

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 36 ###
Zombie Debriefing ###**

Docking is complete. We are back to where we started -- back to the reality from which we departed. And the new recruits (along with the tribute they bring) are pouring in. Let's just say, my will is not my own, if you know what I mean. Seems as though our departure was interpreted as a 'Closed Door Policy', you know, that we were too full to take any more, which is a good thing in the graveyard business -- at least to potential clientele (as it implies conditions are conducive to a long afterlife).

So times are good.

And at the snap of my fingers...

Snap...

Snap...

Snap! Snap! Snap!

“I must apologize, sir. I was in the back chambers cleaning up.”

“Really? More wine, sir? Don’t you think you’ve already had enough.”

And like I said, at the snap of my fingers, a Kibber (as belligerent as ever) is filling my glass. More than a little will find it’s way to the floor. My cup runneth over.

“And your friends, this evening, sir? Where are they?”

“Just, sir? Dining alone? Perhaps you would be less morose if you had company, sir.”

But I am not morose. Things are going well -- very well, indeed. So if I am looking sad, perhaps it is because my thoughts are turned inward, looking to the future (if only I had Wally’s sight), and pondering what the future will bring -- a future that is already in motion.

###

In the East Garden, off in a corner, behind the statue of an angel (I’m guessing, maybe it’s a devil, they look so similar), Bones is knee deep in a freshly dug grave, working at the soft earth with a pick and shovel, while he listens to his son complain (about me, no less).

“I mean, he didn’t even put me in the game. I can throw better than him. And he must have seen me practicing. So, I should have been the quarterback. And if I had been, then maybe we would have won.”

“Would we? We? You and I -- and you Frank,” who is standing right there, shadowing S-Kelly like, well, a shadow. “Would we have won? Or is the tribute is still flowing to him?” he whose name shall not be spoken. “He left me in charge -- or so he said. But did I get a single convert? Did one single solitary lost soul cross the threshold on my watch?”

No, of course not.

And we could listen to them gripe (please feel free to do so as long as you would like) as the trio (with any luck the number shall soon grow) complain about me, mine, and my own -- about my leadership abilities (my awe inspiring sense of cunning and strategy), my sense of

loyalty (or lack thereof), and the many other defects of character that I (supposedly) have...

“He’s cold hearted.”

“Like a stone.”

“That’s why the Dwarves like him so much.”

“You saw how he was making googolly eyes with Darren.”

“Gave the lot of them immunity to the Drip.”

“Traitorous fiend.”

Maybe all true (the fiend part, at least, but as to the rest) probably not. Either way, it is not surprising (least of all to me, I know Bones well, was there at the beginning, so) when the gist of the complaints turn towards conditions in the graveyard...

“The place is falling apart.”

“These newcomers, acting like he’s some kind of godsend when there’s Dust everywhere.”

“Can’t they see the Dust?”

And then, after a slight twist, after one of those ‘clang’ associations that gets the conversation going where it ‘should’ be going, S-Kelly surmises (and/or guesses wildly), “Maybe that’s where his power comes from?” (i.e. the Dust.)

“Or maybe that’s what’s left of his friends when he’s done with them,” Bones corrects (perhaps correctly, after all, one never knows), before he leans on his shovel and adds, “But I’m going to change that. Strike that. We’re going to change that. Pick up a shovel, son.”

“Why?”

“Why? Why?” Bones mimics. “Like you got anything better to do.”

“Still, why?” S-Kelly asks again as he picks up the implement of digging destruction (a.k.a. the shovel) and tosses it to Frank. “You heard him, get to work.”

And Frank doesn’t mind a bit of hard work (one could say that’s what he was created for), so he gets right to it.

Bones, on the other hand, who has made a sort of art form out of malingering, hates physical labor (thinks it’s beneath him, HIM, a heavily decorated skeletal warlord, I’ll have you know), so as Frank

climbs down, he stops and gets out of the hole -- and then, once out, standing at the rim, reaches into his pocket, and shares a map that he found (or that he 'liberated' from Abby if I had to guess) with his son. As I've said before, the cemetery map is one of those multi-dimensional do-jobbers, with cross-winding wormholes, layered portals, and that sort of thing. And it's hard to understand, far beyond the comprehension of a mere skeletal warlord (heavily decorated or not). Which means, Bones thinks he's on to something (perhaps something that should be kept secret); and so, the first thing he does (of course) is to slip and say my name, "Sid." He has now successfully spoken the name of he who would not be spoken (silly skeleton, magic is for wizards, I say this only because if I had not already entered the spell -- but I am most clearly there -- his saying my name and calling me forth would be my in). Anyway, where were we? Ah, yes. The Silly Skeleton (a.k.a. Bones) was saying my name, "Sid." And here, he says it again. And then again, "Sid," so perhaps he's stuttering... or thinks he's smarter than he is (and has purposely said it that magical three times on belief that will make it -- whatever it is -- binding). Anyway, Sid (he doesn't actually say it this time, three being the charm), "has been looking for an exit, but what better way out than in through the out door?"

