

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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www.paufler.net
Brett@Paufler.net

**### Chapter 17 ###
The Library ###**

Word is that in some High Schools of late antiquity the students actually got to choose their own classes. And more than that, the high schools themselves were great big buildings (and/or sprawling complexes) with innumerable rooms and within these rooms there would be various teachers that would teach (I suppose, for lack of a better word, maybe try to teach is a better descriptor) whoever (and/or whatever) might arrive in their classroom on any given day (and if they were eager to learn, all the better, though the latter being perhaps quite a bit rarer than one might otherwise suppose).

Anyhow, in these multi-room sprawling complexes one might go from sun-up to sun-down (or 8:15AM to 2:45PM -- actual times may

vary) without ever seeing their friends or sharing a class with someone they know.

Not so in our little make-believe high school. Where the one goes, the others must surely follow. And although that might be a glitch (in the spell that) we'll eventually have to work out (and I'm thinking there are a quite a few glitches slowly building up that we're going to have to eventually resolve to reach a satisfactory conclusion and/or our destination, as it were), for now it is what it is -- and we are where we are, which for the moment is at the library, mainly because that's where Abby wanted to go and (like I said) the rest did surely follow.

Now, when I realized Abby was trooping off to the library, I had presumed she had one of two goals in mind. The first (and most obvious) being that after Mog's barbarious display, she wanted to go somewhere quiet in the hopes that the ringing would leave her ears before too terribly long. I mean, it's bad enough getting one of those new hit singles out of your head, you know, the one with the catchy lyrics and melodious jingle, but when said song takes the form of nails scraping against a chalkboard (or Styrofoam packaging getting squeaked together -- man, I hate that stuff, so glad they outlawed it), one (literally) cannot get said sound out of their heads fast enough. Seriously, just thinking about that Styrofoam crap gives me the willies (no offense, to any wizards we might know, of course, but then, who knows, maybe a wizard invented the accursed stuff -- or perhaps helped with its destruction one way or another -- and that's a happy thought). Anyhow, long story short, that was the front runner -- theory number one, the

Theory number two being that Abby headed off to the library because she wanted to look up the definition of 'Music' so as to reassure herself that what Mog had committed was not formally (or informally, for that matter) recognized as music by the powers that be or any sentient creatures the dimensions round. Now (being a sensible Necromancer), I don't have to consult any definition in any book to know that Orcs can't sing, dance, create poetry, or any of that other cultured stuff. For one (as long as we're breaking things down and trying to make them logical), muses won't have thing one to do with Orcs. And how can you make music without a muse? Answer me that?

And two, they're Orcs. (Have I mentioned how much I despise Orcs in general or Mog in particular? No? Well, I do.) And if one is going to call what Mog did 'Making Modern Music' then I guess we'll have to call what he does when he goes home at night (midmorning or whenever he gets there) art. (And just in case you wanted to know what it is that Mog does when he gets home, generally speaking it's plastering the walls of his hovel with his own excrement; but then, now that I've told you I'm thinking you're sorry you ever asked.) And really, I don't care if the leading galleries are showing works by 'up and coming' Orc artisans these days or the popular press is all ablaze with the 'profound impact' this new 'modern primitive tribalism' is having on the established art world. The simple fact is that anything created by an Orc is simply not art and I haven't got the foggiest notion why anyone would feel the need to find confirmation of this fact in some reference work -- if for no other reason than because said reference work might have been written by an Orc (extremely unlikely) or an Orc sympathizer (annoyingly prevalent these days) and therefor the author might consider excremental wall paintings and the angry caterwauling's of a middle aged and slightly disenfranchised Orc to be Art (with a big A, mind you). And then, where would you be? I'll tell you where you would be. In a world that honors Orkin culture and considers them intellectual equals, that's where. And I for one am having none of it.

And thankfully neither is Abby.

