

**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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[www.paufler.net](http://www.paufler.net)  
[Brett@Paufler.net](mailto:Brett@Paufler.net)

**### Chapter 34 ###  
### The Big Game ###**

Pop! A zombie takes off it's head.

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

And Score! It lands in the end zone.

“So, what does that make it? 478? 479?” I’ll admit, I’ve lost track. And although I like to think I ask this question rather good-naturedly, Wally just waves off the question (and/or me?) like I’m some kind of fly.

“It doesn’t matter. All those zombie heads in the endzone aren’t going to count for anything.”

“How do you know?” I ask sort of worriedly. And you would be worried, too, if you’d just cast a temporal stasis spell and your intended receipt was still exhibiting symptoms of precognition.

But not to worry (after all), as Wally explains pretty simply (and in keeping with one who has been locked into a sort of forward centered awareness for the duration -- and much to my relief, I might add), "Trent is throwing penalty flags all over the place."

And I must admit, I had not been paying Trent much mind. But even if I had, I would have just thought the stress and rigors of being the referee had finally gotten to him and he was simply shedding his leaves (much like one might lose their hair). Though don't ask me what's so hard about saying, 'Score! Another goal for the Zombies.' Unless, of course, much like me, he had lost track... or didn't have the slightest idea how to score a head landing in the end zone in the first place.

But that's probably not it. As down on the field, Trent is busy calling all the penalties he can think of. "Off sides. Man, er, Zombie in motion. Zombie out of bounds. Too many Zombies on the field." And so on and so forth.

And things would be looking pretty bad for the Zombies. (What are we up to? A thousand yards in penalties? Play cancelled? First down? Heroes on the twenty yard line?) But then, this is when the Heroes do indeed decide to show up and Strathmore (in particular) decides to come out swinging, laying his sword into every last Zombie he can get his hands on. Thankfully, this course of action leads to a new round of penalty flags from Trent vis a vie (vie a vis, or vida la verche, whichever may apply in this situation), "Unnecessary roughness. Face masking," which I believe is the appropriate penalty for grabbing hold of a zombie's face before beheading them, and so on and so forth.

Not that any of that bothers Strathmore. I think we all know enough about him at this point to realize he has scant regard for rules or authority.

But Abby (being an Apprentice and all) has like this psychic link thing going with Wally (her Wizard), so she knows something is up with me (in addition to all the zombies on the field and 'haps' in the graveyard as of late), so she (immediately) jumps to (a possibly erroneous) conclusion just like she always does... and then, she immediately jumps on Strathmore's back as she tries to slow his assault

as she explains, “You’re just going to make Sid stronger. Can’t you see he’s in feeding mode?”

Which he can’t, of course. I doubt anyone else can. But then (again) when you stop and think about it (or I stop to think about it), you (or I) will immediately realize that her real fear is that I won’t stop at Wally and will continue my feeding frenzy off of all of the fallen on the field. I mean, isn’t that exactly what us Dark Necromancers are supposed to do? And, you know, like exactly why we’re so fond of war and mortal combat in the first place?

Well, yes! And, yes!

And, yes! And, yes! And, yes!

I do love a good feeding (smorgasbord, gluttony fest, whatever).

And I do so hate to disappoint. (After all, she’s been reading my notes, so she should know my motivations if any one does -- not I, that’s for certain. No, never, not I.) And as they say, no one stops at just one (seriously, ask any Dark Necromancer). So, why not? I mean, good idea, little girl. And in a flash, I am sucking up souls as fast as Strathmore can lay them to rest.

Or course, it’s just temporary -- for the duration of the game (or so is my intent). But then, no one has had the guts to make a bet with me (except for Wally, but that was a pitiful excuse for a wager the two of us made). And, as they say, winners make their own luck.

Which probably isn’t very clear. (Is it ever? Don’t answer that.) Rather, let me make it clear -- crystal clear. As Strathmore’s sword goes slicing through (yet another) zombie’s neck, I am right there to soak up the power.

Still not getting the understanding that you would like? Well, then, let me be more explicit.

Slice, goes Strathmore’s sword.

Swoop, goes the Dark Necromancer.

