Classroom of the Elite Volume 14 Chapter 5 Part 2

I led Shinohara and Ike on a detour that took about fifteen minutes in total.

When we finally found a safe way to get down the slope, we happened to meet up with Nanase who was walking alone.

“Why are you here Nanase?”

Sudō and the others should’ve still been quite a fair distance away from here.

“That─ Uhm, I wasn’t able to see you and Ike-senpai anymore so I decided to go looking for you…”

Nanase responded, and although her breathing was steady, her brow was covered in sweat.

It seemed like she had been in quite a hurry to come find us, however, her eyes were looking somewhere else.

“Are you searching for something?”

“No, please don’t worry about it.”

She refused to elaborate further, keeping her gaze fixed in a specific direction as she stared on with a rigid expression.

Then, as if a switch had been flipped, she turned and looked over toward Shinohara and Ike, who were trailing a fair distance behind me.

“I’m glad that you managed to find Shinohara-senpai safe and sound.”

Upon seeing Shinohara walking together with Ike, she let out a genuine sigh of relief.

I had been walking ahead so far, so we waited until Ike and Shinohara caught up to us.

“Sudō-senpai and the others are this way.”

As the one most familiar with the route back, Nanase took the reins and led the way.

In the meantime, I decided to tell Nanase about what Shinohara had told us earlier.

In particular, I told her that Shinohara had seen someone push Komiya and Kinoshita down the slope, but she didn’t know if the perpetrator was a boy or a girl.

I also spoke of how she had held her breath and hid in fear of being discovered.

And then, I shared one more piece of potentially vital information.

“It seems that Shinohara and her friends passed a group of first-years last night.”

“First-years, you say?”

“They probably set up camp somewhere nearby. But, she only said that they passed each other, so we can’t really say they’re the culprits here.”

“That’s true. Though, I wonder who the first-year students in question are? If we knew, then we might be able to poke around for information or at least find some clues.”

Even if they were somewhere in the surrounding area, it would be difficult to find them in this thick, overgrown forest. It might be a different story if they stayed in the same location for an extended length of time, but in all probability, they would be constantly on the move, heading toward their next destination. In fact, it was even possible that they were headed off in the opposite direction right now.

In any case, it bugged me that first-year students were involved in this.

After all, if one of them were the White Room student, they would’ve been able to do the deed without so much as batting an eye.

Nanase remained silent for a while before eventually opening her mouth to speak.

“Senpai. If… there really was someone out there willing to cause such a grievous injury, isn’t it strange that Komiya-senpai didn’t notice anybody?”

“Yeah. Normally, you’d know if someone was there or not.”

Komiya definitely would’ve said something if he remembered seeing someone, even if they had been a student that he didn’t know the name of.

However, his memory of the incident was vague, and from what it sounded like, they might not have been attacked at all.

Was it really just a simple accident?

Or, had someone truly managed to pull off this attack without being noticed?

Assuming that it was even darker out when it happened, it would only make sense that the perpetrator had a light of some sort.

“If it were you, Ayanokōji-senpai, would you be able to do it without the two of them noticing?”

“Me? Don’t be unreasonable.”

Although I evaded the question, it wouldn’t be impossible if I set my mind to it.

In his earlier testimony, Komiya said that it all started when something suddenly struck his calf.

In the same way, I would soundlessly approach from behind and kick his calf as a leading strike. In turn, he’d be sent tumbling down the slope, his face warped with pain. He probably wouldn’t even have the time to look back at me.

“As for me… If I were to attack Komiya-senpai and Kinoshita-senpai… I don’t think it would be impossible. Well, depending on the timing. Though, of course, it would still be fairly difficult.”

She voiced her own conclusion. Rather than assert that Shinohara had imagined it, Nanase seemed to agree with the idea that someone had assaulted them.

But, even if there was a culprit, their motive was unknown.

Were they indirectly sending me a warning? No, the risks would be far too great if that were the case.

Or perhaps… they were trying to emphasize that they weren’t afraid of taking on risks, no matter how large they may be?

It was also possible that some unforeseen turn of events had taken place and they had no choice but to take action.

But, as it stood, none of these theories felt very convincing. After all, it was more than possible that the culprit wasn’t the White Room student. Furthermore, there might not even be a culprit at all.

“That said, it’s not clear why they were attacked in the first place.”

Inevitably, Nanase arrived at the same conclusion that I had.

The motive behind the attack. The most perplexing part of the entire situation.

Before long, we made our way back to Sudō and the others, but nothing had changed since we left.

