

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 35 ###
Zombie Apocalypse ###**

Have you ever been in a battle of wills?

Have you ever lost a battle of wills?

Well, Ned has or believes that he has. But the truth is (and this is the truth), if I had been battling him (up against the wall and fighting for my very existence), not even a dusty residue would remain, he would be gone -- utterly and completely.

As it is, he is merely dazed and confused, lying on his back (the slacker), trying to regain his wits (I suppose one could argue it is taking so long on account of the quantity of wits involved), whilst visions of loveliness (sexiness, stark erotica, and/or peaceful tranquility and harmony) dance before his eyes like so many stars. This last, of course, would be the face of Mine'irva, which at this particular point would be

the face of her soul (if you will), the code behind her will (if you are bent on the digital analogies), and/or, most likely, the will behind the mask -- that which is truly her.

So, what does Mine'irva look like?

Like I could tell you?

But if I could, I would say:

Like concern.

And worry.

And love and compassion.

And presently, she is bending over and Ned is staring up into her eyes... like the eyes of an angel.

“So, is he dead?” Strathmore asks, breaking the silence, breaking the mood; and then, thinking better of it, “Or in stasis. I mean, he can't be dust,” because, like, he isn't dust and his body is whole. And on this note, so as if to prove this last comment true, Ned groans like a boy in pain, whose head hurts ever to terribly.

I'm thinking Mine'irva would have tried to nurse him further (not that she has really done anything as yet); but then, what is there to do? A question that Abby answers by insisting that everyone, “Give him air,” because I mean, isn't that what you do in situations like this. And taking this as her cue, Mine'irva fades into the background, while Abby takes over, and Ned pretty much continues to moan... until suddenly, he stops.

“We have to get him?”

“Who?”

“Sid. We have to take decisive action while we have him on the run.”

But I am not running and he is mistaken (about a whole heck of a lot at this point), but I think Abby sums up the main stumbling block in this equation when she simply asks, “What should we do?”

Yes, what should they do? Or more specifically, what should Ned do? From his perspective, I am on the run. (He is wrong.) And he has just been shown (yes shown) this vast new world of power and potential that is mediated by Will. (Let's hope Ned is smart enough to realize that he is no match for me.) ‘Not now,’ Ned thinks to himself; but the truth

is, he will never be as powerful as me (this being a near certainty -- a certain as anything is, or at least), not without assistance, not without a few thousand 'Groaners' (entombed spirits, batteries if you will) or some other source to feed upon. So, with the assistance of a graveyard full of zombies turned into groaning repositories of Will...

Yes, Ned, think on it. With a graveyard at your back (at your beck and call), what could you do? To me? For me? With me? Against me?

But the later is not really an option. This is my graveyard. And I make the rules. So in the end, the zombies (and any groaners) are ultimately mine..

"It all cycles through him," Ned concludes. Rightly, I might add, which is quite excellent, as it indicates he has the vision.

Yippie! Or is such a display of pleasure unbecoming for one such as I? No matter, no need to dwell upon that, for Ned is on a roll.

"If I go down his path, I'll just feed into him," which is true. But are you willing to cut your nose to spite your face, young man?

Which is (more or less) where Ned lets me down (or at least, reveals the current limit of his understanding) as he does not even see that last (perhaps most important part) of the equation: that within the graveyard, I am all, all is me, and in the end, whether things go right or left, up or down, it is more or less, all the same to me.

Capiche?

Understand?

In a closed system, it's a zero-sum game. I am the graveyard. I am the container. I am the closed system. And within that system, I could be all and everyone... but then, that's no fun as I would be forever alone (and perhaps more importantly be my own limiting factor, which is never a good idea).

Though at times like this, it's hard not to question the utility of freewill: when you lead someone to the light (or the darkness as the case may be) and they still don't see it (not all of it, not the important parts of it, and rather and instead, get it all wrong). "We've got Sid on the run, so let's finish the job and liberate the remaining zombies," and put Sid back in his place (no doubt being the unspoken desire and motivation).

But the zombies don't matter (not anymore).

