

## 48 Hours 31

### Chapter 31: Tokyo Drift I

Zhang Heng was preparing himself up to the sacrificial lamb, but the bartender answered nonchalantly, “Since you’ve had a taste of my masterpiece, I’ll give you a tip—if you want to use the box to store the game items, I suggest that you forget about it.”

“Huh?!”

“Didn’t I tell you the last time? Only game items can travel freely between the game and real world. To ensure fairness for everyone, you’re forbidden to bring things from the game back to reality, nor can you bring anything from the real world into the game. So, the only thing the Tule box can do is to contain game items for you here in the real world. You’ll have to figure out a way to do that yourself on the other side.”

“The wooden Tule box is not a game item?”

The bartender shook her head. “There are very few things that can be called a game item, even the lowest F-grade ones. But there are game items that function almost like the Tule box. That’ll all depend on your luck. You can also wait till the year-end auction. There’ll be a lot of goodies there! Of course, provided that your pockets are not empty!”

...

For now, there was nothing Zhang Heng could do to get a suitable object to store game items. It was not an urgent matter, so he would have no choice but to heed the bartender’s words, noting to himself that most game items became effective upon direct contact.

All he had to do was to be careful and perhaps put on a glove or something to minimize risk.

If he stayed on, he might be coerced into tasting some other strange drinks, so Zhang Heng left the bar.

He picked an empty booth and found a small alarm clock under the seat.

Even though that extra 24 hours had prolonged his hardship on the island, he had to admit that the rewards were not insignificant either.

His time he spent in the game was 12 times longer than other players, which gave him a better opportunity to explore the island. Considering the dire consequences that game over could bring, he would have to rely on this ability of his for the rest of it.

He only hoped that it was not some remote and humanless place again this time.

He set the time on the clock to 23:55 before leaning back onto the padded seat and rested his eyes.

After about half an hour, a dizziness filled his head, and he felt weak. It was as if he’d been swallowed by a night hag, having none of the energy to even lift a finger.

Then that familiar voice rang in his ear again.

*[Verifying player's identity...]*

*[Identity confirmed. Random extraction of newcomer's quest for player number 07958...]*

*[Extraction complete—Current quest is Tokyo Drift!]*

*“Tokyo—an international metropolis with a population of 37 million, deserving of its reputation as the center of Japan’s politics, economy, and culture. During the day, this place is the vanity fair for financiers and politicians, but the grand opening of the truly entertaining stories only take place against the backdrop of the night... Will you, an exchange student from China, be able to leave your mark and become a legend here?”*

*[Mission objective: Win first place in an underground drifting championship.]*

*[Mode: Single player.]*

*[Time flow rate: 360] (One hour in the real world is equivalent to 15 days in this game. After 60 days, the player will be extracted and returned to the real world.)*

*A friendly reminder: the game will begin in 5 seconds. Players, please get ready!*

...

Zhang Heng opened his eyes and found himself standing right in the middle of a crossroad.

Perhaps his prayers had been heard by someone. This place was the exact opposite of his first game on the desert island!—he was surrounded by colorful neon lights and advertisement boards, a seemingly endless number of people strolled past him, speaking an unfamiliar language that he only heard on tv and games before.

A phone rang somewhere blaring a tune alike Mika Nakashima’s ‘The Reason Why I Thought I’d Die’. There were a few youths zipping through the crowd on skateboards.

Hot young girls sported miniskirts, and middle-aged salarymen in suits clutched onto their briefcases as they hailed for cabs. Zhang Heng even spotted a large number of western faces. It was night, yet it appeared to be livelier than during the day!

Tsk-tsk! This was indeed the world’s largest hotpot of urbanization!

After Zhang Heng was sure of signs of danger in his surroundings, he checked his personal profile.

*Name: Zhang Heng*

*Gender: Male*

*Age: 19*

*Player ID: 07958*

*Rounds played:1*

*Current game points: 24*

*Skills: Piano, Level 1; Language proficiency: Level 1 (both languages at general communication skills level); Archery skills: Level 2; Wilderness survival skills: Level 2*

*Item in possession: Lucky Rabbit's Foot (E)*

*Assessment: The player has slightly better luck than the average person, but otherwise, do not possess qualities that are worth commending. Has minimal wilderness survival and archery skills. Not expected to last longer than the first five rounds.*

Although Heng had been practicing rock climbing and photography for the past month, it appeared that neither of these skills even made it to level 0, which was why they were not displayed in the skills section.

Other than that, the biggest change was the addition of an 'item in possession' category and the rabbit foot's effects. His assessment was now slightly different too. At least he had gotten rid of that comment about him being unremarkable. Still, he might not be able to make it far enough.

Once he had reviewed his current status, Zhang Heng took in his surroundings again. The place was thriving. Right opposite him was an emporium with a giant outdoor LED screen playing a SONY earbuds commercial. Bustling shops and bright neon signs crowded the entire skyline. It was quite crowded, indeed.

This place... looked a lot like Shibuya!

Zhang Heng had tagged along with his mum on a trip to Tokyo to attend an academic conference when he was much younger. But his memory of that time was little fuzzy now because the conference was lengthy and he spent most of the time cooped up in hotel rooms. It was only on the last day, that his mother had brought him out shopping in Shibuya. She got him a PSP before they left, which was why he had some sort of impression at all of this place.

Getting to play the game in a thriving civilization was a good thing, but the situation was still slightly delicate.

For the most part, Zhang Heng did not understand Japanese at all. Even though there were Chinese characters in the words which allowed him to guess the approximate meaning on the signboards, at this rate, he would not be able to carry out his mission. How could they just leave him here?

He played the role of an exchange student in the game. This meant that he would not have to worry about his accommodation at the very least. There was no mention, however, the name of his school. There were dozens of universities in Tokyo – national, public, and private. He could not possibly go around asking each one of them.

In a time as such, Zhang Heng decided he might as well find out what he was carrying on his character.

He began searching his pockets when a girl in a short skirt suddenly ran towards him, huffing and puffing, carrying two ice cream cones in her hands! "Zhang Heng! Thank God you're here! I was scared to death! I thought I lost you on your first day here!"

The girl exhaled in relief when she saw him.

The traffic light on the opposite lit up green.

“Ah, crap. We’re running out of time! Let’s go!” The girl said, pulling his hand.

### **Chapter 32: Tokyo Drift II**

Ten minutes later, Zhang Heng was standing in front of the door into ITS’ DEMO <sup>1</sup> with an ice cream cone that had magically appeared in his hand.

“I’m sorry, Zhang-san<sup>1</sup>! I had a sudden craving for ice cream while we were walking and left you wandering on the road on your road,” the girl bowed apologetically.

“No, it’s my own fault. I was so busy looking around that I didn’t follow you closely, fellow classmate Ameko!” Zhang Heng had just finished searching all his pockets.

Its contents were simple: a passport, student ID, wallet (with 30,000 Japanese Yen and a transportation card), keys, and cell phone. Among these things, Zhang Heng’s priority was the phone. According to the girl, this was his first day here.

Then, chances were that she could be a friendly schoolmate who had taken the time taking him around to admire Tokyo’s night view. In most situations like these, both parties were most likely to have exchanged phone numbers. Zhang Heng checked a recent missed call and typed in Ameko’s name.

Of course, he could have asked the girl directly, making up an excuse that he did not know how to spell her name, but it seemed a little rude to him.

When he looked up and saw the girl’s expression, he knew that he had guessed correctly.

Ameko looked adorable whenever she smiled, revealing her two snaggleteeth. “Zhang-san, Shibuya is a fashion center! There are a lot of very interesting stores and places of interest here! But occasionally, hanky-panky business goes on around here. So, you better stay close!”

...

Zhang Heng had no objections to that. Ameko had been so warmhearted by being his tour guide, introducing Tokyo as they walked the streets. Up until now, the both of them had been conversing in Mandarin, and she was pretty proficient. She majored in Chinese at the university and planned to apply as an exchange student to China next year, furthering her studies.

But her understanding of China only came from what she saw on the TV and her teachers, so, in order to deepen her knowledge, she made it a point to be friends with this term’s exchange student.

