

Difference is Fine

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English Version

Abstract

I often wonder whether each humans is truly unique or if our differences are less significant than they seem. For example, it's nearly impossible to find two people who enjoy the exact same music in the exact same way. Even if both love the *Beatles* and "*Let It Be*", one might be drawn to the piano more while the other could sense more from the guitar solo.

If we are all truly different, I wonder if it stems from physical differences — like variations in vision, hearing, or the brain's chemical reactions to the same information. These differences inevitably shape our subjective thoughts. On one hand, this can lead to conflict; after all, if everyone interprets the same thing differently, arguments based on individual feelings are almost unavoidable. On the other hand, these differences might help us to survive, allow us to find meaning, to believe in our own worth, regardless of objective facts.

Building on the idea that we humans are all different, I imagine we were created with slight variations in our physical characteristics. Each one of us follows a unique path of development, and together, humanity can gather a complete range of knowledge — whether it's about hiking, designing electrical devices, creating great art, or resolving conflicts. Perhaps the creator — if that is

God — designed us this way to collect and learn from the knowledge we accumulate over time.

Quantum Mechanics, with its concepts of superposition and entanglement, inspires me to think about human diversity. Imagine that these principles allow humans to be created countless times with slight variations, ensuring that every possible path and outcome can unfold. This would make each of us truly unique.

From this perspective, our purpose as humans could be to collectively develop what I call "great intelligence". This intelligence isn't stored in a single, central repository like a massive database but is distributed among us, with each individual contributing their unique insights and knowledge to the whole.

Now God watches as we try to create artificial intelligence, while we still lack a clear understanding of whether machines can ever be fully objective — or how subjective we, as humans, truly are. This uncertainty doesn't concern God, though, as all possibilities resonate with every probability.

just wondering, if we are all unique, then how special is God?

purely Fiction

He stands at the edge of nothingness, a teenage boy, or perhaps a young man, caught somewhere between his fading moments and shadow memories. He holds his breath, as if any further thought is pointless, as if deep thinking has become a luxury he can no longer afford. If he is a machine, then he is a marvel of engineering, a priceless robot crafted to mimic humanity in every detail. If he is human, then he is nothing more than a disposable teenager, easily replaced by the perfection of machines.

This rooftop crowns an old, repurposed office building, its edges clawed by jagged walls of cheap concrete. Shattered tiles scatter the ground, relics of a place long forsaken. Atop this pinnacle of human design lies an abandoned realm — where only hollow souls murmur through the wind, and weeping rains veil the desolation.

A school backpack teeters on the concrete wall, ready to fall. The young man doesn't care, just as he doesn't care about his own life. Just as no one else seems to.

Some believe, once a person suicides and jumps off a building, it tears a hole in the fabric of the world, forming a dark force that lingers and calls to others.

This is a heavy and suffocating energy field, more people therefore would come and do the same. Others believe that such places already harbour a strange, dark force, constantly pulling people in, one after another, to leap to their death.

Psychics with the gift of spiritual sight speak of places like this, where the air shimmers with echoes of the past. They describe souls trapped in endless repetition, doomed to relive their final suicide moments over and over again, as though the earth itself demands their sacrifice.

> what are you doing?

A security man is expected to be on the ground floor but appears on the rooftop.

> I am sightseeing, this.. city view.

Maybe he is a bit surprised that someone else is on the rooftop, the young man still calmly replies.

> a city view that no one wants to see.

> well, I got different math, I am the one who is seeing.

> only if you mean it, then you are literally the only one.

> only one, is an interesting description.

> otherwise, you tell me what city view is worth seeing, come on, this is normal, boring city view.

> these concrete towers, supposed to be built as inspiring man-made structures, fail to achieve that purpose. They only end up as emptiness, nothing more than mere stacks of bricks, products of money and

labor. For me, these cement objects are made by machines, not by souls.

The security man is relatively young, not as young as the young man, but not quite close to middle age either. His skin still holds a certain smoothness and a healthy glow, showing traces of youth.

> I am confused, if this is a view of emptiness, why do you want to see.

> I am curious how such an emptiness was created.

> I'm not sure what makes you think it's emptiness, but this emptiness is created by humans.

> but by humans with souls?

> well, I can't say all architects lack soul, right? There must be some designs shaped by the kind of soul you are referring to.

How about this, here is what I see: maybe it's a system in society that drains human creativity, turning soulful designs into lifeless shells.

is this a better way to think about it?

The young man exchanges silence with the security man.

> you don't have to go back?

> go back where?

> ground floor, I thought that is the place you work.

> one of the places I work, like rooftop, one of the places I work.

> one of, alright.

Pause.

> so, what are you actually doing here?

> I just said, sightseeing.

> sightseeing emptiness?

> correct.

> compared to the natural views on the mountain — created by forces without souls — you'd rather spend time on emptiness, possibly created by souls?

> natural views on the mountain are full of life.

> that's true.

> still, it is interesting to say that natural views were created by forces without souls..

> also true.

Pause.

> enough, now tell me exactly what you're doing here, don't give me any bullshit about souls or ghost sightseeing — let's be straightforward.

> so, you want me to stop giving indirect answers?

> that's right, as that's a straightforward question.

> and you want a straightforward answer.

> at least stop indirect answers.

Pause.

> the fact is, once I am straightforward, I might get some classic lectures.

> such as?

> such as lectures that seem to carry profound wisdom to change blind thinking but are actually just rehashed "copy-paste" crap. It's like saying, "I'm giving advice, but I don't care because I don't really understand how

you feel”.

> more specific?

> such as, “you’re still young, you have a bright future ahead of you, a promising life is waiting for you, you should think twice, or more than twice, don’t let this moment bring you down”, these phrases are well-meaning but feel hollow.

> frankly speaking, such lectures can apply to many situations, do you have more examples?

> how about “life is never perfect, but once you get through this, everything will be fine, don’t give up”, or, “life is all about fighting through struggles, there are so many examples, many people are also struggling, but see how they fight, you just have to follow them, and you’ll be fine”, this kind of stuff.

> let me confirm, some lectures like, “tomorrow will definitely be better than today if you just keep going”? it’s really just a way to stop you from doing anything drastic, rather than offering genuine help.

> you can say that.

> alright, I think I got it, those kinds of classic lectures.

> yap, those kinds of lines.

Pause.

> so, are you about to give such classic lectures?

> do you think I would still lay out such classic lectures after you say that?

> no idea, I am not the person who can make it happen.

> that’s true.

> so you have something else?
> surprisingly or unfortunately, yes.
> yes?
> especially when you mentioned emptiness, I somehow feel there is a connection between us.
> how?
> can't say how, I can say what though.
> I am listening.
> I guess you intend to do what I've been thinking of all the time.
> so you are going to say what you've been thinking?

Pause.

> alright, I agree now, maybe we don't need to be that straightforward about what we are going to do.

The young man nods.

> so I am going to say it in another way, to confirm whether we are thinking the same.

The security man is likely employed by a third-party security company. It's not a stable or promising job — at any moment, the office building owner could cancel the security service, or the company could replace the guard with someone else.

> alright, I go first.

in my view, society lacks a proper way to measure individual worth. Many skills require significant time and effort to develop, yet people who invest that time often don't receive fair compensation. This is because the value of skills is determined by supply and demand

in the market. When the market changes — whether due to innovations like automation reducing demand, or an oversupply of people with the same skill — the value of those skills can plummet. And I’m not talking about losing just a few cents; it can drop below the average wage. In the end, those who dedicated themselves to mastering their abilities might not even earn a basic return on their investment.

> sorry for interrupting, since you mention abilities, what ability do you have?

> I am a Class B Machinist.

> I am not sure about what that is, but okay, I assume that is impressive.

> therefore, due to relatively high salaries, only certain jobs or abilities are prioritized. This creates a divide between “rich jobs” and “poor jobs”, pushing people who excel at “poor jobs” into pursuing “rich jobs”, forcing them to ignore their natural talents.

As a result, society wastes talent and loses balance in its development. Some fields become overcrowded, while others suffer from a lack of skilled individuals.

> it sounds cynical, but I agree with you.

> if a choice is limited by money, then this is not freedom of choice.

> definitely.

> I must emphasize, it’s no longer just about who is richer or poorer. The issue is, I put my best effort into mastering a skill, but if the market decides it’s

worthless, I can't even afford basic needs and end up below average.

> you have already done what you can do.

> I have already done what I can do.

Pause.

> alright, it's your turn.

> you know I am still a student.

> obviously.

> I believe our education system is fundamentally flawed. Using exams and prestigious schools to measure individual intelligence is baseless. This system assumes that each year produces the same proportion of people capable of entering prestigious schools, as if human biology guarantees a fixed number of superior brains annually. But there's no evidence to support this idea. If we had all the elites from the past ten years take the same exam in a single year, not all of them would qualify for these schools. This clearly shows how arbitrary and flawed it is to define intelligence or worth through such a system.

> wow, despite the age difference, I think our thoughts are completely in sync.

> I've never met anyone who shares same view as me.

> same, and I must say, thinking differently comes at a cost, I don't see any benefit, only loneliness.

Pause.

> if I can't prove myself, it's really hard to define myself in the society.

> can't even define the purpose of living.

> some say, "live life your way", I have no idea what that nonsense means. Living your way takes resources, and if you don't have good salary, no rich background to support, how can you even live your own way?

> totally, only those who have money to enjoy life can say "living in the moment".

> tell me about it.

> I have to sacrifice a lot, compromise a lot to get higher income, no time for love or friendship shit.

> just like that, career success is single priority.

> always saying after proving.

> enjoy school life? What school life is if I am not at top school.

> brotherhood is first rule? No money no brothers, bro.

> some always say friendship is more valuable than interest.

> that is because some have already had money to keep friendships.

> and for those some, it is easy, easy money.

> but for me, I still get no money no matter how much I sacrifice.

> it is modest to say "no matter how much I sacrifice" here.

> you are damn right, it is modest way to say "despite I have sacrificed all".

