

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 29 ###
Water, Boy! ###**

S-Kelly is on the South Lawn wrangling zombies. Ironically, there's quite a few trees here these days; so at this point, maybe that's a bit of a misnomer these days. Anyway, he's doing a pretty good job of it -- wrangling zombies, that is. Not that I'd know. I'm not much of a wrangler of any sorts, and especially not zombie wrangling. Some places (i.e. some graveyards -- not as well managed as this one, of course, as most consider reasonable folks consider Z-Wrangling to be an ethical violation of sorts; but in those places where zombie wrangling is taken seriously), there are yearly (monthly and/or weekly) tournaments with valuable prizes (perks and privileges) going to the winners.

So, yeah. In retrospect (and in comparison to a professional), S-Kelly is doing a pretty crappy job of wrangling those-them-there

zombies. He's using a length of willow branch (very whip like -- slender and long -- those willow branches be) to direct the three zombies he is currently ushering back to the stadium/playing field.

And along the way, he sees Abby and Ned. So being the friendly type, he calls out to them, "Hello", "What's Up", and "Nice day to be wrangling zombies" along with other niceties of that sort, before eventually getting down to business. "Seen any more zombies that way? We're gathering them all up?"

"No," Abby admits. The lawns have been quite free of them, but then, her mind has been on other things (or not so much things, as thing - - Dragon -- oh, and getting revenge on me, so I guess things was right, after all). But rather than go into all that, "No," is all Abby says.

While Ned sort of laughs (which is really a misnomer and about as accurate as saying S-Kelly is wrangling zombies; or if that's not clear, Ned snorts rather than laughs) before saying, "There's one." It being one of the three that S-Kelly had under his control only mere moments ago, but zombies are slippery varmints and this one seems dead set on running into trees and tripping over rocks. (And it's not even Mog! So maybe it's an inbred zombie thing. But whatever, which happens to be S-Kelly's attitude, as well.)

"I'll get him later. No one will know," S-Kelly says to himself as much as anyone (as clearly Abby and Ned would know, but neither of them is Bones nor likely to tell Bones, and that's the pertinent party).

Any-the-ways and/or any-the-hows, all of this begs the question, "What are you doing?" which is probably why Ned asks that particular question at this particular junction.

To which S-Kelly helpfully replies, "Corralling zombies." And then, after a moment more, he adds (because he's not trying to be unhelpful or elusive and he likes to chat), "For the game. It's going to be Zombies against all comers. Winner takes all." And then, looking up, looking down, trying to figure out where the best place would be to set his gaze (as to be most respectful-like) his eyes alight on a wayward tombstone (out of the way, up on a hill, perfect view, surrounded by untrampled roses, so like, a nice place to spend the hereafter) and says, "It was Sid's, or rather," he quickly adds, "Insidious the Magnificent's

last and final wish.” But then, remembering the exact words as Bones (his father) had used, “No, that’s not it. Final will and testament. It being Insidious the Magnificent’s Final Will and Testament that The Game be played in order to choose his successor...”

And he probably would have gone on (and in fact, was going on), but Abby is having none of it. “Sid’s not dead... and he never was magnificent.”

“I liked him,” Ned acknowledges, but let’s face it, he’s missing the point.

“He’s not dead, dust, whatever,” Abby says, correcting herself, Ned, and/or whoever might wish to disagree with her at the moment, and then lets loose with a volley of Disintegration Rays (in memorial, no doubt).

“But then, what’s with that?” S-Kelly asks. “If he’s not dead, why are you lighting up the night sky in his honor?” not to mention early morning fog filled landscape.

It’s a question that Abby chooses not to answer, perhaps because she doesn’t want to answer it, or perhaps it’s because she doesn’t really get a chance to answer it on account of how S-Kelly learned social discourse at his (adopted) father’s knee (yes, it’s true) and so has that rhetorical (no need to reply I wasn’t finished talking yet) question thing down pat. “And the bells, the mourning bells,” he says finishing up.

“They’re morning bells not mourning bells, you idiot,” Abby corrects. And then, as if commanded by the last qualifier in her statement, S-Kelly drops the point and lets the entire statement go flying over his head and returns to his earlier inquiry, “But what about the fireworks?” which you’re clearly avoiding talking about at this point, “if they’re not for Sid...”