“Ah, actually, my home is in Shinagawa. I’ve studied in Tokyo since high school. I’ve never been away from home before. Talking about going to a place far away makes me excited, yet a little worried at the same time!” Ameko rubbed her nose shyly. “My parents back home was always worried if I could care for myself in the future! So, I want to take this opportunity to train myself! Err... Is that very childish of me?”

“No, it’s terrific!”

This time, the quest title was 'Tokyo Drift'. From the name itself, Zhang Heng could tell that the primary purpose of this game was to test the player's driving skills—also confirmed by the mission target.

Although it seemed like the rate of time flow was reduced when compared to the previous game, which only lasted for two hours, this mission was actually going to take twice as long to complete. 60 days to be precise.

It might sound generous, but unless the player was already a competitive race driver or a hardcore car tuner, being good enough to win an underground street race, even the easiest one in a mere 60 days, was a practically impossible task.

What more, the problems the players would face in this version of the game were not as simple as merely improving their driving skills.

Right now, in Zhang Heng's wallet, there was only 30,000 yen. How should I put this into perspective? Well, take the ice cream Ameko bought for example, which cost 300 yen each. From the flyer the ramen shop had given them when they passed by, Zhang Heng found out that a bowl of ramen cost between 800 to 1,200 yen.

Of course, the food in the campus should be slightly more affordable, or if need be, he could consider cooking for himself. He might be able to last 60 days but he was not really here to be an exchange student.

In this period of time, he would need to get his hands on a car, find out the location of the race, figure a way to improve his driving skills and sign up for a race. And to do all that, he would need to have the most basic of communication skills to support himself.

If it were other players in his shoes, they might not have listened to Ameko explaining her personal growth journey and jump right into the main issue.

But Zhang Heng was different—he had enough patience. Apart from his own great character, he also knew that everything happened for a reason.

Human beings have continued to progress because they are consistently reflected on themselves and draw inferences—and this had always been Zhang Heng's strength.

The first game had not only gave him twenty-over points and a prop—Zhang Heng had analyzed his experience many times and came to a very important conclusion—whoever the game creator was, it was evident that he always encouraged the players to explore the world they were put in.

The lucky rabbit's foot was a good testament to that. The really good things did not appear in the main mission. If his only purpose was to survive, there was no need to travel to the center of the island at all. Yet, it was this side mission that had earned him the greatest reward. On top of that, the things that he did to improve his quality of life often earned him bonus points and rewards.

Not to imply that the other player did not understand this, but having to think of a way to complete the mission under the pressure of the return deadline, none of them would be in the mood to enjoy the luscious views around them.

However, Zhang Heng did not have any problems here because time was always on his side.

For this game, he had a good 420 days—seven times more than the average place. Other than that, he had also developed a personal interest in the various worlds the game presented. During his first-round back on the island, everything felt very real to him. If it were not for the time-bug that had caused a loop, there was no way of him finding a flaw.

Compared to this megacity with a population of 37 million people, that was nothing.

Everyone here seemed to have self-awareness and responded spontaneously to external stimuli. If all these were expressed through programming, it would take a frightening amount of calculations! In fact, no amount of coding could achieve this level of sophistication. This was not so much a game as a flawless work of art!

Unfortunately, the players were just rushing sojourners in this world, no time to stop and admire. Zhang Heng might very well be the only exception.

Ameko stuck out her tongue. “Am I talking a little too much? I’m supposed to be introducing Tokyo but then I somehow began talking about myself. You must be really bored! Why don’t I buy you a taiyaki<sup>1</sup> to make up for it?”

“... I feel like you’re just looking for an excuse to eat it.”

“Hehe!” Amiko flashed her signature snaggleteeth after exposing her love for food.

“But let me pay this time! You’ve already treated me ice cream. I should thank you—if you hadn’t volunteered to be my guide, I’m afraid I would not have left campus at all!” Zhang Heng pulled out his wallet. He could not keep taking advantage of this girl’s generosity.

He bought four taiyaki from the stall by the road. A ubiquitous snack in Japan, it was an affordable preposition. Even though the name taiyaki literally meant ‘baked seabream’, it was actually a cake with fillings like red beans. Four of them only cost Zhang Heng 640 yen.

“Zhang-san... you really are a good person,” Ameko mumbled as she bit into a steaming hot taiyaki. “We’re not too far from Yoyogi park, but too bad it’s already so late. Otherwise, I could bring you there for a walk.”

### **Chapter 33: Tokyo Drift III**

Ameko had proven herself to be a very competent tour guide. This was especially true after eating Zhang Heng’s taiyaki, turning her even more zealous. She showed Zhang Heng around before reluctantly sending him back to school around nine at night. Then, she took the tram back to her apartment.

Because land was so expensive in Tokyo, only a few universities had dormitories. Owing to that, most students had to rent rooms outside of campus like Ameko. Although her home was within the city, she chose to rent an apartment unit with other university students because it was nearer to campus.

However, the school treated exchange students pretty well. They had an international house, which provided accommodation for students from abroad. What more, they were all single rooms.

Zhang Heng found his room number on his phone and unlocked the door with the key he was carrying in one of his pockets.

The room was mediocre in size, only about 15 square meters. It was, however, furnished with a bed, wardrobe, study table, air conditioner, and even a full-sized bathroom.

Zhang Heng took a quick shower before finding some clean clothes in the closet to change into. There was a half packet of biscuits on the table, a bank card, a notebook, and a bunch of photocopied papers. It all made him look like a real exchange student who had just moved in that day.

He picked up the notebook and found a list of his expenditures. The handwriting was a one to one copy of his. On the second page, a timetable with only one subject was scribbled down, which was Japanese.

Under normal circumstances, universities would never arrange pure lingual classes for exchange students.

Generally, when enrolling exchange students, the university would specify Japanese as a requirement the students must meet. Of course, some did not, but only because most majors were taught English.

That must have been the hidden benefit that this game version gave its players, a sort of tutorial for those who spoke nor read Japanese.

But it was not possible to fluently learn a language in 60 days. For the time being, he would still have to rely on Ameko, the trusty human translating machine, to communicate with others.

He was musing on that thought when he received a text message from her.

Zhang-san. I've reached home safely. Damn it! Momo<sup>1</sup> went to drink from the toilet again while I was out. She left pawprints everywhere!

Ameko had told Zhang Heng about Momo, a Japanese paddy cat she adopted, to which, Zhang Heng replied: Cook it in a stew.

“(☹▽☹)”

Ameko sent him a shocked face!

Zhang Heng typed back: I'm just joking! Oh, by the way, Ameka, do you know where the nearest ATM to school is?

He flipped to the third page in his notebook. There was a list of things to do—one of which was signing up for a bank card. The fee for the months to come would be deducted from the card.

Of course. I'll bring you there tomorrow. If there's anything else that you don't know, you can always ask me! I'm very familiar with the area!

Ameko was still as earnest as the first time they met.

Thank you for letting me trouble you.

Zhang Heng bid the girl good night. He then went online to look up some information. Soon after, he flipped the lights off and climbed into bed. And that was how he spent his first night in a foreign country.

...

The night passed without incident.

The very next morning, Zhang Heng attended the language class. At an entry-level, the learning was relatively simple—to master the *goujon*\* or fifty-sounds chart, which mainly tests the student’s memory. Then, in the afternoon, he and Ameko proceeded to apply for a bank card. The process would take about a week.

Once they stepped out of the bank, Zhang Heng asked his companion, “If I want to find work, is there a place you would recommend?”

The 30,000 yen he had was far from enough. The two-month estimate he made previously was simply too optimistic. Rental for the room alone was already 20,000 yen! Luckily, the first month’s rent had already been paid for. Realizing that he was going to spend another 14 months or so here, Zhang Heng decided that he had to find a way to earn some money.

He did not know how the other players were going to resolve this financial problem. They would probably opt for some high-risk solutions, but Zhang Heng preferred to opt for working. While the money may not come as quickly, it would allow him to familiarize and affiliate himself with this city.

“Hmm, most people work in restaurants, supermarkets or convenience stores, but being able to speak Japanese is a requirement.” Ameko paused for a moment to think. “Or do you have any skills?”