See, crystal clear. Glad you understand, no need to explain further.

But S-Kelly isn't so quick (or is actually listening to his father, silly boy; and so, realizes what the weary old bag of bones that he calls a father has just said doesn't make any sense). "Huh?" being all S-Kelly can muster in reply.

"In through the outdoor," Bones explains again (this time correctly). "A grave to grave portal, and," pointing at the map, which you can't see (I'm hoping), he explains further, "right here looks the most promising. See how it's exposed," doesn't wind against itself; and so, backs into nothing. "If nothing else, maybe we'll be able to do a little grave robbing. You up for that, Frank?"

"Uh, yeah! Maybe I should alert the Assemblage."

Maybe.

But all that's for another time.

They have a long way to go before things get really interesting, as does Abby and her egg.

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“I can’t believe you had the egg all along,” Abby states, shrieks, and/or complains for the near hundredth time.

“Did I?” Wally questions her, looking for the answer (so he’ll know what to do when the time comes, don’t you know).

“Yes. Right under the crypt, unguarded, a fertile Dragon egg was there all this time. And then, you just carried it around for who knows how long, didn’t tell me anything about it; and then, you just gave it, just gave it to Sid when he asked for it!” not that I asked for it, mind you. I’m more of taker. But then, there’s always a little slippage -- an error in the retelling, which Wally has gotten more than a little used to. She says it wrong. He does it wrong. And it all seems to come out in the wash.

So, he replies (quite merrily, I assure you), “Oh, OK. Check. Got it.”

“What? No! This isn’t what you’re supposed to do.”

“But everything turned out fine,” Wally observes. “No zombies. Back to normal. Sid is set on the path,” a path that Wally seems to think he set me rather on than I setting him on it is a fact I can’t help but to note, “so things are going fine and you have the egg.”

“That’s not the point.”

But it is the point, a point which Wally knows well enough. “Um, can I see the egg?”

“You’re not going to give it back to Wally,” she says, asks, inquires, begs, and/or implores; but still, she hands it over.

And after looking it over for a second (checking for any cracks, scratches, and the like), Wally tosses the egg into the fire.

“Stop! No!” Abby is a bit of an excitable one. “What are you doing?”

“Feeding the flames. Priming the pump.” Or if that’s unclear, “Hatching an egg. It’s how it’s done,” Wally says matter-of-factly. “Though, we’ll need a bigger flame, not nearly hot enough,” he

observes, after noting the size of the small flame sputtering in their hearth.

“Bigger,” Abby says (more than asks, and/or commands more than says), as the flames grow. “Bigger,” she says (and/or commands, yet again) and again and again and again. And before you know it (and/or Wally knows it), their little cottage is thoroughly engulfed in flames as sparks fly high and a dark plume of curls into the night sky.

“Getting there,” Wally observes; and then, adds, “Because you’re going to ask sooner or later, it’s why I let Sid do what he did.” Of course, not that he so much let (I’m pretty sure I could take him in a fight -- fair or otherwise); but rather, that he simply didn’t put up a struggle (not much, not any). “So, like, that was the same thing, pretty much: priming the pump and all that, get the juices flowing, letting him get a little taste, so as to ensure he’d be wanting a little more.”

Which sounds reasonable enough (it had been a long time since I’d had a good feeding), but I for one wonder how much of that (really) applies to me and how much of that applies to the dragon, who is even now taking shape in the flames -- if you know where (and how) to look, that is -- just a little tiny baby dragon, who’s spreading it’s wings for the first time as it takes a mighty yawn -- and the shadow it casts rises with the smoke to cover (and/or engulf) the land.

“Last chance,” Wally notes, “to opt for a cat.”

“What? Why would I want a cat?”

“Oh, I don’t know. You are always saying what a bother Dragons are and how you should have listened to me and settled for a cat.”

“I’m sure I never said that.”

“Ah, but you will... but you will.”

And I think that says it all. Never argue with a police officer, a tax collector, your mother in law, or a wizard who has been there and done that -- only, just not yet, if you know what I mean (which I think you most certainly do).

###

And then, there are the others, less important, but not completely forgotten.