“Now it’s just a question of when the teachers will get here.”

It had already been half an hour since the Emergency Alert first went off, but there was still no sign of them anywhere.

We were in the northeast corner of the island, so it would take them an adequate amount of time to get here, even if they made use of a boat or helicopter.

“Uhm~… Has something happened here?”

Just as the situation began to stagnate, a group of several students appeared from within the forest and called out to us.

Nanase and I briefly exchanged glances with each other. The students in question were a group of first-years: Mitsui Ayumi from Class 1-A, Dōgami Mitsuko from Class 1-B, Tsubaki Sakurako from Class 1-C, and Makita Takashige from Class 1-D. Altogether, there were three girls and one boy, a combination that fell in line with Shinohara’s testimony from earlier.

As someone who had also heard Shinohara’s testimony, Ike looked at the four of them with a hint of wariness in his eyes.

“There’s been a bit of trouble. These two fell down the slope and got injured pretty badly.”

Upon hearing this, the first-years exchanged glances for a moment.

“We were camping nearby when we heard an alert go off and what sounded like somebody shouting… We chose to wait a little for it to get brighter out before coming here to check on what had happened, just in case.”

The sound of the alert had been incredibly piercing, so it only made sense that they would hear it if they were in the area.

“Anyway, could I ask if the injured are alright?”

Dōgami, the girl who was acting as the sole spokesperson for the group, looked fairly alarmed, as did Makita and Mitsui.

Tsubaki, in contrast, was perfectly calm.

Despite being surrounded by upperclassmen, two of which who were seriously injured, she didn’t appear to be phased at all.

“They don’t seem alright, but it’s hard for any of us to say for sure. At this point, we’re just waiting for the teachers to get here.”

Like that, another thirty minutes passed.

And then, around an hour after the Emergency Alert first went off, officials from the school finally arrived.

The first to show up were Sakagami-sensei, the homeroom teacher of Class 2-B, and our own homeroom teacher, Chabashira. In addition, there were three adults who appeared to be medical personnel, for a total of five people.

“Let’s get down to business and hear what happened here, shall we?”

Sakagami-sensei spoke as he approached Komiya, who was sitting up, and Kinoshita, who was still lying unconscious beside him.

Everyone began to gather around him, as if drawn in by the prospect of checking out a crime scene.

Seeing this, I distanced myself from the group and approached Chabashira, who was looking in my direction.

“From a cursory observation, it seems like it’ll be difficult for Komiya and Kinoshita to continue the exam.”

“Yes. Their retirement seems virtually unavoidable.”

Her expression was heavy, which was to be expected given that Komiya’s group included a student from her own class.

“Was it just a simple accident?”

“Well… I imagine we’ll find out soon enough.”

After seeing to it that treatment was underway, Sakagami-sensei turned to the unscathed member of the group, Shinohara, and motioned for her to explain.

Shinohara, however, took one look at the state of her friends and burst into tears all over again.

“Crying isn’t going to get us anywhere, I hope you know that.”

Sakagami-sensei admonished her in a strict tone, prompting Ike to step forward to protect her.

“Uhm, is it alright if I explain? Shinohara told me what happened.”

He apparently wanted to explain the situation to Sakagami-sensei on Shinohara’s behalf.

“…Well, I suppose that’s fine. Go ahead and speak.”

“Shinohara said that they were pushed off the slope.”

I took a look at the slope in question as Ike repeated what Shinohara had told him earlier, but all of a sudden, his explanation somehow seemed hard to believe.

“Pushed off? …How awfully unsettling.”

“So they won’t have to retire because of that, right? That’s right, right?”

“If that’s the truth, then yes, of course they won’t.”

“What do you mean ‘if that’s the truth’? Shinohara said so herself!”

“Then, I assume she must have evidence of some sort to back that up, yes?”

Faced with Sakagami’s response, both Shinohara and Ike were left momentarily speechless, at an utter loss for words.

“Y-you say that, but we’re not at the school! There aren’t any surveillance cameras or anything like that!”

“Though, if they were pushed, one of them must’ve at least seen the culprit’s face.”

“That’s─!”

“So how about it, Shinohara-san? You can’t just keep crying, so how about you give us an answer?”

The only evidence available at the moment was Shinohara’s personal testimony as a member of the same group.

Although I could try to mention the mysterious set of footprints I had identified earlier, the ground all throughout the nearby area had long since been trampled by a sizable number of people.

Even if I were to bring them up, it wouldn’t accomplish anything.