“Skills?” Zhang Heng cocked his brow. “Does archery and playing the piano count?”

“Ah? Archery and piano! That’s incredible! If that’s the case, you can work at the *kyudo* practice hall or western restaurants. Mm, but Japanese archery (*kyūdō*) is slightly different from western archery, emphasizing on the cultivation of the spirit and the mind. Also, there’s no way you could avoid talking to people in the practice hall. It looks like your best option is to play at a western restaurant.” Ameko carefully broke down the pros and cons of each option for Zhang Heng.

This girl was through-and-through an executive—she immediately dragged Zhang Heng to an Italian restaurant to apply for a job. Unfortunately, they already had a pianist. Next, the pair tried the Spanish and French restaurants next door. Eventually, a western restaurant owned by a local Tokyolite was willing to give Zhang Heng a chance after hearing him play. Even so, the owner was still bothered by the fact that Zhang Heng did not know how to speak Japanese.

Ameko pointed at the job advertisement outside the shop and said, “You’re still short on servers, right? I used to work in Roast Beef Ohno. How about this—I’ll work here too! If there are any language problems, I can help him translate.”

“Then we don’t have a problem anymore!” The restaurateur nodded. “We pay 1,200 yen an hour, three days a week, 4—5 hours a day. There will be day and night shifts. You can choose to come on the days you don’t have classes. I will try to put you two in the same shift.”

“Thank you for your trouble!” Ameko bowed.

Only when they stepped out of the door did Zhang Heng find out what the two had been talking about. When Ameko sensed a protest on the way, she quickly explained, “The trip yesterday night was really



fun! Everyone is normally so busy with their own lives that very few people would be willing to listen to what other people's opinions! Zhang-san... is a very gentle person. Also, it's not all because of you. I just quit my last job and have been looking for one. The environment and pay here are pretty good as well! Also, isn't it much safer with you around?" Ameko flashed her snaggleteeth.

Could this be the perks of a good first impression? Zhang Heng said nothing. When he saw that it was already evening, he treated Ameko to dinner at a restaurant nearby.

The two were chatting about school when a spray-painted Subaru BRZ and a green Volkswagen Golf R pulled up in front of the shop. Young boys and girls with colorful hair stepped out of the cars. One of them, a guy with a bandanna, shouted at the owner to bring beers the minute he stepped in.

From the looks of most of them, it was apparent they had a round of drinks before this. They were already somewhat drunk.

Ameko whispered, "Don't keep staring at them! That guy is a recent bosozoku<sup>1</sup>. Quite a few of them are from our school. They hang out with good-for-nothing worthless punks all day long! They do nothing good from morning to night."

### **Chapter 34: Tokyo Drift IV**

Zhang Heng did not avert his gaze immediately. He was thinking of a way into the primary mission when voilà!—the cue was right in front of his eyes!

This group of so-called bosozoku were markedly car-tuning enthusiasts. If he could somehow be involved in their circle, he should be able to be acquainted with all sorts of underground street races. Building a good relationship with one or two people, he might just get the person to teach him some racing skills.

But there was one problem—he could sense Ameko's discrimination of these people. Without her to help him translate, he had no way of communicating with them.

Should he try convince Ameko to help or should he just drag her in?

Zhang Heng did not have a lot of time to dilly-dally. The moment the headbanded guy glanced over, he lowered his head and avoided eye-contact. The other customers pretty much reacted the same. The group of bosozoku appeared to have a sense of superiority over the average person, whistling and laughing loudly as they sauntered to an unoccupied table at the back.

At the last minute, Zhang Heng decided to go against breaking friendship with Ameko, purely because this bunch of people was too dim-witted. If he were going to associate himself with them, he would have to lower his intelligence to match theirs.

Zhang Heng did not have any masochistic tendencies and decided to abandon that decision instead. He knew that this wasn't the only way to get involved in street racing, not to mention learning nothing at all from this bunch of goons.

For the next two weeks, Zhang Heng spent his time learning Japanese and working at the western restaurant. There were no developments on the racing front, but his relationship with Ameko was

getting better. The pair worked together, with Zhang Heng helping correct Ameko's Mandarin pronunciation, and in return, Ameko tutored his Japanese. On top of that, Zhang Heng started to realize Ameko's growing fondness of exchanging text messages with him.

After getting to know her more, he realized that Ameko was the kind of girl who could really talk. From Momo the cat, the stray dog on the road, to the supermarket bento discounts—everything she saw, she would send him a text telling him about them!

During his Japanese class, he would receive Ameko's text:

Ah! Today, the Chinese language teacher is wearing an extremely adorable floral skirt that does not suit her age at all! Everyone is shocked.

While he was having his meal, he would get:

Big news! This is a disaster! Did you know that the school's dog Matsuko is actually male?!

Or before going to bed:

Zhang-san, don't you think that the world would be a horrible place if cats don't exist?

The one that he received nearly every day:

Oh no, am I too keen on sending messages? Do you hate me? Yes? No?

Zhang Heng put down the rollerball pen he was using and rubbed his eyes.

"No. I was revising today's lesson."

He had not been loafing about even though he was unable to find out about the covert night street race. It felt like he had gone back in time to his senior year in high school. For the sake of picking up Japanese as soon as possible, or at least be able to understand the dullest everyday conversation, he went all out—paring down his sleeping time to just 5 hours to tirelessly practice his language skills. He even kept a book of Japanese basics next to the piano in the restaurant.

The whole thing undoubtedly was like attending extracurricular classes instead of playing a game!

"Zhang-san, you're too industrious. Compared to you, I feel like I'm wasting time," Ameko said admiringly.

"I'm just doing what I have to." Zhang Heng smiled bitterly. Truth be told, he was not very interested in learning languages. But on the second evening here, he received a prompt from that mysterious voice again.

It confirmed that his return time had been extended to 420 days. Some things could be planned in advance, though. He could not possibly rely on Ameko to be his translator for such a long period. Moreover, she had already applied to be an exchange student in China and may not be around for the next school year. Zhang Heng decided that he needed to be independent.

A fourteen-month long study tour like this was hard to come by. If he did take advantage of it and pick up the local language, it would be a waste of opportunity.

Zhang Heng had a sneaking suspicion that if this game continued, he would have to learn all mainstream languages of the world first.

Ameko still kept up with her prattling messages about trivial things, and after one week of bombardment, Zhang Heng could read between the lines of her message today that she was in low spirits.

So, he typed:

What happened to you?

But before he clicked send, he erased the message and then dialed her number. “Ameko, have you been in some sort of trouble recently?”

The girl was shocked to hear from him! Her voice was a little hoarse as if she had just cried not a while ago, and she was sniffing. “Zhang-san. I’m sorry for worrying you. It’s nothing actually. It’s just a family affair, no, not really a family affair—that person left us six years ago.”

“You’ll feel better if you talk about it. If you’re want to, you can tell me. I can keep it a secret for you. After all, other than you, no one else here understands what I say.”

The upset Ameko chuckled and then proceeded to tell her story to Zhang Heng. It turned out when she was younger, her father became addicted to betting on horseracing. He lost the entire family’s fortune. When her mum could not stand it anymore, they got divorced.

After they had broken all relations, her mother married her stepfather and had Ameko’s younger brother. Their lives had been very harmonious until she started university. Somehow her father found her and reached out.

The first time they met, he asked her to lend him money. At first, he said that it was because his business was trouble and needed some turnover money. But if there was one time, there would be a second. After a few more, Ameko grew suspicious. She found out that not only was he still gambling, he also picked up a terrible drinking habit. f

The father and daughter broke into a fight and stopped contacting each other for a few months. Then during the afternoon an hour ago, Ameko received a call from her father saying that he had been beaten up by debt collectors and did not have any money to see a doctor. Having learned her lesson, though, Ameko did not send her hard-earned money right away. Her father called her ungrateful and even said that he did not have a daughter like her!

Ameko broke into tears, and asked Zhang Heng who was on the other line, “Zhang-san, am I very cold-blooded?”

“Err, I think your father is extremely unreasonable. From the looks of it, he’s most likely lying. But if you’re worried about him, I can go with you tomorrow.”

