

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

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

(c) Brett Paufler 2013-2014
www.paufler.net
Brett@Paufler.net

**### Chapter 14###
CataCombs ###**

Sometimes, it doesn't hurt (well, often it doesn't hurt; in fact, it never really hurts) being dead. Sure the living can taste food, smell flowers, and appreciate no end of nuance to the pleasures of the flesh (the complete litany of which I shall not repeat here). And that is all well and good. But whilst walking through a catacomb -- the bodies stacked high in all manner and state of decomposition -- one might consider the lack olfactory ability to be a decided bonus rather than a handicap or a curse.

"Golly. Gee. Jeepers," or something to that effect, "I wonder what this place smells like," S-Kelly sort of asks in a sing-song sort of voice. He's with his father -- pseudo father, fake father, skeletal adopted warlord father. And said father isn't yelling at him (hasn't yelled at him

in, oh, the last ten seconds, at least, I'd say), and by all appearances is no longer really mad at him (no madder than usual); and in fact, said father is currently taking him along on a little adventure (to make some of that infamous Drip).

Of course, none of that makes his father any the more talkative, so to the preceding question (regarding what this place smells like), Bones simply responds, "I don't know."

So, I (quite helpfully, I might add) take it upon myself to inform the little tyke that "It probably smells a lot like rotting flesh." For good or for ill, I suppose it matters if you like that sort of thing. I find that it often smells a little pukey-sweet, if you know what I mean.

And with a hearty "Cool!" from the kid, that seems to answer that... or so one might have hoped. "Where are we going?" he asks next. "You'll see."

"How much farther?"

"A ways."

"Why don't we just use one of these?" S-Kelly asks while holding up the arm of and poking through the remains of... some catatonic corpse that's just about given up the ghost. Of course, I couldn't tell you exactly who the poor fellow is -- trade secret, privileged information, professional ethics, sworn to secrecy, and all that. And then, I just don't know (this story being chiefly staffed -- characterized, as it were -- by the exception rather than the rule). Just as in life, most of the dead simply aren't worth knowing.

However, the kid's question is reasonable enough, the answer is simple enough, and it might be best (for all) if we did something to diffuse the tension, because rather than say anything helpful (or take the opportunity to bind with his kid), Bones starts grinding his teeth. But thankfully, rather than tearing S-Kelly a new one (not sure how that works with a skeleton), Bones simply mimics the poor lad as he chimes derisively, "Why don't we use this one? Or this one? Or this one?"

"Well, Bones," I extol, always being happy to share the wealth, as it were, the wisdom that I hold, that vast reservoir of knowledge that is mine to bestow, with an eager young mind that is ready to learn, "The answer is simple enough. We could use any of these."

“I know that,” Bones snarls.

“Did you, now? Then why did you ask?” But then, that would be one of those rhetorical questions? In no need of an answer. That to answer, in fact, would only detract from the real answer, which is, “We’re not just making Drip, S-Kelly. We’re going to make some Drip.” See, simple, self-explanatory really. “And for that we need something,” or someone, “special.”

And with that (along with a stern look from his father, telling him to ‘Shut it boy, these grave-robbing expeditions aren’t to be taken lightly,’ along with a flick to the back of the boy’s bare skull the next time he looks like he’s going to open his mouth or say something -- constructive or not), and we shall continue on in (blessed) silence for some time to come, winding down and around the endlessly dying dead.

#

Until, that is:

“Why wouldn’t you let me take his sword?”

“You didn’t earn it,” which is perhaps more cryptic than it needs to be, but Bones is like that (loose lips sink ships and not having any lips at all, I suppose that makes him all the tighter with what little info he has).

But S-Kelly’s whiney complaint of, “You never let me have anything I want,” doesn’t help matters much. But I think we’ve established that Bones is not a master orator... except for, perhaps, when it comes to leading the troops to battle and giving them one of those last minute, pre-battle, last-stand inspirational speeches, and then he’s all silver tongued and full of motivation... assuming dying a pointless death in the name of glory and honor rocks your boat, that is.

