Classroom of the Elite Volume 15 Chapter 1 Part 1

As the downpour continued, a message arrived from the school. Unsurprisingly, it was an announcement that the exam would be canceled for the day. Since it’d be difficult for groups to make a comeback with all the lost opportunity for Tasks and area movement, the message also stated that they were looking into ways to compensate us so that students didn’t have to go to bed worried about missing out on points.

The school probably wouldn’t specify how they planned on compensating us until the weather began to clear up.

That being said, no matter what they eventually came up with, it wouldn’t change the fact that the day had been wasted.

While the compensation would help groups reach the same overall score in the long run, the strategies they had planned for today would all be in vain.

Personally, as far as I was concerned, the cancellation could not have come at a worse time.

My plan had been to conserve my energy so that I could go all-out during the second half of the exam, stealing a march on the groups who were in a slump after exhausting their energy during the first half and racking up a ton of points in the process. However, now that the seventh day had essentially turned into a full day off, everybody would have the time to rest and recover their stamina.

Of course, an uninhabited island during a rainstorm wasn’t exactly a day at the spa, so it’s not like their fatigue would disappear entirely. But, the disparity between getting time to rest and not getting any at all made all the difference in the world.

“───pai!”

“Hmm?”

I could just barely make out a voice through the incessantly loud sound of raindrops beating against the exterior of my tent.

“Sen─ai!”

Once again, the voice called out to me. It was most likely Nanase, trying to talk to me from the tent across from my own. I unzipped my tent’s entrance a bit and peered out through the mesh fabric to see what was happening.

The visibility of the outside world was rather poor, but it wasn’t so bad that I couldn’t make out Nanase’s tent in front of me.

“I’d like to talk to you for a bit, Senpai! Is it alright if I come and join you!?”

Nanase put forward a question, shouting out from her own tent.

She should’ve been aware that it wasn’t exactly proper for a boy and a girl to huddle up alone together in a single tent, but she had apparently forgotten all about that.

The rules expressly forbade boys and girls from sleeping together in the same tent, so there technically wouldn’t be an issue if we were only spending a bit of time together.

And as long as we didn’t lose our sense of reason, there shouldn’t be anything ethically or morally wrong about it either.

Having said that, the rain was still as fierce as ever. Even though our tents were less than two meters apart, there’d be no way for her to avoid getting wet again.

“That’s fine with me, but why don’t I come join you in your tent instead?”

I tried offering her an alternative, but she simply shook her head as she unfolded a towel and draped it over herself in preparation for the journey before fully unzipping the entrance to her tent.

Following her lead, I quickly opened my own entrance to usher her inside as soon as possible.

Just as I did, Nanase swiftly flew out of her tent and made her way into mine.

Of course, she was only in the rain for less than a second, so the damage had been kept to a minimum.

“Hah… I’m sorry for intruding upon your rest, Senpai.”

“No, it’s okay.”

In truth, Nanase was probably more exhausted than I was.

It had been an arduous journey to get all the way out here, one that was immediately followed by a fierce battle, misunderstanding as it was.

I was curious as to what she wanted to talk about, but she didn’t say anything right away.

Or, from what it seemed like, it might be more accurate to say that she couldn’t find the words.

For a while, the two of us sat in silence, merely observing one another…

“I’m pretty shameless, aren’t I?”

Saying that, Nanase lowered her head in apology.

“I treated you with such hostility for the longest time, Senpai. Saying all sorts of terrible things straight to your face… You must be annoyed that I’m reaching out all buddy-buddy like this.”

It was a bit late by this point, but it seemed that she was finally coming to terms with her guilty conscience.

“I really don’t mind, so please stop apologizing. At the very least, it’s been made clear that there’s no need for further hostility between us, or am I wrong?”

There was probably a part of her that wouldn’t be satisfied with a response like this, but we were currently in the middle of a special exam.

Hesitation of the mind would only cloud one’s conduct and judgment when it mattered most.

“No, you’re right.”

Having understood this for herself, Nanase once again lowered her head in apology.

“So? Despite the rain, wasn’t there something you wanted to talk to me about?”

“Ah, indeed!”

As if reminded of why she came to my tent in the first place, Nanase began to speak.

“I haven’t been able to get the image of Amasawa-san out of my mind, showing up out of nowhere in the rain… When I started thinking about all the hardships you’ve been put through, I just… I felt like I had to call out to you.”