“Really? Isn’t it unbecoming of me to trouble you for my family’s problem?” Ameko felt abashed.

“No! Recently, I feel like I’m nearing my limits as well. If I’m not learning Japanese, I would be playing piano at the restaurant. It just so happens I need to a breather.” Zhang Heng blurted all these from the heart. If he had to look at another one of those kana<sup>1</sup> syllables again, he might just throw up.

“It’s Saturday tomorrow. Let’s go after work then!”

“Okay!”

“Thank you so much, Zhang-san!”

“Don’t worry about it.”

Ameko’s problem was just a brief interlude. Zhang Heng did not mind it at all.

After he hung up, he began thinking about how to improve his driving skills again. It was already 15 days into the second game and had still not started on the main mission yet. If another player were in his shoes, they would be panicking already!

But because he had fourteen months, Zhang Heng was not in too much of a hurry. But he could not continue to squander time away so rampantly. It would be better for him to set a deadline for himself—if he were still unable to find a way to improve his driving skills, Zhang Heng would have no choice but to try getting involved with this bosozoku.

### **Chapter 35: Tokyo Drift V**

After getting off the bus, they took a fifteen-minute walk, and after crossing an intersection, they finally arrived at the destination.

Zhang Heng looked at the small shop called Kurahara Seafood and asked, “Your father lives here?”

“Yeah. It doesn’t smell so good inside... so you can wait for me outside.” The closer they were, the more perturbed Ameko looked but she was ever so considerate.

“Since I’m already here, I might as well go in with you.” Zhang Heng, on the other hand, was not reluctant.

The both of them passed roll-up banner stands and an abandoned old freezer as they walked into the seafood supply shop. A pungent fishy stench immediately assaulted Their noses as they took in the overpowering smell of fishes and prawns—all sorts of seafood—everywhere. But there was no one in the shop—all but a Moray eel struggling inside a polystyrene box.

“Father! Father!” Ameko called out, but no one replied. “Could he really have gone to the hospital?” The girl muttered and hesitantly walked up the stairs with Zhang Heng following closely behind.

The wooden stairs had not been mended for a long time, leaving cracks and chips everywhere. Every time they took a step, the stairs would groan and creak under pressure threatening to give up the load they could barely bear.

If Zhang Heng thought the ground floor was packed like sardines, there was barely any space to walk on the first floor. There was dirty laundry, beer bottles, and even porn magazines scattered all over the place. An unshaven, half-naked man was lying on the ground, snoring away.

‘I’m such an idiot! I believed the same lies over and over again!’ Ameko held her forehead in her palm.

“In some way, this is also good news, right? It’s better than lying on a hospital bed.”

“This is even worse, so much worse! Why do men who lie to their own daughters exist in this world?” Ameko pulled the man by both hands and tried to get him onto the tatami on the side.

When he saw that Ameko seemed to be struggling, Zhang Heng offered to help. “Come, let me help.”

As they were dragging the man, something fell out of his pocket. Ameko picked it up to examine it. It was a brown wallet. She was stunned and appeared to be lost in thought when the man suddenly sat upright on the tatami! He lunged for Ameko, shouting at her furiously!

In an emergency, Zhang Heng instinctively employed the defensive move that Bell had taught him and threw the man onto the floor with an over-shoulder throw. The man fell to the ground with a loud hard thud; his eyes rolled to the back of his head as he slumped to the ground, unconscious.

Only then did Ameko react and shouted, “No! Is he dead?!” The girl jumped backward in shock.

“Err, no! But it will be a while before he wakes up. What is he screaming at you about?”

“Give me back my wallet...” Ameko mumbled.

“I will go back and continue learning Japanese.” Zhang Heng answered sheepishly.

After that, the both of them carried the drunk and unconscious man back onto the tatami.

Zhang Heng saw that Ameko was still holding onto the worn wallet and asked, “Why? Is there a lot of money inside?”

Ameko shook her head. “No, this wallet was a birthday gift from my mum twelve years ago. I can’t believe he’s still carrying it.” She opened the wallet and found an old, yellowed picture through the semi-transparent film on the right flap. It was a family picture.

Ameko pointed at the one-year-old baby and said, “This is probably me, and that’s my mum and dad at the back. Mum said that wasn’t a gambler back then. We were all very happy!”

Zhang Heng’s gaze fell on the very eye-catching Nissan behind the man. “You never told me that your father was into car tuning.”

“Car tuning? No, no. How is that possible? Don’t see him for what he is right now. He was a great role model when I was younger. When the seafood supply shop first opened, business was not very good. It couldn’t compete with the local competition. To increase the shop’s income, he began learning English, scouted for overseas clients, calling them one by one, and sometimes even showing up at their doorstep! At the store’s peak, he even sold seafood to London, Los Angeles, and even Peru! Such a serious man wouldn’t have ever been involved with the boso-zoku... and since I can remember, he has never driven a car. The goods have always been delivered by hired hands.” Ameko recalled and then took another look at the picture. “This car must have belonged to someone else. They probably parked it there when the picture was taken.”

“Oh, is that so...” Zhang Heng did not ask any more questions but said, “I’m quite interested in cars. This car is probably a relic now, huh. Can I take a picture of that?”

“Sure, but keep me out of the picture. I was an ugly child.” Ameko blocked out her one-year-old face with a finger as Zhang Heng took a picture.

After that, she rinsed two teacups and boiled some water with the electric kettle on the table. She rummaged through a cupboard and found a packet of black tea leaves.

Ameko brought it up to her nose and sniffed. “This... is probably oolong tea.”

The pair chatted as they enjoyed the tea. But the conversation was mostly Ameka talking about her childhood. After about half an hour, the stubbled man on the tatami opened his eyes and rubbed his throbbing shoulders. When he saw Zhang Heng, his eyes widened with caution.

Ameko quickly explained their relationship.

Only then did the stubbled man relax a little. The animosity quickly turned into disregard, and then father and daughter spoke in native Japanese.

Finally, Ameko took out 15,000 yen from her bag and placed them on the table, but the man did not look very happy. His speech became even more impassioned, and he got up from the mat angrily.

Zhang Heng stood protectively in front of Ameko, his forehead creased! The results of his workout had been pretty evident lately. Although he was not super muscular, there was not an ounce of extra flesh hanging from his body. On top of that, after that shoulder throw Zhang Heng had given the man, the man’s manner softened a little at the sight of him.

Ameko pushed herself off the floor, looking crestfallen and the rims of her eyes red and raw. “Let’s go!”

All the way back on the tram, Ameko only stared out the window. Zhang Heng was careful not to interrupt her. After a while, he took out a packet of mixed-flavored gum and said in broken Japanese, “Don’t eat. I’ll eat strawberries.”

“It’s ‘if you don’t eat one, I’ll eat all of the strawberry-flavored ones,” Ameko corrected as she picked one. The crease in her brows slowly disappeared, and she switched to Mandarin. “I’m sorry, Zhang-san, that you had to see all those unhappy things.”

“Not at all! You have always been helping me; letting me help you once in a while makes me feel pretty good! So. What happened? Did the two of you end up in good terms?”

“No. My dad’s employee is returning to his hometown this month. He couldn’t find anyone suitable to help him deliver the goods. The store is not going to survive for much longer. He always finds all kinds of excuses, anyway! I couldn’t be bothered to differentiate the truth from lies, so I gave him all my allowance for his month. That should be enough to keep things peaceful for now.” Ameko said helplessly.

## **Chapter 36: Tokyo Drift VI**

Every time the girl sent him back to his place, Zhang Heng would feel very self-conscious. He had navigation on his phone and could actually find his way again, but Ameko always insisted on sending him regardless.

To thank her, Zhang Heng bought her dinner in the canteen. Ever since he started working at the restaurant, he was able to work out his pressing financial problem. Now, his monthly income was around 70,000 yen.

This sum of money was enough to sustain him in the city, but that was just about it. Using this method to save up for a car was just too unrealistic. Presently, Zhang Heng still had not found a solution to this setback, but he had at least found a prospect in regards to brushing up his driving skills.

