

48 Hours 251

Chapter 251 Correspondence

Short on weapons and personnel, they had no idea if Nadya was dead or alive. Now, they faced the risk of Wallace and his men barging in at any moment – Leah had never met with such a dangerous situation before.

That very moment, thoughts flooded her mind, and she recalled what Lola told her. Despite it all, she didn't have the slightest bit of regret saving Daisy and Nadya. Instead, she felt guilty that her insistence had plunged Lola into the precarious situation she was in.

Lola's jaws were clenched, and with indignance written all over her face, she knew there was no point complaining now. She squeezed the dagger in her hand and hissed, "Don't say I didn't warn you. You don't want to know what will become of you if you're caught. The best thing for us now is to die together! Dying beats getting caught."

Leah felt a chill run down her spine, but she nodded anyway. With trembling hands, she shoved some gunpowder into the flash pan.

Another loud gunshot rang outside the door; everyone inside the torture chamber held their breaths for what was to come. Nevertheless, Wallace and his guards didn't force their way in.

Leah realized that the guards must have come across someone else. Before the whole thing started, the entire team split up – this meant the group in charge of causing a commotion had returned. Among them were the remaining maids and a good number of well-built male slaves who had joined in halfway. When they saw Wallace and his guards surrounding the torture room, they immediately stormed into action.

Leah and the others in the room didn't let the opportunity slide. As the chaos brewed, they made their way out of the room, led by a male slave with a pitchfork in hand. She rushed to where Nadya had fallen and found his chest smothered in blood, and he was no longer breathing.

Her chest tightened with grief. Fewer and fewer of her brothers and sisters were still alive and breathing. Even so, there was no time to grieve. In a few minutes, another two slaves were shot dead. Wallace and his men reloaded their guns. Leah knew that they had to leave right now, but Lola, the one leading the pack, suddenly stopped. She stood where she was, frozen in place. Then, when the others caught up, she handed Daisy over to another maid.

Leah followed Lola's gaze and saw that she was staring at Wallace. There were flames raging in her burning eyes. Other than the sole instance where she showed her scars, Lola never talked about how she got them or who did it to her, but by how she glared at Wallace right now, Leah had a good idea.

"Don't do anything stupid. They have five guns with them. Even if you kill them, you'll probably get killed yourself!" Leah pleaded.

The others were way ahead of them now. Lola hesitated for a moment. Suddenly, without so much as a warning, she grabbed the gun in Leah's hand, aimed at Wallace, and pulled the trigger. With over meters between them and no training, Lola naturally missed. The bullet deviated from her target and hit the arm of another guard.

Grimacing with frustration, Lola understood that was no time to ponder over anything. Just as they were about to leave, Wallace was done reloading, and he began shooting again. Leah watched in horror as a bullet tore through the cheek of a maid running toward the both of them. Then, the group hastily retreated with the wounded, and Wallace stopped pushing forward since there were only five of them. One of his men was also shot in the arm. They wouldn't stand a chance against a mob of famished and tormented slaves.

As a result, Wallace had to let them go, watching on in vexation as the slaves disappeared into the night.

Meanwhile, Laeli was already the gate of the manor with the carriage. Cauchy and the few colored men had all hailed from different places – there was a sailor, a fisherman, and even a slaughterhouse owner – they all had one thing in common – all ex-slaves that either escaped or joined pirates, subsequently regaining their freedom.

The similar horrors they all shared caused them to sympathize with their own people, where they were all brought to the plantations against their will. Cauchy even established a secret organization to grant assistance to the plantation escapees. So, when Laeli approached this organization with the plan in mind, they readily expressed their willingness to help. Since they were all employed and had proper jobs on the island, their faces were covered tonight to avoid retaliation.

With Cauchy taking point, they swiftly eliminated the guards at the gate.

Then, as if on cue, Leah and the others arrived. Laeli was taken aback by the number of people with her. When the chaos broke out, he knew that a massive riot was about to happen, but upon seeing the group, he realized that there were a lot more people than initially planned.

Thankfully, they prepared two extra carriages in the event of such a situation. For good measure, the slaves in the stables also sneaked out two of Malcolm's carriages amid the chaos.

However, the guards were catching up to them. Cauchy and his men jumped down the carriage and shouted to Laeli as they took cover, "You go first. I'll buy you some time. I'm not a slave of this manor. We'll just get to somewhere secluded, and once we get rid of our cover, then they won't be able to recognize

us."

Another slave, a sailor on a pirate ship, exclaimed, "I am a crew of the Lion. If they touch a single strand of hair on me, they will face my brothers' revenge!"

This wasn't a time for formalities. It wasn't just the manor's guards, but their reinforcements were also approaching fast. Laeli nodded at Cauchy and his people as a gesture of thanks. The appointed time was here, and although some had still not arrived, Laeli could wait no longer. He pulled the reins with all his might, and all six carriages carrying the slaves broke through the night toward the direction of hope and freedom.

Zhang Heng didn't go to the beach. Instead, he chose to stay with Anne and Carina and waited for news of the operation. He had done everything he could. Now, the rest would have to depend on Laeli. Of course, Zhang Heng didn't bet everything on the gladiator and was prepared in the case of failure on

Laeli's end. This, however, made things slightly complicated. Apart from that, Zhang Heng also noticed that Carina seemed a little absent tonight.

"Didn't you rest up in the day?"

"I... I couldn't really sleep," Carina stammered as she managed a smile.

Zhang Heng handed a cup of coffee to her. She thanked him and accepted the drink. Just as she was about to say something, the messenger came running in.

"Captain! Mr. Billy has received the group! Jackdaw is already leaving the port! They also wanted me to give you this," the man panted as he took out five letters from his coat.

Chapter 252 The Dust Settles

Lately, one after another major incident kept occurring in Nassau. Six of the island's most potent ships were led by Black Prince Sam to plunder the invincible Spanish treasure vessel. After a long and arduous fight, they finally managed to sink it. However, the navy ambushed them after that and eventually, only Jackdaw survived the battle, hauling home more than half the gold bars back to Nassau.

Not too long after that, a riot erupted at Malcolm's Terrance Manor. It was a rough night to say the least. The plantations around the mansion sent their men as well, hoping to assist Malcolm in dealing with the dissent. Some slaves were killed in the battle, and a few were recaptured. Just when speculations about Terrance Manor suffering great losses began to gain traction, news of Malcolm framing Normand started spreading throughout the entire island.

After three years, Eugene finally mustered enough courage to tell everyone that Malcolm made him frame Normand. He admitted working with a few captains to accuse Normand of taking bribes, the main reason why the first black-market alliance was disbanded. After that, Normand left Nassau quietly. Eugene even made public the letters between him and Malcolm.

This shocking news impacted the black-market merchants of Nassau significantly. Though Normand had left Nassau for a couple of years, he was still quite influential amongst the merchants, with more than half of the alliance attending his funeral when he died. However, once Malcolm's secret was exposed, enormous pressure fell upon his shoulders. The next afternoon, Redmond made an official announcement on behalf of the black-market alliance. On the surface, it seemed as if he was trying to calm everyone down, but whether he wanted it or not, his true intentions were soon revealed. He told everyone that he was going to investigate this incident.

Of course, Malcolm knew Redmond's ultimate goal, and if he was the one investigating this incident, he already had the outcome in mind. However, Malcolm made no excuses to stop Redmond from immersing himself into this matter; his influence helping him to open up a desirable path. Considering the fact that Redmond was Normand's close friend and leader of the black-market alliance, he was the best person to dig into this matter.

