

**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 3 ###  
### Dinner with the Elves ###  
### First Knight ###**

Oh, hey. This is nice.

“You’ve been here before, Sid,” the old Elf (the father) observes as raises a crystalline glass full of wine in welcome. But don’t let the small show of politeness fool he. He’s still and Elf; and as such, doesn’t bother getting up from where he is sitting at the head of a ornately appointed dining room table.

“You should really go into more detail than that,” the Elf remarks (the same one as before, the father). “Dialogue’s good, but whatever compiler you’re going to use is going to want more than that.”

Yeah, I know. I’ve been having problems with that.

“With what?”

Well, for one, since you guys can't seem to decide what you want to look like...

“Technically, that's not our fault, it's yours.”

And technically, that's only half true, but what do you want out of an Elf.

“Hey, I heard that.”

Whatever. The point is, if I can't decide what you should look like as far as the story is concerned, then it should come as no surprise that I can't decide what your surroundings should look like in this Suburban land of Make Believe, either.

“Once again, that has absolutely nothing to do with us.”

True, so very true.

“So, why not just use our crypt as it is?”

I don't know.

“Come on, it's nice, has one of those full open hearths,” with fire a'blazing, “double high vaulted ceilings,” they paid for the upgrades, “real imitation quartz crystal chandeliers,” it's what they brought with, “classic Courts of Chaos stuff,” because it's where these particular Chaos Elves are from. (We'll get to the rest in a moment.)

But as fine and dandy (and copious consumption and all) as that would be, it's not where you are, you know, in the story -- in the project we're working on.

“And what is that exactly?” the Elf asks point blank, out of the blue, and in a sort of rude way if you want to know the truth about it -- not High Court stuff at all. Which is all (perhaps, just perhaps) to say that after I (which is to say, Sid -- short for Insidious) tries to hem and haws (tries stalls if you will), the wise (who knows, he could be) middle-old-age Elf hazards a guess of his own, “I'm thinking, based on what you've said so far, the thing's going to be set in the Earth Vortex, pre-Convergence. And you're going to, what? Skip ahead of that,” historically deciding moment,” by a generation or two? I mean, that's why you tagged Ned as one of the leads, isn't it? On account of that's when he and his lot died?”

Sometimes you're too smart for your own good.

“Perhaps. But one thing’s for sure, I’m certainly smart enough to know it’s in me and mine’s best interest to be named rather than letting you proceed with these empty place holding variables -- open calls waiting to be filled... or refilled as the case may be. And with that in mind, I believe you know my wife, Bey’linda.”

We weren’t going to use real names.

“No of course not. And that might be because you were perhaps maybe thinking about keeping your options open vis’a vie eventually cutting us out of any... shall we say downstream benefits: royalties, I believe they are called in the trade.” And then, as Sid motions to object, the Elf cuts him off and continues (you know how they can be), “No. No. Don’t deny it. Because, I mean, after all, there is nothing to cut us out of, right? Just a little entertainment, a light farce. But then, this being your first go at such an... enterprise, you’re maybe having a few, shall we say, technical difficulties in regards to the implementation of the... various... inconsistencies -- temporal and so forth.”

You have my attention, Elf. Perhaps more than is healthy for one - - um, since we are parsing our words -- in your position.

“My position being your vassal.”

In short.

“Well then, My Lord. The Feudal obligation cuts both ways, does it not?”

Of course.

“Well, in that case, might I make two small suggestions regarding the, um, enterprise?”

I am listening.

“It might be easier for the porting and compiling to the various end user utilities if everything -- all details, etc. -- were to be normalized to the, ah, destination. Thus rather than the need to describe our humble abode -- this crypt in which we live -- it might be more appropriate to simply assume that we were in our home away from home... some suburban house on Earth, I presume. But then, being who we are...”

Chaos Elves.

“If that’s the name you wish to use.”

It is.

So, being the Chaos Elves who we are, we would hardly take on the behavior and mores of late twentieth century Human Earthlings...”

“As if,” Mata breaks in, unable to help herself. She is Neo’s daughter; and by definition, that makes her an Elvin Princess...

“The Princess’s Handmaiden,” Neo’lander corrects.