On their way back, Zhang Heng asked Ameko for his father's name. He keyed in Kurahara Tetsuya<sup>1</sup> on his phone along, and the search results that came up were all related to Kurahara Seafood.

Everything appeared as healthy as it could be.

After that, he used the editing tool to crop the man's face from the picture, magnify it, then upload it to Facesaerch, an image search engine created by Google application programming interface (API) that allowed its users to track down similar pictures on the web.

The search results varied inaccuracy, and could sometimes be very inconsistent. You could upload Bai Baihe's picture and get Wang Luodan, and a search for Takeshi Kaneshiro would get you Zhao Benshan!

Looking at the masses of pictures that popped up on his screen, Zhang Heng knew that he was going to have a lot of work to do tonight.

...

The second morning, Zhang Heng slept in, which was something he rarely did. Since he did not need to work or attend classes that afternoon, he lay in bed until 10 am before rolling out of bed, not forgetting to make up for his morning run.

After brunch, Zhang Heng checked his phone and saw that he had two messages from Ameko.

One was:

Thank you so much for yesterday.

And the other:

Momo drank too much toilet water and is having diarrhea! I'm taking him to the vet!

Zhang Heng employed his recently upgraded Japanese and typed:

Be careful!

After that, he set Kurahara Seafood as his destination on his phone.

This was the first time he traveled so far without Ameko accompanying him. Fortunately, he had a map at hand and recollection for the place. After an hour and a half, he finally made it to the place they had been to yesterday.

This time, the stubbled man was awake but still looked like he had just got out of bed. Garbed in pair of boxers, slippers, and a sleeping robe, he examined a batch of scallops in front of the store.

He was startled when he turned around and saw Zhang Heng, then rambled on and on about something unintelligible as he kept retreating into the store, his hands searching his surroundings for any defensive weapons. When he saw that Zhang Heng had no intention of withdrawing, he fished out his phone and indicated that he was going to call 110.

“Uncle, I heard from Ameko that you understand English?” asked Zhang Heng in English.

“So what?!” The stubbled man found a mop and held on like his life depended on it! “Hey, kid! I’m warning you! Even if you’re Ameko’s boyfriend, you have no right to get involved in our family’s business! If you don’t leave, I’ll call the police!”

“I’m not here about yesterday.” Zhang Heng shook his head. “Can we please talk inside?”

“Don’t! Don’t move! Don’t think that you can use this trick to get near me! The same move won’t even work on Saint Seiya!” The stubbled man barked, raising his voice. It seemed that yesterday’s shoulder throw had somewhat scarred him.

They spoke in English anyway, so Zhang Heng did not have to worry about any eavesdroppers. Zhang Heng did not push it any further and simply said, “Then I’ll just say it—I was hoping you could teach me how to race cars.”

“....” The man was stumped for a short minute. “You want a seafood supply storeowner to teach you how to drag race? Is your English bad or is there a problem with my hearing? What is this? Some cold Easter Sunday joke?!”

The man paused for a moment and then continued, “Didn’t Ameko tell you? I don’t know how to drive at all. Why do you think I have so much backlog ever since my delivery man quit?” He gestured towards the pile of boxes miserably.

Zhang Heng did not budge. “Isn’t your English too good to be a self-taught learner? Takeda Tetsuya, or should I call you Yosuke Tsuchiya? The famous racing prodigy who left for Europe immediately after graduating from high school. Your excellent driving skills attracted the attention of sponsors, which led to your participation in the FIA GT Grand Prix! Your biggest success was winning second-runner up in New, York but because you offended the racing team manager, you were forced to return home. Seventeen years ago, you won the Tokyo D1 GRAND PRIX, then in the same year, set out to challenge the Drift King (DK) title! You beat all the street racers from 22 wards out of Tokyo’s 23 special wards. But you suddenly gave up and vanished at the final juncture.” Zhang Heng said unhurriedly.

“I don’t know who the hell you’re talking about!” The man said, keeping a straight face. “Kid, if you want to go race cars, don’t stand in front of my shop and disturb my business!”

No matter how hard he pretended to remain calm and unaffected, Zhang Heng, who had been staring at his face, noticed that when he mentioned the name Yosuke Tsuchiya, the man’s pupils contracted. Zhang Heng was 90% sure that he had found the guy.

“Why did you quit, and why change your name to Takeda Tetsuya? Is it because you don’t want to be found?”

The stubbled man’s poker face finally thawed. “Kid, are you threatening me?”



“Are you finally admitting to it, Mr. Yosuke?”

“I’m not admitting to anything!” The man answered cautiously.

Zhang Heng did not continue to twist the man’s arm since he only wanted to confirm his identity. This guy reeked of deceit, but lucky for him, Zhang Heng was not going to threaten to expose the man for Ameko’s sake.

But the man never explicitly denied Zhang Heng’s accusation either.

“Aren’t you short on a delivery man? What about me? I’ll help you deliver goods. I don’t need to be paid. You just have to teach me how to race.”

The man’s eyes lit up at the mention of not having to pay but began quickly weighing the advantages and disadvantages. It mostly revolved around the consequences of refusing the young man’s offer. After a moment, he looked at the Chinese boy, and Zhang Heng could tell that the man was tempted. But the profiteer in him saw Takeda Tetsuya asked, “How about I teach you to race cars, and other than helping me deliver goods, you pay me a fee as well?”

“...”

When he saw the expression on Zhang Heng’s face, he quickly changed his tone. “That was a bit too flagrant of me. Alright! Forget about the fee. But let me get this straight—we need to set some rules. First, don’t ever mention the name Yosuke Tsuchiya ever again! There is no such person. Second, you and I are not master and apprentice! I am your boss, and you are my delivery guy. I’m just worried that you might be too slow in delivering, and slow down business, so I’m just giving you a few pointers. How much you can learn will depend on you. Third, Ameko cannot know about this.”

“Add one more to it—don’t ask Ameko for money ever again,” Zhang Heng added.

The stubbled man thought about it and then agreed reluctantly. “... Fine!”

### **Chapter 37: Tokyo Drift VII**

“Your job is simple—Get here by one every morning, drive me to the Tsukiji Fish Market, wait for me while I purchase the stocks, and then you’ll bring me back here. After I’ve sorted the goods, you’ll deliver them to the places they need to go. That’s all the work for the day. Understand, kid?”

“One in the morning?! Then do I still have time to sleep after all that?” Zhang Heng asked, his brows furrowed.

Takeda Tetsuya grinned, revealing a mouthful of yellowed teeth. “That will depend on how fast you deliver the goods! Alright, do you have any other questions?”

“I have one last question.”

“Hm?”

“You will help me get a driver’s license first, right?”

Takeda Tetsuya's face froze. "Repeat what you just said?!"

"I don't have a driver's license. If I'm going to deliver goods for you, I will need to get a license first, right?" Zhang Heng answered honestly.

"... You don't even have a driver's license, and you want me to teach you how to race?!" Takeda Tetsuya looked defeated. "Are you messing with me? Why would someone who hasn't touched a steering wheel in his life be interested in underground drift racing?!"

"Actually, I'm not interested in drift racing at all, but because of reasons I'm disinclined to share, I have to join the race."

Takeda Tetsuya glared at Zhang Heng, only speaking after a minute through his teeth. "Then, you will have to pray that you can drive faster than the cops."

...

Tokyo at midnight and Tokyo in the morning were like chalk and cheese.

In the dead of night at midnight, most people were already asleep at home. Only residential buildings by the streets would occasionally still have a light on. Zhang Heng left the campus and took the last train. It was almost empty except for a few exhausted salarymen and a couple of geisha with heavily painted faces.

He disembarked at the last station, walked a very long way before finally arriving at the seafood supply store at the agreed time.

Takeda Tetsuya had somehow pulled himself together. Instead of snoring away upstairs, he was squatting in the store, sorting the order forms.

When he heard the footsteps behind him, he did not even bother to look up. "Give me 5 more minutes."

After exactly 5 minutes, he got up and picked up two freshly dead crabs and tied them up with a straw rope. He tossed a set of keys to Zhang Heng and then snorted, "Come with me!"

