

48 Hours 631

Chapter 631 Quick Battle

Zhang Heng was not interested in doing the ten-step walk before shooting at each other.

This method of dueling, however, did sound and look cool in western movies, though. Zhang Heng did not think his marksmanship would be worse than Cook. They had both trained in different environments, wherein Zhang Heng honed his skills on the gun from Simon. He was better at long-range sniping, rather than a Western cowboy's classical duel.

In fact, even if Zhang Heng were familiar with their style, he would not put on his Filter Lens unless absolutely necessary.

No matter how good a shooter was, it was bound for one to be eventually be killed in the duel. There was always someone faster than you in this world. Besides, Zhang Heng figured that Cook might be concealing his real intention with the duel he just proposed. However, it wasn't crucial to Zhang Heng anymore.

From the very beginning, Zhang Heng had never intended to duel.

After killing the three people outside the house, he leaned against the wall and knocked on the door with the back of his rifle to draw Cook's attention. Then, killing the only two light sources, he swiftly scuttled around the end of the house and climbed to the second floor.

Judging from the layout, it should be Wendy's room that he must have stepped into. But unlike rooms of other girls, there were very few dolls. Instead, Zhang Heng saw many wooden ponies and knights.

Zhang Heng also heard Cook's shouting downstairs. Hence, he did not stay in the room for too long. He gently opened the door and walked along the corridor to the stairway. The Filter Lens allowed him an unobstructed view of what was happening downstairs. Zhang Heng then took up the Winchester rifle in his hand and ended the battle smoothly. The entire process took less than a minute.

Cook had no idea where the deadly bullet came from when he was sent to meet his maker.

"Please allow me to express my gratitude for saving the lives of our family."

Since it was late at night, Zhang Heng decided to spend the night at Matthew's house.

The next morning, as everyone was at the dining table, Matthew mentioned the incident that happened last night again, and his face was full of gratitude. "Oh, you're welcome. I'm just fulfilling my responsibilities as a contract employee." Zhang Heng took a sip of milk. "After all, only a living employer can pay me."

"What contract?" Matthew was a little surprised.

"About that..." Zhang Heng put down the cup and took out the contract Wendy signed with him before leaving.

Matthew took the contract and looked at it, "Eighty dollars in remuneration, twenty dollars in debt, plus a good horse... Looks good to me. I can pay you now."

"That couldn't be better." Zhang Heng raised his cup again, "...Happy to serve."

Then, Wendy suddenly interrupted. "Wait," she said.

"What's wrong? Have any questions?" Zhang Heng asked.

Wendy was lucky. The bullet penetrated her palm, grazed her bones, and went right through, leaving behind a gaping hole in her hand. A doctor had treated her wound, and she was fine now, save for a scar that would form later. Naturally, her mother was worried that it would affect her marriage. Wendy, however, wasn't the least bothered by it.

"That contract is flawed," Wendy solemnly proclaimed.

"Are you trying to go back on your words?" Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows. "No, you forgot something," Wendy continued. "I told you that as long as you help my father deal with Cook, I will give you half of the land and cattle my family owns," she said while looking at her father, "Can I be the one that makes the decision, dad?"

"Well..." Matthew thought for a while. "I wasn't home, and you are my eldest daughter, so this must mean that... our family assets are at your disposal. Congratulations, Mr. Zhang. You are now a rancher in Lincoln County. Actually, I overbought land when I first came here. I can't take care of such a large area by myself. It would be perfect if you can take half off my shoulders," said Matthew with a toast. "Are you sure about that?" Zhang Heng put down the knife and fork in his hand. Although he was not as demure as Shen Xixi, he did not feel good taking advantage of a little girl. Obviously, he did not take Wendy seriously when she

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the land.

"Of course," Matthew said, "You said the Cook gang is gone for good now. I know that a few of them managed to escape. Since Cook is dead, I don't think the gang can make a comeback. However, there's the possibility that the few survivors will come back here to avenge Cook. We can feel less worried if a powerful gunman like you became our neighbor, right, Jane?"

Matthew looked at his wife. The latter nodded and smiled at Zhang Heng. "Matthew's right. What happened last night was absolutely horrific. If you hadn't arrived in time, I don't think I'll be sitting here talking to you. I hope you can stay, and we can take care of each other." When Zhang Heng heard the proposal, he felt embarrassed. "Um, actually... I don't know how to raise cattle."

"Don't worry. I can teach you," Matthew graciously offered. "And horseback riding as well. Wendy has told me about you. I won't say that I'm the best horseman in the county, but I can say that I might be the best rider within a hundred miles. No one knows horses better than I, and I can continue to tend to your herd just like before."

"If that's the case... wouldn't that be too generous?" asked Zhang Heng. "Compared to what you have done for us, these rewards are insignificant," Matthew insisted with sincerity.

After breakfast, the old cowboy and the drunk sheriff came to the ranch too. Before they even saw the drunk sheriff, they already heard his voice. "Where is Cook? Where is Cook's body?"

“In the barn, sheriff,” answered Matthew.

The drunk police chief, however, was in no hurry this time. He turned over, got down from his horse, glanced at Zhang Heng, and snorted, “Are you the one who killed him?”

“Yes, sheriff.”

“Don’t be too proud, Oriental man. The reason why Cook could live to this day was that I hadn’t come forward to hunt him down. Back then, I could out five people at once with one gun,” the drunk sheriff gloated as he sipped his whisky.

Wendy, standing by the side, could not help but say, “Zhang Heng can kill ten people with one gun. I saw it with my own eyes.”

At that, the drunk sheriff was rendered speechless for a long while. After all, the feat of killing five people with one gun was his largest pride. He would tell the tale to everyone that he met. Unfortunately, he met someone better than him today.

“Each person is different. You’ll understand when you grow up, little girl.” The drunk sheriff managed to find a good excuse for himself. He then looked at Zhang Heng and coughed twice, “Since you killed Cook, let’s forget the unpleasanties before that. On behalf of the residents of Lincoln County, I welcome you to settle in our humble town.

You can live here as long as you want, but remember, don’t cause trouble. I don’t care if you fight, but just make sure that you don’t kill anyone. If that happens, I’ll arrest you.”

“No one could be disciplined and law-abiding than me, sheriff,” Zhang Heng said. “Very well, let’s go see Cook’s body now. However, the person sent to verify the body will not arrive for another two weeks. Once the person confirms that the body is indeed Cook, you can come to me to receive the reward.”

“Is there a bounty for killing him?” Zhang Heng pondered for a moment. “I don’t seem to see a bounty like this outside the police station.”

“Cook gang has been notorious in recent years, and they have many members. The local authorities have no way to take them down. Usually, a small town like us wouldn’t dare put a bounty on their heads since they might attack us. In other words, the reward for killing Cook is actually very handsome... Damn, why don’t I have this kind of luck? If Cook was in front of me, I would shoot that old bastard without hesitation,” the drunk sheriff complained.

Chapter 632 Bad Boy

A month and a half passed in the blink of an eye.

Zhang Heng finally set up his new home, including a two-story building, a cowshed, and a horse pen. Initially, he wanted to start a vegetable garden, but the land wasn’t suitable for crops. Even if he were given the seeds and took good care of them, he wouldn’t obtain a good yield. In the end, Zhang Heng gave up.

He was not an expert in building stuff or had very high requirements for the quality of life. Mainly because Matthew gave him a large piece of land, but there was nothing on it but grass. He had no choice but to build everything himself.

Fortunately, he had not wholly forgotten the building techniques he learned from the short man in the novice dungeon he entered. After getting paid for killing Cook, he hired two more helpers and a mason.

Most houses in the town were made of brick and wood. The advantage of building a house like that was that it could be completed relatively fast; the cost of building could be controlled easily. However, after Zhang Heng asked the drunk sheriff about the bounty, he decided to build it with his own money. He decided to replace all the wood with metal, meaning his house would be sturdier and had a lower chance of catching fire. As for its shortcomings... it was expensive.

