

# 48 Hours a Day

## Chapter 5: Covenant

Thursday afternoons were set aside for staring into space.

This time every week, he would normally refrain from being involved in any work or activities. Instead he would burrow in a place of his liking and waste his time away to his heart's content.

These places could be the park, the temple, the museum... and, of course, it could also be a maid café like the one he was in right now.

Just the eye-candies in that place alone made it Zhang Heng's favorite place—which was also why this was the place he went to daydream most frequently.

“A cup of Forbidden Love, and a plate of Gege<sup>1</sup> Can't Do It Today, thanks.” Zhang Heng tried to keep a straight face and not give away the fact that he had no idea what he was ordering.

“Yes, Master. Please hold on.” The maid with cat ears answered subserviently, hugging the tray she was holding to her chest.

Professional! Zhang Heng gave her a big mental thumbs up. The maids working in the café were mostly part-time university students—a major topic of discussion among the neet community.

In comparison, the owner of that maid café down Chun Xi Road was less sincere in his efforts. He employed a whole bunch of ladies in their thirties and forties to make up for the number. It was even said that the owner himself would pitch in when they were short-staffed, torturing his customers' mental wellbeing with his thick bush of leg hair. Dining there was more like volunteering for torture.

While he waited for his orders to arrive, Zhang Heng picked out a copy of 'Shokugeki no Soma'<sup>1</sup> from the rack nearby. He was flipping through the pages when someone said, "What a pity. I prefer his former works."

Zhang Heng looked up and found a stranger in the form of a small old man in a Tang suit<sup>1</sup> paired with a tie and a homburg sitting across the table. His unremarkable, half eastern-half western dressing gave him an uncanny appearance.

All eyes in the café were drawn to this strange little man.

Zhang Heng's eyebrows rose to his forehead. "Shun Saeki<sup>1</sup>? He used to be a Bilibili mangaka."

"Then it looks like my memory does not fool me." The old man grinned, revealing a row of yellowed teeth. "So, how has this month been, Zhang Heng? Are you pleased with my little gift? Don't worry. That thing that you're worried about won't happen. The extra twenty-four hours is a gift. It won't deduct your lifespan."

"Did you do something to me?"

"That's not easy for me to do. But you are the one that I choose, it is only right for me to give you a gift. Isn't that right?"

The old man reached out and picked up the cup of Forbidden Love from the serving tray a maid walking past was carrying, startling the waitress.

Zhang Heng smiled at the girl apologetically. "Thank you. We won't be needing anything for the time being."

"I won't take advantage of you. After we've finished our conversation, you'll still be able to drink your beverage." The old man mumbled something unintelligible and then said, "Now, let's get down to business. I'm quite pleased with your performance this month. Now, since the trial period is over, let's discuss the conditions of transfer."

"Conditions of transfer?"

“Yes, simply put, I need you to help me win the next round of game. This game will bring you a generous return. Other than that, you can still continue to use that little gift I gave you.”

When the old man saw Zhang Heng open his mouth to speak, the old man waved him off. “I know your family’s situation. Money is not very attractive to you. Not to mention, with this ability, it’s going to be effortless for you to acquire money. But trust me, the things that this game can bring you is beyond your imagination.”

“What game?” Zhang Heng asked.

“In the distant past, we used to employ war to solve conflicts. It’s simple and effective. My god, how I miss those good ol’ bloody days. But the times continued to develop and change, and a civilized society shouldn’t be using those barbaric, primitive means, right?” The old man paused, and proceeded to gulp down the entire cup of Forbidden Love. “Which is why nowadays, we use games to decide the winnings or losses. The person sitting on the throne right now is that despicable bloke; because of the ancient pledge, I cannot reveal the content of the game in advance. Strictly speaking, this meeting is also prohibited. But don’t worry. I can handle this little problem.”

“If this game is so important, why don’t you participate in it yourself?”

“Like I said, I’m restricted by some ancient pledge, we cannot participate in the games ourselves. You are like my representative. I’m betting all my chips on you. When you win, I win; but if you lose, I lose too. The both of us are like locusts tied to the same rope. We’re on the same boat. But I don’t have very good luck. My rankings in the game have been pretty bad recently.” The old man sighed. “As you can see, I am growing weaker. So, this time, I’ve decided to limit my bets earlier even though it’s a big risk, and you might be eliminated halfway.”

“Who are you?” Zhang Heng studied the man.

“For the time being, you can think of me as your investor and partner. As for the future, I can only tell you one thing—the longer you persist in this

game, the closer you will be to the truth about this world. Alright, we don't have much time. Now, tell me your answer."

Zhang Heng looked at the old man in the eye. He has just been given a long speech that sounded very absurd with the maid café's atmosphere. But the fact that the old man knew his name and had good insight into what had happened to him, this comically dressed old man was not joking.

Zhang Heng thought about it for a moment before answering, "Sounds interesting. How do I join?"

"It's very simple. Let me find the checkpoint closest to your school..." The old man took out a Xiaomi cell phone from his pocket and opened the Baidu Maps app. "Sex and the City bar, checkpoint 137, eleven o'clock tonight. You don't regret this decision. Oh, I almost forgot." The old man reached out a hand. "The last step: concluding the contract. Once we shake hands, you belong to me."

Zhang Heng put out his right hand. "Please refrain from using these terrible, ambiguous statements. I'm already starting to regret it."

When they shook hands, Zhang Heng felt as if he was holding onto a hard, icy rock.

The old man was in good spirits. "Be careful of other representatives. You probably won't meet at the initial stage of the game. But no matter what happens, you have to prioritize survival." (Editor Note: Omg why does this remind me of Mirai Nikki?)

"Wait a minute. You can die in this game?"

"No, just dead in the game. To be precise, it's more like disappear. Your physical body will disappear and all the memory related to you will disappear as if none of it ever existed. I happen to know a guy who's an expert in this." The old man said in the most casual manner.

"..."

Zhang Heng was about to say something when his eyes dimmed for a moment, and the old man suddenly vanished right in front of him.

A maid walked up to his table with a deep red beverage, her smile revealing to cute pointy little fangs.

“Master, your Forbidden Love. Please enjoy.”