“Oh, they’re for Sid, alright,” Abby corrects as she lets loose another spray of bolts.

“You know,” S-Kelly muses. “I mean, I know black was his, er, I mean, rather, Insidious the Magnificent’s favorite color and all,” (but not really, it’s sort of like saying a doctor’s favorite color is white because that’s the color of the smock he wears every day; I actually prefer purple, but, anyway), “It’s, um, sort of...” boring, I think he’s trying to

say (or would say), but Abby cuts him off and lets loose with another volley (that really just disappears into the fog at this point).

“I mean, if they exploded,” S-Kelly goes on, “like fireworks...”

“They’re not fireworks,” Abby corrects. But then, her correction is not really correct (as in, true and accurate -- not anymore, at least) as I for one am getting a bit sick of this disintegration ray crap (you can bet somebody is going to be spending a few months on yard detail when I reform, Missy); and so, quite mysteriously (yes, it’s a mystery, even I don’t know how this was accomplished, he said with more than his usual level of sarcasm), the ray Abby is currently shooting (and all henceforth that she shall choose to shoot will) turn into a colorful display of light and magic -- i.e. fireworks.

“A suiting,” perhaps even colorful, “memorial to he who once was,” S-Kelly somberly observes.

“Not was, is,” Abby corrects (this time correctly) with more than a little exasperation in her voice. What more proof did a person need that Sid was still around than her (or anyone’s else’s) magic (for that matter) going awry, which of course, is a point that S-Kelly immediately takes to heart, “You’re right, as long as we remember, Sid will live on in our hearts.”

It’s all Abby can do not to blast S-Kelly into a billion pieces, but then, restraint has not been her strong suit lately. So she does, indeed, let rip with a disintegration ray (at point blank range, no less), which thankfully (thanks to me, you’re welcome S-Kelly) turns into a sparkly fire show that fills S-Kelly’s empty head (numbskull skeleton that he is) with all manner of twinkling delight.

“Cool! Do me next,” Frank begs from where he appears at the edge of the lawn, corralling a half dozen zombies of his own (including the one that S-Kelly just let get away).

Eh, why not, Abby thinks to herself, and in no time, Frank is lit up all colorful like, just like the night he was born.

“Yes! Give me the juice!” he says, which I guess is his way of saying that he is most pleased,

And from there, it is little more than a continual game of Blast the Zombie Wrangler as the lot of them walk on.

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By the time Abby (and the rest) get to the stadium, it would appear that she's come to grips with the fact that the only spell she's going to be able to cast for a while will be one of colorful delight. "Don't think this is over, Sid. Never forgive. Never forget," but random threats aside, she seems to be in a better mood for having switched spells. (I know it sometimes works for me, death and destruction can be a bit of a downer after a while). And as if to prove my point, Abby has even taken to setting off gratuitous displays of 'works' whenever the team does something even remotely promising. (I would say 'whenever the team practicing on the field does something even remotely promising', but at this point, that's not quite right).

So, about that. The Zombies have taken over the field and refuse to yield -- refuse to be corralled in any meaningful manner, as well - but that's a different story, or, um, not really. In truth, at this point, I believe it is the story, so perhaps I should elaborate. At the present, Bones is pretending he's the coach for the zombies and so 'plays' at giving them orders, coaching commands, and game play suggestions. While in turn, the zombies pretend that they haven't heard a single thing that he's said, don't understand what he's just request, or simply don't care and so mill about at random.

Oh, and here's a detail I'm sure you'll be delighted to learn. Out on the field, Mog has found the goal post.

Thunk! Mog stumbles into the goal post.

Thunk! Mog stumbles into the goal post.

Thunk! Mog stumbles into the goal post.

Ah, good times.

Worthy of reminiscing if you ask me.

Thunk! Mog stumbles into the goal post.

Thunk! Mog stumbles into the goal post.

Thunk! Mog stumbles into the goal post.

Anyway, Mog is doing his bit for the team while the remainder of the zombies on the field are doing a carefully choreographed dance

strategically calculated to assure victory in the upcoming game (yes, there will be a game, everyone says so, and if not my last, it is most certainly My Will, so live with it).

Anyhow, as to this carefully choreographed dance to which I previously referred, to the untrained eye, it might appear (and, ‘Ha! How little one knows of football strategy,’ if that be the case) that the zombies are mindlessly bumping into each other as they randomly (and quite chaotically) shuffle about the field...