And there I stand, the zombie’s forlorn (if a zombie can be forlorn) head in one hand, and the sharp edge of Strathmore’s sword in the other. (He was getting ready to take a swipe at me next. You saw that, right?) But the important point is that life tastes good (or death as the case may

be, but it's really only a proxy death here -- a death of death, and how much power is in that? Still, it is what we have.)

So, savor the flavor (reminds me of cinnamon and nutmeg with a hint of all spice).

Savor the power (gives me goose bumps).

And just like Wally, for the duration I will be feeding on you, poor chap, another fallen hero (unless I change my mind and get a hankering for the taste and want to extend the enchantment).

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

I mean, those that fall by the side have already proven themselves to be lacking, so perhaps this is the best use for them -- no more talented than a Wizard whose spells go awry... or is stupid enough to walk into a deathtrap.

And speaking of Wally, might as well throw him up on the goal posts like some sort of Pagan Offering, arms outstretched, bound in place with lightning striking down from the boiling sky above, and the Wiz himself screaming for all he's worth. (Eh, perhaps, I'm taking more than he bargained for. But not more than I did. I have him for the duration, you know. That was the deal.) And with all of that, the world has taken on a darker aspect, like how a graveyard might look, ought to look, and those zombies who were loyal enough to behead themselves for my greater glory and the needs of 'The Grand Game', now feed me, as well. I can feel my power grow (and who wouldn't be able to -- that's 486, 487, faithful servants -- I forget the exact number; and then, the double-dozen Strathmore knocked down), and that life force (all that is left here in the thereafter -- that final spark, but it is enough) is surging through me; and this is nothing like a real battle (or sacrifice or ritual beheading or the delight that comes from a genocidal mass murder butchering or even the taste of a newcomer as they pay their tithe for the privilege of entering my oasis of calm and sympathy amidst the chaos that is death -- for they all do walk through the gates and sign the papers willingly... but the current experience is nothing like that initial sacrifice that addition to my being). But then, it is enough -- a tasty and

delightful treat after all these many long centuries of abstinence (or near abstinence, I mean, I was dieting, at least, trying to cut back).

And it would be this (all of this) and not some tiny puny pipsqueak little girl hanging off his shoulders (nor some impotent would be referee throwing penalty flags) that finally brings the berserker elf (a.k.a. Strathmore) to his senses and halting his spree... just in time to listen to the (psuedo) bad guy's big pre-game big speech. (And yes, despite all this, I don't consider myself a bad guy. I mean, rather than once a millennium, I could do this sort of thing every moment of every day. And so, measured in relatives rather than absolutes, I'm really not that bad of a guy -- so really, I more of a 'bad' bad guy if you will. Not that I'm any better at being good. But I digress.)

So, let's cut to the chase. And that means it's time for me to pull the dragon egg out of my robes. And seriously, must I explain this? Wally's robes or mine, if it resides in the graveyard, it is ultimately mine and at my beck and call. In most places freewill is an illusion -- and here in the graveyard, more than most. I mean, that in itself should be motivation enough for everyone else to want out of here. And as for me, I simply want more -- power, notoriety, and attention, but mostly power, that taste of blood -- certainly more than the measly trickle of newcomers and the tithe they pay provides. And since I already control all that lies within, if I wish to expand my reach. And that -- obviously - - means I must go beyond and without. But as of yet, there have been certain -- um, how shall we say, difficulties -- to which I shall simply refer you to the preceding sections of this tome for a clearer description thereof.

Anyhow (all of that aside), the egg is out and it's time for my big speech, only having not really expected this moment, I have nothing planned, and so merely croak out (a rather lame, if I do say so myself), "Let's play ball."

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And there it is (without further preamble): Game On!

I will not recount how many penalties I received in the first few moments of the game: Off Sides, Zombie in Motion, Too Many Zombies on the Field, and so on.

But I run a tight ship. And being in feeding mode as Abby has so thoughtfully observed, it is a small matter to simply suck the life force (a.k.a. energy, force, soul, and so on) from the offending party to get them off the field, keep the rest in line, and get the energy to teleport the remaining mass of zombies into the stands where I am sure the difference between them and the typical high school student (teacher, parent, and/or random bystander) is one of semantics rather than substance -- brain dead, the lot of them (and typically feeding their own demons, as well, so there you go).