And as such, Ned's focus (or obsession) on them seems like a misstep or fatal cognitive flaw (which it most certainly is). I mean, we could go so much further (have so much further to go), why turn it around, now?

But then, in the end, All Roads Lead to Rome, so what do I really care?

Baby steps, that's all I ask -- a little closer every day. I've got time. Someday he will come to understand completely. And when he does...

But not today, "Jack, you've got to turn the rest of the zombies," turn them back, dezombify them.

Only, of course, the question is, "How? Every time I think I'm going down the right track and doing that blessing thing correctly, whatever I'm doing fails and stops working."

The foregoing being a string of complaint which causes Ned remember and act as a focus as he looks back to a time when he gazed into my eyes and saw what I see, "Sid, didn't like it when you turned the zombies," a miss-appropriation (or interpretation) of my feelings if ever there was one, "and he focused on your intent... or was it mine? No, that's not it. That not it. On your will, that's the word he would have used. You just have to will..."

And here, Mog breaks in, seeing where the conversation is going and Ned's cognitive mistake (or at least, one of his cognitive mistakes, there have been so many -- two at least, enough for a failing grade (in the world of magic, at least) -- but we were talking about mistakes, and that must mean it is Mog's turn to speak). "Mog's Will is his own," to a point. "No one give Mog his Will," not even his creator? "And no one can take Mog's Will from him," in which zombie-boy is wrong. "That be why Mog break zombie enchantment on his own," ah, how quickly he forgets. "Mog's Will that strong," and I am this tall (and/or this many fingers old).

Really, the gist is that Mog says it is so; and so, it shall be; and anyone who disagrees with his analysis of the situation will maybe (most certainly) need some cognitive restructuring (learning, in fact) vis-a-vie a fist to the face, a boot to the head, and/or a multiple repeat of the

foregoing dependencies. Capiche? Or does Mog need to hammer the point home vis-a-vie a physical demonstration?

Of course, in truth (or in any of the other alternatives, whatever those might be, for that matter) no one really understands what Mog is getting at other than he's getting a little worked up, defiant, and agitated, and more than a little close to punctuating his remarks with a little physical graffiti, if you know what I mean.

Or if you don't know what I mean, which I shall blame on Mog at this point, perhaps you will understand Mog the second time around as he tries once more, "Listen, Jack, or Mog beat you good. Mog no like having to repeat himself. Mog have Will. Jack have Will. And Sid have Will. But Sid's will be closer to the Big Will. Jack defy that Will, he go down, he get crushed." And what Orcin speech of enlightenment would be complete without a little hand crushing and boot stomping for effect, so Mog gives Jack's foot a good stomp at this point so as to clarify the penalty for defeat.

"Ouch!"

And since that was pretty fun, Mog slaps Jack in the face.

"Stop it!"

Why? Or, better yet, why not? And having no answer for either (and at this point, apparently neither does Jack) Mog stomps on Jack's foot once again.

"Ouch! For the love of..."

"He's never going to get it," Strathmore observes, which one has to wonder (or at least, I for one wonder) whether Strathmore is drawn to this course action through indifference, stupidity, or simply because he understands Orcs so much that he understands that if he opens his mouth, he'll draw a little fire, and thereby relieve his friend of so much unwanted attention. Either way (and I'll lay odds without thinking it through or analyzing it in the least) Mog is more than happy to comply with this strategy and shoves the pesky Elf to the ground.

An action which causes Abby to yell, "What are you doing?"

An action which causes Mog to push her down, as well.

Being an action which causes Ned to yell, "Stop it!"

Which in turn causes him to take a punch to the stomach, bringing him to his knees, while both Mata and Strathmore draw their swords and slowly circle around Mog.

Which, of course, causes Mog to smile. “Good Elves. Dependable Elves. Elves always looking for the fight. But no never see the big picture. Not like Mog.”

“What? What are you talking about?” Mata hisses, while Strathmore sneers, “You started this. We’re going to finish it.”

