

Nineteen Days Later

by KingPig

In a world where liquor runs dry, where shirts and shoes are scarce, where danger and snow slowly envelope a once-thriving metropolis... One man and one woman stand alone in the midst of a ghastly invasion of the undead... Severus Snape. Hermione Granger.

And introducing Zombies, in an all new Kingpig production that. Will. Probably. Incite. Some emotion or other.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Obligatory Attempt at Explanation of Madness:

Ah, yes, well... Written for the 2008 Winter SSHG_Exchange for a very talented, some might even say *gifted*, author Lulabelle72, whom I idolize... So the resulting demented, deranged orgy of insanity can be solely blamed on her twisted ability to encourage me to ever greater depths of depravity. Prepare yourselves.

The original prompt:

Severus and Hermione and zombies. Go! (Why? Because the undead rule. I'd love fast and funnymaybe they're defending Hogwarts from an onslaught of the undead, or maybe they went to the supermarket in Spinner's End for arugula and found zombies in the produce section. Whatever. If you go straight horror, that's fine too. Again, the undead rule!!!)

Spinner's End wasn't the type of place where things of any particular interest happened. Well, other than the fact that an infamous dark-ish wizard was raised within the walls of the last house on the end of the block. A wizard that (although widely and falsely believed to have perished in the Great War) still lived there, to this day.

But, other than that, it was a thoroughly uninteresting place, and if one were interested in it enough to label it, one might call it 'boring,' 'uninspiring,' or even 'mind-numbingly dull.' But no one could be bothered long enough to come up with a suitable depiction of the unassuming place, so for the sake of argument, it was a nondescript tiny neighbourhood, where *usually* nothing worth mentioning ever happened (there was this business in the recent past involving an Unbreakable Vow, but other than that, it is assuredly a monotonous place) that is, until Boxing Day, 2002.

He had intended to spend his holidays as he did every year: blissfully alone and suitably plastered on Firewhiskey, reading tattered copies of classic Muggle literature (which, by 'classic' and 'literature' meant James Bond espionage novels from his youth). At nine in the morning, he had already accomplished the alone part, and as he padded his way into his excessively sterile kitchen toward the cupboard, he was well on his way to soon achieving the drunk part as well.

He was dressed only in soft, heather grey pyjama bottoms, and the icy chill of the morning pressed against his naked chest deliciously. He despised the oppression of warmth and heat, and was inordinately pleased when the ancient radiator died a violent death (of unnatural causes) ten years prior. He drew in a deep breath of satisfaction, permitting the brisk air to fill his lungs and awaken every nerve in his body.

He allowed the feeling of freedom to wash over him. He was here, at home, self-exiled from the Wizarding community at large, finally out from under the thumb of Hogwarts and all within it who sought to control him. Or pry into his private life. Or ask unending questions. Or nag him to eat more. Or scold him to sneer less...

He shook his head to clear his thoughts as he opened the cupboard door...and then let out a roar of frustration. The cupboard was empty.

He flew through the kitchen on a rampage, opening cabinet and pantry doors violently, shuffling through their contents in a frenzy.

All around him, the empty bottles mocked and jeered. Had he already consumed it all?

He swore loudly. He'd have to pop into the nearest shop to get more. And, undoubtedly, several other people had found themselves in the same predicament this morning, and the shops were bound to be crowded ('crowded' meaning any one person there other than himself).

Fuck.

There was a heavy knock at his front door that momentarily interrupted his rage.

Double fuck.

His breath coming out in ragged pants, he tore out of the kitchen and through the living room at an almost inhuman speed. He threw open the door dramatically, unselfconscious of his half-naked state, looking to the world at large like a half crazed mad man with his oily locks dishevelled.

"*What?*" he demanded, his eyes narrowed to two slits as he looked down at the unwelcome intruder.

The guest seemed foolishly undeterred by this greeting, and merely stared back at him with warm, chocolate eyes that danced with silent mirth. His tongue was poised to inflict severe emotional harm, but the shorter figure that stood in the thick snow, on his doorstep, spoke first: "Professor Snape!"

