Classroom of the Elite Volume 14 Chapter 6 Introduction

Chapter 6: The Aloof Wunderkind of Class 2-D

At just before 7:00 AM the following day, the fifth of the exam, we were pushing south along the river from area D4 to D5. After we stepped foot in G3 yesterday, we decided to forego our next designated area, H4, and travel due west on our way back to the starting area. As a result, we missed out on the next two designations — H6 and I7 — as well, meaning that we had now missed three areas in a row.

Unless a randomly designated area were to appear somewhere along our projected route by some miracle, that number would inevitably increase to four. Ultimately, the odds didn’t play out in our favor, as when the clock finally struck 7:00 AM, the first designated area of the day was revealed to be I8.

Well, on the bright side, the designated area was so far away that it made it easier to detach from the matter since I wouldn’t have to fret about going through the effort to get there.

Perhaps because it was so early in the morning, the gentle murmur of the nearby river was quite pleasant.

If it hadn’t been for the bad news that came shortly thereafter, it would’ve been a pretty solid start to the day.

“Shinohara-senpai’s situation doesn’t seem very optimistic…”

Shinohara had been left to fend for herself after Komiya and Kinoshita retired yesterday. Even though Ike and Sudō were doing what they could to support her, the number of points she could score on her own was, in the end, limited.

As of yesterday, her group hadn’t been included in the bottom ten, but when we checked the rankings this morning, she had already dropped down to the bottom eight. From the fact that the groups ranked below her would earn points at a faster rate, she would probably sink down to last place by tomorrow or the day after at the latest. Thanks to this, in an ironic twist of fate, Akito’s group had been spared from the bottom ranks, at least for the time being.

Meanwhile, there were the current rankings for the top groups that I hadn’t gotten the chance to look at yesterday. In first place was Nagumo’s group, made up entirely of students from Class 3-A, whereas second place was held by Kiriyama’s group from Class 3-B. The two top representatives of the third year were fully accounted for.

“Ah, Senpai. There’s someone fishing up ahead.”

A lone student came into view ahead of us. They were sitting on a rocky sidebar, leisurely passing the time with a fishing rod in hand. Due to their distinctive outward appearance, I recognized them immediately. They were a member of the one group I wanted to meet more than anyone else right now. I didn’t expect the chance to meet up with them to come so soon. Due to the nature of the exam and the size of the island, finding one specific individual was akin to finding a needle in a haystack. I had even considered making use of the GPS searching feature once it was made available tomorrow to attempt to meet with their group.

I wanted to capitalize on this stroke of good luck no matter what.

“Mind if we make a detour, Nanase?”

Although several solid Tasks had popped up in the nearby area, we’d probably have to give up on them.

“I’m just your travelling companion, Ayanokōji-senpai. Please don’t feel the need to ask for my opinion.”

I took her thoughtful words at face value and decided to approach the student.

They hadn’t seemed to have noticed us yet, but I chose not to call out to them so as to not interrupt their fishing.

Instead, we approached quietly, walking along the sandy gravel of the riverside.

Before long, we drew in close enough for them to notice our presence, as they slowly turned to face us.

“You started off on your own, but it doesn’t seem like you’ve dropped to the bottom ten yet.”

With these words, we were greeted by Katsuragi of Class 2-B, who openly welcomed us.

“Somehow. But if I took it easy for a day, my rank would probably plummet.”

Having overheard the commotion, Ryūen emerged from inside his tent and gave me a somewhat surprised look.

“So you’re strollin’ ‘round the island with a lass on your arm, eh? You get tired of that Karuizawa chick and ditch her?”

“Karuizawa? Why are you bringing her up?”

Katsuragi looked back at Ryūen, confused.

“Kuku, it’s nothin’. Don’t mind it.”

“It seems you two have been doing pretty well for yourselves.”

You could easily check the top ten highest-ranked groups through the tablet. As of this morning, I had a cumulative total of 52 points, putting me in 74th place overall. If you took into account the fact that I was a one-man group, my placement was fairly high.

Be that as it may, Ryūen and Katsuragi were ranked even higher, occupying tenth place with a cumulative total of 92 points.

Of those 92 points, 29 had come from Arrival Bonuses, 41 from Early Bird Bonuses, and 22 from Tasks.

“Oh shove it with the sarcasm. Isn’t that freak with a few screws loose one of your classmates?”

“Well, that’s true.”

The ‘freak with a few screws loose’ that Ryūen was referring to was none other than Kōenji.

Like me, he was taking on the exam alone. But despite that, he currently sat in fourth place. Out of all the groups in the top ten, he had earned the most points from Early Bird Bonuses, not to mention the noteworthy number of points he had racked up from Tasks as well, all for a cumulative total of 126 points. His performance so far had been truly outstanding with practically no room for error.

However, there were still ten days left in the exam, including today. If an accident were to happen due to overexertion or injury, he would drop out of the top ten in an instant.

In this two-week long exam on an uninhabited island, we wouldn’t be given even a single day to rest our bodies. No matter who you were, stressing your body out day after day would inevitably lead to muscle damage. It would start with obvious symptoms like muscle pains and general soreness, and then, little by little, your legs would grow heavier as even simple tasks like walking became difficult. Furthermore, since we could only replenish the bare minimum of nutrients that our bodies needed while we were on the island, you’d be afflicted by constant mental and physical fatigue as well.

