

## 48 Hours 51

### Chapter 51: Tokyo Drift XXI

Zhang Heng had to admit that the older the ginger, the spicier it gets 1. Even though he had been training in Tokyo for 9 months, his driving skills were still nowhere nearly as excellent as the professional racing driver Takeda Tetsuya, the man who was only one race away from the Drift King title.

This became even more apparent during the second half of the journey when Takeda Tetsuya had gotten the hang of the mechanics of the car and began to rediscover the form he was in back in the day.

Putting his life on the line for Kobayashi's little sister did not cancel out the guilt he felt over his best friend's death. After that near-death experience, he had, at least, redeemed himself, and redressed a good portion of his self-condemnation.

Zhang Heng would not be able to triumph over Takeda Tetsuya, who was in this state.

On top of that, there was Kobayashi's sister, who had been planning this for 22 years, and whose driving skills were just as competent as her brother's. Not only did she possess that meticulous quality a woman possessed, but she also inherited Kobayashi's intrepidity.

However, someone once said, 'Having a good opponent would bring out the best in you.'

Encouraged by his two competitors, Zhang Heng gave 150% of his ability. The L300 turned into a mustard phantom zipping in the darkness.

In the end, however, he was still one step behind.

But when they were drawing near the finishing line, the Nissan 180SX and the Viper suddenly slowed down and as if on cue, giving each other deference. Zhang Heng did not care about any of that, so the minivan zoomed past Takeda Tetsuya and Kobayashi Yu, taking first place.

When he reached the finish, a series of notification rang in his ears.

[You have won an underground street race!—Mission complete!]

[To return after 134 days]

[Successfully defeated a professional racecar driver: +15 game points. You may refer to the character panel to view the corresponding information]

[Successfully defeated the best racing driver in this edition, Yosuke Tsuchiya: +25 game points. You may refer to the character panel to view the corresponding information]

[Successfully completed one death racing mode: +10 game points. You may refer to the character panel to view the corresponding information]

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Yosuke Tsuchiya was the best driver in the Tokyo Drift edition. That came as no surprise to Zhang Heng. The fact that Kobayashi Yu was a professional racing driver, on the other hand, bewildered him as female professional racing drivers were as rare as phoenix feathers and unicorn horns.

It was no wonder, though, that she dared take on a one-versus-two challenge. Her skills may have been slightly weaker than Takeda Tetsuya's. Considering how disheartened the latter was before the near-accident, and if Zhang Heng was out of the picture, it would have been hard to say which one would win.

In reality, when compared side-to-side according to their skills, it would be out of the question for Zhang Heng to win. But after everything that had happened along the way, the atmosphere of hostility was extinguished. There was a silver lining amidst all the complications, helping Zhang Heng to complete his primary mission.

The rewards that came along with it were so much more generous than he had expected. The race alone earned him 50 game points. Combined with the 6 points he gained throughout the game, a total of 56 game points had now been collected.

Kobayashi Yu and Takeda Tetsuya talked to each other through the night. No one knew what they were talking about, but on the second day, the two of them visited Kobayashi Ryo's grave to pay their respects.

Two days after, Kobayashi Yu and her racing friends who had helped her left Tokyo.

Two months later, Ameko's exchange student application was approved.

Zhang Heng had driven her to the airport himself. She was about to embark on a one-year learning trip in China.

There was still some time before departure, so Ameko requested for coffee. Zhang Heng bought two cups of coffee from the Starbucks nearby. As he was handing it over to the girl, something soft nudged his lips.

Ameko was clearly very nervous. This was her first time doing something like this, so she was a little clumsy and timid; their lips only touching for a brief second.

"Come find me when you get back to China," Ameko whispered softly.

That kiss had spent all of her courage, so instead of waiting for Zhang Heng to reply, she picked up her luggage and quickly made her way to the check-in counter.

Zhang Heng watched the girl disappear into the crowd, suddenly feeling that having the extra hours might not be a good thing—the initially subtle feelings, with the passing of time, had slowly blossomed...

This was destined to be a promise that could never be fulfilled.

Zhang Heng sat on one of the seats in the airport alone, deep in thought, and finished the two cups of coffee quietly.

In whatever country, airports and train stations were always places brimming with a sea of emotions.

The wobbling elderly grandmother sending off her grandchild who was studying abroad, fussing over his backpack; the four-year-old holding onto his mother's hand, waving goodbye to his father going overseas for work, not knowing that the next time they would meet again would be the following year; the girl who had just stepped down the plane running to her boyfriend's embrace in her heels.

Then, at the same time, there were people rushing home, while the others leaving somewhere far away.

After swallowing last drops of the warm coffee, Zhang Heng got up, pulled up the zip on his jacket, and stepped outside into the snow.

...

After that race, Zhang Heng had basically stepped into leisure mode. He was getting pretty good at Japanese and even scored full marks for his first monthly exam, which earned him 3 game points. His most significant achievement, though, was that woodcarving, the second game item he found a month before.

The one thing that had been bothering him was other than the racer workshop, it was common for societies to recruit new members every two months—especially the two related to cars. The 4WD club and the auto show model photography club, which, like their names suggested, were a gathering of a group of chūnibyō 1 and gentries.

Zhang Heng had joined, patiently remaining in the clubs for two months only to learn how to scream 'Shooting Star and Cannonball' at his own 4WD, and to determine by eye the model of a car from a picture, deduce bra sizes, and many other random strange skills.

But Zhang Heng was still reluctant to give up because, according to his first game, whenever a cycle took place, he should have more than one valid option. After that, he decided to alter his thinking pattern, to stop focusing on organizations related to cars, but to broaden his search instead. So, he began paying attention to some of the more unusual groups.

He thought about the altar that he had come across on the island and opted to join a club that studied mysterious happenings, and another that researched popular paranormal activity. Eventually, he discovered that his membership in the latter really did pleasantly surprise him.

The woodcarving was a collection that belonged to the vice president of the club, who had claimed to have found it in Rakuten for only 500 Japanese Yen. There was nothing special about the carving—it did not even have a face. But just like the rabbit's foot, when Zhang Heng picked it up, he heard the same announcement in his head: [Found a game item].

He decided to buy it from the vice president, who was so happy that she presented it to Zhang Heng immediately, mainly because there were only three members in the club and the vice president valuing new members a lot. The woodcarving was not worth much anyway, so she was more than happy to give it away.

So, that was how Zhang Heng got his hands on another game item, without having put in much effort.

Although it was not difficult to get the game item, it was buried deep within the game. For other gamers who did have as much leisure time in the game like him, it would be tough for them to find hidden items like this.

## Chapter 52: Tokyo Drift (End)

With Ameko's departure, Zhang Heng's life as an exchange student also came to an end. He moved out of the dormitory of the International Exchange Hall and rented a small apartment outside the university.

Takeda Tetsuya also taught him nearly everything he knew. Now, to improve his skills and technique, there was only continuous practice and relying on his talent. Improving his driving skills from level 2 to level 3 in a short period was quite impossible, so Zhang Heng did not invest too much effort into it.

He participated in a couple of underground drifting competitions with his L300, earning him quite a bit of money. He even won an 80%-new Mazda. Unfortunately, no game points were credited for that.

The money he made was enough to sustain him for the rest of his time in Tokyo, and since he would not be able to take it away with him, it was kind of pointless making more, so Zhang Heng did not continue racing. That mysterious mustard color van that appeared and vanished so suddenly eventually became a legend in the Tokyo underground racing world...

But that was a story for another day.

Now that he no longer had to work or attend classes, Zhang Heng found himself with plenty of time. One day, while he was out traveling, he came across a gym, and he suddenly remembered that karate originated from Japan, derived from the combination of Japan's indigenous martial arts and Tang Shou Dao.