###

"Nothing on Dragons," Abby says in resignation as she finishes looking through the new books. And (perhaps surprisingly) there are always new books here at the crypt. New arrivals (inmates, constituents, folks who say -- and often believe -- that they are "just passing through") often arrive with a few (or more than a few) cherished possessions. (Actually, sometimes it's a whole lot more than just a few cherished possessions, sometimes it truckloads, cartloads, boatloads, and/or museum vaults full of their 'most cherished possession'. I guess some folks have more baggage than others... or just haven't learned the art of

traveling light.) Anyway, these items often (very often) take the form of a book: sometimes these books are religious tomes (anyone care for slightly worn copy of Gra'gl's Codex? I've got those by the trunk-load. Though really, I shouldn't complain. Nothing warms a reading nook like a burning copy one of his Codex's on a cold winter's eve, channeling the fires of Hell & Brimstone as they do, if you know what I mean); others pack a copy of their favorite author's collected works (and that's right, kudos and bonus points to anyone who shows up at my front gate with a copy of something (anything) that I've written tucked into their back pocket); or often it's something the individual person in question wrote (lots of suicide notes, sort of bland reading that, but also last wills and testaments along with more than a few secret confessionals -- ethical considerations aside -- ethics not being my strong suit -- I could write a book); and then, of course with the advent of computers and personal data devices, let's just say, somewhere, I've got a copy of a copy of a copy of pretty much everything -- (the recipe for your grandmother's secret sauce that she took to her grave, I've got it; in digital form most likely, it's true; but then, sometimes that's all you need).

So, like, that's a lot of background information; but the point is (and I've been saying that entirely too much lately, but all the same, the point is) Abby wasn't so much going through the stacks of some back-water late-century public high school library, she was going through The Stacks -- that is, my stacks -- as she always does (or certainly has been doing for the last few weeks, months, years, decades -- I lose track sometimes), searching frantically for anything new on the subject of dragons. There isn't, of course. Or there wasn't. And in all likelihood there won't be, so it's starting seem like a fool's errand (new knowledge on the subject, that is; lots of folks think dragons went extinct -- during the 'transition' -- and for the most, they may have; but mostly, nearly, and almost extinct are not quite the same thing as totally extinct if you know what I mean).

And then, there's always hope of a resurrection (or resurgence) as we did pass a Dragon's skeleton whilst in the crypt. It was sleeping (if that's what you want to call a millennial long catatonic stupor with nary

a snore, yawn, stretch, or snuffle thrown in for good measure). But the thing hadn't turned to dust (not yet, anyhow), so if you (or Abby) needed something to hang your/her hope on, there's the hope.

And so, about here (yes, right about here), Abby whispers to Ned, sort of conspiratorially to Ned (hoping others won't hear her I suppose, but I've got keen hearing, so I don't know what good it does her), "S-Kelly mentioned there was a dragon in the crypt while they were smoking under the bleachers."

For his part, Ned a bit more sanguine on the subject (if sanguine is indeed the right word for what he is feeling; but then, not a lot of people's favorite book is a thesaurus or a dictionary, so not many of those lying around and you'll have to forgive me if I don't look it up); anyhow, Ned is a bit more sanguine, reserved, and/or desperate to avoid some sort of crypt cruising side adventure, so he says, "I'm not going into the crypt," (just like anyone who was trying desperately to avoid a crypt cruising side adventure might say).

"Scared?"

"Um, yeah," is the correct answer, because:

"You may have a point," Abby concedes before sort of (or exactly sort of like) glances over to where S-Kelly is casually tearing out the pages from a codex one by one and setting them afire (for the sheer joy of it; which is sort of sacrilegious, but since sacrilegious is Gra'gl's middle name -- or at least, exactly the sort of behavior he goes in for -- it's a tough call as to whether S-Kelly is being stupid, suicidal, or simply 'honoring his god through an natural expression of self' -- this last being a prime example of why Fundamental Liberalism is so popular these days). Though, the truth of the matter is that neither S-Kelly nor Frank are especially interesting in the metaphysical theology of it all. And in truth, rather than thinking on the subject at all (like the least little bit), S-Kelly is devoting his mental facilities on the task at hand, which at the moment consists of tearing pages out of the codex, setting them afire, and throwing said burning pages at Frank one by one (good sport that last -- or maybe it's evil sport; eh, no matter). While at the same time (and more or less in perfect synchronicity), Frank acts surprised (yes, every last time, like he didn't know it was coming), jumps out of the

way, and just sort of freaks out, “Stop it! It’s not funny!” But it is funny, all more so because, “My uncle died that way, you know!” which really, just adds to the punch line if you ask me.

