

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 19 ###
Castle Scouts ###**

Ah, the pre-meeting festivities -- it brings back memories of the good (or bad) old days, as the boys and girls run around and hit each other with broomsticks, willow branches, and whatever else they can lay their hands on. Strathmore wanted to use his sword, did use his sword, but it really wasn't very sporting; and although pointing that out to him didn't seem to faze him so much, the threat of being hit over the head with my staff did. And now, the lot of them are behaving reasonably well (for a band of wild thugs, that is), running around, jumping over, around, and under the tables, chairs, and other obstacles (chests, barrels, piles of old lumber -- great for salvaging pretend swords, spears, and clubs from) as they continue to attack one another. I'm not really sure what the rules for the game are; but then, a game like this doesn't often

have that many rules, just hit hard, hit often, and try not to bear the brunt of anyone else's assault. Though, in truth, it's a bit one sided than I've in the past as the elves do seem to dominate. Strathmore and Mata have taken up flanking positions beside Mine'irva. I would say defensive flanking positions, but there really is nothing defensive about their behavior. Often as not, Mine'irva leads the charge, dustbin shovel in hand, which she uses to clobber a zombie, hitting it hard on the head

Oh, I should probably mention that. I sort of presume that you saw that one coming; but if not (or you just want a more thorough explanation than that), Drip often packs a hidden wallop (along with a not so hidden wallop); and in this particular case that hidden wallop transitions the user into one of those-them-there zombies (decaying flesh optional, but highly recommended). Of course, not all those who imbibed have undergone the transition. S-Kelly was in on the Drip's manufacture, so he's not likely to be turned (what kind of enchantment would it be if he did). And Frank (being of the assemblage) is more or less immune to these sorts of shenanigans. And although Abby and Ned, probably inhaled more than enough of the stuff while hanging out above the bleachers, that was all second hand smoke (so to speak), and so even though it should count (it really should), it doesn't (which just sort of goes to show that I don't get to make all the rules around here). So, anyhow, maybe three quarters of the room (and school, graveyard, etc.) has turned (into zombies)-- mostly the orcs, goblins, and humans. And don't ask me why humans get lumped together with the other two so often. Oh, I know. It's because when you get right down to it, they are of the horde -- just of a slightly higher caste (personal opinion, of course).

So, that's basically where we're at: zombified this (orc and/or goblins) and zombified that (humans and other assorted ghouls with a few ghastrs thrown in for good measure -- but with a notable lack of any ghosts) are getting their 'what for' and 'just desserts' handed to them by the sole survivors -- the elves, dwarves, a few of the more gallant humans (Ned and Jack to name but two), and assorted others who haven't made the transition (Abby, whatever Gwyneth might be -- I don't think we'll ever know that -- oh, and Nicki the Ninja -- haven't

focused on her for a while). And apparently, neither has anyone else, or so I'm assuming in as much as she is currently doing one of those infamous sneak attack / backstab routines (from behind, hence the name). But then again, we're talking about zombies at this point, so sneaking up and attacking them from behind isn't all that hard, but you got to start somewhere.

Speaking of which (and as I recall from my misspent youth), this is more or less the way most these-them-there-those extracurricular after-school meetings tended to start.

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Now, me, I was in the Lost Legionnaires myself. Of course, little did we know at the time that we'd wind up being the Last Legionnaires, as well. Not that we would have taken our studies any more seriously if we had known, but that's a different story. What is the story is that then (as now) the meetings usually started with some sort of random activity: kill the guy with the ball (literally, as we were dark necromancers in training), keep away (call it capitalism if you like), and hide and seek (better known as making the Leader of the Legionnaires hunt us down and corral us back to the meeting for the better part of an hour; we did this before each and every meeting and between activities within each meeting; man, I loved that game). Sadly (or not so sadly, honestly I couldn't care less at this point), for whatever reason I can't remember The Faceless One's name at this point (maybe he was smarter than he looked -- probably goes without saying -- and so had cast some sort of defensive dweomer lest we hunt him down later in life... or as proof against our using a 'named' spell on him, as part of a practical joke -- boys will be boys, you know). Still, for all the grief I gave him at the time (which was about as much as I could, which would also be equal to about as much as he would take -- so blame him not me), in retrospect I have to hand it to the guy (ghoul, ghost, ghast, and/or grave robbing goy), he gave a lot of his time (days, nights, weekends, and assorted unholy holidays) to the cause; and I don't think we ever thanked him (not the once). No. Rather, what we did to repay his kindness (if taking

a young lad on an overnight expedition into a graveyard to disinter fresh corpses can be called a kindness), we ran around as much as possible and did everything we could to interfere with the progress of those-them-there meetings.