Apparently, instead of having some sort of ulterior motive, she had simply been worried about me.

It was a slight problem that she was more caught up about the whole ordeal than I was, but I appreciated the sentiment nonetheless.

“I convinced myself that Amasawa-san was the one who pushed Komiya-senpai and Kinoshita-senpai down the slope. I thought that she was just hiding her true nature because she wanted to hide the truth, but then you said that she wasn’t necessarily the culprit and now I just don’t know what to believe anymore…”

“That’s because the truth is still shrouded in darkness.”

Amasawa’s color was grey, a grey that just barely toed the line before being dyed in black, but she definitely hadn’t crossed that line just yet.

“I wonder what the culprit’s goal is. Whoever they are, why would they do something so risky like this?”

“We wouldn’t be having such a hard time if we knew the answer to that. So, let’s move forward under the assumption that Amasawa is not the culprit.”

We decided to review our thoughts regarding the Komiya-Kinoshita incident.

After all, by exchanging opinions, we’d be able to shed light on things we may not have considered otherwise.

From what we knew: someone had pushed Komiya and Kinoshita down the slope. And, judging from the fact that there were no other GPS signals in the area at the time, it was clear that it had been a premeditated attack, rather than something done in the heat of the moment.

Furthermore─

“That… Uhm, wouldn’t that be strange though?”

As soon as she began to speak, Nanase furrowed her brow, as though there was some sort of discrepancy she couldn’t wrap her head around.

“It’d be weird if Amasawa-san was completely unrelated, right? I mean, her watch just ‘happened’ to be broken when Komiya and Kinoshita just ‘happened’ to get attacked, and she just ‘happened’ to be watching from somewhere nearby? And to top it all off, I just ‘happened’ to catch sight of her as she fled the scene?”

“With so many coincidences happening back-to-back, it’s hard to call the entire thing one as well. We’d basically be setting ourselves up for failure telling ourselves that Amasawa is 100% unrelated to what happened.”

“Even if Amasawa-san isn’t the real culprit, they’d still have to be someone she knows, right? Therefore, isn’t it also possible that she’s an accomplice of some sort?”

With that, an alternative theory began to take shape: that someone close to Amasawa had pushed Komiya and Kinoshita instead.

“That seems reasonable. Those footprints I found earlier could’ve belonged to the real culprit as well.”

If we were to look at what happened as an attempt to help the real culprit, it’d more or less explain Amasawa’s actions.

“I suppose it’s not hard to imagine that Amasawa-san is capable of exercising violence in much the same way.”

Nanase nodded to herself as she said this, confident that we were on the right track.

“However…”

At this point… Well, I started feeling caught up about something completely unrelated to any of this.

“However what?”

It had to do with Nanase, but when I saw her looking over at me with a puzzled expression on her face, I felt hesitant to say anything.

If I had to give a reason for that, it was because I simply couldn’t understand the ‘mechanisms’ behind what was going on.

This was our seventh day on the uninhabited island, and Nanase had been together with me for effectively the entire time so far. As such, neither of us had the time nor space to wash our bodies properly.

Of course, she had the opportunity to rinse the sand and sweat off her body back when she changed into a swimsuit during the Beach Flags Task, and she had also probably taken a shower after taking part in the swimming Task in the starting area.

That being said, even a single day’s worth of sweat and perspiration would usually end up being fairly noticeable.

Since there wasn’t very much room inside my cramped one-person tent, Nanase’s scent had slowly filled the space. But, strangely enough, it wasn’t exactly an unpleasant smell. Even though it was possible that she masked the smell of sweat by diligently wiping down her body, I just couldn’t wrap my head around how she managed to make herself smell so good.

I wanted to ask her about it, but that was clearly not something a tactful senpai ought to be doing.

“No, I just misunderstood something. Don’t worry about it.”

“Is that so?”

She nodded along without probing any further, and perhaps without even suspecting anything at all.

Although I had a girlfriend, I was still just a beginner when it came to this sort of stuff, and there were just too many things that I didn’t understand.

Things like deodorant and antiperspirant spray were relatively cheap and easy for us to get our hands on because of the rules, so I ultimately opted to tell myself that she used something like that. It was the only answer I could come up with at the moment.

Even though I had chosen not to say anything, the mood between us had somehow gotten strangely awkward.

And while Nanase didn’t seem to think anything of it, I decided to get our conversation back on track in an attempt to loosen up the atmosphere again.