S-Kelly certainly agrees. And besides, he’s as bored as the rest of his new found friends at the moment (not that you should ever consider a ‘Drip Fiend’ to be your friend -- or even turn your back on them, but these particular “friends”) are in that (how shall we say?) transitional phase (yes, that’s how we shall say it). After smoking all that Drip, they’re sort of (um, and I’m parsing my words carefully here) in a stupor. (I guess, that’s the way to say it -- obviously not enough information, but then, in a few pages you won’t be able to look back and said I lied. Look at them. They’re obviously in a Drip induced stupor. That more is to come is neither here nor there). Foreshadowing aside, of those who imbibed in the Drip (which turns out to be quite a few... probably on account of the drifting effect of smoke, I’m thinking, and in days to come, I’m sure many will use as their excuse; anyhow, of those who imbibed); some sleep where they stand, some bob their heads while trying to stay awake (probably reading Kathrax’s Code, I’m thinking, it’s a snorer -- do this, do that, and none of it fun), while some (the more energetic of the lot) simply mill about aimlessly as if they are trying to remember what it is that they were doing, which was trying to remember what they were doing (if you catch my meaning and/or drift); which is to say, drifting aimlessly, going around in circles, and getting nowhere would be exactly what they would be doing if they were actually doing anything in the first place.

Capiche?

If not, no worries. Eventually, all will be revealed.

So Gra’gl says, so shall it be.

And/or, so Karthrax says; so shall it be.

Obviously, there’s a bit of a rivalry there; each wanting something different. Of course, since each also claims that their word is law (as it is said, spoke, written, etc., so it shall be), whenever they run into each other in the Planes, it just sort of results in raised voices and a shouting match as they try to out-do and un-do each other.

“Is too!”

“Is not!”

“Is too!”

“Is not!”

“Is too!”

And there in a nutshell, you have the basic disagreement between the world’s major religions.

“Is too!”

“Is not!”

“Is too!”

Etc. Etc. Etc.

On the plus side, some of their basic disagreements take the form of:

“It’s day!”

“It’s night!”

And/or, “It’s low tide!”

“It’s high tide!”

And since I like the contrast (day following night and all that), I tend to take the metaphysical implications of it all with a grain of salt -- a statement. which of course. begs the echoing refrain of, “Salt Free!”

“I said, ‘With Salt!’”

And on and on it goes.

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Now, I would have thought that Abby and Ned had said everything that they had to say at the moment -- i.e. ‘Dragons! I like Dragons!’. But just to prove me wrong (and I think she does this on purpose), Abby points out (perhaps because she is seeking confirmation), that Mog’s ‘musical’ demonstration “means that he’ll be able to neutralize any future Elf-Song,” that may arise, like, say, during the game. “Though, he really shouldn’t have revealed his hand like that,” because that’s just sort of stupid; but then, he’s an orc, so I don’t know if I’ve mentioned it, but that means he’s more than just a little stupid. (And I’m more than just a little prejudiced. Deal with it.)

Anyhow, moving on, Ned has been reading about football -- and in particular, the rules thereof.

“Why?” Abby asks. “You know they’re going to cheat.”

“Not everyone,” Ned insists as he looks over at Strathmore and then Mine’irva -- ah, beautiful Mine’irva.

So, speaking of Elves, perhaps I should mention that Strathmore is busy playing one of those tabletop games with Jake, you know, the ones played by schoolboys since time immemorial: there’s the one where you fold a piece of paper into a triangle and then flick it across the room; or the one where you take three coins (gold, of course, we’re talking about an Elf here) and then slide them through each other across the table to make a goal (or spin them, or flick them, or bounce them, or whatever them into, through, or over a pair of hands forming a goal).

