Classroom of the Elite Volume 14 Chapter 6 Part 1

Nanase and I were making our way south toward the starting area, but along the way, a Task appeared near the summit of area C5, so we adjusted our route accordingly. The Task in question was a one-on-one match of Tug of War. It had a short registration deadline of 40 minutes, and the number of participants was limited to two boys and two girls, so overall the conditions were iron-clad. However, you would earn five points just for participating, and if you won, you would earn an additional ten points, for a total of fifteen.

Due to the fact that the summit was just a short distance ahead of us, it would be more or less impossible for other students to beat us there unless they were already in the area. After taking into account the fact that I would be missing my fourth designated area in a row soon (and would be losing two points as a result), I decided that we should go for it. Plus, there was a good chance that we would have fifteen points simply fall into our laps if nobody else showed up.

Despite the high elevation of the mountain, we pushed forward at a rapid pace and arrived at the Task with around five minutes to spare.

I thought that we would be the first to arrive, but apparently somebody had beaten us to the punch.

This ‘somebody’ seemed to have noticed our presence, but they made no effort to look in our direction.

“He got here pretty quickly didn’t he? He must’ve been even closer than we were.”

“I wonder.”

Even if he had been toward the south side of C5 when the Task was announced, it should’ve still taken him a decent amount of time to get here.

“I’m not sure whether this will help clear things up for you or not, but that’s Kōenji Rokusuke.”

“Kōenji…? The same Kōenji from your class who’s currently in fourth place overall? …Well, he does seem to give off an… aura of greatness of some sort.”

It was one thing that he had arrived earlier than us, but even stranger yet was the fact that, apart from the single bottle of mineral water he was holding, he didn’t have any bags or luggage with him.

If he was traveling light, then it made sense that he would be able to climb to the summit faster than us, but…

That would then mean that he had been moving around without a tablet, which I suppose was only to be expected of someone like Kōenji.

After taking a single sip of his water, he proceeded to pour the rest above his head, showering himself with what remained in the bottle. In a sense, it seemed as though he was basking in the satisfaction that came with ascending to the summit of the mountain.

“He seems to be saying… something… Is he talking to us…?”

“No, he’s definitely talking to himself. He’s probably just immersed in his own beauty.”

“I-is that so…”

Puzzled, Nanase tilted her head, unable to comprehend his behavior.

I didn’t think that anyone else would show up, but there were only a few minutes left to register, so I figured that we should just focus on getting it over with. As such, the two of us went forward with the registration process and secured our spots in the Task. However, since the rules called for a one-on-one match split by gender, I would be forced to face-off against Kōenji as we were the only boys who registered. Nanase, on the other hand, was the only girl to show up, so she won her category by default.

“It seeeeems that my opponent is you, Ayanokōji-boy.”

“That it does.”

In previous Tasks, I had indirectly competed against my own classmates by simply being a part of the crowd.

However, this was the first time I had to compete with a classmate in a direct one-on-one match. Furthermore, the opponent of that match was none other than Kōenji. I sincerely hoped that this wasn’t the start of something written in the stars.

The staff member in charge of the Task presented us with a rope and instructed us to wrap the ends around our bodies.

Given that my series of missed designations would only continue to increase, I wanted to secure as many points as possible, but…

Instead of taking the win for myself when I wasn’t even a part of the top ten, it seemed more reasonable to concede the points to Kōenji so that our class would ultimately have a higher chance of coming out on top. With the fifteen points he’d get from winning, he would overtake Kiriyama’s score of 135 points and rise up to second place all on his own, temporary as it may be.

Anyway, if I was truly going to concede the win, it would be better to give up now so I didn’t waste more time or energy than necessary.

I could simply take my five points, head back down the mountain, and resume my journey back to the harbor at the starting area.

“The match will begin momentarily, so please prepare yourselves.”

“Is something the matter, Senpai?”

As the staff notified us about the impending start of the match, Nanase noticed that I was lost in thought and looked to me with a question.

“Well, I…”

“Fufu, so you’re a man who thinks about things from the perspective of efficiency, hmmmm?”

Kōenji instantly gleaned my inner thoughts as if they had been written expressly on my face.

“You were thinking that it would be best to abstain from the match rather than go to the trouble of facing off against me, weren’t you? After all, relinquishing the points to my fourth-place self would indeed bring about the most benefit for our class. As would it be the best use of our time.”

“Is… Is that true, Senpai?”

“I have no complaints as long as it helps Kōenji succeed in the rankings.”

“Though, I doubt the Horikita-girl would be very satisfied with that, wouldn’t you agree? For her, it’s not hard to imagine it’d be preferable that I take second or third place rather than first.”

He was so spot-on with his conjecture that a part of me wondered if he had somehow been listening in back when Horikita and I talked about this.

“That’s limited to the situation where our own classmates are competing with each other for the top spot. As it stands now, your group is the only one in the top ten composed entirely of Class 2-D students, so if we were to compete for points here, we’d just end up getting in each other’s way.”

