

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 30 ###
Literature ###
Studying the Classics ###**

Gloria cowers under the bleacher seats hiding from the zombies.

Thunk! Mog stumbles into the goal post.

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Yes, indeed. Everything is good with the world. Everything is as it should be.

Thunk! Mog stumbles into the goal post.

But what's this? Gloria cowering under the bleacher seats as the zombies mill about overhead? We can't have this. Personally, I've been noticing as of late that Gloria is a bit, shall we say, meek -- a little

unsure of herself, lacking in confidence, and that sort of thing. Granted I locked her in a book, but once I released the binds, she decided to stay in the book, and more than that, decided stayed in the book when I handed it to someone else (Jack in case you forgot, oh, ye of the short attention span); and then, chose to stay with that person (a one Jack, and seriously, how many times do I have to remind you?) long after both she and he (Jack, come on) had left the book behind. Perhaps the motive was love at first -- but hardly a true love and one can only hope that even that has been crushed at this point.

Anyway, that leaves (i.e. the pertinent factors that remain):

Thunk! Mog stumbles into the goal post, while Gloria cowers under the seats.

I'm going to have to do something about that.

So, why not wrap her in my arms.

I am the wind. I am the breeze. I am the fog that falls in the night and the clouding mists that lasts through the day. I am Insidious the Dark Necromancer and I have been pining (if pining is the correct word, probably not) for far too long, for I am master of my domain and all I perceive and that includes Gloria, so obviously she is mine to love and hold and all the rest, but mostly to hold, sort of wrapped in an ethereal shroud that is an extension of my Self and once within this protective embrace the two of us float gently above the field.

Ah, life (er, I mean, ah, death) is good (and/or evil, have it your way).

Thunk! Mog stumbles into the goal post.

Bones yells coaching instructions to the zombies through a bullhorn, while S-Kelly and Frank (from the Assemblage, and seriously write it down if you can't remember that fact any other way, anyway these two) toss a ball (football, primitive, American) back and forth. The 'pigskin' as it is called (perhaps on account of its construction) feels good (or evil, once again, have it your way) in their hands; and believe it or not, S-Kelly has a surprisingly good arm.

Frank goes long. S-Kelly throws it high. And Frank catches it for the touchdown.

Meanwhile, Bones yells something into his bullhorn, “NO! NO! The other way!”

While the zombies ignore his instructions;

And Thunk! Mog stumbles into the goal post.

So, life is good (or evil or whatever), Gloria is at my side (where she probably always should have been), shivering a little, maybe a little cold, perhaps still recovering from her scare (months spent with Jack in all his intimated moments, I shudder to even think about it), or maybe just a little sad as she realizes that he never noticed her, probably doesn't miss her absence, and what kind of spooky attachment (yeah, I love a good -- or evil -- pun) did that turn out to be -- I mean, considering it was so one sided?

No, much better to opt for the two-sided (multi-faceted) infatuation, my dear. And so with that in mind (to cheer her up a little) and because I can and it's fun, why not swoop back and forth across the field, buzzing Bones for no apparent reason, “Are those flies? Get away from here. Place is falling apart,” cruising over the tops of the zombies, “Murmur. Murmur. Murmur,” and then following the flight of the ball as S-Kelly throws it about, guiding its course ever so slightly (correcting it's flight); and then (mostly because I can):

Thunk! Mog stumbles into the goal post.

Thunk! Ball hits Mog in the head.

And Swish! Gloria flies through Mog (he looks no better from the inside), turning Mog back into his old repressive Orcin self (complete with bad breath, oily skin, self-righteous attitude, snarly disposition, and all the rest).

And so, there (THERE!) it works (again, twice, three, four times). Don't ask me how. (OK, I know how, Gloria is not of the dust, so somehow she counteracts the Drip -- a dust based dweomer -- and that's how she effecting the change.) But as to the why (why she has this power over the Dust and Drip), I know not. Likely it has something to do with her being a ghost (and therefore not subject to dust as she will never turn to dust, perhaps fade, but not turn to dust) and so is somehow different and above all of those Earthly matters. (Get it? Eh, maybe I'm trying too hard.)

Or perhaps, I put my love on a pedestal and grant her too much?
No, I think not. For this is not my doing.

Besides, if she knew all the advantages, I'm sure she'd rather be my apprentice than anything else. I mean, why let Wally have all the fun?

But that is neither here nor there (or more specifically, here and now).

What is here and now is that Mog doesn't miss a beat (quick reflexes those orcs must have as it couldn't be a strong mind); and so, he picks up the ball that just hit him in the head (or what turned him, as I am sure that's what he believes) and runs for all he's worth.

"Get him!" Bones yells. But as might be expected, the zombies ignore these new instructions as they have ignored everything else that Bones has said during the proceeding.