Pause.

> I refuse to live my life being exploited for someone

else, while being labelled as secondary.

> I refuse to live just to prove someone else is smarter, better than me, while diminishing myself.

Both seem to understand each other now, showing less suspicion. Now, it's more about what comes next.

The young man says.

> alright, so you might know what I want to do, and you have been thinking of it as well, but I don't know when do you plan to do it.

> I didn't plan which day.

> I am pretty sure I want to do it today.

> it seems like that.

> so you are about watching me doing?

> no, no, no, I want to join.

> but you just said you didn't plan.

> I don't have exact day, but I do think if somehow I meet someone who wants to do, I will do together.

> together?

> together.

Pause.

> I won't say that's not feasible.

> it's feasible.

> I agree your point in terms of thinking differently comes at a cost, it's funny now we meet.

> wow, this speak sounds like the beginning of some classic lectures.

> I have no problem if this is enough to stop you.

> this can't stop me, don't get me wrong, it is fact that I

have no value to the society, and this fact won't change no matter who I meet.

Pause.

The young starts moving toward the edge of building, then sits on the concrete wall with school backpack. The security man slowing follows, then takes a glance down at the street over the concrete wall.

> what now, count to three?

> no, I go first.

> what?

> you heard what I said.

> are you kidding me?

> show your respect to senior people.

Pause.

> don't tell me you are trying to stop me in such a funny way. I agree you go first, then you never go, hence I can never go.

> don't tell me this is enough to stop you, you will do regardless how funny a way can be, am I right? You are determined, I can't stop you.

> of course.

> I absolutely understand. When a person is desperate, the person does not hesitate. When a person wants to dominate, the person does not hesitate.

> nothing can stop me because I am determined.

> you know this very well, there is nothing you couldn't sacrifice.

From the rooftop, the view is blocked by towering

modern buildings. In this city, everything — every object, every detail — is artificial, meticulously designed, and mechanical. The young man waves his hand, watching the school backpack plummet. His expression is cold as a machine, resolute as he speaks to himself.

> of course, there is nothing I couldn't sacrifice.

A small sedan is parked by the sidewalk of the street. It is an average car, on the roof of the car rests the school backpack, as if it had just fallen from the rooftop moments ago.

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There is no way to measure how special an individual truly is. No matter how unique, many live their whole lives in silence, alone. One day, when they leave, that specialness quietly disappears, unnoticed and unknown.

The life before suicide was as if a dream, the life after suicide is a dream.

The person on the other end of phone spoke in a softened tone, gently tried to convey information. Such a sad news, no one can comprehend at the first moment, it was some language that people don't use in daily conversation, so it was natural to assume some misunderstanding, expect there might be some explanation, and deny until the certainty landed the key word, suicide.

That instant didn't feel like a sharp slap in the face, after all, this information needed time to sink in. It sank in, deeper and deeper with each passing day. It slowly seeped through the skin, corroding the veins, and making the heart brittle. The suicide stole away the warmth of family, leaving only the crushing weight of silence. Now, the smiles of strangers seem hollow, utterly false, stripped of sincerity. The connection to society feels severed, as if the family was never a part of it at all.

Perhaps there's too much to sort through emotionally, leaving his mind blank — or maybe his heart has been hollowed out entirely, making it impossible to form coherent thoughts. Yoshiki refused to attend the funeral, distancing himself from any expressions of concern. He allows silence to echo the voices, builds a wall between himself and family. He moves through the days like a machine, following the same lifeless pattern: wake up, go to school, come home, but no sound, no color. Nothing.

Father, once a commanding businessman who oversaw every cent with precision, was the embodiment of success — a symbol of discipline and control. But when the economic crisis struck, the financial markets he once mastered turned on him, erasing years of hard work overnight. Bankruptcy shattered him, and the family's wealth vanished as if swept away by a tide. The phone now rings only with calls from debt collectors, its sound a constant reminder of their downfall. Meals become uncertain, and survival turn into the new focus. Society, once full of warm smiles and praise, grows cold. People gossip endlessly — no help, no sympathy, just whispers of criticism behind closed doors. Family troubles are no longer hidden; they are dissected and judged by everyone. The once-busy house, where clients and employees gather with lively conversations,

now stands silent. Holidays, once marked by gatherings and toasts, feel hollow. The home is empty, stripped of life, its silence heavier than any words.

The relationship between father and son had always been distant and strained, long before the family's downfall. Smiles were rare, if not nonexistent. The pressure society placed on the father was amplified and passed down to the son. Only perfect grades and top school rankings were acceptable — anything less was met with harsh criticism. Independent thinking was dismissed as a rebellion against tradition. Words like “second-rate schools” and “failures in society” were embedded in every scolding, making their bond anything but warm. It was never a nurturing relationship, and it's certainly not improving now.

Following the bankruptcy, the family business closed, the older brother committed suicide, and the mother ended up in the hospital, Yoshiki is left lost in deafening loneliness.

Schools in Taipei are typically enclosed by walls that clearly define their boundaries, with architectural styles distinct from residential buildings or government offices. The exteriors often feature walls with at least two contrasting tile colors, and rows of medium-sized, semi-transparent windows line the buildings. Corridors are constructed with cement walls on one side and open to classrooms on the other. Inside,

marble floors support rows of wooden desks and chairs, making it unmistakably a place for learning.

Restory Middle School, a public junior high in Twin Merging District, Taipei County, consists of four interconnected buildings forming an “M” shape from above. One building is dedicated to specialized classes like chemistry, while the other three house students by grade. Each building has five floors, and the restrooms are located at the end of the corridor on every floor, requiring students to pass several classrooms to reach them.

The school uniform follows a consistent design across all three grades. Girls wear a preppy style paired with skirts, while boys have a suit-like uniform. The gym uniform, on the other hand, is identical in design for everyone but differentiated by grade through color: red, green, or purple. When students from different grades gather wearing their gym uniforms, the contrasting colors make them stand out noticeably.

In the third-floor corridor of the school, Yoshiki presses his back against the wall, facing away from the classroom. The corridor is utterly empty, as silent and reflective as a mirror. For a moment, it feels as though gravity shifts unnaturally, pulling him into a realm only he can perceive. His eyes, mechanical in their precision, reflect the ground outside the corridor, as if he’s plummeting from the third floor, falling through

an illusion only he can see. Then, everything turns pitch black. The heavy impact fractures his body in countless places, as though a machine's delicate structure has collapsed. Nerves, like electrical circuits, overload with intense signals, forcing his brain to process unrelenting pain. Strangely, the pain doesn't fade with time. Even as nerves are severed and signals weaken, the brain clings to the final echoes, replaying the agony on a loop, like a malfunctioning processor unable to power down.

At this moment, Yoshiki can no longer sense where his body ends or begins. He feels like a shattered sculpture — his form splintered into lifeless fragments, his essence drained away. Yet, perhaps the brain persists, locked in a futile cycle of regret, replaying alternate possibilities: a wish to undo the fall, to rewrite the moment, to reshape the world, to rebuild himself.

> Hey, Zenerate, Fisty-Done is coming.

Snapping back to reality, Yoshiki sees Zoneli's tense expression. His voice carries an unmistakable tone of warning.

During the break, students stroll through the corridors and classrooms, chatting and moving freely, enjoying their brief reprieve before the next class. Then, a sudden commotion from one side snaps the calm like a whip crack. Heads turn, and the crowd ripples in unison, shifting to the walls as if swept by an invisible

force.

It is Fisty-Done, a notorious gang member, strides through the corridor with a menacing air, gripping Han by the arm as if dragging him to his doom. His senior-grade gym uniform sets him apart, making his presence even more commanding. Behind him, Chancist and Tealand follow like shadows, their faces cold, their steps measured. The scene reeks of an execution — silent, deliberate, and heavy with dread. Fisty-Done's gaze burns with intent, and Han's pale face betrays his terror. The crowd is paralyzed, caught between curiosity and fear. Such a brazen, public display of dominance is unprecedented, and the sheer audacity of it leaves everyone frozen, the air thick with unspoken threat.

> must be about last time. Han was being an idiot, running his mouth, saying he could take Fisty-Done one-on-one. What the hell was he thinking? Does he think the DeLight-Street crew's a bunch of nobodies?

Zenerate replies with silence.

> but it's been so long—why's DeLight-Street pulling this now? And in school? What the hell, making such a scene. KingHall soon will come. Zenerate, let's talk to Tealand, just give him a heads-up that Han's with KingHall. Won't change much, but at least we're showing we tried.

To Zonelimi, negotiation is always both the first and final step. Negotiation requires leverage, and if there is

not enough resource to support, then the right action at the right moment becomes essential.

> they know Han is member of KingHall.

> what do you mean, so we leave it?

Zenerate nods.

> are you sure? Zenerate, if we just watch, Mindhunt would take this as an excuse for trouble.

> stupid, we are not gangster, don't get involve this.

> what do you mean don't involve this, idiot Justous, what makes you think you differ from them? You think teachers think you are good student?

> we don't involve what we don't know.

Zenerate cuts the dialogue between Zonelimi and Justous, but looks like he is calculating something in his mind.

> for fuck's sack, I still don't get why they make such a lousy scene, usually they would wait until everyone leaves school, it makes me feel like they deliberately pick this moment, Yoshiki, any thinking?

The vision is so vague, the sound is so intruding, Yoshiki struggles to focus, slowly turning his head over the corridor. He sees Han has being dragged into the restroom.

> what thinking, they are starting.

The packed crowd immediately erupts with noise when the first punch lands, and it sounds absolutely merciless.

This rare incident naturally draws the crowd's

attention and curiosity. Some students watch passively, unsure how to react, while others assume the victim must have done something to deserve it. Fisty-Done, with his towering frame and iron grip, exudes power, and gains the reputation. Many have never seen his punches, so his presence suppresses any thought of intervention. As long as they're not involved, the crowd doesn't imagine how things could escalate, also can't imagine what does it feel like as a victim.