“We don’t have any way to confirm whether or not Amasawa actually did something to Komiya and Kinoshita, but I do have a pretty good idea which Table everyone belongs to.”

Nanase tilted her head to the side, seemingly unable to understand what I meant by this, so I took out my tablet and showed it to her.

“Uhm… Your personal information is on there, right Ayanokōji-senpai…? Are you sure it’s okay for me to be seeing this?”

By personal information, she was probably talking about the points I had earned thus far. This was indeed very important information since the points and rankings of groups outside of the top and bottom ten weren’t publicly disclosed.

“Nanase, I thought we had a relationship where we could trust each other without hiding anything. Or was that just a misunderstanding on my part?”

I spoke openly, prompting her to match her eyes with mine, clearly taken aback.

“What? No! Thank you for placing your trust in me! I’m very grateful!”

Her words were filled with a slight mixture of embarrassment, happiness, and guilt.

In fact, her reluctance to write off the discourtesy she had shown me so far was very fitting of her.

“Besides, since we’ve been moving together, you should already be able to get a rough estimate of how many points I’ve earned just by thinking back on it.”

Although I had taken part in a handful of Tasks on my own, from what I knew of Nanase, she’d at least be able to estimate my score under the assumption that I had taken first place in them.

Therefore, without paying any mind to the fact that I was revealing sensitive information, I began with my explanation.

“Anyways, regarding what I said earlier about knowing who was included in each Table─”

“Wait, isn’t your score somehow… lower than expected?”

Astute as ever, Nanase immediately noticed that a certain something was out of place before I could even get into the thick of it.

“What do you mean?”

I responded to her question with one of my own, testing her. She began counting on her fingers as she ran the calculations in her head.

“There are Arrival Bonuses, Early Bird Bonuses, and Tasks… then subtracting points for any penalties─ Ah, I’m also assuming that you took first place in the Tasks you took part in while I was taking a break.”

All things considered, her memory seemed quite solid.

This was a good thing too, as a solid memory would probably prove useful for her at some point in the future.

“I’m surprised you noticed. Properly speaking, I should have 88 points right now.”

“But you only have 78, 10 points less. I don’t think I forgot a penalty or something either…”

Thus, it begged the question: how, when, and why did those 10 points disappear? The answer to which I would now elaborate.

“For this special exam, designated areas are announced four times per day as students move throughout the island. This time window lasts for ten hours per day, from 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Yesterday, when the school lifted the restriction on the GPS searching feature, I decided to do a total of ten searches. The first was at 7:00 AM and I repeated it every hour on the hour until 5:00 PM. That is, with the exception of the break at noon.”

As for why I had done this, it didn’t seem like Nanase had connected the dots just yet.

“The GPS searching feature is an extremely convenient tool that allows you to find out the location of every student on the island. However, if used only a single time, you’d just get a glimpse at everyone’s current location, so its overall usefulness is marginal. But by splitting up the day into parts and doing ten of them, you’re able to find out all sorts of things that you couldn’t before.”

By connecting all the different dots into lines, you’d be left with the various routes that everyone had taken throughout the day. If someone else were to run ten searches of their own, they’d learn that Nanase and I were always traveling together.

“Uhm, I already understand what you used your points on, Senpai. And I agree that if you know where everyone’s moving on an hourly basis, you might be able to find out which Tables they belong to. However, it didn’t seem like you were doing very much with your tablet yesterday, and it’s not very easy information to memorize either… Are you… Are you really telling me that you memorized everything in an instant?”

“That’d be impossible. It’d take an enormous amount of time just to check everyone’s name and location.”

I opened up my tablet’s picture storage and showed her the images I had saved there.

“After running the GPS Search, I took a high-quality screenshot of the results and saved it. This way, I can study the images during my spare time and slowly analyze the movements groups made that day whenever I want.”

While we couldn’t send messages or photographs to anyone during the exam, saving screenshots to our own device was a built-in feature of our tablets, so it was only natural that we could make use of it. By repeatedly scrutinizing the screenshots, it was possible to keep a detailed, persistent record of every single student’s position.

“By thoroughly cross-referencing the images, I’m left with what’s essentially a record of an entire day’s worth of movement that can be viewed at any time.”

There’d be plenty of time to look at the data too, be it just before going to bed at night, in the morning before the exam started, or even during the two-hour break period at lunch.