To which what can Mog say or do, but shrug, turns his back on the Elves, and put his arm around Jack’s shoulder (all friendly like) as he walks Jack out of the circle, turns him around (facing the Elves), and explains, “Elves stupid. Elves dumb,” a pair of comments which in and of themselves don’t explain very much, but the fact that Mata and Strathmore now face each other, a dozen paces apart, swords drawn, in battle stance, perhaps says it all.

“Mog like the good fight. Elves feel free to start anytime they like.”

Which seems clear enough to me, but the blank look on Jack’s face indicates that he’s still pretty much (or altogether completely) still in the dark (and this when what he wants to be is in the light symbolically, literally, and metaphysically). So (being the helpful Orc that he is), Mog tries to explain it (things, this rather elusive idea) in such a way that even a Human can understand; which means, he starts by slapping Jack as hard as he can. And then, when that doesn’t seem to work (Jack being more startled than anything else, though don’t ask me why), Mog proceeds to stomp on his foot again, punctuating each blow with a pearl of wisdom. “Fight the Sid,” stomp. “Resist the Sid,” chomp. “And he crush the Jack like the bug,” chomp, stomp, whamm, pow. “But if Jack hit Mog,” pause. “It OK. Jack can hit Mog,” and to prove his point, Mog slaps his (plentifully) belly so Jack knows just where to land his blow, but Jack still does nothing. So, Mog slaps Jack one final time as he commands him to, “Hit Mog!” And Jack finally does. And Mog bursts into laughter. “That no hit.” So, Jack hits him again... and again... and again. And since that feels so good, he starts to use Mog like a punching bag: a fat, greasy, slippery, disgusting to touch punching

bag -- one with a stupid goofy smile on its face. "See, Mog no care. Mog no mind. But Jack get tired, wear himself out." And apparently, Mog get bored, as hereabouts he cuts loose and roundhouses Jack in the gut, bringing him to his knees; after which, Mog plunks down beside his friend(?), kneeling in the dirt, as well. "Jack see? Jack understand? Only Sid no follow you to the ground? He follow the will," wherever it goes, for he must eat, which (after putting a few words in his mouth) is pretty observant for an Orc.

One cannot turn the wind against itself. And I suppose I would have higher regard for Strathmore if he had said this rather than I merely wishing that he would.

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It's not a complete thought (a well reasoned doctrine). But it is a seed (a kernel). And down on their knees, Jack and Mog work it out (silently in their minds) until Jack is confident (if wrongly confident and/or overly excited) about exactly what he needs to do, which is: not so much dezombify the zombies as remove the barriers of will that bind them... a thing that he himself must not will (for fire does not fight fire, but only feed the flames). And it is a dizzying concept if ever there was one (in the end, no rock can hold back the stream), but for moments here and there (and with practice longer) a person can embrace the unknown and unknowable and become part of the flow -- taking a momentary descent into nothingness (if that explains it any better). And in this, Mog is correct. For although I could follow, I won't. Rather than ride the raft over the falls, I will jump off, and swim to the shore. (I am not ready for dust.)

But then, that is not the only problem at hand. Even if Jack's mind gets in the right state to bless the water (which so far he hasn't and at this point it makes little difference if he does, as it is Gloria rather than he who has worked the effect and transformed the zombies thus far, but all that aside, even if Jack blesses the water, makes it Holy -- whatever that means) there is still the problem of suitable delivery method (squirt

guns, water catapults, damp rat tails, nothing has proven very effective to date).

But, “Mog handle that.”

“How?” being the obvious question (raised by Strathmore).

“Rain,” Mog replies rather dryly. (Get it? Rain? Dry? Fine, whatever.)

Besides, more important than any dry bit of humor (if you’re going to let that fly, me calling that ‘humor’, I suppose) is once again the question of “How?” which is, once again, brought up by Strathmore. I guess he’s trying to make up for missing his chance when he didn’t say, ‘You can’t turn the wind against itself’ especially now that it looks like it’s going to rain. But then, let’s face it, ‘How?’ doesn’t add much and it is Mog who must carry the ball in the conversation at present (wait for it), which he does by saying, “Sid no play ball,” (there it is) as he raises his football staff high (the pun is hammered home), and a few of the zombies pause in mid-murmur to wish they could groan (but for the most, they just shuffle about as if there were no joke at all).