The iron and construction materials were produced in factories on the east coast and transported to the town by train. By the time they reached him, their prices would be hiked up several times. Since Zhang Heng had not received the bounty reward yet, he could only borrow the money from Matthew first.

Fortunately, the outcome looked pretty good. The design of his house closely resembled his house in Black Sail. He even took some reference from the design of other houses in the town. With a total area estimated to be about 200 square meters, it really wasn't that large. It was, however, more than enough for him since he would be living alone. Hence, after construction was completed, Zhang Heng also received an Lv.0 construction skill and 20 game points, which was an unexpected gain.

Zhang Heng took two steps back and admired the house he would be staying in for the next few years.

Although there were still several hours before sunset, he paid the helpers and masons a day's worth of wages and let them off early. Zhang Heng then found his Radish leisurely munching on the grass beside the house. Grabbing his steed, he rode to Matthew's house next door. Wendy was in front of the door, already waiting for him to come.

"What do you think? Do you want to try it today?" When Wendy saw him, she got up and patted the dust off her skirt.

Zhang Heng nodded.

"Then I'll call my father." Wendy briskly rushed into the room.

Two minutes later, the three of them were standing in front of the stable. "Are you ready?" Matthew asked.

"Hmm, let's start." Zhang Heng took a deep breath, pushed open the stable's gate, stepped in, then lowered the wooden latch.

There was only one horse in the stable. It was jet black with dark and shiny fur. According to Matthew, it was initially the leader of a large herd of wild horses on the grasslands. It was the most grumpy and difficult horse to be domesticated, getting into serious trouble less than a week after it got here. The stubborn horse destroyed the stable's door and escaped with other horses.

After that, Matthew had to spend several days to get it back. He subsequently built a personal stable for it, and Wendy named it Bad Boy. According to Wendy's promise, Bad Boy now belonged to Zhang Heng. However, after a month and a half later, he still couldn't ride it.

Zhang Heng had suffered a lot from the Bad Boy's temper. Thanks to the impossible horse, he was dragged five-meters on the ground like a ragdoll. The scratches on his arm were still visible.

But before he even got better, Zhang Heng had come to rechallenge Bad Boy. After a month and a half of Matthew's intensive training, Zhang Heng was no longer the man who could not even control Radish. His horseback riding had now officially reached Lv.1.

However, in the repeated fighting of wits and courage with Bad Boy, Zhang Heng realized that Lv.1 horse-riding skill was nowhere good enough to tame this wild dark horse. Despite the odds, he did not give up. After experiencing so many quests, he had mastered skill after skill. Zhang Heng came to realize that the most valuable skill a human possessed was the ability to learn. Gathering experience from past failures and continually finding solutions to problems was a skill many creatures possessed. However, only humans could fully utilize this ability.

When first playing "Sekiro," the player would be defeated by various bosses again and again. Just like attending classes, after all the teacher's knowledge had been gathered, it was time for the graduation exam.

Zhang Heng took off his hat, grabbed the noose thrown by Matthew, and swung it over his head.

On the other side, Bad Boy seemed to know that his old nemesis was coming to get him. Immediately, it stopped strolling around and began to scratch the ground with its hooves. And at the same time, its ears turned down, and it was showing his teeth.

Before Zhang Heng could even make a move, it rushed toward Zhang Heng with full force. If Zhang Heng failed to dodge it, it meant everything that he learned during his umpteen years of piracy was just a waste. When Bad Boy approached him, he swiftly dodged aside, avoiding the brutal attack easily.

Bad Boy, however, was not going to stop there. It turned its head around and tried to bite Zhang Heng. Zhang Heng hesitated for a split second, then hurriedly squatted to avoid the bite.

This time, Bad Boy's attack revealed its weakness. The last time Zhang Heng caught its fault, he got dragged on the ground for five meters after throwing the lasso around its neck.

This trick was extremely effective against the ordinary horses, but it wasn't about to trick Bad Boy into submission. The ill-tempered black horse had an incredible will. After such a long time of training, Zhang Heng's strength had improved, but he was nowhere nearly as strong as a horse. Each time, he got dragged and thrown around by the creature's brute strength.

So this time, Zhang Heng did not make any rash moves. Instead, he let the horse think that it had gained the upper hand in this battle. Meanwhile, he would keep looking out for the golden opportunity to control it.

The black horse's attacks were limited. Zhang Heng had been having fun taming it, even naming those skills by drawing references to the games he played. There was Brutal Ramming, Death Trampling, Diving Dragon Swipe, Ultimate Kick, and even the Furious Bite.

Other than that, Bad Horses would step on your feet while you were not paying attention. If that happened, it would pretend to enjoy the beautiful scenery around it and take a deep breath of the fresh air. And the person had to suffer 400 to 500 pounds of weight being crushed on the feet.

Although Bad Boy was born of a violent nature, its attack methods would always repeat.

After performing a set of (Brutal Ramming) + [Divine Dragon Swipe] + (Furious Bite) + [Ultimate Kick], it would enter cool-down period. It then turned around and looked at Zhang Heng triumphantly. If it could speak, it would have gone along the lines of “Stupid humans, you are not worthy of riding me yet!”

Chapter 633 Taming a Wild Horse

While the fierce horse-versus-human battle was ongoing, it was a completely different picture on the other side of the field. Radish munched away on its hay, utterly oblivious to its surroundings. It did not even so much as look over as if apathetic about getting replaced by another horse, further convincing Zhang Heng that it must be suffering from Alzheimer’s.

As he graduated from the beginner stage, the novice mount became gradually less able to meet Zhang Heng’s needs. Radish’s strong suits—its Buddha-like character and a laid-back attitude—had now become shortcomings, reinforcing Zhang Heng’s desire to find a replacement.

Zhang Heng couldn’t wait anymore, and he was determined to conquer Bad Boy today.

In the beginning, Matthew would give Zhang Heng pointers, but there was no need for that anymore. Zhang Heng had basically mastered all the maneuvers, and now it was just a matter of gaining experience and finesse.

Today, Matthew stood outside the fence with his daughter, quietly observing Zhang Heng and Bad Boy grappling with each other. Even though Zhang Heng was desperate to change his mount, he was very patient in the round pen—he did not rush the process, letting Bad Boy run loose instead, exerting its energy.

After a while, realizing that it had failed to provoke Zhang Heng, Bad Boy became frustrated.

The anger in its eyes, the aggressive snorts, and the way it gritted its teeth—one would have mistaken it for a carnivore at the top of the food chain.

Bad Boy charged again, finally using its trump card—the Brutal Ram. It raised its hoof to kick Zhang Heng in the chest, finally sending this annoying human flying in the air.

However, this was exactly what Zhang Heng had been waiting for. He threw out the noose, which caught Bad Boy’s front left hoof, and he rolled over, escaping its Brutal Ram. Then, he got to his feet and tugged at the rope.

When Bad Boy performed the Brutal Ram, it stood on its hind legs, giving Zhang Heng time to get off the ground. By the time the horse realized what was happening, it struggled to break free, but Zhang Heng already had a firm grip on the rope. Unlike when the rope was around its neck, Bad Boy’s movements were now restricted. Barrelling about became almost impossible. Nonetheless, it did not stop the wild stallion, kicking up dust and dirt into the air in a raging tantrum.

The tug of war between man and horse continued. Wendy, who was watching from outside the fence, watched on with bated breath.

Zhang Heng struggled to stand his ground against the violent tugging at the other end of the rope. Eventually, he had no choice but to run alongside Bad Boy. Fortunately for him, Bad Boy could not run any faster due to the external force, and its movements were unsteady. Bad Boy whizzed around the

round pen, hoping to topple Zhang Heng but little did it know that doing so would cause its other leg to be caught around the rope. Instead of a strong, wild horse, it was now more like Tigger.