Last time, when he fought the men who worked for Kobayashi Yu, he was able to confirm the effectiveness of his training in the gym. But the person he had fought was only a commoner. While Zhang Heng had the advantage of speed and strength, he was simply throwing punches without any proper technique. It dawned on him that he could use this opportunity to learn a little bit of karate.

So, Zhang Heng spent the final two months achieving Level 0 in Karate skills.

On the 420th day, he stood on the Sky Tower overlooking Tokyo, enjoying the night view for one last time. Then that familiar voice rung:

[Return deadline arrived. Mission completed.]

[Tokyo Drift edition cleared! The second round has ended. Returning to reality...]

...

When Zhang Heng opened his eyes, he found himself back in the lounge booth. This time, the Tokyo Drift mission did not send him into some challenging situation isolated and far away from civilization. Still, after spending 14 months as an exchange student in another country, Zhang Heng found himself feeling an indescribable comfort and warmth hearing the language he was accustomed to.

"A glass of lemon water—no—give me something more flavorful," Zhang Heng walked up to the bar and had a brief flashback of the Tokyo girl with the snaggletooth smile.

“Congratulations on making it through the second round!” The bartender lady masterfully mixed a glass of cocktail and pushed it in front of Zhang Heng. “It looks like you’ve just completed a very unusual journey!”

“Mm. Hey, I’d like you to help me identify something.” Zhang Heng took out the woodcarving. After his first experience with the rabbit’s foot, he made sure to come prepared with a pair of gloves to handle the woodcarving, be it inside or outside the game.

The bartender’s eyebrows rose at the sight of the game item. “Another one? Aren’t you a little too lucky?”

She picked up the woodcarving carefully and placed it inside a tulewood box, not forgetting to take 5 points from Zhang Heng.

Zhang Heng sat at the bar as he finished his drink. When he was about to leave, the bartender called out to him, “Do you still remember the year-end auction I told you about?”

“Mmhmm?”

“As usual, it will be held on the last day of the year. If you plan to participate in the auction, you better prepare in advance. Remember not to set the third game on that day,” she reminded him.

Zhang Heng thanked her and then left the lounge.

...

The next day, Zhang Heng skipped English class in the morning. The second game had ended a little too late that by the time he left Sex and The City, already 4.30 am by then. He needed to make up for all the sleep he had lost.

Then in the afternoon, as he was having lunch, Ma Wei and Chen Huadong gave him the same sympathetic look.

“You’re screwed. Today, Old Zhang gave a random test in class. When he found out that 5 papers were missing from the stack, he threw a fit! The College English Test (CET) 1 is only two weeks away—he said that those who don’t know what hard work is cannot be saved. The people who didn’t take the test won’t get any marks for their continuous assessment.”

In most universities, exams were usually separated into two parts: continuous assessment and a final exam. The latter made up 70% of the final score, while the former made up the other 30%. These two combined, made up the final grade.

This 30% shouldn’t be underestimated. It regularly determined if someone passed or failed a subject, either saving the person from failing or dooming a supposed pass to failure. Of course, the latter scenario was relatively rare. After all, there were no ongoing grudges between lecturers and students, so crackdowns on the students during the continuous assessments were uncommon.

But if a person did not have any continuous assessment marks at all, it would be a severe problem. A student would have to score 86 out of 100 to get a credit, and English was a slightly more special subject, whereby the final results were graded based on the CET-4 and CET-6.

“710 is the full marks—which means that to get a credit, you will need to score 609 points in the final exam.” Ma Wei frowned. The passing mark for the CET-6 is 425 marks. For a non-English major, 600 points and above was usually considered a high score. Even a nerd like him did not have the full confidence to be able to achieve that, especially not English, which was a subject that Ma Wei was slightly struggling with.

Zhang Heng was speechless. If he had known about it, he would have fought his sleepiness and gone to class. But it was too late for him now. He simply had to find a way to get a score of 609 and above. In fact, if he was previously presented with this problem, he would have thought that it was impossible. But having learned English from Bell back on the island, Zhang Heng felt that the situation was salvageable.

It was about 20 days away from the College English Test. To him, that amounted to 40 days. When it came to his listening skills, there was nothing to worry about. The essay and grammar portions, though, still required some reinforcement.

Zhang Heng did not expect to have to tackle English right after having to grapple with Japanese in Tokyo. Perhaps, taking up a job as a simultaneous translator after graduation was a good idea.

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Later that afternoon, Zhang Heng ran to the library to borrow some books to get cracking on English when he suddenly ran into Shen Xixi.

Without Cheng Cheng harassing her all the time, peace had been restored to her life. Although they had exchanged numbers after the camping incident, neither of them made the first move to contact each other.

They would often meet on campus, and Shen Xixi would greet him liberally, but they were only friends. On the contrary, Chen Huadong and Xu Jing quickly became close friends after that day. Even though there was still no confirmation that they romantically involved, but they had been hanging out together a lot lately, and it looked like success was on the horizon.

Nowadays, Chen Huadong had forgone his games and no longer attended his anime club. Instead, he would spend his days shopping and walking around the streets with Xu Jing, betraying his club, Tiger Shark—some loyal members even thought of burning him at stake...

Since they were both there by chance, Zhang Heng figured that he might as well go up to her and say hi.

### **Chapter 53: Moresby**

Shen Xixi was sitting on her own by the window, reading intently. The warm sun rays lit up a side of her face, making her glow to the point that some guys sitting nearby were unable to focus on what they were doing.

Zhang Heng forcefully quickened his pace, hoping Shen Xixi would look up to see him waving at her.

Seeing him, Shen Xixi put down the book in her hand and smiled. Since they were in the library, they had to be quiet. As they were not allowed to talk, they did not say anything else to each other.

Zhang Heng found the book that he wanted, so he waved at her to say goodbye, but before he walked out of the library, his eyes fell on the half-opened book in Shen Xixi's hand, catching a glimpse of the title, 'The Criminal Personality.'

Of course, as someone who had read 'Bill of Quantitates for Water Drainage, Heating, and Gas Engineering,' he was not qualified to question others' personal reading preferences.

But Zhang Heng had to admit that this girl's hobby was somewhat unique, especially with her incredible observational skills and reasoning skills. Did she plan to work in the criminal investigation field? But then again, she was studying public relations.

He had simply acquainted with Shen Xixi and was not about to interfere with others' life choices, so Zhang Heng went to another floor to study. He was simply surprised to discover Shen Xixi's interest in topics of criminal investigation.

In between, he dropped by the canteen to have dinner, then in the library until its closing. Since he was going to return in an hour, he did not take the grammar book with him but left it on the shelf.

Done with the washing up and brushing teeth, Zhang Heng checked his inbox and found an email from the photography society informing him that his work was shortlisted for the 'urban impression theme' competition, which would be entered into the judge selection section. He would know the results in about a week.

He had been so busy recently that he had nearly forgotten all about this—joining the competition to see how much he had discovered. Making it through the intermediary contest was already meeting his expectations. As for getting the prize money and rewards, it would be great if he got them, but even if he did not, he would have no problem with it.

Zhang Heng browsed forums and posts on his phone to pass the time. Midnight came quickly, and silence filled the whole town. He got dressed and was about to continue his revision in the library when he noticed that someone had sent him a text.

It was an arbitrary message from an unfamiliar number:

'I need your help! Meet me at the place we first met.'

This was the first text message he had ever received in still time. For countless nights, he had been the only one who could roam around the sleeping city while everyone froze in time. Right away, a figure in a Tang suit and fedora popped into Zhang Heng's mind. Everything supernatural that had happened to him so far had to do with the strange old man. If there was someone who could enter this world, it would be that guy. From the looks of the message, it seemed that he was in some sort of trouble as well.

