

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 26 ###
Playing Games ###**

“You’re cheating.”

“No I’m not.”

“No one rolls doubles that many times in a row.”

“I do. And it’s no more cheating than you not rolling doubles.”

“Which I haven’t, because I haven’t had a turn yet.”

“Your fault. Shouldn’t have let me go first.”

“As I recall, we rolled for it.”

“Same thing,” Abby declares as she picks up the dice and rolls (doubles) again.

“Stop cheating!”

Abby and Ned are playing some game, ‘Back Game On’ or something like that. Ned had originally wanted to play this game called

Monopoly, only he didn't have the pieces, couldn't quite remember exactly how the cards and pieces looked and the intricate rules to the game; and of course, before he had gotten very far in his explanation, Abby had started in with her questions, "Bored Walk? Why is that most expensive property? Oh, it's a zombie tie in. You guys had games about zombies?"

And things had sort of fallen apart from there.

Why they are even playing a game in the first place is a sort of interesting chain of events.

"We have to keep on doing it like Sid wanted," Abby may have said.

"Why? It's over," Ned may have responded.

"No, that's just it, it's not over," Abby may have pointed out and then probably (more than likely, just like her chances of rolling doubles six times in a roll), she may have explained way too much about spells, enchantments, and how once the runes are tossed, the Fates have a way of intervening and taking control.

"So, he couldn't stop it even if he wanted to."

"But he's the one who turned everyone into a zombie?"

"Sid?"

"Yes, Sid."

"Nah."

"What do you mean, 'Nah'?"

"I mean, the zombies are trampling his flower beds, mucking with his landscaping, turning over grave markers, and making a general nuisance of themselves in 'His' graveyard. They weren't his idea... or at least, that part of it wasn't his idea."

"So, whose idea was it?"

"Probably Bones. He's the one who's making out like a bandit."

And so, then they started thinking about what went wrong and how they could make it right.

"We're just going to have to play it out till the end," which would be a perfect tie in for board games and what not if that's how the conversation had turned, but they took a more circuitous route, so instead they started talking about their role in the enterprise and how,

“Sid seems to be infatuated with food these days. So, we should do another one of those eat over, dinner/supper things.”

Only they had no food. And when Abby suggested, “Let’s bake a cake.”

Ned asked, “Out of what?”

And it quickly became apparent that Abby was more than happy to eat and consume an fake cake made out of candle wax, mud, nail clippings, sawdust, or just about anything else lying about. “It’ll taste just as good. We might as well enjoy the last little push of the enchantment.”

“It does seem to be getting stronger, doesn’t it?”

“Probably has something to do with the zombies and how as more turn, there’s less of us remaining that the baseline enchantment has to work on, so even though it’s getting weaker, it’s relative strength is increasing.”

A statement that I, myself, have a hard time following, but which Ned seemed to be able to take in stride.

“So, a cake, then?” Abby suggested.

But no, turns out Ned didn’t like the idea of eating a mud pie.

“You’ll never taste the difference.”

“But I’ll know.”

And sometimes that is enough.

Of course, that may not explain adequately why they’re playing games, so after deciding they should hang out together and do another one of those supper thingies, if eating enchanted mud pies was out of the question, what were they going to do then?

“We can play a game!”

“You and your games.”

“You and your spells. Games are great learning devices. And I bet I know of some game that would model this zombie problem of ours and act as sounding board, a learning tool of sorts.”

“Doubtfully,” and I have to agree with Abby there. But then, Ned started talking about how (along with the food) I seemed to be infatuated with a certain time period (the time he came from) and so playing a

game from back then might help, and so he started listing off the ones that he could remember: Monopoly, Risk, King Oil, etc.

And Abby kept rejecting them, “No. No. No. And no.”

But clearly, she finally gave in and they settled on Back Game On... if only reluctantly.

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“I still say we should have made brownies. We still can, you know.”

“I’m not eating mud pies.”

“I could go for a brownie,” Carol (Ned’s mom) chimes in from across the room; and at this point in the game (get it? game) it is all the encouragement Abby needs.

“But the game?” Ned sort of whines.

“You can roll for me.”

“And play your pieces?”

“Sure, whatever.”

“I’ll only make you lose.”

“Wouldn’t that be cheating?” But Abby really doesn’t care one way or another and is already working her magic in the kitchen (as it turns out that baking brownies is an awful lot like magically turning chimney ash into, well, a multi-layer cake of goey chocalatey goodness).

