



4

ようこそ**実力至上主義の教室へ**2年生編

Welcome to the Classroom of the Second-year

衣笠彰梧 × トモセシユンサク





「っと」

倒れそうになる一之瀬を抱き留める。

「一体どうしたんだ一之瀬」

「わ、私、どうしても綾小路くんに
伝えなきゃいけないことがあって……」



「綾小路先輩に会いに行くって言うなら、
それを止めるためにちよつとだけ遊ぼつか」
「ッ!？」

「綾小路、私の行動は不要だったかな？」

「それはこの後次第ですね。
手を貸していただけると考えていいんですか？」

「もちろんだ。先輩として
後輩を守るのは自然なことだろう？」





Uninhabited Island Exam (Second-Year)

Exam Overview

- Survive for up to 2 weeks on an uninhabited island.
- Because of the variety of skills needed, groups with higher overall ability will have an advantage, but the value of cooperation and cohesion mustn't be ignored.

Rewards

1st Place Group

300 Class Points, 1,000,000 Private Points, 1 Protection Point

2nd Place Group

200 Class Points, 500,000 Private Points

3rd Place Group

100 Class Points, 250,000 Private Points

Top 50% of Groups (1st-3rd Place Included)

50,000 Private Points

Top 70% of Groups (1st-3rd Place Included)

25,000 Private Points

- ✧ The class points earned by the top three groups will be transferred from the classes of the bottom three groups. Class points will be evenly distributed to each class present in the group, regardless of group composition (Rounded Up).

Penalties

Students in the five lowest-ranked groups will be subject to expulsion. Should a student receive this penalty, it can be waived by paying a lump sum of 6 million private points.

- ✧ The 6 million point bail will be divided evenly amongst all members of the group.
- ✧ Students will not be allowed to transfer private points after the exam has begun, so they must make sure that they have the necessary points on hand before disembarking.

Distributed Cards

Basic Card Summary

Head Start	Provides the cardholder with 50% more points for provisions and supplies at the start of the exam.
Stimulus	Doubles the private points earned by the cardholder throughout the exam.
Half Off	Upon receiving a penalty, reduces the private points to be paid by half. Only applicable to the cardholder.
Free Ride	Allows the cardholder to designate a group at the start of the exam. The cardholder earns half of the private points earned by the group as a bonus. Joining the aforementioned group nullifies the effect of the card.
Insurance	Grants the cardholder a one day reprieve to recover in the event of disqualification due to ill health. Disqualification due to dishonest means invalidates the effect of the card.

Special Card Summary

More People	Allows the cardholder to become the 7th member of a group, irrespective of the ratio of boys and girls already present in the group. Only to be used after the start of the exam.
Nullify	Reduces the private points to be paid upon receiving a penalty to zero. Only applicable to the cardholder.
Trial	Grants the cardholder the right to increase class points provided as a reward from the exam by 50%. However, should the cardholder's group not place within the top 30% of groups, the group will be subject to a penalty. The additional class points will be provided by the school.

CONFUSED TLS

Chapter 1: Ichika Amasawa's Soliloquy

HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF THE TERM test-tube babies? I don't think it's called that anymore; now they call it in-vitro fertilization. I am someone who was a product of this so-called "in-vitro fertilization."

Other than that, I know nothing about my backstory. I've never even seen the faces of my parents. What are they doing now, and why did they send me to the White Room? I don't know the answer to these questions, but I wouldn't accept them even if I did. Simply because I have no interest whatsoever. That is how I was raised in the White Room. All they told me was, "Your parents are both very talented people." They told me I was a special child who was qualified to be a genius.

However, my very existence contradicts the meaning of the White Room. The ultimate goal for the White Room is to make all humans equal. The White Room exists to prove that human limitations are not determined by genetic factors but by the environment that humans are raised. Therefore, the institution does not expect me, who has excellent genetic factors, to master talents that others cannot. To the White Room, my existence is nothing more than an "experiment."

I don't necessarily disprove the White Room's experiments, but do they honestly believe such a thing is possible?

If you ask me, it's impossible without a doubt.

Intellect, character, and spirit will always differ among people. Don't you think my existence is proof of that? My inner self has always shown a different mentality from my surroundings ever since I was a child. While I was obediently doing tasks in the White Room, I was constantly thinking about the meaning of this institution. Growing up for the sake of the White Room? Gambling my own life as nothing more than a contribution? Is my goal to be the most successful experiment, and should I spend every day desperately trying to prove it? Don't you think this way of living is quite unfortunate? Wouldn't you want to live more freely? At least, that's what I think. Trapped in that dark world for the rest of my life, I really can't stand the thought.