And while it was only for the sixth day, the screenshots also showed the details of the Tasks that were available at the time, so we could gain some insight into the higher-level strategies that each group was using as well.

“…I didn’t even realize that you had done this, Senpai.”

“I’m not so foolish as to let a potential enemy catch wind of what I’m up to. After all, I had no idea what kind of person you truly were.”

At the time, I still saw Nanase as an enemy, so it would’ve been immensely foolish to tell her about what I was doing with the GPS Search. Students had quite a few reasons to always be using their tablets, from confirming their current locations to checking the details of nearby Tasks, so it wouldn’t seem that unnatural for me to be focused on it throughout the day.

It had been as simple as taking a screenshot of the GPS Search results every hour or so, all while staying on top of my designated areas and Tasks.

Impressed, Nanase began to swipe through the screenshots. Every time she went to the next image, the GPS signals of every student on the island would change places on the map.

“I say this with all due respect, but is this really worth paying ten whole points for? If it was possible to share the screenshots with someone, then there might be some added value, but it’d take a considerable amount of time for one person to analyze the movement patterns on their own, wouldn’t it?”

It was true that these images would be more valuable if we could attach them to a text message or email of some sort and send them out to our peers. By collaborating with several people, it would open up the possibility to run searches in shorter time intervals, or even keep track of other groups outside of the standard exam hours. I wouldn’t be shocked if the other classes implemented a plan exactly like that if we weren’t explicitly restricted from doing so.

“Even if I’m just one person, it all depends on how I make use of it. You could say that whether or not this was worth the points I spent will be decided in the days to come.”

“And by that you mean…?”

“Well, let me show you some of the information I’ve found out from it so far.”

From the first-years to the third-years, all kinds of new things could be found out by looking at the data based on grade level.

In the case of the third-years, in particular, there was clearly something peculiar going on with regard to their movements.

“For example, some third-year groups moved fairly unusually throughout the day yesterday. Furthermore, these groups are always closely related to Nagumo’s group or Kiriyama’s group. When I looked into it, I noticed something pretty interesting.”

Starting at 7:00 AM on the sixth day, we traced the position of Nagumo’s group hour-by-hour as they moved throughout the island.

“To begin with, Nagumo’s group was in area B8 at 7:00 AM that morning.”

“Does that mean his last designated area on the fifth day was area B8?”

“That’s highly likely, but he was at the southernmost edge of the area, so he could’ve actually started at area B9 instead. In any case, the only other GPS signals in the area at the time were those of his own group members.”

However, at 8:00 AM, only an hour later, several other groups had begun to concentrate in the area around Nagumo.

The trend became even more pronounced at 9:00 AM, making it clear that groups were actively seeking out and meeting with him.

And from that point on, the large conglomerate of groups began to move.

By 10:00 and 11:00 AM, the obscurity of what was taking place became even more apparent.

“There are so many groups moving around together… almost like they’re a school of fish.”

“With just a glance at the data, you wouldn’t even notice it, but it paints a completely different picture once you know what to look for, right?”

Nanase nodded a few times in response as we proceeded to flip through the next couple of screenshots. Once we got to the one I had taken at 3:00 PM, she asked a question.

“Are they… doing this to monopolize Tasks?”

“Most likely, the point is to have Nagumo effortlessly secure first-place in any Task they come across by fixing the competition in his favor.”

It wasn’t complicated in the slightest. Rather, it was a very simple strategy, and a potent one at that.

“However, groups other than President Nagumo’s won’t be able to score points as a result, right? I can’t imagine that they’re all part of the same Table either. Working together for the success of a specific group… It’s an idea that pretty much anyone could come up with, but it’d be impossible to put it into practice effectively.”

Groups would need to forego their own designated areas as they wasted their time traveling with those in other Tables.

Moreover, by yielding first place to Nagumo’s group, they wouldn’t be able to earn many points from Tasks either.

“You’re not wrong. But, the reason the strategy works is because it disregards one of the most basic principles of this exam. Tell me, what’s stopping students from working together to have a specific group come out on top?”

“That would be due to class points and the overarching threat of expulsion, of course.”

At that, I motioned for Nanase to zoom in closer and look at the students that had gathered together around Nagumo.

“They… they’re all from groups down at the bottom of the rankings…”

“And there aren’t any Class A students mixed in with them. Not a single one.”

“The gap in class points between Class 3-A and the other third-year classes must be so hopelessly large that there’s no way for them to catch up…”

“Or, to put that another way, the third-year is in such a state that it doesn’t really matter to them who loses.”