“You should try some.”

“I’m not eating dirt, dust, ash, mud, or anything like that. I saw what you swept off the floor.”

“Your loss,” Bob (Ned’s father) chimes in. “These really are good.”

“Thanks Mr. Ned.”

“You’re welcome. Now about this zombie problem...”

I like Bob. He’s happy, stable, well-adjusted, and has managed to avoid becoming a zombie thus far, which are all good things. But he’s not much of a philosopher. And really, after a while, he just sort of starts to throw out random well-known platitudes -- one after the other -- pausing for a few moments in between, the rest of the family having sort

of drifted off (giving given him the verbal space), lost in their own worlds, but perhaps using what he has to say as a sounding board of sorts.

“You got to go to the source of the problem...”

“Get to the root of the issue...”

“Ask yourself the questions you’re not asking,” advice which I personally think borders on the sublimely stupid. But it resonates with Carol, who suddenly pipes in with, “Or ask yourself what question you’re asking, but answering wrong.”

To which there is a sort of collective, “Huh?”

“A misconception or a new way of looking at things, you know, a paradigm shift. What? Don’t look at me like that, Mister,” to whom she means her husband, “You’re the one who leaves all those self-help books lying around. You think I can’t read? You think I don’t take an interest?”

“I’m just pleasantly surprised.”

“I don’t know if I should be insulted... or pleased,” she continues after Bob stops kissing her.

“I should hope you’d be pleased,” Abby remarks, while Ned just sort of cringes.

And from there, you have the opened ended rapid pace makes no sense sort of discussion in which Humans, Orcs, Goblins, and Wizardly Apprentices are so often seen to be taking part.

“So, what are we looking at wrong?”

“That the zombies are our enemies,” Carol offers.

“OK. Like it,” Bob agrees.

“That’s stupid,” Abby counters. “They are our enemies.”

“But assume they weren’t.”

“Turn Your Enemies Into Your Allies,” Carol muses, reciting the title to some book she’s recently read -- a course of action which cause Bob to kiss her once more, and Abby and Ned to sort of leave them to themselves and enjoy that aftershock magic bump on their own, if you know what I mean.

And so Abby and Ned continue that confusing sort of conversation (to which I alluded to earlier) on their own. Of course, maybe I faded

out here and there so I missed a few lines, perhaps they just weren't making any sense, maybe (just maybe) having spent so much time with each other recently, they were at that point in their relationship where in they could complete each other's thoughts and sentences... well, mostly. Not really much point talking at all if that could really do that.

Anyway:

"So, are the zombies are friends?"

"Well, they were our friends."

"Were?"

"Yeah, OK. Are."

And then, after a pause, "One thing's for sure, playing those stupid games of yours didn't get us any closer to solving this problem."

"If you hadn't cheated..."

"I didn't cheat. Besides, you only keep saying that because what you really wanted to do was play chess."

"It a territorial strategy game and clearly this is a time-stamp land grab."

"You have no idea what you just said, do you?"

"No, just trying it out. But I think Sid was intending on more than just 'Playing' at all this. He wanted more than to just put on some sort of entertainment diversion. He really wanted..."

"Wanting and doing are two different things."

"But you and Wally were helping him..."

"Eh, well. When in Rome..."

"But if all roads lead to Rome..."

"What, you want to walk out the front gate, now? If Sid could have done that, he would have done that a long time ago."

"And he hasn't gone anywhere," Abby says, while... well, while looking directly at where I might be if I wanted her to catch my gaze or she could see the reflection of my presence in the fog, crafty girl that Abby.

"How do you know?"

"I can feel his presence."

"So, where is he?"

"Everywhere. Nowhere."

“That doesn’t help.”

“I know, it doesn’t. But then, it sort of does.”

“What do you mean?”

“Sid’s the only one who came here before his time. I mean, it was his time, but he accelerated the clock, he still had a little life left in him.”

“Meaning?”

“Meaning, like Lorien’thral, he might have some ability to go back and forth across the divide.”

“Ah, like he was able to store that last bit of life for use at some point in the future... or past!”

“Yes, precisely!”

“So, where does he keep it?”

Or seriously, on that line of thinking a better question might have been when do I keep it. But they did not consider that little snag (or many other little snags) in their line of reasoning, and instead jumped right to the heart of the matter, both of them at the same time, blurting the answer out, “The Crypts!”

“That place gives me the creeps.”