Which is to say, we did pretty much exactly what the Elves and all the rest are doing now (zombies included).

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And then, out of the blue (I mean, like with absolutely no warning), Abby asks, “So, when are we going to start this meeting?” I suppose I should mention that she says this (and/or asks this) while stopping to gasp for breath -- taking a breather from the game, as it were, which could be best described (said the game, that is) as seeing how far back the zombies can be beaten back. And the answer to that would be back into a small corner (an alcove, really) of the storage cellar that we will use for these meetings, a storage cellar which is not much more than a closet itself -- the Dark Necromancer said half-jokingly. But then, not so half-jokingly, as the space involved is not really as big as one might want if they were beating back a zombie onslaught; much less, hold one of these scout troop meeting thingy-bobbers.

Anyhow, seeing as how I was ignoring her and/or my mind was on other matters, Abby repeats her question, “The meeting?” And then, after another brief pause, sees fit to ask yet again (third time’s the charm, and all that), “The meeting, Sid? When are you going to start the meeting. It’s time, you know. It’s been time for a while.”

“Yeah,” Ned asks (if saying ‘Yeah’ can be considered a question: these humans and their sloppy colloquial grammar), “Isn’t it time to get this show on the road?”

But really, what is there to say to that, but, “We’re waiting for the Den Leader,” or Den Master or Den Mother or Dominatrix or whatever the head of a scouting troupe like this is called... if this is, indeed, even a scouting troupe. And I guess that’s part of the problem, not only don’t I have a Den Mother, Father Figure, or whatever lined up for this gig, I’m not even sure what to call the outfit. And therein lies the root of all this

chaos (outside of the Elvish influence, of course). Not knowing what to call this group (and/or its function), leads to a certain lack of focus. So, they could be a group of Lost Legionaries (but then, we were the last) or Indian Scouts (but I haven't seen any Indians lately, have you?) or even Boy Scouts; but then, that doesn't explain Mata or Mine'irva's presence. I mean, oh, sure, Abby's happy to take on the form of a boy and wear a disguise. But Mine'irva isn't going to -- you know, any more than she does normally. I mean, if that's what you see in her...

But then, I digress.

But then, again, for the moment, that appears to be the point: digression, for there is no other point.

Other than, I have no idea what type of organization (much less which particular organization) the troop is going to be affiliated with; and therefore, I have no idea who should be (or is going to be) the Pack Leader; but then, saying it like that brings Wilfred immediately to mind (for reasons which I hope are obvious -- Wilfred being a Werewolf, don't you know).

"No," Abby says all of a sudden and out of the blue (likes she been doing a lot of lately). She's probably disagreeing with what I said out loud a little while back. But with Abby, it's just as likely that she's taken exception to everything I've said in between (contrary little scamp that she is). "We know who the Leader is," she says all authoritative like, but please note how even she sidesteps the issue as to whether said Leader is to lead a Troop, Pack, Den, or whatever. Still, there is no time to ponder the issue (not for me anyhow, you take all the time you want), for just as soon as she is done saying the last, she follows it up with another one of those annoyingly declarative statements (that I for one am getting a little sick of tired of, especially after considering that what she has to say is), "You're the Leader, Sid."

"So, when are we going to get started?" Ned asks -- almost on cue, almost as if he'd been off in a corner recently with Abby discussing (or plotting more likely) the solution to this exact problem and they've come to the conclusion that the ideal solution is to railroad me into the job.

But, as we all know, being a Whatever Leader (and I should know, as I am the Crypt Master, after all) is a thankless job. (Thankless I tell you. Thankless.) So, “I wasn’t planning on being...”

But Abby cuts me off (further proof that she, maybe, had this discussion all planned out in advance), “But if you don’t do it, no one will.” And I’m sure if she could pull it off, she’d try to get all teary eyed on me. But then, she’s Abby, so not much chance of that.

Ned, on the other hand, is game to give the teary-eyed thing a go. (I wonder about Ned, sometimes).