The Dwarves are back at their forges. (Did they ever leave?) They will never forge the path, but should Bones & S-Kelly (and the Assemblage, I'm guessing) ever break through (I have my fingers crossed), someone will have to secure the passage, line the way, and make sure the portal doesn't collapse in on itself -- a job for Dwarves if ever there was one.

And as to Mog? I don't know. I've grown to respect him -- a respect I begrudge, I'll have you know, the orc still smells, but he has a power. To what use or utility, I could not tell you, so perhaps it is that great... or simply that he doesn't know, either.

Jack, on the other hand, is down by the Diaz, trying to decide what God he should thank and/or what path he should follow (but they are usually one and the same), for was it not through his hands, acting as their conduit, some tremendous power has passed? I mean, he can feel it. His fingers still tingle. His head still thumps. And his heart is still racing. So, talk about priming the pump. Delusion is a powerful force -- one I have no desire dispel -- or have to fight against. But how to ally it to my cause? And what exactly it shall be (if it becomes anything), remains an unknown.

And then, in a more mundane light, Gwyneth has teamed up with Nicki to form a sort of Cheer Leader Assassin Squad. I don't even know what this means... or if it, too, will mean anything. So, I suppose, what it means is that for the moment, both of them practice their gymnastics together, doing summersaults and cartwheels and that parquet parcor thing -- a soothing activity to watch, which is perhaps best thought of an advanced game of follow the leader as one tries to go in and around or over an under any and all obstacles (the bigger and harder, the better), which is all perhaps an end to itself or simply the means to some ends as yet unknown (even to themselves).

###

And that, I suppose, brings us to Ned, sitting at home with his parents as they discuss (and/or wonder) how they really got here.

“I mean, if the Goblins didn’t all die in battle like Gary suggests, maybe none of us died like we thought we did. For one, I’d much rather have been at the wheel,” and taken an active role, “than have been the passenger.”

“You’d want to have been the one who ran me off the road,” Carol almost shrieks with despair.

“I think he means he’d rather have done than been done to,” Bob clarifies, amends, and/or reconstructs as he adds, “I’m pretty sure I was some sort of outlaw gangster, a New Age Bonnie and Clyde.”

“You?”

“Yes, me. And you were my Moll, my Babe, my Inspiration, the love of my life -- and death, I might add -- dying as we ran from the law, one final last stand, ‘You’ll never take me alive copper! I ain’t going back to the slammer!’” the last said in a sort of mox-gangster voice that works for me.

And apparently it works for Carol, as well, “You’d die for me? You’re so sweet.”

“For us, Baby. For us.”

And that would be that -- another trio of Humans spending another night together at home, playing at whatever game of make believe suits their fancy; that is, if there wasn’t a knock at the door... and then, Mata letting herself in, without waiting for an answer (and then getting to the gist of her visit without much of a preamble), “You did good, Ned. Mine’irva wanted to thank you,” you know, for distracting Sid and all.

Which is all fine and dandy and perhaps a dream come true for a kid such as Ned, to be noticed, singled out, and appreciated -- thanked even -- by one such as Mine’irva, but Mata is not Mine’irva. And even if Ned did not know all this before (completely and unequivocally), Abby had prepared him and mentioned in passing a thing or two about how elves operate -- to wit, if one accepts an emissary as an equal, then one is deemed to be equal to that emissary (and will never -- ever -- rise above).

Or, that is to say, (or more specifically Ned says), “I’d be happy to accept your thanks, Mata. Or if Mine’irva were to come here herself, I’d be delighted...”

Well, I think that says it all, delighted...

But Mata doesn’t understand, not yet. So, she asks, “You’re turning me down?”

“No, not you, not yours, not your families, and not especially not Mine’irva’s...”

But before this can go any further in his explanation, Carol inquires of her son, “Mine’irva, I think I’ve heard you mention that name before. You like this Mine’irva?” a statement which causes Ned to blush (don’t ask me where he finds the blood), which is an answer in and of itself (to some anyhow) but not to his mom, so she asks, “Why didn’t she come here herself?”

And that would be the crux of the matter. To accept Mine’irva thanks through Mata, would be to accept Mata as their perpetual go-between -- not exactly what Ned (not so secretly) desires.

And where does that leave them (Ned and the Elves)?

Who knows?

Certainly not Carol, who suggests, “Why don’t you stay and join us for dinner? We’re having fried chicken.” Yes, the times are good, the tithes are high, and a rising tide floats all boats. Yes, all boats. I’m sure even Mog is fairing better these days, not that I know what that would mean exactly. Who knows, maybe he has access to higher quality mud to wallow in -- something imported and exotic.

