

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 33 ###
The Pre-Game Show ###**

I like the sound of my own voice -- especially when it echoes above a milling throng. "We're just about ready to start the big game. And the Zombies have taken the field." Actually, they cover the field with nary an inch to spare, but that's another matter. The important point is, they're on the field and ready to go.

But where is the opposition?

And seriously, what is the opposition even calling itself?

The Corpses?

The Dead Player's Society?

I mean, sure they're the home team and everyone in these parts knows who they are, but that doesn't excuse them from having a name.

“The Heroes,” Wally suggests as he walks in and takes a seat. Or maybe it’s more like a statement of fact -- that which is and has already been decided. It can be hard to tell with Wally sometimes.

“Oh, when did they decide that?”

“Sometime after the game... or maybe during, you know, on account of that’s what you”, being me, the announcer (it’s my crypt, so my rules, and I’ll announce the game if I want to), “called them during the game.”

So, see what I mean about understanding Wally? What’s that supposed to mean, anyway?

But then, I think we all knows what it means.

But then again, we don’t, because I for one don’t want to play That Game. And besides (or much more importantly), I’ve been hankering for, well, a little something. I mean, coffee is fine (actually don’t like the stuff), wine is OK (but just), and Drip is doable (still got the last little bit of that to last me through the halfway mark of the game, so personally, I’m expecting zombies to carry the field until then). But, come on, by Dark Lord standards even Drip is a bit tame -- one puny centuries old soul, shriveled and worn out, split amongst an entire graveyard. It’s a bit thin.

And then, here comes Mister Know It All, who can’t seem to get a spell straight to save his life (or everlasting soul), so why not take a bit of his -- not all, mind you, but just for the duration... just for the duration.

And then there is the thought: I do owe him (or rather, he does owe me) since I let him (or he just put me, I can’t really remember if I gave him explicit permission or not at this point to) include me in his enchantment (a ways back when this all began -- or nearly so), but either way (and even if he didn’t, so no worries if you don’t remember that little detail or even if I’m making it up right now), it’s clear that he (Wally) has it coming, that he (Wally) knows it to be true, and that he (Wally) walked right into willingly without blinking an eye, so if that isn’t explicit consent, I don’t know what is.

And it’s not like I need his permission.

So, after all that (having made the decision), it’s just a short:

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

Not even a full:

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

A flick of the wrist (don't ask me why it's a flick of the wrist), and Wally, well, Wally isn't exactly Wally anymore. And instead, he's rubbing his eyes as if coming out of a dream.

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“Nice set up you've got here, Sid.”

“Yes it is.” Port holes, defensive bars, it was intended to be the Command Center for the Dwarves -- something they built into the bleachers structure. Of course, that probably doesn't give you a feel, so think medieval castle defense, all arrow slits, and rock walls. Of course, the Dwarves probably intended to put a ballista (one of those giant crossbow thingies) up here, so maybe it was intended to be more like a battle station, but add a few crystal balls, pools of looking (powered by blood, oil, or simply water), and more than one or two animated portraits on the wall of key players (with relevant statistics listed below in chalk) and you've got a passable Command Center and/or Control Tower.

“Got something brewing, Sid?” Ah, yes. Wally's mind is mush. It's weird, I didn't really feel any guilt about wasting What's His Name. (And what was his name? You know, the fallen hero, the source of the Drip?) Whoever (exactly) he was, I feel no guilt at all. Sort of forgot about it, in fact. Like the poor guy (and really, how else can you think about someone who's been in chains for centuries -- OK millenium -- but as a poor guy); anyway, the poor guy knew it was coming, I knew it was coming, everyone knew it was coming, just not when, where, or how -- you know, the specifics.

But as to the why, everyone knows that: escape, of course -- a second chance (or maybe just a little fun)

Only we never did reach escape velocity; but we have had a bit of fun, haven't we?

And now we're just in freefall (anyway you look at it).

Of course, that's probably not overly clear. But then, this was never intended to be a primer on the dark arts. Suffice to say, win or lose (and I'm guessing it will be a loss, actually, I'm hoping it will be a loss for the Zombies), the party is over. And things are going to go back (more or less) to the way things were. But then, more always means less for someone (and vice a versa), so one could say everything (or nothing) hangs in the balance of the game: Winner Take All.

"Mu-ha-ha-ha."

###

But then, Wally isn't totally out of it, just mostly (perhaps that ties into the more or less, but perhaps not as much-so as the rest), as I'm just 'feeding' off him, not consuming. And I suppose it probably looks like I'm 'feeding' off Gloria, as well. But she's just sleeping in the corner like a baby... or is it the slumber of the damned -- only time will tell.

Anyhow, hereabouts, Wally makes some chirpy comment, but I don't feel like relating it. Fact is, the man (Wizard, whatever) let me down (big time). I gave him the reins, let him weave his spell (about me, around me), and with that power, he was suppose to work the magic that got us going to escape velocity...

"Oh, we will," just not now, not yet. And with an (inline) comment like that, it should be obvious that Wally isn't totally out of it. Still present enough to talk, to work a little magic, but that forward thinking backwards living thing -- for the next few hours, it'll be like it never happened, so ort of like amnesia, only before the fact.

"Actually, it's sort of like having your brain wiped," Wally corrects.

"So," anyhow, in light of that, "want to make a bet?"

"Yeah, but I still know you lose."