“I-it was dark…”

“Dark? So dark that you couldn’t see the culprit’s face?”

In response, Shinohara nodded several times over, however Sakagami-sensei simply let out a deep sigh.

“So, it was dark to the extent that you couldn’t see their face, and yet you were able to see them get pushed without any problems…? It pains me to say this, but that’s an awfully convenient tale you’ve spun, now isn’t it?”

With that, Sakagami-sensei began to pressure Shinohara to confess as she broke into tears once more.

She was crying to the point of incoherence, so she just kept nodding her head, trying what she could to affirm that she was telling the truth.

“Shinohara would never lie!”

“You’re her classmate. It’s only natural that you would say that.”

“Are you saying that you don’t believe her!?”

“If she’s telling the truth, then this is quite a serious matter. However, this testimony alone is not enough.”

“How could you! Then what’s gonna happen to Komiya and Kinoshita!?”

“No matter how things play out, I’d say that their only real option is retirement. As their homeroom teacher, I certainly can’t say I’m happy to see them withdraw from the exam either, but from the look of their legs, it would be impossible for them to continue.”

It’s not like Sakagami-sensei was actively trying to be cruel here or anything like that.

He was just being objective. The damage that had been done to their legs was by no means light enough that they’d be back on their feet in a day or two.

“Given the current situation, we have no choice but to conclude that Shinohara-san is lying in order to gloss over the injuries caused by this accident.”

“You’re fuckin’ kidding me! Who in their right mind would buy that bullshit!?”

Ike fought back in a blaze of passion, holding onto Shinohara’s shoulders as she wept, but the response he got back was exceedingly cold.

“Tsk…!”

Realizing that he had said far too much to a teacher, Ike bit down on his lip.

Together, Shinohara and Ike had been desperately pleading their case for a while now, and yet, there seemed to be something peculiar about the way Sakagami-sensei had been responding to them.

“It seems that you already had a lot of this figured out before you got here, Chabashira-sensei.”

I expressed my thoughts to Chabashira as we stood beside each other, to which she nodded quietly.

“We relied on Komiya and Kinoshita’s GPS signals to get here. Komiya’s Emergency Alert went off at 4:56:24 AM, whereas Kinoshita’s went off seven seconds later. The only other signal that was in the nearby area in that timeframe was Shinohara’s and Shinohara’s alone.”

Chabashira responded, her eyes focused on a tablet in hand.

It was just as I had expected.

This meant that Sakagami-sensei had this very same information as well.

If there had been even a single questionable GPS signal in the area, then there would’ve been room for suspicion. However, the information gathered from the GPS went against the notion that there was a culprit in the first place. In which case, the only logical conclusion for the school officials to make was that Shinohara was fabricating the existence of an unknown third party, all for the sake of procuring a lighter sentence and protecting her fellow group members from retirement.

“The first to arrive at the scene after the alerts went off was a group of five students, yourself included. The next to arrive was a group of four first-year students. We were the last to arrive.”

According to the records, nobody else had come into contact with Komiya’s group before us.

It should probably be safe to trust this information to a certain extent.

Then… was it possible that the culprit wasn’t a student?

The teachers and exam staff didn’t have to wear watches so they wouldn’t have a GPS signal.

No─ that shouldn’t be the case here, right?

I had a hypothesis in the works, but there were still a lot of points that didn’t quite add up yet, such as the fact that the teachers seemed to be missing something.

“Chabashira-sensei. You’ll be heading back to the starting area with Komiya and Kinoshita after this, right?”

“Yeah. We’ll do a more detailed examination of their injuries back on the ship.”

“There’s something I’d like you to investigate while you’re at it. Discreetly.”

I then lowered my voice and whispered something into her ear. Although she was slightly surprised by my request, she nodded in agreement nonetheless.

Nevertheless, there was a more pressing matter at hand right now.

With Komiya and Kinoshita’s retirement all but guaranteed at this point, Shinohara would be left to fend for herself.

For her, surviving on her own for the next day or two must seem impossible, let alone the next week and a half.

“I can’t… I-I can’t go on like this…! There’s no way I can do this alone…!”

Ike watched as Shinohara fell to her knees, unable to find the right words to comfort her.

He simply stood there, stuck in a perpetual state of uncertainty about what to do next.

I wasn’t the only one who took notice of this either.

Komiya, moments away from being carried off on a stretcher by the medical personnel, had as well.

“Ike… come here real quick.”

“W-what is it?”

Komiya suddenly called out to Ike, motioning for him to come within arm’s reach.