But then, as I’ve said, this (all of this) does not provide any clarity to Mata vis a vie Ned’s response to her current entreaty (an offer of treaty, I do believe, quite literally), so being the gracious host that he is, Ned makes it simple (on everyone and for everyone), “If you are thanking me, then I accept and thank you in return,” in the most Elvin of ways, “and invite you to dinner. And I would have you tell Mine’irva the same, that if she wishes to thank me, she must thank me in person.”

“But I have a kiss for you from her?” Mata states. It is the ultimate prize -- a kiss from an Elvin Princess -- heroes have died for less, monsters been slain, kingdoms conquered, and people freed.

But then, the real question is, “Would that be your kiss or hers?”

And that, pretty much says it all.

And as to Mata’s opinion on the matter, “No offense, but I wasn’t really looking forward to kissing you,” now and forever in the future. “So if Mine’irva wants to kiss you, she can do it herself. Now, about that chicken, Mrs...”

“Oh, we’re on a first name basis here, Mata. I’m Carol...”

“Bob...”

“And we are delighted to have you as our guest. Now, tell us how you know Ned,” cause we’ve been in a sort of daze, living in a dream as of late (being all zombified as we were); and so, we sort of missed out on all the action.

###

And without repeating the entire tale, which is what Mata is being asked to do, who else does that leave?

Anyone?

Well, yes. Pretty much everyone.

But of those who matter -- who matter most?

I believe there is only Gloria, who has been dancing with Lorien’thral as of late -- or at least, the butterflies and pixies, who surround Lorien’thral. And a ghostly apparition of one (a pixies spirit ghost, I do believe) has even woven its way into Gloria’s hair. Don’t ask me how that happened. But a fiend is a friend. And so, when Gloria finally winds her way home (she lives with Bones and his corpse bride, Carrie -- just in case you’ve forgotten -- along with S-Kelly), she is skipping along, humming to herself, and in general feeling like she’s on top of the world (or has the world at her fingers, which is so often one and the same).

“Well, aren’t you chipper?” Carrie notes.

And I do believe that state of affairs is deserving of a hug (in celebration of self same fact) and so does Gloria, so she does (hug her mom, that is).

“You didn’t find yourself a stray vial of Drip, now did you?” her mother jokes.

But that is not the case. “I’m just happy,” Gloria notes.

And I for one am glad to see it. It is a change (for the better). Gloria deserves to be happy, to have the world at her beck and call, and have the confidence to speak for herself when the need arises. “I guess I’ve finally accepted that even if most folks don’t notice me, look straight through me, or act like I’m not even there, well, that doesn’t matter, because those that matter do...”

And from there, what follows is one of those mother/daughter heart to hearts about boys, life, and the things that really matter. But at some point, her mother feels compelled to share (and outside of a fondness for spying on Gloria, this last would be the real reason for transcribing this conversation here), “I don’t know if you know this or not, but as a ghost, you can enter other people’s dreams.”

“But we don’t dream here.”

To which her mother only smiles, kisses her adopted daughter (we are all adopted here) on the forehead, and advises, “We all have dreams.”

Dreams of a better life -- another life, a fuller life.

But let’s not skip over that last too quickly. I think the operative phrase here is ‘another life’.

That’s a dream I think we all share -- everywhere, every time, in this life, the next, and even before.

And so, if I (yes I) were able to enter the dreams of another (or a several others), that is exactly the type of dream I would be searching to make real in a place such as this -- a dream of another time and another place... of even before.

###

But enough of that for now.

It is neither the time nor the place.

The flowers are in bloom, the tribute rolls in, and I am in the mood for a walk to survey my kingdom, the crypt that I rule.

It's a nice place.

And although they say, no one gets out of here alive, someday, someone will -- and if we play our cards right, maybe that someone will be all of us.

Hmm. Perhaps that's why the tribute pours in.

All aboard!

The next stop some future past that never was.

This ship is sailing soon.

###

But first, a walk.

And then, maybe a swim.

Oh, and then, I should probably dry off at the bonfire that Abby & Wally have going -- walk straight into the flames, and with any luck adopt a baby Dragon as my own... or at least, as someone to become good friends with.

I wonder what Dragon's eat?

Maybe cats?

But probably not.

Hope it's not Will.

With any luck it's the fiery flames of discontent.

Now, that is something I can work with.

###

So, until next time -- perhaps the final time?

"Mu-ha-ha-ha."

"Mu-ha-ha-ha."

"Mu-ha-ha-ha."

And all's well that ends well -- as they say, the journey (getting there) is half the fun.

{{{Story End}}}

{{{Chapter End}}}