“We did a...” Bey’linda starts but doesn’t get very far as she is interrupted by her son, Strathmore, the prince. “We did a switch out. I mean, come on, Mine’irva is, like, waaaay better looking than, Mata Hari over here. And we all know that’s the only thing that matters when it comes to the lead Elven Chick. I mean, if you can’t put the Hot qualifier in front of it,” as in the Hot Elven Chick, “why even bother?”

And it would be at this point that Mine’irva (the aforementioned stand in, the newly recognized daughter, heir, and princess of the clan, and therefore defacto ruler of the tribe -- as that’s the way Elves -- or at least, Chaos Elves -- are); anyway, Mine’irva sort of nods to Mata, who in turn flicks her wrist, which sends a silver dagger flying at her brother, who for his part, catches it nonchalantly (as if this sort of thing happens almost every time these particular Elves sit down to eat with each other - - sibling rivalry being what it is) and proceeds to use said implement of death and destruction to butter his bread without missing a beat.

“See, now that’s good color text and all,” interjects Neo -- the Family High Elf -- who perhaps has aspirations of being a literary critic (or maybe he’s just looking for something a little more deathlike -- and stuporific -- in his afterlife). “But you’d get a lot more mileage out of the passage, if you waited a bit and included a description of how Strathmore eats his peas. He’s going to use the knife, you know.”

“What? Like a barbarian?” Mata stammers, aghast at the concept.

“Well, when in Rome,” Bey’linda, the mom, sort of throws out, as if her statement explains it all (which I hope we can all agree, it does not).

So, that’s probably (more or less) why Strathmore concedes that, “It’s true, they,” humans, “are savages.” But then rather than proving his point by eating his peas like a gentlemanly Elf, Strathmore proceeds to consume said vile vegetables with Mata’s dagger -- a detail to which we shall attend to further in a moment.

In the meantime, “Just because we are going to live with a Horde, doesn’t mean we must join the Horde!” Mata exclaims. She is, of course, enraged. She, if no one else in this family, has standards.

But she, without a doubt, is missing the point. Humans are not Hordlings.

“Uh, yeah, they are,” Mata insists, as she sets herself up nicely for the role of Miss Priss for the rest of the story. (Or so I had thought at the time. Fancy that.)

(Anyhow), um, no, Human’s aren’t Hordlings. With a gestation period of nine months and twenty to thirty times that till full maturity...

But being the haughty Elf that he is, Neo’lander (apparently) doesn’t always notice when another is talking; or maybe, he just doesn’t always care. Anyhow, he puts the issue to rest (in his mind, anyways) by explaining, “They breed till they run out of resources and then they fight. That’s a Horde. End of story. Elves don’t do that. Demons don’t do that. Even Dwarves don’t do that.”

No, they fight first.

“I didn’t say Dwarves were good guys, just that they weren’t of the Horde. Humans on the other hand are.”

And?

“And so, by going to Earth, we’re slumming it. You’ve sent our family, my clan, back to, um, a fictional past... for what? The fun of it?”

Yep. That’s right. (And if you believe that... But, whatever.)

“Well, then, what I’m saying is here’s your chance to set up the differentiation. You know, what it means to be an Elf.”

In comparison to a Human, and that difference would be?

“Well, if you’re going to take my advice and do things Earth Centric from here on out,” as a point of reference for the compilers from which others can expand, “then the easiest thing to do would be to look at the history of the place. And if you go back a few hundred years,” or whatever, “the average human was eating with their fingers....”

(And what does this have to do with anything? I ask myself in the rereading. But then, this is how we got from here to there and that is the story, so...)

“...as material wealth increased -- and in the Western Tradition -- most commoners bought themselves a blade of some sort -- call it a knife -- as a general purpose tool.”

(So, we're back to the knife that Mata threw at Strathmore?)

“And being of the horde, at mealtimes, these humans ate from a communal trough with their fingers and said knife if they were lucky enough to have one.”

(Which I suppose Strathmore is -- lucky enough to have one -- vis a vie the kindness of his sister.)

“Of course, it's dangerous to grab a slice of prime beef -- prime beast, or whatever -- with your fingers when those around you are slicing at the roast with sharp knives,” and perhaps when you live in a family such as this, “so the well-to-do,” and/or brazenly psychotic, “increased their efficiency at the feeding trough by investing in a secondary feeding implement known as a fork, by which to grab hold of a prized bit of food without having to worry about whether a finger was going to get sliced off or not.”

