

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 8 ###
Gym Class ###**

Once again, no need to say action as the bulk of the actors continue to be under Wally's spell (and still in the thick of it), while the remainder play along good naturedly.

We are on the Field of Glory where a large human contingent from the Final Conflict (and/or The Latest War to End All Wars) is buried. Flat stone markers set level with the ground mark some of the graves. But the bodies are stacked so dense here that even with only one in ten being identified, the headstones form a sort of tiled plaza: a haphazard tiling pattern to be sure; but then, within the chaos here and there appear patterns of meaning (spirals and checkerboards, mosaic designs): all with short grass growing in the cracks between. And with the War Memorial Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (for the aforementioned nine

out of ten which are unmarked) overlooking the plaza at the one end and Trent the Treant at the other (who is happy to raise his branches in order to form a goal post or act as a sort of interactive backboard), the entire area makes for the perfect playing field

And then, if you want to annoy Trent, ask him if he died in a 'Lumbering Accident'; because, you know, just between, you, me, and anyone who is willing to listen to Trent rant and rave on the subject, it was no accident. Call it genocide, call it herbicide, call it the price of progress, call it what it really is (murder), or call it whatever you want; fact is, when the last tree was felled in his forest, Trent went down as well. And for the most, he would have been happy to stoically accept his fate (only throwing the occasion curse out onto the wind), stare off into the distance (and plot his revenge... don't we all), and eventually befriend (or at least, make a sort of peace with) a hive of newly deceased honeybees, who insisted that the hollow core of his tree was the only place in the graveyard suitable for their home. Well, like I said, he would have been (more or less) content. Sun up, sun down: throw in the occasional rain shower and what more does a tree (Treant or otherwise) really need? But then there was the war and the casualties and the need to put them somewhere; and so, although he could always pick up roots and move farther away and deeper into the forest, he never actually did; and so, he eventually became the de facto coach, referee, and arbiter of all that transpired on the field (of battle), which the kids, of course, use as one giant playground: like say a baseball diamond (in season), or at the present (in the autumn-ish season), a football field.

And that's probably enough back story for an entire book (let alone a single chapter therein); so as if on cue, as if he was just waiting for the opportunity to say it (because let's face it is -- this is what he 'lives' for these days), upon witnessing a bit of foul play (as conducted by almost everyone playing on the field, almost all of the time), Trent was more than happy to bellow out, "Play nice! Don't make me come over there!" Of course, he never does (come over there); but once or twice a year, the bees do; and so, the threat is enough.

Sort of odd that: that the pain is real enough -- bee stings still hurt, and all; as does landing on a grave marker with your knee, head, or

elbow when being tackled. It really does hurt. You should hear them scream; or the ghastly sound a skull makes when it squashes open: it's a sort of a sickening slurping smack-crack. But then, (being dead and all) in a moment, it's all gone and forgotten.

"Walk it off! Walk it off!" Trent hollers, sort of uselessly, as that's exactly the sort of thing that isn't going to happen when your leg is (quite literally) bent the wrong way. But then, wait a few minutes and that's exactly what you do, here. I mean, we're not in Heaven. We're not in Hell. And personally, I don't really know if either exists. All I really know is that we're in a sort of Purgatory that sort of goes on and on and on until one -- not so much fades away -- but simply forgets about living (and life) and eventually turns to Dust. It may take thousands upon thousands of years (for some/most/all), but eventually, everyone gives up the ghost -- figuratively, of course. But being a graveyard, we have a few literal examples, as well. Not as many as one might expect. I mean, oddly enough, a true ghost is a sort of rarity in a graveyard. Maybe most of them stay behind (where they gave up the ghost in the first place, if you know what I mean). And let's face it, for the most, that's what differentiates a ghost from the rest of the walking dead. But even with that said, we have one or two ghosts here, as well.

Coincidentally, one of them is S-Kelly's (afterlife) sister, Gloria. She's not playing on the field, of course, as she would have a hard time holding onto the ball -- if anyone would throw it too her in the first place or even notice that she was open. So instead of that, what she is doing is what I believe is called cheerleading. (I think I read that somewhere). But it's probably a misnomer. Anyway, Gwyneth the (not so) Gay Witch is cheering, as well; or really, it's more like cursing as that's more his/her style. And since Gloria doesn't think cursing is kosher (which I sort of find hard to believe that it is) or sporting (which it most definitely is not), Gloria is busy countering Gwyneth's curses with blessings of her own. It makes for an interesting cheerleading squad... and some wonderful plays on the field, as well:

"And it's a fumble!"

"Bobbling... bobbling, but he recovers."

"Only to lose it in the end."