“So, would you rather go talk to Lorien’thral?”

“Duh, yeah.”

“So, clearly we should go to the crypts.”

“Maybe you didn’t hear me.”

“Maybe you didn’t hear me.” or for that matter your father, “Do that which you fear and you will fear nothing.”

“Maybe we could just go play a game of Risk, it’s got like mass armies, lots of zombie potential, there.”

“We must go into the Heart of Darkness.”

“Yeah, I read that book to, but it has nothing to do with what you’re saying. Why do you want to go into the crypts?”

“I thought that was clear, because I don’t want to.”

“That makes no sense.”

“Because I don’t think Sid wants us to,” but if you want to know the truth, I’m quite indifferent on the point. “And I think that’s where we’ll find what we’re looking for.”

“Which is?”

“I don’t know, but I have a hunch we’ll know right away when we see it.”

Now, perhaps I should break into the conversation and interject my two cents right about here. I’ve got a fair bit of magic up my sleeve. I do. I give life -- as it were -- to the dead. I’m mega-powerfully awesome. But as to a little spark of life that I may have held in reserve? That’s simply not part of the Dark Covenant. Nice idea, but it’s not something that I was able to do (or even know how to do). I mean, seriously, it took every last ounce of my energy to get us here (yes, all of us). Every last ounce. There was nothing leftover (but the graveyard, of course, but certainly nothing on the other side). And it’s definitely NOT (once again, NOT) like I put the reserve (the part left over) in a bottle, placed it on a shelf in the depths of some dark dungeon where even now -- century upon century later -- it sits waiting for Ned and Abby to go find. Trust me on this, had I somehow managed to hold something back, first I would have used it by now, and second, I would always keep it with me, hold on tight, and latch onto it as if my very soul depended upon its safekeeping. But it doesn’t, because I didn’t, and such an idea is pure nonsense. So, if you’re looking for some gateway to the living, some last spark of life, oh, sure, you might find it at the bottom of some deep dark dungeon, but that’s only because that’s where you bothered to go and look for it.

“Yeah, I think we’re on the right track,” Abby observes, “I just had this sudden premonition that I was making a big mistake, going off on a wild goose chase, running after a red herring.”

“And that’s a good thing?”

“Sure. Probably means Sid senses my intent and is trying to stop me. Won’t work, Sid,” she says to where I was focusing just a moment ago. “Yeah, we’re on the right track,” Abby says turning her attention back to Ned. She’s wrong, but then, what do I know. “Besides, ever since I overheard S-Kelly talk about that giant Draco Skeleton he saw in the crypts, I’ve been anxious to have a look at it myself.”

And that reminds me of an old sailors verse: Loose lips sink ships.

But then (perhaps a whole lot more pertinent) I'm not convinced S-Kelly ever said such a thing.

Did he?

Did I?

Did Abby just read my mind? Or scan just a part of it?

Nah, she's not that powerful. And I would have felt something.

So, maybe Bones has mentioned it in passing.

Or I could have; it's no secret.

So, maybe someone else. I mean, Draco's down there. And that's not really much of a secret. Though, not really something I talk about that much. Still...

"Are you coming?"

But she really isn't talking to Ned.

"Come on. We need to do this. I need to do this. And I'd appreciate the company. I consider it a personal favor. This is exactly what friends are for, what tests the bounds of friendship."

"Well, if you put it that way," and I think Ned speaks for both of us at this point, "how can I say no."

"Excellent. Come on."

And grabbing his hand, she's off and running, dragging him along, a strange compulsion pulling me behind in their wake... call it curiosity... call it...

"Stop making me drag you along, come on!"

"What's the hurry?"

Seriously. Drake's been there for a thousand-thousand years, he'll be there for a few more.

But then, perhaps this window of opportunity will not. After all, as Bob has mentioned (only just recently), you've got to strike while the iron's hot. And the early bird gets The Worm.

A saying which makes pause me wonder. I mean, have you ever considered why Dragons, Wyvern, and Worm are so often used as synonyms? I know I haven't.

But there is no time for that (thought, that is).

“Come on! Hurry!” Abby insists as she thinks she’s on to something or maybe she’s just worried about her cat, if you know what I mean.

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

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“I ever tell you I always wanted a dragon?”

“Only like a million times.”

Yes, Abby. Only like a million times.

“Well, I’ve got a good feeling about tonight.”

Don’t hold your breath, little girl. Don’t hold your breath.

{{{Chapter End}}}