Until now, Malcolm still couldn't find a way to dismiss the accusation. On the other hand, three days were almost up, and he was slated to meet up with Carina. Malcolm had high hopes for the meeting, seeing that his situation was deteriorating by the minute. He also needed new allies to overcome this

crisis. The terms he offered Carina were still negotiable, and he was prepared to sacrifice some things on his part in convincing her to take his side.

The day eventually arrived, but Carina was nowhere to be seen in the coffee shop. He waited at his favorite table for the entire afternoon until the sun went down. Then, just as he was about to leave, he finally heard someone walking into the restaurant. It was Wallace.

“Something happened again?”

Malcolm set the cup of cold coffee down. He lifted his head and frowned.

“Rumors about you spreading all over the island like wildfire! They say that you have something to do with Mr. Fegan’s incarceration. Many knew that he disagreed forming of the black-market alliance before he went to jail. Ms. Carina is with Redmond right now, hoping that he would help her uphold justice,” said Wallace.

To his surprise, Malcolm’s face remained stoic and unmoved. It appeared as if he’d expected Carina to side with Redmond.

“I got it,” Malcolm replied calmly.

“The investigation regarding the riot at your manor has come to an end. Leah started the whole thing. She led a large number of slaves to the beach, boarded a ship, and left Nassau. I have checked all the ships leaving port yesterday and the day before that, and guess what I found. Jackdaw set off early this morning with a ship full of supplies. It’s possible they returned to port when it was dark. So...”

“So what?”

“I believe the riot has something to do with them. There’s a high possibility that Leah was the one who stole all those letters. Regarding this, we should inform all the other powerful landlords on this island. I’m certain they don’t want the same thing happening to them someday. We’ll also need to force Jackdaw to surrender the slaves to us.”

Malcolm did not respond to that. Instead, he pointed at the seat in front of him.

“I remember that we messed around every day when we were kids. You used to steal baked potatoes for me. After I went to school, we no longer had meals together. In fact, you’re the one who hired this restaurant’s chef.”

“Yes, you’re right. He’s called Alfonzo, a Spaniard. He has a terrible temper, and he hates pirates to the core. I had to spend an entire week and two times the usual salary just to convince him to work here. I remembered that after he hung a large ‘NO PIRATES ALLOWED’ sign outside the restaurant, someone almost strangled him to death that night.”

“I see. I have to admit that his coffee and fried eggs are pretty darn good. Anyway, we should eat. Let’s have a meal together since you’re here. After that, can you ask Alfonzo and see if he is willing to leave Nassau with us.”

“Mmm...”

Wallace was worried about Malcolm.

“Don’t worry about me. I came here four years ago, empty-handed. Within that period, I have made more money than most can make in a lifetime. The wealth is still mine even if I leave this place, but I have lost this fight. That said, I’m not the kind of person that won’t admit my mistakes. I can always move somewhere else and start all over again. There are tons of ways to make money. Remember that I came with nothing and now, I leave with everything in my hands. With all this money, I believe that I’ll be able to forge a new path. Besides, Redmond’s not going to last long in Nassau. The moment he underestimated Carina, he was doomed from the start.”

“You appear to have high hopes for her.”

“I’m the one who opened Pandora’s box and released her inner demons. Now, she can finally inspect her own ambitions and desires. I know she’s a good student, but how fast she grew exceeded my expectations. Just not too long ago, she blamed me for destroying her whole life. Now, she can take stock of her emotions and make decisions that only benefit her, even going as far as teaming up with the person responsible for putting her father in jail. This is starting to get really interesting. I made her who she is today, and yet, she had to be the one to destroy my career on this island completely. I guess we are even now.”

“Her relationship with Redmond is very fragile. We can always tell Redmond that she knows who really put her father in jail.”

“No, we are not going to do anything about it. Redmond is no idiot, and I won’t turn my back against Carina before I leave Nassau, either. At this age, I won’t allow emotions to govern my decisions anymore. Why would I do something that won’t benefit me? I’m guessing that Redmond is drowning in victorious joy right now. However, he doesn’t know that he has a ticking time-bomb by his side. It’s best to leave her with him. Consider it a parting gift for my old friend.”

Chapter 253 A Walk

Zhang Heng looked at Billy, not expecting to see another person on board Jackdaw when he returned.

The helmsman shrugged. “It wasn’t my idea. She wanted to come back. It was her decision.”

Leah held her luggage with both hands, and requested politely, “Can you please take me in? I can do lots of things.”

“I could do that, but why didn’t you leave with your people? You fought so hard to escape that manor. Wasn’t it so you could live a life of freedom?”

“I... I respected Laeli very much. He united us in our most difficult time and led us out of a miserable life. He’s surely a better chief than his father but I don’t agree with him on some things. I don’t think the deserted islands are a way out for my people.”

“Hmm?” Zhang Heng cocked his eyebrow.

“We may be able to live a peaceful life on that island for a while, but sooner or later the slave traders will find us again. Just like what happened back home, they’ll kill the old and the weak first, then separate the mothers from their children. If we can’t find a secure way out, it will happen again and again until every black man and woman will become a slave.”

Zhang Heng was astounded by how someone of Leah's age would consider such things. Although she was simply a teen at this point, she saw further into the future than Laeli when it came to certain things.

Zhang Heng looked earnestly at her and asked, "What do think should be the way out then?"

"I really don't know," Leah shook her head. "I'm still searching for it. One thing for sure, I know my talents and skills won't be very useful on the islands, which is why I want to live in the civilized world and fully utilize my potential."

"This isn't a very civilized place. I've already recruited enough sailors, and you're not even a sailor and you're a girl..." Zhang Heng trailed off, thinking hard. Then he looked at Carina. "Do you need anyone on your side?"

Carina nodded and turned to Leah, "I heard that you know how to read. It just so happens that I have a grocery store in Boston that is about to open. You can go there to help me keep the accounts, and I will provide you with lodging. You will be paid a pound each month. Once the business picks up, I will increase your salary accordingly."

Leah beamed at the prospect.

After Leah's issue was settled, Carina continued their interrupted conversation. She gave Zhang Heng a brief account of her private encounters with Redmond and the agreement between them. When they were done, she suggested that they take a walk. Zhang Heng nodded and followed Carina out of the house to the field.

It was a fine day; the sun blaring down its bright rays and a gentle sea-breeze was blowing – an excellent day for a walk. Carina had no destination in mind, so she just walked in a random direction. Zhang Heng simply followed her. All the way, neither Carina nor Zhang Heng spoke a word.

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It wasn't because they had nothing to say to each other; they were simply enjoying the rare calm. It had been three weeks since the riot broke out at Terence Manor, and so many things happened during this brief period of time. Nonetheless, for the time being, the situation had stabilized itself, and Malcolm's defeat was imminent.

Malcolm reacted to the situation accordingly, immediately listing and selling various assets on the island. Without Malcolm's specialty, Redmond, on the other hand, was unable to continue managing operations of the black-market alliance. Although no formal statement had been issued, everyone knew that the dissolution of the Black Market Alliance was inevitable.

Soon, there would be a major reshuffle of powers among the black-market merchants on the island. The situation would return to what it was when the competition was fierce. Recently, the black-market merchants had been the move again, contacting the pirates they previously worked with and looking for anybody to spy on their competitors prices."