“Fortunately, the ball is picked up by his teammate.”

“Who is tackled from behind.”

“But turns out it was a sneak play; and Strathmore is off and running, a clear field ahead.”

“Unfortunately, disturbed by the racket overhead, an arm,” from one of those aforementioned unmarked, unsung, and unremembered heroes, “reaches up from below and grabs onto his leg.”

“But it’s only a revenant” which means it’s clumsy, old, and brittle, “so Strathmore easily breaks free,” or breaks the hand off at the root, as:

“The hand’s not letting go!”

And this then would be about where Strathmore does one of those them there victory dance things (a few feet short of the end zone, I might add) as he tries to get as far away as he can from the skeletal hand, while at the same time, somehow try to pry it loose. Not an easy feat, that. But he’s an Elf (gallant and brave); and so, a few seconds later, he’s spiking the hand on a tombstone (where it shatters and sinks back under the earth) just like the best of them (unsung heroes and Elvin football players, both, I presume). And then, because (like I said) he’d stopped to do all this a few yards short of the end zone, Jack does one of those illegal flying tackle things from behind (forget what you call those -- ah, yes, now I remember, clipping -- Jack clips Strathmore) bringing him to the ground, which makes it incredibly easy for Frank to do one of those flying (pile-on) tackle things onto the pair of them, who in turn is soon followed by a gaggle of Goblins, an order of Orcs, a gang of Dwarves, and so on and so forth, until it is S-Kelly’s turn to do one of those cannon ball jumpy things onto the very top of the pile.

And although Trent can be heard to bellow, “Break it up! Break it up!” from across the field, no one is listening or seems to care (or maybe it is that those on the bottom can’t hear and those on the top simply do not care). Whatever the case, it soon becomes obvious that rather than playing football, the game has reverted to Rugby or Pile On or Kill the Man Child with the Ball or whatever might be your favorite field sport that involves tackling, pain, possible injury, and secondary death, which seeing as how there are over a hundred players on the field, each with a

different notion as to what this might be, things have quickly gotten out of hand (i.e. chaotic). Of course, that's just the sort of environment in which a Chaos Elf (meaning Strathmore) is going to excel; but then, perhaps you saw that coming. What can I say, more than a few others (myself included) had not.

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“So, what's going on, again?” Abby asks of Ned. And perhaps I should mention that both of them are standing off to the side, not involved in the main game itself. And perhaps I should also take a moment to reiterate that in Ned's mind, he is in a high school gym class on pre-contact earth (or rather, slightly after contact was made... obviously) outside on a practice field.

But back to the question at hand.

“I don't really know. I think they're,” which is to say, “we're supposed to be playing flag football. But that really looks more like Pile On or Kill the Guy with the Ball than anything else.”

“I suppose, it was a bad idea to let Strathmore and Jack choose teams.”

“Maybe, but it is sort of traditional.”

“Yeah, well, it's also sort of traditional for Orcs to fight Goblins. Putting them on the same team (not to mention separating the clans) was a mistake.”

“Hey, blame Strathmore for that.”

“Well, as you say. But in all fairness, when he was picking Gary, he probably thought he was picking the Goblin's en mass,” i.e. by convention. “I mean, that makes a lot more sense. And explains why he wasn't so keen on getting Erin or Orin.”

“What? The Orc runts? That's also sort of traditional. Every team gets a few of the best players and a few of the worst. I mean, no one wants to be last picked and certainly no one wants them on their team,” Ned explains as he jiggles the clipboard he is holding, “Which is why some of us find it in our best interest to bypass the entire ritual by volunteering to keep score.”

“See, I knew you were a smart kid, and I suspected you were on to something when you did that, which is why I followed your lead. But you’re selling yourself short,” no pun intended, I’m sure. “If you recall, I saw you playing Kick the Can the other night. And you were more than able to hold your own.”

“Yeah, but if you take a look out there, you’ll realize they’re playing a game of pain: giving and receiving. It’s not my cup of tea.”

“I can see why you’d want to get out of that. So, anyhow, I’m here to learn,” the barbaric ways of you humans. “So, what’s going on, again, out there?”

“Looks, like Strathmore just scored another touchdown.”

“And Jack just got another late hit penalty against him.”

“He’s a Neanderthal.”

Of course, a big word like that (not one much used in the world of wizardly), it takes Abby a moment to figure out what the word means (cave man), and what Ned is trying to imply when he says it. “Oh, you mean, like, figuratively.”

To which Ned doesn’t say anything, just sort of looks at her, ‘Yeah, duh?’