Anyway, Strathmore is teaching Jack the Elf variations.

And Jack is teaching Strathmore the human variations.

And although they got off to a rocky start, it looks as though they’ve made a sort of peace -- that is, until they started talking about the upcoming game.

“I’m glad you decided to play with us.”

“Likewise, to be sure; though it is you that will be playing with me.”

And so on and so forth -- just like some Gra’gl/Karthax feud of old:

“You mean playing with me.”

“Me.”

“No, me.”

So no need to record it here any further. Let’s just hope they have the good sense (that neither Karthax nor Gra’gl seem to have) and they can stop short of a good old fashioned religious debate (otherwise known as a war).

“Well, of course I’ll be playing with you, because you will be playing on my team.”

“Yes, your team, the one I am on, otherwise known as my team.”

“No, mine.”

“Mine.”

And so on and so forth.

But enough of that.

“My team!”

“Mine!”

Whatever.

Who cares.

“So, we’re agree, on my team...”

“No, mine.”

Well, obviously Strathmore and Jack will be at this for a while.

In the meantime (and all of this time), Mine’irva has been showing an interest in the books... or maybe, it’s not so much showing her interest in books, as expressing an interest in the betterment of her L.I.W.’s -- ‘Like, Oh! My! Gra’gl! Ladies in Waiting takes, like, just too long to say and you shortened it to L.I.W. just like that!’

Totally!

Anyhow, being a L.I.W. is just (and only) about looking good, dating the right dude (or dudette, these are progressive times), wearing the right clothes, and/or doing the right things; it’s also about thinking the right things, having the right thoughts, and knowing the right stuff -- i.e. art, literature, philosophy.

“I mean, you don’t want to be talking to a Dwarven King -- well, I mean, you don’t want to be -- but if you do, you need to know about the Code of the Forge,” and perhaps also that there is no such thing as a mere Dwarf. A Dwarf of Copper Head Mine, a Dwarf Whose Family Has Mined This Vein of Gold for Three Thousand Years, a Dwarf For Hire That Likes Breaking Skulls, all of these are acceptable. But to call a Dwarf a mere Dwarf? Unthinkable, it would be like an Elvin Princess going out in public without her personal entourage (or a King’s Ransom worth of diamonds woven into her hair -- of course, not that said hairdo will stay static -- but as it morphs from this to that, from ponytail, to free flowing, to those more complicated styles that I know not the name of, the diamonds will remain, shining through -- so perhaps the diamonds (vs. rubies vs. emeralds) are one way for us mere mortals to differential one Elvin Princess from the next; but then, once again, I digress).

I couldn't tell you why I'm surprised (OK, it just might have something to do with never -- like, ever -- having seen an Elf with a book in their hand), but Mine'irva appears to be amazingly well read and is insisting that her 'L.I.W.F.F.'s' (whatever that might mean) take a crash course in culture, lest they embarrass her (and/or someone accuses Mine'irva of not training them properly, which probably amounts to the same thing).

So anyway, I guess I was just looking around the room and I think that more than covers the Elves.

So, let's see, who else is here?

Oh, the Dwarves. I apologize, what I meant to say was that the Dwarves of the Paper Keep are busy building a fortress out of books (chairs, desks) and old tomes. It looks a bit rickety. But compared to the haphazard pile Abby and Ned have going, it's a positive work of art (in the Late Gothic Architectural Style with a hint of Neo-Classicalism thrown in for good mention). But then, did I mention they were Dwarves? So maybe (just maybe) the school of architectural style they subscribe to is High Functional (perhaps with a little of the old Bauhaus thrown in for good measure) and leave it at that: Form is Function and all that.

And then, of course, there's Gloria. (I'm starting to like Gloria.) She's in the horror section, reading up on ghost stories and what not (tricks of the trade and all that, call it a bit of personal research). And I can see it in her eyes, you know, the way she looks around, slyly pays attention to Mine'irva and her crowd out of the corner of her eye as they edge closer...