Bad Boy hopped for a bit until Zhang Heng found the opportunity to approach its side finally. Zhang Heng held onto the rope with one hand and grabbed Bad Boy's mane with the other.

Now, Bad Boy could neither escape nor kick. Its resistance became more futile by the minute, and finally, Zhang Heng could almost taste victory. He wasn't about to let Bad Boy regain control-he tugged at the rope so that Bad Boy had to curl up his front hooves, then pushed Bad Boy down until it was in a kneeling position.

In the end, Bad Boy was lying on its side again, both man and horse out of breath.

Zhang Heng composed himself first before reaching out to stroke the horse. When Bad Boy eventually calmed down, Zhang Heng loosened the rope around its hooves.

However, once it was free, Bad Boy abandoned the pretense. It got off the ground and broke free of Zhang Heng's control. It gave Zhang Heng a look as if saying, "Surprised? I was only pretending!"

Zhang Heng did not get angry at the creature. He got up, dusted his trousers, and spun up the lasso again.

The wrestle between horse and man resumed, and it wasn't until five minutes later that Zhang Heng managed to restrain Bad Boy to the ground again.

This time, Zhang Heng was ready to teach it a lesson.

He waited a whole ten minutes before undoing the ropes. Most horses would have surrendered by then, but the intransigent, impossible Bad Boy of a steed refused to be subdued.

Thus, commenced the third rodeo.

This time, Bad Boy learned from its previous mistakes and refrained from doing the Brutal Ram.

But it was naive to think that it would be able to escape its eventual fate-getting bound. Zhang Heng had already felt it in his heart. He had the right feeling to do it, and although a little knackered, he was in the zone.

He felt his vision getting sharper and the lasso easier to handle. Zhang Heng waited for Bad Boy to start running before he once again tossed the lasso out. In the past two times, the rope caught Bad Boy's pastern. This time, however, Zhang Heng was aiming for its forearm.

Once again, Zhang Heng had the black horse falling to the ground.

Finally realizing that there was no escape, Bad Boy did not dodge or start a wrestling match with Zhang Heng. Instead, it stayed where it was.

But Zhang Heng knew all too well that it was still too early to celebrate. This battle had only just begun. As anticipated, once he got on Bad Boy's back, the black horse went berserk again, jumping and kicking around, sparing no effort to fling the offending human off its back.

Zhang Heng was thrashed about like a little canoe trapped in the giant waves of an ocean.

But Zhang Heng happened to an experienced sailor who was an expert at navigating a boat in a storm. He gripped the horse's mane firmly and braced his legs. No matter how much Bad Boy tossed about, it failed to get rid of its rider. All Bad Boy could do was zip around the pen. Wendy was sweating bullets when her father said, "Open the gates."

Although unable to fathom the reason behind her father's instruction, Wendy did as told and unlatched the wooden gate. The next thing she knew, Bad Boy bolted out of the round pen like lighting, sprinting across the field with Zhang Heng on its back.

It wasn't like Zhang Heng had never driven a fast car before, but this was like driving without a windshield. The wind was blaring at him from all directions, and his butt hurt severely from the bumpy ride. The force was different from a car engine, far more uncomfortable than driving a car. But it was exciting and invigorating.

The red sun setting over the horizon, the endless pastures, and the joy and satisfaction of having just tamed a fierce horse intertwined to form the perfect picture of the wild, wild west.

There was freedom in the wind, and Zhang Heng could smell it.

Chapter 634 Chewing Tobacco and Lucky Horseshoe (End)

As for this time, the situation was quite special. Zhang Heng completed the main task ahead of schedule before the given deadline.

The task of looking for the Lucky Horseshoes was automatically completed after meeting Cook and Matthew. Other than that, the task of settling down in Lincoln County was completed two weeks after he owned the ranch.

In other words, he did not need to worry about his quest anymore, and he could do whatever he wanted. And his life in the west had just begun. After redeeming his extra 24 hours, his time in the quest was extended to 520 days. Soon after taming Bad Boy, he also received the bounty that he was supposed to receive after killing Cook.

In total, killing Cook granted him ten thousand dollars. And the twenty Cook Gang members that he killed contributed another eight thousand dollars to him. In total, he bagged a satisfying eighteen thousand dollars.

Undoubtedly, such an amount was a huge sum of wealth in the 19th-century United States.

It took less than 500 yuan to pay for the cost of building materials, and whatever money that remained was enough for Zhang Heng to spend the rest of his life here, as free as the wind.

The old cowboy and the drunk sheriff looked for Zhang Heng that day and gave him information about the remaining Cook gang members. Those farmers and miners were poor marksmen, but with the help of the old cowboy and young deputy sheriff, they managed to hunt down a few of them after a night's pursuit. In the end, only four gang members managed to get away. In other words, they could no longer do any more evil. To ensure that Matthew's family was 100% safe, Zhang Heng went on an excursion, hunting down Cook gang remnants. And it took him two months to find all four of them. Zhang Heng handed two of them over to the local sheriff, and he killed the other two when they attempted to retaliate.

At this point, the incident had officially ended.

However, Zhang Heng did not just idle and do nothing throughout the day. There were a myriad skills to learn and master in this dungeon, and in addition to horsemanship, tending to cattle and rapid-shooting were skills that Zhang Heng was interested in delving into. Among those, rapid shooting was the skill he had to master. That said, he hoped that he could further improve his marksmanship through rapid-fire practice. As for tending to the cattle... it was actually a niche job.

Especially the use of a lasso. A skillful cowboy could rope in a target with ease. When a herd of cattle went out of control, the cowboy's skill and mind would be put to the test—they would need to catch up with the cows in the shortest time possible and toss the lasso to rein in the herd.

This trick could also be used on people. Without employing deadly weapons, a lasso could be used to incapacitate the target. Zhang Heng also paid attention to the whereabouts of game items in this round of the game. Unfortunately, he heard nothing about the existence of game items in this dungeon.

Now, he had a better understanding of these game items' origins. Basically, every game item was related to a god, just like those gods behind each occurrence. However, the gods may stay in more than one instance. According to Miss Bartender, there were even cases where a dungeon held no game items at all.

Zhang Heng did not know which god he would encounter in this quest. Could it be the god of the west? The cowboy-god? The god of the wilderness and the god of liberty seemed to make sense in this context. However, since the god in charge of this dungeon did not show up like the gods he encountered in the previous one, it was clear that this god wanted no further communication with him.

Naturally, he didn't want to provoke the god.

Nonetheless, his peaceful life was short-lived. Six months later, he was involved in the war in Lincoln County. Lasting five months, it was a dispute between Major Murphy, Lincoln County's most influential man, and the town's ranchers. During the early phase of this county war, they harassed and assassinated each other.

It was not until the fifth month that the war became a full-blown battle. After Zhang Heng picked up arms to help with the war effort, the ranchers began to overwhelmingly. Eventually, the two parties decided to come to a new agreement. After seeing his hired gunmen getting killed and wounded, Major Murphy promised to reduce the price on items purchased from the East Coast by half. And he also promised that he would never raise prices again. At the same time, he sold off two pastures and swore never to get involved in Lincoln County's livestock business.

The five-month-long Lincoln County war had finally come to an end.

And Zhang Heng's biggest gain in this county war was not the ranch that he bought from Major Murphy at a low price. After all, he could not stay here forever. The wealth that he possessed in this world meant nothing.

What he was really interested in was a shooter named Billy.

If Zhang Heng remembered correctly, this man appeared most frequently in western movies, and there were many stories about him.

Contrary to the wild and unruly character the actor brought to the silver screen, Billy was a relatively young and timid man. Having arrived at Lincoln County recently, he was hired by a rancher and joined the county war in Lincoln County not too long after that.

Zhang Heng had fought by his side several times. Billy was certainly nowhere as amazing as portrayed in the films and television series, but he was indeed a quick shooter. With only a pint of beer, Zhang Heng managed to make Billy teach him the secrets of becoming a 'fast-gun.'