Both first and second-year students still hadn’t gotten to the point where they’d consider giving up on the class competition, and it was precisely because they had their sights set on reaching Class A by any means possible that sinking down to the bottom rankings felt so utterly unacceptable.

However, the same didn’t apply to the third-year students. In their case, the four classes were more than capable of looking past that and working together with one another.

“The strength of this strategy is that the groups down at the bottom of the rankings are free to do anything they want during the exam. When you’re in last place, there’s no difference between having one point and having fifty. At the end of the day, you’ll still lose class points and get expelled all the same.”

“If you’re really doing everything you can to support a specific group, you most likely wouldn’t have any points of your own, right? So while it’s true that these third-year groups are down at the bottom, don’t you think it’s weird that they each have 20 to 30 points?”

If they truly forewent all designated areas and Tasks, they naturally wouldn’t have earned any points as a result.

Therefore, Nanase was saying that it would make more sense for them to be hovering at or around zero points instead, due to the ramping penalty that came with missing designated areas.

I chose not to say anything in response to this, subtly prompting her to think about it for herself. And after a little bit, it seemed the answer slowly began to dawn on her.

Ultimately, I decided to add in a couple of words to help accelerate the process.

“A strategy becomes less effective once people catch onto it. So, what should be done in order to prevent that from happening?”

“If you have two or three groups with zero points, then the other school years will obviously realize that something weird is happening. Therefore, as long as they have at least some points on hand, it’ll make it harder for others to notice what’s going on…”

She peered over at me as she spoke, having arrived at an answer all her own.

And, she was probably right. That was exactly why Nagumo’s strategy was so brilliant. If multiple groups all had zero points, it would be far too conspicuous. It would be like they were going around and declaring to the public that they were up to something sinister.

“In fact, while there are several groups that seem to be providing support for Nagumo, there’s always at least one member from each who’s dedicated to reaching designated areas.”

“So they’re trying to prevent the ramping penalty from getting out of hand.”

And in the process, they’d gradually accumulate points, however few in number they might be.

“In a sense, we should also assume that the groups supporting him are competing with each other. Sure they’re conceding first place to Nagumo, but second and third are up for grabs by whoever’s adept enough to grab hold of it. That’s why, even among the bottom groups, the rankings will change around from time to time or the point disparity between them will start growing larger. It also helps make it seem as if they’re taking the special exam seriously.”

If you didn’t run ten GPS Searches, you’d never be able to see through this strategy.

Even if you suspected that something was going on, it wouldn’t end up as anything more than suspicion.

“Would they really want to let Nagumo win, even at the cost of their own expulsion? Even if they can’t rise up to Class A, I can’t imagine that they’d want to leave the school, right?”

“There might be some eccentric exceptions among them, but for the most part, I agree. Behind the scenes, Nagumo has probably prepared some relief measures of his own.”

“Relief measures of his own…?”

“It’s impossible for the other third-year classes to graduate as Class A by coming out on top through special exams. That being said, what if it’s possible to get into Class A by agreeing to work together with Nagumo instead?”

“If that’s really the only option they have, then… I guess I can see why they’d cooperate.”

If faced with the choice between graduating as a member of one of the lower classes and putting everything on the line to try and graduate as a member of Class A, it wouldn’t be strange for there to be those who volunteered themselves for the latter.

“In a way, I can’t even tell who’s running this exam anymore: the school or the student council president.”

“Honestly, you’re probably onto something there as well. Nagumo has the entire third-year in the palm of his hand after all. He’s not here to follow the rules; He’s here to make and dictate them to the rest of us.”

The mere fact that he orchestrated this situation in the first place was highly impressive. It probably wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that, throughout the entire history of the Advanced Nurturing High School, Nagumo was and will be the first and last of his kind.

Of course, we second-year students weren’t just going to sit back and watch as he did whatever he wanted either.

On the fifth day of the exam, I approached both Ryūen and Sakayanagi with a certain proposal of sorts: to clear specific Tasks together with the help of a ‘select portion’ of the second-year student body. Or, put more simply, a strategy similar in nature to the one that Nagumo had adopted. However, it differed from his in that the points wouldn’t all be concentrated in a specific leading group.