While this meant a loss of income for some, it also meant opportunities for others. In the past, Malcolm used the first black-market's dissolution to quickly climb up the ladder, and now, many were eager to reproduce his success. In a case like this, Malcolm was clearly on the losing end. Even though Redmond lost the position as the president of the black-market alliance, his reputation rose to a whole new level

thanks to him seeking justice for Normand and Fegan. As a result, he had almost caught up to Normand.”

With a good reputation and strong connections, many powerful pirate gangs in Nassau had already expressed their willingness to continue working with Redmond even after the black-market alliance was dissolved. However, as long as he sat on the throne, he couldn't respond to those rumors. Nonetheless, everyone believed that Redmond would have more pirate ships than before after the disbanding.

The next beneficiary of this was Carina. Despite being fairly new on the island, she responded well to the enormous pressure that Malcolm and the black-market alliance imposed on her and at the same time, letting her extraordinary flair for business shine. Her pawnshop also won the praises of the smaller pirate gangs. On top of that, Malcolm had deliberately sent a wave of powerful pirate ships to her. If she could handle it successfully, she would become the second most successful black-market merchant after the alliance's dissolution. But that was still a long way to go. Right now, she wouldn't think too far ahead, wanting to savor her victory first. The pair eventually ended up on the beach.

After the long silence, Carina decided to speak. “I'm sorry. I've been actually hiding something from you.”

“Are you referring to the time Malcolm talked to you in private?” Zhang Heng asked.

Carina's eyes widened in surprise.

“Please don't misunderstand me. I didn't send anyone to monitor you, but it was the day of the operation and I was keeping tabs on Malcolm's movements. In fact, I can guess what he said to you,” confessed Zhang Heng. “When I thought about it, there were just too many coincidences in Eugene's case, and he was simply too cooperative. I did have my doubts on Redmond, and afterward, when I saw how distracted you were, my theory was confirmed in some way.”

“Since Eugene's case was related to Redmond, then there's a good chance Redmond also played a part in your father's case. We were prejudiced at first. When we saw the letter Leah stole, we believed that Malcolm had framed your father, but the truth was, from the contents of those letters, Malcolm was obviously investigating the matter. You didn't tell me because you feared that I wouldn't have given you a choice in this matter. From my point of view, I would have suggested that you use the opportunity to get rid of our biggest threat: Malcolm. Then you would lose the chance of joining forces with him to avenge your father.”

“Why? Why didn't you warn me if you knew?”

“Because the choice is yours to make,” said Zhang Heng. “Even though I have a share in your pawnshop, this is your enterprise at the end of the day, and it was your father who got framed and subsequently imprisoned. You and you alone must make the choice.”

“Then do you think that I'm cold-blooded for not avenging my father and instead, sleeping with the enemy?” Carina asked.

This time, Zhang Heng did not answer her directly. He simply said, “One day, you will defeat Redmond and become the most powerful merchant in the black market, just like how you defeated Malcolm.”

“But when that day comes, would I have changed so much that I won’t even recognize myself anymore?” Carina smiled bitterly.

“Perhaps, you’ve never really known yourself, in the first place.”

Chapter 254 The End

“Have you heard of his story?”

“Whose story?” asked the aristocrat with a silver wig to the man sitting across him. The nobleman seemed increasingly nervous as he talked.

“The story of the Caribbean King.”

“This part of the ocean belongs to Scotland, and there’s only one king in England. King George is his name.”

The aristocrat valiantly defended his country, but the bearded man opposite him knew that he wasn’t too confident. Ignoring the aristocrat, and like a graceful whale cruising the oceans, he said,

“He goes by many names. The slaves from the New World call him the Freedom Fighter. That’s because he attacks slave ships, and sets the slaves free. When he plunders merchant ships, he would only take their possessions but not hurt a single soul. Some merchants even complimented his ways. The Royal Navy deems him their worst nightmare. In these ten years alone, he’s sunken at least a dozen navy battleships, and he’s even managed to evade a coordinated attack between the navy and pirate-hunters. Oh, before I forget, the pirate hunters call him the Pirate-Hunter Killer. Whenever they see his black flag, even the bravest pirate-hunter goes into hiding.”

The man then paused for a while.

“Do we have any liquor here?”

The aristocrat was ungratified that the bearded man had dominated the conversation. Even though four muscular bodyguards were behind him, he still felt as if he was trapped in a cage with a ferocious beast. After a while, the aristocrat loosened his collar, his face looking pale and nervous. He wanted to remind the bearded man that he was merely a criminal here. However, he quickly changed his mind.

“Get him a glass of tawny port.”

“Seven years ago, he led his men in an attack against Nassau’s Roger Wood. During that battle, he managed to destroy Roger Wood’s ship and turn Nassau into a land of the free.”

“Land of the free? We reclaimed the place three years ago.”

The aristocrat smirked, finally finding something to gain the upper hand in the conversation.

“You are right. The navy provided immunity to all the pirates of Nassau except for him. You guys even tried to convince a mighty black-market merchant, which was also his most trusted ally to betray him. I must say, the real reason why the navy won the battle was because the man gave up in the end.”

The aristocrat was speechless. Roger Wood was a good friend of the royalty, and even though he was rescued from a battle seven years ago, his life had turned for the worse since then. Whenever the name

of the person was mentioned in front of him, he would start shivering in fear. Three years ago, Roger Wood was asked to become the navy's consultant for a reconquest of Nassau. However, he had a grim outlook about the future. He once told the royalty that even if the navy managed to reclaim Nassau, they would have to pay a hefty price for it.

However, Jackdaw left Nassau the night before the battle broke out. With Carina's help, the navy managed to reclaim Nassau without shedding a single drop of blood. Roger Wood was appointed the new governor-general of Nassau, and Carina became his special consultant.

"I heard his achievements have spread as far as London, Paris, and even all the way to Lisbon. He has become the talk of town. King George even hired someone to learn more about this legendary figure. What about you? What kind of person do you think he is?"

The bearded man lifted his head and looked at the aristocrat seriously, who quickly looked away, trying not to make any eye-contact. In that split second, the aristocrat realized that his actions only indicated that he was the weaker one here. To protect the royalty's honor, he quickly looked back into the bearded man's eyes.

"Only fools and plebeians will address him as the Caribbean King. Some are even dumb enough to believe that he's under the protection of Thetis herself, the Goddess of the Ocean! They also say he has the ability to control storms, and that he's actually immortal. To me, he's just another rotten pirate. When he's sent to the gallows, I will watch him struggle for dear life. By that time, I will know if he is truly immortal or not."

After the aristocrat was done talking, his face turned grave all of a sudden.

"Captain Zhang Heng! I now officially arrest you for crimes not limited to piracy, murder, plunder, assaulting the navy, and contempt of the King of Scotland. You will be tried in London. You will not be represented in any way whatsoever."

After that, the aristocrat stood up and waved his men over to apprehend Zhang Heng.

"I don't think I can wait that long."

Zhang Heng calmly glanced at his watch. The hour hand had completed 102 cycles, which meant he had been in this world for 3,900 days. After all these years in the game, he could no longer differentiate between the real world and the constructed one.

"I have asked many people about you. Everyone said that you're from the most powerful family in the New World. Good. I'll need you to tell everyone what you're about to witness. My request is very simple. I would like you to drop all charges against Anne and Jackdaw's pirates. You'll also have to promise me that the navy will no longer deem Jackdaw as a target. Otherwise, I might just enter your bedroom at night without you realizing it."