Meanwhile, down on the field and down to the fifteen required backup players (who are under my direct control for I am the quarterback -- probably should have enlisted S-Kelly's services, but that is in retrospect, and in the moment) one might be surprised how smooth, agile, and gracefully a zombie can be... and/or their death-like resolve, imperviousness to pain, supernatural endurance, and so on and so forth.

Or in other words, Sid throws a long spiral deep into heart of enemy territory and "Score!"

Zombies take the lead. While for his part, Wally screams from the goalpost. (A pain which he shall not remember, so I put it to you, the philosophical question of old, does a pain unremembered remain a meaningful experience after it is forgotten. For extra credit, you may wish to consider whether the same is true of pleasure). Of course, unconcerned about such things, the fallen (those who feed my wrath and power my will) groan in a pain and anguish of their own -- the loss of one's personal will being the final insult to injury and basis for all 'Purgatories' of which I know of.

But I digress.

And meanwhile, the Heroes have the ball... er, the Dragon Egg, that is. But they make no progress for Abby refuses to let go of the egg and she is a crappy player; for in truth, her magic is no match for mine. (I own you little girl, for all that resides herein is mine.) And four short plays (all runs, all at a loss, all with Abby carrying the egg-ball) and

after much discussion, argument, and a Delay of Game penalty, Trent finally manages to relieve her of the egg and give me the ball... and into the end zone it goes for a quick score.

And with an early lead (2 to 1, I believe, however it's scored), it's time for me to up the ante. "If I win, I will consume all of you down to the core."

"You wouldn't dare."

"Wouldn't I? Newcomers never need know," my real concern if I have one. Besides, "It's not like any of you have once thought twice," personally, I like that turn of phrase, "as to the why's and wherefores of those who have come before and where they might have gone," willingly or unwillingly.

And since that might be a bit unclear, on the next play, I let the graveyard (itself) speak for me, as the hands of the dead reach up from below the ground, from out of the turf and the crypt below to express their grief and displeasure at how they have been mistreated... forgotten... and simply cast aside by these upstart newcomers of the last millennium.

Yes, any further newcomers never need know about the horrors of the past.

And with the aid of crypt-walkers reaching up and through the turf, immobilizing the Heroes, once again it is a quick turnover. And once again it is a quick score. A zombie goes long. Sid fires the egg like a fireball rocket right into the sweet spot. (Yes, this I can do this with ease. Years of practice should there ever be another war, don't you know.) And it is another score for the Zombie Horde.

And another.

And another.

And another.

It's almost as if there is no competition... no other players on the field... and if that is the case, assimilation (to make room for the next) is the proper course of action, don't you think?

Yes, I do. And I also think it's time to 'eat' yet another dozen or so zombie spectators and add their (almost insignificant) power (in comparison) to my own.

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

# # #

“We need a new strategy,” Ned points out. “Abby, give Jack the egg. Strathmore, go long.”

And Jack throws the ball.

But of course, it doesn't work, is intercepted, and run back for another Zombie score.

I mean, how could it work?

The Heroes are clearly outmatched. I control the field. I control the players... and the extras. In truth, I control it all -- home field advantage and all that.

So, before you know it, it is halftime.

And in the dugout (the depths of the bleachers), Ned instructs more than asks (for now is the time of action), “Give me your uniform Jack.” And just by-the-by, I should maybe point out that Jack is the only one in uniform -- that has a uniform. As Ned explains, “Maybe Sid will think I'm you,” fat chance that, “and you can turn a few zombies on the sidelines. That has to be our plan -- to reduce his power.”

But as a plan, the idea more or less sucks, because after half time is over and the Heroes return to the field, the beat down continues.

Of course, on the sideline (with Gloria's help, I might add), Jack does indeed turn a few zombies back into their native form. But it is only a few here and there, haphazard and unpredictable, at Gloria's will and discretion, not his, for I have explained my plan for the new order to her (and her place therein at my side), and I like to think that she is more than a little conflicted as to whether she should help Jack who has never even noticed or seen her and who thinks the turning has something to do with his ability or power? Or to aid He who knows and understands and who has given greater clarity into her own power than anyone else in centuries?

Yes. She is conflicted.