“I, of course, understand, but that’s just poppycock. The fact that you believe you have a chance to prevail over me is the fundamental reason you’re having these wasteful thoughts. No matter who the opponent, the one to win this bout will be yours truly.”

Kōenji had taken part in a fair number of Tasks so far and he had earned rewards in each and every one of them.

Out of all the various groups spanning across the three different school years, he was the only one who had taken complete control like this.

There had been some Tasks where he had come in first or second, but in those that had to do with strength or stamina, he swept first place across the board.

So as far as this Task was concerned, he understandably held absolute confidence that he would take first place as well.

“Ayanokōji-boy, quit overselling your worth inside that head of yours. After all, it’s not every day that you’ll get the chance to compete against my motivated self.”

The fact that he would believe in his own strength come hell or high water was probably Kōenji’s greatest charm.

I slowly picked up the rope at my feet and wrapped it around my waist.

“Now then, if you’ll each take up your positions, I’ll begin the countdown. You may start pulling when I get to zero.”

All I had to do was make it seem like I was putting in effort and then lose to him. That way I wouldn’t pointlessly waste any energy.

“It doesn’t seem my wisdom has done much to motivate you.”

For Kōenji, my true intentions were probably as transparent as they could possibly be.

“Well, just try as best you can. Either way, just know that no matter how you may struggle, victory shan’t be smiling upon you this time.”

From the moment we each took hold of the rope, the countdown began.

“───Three, two, one… Zero!”

At the count of zero, I very lightly pulled the rope in my direction.

Given how little force I was exerting, if Kōenji were to make a serious effort, he’d probably drag me over the line in less than a second.

However, the rope didn’t move in his direction at all.

He stood across from me with a fearless smile painted onto his face, waiting for me to start competing in earnest.

While I didn’t have any intention of taking this seriously, I didn’t want to waste any time here either.

That being the case, it might be more productive for me to fight back a little bit in order to make him feel threatened.

If I were to suddenly start pulling with more force than he expected, he would have no choice but to panic and respond accordingly.

There was more to winning Tug of War than just pulling at the rope with all your strength.

There was the force of the friction of the rope in your hands, the force of the friction between your feet and the ground, as well as the normal force tying it all together.

And to be even more precise, you’d also have to take into consideration the force of gravity.

I maximized my grip on the rope and firmly planted my feet on the ground. I then inclined my body back without bending at the waist.

And finally, by bending my knees and pulling the rope in close to my waist…

The flag marking the middle of the rope gave way in my direction ever so slightly. Everything was moving in accordance with my calculations.

That said, the amount of give was smaller than expected.

A heinous amount of force had begun to pull back on the rope, sealing away my counterattack in an instant.

“To win at Tug of War, one needs not these paltry parlor tricks, but raw, unbridled power.”

It’s not like I was going easy on him, not by any means. However, the force he was exerting on the rope was so great that it drew the center flag back to its place in between us, returning the match to a state of equilibrium.

From this, it seemed that Kōenji and I were just about evenly matched when it came to arm strength.

Not only that, he also weighed more than me. The most important factor in Tug of War may very well be weight, and since I lost in that respect, it would be difficult to beat him without securing an advantage in another way. If I used the full extent of my strength, I could easily turn this into a battle of attrition and wait for him to make a mistake of some sort, but that would be a complete waste of both time and energy. I did have another strategy I could use to come out on top, but it would be too early to use it now.

As the rope painfully dug into my fingers and palms, I once again thought about the fact that our arm strength was evenly matched. The young man known as Kōenji had physical capabilities in a league all their own. Even the likes of Sudō and Albert, who were themselves exceptionally strong amongst high school students, were far inferior in comparison. In fact, even the title ‘Super High School-Level Student’ seemed far too mild for him.

When I put strength into my arms and pulled on the rope for a second time, Kōenji instantly sensed my movement and responded with an equivalent amount of force.

Taking full advantage of the opportunity, I immediately relaxed my grip and stopped pulling.

Naturally, the rope was then pulled all the way in by Kōenji, and just like that, the match was over.

“So you chose to prioritize efficiency until the bitter end, did you?”

Kōenji seemed a little surprised, but with the outcome decided, he apparently lost all interest in pursuing it any further as he didn’t say anything else.

“It’s quite unfortunate, Senpai.”

“No, even if I were to seriously face off against him, I wouldn’t stand a chance. It’s only natural that it ended up this way.”

Overall, this Task had resulted in a net gain of 20 points for groups Class 2-D students.

That alone was more than enough to make the journey here worthwhile.

“Can you keep going, Nanase?”

“If I’m being honest, my legs are slightly sore.”

She rubbed the side of her thigh a little as she spoke.

“But like I said back when I first joined up with you, please feel free to take action as you see fit, Ayanokōji-senpai.”

Her resolve to stay with me hadn’t wavered in the slightest.

“Full speed ahead then.”

“Yes!”

Apparently, Kōenji had already started on some other route down the mountain in the brief period of time I was speaking with Nanase, as he was nowhere to be seen.