

# 48 Hours a Day

## Chapter 3: Still World

Zhang Heng pushed the door of his dorm opened. The hallway was quiet, it felt like he walking in one of those hospital morgues, with only the sound of his footsteps echoing.

The door to the opposite dorm was left ajar and there was a bright light pouring from it. Zhang Heng stuck his head in to take a look and saw four people engrossed in a computer game.

On the screen, their characters were pursuing a low health point Annie<sup>1</sup>. The skills emitted were suspended in mid-air, and the excited expressions on their faces were unmoving like four very life-like statues.

Zhang Heng noticed an alarm clock on of their desks—the time showed 00.00.

After that, he went around to all the other dorms on the same floor.

Some of them were locked before their tenants went to bed, so he could not enter them. The ones he did enter were all the same, all frozen at the very last moment of the day.

In the bathroom, someone was huffing away while hiding from the dormitory caretaker. The sparks from the cigarette butt were clear as stars but they were not spreading, and the smoke the person exhaled from the corner of his mouth was suspended in the air.

Zhang Heng could not help but take out his phone and took a picture of this magical scene.

When he was clicking on the camera shutter, he made another interesting discovery—in this world where the time had stopped moving, it was not only the people who were on pause, the things all around also remained in the state it was in at the very last second of the day.

Just like that skill in mid-air, the electric fan in standstill, and now, this cigarette that never burns out.

But there were also exceptions.

To test his theory, Zhang Heng plucked the cigarette out from between the person's fingers.

When the tab was tucked in between his fingers, it began to continue burning.

So that was how it was.

In this space of time, where he was the only one who could move about, anything that he touches would continue to function as usual, just like this cigarette, and his cell phone, computer, and MP3 player. The only thing was that the time displayed on the screens remained unchanged.

However, this trick did not seem to work on humans. Earlier on, he had shaken Chen Huadong to wake him but his friend had remained unresponsive.

Then what about all the other living creatures other than humans?

Intrigued, Zhang Heng returned to his room, turned on the torchlight on his phone and went near his roommates. After two minutes, using his 20MP soft-light dual camera in the pitch-black room, he finally found his what he was looking for—the most commonly seen, most detested creature in the summer—mosquito.

Once this insect enters your room, you can forget about having a peaceful night.

Zhang Heng's dorm was on the third floor, which was considered quite close to the ground. At this height, the mosquito did not need to take the lift to move into their room. To keep those pests away, people resorted to all kinds of repellents: lighting up mosquito-repellent incense, applying repellent sprays, hand mosquito nets, et cetera. But there were always one or two fugitives.

This particular mosquito was lurking next to Dorm Leader Wei Jiangyan's pillow, waiting for its chance to enjoy a full meal.

Unfortunately for the insect, its dream was about to be crushed tonight.

Zhang Heng reached out a hand, plucked the mosquito from the air by its wings, and then place it on his palm.

The insect maintained its mid-flying posture like a most dedicated actor—ignoring the target that was near to it.

“It looks like it doesn't work on animals either.”

Once the experiment was over, Zhang Heng crushed the mosquito and successfully eliminated the pest.

Alas, now that he had explored the building, it was time to go out and take a look.

He went to the bathroom and washed away all traces of the crushed insect, and then continued his walk downstairs.

The caretaker lady on duty was standing by the door holding a large U-shaped lock. She was probably locking up.

Now, this was another distinguishing feature of higher education institutions, although some other universities had very different managerial styles on dormitory.

Zhang Heng's school had a twelve o'clock curfew. But if the students for some reason had to return late, they could always wake the caretaker by tapping on her window.

They would be allowed to return to their rooms once their details were taken down. Nonetheless, if this happened frequently, the student would be reprimanded and punished.

Zhang Heng walked past the caretaker without so much as breaking a sweat. On a normal day, she would have stopped and questioned him.

But right now, she seemed to have suddenly developed the ability to see through things. Her eyes were focused on the handle of the door, past Zhang Heng's body, as if a living person had not just walked past in front of her.

That was how Zhang Heng strolled out of the dormitory building. He raised his head to take a look at the night sky as he walked through the empty campus, and finally came to the school gate.

It was much busier here.

While the campus was not very big, it was in a pretty good location, sitting on the edge of the third ring road, facing the main road.

Nights in the city were especially long.

The fried pancake stall on the overpass was packed with customers. Many of the white-collar workers who had just left their offices stopped by for supper on their way home. Not far away, a street cleaner was quietly sweeping the walkway. Under the platform, two bald uncles in suits and leather shoes were talking into their phones as they waited for the very late night-bus. Behind them, in a twenty-four-hour convenience store, a girl with a bear hairclip sitting at the counter yawned...

At precisely 00:00, they froze synchronically.

It was like pressing the pause button while watching a movie.

The cars speeding on the road had all went still.

Zhang Heng had seen what this city looked like at midnight the one time he went to the train station to pick up a friend.

But this was the first time he was able to observe it up close.

He could see the green onions that the pancake hawker was sprinkling onto the dish, the street cleaner's calloused hands and darkened complexion, the bald uncle's oily nose and the picture of his one-month-

old baby on the screen of his phone, the idol poster that the girl behind the counter hid under the cash register...

All these little details that were overlooked every day now stood out to Zhang Heng.

It was as if he was getting to know the city all over again.

Zhang Heng used his WeChat to unlock a mobike. While riding through the city, he also tested his presumptions.

Before the hour hand on his watch had completed its second rotation, he hurried back to his dorm before the caretaker lady could lock the door.

At 00:00, Zhang Heng was not wearing any earphones.

The next second, sounds and noises poured into his ears like water.

“Nice! I’m going to kill that person! I can finally use my Infinite Blade!”

“Push tower! They don’t dare to go against us!”

“I can’t! I have to go back and replenish my hp!”

...

The electric fan above the door creaked as it oscillated. Outside the window, a feral cat wailed. In the hallway outside, slippers slapped the floor as someone ran past. Zhang Heng who had not closed his night for more than a day was finally overcome exhaustion. After plugging in his phone to the charger, he threw himself onto his bed and entered dreamland.