“For a second, I thought you were being serious.” And now, because of his continued looks of incredulity, she feels the need to explain her confusion. “Well, Neanderthal’s are your ancestors, right?” But it’s more of a rhetorical question, which might explain Ned’s silence on the matter, but it’s something Abby is curious about, so she continues. “I mean, like, the classes here are inside dark rooms, sort of like caves, right? And the teachers draw on slate boards with chalk. You can see the obvious caveman, cave wall connection, right?”

What can Ned do but shrug and answer truthfully, “I really never thought of it.”

“I guess what I’m asking is, how long ago did you guys, you know, evolve?”

“So, now, you’re calling me a Monkey Boy?”

And let’s face it; wars have been fought over less. I’m talking to you, Mr. Bog Troll.

But Abby’s not looking to start anything. “No, I was just

expecting..." but then, who knows what she was expecting? I'm not sure that even she does.

And then, of course, Ned has any number of unfilled expectations of his own. "You all aren't exactly what I was expecting. I mean, Elves are supposed to be honorable and dignified... or so I was led to believe. But Strathmore is an attention whore. Mata is endlessly annoying. And Minny, well, she's just..."

"Beautiful," Abby finishes for him. "And her name is Mine'irva," she helpfully corrects. "You're never going to get anywhere with her if you call her Minny. Elves don't do nicknames."

"Well, she better be careful. I've already overheard more than one conversation in which she was referred to as Minny the Ninny."

"Ninny?"

"From what I gather, it's supposed to be short for nincompoop... account of how she doesn't know how to do anything for herself."

"Sounds like sour grapes."

"What?"

"I see you," and everyone else, I might add, "staring at her."

"Well..."

"Well, that's her appeal." And as Ned mulls that over and because it's pretty clear he doesn't really understand, Abby decides to try and fill in some of the blanks for him. "Look at the Goblins. They act as a tribe. Putting them on separate teams is never going to work. If you do, they're just going pick one side or the other (or possible neither or both) and sabotage the rest."

And to support this idea, one of the Goblins (Gary, I believe) miraculously fumbles the ball to another Goblin who is supposed to be on the opposite team (probably Greg), who in turn manages to run forty yards before being pummeled by a dozen orcs (whatever team they were supposed to be on not mattering in the least).

"Yeah, OK. I guess I see what you mean."

"Well, Mine'irva, Mata, Strathmore, they're all one team, as well. Strathmore will score the touchdowns. Mata will plan the strategy from the sidelines," and be annoying in that way that only smart scheming girls can be annoying (let me tell you about my ex-wife, sometime).

And from there (as if on cue, as if I had some magical way of editing these recollections and making things happen where and when I wanted), Mata calls a play onto the field via a Kibber assistant that she's somehow befriended.

And just in case you don't know, Kibbers are geeky looking, formally dressed frogman looking nerds, keen on careers in the field of domestic service, and as such genetically predisposed to cow tow to Elves, Royalty, and whoever happens to be in charge at the moment (like me), and whoever looks like they might be in charge in a moment (which also had better be me).

Anyhow, Abby was going down a list, so we might as well let her finish it up by explaining, "And through it all, Mine'irva will just look stunning," captivating the hearts of one and all, "because that's her job."

"She is beautiful," Ned agrees, his eyes transfixed on Mine'irva.

"Be careful there, lover boy. More than one mighty hero has met his end trying to attain the unattainable." But then, Abby shrugs, "So, you've fallen under the Elf's spell. No big surprise there."

And once again, we will accent Abby's words by watching Jack make a rare touchdown; after which, he'll let his gaze fall on Mine'irva to see if she was watching (she wasn't, she doesn't, she never will); but the one moment of distraction is all Strathmore needs in order to do one of those flying tackle things on Jack and (Finally!) get one of those late hit penalties called against him for a change!

"Fifteen laps! Both of you!" Trent (under guise as the gym coach) bellows. But what does Strathmore care. It was worth it.

"I'm going to get you, Elf!" Jack swears.

"Going to have to catch me first, knuckle dragger," Strathmore retorts. And the race is on (which as long as Strathmore continues to run backwards, Jack just might stand a chance at winning... or at least, keeping up).

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Anyhow, the intervening interlude has given Ned a moment to consider the ultimate unattainability of Mine'irva (as alluring as she may

be) and the obvious availability of the young apprentice sitting next to him -- the one who's been sitting next to him all day, following his lead, and showing a remarkable interest in his comings and goings.

Being a man (or a boy... or just an idiot when it comes to such things), Ned does a fair bit of this aforementioned 'considering' by checking out Abby's form and figure and then gazing over at Mine'irva's form and figure, coming back to Abby, comparing, contrasting, sizing things up, thinking things out, projecting, predicting, all of which Abby sort of watches amused until she figures out what he's doing.