Zhang Heng changed into his sports attire and went to retrieve his sf recurve bow from the archery range, then bought a small knife from the outdoor sporting goods store next door and strapped it to his waist. After he was done, he jumped on a yellow public bike and cycled to the maid's café.

The door into the mall was uncharacteristically unlocked and half-open, a light coming from within. Zhang Heng unstrapped his bow and armed it with an arrow, treading as carefully and quietly as he could.

"I really liked that milk tea shop on the second floor, but there's always a long line! It's seldom empty like it is now, but then again, at least there's one to make a cup of milk tea for me. Perhaps this is life—it's difficult to find the best of both worlds." The old man in the Tang suit sighed. Sitting on the handle of the stationary escalator, he was dressed in the same way as they first met two months ago. This time, however, he wore a baseball cap instead of that formal hat. Other than that, everything else was nondescript.

The old man was holding a bag of M&Ms, which he tore open before emptying half of its content into his mouth.

Zhang Heng put down his bow and said, "Forgive me for being indiscreet, but you don't look like you need any help."

"Trust me, I care more for your privacy compared to all the employers you'll find out there. I wouldn't come to you unless something dire happened," said the old man as he chewed on the M&Ms.

"Serious?"

"We'll talk about it on the way. We don't have much time." The old man poured the rest of the chocolate-coated candies into his mouth and then got up. "Let me ask you a question: you've probably played two rounds of the game now, what kind of skills have you acquired?"

"Wilderness survival skills, archery skills, and driving skills," Zhang Heng listed all of his level 2 skills.

"That a pretty good start. You'll be able to use them soon. Right now, find us a mount first—oh, sorry, old habits die hard—go get the car." The old man tossed a set of car keys to Zhang Heng. "Black Audi A6. Carpark B34, one level down. I promise I'll tell you everything in the car."

Zhang Heng took the elevator down to the parking lot and was able to locate the car pretty quickly. When he opened the glove compartment, however, he spotted a driver's license belonging to a heavily-set guy called Wang Jianguo. It was obviously not the old man's. The guy in the picture looked at least 20 years younger.

The old man was waiting for Zhang Heng at the mall's front entrance carrying a piece of broken luggage looking like he had just escaped from a nursing home. Zhang Heng drove to the front, where the old man climbed into the back seat.

"Don't mind these small little details. You have probably done some things in the game that you would never have in the real world, right? Considering the enemy we're going to face, you wouldn't make me sit in the front on our way to battle."

"What enemy?" Zhang Heng asked.

"There's a tribe called Alkiz in Papua New Guinea. Their ancestors traveled to that place early in the days and fought a few battles with the island's overlord Huli tribe. Both sides won and lost. Even though the Alkiz soldiers were very mighty and brave, each of them as powerful as ten men combined, an underpopulation problem developed as the war continued. For every Alkiz, there was twenty Huli. If they continued to deplete in numbers, they would soon be wiped out. In desperation, the Alkiz offered prayers to a monster called Moresby.



“They offered the old, weak and lame, as sacrifices to Moresby. In return, the monster aged the Alkiz babies into able-bodied young men in the span of a few months so that they could have one batch of soldiers after another. Thankfully, in the end, the tribe was snuffed out by the Huli tribe. Everything related to the Moresby, its totems, the altars all destroyed. In most circumstances, this meant that the monster was also exterminated.

“But, by the way—I really hate this phrase—but... Moresby is a monster with time attributes, making it very difficult to completely eradicate it. In the last moment, it somehow found a way to seal itself into a small stretch of time, escaping death. Of course, in a way, you can say that it’s dead, trapped inside for over 20,000 years, dragging out its feeble existence until... err, the equilibrium was broken.” The old man suddenly became really quiet as his gaze fell on Zhang Heng.

Zhang Heng was suddenly filled with a sense of foreboding. “You’re kidding, right?!”

The old man sighed again. “Unfortunately, when I gave you the gift, I accidentally broke the time balance and released the creature.”

#### **Chapter 54: Go After It!**

“What you’re saying is that in the real world, the city I’m living in, there’s a monster?” Even though Zhang Heng had experienced supernatural phenomena these past months, he still found the old man’s story inconceivable.

“Mm... Not exactly, the specifics are not completely accurate, but the essence about it is about right.” The old man pulled out a packet of Wangzi QQ soft candy. It would seem his mouth would just not stop. “But don’t worry, after losing the Alkiz’s worship, it’s in the weakest it has ever been. In my heyday, dealing with this kind of low-life pest is just a matter of snapping my fingers.”

“What about now?”

“Now... I just found someone to help me, didn’t I?”

Zhang Heng turned to a street per the old man’s instruction. “...that sounds very reassuring.”

“Relax. Even though my strength has depleted quite a bit, there are two of us and one of them. In terms of numbers, we are at an advantage.” The old man said encouragingly, as he wolfed down the candies in his hand. At the rate he ate, it would be a miracle if he survived diabetes.

“I still don’t understand why a Papua New Guinean monster come all the way here?”

“Its original believers, the Alkiz, are all dead. If we compare it to an economy, while it has escaped from the prison of time, the Papua New Guinean market has now split up. Unable to mingle inside but desperate to recover its strength, it needed to find new believers. And so it was forced to leave and eventually followed a couple to China.

“I was in Shanghai’s Hongqiao International Airport when I came across the monster. That dumbass had been locked up for too long and was completely out of touch with society. Thinking that since there were so many people there, he would try his luck. But 99% of the people who went to the airport never stayed long, and while it may have been able to fool the indigenous 20,000 years ago, it wouldn’t work

now. The monster spent half a month there, managing to convince two cleaners – they were elderly women, where one of them offered the remainder of her time to the monster as a sacrifice. The other one remained undecided. Then, when it saw me, it ran away!”

The old man shifted in his seat, settling in a more comfortable position. “Ever since we last met, I have been busy taking care of this matter. I’ve been going after it for nearly two months now. Tonight, with your help, we can probably solve this problem. Otherwise, I’m afraid sooner or later, this guy will find you.”

“Why?”

“Because the ‘Time Anomaly’ you have on you poses a fatal attraction to it, and because you are my representative. We had friendly relations for these past two months. I’m 100% sure that that thing wants to get even with me.” The old man answered. “Turn left at the intersection in front, take the side road, but don’t take the overpass.”

Zhang Heng was quiet as he tried to process the old man’s words. After a while, he said, “Did this world go crazy after you found me, or has it always been this insane?”

The old man gave his driver a meaningful smile. “You are a smart guy. You already know what the answer is. You just need to continue to play the game to find the answer. There are some things in this world that unless you see them with them your own eyes, it would be very hard to believe... Stop the car over there, I can feel it nearby.”

Zhang Heng stepped on the brake and the Audi A6 slowed down until it came to a halt in a damp looking tunnel.

About 2.8 km long, it was located in the center of the city. The construction site had been sealed off to reduce noise to its surrounding areas. There were few cars in the tunnel at this hour, and Zhang Heng had not spotted anything suspicious so far. He was just about to speak when he saw the old man placing a finger on his lips.

Zhang Heng turned off the engine, and the whole world was once again immersed in complete stillness. After about half a minute, loud clattering footsteps came from the roof of the tunnel. It was getting closer and closer, then stopped abruptly!

Just like that, 5 minutes had passed. The two people in the car were composed and silent. Just when Zhang Heng thought that the thing had disappeared, something hefty suddenly landed on the roof of the car! There were dents in the steel the shape of two footprints above Zhang Heng’s head.

And then, the next minute, a strange face peeped down from the windshield!

It was a creature that looked very much like a monkey, but with unusually large eyes that took up nearly a third of its face. Like the primate, its face was hairless, covered only in wrinkles like an old man.