It was a feminine, somewhat shrill tone of voice, overly excited and brimming with disgusting optimism. It was *her*. Of course it was her. Who else would it be?

With revulsion very evident in his voice, he answered, "Miss Granger. Or, is it Mrs. Weasley? Or Potter?"

"Granger is fine," she replied, her eyes still smiling up at him.

They stood in uncomfortable silence. Uncomfortable, that is, for her. He seemed to be enjoying her unease, and he didn't look as though he was too eager to end it. He casually leaned against the doorframe, crossing his arms over his chest.

"Um, it's really cold out here..." she began.

"It's just as cold inside," he interrupted nonchalantly.

"Oh, well, it's kind of wet out here," she said with a pleading expression.

He frowned and appeared to be thinking her comment over with deliberate slowness.

"Can I come in?" she asked exasperatedly.

With a look of calculated innocence, he stepped back to allow her to pass by him, then shut the door behind her.

"I'd offer you something to drink, but I recently discovered that I have nothing to offer," he said somewhat sincerely, trailing her as she entered the living room.

"It's freezing in here," she said as she shivered slightly.

He cocked his head to the side and peered at her as though she were a Potions experiment gone seriously, irreparably wrong. "I thought we had already established the climate, both inside and out."

She gave him a strange, indignant look. "May I sit?"

He shrugged. "If you want."

She sat on the threadbare sofa.

He stared at her, as if waiting for something.

She stared back, her gaze seemingly drawn again and again to his bare chest.

He cleared his throat.

Her face became infused with crimson. She shifted her gaze away, quickly, to the floor beneath her ice-encrusted boots.

"To what do I owe the..." He let the sentence trail off, unsure of what to call her sudden appearance.

"Oh!" She blushed again, endearingly. "I was in the neighbourhood, and..."

"No one is 'just in the neighbourhood' around here."

"Right." She paused, fidgeting nervously under his scrutiny. Her eyes began to flit about the room as though searching for an escape route. She had come too far to back down now. Even though everything depended on his answer, she felt the need to prolong this moment, this suspension of time where she could still hope for a positive outcome. Before he could turn her away, ridicule her and humiliate her and deny her what was just beyond her reach.

She sighed. Impatience and annoyance were radiating off him in waves that threatened to knock her over. There was nothing for it, she'd have to get on with it.

She reached down into her bag and produced a few pieces of parchment, which she shuffled anxiously in her hands before presenting to him.

"What's this?" He reached out to take the documents from her and for a fleeting moment she clutched them even tighter before allowing him to take them, fearful that he might destroy them without even a cursory glance.

"They are copies of my correspondence with the Ministry with regards to obtaining a Potions mastery. I, ah, I came here to request a well, a recommendation." Inwardly, she cursed herself for her faltering speech.

He thrust the parchments back at her with a venomous sneer. "Harass Horace."

Immediately, she switched tact. "Sir, with all due respect to Professor Slughorn, you have a much firmer grasp on my capabilities in the Potions classroom, my eagerness to learn, and, of course, a recommendation from you would garner much more respect..."

"What's that?" he interrupted her, focusing intently somewhere over her left shoulder.

She smiled as she began to clarify the finer points of her previous statement. "No one else has made such advancements in the field of Potions as you have..."

"Not that," he snapped at her. *"That."* With a nod of his head he indicated the direction just behind her, through the grimy window that overlooked the street.

Instantly mortified and with rapidly deflating confidence, she whipped around to face the glass at such a speed that would suggest fierce curiosity, but in fact was mostly just in an attempt to hide her humiliation.

Peering closely at the usually deserted street, she immediately noticed a figure drunkenly staggering toward the direction of the house. "A neighbour of yours?" she suggested in a tone that belied her own disbelief.

He confirmed her suspicions with a curt and vague, "No."