And then, caring not for strain on his injured body, he lurched out, wrapped his arm around Ike’s neck, and pulled him in close.

“Show me how much of a man you are.”

After those few short words, Komiya laid back down, practically collapsing onto the stretcher.

Komiya had planned on confessing to Shinohara during this very exam.

But it didn’t seem like he had done so yet.

Perhaps, on the contrary, Shinohara had consulted him about Ike before he ever had the chance to make his feelings known.

If so, then Komiya would be aware of just how much Shinohara cared for Ike.

With those few short words, he had entrusted Shinohara, the girl he had sworn to protect with his own two hands, to Ike, his rival in love.

“That’s gotta be tough…”

Sudō commented as we all watched the medics carry Komiya away.

It seemed that, after bearing witness to what had just taken place, Sudō had realized how hard this must’ve been for Komiya as well.

My classmates weren’t the only ones moving forward on the journey to adulthood. Day by day, Komiya was growing as well, just like Sudō.

After a brief period of silence, Nanase addressed Shinohara, proposing an idea to help overcome the harsh situation she had been put into.

“It’s possible to lighten the burden by bunkering down near the starting area. While you won’t be able to earn points from reaching designated areas, it should definitely be more than enough to help you avoid retirement.”

Indeed, this was most likely the best strategy that Shinohara had available.

In what remained of the two weeks we had on the island, she would have to pin her hopes on other groups getting eliminated.

Of course, if no other groups retired, then Shinohara would have no way to escape expulsion.

Chabashira, having overheard Nanase’s suggestion, chimed in as well.

“Shinohara. I don’t want it to sound like I’m expecting you to get expelled, but… what’s your plan? It’ll be difficult to continue with the exam on your own.”

“I-I know…”

“Then, like Nanase said, you can at least head back to the harbor and hold out until the end of the exam. It’s not like it would be impossible for you to pick up the Tasks that show up in the nearby area either.”

Their proposal was undoubtedly cruel, but it was the best option Shinohara could make now that she was on her own. If she tried to continue with the exam alone, then in all likelihood, she would end up burning out at some point. And once she ran out of stamina and provisions, she would eventually be forced to retire.

However, if she changed her approach to the exam as a whole, she could hold out at the harbor and potentially even get help from groups that passed by. That way, she might be able to survive until the end.

Ultimately, it was a far better alternative than the one currently in front of her: expulsion.

Wiping away her tears, Shinohara slowly nodded her head.

Seeing that, Chabashira said one last thing to her.

“I hope that, somehow, you’re able to make it to the starting area on your own.”

“Yes… Understood.”

Since the school wasn’t allowed to provide any aid, Shinohara would have to get to the harbor all by herself.

After the first-years and Sakagami-sensei left, Shinohara went to pick up her bag, only for Ike to hurriedly grab her wrist.

“…What?”

“D-don’t give me that…! Are you really just gonna go back to the starting area and wait there!?”

“What other choice do I have? Komiya-kun and Kinoshita-san aren’t here anymore… There’s absolutely no way I can make it through this special exam on my own.”

“But, but like─”

“I’m just gonna be expelled anyway, so leave me alone!”

She jerked her arm away, breaking free of Ike’s grasp, and immediately turned to leave.

“…”

Ike stood frozen, his teeth clenched in silence.

The Ike of the past probably wouldn’t have had the strength to keep moving forward, to keep trying.

But Komiya’s words had given him the push he needed to take the next step.

“I… I’ll do something about it!”

He shouted after Shinohara, watching helplessly as she began to close herself off to the world around her.

“Just stop. It’s impossible. Absolutely impossible.”

Shinohara just continued to walk without even considering entertaining Ike’s protests.

“It’s not impossible!”

Unable to stand and watch as she left, Ike sprinted after her and grabbed hold of her wrist for a second time.

“Let me go…!”

“I won’t! You think I’m gonna let you get expelled cuz of somethin’ like this?”

“Why not!? This has nothing to do with you Ike! With me outta the way, there’ll be less of a chance for your group to get expelled… You should be happy!”

“Happy? What kind of shit are you spouting!? There’s no way I’d be happy!”

“Huh…?”

“I mean, we’ll lose a whole lotta class points if you get expelled! I’ve, uhm, you know, I’ve gotta stop that from happening! That’s why I’ll lend you a hand to make sure!”

“Well, that’s true, but… What’ll you do if your group sinks down to the bottom because you’re helping me? Not to mention, it’ll just end up making trouble for Sudō-kun and Hondō-kun.”

