

48 Hours a Day

Chapter 10: Desert Island Survival IV

The sun rose just above the horizon, a new day had come.

In the cave, Zhang Heng opened his eyes and saw that Ed was up, sitting. “Good morning, Zhang.”

“Morning,” Zhang Heng yawned

“My goodness. How I wish to have a cup of coffee, fried egg, sausage, and toast right now,” The former captain lamented, “But given our current situation, we can’t ask for too much, can we? Too bad the coconuts are giving us too little calories. One of those green ones can only provide 200 calories worth of energy. Even if don’t exercise, we’ll be burning at least 2,000 calories a day. Also, we need to expand our menu in order to obtain a richer source of nutrients. Well, since we’re by the sea, I think we can take advantage of that.”

“What do I need to do?” Zhang Heng asked.

“Hold your horses. Your life in the city has caused your digestive system to be very fragile. Even if I told you how to catch food from the sea, with no way to cook it, one crab can cause you to the runs so bad it’ll lead to dehydration. We need fire. The water that you found earlier will need to heat before drinking. It only needs to be cooked for three minutes to kill most of the bacteria in it. Right now, I’ll teach you how to start a fire first.” Ed paused for a moment before beginning to explain, “The most important thing you’ll need to start a fire is to find the right wood. Fast-growing softwoods are the best kind. The drill [stick] and the base can be taken from the same tree. Tear off a tree bark and dry it under the sun...”

Zhang Heng listened to the instructions intently, but when it came to actually performing the task, it was not as easy as he imagined it to be.

He spent the whole morning trying to start a fire.

Alas, it was one failure after another. The action of twirling the drill-stick alone rubbed away a whole chunk of skin from his hand. It hurt so bad that he grimaced. At the same time, because they did not have time to search for food, he and Ed ate all their reserve-coconuts which barely filled their stomachs.

What was even more frustrating was that even after all the effort they put in, they had nothing to show for it.

“Zhang, you cannot go from a rookie to an expert in one day,” Ed comforted. “The beginning is always the hardest.”

Zhang Heng tossed the broken stick on the ground in contempt. “That is true but failure is still agonizing.”

“Failure is also a valuable experience. Tens of thousands of years ago, our ancestors have continued to evolve from failures.” Ed empathized. “You are a smart student, Zhang. Don’t worry. There’s still time for you to learn and grow. Now, tell me what have learned from this failure?”

“The wood is still no good. The skin on my hands are flayed and there’re still no sparks. I have to try using other woods.”

Nevertheless, fortune is as unpredictable as the weather. At sundown, a gust of wind blew, and a mass of dark cloud gathered above their heads. It happened so quickly that Zhang Heng did not have enough time to gather the things. The tree bark that had been drying on the rock was soaked in rainwater.

His entire day of work was wasted.

Disheartened, Zhang Heng lay on the cavern floor with his arms and legs spread out like an ‘X’ staring at the ceiling of the cave. “Ed, I don’t think your chicken soup for the soul is going to work anymore.”

“Give up then,” Ed said in a quiet voice.

“Huh?”

“But it’s limited to only before the rain stops. It’s only after you’ve vented all your negative emotions can you better devote yourself to work.”

“Are you always this optimistic, Ed?”

“It could be that I’ve encountered situations than this in my travels across the Amazon forest. Thinking about how I’ve managed pulled through inspires me not to give up.”

“Does experiences make us who we are?” Zhang Heng muttered under to himself, remembering what the bartender told him, feeling as if he had on to something.

“It looks like the rain is not going to stop before dark. You should go to bed. There is still a lot of work to do tomorrow,” Ed said and as he lay down to sleep.

The two went to bed on the second night with an empty stomach.

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The next morning, Zhang Heng got up before first light—mainly because he was starving. The first thing he did was to run to the coconut tree to quench his thirst and hunger with a few fruits. The coconut tree at lower ground was nearly picked clean. The remaining trees were taller, and knocking the fruits down with rocks was going to be very difficult. Zhang Heng was aware that he had not much time left, he had to get that fire going, or else he would not be able to continue with the rest of the tasks.

On that account, he decided to take a little bit of risk. After bringing breakfast back for Ed, he ventured a little deeper into the native forest behind the beach.

The end result was gratifying. Not only did he find suitable wood for the fire, he also found an animal that he suspected was a fowl. Unfortunately for him, the little thing was very agile; before Zhang Heng could even

approach it, the creature flapped its wings and disappeared. There was nothing Zhang Heng could have done about that.

He broke a tree branch and returned to the beach. Using the same method he used the day before, at noon, a tendril of smoke finally rose from the wood shavings. Employing the knowledge that Ed had passed on to him, Zhang Heng sprinkled the sawdust onto the leaves of the candlenut tree, and then carefully blowing until the sawdust glowed and ignited the tinder underneath.

After a short while, the two people on the island finally had a long-awaited fire.

“Well done! Now we can avoid the danger of infection!” Ed exclaimed.

Zhang Heng never thought that he would ever be so excited to see fire. He was about to say something when a third person’s voice sounded in his ear.

“Started a fire successfully. A new skill is obtained—Wildlife Survival: Level 0; Game Points: +3; character panel has also been activated; you may view your personal status.”

The voice sounded very familiar. Zhang Heng thought about it for a moment before realizing that it was the same voice that had heard earlier when he was unconscious.

Zhang Heng looked at Ed. “Ed, did you hear something?”

His companion looked taken aback and then concerned. “Should I be hearing anything? Zhang, are you experiencing hallucinations due to dehydration?”

“...”

Zhang Heng, too, wondered if he was suffering from heatstroke because something that resembled a character card appeared before his eyes.

Name: Zhang Heng

Gender: Male

Age: 19

Player ID: 07958

Game rounds experienced: 0

Current game points: 3

Skills: Piano: level 1; Language Proficiency: level 1 (both languages at general communication skills level)

Assessment: The player is unremarkable with no quality worth commending, has no special skills and is not expected to be able to last longer than the first three rounds.

Zhang Heng was speechless. The harsh evaluation at the bottom aside, how was it that he only had two skills?

Okay, he could see a line of words in small prints under skills—*Level 0 skill cannot be displayed.*

His amateur grade nine piano playing level was passed off for a pathetic Level 1?!

This game's definition of skills was too harsh! Not everyone out of a hundred people could start a fire using their bare hands, yet it barely even made Level 0 on his list of skills!

It would seem that this game was more difficult than he imagined it to be.