But then, this is exactly what the zombies are doing...

Of course, there is more to this hidden strategy than meets the eye...

Eh, who am I fooling? There’s probably not.

“NO! NO! NO!” Bones yells. He has one of those bullhorn things in his hands. But really, it does little good over the murmur of the zombies.

“Ack!”

“Grumble.”

“Mumble.”

“Murmur. Murmur. “Murmur.”

With only the occasion old school “Brains!” thrown in for good measure. But then, that last is classic Hollywood misinformation. The dead do not need food or drink, so certainly the dead of the dead would require neither, as well. And as to brains, anyone who has ever conversed with a zombie (“Ack!” “Grumble.” “Mumble.” “Murmur. Murmur. Murmur.”) will attest that brains are the last things on their minds.

Anyhow, Bones is/was trying to train his team and having failed miserably at that (something Bones seems to be quite good at doing, by the way, failing miserably), he’s come up with an alternative strategy that will work just as well and has the added bonus of requiring far less Zombie Discipline (a thing which is always in short supply).

“He’s filled the field so there’s not any room for our team,” Mata observes sort of unnecessarily (but then, someone had to say it), and it’s a good as way to break the ice as any while she and Mine’irva sit down next to Abby and Ned.

This, of course, means Ned will transform into a slithering idiot unable to concentrate on anything else but Mine'irva's dazzling eyes for the duration of her visit.

"It would be nice if someone," anyone, even you Ned, "would do something about these zombies," Mata says/offers/instructs, but Ned is in a world all his own and doesn't say much but, "Ga." And well, between that and the bit of drool in the corner of his mouth, it's clear he's a lost cause, so Mata shrugs and continues the conversation with Abby, "That's why practice has moved up to the bleachers."

"Penalty for being out of bounds!" Bones calls from across the field in reply to the sound of their voices. "Trent!" Bones yells again, redirecting the conversation and trying to get the attention of the Treant referee, "Penalty for being out of bounds. Game day, they won't be able to do that? Right? Right?"

But by game day (or some day before), Trent has been thinking about shoving that bullhorn down Bones throat... or whatever passes for a throat in a skeletal warlord; and in the meantime, has been far more concerned with his field. (His Field!) So (in direct reply to Bones inquiry, no doubt), Trent takes a zombie in arm (branch, appendage, whatever) and drop kicks (and/or launches) the thing far into the distance.

"Score!" Strathmore cheers, playing along as makes the sign of a field goal -- raising his arms high -- while one of his teammates (Jack, it's Jack) interprets this as a golden opportunity to launch himself at Strathmore and do one of those flying tackle things on him while the Elf's not looking and attentions are elsewhere.

Trent, of course, ignores all this (unnecessary roughness, etc.) and instead busies himself by gathering another zombie into his outstretched branches and launching said abomination into the distance.

"Murmur. Murmur. Murmur."

While for his part, Bones has (apparently) already lost interest in the matter (what was that, I forget) and is urging the zombies at the twenty, thirty, forty (and so on) yard lines to stay in bounds. Sadly, his pleas go unheeded and the zombies cover the field, in bounds and out,

swarming over the landscape and lower risers of the bleachers. (Sigh. Maybe the graveyard is as overcrowded as some folks say.)

Anyway, this continues for some time: Bones yelling orders, Zombies ignoring said orders, Trent drop kicking a zombie here and there, while Strathmore, Jack, Darren the Dwarf and a few of the remaining others practice in the bleachers, throwing the ball, running up and down the steps, making up plays, and preparing to put on the good fight on game day (night, whatever and whenever it might be) while down on the field the zombies continue to retain control by sheer force of numbers... even if every few moments another zombie goes flying through the air into parts unknown for S-Kelly, Frank, and the rest of the assemblage to eventually round up, return, and repeat the process ad infinitum -- or ad nauseum.

Though, when you get right down to it, Trent and the zombies would likely never tire of this (Bones either), but the Dwarves, Elves, and Humans are another matter entirely.

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“OK. That’s enough for today,” Strathmore says eventually, as he prances over, sweating like an... Elf that has been practicing for far too long. “And speaking of enough, when are those bells going to stop ringing?”

Oh, I forgot about that. That’s enough for now, Kibbers.

