

48 Hours a Day

Chapter 2: Selecting The Right Book To Read

He ran seven laps around the field—2,800 meters.

After that, he showered in the public bathroom, changed into a clean white T-shirt and a pair of jeans, enjoyed his breakfast at a leisurely pace in the canteen and then finally walked to the library with the book 'Xiao Shan Wanhua Mirror' he had finished reading.

Like the morning run, reading was also one of Zhang Heng's routine which he kept at the speed of one book per week.

But unlike the run, reading brought him many pleasures. It was more like a pastime for him—one that he had always enjoyed.

As a matter of fact, if it were not for the limitation of time, he would be reading more than just one book every week.

After he returned the book at the service desk, Zhang Heng pulled out the phone in his pocket and opened an applet called Random Number Generator. With the setting adjusted to eight digits, he eagerly rolled the virtual dice.

Admittedly, it was not without ground that people thought that this guy was a genius.

The regular person would never have thought to use this dice-rolling method to choose a book to read.

But there was merit or perhaps eccentricity to Zhang Heng's reading style. Perhaps it was because he had gone through too many books since he was child, Zhang Heng could read any kind of books. From world-famous works to Dragon Proud Sky^{*1}, Xiaobai Wen^{2*}, and even the Perfect Man from Jin Jiang, Zhang Heng would soak them up like a sponge. And he got worse after that. He would still complete rapid books

like Compendium of Medical Herbs and Scientific Swine Raising Handbook.

To avoid the trouble of having to select a book and to experience the pure joy of having chanced upon a good book, he developed a normal distribution applet to help him pick his weekly reading material.

It was such a pity that the appeal for campus research grant had fallen through, where he lacked the funding to market his invention.

Zhang Heng concluded it was because the capital market lacked vision.

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Using the last two digits of the randomly generated number as a guide, Zhang Heng found himself in the management section.

Although not literature like the last time, he considered it to be quite a stroke of luck. At least it was much better than the 'Bill of Quantitates for Water Drainage, Heating, and Gas Engineering' he got last month.

Stretching out a finger, Zhang Heng pulled out the title for this week—Adam Smith's 'The Wealth of Nations'.

This was going to be a very pleasant afternoon.

Zhang Heng found himself a seat by the window and began to engross himself in the book.

Some of you might be scoffing right now. Really? He's not going to fuss over that recently turned-faerie watch of his?

Well, as evident by Zhang Heng's attitude, he really could not care less about it.

Addressing the issue proactively was the appropriate response, but only if it was within your capability. But in the face of a supernatural phenomenon like this, where there is a lack of information, perhaps not doing anything about it is the better option. Have you not seen those classic horror films where the ghosts touch the person and the person

would die? The actors or actresses had to pack their bags and go home since they were no longer part of the horror film.

On the contrary, you have to pretend that it did not exist at all, keeping a cool and composed mind, and keep moving. Who knows, it might just be a frightening but harmless haunted house tour.

Which is exactly why, many a times, staying calm and collected is the most important thing.

Right now, Zhang Heng was exactly that. No one would be able to tell that this guy had just experienced paranormal encounter; he missed class and use the time to go for a morning run, spent a whole afternoon poring over 'The Wealth of Nations', and then attended his elective Critical Thinking class. Come night, he even honored his promise to his roommates and went to the restaurant opposite for barbeque skewers¹ and ended the evening watching American TV-series back in their dorm.

At eleven-thirty, it was lights-off in the dormitory.

Zhang Heng's laptop had another three to four hours of battery life but he did not want to disturb his roommate's sleep, so he powered it down.

There was still another half an hour before the day ended, and while other people's watch hand had circled twice, Zhang Heng's familiar yet alien analog was only about to complete one cycle.

Was anything going to happen? He did not know.

All he could do was wait.

Earphones plugged into the MP3 and into his ears, Zhang Heng spent the last thirty minutes of the day waiting quietly on his bed.

00:00

All three hands converged pointing upwards. There was a split-second pause before the seconds hand continued to travel.

Zhang Heng did not notice anything unusual.

Was his guess wrong?

He pulled out his earphones and immediately—he could sense that something was off.

The surroundings—it was too quiet.

Summer nights were especially full with activities: the small electrical fan above the door groaning and squeaking as it swiveled from side to side, the mosquitos droning tiresomely at people's ears, the water tap next door dripping onto the sink, the stray cat mewing as it hurried across the plant beds downstairs, the snoring of his roommate in the bed opposite...

Tonight, all of it was gone.

The whole world suddenly lost its sounds, and became unprecedentedly, and eerily silent.

If it were not for the faint music playing in his earphone, Zhang Heng might have presumed that he had lost his hearing.

Borrowing the dim light coming from the screen of the MP3, Zhang Heng peered at the time on his watch.

It was now 00:01.

Usually, the people in the dorm opposite theirs would still be up playing League of Legends and their loud hurrahs at their completion of a brilliant kill or narrow escape were perceptible through the thin walls separating the rooms.

Zhang Heng also noticed something else unusual—the date display on the right side of the watch face, instead of changing along with the time, remained the same as yesterday.

An idea popped into his mind, and he jumped off his bed—he had gone to bed fully-clothed.

His laptop lit up in the dark, and in less than seven seconds, the QQ login interface popped up. But Zhang Heng's attention was not on the main portion of the screen. His gaze was on the toolbar at the bottom.

00:00

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Wasn't it the last moment of yesterday?

Zhang Heng waited for a moment, and then pressed his fingertips against his wrist, and counted to 200. That was seventy-two beats per minute. Two minutes had passed yet the time on his monitor remained at 00.00.

Zhang Heng's raised an eyebrow at this, but made no hasty conclusions.

He walked to the bed opposite his and shook the sleeping Chen Huadong who was the lightest sleeper in the dorm. Normally, someone getting off their bed to get a drink of water would have startled him but this time, no matter how hard Zhang Heng shook him, he remained unresponsive.

"I'm sorry, bro. Although I don't have a girlfriend, I'm not the kind of person you may think I am."

Zhang Heng put his finger under his friend's nostrils and tried to have fun in such a weird atmosphere.

This guy's mental state was rather excellent.

After five minutes, Zhang Heng still could not detect any breath.

If this was part of the prank, then Chen Huadong's breath-holding ability was out of this world. He could even break the Guinness World Record.

So, Zhang Heng did the same, testing his two other roommates' breath.

The results were the same as Chen Huadong's.

Zhang Heng could say for certain that he really was facing a scientifically unexplainable otherworldly phenomenon.

He was in a time zone that should not exist.

An example would be like the river of time had purposely branched out another stream just for him.