Anyway, another step and another corpse is offering a necklace, a ring, a jeweled chalice (hey, I could use a new one of those; but then, no), and on and on.

“Can I take that?” asks S-Kelly (again and again and again).

“No,” Bones replies in perfect monosyllabic monotone. Of course, he says it in an offhand monotonous sort of way, that some might find annoying after a while, but I find it to be rather melodic and soothing, in

its own way. But then, I fear I digress. But more than that, I am being rude. As the two of them were/are having a conversation.

“How about this?”

“No.”

“But he wants me to have it.”

“No.”

“Come on, why not?”

“Because I said so.”

Never a meaningful answer, so maybe it's time to teach the kid something besides wreaking ruin... something that the next generation (and it's always the next generation's fault) seems to pick up quite easily -- almost naturally, I might add, or digress to add, so let's return to the topic at hand, and I will thank you kindly to stop interrupting me every half thought -- and then, if you extrapolate that last into a lifetime of beratement and abuse, perhaps you will begin to understand -- a little, sort of, kind of -- of what it's been like for S-Kelly to have Bones as is father all these years. But once again, I digress. And I will thank you kindly to keep your questions and interruptions to yourself from here on out. I've got a graveyard to run and a story to tell. And at this rate, we'll never get to the Drip. So, let us get this explanation out of the way. Shall we?

I mean, if your quite certain that you're not going to interrupt?

Nothing rhetorical about it.

If you have a question, now's the time to ask.

No.

Well, OK then.

Listen and learn.

“See, Corpse Boy up ahead, the one crawling into the passage way, the one that's trying to block my way, the one that's going to wind up experiencing a whole new level of pain and torment if he doesn't get out of my way right quick?” Which it does. “Thank you,” oozing out of the way as best it can. (And I do believe ooze is the proper word for any sort of movement at that stage of decay.) “Well, he,” she, it, “would like nothing better than for you to take that coin...”

“Myth-Real?” Bones suggests.

“Adam-Might?” I counter, pretty sure that Bones is wrong,
“Looks, like tarnished silver and gold, to me,” S-Kelly chirps in.
“Because you’d know,” his loving father throws back. “Remind me again, how many years did you languish in the mines dragging ore carts about?”

Um, right. “For arguments sake, let’s assume it’s Adam-Might...”

But Bones can’t leave it alone, “For arguments sake, let’s just assume I know my mythical alloys and that’s Myth-Real. We’re way too deep for Adam-Might.”

“He’s mobile,” Corpse Boy is. “Headed downstream,” and like, he obviously carried it with him from the other side...

“Why?”

“Going deeper? Maybe he read Dante’s Inferno,” and thinks that’s where the exit is.

“Fool.”

“Yes, he is a fool. But why is he a fool S-Kelly?”

And here if we could only crack S-Kelly’s skull open and listen to him think, which, what do you know, we can! So, let’s listen in as S-Kelly tries to work it out. Why is the idiot with the coin a fool?

What do you say, S-Kelly?

‘Because he chose to reside in your cemetery?’ No, I can’t say that. That will only get me in more trouble. ‘He died?’ No, they -- we -- we all died. “Because he’s not lying down and taking it,” (death, that would be), “like a man?” S-Kelly finally decides upon as the best possible answer to voice outloud, beating out ‘I don’t know’ by a slim margin; or perhaps it might be more accurate to say that ‘I don’t know’ was beaten out of S-Kelly going on a few year back, and I haven’t heard him say the useless phrase ever since. (And who says negative reinforcement doesn’t work?)

Anyway (to recap), one skeletal boy child has been quizzed and the top answer on the board is ‘Because he doesn’t take death like a man.’

And “Buzz, wrong!” Bones (un)helpfully informs the lad.

Which leaves me to explain, “Corpse Boy is a fool because he took on a debt of honor,” the coin, “prior to a battle in which he was very

likely to,” and indeed did, “get killed. Probably some nonsense about Do or Die. Death is not an option, and all that.”