“You made them stop,” Jack half jokes. “Try it on the zombies.”

“Go away!” Strathmore yells, but nothing happens.

And that would be that if Abby and Ned were not on a mission.

“Ned!” Abby instructs, sort of jolting him out of his reverie, which probably wasn’t so reverie like. It probably was more like an endless circle of thought going through his head to the tune of, ‘I like Mine’irva. I wonder what I could do to please her. But I don’t want to look like I’m trying to please her. Don’t want to look like an idiot. I should say something. But she won’t reply. And then, I would look like an idiot. But I really should say something.’ And so on and so forth, endlessly

going around with Mine'irva at the focus but Ned never actually doing anything about it.

“Ned!” Abby says again, finally getting his attention.

“Oh, right. Water,” Ned says, shaking his head, breaking the spell, and almost miraculously producing a rather large barrel of water that he’s brought along for the occasion.

And since it doesn’t sound like such a bad idea and certainly what you’re supposed to do after a game or practice, they all dip in and have a good drink.

“No. Bless it,” Abby instructs.

“You are blessed, Mighty Waters,” Strathmore says, making a big show of it. “There you go, consider your waters blessed.”

“No, not you. Jack.”

“Jack?”

“Yeah, Jack,” Abby confirms. And then, to Jack directly, she says, “If you’d be so kind.”

But then, he wouldn’t really be so kind, because he’s not really that nice of a guy. Not really that mean of a guy, but not understanding the situation, being put on the spot (unlike Strathmore, he doesn’t relish the spotlight, would rather be off somewhere reading alone, in fact), so put on the spot, he’s a bit uncomfortable, feeling perhaps exactly like Ned might feel if Mine’irva were (and in fact does) give him a quizzical look during all of this, as if she were wondering if he is some kind of helpless and/or hopeless moron or does he (in fact) have a head on his shoulders, that he knows how to use, because if he does, now would be the perfect time to explain himself.

And to all of this, there really is only one proper response, one proper thing to do and/or say and that is to reiterate the instructions to Jack that Abby had already made; and so, ironically enough, that is exactly what Ned does.

“Like a Holy Warrior Paladin’s blessing,” Ned offers/instructs/asks.

A statement which only causes Strathmore to laugh, “Jack? Jockstrap Jack?”

Laughter in turn which only causes Jack to become even less thoughtful and even less considerate of others than he might normally have been as he looks for a way out and an opportunity to focus the spotlight on someone else. But then, what to do? And then, it hits him. I mean, he does admire Strathmore, competes with him, is jealous of him (a fact which makes Strathmore's words of laughter sting all the more in the moment); but then, Jack does admire the way Strathmore stands tall and proud in the spotlight, so at this critical juncture, Jack thinks to himself, 'What would Strathmore do?' And the answer to that is that Strathmore would be a jerk about the entire thing. So in turn, Jack decides to be a jerk about the entire thing. And having made the decision, it becomes amazingly easy for him to carry through with the decision and wash his face with the water. Of course, when he looks up and about, it's clear no one understands (clearly he hasn't taken the joke far enough), so he dunks his head in the water, washes his hair, blows his nose in the lot of it, and sprinkles a bit of the despoiled liquid under his armpits. But then, that's clearly still not enough, because he's still not getting the reaction he wants. There's 'Way to go' from his teammates and no pat on his back from Strathmore as the Elf chuckles, 'Good one.' So, Jack decides the best course of action is to simply cut and run. But first, he should make Ned pay for putting him on the spot, so Jack grabs the barrel of water and says, "With these waters I do solemnly bless you," and then dumps the lot over Ned's head.

"He's all wet."

"What a drip."

"All washed up."

"No need saving any for a rainy day?"

"What?"

"Soaker Croaker. Hey, Kibber. Taking orders."

And let's face it, it's not the quality of the jabs (it never is). Rather, what's important is that the crowd is behind him. Ergo Sum: Jack is happy, safe, and at one with the pack.

"Just a joke, Ned," he says as he tosses him a towel. "No hard feelings?"

"I'm sure it'll wash off."

“Drip right off.”

“Clean and rinse,” eh, some folks never get it. Anyhow, the team departs, arm in arm, “Solidarity!” joking and laughing, as they head off to the showers, so it’s been a good teambuilding exercise if nothing else.

