Volume 14 Chapter 2 Part 1

Before long, the flat, even ground gave way to a dense thicket of trees.

And just like that, I reminisced about the island from last year’s exam as I entered the forest.

I hadn’t really noticed it last year because I had been moving together with my classmates, but it wasn’t exactly easy to make it through the forest like this. Unsurprisingly, it was difficult to keep moving in a straight line, and getting a proper foothold on the forest floor was much more challenging than expected. The presence of such a huge harbor seemed to indicate that the island hadn’t always been uninhabited, but even so, that very well could’ve been something of the distant past.

From time to time, I would spot gigantic webs stretched between the trees, presumably spun by spiders several centimeters in size. Students who were afraid of insects would definitely have a hellish journey awaiting them. It reminded me of the wildlife advisory notice that had been included in our manuals.

It was impossible to go to your destination by traveling in a simple straight line, but on the other hand, taking a detour would cause you to lose all sense of direction, no questions asked. If you didn’t have some sort of tool to help you find your way, it’d be difficult to reach your designated area. The only reason the trip wasn’t already down-right impossible was due to the tablet I was holding right now.

While on the island, being able to confirm your own location at any time would be an indispensable asset.

As long as you moved with your GPS in hand, the path ahead would always be open to you.

Although, even without the tablet, the probability of getting lost during this first interval was quite low.

I could see several groups in front of me fumbling about as they made the trek forward.

And since I could also hear voices talking behind me, it seemed reasonable to think that essentially everyone nearby was taking the same route to this first destination. So as long as you followed after the students in the lead, the risks of injury or running into a swarm of insects or something would go down accordingly.

Few groups would have the courage to recklessly plunge their way into an unexplored forest right off the bat.

Those who had given up on the first area’s Early Bird Bonus were simply moving along as though they were in the middle of a field trip.

After a while, I caught sight of Haruka, Airi, and Akito, who had stopped to look at their tablets together. From the look of it, they were talking amongst themselves as they confirmed their surroundings.

As I began to draw closer, I could hear them exchange views with each other about their next designated area.

“You guys talking about what to do next?”

I called out to insert myself into their conversation, to which the three of them nodded their heads all at once.

“Our first area was D8, so like, we’re done already, yeah?”

The edge of area D8 came not too long after stepping foot into the forest, so it seems they had already managed to earn their points earlier. I didn’t really feel the need to ask about how many they had earned, since it was nearly guaranteed to be only the three-point Arrival Bonus.

“It’s pretty hot, and there isn’t any shade out on the beach, so we came here to speculate about the next area.”

As a whole, you’d certainly be better off trying to account for where the next designated area might appear at.

“What area do you have, Kiyotaka?”

“D7; One cell north from here.”

“That so? A buncha students have already gone up ahead, but, well, one point is one point I guess.”

“If we had the same Table, we could have traveled together…”

Airi muttered to herself quietly, seemingly disappointed.

Even though we were split up into different groups, this exam still had a surprising variety of ways for students to work with each other.

There were even several rules that facilitated this, such as the ability to share food or lend and borrow equipment to each other. Plus, if two groups had the same Table, they’d essentially have the same destination, so it would definitely be easy for them to stick together.

Of course, there were downsides to this as well. The more groups there were working together, the more difficult it’d be for them to keep pace with one another. Furthermore, each group would have their own opinions and goals, inevitably leading to increased competition for Task participation. This could easily become a major source of conflict if the groups didn’t come up with some sort of contingency plan in case there was only one more space left for a Task.

In this particular case, you could say that it was fortunate that we didn’t have the same Table. It was absolutely critical that I avoid working together with people that might hold me back, so this had effectively spared me the trouble of having to turn them down.

“There are twelve Tables, so the odds weren’t great from the start. In any case, for now I think I should get to my designated area sooner rather than later.”

“Yeah. We’ve gotta get moving to our next area sometime soon anyway, so go ahead.”

“It kinda sucks though. I hope we can meet up again somewhere when we’ve all got more time to spare.”

Haruka bid me farewell with Airi waving goodbye from behind her. And with that, I turned my back to the three of them and continued my journey to area D7.

After about 30 more minutes of walking, I finally arrived at my first designated area, causing my watch to sound off a few times.

I took a look at the notification on the watch, which said that I had been given an Arrival Bonus of one point.

I also noticed that I was given the option to adjust the notification volume, but I chose to leave it as-is for now. Just to make sure everything was working properly, I took out my tablet and found a matching record for the bonus in the point transaction history.

Since each area didn’t seem all that big when viewed on the map, it almost felt like you’d always find yourself running into other students. But once you were actually out on the island, it gave off a completely different impression.

Even if there really were students scattered around you, it’d be difficult to catch sight of them because of all the trees.

Although I couldn’t see anyone around right now, I felt fairly certain that a good number of students were in the area somewhere.

In which case, they had probably gone in deeper, opting to move closer to the area’s center to make it easier to head out to the next designated area and gather information.