"Do you have the slightest idea of what you are talking about? How dare you threaten me when I'm about to arrest you?! I was only so polite because of my good upbringing, but it doesn't mean I can't play the bad guy too."

Once the royalty was finished, he signaled his two guards with the eye. Like mindless androids, they put their guns away at the same time and walked towards Zhang Heng with curled fists. On the other hand,

Zhang Heng was still sitting calmly on their chair. However, right before the guards could land their punches on him, he disappeared into thin air.

Zhang Heng's vision blackened, and he heard an echo. It was the sound of a familiar voice.

(Your time to return has come. The mission is complete...]

(You have completed Black Sail, your fourth round of the game. You will now be sent back to the real world...]

....

"Hehe! You look like shit. Just like the other player."

The bartender poured a glass of whiskey with her masterful hands and pushed the drink over to Zhang Heng.

"I like what you are right now. It looks like you have lots of stories to tell me. I must say that it's hard for a woman to resist a man like you."

Zhang Heng grabbed the glass, gulped down its contents, and asked, "What time is it now?"

His current voice and younger body took him by surprise, and he wasn't used to it.

"Welcome back to 21st of January, the year 2018. You can check your phone if you don't believe me. Or, tomorrow morning's news will tell you anyway."

Chapter 255 Dinosaur that Trespassed the Chicken Coop

Zhang Heng checked his phone and found that the date displayed matched the bartender's statements. If it was right, Zhang Heng had spent a total of 3,900 days in an 18th-century Caribbean. However, he had only been gone for two hours in the real world.

"It seems you've taken a long trip this time."

The bartender lady leaned over the wine cabinet and stared at Zhang Heng with a sparkle in her eyes. As he sipped his whiskey, he unconsciously tried to wipe away the foam on his beard. Suddenly, he realized that he no longer had a beard. All he had was his bare, smooth chin. After a short pause, he asked the bartender a few questions.

"What's the longest a player has ever stayed in the game?"

"No one knows. I heard of a player who stayed in his quest for a total of six years. This is the longest known time a player has spent inside the game. Also, the world he was in wasn't much different from the real world. After his quest was completed, he had to spend a long time telling apart real and fictional events that he had gone through."

"So, this is just a game?"

"Why? Why would you ask something like that?"

“I have a solid foundation in world history, and I have done extensive research about it as well. So far, every event that I’ve experienced in the game is no different from real history. Of course, with my involvement, the game’s history differs slightly to the real world.”

Zhang Heng then took out his cellphone, clicked on his Baidu browser, and typed in the keyword, Nassau. He discovered that Nassau’s history didn’t change at all. In the year 1718, Roger Wood had been appointed by George I of Great Britain to become the governor-general of Nassau. He also led the navy to New Providence and reinstated order there after driving out all the pirates in the area. Not long after Blackbeard Teach assaulted Charleston, he was killed by the navy. They also captured Anne, causing her father a great deal of money just to give her back her freedom. She died of old age in the colony.

He realized that everything about him had been wiped out of history. Logically speaking, this was impossible. After the Mannerheim quest, Zhang Heng had a plan inside his head. During the Black Sail quest, he deliberately made his name known in as many countries as he could during his last few years in the game. Once he left the quest, he wanted to verify his speculation and eventually found the answer that he wanted.

“During my second quest, I was wondering if I had traveled through time, but the possibility was simply too slight.”

“Hmm?” The bartender cocked her head.

“Because in a dynamic system, even the smallest change can spur a long-term chain reaction in the system.”

“It’s called the butterfly effect,” the bartender snapped her fingers.

“Yes. If all the players are really being sent back to the past, our world history would have turned into a mess. During the last auction, around four to five thousand players were present, and I can say for certain that there are at least tens of thousands of players in the system. With so many wings flapping, the changes it would bring to history would be unimaginable.”

“Perhaps, those living in their countries don’t even know that their nation’s borders have changed,” shrugged the bartender.

“That is a possibility, but I’ve left many marks on the script this time. It’s impossible that the real world had remained the same, and I clearly remember two different periods of history.”

“Wow. It seems like you’ve done many great things this time,” exclaimed the bartender.

“So, I’m now leaning toward the theory that you’ve integrated a historical timeline in each quest and made it a game. My question is, why do it? Why did you choose actual human history? What’s the message you’re trying to convey? And what happens to the people inside the quest when I leave?”

Now that the thought crossed his mind, Zhang Heng told the bartender, “Give me an extra round of the game.”

Having spent over ten years in the Black Sail quest, he had accumulated a shocking 342 game points, a whole 100 points more than he had expected. Whether it battling against the proud Scarborough of the Royal Navy while he was on Sea Lion, or when he and Black Sam and the others robbed the Spanish

treasure ship, or even fighting against Roger Woode to keep him from capturing Nassau's fleet, eventually earning himself great fortune and reputation – all these earned him many points.

Including the remaining 700 game points from the sale of the Moresby Bones, he now had more than 1000 game points. Spending 400 points to buy a chance at an extra game wasn't extravagance on his part.

That said, he had just ended a long episode and was in no hurry to begin a new journey.

So, Zhang Heng spent 400 game points on an extra round of the game, but he wouldn't be using it any time soon. Shortly after, he passed 'Betty's Shell,' the game item, to the bartender and left the bar.

Upon stepping out of the lounge, he was greeted by the deafening thump of electronic dance music, with folk bobbing their heads and flailing their arms in the rhythm.

The nights here were always so lively, an actual city that never slept.

Zhang Heng walked down the steel staircase. With his figure, he would soon be swallowed by the manic crowd. This time though, when the hormone-filled youths saw him walking down the steps, they automatically stepped aside to make way for him. Even the showoffs, rebellious thugs who loved to exhibit masculinity before their female counterparts dared not strong-arm him.

They had no inkling of why they would unconsciously step backward when they saw the man who looked no different from a university student. Those who frequented the establishment knew better than to mess with the two brawny men standing at the bottom of the staircase. When compared to Zhang Heng, however, the bouncers in suits and sunglasses seemed like harmless sheep.

Zhang Heng frowned. He could guess what was going on, sort of. He had been an 18th century pirate for more than a decade in the Caribbean Sea, and he became a horrible nightmare in all of Great Britain, and even Europe, putting the fear of God in them. Even if he didn't enjoy killing people, he spilled a lot of blood to survive in the cruel and harsh environment – so much he could not even remember how many people he must have killed, or how many had died because of him. Without him realizing it, his temperament had undergone tremendous changes.

In the eyes of these intoxicated youths, born and raised in peacetime and dancing the night away in a nightclub, Zhang Heng was like a dinosaur that trespassed the chicken coop.

Chapter 256 Let's Us Bring You For Some Fun

Zhang Heng didn't stay at the bar for long. He pulled his hoodie over his head and walked out of the with his head lowered.

Instead of going back to school, he went to a nearby public restroom.

Since it was a little over two in the morning, no one else was around. But the lights were on, and the air smelt of cheap disinfectant. Zhang Heng walked up to the sink in the men's toilet. The leaky faucet on his right dripped with a steady plop.

However, his eyes were on the mirror above the sink.

Back in Sex City, he did feel like his younger self again, but only now did he have a chance to examine his reflection. The beard on his face was gone, and the weathered hue on his skin had lost its bronze tone. The callouses and scars on his body had disappeared too.