Even though groups within the school don't get along, violent incidents are rare, and such an execution-style demonstration is absolutely unheard of. After all, those are just middle school students, no serious interest conflict, no deep hatred history. Perhaps some occasional quarrels are inevitable, but all groups tend to keep low-profile.

> people from KingHall are here.

Zonelimi lowers the tone.

> move! hey, move out of the way!

Kindaway arrives with a group of people, briefly glances at Zenerate, then confronts DeLight-Street, trying to push his way toward the restroom. Pongen is always energetic, speaking in an aggressive, excited, and often shouting tone.

> Zenerate! simply cut the bullshit, come to help us!

Pongen shouts at Zenerate, urging him to join

KingHall. Zenerate shakes his head and ignores Pongen.

> come, Zenerate, don't be asshole!

> Zenerate, maybe we don't need to do anything, just follow them, should be fine.

Zonelimi and Pongen are acquaintances, used to be classmates. Zonelimi tries to find a peaceful balance, but Zenerate firmly refuses. Pongen, angered, curses under his breath before joining Kindaway.

Both groups are pushing against each other, with neither side showing any sign of weakness.

> hey, I am just standing here, what, I can't stand here?

> just get the fuck out of the way!

> any law says that I can't stand here?

Many of those are classmates from both side, not really gang members, simply teenage support. The people from DeLight-Street stand with arrogance, clearly intent on blocking the way. Kindaway feels powerless, so the people from KingHall could only stand there, doing nothing but following along.

> this is KingHall, we protect one another, we care each other.

Perhaps due to his religious beliefs, when the tattooed Eastern religious talisman on Meanhunt's hand is raised above the crowd, a palpable energy can be felt, like standing in a high-radiation zone, wondering the reality of the warmth creeping through. The tattoo

starts to sway, mesmerizing the eyes and controlling all attention. Movements cease, arguments are silenced, and then Meanhunt begins to speak, a voice that commands, a voice that incites.

His father had been a Daoist spirit medium, a man chosen by the gods to serve as their vessel and voice. Becoming a medium isn't something anyone could choose — it is a divine calling. But his father's faith had been eroded by addiction. Drugs cost him his role as a medium, and debt to loan sharks pushed him into despair. One day, he jumped from a building. The police called it suicide.

Meanhunt grew up immersed in these spiritual traditions. The talisman tattoos on his body aren't just symbols — they are his anchor, his proof of belief. His father's fall left a scar, but it might also fuel Meanhunt's determination to forge his own path.

His joining the Daoist temple KingHall isn't to blindly follow rituals like others. Meanhunt has a sense of justice shaped by his faith, his need, and his past. He is a core member of the Eight Generals in KingHall, wielding a unique authority that set him apart.

> if any of us has trouble, the rest of us offer helps.

Meanhunt shows up among KingHall, the people from DeLight-Street obviously show nervous, maybe even step back without conscious thought.

> I only ask you to let us pass.

> come on, Meanhunt, I just stand here, nothing else.

> you are not just standing here, you are blocking here, blocking us from the way to save our people over there.

> I really just stand here, I don't do anything ... how ... how about asking C.T. to come, let him talk to Fisty-Done.

> what C.T.? do you see C.T. now? I don't see him, what you are talking about, our man is inside, right here, right now, we need to pass, you give me what bullshit, huh?

> I don't have position to say anything...

> If you were me, what you would do?

> come on, Meanhunt ...

> if God were here, what God would do?

The person talking to Meanhunt stands close to the corridor wall. Suddenly, Meanhunt uses his arm to shove the person against the wall, then lifts him up and presses him away from it.

> God, will surely do everything in HIS power to protect HIS people.

The person is startled by the sudden movement. Though most of his body remains pressed against the wall, he feels like he could be pushed off the edge at any moment and desperately clutches the wall. The members of DeLight-Street quickly back away, creating space between themselves and Meanhunt. The people from KingHall begin shouting in support, pushing the DeLight-Street crowd further back.

The person is released but is still frozen in fear.

Meanhunt briefly locks eyes with Zenerate before turning to join his people.

KingHall surged forward with unyielding energy, their morale high and their resolve unshaken. But their advance came to an abrupt halt, as DeLight-Street countered with a force even stronger, halting their momentum in its tracks.

With the crowd packed tight, Yoshiki can only hear the shouting but can't see what's really happening. Despite the tension and aggression unfolding before him, Yoshiki still struggles to ground himself in reality. The shouting around him feels like a thick morning fog, visible, tangible, even detectable by scent, yet entirely insignificant. It's as though he's been asleep his whole life, and this moment marks his first time waking up, still lingering in the blurred space where dreams and reality overlap, not fully transitioned to either side.

The situation shifts abruptly. A group of people swiftly passes in front of Yoshiki, including Teacher Tsai. Although the others are in plain clothes, it takes only a second to realize they're policemen. Walking at the rear, possibly a police officer, is another man in plain clothes, but with an entirely different demeanor. His eyes are sharp, and with both hands, he pushes his athletic jacket back, resting them on his waist, commanding the movements of everyone ahead with a

subtle authority.

> everyone gets out of the way, move! anyone who blocks will be taken by police!

Teacher Tsai pushes the students aside, following police men into the crowd, disrupting the already heated atmosphere and swiftly cutting off the potential escalation of conflict. The policemen charge into the restroom, and from the sound inside, it's clear that the chaos has shifted into something entirely different. After a while, gasps ripple through the corridor. Moments later, Han emerges from the crowd, clutching one side of his head with both hands. It needs to take a moment to realize why. Blood is seeping through his fingers.

> you drop your ear!

Despite the ear being drenched in red blood, Han still hears someone shout. He turns back, groping along the ground, eventually picking up his severed ear. He quickly tries to leave, but after only a few steps, he stumbles, and the ear falls to the ground again. Texts alone can hardly convey this gruesome scene. Witnessing it firsthand, the fallen ear is nothing more than a blood-soaked lump of flesh, barely discernible, and even harder to fully grasp the horror of the moment.

Teacher Tsai emerges from the crowd, rushing to assist Han and helping him off the scene. Shortly after, the policemen lead Fisty-Done and Chancist out in

handcuffs. As they pass Yoshiki, Fisty-Done's menacing aura has completely dissipated.

With the policemen gone, the corridor lay steeped in an uneasy silence, as though the air itself held its breath. The tension clung to the walls, palpable and heavy, like the aftermath of a storm, leaving the onlookers suspended in a strange, unspoken apprehension.

> Tealand, why you are not taken by the policemen, you didn't participate?

Seeing Tealand walk out as if nothing happened, Reali playfully asks.

Reali is one of the Seven Posh Golds in school, closely connected with the DeLight-Street, while also maintaining good relations with members of KingHall. Despite the tense relationship between the two groups, Reali is confident in her social skills, believing she can easily navigate between local gang members and win their favor. Or perhaps she simply enjoys being around powerful figures, always finding a way to stay connected with influential people.

> I didn't do anything, I am good boy, I was trying to calm them down.

> sure, you are the good good boy.

It could very well be true. After all, Tealand had been mediating between Fisty-Done and C.T. regarding Han's reckless remarks.

> if I throw you out of here now, any impact to DeLight-Street?

The corridor remains packed, DeLight-Street, KingHall and Meanhunt.

> Nah, not at all, just one useless coward who stood there watching when it all went down, won't make a damn difference.

Meanhunt instantly steals the spotlight, changing the air and drawing all eyes to him. Tealand, clearly annoyed, flips a middle finger.

> so what, I didn't do anything.

> exactly, you are responsible for this incident and you didn't do anything.

> I don't know the fuck you are saying.

> you were mediating this, now I only see escalating.

> I was trying to mediate, but it was before, now is now, it is different.

> what the dog shit I am hearing, huh, the same reason to hit Han, it is the same shit, you stupid fuck face telling me different?

> how do I know all the sudden Fisty-Done wants to hit him, how can I stop him?

> That's what mediation is, putting an end to conflict, not letting it escalate. I thought you all agreed to squash it and move on, leave the past in the past, that's it. Now you're telling me Fisty-Done wants to do it today? Did you even try to stop?

> of course.

> so you do know it would happen.

> so what!?

> you could have told us in advanced.

> funny, why should I, what could I have if I told you?

> you stupid fuck, as the mediator, this is on you, you gotta do whatever it takes to shut this down.

> don't play this with me, don't repeat what the past is, I have said, past is past, now is now, I don't have time taking care every shit, I don't do shit for free.

> I am not playing with you, I think it's you playing with we KingHall.

> come on, Meanhunt, you know I prefer peace, Fisty-Done also doesn't like trouble, but today it is your people having problem, hey, Han keeps saying he can beat the shit up Fisty-Done, huh? fuck, you think we like to hear that? you should manage your people well, just that simple. Your people are messing with us, then Fisty-Done thinks, alright, we have to give you some lesson, send you some message, to shut your people's mouth.

> what do you mean we were messing with you, we were trying to cool down, if you think there is still problem, you come to us, that's call mediation.

> I only know we don't have people provoking C.T.

> alright, so now DeLight-Street are ready to fight with us huh?

> how do I know, I am not leader, you go ask Fisty-Done.

Meanhunt turns to face his people.

> Tealand means from now on, DeLight-Street will “take care” of us one by one.

> fuck you, Meanhunt, you want to steal the attention again? just let C.T. and Fisty-Done talk.

As Tealand throws his hand up to leave, Meanhunt stretches out his foot, tripping him up. Tealand stumbles, managing not to fall, but looking awkward and flustered all the same.

> what the fuck, Meanhunt...

Meanhunt’s expression shifts in an instant, and with a swift motion, he grabs Tealand by the throat.

> you think you can fuck with KingHall hmm?

> I really don’t give a fuck about you.

With his throat gripped, Tealand struggles to speak, but that doesn’t stop him from slowly pulling a knife from his pocket and pointing it at Meanhunt.

> you know I don’t like trouble, and I am always kind, you got problem, just let C.T. and Fisty-Done talk.