I searched for a clearing in the forest with this assumption in mind, and before long, my field of vision suddenly opened up.

Sure enough, a large number of students had gathered together in the same place. The race to the next designated area would be a competition between students of all school years, so it’s understandable that they’d look to raise their chances of winning, even if only slightly. Furthermore, the only way to find out who had the same Table as you was to come and take a look first-hand.

By going through this process a few times, you could get a rough idea of who your direct rivals were.

I took a quick headcount, for a total of 29 people present, myself included. As far as I could tell, it felt safe to assume that there were more students elsewhere in the area.

“Good morning to you, Ayanokōji-senpai.”

As I took note of the names and faces of everyone present, a female student noticed my presence and approached with a greeting: Nanase Tsubasa of Class 1-D. Her fellow group members, Amasawa and Hōsen, were nowhere to be seen, prompting me to wonder if they were out exploring nearby or had come up with a strategy of some sort and left the area already.

“What happened to the other two? Aren’t groups supposed to stick together for the most part? Seems better to do it that way to me at least. Especially at first.”

I put forward a question, interested in seeing how she would respond.

“They said they’d scout out the area and then we all split up. So I decided to come check how many other groups were here.”

Apparently, she had chosen to do the same thing that I had.

Since I had arrived late, she probably had a better grasp of the competition than I did.

There were still many things I didn’t know about Nanase. For the time being, I felt pretty confident that nothing good would come out of lingering around here any more than necessary.

“I think I’m going to leave. It can’t hurt to take a look around.”

“Indeed! You’re all alone, so please be careful Senpai. Goodbye, then.”

She readily set me loose and walked over to where a cluster of first-year students had gathered.

With my brief exchange with Nanase finished, I left. After walking for a bit, I found a place to sit, set down my backpack, and took out my tablet. I wanted to avoid wasting energy if at all possible.

In total, it had taken me about 50 minutes to reach the designated area. Since there was a break, the next area would be announced in slightly over 3 hours. Tasks, on the other hand, would start showing up very soon.

I patiently watched the clock; Waiting until it was finally 10:00 AM.

And then, I promptly began to comb through the locations, details, and rewards of the various Tasks that popped up on the map.

I’d have to decide between waiting for the next designated area and trying to go for a Task based on what I found.

To start out, there were a total of 14 different Tasks. One of which had appeared in the upper left corner of area D7, the area I was currently in. This was by far the closest. I could see several of the students within my field of vision immediately head off toward the northwest, probably intending to check out the details of the Task as they walked.

The Task in question was called ‘Fire Starter’. 5 points would be awarded to the first group that managed to start a fire using a specially-provided tool. There was no reward for second place or below.

Another Task, albeit slightly farther away, had appeared in the central part of area E7 called ‘English Test’. It had a participation limit of two people per group, with first-place receiving 5 points, second place 3 points, and third place 1 point.

More students seemed to be headed that way than for the Fire Starter Task.

Starting a fire wasn’t going to be easy, especially for anyone who hadn’t actually done so before. Rather than trying to tackle it, it made far more sense to try their hand at English that they were already familiar with.

There was also a ‘Geography Test’ task in area D8, but only one group went in that direction.

The reason that there was such a difference between this Task and the English Test could be primarily attributed to the area in which it had appeared.

Area D8 had a large number of students with another Table. And even though it was only one cell to the south, it would still take time to get there. You’d hardly have a chance of beating the students who were already close by.

While there was a 60-minute registration deadline, it would probably hit max capacity long before that.

Heading toward the Task at area C6 was yet another option, albeit the furthest away of those I had considered so far.

It was called ‘Grip Strength Measurement’, and seemed to be split up based on gender. Furthermore, it had a longer registration deadline of 120 minutes.

It seemed like a perfectly reasonable option, but I had to keep in mind that those who weren’t able to register for the Fire Starter Task would probably choose to head over to it instead. Plus, if the next designated area appeared off to the east, I’d have to travel a considerable distance from C6 to get there.

Speaking of distance, the furthest of the 14 Tasks was all the way in area G3, a Task called ‘Trivia Test’. It was a high-value Task that one person from each group could participate in, where first place would be awarded with 10 points. Even though the registration deadline was 180 minutes, there was still a chance that you’d run out of time before you could get there. And, if you went to G3, there was a high probability that you’d have to give up on reaching your next designated area, so you couldn’t make the journey without giving it a lot of thought first.

However, if everything went smoothly, you could effortlessly earn 10 points with this Task alone.

“What an interesting exam.”

In a sense, we were free to choose whatever option we wanted.

There were a full three hours until the next designated area would be announced. I got up from where I was sitting, having ultimately decided to head for the Grip Strength Measurement Task in area C6. The students who had gone to see if they could participate in the Fire Starter Task would inevitably waste a little time, so this was my chance to steal a march on them.

As I walked, I began to carefully look over each of the Tasks I didn’t plan on participating in, all for the sake of memorizing everything about the different locations and types of Tasks that might appear.