His face was ten years younger than his time in Nassau, a sight he found a little unfamiliar.

Most importantly, he understood what the bartender meant when she said that he looked like a completely different person. Physically, he might look the same, but he had retained the temperament of an 18th-century pirate.

This was actually going to be troublesome. Most wouldn't notice it, but those who were close to him would be able to tell from a glance that he had changed a lot, especially since the Spring Festival was approaching, and he would have to return home soon. His parents, who had been having the time of their lives in Europe, may not sense the change in him, especially considering the fact that they never once remembered his birthday correctly. He could even send someone else of the same height and age back, and they probably couldn't even tell the difference. Nonetheless, his granddad, who had raised him since he was a child, would definitely sense something.

More importantly, with his current demeanor, he would inevitably be asked to have his ID checked whenever he was out on the street.

While he was still deep thought, a group of young men with colorful hair swarmed into the restroom, each with a cigarette between their fingers. They gave off the appearance of the neighborhood's small-time ruffians. Zhang Heng saw them outside of the bar a few times before; many of these the children of relocated villagers. Initially, there were two relatively large villages here. As the city continued developing rapidly, expanding further into the wilderness one ring after another, many small hamlets turned into either industrial or residential areas.

This was something worthy of celebrating – the villagers received compensation and were relocated from their small wooden huts to chic and modern high-rise apartments. Many of them switched from farming to playing mahjong all day and collecting rent. Along with the sudden influx of wealth came its own set of problems, where the once simple villagers started to lose purpose in life, and their children lost the motivation to be diligent.

After all, all they needed to get by was to collect rent. As a result, most of the village's youth turned into neighborhood thugs after high school. Of course, to the common man, there was a certain light-heartedness within the cacophony even though it was a nuisance.

Every day, these youths who dressed like gangsters from old Hong Kong films did nothing all day but patron the arcade, cyber cafes, or roughing up hawkers operating nearby – nothing but indulging in their own folly and fantasies.

Come night, their favorite hangout spot was in front of the nightclub or the bar. In addition to helping the owner solve inconvenient security issues, they also picked up drunk girls from the side of the road. Unlike hustling for money on the streets, this brought them great excitement and pleasure. Nonetheless, since it was illegal to do so, they tended to get into trouble. Not to be outdone were certain quarters who took advantage of men's philandering desires. They planted young, scantily

dressed women on the street pretending to be drunk. When an unsuspecting victim picked the ladies up, he would have to choose between getting blackmailed or serving jail time.

However, these local thugs weren't worried about anything this sort happening to them. They shared a pretty good rapport with these conniving groups, and they were gutsy and familiar with the place. Once they were done with their business, they would leave hastily. That way, they rarely ran into any trouble.

Hence, this group of rowdy young men entered the public restroom with a young, unconscious girl, jeering loudly among themselves. Much to their surprise, they weren't alone. While the toilet wasn't too far from the bar, it was definitely not close to it either. Between the buildings was another restroom, so most of the bar's patrons wouldn't come all the way here.

By the time the youths entered the building, Zhang Heng's hood was over his face so his identity could be concealed. He didn't react to the situation, though, feeling that he had become more cold-blooded in character. He wondered if it was because of the ten years he spent as a pirate.

Moreover, this situation was completely different from when the wall engulfed the scavenger. At that time, he had hurried over to help the elderly lady and the child because they were innocent, genuine victims who were simply at the wrong place and time. Since it was within his ability to help, he was willing to lend a hand.

In essence, single men and women patroned nightclubs so they could unleash the raging hormones burning within them. All were adults, though, capable of taking care of themselves. Since women were the fairer gender, they should have known better what might become of them if they got sloshed at the bar at two in the morning. Every night, many young women would be so hammered they often collapsed by the side of the road outside Sex City. From the way Zhang Heng saw it, such matters were out of his control, and he wasn't interested in barging in.

Every sentient being had the right to live the way they wished, and at the same time, they too were responsible for the consequences of their own choices.

So, Zhang Heng merely glanced at the group and left with his bowed low.

However, someone reached an arm out to block his path.

"Dude, it's your lucky day today," a boy in a leather jacket grinned. "What do you think, eh?" he pushed the unconscious girl's head up by her chin. "See here, this is what we call by fine quality – an absolute beauty. On a normal day, when you ask girls like this for their WeChat contact, they would ignore you unless you drive a BMW. We are all brothers here, and we must have met by fate. We'll bring you for some fun if she refuses!"

Zhang Heng knew what the guy was thinking. All that destiny crap was bullshit. The youth didn't expect to run into anyone and was worried that the stranger would report them. Thus, they decided to cut Zhang Heng a deal and turn him their accomplice. At the same time, an extra man would make it an even more exciting state of affairs.

There was no point trying to explain anything in this situation. Even if Zhang Heng wouldn't call the cops, these thugs would never believe him. So, Zhang Heng stuffed his phone into his pocket and threw a punch at the guy's face without warning.

He had been training hard in the gym recently. With his forty-eight hour day, his strength had exceeded that of the average person. So, when Zhang Heng's fist made contact with the youth's face, the kid subsequently fell to the ground with a sickening thud.

Chapter 257 Superpowers of Ordinary People

The gangsters held sway over this area, relying on their large numbers. They had always been the ones doing the bullying, and this was the first time the tables turned against them.

Zhang Heng's punch was too sudden, coming entirely without warning. The leather-jacketed boy had invited him to join their little party, and his friends were all grinning from ear-to-ear, excited by this new gameplay. Lo and behold, something even more stimulating happened. The leather-jacketed youth crashed onto the floor, head first. His vision went dark, and before he could scream in pain, he was already out cold.

His friends were all disconcerted. They simply stood there, forgetting to fight back for a split second. However, real-life was no turn-based game, and Zhang Heng wasn't going to go easy on them. After taking one down, he immediately grabbed another by the collar and threw him down. This one was even unluckier. As he fell, his forehead hit the sink, and bright red blood gushed out. There was no fight left in him.

Having lived in the Caribbean for more than a decade, Zhang Heng didn't just upgrade his knife skills to level 3; even without a weapon on him now, his melee skills were just as impressive. Anne was the one who taught him that shoulder throw, and he managed to learn everything from her when they sparred. Coupled with his extensive combat experience, it would be challenging to find a match for his skills.

In just five seconds, Zhang Heng had taken down two opponents.

After taking a moment to register what was happening, the remaining three thugs finally snapped out of their stupor. They set the girl down as they screamed a cheer for themselves, armed with switchblades and slicing the air as a gesture of intimidation.

This scare tactic usually worked on ordinary people. Unfortunately, they ran into Zhang Heng today. By simply observing their posture and gait, Zhang Heng could tell that these small-time thugs weren't formally trained, and in fact, had already made all sorts of mistakes. They seemed formidable standing still, but once they moved, their weak points were glaring

But a sharp weapon like the switchblade still posed a degree of danger, especially in a scuffle. That was also why Zhang Heng opted to take down two thugs first, making it easier for him to tackle the other three.

The whole fight lasted less than a minute. Zhang Heng actually held himself back. Two out of the five thugs were out cold, and the other three were conscious but bruised. The most miserable one was the one who charged at Zhang Heng with the blade but missed and had his head pushed down the urinal. Zhang Heng even finished him off with a kick on his back.