'Huh? What?' And before any of the zombies know it (not that they care), Mog is off the field, running the wrong way (of course) as he is not trying to make a touchdown, but rather just get away with the ball. All of which leaves Bones to simply scratch his head, "Zombies are allergic to footballs? Could have told me that, Sid." Not that he can sense either Gloria or myself. True, perhaps Gloria by herself, but not wrapped in my protection as she currently is. But then (like I said) not sensing any of this, Bones is pretty much left to work with what he knows (or think he knows); and so, concludes rather erroneously, "So, touching the football is going to cause the zombies to turn during the game." This is incorrect, of course. It was Gloria that did the turning. But then, even I had to make one final test just to be sure.

Anyway, after processing the information for a bit, Bones suddenly announces, "We have a new strategy."

"Oh, yeah? What's that?" S-Kelly asks rather nonchalantly.

"Don't let the ball touch the zombies." (Like, duh!) And more importantly (like double, duh), "Don't tell anyone about this," because if you have a secret weakness, it's usually best to keep such weakness a secret, I mean, that's why it's usually a 'secret weakness' in the first place.

“I don’t think we have to worry about that. We don’t have a ball anymore. Didn’t you see him? Mog took off running,” S-Kelly advises.

To which Bones merely shakes his head and clarifies (as he perhaps dies a little more inside), “During the game,” my son, “during the game. Don’t let the zombies touch the ball during the game.”

###

I couldn’t really tell you why I selected Mog out of the crowd, why I elected to un-zombify him over anyone else. Perhaps it’s because I secretly like him (unlikely) or respect him (eh, maybe) or more likely because I have a hunch (yes, that’s probably it) that he’s needed, like (I’m beginning to realize) all the major players are needed (Elves, Wizards, etc.) to work in concert to effect a universal alteration (to this dilemma of mine). Or in other words, that we’re all in this together. Meh. But then, that’s just a hunch.

Much like the hunch that I had that there was no need to hurry and follow Mog, because a wrong turn here, a false start there, and amid changing his mind, changing his direction, and backtracking on himself (to throw off any zombies that might be following him, I suppose), he soon found his way to my quarters.

“Espresso, Master Mog,” a Kibber greets him in style.

“Yes, Mog is in a hurry,” the ex-zombie born again Orc says as he gulps down the glass of vile brew in a single swallow, waits for it (the potion to take effect), and is more than a little disappointed when he realizes that it’s little more than coffee, which is going to have precious little effect on him (dead as he is). “I don’t have time for this,” he announces. But the truth of the matter is no one cares... or almost no one.

For her part, Abby glances at Mog briefly, fires off an obligatory spray of sparklers in my direction (not his, don’t ask me why), and probably would have said, “Don’t have time for what?”

But Strathmore is getting more than a little peeved at Abby’s carelessness. “Watch where you point that thing, Missy,” he instructs, as he shakes out the wayward sparkles from his hair.

To which Mata quips, “What are you complaining about? They,” the sparkles, “match your eyes.”

And I do believe Jack was going to say something witty, if he could think of something witty to say, but Mog doesn't have time for this (any of this), a fact I (and most certainly he) believe that he has already stated most clearly. “I was a zombie.” Yada-Yada. Mog was a zombie love child, etc., etc., and would have been still if he hadn't been hit in the head by a football during practice one sunny day -- freak accident that. And to punctuate the story (and so as to prove the authenticity of same), he shows off the football he is currently holding in his hands.

“Can I see that?” Jack asks, which of course, Mog doesn't like the sound of. He's got the talisman, the ball of power, the proof against zombies. I mean, let's face it, being an Orc Shaman, even now, he's trying to figure out a way to attach the ball to the end of his staff... maybe if he had some leather cord?

Wait! But Oh! Now I see! That's what he was running around looking for when he first turned: his rod. I can appreciate that. Surprise. Surprise. For someone so stupid, he's awfully clever.

Anyhow, the answer to Jack's question regarding whether Mog would be so kind to hand him the ball is obviously a great big resounding, ‘No!’ So no need to ask it or wait for an answer, so Ned decides to ask a question of his own, “Isn't that the ball you guys were practicing with?”

“Duh? Yeah,” Strathmore replies in that condescending way that he (and all Elves) have, before adding in that completely insulting way that he (and all Elves) have, “Why does everyone think Ned is going to become a mighty spell slinger? Talk about a stupid question. ‘Is that a ball?’”

Joining the fun, Jack quips, “I don't know, let me see?” as he deftly takes the ball away from Mog (without asking, I might add).