And this has what to do with anything? (See, this little aside into historical human culinary customs didn't make any sense back then, either; but then, Neo'lander was on a role, so...)

“The knife and fork, if they were very lucky, it's what most humans ate with until the Industrial Revolution when material success and abundance descended upon Man and their interest in cutlery expanded to include spoons as a sort of fetish item for the Nuevo Rich, because they didn't just use spoons -- no, that would be too easy -- they used soup spoons, sugar spoons, fruit spoon, tea spoons, table spoons, and of course, that most nefarious of beasts, the pea spoon.”

You're just making this up.

“Am I? Look around you, Sid. I know decadence. I know needless extravagance. And I know my silverware. And let me tell you, this stuff doesn't come cheap.”

What's your point?

Late, middle, early last century and, “You have all these well-to-do Earth families with big fancy names who invested a lot of money in their silverware.”

So, you're drawing a relationship between Elves and Humans?  
Birds of a feather?

"Oh, god, I hope not," Mata says almost choking.

"No, dear, of course your father's not. You aren't, dear, are you?"

"No, all I'm saying is after you've paid good money for a set of pea spoons, no matter how ridiculous such a notion is, you tend to want to show off the full extent of your cutlery collection whenever possible, so you pretty much end up serving peas at every meal... or at the very least whenever you have guests."

Fascinating, Neo. I must say, fascinating. (Truly, a riveting bit of trivia, even now.)

"Sarcasm, don't think I don't recognize it. We'll make an Elf out of you yet, Sid."

I wouldn't hold my breath.

"And yet, that seems like all we've been doing for the past thousand years."

Whatever. Your point?

"High Born Elves such as me and mine grew up with the full -- and proper, I might add -- complement of cutlery on our table. We know a sugar spoon from a jelly spoon from a mustard spoon. Whereas your typical barbarian, or low-born, forest elf, does not."

Sorry, Neo. Still not getting it. Maybe we should just scrap the scene and start again from the top.

"Sid, hear me out. Diplomacy is often referred to as War by Other Methods, correct?"

OK.

"And the terms of your typical diplomatic agreement are negotiated at some sort of formal function: a dinner party or whatnot."

Sure, fine. Whatever.

"Well, how do you exclude the undesirables from such a meeting?"

Neo, I do not know, nor do I care.

"But you should, because it's relevant to your project and it's just not that hard to understand. You see, to tell someone's breeding," and

therefore whether you can trust them to keep the peace,” all you have to do is invite them to dinner, serve a bunch of peas...”

And if they can eat them without making a face and spitting them out, they’ve clearly got breeding?

“Well, that,” Neo’lander agrees. “But more specifically, if they know instinctually, without having to ask, which spoon is the pea spoon, then you know you are dealing with the gentry. Conversely, if they use their fingers,” oh, horrid thought, “or their knife as a shovel,” you know, because that’s all they’ve ever known, because that’s all they could ever afford, “well then...”

“You know that you’re dealing with traitorous low-born hordling scum,” Mata finishes for her father as she glares at her brother, who just so happens to be eating his peas with the dagger she threw at him earlier. (See, I told you we’d get to that again, sooner or later).

So, anyhow, lesson learned. Throwing knives at your brother is good and proper; it’s just what ladies do, while eating peas with said knife is reprehensible and an obvious sign that you’re dealing with traitorous scum.

(Word to the wise? Probably.)

Strathmore -- for his part, and however -- could not give two hoots (or even the one) what his murderous sister might think, so he continues to use his fork to flick a string of peas into the air, catching them on the sharp blade-edge of his knife, where he then tosses the lot into the air en masse, flicking a single pea into his mouth before catching the rest on the edge of the blade once again, a process he will be happy to repeat for you as long as you care to watch (show off that he is); and thus amply demonstrating his skill with the sword (or at least, diner knife) and contempt for his sister (and Elven mores) all in one easy (or not so easy) to comprehend metaphor. Also, perhaps (or perhaps not), setting him up as one who is willing to betray his family and friends if his goals and theirs do not align; but then, he is a Chaos Elf; and as with all of his lot, looks can be deceiving.

