



Azief woke up at approximately 6 in the morning. It was still dark out, though the pitch black of night had been lightened by a sun that was just below the horizon.

Why so early? He did only sleep for a few hours after all.

Perhaps it was a combination of his strained nerves and his old habits.

Drowsily getting up, he rubbed his eyes open.

He was half-convinced and half-wishing that everything he experienced just yesterday was some terrible nightmare.

Unfortunately for him, as he looked around, he quickly realized that it wasn't a dream. He wasn't in his room and, looking back, he also woke up to an unfamiliar ceiling.

Shit.

"Yesterday wasn't a dream..." He sighed. "The stiffs, the aliens, the monstrous beasts... It seems none of it was a figment of his imagination. How lamentable. The world really did end yesterday. On the bright side, a new world begins today, I guess."

All he wanted was to lay back down, but reality was harsh.

If he wanted to stay safe, he couldn't stay in one place for too long and he had already overstayed, what he felt was, his welcome.

Even if Tan wouldn't mind, would the zombies be as kind?

Though they lacked intelligence, who could say if some freak coincidence would lead them to discover him.

Furthermore, he was constantly learning new things about this new world. He didn't like that. He hated the feeling of ignorance.

Especially now that it could lead him straight to the jaws of death.

And though he didn't fear death, he much preferred to see death on his terms.

If he had his way, he would only die when he was old, decrepit, and living in a lake-side with his lover.

He wanted to die of old age not because of illnesses, gory accidents, or drugs.

Of course, now, he had to update his list of ways not to die to include getting eaten by some monsters.

Actually, now that he was thinking about it, he wanted to die doing something erotic. Maybe sex? He laughed at his unreasonable thoughts.

'Today will be... eventful. Hopefully, everything goes well...'

Thinking this, he got up and equipped his armor.

Clad in the mysterious clothing, he drew a striking resemblance to Altair from Assassin's Creed.

The only difference was that his outfit was black and enveloped him in a nearly imperceptible aura.

However small it may be, it was still there and added an air of mysteriousness to his being.

Looking outside the window, he saw a horrifying view.

The streets were filled with, not only, corpses, but reanimated ones as well. Luckily, the vast majority of them had already shambled away from the house.

His perception then enveloped everything in a radius of 100 meters, sensing nothing particularly dangerous.

“Good,” he said, satisfied with the passive skill he learned yesterday.

Now that he was ready, he began to organize his thoughts.

Goal? Food. Where? The mall.

Thankfully he got the storage ring which increased his carrying capacity.

Using that, he'd drain the mall of its resources.

Canned foods, first aid kits, and medicines. He'd take everything useful. But to do this efficiently, he'd need a helper. This is where Tan came in.

He opened the door and went down the stairs. Looking at the sofa in the living room, Tan was there, sleeping peacefully.

Azief approached the sofa and nudged him.

“Wha-” Tan blurted out groggily. The moment Tan recognized Azief he quickly regained his composure. “Azief. You scared me. I thought the zombies breached my defenses and got in somehow.”

“They didn't. I would've noticed and you would've died. Get up. We're moving.”

“Yes...” Tan said bitterly. Azief didn't give him one iota of respect.

Both of them cleaned their faces and got ready. Tan brought his backpack. It wasn't big and wouldn't hinder his running. It even has back support. Azief didn't bring much that wasn't already on his body as he already stored pretty much everything he wanted in his storage ring.

Just as they were about to leave, Azief decided to say something to Tan before they ventured outside.

Tan needed to understand what they would be doing outside. “Tan, do you know where we are going?”

Then Tan, who was behind Azief, stopped and said, “The mall, right?”

“Yes. Here’s what I want you to do. You will store food, drinks, and anything useful. Don’t pick up anything else. Pick up anything, and only anything, that you deem useful for our survival. That’s your job.”

Tan nodded.

“Now I want to know, what level are you at, what are your highest stats, and your World Orb items?” Azief interrogated.

Tan replied honestly, “I’m level 1, my highest stat is Spirit, and my weapon is a staff.”

“Did you bring the staff with you?” Azief asked incredulously, seeing nothing that resembled a staff on Tan’s person.

“No.”

“Where the fuck is it?”

“In the kitchen.”

“Go bring it then!”

Tan went into the kitchen and brought the staff. Arriving in front of him, Azief then quickly said, “I also want you to level up when we leave.”

Hearing this, Tan’s face paled. “But I’m afraid of the zombies…”

“Don’t worry, I’ll weaken them. You need to gain some type of power if you want to survive. Besides, if you become a dead weight I’ll leave you. It’s that simple.”

“You…you wouldn’t do that, would you?” Tan said, trembling. Could this young man have the heart to leave him to be eaten by the zombies?

The answer would be yes. Azief doesn’t know Tan. He doesn’t even owe him anything. If he became dead weight and hindered Azief’s survival, then he would leave him in a heartbeat. After all, if he couldn’t benefit from helping

Tan, what function would he serve? A mascot? Tan wasn't cute and he certainly wasn't beautiful. And even if he was, Azief hated mascots with the passion of a thousand burning suns.