Since the flames of competition between the second-years were still burning strong, the proposal wouldn’t have gotten anywhere the moment points got involved. Therefore, I made it a condition to cooperate with respect to something else. Both Ryūen and Sakayanagi were worried about the success of some of the groups that their classmates had formed, so they agreed to negotiate on equal footing with more of a ‘you scratch my back, I scratch yours’ kind of approach.

As an example, certain Class 2-A groups would help Class 2-D with increasing the maximum group size of Sudō’s group, and in exchange we would help them increase the maximum size of one of their own that needed it. That was the general idea behind it.

Despite our being mutual enemies, as long as our interests were aligned, we could join hands without so much as a second thought.

I guess you could say that was one of the strengths of those leading the second-year.

Naturally, I don’t think the proposal would’ve worked nearly as well if this had taken place a year ago.

Rather, it was all thanks to the past year and a half of experience we’ve had together that we could put this plan into motion.

“I think I understand now. You’re saying that, for you, it wasn’t a very big risk to spend ten points in exchange for this information, right Senpai?”

“Somewhat. I haven’t exactly done away with my goal of reaching the top or anything. Fortunately, Kōenji has been putting in a lot of work of his own, so instead, I’ve been focused on gathering the resources necessary to support my peers who need help.”

“Kōenji-senpai sure is amazing, isn’t he? Giving President Nagumo a run for his money all by himself.”

Kōenji was indeed amazing, but the truth behind what was going on here was probably a little bit different. Every time someone went to check the top rankings, they’d see Kōenji and Nagumo’s group locked in a close back-and-forth struggle and think that Kōenji was squaring off against an entire group all on his own. In reality, however, Nagumo’s group was most likely just putting on an act as they slowed down to match pace with Kōenji.

The rankings would be available for public view until the end of the twelfth day, so Nagumo was probably going to keep up the ruse until then.

And then, once the rankings were hidden again, he and his group would pick up the pace for the final two days of the exam.

By doing so, it would paint the picture that Nagumo had emerged victorious over Kōenji, who had run out of steam during the exam’s endgame. The fact that he’s used such a large number of allied groups to rack up a ton of points from Tasks wouldn’t be exposed either.

Though, given that he was slowing himself down to match his pace with Kōenji’s, that also gave the rest of us a chance to snatch up the win for ourselves.

“Anyways, for now, let’s use this info to take a look at the movements Amasawa was making on the sixth day.”

With these words, Nanase clearly made the connection that there was all sort of value hidden in the screenshots that even I hadn’t uncovered yet.

“It doesn’t look like Amasawa was in the designated area that morning.”

Given that she had the same Table as us, it wouldn’t be strange for her to pitch camp in the same designated area as us as well.

However, her GPS signal showed her to be two areas to the south instead.

Furthermore, there were no other signals overlapping with hers, indicating that she had spent the night alone.

“Here’s the screenshot from 8:00 AM, one hour after the first designated area was announced.”

“The area we were headed to at the time was B6, right Senpai?”

“Yeah. It seems like she took a different route to B6 than we did.”

She was also moving quite fast, given the distance she managed to travel from the previous screenshot.

Was it that she had just traveled faster than expected, or had she just taken the most optimal path?

Either way, it didn’t seem like the movement of a lone girl walking through the forest.

We then checked the next map at 9:00 AM, and she was in area C6, one area to the right of the designated area.

It was likely that she had stepped foot within the designated area at some point earlier and was now heading off toward a nearby Task.

“This really is amazing. Every movement that someone did throughout the day is right at your fingertips, clearly displayed on a map.”

At least during the morning hours of the sixth day, she seemed to be diligently taking the exam just like any other student.

We soon began to analyze the next seven screenshots, focusing our attention solely on Amasawa’s signal.

But in the end, she didn’t do anything that stood out. She just participated in three or so Tasks as she diligently made her way to the designated areas. We could probably find out whether or not she placed high in said Tasks by cross-referencing with the logs on Nanase’s tablet, but her performance didn’t really matter here.

“At the very least, there’s nothing to indicate that Amasawa was following us, or up to anything suspicious in general as of 5:00 PM yesterday.”

“…So in the end, we haven’t learned anything?”

“No, we’ve learned plenty. This makes it clear that Amasawa’s taking the special exam at least somewhat seriously. Plus, this means that she isn’t leaving any openings that we might catch wind of through GPS Searches.”

It was safe to assume that she was up to something once the scheduled exam hours were done for the day, that is, from dusk till dawn. But while it was possible to run a GPS Search during that time period, that’d just end up being nothing more than a waste of points.