Meanhunt ignores what Tealand says, tighten the grip on the throat.

> don’t push me, Meanhunt, don’t.

Tealand talks in a soft way, but that is actually a warning.

> go back to classrooms, what are you still doing here!?

The police officer suddenly steps out, loudly reprimanding everyone present. His scolding cuts

through the tension, turns off the escalating hostility. The focus shifts in an instant, resetting the atmosphere. People are caught off guard, thinking all the cops had left, and were just anticipating another show to unfold.

> what is this, wow, knife!?

The police officer takes off the knife from Tealand and pushes Meanhunt away.

> officer, it is him choking me, see, my neck is hurt.

> wow, wow, it is you taking knife, don't tell me you are innocent, you two, come with me now.

> officer, I didn't do anything, really, it is him hurting me, my throat is in pain.

> what the hell you little are still here, go back to the classrooms now.

The police officer grabs the two teenagers, reprimanding everyone to be back to classrooms.

The tension evaporates completely. What had seemed like an inevitable showdown vanishes in the officer's shout. The flash of a knife and the talisman tattoo suddenly seem insignificant in front of his authority. Street thugs might be able to challenge school rules, but once they cross the line, the police are waiting for them.

The police officer's gaze sweeps over the crowd, ensuring everyone leaves in compliance. As Zenerate and the others return to class, surprisingly, Yoshiki

remains by the wall, arms propped up, unmoved.

> I am asking you to go back to classroom, you got problem?

Pause.

> have you heard?

> what?

> the bell sound, signaling that it's time to return to class.

Language carries its own fingerprints, quietly mirroring its time and its speaker, so there is always someone who could notice what others overlook. Yoshiki steps away from the wall, facing the police officer without hesitation.

> Each class is forty minutes, with a ten-minute or twenty-minute break in between. We hear the bell, go to class, and wait for the next bell to get our free time, that's school rule.

I haven't heard the bell to tell us go back yet, have you?

The officer, unable to believe what he's hearing, narrows his eyes in anger, stepping closer to size up the boy, including the name tag on his uniform.

> your name is what, Yoshiki? you are trouble maker right? very good, very very good.

> it just makes me wonder, who can be bigger than the rule.

The officer wears a sports jacket, a cheap shirt, and dress pants. Whenever he rests his hands on his hips, he pulls the jacket back, placing his hands just above

the cheap belt at his waist.

> listen to me very carefully, my name is Leanruler, my colleagues call me the ruler of the land. I go wherever I'm needed, and I make sure things are in order, which is why they call me that. I've only just moved here, so it makes sense you don't know me yet, so of course you don't know how much I care about keeping order wherever I am.

The bell rings.

> is this your mother fucking bell sound, huh? Yoshiki, can I kindly ask you to go back to class?

Leanruler doesn't give much room, forcing Yoshiki to push past him. Unfazed, Yoshiki heads toward the classroom, carefully avoiding the blood on the floor. Just before stepping inside, Yoshiki turns and flips middle fingers to Leanruler.

Leanruler, with both hands resting above his cheap belt, sizes up Yoshiki briefly before leading Tealand and Meanhunt away, leaving the empty corridor to the sound of the ringing bell.

The corridor stands empty, haunted by the lingering trace of the earlier violence.

> wow, there you go again, always crazy talk, "have you heard the bell sound", ha ha, what the hell.

Zenerate sits right in front of Yoshiki, smiling at his friend as he slowly enters the classroom.

The desks and chairs are perfectly aligned, the classroom an image of order. The uniforms divide neatly — girls and boys alternate each other in different rows — but the blackboard reflects a room full of unique minds. Some whisper about what just happened, others flip their books open as usual. A few sit detached, while others focus, fully prepared. What unites them all: everyone is seated, and the lesson is ready to begin.

- 3 -

In Taiwan, organized crime reflects the island's complex history. Two distinct groups dominate the underworld: the Taiwan-Local Crime Groups, whose roots predate the arrival of Chiang Kai-shek's government in 1949, and the Mainlander Crime Groups, formed by those who fled with the Nationalist regime. The Taiwan-Local Crime Groups, with their deep territorial ties, prefer a flat hierarchy where power is earned over time. In contrast, the Mainlander Crime Groups operate more like corporations, with centralized leadership and merit-based advancement.

By the 1980s, the Taiwanese government initiated 'Operation Clean Sweep,' a nationwide crackdown on organized crime that led to the arrest of prominent leaders from both Taiwan-Local Crime Groups and Mainlander Crime Groups, plunging the underworld into chaos. During this period of upheaval, the Mainlander Crime Groups, better equipped to navigate the shifting economy, began to rise in prominence. Meanwhile, the Taiwan-Local Crime Groups faced internal struggles, grappling with unstable leadership and declining profits. Amid this uncertainty, bold and charismatic figures like Le-Pinguino began to emerge, representing a new generation of leaders poised to reshape the underworld.

Le-Pinguino is quite a figure, and his story begins with

one of the most powerful gang among Taiwan-Local Crime Groups: Wanfan-House.

Once a minor player in Wanhua District's crowded underworld, Wanfan-House rose to prominence under the leadership of Wan-Zi. Known for his sharp instincts and fearless strategies, Wan-Zi expanded the gang's revenue streams, earning Wanfan-House a reputation as the gang to join. However, as the tides of history shifted and the pressures of modern crime intensified, the gang found itself at a crossroads, setting the stage for an intense power struggle that would define its future.

As the Operation Clean Sweep hit the underworld as well as Wan-Zi's era drew to a close due to age, a new generation began to rise within Wanfan-House. Le-Pinguino, with his wealth, charisma, and bold ambitions, and TresUno, revered for his martial prowess and chivalrous reputation, formed a powerful alliance. Their ascent challenged the old guard, represented by Tao-Gone, and hinted at the upheaval to come.

In the aftermath of Operation Clean Sweep, Le-Pinguino forged an alliance among Local Taiwanese Gangs known as the Vertical Way Union. Operating like a partnership, each gang maintained its autonomy while uniting under Le-Pinguino's leadership. This move not only cemented his power within Wanfan-House but also reshaped the landscape of

organized crime in Taiwan.

Le-Pinguino eventually inherited the throne soon after Wan-Zi's death. However, rumors began to swirl that TresUno had poisoned Wan-Zi to hasten his own rise to power. Whether true or not, these whispers created a fissure in their bond. In a decisive and brutal move, Le-Pinguino issued a kill order against TresUno, plunging the gang into an internal chaos. TresUno vanished without a trace, and his loyal supporter, CaraLarga, was forced into hiding. Despite the turmoil, Le-Pinguino's grip on Wanfan-House remained firm. His strong personality and cunning leadership allowed him to navigate the crisis and re-establish control.

Le-Pinguino's story was anything but ordinary. Unlike most gang leaders, he wasn't born into hardship but into privilege. The only son of a wealthy family, he grew up pampered and reckless, accustomed to getting his way. As a teenager, his arrogance earned him plenty of enemies, but his towering physique often kept them at bay. That all changed after a brutal confrontation with a rival gang boss left him with stiff, unbending legs — a permanent injury that earned him the nickname "Le-Pinguino".

Apart from his ruthless character, Le-Pinguino holds a belief that defines his career — the desire to prove that local Taiwanese people possess qualities equal to, if not superior to, those who migrated to Taiwan from

mainland China in 1949. This belief resonates with a unique sentiment among some local Taiwanese, who feel that migrants from mainland China often have better opportunities and status due to their connections with the government. Le-Pinguino's drive for power stems from this belief, as he seeks to demonstrate that Wanfan-House is a stronger and more capable gang than any from the Mainlander Crime Groups. This shared belief is also why TresUno became such a strong ally — they both stood for the same vision.

Despite Le-Pinguino's ruthless reputation, his relationship with TresUno was a genuine friendship. Together, they supported each other, fought against the old guard, and reshaped the dynamics of the Taiwan-Local Crime Groups. Their bond once stood as one of the most celebrated tales of loyalty and transformation in the underworld. Yet power, by its very nature, is difficult to share. Whether Le-Pinguino betrayed TresUno to protect his vision or simply to preserve his own dominance is unclear to people — perhaps even to him.

Le-Pinguino's ambition, however, extends beyond crime. He is running for a seat in the national parliament, aiming to spread his influence far beyond the underworld. This move underscores his vision, which is no longer confined to Wanfan-House but encompasses broader aspirations. His influence even

extends to Twin Merging District, where his nephew, Fisty-Done, operates under his guidance.

With the powerful backing of Le-Pinguino, the DeLight-Street motorcycle crew reigns supreme, enforcing its own rules across the neighborhood. Parking is tightly controlled — there are no violations, only temporary stops allowed by their authority. Noise complaints are non-existent, as the crew dictates the local safety standards, and traffic bends to their will, re-routing wherever the crew decides to ride.

The crew's influence extends far beyond the streets. A coalition of motorcycle shops works closely with them, pooling their revenues and exerting sway over local elections. DeLight-Street's dominance is absolute, and their motorbikes are as iconic as their power. Their fleet includes everything from custom-styled Vespas and modified DIOs to Kawasaki B-125s, racing bikes, and bespoke heavy motorcycles. Each bike, sleek and cutting-edge, exudes personality and attitude. For locals, even the tire tracks left on the road are a signature of DeLight-Street's territory.

Fisty-Done, Le-Pinguino's ambitious nephew, idolizes his uncle and works tirelessly to make a name for himself. From a young age, he learned to socialize with adults, forming connections with neighborhood businesses and building his own network of influence. However, while Fisty-Done thrives on the crew's

reputation, it's clear that a single adult pulls the strings behind DeLight-Street's every move. This shadowy figure has never stepped into the public eye, adding an air of mystery to their operations.

The scale of KingHall is much smaller compared to DeLight-Street. It's a humble Daoist temple located in a township within Taipei County, quietly serving its community. KingHall participates in annual religious festivals and trains members of the Eight Generals. Tucked away in a typical residential area, the temple fulfills its spiritual duties while acting as a subtle yet enduring part of local life.