Anyway, the football, the ball, we had one but played the game with an egg, “Why?” Mog asks, sort of (or completely rhetorically), “Because (the) ball is Mog’s friend,” which might be debatable (in fact, is debatable as Mog has been rubbing that ball against his greasy body for some time now, which is certainly not what I want out of a friend), but the fact remains, “Mud is,” also, “Mog’s friend,” (and this is most certainly not open to debate). And so, when Mog says, “Mog can make it rain,” no one doubts him (he is a Shaman after all, and if he says Mud is his spirit animal -- or whatever -- and he can bring more into being by willing it to rain, who are you, or I, or Strathmore and/or even Abby to second guess him). And in fact, when he starts to chant and dance, everyone joins him -- everyone.

Ned and Abby are to the first to join him in the circle, dancing (or what passes for dancing in humans these days), while Mine’irva, Mata, and (yes, even) Strathmore soon join them (and show them what dancing is all about (Mine’irva can move and even Strathmore can cut a rug), while Nicki and Gwenyth clap their hands and sing and skip along as best they can, while Mog throws dirt in the air (not really anything

special for him, but it might just be key to his current endeavor), while saying a few words of power (which I shall not endeavor to repeat here), as he is soon joined by the rest (there being safety, strength, and a whole slew of other stuff in numbers). And at the center of all this, as it starts to sprinkle, Jack stands, arms raised, before falling to his knees, and tumbling down that rabbit hole, looking for that absence of will (which you really can't seek to find), a state which happens to be remarkably similar to that place from which Ned had so recently emerged (if you gather my meaning, but that, in truth is neither here nor there nor anywhere, so perhaps it is best to let the thought wash away), as all about the cemetery, the rain starts to pour -- first in a fine mist, then in sprinkles, and finally in a ravaging torrent of a downpour.

And though we could go down the list of the actions of all in the graveyard (their response and reaction, not to mention their change in state of being), the first and foremost, the one that really matters at the moment is Gloria -- alone in the meadow, down in the old parts, dancing (alone, sort of) with Lorien'thral as the pair mirror the movements of Mog, heeding his call, playing along, enjoying the moment (the rhythm of the chanting music), as butterflies, fingerlings, and pixies flutter about, forming a cyclone of movement around Gloria, encircling her, moving through her, and with her -- but also, accepting her, which for them means ignoring her, as if she wasn't even there.

Can you feel Gloria sigh -- always, it's almost as if she wasn't even there.

But then, she doesn't want to be there (not really) -- the spotlight is not her home, at the core, she is still shy and unsure. But she knows what is to come. It is her moment. For she has read my books, looked at my notes, seen the plans I have made (I have shown her all and unlike Ned, she was able to see... so much more). And now, it is for her to decide (to exercise her Will) and play her part, select her role, and decide on the course of action she will pursue.

Even I have do not know which course she shall pursue.

For she does not know which of course of action she shall pursue.

And as the great swirling mists turn to walls of water -- a torrential downpour -- and the thunder turns to lightning, still she does nothing --

only dancing, thinking, deciding -- until finally she does know what she Will do.

And then in a flash, as if seeing how fast she can do it, Gloria goes down the list, sweeping through the graveyard, dezombifying all that are there, starting with Ned's parents (good old Bob and Carol) turning them back into themselves, freeing their will as they look to the Heavens and give thanks (or perhaps simply enjoy the downpour, which to my mind is one and the same); and from Ned's parent she flashes to his friends, the ones who were there to play Kick the Can, but who have had so little a role in the events as of late (and become so utterly unimportant through the strands of time), dezombifying the one after the next, as they stop where they stand, their mindless stumbling through the dark forest coming to an end; and then she is on to the Orcs, the Goblins, and the Trolls, even the two or three Dwarves that were turned (and who will never live it down). And still, Gloria is not done, bringing new life to the trees (who had grown old and grayed and decrepit) who none (not even I) had attended (or had even thought they had turned -- perhaps not even themselves); and then, when all seem free (but not quite), she is zipping through the crypt (perhaps she goes to far) 'freeing' (if that is the word) those who have been trapped there (or have fallen victim to their own circular memories, as is far more likely, but believe what you will), until only two (or three) remain for her to 'bless' or whatever it is that she is doing.

