized to the fullest extent possible), Abby adds, "Though in truth, I'd rather find a Dragon. You haven't seen any, have you?"

"No."

"I didn't think so."

And then, interrupting their conversation as if on cue, Bruce comes running back. "Made it!" he declares as he hops onto the platform. And then, the round over (and won), the rest of the gang, slowly makes their way back to the perch.

During which time, Bruce asks of Abby, "So, are you an Elf?"

"No."

"No?" Bruce asks again as he takes in her street-urchin attire. "You sort of look like an Elf," he continues in that way certain Humans have (the dumb ones, I'm guessing).

“I’m not an Elf,” Abby replies with rising annoyance, a mosquito having just bitten her.

And from there, Bruce was getting ready to say something else equally as stupid -- and calculated to annoy Abby -- just for the sheer joy of it. To which Abby was getting ready to transform him into a toad, which would have solved the growing insect problem, but in other ways would have been as stupid as Bruce’s own remarks.

So, it was a good thing that both of them were saved from going down that road by the sudden arrival of Strathmore, who was more than happy to proclaim, “She’s not an Elf. I’m an Elf.”

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And after the general introductions (which can take a tiresome amount of time where Elves are concerned, so we’ll just skip those pleasantries), the conversation turns to an explanation of the game at hand. And from there, it’s only a matter of time (a very short time, indeed), before Strathmore is challenging Ned (the reigning champion, so I guess Strathmore missed that part about Bruce winning the final round) to a game of Kick the Can, Hide and Seek, Ghost in the Graveyard, and/or whatever you want to call this here game. But then, the early parts of the challenge are not all that interesting to watch. I mean, Strathmore challenging Ned to a game of Hide and Seek in an old growth forest is sort of like a full grown adult Titan challenging a baby Church Mouse to a wrestling contest.

The Mouse is going to lose.

Which is to say, Ned lost.

Or more to the point (come on, we’re talking about Elves here, like another person’s point of view could possibly matter), Strathmore won -- decisively, repeatedly, and without much real effort.

So thinking quickly, Abby suggests Strathmore try to do it again with both hands tied behind his back, bound and gagged. (Hey, it’s worth a try. Because if it works, they could then play a robust game of Kick the Elf.) But all arrogance aside, even Strathmore isn’t that stupid. So, Abby does the next best thing and intervenes, giving Ned the *Sight*.

“Hey, um, Strathy? I see you.”

“It’s Strathmore,” Abby corrects Ned, because it’s one thing to trick an Elf, it’s quite another to insult them by saying their name wrong or mispronouncing it on purpose.

“Strathmore, I see you behind the tree...”

“By the logs...”

“Down by the rocks...”

“In the tree.”

And when, Strathmore objects this time, something about how Abby was cheating, the humans having home field advantage, and whatever else he could think of (Elves not being good sports -- gracious winners, losers, or come to think of it, opponents in general -- dirty tricksters the lot of them), Abby suggests that Strathmore defend Home Base for a while, calling out the human’s names as they approach. And not only does this have the benefit of introducing Strathmore to each of the players (a named being, being a vastly different thing than an unnamed entity, if you catch my meaning), but also allows Abby the opportunity to turn each of the players silently-invisible until they miraculously appeared on the stone Diaz, er, I mean, water tank, next to and/or behind Strathmore.

“You cheated!” Strathmore (unsurprisingly) accuses Ned, when at the end of it all, it is his turn, and he suddenly appear before the Elf. To which Strathmore further responds by yelling, “Prepare to die, Human scum!” Which I concede seems sort of extreme, but as I may have mentioned Elves are not good losers (sports and/or so on). In fact, if asked, they might tell you that, ‘We don’t lose!’ And if that eventuality requires a beheading here or an evisceration there, well then, that be the price of victory. Who says world domination comes cheap?

But Abby isn’t going to let something like that happen. Not that one, two, three, or even four dozen less Humans in the world would make any difference to her (certainly not any more difference than there being one less Elf in the world), but she’s able to see the bigger picture. So cutting to the chase, she says, “Humans are full partners in the Accord.”

“And because of their involvement, countless Elves died.”

“Then you can see their importance,” and if that isn’t clear (perhaps because it isn’t), Abby adds, “I mean, they do have an uncanny knack for allying themselves with the winning side.” And perhaps they are only second only to Kibbers in this regard. But I digress.

“So, they’re like rats and Kibbers,” Strathmore observes, so maybe I wasn’t digressing that much as he sees the connect, as well. Of well, and in any event, at some point in the proceeding, Strathmore has drawn his sword and sort of pressed, poised, pointed at Ned’s neck (a fact which perhaps lends further credence to the fact that Elves do not lose graciously).

“But then, the price, victory,” Abby says, her voice sort of trailing off as she snaps her fingers, wiggles her nose, or simply wills it to be, and Ned slowly floats up into the sky. “Personally, I sort of wonder how this game would play out if everyone was flying through the air,” she adds as she causes the rest of the Human (Horde? Host?) to ascend into the night sky one by one. And when there are no more Humans left on the ground, Abby inquires of Strathmore (oh, so politely), “Would you like to join them?”

“It would be fun,” Strathmore has to agree. “But I’m not making any alliances.”

“No! Heavens, no!”

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So, no alliances. (Heavens, no!) But that doesn’t mean Strathmore didn’t join Ned and the rest in the air as they played an aerial version of Tag that tended to switch on a dime between Keep Away, Monkey in the Middle, and Kill the Elf with the Ball; but in the end was a lot more like a small scale dog fight with no rules and constantly shifting alliances than anything else. But then, boys will be boys (girls will be girls, and Apprentices will be Apprentices), and the lot of them seemed to have a good time: even Strathmore, who won, I hear tell (if you hear him tell it that is, at least) in whatever fashion a game like that might be won.

And as for Abby, she lay down in the middle of the stone Diaz (which to her always was a Diaz) wondered what had happened to the



gods of old, what it would take to revive them, and whether the gentle breeze that blew this way and that was a Water Sylph, a Ghost Walker, Zephyr himself, or simply a breeze.

And then, somewhere along the line, a stray kitten found Abby, nuzzled up to her, and convinced her to feed it a saucer of milk.

“I’m not taking you home, you know.”

“Purr! Purr! Purr! Purr!”

“Well, as long as we understand each other.”

And after a while (as the boys were completely engrossed in their game and she might as well been alone with the cat), she inquired of her feline acquaintance, “You wouldn’t have happened to see a Dragon sleeping anywhere, would you.”

“Purr! Purr! Purr! Purr!” which means precious little to me. But apparently, Abby speaks cat, so she replied, “Well, if you do...”

And that, my friends, is where I think we shall end it tonight.

{{{Chapter End}}}