And when all is said and done, that was pretty good use of color text! I like the way that worked out. I mean, even if I do say so myself.



So, um, Neo'kander, if I remember correctly, you said you had two ideas?

“Well, to be honest, Sid, it’s confusing when a scene is supposed to start.”

“Oh, totally confusing,” Mata agrees as she takes over for her father. “I mean, are we practicing? Waiting around? Just shooting the breeze? Is this a take? A retake? I mean, are you even recording now? Who knows? Truthfully, it feels like a train wreck.”

“Eh, let the Dark Necromancer do what he wants?” Strathmore steps in, perhaps feeling giddy with success after his performance with the peas. “Maybe Ole Sid is looking for a train wreck. Don’t have the colorful metaphor on the tip of my tongue, but you know, being who he is, maybe what he’s looking to do is kill the story before it gets started, if you know what I mean.”

“Bravo! Excellent job, Sid. You’re nailing it dead, then, if that’s what you want,” Mata says in that sarcastic way that Elven teens have.

But then, I have to agree. I mean, I don’t really like your attitude, Strathmore, but the story has been sort of choppy.

“Choppy? More like sucky?”

“Pretty random.”

“Incoherent.”

“Amazingly amateurish, I’d say.”

Enough! Do any of you have anything useful, you know, constructive to say?

“‘Action!’ Sid. When you want to start a scene, just say ‘Action!’ or something, so we know when to start.”

OK. ‘Action!’

“OK. See, but you haven’t given us a script, a plot outline, or anything like that, so even if you’re just looking for a little improvisation, we’ve got to know what we’re improving. Otherwise, it’s another supper at home, diner in the crypt, and all of a sudden, ‘Oh, hey! Look! Sid dropped by? And he’s got a lot of extraneous enchantments going at the moment. So, Gee! I wonder what that’s all about? Is there maybe a little trouble in Paradise, Sid?’ And then, I’m wondering if there’s anything I can do to help, if maybe I should be

concerned, or have you just dropped by to tell me that you're finally going to get rid of those Nightshade plants like I asked you to -- oh, I don't know, what is it now -- like three centuries ago?"

You don't like them?

"I'm allergic," Bey'linda offers.

Why didn't you say?

"I thought you said you were going to tell him."

"I did."

"Clearly, you did not."

"Come on, this is Sid that we're talking about."

But rather than arguing with her husband, Bey'linda would rather get the job done. "So, you're going to take care of the Nightshade, then, Sid?"

No. I'm going to say 'Action!'

"But my allergies?"

There are worse things than sneezing... like not sneezing.

"Is that a threat?"

I thought I said, 'Action!'

"And I thought I explained that you still haven't told us what this scene, story, or anything is supposed to be about. For all we know, and by all appearances we would be correct, right now we're discussing your cavalier attitude towards your duties as a Keeper of the Crypt. And flowers or weeds by our side walk, it's all the same to you.

Fine, I'll send over some Ghouls later to dig out the Nightshade. In the meantime, 'Action!'

I thought I said, 'Action!'

Oh, right, plot, details, you want motive.

OK, let's see, you've just settled into your new home in the Earth Vortex and it's your first meal...

"Are we going to be able to taste anything?"

"It's peas mostly," Strathmore replies to his sister, "Bland nothingness is actually an improvement from what I remember."

You're not here to discuss the food. This is a strategy session. You just rode in, strangers in town and you're plotting strategy.

"For what?"

But this time, it is Mata's turn to provide her brother with the answer. (Strathmore may know peas, but more serious subjects are often beyond him.) "My rule, you idiot. Well, or Mine'irva's rule."

"Yeah, I couldn't help but notice how your subjects were lining the streets in welcome," Strathmore responds in that sarcastic way that Elven lads, lasses, and all Elves in general just seem to have. (Maybe it's genetic?)

But then, perhaps more to the point, they're not actually your people.

"We're elves. We're here. They are our people."

"You just have to tell them that," Strathmore observes (quite wisely, I might add).

"So, we kill some and make an example," Mata declares evenly. "The rest will fall in line."

Um, perhaps you would like to take a moment and consider that you're about to make a Dark Necromancer look like the good guy.