Yes, it is surprising how everyone thinks that I sided with the zombies, wanted the zombies to play a role, and even now root for them. Like it's my fault no one could do anything about them? I mean, what if things had worked (like really worked), what then? Well, there would

be zombies then (for ever and anon -- if that's the way you say forever and always in your neck of the woods). But I digress, for there is a question on the table. Something about a bet and one side believing they know the outcome in advance.

But, "That doesn't matter. I asked you if you wanted to make a bet."

"Even I," Wally says, "even in this state, know it's a bad idea to bet against the Keeper of the Keys."

"Yes, and everyone knows Wizards cheat," a comment to which Wally doesn't have a lot to say or add -- a truth being a truth. "So, what about that bet?"

"But I know you lose."

"So why are you so reluctant?" But then, he already knows that I know why. Without his full sight -- stuck in the present as I feed off a future that for him will never be -- well, it's perhaps not the sort of situation one walks into willingly (only he did). And either way, one thing's for sure, it means there is quite a bit ambiguity lying on the table. No, that's not the word I'm looking for: unknown, unknowable. That's it. There are quite a few things floating about that are unknowable -- even for Wally. I mean, he knew, he could see it (freedom, the other side, or so he said), but could he get us there? No. So, clearly even he is not infallible, and some of his information is wrong, and might this in itself might go a long way towards explaining Abby's current lack of faith in her Wizard.

But no matter, I believe we were about to make a bet.

So, "If I win this game, I get to strip you forever and feed off a future that never was from now until the end of time."

"So, you're offering me immortality."

"Didn't do the Gra'gl Slayer a lot of good," I note (the aforementioned Fallen Hero).

"Well, that would be all fine and dandy if you were going to win, but you're not going to. Even you know that. I can see it in your eyes."

"Deception is my strong suit."

"But I can see past the next few hours."

“But it’s fuzzy inbetween, so perhaps I use that time to plant false memories and rearrange things.”

“That’s awfully hard to do, even for you.”

“Hard to do right, you mean. Mucking with a person’s brain,” and/or memories if you want to get all technical on me, “is incredibly easy to do wrong. I could just let you dream walk through it all,” once again, not a hyper-exact description, but Wally’s a smart guy, knows the score, and can tease apart what I’m saying: real memories are hard to reformat (one has to change the underlying reality, as well), fake ones that don’t matter (or aren’t accurate) are relatively easy to come by.

But it would appear Wally has faith in his memories (and believe it or not, I do too, as there is always a next time), so it should come as no surprise when Wally agrees, “Fine, if you win, you can do as you say. But you’re not going to win,” which doesn’t seem like a real bet, to me. I mean, can you see the magical lines of flux bend at that one? ‘Heads if it’s Heads, but it’s going to be Tails,’ just sort of reduces to Tails.

“So, maybe that’s the wrong bet to make,” I note and Wally just waits expectantly.

What’s a Dark Lord to wager? Hmm? Maybe, I should...

“The Dragon,” he says, patting the pocket of his robe. (So he hasn’t forgotten.) “Ours, forever and always, in all ways. Or rather, Abby’s forever and always, in all ways, win or lose. You and I, either and both, just guardians, should it ever fall our way,” which perchance it already has.

So seriously, not much of a bet.

“You suck at bets, Wizard.”

“You suck at enchantments, Zombie Ringleader.”

“Fine, next time. You’re on your own.”

“Next time?” the Wiz asks.

“We had a deal.”

The Wiz simply shrugs. “Look where that got you.”

And the man has a point.

Never trust a Dark Lord.

Never trust a Wizard.

Unless, of course, you have to... or have no other choice.

###

And that's probably not clear (one often doesn't make a lot of sense when they're angry). And to be truthful about it, I don't know if I care if it's all completely understandable or not. But the pertinent fact is, we're going to try again. (We all know that we're going to. And by Wally's account -- if you can trust a Wiz -- someday we succeed.) But when we do, by all accounts and appearances, everyone and everything is likely to be a tad bit more confrontational than it is now... or then again, maybe not.

No. It has to be confrontational.

I mean, who doesn't want a graveyard to be swarming with zombies?

"I don't," Wally offers.

Of course, he doesn't. But then, he doesn't like Smoking Nightmare either. And it's not like he's the one who's been deriving any benefit from either.

And really, with that said and done, what else is there to say or do, but to listen to the deafening (or not so deafening) "Murmur!" that rises from the field as the Zombies make the first score... and the second... and the third... and the fourth... as the game starts without the opposition and as such, the Zombies take an early lead.

"You're cheating."

"I'm a Dark Lord."

"How can you score if there isn't even a ball on the field?" Wally asks (as Mog has the only football I know of, and as previously stated none of the -- so called -- Heroes are in attendance yet).

But to answer that question, perhaps it is time to drop to the field and watch the action -- as it were -- up close and personal.

Pop! A zombie takes off it's head.

Punt! The 'ball' is kicked through the air.

And Score! It lands in the end zone.

Rinse. Lather. Repeat.

“And thirty seconds into the Big Game, the Zombies are ahead 28 to nothing... 35... 42. It’s going to be a rout.”

“You’re cheating.”

“I believe we established that cheating was allowed when we agreed on the rules,” all those many long months ago.

Pop! A zombie takes off it’s head.

Punt! The ‘ball’ is kicked through the air.

And Score! It lands in the end zone.

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

I wonder what will happen if the Zombies actually win. Well, among other things, I guess we’ll be needing a new Wizard -- maybe we’ll get one this time, who good to his word.

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

{{{Chapter End}}}