Zhang Heng could see the greed in its yellow pupils. But when the creature noticed someone else sitting at the back of the car, it quickly turned around and scrambled towards the other end of the tunnel!

“Go after it!” The old man in the Tang suit finally broke the silence.

Since there was no time for questions, Zhang Heng got the car running and floored the gas pedal. The metal beast roared as it barreled forward.

Zhang Heng turned on the high beam, and under the luminosity, he could see that Moresby creature running on the wall of the tunnel. Its movement was swift, as if completely unaffected by gravity.

If he had not seen it with his own two eyes, he really would not have believed that such a being existed on earth, and at least now he knew why the old man had been chasing this creature for two months and had yet to succeed.

With his level 2 driving skills, he was barely able to tread on the creature's heels, and that too was thanks to his car's light that flooded the tunnel. Once they were outside of the area sealed in both directions, it would be able to burrow its way into a building nearby with this creature's agility.

If that were to happen, even if Zhang Heng's driving skills were 10 times better, he would never be able to catch up to it.

Fortunately, the old man in the backseat finally made a move. He opened the broken luggage he had been hugging to his chest, and took out a metal piece speckled with rust and assembled them into a rusty spear.

From its appearance, it did not look like a weapon but a cultural relic that had just been unearthed.

"I borrowed this thing from a friend of mine," the old man explained as he opened the window and stood up on the seat with the spear in hand.

He was not very tall, but at that very moment, he appeared like an imposing god as if becoming one with heaven and earth.

Zhang Heng did his best to keep the Audi stable, keeping the car from swaying side to side as the old man threw the spear without even aiming.

When the spear left his hand, it exploded into a burst of light, flitting across the sky like a bolt of lightning!

As it sensed the incoming danger, the Moresby creature gathered even more speed, and began to jump frantically! But no matter how hard it tried to avoid it, the spear remained firmly locked onto it as if it was equipped with a tracking device.

Finally, the creature pushed itself to its limits, and just when it was about to escape the tunnel, the spear punctured it from the back into its heart and out through its chest!

Moresby dropped as if he had been drained of all strength and fell motionless onto the asphalt road.

## **Chapter 55: Reward**

Everything happened so quickly from the moment the creature started fleeing to the moment it was hit—Zhang Heng did not expect the battle to end so soon. As the small-ish was falling mid-air, he decelerated and stopped right at the tunnel opening!

The old man in the Tang suit stepped out of the vehicle, bent down, and checked the creature's breathing.

"Is it over?" Zhang Heng pulled the handbrake and exited the vehicle.

"I wish I could say yes, that it's over and that the both of us could go wherever we want, do whatever we want, but something seems off about this. The whole was just too easy." The old frowned. "I've been going after the creature for 2 months. If it were this easy to kill, it wouldn't have lasted until today."

"From your understanding of this creature, think it still has some tricks up its sleeve?" Zhang Heng stepped closer. The thing had appeared on the windshield, but he did not get a good look at the creature. Now, he could finally see it upfront and personal.

The creature was slightly bigger than a monkey, about the size of a six or seven-year-old child with small, short limbs. Other than its hairless face, its body was covered in gold hair, which was why Zhang Heng's first impression of it was that it resembled a monkey. But the one thing that caught his eye most was the reproductive organ in between the creature's legs—it was three times the size of a grown man's.

Zhang Heng was sure that this thing did not belong to any known species on earth.

"Reproduction worship. Many of the indigenous people have similar preferences. Also, you seemed to have misunderstood something. I may look old, but I'm not as old as you think I am. Moresby is a 20,000-year-old monster. Like you, I don't know anything about it. So, thanks to Google and Wikipedia, I was able to find some information about it on the internet." The old man pushed himself off the ground and pulled out the spear from the corpse. "We..."

He was about to say something when he suddenly froze. There was a transparent, sticky substance dripping from the spear.

"This is great!" The old man exclaimed.

But then, a silhouette jumped down from above!

Who would have thought that there was another Moresby?!

It was fast, pouncing on the old man so hard he fell to the ground. Then, it opened its mouth to bite the old man's neck, only to be stopped by something.

The old man was in terrible condition. His baseball cap had fallen off his head, and his hair and clothes were disheveled, desperately holding onto the spear to defend himself.

The old man was not as strong as the Moresby creature. The horizontal spear was getting closer to his chest by the moment

Zhang Heng thought that the old man would use that trick he used back in the maid's café, but he did not realize that the old man's strength had weakened to this extent, or maybe he just could not rewind time when in still time—whatever it was, he looked like he was in deep trouble.

Zhang Heng knew what he had to do. So, he ran back to the car as fast as he could and grabbed his recurve bow and arrows, tightly aiming at the creature.

There was no way he could miss at such a short distance.

Thwack!!!

The arrow pierced the skin of the creature as expected but did not penetrate any further.

Zhang Heng was taken aback. He had just witnessed that rusted spear puncture the Moresby's chest effortlessly. He thought that the creature was not that strong, but now, it looked like the creature's muscles were so robust it was akin to a small tree.

The Moresby turned around to glare at its attacker, but it did not do anything else. It could obviously tell who was a bigger threat to it and decided to get rid of the old man first, then taking care of Zhang Heng.

Zhang Heng shot it twice again, and when he realized that it was useless, he tossed his bow and arrow aside and ran to the back!

The old man thought Zhang Heng was going to take the car and leave. That would be extremely stupid because if the old man died, he would not be able to outrun the Moresby alone.

But 7 seconds later, the old man could see that the black Audi had not left but was coming towards him at full speed! The glaring highbeam blinded his eyes and also affected the creature's vision!

Wham!!!

The creature was knocked over, and the Audi's hood caved in! In the last second, Zhang Heng slammed on the brakes, its impact violently throwing his head forward into the inflated airbag.

The tire of the car was less than 1cm away from the old man's left arm! This was the deadliest attack Zhang Heng could think of. With the hardness of the monster's body, only a 2-ton block of metal could do any damage to it.

But that made the Moresby really angry. After it was knocked by the car, it stumbled once, then sprang back onto its feet again! Its eyes were fixed on Zhang Heng in the driver seat the whole time. It then squatted its tiny legs, getting ready to leap.

The next moment, a bolt of lightning flashed from under the Audi and pierced its bald forehead and out through the back, pinning the Moresby onto the wall of the tunnel!

The creature twitched twice before going into a limp like a piece of cured meat.

The old man in the Tang suit crawled out from under the Audi, face covered in dust and dirt, and stumbled towards the wall, cursing. After making real sure that the thing was dead as a doornail, he turned around and gave Zhang Heng a big thumbs-up. "Beautifully done!"

Zhang Heng unbuckled his seat belt and leaned back onto the seat. After that almost too-close-to-call brush with death, he was mentally exhausted. Slightly anyway. "Didn't you say that it's two against one tonight? What was that just now?"

"It is supposed to be two against one tonight. I did not know that it would have two bodies." The old man shrugged innocently. "Previously, when I was hunting it down, it did not show this side! I think it was planning to use it against me. Thank goodness I have had help tonight!"

“Alright, stop being so upset. I was not going to make you help me for free.” The old man pulled out the spear from the wall, disassembled it before returning it into the luggage. Rolling up his sleeves, he plunged his hand into the Moresby’s pierced head. He dug around for a bit, and finally pulled out a piece of bone covered in greyish-white brain matter and tossed it to Zhang Heng.

“Your reward.”

Zhang Heng let the thing fall to the ground, not intending to pick it up.

“Don’t be fooled by its appearance! This is the game’s equivalent of a C-grade item! You can use it yourself or sell it at the year-end auction. But as you already have the gift I gave you, this ain’t going to be that useful.”