Zhang Heng followed the man to a small open-air carpark nearby. Takeda Tetsuya gave the metal gate a shake, and after a while, the lights were turned on. Then, a hunched elderly man slipped on a shirt as he came and unlocked the gate.

Takeda Tetsuya smiled at the old man, telling him something in Japanese as he handed the crabs over while pointing at Zhang Heng.

The elderly man looked delighted receiving the crabs—his smile stretching out the wrinkles on his face. He glanced at Zhang Heng and gave the young man a friendly nod.

"Mr. Crab—to be honest, I don't know what his real name is. It doesn't matter. Nobody cares about these kinds of things anyway. His old partner passed away a long time ago, and after his children went overseas, they never contacted him anymore. He makes a living for himself with this carpark, and this is also where he lives. We're old friends. I give him dead crabs that can't be sold, and he lets me park here for free. Also, I've already introduced you to him. From now onward, you can just come here to pick up and return the car."

“Which one is it?” Zhang Heng looked around at the car park, and finally, his gaze settled on a mustard yellow van parked in the corner.

“Isn’t it beautiful? Mitsubishi’s second-generation L300 (Delica), launched in 1982. It’s the first four-wheel-drive van in Japan!” When talking about cars, it was like Takeda Tetsuya had become a whole different person! That dejected uncle seemed to have vanished. He lit a cigarette and ran his hand along the body of the car. “It runs a 4D56 diesel 2.5 engine and the same chassis as the Pajero, powerful enough to cope with bad weather and terrible road conditions. This van has the performance of an off-road vehicle...”

“1982? Are you sure it still runs?” Zhang Heng asked uncertainly.

“Don’t worry, I found it in a scrapyard, and I’ve refurbished the interior. This 4-wheel-drive is now a 2-wheel-drive. In terms of stability, it’s much better than before. 4-wheel-drive adds to the weight of the car, but a car that is too heavy is not very good for the driver... it uses too much petrol... Most importantly, I fixed the cassette player!” Takeda Tetsuya opened the codriver seat, climbed into the car, and picked a cassette tape.

Zhang Heng climbed into the driver’s seat. After getting home yesterday morning, he quickly looked up on some driving knowledge, especially videos and pictures on the web. On top of that, he even downloaded a driving simulation game on his phone and played it on the subway on his way to the store, which was why right now, he... still had zero confidence.

Zhang Heng pushed the key that Takeda Tetsuya had given to him into the ignition. It took him three tries to get the car going.

Takeda Tetsuya completely ignored him. He waited until the vehicle roared to life and then slipped the Chage and Aska cassette into the player on the dashboard. But before the car could even move 5 meters, the car suddenly jerked and came to a stop. Takeda Tetsuya lurched forward hard, hitting his head on the glove compartment in front of the passenger seat!

Zhang Heng said flatly, “Sorry. Wrong gear!”

As he spoke, he shifted to 5th gear.

“Please inform me when you sign up for a race. I will buy insurance for you. I will be the benefactor, of course. You win!” Takeda Tetsuya stopped the tape player. “Start with the first gear. Press the clutch with your left foot. Push it down all the way. Then slowly, with your right feet, step on the gas pedal as you depress the clutch...”

After about three minutes, the L300 finally wobbled out of the parking lot, and under Mr. Crab’s supervision, it slowly bumped into a fire hydrant.

Luckily, it was very early in the morning, and the road was still quite deserted.

Zhang Heng drove the van onto the open road, lurching every now and then. When he looked over at his passenger, he saw that Takeda Tetsuya had fastened the seat belt like an honest man.

The fifteen-minute journey took Zhang Heng twenty-five minutes. On the way, the engine stalled five more times, and he ran two red lights. He even drove over the curbs! Fortunately, though, they arrived at their destination in one piece.

Tsukiji Fish Market was the biggest seafood market, not only in Tokyo but in the world. Fishermen from all over Japan would deliver all the produce they caught to be sold here. In its heyday, they could sell 3,200 tons of seafood a day worth 3 billion yen. Every single day, over 60,000 wholesalers would come to select and bid for the products they want. To them, this was not just a marketplace, it was a battlefield.

Zhang Heng pulled the handbrake.

Takeda Tetsuya was about to say something, but he blanked out. Finally, all he said was, "Wait here." Then he jumped out of the van and greeted someone he appeared to know. The man produced a packet of cigarettes, and the pair walked into the market, puffing away.

By the time Takeda Tetsuya returned, it had already been an hour. Following him was a forklift carrying the boxes of seafood he had selected. To the man's surprise, instead of taking a nap while waiting for him to return, Zhang Heng was practicing his driving skills! Compared to his jerky driving this morning, his skills had now improved noticeably.

Takeda Tetsuya, however, did not comment but instead, grumbled grumpily, "Get down and load the van!"

### **Chapter 38: Tokyo Drift VIII**

Zhang Heng realized that he underestimated the extent of Takeda Tetsuya, his new boss' ruthlessness.

He sent the man back to the shop at 3.15 in the morning. Then after spending ten minutes unloading and packing the seafood, Zhang Heng left the shop at 3.35. By 6.30, he was still driving with about half of the undelivered goods at the back of the van.

By then, the street was growing busy—all the office workers who lived far from their workplaces were already out the door, spilling into the underground subway and bus stations. The number of cars on the road were also gradually increasing. Zhang Heng went to two other places, and when he left an izakaya<sup>1</sup>, he encountered two traffic policemen who were just starting their shifts. As a result, he decided not to risk continuing the delivery.

Driving without a license in Japan would be a severe offense. Not only would the offending driver have to serve less than 3 years of jail time and pay a 500,000 yen fine, all passengers and owners of the vehicle would also be convicted and fined. It was almost at peak hours. If Zhang Heng did not leave, chances were, he would be stuck in a jam.

Zhang Heng brought the L300 back to the store to an unsurprised Takeda Tetsuya. The latter picked up the phone and contacted the former delivery man, before turning to Zhang Heng and said, "You have one more week. After that, Takahashi Koichi will be back in his hometown. If you still can't complete the delivery by then and I suffer a loss, would you pay me back?"

“Alright.” Zhang Heng answered.

Zhang Heng’s unwavering answer was not quite what Takeda Takashi had expected. This situation was, in all honesty, quite a tragedy for the store owner—not only was he unable to contend with the young man, but he was also in a vulnerable position that the young man could capitalize on. He could do nothing about Zhang Heng not completing the job, so he could only grumble and make a fuss. He really hadn’t expected the young man to actually agree so breezily.

Takeda Takashi said cunningly, “Hey, kid, you better don’t lie. If you can’t do it, then you can’t! The sooner you tell me, the sooner I can figure out a way to hire another driver. I worked hard to get each and every one of these customers! Don’t make empty promises. If you still cannot complete your task, the one at stake is my shop!”

“If I fail to complete the deliveries, I will pay you back whatever you lose!” Zhang Heng hopped down the van and stretched his shoulders and wrists. His first delivery was unsuccessful, and after driving from the wee hours of the morning, his body and mind were exhausted. But he found that somehow, this pressure had drastically improved his driving. It would appear that this nonstop driving around was much more useful than if he were to practice the entire day.

Of course, he could always tell Takeda Takashi to reduce his cargo, but if he was not even willing to accept a small challenge like this, then why bother to participate in the competition? He might as well just give up then.

Zhang Heng took the bus back to campus and was only able to wash his face and quickly gobble down a few pieces of bread before he had to rush for another Japanese lesson.

Only in the evening did he get the chance to make up for being awake the whole morning. He had set the alarm for four hours. Later, he had dinner. He then visited the bookstore nearby to buy a map of Tokyo.

As mentioned previously, self-reflection and deduction were Zhang Heng’s strengths. On his way back to campus that morning, he had already started mulling over reasons he was unable to complete his task that day. Other than his unpolished driving skills and the L300’s poor performance, his unfamiliarity with the roads and lack of route planning were also crucial factors.

No matter how good a driver was, it would be challenging for him to be able to perform to be at fullest capacity if he was unfamiliar with the location of the competition.