The last two months saw Zhang Heng practically do nothing but practice drawing his gun and shooting. In the end, he managed to improve his shooting skills to Lv.3. With that being said, he was now an expert in long-range sniping and close-range shooting.

Other than that, he combined the horseback riding skill and cattle-tending skill and came up with a Lv.2 skill called 'cowboy.'

Before leaving, Zhang Heng divided the remaining fifteen-thousand dollars into two bags.

One was buried under the fence of Matthew's house, and another under his own fence.

After that, he chose a good day and brought Wendy for hunting.

The two returned to the woods where Zhang Heng fought with the Cook Gang. Some time had passed, and peace was once again restored in the place. The bailiffs took away the dead bodies that night, and the hunter's hut was rebuilt and cleaned. There was even some chopped firewood courtesy of hunters who had stayed there.

The only trace that proved that a battle had taken place here was the bullet marks on the door.

Zhang Heng and Wendy returned to the hut before sunset with the rabbits and deer that they killed. After that, Zhang Heng started a fire and begun dealing with their prey.

Wendy sat in front of the campfire and watched him getting busy. "You haven't told me where you're from."

"Is that important?" Zhang Heng asked rhetorically without looking back.

"Well... if I want to tell my future child your story, how am I supposed to tell him where you're, why you were here, then met me, and we both set off on a journey together?"

"It's not my origin that allowed us to embark on this journey, but your persistence at that time. You are the most stubborn kid I have ever seen. You knocked on my door before dawn. I was still awake back then. When I looked into your eyes, I knew that if I didn't say yes, you would continue to bug me into the

week."

"Hmm, was I that annoying?" Wendy flushed.

"10,000 times more annoying than you can imagine." Zhang Heng reached out and touched her hair.

"But, you saved your mother and father that night. It was really... brave. Although you are a girl, you are stronger than most men I have ever met."

Wendy looked embarrassed after Zhang Heng praised her, “You saved my family that night.”

“Yes, but if it weren’t for the time you bought me some time by pointing the shotgun at Cook, I would not be able to get there in time before Cook killed your mother.” Zhang Heng said, “That means you have played a part in changing your destiny, kid.”

Chapter 635 Ring-Toss Game

“Young man, bring your girlfriend over here for a chance at my ring-toss! Four rings cost you only ten yuan, and ten rings cost you only twenty. The prizes I have include bunnies, soft toys, and the grand prize is a Xiaomi Mi Band! It’s a fair game. You will definitely win something in the end.”

Zhang Heng and Hayase Asuka came across a ring-toss game booth when they visited the night market.

Hayase Asuka held the stinky tofu in one hand, stopped, and watched on with enthusiasm. The owner immediately took the opportunity to promote his game, but his effort was in vain. That was because Hayase Asuka, a Japanese exchange student, could not understand Chinese.

And there was already a couple playing in front of the booth.

The two seemed to want to win the Mi Band. Judging from its packaging, it should be a second-generation Mi Band with a market price of around 120 yuan. If they could win the grand prize, it was no less but a significant profit.

But this kind of game was like the discount bundle sold in a penguin game. The customers would always feel that they had profited from the game if they won something. As for the boss, he would still benefit from whoever visited his booth.

Mini-games like this often came off as innocent and straightforward, but they were far more complicated than one could imagine.

For instance, the booth owner would usually put the most valuable prize the furthest and the unworthy ones closer to the customers. It was an attempt to tempt the players into aiming for the valuable prizes that were a lot further to reach. Furthermore, the valuable prizes were generally larger and more challenging to get a ring on them. The ring was designed to be very light in weight, making it was hard for the players to control their throw. It was made out of a material with great elasticity as well, usually bouncing off the surface it hit.

The couple spent 20 yuan on buying ten rings. Unfortunately, none managed to put the ten rings on the grand prize. Their rings managed to graze the packaging a few times, but the owner wasn’t worried at all. In fact, he still wore a smile, as if encouraging the couple to keep playing until they bagged the grand prize. When the young couple threw their last ring, the boss saw their frustrated looks. He then waved his hand at them and kindly gave them two consolation prizes—two One Piece keychains. Eiichiro Oda would probably be wondering just when did he authorize a random game booth to sell his One Piece merchandise. When the boss asked them to try again, the couple rejected his offer. So, the boss smiled and watched the dejected pair walk away from his booth. He then stuffed the 20 yuan hustle that came by so easily into his pocket.

Zhang Heng then asked Hayase Asuka in Japanese, “What do you want?” “The little rabbit is adorable, but the foreign student dormitory does not allow us to keep any pet there.” The latter looked at the

rabbit in the cage and moaned with disappointment, “but this game looks entertaining. How much does it cost to play?”

Zhang Heng translated the amount of money needed to play this game to Hayase Asuka, and she quickly took twenty yuan out from her wallet.

“Oh, she’s not from around here!” The boss overheard the two conversings in Japanese. He took the money from them, once again wearing his ear-to-ear smile, “I will send you two extra rings.”

Zhang Heng then passed the rings to Hayase Asuka.

After receiving the plastic rings from Zhang Heng, she looked at the prizes on the ground. The first thing she laid her eyes on was the rabbit cage. She wished she would get to keep the little rabbit in her room. Thus, realizing it would be a somewhat impossible endeavor, she fixed her eyes on the Kingston 64GB flash drive. No matter the woman’s nationality and age, they were always good at choosing what they desired. This was probably one of a woman’s hidden talents.

Although there were various prizes on offer, most were useless objects produced by some small factories, save for the Mi Band used as a gimmick to attract customers. The second prize would be the flash drive.

The market price of the flash drive was about 70 yuan.

Hayase Asuka watched the pair of couples playing earlier, and she knew that tossing a ring on the Mi Band, the prize furthest away from her, was no small challenge. So she took the initiative to lower the difficulty for herself.

She took a look for a long time to aim before throwing out her first ring. Even before she threw the ring out, Zhang Heng knew that she would be winning no prizes today. He caught her bending forward when she tossed the ring, meaning that there was a 100% chance that it would bounce off its target.

The moment the owner saw her throwing technique, he could instantly tell the girl was an amateur who knew nothing about the game. The smile on his face only served to grow. And, of course, he did not forget to console her. “It’s okay! It’s okay! You’ll get the next one.”

Zhang Heng interrupted Hayase Asuka before she could throw the second ring. He then corrected her posture. Hayase Asuka immediately realized that she had made a mistake, sticking out her tongue as a thanks gesture.

Although she corrected her posture, the fact that the plastic rings were too light and difficult to control was not something easy to overcome. Perhaps she wasn’t used to throwing this way, that the second plastic ring landed even further from her target.

Asuka Hayase looked at Zhang Heng again, attempting to seek an answer from Master Zhang. But this time, Zhang Heng could only shrug his shoulders helplessly. This was not rocket science. As long as one got the posture right, the rest would have to be left to skill and fate.

In the end, Hayase Asuka tossed ten rings by herself. But unfortunately, the result almost matched the previous couples that played this game. She eventually gave up on her target and chose a worthless soft

toy in front of her. However, she was probably disappointed in herself and failed to land the ring on the easy target too.

Seeing that there were only two rings left with her, a little frustration began to set in.

Zhang Heng suddenly chimed in, "Would you like me to give it a go?"

Hayase Asuka nodded and passed the rings to Zhang Heng.

Holding the rings in his hand, Zhang Heng estimated their weight. He had lived in the West some time ago and was now an expert at using the lasso. He could land his lasso at a bull that was running among the herd. A mini-game like this should come as a breeze.

Zhang Heng threw the first ring in his hand without any preparation. Instead of waiting for the first plastic ring to land on the target, Zhang Heng threw the second ring.

In the end, one of the rings landed on the USB flash drive, and the other ring landed on the Mi Band. These two items were the most valuable prizes at the booth.