Such petty street fights were no match for all the battles Zhang Heng had fought all throughout his pirate career. He did not even break a sweat. Upon their defeat, the other three thugs, having some life

left in them, dragged their unconscious friends out of the toilet while shooting their mouths off, making empty threats as they made a hasty retreat.

Zhang Heng pretended to chase them. The thugs were so scared they tripped over the sidewalk and fell onto the tall grass. Having learned their lesson, they kept their mouths shut and ran desperately for their lives.

Zhang Heng had no interest in pursuing them. So, he returned to the toilet. Once inside, he couldn't help but furrow his brows at the sorry sight.

There were traces of the fight everywhere, with obvious trails of blood on the floor left by that unlucky bastard who hit his head on the sink, and vomit from the leather jacketed guy. There was even a random sneaker, three switchblades, and a small dent in the stainless-steel handrail of the urinal.

Everything else was the same as when he had left two minutes ago. The only difference was that the unconscious girl had disappeared.

Had she run off on her own?

Zhang Heng had been so focused on the group of thugs that he did not pay attention to what was happening behind him. The girl might have taken the opportunity to escape. The toilet had two exits, one at the front and the other at the back. Zhang Heng had chased the thugs out of the front entrance, but the one at the back led to a small, open park with lush vegetation. It would take less than two minutes to get from the toilet to the park.

Although the girl appeared to be unconscious when she was brought in by the group of thugs, Zhang Heng wasn't sure how drunk the girl actually was. The fight was a messy and loud affair, and she could have woken up in the middle of it. Upon realizing that she recognized nobody around her, she might have pretended to be drunk until everyone left before escaping into the park.

Having made a satisfactory deduction of what happened, Zhang Heng left the matter as it was. He had no other intentions for the girl, and it wasn't important if she thanked him or not.

His fight had nothing to do with the girl, but rather because he was stopped from leaving. Since the girl escaped on her own, it saved him the trouble of having to contact her family or friends to come for her.

To avoid unnecessary trouble, Zhang Heng cleaned the blood on the floor and pocketed the switchblades before he left.

At this hour, the main door leading to the dormitory was already locked. Not wanting to trouble the caretaker, Zhang Heng checked himself into a single room at a hotel like he did the last time.

Since most modern hotels were equipped with face recognition equipment, Zhang Heng had to unsheath his hood to peer into the camera. Unsurprisingly, his appearance gave the receptionist a good scare. Unconvinced, the receptionist swiped his identity card twice. No match to any fugitive was found in the system, and although good news for her and the hotel, the receptionist seemed reluctant to believe it.

In the end, Zhang Heng had to show her his student ID and his campus card. The receptionist, in turn, was very surprised.

When she returned it to him and gave him the room card, she could not help but ask, “Are you really nineteen?”

Zhang Heng took the room card from her and answered, “Err, there’s still some time before the new year, so, yes. I’m still considered nineteen.”

Until he got on the elevator, the lady at the front desk downstairs still seemed to be in a daze. She had held her position for two years, and during the tenure, she had seen all kinds of people. To pass the time during her tedious, monotonous job, she had invented some games to entertain herself. One of her favorites was guessing her guest’s profession.

Whenever a guest walked into the hotel, the receptionist’s mind would begin conjuring theories of the occupation of the person. Then upon issuing an invoice or during checkout, she would ask them to confirm.

She had always enjoyed this game. After two years, she could now accurately guess eight out of ten professions, and she considered that a superpower of an ordinary person. But this time, the superpower she was so proud of proved completely ineffective.

Student? How’s that possible. That kind of temperament, to be frank, was more like a pirate from the movies, who killed their victims without remorse.

The receptionist was greatly amused.

It was the twenty-first century China. How could such inexplicable things even exist?

Chapter 258 Peeking

The comfort of the budget hotel chains was only averagely comfortable, but way better than sleeping on some woven fabric or straw on a hard wooden floor. It had been the longest time since Zhang Heng slept on a proper bed. During the Black Sail quest, he spent more than half of his time out at sea and usually slept on a hammock on Jackdaw. Only after returning to Nassau would he be able to sleep on a bed. That said, it was a bed made out of two blankets and a cotton cloth.

According to history, European royalties would typically sleep on feather mattresses. As for pirates, they didn’t have many options to choose from. When Zhang Heng’s first entered the quest, he did experience a few sleepless nights.

This was Zhang Heng’s first night returning to the real world. After doing some simple cleaning, he turned off the lights and went to bed. By the time he opened his eyes again, it was already afternoon, with bright rays piercing through the curtains flooding the room. When he got up from the bed, he felt warm sunlight caressing his face. Thirst hit him hard, and immediately, grabbed the complimentary water bottle from the table and gulped its contents down. Fragments of last night’s dream still lingered in his mind.

The ferocious ocean, salty sea breeze, and crimson hair... all these memories were like a longspun dream to him. Everything disappeared the moment he opened his eyes. After that, Zhang Heng grabbed his cellphone and saw there were two unread WeChat messages. One came from Wei Jiangyang. He informed Zhang Heng that he’d arrived in Qingdao with his girlfriend and planned to stay there for two

to three days. Before leaving, he intended to head to the wholesale market to buy some raw seafood and asked if Zhang Heng wanted anything, also offering to send it to him by express delivery.

The other message was from Hayase Asuka. She told Zhang Heng that she had bought a return ticket to Japan and was set to fly on the 1st of next month. Before she went home, she wanted to ask if he could accompany her to buy some souvenirs for her family.

Zhang Heng replied Wei Jiangyang first. After that, he changed his keyboard language to Japanese and replied Hayase Asuka. She texted back within a second, seeming as if she had been anxiously waiting for his reply. Zhang Heng replied to her, and once again, she texted back almost instantly.

“I haven’t thanked you properly for helping me win the giant doll! You haven’t had lunch, right? Can we meet after one hour at Xidan? My treat!”

She even inserted a smiling bear emoji at the end of her message. In his current state, Zhang Heng didn’t want to walk around the streets. It wasn’t the first time he experienced such a sensation, though, for when he returned from the Mannerheim quest, his character and temperament had changed. Some small habits from the battlefield had stuck with him, and even his friends from the hostel could sense that he was different. However, he was slowly recovering after reintegrating himself into the daily life of the natural world.

To neutralize the memories and habits of his ten-year piracy tenure, Zhang Heng knew that he had to socialize with as many people as possible. After a brief consideration, he replied Hayase Asuka with a ‘yes.’ He then set his phone down and headed for a shower. After checking out at the front desk, Zhang Heng proceeded to the pharmacy to purchase a 3M face mask. With the industrial boom of the era, developing cities would usually be engulfed by a thick layer of noxious haze, especially true for the cities up north. For obvious reasons, many had taken to putting on masks, and the way Zhang Heng presented himself was nothing out of the ordinary.

However, a mysterious sensation hit him as he paid his items with his Alipay, feeling that someone was staring at him from the back. When he turned around, he saw an old grandma searching for some over-the-counter flu remedies for her grandchildren. She had to put on her glasses to read the description that was printed on the packaging. The pharmacy was rather small, and other than the pharmacist, cashier, and the elderly grandma, there wasn’t anyone else around. Zhang Heng could finally rule out that an enemy was lurking around the corner.

It was almost time for Zhang Heng to meet up with Hayase Asuka, and hence, did not dwell further on the matter. After boarding the metro, Zhang Heng arrived in Xidan on time. On the other hand, Hayase Asuka took full advantage of studying abroad and traveled to as many places around her as she could. After feeling that taking pictures with the phone was simply not engaging enough, she bought an instant camera, voraciously capturing photos of life on the subway and streets. Those around her must have had the impression that she had all the money in the world to buy the unlimited rolls of films to feed her polaroid.