They stared at the shadowy form together in mute silence. Upon closer inspection, it seemed to be the outline of a man who paused with each step indecisively, swaying on his feet before he resumed his slow journey toward Snape's home. Beside her, she felt her former professor stiffen.

Hermione squinted, trying to discern whether the man had any recognisable features, when she noticed something quite unnerving. "Is that...is that ~~blood~~?"

"Step back," hissed Snape in a low voice as he brandished his wand.

"Wait!" she cried out. "He's hurt! Do you have any bandages..." She had started toward the door, her voice edging closer and closer to panic, when suddenly a strong arm wrapped around her waist and physically pulled her back.

"Don't be stupid," he growled. "Get into the kitchen." He released her with a faint shove, pushing her in the direction of the opposite end of the room.

Slightly angered and harbouring a bruised ego, Hermione shuffled toward the kitchen, intent on finding some supplies therein to patch up the poor fellow. She had only made it three steps into the room before she let out a startled scream.

Outside, pressed against the dingy kitchen window, stood a horribly disfigured woman (Hermione could only assume it was a woman due to the long, stringy hair and the remaining petite facial features that were still intact) clawing against the glass and smearing great streaks of reddish-brown blood.

Lightning quick, Snape's lean arm snaked around Hermione's waist once more, pressing her body close to his.

A few, insufferably long moments later, he swore. Colourfully.

"Try to Apparate," he commanded.

She tightly squeezed her eyes shut. "I, I can't!"

He dragged her toward the fireplace, then, and thrust her forward as he haphazardly threw a fine dust into the stone cavern. No green flames emitted. Not even a spark.

"*Shite*," he cursed.

Amidst all this, the sound of glass shattering could be heard in the near distance. He shoved her behind him, his wand raised and pointed in the direction of the kitchen.

"*What is going on?*" she whispered frantically.

"Stay here," Snape instructed as he cautiously made his way back toward the living room window. She watched him intently, her own wand trembling in her fingers, forgotten. A shuffling noise from the kitchen grabbed her attention, and when he next spoke, it was from a close position behind her, causing her to jump.

"There's a back door," he explained, his voice hard and decisive. He wrapped his slender fingers around her wrist, bounding off through the corridor while Hermione stumbled as she was forcibly dragged along in his wake.

*

"What... the... hell... was... that?" Hermione managed to ask between the chattering of her teeth. "Friends... of... yours?"

They stood, huddled together behind an aging shed in the far corner of the backyard. Well, *she* was huddling, whereas he stood ramrod straight, his muscles taut and tense as though preparing to flee from her proximity and back into the house at any given moment.

The icy December chill slithered around their bodies in a serpentine fashion, drawing her even closer to him in an attempt to combat the dropping temperature. He subtly pulled away, his bare chest and arms riddled with goose bumps as he shivered.

Severus peered around the corner of the decaying building, his eyes scanning for any sign of followers. Once satisfied that they were alone, he turned to her with a fierce gaze, daring her to question his next words: "That man was dead."

"What?" she asked with an incredulous expression, followed by a nervous giggle. "You're kidding, right?" When his grave expression gave no sign of relenting, her tittering quickly subsided. She gave him a deeply concerned look, as though questioning his mental health. "Er... He was clearly not dead if he was walking up to your door..."

"He was *dead*," he repeated insistently. "He died in the mill, died a very long time ago..."

She snorted skeptically. "How could you tell who he was? Or if it was a he, even? It was really far away, and it isn't exactly a bright and sunny day, and, plus, he was all bloody!"

He grabbed her, without warning, and thrust her forward. "Have a look for yourself. Could someone survive that?"

The shuffling figure in question had staggered into the backyard, spotted the two, and was currently making its way toward the shed. It was of a stocky build, with the matted, torn coveralls of a mill worker, and the flesh that was still visible was of a festering, putrid grey colour. It had very little hair, and absolutely no face. Instead, one eye stared out at them from the precipice of the right-sided eye socket, and a few spots of gleaming skull could be seen from under layers of dirt and crusted blood. Tattered flesh hung from where the cheeks should have been, the jaw bone dangled, unhinged, and the entire look was completed with wriggling maggots dripping from the empty, left ocular cavity like a cascade of white tears.