The Eight Generals are a traditional belief in Taiwan, representing eight gods tasked with capturing evil spirits. Many Daoist temples in Taiwan train ritual performers to reenact these exorcisms and ceremonies as part of their religious practices. Both C.T. and Meanhunt are members of the Eight Generals.

There is a reason why Daoist temples perform these ceremonies. Temples like KingHall are common throughout Taiwan and are often established in response to significant local events. For instance, some were built after homicides or natural disasters to ward off malevolent spirits and restore harmony. People believe that the Eight Generals can capture evil spirits and dispel dark energy lingering in the neighborhood.

KingHall is led by CaraLarga, once the trusted right-hand man of TresUno. Having left his turbulent past behind, he now dedicates himself to community service, striving to keep a low profile. Despite this, his history as a former gang member remains a source of fascination for local youths, who idolize him as a figure of myth and legend. This admiration sometimes stirs tension between the temple and DeLight-Street, though the rivalry is mostly fueled by baseless rumors. Though the younger generation harbors no deep grudges, and no real conflicts have ever emerged. Under CaraLarga's leadership, KingHall operates with a clear purpose. C.T. has been appointed to oversee the temple's day-to-day activities, while Meanhunt is widely regarded as his chosen successor. Together, they maintain KingHall's traditions and ensure its continued relevance in the evolving local culture.

The income source for KingHall remains a mystery. Some say that the primary revenue seems to come from a small arcade across the street, nicknamed DownTheDark, though it's hard to imagine an arcade as a major moneymaker. Despite its modest size, DownTheDark stands out for its unusually large selection of games — more than twice that of most arcades. Popular fighting games like *The King of Fighters* and *Street Fighter* draw in loyal players, while classics like *Tetris* attract skilled enthusiasts.

The only light in the arcade comes from the flickering glow of game screens, casting long, distorted shadows across the room. The air is heavy with a peculiar chemical odor, faint yet unmistakable — some whisper it's the smell of amphetamines. The owner, nicknamed The Limp, lost a foot to amputation and is often seen in KingHall, cracking sunflower seeds and chatting idly with CaraLarga.

One evening, Yoshiki saw The Limp sitting alone in the dimly lit arcade, his usual composure replaced by an air of quiet defeat. As he slumped into a chair, his cane clattered to the ground, and a syringe, rubber tubing, a spoon, and other paraphernalia spilled out of his pocket. For a moment, the room fell silent, players frozen mid-match, unsure how to respond. Yoshiki visits DownTheDark occasionally, not for the games, but to catch a glimpse of Soya at the counter. Though they've never spoken, just being near her feels worth the risk of entering KingHall's territory, where the air is always thick with tension.

Zenerate isn't involved with KingHall or any gang-related activities, but his brother's past casts a long shadow. Once the first leader of KingHall's Eight Generals, his brother remains a key figure in the temple's hierarchy and a trusted advisor. His seniority to C.T. and enduring bond with CaraLarga have inevitably tied Zenerate to this intricate web of

connections. Even now, his brother's opinions carry weight; every new Eight Generals member must first gain his approval. For example, it was his brother who recommended C.T. as the current leader of the Eight Generals, impressed by his strong moral code and belief in sincerity as the foundation of trust. Despite his influence, Zenerate's brother has been absent from the scene for some time, leaving Zenerate with little choice but to distance himself from these entanglements.

Each grade in the school is divided into 27 classes, numbered consecutively. Yoshiki and Zenerate belong to Class Eleven, one of these 27. What sets Class Eleven apart is its complete independence: no one in the class is affiliated with any gang. In fact, it's an exceptionally unique class, where no one has ties to any faction at all. In Taiwan, exams are often seen as a way to allocate limited resources by distinguishing levels of intelligence. The idea is that students deemed more capable receive greater resources, enabling them to contribute more to society and, in turn, benefit the community as a whole. While this system has its logic, it inevitably creates dissatisfaction among those who feel left behind, leading to potential instability.

To address this, middle schools have moved away from hierarchical systems, offering equal access to education for all students to raise general standards. However,

exams remain crucial at the next level, and some schools conduct assessments to sort students into different classes. For example, Restory Middle School administers an IQ test before enrollment and places students into classes based on the results. By grouping high-achieving students and assigning them the best teachers, the school aims to boost its reputation by sending more students to prestigious institutions.

Class Eleven is composed of students who scored high on the IQ test. However, even if the test accurately measures intelligence, high IQ alone doesn't guarantee academic success. Excelling in school requires more than just raw intellect — it demands a supportive learning environment, focus, and determination. Unfortunately, Class Eleven's academic performance fell far below expectations, leading the school to eventually discontinue assigning specialized teachers for gifted education.

Upon closer examination, it's evident that every student in Class Eleven possesses intelligence and strong independent thinking skills. Each of them is constantly calculating their next move, observing their surroundings, and adapting to circumstances. They are proactive in navigating their own lives and finding ways to work within or around the system. No one in this class passively follows the rules or waits for instructions; each student has a drive and a unique perspective, even if it doesn't align with traditional

academic success.

The students' diverse backgrounds, upbringings, and views on society shape their individuality. When they receive new information, their minds actively process and respond to it in distinctive ways. Each has their own logic, molded by personal experiences, which sets them apart.

No one in Class Eleven would ever join a gang and simply follow orders, nor would they blindly adhere to the established education system without question. Instead, they think critically, adapt creatively, and make independent decisions. It's this combination of individuality and autonomy that makes Class Eleven stand out as an unusually unique group.

Teacher Huang has never liked this class. Their unconventional approach to learning frustrates him to the point that he has even suggested some students transfer to another school, warning that staying in this class would only squander their potential. Zenerate doesn't care much for this math teacher either — he doesn't even bother taking out his textbook, instead tilting his head as he watches the blackboard where Teacher Huang writes out the principles of factorization, only to erase them moments later. Yoshiki, on the other hand, has already skimmed through the textbook. After grasping the basic concepts, he tunes out the rest of the lecture.

Some students in the class have already understood the

material and wait idly for something more challenging or unique to be introduced. Others have decided not to expend their mental energy just yet, instead doodling or scribbling unrelated thoughts into their notebooks.

Teacher Huang meticulously breaks down polynomials but never explains when or how these formulas might be applied in real life. His main priority is drilling correct answers, reducing mathematical principles into templates for standardized exams. While everyone in the room is ostensibly studying the same subject, at the same time, in the same space, their minds are processing the information in completely different ways.

> Zenerate, what is next?

Teacher Huang suddenly asks a question, and the entire class falls silent. Zenerate has no intention of answering and simply lets the moment linger.

> if you don't know, why don't you take out the textbook?

The same situation can lead to vastly different interpretations. To Teacher Huang, Zenerate's refusal to take out his textbook is nothing less than a challenge, but for Zenerate, it's an act of expression — a quiet rebellion against what he perceives as unfair treatment.

Teacher Huang's preferences are apparent: he is patient with students he considers "good" and openly scornful

toward those he deems unmotivated. He insists his judgments are objective, defining “good” and “bad” based on what he calls a “learning attitude.” In his view, refusing to bring out a textbook is the very definition of a poor attitude — objectively speaking. He doesn’t stop to question why a student might appear disengaged, whether it’s frustration, rebellion, or something deeper. To him, there’s no time, no ability, and no obligation to analyze such things.

Teacher Huang steps forward, issuing a direct challenge to Zenerate. As the one being confronted, Zenerate has several options. He could stand up, apologize, and start bringing out his textbook in the future — a compromise that would demand significant concession. Or, he could react explosively: flipping the table or throwing something to assert that this public confrontation has crossed a line.

Zenerate does neither. He stays exactly as he is, maintaining his posture and expression, letting silence absorb the challenge. It’s not a counterattack, but it’s also not a retreat — it’s a refusal to yield. His stance communicates that he doesn’t intend to bring out his textbook next time, either.

It works. Teacher Huang turns back to his lesson, the tension dissipates, and Zenerate continues to ignore the class. The conflict is temporarily resolved, and the standoff doesn’t escalate further.

In the classroom, each student interprets the moment

differently. Some see it as the teacher putting a troublemaker in his place. Others think Zenerate's attitude is disrespectful. Some feel relief that the situation didn't blow up, while a few secretly wish for a bigger showdown.

> why don't you take out the textbook?

Justous is imitating Teacher Huang from a moment ago.

> shut the fuck up, Justous.

> fuck, admit you have a problem with us and leave it at that, bitch.

Justous shows frustration to Teacher Huang.

> can that solves problem if he admits?

> ha, right, then we would fuck him up.

> fucking hate that math class.

Zoneli joins the conversation.

> you hate then you leave the class.

> shut your mouth, Justous, you stupid.

> you stupid.

Justous gives Zoneli a shove, and he shoves back — soon they're play-fighting.

Usually, at this time, Zenerate and Yoshiki would head to the small ledge behind the school to smoke. But in light of the bloody drama that just unfolded, they silently decide against it.

In the corridor, someone scrubs away traces of blood —

after all, it's the spot where someone's ear got sliced off. Students from various classes move back and forth, carrying buckets and brushes in a steady flow. Amid the activity, Yoshiki's gaze lingers on Soya from the neighboring class as she carries a bucket into her classroom to change the water.

Soya is one of the Seven Posh Gold, a close friend of Reali, and like her, she occasionally interacts with people from DeLight Street and KingHall. Yet, she remains quiet, exuding an understated charisma tinged with mystery. She is like the sky, like rain, like someone with a revenge story buried deep within—a myth that cried itself dry long ago.

> fuck, C.T. is coming.

The school enforces a strict hairstyle dress code: all boys must keep their hair cropped short, while girls must adhere to specific styles. Each month, a hair inspection takes place, and any boy who doesn't comply faces a humiliating punishment — having a patch shaved off the back of his head. For some students, this rule is just another challenge to defy. C.T. is one of them, refusing to follow the cropped-hair regulation and letting his hair grow long, parting it boldly down the middle.