“What’s your next designated area?”

“Hah?”

“It’s already past 7:00 AM. You two sure seem to be taking it easy.”

“It was my decision.”

Katsuragi responded as he cast his line into the river.

Ryūen let show a wry smile as he shrugged his shoulders. Ryūen was the type of person who always looked to push himself to the absolute limit, and yet Katsuragi had somehow managed to persuade him to take a break. Ishizaki or Kaneda probably wouldn’t have been able to control Ryūen to such an extent. It seemed that Katsuragi was already playing an important role as a member of Class 2-B.

“So, have you caught anything?”

Nanase posed a question to Katsuragi as she eyed the bobber in the river.

“Sadly, not much. We’d have to go to the sea if we wanted to catch a lot of fish.”

In other words, they were fishing here simply as a way to pass the time.

“I take it you’re doing fine on the food front, then?”

While I didn’t know if he’d answer me honestly or not, I decided to take a stab at it anyway.

“There’s plenty of food to gather from the sea, rivers, and forest. Water is no different too since all you have to do is boil river water.”

“But isn’t it risky to drink river water?”

“You’re not wrong. Boiling it doesn’t guarantee that it’s perfectly safe, but that’s why I’m the only one who drinks it. Ryūen drinks the water we started out with and whatever we get from Tasks.”

They were managing the risks flawlessly. By this point in the exam, there should be groups out there who were struggling to get by, but it looked like these two would be living steadily for quite a while.

“It just so happens that I’ve been looking for you, Ryūen.”

“Lookin’ for me, eh?”

“I assume you’re aware of which groups are in the bottom ten right now, right?”

“Well, sure. I dunno what those idiots from my class are doin’ down there in the bottom eight though.”

With two members out of the picture, their income had dropped sharply, creating an ever-growing disparity between them and the other groups at the bottom.

“Komiya and Kinoshita retired.”

The smile on Ryūen’s face disappeared instantly, replaced with a serious expression.

Katsuragi looked in my direction as well, his attention ripped away from the fishing pole in his hands.

“They retired? What happened?”

Since Katsuragi was now a full-fledged member of Class 2-B, both Komiya and Kinoshita were fellow comrades that he needed to protect.

Nanase spoke up in response to Katsuragi’s question.

“They were seriously injured. It’s unlikely that either of them will be able to walk anytime soon.”

“Was it an accident?”

“Well, that’s─”

“According to Shinohara, the last remaining member of their group, they were attacked by someone.”

“I assume this ‘someone’ was kicked outta here right along with ‘em then, right?”

“Unfortunately, Shinohara’s testimony was the only evidence they had. Neither Komiya nor Kinoshita could recall whether they were actually attacked or not. The school should still be investigating it, but I wouldn’t get my hopes up.”

“They’re looking at it under the pretense that Shinohara-senpai lied because she didn’t want her fellow group members to retire.”

“What should we do Ryūen? Even if we manage to place in the top three, it’ll be meaningless if Komiya and Kinoshita get expelled.”

If Shinohara’s group came in last place, Class 2-D and 2-B would both suffer major setbacks.

“You said you were lookin’ for me, right? Shinohara’s your classmate, so I assume you’ve already come up with a plan to stop the expulsions. Or am I wrong?”

Of course, despite not knowing any of the details, Ryūen instinctively knew that I had thought of something.

“Sorry Nanase, but I can’t let you listen to the rest of this conversation. The survival of the second-years is at stake here.”

“I understand.”

After confirming that Nanase had moved a sufficient distance away from us, I approached Ryūen and shared the details of my strategy with him.

He could just tell Katsuragi about it himself afterward.

“Kuku, I see. With a plan like that there really is a way for Shinohara to survive. That said… will it all go smoothly?”

“It should have a decent chance as long as you cooperate. The rest will happen naturally.”

“You’ve got balls changing shit up like this. If the other groups realize what’s happening, they’ll start takin’ action too.”

I responded with a small nod. That was the very reason why I didn’t want Nanase to overhear us. If the first-year students were to find out about it, it would probably lead to a confrontation between the second-year students and everyone else.

“There are some clever first-year students out there as well. There’s a chance that they might catch on sooner than anticipated.”

It was also impossible to predict what the third-years would do if they found out.

“If it were a couple of small fry I wouldn’t even hesitate to let ‘em go, but Komiya and Kinoshita still have their uses.”

“So you’ll work with me… is that what you’re saying?”

“Our interests align so there’s no way I wouldn’t take advantage of this strat of yours.”

Shinohara’s group was made up of students from both of our classes, after all.

If we didn’t join hands here and now, it would be impossible to save any of them.

“If you run into Ichinose, can you tell her the plan as well?”

“That doormat Ichinose aside, I don’t think Sakayanagi’ll choose to lend a hand so easily.”

“She’s not the type to sit back and let the first-years look down on her.”

“Kuku, I guess so.”

With that, our impromptu meeting came to an end. We said our farewells and immediately set out for the starting area.