Besides the action on the field is more interesting than anything Jack is up to and she often stops what she is doing to watch the game, causing Jack no end of frustration as that which worked to turn a zombie only moments before now has no effect.

On field, it turns out that Ned (taking Jack's place) cannot throw worth a darn or a damn or a ding-dong blast dag-nabbit. But then, I'm using spells to direct the ball (and that's pretty obvious what with the sparks and whizzers in attendance), so after a bit, Ned figures he should try the same. Only his magic? Well, don't make me laugh. Ned has no magical abilities to speak of -- the n00b, the rube, not even worthy of being called a student of the art... and this despite his -- one or two -- classes. Seriously, the boy needs to crack down and study.

But he hasn't.

So, it's Score! Score! Score! All for the Zombies as the Heroes get slaughtered, and the pile of 'groaners' (and fallen) feeding my wrath grows ever higher. And here, perhaps, is where Ned gets The Idea -- the grand idea. I mean, this is a graveyard, right? And the only free energy (if any of it is free, but certainly the only real source of power) here is necromantic in nature.

"Going to have to fight fire with fire," he snarls under his breath (though snarl might be a bit much, even cold determination might be an overstatement, perhaps more of a shrug, and it can't hurt to try). And on a hunch (or whatever), Ned tries his hand at sucking the life (or death or whatever you wish to call it) out of a zombie that is about to tackle him (or clobber him, I think clobber him, might be a better descriptor, so his self-preservation instincts might have just kicked in). And before you know it (or at least, before I know it), the zombie is on the ground (turned into a groaner, which from the zombie's perspective is not much different -- certainly no better), but the important point is that it's power is now feeding Ned, who uses the this self-same power thus gained to launch the egg at Strathmore... in the end zone... for the Heroes first score.

Strathmore, of course, spikes the ball. Finally, he can do his touchdown dance (for which he has practiced so hard), while the cheerleaders go crazy (these being down to Mine'irva, Nicki, and

Gwyneth): “Go Strathmore!” And Abby just sort of gives out a shriek, “The Egg! Be careful!”

And then, the Zombies do not score on their next drive, for some inexplicable reason. (Ned turning them in groaners, I believe, is the reason, so maybe inexplicable isn't the right word), but whatever the word or explanation you choose to believe (though believing it was Ned's doing would be the most accurate choice), which is sort of vexing in and of itself as my passes are spot on (like right there), but rather than catching the ball, my Zombies (my poor-poor miserable zombies) are turned into groaners (under Ned's power and direction, making the loss all the more painful). And so, rather than catching the ball, the egg merely bounces out of their hands as they both (egg and all) go falling to the ground.

So, um, in light (or dark?) of all this, maybe Ned should be my apprentice?

Or maybe I should have two apprent'i?

Or maybe I should squash the insolent upstart like a bug?

Yes, maybe. Just maybe.

Lightning flies (from my fingers and the sky in case that was unclear, so just, lots of lightning for ambience, because I like lightning, think it adds to the moment, and hurts like the Dickens, Shakespeare, and/or Chaucer-Hemingway-Austin when a person -- or small lad -- is struck thereby).

And when Ned targets his next zombie victim (to garner yet more power, the greedy little bugger), I don't let him, stop the flow, cross the paths, and so on and so forth as the sparks fly.

Now, they (whoever they might be) often like to say that words cannot describe (this or that, but mostly this); but in truth, this is never the case. Words always describe. The real problem lies in using words to describe something new and different, something beyond the experience of the reader, that is different from what they already know and comprehend.

Magic?

Does it have meaning (to you)?

A fight of will with psychic lines of force?

Does it have meaning? Have you ever experienced that?

Or how about a cat playing with a mouse?

How about that? Do you understand that?

Ned is but a bug, an ant, an insignificant speck. He is of the graveyard, of me, under my control; but then, that is no fun and not entirely accurate.

I control my body, my arms, my legs, as I imagine, so do you. But do you not get an unwilling (and perhaps unwanted) twitch or a spasm on occasion? Do your limbs not move reflectively and of their own accord every once in a while? And if you are wise or powerful (as an octopus-like sea monster, terror from the deep, might -- yes, just might), does it not make sense to give your appendages a bit of freewill. Or then, in my case (and in the specific case history at hand), to let the denizens of your domain retain whatever freewill they are able to maintain.

