

48 Hours a Day

Chapter 11: Desert Island Survival V

Zhang Heng finally started a fire.

That meant that his menu was no longer limited to just coconuts. Shortly after, following Ed's instructions, Zhang Heng found conches on the rocks by the beach, even lucked out and found crabs and oysters.

The latter especially, was fresh and sweet, rich in nutrients—calcium, iron, phosphorus, and vitamin B2—reputed as the milk of the sea. It was pity, however, that the calories they provide were not high; each of them containing only 70 calories. For chowhounds, this was a good thing but on a deserted island, Zhang Heng preferred something with higher-calorie content to provide him with the necessary energy.

He did not need to worry about exceeding his calorie count and getting out of shape seeing that he had been starving these few days.

Thank goodness, they just might be able to enjoy a decent meal tonight.

Zhang Heng collected about seventy or so little conches, six oysters, and four hermit crabs which were sadly, rather small. Ed had told him that the hermits were edible but tasted average. Nevertheless, the two of them were not dining in a Michelin star restaurant so taste was no longer an important factor.

Zhang Heng even spotted some fishes by the coast but without the right tools, he could only watch them swim about from afar.

To boot, they also had the small puddles of water that he had found two days ago. With the shells of the mollusks he picked up, Zhang Heng was able to scoop and transport the water. But for all that, the pair found themselves having problems with the tools for boiling the water. They did

not have bowls and the shells they were using were too well insulated that even under direct heat, the water refused to boil.

Ed thought for a moment and then said, “Go find some pebbles—not the ones with a lot of holes or stratification.”

Zhang Heng nodded and did as Ed instructed. They spent twenty minutes cooking the pebbles until they were burning red, and fastened them to the clams using small branches. Soon, the water inside began to boil.

“There’s not a lot of water in here. Two should suffice.” Ed said.

The water inside the shells boiled for around a minute, enough to get rid of most of the bacteria.

Zhang Heng put these little outdoor survival skills to memory.

Ed was a good teacher. With the injury to his waist, he could not move about freely. But Zhang Heng was able to benefit from his companion’s comprehensive survival know-how, so he had no complaints about having to take on full responsibility of collecting food and water for the both of them.

At the same time, Zhang Heng was careful not to be too reliant on Ed; he hoped that he could make all the knowledge he had picked up from Ed into his own practical skills—not so that he could get rid of Ed later on, of course. As a matter of fact, he was so grateful to Ed that if there was only one morsel of food left, Zhang Heng was willing to give half of it to Ed.

Having said that, Zhang Heng could not shake off this ominous feeling; he had noticed that Ed appeared to be worse than the first day he came to shore. This period of rest had not improved his condition. Since the last time Zhang Heng bandaged the fatal wound on Ed’s thigh, and stopped the bleeding, there was nothing else he could do to tend to the injury.

There were no antibiotics so readily available in the hospitals in the city. Once the wound was infected, it would be untreatable.

Zhang Heng believed that the former captain knew this better than him—yet, Ed never raised the subject in the past few days.

This seemed to confirm the foreboding hunch that Zhang Heng had been feeling. Not knowing what he could do for his companion, Zhang Heng looked after Ed as best as he could.

For the rest of the days, Ed taught Zhang Heng how to make simple stone tools, use wood charcoal to clean his teeth, collect rainwater, make ropes out of tree barks, build a basic raft out of wood, use corals to trap fish...

Compared to the time when the both of them had just arrived on the island, the pair had moved past the most dangerous period, and now had extra reserves. The leftover dried fish was hung from the ceiling of the cave so that should they encounter terrible weather and were unable to go out to scavenge for food, they would not go hungry.

Things seemed to be going uphill, and the forty days no longer seemed like an unattainable goal.

Just when this notion appeared in Zhang Heng's mind, doom showed up.

On the sixteenth night, Ed suddenly developed a high fever. Zhang Heng devoted his time and energy to care for his companion, and gradually, their supply of food and water gradually depleted. Their search range was also greatly reduced. The food they had set aside for a rainy day was immediately put to use in this crisis.

What even more worrying was that Ed's condition did not improve at all.

When Zhang Heng undid the makeshift T-shirt bandage on Ed's thigh, he discovered that the gash that was so deep you could see the bone had festered.

Since yesterday, the former captain of the British Army had been in a comatose state.

What little food they had in the cave was slowly diminishing. Very soon, they were on the brink of running out of food.

Finally, on the nineteenth night, Ed's eyes suddenly flew open. He turned to his side, and murmured to Zhang Heng, half-conscious, "Do you know what's the most important thing to survive the wilderness? It's never being satisfied with what you've achieved yesterday. Live each day better than the last. You have to find a way to conquer nature."

Zhang Heng rubbed his eyes, and smiled sadly, "Ed, that's not what you told me the last time."

But Ed made no response.

Zhang Heng put a finger under Ed's nose and discovered that his friend was no longer breathing.

Even though he had been mentally preparing himself for Ed's passing, he was still sad. While the two of them had not spent a lot of time with each other, Zhang Heng's ability to navigate in this wilderness was all thanks to Ed's teaching.

The shared a student-teacher relationship, but they were also friends.

Zhang Heng dug a hole in the forest near the cave, and buried Ed. To prevent wild beasts from damaging the grave, he outlined the grave with some sharpened twigs.

Only when he had done all that did he drag his starving body to the beach to search for food.

The good news was that he was already halfway into the forty-day goal. Even though he was alone again, Zhang Heng was confident that he could survive the island.

On the noon of the twentieth day, Zhang Heng's coral trap caught him a large two catty¹ fish. This meant he could go to bed tonight with a full stomach.

But just when Zhang Heng thought that his bad luck had finally passed, he suddenly received a voice prompt in his ear.

[Alert! Alert! An anomaly had been discovered in the quest! Critical time error]

[Reporting error]

[Second level authority enabled, verification approved, report canceled...]

[Remove the error permanently from the decision-making sequence]

[Assignment objective remains unchanged; the return time has been changed from 40 days to 520 days. Please pay attention!]

Zhang Heng's head nearly blew up at the series of messages. When he finally registered the drastic, unanticipated changes, his eyes flitted to his right hand.

All three hands were pointed upwards.

No way. He had been so preoccupied learning how to survive in the wilderness, and having experienced all kinds of situations, he had forgotten about that twenty-four-dial watch on his wrist.

On the first few nights when he first arrived on the island, he was not able to enter that still world and had thought that it did not apply to this game. He did not think that the game would actually be holding back!

The first thing that came to Zhang Heng's mind was where did the 520 days come from. The extra twenty-four hours he had every day, after being multiplied by 480, left him with the most frightening string of numbers.