And of those two, the first two would be S-Kelly and Frank (so it's three), smoking their last pipe of the Drip, under the bleachers, as the rain drips through, until a drop full of Gloria extinguishes the flame, all poetic like. And though they were never zombies, from the Drip, they are freed of its grip. And oddly enough, even at that distance, her brother does not notice her, does not see that it is Gloria that effects the change.

And then, there is only one left that requires her touch, that remains unturned, unchanged: the source of the Drip. He is an old, very-old soul, so very very-old, alone in his chambers, watching it all, through eyes that see all, but who is still so very-much alone. Even the Kibbers are gone. And he pages through a book that once held so much

meaning (perhaps it was Wuthering This or Wuthering That, but it matters not now); for now, it seems... empty and hollow. And he, too, has his pipe drawn to his lips, for I like a good smoke, and I like a good pipe. It is a small pipe that cups in his hand. It is silver and ornate and is fit for a king -- tribute from years long since past, a treasured item, buried with the lad (Ned, I believe his name was), who died in a car crash (no war, no epic battle, nothing to brag) just a late night joy ride, he wasn't even driving, no active role; and after a swerve and a miss, which caused the one he now calls his mother to go crashing over the side, and which caused the grief and the sorrow and eventually slow rotting suicide (death by the drink) of the man she left behind...

Or perhaps it's all lies? Does it matter? Would you like to trade your memories for another? This I can do. Perhaps I already have. Perhaps I flipped them with you -- for I have known so much sorrow.

Truth, so relative, curling with the smoke (where all is untrue, chaos unwinding) -- it's tendrils reaching out, fading to black and nothingness (potential unreal); and then, it's back to the pipe, inhaling, dreaming -- so real -- exhale, yearning for more.

And then, there is Gloria, with a kiss on her lips, a soft gentle puff of her breath and then there is no more -- no more Drip, the stash has run dry.

Though I am dry, I have no supply.

Like a kiss from an angel...

And suddenly the air is all clear: no smoke, no mist, no black shroud of death, and the rain has all stopped -- the trickle from leaves.

And there is a rainbow.

Let me stop for a moment, let me gather my will, and of Jack's and Ned's and Mog's and the rest (even the Dwarves and the Elves) and turn to the East and in morning sky -- like a breath of fresh air -- let their be a great rainbow to rival all wonders, one of those double and triple banded bows with the faces in the corners as the pillars rise. (Have you ever seen that? The three layered bow?) As the Heavens turn to gold (earning their name) and the world turns that shade of green that I love, oh, so. I mean, I simply adore it -- after a battle is over and the stench on field, where life is so wasted, but there too men rise up and are born,

created anew. But no, that is not the vision I wish to describe. It is one of wet flowers, golden dew, and a newborn day, glorious sunrise... with a bird chirping in the distance.

Life goes on... long after you think it is over -- long-long-long after you think it is over and do not care if it goes on.

And then you find your reason, your muse. And Gloria is standing before me -- a vision of loveliness, a ghostly apparition. And will she come or go, stay with me or...

She takes a seat.

Thankfully, she takes a seat...

Picks up a book...

Smiles.

"I think I've read this one," she says. "I think I've read all of these," she smiles. "You'll have to make a sequel," and that we will do.

And with any luck, we'll get it right -- escape from this desolate hole.

But I can't complain, an angel at my side (do not take my words too literally), who is busy whispering in my ear, telling me secrets, I already know, "Mog is more powerful than you ever imagined." And so, clearly, he needs a greater role, clearly, even greater. And "Wally has more compassion, than you ever did know. You will have to listen to him, next time." And as to Ned, "Did you ever think Ned would open his eyes to your path, wasn't he destined to walk with Abby?"

Maybe he still is.

Yes, maybe he still is.

###

And no need for a 'Mu-ha-ha.'

For I cry with joy... and have been for some time.

Who would not with the love of an guiding angel nearby...

{{{Chapter End}}}