So in truth, a Battle of the Wills is a bit of an overstatement (an incredibly inaccurate exaggeration of Ned's power to be exact). But then, power is not always the allure. Yes, I knew he had potential. But without formal training, in the heat of the moment, to suddenly (without warning or prior indication) copy the effects of another -- this is a wonder, an item of interest, a bit of a gem, something to savor, deconstruct, and watch -- in real time, as the lines of force dance, lightning strikes (as if there was any contest as to the victor, which there is not); but the wonder is in the doing, like a little girl doing summersaults for the first time. "Hey, look at me." Or a boy showing his father a frog that he caught... or the birdhouse he made in shop class. "That's my boy!"

And before you know it (my attention elsewhere, my will distracted, I will not bore you with the play by play for it is the real action played off stage with Ned at the lead that captures my interest), Trent is letting the wind whistle through his leaves and he is calling the game.

Heroes: 92

Zombies: 84

And Strathmore does the extended version of his victory dance in the end zone...

While Mine'irva, Nicki, and Gwyneth cheer his praise (or singing, but it certainly sounds a lot more like cheering)...

While Jack has a good run turning a good double-dozen zombies back into their former selves (sadly the orcs stay orcs, but that is a transformation best left for another day) and all seems to be going fine with his newfound powers (and the presence of his Holy Ghost, as it were) until Gloria loses interest (actually comes to see if I'm doing OK, I like to believe)...

While Abby for her part (having forgotten about the egg -- or left it behind for the moment) frees Wally from his binds (he, himself, having been released from the enchantment, along with any and all of the Groaners that me and Ned -- Yes, dear sweet Ned -- have been feeding upon)...

And speaking of Ned. He takes this the opportunity to collapse in exhaustion as I release him from my grasp; but then, I do believe the fascination was mutual. The things he has seen. So perhaps 'release' is a misnomer of sorts (perhaps better phrased as closing the door)...

And all in all things are pretty much as they should be, except for the fact that the vast majority of the zombies are still zombies and at their plight they simply "Murmur," which all in all is much preferable to the alternative of "Groaning," or so I would have you believe.

###

And what does that leave?

What else is there to explain?

Everything?

Nothing?

Perhaps amongst the excitement the most interesting thing of note is Mine'irva's sudden awareness of Ned collapsed form on the ground, and her rushing over to his side.

"Are you alright!"

Yes, I would say that is fairly interesting. Not altogether unexpected. But interesting nonetheless.

I mean, it certainly would be obvious to any who cared to note that it was Ned who kept me engaged (sparked my interest, and/or channeled my attention and kept me occupied) through the later part of the game, whilst the rest of the team went about with the work of scoring a few goals and turning a few zombies?

But then, often, standing still, off to the side, trapped in a trance, it is easy to be overlooked and one's contribution minified, dismissed, and considered unimportant, which is why I like to go with lightning effects, sparklers, and whizzlers... and collapsing on the ground in a pile of exhaustion is often a good way to end the show, though personally, I prefer exiting in a puff a smoke, whisking Gloria away in the process if she is willing, (yes, turns out that she is), and maybe capping it all off with a bit of a laugh, a tag line on exit:

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

... until the next episode, my friends, for this is not the end, and we shall meet again.

###

“What the heck is he laughing about,” Strathmore muses (curses, wonders in dismay).

But have I, lost?

Or found a new ally... a worthy opponent... which often is one and the same.

I mean, now, how does that saying go. A lawyer can make a descent living, but it always takes two lawyers for either to get rich.

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

“Mu-ha-ha-ha.”

###

“Seriously, why is he laughing.”

Poor Strathmore, some folks just don't get it.

Battle lost, but the war is on.

Have I mentioned the benefits of war...

"Mu-ha-ha-ha."

"Mu-ha-ha-ha."

"Mu-ha-ha-ha."

# # #

"Shut up, already."

But it is Jack's, "Demon, be gone," that I will honor. After all, he is beginning to believe, so I shall believe, and together, perhaps (yes, just perhaps), we shall make something out of nothing... more than a shared belief.

And seriously, I would laugh again, but that might just ruin the effect... unless of course, you would care to cackle along at home... perhaps start a graveyard of your own...

{{{Chapter End}}}