### **Chapter 56: The Dispute on Food Street**

Zhang Heng helped the old man load the carcasses into the trunk.

After slamming the door shut, the latter clapped, “Typically, I should be bringing you somewhere and buy you a drink to thank you, but unfortunately, we won’t be able to find any bar that is still open at this time, so let’s part here... You can just leave the rest to me.”

The old man offered his hand, and Zhang Heng shook it.

“Something’s up in the north. I better go return the weapon and see a few of my old friends. I will be out of the country, so we won’t be seeing each other for a while – we were not supposed to meet so soon anyway. Thank goodness this is during still time, so it’s not that big of a problem. Finally, I wish you success in the upcoming CET-6 exam!”

The old man climbed into the driver’s seat and cut away the deflated airbag with a small knife. Just as he was about to start the car, Zhang Heng called out and asked the question that concerned him the most, “Wait! Are there many types of these... monsters here on earth?”

The old man chuckled. “A very long long long time ago, there were actually quite a few of them. But now...” He pointed at the lucky rabbit’s foot hanging from Zhang Heng’s keys, and then the bloody bone wrapped in tissue. “I’m very sure that most of them are very safe.”

“You mean that all of those game items that we found are their remains?”

The old man clammed up. “I’ve already said too many things I shouldn’t have. This meeting never happened! You should get back to school and continue to the next game. You’re already one step closer to the truth!”

Zhang Heng watched the black Audi disappear from the tunnel’s exit. Discounting the hole in the wall, the road of the tunnel, and also the small missing parts on the car, it was as if nothing had happened.

...

That night left a deep impression on Zhang Heng. After that incident, he looked up Moresby and Alkiz, and he found several records. Clicking onto one of the research articles on Alkiz culture, he was

immediately drawn to a picture of a recently exhumed stone relic with a carving of a creature. It looked exactly like the Moresby creature from the tunnel!

Other than that, there was also a picture of the spear the old man in the Tang suit had used. The more Zhang Heng thought about the fight that night, the more he realized that the spear was very similar to one he heard in a story when he was still a child.

Zhang Heng suddenly discovered that he was not as unfamiliar with this world as he thought he was.

Alas, no matter how much he searched, he could not find any other evidence to support his theory and had to leave that night on the back burner as time passed.

After a week, his work 'Late night fried pancake stall and night bus' had won second place in the urban impression themed photography competition. The comment the judges gave was, 'Although its technical skills were a little crude, the details were outstanding! The picture is full of emotion!'

Owing to this, Zhang Heng went to the society to collect his 3,000 yuan prize money. A tripod and a camera bag were also included. After taking a picture of him with the other winners and their prizes, it was posted in an article on the school website that afternoon.

"That's not real! You've only just started learning!" Wei Jianguang said when he saw the names on the list of winners, popping a hard-boiled egg whole into his gaping mouth.

On the other side of the room, Chen Huadong had grown rather numb to all these surprises. Last time, his friend had only started practicing archery and could already 'accidentally' scare the trespasser away. This time, he had only just bought the camera for two months and was already winning prizes.

On the other hand, Chen Huadong had been working double shifts trying to promote the development of his Anime, Comic, and Games (ACG) career, looking up resources for everyone for free. Despite that, he had yet to receive a single consolation prize.

"Sigh, life is getting more stressful thanks to those Europeans who are everywhere."

"Let me treat all of you to dinner!" Zhang Heng volunteered as he placed the tripod and the camera bag on his table. He had missed his three dorm mates ever so often during the one year he spent in Japan. This was the perfect opportunity for a gathering.

"Sure. Sure!" The expression on Chen Huadong's face changed instantly as he broke into a smile.

"Europeans may be hateful but they are not all that bad..."

Wei Jianguang informed Ma Wei, who was still studying in the library, and when it was time to eat, the four of them gathered in front of the campus gate and headed straight for the food street nearby that they usually frequented.

Lined with popular stalls and restaurants, it was always packed with students from universities and schools nearby enjoying their meals or having supper – not only because the food there was particularly good or affordable, but it was a great spot to gaze at pretty girls from other schools as you ate.

Zhang Heng ordered 50 skewers of lamb, 1 grilled fish, 8 oysters, some goat liver, vegetables, and baked bread slices.

When the food was served, Chen Huadong picked up the beer bottle from the table and said, “May Africans never be servants 1!”

His friends all dissolved into laughter as they clinked their bottles together!

After a few skewers of meat, even the usually quiet Ma Wei was yakking away. When boys chatted, they either talked about sports or girls. After hovering over several subjects, the topic finally came to relationships.

Wei Jiangyang asked Chen Huadong, “How are you and Xu Jing? Have you decided on your relationship yet?”

The latter shook his head. “We’ve gone out a few times, but each time, she would ask for us to go AA 1. I don’t really understand what it means. Was it the same when you were wooing your girlfriend?”

Wei Jiangyang was quiet for a moment, then answered cheekily, “I’m sorry. Xiao Xiao was the one who pursued me!”

“Tsk! Tsk!” Everyone gave him the middle finger.

Ma Wei, the honest guy, commented, “Old Wei, you are you lying to? Whenever you’re next to Han Xiaoxiao, you become more docile than an Angora rabbit!”

“I don’t know how, but it just happened. It’s true, she was the one who saw me playing ball and asked for my WeChat.” Wei Jiangyang grinned.

As they were talking, there was a sudden commotion not far away from where they were.

Two black men were tugging aggressively at a petite girl. The latter looked alarmed, the rims of her eyes red, and she was repeating something over and over again. The men looked on with amused smiles on their faces.

This had caught quite a few people’s attention, and eyes were drawn to the spectacle.

One of the black men addressed the onlookers and said in broken mandarin, “My friend and his girlfriend have a disagreement! I’m really sorry for the disruption!”

The crowd looked uncertain. The two men looked like exchange students from one of the universities nearby. When someone asked the girl if she needed help, she said nothing and kept shaking her head.

That seemed to confirm the black man’s statement.

Was this just a false alarm?

When they realized that it was simply a misunderstanding, the crowd gradually dispersed. Despite that, the girl’s face grew redder. She looked extremely troubled. A few times, she made attempts to grab the black man’s shirt, but the guy evaded her effortlessly.

Just when she was about to give up, a voice spoke from behind her!

“Dōshitandesuka 1?”



## Chapter 57: Welcome to China!

Zhang Heng noticed his housemates craning their necks at something, so he too turned around to look.

His eyes fell on the Maneki-neko bracelet around the girl's wrist and were immediately taken aback!

Back when he was in Tokyo, he had visited the Sensō-ji temple with Ameko, who gave him a teru teru bōzu; in return, Zhang Heng bought her a bracelet that was exactly like the one this girl was wearing.

So, Zhang Heng approached the girl and said something in Japanese. The girl's eyes lit up at that as if he had just thrown her the lifesaver, quickly explaining to him in fleeting Japanese that she was in trouble!

Her name was Hayase Asuka, an exchange student at a university nearby who had only just arrived in China and was curious about everything here. So, before she could even learn enough Mandarin, she snuck out and wandered around on her own.

She did not know who the two other black men were. While she was out that night, taking pictures, they grabbed her phone! No matter how much she begged them, they refused to return it to her, and she panicked. Her Mandarin was terrible, and she could not understand what the people around were saying. If she went to the police for help, she was afraid that by then, the men would have been long gone with her phone.

Worse still, she had a profound sense of direction. Without her phone, she did not even know how to get back to school.

Zhang Heng felt that this girl must have been too humble when she said her Mandarin was awful—she had been here for almost three months already, yet she still did not know how to ask for help. She clearly paid no attention in class at all.

But as he had come to know about the situation, he felt that he could still be managed.