"Oh, you think? Me? That I? No. The answer is no."

Which, of course, explains nothing to Ned. Humans (male children in particular) can be so clueless about these things.

"I'm not interested in you. OK?"

"But all day, you've been following me around."

"You're a great guide. I like your company. It doesn't mean I want to have your children. Besides, I've already got a Wizard. And he's the jealous type?"

"Wally?" Ned echoes in a way that conveys a general aura of disbelief. And since (I think) we've already established Abby's desirability -- or if there is any doubt about that, she is -- brains, beauty, and the intrinsic ability to work magic, what more exactly are you looking for? So, anyhow, after considering all of that (and the overwhelming obviousness of all that, I mean, she is a looker in her own right), that can only mean that Ned was questioning Wally's desirability.

Um, have I mentioned that wars have been fought over less?

"If you know what's good for you, you won't be disparaging my Wizard," Abby sort of threatens, before loosening up a little and adding, "Don't let his knobby knees or spindly legs fool you. He might not know where his shoes are at any given moment, but you are never going to be in a position to fill them," there shoes.

And what is there to say to such a declaration beyond, "Really? Wally?"

Of course, the only thought/reaction this elicits from Abby is, 'Are you trying to annoy me?' But then, upon reflection (something both

Wizards and their Apprentices are amazing good at doing), she realizes Ned isn't trying to be annoying. Rather, like most men, he's just ignorant. So Abby explains (or tries to explain), "Wally's a wizard, I'm his apprentice. What do you think that means?"

"But he's so old."

A comment Abby dismisses out of hand, "Actually, at this point," no matter how you measure it, "I'm probably a few thousand years older than him, so I don't really know what the deal is." And then, thinking it through, and/or watching Ned's gaze float unconsciously back to Mine'irva, yet once again (you know, to see what she looks like this moment, what she's done with her hair lately -- it changes so often -- and maybe, perchance, perchance, to see if she is looking in his direction... but alas, she is not); anyhow, after sort of taking it all in, Abby suddenly has an epiphany (assuming that's the right word for a sudden insight into a remarkably good idea).

"We should break bread."

"Huh?" Ned sort of says, it probably being the most reasonable reply there can be to such a suggestion, coming as it is from out of the blue.

"You know, have dinner... at your place, I'm sort of interested in seeing how you live."

"With my parents?"

"Yes, exactly," Abby agrees. "I would like to arrange a meeting with the rulers of your clan, so that we may discuss the possibility of an alliance and determine how each of us might assist the other in the forwarding of our personal agendas."

It's a bit formal, sure. The wording could use some help. But it's just a rough draft of an idea, verbally conveyed on the spur of the moment. But more importantly, it's also happens to be the exact kind of whispered diplomatic intrigue that elves have been trained to listen for (and overhear from a remarkable distance) since birth; and so, despite her training (and even from across the field of battle, where a sort of free-for-all melee has erupted), Mine'irva can't quite help herself, but to let her gaze fall upon and through Ned -- piercing his heart and soul, you know, if you go in for that sort of poetic nonsense.

Anyway, that might explain why Ned has a hard enough time just sort of managing to say, “OK,” to Abby’s suggestion. But then, Mine’irva remembers herself, looks away, and Ned can think again; and the first thing Ned thinks about is what an angry Wizard (possible a crazy Wizard) who has been rumored to be more than a bit of a jealous Wizard, might do to him if said crazed jealous angry Wizard were to take Abby’s suggestion and/or invitation the wrong way. So, sort of concerned for his continued existence (and/or continued existence as a human boy and not a mongrel dog, flying squirrel, pet monkey, or the ever popular bullfrog/toadstool), Ned asks ever so nicely, “But what about Wally?” You know, Wally, the crazy jealous -- perhaps psychotic insane -- Wizard that you’ve mentioned a time or two in passing.

“Don’t worry about Wally. If I like you, then Wally will like you. And I think I’m going to like you.” And then, of course, being an Apprentice, there’s a spell or ritual for everything, so spitting into the palm of her hand, “Friends?” she asks.

In truth, the only reason she does this is because she thinks it’s a human custom; and in truth, the only reason Ned does it is because he thinks it’s one of her weird customs (and let’s face it, she does seem like maybe she has a bunch of weird customs); but the agreement made, the deal set in saliva, the only thing left is for them to arrange their next meeting.

“So, dinner tonight?”

“Um, yeah. Sure.”

And with that, the first (perhaps of many) alliance(s) is struck. So, might I recommend a brief fade-out? We can always catch up with them later.

{{{Chapter End}}}