You know what? I bet you...

Yep, right there.

Gloria has hopped into a book (slipping between the covers, if you know what I mean, inhabiting it and haunting it -- for lack of a better description). And sure enough, she chose her target well as it is the next book that Mine'irva grabs.

"Catherine, here's a romance for you..."

"I'll take that. Thank you very much," I say.

"Sid?"

“Wuthering Heights? I didn’t know you went for cheap romances, Mine’irva?”

“No romance is cheap, Sid.”

“As you say. All the same, I’m going to take this copy. It’s got, ah, margin notes. Dark Necromancer stuff. I don’t really think Catherine would be interested.”

“No, Mr Sid,” Catherine says backing away from the crazy teacher principal man who seems to be a bit possessive about certain of the books in his library. (Oh, well, I forgot she was under the enchantment. Eh, no worries, she’ll forget it all in a moment and/or recalibrate, so no sense dwelling on it.)

“You’ll find more of these over there, Mine’irva. Next to Pride and Prejudice.”

“Elizabeth, that would be good for you,” Mine’irva says without missing a beat, though I must admit Mata takes an unusual interest in my doings, as does Abby...

“What’s Sid up to now?”

‘What’s Sid up to, now?’ you may ask? Well, the answer is simple enough. At the moment he’s concentrating on keeping the covers of a book tightly closed as Gloria is stronger than she looks and keen on escape. (She certainly didn’t bargain for this! That’ll teach her not to plan for contingencies.) But in the meantime, I’ve got a little more Will than her (maybe just a tad bit -- overwhelmingly -- little bit more of that thing we shall call Will), so I think I can keep Gloria safely in hand. Still, all would be easier once I can get a band -- not to mention a bond - - about her.

Can’t really tell you why I did it, though (grabbing that book). I could claim that I was one-upping her practical joke, but that would be a lie. Rather (and closer to the truth), would be that a strange compulsion had washed over me (taken me over, if you like), telling me (no, informing me, convincing me) that things would be better if Gloria were close at hand -- maybe in a breast pocket, close to my heart.

And truthfully, at the moment, I can’t help but to wonder whether she’s ever thought about going into the Necromantic line. I mean, I could use a good apprentice (or not so good, if you know what I mean).

Though, these thoughts are not of the moment (and will have to wait until the distance future to be properly be sorted out).

As to the present, all I know now is that the bell announcing the end of study hall can't ring soon enough, so magically enough, it does.

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And then, soon enough in a dark corner, a bookmark in place, a band around the cover, a hex here, a rune there, the book still shaking more than I would like, Gloria inside, frantic to escape, I try to reassure her (as only a Dark Lord can, I suppose), "Don't worry, I'll let you out soon enough. Just be glad you didn't jump into a Codex..."

"Mu-ha-ha-ha."

"Mu-ha-ha-ha."

"Mu-ha-ha-ha."

###

But for some reason Gloria is not reassured; and my dark corner turns out to be not nearly dark enough, as Gwyneth has followed me here, watched all, and even now glares at me with accusing eyes.

"Fine. Fine. Seventy two hours, maybe less, and I'll let her out. OK? But by all that is holy and unholy and everything in between and else, if you so much as tell a soul between now and then..."

Best not to complete that sentence. No sense making a threat or binding a curse that one might later regret.

And I don't know if she believes me (either, both), but Gwyneth slides back from around the corner where she was watching, and Gloria (and/or the book she now inhabits) stops shaking, so there is that.

Still, I feel some additional reassurance (and/or commentary) might be in order, so although my first impulse is to say, 'Come on, we'll have fun. You'll see.' In the end, I opt for a more sinister (I guess, sometimes I can't help myself), "You're a ghost. It's time you started acting like one."

"Mu-ha-ha-ha."

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

Cough. Cough.

Hack. Hack.

Wheeze. Wheeze.

Going to have to lay off that Drip.

{{{Chapter End}}}