At 1.20 in the morning, Zhang Heng arrived at the parking lot, gave Mr. Crab two onigiri<sup>1</sup>, who gleefully opened the gate for him. He returned to the store at 7.34 am. Unfortunately, his performance today was worse than the day before, delivering only about 40% of the goods.

Takeda Takashi was cleaning the sink in his pajamas when he saw the young man return. “Young people should not be too confident. It’s not too late for you to give up now. Otherwise, in six days, you will have to sell yourself to me as a slave and work for free your whole life.”

Zhang Heng said nothing in reply. He had only himself to blame, taking too much time planning the route and unfamiliarity with the names of the places causing him to arrive at the wrong location a couple of times. He even nearly drove all the way to Okinawa to see bikinis!

Zhang Heng added another item to his to-do list—Get familiar with Tokyo’s streets.

Takashi Seafood Products’ customers could be divided into two main types: regular customers and new customers. The former received their goods at the same locations while the latter was more spontaneous, which, at the moment, Zhang Heng could do nothing about. For the regular clientele, on the other hand, Zhang Heng could mark their location on the map, then use a pen to connect the dots and find the best route for delivery.

After that, he simply had to slot in the new customers’ locations that were en route. That way, he could save a large portion of his time.

So, on the third day, Zhang Heng delivered 70% of the goods, and for the first time, when the L300 pulled up in front of the shop, Takeda Takashi did not make fun of him.

On the fourth day, only 20% of the goods did not make it to the clients. On the fifth day, however, Zhang Heng found himself at a bottleneck.

Although he had done his best to make every minute count, he still had 15% of undelivered goods. It was only thanks to the careful planning that he was able to send them to nearby clients. The remaining ones were located further from town or in more secluded areas—completely overlooking them.

If he were to deliver them now, it would take him an exhaustingly long time to reach. While his driving skills still had room for improvement, he only had two more days before the ‘deadline’—not delivering all of the remaining goods was out of the question. Once again, Zhang Heng found himself deep in thought.

Takeda Takashi, who had his head buried in an adult magazine, looked up suddenly. “To a racer, his car is more important than his wife. So, how could a person who doesn’t even understand his own wife manage the relationship? Tsk, tsk! Young people nowadays are so foolhardy.”

“Do you have the blueprint of the car?” Zhang Heng asked the man poring over an ocean of cigarette butts.

“A great racecar driver simply needs to listen to be able to tell the horsepower of an engine, but I can’t be so harsh to a rookie like yourself, right?” Takeda Takashi answered in a patronizing tone. It was like this guy had to accomplish something, however small, or he would die. “I have the drawing of the modification on my computer. Take a look at it yourself. Don’t compete against it. Get to know its temper, then you’ll be able to control it well.”

Zhang Heng turned on the computer and was immediately greeted by Takeda Takashi’s ‘hidden files.’ Among the mountain of porn, Zhang Heng found what he wanted. To his surprise, there was not only the blueprint for the L300 but also blueprints for other cars as well. They were all earlier models, though. It seemed like they had all been modified by a certain Mr. Takeda Takashi.

On top of that, there was also a copy of a manual.

Takeda Takashi called out from downstairs, “Focus on studying the L300. Ignore everything else. You’re not at that level yet. Don’t try to run before you can even crawl!”

### **Chapter 39: Tokyo Drift IX**

The next day, after the former delivery guy returned to his hometown. Zhang Heng was now able to deliver all the goods before the traffic police showed up for the first time. The moment he achieved that, that familiar voice spoke in his ears:

[Acquired new skill—Driving skills: Level 0]

Zhang Heng took in a deep breath. This period of nocturnality finally paid off, not knowing what the benchmark for skill levels was until now. About instances when his survival skills were recognized in the previous game, Zhang Heng knew that Level 0 meant that he had stepped over the threshold, at the very least.

When it came to time, this wasn't considered fast, but it was definitely not slow either. It had only been a week since he first touched the steering wheel. Now, even the Takeda Tetsuya, who had been waiting for Zhang Heng to screw up, could only murmur to himself, "Did he throw all the undelivered stuff on the side of the road?"

Zhang Heng simply ignored the remark, returned the keys, and silently took the bus back to school.

He was starting to get used to this kind of life now: go to class, then work, and then to deliver goods for an unkind employer. Whenever he had the time, he would reply to Ameko's strange everyday messages.

The days went on like this, and in a blink of an eye, two months had passed. It was now drawing close to three months since he'd started this game. At this time, other players would have been removed from the game and had returned to reality, but for Zhang Heng, he wasn't even a fourth of the journey in.

He was in no hurry to complete the primary mission, and as he was working towards achieving his goal, he unexpectedly completed two small achievements.

One was for visiting ten places of interest in Tokyo, and the other was for tasting thirty Japanese delicacies. Each achievement earned him 3 game points.

These weren't actually tricky things to do at all. As long as you were willing, you could visit ten of any of Tokyo's tourist attractions. The only thing to consider was the limited time given to complete the tasks. An exceptionally few people would be willing to spare a few days just to visit non-mission-related places.

Zhang Heng, on the other hand, had Ameko dragging him around places like Skytree, Ghibli Museum in Mitaka, Sensoji Temple, and many other sites. He never refused to go on these outings since he had plenty of time, and his daily schedule was so packed that it was nice to take a break and relax every now and then.

Having a cute, snaggletooth tour guide bringing him around the city was a rare opportunity that somehow earned him 6 points.

Other than that, having learned from his previous games, Zhang Heng kept an eye out to see if anything would be refreshed once the 60-day time limit was up. Lo and behold, he discovered a bug!

Japanese Universities typically had new intakes during March or April every year. Also, with the increasing number of foreign exchange students, the other peak period for club and society recruitments were in September. When Zhang Heng first arrived at the university campus, there were

posters and flyers everywhere, but because he was so busy learning Japanese, he did not join any of them.

So, when the 60 days reached its end, these associations began recruiting again. When Zhang Heng asked Ameko about it, she too replied that she had no idea either and that it was probably because they did not have enough club members.

But ever since that unresolved inconsistency with Bell, Zhang Heng became very sensitive about these anomalies. He was almost sure that he knew what secrets these organizations were hiding.

So, Zhang Heng came up with a solution—to collect every club and society's recruitment flyers. They included the typical football club, swimming club, baseball club, taekwondo club, shogi<sup>1</sup> club, and hanafuda club<sup>2</sup>. The hanafuda club was hugely popular, notably when their brochures featured their president and co-president, both of whom stunningly beautiful girls.

But just to be clear, Zhang Heng's attention was not on all these. His focus was on car-related clubs. So far, he had found a 4WD club, a racers workshop, and an Autoshow model photography club. After he inquired about the 4WD club, though, he found out that it was not the four-wheel-drive that he thought it was.

This group of people were not racing 4WD cars but instead, the mini 4WD toy cars from 'Dash! Yonkuro<sup>1'</sup> developed by Tamiya Incorporated—Audley, which was also popular once upon a time, was China's knockoff version. It was, however, yesterday's news among today's generation. Zhang Heng was pleasantly surprised that a group of hardcore fans still existed in the university!

At the moment, Zhang Heng did not feel like collecting dust behind some toy cars while cheering for Shooting Star, Cannonball, Burning Sun<sup>1</sup>... that would be quite a sight to behold! On the other hand, he thought that the name 'Autoshow model photography club' sounded rather dubious. So, in the end, Zhang Heng decided to join the racers workshop.

This one sounded the most legit out of the three.

To his delight, he really did learn quite a lot from this group, which was founded by a senior who started as a racecar fan. He and a group of like-minded friends decided to start this society, and after much self-teaching and practice, he was able to obtain specialized skills. Eventually, a team signed him when he was in his fourth year in university to become a professional racecar driver driving for the GT300 race season.

Three years ago, he put all the discoveries from his training down on paper and shared them with the members of the club. He even shot daily tutorial videos and recorded his experience and opinions in a blog, which he kept up-to-date.

He was extremely generous when compared to Takeda Tetsuya, who only gave Zhang Heng minimal pointers on their way back to the shop whenever they went to the fish market together. Still and all, both of them had very different training and driving styles.