The boss counted his money happily at the side, even going as far as to prepare a keychain as the consolation. He did not expect to lose both of his most valuable prizes in a blink of an eye. His face changed immediately. The two rings landed on the prizes accurately, and the boss could not come up with an excuse to disqualify them. It was then that the owner knew that he'd encountered a maestro tonight.

If the ring on one prize, it could be pure luck. However, if he managed to land the rings on two prizes, that was pure skill.

So, the owner could only conclude that the young man in front of him must be a master.

It was not easy to make a living. Zhang Heng heard that some people went as far as buying their own claw machine to practice catching the dolls at home. That said, some people would practice tossing rings at home just to win the prize that they wanted.

Game booths that ran on such a concept was a profitable venture when it had many customers. However, the booth's owner would occasionally encounter an expert. Most of these were willing to admit defeat. Nonetheless, Zhang Heng showed mercy to the owner. He only decided to help his girlfriend after failing to land a single ring on anything after ten attempts. The owner of the ring stall shook his head and sighed. He then walked over, handed over the prizes to Hayase Asuka, and congratulated the reluctantly grinning girl.

However, the boss could not bear to be the only one to make a loss tonight. So, he decided to drag other booth owners down with him. After that, he gave Zhang Heng an idea, "Hey young man, listen to me, there is one more game stall like mine 30 meters ahead. He has better prizes there, more valuable than my Mi Band. You should pay it a visit!"

Chapter 636 Everything Will Be Fine

Zhang Heng didn't follow the owner's suggestion. It wasn't his goal to come here to win all the prizes that all those booths had to offer. The money spent would be used to bring joy to him and Asuka

Hayase. Instead of relying on winning prizes to become rich, it was better to buy a ranch in the west and raise cattle on it.

Asuka Hayase may not have much use for the USB flash drive and Mi Band, but the joy of hitting the jackpot was enough to keep her excited the whole night. Such was the kind of feeling that motivated thousands of players to spend huge sums of money on their gacha games. After that, Zhang Heng sent Asuka Hayase, whose legs had gone weak from excessive shopping, back to the international student dormitory. He then looked at his watch. It was 10:30 at night, and there was still an hour and a half before midnight struck.

After that, Zhang Heng found a place without cameras and parked his Polo by the roadside. He then went to a nearby convenience store to buy a bottle of Pocari Sweat. Due to the extra 24 hours that he had, his fitness level was also doubled. Although it had only been half a year, the hard work that he put in to strengthen himself had started bearing fruits. After taking off his clothes, his abdominal and chest muscles could be seen popping up. He began to pay attention to his diet, too-excess calories

still better to go on a low-calorie regime. To achieve that, he tried his best not to consume any cola, even if it was a Coke Zero. Fried and oily foods were out of the question as well.

After Zhang Heng settled the bill, he returned to the car and sent Fan Meinan a text.

(Where are you?)

After a good while, Fan Meinan finally replied.

(I got a sudden stomachache right before I went out.)

(Where do you live? I'll bring you some medicine.)

[Ah! Trying to trick me into giving you my address? Then, you will provide an excuse that you need to take care of me, and come knocking on my door in the middle of the night. Then, when I'm feeling weak and need someone to be my side, you will nurse me with medicine. From there, you plan to conquer my body, right?]

Fan Meinan, on the other side of the line, became instantly alerted.

[...]

Zhang Heng sent an ellipsis as a reply to her.

(Just give up. I won't give let you do that to me. I will arrive on time.)

[See you then.)

Zhang Heng put away the phone and drove his Polo to the nearby McDonalds.

Fan Meinan arrived on time at 11:07. Her face looked a little pale, and she was panting. Putting down her backpack on the table, she plopped down on the stool opposite Zhang Heng. "Hey, here are all the game items that you temporarily put in my place."

"Thank you." Zhang Heng did not open the backpack, directly placing it on the seat beside him.

The game items in the bag came from the players he killed while rescuing Fan Meinan more than a month ago. And this time, Zhang Heng had sold everything that he could sell to recast the (Ordinary Katana). He spent all his points, but he also sold the items that he did not need. In the end, he was still short of around seven hundred game points. With the 100 over points that he earned in the previous game, he should clear his debt.

After that, he just needed to wait and see what changes would happen to the (Ordinary Katana) after the recasting. If it got upgraded from its F-Grade to a measly E-Grade, he would have to find some time to kill the swordsmith.

But now, he was more concerned about other things.

Zhang Heng looked at Fan Meinan. "What are you up to during this time?" he asked. "Why do you reply to me slower and slower after I send you a message?"

"Huh? I usually have my own things to do. I'm sorry that I can't be the 'honey' that comes to you every time you summon me. Isn't there a rich woman and a cute Japanese student accompanying you?" Fan Meinan curled her lips as she bemoaned, "Ah, you have been here for so long, and you didn't even order any food. Why hasn't the waiter chased you out yet?"

"I ordered a single set meal for the vagrants nearby, and I have ordered something for myself to take away later," replied Zhang Heng. "What do you want to eat? I can treat you to whatever you want to eat." "Sounds good to me." Fan Meinan then blurted in satisfaction, "Thank you, boss," she turned to look at the menu that wasn't far away and squinted for a bit. She then retracted her gaze and sighed, "Forget it. It's almost midnight. I don't want to become fat."

"You are already thinner than when we first met."

Zhang Heng still remembered when Fan Mei had put on men's clothing to transform herself into Ma Wei, attempting to play a prank on him. Unfortunately, they ran into Zaviilcha, and Zhang Heng had to carry her for a while in the school. Fan Meinan was taller than her counterparts, standing at a lanky 170cm. Nonetheless, she weighed less than 90 pounds. And now, she looked to be only about 80 pounds. She was not supposed to be this thin. Perhaps she had eaten something wrong, and it caused her to lose some weight. Even though Fan Meinan was as rude as ever when she spoke in WeChat, she looked a little weak when Zhang Heng met her in person. After a while, he noticed a band-aid stuck to the back of Fan Meinan's hand. The girl subconsciously retracted her hand when she saw Zhang Heng staring at it and tried to explain herself. "I accidentally cut my hand while cutting fruits."

"You use the back of your hand to hold fruits when you cut them?"

"What the heck? Have you just completed a quest where you played detective? Since when did your observation skills become so good?" Fan Meinan exclaimed with raised eyebrows. "Did no one tell you that you don't have to speak up all the time even if you noticed something wrong?"

"You look a little embarrassed."

"Every dog has its day. Your rich woman almost died in her dream last time. This is the truth of life. And can you ask her to take back the Lexus she gave me? Well, I didn't know that maintaining a luxury car is so expensive. I can't afford it with my meager salary," Fan Meinan sighed.

“As I said before, you helped me last time. If you have any trouble this time, you can ask me to help you.” Zhang Heng looked into Fan Meinan’s eyes.

“.....”

“Thanks, but you can’t help much with this matter. I still have to do it myself,” replied Fan Meinan. “You should prepare for your proxy war. You’d better pray you don’t encounter me there. If you run into me, I will make you suffer. By the way, you are so damn mysterious all the time. Who do you work for?”

“I thought I had found the answer before, but now I am a bit unsure.” Zhang Heng replied.

He was sure that the old man in the Tang suit was Kronos, but the real question was his true identity was still unsure. His emotions were slowly disappearing. What did the expedition to Greenland seventeen years ago have anything to do with him? And why did Kronos approach him? Without getting answers to these questions, Zhang Heng could not determine whether the old man in Tang suit was a friend or foe, nor did he know what the latter’s plan was. He had a faint hunch that Kronos hoped that the extra time that he granted in the games could accelerate the disappearance of his emotions. However, he was unsure of what the consequences of that would be. “It seems that each of us has our own worries,” said Fan Meinan with both of her hands put into her pockets. After hesitated for a while, she took out her hands again and held Zhang Heng’s hand on the table. She then looked at him and said softly, “Don’t worry, everything will be fine.”