And from there, we have a game a keep away, while the events (their interpretation of the events) are explained to Mog. A story we need not repeat here and now, because let's face it, if you can't remember it from when I told it to you only moments ago, a rehash of

the entire thing isn't going to help any. In fact, you'd probably just yawn, say, "Heard it," and then, drift off when I got to some interesting part, and you'd be all, "What's that?" and then, I'd have to repeat it again. So, I'm not doing it. I'm not going down that road.

Quickly, the story is retold. If you don't know it already, you can just pretend that you weren't paying attention -- again. And so if things... IF they get a little confusing later on, well, now you know why. And then, you can just come back here, reread the section and all will be clear. Or if you've already done that (highly unlikely if you ask me), then let's just cut to the chase. The kids version and my version of reality differ -- and the difference is most strikingly in their attribution as to what caused some of the zombies to de-zombify.

"The ball must have had some of Jack's sweat on it," Ned finally surmises most succinctly.

But Mog looks doubtful. No, sorry. I'm wrong. That's not a look of a doubt. That's the look of a full grown male Orc (warrior caste chieftain) eyeing up another man/warrior/equal before giving said man/warrior/equal a hug. Well, hug is not really the right word for it. Rub down? No. OK. Um, let me see. How to describe? Have you ever seen a bear scratching it's back on a tree. Well, that's sort of what Mog is doing to Jack, trying to leach out every last drop of sweat the man/warrior/(clearly not equal) has to give up. I mean, seriously, Mog would probably have used him for a towel (and wrung the poor guy out over his head). Heck, probably was thinking of it.

"Stop!" Jack insists. An insistence that would have somehow lacked a little force if he hadn't somehow managed to draw Strathmore's sword from its sheath (neat trick that, especially without Strathmore noticing) and wasn't currently pointing the business end at Mog's throat. "Stop!"

So, the orc does. He's no fool. OK. Fine, he is, but even fools tend to obey a craftier opponent.

Anyhow, not overly concerned with all this, "Give me my sword back," Strathmore insists (begs, pleads, whines), while both of his sisters sort of fail at holding back their giggles, which does nothing to appease

good old Strathy. “You don’t go taking another man’s sword. If you’re going to do this Holy Warrior thing...”

“What?” as in there is a more or less universal and collective “What?” that issues simultaneously from the lips of everyone in the room.

“Holy Water, Holy Sweat, Holy Warrior,” Strathmore continues as if that says it all (which oddly to me, it does).

“Jack?” Mata questions. “A Holy Warrior?”

“Whatever,” Strathmore shrugs (it is what it is) as he grabs his sword back, “If you’re going to play the gig, you’ll need a sword, sure, but not mine.”

“So, please give it back,” Mata teases.

“I have it back,” Strathmore sort of points out and/or pouts. It’s going to be a long time before he can live that down -- another man stealing his sword.

But none of that is central to, well, almost anything, so Ned jumps in with, “So, you believe me now, that Jack’s sweat will turn the zombies?”

“Or maybe it’s the water he blessed,” Abby points out. “I’m hoping, anyway. It would probably be a lot easier to spray water on the zombies than to sweat on them.”

“Could be a long day if you have to rub and hug every last one of them like Mog, here, just did,” Strathmore chides, as he secretly (or not so secretly as the case may be) hopes that will be exactly the case. I mean, it’s probably going to be a long time before he lets that sword thing go... and how did Jack grab it so quickly and without him noticing or stopping him?

Me, I think it was just beginners luck. You don’t really expect your friend to grab your sword. It’s just not done. So, Strathmore wasn’t expecting it, had his guard down, but not anymore. He’s waiting for it, in fact. So should Jack try to repeat the performance, I do believe he will sorely disappointed,

Anyhow, all that is neither here nor there. Well, OK. Technically, it’s here; but then, even more technically, it doesn’t matter.

So, yada-yada.

And meanwhile, Abby is only half paying attention to the world around her anyway as she sorts through the papers on my desk. Oh, and not the ‘my desk’ that Bones has co-opted, but another ‘my desk’ used for different purposes, more private purposes, purposes that one does not generally wish to be known.

“Aha! I found it!” Abby suddenly exclaims drawing attention to herself as random outbursts of this kind are want to do.

“What?” Ned asks (mainly because someone has to).

And truthfully, if I were in Abby’s position, I might have said something along the lines of ‘What we’ve been looking for?’ But Abby is a bit more forthcoming than that, “The project Sid has been working on. His diary or journal or whatever,” and as she says each of these options, she lets loose with a shiny sparkler or whistle zoom firecracker or something of the sort. I do believe she’d rather be casting some sort of disintegration / Sid Erasure beam, but we’ve been through this (and more than a few of those have nearly made their way through me). And what, with this, with that, the close quarters, the general sloppiness of her enchantments, and the fact that I’m a grudge holding being and more than a little fed up of her aiming her projectiles at me, the effects of her magicks have been getting progressively less dazzling by the moment. In fact, the last whiz bang bottle rocket firecracker is little more than a plume of putrid smoke.