“That─”

“Ike, you never think things through, do you? If you keep going on like that, then sooner or later you’re gonna get yourself expelled.”

Shinohara smiled a somewhat exasperated smile and lightly shook off Ike’s hand.

“Anyway, I’m not going to give up until the very end, so you should do your best too Ike.”

She tactfully rejected his offer before turning away for what seemed like the final time.

“W-wait…!”

Ike’s previously confident attitude had disappeared without a trace.

There was nothing more he could do to stop Shinohara from leaving.

“Kanji.”

Seeing this, Sudō called out to Ike with a fearless smile on his face. He beat his chest twice, wordlessly encouraging his friend to persevere.

At that, Ike tried to step forward once again, fueled by the support of his best friend.

“Wait…! Wait Shinohara…! I, I just… so… that…”

He desperately tried to squeeze out the right words, but he simply couldn’t find the strength.

They were sitting right there, on the tip of his tongue, yet they just wouldn’t come out.

He needed one last push. This was the final stretch.

But neither I nor Sudō nor Nanase would be able to say the words for him.

The only person who could do that was Ike himself.

He had no choice but to suppress the fear within his heart and take the last step forward on his own.

“Wait, I said wait!”

“M-my god, you scared me. I heard you already, jeez… Is there still something you want from me?”

“There is! There’s all sorts of stuff! I really don’t want you to get expelled! That’s why I’m gonna save you whether you like it or not!”

The words he had chosen… weren’t elegant or beautiful like a confession of love.

But even so, they embodied Ike’s way of doing things, as they were packed full of every ounce of emotion he could muster.

“Right-oh! If this is how Kanji wants to do it, let’s discuss battle plans, Ryōtarō!”

“G-gotcha!”

Sudō and Hondō circled around and took a stand behind Ike, fully supporting his resolve to help Shinohara. They waved her over, beckoning for her to come and join them.

“Huh…? What the? Are you guys stupid? Even though you shouldn’t waste your time on someone like me, you guys…”

Unwilling to wait for a Shinohara who might not even come, Ike ran to her and took hold of her wrist for the third and final time.

He was burning with a level of determination that seemed to shout to the world that he would never let go of her again.

Upon seeing this, even the usually indifferent Chabashira cracked a slight smile.

It must’ve been enough to make her feel like Shinohara would be in good hands, as she then disappeared into the forest, headed off in the same direction as Sakagami-sensei and the medical team.

That being said, this was no time for blind optimism. After all, saving Shinohara certainly wouldn’t be easy.

“In order to guarantee that you save Shinohara, she’ll have to join up with a group with at least three slots for extra group members.”

Once the four of them gathered together, I spoke up.

It was hard to say whether or not Sudō and his group would be able to win the rights to those three slots on their own.

“It’d be most realistic to try’n ask for help from people in the same class, right?”

“I don’t believe there’s anything exactly wrong with that, but from what I recall of the rules for the exam, it’s impossible to find out which groups have earned the right to increase their maximum size. I also imagine that you’d be hard-pressed to find a group willing to take Shinohara-senpai in when two members of her group have already retired. Moreover, since losing points comes as a direct side-effect of the merging process, the entire notion is just riddled with numerous risks. All of that being the case, rather than going through the effort of forming another group, it may very well be more realistic for her to prioritize accumulating points. I think she should steadily score points from designated areas and use whatever time she has to spare to challenge Tasks.”

Nanase was recommending that Shinohara give up on merging with another group and focus on gathering points independently instead.

“But wouldn’t it be better to assume that there won’t be any Tasks that she can win by herself? She’d prolly end up having to pin her hopes on getting lucky or some kinda freak coincidence where there aren’t enough participants or something.”

“Is there really no way for her to get into a group smoothly, Ayanokōji?”

In the midst of their conversation, Sudō suddenly turned to me, looking to see if I had any ideas.

“It’s not like it’s impossible. There is one idea that comes to mind that has a high probability of working out.”

“R-really? What is it!?”

I considered for a moment whether or not I should share it with them, but ultimately decided against it.

If I told them my plan now, a sliver of hope would be born amidst their despair.

But at the same time, it would weaken their resolve to save Shinohara, so it was hard to say that it’d be worth it.

It was important for Ike and the others to maintain a strong competitive mindset until the very end of the exam.

Not to mention that there were several things that had to be done in order to realize the plan.

I began walking toward where the luggage was located and instructed for Nanase to get ready to head out as well.