Chapter 637 New Email

In retrospect, the life of the vast majority of people in college was not that exciting.

Every corner of the campus exuded the gross scent of love, where couples publicly displayed their affection everywhere. The classic scenes of romance novels were brought to life here every night. The president of the student union and the heads of various clubs were in high spirits, organizing various activities. However, the buzz couldn’t conceal the fact that most people were single. The only three places that they could go were the dormitory, canteen, and classroom, either attending classes or having fun with their roommates.

It was as if the city was an exciting place, but it had nothing to do with most people.

After graduation, they would soon realize that they actually didn’t do much during their time in college. Life on campus didn’t feel so monotonous and boring, though. Even if the students were bored, there was always someone around to spend time with them.

It was not until they entered society, that they realized the familiar avatars in their friend list on a random game hadn’t come online for a long time. The online game that they used to play together had now been replaced by other online games.

This specific breed of loneliness was probably called growing up...

Those, however, were the things that they had to consider in the future. For now, the four, still in their sophomore year, felt like college life would never end.

Today, the film club was slated to play a Quentin classic in the small auditorium Django Unchained. After a meal, Chen Huadong dragged Zhang Heng and Wei Jiangyang to watch the movie together in flip-flops. They paid two yuan each before entering the auditorium.

Although they came twenty minutes before the movie started, many were already seated. The first few rows of seats were either occupied or reserved.

Chen Huadong did not rush to find a seat. Instead, he looked around him and saw many pretty girls. Some of them came with boyfriends, meaning he wouldn't have to chance to talk to them. Others sat alongside their roommate or friends...

Chen Huadong was one who lacked guts. After struggling for a long time, he saw many pretty girls, but he had no courage to make a move to sit beside one of them. After all, there were still so many empty seats in the auditorium. If he went ahead and sat beside a gorgeous one, everyone would find out his true intention.

"Over the top. I think they are over the top. It doesn't match my calm and mature temperament." Chen Huadong shook his head and chose one of the seats in the middle row. However, he made sure to explore the possibility of sitting next to some of the girls that came late. Hence, he picked a seat where both of his sides were still empty. If what he imagined came true, he could only blame it on fate.

Wei Jiangyang sat on his left side, while Zhang Heng sat near the aisle. Wei Jiangyang then said, "Master Chen, if you continue to act like this, I am afraid that you'll be single for the rest of your four years in college."

"Show me what to do in this situation then?"

nted at Wei Jiangyang, "Sit right there?"

"It's inappropriate. This trick can only be used by Young Master Zhang. I'm afraid that the ordinary people of my generation will be unable to master it," Wei Jiangyang shook his head.

"That's not enough. In the end, one's look is still the most important factor to attract girls," Chen Huadong sneered. "If I were blessed with a handsome face, I wouldn't worry about where I should sit. I could sit wherever I want, and the girls would automatically flock to me." "That makes sense."

Chen Huadong's wishful thinking eventually fell through. In the end, the seats in the auditorium were not fully occupied. A boy sat next to him, though, and the two silently looked at each other, glimpsing a touch of loneliness in each other's eyes.

"Why do men make another man suffer?" Wei Jiangyang said.

Similar things were happening everywhere in the auditorium. This was the age where hormones raged. However, bashfulness got the better of them, and it was causing both the boys and girls to be too embarrassed to take the first step. Everyone was waiting for the signal to make up for the next ninety-nine steps. Yet, no one was willing to take the most critical step-the first.

As such, a love story would not be born here. Seeing that the auditorium was full, the film club stopped letting people in and began the movie began to play. The students' commotion calmed down as well, as the crowd started to immerse themselves in the film.

The bounty hunter Schultz, pretending to be a dentist, brought the black man called Django to hunt down their target, and their enemies outnumbered them. When Chen Huadong saw that, he commented, "Quentin is a legend. The scenes are pretty explicit. How did the film club members get their hands on the uncensored version? I want to be a bounty hunter now. I envy their lives so much! They ride their horses everywhere to bring down the scales of justice, and they were paid to do that. Life can't get any better than that."

"Hey, wasn't your dream moving to Japan to be a porn director?" Wei Jianguang asked.

Zhang Heng, on the other side, shook his head. "It's not that simple being a bounty hunter. The risks outweigh the benefits. The west is vast, and people have to endure extreme heat all the time. No one can work as a bounty hunter forever. If you possess the skills for that, it would be better to move into a small town and become their sheriff."

"Pfft. You make it sound like you've worked as a bounty hunter before," Chen Huadong rolled his eyes.

The movie was rather lengthy. The North American version was 165 minutes in total, which was almost three hours. The movie started at seven in the evening, and only ended around ten. When the ending credits started rolling, students started to leave the auditorium one after another while discussing the movie they had just watched. Chen Huadong felt that the dentist was too impulsive, and thanks to his inability to let go of his grudge, he was killed in the end. It was really not worth it. As for Wei Jianguang, he was interested in the explicit scenes. With a newfound interest in Quentin Tarantino, he decided to binge-watch the "Kill Bill" trilogy.

After the movie, Zhang Heng discovered that he had received a new email.

After looking at the sender, Zhang Heng realized that the inevitable had come.

It was an email from the game committee.

Its contents told about the proxy war that was bound to happen in a week. At the same time, other agents in various places had also received the same email. Zhang Heng found a secluded corner and opened up the mail to read it.

The organizing committee first congratulated Zhang Heng for entering the second stage of the game and announced the time and general rules.

The rules were almost the same as before. It was still quest-based, but the new quests were no longer the ones where the player needed to master their skills and search for game items. They would now be more inclined to a level system. And these quests would be more dangerous and unpredictable—they adopted the elimination system, their purpose similar to what the old man in Tang suit told him. They were carried out to rank all the agents, and the final winner stood to get a mysterious gift prepared by the organizing committee.

Chapter 638 Alien

The proxy war participants were all players who had worked their way up to become an agent.

Non-agent players, on the other hand, were allowed to join the proxy war as but they could only enter as an apostle. They could only choose one deity to side with. Since each agent could recruit up to three apostles, the new system would allow players to play the game in small teams.

However, if an agent wished to join the proxy war alone, they were more than welcome to do so. Recruiting apostles was not compulsory, but it was better for most agents to have a helper than none, and the chances of completing a level in a team were also greater.

Zhang Heng, however, had no intention to recruit any apostles due to his special circumstances. Besides, there were some differences between the dungeon in the proxy war and an ordinary dungeon, the details of which would be explained during the game.

Only five days were left before the proxy war began.

Zhang Heng did a quick take on the email sent by the organizing committee. He then opened the browser and saw that the organizing committee had launched an official website, and the players could log in with their forum accounts.

The official website was now empty, and little information had been uploaded to it. However, Zhang Heng noticed a player list on the website's left side, looking like a leaderboard of sorts. For now, there were no names on it.

Zhang Heng looked for his player code on the website, and the system prompted him to enter a display name to others. He pondered on it for a moment and eventually decided to go with 'Simon.'

After that, he left the empty official website.

In the next five days, Zhang Heng made no special preparations. He had appointed the bartender to send the [Ordinary Katana] for recasting before the first proxy war, and he probably wouldn't get it now. Fortunately, his game items bettered most of the players, and he wasn't too stressed about the war's early phase.

Five days later, Zhang Heng went to the Sex and the City bar.

The bartender lady gave the nod after checking his player number. "Welcome to the proxy war. The first three rounds are equivalent to an admission test. You need to clear the three dungeons solo or in a team within 45 days. While you are at it, get as many scores as possible. "Does the score mean game points?" Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows.

"No, have you played Super Mario?"

"Well, I've played it several times on the Xiao Bawang learning machine when I was young."