He was helping Tan precisely because Tan could help him. Tan wanted his strength and Azief wanted a pack mule. He didn't ask much. And if Tan leveled up, it would benefit both of them.

"I would," Azief stated matter-of-factly.

Hearing this, Tan's face paled further, but then a face of determination appeared.

He understood the world today is different from the world yesterday.

Even back then, if you were useless, you'd be disposed of. After all, people were replaceable. And so he made a decision.

"What do I have to do?" Tan asked, determined to survive.

Azief was delighted when he saw the middle-aged man's will. If possible he didn't want to be needlessly cruel to people.

The world may have changed overnight, but he couldn't do the same.

There were still some traces of sanity in Azief's mind. This might change later but, for now, at least, he was still the same as yesterday.

He was a bit twisted, but he still had certain boundaries. No rape and don't touch children.

Those actions crossed his bottom line.

He hated forceful people and really fucking hated those sickos who could touch children.

Both people disgusted him and, no matter how the world changed, Azief would never break these two rules.

But apart from those two big NOs, there weren't many other restrictions. He didn't like to kill, but he would if push came to shove.

Oh, and he didn't like smokers.

Azief looked back at Tan and said, "Easy. Don't be a dead weight."

"But I'm afraid of the zombies and too weak. If I was just afraid, I could deal with it, but I'm also weak. Bravery isn't enough. I'm not as strong as you, if I'm bitten I'll die, y'know?"

Azief nodded in understanding.

He acknowledged that he was lucky.

If not, he, too, might be walking aimlessly and groaning in the street like the other zombies.

If not for his luck and gambling, he might be as unconfident as Tan. It was only because he had fought the zombies and won that made him this confident. Strength breeds confidence.

Of course, he understood the fear in Tan's heart. He also was fearful before. But it's not as if fear was a bad thing. If he wasn't afraid, he wouldn't have survived. Fear was good. Fear kept him alive.

"It's not like I won't help you. Here, take these," Azief said as he opened his palm with a flashing light. Following the flash, a robe, a knife, a boot, and a glove appear beside them. "Equip them all."

Tan took them all and examined them. They helped him to avoid infection from levels 10 to 15 as well as giving him some fairly mediocre stat bonuses.

Azief didn't have such equipment, but he knew that his Shadow Lord Set was capable of enduring infection. After all, when he examined his attire he realized that it had some special properties. Anything that wasn't level 5

higher than him couldn't infect him. 'One of the perks of a unique class.' he thought at the time.

After Tan was done equipping his items, Azief continued talking.

"I need you to understand something else. I am the main DPS and the vanguard. You are the support. So, when you level up, I want you to invest in spirit. When you reach level 10, quickly class up and choose a healer profession. If you can promise me this, then I can promise that I will do my best not to ditch you."

Tan just smiled bitterly.

Did he even have a choice?

Still, he wasn't that bitter.

He played a few RPGs and knew that being a healer had its advantages. Not only did he act as the support in most of his parties, but he also wouldn't have to fight on the front lines in real life.

"I agree," Tan said.

"Ok, so here's the plan. In the elementary school, there is an alien. From what I've seen, he's the boss around here. Most of the other beasts have moved to other places, maybe they've become the bosses of other regions or states. Anyway, they're not our problem. Right now, most of ours are the stiffs."

"You mean zombies?" Tan asked.

Azief rolled his eyes and said, "I mean stiffs. They may be slow, weak, and stupid, but they might also have the ability to evolve. If we can rise in level, maybe zombies can too. Either way, they're our main enemies right now."

"So what's the plan?"

“The plan is to level up. I’m pretty sure that near the mall there will be many more stiffes waiting for us. I might be powerful against individual stiffes, but a horde? Even I can’t win. So here’s what I propose. A cleaning up operation. We won’t raid the mall yet. It’s too dangerous and stupid. We level up first. Only after we strengthen ourselves can we raid the mall.”

“I thought you said that you would raid the mall today?”

“There’s been a change of plans.”

He might have been too rash and optimistic. Thinking about it, Temerloh had quite the population. It’s not as great as the big cities, but it was still a lot. Dealing with all of those zombies and survivors was too much for him right now.

Tan just shook his head. Even though Azief changed his plans at a drop of a hat, he couldn’t do anything but follow along. Going outside alone would be equivalent to suicide.

“And how do you propose we level up?” Tan asked. He was worried, but he already accepted his role.

“By killing the stiffes, of course. Look. This residential area is filled with back alleys and narrow roads. The environment is perfect for kiting and grinding.”

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“But I’m not like you. I can’t one-shot these zombies.”

“I know. That’s why I’ll cut the stiffes’ hands and feet. You just need to smash them with your staff. Sooner or later a skill book will appear. If it’s a sword skill or body technique you concede it to me. If it’s a magic or healing skill, I will concede it to you. How about it?”

Tan just nodded.

“Good, now we leave.”

They opened the door to the dimly lit outside and saw a couple of zombies around. They were still walking, not realizing that, behind the high walls and decorative bushes, two men were walking into the city of the dead.

“Here we go,” Azief said and smiled.