“O-oi, Ayanokōji? What’s this plan of yours?”

“The only thing you can do right now is have Ike take the lead in protecting Shinohara and focus on earning as many points as possible. Beyond that, you should try to take part in Tasks that increase the maximum number of people allowed in your group if you get the chance.”

“What are you gonna be doing?”

“I’ll be setting up a contingency plan of sorts just in case something goes wrong.”

For that very reason, I simply didn’t have the time to stay here and dawdle with Ike and the others.

“But, like I said earlier, there’s no way to guarantee anything here. Furthermore, if any of our other classmates were to fall into the bottom five as well, then… we might be forced to make a tough choice about who to save.”

I wanted to make sure they knew beforehand that we might have to give up on Shinohara at some point.

This special exam was such that, as long as it held true that five groups would be subjected to the ultimate penalty, there would inevitably be students that couldn’t be saved.

“Don’t forget that, Ike.”

“…I won’t.”

About two and a half hours after the whole ordeal began, we finally arrived back at our campsite with Shinohara in tow. It seemed that Kei’s group, who had been camping nearby, had already left for their next designated area.

The backpacks that Komiya and Kinoshita had left behind were brought back by Sudō and Ike respectively.

“Sudō, take care of Ike and the others. Out of everyone, you’re the one capable of making the most sensible decisions.”

“R-right, leave it to me.”

Since the next designated area had already been announced, I retrieved my tablet from Nanase as I finished up with the final arrangements.

“It seems like you’ve used up quite a lot of energy this morning…”

“Please don’t worry. I still have enough to keep up with you.”

From today, the fourth day of the exam, onwards, the ten highest and lowest ranked groups would be revealed. Alongside that, it was also the day where Tasks that allow for large group creation would be added to the pool. If one of these Tasks appear, it would probably reach max capacity in an instant and the ensuing competition would most certainly be fierce.

However, before any of that, we first needed to confirm our next designated area.

The area we were given was area G3, which meant that we needed to go northwest from our current location.

We were already half an hour behind schedule, so it was highly unlikely that we’d be able to get the Early Bird Bonus this time.

Despite the fact that it would take at least an hour to get there, I decided to sate my curiosity and look at the current group standings first.

Though I was interested in the groups that were in the lead, it was far more important to check the bottom five, as those were the ones who were at risk of expulsion.

Interested as well, Nanase took a look at my tablet from over my shoulder.

The bottom ten groups were sorted in a table from highest to lowest. The information displayed in the table was more detailed than expected, as it not only told us the members and scores of each group, but it even had a general breakdown of how they had earned their points.

“This─”

Of the bottom ten groups, seven were composed of students from Class 3-B and Class 3-D. The group in last place was a three-person group from Class 3-D with an overall total of 21 points. 5 of which were from Tasks and 16 were from designated areas. However, this particular group was the one who had someone retire due to illness on the very first day of the exam, so there was some room for sympathy.

Of the remaining three, there was one second-year group and two first-year groups.

The lone second-year group was composed of three of my classmates: Akito, Haruka, and Airi.

“It seems that some of your classmates are in a dangerous position, Senpai.”

Currently, they were ranked ninth from the bottom with a total of 28 points, which was worse than I expected. It required a certain amount of strength and fortitude to continuously travel between designated areas. Since they had Airi in their group, who tended to struggle when it came to stamina, it would probably be difficult to earn Arrival Bonuses.

Meanwhile, there were two first-year groups in the bottom ten, but they were both composed of two people each. Given that the first-years were allowed to form four-man groups from the beginning, it made sense that there wouldn’t be very many of them occupying the bottom spots.

“All things considered, it’s surprising. To think so many third-year students would be at the bottom…”

Although it was certainly unexpected, I doubted that their poor performance was just due to incompetence.

I decided to check the top rankings later and instead focused on telling Nanase what our plan would be moving forward.

“To start out I’m going to aim for the Arrival Bonus at G3. But, I’ll probably skip the designated areas that come after that for a while.”

“So there’s somewhere you want to go, even if it means missing out on the designated areas?”

“Yeah. If you want to continue going for them, then we’ll have to split up at G3.”

“No no, I’ll stay with you. As long as Amasawa-san or Hōsen-kun arrive in time, my group won’t miss out on the area… Besides, this has to do with the plan you’ve thought of to save Shinohara-senpai, right?”

After responding with a light nod, we set out. Once we reached G3, we’d head to the starting area.

If possible, I wanted to make it there by sometime tomorrow.