Classroom of the Elite Volume 14 Chapter 7 Introduction

Chapter 7: The First-Years Start to Move

The sixth day of the exam. We started out by making a beeline south to our first designated area of the day, B6, where I took the first-place Early Bird Bonus. After that, our second designated area was A5, which was fairly close, but we unfortunately only received the Arrival Bonus.

Following closely after at 1:00 PM was the third area, which was the random designation over in area C3. There were a couple of different ways available for us to get there. The first was to cut straight through the steep mountains of area B4. Though it wasn’t readily obvious from looking at the map, this route would probably require us to do a fair bit of rock climbing. A somewhat safer alternative to this was to move a bit further east from where we were now before going through the pass in area C4. And lastly there was the option of making a huge detour around the mountain range to area D5 and traveling north from there along the river.

“I’m guessing that most of the other groups we’re up against are going to go through C4 or take a detour down and around.”

“I think so too.”

If we could successfully navigate the slopes of A4 and B4, we’d have a very solid chance of securing the first-place Early Bird Bonus.

“While I don’t imagine that you’re in the best condition, we’re going to have to take on the risk anyway.”

“You want to take the direct path through A4 and B4, don’t you Senpai?”

Nanase had somehow managed to keep up with me so far, but there was no telling if she’d make it this time.

But apparently, she had already made up her mind about it, as she elected to follow along with me without any hesitation.

Shortly thereafter, however, she found herself standing face-to-face with her largest obstacle yet.

We had only had to navigate a couple of fairly steep inclines and slopes so far, but the challenge before us now was far more akin to a sheer cliff.

Whether you looked to the left or right, the cliff stretched on as far as the eye could see. Taking a slightly easier detour didn’t seem like it would be an option here.

Now that it had come to this, we had two distinct options: Scale the mountain, or turn back and find another way.

“I… I can do this!”

Watching as she talked herself into it, I decided to let her go first and see how she’d hold up.

She pulled a ribbon out of her backpack and tied up her long hair to make it easier to climb.

“Ah…!”

The very moment she started the climb, she made a mistake with her footing on the rock and came tumbling down to the ground.

“Oww, that hurt…!”

She gingerly rubbed at her bottom as she stood up again. Fortunately, she hadn’t been very high up when she fell. If she had been two meters higher, it probably wouldn’t have ended as well for her.

The cliff was close to ten meters tall and in all honesty it didn’t even seem like it would even be that hard to climb. That being said, it would probably be challenging for Nanase to scale it by herself.

“I guess that’s the end of the line.”

In reality, this obstacle was more challenging for her than I thought it’d be.

She had done well to keep up with me these past six days, but it seemed like I would have to push on from here on my own.

“I-I can do it!”

“Even if you can, there’s no point if it takes up all your stamina just to get to the top. The entire reason why we’re scaling the mountain like this is to save time. Not everyone is going to end up taking a detour, so every second counts.”

In fact, pointlessly standing around and talking about this was already a massive waste of time, something that Nanase probably understood as well.

“I’m going now. It’s up to you if you still want to insist on climbing, but you’re the one responsible for whatever happens.”

She looked blatantly frustrated by this, but I simply turned my back on her, placed my hands on the rock, and began to ascend the cliff.

Knowing her, I felt confident that she’d make the calm, rational decision here, so I didn’t have any intention of looking back to see what she ended up doing. Contrary to my expectations, however, I sensed her presence draw closer to me from behind and looked over my shoulder.

“What are you doing?”

“Please… don’t mind me. I’ve made the choice to follow after you of my own volition, Ayanokōji-senpai…!”

Saying that, she fearlessly reached out and took hold of the rock again.

But, due to the lingering traces of fatigue still plaguing her body, she couldn’t put enough strength into her grip. Her arms began to shake as she clung to the face of the cliff.

“If you’re not careful, you might end up facing consequences even worse than retirement.”

I warned her yet again, but she still seemed hell-bent on chasing after me.

What exactly was compelling her to go so far to accompany me?

If she was trying to slow me down by being a hindrance, then in some ways, she was succeeding.

Being careful to maintain a secure foothold on the cliff, I climbed back down to around the halfway point and outstretched my hand to her.

“Take my hand.”

“I, I can’t do that Senpai. I promised you that I wouldn’t get in your way back when I asked to accompany you… So please, go on ahead and don’t worry about me. I beg you.”

“If I went ahead and you got injured, it’d leave a bad taste in my mouth. If you were down there begging me for help I might feel differently, but I’m the one making the decision in this case, so don’t worry about it.”

“But…!”

“Isn’t it a waste of time to continue arguing about it like this?”

After bringing attention to this for a second time, her hand was forced. There was nothing more that she could say.

“…Alright.”

Although she was still slightly frustrated, she took hold of my hand. It was one thing that she wasn’t in peak physical condition right now, but even if she was, the question still remained on whether or not she’d be able to climb at all.

“Senpai… Do you perhaps have prior rock climbing experience?”

“No, this is my first time doing something like this.”

This exam required you to fumble through all sorts of things you’ve never tried before. Reaching out to help her like this probably wasn’t the correct approach either, given the various risks that came with it.

“Is that so…”

I guided her hands, showing her which spots she should grab on to.

Though it was an inefficient way of going about it, we eventually managed to scale the cliff.

However, we hadn’t crossed the finish line just yet. We had spent more than ten minutes simply getting up the cliff. Without a moment of rest, I set off once again. Now that I had helped her find her way up, she could take her time finding a way back down on her own. She lagged behind me for a bit at first, but her firm resolve hadn’t changed in the slightest as she quickly caught back up.

As we continued to push forward, I couldn’t help but think that she had an uncanny resemblance to a loyal dog chasing after its owner.

Before long, we finally arrived at area C3. Although it had taken a fair amount of time, none of our competitors seemed to have made it here yet, so I easily secured the first-place Early Bird Bonus.

“T-thank goodness…!”

Even though she hadn’t even gotten the second-place bonus for her efforts, Nanase let out a sigh of relief.

We had a bit until the next designated area would be announced, so figured that I might as well keep her company and rest for a while.

Just like when we were at the top of the mountain, the light breeze that swept by from time to time was quite refreshing.

“It’s been pretty calm out these last few days but it’s pretty windy today, huh?”

It had been consistently clear and sunny so far, but thick clouds had begun to fill the increasingly overcast sky.

“It must’ve been surprising to suddenly get tossed onto a deserted island right after entering highschool.”

“Of course it was. This really is such an amazing school.”

Nanase let show a shy, yet forced smile.

“Senpai, do you enjoy it? This school?”

“I guess. There have certainly been a handful of headaches to deal with, but I’ve never really thought of it as unenjoyable.”

For the most part the school seemed to be the same day by day, but in some ways it was quite different.

I was simply enjoying my time here, content with the constant, subtle daily changes it brought into my life.

“While it feels like graduation is a long ways away, it’ll probably be here in the blink of an eye. That’s why I think it’d be best to spend what time I do have without any regrets.”

“…Graduation…”

“Is something wrong?”

“O-oh, no. It’s nothing.”

There was something about Nanase, a certain air with the way she was acting, that seemed completely different from the Nanase I had become accustomed to over these past several days.

It was roughly identical to the feeling she gave off back when she first enrolled here.

However, it was very faint. So faint, in fact, that if someone were to tell me that it was just my imagination, then I might even be inclined to believe them.

If she really did have something on her mind, then I suppose I’ll just have to wait for her to tell me about it when the time comes.