The senior was a feistier, go-all-in kind of competitor who believed in momentum, flooring the pedal all the way, whereas the owner of the seafood store was a positively technical driver. Zhang Heng had found old videos of Takeda Tetsuya's racing days, and came to learn that this guy was cunning when it



came to competitions. His style was to draft, always tailing other cars closely and then only punching it to full-speed in the final two laps.

A line he often repeated was, 'Racing is a tactical game. It's not just a competition of skills, but it is also a battle of the mind. An average driver only sees the road ahead, but a great driver must never be fettered by the limitation of the eyes but look at the bigger picture.

But every time after he said this, he would add insultingly, "Sigh, but a green boy like you will never understand this world! You better stick to delivering the seafood first. Thanks to you, business has been pretty good lately. The orders have increased by another 20%! The same rule applies—you will pay me back for whatever you fail to deliver!"

Zhang Heng had already gotten his driver's license but eventually found out that it was pointless because he had to rush back to school for class before Tokyo was awake anyway. To add, the L300 that Takeda Tetsuya had apparently dug up from the rubbish pile was not insured and nor inspected. To top it all off, the number plate was a fake!

It now made sense why Takeda Tetsuya had turned a blind eye when Zhang Heng broke traffic rules in the earlier days. The police would not be able to catch them anyway, so it did not matter how badly Zhang Heng was driving. Of course, if they were stopped by the police, they would be seriously screwed—they could be thrown into jail.

Owing to that, Zhang Heng could only continue to keep a fast driving pace and lay low whenever he was on the road.

Having said that, he found the notes and tutorial videos provided by the racecar workshop's founder to be very enlightening—his approach towards racing was the exact opposite of what Zhang Heng had been learning from the seafood store owner.

Eventually, only after three arduous months, did Takeda Tetsuya impart his car tuning knowledge to Zhang Heng.

Chapter 40: Tokyo Drift X

"4WD racecars rarely have oversteer problems, but to drift around corners with rear-wheel drive, you'll have to upgrade the suspension system of the front and rear axle. At the same time, you have to calculate the factors that help maintain trackability when turning in," informed Takeda Tetsuya as he blew a cloud of smoke from the passenger seat.

"This problem can be easily solved—you just need to adjust the spring and the damping coefficient. Soften the rear suspension, reduce the compression rate of the shock absorber's damping force, increase the ductility, reduce the rigidity of the rear anti-roll bar, and perhaps, even increase the rear track width. Official competitions typically have rear track width restrictions, but underground tournaments are not particular about that.

"Also, if you notice any turbulence after the configuration, you can consider increasing the rake angle of the spoiler. Doing that will increase downforce on the rear of the vehicle. Of course, that will mean

sacrificing your top speed. All things considered, there is no such thing as the perfect racecar; tuning a racecar is finding the right balance between performance parameters...”

Zhang Heng committed everything to memory as he drove in silence, and as slowly as he could so that they would only arrive at Tsukiji Market ten minutes later.

Once the L300 pulled up in front of the seafood market, Takeda Tetsuya’s mouth clamped shut instinctively. This guy was really sticking to their agreement—not saying another word as he pushed the door open and exited the van.

He took two steps forward and then halted abruptly. He turned around and said, “Come earlier this Sunday.”

Zhang Heng stared after the man quizzically for a moment, and then it dawned on him—he might have triggered a new storyline as he just received a new update 4 seconds ago that his driving skills had gone from level 0 to level 1. At the same time, after a month of learning, he even attained another skill—car tuning and maintenance (level 0).

So, on the third night, after his taking a stroll around Shinjuku with Ameko, Zhang Heng took the bus to the seafood store, three hours earlier than usual. When Takeda Tetsuya saw him coming, he turned around and locked the door behind him and then tossed the key to Zhang Heng. “The shop’s having a day off today.”

“Where are we going?”

“The beach. Starting from today, I will be teaching you how to drift.”

Zhang Heng was a little taken aback by this short announcement.

Even though Takeda Tetsuya had been instructing him on how to race, and had taught him quite a few techniques, he had never once revealed his best secrets. Zhang Heng had asked a few times before, but he was always dismissed with ‘You’re not qualified yet!’, which was a clear and direct way of telling him that he needed to meet a certain standard.

Under normal circumstances, this would have been unattainable for an inexperienced fledgling with zero foundation like Zhang Heng. He had been learning how to drive for four months now, which was already way past the deadline. He managed to fulfill the criteria only yesterday.

It went without saying that Zhang Heng was not going to let this precious opportunity slip away. Who knew why Takeda Tetsuya, the scrooge, suddenly had a change of mind? If it were not because he had been the champion of D1 Grand Prix tsuisou format in Tokyo or the man who nearly bagged the Drift King title, Zhang Heng would already have looked for someone else to consult, like that racer workshop senior.

Not only did he have the right attitude, but to benefit the next generation, and to pave the way for those who desire to become a racing driver like him, he shared his views and experience generously with the members of his group.

Zhang Heng believed that if he continued to work hard, he might be able to set himself to the path of success. After all, compared to Takeda Tetsuya, the seafood store owner, this senior guy was the more authentic racing driver. After much deliberation, Zhang Heng decided to give up that plan.

The GT300 was a sanctioned racing competition. The race track and the driving skills requirements are very different from underground drift racing. As the name GT300 implies, the maximum horsepower output is capped at 300ps. On the other end of the spectrum, the only rules in underground racing were that there were no rules. No one cared what kind of cars you drove, or what type of technique you used. Whoever crossed the finishing line first was the winner. In fact, if you were ballsy enough, you could even use nitrous oxide.

Zhang Heng had already read through all the workshop guy's notes and videos more than once. His vigorous and hawkish driving style was more suited to professional track racing. In a complicated environment, he would be no match for Takeda Tetsuya, the former champion of D1 Grand Prix.

The seafood store owner brought Zhang Heng to a private pier that was close to being abandoned and created a drift course with tires and cardboard boxes lined as the apexes.

"Drifting is a driving technique by deliberately oversteering the car, forcing it to slide sideways through a turn. Young people nowadays love to show off their skills by drifting, but in reality, drifting on the normal road would only slow the car down and wear out the tires. This technique was designed to cope with complex road conditions."

Zhang Heng looked at the massive pile of tightly packed boxes and tires. "Isn't... a little too complex?"

"As long as someone can do it, it's not complex!" Takeda Tetsuya retorted imposingly.

Zhang Heng thought after that uttering such heroic statements; the guy would at least give him some sort of live demonstration. To his disappointment, however, Tetsuya only showed him a video, and from the looks of which looked like a really old one. After that, the guy removed a folding stool and a fishing rod from the back of the van.

"..."

"Don't look at me. I swore that I would never touch another steering wheel in this life. But, don't you worry. The obstacles I've set up for you is not impossible to complete." said Takeda Tetsuya as he baited the hook. Zhang Heng skimmed through the video and quickly realized that he had misjudged the guy. He was probably trying to make up for the fact that he could not show Zhang Heng the technique himself, but instead, with the surprisingly detailed tutorial. Except for the demonstration at the beginning, the rest of the video contained new materials that Takeda Tetsuya had recorded.

Zhang Heng played the video over and over again nearly seven times. In between, he even played the video in slow motion twice.

Once he was satisfied, he tucked his phone away into his pocket and began his practice.

The result... as expected, was a tragic sight. The ear-piercing screeching sounds of tires scraping the ground echoed on the pier. The cardboard boxes and tires were strewn about and had all been knocked over! Zhang Heng initially thought his driving skills had improved so much that he even thought about acquiring a car and completing the primary mission.

But this new training felt like someone had just poured ice-cold water on him. Even though Takeda Tetsuya had not been very reliable all this while, he would not lie to him about such a trivial matter. Since he said that completing the training was attainable, it meant that Zhang Heng was the problem.

On that account, the boy wrestled with the heap of tires and boxes until the next morning until the sun had started peering out from the horizon. The seafood store owner packed his fishing rod, stretched his body and then looked at Zhang Heng. "You'll continue to deliver the goods after today. When you have free time, you can come here to practice drifting. So, how soon you complete your training is up entirely up to you. You can start modifying the L300. I will give you suggestions, but you will have to take care of the parts yourself!"