Hermione desperately fought against the urge to be sick. She raised her wand courageously and managed to shoot off a stunning spell before she fell victim to the nausea.

The creature stumbled backward momentarily before resuming its forward pace, otherwise completely unaffected.

Stepping in front of her quickly, Snape once again wielded his wand and, with an expression of stern determination, fired a series of non-verbal spells aimed at the dead man. Only one spell was successful, and once it hit its mark, the creature's head flew from the body in a spectacular chain of flips.

Severus casually stuffed his wand into the waistband of his pyjamas.

"What was that, what did you just do?" interrogated a wildly distraught Hermione.

"Severing spell," answered Snape, nonchalantly.

She blinked and waited a few moments before inquiring testily, "And that spell would be?"

"One you should be very familiar with." At her lost expression, he further explained in a longsuffering tone, *Diffindo*."

"Right," she replied, embarrassed and slightly ashamed that she had not thought of it first.

He moved to once again grasp her wrist, but she quickly pulled away. "You can just ask me to follow you, you know, you don't have to drag me along."

With a grunt, he nodded his head toward the direction of the street ahead. "Try to keep up, then," he instructed, clearly annoyed.

*

"I didn't know there could be Muggle Inferi," Hermione said quietly after they had walked along in silence for the better part of an hour. Her feet ached terribly, but she wisely decided not to bring that up in conversation.

"They aren't Inferi," Snape said, apparently unwilling to give any further explanation.

"Right, then, so what are they?" she asked irritably.

"Zombies," he deadpanned.

A weak laugh burst from her lips before her brain could advise otherwise. "All right, then," she said, humouring him. *Zombies*," she repeated with a snort. "I don't recall reading about them in *Hogwarts: A History*."

Snape halted and whipped around to face her with a steely glare. *Hogwarts: A History* is not the be-all, end-all, font of information," he snapped.

Undeterred, she shot back, "Then where did you get *your* information for this theory?"

Snape didn't answer at first, but instead began to walk ahead, leaving her standing alone in the middle of a deserted street. Finally, he called back, "Films."

She ran to catch up with him. *Films*?" she gasped incredulously. "You base our current reality on some *movie*?"

"More than one movie, and yes."

"You are clearly insane." She shook her head.

"Watch your tone," he hissed.

"Fine," she retorted. "You're clearly insane!" she cried out in blatant fabricated cheer.

"That's enough," he warned icily as he surreptitiously enveloped them both in a warming charm.

*

Other than the obvious fact that night had fallen and the chill in the air had become even more biting, there had been no way to clearly tell time as Hermione and Severus continued their journey in relative silence. She felt it could just as well have been several hours, though in reality, it was only one more. The warming charm dissipated some time ago both had been too distracted by their current circumstance to think to renew it and the gradual exposure to the freezing temperature had brought at least one advantage: her legs and feet were now far too numb to register pain.

"Where are we going?" she asked after once again reassuring herself that surely no 'zombies' were loitering around the Caribbean, where her parents were presently enjoying a holiday. Surely, surely not. Pirates, maybe, but certainly there would be an absence of the undead.

"Leaky Cauldron," he answered.

"But that's in London!"

"Observant as ever," he snidely retorted.

"You can't possibly expect us to walk all the way to London," she cried in exasperation. "And what if those *things* weren't just an isolated incident?"

"I'm certain they're not."

"How can you be so sure?" she asked. "We haven't seen a single one since we left," she pointed out. "In fact, we haven't seen a single person, living or dead."

"Apparation has been disabled, and the Floo networks are obviously closed. I doubt the Ministry would go to such extreme measures simply because they somehow anticipated zombies showing up at my front door." She pulled a face at the word "zombies," though he failed to catch it. "And until now, there has been a noted absence of something else besides the living and undead."