“Ah! I’m glad that you are here!”

Hayase Asuka tucked the camera and photos into her bag. With a sniffle, she rubbed her demure nose and said, “This morning, I was thinking about what to buy for my family. My mom asked me to buy her

fermented tofu soaked in red oil and tea leaves, and my father wants white wine. Sigh... this is so troublesome. They should know how to shop online, right? They told me that only the locals would sell me the original stuff. But, then again, I've never bought those things before. Luckily, you're here to help me. Before that, let's get some food. Do you have anything in mind?"

"Nothing in particular. What about you telling me what you feel like eating, and I'll take you to the best restaurants where they serve it."

"Really?! But... is this appropriate? After all, you're the guest here."

As she talked, Hayase Asuka pulled out a flyer from her bag.

"What is this? It looks so yummy!"

"Ah! This is a hotpot. Follow me. I know of a place that serves delicious hotpot."

However, right after saying that, Zhang Heng couldn't take a step forward. Only half a month ago, he was here to purchase something, but right now, everything felt so foreign and awfully disorientating to him. He had no idea how to go to the restaurant that served the famous hotpot. In confusion, he had to use his cellphone to search for it.

This was one of the drawbacks of staying in a quest for too long. There were limitations to how much a human could retain memories, and upon absorbing new sets of knowledge, the person would gradually forget the past. Zhang Heng was lucky enough to enter the Black Sail quest right after his final exam, or he would have failed by now.

There was only a short line outside the restaurant when Zhang Heng and Hayasa Asuke arrived at the place. After all, it wasn't lunchtime. He then took a number from the reception. That was when the feeling of being watched hit him again. What happened at the pharmacy was perhaps, an accident, but having the same feeling twice was enough to alert him. With his current skills, he wasn't afraid of thugs or gangsters. He recalled that when he attended the auction, the professor and Ding Si warned him that the circle of players wasn't always peaceful and pleasant.

Humans were the most complicated creatures to step this planet, and once its population reached a specific number, a variety of people and characters could be found in society. Ding Si once told Zhang Heng that there were crazy players that would hunt down other players for game items. Until now, he had been playing the game alone, making sure that he laid low and as inconspicuous as possible. He hadn't even revealed his identity to any players in the system. It wasn't logical that anybody would target him.

Chapter 259 Kumamon

Zhang Heng started observing the crowd after collecting his number. This time, the situation was way more complicated than the pharmacy. There were students, couples, families, sons and daughters, and office workers waiting to enter the restaurant. In total, 20 to 30 people were queuing up. Zhang Heng even saw a gay couple in the line, with the slightly plump one donning Hello-Kitty hair clip on the left of his head.

On the surface, it was hard to find out the person who peeped at him. Even though a couple of high-school students were looking at his direction, Zhang Heng knew that they were actually staring at

Hayase Asuka. She was standing close to them before they queued in front of the restaurant. In other words, they weren't the ones who peeped at him.

Besides, the mall was an open space, and many different people regularly passed him. Technically, it was entirely possible that the person staring at him wasn't in the line at all. Zhang Heng could feel something about to happen to him. However, he couldn't figure out what exactly, and it frustrated him.

Suddenly, someone tapped his shoulder. Zhang Heng then heard Hayase Asuka screaming in excitement. When he turned around, he saw a Kumamon mascot. Many shopping malls would hire people in costumes to walk around, a marketing strategy to attract more customers. Usually, children and girls adored Kumamon a lot.

Just as expected, Hayasa Akuma was elated when she saw the mascot.

"Ah! So cute! I didn't expect to see Kumamon in China!"

As Hayase Asuka spoke, she took out her instant camera.

"Can the three of us take a picture together?"

Zhang Heng nodded, and momentarily gave up looking for the peeping tom. A couple was standing near them, and he politely requested their assistance in taking a picture. When that was done, the Kumamon didn't leave but instead, stood in front of Hayase Asuka and extended its hands. With a broad smile plastered on her face, she quickly gave the mascot a tight hug.

A rose appeared in Kumamon's hand the moment she let it go. It then pointed at Zhang Heng and Hayase Asuka. She instantly blushed, probably feeling shy, or that she wasn't well versed in Mandarin. After taking the rose, she didn't utter a single word.

The Kumamon then used its hands to draw a heart before leaving them alone to search for the next couple. Hayase Asuka's mind was filled with all kinds of thoughts after that. A minute later, her instant camera printed the picture, and she quickly stuffed it in her bag without looking at it. Just as she was about to put the picture in, she paused.

"What's wrong?"

"Huh? Where's my wallet? I remember it was in my bag before we took the picture!"

She then searched her bag all over again, but to no avail. She frantically searched her pockets as well. Yet, there was still no trace of her wallet. It was at that time that panic began gripping her. Not only was there cash, but her Chinese and Japanese bank cards and student ID were in there as well. To make matters worse, she soon discovered that her passport had vanished too. She was slated to celebrate the New Year with her family and even purchased a flight ticket earlier. Without the passport, it would be impossible to board the airplane.

If she remembered correctly, before taking out the instant camera, her wallet was still in her bag, and the only person that got close enough to her was that Kumamon. The mascot had left for less than three minutes.

"Wait for me here. Do not leave this place. I will come back to you in a while," said Zhang Heng sternly.

Hayase Asume was on the verge of crying. Immediately, Zhang Heng started to go after the Kumamon mascot. However, after searching for a bit, he failed to spot it even after reaching the end of the hallway. Logically, the mascot shouldn't outrun Zhang Heng since the person was in a giant, clumsy suit. Zhang Heng asked around to see if they had seen a Kumamon suit, deliberately picking those coming from different directions. Unfortunately, not a single person said that they saw a large Kumamon passing them. It was as if the massive thing had simply disappeared out of thin air. Perplexed, Zhang Heng approached the concierge counter and asked the person operating it about the Kumamon.

"I'm sorry, Sir. We cannot divulge personal information of our mall's employees," the guide replied nervously, feeling that Zhang Heng looked more like a criminal than anything else.

"Do you think I should call the police and reporters here to investigate this for me? Do you want everyone to hear about this? Perhaps you wish to be seen in the newspapers and the internet? Next time, the first thing your customers will do is to protect their wallets whenever they come here. Or, should we look for the thief now and retrieve my friend's wallet. We can choose not to call the police, or we can call the police but not the reporters. Which option do you think would benefit the mall more? Don't blame me for not reminding you; the thief got away only a few minutes ago. There's a high chance that he's still in this mall."

The guide was startled by Zhang Heng's dominant approach.

"Please hold on, sir. I'll consult my supervisor regarding this," replied the guide while gulping hard.

Half a minute later, the guide was done talking with her supervisor.

"Sir, I just asked my colleague about this matter, and he told me that our mall didn't hire any Kumamon today."

"How about the tenants in the mall? Did they hire any mascots?"

"I can't be too sure about that."

The guide paused for a while before continuing

"One thing is for sure; the shop owners would have informed us if they were to hire anyone to put on a show..."

Before she could go on any further, Zhang Heng scooted to another escalator. As the guide was talking to him, he saw the Kumamon on the second floor from the corner of his eye. It appeared that it had no intention to run away and was playing with a young girl in front of a shop. After giving a hug, it handed a lollipop. Before leaving, it brushed the little girl's head.