Zhang Heng turned to the two black men and said, "Give her phone back to her."

Both of the men played dumb, shaking their heads like rattle drums, repeating, 'I don't know' over and over again. Hayase Asuka was so mad, she wanted to lunge at them only to be held back by Zhang Heng! Yet, he patiently repeated what he said earlier in English.

More and more eyes were drawn to the commotion, and the black men were starting to get ticked off while hissing at Zhang Heng, "Mind your own business, chink!"

"There will always be idiots who won't remember until they've been taught a lesson, right?" Zhang Heng muttered to himself. He had heard that derogative word the black man uttered, but instead of arguing with them, he threw a punch right at the man's face!

He held nothing back, letting his fist break the man's nose, which also sent a slight, sharp pain up his knuckles!

When the other guy saw his friend getting attacked, he was furious. His angry eyes and muscular physique looked menacing in the dark of the night.

Hayase Asuka took two steps backward, but Zhang Heng remained where he was.

The black guy raised a curled fist, but before he could even swing it, all the customers sitting at the tables nearby got up.

The food street was mostly populated with university students, generally hot-blooded and unafraid, unlike the old and the middle-aged, who were more concerned about international relations. Most of the guys were already agitated when they saw Hayase Asuka's eyes redden, and after hearing the conversation between Zhang Heng and the black men, especially that vilifying term the black men had used, they were even more outraged.

Ma Wei and the others got up from their seats to support Zhang Heng. They did think that their actions would lead to a chain reaction—when the other students saw that someone had taken the lead, they followed suit and stood up as well.

The outburst was so big that it drew even more people's attention. It had everyone jabbering, trying to find out what was happening. More and more people joined in until the entire half of the alley was standing up!

Having never seen such a show of force before, the black exchange students were beside themselves.

The pressure of standing in the middle, surrounded by a mass of people, was unimaginable. Tonight, even if it were Tyson who was in this situation, he would have been terror-stricken too. The black man finally realized what a big mistake he and his friend had made.

Many of these exchange students were not exactly model citizens in their own countries. Only when they were no longer welcome there, did they escaped to this ancient, Eastern country, choosing whichever school they wanted, free accommodation, and could even apply for subsidies! With their pride and glory being part of the face-saving culture, whenever they had any sort of conflict with other students, the school would always stand by them for the sake of the bigger picture. So, eventually, after a while in this foreign country, they began to lose their bearings and became conceited.

Tonight, the both of them were out looking for fun, and when they spotted the Japanese girl, they thought of a heinous idea—grabbing the girl's phone was not their real motive; what they really wanted to do was to use the phone to trick her into getting a room with them! They never expected there to be any impending problems, at least not running into Zhang Heng, who spoke fluent Japanese.

In their anger, they used an expression they often used back in their country.

Outraged by their slur, Zhang Heng had taken the first move and knocked one of them down. He could easily take down the other one even if they had to fight mano y mano.

He did not expect his roommates to get up from their seats and also the rest of the people who were eating along the streets to join in as well. Coming completely as a surprise, it was the first time he had seen something like this! He could only presume that because these assholes had been kept unchecked for too long, many people were wary of them.

In the end, Zhang Heng said to the other black man who was now petrified, "Welcome to China!"

The culprit then quickly returned the phone to Hayase Asuka, then ran away from the scene with his bloody-nosed friend.

Someone started to cheer, and the rest of the street followed.

Wei Jiangyang ran to his roommate, exhilarated. "That was incredible! We will be bragging about tonight ten years down the road! Did you see how, when everyone stood up together, that black men nearly wet his pants?!"

Ma Wei stuck out a thumb and said, "Virtuous macho men!"

The ecstatic one was Chen Huadong. He fumbled excitedly, "Since when did you learn how to speak Japanese? When did you learn Japanese?! My god! Is that even natural? Is that even natural?! Is there anything you don't know? Damn! That punch to his face was really cool! You have to teach me how to do it!"

Hayase Asuka did not understand a word of it, but she caught on to the atmosphere and was grinning ear to ear.

Zhang Heng said to her, "You better go back while it's still early, and don't come out alone late at night. But if you have to, at least learn some Mandarin."

Hayase Asuka's face flushed red as she answered in a small voice, "I have a few classmates from Japan. Their Mandarin is pretty good, and we usually hang out together. Are you an exchange student from Japan as well? Your Mandarin is so good, and you even know how to speak English as well."

When Zhang Heng realized that she was mistaken, she shook his head, "I'm Chinese, but I've spent some time in Tokyo before."

## **Chapter 58: Shadow Moment**

Hayase Asuka was intrigued by Zhang Heng. For the most part, having been in China for so long, this was the first time she had come across a Chinese who was so fluent in Japanese, one who even spoke with an authentic Tokyo accent, which she had found very comforting.

Perhaps this poor child had been ignored for too long, not leaving the moment she got her phone back, but stayed by Zhang Heng instead, bombarding him with questions.

Chen Huadong nudged Wei Jiangyang on the shoulder and gave him a look.

The latter understood immediately and quickly said, "Xiaoxiao needs my help with something urgent. I have to go first!"

Chen Huadong chimed in, "I'll come with you. I should be chatting on QQ 1with Xujing too."

Ma Wei was the only one a little clueless, still caught up in that moment of furor. Based on his understanding, this was the moment to order two more large bottles of beer! Why did everyone have to leave suddenly?

Wei Jiangyang coughed twice and said, "Hey, Old Ma, you haven't memorized the TOEFL words yet, right?"

Only then did Ma Wei suddenly get the message. They were all so focused on the two black exchange students that they did not pay much attention to Hayase Asuka. Now that they did, he realized that this girl was quite a looker with an exotic appeal so dissimilar to the likes of Chinese girls with a small face, delicate features, and short chestnut hair.

Brothers needed to create opportunities for each other!

Ma Wei nodded, "Yes, yes! I have to go back and memorize all the words. CET-6 is coming soon."

After that, the three boys vanished without so much as a goodbye, leaving in such a hurry that the owner of the food stall thought they were trying to avoid paying for the meal!

...

Zhang Heng paid for the food, then sent Hayase Asuka back to her school. Coincidentally, the foreign university she was studying in was right next to Zhang Heng's campus.

Hayase Asuka looked rather happy as they stood outside of the student dorm. "Can I come hang out with you for fun next time?"

Zhang Heng found this request hard to refuse, and so, the both of them exchanged phone numbers before saying goodbye. When he returned to his dorm, the atmosphere in the room seemed a little strange. All three of his housemates were there. Chen Huadong even borrowed a mahjong table from next door and set it in the center of the room with a 30,000 yuan banknote on the table. "The Court is in session! Someone! Bring me the suspect!"

"..."

"Come, Childe Zhang. You either take the initiative to confess first, or we can do it for you!" Chen Huadong wore this jealous look on his face. "Oh, how wicked of you! I've always asked why you never date, and it turns out you've been learning Japanese secretly so that you could woo Japanese girls, huh? So, has she given herself to you? Where do the both of you plan to stay in the future? China or Japan? Do you want to have a son or a daughter?"

Wei Jiangyang was also very keen. "Are all Japanese girls very gentle?"

"You guys are overthinking! We were just making friends," Zhang Heng said.

"Ask your conscience! You think what you did is worthy of Shen Xixi waiting for you for years?" asked Chen Huadong.

When Shen Xixi's name was mentioned, Wei Jiangyang suddenly had this strange expression on his face. He thought about it before deciding to ask Zhang Heng, "Have you been in contact with Shen Xixi recently?"

Zhang Heng raised an eyebrow at that question. "Why?"

“There’s been a not-so-good rumor about her recently ...” Wei Jiangyang answered hesitantly.  
“Apparently, some time ago, someone saw her get into a black Mercedes after curfew.”