One time, the disciplinary director decided to make an example of him. After publicly berating C.T., he prepared to shave off his long hair. But C.T. swatted the

director's hand away. The director tried again, razor in hand, but C.T. batted him away once more. The two were locked in a tense, back-and-forth standoff until the director finally backed down. Later that evening, as the director returned home, someone ambushed him at his doorstep, throwing a sack over his head and beating him severely. Afterward, C.T. made a habit of skipping school on inspection days, disappearing each month without a trace. The director, meanwhile, seemed content to look the other way.

C.T. has an undeniable presence. Once, a classmate was extorted outside of school and had a prized basketball card stolen. C.T. ventured alone into the extorter's territory, challenged them to a one-on-one fight, and came back victorious, card in hand. He has a knack for looking out for his Eight Generals crew, carefully observing each member's personality and offering timely support. But as a leader, he struggles with making big decisions. For example, when Han was caught badmouthing, Meanhunt suggested taking swift action to set an example internally and protect their standing with DeLight-Street. Yet C.T. hesitated, unable to make a move, leaving Tealand to eventually step in and mediate.

> hey, Zenerate, quick question — did you tell Tealand that Han's still spreading crap about how it's 'fun' to mess with Fisty-Done, even after we already worked

things out?.

> no.

> someone said you did.

Everyone behind C.T. wears a blank expression, their cold eyes fixed unflinchingly on Zenerate.

> if facts are just about what someone says, then why do we even need the police? we could just screw whoever we want as long as we say so.

Zenerate replies emotionlessly, C.T. turns and exchanges awkward to Kindaway.

> man, this is fucking crazy, Tealand and Meanhunt are still in the police station. Have you heard? Han has two broken ribs and doctor needs to sew his ear back, insane!

Kindaway is obviously quite, while Pongen also hides his voice.

> anyway, I will handle it, how is your brother?

> don't see him quite a while.

> right, he hasn't come back at all, that worries me, if there is anything he needs, just let me know, I will support him without a second hesitation.

Zenerate slightly nods.

> Zenerate, you know I always welcome you join me, your brother contributes KingHall a lot, I hope I can have more people like him.

C.T. gently pats Zenerate on the shoulder, then heads out with the others, with Kindaway trailing behind, his gaze lingering on Soya.

Behind the school stretches a vast expanse of abandoned fields, covering an area so large it could fit ten football fields. Egrets and silken birds occasionally land among the overgrown grass, their white feathers stark against the emptiness. These fields were only recently abandoned, yet no one seems to know what was once cultivated here. Some say the land is being prepared for sale and conversion into non-agricultural use. Others whisper that farming ceased when the crop distribution channels collapsed.

A small ledge runs along the school wall, where Zenerate and Yoshiki often recline after a long day of class, gazing out at the abandoned fields. The ledge has become their quiet refuge, a place to unwind, talk about nothing and everything, and share a cigarette. Whether it's something smoother or more affordable, it doesn't really matter. What matters is the time they spend together, puffing away their worries and letting the stillness of the fields fill the silence.

The friendship between Yoshiki and Zenerate was almost instant from the moment they met. On his first day in class, Yoshiki declared that he disliked everyone — everyone except Zenerate. Zenerate, in turn, once said, 'A true friend can shape your whole life. You don't need friends, but if you have one, it should be the best.'

Whenever someone sees Zenerate, they ask for Yoshiki, and whenever someone sees Yoshiki, they think of Zenerate. Their bond is an unspoken truth, an undeniable connection no one has ever dared to question.

> I envy you have such a powerful brother, he is really a good one.

> ha, I don't know whether he is good.

They briefly touch on the today's incident in school without delving into detail. Yoshiki knows well that Zenerate's brother always urges him to stay out of trouble, and for now, keeping a safe distance from the scene is all he needs to worry about.

Yoshiki has always thought of Zenerate's brother as a big deal — after all, even C.T. learned from him. There's no way someone like that could be insignificant. Not only was he the leader of the first generation of the Eight Generals in KingHall, but he also trained nearly every thief in the area. Whether it was breaking into houses, stealing motorcycles, or dismantling locks of all kinds, Zenerate's brother had mastered it all. Even Kindaway, one of the most skilled, was his apprentice. Over time, though, his brother realized that theft was a low-value skill with high risks. If he was going to take risks, he decided, it should be for higher rewards.

Where Zenerate's brother picked up these skills or who he was connected to remains a mystery. Some speculate

he had ties to gangs in the city, possibly through CaraLarga. These days, he rarely shows up in KingHall, but when he does, CaraLarga and the others treat him with undiminished respect.

Once, Yoshiki noticed a modified Type 90 pistol on the side of Zenerate's bed. When he opened a drawer, he found a row of bullets neatly lined up. Zenerate explained how the gun worked, describing in detail how the bullet fired, how the shell separated, and how it spiraled through the barrel. But despite all this, Zenerate's brother strictly forbade him from joining KingHall or getting involved in gang conflicts. His only advice for handling trouble was this: never compromise. "If you give in once," he warned, "you'll spend a lifetime giving in".

Zenerate's brother was clear about what he wanted for him — a future built on honest work. He even defined what he meant by "honest": jobs like glass installation or auto repair. One thing was certain — gang life wasn't part of the plan.

> if you are gonna die tomorrow, what you would do today.

> hmmm.

> what?

> you always throw strange questions.

> always?

> yeah, odd questions.

> tell me how odd.

> once you said, 'People love making themselves the main character of every story. That's why most myths assume humans are the big deal. Take humans out of the story, and everything would feel boring. In the end, myths aren't really about gods or legends — they're about people wanting the spotlight'.

> hmmm.

> then you asked me, can we not take ourselves as main one in the story? what the hell, who comes up with so many weird questions like that?

> ha, fuck.

> another time, you asked, a smile from a dog is cute, while a smile from a retard is pathetic, why.

> I forgot I asked this, but I think that's a good question, so what did you answer?

> I didn't, no idea how to answer.

> ha.

> didn't cross such a crazy question in my mind, if you give me more time to think, I might still don't know what I can say.

> ha.

> what makes you think that is good question?

> no idea, if a dog has six-year-old human intelligence, we would think that is pretty smart, but if an adult only has six year old human intelligence, we react in negative way.

> alright.

> so?
> what?
> if you would die tomorrow, what you would do today?
> easy, try not to die tomorrow.
> holly fuck.
> shouldn't be like this? or what would you do.
> try not to regret tomorrow.
> shut the fuck up.
> so try to finish important thing, but I don't know
what is the important thing for me at this moment.

The sky and fields lie interwoven, yet remain wholly disconnected. Gazing up at the sky, there's no reflection of oneself, no glimpse of the future — only the restless flights of birds and clouds shifting shape in the wind. Nothing. The earth creates questions; the sky offers silence. Perhaps heaven merely shelters all living things from the vastness of the universe, never intending to intervene, lacking even the power to do so.

> you don't know yours, I know mine.
> what?
> try to get back Lixy.
> again?
> right, again.

Once, during a school festival, the administration invited seven girls to serve as greeters. Dressed in identical outfits, each girl was said to embody a unique

aspect of beauty, earning them the nickname “The Seven Posh Gold.” Among them was Zenerate’s girlfriend, Lixy. After the festival, Lixy became close friends with Soya and Reali. Known for her gentle and graceful demeanor, Lixy speaks with a calm confidence and a sense of conviction. She and Zenerate have had an on-again off-again relationship for quite some time. Despite their connection, even Zenerate’s closest friend, Yoshiki, barely exchanges words with her — two or three words between them feel like a stretch. When they cross paths without Zenerate around, they might not even acknowledge each other.

When lying back, the two boys let the sky gaze down upon them, silently facing the universe.

Midway through his cigarette, Zenerate flips it around and places the lit end to his mouth. Yoshiki, startled, sits up to watch, convinced for a moment that Zenerate is about to extinguish it with his tongue. But no — after a breath, smoke streams lazily from the cigarette’s filter, curling upward into the air.

> what the hell is this?

> what do you mean what the hell, just smoke, ha.

> no shit, how did you do that?

Yoshiki picks up his own cigarette, watching its burning tip before glancing at Zenerate’s amused smile.

> don’t try at all, don’t try, ha.

He tries it anyway — flipping the cigarette around,

watching as white smoke streams softly from the filter. Finding it strangely amusing, he does it again, releasing even more wisps into the air. Soon, the entire scene — sky and field alike — is shrouded in a hazy mist, the two friends fading into the drifting clouds of smoke, their futures as obscured as the view before them.

Operation Clean Sweep reshaped the dynamics of Taiwan-Local Crime Groups, fostering a mix of cooperation and rivalry while introducing a hierarchical system for internal management. Ironically, however, the operation was primarily aimed at Mainlander Crime Groups, with a particular focus on the most powerful mafia in Taiwan's history: the Peace Society.

Rumor has it that Taiwan's intelligence agency trained the Peace Society's boss, General Chen, to assassinate a secret double agent in the U.S. General Chen brought along Xiaolin, his top assassin, and the mission was a success. However, upon their return, both were arrested by border guards. Meanwhile, a murder committed on American soil is, without question, a serious matter. U.S. law enforcement eventually traced the crime back to Taiwan and demanded the extradition of the suspects. Taiwan, however, responded that it was in the midst of an extensive anti-gang crackdown under Operation Clean Sweep, which intended to purge all gang activity and ensure public safety. Conveniently, the suspects were on the Operation Clean Sweep list, currently serving time in prison and thus unavailable for extradition.

Since this was a full-scale sweep, the government couldn't single out General Chen and Xiaolin without

also arresting other gang leaders. As a result, all major gang heads across Taiwan were rounded up and incarcerated without trial. Most of those imprisoned were members of the Peace Society. In prison, this environment prompted the Taiwan-Local Crime Groups to unite and form an alliance, creating a shared need to band together.

General Chen was no ordinary man. He understood that as long as his mission was ongoing, the government wouldn't eliminate him — they'd protect him. Using this advantage, he significantly strengthened the Peace Society's influence and power before the mission.