"Scores are similar to the gold coins in the Super Mario game. Unlike game points, however, you can actually look at the scores. However, whether you can earn them or not will all depend on your skills."

Zhang Heng immediately realized the leaderboard's function on the newly launched official website.

"How many can pass this test?"

"The top 500," said the bartender. "The top 50 have additional rewards, but the rewards for 1-50 are the same. After all, this is just an entry-level test. Do you have any further questions?"

Zhang Heng shook his head.

“You’d better be mentally prepared. The quests of the proxy war are very different from what you’ve been experiencing.” The bartender also added, “Happy gaming.”

“Difference? How big of a difference?”

“You’ll know when it happens.” As usual, the bartender lady did not tell him everything.

Zhang Heng set the alarm, laid on the deck, and allowed the drowsiness to consume him.

[Verifying player ID...] (Verification complete. Agent identity confirmed. Player number 07958 is welcome to join the proxy war. This is the first round of the test. Quest is being randomly selected...]

(Extraction complete. Current quest-Alien]

“Please explore the background of the game by yourself.”

[Quest goal: earn as many points as possible, 5 points for every alien found and killed)

[Mode: Single]

[Time flow rate: 120) (1 hour in the real world is equivalent to 5 days in this game. Player will be sent back to the real world after 20 days)

[Friendly reminder, the game will officially begin in five seconds. Prepare yourself!)

The opening dialogue that had remained unchanged for years finally changed this time. The system even reminded him that he was joining the proxy war.

Before figuring out the old man in the Tang suit’s true intention, Zhang Heng had to maintain a cooperative relationship with the other party. After all, he had to admit that the ‘gift’ the old man gave him was indeed handy, not just in games but also in his regular life. In the real world, 48 hours a day allowed him to do a lot more than a regular person.

Therefore, he decided to fulfill the promise made to the old man in the Tang Suit the day they met in The Maid Café. He would win this proxy war for him.

The title of this quest sounded like the time when Mayflower sailed across the sea while American post-colonists were still fighting with the natives. In this case, Zhang Heng’s marksmanship and riding skills should help him earn many scores in this quest.

However, when Zhang Heng opened his eyes, he was a little surprised by what he saw-he was sitting on his own bed.

He looked around the room-he was certain that he was in his room or at least an excellent replica of it.

Modern-day earth?

Many years had passed since the Second World War. Although conflicts broke out now and then, society as a whole had started working hard to make good money as a collective. Those who were classified as alien and had to be killed were getting rarer and rarer.

What more, Zhang Heng was back in his hometown, a third-tier city.

Zhang Heng had no idea what else would have been labeled as 'alien.'

And since the game required the players to 'explore on their own,' Zhang Heng would have to solve this mystery himself. He looked around again. It was indeed his room, save for some minute differences. This room was a copy of his room when he was in high school.

The timetable he posted on the wall was in its place and the textbooks and workbooks on the desk. There was even his old Mate-7 mobile phone.

There was a sudden knock on the door, and Zhang Heng could hear his grandfather's voice on the other side. "We're having fish tonight. I'm going out to buy one. Stay home and do your homework. Don't fool around."

Zhang Heng mumbled a reply. After a while, he heard the door open and the lock clicking.

He quickly put the White Horse Crown, Paris Arrow, and Pestilence Bone Bow from under the bed, inconvenient items to carry around.

Since it was his first time joining the proxy war, Zhang Heng wanted to take no chances, taking practically everything he could bring. Then, he opened the door and walked out of the bedroom into the living room.

Chapter 639 Someone Familiar

Zhang Heng stood in front of the mirror in the living room, staring at the reflection of his seventeen-year-old self.

Three years ago, his height and figure were starkly different from what it was now. Fortunately, his attributes—strength, and speed included—were preserved in this quest. After that, Zhang Heng unlocked his Mate 7 and looked at the time. The screen displayed today's date as Wednesday, April 13, 2016.

Zhang Heng had no idea what happened during the previous day. Even if he did remember it, it wouldn't help much because he was now in a dungeon. A quest where the setting mimicked the real world was actually quite a troublesome one. He would now need some time to figure out the difference between this world and the real world, and he couldn't tell for sure whether his past memories would have a positive or negative effect.

Zhang Heng walked around the living room, then entered several rooms and found nothing unusual. So he planned to go out and have a look. His grandfather did advise him to stay put before he left, but Zhang Heng wasn't really just going to sit there and do his homework obediently since he wasn't in the real world.

Finding the key, Zhang Heng took it and opened the door. Usually, his grandpa would go to this huge wet market to buy fish, and it was quite a distance from his house. Taking that into account, he had about forty minutes to explore this dungeon before his grandpa returned.

He wasn't given any goals either, and so far, he had been given nothing that could be considered a clue. So all he could do was to continue wandering around.

The residents that lived in the community were exactly the same as he remembered. He even ran into Qin Zhen. He rode a bicycle, and there was a basketball in the basket, ready to head to the court by the riverbank for a game.

Once he saw Zhang Heng, he stopped the bike with one foot on the ground. "Come and play basketball with me."

"No, I haven't finished my homework yet," replied Zhang Heng. "I didn't do mine as well. I'll wake up a little earlier tomorrow and go copy the others' work in the classroom." Qin Zhen spread his hands, "Why are you wandering outside now?"

"I have something to do. We'll play together next time."

"What's the matter?" Qin Zhen was intrigued by Zhang Heng's reaction, "Is it a date? Is it a girl in your class? Do you want me to help you? For example, I can act like a bully, blocking her way, then attempt a robbery. You can then be the hero and come to her rescue!" Qin Zhen waved his arm as he spoke. His tanned skin and lanky figure made him look like a bully.

"I appreciate your kindness," Zhang Heng said. "You should go ahead and have fun with your basketball. We ran out of soy sauce at home. I need to get a bottle for grandpa."

"Pfft! You should have told me earlier." Qin Zhen retracted his foot and stepped on the pedal, "Don't forget about the weekend," he said before cycling away.

Zhang Heng did not know what he promised Qin Zhen three years ago. Friends since childhood, he must have either promised to play games or basketball with him. These two activities were basically his hobbies. When he was alone, he would download porn to watch.

Undoubtedly, Zhang Heng was not too bothered by it. Apart from Qin Zhen, he met several other familiar aunts and uncles. He greeted each of them before stopping at a newsstand where he bought the day's newspaper. The reports in this now three-year-old edition were the way he remembered it. Most articles focussed on meetings that different politicians held at various places in the country. There were particular articles promoting positive thinking and Zhang Heng could remember most of them. However, after reading them altogether, he realized he didn't remember its details. The following story was about workers who were trying to restore the electricity somewhere, and three children who had drowned in a river.

Zhang Heng clearly remembered this one. A major event three years ago, no one knew how the three children quietly fled their respective homes after their families fell asleep that night. And the most bizarre part was that they walked a whopping five miles, arriving at the river before dawn where they eventually drowned.

This incident was questionable, causing quite a stir among the public at that time. It was the talk of the week, and along with it sprouted speculations of all manner. Among them, the river spirit had to be the most popular one. Every summer, there would surely be a drowning case in that particular river. Some drowned while playing in the water, while some committed suicide. Although there was a sign prohibiting people from swimming, it wasn't enough to stop the more eager residents from getting their fix of the river.

The three kids found drowned were relatively young. The oldest was only fourteen years of age, and the youngest was only ten. At that time, the authorities had swiftly announced the results of their investigation. One child left a diary to prove that this was indeed an accident. Zhang Heng was still studying at that time, didn't think much about it.

He was now in the proxy war's dungeon, and the game started on the second day after the drowning of the three children. Perhaps the incident might have had something to do with the quest. Having no more use for the paper, he tossed it into the trash can but kept the page that contained the report about the drowning

After that, he saw a pancake stall next to the newsstand and a wave of nostalgia washed over him. The stall was closed permanently during his third year in high school. Apparently, the owner had made enough money and had gone back to the village to build a house and get married.