“No way. She doesn’t look like that kind of person. She comes from a pretty good family and probably shouldn’t be short on money to spend.” Gossip really was the most irresistible. Chen Huadong’s attention quickly turned away from Zhang Heng and his new Japanese friend. “Wasn’t she very cool towards Chen Cheng?”

Ma Wei turned around from his books to say, “I heard about that too! Some people say she was just pretending, playing hard to get.” Although he always focused on his studies, he was not a lone wolf like Zhang Heng. Shen Xixi was the prettiest girl in the Public Relations department, the dream lover of many boys, so naturally, rumors about her would spread really quickly.

“It’s probably a relative or friend.” Zhang Heng did not know Shen Xixi that well and was not in the position to comment. But ever since that camping trip, she left quite an impression on him—she was a brilliant girl. He did not quite believe this rumor.

“Who knows?” When Chen Huadong saw that he was not going to squeeze any valuable information out of Zhang Heng, he returned the mahjong table to their neighbor and returned to playing games on his computer, sulking. The others also returned to their respective areas in the room.

Zhang Heng decided to take shower. When he opened his closet, a wooden carving sitting in the corner caught his eye. This thing was returned to him 4 days ago, also sent by post.

[Name: Shadow Moment]

[Grade: D]

[Usage: Could place the user in shadow form, lasting for 3 minutes. Can only be used under conditions where shadows can be manifested. Number of uses: 3]

This was the second supernatural item that Zhang Heng had found. In reality, it could only be used 2 more times. He had no choice, at least needing to try it out once.

Unlike the lucky rabbit’s foot, the Shadow Moment was the kind of item that needed to be first activated. He had to carve his name at the bottom of the statue and focus his mind on visualizing a crow for the thing to take effect. According to Zhang Heng’s experiment, this transition into shadow form actually made the person’s physical body disappear, leaving only a shadow.

As for the conditions stated at the end, it merely meant that it could only be used when he had a shadow.

The way to get out of shadow form was also very simple. He just needed to turn off the lights, and he would reappear again. Or, he could also install spotlights on all four corners of the room to stop the effect.

Even though there were a lot of restrictions, its effects were also pretty pronounced. In shadow form, it would be difficult for anyone to inflict damage on him. Characteristically, shadows could reach places that were not usually easily accessible and could be used to avoid notice.

So, Zhang Heng decided to keep it for himself. Other than that, he also had a piece of Moresby bone. Unable to reveal its source, he could not ask the bartender lady to identify it for the time being.

Mid-December came quickly. Zhang Heng thought that he had done pretty well in his CET-6. The listening test at this level was pretty easy for him, also completing the reading, understanding, and translation part pretty quickly. The only part he needed to spend a little more time and effort was filling in the blanks and composition—these were also the areas in which he focused on these two weeks.

After he penned down the last word, he looked at the time. There was still an hour left. Not wanting to make such a dramatic exit or adding too much pressure to his fellow comrades in the battlefield of exams, he remained in his seat for another half an hour and checked his paper twice.

Even so, when he got up from his seat, the frustrated Xujing, who was sitting behind him inhaled nervously.

She had only just shaded in the answer sheets, not even writing a single word for the essay.

### **Chapter 59: The Mannerheim Line Welcomes You I**

The college entrance exam was over, and Zhang Heng received an unexpected mail.

It was from the game committee reminding the players that the annual auction was about to begin and that those interested in attending the event could register at any game checkpoint before the deadline on the 25th.

Zhang Heng did not want to wait, and was quite interested in the auction—buying and selling game items were secondary. The auction's main appeal was that he had been playing the game on his own and had only superficial knowledge about the rules. Since he did not know what old players felt about newbies, Zhang Heng did not approach others in the lounge before and after the first two games. Now that a rare opportunity had presented itself, he did not want to miss it.

So, upon receiving the main mission, Zhang Heng went to register with the bartender lady at once. Filing in the necessary personal information, he had to pay an entrance fee of 1 game point.

While there were still 2 weeks until the end of the month, Zhang Heng decided he did not want to make another trip to the bar, immediately settling down in a booth the moment he was done with the registration. Deftly, he set the alarm at 23:55 with the intention of completing the third round of game ahead of time.

He was slowly becoming accustomed to the game's format and would move his sleeping hours forward to the day. Furthermore, he would make sure to warm up before getting to the bar in order to keep his body and mind in tip-top condition. With the many skills and game items he had banked in the last two rounds of games, Zhang Heng was confident in the face of upcoming challenges.

Having said that, he would seem to have once again underestimated the challenges he was about to encounter.

23:55.

Once again, that familiar vertigo engulfed him. But because he was prepared this time, it was not as awful as it was the first two.

[Verifying player's identity...]

[Identity confirmed. Random extraction of the third edition for player number 07958...]

[Extraction complete—Current quest is 'The Mannerheim Line Welcomes You']

"Please explore the game's background on your own."

[Mission objective: Survive within the Finland territory for 20 days]

[Mode: Single player]

[Time flow rate: 120] (One hour in the real world is equivalent to 5 days in this game. After 20 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!

...

The moment the countdown ended, the first thing that Zhang Heng felt was frigid cold! He opened his eyes and saw that he was standing in a snow-covered forest. Whenever exhaling, his breath would quickly condense into ice crystals! This was the first time he had ever experienced a situation like this—the game did not provide any backstory at the beginning of the game, instructing him to explore it himself instead.

From the mission objective, he could confirm that he was in Finland. The Nordic pine trees all around him verified that fact as well. Zhang Heng's knowledge of Finland was that it was a country with little human interference. Lush green forests took up 75% percent of the land area, and a third of its territory lay within the Arctic Circle.

But this country... Zhang Heng had never really heard of any perils within it. Why was this mission's objective to survive like the first game?

Despite the fact that he was once again faced with a communication problem (Finland's primary languages are Finnish and Swedish) which would make it impossible for Zhang Heng to be employed, he could simply roam around the forest and quickly make it through 20 days with his Level 2 wilderness survival skills.

Even so, Zhang Heng was not careless. The timing of the game this time was very anomalous—the exchange ratio between the real world and the game world was very low, and the overall gaming period was also the shortest out of the three so far, an indication of the degree of danger in this game. Other than that, the title of this edition 'Mannerheim Line Welcomes You' sounded very familiar. But he could not, for the life of him, remember where he had heard it.

Routinely, Zhang Heng checked his current status.

Name: Zhang Heng

Gender: Male

Age: 19

Player ID: 07958

Rounds of game played: 2

Current game points: 77

Item in possession: Lucky rabbit's foot (E), Shadow Moment (D)

Skills:

Piano: Level 1

Language proficiency: Level 1 (three languages at general communication's level)

Car tuning and repairing skills: Level 1

Archery skills: Level 2

Wilderness survival skills: Level 2

driving skills: Level 2.

Assessment: The player has slightly better luck than the average person. Shielded by shadow, he has some wilderness survival skills and archery skills. If lucky, he will be able to survive six rounds of the game.

After two rounds, Zhang Heng had managed to accumulate 77 game points. However, other than identifying game items, he had no idea what other uses they had—yet to receive the detailed service statement that the bartender lady had promised to send. However, it no longer mattered anymore as he could just ask the other players during the auction.

In terms of skills, the report was not too far from his projections. The one thing that he did not foresee was that his language skills level did not increase even though he had mastered Japanese. But considering that there were over 5,000 languages in the world, it was an acceptably fair verdict. The other one was the addition of the Shadow Moment's protection in the assessment section, which raised his survival expectancy to six rounds.

After inspecting his character profile, he checked the belongings he carried. Perhaps due to an absence of background introduction, he was actually wearing his own clothes this time, which consisted of his Asics autumn-winter runners, a black Lee down jacket, and jeans.