Which then just leaves Mata, Mine’irva, Gwyneth, and Nicki not to mention Abby to stare blankly at Ned as he lamely holds the towel Jack threw at him as he tries to retain some sort of dignity.

“We all know Jack’s a bit of a jerk,” Mata observes.

“He was only trying to impress Strathmore,” Gwyneth agrees.

“Should have kicked him in the balls,” Nicki (the Ninja) just sort of lays out there, giving a jab with her hands for added emphasis, which all in all is about the best advice there is.

“Well, that didn’t work,” Abby finally manages in regards to their quest to get some Holy Water.

“What were you trying to do,” Mata asks as Mine’irva eagerly watches on, anxious for the answer herself.

“Paladins, holy water, to undo the zombie spell,” Ned explains, in perhaps a way too condensed version to make much sense (or perhaps because Jack would be the implied Paladin in this case), so what is there for Mata to do, but say, “Oh,” while Mine’irva sort of rolls her eyes, killing whatever is left of Ned’s will and happiness.

“We got to go.”

###

And then, it’s just Ned and Abby... and a thousand zombies.

“To the stands!” Bones instructs -- which isn’t so much an order that the zombies obey as something they just naturally do -- as they slowly shuffle randomly about filling the available space around them, which just so happens to include the bleachers.

But Ned is having none of it. He’s been made a fool of. The girl he secretly admires, dreams of, has all but laughed at him, really did laugh at him, as much as she laughs at anyone, certainly dismissed him, and now the zombies.

No.

He's not having it.

They can't have the whole graveyard.

Not all of it.

I mean, there's no danger, no real reason not to simply just sit there and ignore them, but it's the principal of the thing. He just wants a little space for himself. He was here first. It's his. And let's face it, he's a bit pissed at this point and maybe looking for a fight and, well, zombies don't hit back (not these zombies), so it's easy pickings, or should be, so as the zombies approach, edge in, start to jostle...

"We should go," Abby suggests.

"No," Ned replies. Time for my last stand... or to kick someone in the balls, metaphorically speaking, or literally, and I might as well start with a zombie. So, with that thought in mind (time to make his stand), Ned grabs hold of the towel, swirls it up into a Rat Tail (a wet whip like contraption popular in the locker room for smacking your friends with, but stings like the Dickens) and flicks the cruel contraption (or Rat Tail as the case may be) at the nearest zombie.

'Crack that whip!'

'Sweet. I did it right!' Ned thinks to himself.

'Felt so good, I'm going to do it again.'

'Crack that whip!'

"Ouch!"

And the zombie that was has turned back into its human form.

"What?" Ned can only ask amazed, dumbfounded, and at a complete loss for words (a state he's been in a lot lately).

"The towel! The Water! It worked!" Abby squeals (and yes, she doesn't do it often, but in this particular case, she most definitely squeals) with delight.

And it's a Crack! Crack! Here.

And a Crack! Crack! There.

Young Ned has Holy Towel!

E-I, E-I, O!

Or however it is that that song goes.

But no real time to remember, because just as soon as it starts, the magic stops working.

Crack!

Nothing.

Crack!

Nothing.

“It’s stopped working.”

“Maybe we should get out of here!”

And so, the five of them do. Ned, Abby, and three new ex-zombie recruits (whose names are completely unimportant, a fact I can confidently relate as I do not know what their names, in fact, are).

Anyway, as they run up the bleachers and back over the other side, I will simply direct your attention to a young ghost (a one Gloria), who having spent the bulk of the last few months in and around Jack, had sort of taken up residence, perhaps gotten a little sloppy in her attachment, and well, that whole water washing episode had taken her a bit by surprise, from Jack, to Ned (“Ew!”), to the towel, and it is her presence (at her touch, or so I believe) rather than anything else that has affected the transformation and cure, turning the zombies back to what they were before.

Anyhow, that last crack of the whip sent her flying out of the towel to where she now hides under the benches on the bleachers as the zombie horde mills about overhead.

Can’t say I know how or why she was able to break the zombification spell, but I’m pretty sure it was her, rather than Jack blowing his nose in the water that did the trick.

Not that Abby or Ned know this.

“So, Jack really blessed the water?”

“I guess so.”

And there we have it, the basis of belief -- oft misunderstood, almost always a misattribution.

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

{{{Chapter End}}}