“So?”

“So!” Bones repeats, though not in the same tone as his son, so even though he’s using the exact same words, it’s not really anything like repeating them at all, a whole lot more like hissing them in open contempt.

“You really should talk to your kid more,” I suggest. And then, noticing S-Kelly’s reaction to the suggestion (more of an involuntary flinching, than anything else... for which he will, no doubt, be given a good solid talking to later -- and by talking, I mean thrashing -- because a real man -- and by real man, I mean a real Skeletal Warrior -- Does Not Flinch!), so, um, in light of the preceding, I hasten to reword my earlier suggestion, “Talk, Bones. I mean, really talking. Less hitting, more talking.” Gee! Golly! Jeepers! “Explain the facts of,” life and, “death to the poor kid.” And then, since it’s clear Bones doesn’t have it in him (and probably never will, I can already tell he’s planning on hitting the boy a few extra times, because ‘S-Kelly got Bones in trouble’), “Look, it’s simple if you take on a debt of honor, you carry that debt with you...”

“Forever?”

And you got to hand it to Bones, because rather than punching, hitting, pushing, harassing, or otherwise punctuating his contempt with physical abuse, merely advises his son, that, “No, it’s not forever. It’s until you pay the debt off,” with the you stupid freaking idiot, being left unsaid at the end.

So obviously, I’ll say it for him. Kids these days.

###

And there you have it. Payment can be made in advance or after the fact, for services rendered or services to be rendered. Sometimes that payment aids the receiver (makes it easier to get the job done) and/or works like a little bit of positive reinforcement. And sometimes that payment works like a loadstone, a subtle reminder that said

supplicant has made a promise and by all that is Holy or Unholy (which almost always depends upon your point of view and which side you're fighting for), said supplicant better get his act together and do what he said he was going to do. 'And no, I don't care if you're dead. You will walk the Earth until you vanquish...' this or that, or do this or that, complete whatever task or errand you said that you would do (no matter how impossible it might be now, like say, defending a certain kingdom, which no lays in flames or keeping so and so alive who now lays in his grave, but whatever); fact is, if you fail in your quest and/or your body needs a little after life animating to help you along (and/or -- mostly often both -- you need a little eternal torment to remind you of your failure to fulfill the terms of your oath); well then, that's what curses are for and the die has been cast, the magical oath taken, and you'll just have to live with the consequences of that, because sometimes what has been done cannot be undone.

"Capiche? So, do you understand, now?"

Personally, I find that a stupid question (even if I say so -- or ask it so, myself) as how does a person know what they don't know or know if they understand it correctly, but for present company (S-Kelly and Bones, of course, not you dear reader), it will work.

"I think so," S-Kelly cautiously agrees.

"And so, does that shield look tempting?" Bones asks of his son.

"It's kind of nice. I wonder what he..."

Promised? Had to do? Who knows? I certainly don't.

I also don't know how S-Kelly was planning on finishing that sentence, because '...' is about where (or exactly where, I'm thinking the smart money is on exactly where) Bones smacks his son upside the back of his head -- with no little amount of force, I might add. "What!"

"Maybe it's a simple quest," S-Kelly suggests. (He really is an idiot.) "Maybe I could complete it for him."

"Are you an idiot?" But I think we've already answered that, so moving on, "He failed. Get it? He failed. So, did he. And him. And him. We're deep in the heart of failure central. What kind of idiot puts their soul on the line for a shield, a sword, a trinket, a bauble? I'll tell you what kind of idiot. That kind! And that kind! And that kind!"

We're surrounded by that kind of idiot! Get it? Don't be that kind of idiot!"

And seriously, at this point it takes about all the willpower I have not to start slicing off outstretched hands, but slicing could be (and you can darn well bet it will be) considered an act of acceptance, and wham, bamn, thank you ma'am (yes, women are the source of ALL EVIL, said the bitter old bachelor), you have now found yourself the owner of a brand new (or two millennium old) unsolved quest, geas, and/or curse (that is probably nigh near impossible to complete at this point and ironically probably wouldn't change a single thing even if said quest was fulfilled to the letter of the oath).