Sometimes, when he woke up late in the morning; he would come here to buy a pancake for himself. The owner could recognize him, and he always smiled as a friendly gesture. Looking at the time, Zhang Heng figured that if he went to the river, he wouldn't make it back in time before his grandpa got home. Left with no other options, he had to postpone his investigation until that night. That, however, left him with time to prepare. Zhang Heng first visited the convenience store and bought a bottle of mosquito repellent, mosquitoes swarmed by the thousands by the river in summer. He then got four batteries for the flashlight that he saw at home, a bottle of mineral water and a packet of biscuits. The sum of those items almost consumed all of his pocket money.

While he was paying, he saw another familiar face.

The person was a rather well-known in the community. Having graduated from a prestigious university, he was the child that families would use to compare with their kids, excelling in both character and academics. After graduation, however, something happened to him. He found a few jobs, but couldn't hold any of them. After that happened, he just stayed at home to play games and watch anime.

As a result, the people around him started to see him differently—from role model to bad example. After staying at home for such a long time, his mental state began to deteriorate, and he was soon admitted to a mental hospital by his family. If Zhang Heng remembered correctly, he should have just been discharged.

He looked frail and thinner, wore an old T-shirt, and looked like hadn't shaved in a long time. When he entered the convenience store, his head was faced down all the time because he did not dare to look at others. He came to the convenience store to buy cigarettes. In this era where almost all people were using Alipay and WeChat to make their payments, he still used paper money to pay. After he spent a long time searching for the money that he had on him, it yielded no result.

The cashier started to get a little impatient.

"Let me pay for him," said Zhang Heng.

Chapter 640 Investigation At The River

While talking, Zhang Heng took out his cell phone, clicked on WeChat, and paid off the one yuan for the person in front of him. However, he received no thanks from the other party. All he did was hastily grab the pack of cigarettes, opened the door of the convenience store, and leave.

“What kind of person is that,” the cashier lady muttered. She felt that the situation wasn’t fair for Zhang Heng. “He was so rude. You shouldn’t have paid for him.”

“It’s alright. It’s only one yuan anyway,” Zhang Heng said, “We should help each other since this is a small community.”

If Zhang Heng remembered correctly, when the man that just left was still a college student, the cashier used to have a crush on him. Whenever he came to the convenience store, the cashier always wanted to buy him some snacks. At the same time, she would try to look for a topic to chat him up. Tragically, their lives were very different, and in the end, their relationship did not work out well.

However, his current situation did make it difficult to relate to the bright young man before. Zhang Heng did not dwell on this issue, scanning the code of his purchases, and left the convenience store. He then went around to wander a little longer and returned home after realizing that it was almost time for his grandpa to be home.

After dinner, Zhang Heng returned to his room, closed the door, and turned on the computer.

The first thing that he did was to search for news about the three drowned children on the internet. Two of them were boys, and one of them was a girl, and they were all from the same community where they knew each other. The girl came from a single-parent family, where her father had passed away when she was still very young. When the distraught mother found out that her daughter had drowned, she wailed and fainted several times. The police officers had to call an ambulance to take her to the hospital. Zhang Heng watched the interview, but he couldn’t find anything amiss. If the victims of the incident weren’t three children, it would not have received such big attention. It would just be another ordinary piece of news.

Unfortunately, few useful clues were found regarding the incident, and he could only carry out the basic investigations first.

He waited until 10:30 when his grandpa went to bed. After waiting for a further half-hour, he figured that his grandpa should be asleep. At 11, he carried the backpack with the Pestilence Bone Bow on his back, grabbing his car key on the table before leaving. Zhang Heng entered the car, tossing the backpack and bow to the rear seats. He chose a CD and inserted it into the stereo, and Jay Chou’s melodious tunes started filling the car.

His residence was quite a distance from the river where the three children were drowned. Considering that he was now a high school student and had barely turned eighteen, a detour was necessary. Thus, he avoided a few intersections with more traffic.

By the time he arrived at his destination, it was 11:36 at night.

The place was devoid of people at that hour, and there were no lights either. The only sound that filled the air was the powerful sound of water rushing through the river. The place was dark and gloomy, but for someone like Zhang Heng, who killed a Horseman of the Apocalypse, he found no fear in himself.

He found a place to park, turned off the engine, and took his backpack and bow with him. Turning on his freshly powered flashlight, he began to walk toward the river. The police had found their bodies downstream, but as for the exact spot where the accident took place, authorities deduced it must have happened where they found the girl's shoe.

They speculated that the girl fell into the river accidentally. The two boys must have attempted to rescue her, and they too entered the river. Thanks to that, all three were lost in the currents of the dark, raging waters.

Zhang Heng descended into the embankment. During the rainy season, these walking paths and the riverbank would be completely submerged underwater. A drought during the past two years, however, had brought the water level down, and many often came here to fish and swim.

After walking for about five minutes, Zhang Heng came to the spot where the accident happened. Since police investigations were complete, they removed the yellow-stripe tape that once cordoned off the area. Not far from where Zhang Heng stood, a new sign had been erected, prohibiting swimming in the river. When Zhang Heng pointed his flashlight at the signboard, he found that the word 'prohibited' was missing. The area was deemed unfriendly to investigators, seeing how pebbled littered the entire riverbank. This made looking for footprints almost impossible. The police had already been here once, and to them, it was pointless to investigate the scene again. Zhang Heng could only start his investigation from somewhere else.

He stood at the place where the girl left her shoes, then stretched out his foot and felt the ground. Apparently, the moss-laden rocks on the riverbank were extremely slippery, and if one were not careful, they would most definitely lose their footing and fall into the water.

There were many small puddles around Zhang Heng, probably formed when the water level rose to a certain level. Communities of small fishes and tadpoles were trapped in these puddles and could be caught easily with a plastic bottle. Now, Zhang Heng understood why this place was so attractive to children. Coupled with the diary that the police found later, was this really just an accident? While Zhang Heng was in deep thought, a sudden noise came from behind him. He moved the flashlight over and found a small toad. The amphibian remained motionless as the bright light hit it. He figured that the sound must have originated from this little thing leaping and kicking the pebbles around.

At that instance, an idea struck him. When the light hit the spot under the bridge, he saw something else in a split second. However, when he shone his torch at the spot again, there was nothing there. Zhang Heng stood there, thought for half a second, and decisively turned off the flashlight.

He took out his Filter Lens from his pocket, put it on his eyes, and walked towards the bridge pier.

If there was something hidden behind the bridge pier, that thing should have fled right before he walked toward it.

Of course, it did not rule out the possibility that the thing would continue to stay there, waiting to ambush him. Zhang Heng wasn't too worried, though, carrying the Pestilence Bone Bow and Paris Arrow with him. There was also a pocket knife in his pocket.

Just as Zhang Heng took two steps forward, he saw a black figure rushing out from behind the bridge pier and running to the other side. Judging by its silhouette, it looked like a person or at least a humanoid creature. His face was covered, and all Zhang Heng could tell was that the person was a male.

Zhang Heng quickly went after him. The opponent's stamina was below average. Let alone a powerhouse like Zhang Heng; he was even slower than the ordinary man. Besides, the surroundings were pitch black, and his vision severely impaired. Zhang Heng's speed, on the other hand, didn't reduce thanks to the help of the Filter Lens.

The two drew closer and closer. The mysterious man realized that he could not outrun Zhang Heng. With gritted teeth, he jumped into the river.

Zhang Heng did not follow him in. Although a fine swimmer, this was known to be a perilous river, where powerful, unpredictable undercurrents could overpower a man in seconds. Zhang Heng was surprised when he saw how willing the mysterious man was to risk his life just to shake him off.

The more important thing was that Zhang Heng already knew who the person was. He could just go and look for him tomorrow. Zhang Heng did not want to go into the river simply because he did not want to get his clothes and game items wet.