At this point, we received a notification from the school about the compensation we’d get because of the exam’s suspension for the day.

『Due to ongoing complications with the weather, only one-fourth of the day’s quota of Tasks and area movements were able to be completed. To compensate for the lost opportunity, the school has passed the decision to double all points earned through Arrival Bonuses, Early Bird Bonuses, and Tasks on the final day of the exam. According to the forecast, the weather is expected to improve sometime before tomorrow morning.』

The final day of the exam was similar to the first day, with only three-fourths of the day dedicated to the special exam.

So in that sense, you could say that the compensation they had chosen to go with was just what the doctor ordered.

“Senpai, this looks like it could end up changing everything.”

The final day was when the majority of conflicts would be settled, so with double the points on the line, the chances of successfully making a comeback were very real.

“The school was right to tell us about this so far ahead of time. It’ll give groups the chance to reassess their plans for the second half of the exam.”

With today having turned into a full day to rest, there would surely be groups out there that think to pace themselves from tomorrow onward, conserving their stamina in anticipation for the finale. On the other hand, it also wouldn’t be all that surprising if there were groups that chose to take advantage of that and go all-out as soon as tomorrow. In any case, this outcome was hardly a welcome turn of events as far I was concerned.

After staring at my tablet for a while, I realized that Nanase had stopped talking as much and watched as she began nodding off beside me. It was as if she was gradually slipping into the unconsciousness of sleep, her eyes at times wide open or slowly falling shut.

“I know it’s still daytime, but maybe you should go and get some rest?”

She had forced herself to climb a mountain earlier this morning, only to use up the rest of her stamina fighting me immediately afterward. She’d no doubt gone two or three times over her limit today, so she was probably wrought with fatigue by now.

“Eh? Ah…! Sorry!”

She tried to straighten herself in a fluster, but a strong spell of drowsiness wasn’t something you could snap out of so easily.

And this was even more true for someone with a tattered body like her.

“…I’ll head back to my own tent then.”

She was the one who knew what was best for herself.

If she were to continue to stay here while dozing off like this, she’d just end up being a hindrance.

“That sounds like a good idea.”

Judging from the way the rain was still coming down, it didn’t seem like we’d be able to get any productive traveling done today anyway.

With that being the case, we should take every second possible to give our bodies as much of a break as possible.

Though, it’s not like resting inside a tent was exactly comfortable or anything, but that’s just the way the cookie crumbles sometimes.

Just as Nanase was about to unzip the entrance, she turned and looked back at me from over her shoulder.

“As soon as the rain stops, I think I’m going to try to chase after Amasawa-san. It’s clear enough that she’s from the White Room, and I’m concerned with what she’s planning to do after this.”

Indeed, if she just continued to stick together with me like this, we wouldn’t find out nearly as much about what Amasawa was up to.

And, as they were fellow members of the same group, I didn’t think that Amasawa would do anything cruel to Nanase either.

“The fact that Amasawa managed to make it until now as a student of the White Room means that she’s a threat. It’s vitally important that you don’t underestimate her due to gender or age.”

“I’m not clear on all the details, but from what you’re saying she must be an extremely dangerous opponent.”

In terms of pure combat power, you could say that Amasawa was even a step above the likes of Sudō and Ryūen. While they may have her beat in terms of raw physical strength, she’d definitely be far, far ahead of them when it comes to technique and experience. No matter how hard she tried, Nanase herself probably wouldn’t stand a ghost of a chance against her.

“You have your other group member, Hōsen, to watch out for as well.”

“Yes. Given his sheer strength, he’s not an opponent I can handle either.”

Nanase nodded along, clearly believing herself to have understood, but Hōsen’s overwhelming physical strength wasn’t the only thing that made him dangerous.

You’d be better off thinking of Hōsen as the type of person who has more than just raw physical power going for him.

“I think it’s extremely unlikely that Hōsen is a White Room student, but after what happened with Amasawa, I’m not so sure about that anymore. In any case, put my matters on the back burner for the time being and just focus on protecting yourself.”

That is, of course, assuming that her primary goal doesn’t turn out to be getting me kicked out of school.

“I’m not afraid of getting expelled, Ayanokōji-senpai. I’ll do anything if it means protecting you, no matter the cost.”

Rather than offering advice, my words had been meant as more of a warning, but based on her response it didn’t seem like the message had gotten through.