"But defying our rule is treason," Mata explains -- quite reasonably, I do believe. I mean, it's certainly how I feel about my rule (always have and always will).

But if we're going to do this right (all historically accurate and all), then we'll need to keep the Accord in mind. And how, at first contact, there was only a trial neighborhood that was integrated, you know, to see how it went. And you're going to be there (here or wherever in that trial neighborhood) along with the Dwarves, the Trolls, the Goblins, and emissaries from everywhere else. And as such (equal footing at the start and all) no one is going to recognize your supremacy. For, you have no edict...

"But we're Elves? I'm an Elven Princess," Mata says, speaking on behalf of Mine'irva, which is essentially what an Elvin Handmaiden does, so maybe it's not really all that surprising why Mata was willing to be 'demoted' to Handmaiden and more than happy to let an outsider become the aloof Princess, who in many folks eyes doesn't do much more than look pretty. But that is perhaps neither here nor there.

"But that's exactly the point. We are Elves. We have Rights of Dominion as granted by Eldritch," Mata insists.

“Sure you do,” Strathmore says, sort of chuckling to himself (and at his sister) as he bats peas around in the air with his new knife (finders keepers and all that, so what if he found it flying through the air at his throat). And then, done with his bit of color, he suddenly announces, “I’m going to go out and ‘play’,” as he tosses the last word around in his mouth to see how it feels. “Scout around, see what that Ned character is up to, make sure the perimeter is clear, and insure that Sid lives up to his word and actually does something about those Nightshade plants, put in roses or something.”

“Orchids,” Mata suggests (or sort of commands) and at a motion from Mine’irva, adds (and/or amends her previous decree), “and Dragon Lilies. And not so much a moat, but a little pond would be nice.”

I said, I’ll send over some ghouls.

“Send Greg, Gary, and Grant,” Strathmore suggests, so maybe he misheard me and has Goblins in mind (and of course by suggest I mean that he request, commands, or decrees).

No matter, the details are unimportant (always are). Key and central is the fact that we seem to be making progress. After all, this really isn’t a story about parents. That’s the old generation. This is about the next.

Of course, having said that, Neo’lander (like pretty much any Elf would) ignores Sid’s, you know, suggestion, and states, informs, decrees, that he, Bey’linda, Mata, and Mine’irva (and not necessarily in that order, because by legal precedence, it would be the reverse, but good luck telling him that), “We’ll just stay here and do some strategic planning. There’s got to be some sort of contest, field of battle, at the end of all this, right?”

Yes.

“Well, we’ll just figure out the rules of the game. No doubt, Strathmore will manage to win whatever tournament there is...”

In that regard, football comes rapidly to mind as I do believe a lot of the ‘action’ will be set in some sort of High School and I think football was the game of choice in those institutions. But in truth, I’m pretty much open about the entire thing. And that’s the truth. Whatever

works, you know. And to the victor goes the spoils in case anyone cares about that sort of thing...

“And if Strathmore is not victorious?”

“I’ll be victorious.”

“And if not, we’ve got our ace in the hole,” Bey’linda adds. “If not gold, an Elvin Princess is certainly worth her weight in legal decries.”

Which might just be a wee bit hard for a non-Elf to understand, but Mata is an Elf and so she does and being the handmaiden, spokesperson, and/or ambassador for the princess, just sort of mentions, “An Elvin Princess does not marry the winner of the joust.”

“No, darling,” Bey’linda assures her. “But she does make sure the winner is bound to her cause by an oath of fealty.”

“Unless, of course, said victor falls victim to an after hours hunting accident,” Strathmore points out before putting a hand up to his ear. “Hark! In the distance, methinks I hear squeal of laughter. Pray, mother. I beg, give me leave from my sup’ so that I might join the local ruffians at play.” And then, without waiting for a reply, because it really is the Prince and Princess who runs things in these Elvin clans, Strathmore stands, casually tosses the knife Mata had ‘gifted’ him mere moments ago into the air as he tests it’s weight and heft, and declares, “I never did like that Ned, bloke. I wonder how he’ll manage playing the lead buried under a pile of rocks in his grave.” And with that, Strathmore walks out the door and into the dead of the night.

Mu-ha-ha!

Game on!

I think we have a start, doing things the Elvin way.

{{{Chapter End}}}