But it is Gwyneth who comes over and really lets the tears roll. Mel-o-DRAMA be thy middle name and all that. I won’t bore you with the details, but let’s just say, she/he/it earned her Dramatic Presentation Merit Badge right then and there.

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“So, you’ll do it?” Like Abby ever had a doubt.

“Yeah, I guess,” which aren’t the words of a leader. So, scratch that. Edit. Rewind. And start over. “This meeting of the C Scouts,” chaos(?), crazy(?), castle(?), crypt(?) (see how I elegantly bypassed all those naming issues?), “Is now called to order.”

And with that said (along with a carefully aimed blow to the ribs with my staff) a zombie falls back into place (in the closet). Talk softly and care a magically charged stick, that’s what I say. Of course, sometimes I also say, “Take your seats, everyone.” Which unfortunately doesn’t quite communicate the desired level of responsiveness I’m after, so jab to the ribs -- and yet another zombie falls... frozen. It’s just a frost spell, so no need to worry (or call the United Zombie Front and scream abuse). In an hour or so, they’ll thaw out -- at which point, the meeting will be over and the freeform gaming session may resume (Zombies vs All, I believe is what we the C-Scouts are playing today).

But in the meantime, “My name is Sid,” I announce -- and sort of accentuate with a staff to the head of another trouble maker; and although said victim (Harry) hadn’t been turned into a zombie by the Drip, he also wasn’t quick enough to take a seat when I announced the

start of the meeting, so he'll be sitting this session out: frozen where he stands, an icicle of drool already forming in the corner of his mouth.

And if I do say so myself, that, my friends, is how you call a meeting to order.

Everybody in their places, we may begin.

Of course, I have nothing planned. And neither does anybody else (apparently), so this is (obviously) going to be one of those get to know you and what do you want out of this club meetings.

So, maybe we should go around the table and let everyone introduce themselves.

"Hi, I'm Mata, Elvin Embassy from the Seven Realms, personal spokesperson for the princess Mine'irva Van," blah, blah, blah, and on and on and on, and it's pretty clear that was a bad idea.

So, a quick staff blow to the table (freezing it over and giving it a nice icy sheen), and I think everyone understands that it's time to move on.

"So, what are you looking to do?"

"Kill zombies," Strathmore offers.

"String 'em up," Mata agrees.

"We could break them apart while they're frozen..."

And once again, I don't know if I've said this before, but participant input is almost always a bad idea.

So, what do do?

Ah, this is a supply room and happy there is one of those great big coils of rope lying on the ground nearby, so I toss it onto the table and announce, "We're going to make lanyards... or practice knots tying," couldn't say which.

Of course (speaking of witches -- don't you just love ambiguous puns), the very idea of tying knots brings a gleam to Gwyneth's eyes (but it's probably best not to go there); and so, maybe sensing the impasse (or sensing my difficulty even getting to an impasse), Abby says, "As Castle Scouts," and I can't say that I like the name, but as she's got the ball, I say let her run with it, "We have a duty to be prepared," or some such nonsense. She actually went on for a while, can't say I'm going to repeat it here. Not that it didn't make a lot of

sense. 'A Scout does this. A Scout does that. A Scout prepares for the worst, does their best, and is there when needed.'

"So, like a militia?" Ned asks when she is done.

"Yeah, I suppose."

"I'm not really interested in that," Jack interposes.

"Huh?" is all Strathmore can manage. And truthfully, I think he speaks for everyone when he says that.

"I get enough violence on the field," of playing battle-ball and/or football (call it what you will). I should perhaps, also, mention here that Jack was slated to play a Paladin at first -- maybe should have called him Pete instead of Jack to make the point clearer, but he's really not living up to the model. Anyway, Paladins tend to be pacifists (and perfectly prissy pussies); and so, that my explain why Jack continues to say (and explain), "I was hoping for something more relaxed, here." And when everyone looks at him blankly (and I do mean, everyone, Harry, me, the frozen zombies, everyone), he goes on to say, "I liked the idea of lanyards. Truthfully, I was looking forward to making a key chain, maybe a leather wallet... or even learning how to cook. I'd really like to learn how to make brownies, but I'd be happy just knowing how to make those rice treat things."

"Marshmallows and puffed rice," Mata offers. "Bake and serve, even I can do that."

"But I can't."

"I'll show you how," Gwyneth offers.