“Let me put it slightly differently for you then, Nanase. It’s possible that your careless actions may cause me unintended problems. I want you to avoid doing anything that may put me at risk.”

I conveyed to her that this wasn’t me being apprehensive or worried about what would become of her, but what would, by extension, become of me.

Upon doing so, Nanase’s valiant, loyal demeanor changed into that of a meek, frail puppy.

“That… That would be unacceptable of me. I can’t be causing you any more trouble than I already have…”

“If that’s really true, then in any case, I just ask that you be careful. Got it?”

“I understand, I promise.”

Having told her all of this, I felt fairly confident that she wouldn’t do anything reckless.

After all, I really didn’t think she wanted to do anything that would bring more shame onto herself than she already had.

Once Nanase had returned to her own tent, my gaze dropped down to my tablet once again.

I wanted to quickly comb over the scores of the top ten and bottom ten groups and then iron out the exam’s current state of affairs with my own score in mind.

『Top Ten Rankings』

1st Place: Second-Year Group Kōenji – 168 Points

2nd Place: Third-Year Group Nagumo – 166 Points

3rd Place: Third-Year Group Kiriyama – 150 Points

4th Place: Third-Year Group Mizoe – 133 Points

4th Place: Third-Year Group Ochiai – 133 Points

6th Place: Second-Year Group Ryūen – 128 Points

7th Place: Second-Year Group Sakayanagi – 127 Points

8th Place: First-Year Group Takahashi – 115 Points

9th Place: Second-Year Group Kanzaki – 104 Points

10th Place: Third-Year Group Kuronaga – 101 Points

I was currently ranked 49th overall with 78 points. There was a full, 90 point difference between myself and Kōenji, who was all the way up in first place.

Though it may seem impossible for me to recover from the gap in our scores, I’d still get 11 points for getting a first-place Early Bird Bonus. And with four chances per day, I’d catch up just by placing first nine times in a row. Of course, this was also provided that Kōenji wouldn’t earn any points of his own in the meantime.

If Kōenji were to maintain his current pace and keep diligently racking up points, he’d end up with a final score of around 350, so if I wanted to bridge the gap, I’d have to earn close to 40 points per day for the rest of the exam. If you were to ask that of another group, they’d pass it off as impossible and probably give up on the spot. However, even an outlier like Kōenji would surely slow down during the second half of the exam.

“But tenth place has 101 points, huh?”

Back when the rules of this uninhabited island exam were first explained to us, I thought that groups would’ve had slightly higher scores by this point. However, from the current status of the top ten and the fact that I was currently ranked 49th overall, it felt like overall progress had stagnated somewhat since the exam entered the midgame. After overall efficiency hit its peak on the second or third day, a lingering sense of fatigue began to set in, and there had been a noteworthy increase in the number of missed designated areas, penalties, and Task abstentions.

At the same time, since small groups were also steadily beginning to merge with each other, the total number of groups was going down little by little. This was definitely something I ought to keep in mind as well.

In order for me to successfully break into the upper ranks, I’d need to show significant growth during the second half of the exam.

And the key to that was the tenth place score, which acted as the barrier between public knowledge and anonymity.

To that end, I previously strove to silently, patiently rise through the lower ranks during this first half without pushing myself too hard.

My efforts would’ve borne fruit starting tomorrow too, the eighth day, but with the exam having been put on hold today due to the heavy rain, I should expect another large spike of activity from all groups for the next two days or so. Furthermore, there would definitely be groups looking to conserve their stamina for the double points being offered on the final day as well.

This special exam seemed as if it was completely unwinnable for a one-man group. However, there was actually something contradictory residing within the relationship between the rules of the exam, basic movement, and Tasks.

If you tried to make it to your designated areas the fastest, you’d run the risk of missing out on Tasks; conversely, if you focused your energy on getting to Tasks, you’d most likely end up missing out on Early Bird Bonuses. This was a universal truth regardless of whether you were part of a large group or all on your own.

As a whole, the exam had been very cleverly constructed and balanced like this, from the fact that eligibility for Early Bird Bonuses was based on when the last person of a group stepped foot in the designated area, to the system put in place that required groups to venture out to Task sites without even knowing if they’d be able to participate.

It was unclear exactly when the rain would stop, and I was still worried about Nanase among a few other things, but starting tomorrow, the second half of the exam would begin, and I was going to fight with an all-new strategy in hand.