

48 Hours a Day

Chapter 12: Desert Island Survival VI

So, this really was all just a game?

In reality, once watch hands pointed to twelve midnight, Zhang Heng would enter Still Time. But here, the wind continued to whistle in his ears, and the coconuts trees swayed along, except for that voice that appeared suddenly not long ago, nothing else had changed.

Zhang Heng had tried playing several computer games during Still Time.

Following the contact-recover principle, as long as he was not in contact with other people, everything would continue to work.

But now was not the time to talk about such things.

Just as victory was within reach, the difficulty of the game was raised to a hellish level.

Realizing that he had another five hundred days and not twenty days left on the godforsaken island, Zhang Heng did not even have the strength to draw a bitter smile.

Instead, he sat by the beach, staring at the horizon, doing nothing else until sundown. This was the first time he felt like life was full of spite.

But at this point, griping was meaningless.

Even if he wanted to settle scores with whoever, he would have to wait until five hundred days later.

Before dark, Zhang Heng finally roused. He was never the kind of person who was easily knocked down by difficulties. He did as Ed had taught him in between the lessons, to let go, to vent out all his negative emotions first, and then regain his composure.

With the fish and crabs he caught, Zhang Heng enjoyed a full meal, and then early the next morning, devoted himself fighting against nature.

Fire can be used to cook food and boil water, and keep him warm at night. Simultaneously, keeping the fire burning had become Zhang Heng's responsibility.

Every day, not only did he have to go out to collect food and freshwater, he also needed to find firewood that would burn easily—this task was especially tough after a shower of rain.

He had wanted to collect more firewood and store them in the cave to cope with the rainy weather, but earlier on, he had to focus his energy on scavenging for food; now that Ed was gone, the amount of food he needed to find was halved, leaving with ample time to do other things.

Other than collecting firewood, Zhang Heng also attempted at fashioning a couple of stone axes. Ed was not very good at making tools, and had only imparted the rough idea of how to put together a stone axe. Before this, Zhang Heng had used the sharper edge of the clams to hack at the trees but it did not work very well—it took him at least two to three hours to cut down a small tree.

That got him thinking about trying out the stone tools so highly favored by the primitive man. But for some unknown reasons, the axes he made either crack after only two chops, or the heads would be separated from the handle at a swing.

Zhang Heng could only comfort himself that failure is the mother of success.

In a blink of an eye, another twenty days had passed.

That familiar voice, again, sounded in Zhang Heng's ears.

[Task complete...]

[To return after 480 days...]

The sentences were fine on their own but when put together like that, it sounded like a bit of a joke.

Zhang Heng ignored the voice. He had just finished his lunch, and was looking for some shells to carry water. The one he had used was burnt. He was picking up goods from the 'free market' when he suddenly noticed two black dots from afar.

Huh? This was a rather familiar scenario.

What was more familiar were the two people struggling in the water.

Were those option B adventure man and option C laddie in shorts?

Zhang Heng found himself speechless. What kind of humans were they? That was some powerful will and tenacity to live. It had not been easy for him to have survived on this island and yet those two were still living and kicking after drifting in the water for forty days.

Zhang Heng's thoughts immediately went back to the late Ed. Before he breathed his last breath, Ed had thanked Zhang Heng for saving him, and being able to die on land, unlike the two other people who would be swept into a watery grave.

Instead, right now, Zhang Heng felt sorry for Ed.

If he had not 'saved' Ed, Ed might still be alive, floating on the waters with the other two.

This was not the first day Zhang Heng played games. He knew that this situation meant that he was encountering a bug.

The root cause of that was probably that extra twenty-four hours he had that disrupted the quest.

Theoretically speaking, the game should cease to exist after forty days. The other players had probably all returned to reality. He was the only was still stuck in the game—still suffering.

Most games would have crashed or broken down. Yet, this game continued to run. This fact alone was enough to prove that this was no ordinary game.

The bartender lady had said that this was the greatest game in the history of mankind. Right now, Zhang Heng found himself a little convinced of that. Ever since he arrived in this 'world', everything he had seen was extremely realistic, from the plants to the animals on the island, everything was true to the real world. Even Ed did not appear any different from a real person.

Right now, however, a flaw had finally appeared in this impeccable world.

“Is it because the plot has ended, it has no choice but to repeat?”

However, unlike mechanical loops, the Ed whom he had buried in the little forest did not reappear, meaning that the repeat followed a logical sequence.

Zhang Heng peeled off his clothes as quickly as he could; of course, he was not going to miss such a good opportunity.

Unlike the physically weak and feeble person he was forty days ago, Zhang Heng was well-fed, and was even able to perform some training exercising outside of labor.

His body had nearly recovered to its most optimal state.

Having gauged the distance between himself and the two people in the water, Zhang Heng decided to save the laddie in shorts, who was further away. Because according to game designers' logic, the more effort you put in, the better the reward.

With Ed's help, he had basically overcome the problem of finding food; now, he wanted to know what kind of changes would saving that young man bring to his life.

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Ten days later, Zhang Heng found himself marveling at the brick kiln and tile-roofed house.

There were actually people in this world who could build a house with their bare hands! All throughout, Zhang Heng trailed behind the lad in shorts from finding clay, to constructing beams, firing the bricks in a kiln, to finally building the half a meter tall bricked house. In addition to that, the lad even showed him how to make a proper stone axe, set up a wooden shed, make ceramics, prawn traps, and sandals, and use the fibers from tree barks to weave, make bow and arrows, and slings.

Not having to worry about food, Zhang Heng was able to spend his time taking it all in.

It was a pity, however, that the short pants lad never spoke. He merely did as Zhang Heng requested and quietly demonstrated all the techniques.

Then on the nineteenth day, he accidentally ingested poisonous mushrooms and died in the forest.

Killed by the plot?

Now Zhang Heng understood that the game was designed in a way that the player would have to spend the later half of the game alone. So, no matter what they did, the already injured Ed and the lad in shorts would not last until the twentieth day.

Zhang Heng buried the lad in shorts next to Ed's grave.

Unlike Ed, this lad never spoke a word; so, they did not share very strong ties. In addition, after knowing that it was all just a game, Zhang Heng was not terribly upset.

But, at the end of the day, they were teacher and student. Zhang Heng felt obliged to give him a proper burial.

After that, Zhang Heng digested and began to put everything the lad in shorts had thought him throughout their nineteen days together. In between, the adventurer drifted past twice, but Zhang did not 'save' him.

He would come back again some other time.

If Zhang Heng saved him, he would have only nineteen days left to live.

On the 130th day on the island, an announcement rang in Zhang Heng's ear.

[Tiled-roof house successfully constructed; Wilderness Survival Skill has increased from level 0 to level 1; Game Points +5; you may view the character panel...]