Upon his return, being arrested, rumors began circulating again: the government allegedly planned to silence both General Chen and Xiaolin by having them killed in prison. General Chen, however, had prepared for such a scenario. He secretly recorded his mission briefing with the intelligence agency and entrusted the tape to another Peace Society member, Que Wolf. Chen instructed Que Wolf to flee to San Francisco and deliver the tape to the FBI if anything happened to him. This move effectively protected Chen, ensuring his survival.

After years behind bars, General Chen was eventually released. In the subsequent era of political corruption entwined with organized crime, the Peace Society ascended to unprecedented power, cementing its

dominance in Taiwan's underworld.

The Peace Society operates through seven key divisions, with the Taipei Division being the wealthiest and most influential. It plays a crucial role in Taiwan's "black-gold politics" — a fusion of political corruption and organized crime — by securing lucrative public infrastructure contracts. The division's leader, Fu Zongli, known as "For Profit," stands out as the only division head who is not from the post-1949 Nationalist migrant background but instead hails from the island's long-established local population.

Early in his career, For Profit gained a reputation for his efficiency in debt collection under the mentorship of Fat Yan. When the Peace Society expanded from five divisions to seven, Fat Yan promoted his protégé to division leader. After Operation Clean Sweep, when gangsters were released from prison, Fat Yan died under mysterious circumstances, reportedly falling from a building. Taking the reins of the Taipei Division, For Profit introduced a revolutionary shift: abandoning traditional loan-sharking activities to focus exclusively on government construction contracts. This pioneering strategy transformed Taipei Division into one of the most iconic brands in Taiwan's mafia world, cementing For Profit's reputation as a trailblazer.

Le-Pinguino, frustrated by For Profit's success and

seeing him as rival. While struggling to obtain any government contracts, he decided to run for office to advance his business interests.

For Profit has twin sons, Qianyou and Qiantang, known at Restory Middle School as the Fortune Brothers. Though they keep a low profile, everyone knows their father is no ordinary man, and it doesn't take long for them to establish a quiet but undeniable influence. With the Taipean Division's immense wealth and reach, the Fortune Brothers have little interest in claiming territory in their small-town middle school, unlike factions such as KingHall or DeLight-Street. Yet, their presence commands respect wherever they go.

For Profit maintains a distant, almost indifferent relationship with his sons. Their interactions rarely go beyond polite greetings. While the boys revere their father in a quiet way, For Profit keeps them at arm's length, preferring the company of a solitary figure named Lieburg.

Lieburg is something of an anomaly at Restory Middle School — a student repeating grade many years, age unclear, bad skin, a soft-spoken manner, and limited popularity. He initially had no connections to any gang. One day, a student nicknamed Oldhead — feeling smug due to his classmate connection with Tealand — decided to beat up Lieburg with no proper reason.

With Tealand watching from the sidelines, Oldhead and his friends pinned Lieburg down, punching him in the face until one of his teeth was knocked out. Smirking, Oldhead ordered him to pick up the tooth and put it back, and when Lieburg, trembling, complied, they beat him even harder. Oldhead then warned him that every time he saw Lieburg at school, he would beat him up again.

For a while, Lieburg heeded the warning, eventually stopping school entirely and finding work with local construction crews, where, he happened to meet members of the Taipean Division. Recognizing his potential, they introduced him to For Profit. One year after the incident, Lieburg returned to school and found Oldhead. This time, with Tealand once again observing from the sidelines, Lieburg turned the tables — punching Oldhead until his teeth shattered. Then, with cold precision, Lieburg ordered Oldhead to crawl across the ground and collect his shattered teeth. Trembling, Oldhead complied, only to be forced to swallow them. Lieburg struck him again, breaking more teeth, and repeated the process — shatter, gather, swallow.

As the saying goes, "revenge is best served with patience". One year, two boys, two rounds — one calmly watches as the other crawls across the ground, desperately searching for broken teeth.

Han lives alone with his grandmother, who, upon seeing her grandson so severely beaten, can only cry helplessly. C.T. proposed that everyone contribute money to help cover Han's medical expenses, while Meanhunt argued for a stronger course of action: hiring a lawyer to draft a lawsuit against Fisty-Done and using it to pressure DeLight-Street for compensation. The strong support for Meanhunt's proposal left C.T. uncertain and unable to commit to a course of action. As KingHall deliberated, the matter dragged on without resolution.

Meanwhile, Fisty-Done's side reached out, offering to negotiate at DownTheDark, on the condition that the Fortune Brothers act as mediators. C.T. agreed to the location, but every attempt to set a meeting time ended in conflict. Fisty-Done kept stalling with excuses, accusing C.T. of exploiting the "territory advantage" by proposing times that supposedly favored KingHall. Meanhunt argued that the claim was absurd since no particular time could reasonably give KingHall an advantage, especially since the meeting location was DeLight-Street's suggestion in the first place. He saw this as proof that Fisty-Done had no intention to negotiate.

With Fisty-Done's continued stalling and C.T.'s hesitations, the negotiation process devolved into

endless delays and increasing frustration on both sides.
> so this is the actual situation that I interpret based on Pongen version.

Four close friends step into a building worn with age, while Zonelimi chats casually. The old residential complex feels desolate, its courtyard perpetually shrouded in shadow. Many of the apartments seem vacant, lending the place an air of abandonment, almost like a ruin. Tiles have peeled away in patches, the walls are etched with uneven cracks, and the stairwell is damp, echoing with the rhythmic drip of water from an unseen source.

> then I asked what's next, Pongen said Fisty-Done now requests a last-minute negotiation meeting, in case KingHall play tricky.

A dim light hangs haphazardly above the concrete floor, barely piercing the shadows of the corridor. A few units in the apartment complex have their metal gates closed, but the inner doors are left ajar, allowing glimpses of flickering TV screens to spill out, adding an eerie atmosphere to the hallway. As they pass one unit, Yoshiki notices a samurai sword mounted on the wall, with a large blue dragon totem displayed above it.

> if that is last-minute meeting, how Fortune Brothers could join?

> no idea.

> and it is odd that Fortune Brothers want to participate this, they never involve anything like this,

especially this is between KingHall and DeLight-Street.
> so KingHall agree?

> Meanhunt openly disagrees, it is not good for KingHall if everything goes as DeLight-Street say, but you know C.T., he has no idea what to do.

Zonelimi opens the door of a billiard club.

The door is made of clear glass, offering an unobstructed view of the polished interior — a strikingly modern oasis within this strange, dilapidated building, the only sign of life in an otherwise worn-out space. Bright white lights illuminate the room, highlighting wood paneling paired with synthetic materials in black, brown, and green tones. The air is clean and smoke-free, with the hum of air conditioning lending an air of meticulous order.

Billiard tables are arranged in neat rows, each equipped with an overhead light that signals its use when turned on — rates range from forty to sixty dollars an hour. Sturdy columns dot the hall, each adorned with cue racks where players can grab sticks as needed. Chairs surround every table, creating semi-private zones where players focus on their game without interference. The layout ensures strangers rarely pass through others' spaces unless retrieving equipment, adding to the club's atmosphere of quiet precision and exclusivity.

> those nasty gangsters, fuck.

> you don't manipulate others, others manipulate you,

expand your resources, expand your interests.

Around here, billiards carries an unusual stigma: it's seen as a sport for "bad" students. The reasoning seems simple enough — the "good" students are not here, the studious ones. Because they stay away, the scene is left to those with a rougher reputation, reinforcing the stereotype. The other reason, unfortunately, Billiard clubs do attract a rowdier crowd, and occasional conflicts erupt, lending credence to the idea that these places aren't for the well-behaved.

Sport itself is fine. The real issue is that students get boxed into rigid labels — either "good" or "bad" — with little thought given to those who don't neatly fit into either category. Sport is just the victim of the categorization system.

> I go opening the table.

Justous never plays, but always joins, and the only thing he would do, is opening table for his good friends.

> fuck, Chancist is here.

> huh, forget about it, you always worry too much, Zonelimi.

More than twelve people are gathered in the area where Chancist is playing. Zonelimi looks a bit concerned, Justous simply shakes his head dismissively, and Zenerate gives a nonchalant shrug. Meanwhile, Yoshiki pulls cue sticks from the rack one by one, inspecting each to check if it's straight enough.

> good students never need to worry about the street

right? how to be good students?

> study hard, I guess.

> exactly, Zenerate, you see, bad students are not necessary being bad as a person, bad students are bad because of poor future, right? because we don't study good, we might have trouble to find a good job in the future, no stable job, no stable income, so we are bad. This is why they use academic performance to decide good or bad students.

> maybe.

Zenerate looks toward Chancist, as if calculating something in his mind.

> frankly speaking, Delight-Street are deliberately messing with KingHall, no doubt about it. Everyone knows Han has issues, he always says something stupid, but no one ever takes it seriously. He once said Fortune Brothers' family was involved in some corruption case, fucking wide, though I've never seen any reaction from Fortune Brothers.

> so that's why I said, leave it alone.

The overhead light is on, means it starts counting rate.

> fuck, there is no proper stick.

The three of them quickly scan the club and see only one rack with available cue sticks — unfortunately, it's right where Chancist is. Yoshiki doesn't hesitate and walks toward it.

Chancist's jacket catches the eye immediately, adorned with a small, intricate silver charm that elevates the

ordinary school uniform into something effortlessly stylish. He's replaced the standard white shirt with a deep black one, adding a bold, refined edge to his look. His presence is magnetic — an understated confidence that makes it hard not to notice him.

As Yoshiki walks past Chancist, the air subtly shifts. Conversations fade, and an unspoken tension fills the space, as though the room itself is holding its breath. Unfazed, Yoshiki inspects two cue sticks nearby. They're not perfectly straight, but they're a marked improvement over the earlier ones. Satisfied, he turns to leave, his movements quiet but deliberate, a stark contrast to the charged atmosphere Chancist leaves in his wake.

