Volume 14 Chapter 3 Part 1

The designated area announced at 9:00 AM was area E6.

I arrived a bit slower than I had for the last area, as I received a 5-point reward notification for coming in second place.

And at 1:00 PM, after the two-hour break, the third designated area was area F7.

Even though I started a bit off to the southwest, my success streak continued, racking up an additional 5 points for another second-place finish.

Most of the Tasks that showed up along the way required at least two people to participate. I felt pretty sure that a fair number of students went to them too, something I was grateful for as someone who moved alone.

I had gotten 23 points so far today, for a total of 26 when combined with the 3 I earned yesterday.

While this was certainly good progress, a group of three would have at least 18 points as long as they had been steadily piling up Arrival Bonuses. Even though I was on a hot streak, the difference was almost negligible.

If I lost pace even slightly, I’d begin falling behind again. I may have gotten second place twice, but put another way, that just meant that I had missed out on first place twice. There may very well be some unknown, powerful opponent who had the same Table.

For the time being, I decided to head back to area E6 and wait for a Task that I could participate in to appear.

So far, all three of the designated areas today had been normally selected.

In other words, the upcoming fourth and final area of the day would be the first randomly designated area of the exam.

“Ayanokōji-senpai, it seems we meet again.”

As I sat down to take a break, Nanase showed up on her own again.

There had been six designated areas so far. And throughout those six, I had crossed paths with Nanase three times now.

“By any chance, do you think that we might share the same Table?”

“Maybe.”

Since we had been running into each other so often, it wouldn’t be that strange if our tables overlapped with each other.

Though at the end of the day, it didn’t really matter to me if we had the same Table or not. The thing I was concerned about was the fact that we were running into each other so much. For argument’s sake, even if she and I had been going to the same destination, the probability of meeting face-to-face like we have been shouldn’t be this high. Not only would our routes be different, but our time spent traveling and staying in the different areas would be as well. I hadn’t noticed anything that would lead me to think she had been following me, so I guess you could say that it had been nothing more than a coincidence, but was that really the case…?

Without any further evidence, figuring out whether or not she actually shared a Table with me would be impossible. Nanase was in a group together with Amasawa and Hōsen. This meant that, by entrusting her fellow group members with arriving at the designated areas, she wouldn’t be penalized for missing them. While the group wouldn’t be able to get any Early Bird Bonuses, they could still steadily pile up points, two points at a time.

I could theoretically find out something by paying attention to the alerts she might get on her watch, but there was a chance that she had muted that already.

Our last two encounters hadn’t gone on very long, so I thought that she’d leave immediately this time around as well, but instead, she paused for a moment and looked at me.

“Um, Ayanokōji-senpai, there’s a favor I’d like to ask of you.”

“A favor?”

“If it’s not too much trouble, would you perhaps allow me to accompany you for a while?”

“Accompany me? What do you mean by that?”

No matter how incredibly likely it was that she and I had the same Table, the special exam had been set up in such a way that made it essentially impossible for students of different school years to collaborate. Neither party stood to gain anything from it.

“To tell you the truth, a slight issue came up as my group was talking last night. Both Hōsen-kun and Amasawa-san felt that we would be better off if we all acted independently, so everything more or less fell apart.”

Even though they were all part of the same group, there wasn’t any rule stating that they had to work together.

Of course, there were many advantages to working together as a unit, but independent action was another viable strategy for students who didn’t have any problems with working alone.

“I’ve crossed paths with you a total of three times now, Senpai. From what I’ve seen from our encounters, I believe that you’ve managed to reach the designated area faster than me. That is of course, except for the first time. I fear that if I’m on my own, it won’t be long before I start to fall behind the designated areas.”

“Don’t you think it’s possible that I just happened to be faster than you these last two times?”

“That may be so indeed, but either way, I’ve still recognized you as a step above someone as inexperienced as myself.”

Although her words sung me praises, it didn’t seem like these were her true feelings at all.

“I don’t think it’s a very wise idea to travel together with someone in a different school year.”

“You’re saying that due to the influence it would have on Early Bird Bonuses and the increased competition for Tasks, correct?”

“There would be a conflict of interest if we came across a Task that only had room for one more group.”

“I would be perfectly fine with taking the back seat in that regard, Ayanokōji-senpai. I would only step foot into the designated area after you’ve checked to make sure you’ve received your points and Bonuses. That way, it shouldn’t place you at a disadvantage. As for Tasks, I’ll just defer to you should there only be one space remaining.”

So she had no problem with abandoning the valuable Tasks and Early Bird Bonuses?

There was absolutely no physical way I’d recommend doing that.

“You’d ultimately lose points by doing that, Nanase.”

“This is my first uninhabited island exam, and you’ve already proven the extent of your physical abilities during your fight with Hōsen-kun. It would be immensely helpful to me if I could have you choose a suitable route for us to take.”

While she said it would help, it didn’t seem like she really needed it given how she had moved around the island on her own today without any issue.

There was really no reason for her to take on the risk of traveling together with me.

“Even if we assume that I’m going to choose the most suitable route, would you be able to keep pace with me? Sometimes the path I choose might even be dangerous. Would you really be able to do it?”

I already knew the answer to this question and yet I chose to ask anyway.

After all, I figured that her response may help reveal the reason behind her strange behavior.

However, her response was different from what I had expected.

“I’m fairly confident in my stamina. …You’re not uncertain because you think I might hold you back, it’s more that you’re not able to trust me, isn’t it?”

Nanase had previously teamed up with Hōsen and Amasawa to try and force my expulsion.

In that regard, I was certainly a fair ways off from trusting her.

But even if I turned her down here, she was free to follow after me if she wanted to. I didn’t exactly have much of a choice when it came to that.

Though, if she began awkwardly tailing after me from a distance, it would seem unnatural if we were seen by a third party. It wouldn’t be impossible for me to give her the slip or anything, but doing that would just be a waste of energy. After all, we would inevitably cross paths again at some point if we both had the same Table.

That being the case, I felt like it’d just be less of a hassle in the long run to fold and allow her to tag along.

“Alright. If that’s what you want, then go ahead.”

“Thank you very much.”

After letting show a delighted smile, Nanase bowed to me deeply.

“We just have to make sure you and I really have the same Table. We on the same page?”

“Indeed! The notion that we’ve just coincidentally shared some of the same designated areas is certainly feasible, so further investigation is the natural first step. What do we do for now though? It seems we still have some time until the next designation happens.”

It was only half-past one in the afternoon, so we still had more than an hour to spare.

“True… Oh, on that note, some Tasks just showed up.”

Several new Tasks appeared on my tablet.

I looked over the Tasks in the surrounding area and quickly decided where to go.

Then, I showed her the screen and pointed at the Task we’d be heading for as I began to explain our next steps.

“It looks like there’s a quiz-type Task right under area F8. We’ll go there.”

“It’s fairly close by too!”

“Yeah. After we’re done there, if the next designated area shows up too far away from us, I think we’ll give up on trying to get there in time.”

Since reaching the next area might not be very practical, I wanted to rack up points by clearing Tasks instead.

“Understood. Please lead the way.”

In truth, I wanted to head for the ‘Football Juggling’ Task that appeared in area E5, but the route and distance made it much more difficult to reach than area F8.

In any case, I first wanted to find out exactly what Nanase was capable of.