At the same time, everyone was left in shock and awe when they saw Zhang Heng jumping down from the escalator. He spent only ten seconds getting from the fifth to the second floor! Two ladies that were having their milk tea were about to record his fantastic feat with their phones. However, Zhang Heng was too fast for them. The Kumamon was on the second floor, and he had to go after it as quickly as he could.

They weren't very far apart from each other, but an atrium divided them. Zhang Heng had to run along the corridor before he could get to the Kumamon. It seemed that the mascot had noticed him too, but

instead of feeling nervous, it stood in front of the shop with both hands on its hips, waiting for Zhang Heng to come at it. The combination of a gaping mouth and two red cheeks made it look like it could use a beating.

Chapter 260 Gratitude From An International Friend

The Kumamon waited until Zhang Heng ran past seven to eight stores, and when he was about 30 meters away from him, it turned around and ran into a women's apparel store called Only. Unfortunately, there was no escaping this time, for there wasn't another exit. In other words, the bear was bound to be captured by Zhang Heng. When he saw the mascot entering the fitting room, he quickly proceeded to follow it.

The sudden commotion had startled the store's attendant, and considering it was a store specifically for women, it was rare to see men entering it. Even if there were any, they would usually come with their wives or girlfriends. When someone like Zhang Heng so aggressively barged into the shop, it was only natural that the attendants would be afraid. Customers quickly fled the store in fear, but the same couldn't be said for its staff.

Left with no other options, the store manager was forced to confront Zhang Heng.

"Sir, how can I help you?"

Zhang Heng simply ignored her and went ahead to pull the curtains of the fitting room open. The shopkeeper was so shocked by Zhang Heng's actions that she thought she must have come across a pervert of some kind and was close to screaming for help. The fitting rooms in Only had a particular layout. A curtain covered the two-square-meter fitting room to allow the customers' privacy. However, it only blocked the front; the top was bare and uncovered.

Before Zhang Heng pulled the curtain, he could see the Kumamon's calves and feet. It appeared that the person was hastily trying to remove the cumbersome suit. He could also see the mascot's head popping out above the fitting room. However, there was no one in the fitting room when Zhang Heng pulled the curtain. Like magic, the Kumamon's costume lost all rigor and form and fell to the ground in a crumpled heap! Initially, the manager was on the verge of shouting, but she stopped herself when she saw that it was actually empty.

"Where is the person?!"

Zhang Heng didn't answer the manager. Instead, he bent down and shook the flaccid costume vigorously. A small piece of paper fell out with a short message written on it.

It said: (I have returned your items to you. Here's a friendly reminder. As you're reading this, mall security should arrive in about a minute and a half. Don't let them think you are a pervert, lest you might just get caught.)

As if to add insult to injury, there was even a Japanese phrase at the end of the message.

[Gambate!]

At the same time, Zhang Heng received a message from Hayase Asuka as well.

“I’ve found my wallet! This is weird. How is it on someone else’s table? I didn’t even go near it. I still can’t find my passport, though.”

Suddenly, Zhang Heng remembered the person mentioned that he had returned those items to him instead of her. He then touched his pocket and found out that Hayase Asuka’s passport was on him. Suddenly, footsteps could be heard approaching the fitting room. Earlier, when he jumped off the escalator, he had attracted the attention of the shopping mall’s security guards. However, the most troublesome part was that he ran into a women’s clothing shop and pulled the curtains of the fitting room open, enough to warrant severe punishment.

Now that he had found the wallet and passport, the person in the Kumamon costume was nowhere to be found. He would have a hard time explaining things to security, so, he sent Hayase Asuka another message.

“Your passport is with me. Let’s meet at the subway.”

Zhang Heng wasted no time after sending the text, pulling his hoodie over and exited Only’s main entrance. It was at that time when he noticed that two security guards were approaching him from his right. At the same time, more security guards had gathered on the first floor’s escalator.

Zhang Heng didn’t panic at a time like this, instead, taking two steps forward along the glass railing. Just when the two security guards thought that they had got him, he jumped off. As he descended, he grabbed the bottom of the rails to absorb the impact. When he let go, he’d already landed on the first floor successfully.

Before Zhang Heng entered the Black Sail’s quest, his rock climbing skills were at Lv. 1. Throughout his ten years in the Caribbean, he didn’t improve on his climbing skills, but his muscle control had gotten better after training a lot with the saber. Living at sea for a long time had granted him good balance as well, which was why such feats were no sweat for him.

The two guards were in disbelief, having a hard time picturing how someone actually jumped off the escalator. Now that they saw it with their own eyes, they were definitely impressed. On a regular day, the guards would be dealing with disgruntled customers and the minor arguments that ensued from it. At most, petty shoplifters or street thugs were the worst they had to deal with. None had seen someone pulling off what Zhang Heng did. Naturally, they felt as if the whole thing was a scene from a movie.

No one dared stand in Zhang Heng’s path after he jumped from the second floor. He simply walked out of the mall with no complications. Chinese New Year was just around the corner, and throngs of people had crowded the mall for some last-minute shopping. When the guards arrived at the mall’s entrance, Zhang Heng had already disappeared amid the crowd.

After Zhang Heng exited the mall, he walked around the area to ensure that no one was following him. Only when he was sure that he was safe did he move to the subway station. That was when he saw Hayase Asuka waiting for him over there. Earlier, she was leaning on the glass railing and witnessed all that happened on the second floor. Throughout the whole incident, her mouth stuck in a round ‘O,’ momentarily forgetting that her wallet and passport were lost. It wasn’t until Hayase Asuka received Zhang Heng’s message that she the mall for the subway station.

As quickly as the situation escalated, she had already forgotten the earlier incident. Right now, she was more interested in Zhang Heng, as if it was her first time meeting him.

“Zhang San, please tell me! Are you actually Superman?”

“Err... I’ve trained hard for my marathons.”

Zhang Heng realized that what he did earlier was indeed insane. After all, he wasn’t in 18th century Nassau anymore. Not only did he manage to retrieve Hayase Asuka’s wallet and passport, but he even discovered that the mysterious person was, in fact, targeting him. However, he was still unable to figure out its identity and purpose. If he managed to capture the person in the Kumamon suit, everything about his current situation would immediately be enlightened.

Speaking of which, the mysterious individual’s attempts were all futile. After running off with Hayase Asuka’s wallet and passport, it was returned in the most dramatic way possible. The whole thing almost seemed as if a kid was pulling a prank on them. However, Zhang Heng could confirm that the person in question possessed at least one game item. Otherwise, what happened in the fitting room would be practically impossible to explain. Judging by the handwriting and sentence structure of the note, the mysterious person was probably female.

“Huh? Running a lot would eventually allow you to jump down from great heights? During high school, I woke up nearly every morning to jog. However, I’m still hopelessly clumsy.”

Hayase Asuka took two steps back, attempting to figure the whole thing out.

“Since you’re the one who’s telling me all these, I’ll believe you for now. Oh, right. I feel you’ve changed a lot. When I saw you earlier, I almost didn’t recognize you. Thankfully, you’re still as reliable as before. That’s great,” she murmured shyly in a soft tone.

After that, Hayase Asuka spread her arms and hugged Zhang Heng tightly.

“Consider... consider this as gratitude from an international friend,” she continued as her face blushed.