> yo, the fuck you think you doing.

Chancist suddenly says with a bit warning tone.

> what?

> you take all the sticks, then what about us?

> how about, using the sticks currently on your hands, that could be a good idea.

> I don't want to just use the stick on my hand, I also want to use the one on your hand, bitch.

> you have been using the one on your hand, since when you also want to use the one on my hand?

> now.

> those are not straight, I don't think you want, I will leave it if you want, and I will see how you are gonna use those bent sticks.

> shut the fuck up, bitch, you talk so weird, when I can find a reason to beat you up.

Chancist warns with calm tone, but it is enough to hold Yoshiki without moving.

> alright I hate to talk to weak, you want to take it, you win first.

Chancist stands up, his people start organizing the balls on the table, preparing game for him.

> alright, so use the sticks on my hand?

> wow, fuck you, no problem, you bitch ass, I am gonna use it.

Yoshiki can't jump, can't run, he is never good at any sport, basketball or billiard.

> the fuck you are doing here, Zenerate.

Zenerate joins his good friend, doesn't leave him drying here alone.

> just watch how you play, what else I can do.

> what do you mean just watch, join or leave, why I feel this is deja vu, like someone always is just watching, ha ha.

Chancist exchanges laugh with his people, like they are mocking someone else not here.

> no problem, Yoshiki, let me do it.

> hold, we just have agreed, I play with him, alright, it's fine, you are watching.

Chancist asks the stick from Yoshiki.

> yo, this stick is serious bent, bitch, alright, let me open the shit.

Chancist smiles, moves the sticks in a powerful way, two balls fall into baskets.

> wow, is that good luck or good ability, huh?

Chancist quick calculates path, aims, moves the stick, another ball goes into basket.

> yo, this stick is the worst, but I still make it, guess I am too good, ha ha.

Yoshiki and Zenerate quietly watch Chancist solo show, one ball after another with ease. Finally, he slips up, leaving the cue ball pressed against the rail. Yoshiki takes his turn, carefully lining up the shot — but the ball doesn't go in. The table passes back to Chancist, who smoothly sinks the next shot without missing again, taking it all the way down to the final nine-ball.

> yo, if I don't miss this one, I will win, is that unfair, huh? how about this, I let you play now, if you make it, you take the sticks, if no, my turn, I make it, you leave without sticks, I miss, your turn again, cool?

> sure.

The nine-ball sits near one end of the table, while the cue ball rests against the opposite. Yoshiki considers a tricky bank shot to sink the nine. He carefully sets up his cue, aiming for a while before finally making his move. The cue ball strikes, sending the nine-ball rebounding toward the corner pocket. It looks like it's going in — only to stop, hanging frustratingly at the edge.

> holly, wow, you almost make it.

Chancist smiles and sinks the final ball with effortless ease.

> you bet, you take the consequence, didn't I bully you huh?

Zenerate pats Yoshiki on the shoulder, then places sticks back in the rack. They now need to wait for other available sticks.

Chancist leans back into his seat, casually wrapping an arm around a strikingly beautiful girl beside him. His grin radiates confidence — a blend of pride in his athletic physique, an almost comical belief in the superiority of his own genes, and the satisfaction of a recent gambling win. The girl, however, remains icy and reserved, her aloofness only amplifying her allure. She carries the air of a high-maintenance beauty, offering the faintest, carefully rationed smiles that feel more like rewards than expressions of joy.

DeLight-Street always seems to have stunning, enigmatic girls accompanying them — many of whom are from different schools. The sight of these girls with DeLight-Street members, unsurprisingly, often sparks jealous confrontations with gangs from other territories. Yet, the more confrontations arise, the more their notorious reputation grows: bold, brash, and utterly dominant in the rough-and-tumble world they inhabit.

Chancist's demeanor exudes a message that is

effortlessly decoded by onlookers. Sounds of victory travel through the ears, while visual cues pass through the eyes, triggering a cascade of signals processed by the brain. For someone grappling with the sting of a game loss, these inputs intertwine with existing emotions — perhaps a flash of frustration, a reluctant acknowledgment of Chancist's physical dominance, or a quiet resignation devoid of anger or sorrow. Like a finely tuned mechanism, Yoshiki and Zenerate each process the scene in their own way. Their responses, shaped by their inner calculations, remain composed; they walk away calmly, leaving no trace of frustration or suppressed emotions behind.

The billiard club plays a few dance tracks, upbeat tunes like *All That She Wants*, *Scatman*, or *Coco Jamboo*. Naturally, no one understands the English lyrics. Watching Justous bob his head and hum off-key, Zonelimi starts mimicking him, sparking a round of laughter from everyone.

> what the hell language you are singing?

> shut you bitch mouth.

Zonelimi keeps laughing, Justous feels awkward, gives a sudden punch to Zonelimi. This punch is not small, Zonelimi changes expression.

> what is this, you wanna fight?

Zonelimi picks up the cola can on the table.

> let's go out, I am gonna use this can to tear your face,

fuck you.

Justous steps forward.

> I can easily dig out your eyes by my bare hand.

> alright, fuck face, let's go out.

Zenerate just shakes head and laugh.

> two idiots.

Just a few moment, Zonelimi and Justous both bust out laughing.

> saying what go out, huh, you are afraid of making a mess here and getting scold by owner right?

> shut the fuck up, see how scare you were.

> fuck you.

> fuck you.

The two start play-fighting.

Yoshiki's gaze drifts over to Chancist's table, where Soya has somehow appeared without him noticing. The original girl is left ignored to the side, while Chancist seems to be inviting Soya to take a seat. She stands there with that mysterious, icy expression, utterly unmoved by his invitation.

> Zenerate, why did you tell Tealand that Han's still spreading crap about Fisty-Done.

Snapping back to attention, Yoshiki notices a crowd gathering around the billiard table, blocking the light from the overhead lamp.

> this is why I always say, Zenerate and his brother are the source of disorder. They intervene KingHall, cause

unstable situation, if we don't fix it, no one can feel safe. We kindly ask Zenerate to join, he doesn't want, now he is spreading untruth story out there, what we can do?

Someone sits on the billiard table, another shoves Zonelimi aside, but what grabs everyone's attention is a tattooed hand, inked with eastern religious symbols, sliding through the crowd and slapping down onto the table.

> as I say, Han's case, we need to reclaim justice from DeLight-Street, also from Zenerate.

Zenerate might be calculating something in his mind — expressionless, unresponsive, staring straight at Meanhunt. The air feels taut, tense, as if everyone is being tortured here, an invisible fire searing through them all.

> get back what, we don't own you.

Justous confronts Meanhunt. Zonelimi steps between two.

> Meanhunt, we didn't say anything, we can have a face to face with Tealand, get this straight.

> Zonelimi, this is none of your business, hm, you should shut your mouth, see, the perpetrator is standing there, no word, why, because you don't let him talk.

> get the fuck out of here.

Zenerate shoves people back from the table. Seeing no reaction, Meanhunt picks up the cue ball and lets it

drop to the floor with a heavy thud, echoing through the room.

> I don't touch you, not because I couldn't touch you, instead, I am giving you a chance.

Meanhunt waves his tattooed hand, a signal that sets every KingHall members nodding in agreement. The air feels like it's laced with gasoline, waiting for the smallest spark to ignite the whole scene. Zenerate stands firm, showing no sign of backing down — retreat isn't an option right now. But who knows what calculations run through his mind or whether he's wavering, uncertain of the next move.

> what the fuck you say, huh, what the fuck is this!!

A commotion rises from Chancist's table, drawing everyone's attention. They see Chancist grabbing Kindaway by the collar, with Soya standing nearby, caught between the two as if in some jealous quarrel. C.T. steps in, trying to pull them apart, his efforts only heightening the tension.

> hey, Chancist, calm down, what the fuck!

> what did you say to her? what did you say?

Kindaway stays silent. He's too gentle, even when faced with Chancist. He holds his composure, though a hint of a tear begins to well up in his eyes.

> Chancist, if you don't calm down, how we are going to talk with Fisty-Done later.

This changes dynamic within Billiard club, Meanhunt

waves his crew toward Chancist.

> Zenerate, I think we should go.

Zonelimi immediately whispers a warning to Zenerate.

> Yoshiki, what's matter with you. Meanhunt might actually start something, and you're just standing there like it's none of your business — this is not you.

Justous's expression is stern, a mix of reproach and warning. Yoshiki swallows, glancing over at Zenerate.

> it's ok, let's go.

Zenerate pats Yoshiki's chest, four of them are ready to move.

> Chancist, again, calm down.

Chancist's side now are crowded with students, gangsters, fighting machines, feeling the light above table is vibrating and shaking.

> calm down your ass, C.T., fuck you!

A sudden shout pierces the air, sharp and disorienting. People glance around, unsure of its source — until Fisty-Done bursts through the door, flanked by a group brandishing bats. The club falls silent in stunned disbelief, with C.T. the most visibly shaken, his face frozen in utter shock.

The stillness shatters as chaos engulfs the billiard club. Tension erupts like a lit fuse, and the two factions collide with unrestrained fury. Bats swing wildly, fists fly in all directions, and tables topple amidst the frenzy. The sounds of wood cracking, glass breaking, and shouted curses fill the room. No one cares if their

blows land on friend or foe — only that they hit someone, anyone, in the pandemonium.

Zenerate leads Yoshiki leaving, Meanhunt surprisingly blocks the way.

> where you wanna go?

> are you crazy?

A surge of energy propels Justous forward as he shoves past Meanhunt, while Zenerate pushes Yoshiki off to the exist.

> leave!

Yoshiki catches sight of a door in the corner of his eye and dashes toward it, assuming at least someone would follow. But when he glances back, all three of his friends are still inside. Hesitating for a beat, he opens the door — and finds himself face-to-face not with a stranger, but someone all too familiar. A police officer stands there in a sports jacket over a cheap shirt and slacks. When he plants his hands on his waist, the jacket pulls back to reveal a worn fake leather belt beneath.

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