Classroom of the Elite Volume 14 Chapter 4 Part 3

Our third designated area of the day was H5.

We wouldn’t be able to get there by walking along the beach, but it was a relatively decent location, all things considered.

“It’s a fair distance away, but we should easily be able to make it there without too much difficulty.”

“We should be able to manage it in an hour or so.”

Of course, if we wanted to go for the Early Bird Bonus, we’d need to move at a faster pace than we had this morning.

However, even if we did, we’d probably only get a single point at most.

It was the type of situation that made me want to escape to a nearby Task instead, but most of the available Tasks were currently concentrated on the west side of the island. Since we were in the east, we didn’t really have very many options available to us.

Given that, would it be better for us to rush to H5 to try and get the Early Bird Bonus, or just take it slow and settle for the one-point Arrival Bonus instead?

It had already been three days since we first stepped foot on this island; it was time to make a decision.

“Nanase, how much water do you have?”

“I used up the last of what I had on hand this morning. All I have left is the bottle I was given from participating in the Task earlier.”

We seemed to be in a similar spot, as I only had a single 500ml bottle left as well.

Even though we were being conservative with our water consumption, if we kept having to travel long distances like this, we’d surely run out by the end of the day.

In other words, there was a very real prospect of water shortage.

I had bought 3.5 liters of water back when the exam began. Even if the other groups were being conservative with their water consumption like us, they’d probably start running out by today or tomorrow. It was unclear what overall percentage of groups this would apply to, but for the most part, things would be difficult moving forward.

“This is our first major hurdle.”

“We’ll need to obtain fresh water somehow, won’t we Senpai?”

If I were on my own, I’d opt to reach all four designated areas and clear nearby Tasks in the downtime. And after finishing up with everything for the day, I’d just return to the starting area to rehydrate and prepare for the next. This was one of the main strategies that I had been considering, but it’d be hard to execute with Nanase tagging along with me. She’d definitely go along with it if I explained it to her, but if she were to fall ill because of that, she’d have to retire from the exam.

Though, I wasn’t exactly obligated to pay heed to an enemy underclassmen.

For the time being, I just kept walking toward our next destination.

“Ayanokōji-senpai, why did you decide to take part in the exam alone?”

“I don’t have many friends, so I couldn’t find anyone to group up with.”

“That doesn’t seem to be the case to me.”

“I’m not lying. There really aren’t very many people I’d be willing to call a friend.”

“Even so, I’m sure you could’ve at least found someone.”

“Are you really that curious?”

“Yes. Because no matter how you look at it, acting independently puts you at a complete disadvantage, wouldn’t you agree?”

Nanase, who had been trailing behind me this whole time, quickly ran forward to keep pace beside me.

Then, she looked at me, trying what she could to ascertain my true intentions.

“Back when you faced off against Hōsen-kun, your movements were different from those of a normal high school student, Ayanokōji-senpai.”

“If you managed to notice something like that, then you’re not exactly a normal high school student either, Nanase.”

Nanase seemed a bit troubled by my immediate response and let show a somewhat forced smile.

She then lightly scratched at her cheek before softly conceding with an ‘I guess you’re right’.

I could’ve taken the opportunity to press her on this if I wanted to, but it would’ve been entirely up to her if she would answer honestly or not.

If she gave me some half-baked lie, I’d be able to see through it, but I didn’t think she’d make a mistake like that.

“It’s true that acting independently comes with many disadvantages. It shouldn’t be impossible for me to join up with another group during the exam, but if I don’t have a decent number of points when the time comes, I’d just end up causing trouble for the other group.”

“Understandably so. After all, your score would be averaged together with theirs, regardless of how many people their group might have.”

“But, it seems fairly misguided to complain. The school recommended that we form groups from the very beginning, so those of us who decided otherwise aren’t in any position to complain.”

Regardless of whether you specifically decided not to form a group or couldn’t find one to join, it was still ultimately your own decision. Therefore, even if the rules put you at a disadvantage and got you expelled, you’d only be reaping what you yourself had sown.

“Even so, it’s not like it’s impossible for me to win either. If I were to join a group that was struggling to accumulate enough points, there’s a chance that my presence might bring forth unexpected synergies.”

“So you chose to fight on your own in order to bring forth these synergies…? Is that what you’re saying, Ayanokōji-senpai?”

“Well, I’m not sure. I was just talking in a general sense. Despite your misconception, you still shouldn’t discount the possibility that I simply struggled to find a group to join.”

“Fufu, that’s true. You certainly seem a bit inarticulate at times.”

Despite her usual reservation, Nanase spoke her mind.

“Have you always been like that?”

“For the most part, aren’t people with my sort of disposition usually like this from the start?”

“I don’t think so at all. Things happen that can cause someone with a gloomy disposition to become bright and spirited, and in the same vein, someone with a spirited disposition may become gloomy. That can happen, right?”

While I could understand what she was trying to say, I had doubts about how much a person’s core nature was truly capable of change.

“I hear you say that a naturally gloomy person can change, but I can’t help but feel like it would be forced.”

“Yet, though it may be forced, the fact that they can act cheerful is amazing in it’s own right.”

“…True.”

If I were suddenly told to adopt a bright, amiable persona, I wouldn’t be confident in my ability to see it through to the end.

Of course, I could temporarily put on an act in front of people I didn’t usually interact with, but if you asked me if I could do that in front of my classmates, then the answer would be a resounding no.

“I don’t think I’d be able to do it. On that note, have you changed since you were in middle school, Nanase?”

I managed to bring up the topic of middle school without it sounding too sudden.

After all, somebody from the White Room certainly would’ve never attended middle school.

Nanase paused to mull my question over for a brief moment.

“I wonder. I don’t feel like I’ve changed very much since back then, but I probably have a little.”

In other words, there was something that made her think she had changed, even if only slightly.

“In what way?”

“In the past─ I get the sense that I used to smile more.”

So for her, the direction of change had been from ‘light’ to ‘dark’.

“I also get the sense that I talk and go out with others far less often than I did back then.”

Was she telling the truth, or was this merely a lie she’d spun?

“After all, an incident took place that I believe changed me forever…”

I found myself somewhat reluctant to ask what that ‘incident’ was. She was the one who had initiated this conversation, and it felt as though she had been subtly trying to bait me into mentioning it, so I decided not to pry any further.

Nanase patiently waited for me to say something, but at some point, she slowed her pace until she was trailing behind me once again. I took note of this, and opted to change the topic.

“By the way, how’s your group fairing, Nanase? Are you guys doing alright on points?”

“Yes. Between Hōsen-kun and Amasawa-san, we’ve been earning quite a few from Tasks recently. I’m not sure which of the two has been contributing more, but either way, they appear to be doing more than me.”

If she was telling the truth, then her group was doing fairly well for itself.

Depending on what Amasawa and Hōsen had been doing, there was a possibility that they were earning Early Bird Bonuses as well, though that was just conjecture on my part.

“Conversely, I might be in a risky spot.”

While I had been steadily racking up points, it was safe to assume that I was gradually sinking down toward the bottom ranks.

A three-man group doing the same thing that I was would easily overtake my score.

“Let’s do our best moving forward, Senpai.”

“Right.”

Before anything else, we needed to safely arrive at our next designated area.

With that as our goal, the two of us proceeded to forge our way through the untamed forest.