Even though he was also wearing a set of thermal underwear underneath, one should know that winters in Finland could reach a toe-biting -20 degrees Celsius, which meant he was still feeling really, really cold.

His first priority would be to locate a store and procure warmer clothing.

Zhang Heng rubbed his hands together to keep them from freezing. He had his wallet and phone with him, but there was not much of a signal out here. The electronic compass could still be used, but



without GPS, he had no idea where he was. The only thing he could do was trust his instincts and pick a direction.

After walking for around half an hour, Zhang Heng spotted something in the snowy pasture. He picked it up and found that it was a metal helmet. The style was a little strange with a big hat and outward protective ear covering and a raised metal ridge sitting on top. Evident by the bullet hole and the bloodstains on the inside, it now seemed that this object failed to protect its owner's life.

Looking down at the object in his hand, Zhang Heng was filled with uneasiness. But before he could even examine this premonition, he heard a series of gunshots!

He instinctively ducked to the ground, but after a while, he could ascertain that shots were not fired in his direction. They were a distance away, probably two people firing at each other, where one was in pursuit of another.

As they were not heading toward his hiding place, Zhang Heng waited patiently for the gunshots to move further away before standing up and emerging from behind the tree.

Although he could still be in danger, Zhang Heng decided to explore the location where the shots were fired, needing to verify some things before deciding his next move.

## **Chapter 60: The Mannerheim Line Welcomes You II**

Zhang Heng knew that he was in deep trouble the moment he saw the two bodies on the ground.

The Soviet military uniform was too easily identifiable—its field uniform with red edges, the boat-shaped grey and green beret, the red five-pointed star on the cuffs. Combined with the 'Mannerheim Line Welcomes You' title, Zhang Heng's premonition radar hit its peak.

He was in Finland for sure—not modern-day Finland, but Finland during the Winter War.

His cumulative reading proved to be very useful this round—being able to retrieve information from his memory about the Winter War.

On the fringes of World War II, the Soviet Union and Germany signed the infamous German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact in Moscow, delimiting both parties' sphere of influence in Europe. In August, Germany invaded Poland. Unwilling to be outdone, the Soviets occupied three Baltic States, then proceeded to set its sights on Finland, who had just proclaimed independence.

In order to safeguard its capital Leningrad, only 32 kilometers from the Finnish border from potential German attack, the Soviet Union proposed a very harsh treaty that involved the Finnish ceding their land, leasing their ports, and removing their lines of defense. After Finland's rejection of the proposal, the doctored November 30th artillery bombardment of Mainila ignited a war. Considering the military strengths of both parties, the general global opinion at the time was that the war would end in two weeks.

But in reality, this battle lasted until February of the following year when the Soviets finally broke through the Mannerheim defense line. In March, due to the artillery and massive ammunition shortages, Finland signed the Moscow Peace Treaty with the Soviet Union, in which they were forced to

surrender 10% of their national territory including Karelia, Finland's second-largest city Vyborg, one-fifth of their industrial output, and 30% of their pre-war economic assets. Some 220,000 occupants were repatriated, where only a handful chose to stay and join the Soviet Union. As it turned out, this war also laid the groundwork to Finland joining the Axis.

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Zhang Heng did not care much about who was standing on the side of justice in this war—after all, world war two had already ended more than 70 years ago, and this was merely a game. He only needed to figure out how to survive and live through this ruthless war.

Because of his additional 24 hours, the game was extended to 140 days, which made it extremely disadvantageous for him. There was nothing he could do about it—being unable to predict what the next game was, nor did he know how long the duration of each would be.

Since he had enjoyed the additional benefit of an extended period, it was only reasonable that he would have to bear an equal amount of risk involved.

Fortunately, the Winter War only lasted for 105 days. From the looks of it, they were probably at war for some time now. So, strictly speaking, not all of his 140 days here would involve battle.

Now, logically, whenever there were two opposing camps in a game, the player would have to choose one side. Based on the denouement of the actual war, the winners were decidedly the Soviets. Whether in terms of equipment superiority, number of troops, tanks, and fighters, Finland was at an absolute disadvantage. From the moment the war was waged, the brutal epilogue had already been decided.

Regrettably, though, this 'reaping the fruits of the winner's labor' gameplay was not suitable for this peculiar Finnish Winter War.

Zhang Heng knew precisely how brilliant the Soviet commander's performance was during this war: The Soviets invested nearly 1 million troops and dispatched more than 6,000 tanks to fight the Finns, who only had 32,000 standing armies and 32 tanks. The Soviets, who had dominance over the airspace fought the Finnish guerillas. The results were a shocking 30 to 1 in terms of losses; the latter having only lost 900 soldiers against the Soviets who lost over 27,000 men.

On the battlefield, the Soviets did not gain any advantage over their enemy. The Soviet body count was piling up in the Mainila defense line, exhausting Finland's ammunition with their own flesh and blood. The total Finnish casualties from the war were 70,000 people, while the Soviet Union's total death count went up to a tragic 600,000.

Even though the Soviets won the war in the end, they actually gained nothing from their victory. On the contrary, it exposed their weaknesses to the West, and this pyrrhic victory procured at such a great cost encouraged Little Mustache 1 to attack them later on.

From this perspective, Zhang Heng might as well join the vanquished Finns.

Still and all, reality was harsh—Zhang Heng could neither speak Russian nor understand Finnish; his yellow skin and modern clothes making him stand out like a sore thumb in this war. He would not be able to explain why he was there, and even if he was willing to surrender himself to either side, no one would be willing to take the risk of accepting him.

The best idea Zhang Heng could come up with so far was to allow himself to be captured as a prisoner of war, but he was more likely to end up being shot by some mentally traumatized soldier that way.

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Zhang Heng smiled bitterly. While able very quickly to make sense of the environment he was in, he had already forgotten the many details about the Winter War. Even if he did remember them, it was still useless. He was neither familiar with Finland, nor was he the commander of a troop. All that information would have been useless anyway.

Right now, he would just have to take it one step at a time.

Not knowing when the Soviets would come to collect the remains of their fallen comrades, Zhang Heng peeled a coat off a corpse and put it on himself as quickly as he could. That khaki uniform clearly had not been washed for a long time. It was stained with stale blood and sweat that gave it a putrid stench.

For the sake of keeping warm, though, Zhang Heng could not afford to be picky. There was also a pistol and what looked like a machine gun on the ground. The latter looked strange to him with a giant mosquito coil at the top. Zhang Heng could not tell which model that thing was since he had little knowledge much about guns. Especially not World War II firearms.

But whatever it was, it looked like it had much better firepower than the pistol lying next to it.

In the end, however, after much deliberation, Zhang Heng chose to go with the pistol—largely because the machine gun was too heavy. He tried carrying it and felt it was at least 10 kilograms. The gunfire he heard earlier had already stopped. It was evident that both sides had stopped engaging, and chances were the Soviets would come back. Upon discovering that their comrades' body had been moved, it was very likely they would begin searching the area.

Zhang Heng was worried that he might not be able to get away fast enough if he carried that hefty thing. Other than the pistol, he also lugged around a canteen and a bag pack. He did not have time to look at the contents of the bag, for he could hear footsteps approaching.

In his haste, Zhang Heng had not taken into account that those guys might have split up. The place where the firing had only just stopped was still a distance away, and already, someone was returning.

It was impossible for him to set an ambush. Although the Soviets' performance in the Winter War had been lambasted by various military forums every once in a while, they were still trained professionals and were a collective. Zhang Heng was on his own, and this was his first time handling a firearm.

In times like this, a head-on confrontation would be a real bovine move.

There was no need for him to dilly-dally, so he carried his loot and ran for his life!