“Cough. Cough. What are you doing?” Strathmore complains. “I can hardly breathe.”

“Mog like,” the big guy observes, but his is the minority opinion as almost (yes, almost) everyone else (so it is everyone else) agrees with Strathmore. Fact is, Gloria and I are the only others in the room besides Mog that aren’t coughing themselves hoarse at this point -- with tears welling up in their eyes. Tear gas has that effect, after all. General nausea, as well.

“I’m going to be sick,” Jack announces as he bolts out the door, followed by Mine’irva (never one for saying much, “Bye, Ned.”), Mata (“See you around”), Strathmore (“Adios”), and the rest, until only Abby and Ned (along with Gloria and I) remain.

Of course, Abby hasn't been right in the head for some time now, so she just lets loose with more of the noxious gas with no mind to the consequences.

"Are you crazy? What are you doing?" Ned asks from behind an impromptu rag mask, which isn't very effective at shielding the smoke from eyes, face, or lungs. In fact, it's so not effective at filtering out the smoke that his next words are (and I quote, as I usually do), "Cough, Cough. Gasp. Cough. Gasp. I think I'm going to die."

"Hold your breath," Abby advises, because, you know, you already are dead, so no worries and quit your complaining, while she continues to sort papers. And then, having gathered together that which she feels is important, she sprays a final oily plume into the air as she explains, "This isn't just a journal. It's whatever Sid's been working on. See the sigils? That's Wally's mark. So, this is Sid's plan... or record, or spell, or enchantment, or whatever." And then announcing to me, the roof, the ceiling (the whatever), "So, I've got your whatever," whatever it might be. And then, adding to Ned, "We'll figure it out." Before she's talking to me again, "So if you ever want to see this again," whatever it might be (perhaps a copy of the tome you -- yourself -- are holding, my friend), "you'll hand over that Dragon." And then, I do believe she would have torched the sucker right there (manuscript, building, entire graveyard), but you know how it is with Apprentices, sometimes their spells don't work quite as expected, so rather than the glimmering flame she was intending (but hardly expecting, at this point), it's just more of that thick black oozing smoke.

And that's about all Ned can take as he stumbles for the door with Abby close on his heels, as she calls out one final warning, "The Dragon! Or it's toast!"

###

And then, she is gone.

And it's just Gloria and me.

Unleashed, just floating as she will, her pale skin offset by the black smoke, so ethereal, so pure, so innocent.

“So... What are you going to do to me?” she finally asks.

“Invite you to have a seat. A cup of espresso for our guest!” is all one need call out and a Kibber appears (complete with gas mask securely fastened; and, no, I don’t have the slightest idea where they got them) holding a silver tea service all decked out with lemon peels, sugar cubes, and tiny little cups of espresso, should one desire.

Of course, Gloria doesn’t understand, which is, of course, why she needs me around. Not that I understand, but after dropping a cube of sugar into her cup, laying a slice of lemon peel on a saucer and handing the lot to her... or not, “OK. Maybe I’ll just set it down over here.”

“What are you going to do to me?”

“I going to,” I say as I tower over her, getting those nerves of hers a shaking, before I back down, “I’m going to invite you to have a cup of espresso, hurry, it’s getting cold, while we look through some of these books and see if we can’t figure out the mechanics behind that zombie transducing ability of yours. Aren’t you interested in that? I’m interested in that? And then, after we figure that out, if all goes well, well, perhaps you would be interested to know about some of the other, um, dark secrets that I hold dear to my heart, um, my apprentice?”

“You’re going to make me be your apprentice?”

“No. Not make. Invite. I mean, stay or go. It’s your choice. But then, do you really have a choice? We both know you’re better off staying. And aren’t you interested? Or do you already know the why and wherefore of your dezombifying ability?”

“I don’t know.” And then, settling down, having a seat, actually taking a sip of the brew. “It’s bitter.”

“So many things are,” bittersweet, my dear. “Um, you might want to start with this book.”

And so she does.

And I must admit, as she reads, I enjoy just staring at her, simply enjoy her presence.

And as I do, I wonder if that’s how it usually goes. I mean, they say when the student is ready, the master will come. But perhaps it has more to do with the master finding one with whom he is willing to share his innermost (Dark?) secrets.

Perhaps.

#

Flip. Gloria turns a page.
I think I could grow used to that.
Sounds so much kinder and gentler than so many of the
alternatives.

Flip. Gloria turns a page.
And so, maybe, should you...

{{{Chapter End}}}