"What would that be?"

"*That*," Snape replied, pointing at a nearby sports car. When she seemed to fail to register his meaning, he clarified, with unmasked exasperation, "Transportation."

*

Hermione stared at her former professor in utter disbelief. It was the same expression that she had worn for nearly half an hour as they raced through the smaller towns and cities on the outskirts of London.

Professor Snape, *Severus Snape*, former Death Eater, exalted Potions Master, had just stolen a car. Casually. As though it was an occurrence that happened daily.

Hotwired, proficiently, skillfully, as though it was his profession.

Severus Snape, esteemed car thief.

The man who had seemed so two-dimensional in her youth was now flying down the road in excess of one hundred and twenty kilometres per hour, perched as calmly and perfectly at ease in the driver's seat as he was in his own classroom. And not only this, but in addition to being quite skilled in Muggle criminal activity, he was also apparently something of a zombie expert. Or, at least, of campy B-movie horror films featuring zombies.

And, to her rapidly increasing agitation, he continued to smirk in that arrogant, obnoxious, cheeky, incorrigible way of his.

*

Just a few blocks away from the Leaky Cauldron, Snape hastily applied the emergency brake and sent the vehicle skidding, spinning wildly, to a polished and abrupt stop before an abandoned storefront.

"What's this...why are we stopping?" demanded Hermione, her fingers still gripping the dashboard with enough force to leave permanent crescent-shaped divots.

"I need a shirt," Snape announced offhandedly. It was a shop that tailored exclusively to men of wealth in need of smart, expensive attire. If he were going to save the world (*again*), he figured that he might as well dress the part.

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Hermione moaned and lurched forward unsteadily. "Like that," she instructed in a matter-of-fact tone.

They had arrived at the vacant Leaky Cauldron in a whirl of skid marks and smoke, the tires and brakes screeching and squawking in unified objection. Snape had exited the car with resolute, unflinching poise and grace, stopping to smooth the wrinkles on his newly acquired three-piece suit with matching black bow tie apparel worthy of Mr. Bond himself.

Hermione, however, had crawled out of the black vehicle with a decidedly green pallor, desperately fighting the urge to kiss the pavement as she went.

A few moments later, they found themselves indoors, staring out the round, grimy window of the back door to the establishment. Pressed against the very exit that led to the gateway to the Wizarding community of Diagon Alley, the thin sheet of metal the only shield against the horde of stumbling, groaning, mass of undead clambering against the magical wall, desperately seeking entry.

It was then that Hermione had come up with a plan. Hardly a fool-proof one, at that, but it was the only idea that had half a chance of succeeding. "Act like them," she had said, "Mirror their movements and sounds. Surely they lack enough intelligence to discern between the living and themselves that is, if we don't give ourselves away, I mean."

"They can probably sense us," he had pointed out, "Perhaps by sense of smell..."

"Half of them don't even have noses!"

He was exhausted, as was she, and could think of no valid counterpoint beyond a customary, reproachful glare and thus they found themselves doing their best to practice the universal zombie method of walking and communication.

"You're being too precise in your steps. Shuffle more," Hermione whispered in a bossy, authoritative tone, pointedly ignoring his mumbled commentary.

When Snape could finally list, sway, and stagger to her satisfaction, the two pried open the heavy door and, taking a deep collective breath, began to reel about aimlessly among the mob.

Nineteen days later...

"Thank you all for coming today, and if you could please take your seats, we can get started," began a plump, middle-aged wizard in Ministry robes. He paused as several journalists slowly sat down and a hushed calm began to settle over the small room. "Excellent," he continued, "Now, welcome to the second installment of press conferences concerning Mr...."

"Snape. *Severus* Snape," interrupted a wire-thin, austere man with raven hair, perched imperiously behind a long table at the forefront of the room.

"Er, right," the plump ministry official began again, clearly flustered. "As I was saying, Mr. Snape, our leading expert on these commies..."