"I'm not baking," Strathmore sneers (like derisively) at Jack. And I know some of you might be thinking that Strathmore is a bit sexist (which he is) and that he's offended by the notion of doing 'Woman's Work' (which he also is), but neither of those fine upstanding Elf-like qualities of Strathmore's play into this particular moment. Because rather than linking cooking to the female sex, elves link cooking to the working class; and so really, what Strathmore has to say on the subject can more or less be summed up with, "That's for servants," and it would be beneath him to learn such things -- as are all people who would do so.

But a good leader (or a great leader such as I -- and I will forgive you if when I only said good you had a hard time recognizing who I was

talking about... on account of me being great; and so, not merely good leader) recognizes an opportunity when they see it (which I do, thus proof of my greatness if not goodness).

But then, even the stupidest orc recognizes an opportunity when they see it (just ask Mog), so the real trick is actually seeing it when others don't, which I did and do, so I pounced -- just like a Dark Ninja, or, er, a Dark Necromancer standing in as Den Master until a better replacement can be found.

Whatever.

The pertinent point in all that is having seen the opportunity, I announced (as only a newly ordained temporary/replacement Crypt Scout Master can announce), "We can do separate projects. You know merit badges. Jack, I admire your interest in baking," provisions and all that being an important part of castle defense, etc., "and I think everyone here would appreciate a little snack or something the next time we meet..."

"Yeah, some of those rice thingies would be great," Strathmore smugly sneers, as he places his order, like the best of the golden folk.

But then, there is no sense acknowledging such remarks (recording for posterity, yes; acknowledging, no). And so rather, what makes sense (to me, or at least) is to toss a book I've been carrying around for a while onto the table, "Here's a cookbook for your use, Jack," a cookbook that just might be inhabited by one ghost (Gloria the Heart Struck). Or maybe she's in the next book I hold up (of course, she's not, but for all you know, she could be.) Anyway, "There's plenty of merit badges in here to choose from," I say before tossing said tome onto the table.

"This is just that copy of Wuthering Heights you picked up in the library earlier," Abby notes as she leafs through the pages (sans any ghost fluttering into the air, I might add), so I guess I threw the right one to Jack...

Or maybe, I'm a bit of a magician (us Dark Lords often are, a quarter from behind the ear, the endless scarf, or pulling a rabbit or other soft furry creature out of a hat, I do it all, and I'm available for parties and other special occasions -- reasonable rates, please inquire, sadly I am unable to mop up after sawing a guest of honor in half, so do don't ask).

Um, so, anyway, I guess what I'm saying is, a bit sleight of hand is a small time effect for me. And really, for all you know (and maybe for all I know) Gloria might just remain in third book that I now hold up (now you see her and now you don't and all that).

"What was I saying? Right. If you're interested, merit badges or whatever, let me know," and we can work out the requirements or you can just look them up in this Scouting Manual. And that's about all there is to say about that. I mean, you know the Dwarves are going to complete every last one of those merit badges (one by one, in order, as a group).

And as to the Elves, well, let's just say, sensing that the meeting is over (or at least the guided part of the meeting is over), Strathmore leaps back onto the table (not really sure why; oh, right, because he likes being the center of attention) as he announces, "I'm going to get my swordsmanship patch first."

"Zombie slaying sticker," Mata agrees as she leaps to his side.

"All undead must die," Mine'irva succinctly surmises as the trio glance in my direction ever so briefly (and don't ask me why, I mean, it's not like they're not undead, too). But these subtleties are not to be explored any further. For as the trio launch themselves at the quickly thawing zombies, the dwarves get to work making lanyards and completing their rope trick merit badges, while Jack and Gwyneth start to pursue their copy of Wuthering Heights looking for a recipe they can make. Not that Wuthering Heights is known for its in-story recipes, but changing a book's text is easier than most card tricks I know. (Have pencil, will travel, and all that.)

And not that it necessarily follows (like in any way, whatsoever), but I did say I was thinking about ending each chapter with a hearty:

"Mu-ha-ha-ha."

"Mu-ha-ha-ha."

"Mu-ha-ha-ha."

So, that said, there really is only one more thing to say, "Meeting adjourned."

Well, that and, "Get the zombies! They're escaping!"

Yep, scouting hasn't changed much over the years. Surprising, that. Or then, when you think about it; not really so very surprising, not at all.

{{{Chapter End}}}