So anyway (really, seriously), do all the grave robbing you want. The fences around here are broken, rusted, and low. The locks don't work and all the doors are open. I mean, security is seriously lax. But maybe, that's because (as the joke goes) everyone is dying to get out (or in, or just rid of that stupid copper coin).

"Seriously, I didn't know I was agreeing to this!" It's what they all say. Like I care. I mean, have I mentioned how I'm a Dark Necromancer lately?

No.

Well, then. Have I given a good chuckle lately?

No?

Seriously?

Well, then. Let me give a hearty "Mu-ha-ha-ha" at this juncture as it echoes down the catacomb halls...

"Mu-ha-ha-ha..."

"Mu-ha-ha-ha"

"Mu-ha-ha-ha"

###

Any-the-how, this is about the where and the when of it all that we got to the end, the bottom, the final destination, of it all. A great big hall where a nice big thuggish sort of a monstrously large man (Human, though mostly decomposed, so one can never be sure) is chained to a

throne (you want it? It's yours. Forever! Mu-ha-ha-ha), doing his bit to look psychotically deranged and angry. You know, the sort of psychotic angry derangement that comes from being the good guy (or so, you were told) and then getting tricked and wind up spending your happily ever after (for like all eternity), like this. Like, this, I tell you.

No girls. No drinks. No soft music. No incense. No nothing. Just a throne of death and destruction (the true result of one's life work), surrounded by all the misery, one has created.

Meet ----- (all names have been changed to protect the innocent, celebrity voices may be impersonated, fallen heroes may not available in all markets, etc. etc. etc.).

"Is it really, -----."

'Glarb! Ga'larb, gallam Gar! Glab! Glarb!'

And if that doesn't answer your question, "Yep, it's really him," or what's left of him. He's "maybe a little mad," insane, completely gone. "Maybe a little the worse for wear," at this point; but then, this is the point where Glarb! Ga'larb, gallam Gar! (or whatever he's calling himself these days) reaches out and tests the extent and reach of his chains -- an action which causes S-Kelly back out of the way, his father to smile (as only Skeletal Warlords can smile whilst witnessing the torment of another), and me to comment, "OK. Let's make a little," or a whole heck of a lot of that stuff I like to call, "Drip."

###

And though, I cut here, I don't mean to imply that I would not like to teach you how to make Drip, I would. It's just that I need a little assurance as to your loyalty, a drop of blood here, an eternal vow there, after which I'll bestow a nifty sigil onto your personage (by means of ring, necklace, tattoo, scar, or whatever), and we're in business. Or maybe, I'll just pay you in advance the traditional two coppers, so when all is said and done, you'll be able to make your way here into my domain. Wouldn't want you to get stuck on the wrong side for lack of being able to pay the toll, now would I?

"Mu-ha-ha-ha."

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

Cough. Cough.

Cackle. Snort.

###

And just between you and me, I’m surprised S-Kelly never asked (not once the entire time), where he was born (buried or died), because he does ask that a lot.

But perhaps he knew he wasn’t ready to carry the secret.

Or perhaps he knew it wasn’t the right time.

Or, you know, knowing father and I, perhaps he was just glad we weren’t making the Drip out of his remains.

Or perhaps he could finally appreciate the need for secrecy (and you know, if we wouldn’t tell him, maybe his secret really was safe... or as safe as it could be).

But that’s all neither here nor there. I do believe we were making some Drip.

And, ‘Oh! Oh! For the love of Gra’gl!’ They do tend to scream.

Or at least, I think that’s what “Glarb! Ga’larb, gallam Gar!

Glab! Glarb!” at a hundred decibels means.

Oh, well. In the end, really none of my concern.

I mean, they don’t call me a Dark Necromancer for nothing; and perhaps, now you know why.

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

Cough. Cough.

Cackle. Snort.

{{{Chapter End}}}