"*Zombies*," corrected Snape with a sinister, acerbic smirk.

"...Yes, *zom-bees*, and Miss Hermione Granger, founder and sole member of U.R.P., the Undead Rehabilitation Project." The portly wizard paused dramatically for the applause to die out, waving his hand in a grand gesture indicating the dais where both Hermione and Severus sat. "They have graciously returned to answer any questions regarding the narrative they presented yesterday. Same rules as before: please raise your hand, and either Miss Granger or Mr. Snape will call on you for your question. They will be here for one hour." He then turned to the table, bowing gracefully (or, rather, as gracefully as a man of his immense size can manage) as he said, "Whenever you are ready."

A sea of hands suddenly pierced the air, waving frantically in an attempt to gain the attention of either the Potions master or his former student. "Yes?" called out Hermione to an extremely short, youthful witch.

"Penelope Clearwater, *Daily Prophet*," said the witch, ignoring the audible groan that escaped from Severus' lips. "Thank you for taking my question, Miss Granger, Professor Snape. I'd like to direct my question to Professor Snape, if that is all right. The *Prophet* would like to know how such creatures came to exist where did they come from?"

"I believe that the exact answer to that is still unknown," replied Snape, "though many have theorized that it may have been a Ministry experiment gone awry..."

"Next question, please!" cried out the obese administrator as he wrung his hands anxiously, his eyes nervously darting from side to side.

"Follow up, if I may?" asked Penelope. Severus gave her the briefest of nods. "Some have said it could have been an infection of some sort, perhaps gleaned from Muggles who had contracted it from 'rage' infected monkeys..."

"Nonsense. What utter bullshit," snorted Snape.

The flustered Ministry official blanched and quickly called out, "That is an excellent theory, Miss Clearwater! Something that definitely needs to be investigated by our team of highly-trained, 'zor-bee'-hunting Aurors..."

The Potions master sneered and, raising his voice over that of the excitable administrator, called upon an older wizard in the far back of the room.

"Roger Wilson, *Witch Weekly*, question for Miss Granger?" Hermione quickly nodded her consent. "What, exactly, do you hope to accomplish with U.R.P.?"

"These creatures are victims just as much as anyone else!" she retorted, immediately on the defensive. "They deserve the same civil rights afforded to all victims of an atrocious massacre, *especially* genocide!"

"But," interrupted the journalist, "what purpose could they serve in society?"

Hermione's face became infused with crimson as she countered in barely restrained outrage, "Why must they *serve* a purpose'? Would you have them enslaved like house-elves?"

Several people let out quiet snorts of laughter as Roger replied, "Well, certainly not! I'd rather not become the main course when I send for tea!"

The young Gryffindor's eyes narrowed dangerously. "Next question, please," she said, pointing to another reporter at random.

"Gregory Beddingfield, *Potioneer Monthly*. Miss Granger, have you received your recommendation for Potions mastery?"

All eyes turned expectantly toward Snape.

Clearing his throat, Severus silkily replied, "I've sent the request on to Horace Slughorn."

When a ringing silence descended, then stretched into the range of awkward and uncomfortable, the heavysset Ministry wizard quickly piped up, "I think that's all for today. Thank you again, Mr. Snape and Miss Granger."

Snape bowed slightly and rose to leave, his left hand reaching out behind him to grasp Hermione's petite wrist tightly. She did not pull back, instead only allowing a flicker of a contented smile to cross her otherwise inscrutable features.

~*Fade Out*~

Author's Note The story is completely AU (heh, obviously), and takes place somewhere after DH, though DH in and of itself is mostly ignored. All references to *Shaun of the Dead*, *28 Days Later*, and Ian Fleming's suave spy, James Bond, are completely intentional.

Okay, *mostly* intentional.

I may, in the future, expand this story to include some much needed... meat.

Thank you so much to my two betas Amsev and sbrande especially to sbrande, who helped me whip this into shape in order to meet my extension deadline! You are a saint, love!