That is my stance on the matter, but this is nothing more than an irrelevant topic right now. The main topic is the existence of Kiyotaka Ayanokōji. This was a person who achieved unsurpassed results in the White Room. Of course, when I first heard it, I took it with a grain of salt. What he had done so effortlessly is what I had been desperately trying to accomplish for so long. Can you believe that? But oh well, after looking at his data and seeing him and talking to him, I realized it wasn't just empty talk. He really is remarkable.

But I'm sorry, senpai. I wanted to be your companion, but that won't work now. In terms of how long I've known you, it's been a very, very long time. However, you've only just met me. This brings me to wonder if I am more affectionate than I thought I was.

As a worshiper of my senpai, please allow me to look at you from afar when "that time" comes.

Chapter 1: Active in The Dark

THE RAIN WAS GETTING STRONGER, and the fog was getting thicker. Now that my vision and hearing are reduced, I feel the nasty scent of someone approaching from behind. The sound of mud and water splashing on the ground rang out as if this person was deliberately trying to get our attention.

Nanase also seems to have quickly noticed this unusual sound and scent. I look back to see the red hair of a student swaying around.

“It seems like it’s going to rain heavily senpai.”

The person who had appeared out of the mist and rain was Ichika Amasawa of the 1st year A class. Although I already knew that she was following a similar path as Nanase and me, I really didn’t think that it was a coincidence that we met here. It didn’t look like there were any other students in proximity to us, nor did it look like she was carrying a backpack or a tablet. How did she manage to find us? I assume she probably hid her belongings somewhere around here to reduce strain and then quietly followed us. Or perhaps she never had any luggage to begin with and was following us from the start. Maybe, someone searched for us through the GPS and transmitted our location through a wireless transceiver. Whatever the case may be, we can rule out the possibility that it was due to chance.

Whatever her method to find us was, she certainly wasn’t a welcoming presence. Amasawa wasn’t empty-handed. In her left hand is a thick wooden stick. The type that’s perfect to beat people up with.

I would assume Amasawa would take us by surprise; considering the weather conditions at the moment, it would have been relatively easy to hide until the time is right. In such dire situations, an undetected attack could be devastating.

“Senpai, please get behind me.”

While I was thinking about the reason for Amasawa’s appearance, Nanase, who was clearly physically exhausted, stood next to me. Nanase stared at Amawawa without hiding her wariness.

“Hmm? Wasn’t I supposed to be welcomed by Nanase? Look at this, my own comrade abandoning me. Or did you see me with this thing and found me intimidating?”

Amasawa gently tossed the thick wooden stick towards her feet, declaring herself non-threatening. But Nanase didn’t even show a slight change in her defensive posture.

“You are not trustworthy at all.”

“Fufufu, you’re really too much, why would you say that? I’m so cute!”

I don’t think that trust can be linked to cuteness at all, but that doesn’t matter.

“What’s going on Nanase?” I ask her as she continuously stares down Amasawa.

Amasawa had a side to her that no one could understand. To say that she was someone who had exceptional acting skills, as well as the ability to execute complex plans, would not be an exaggeration. It’s only natural to be wary; I’ve always done that. But there is no way to explain this unusual vigilance of Nanase. However, it should be natural to have such a reaction on occasions like these. You could assume Nanase was exaggerating because she is now on my side...

“I’m not a bad person, am I, Ayanokōji-senpai? So how about we just talk things over.”

“Please don’t listen to her senpai, she’s dangerous.”

To Amasawa, who isn’t showing any hostility, Nanase is displaying staggering amounts of determination. Although Nanase’s statements seemed like unwarranted criticism, Amasawa didn’t seem to show any dissatisfaction.

“Senpai, I must confess something to you. The slope where Shinohara-senpai’s group was attacked, you and Ike-senpai went up the same slope together right? The slope that caused Komiya-senpai and Kinoshita-senpai to withdraw.”

Having heard Shinohara’s voice call out, Ike had rushed up blindly. I followed him, seeing as it was quite dangerous to go up that slope alone.

“During that incident, I sensed someone approach us and I chased after them.” Nanase added.

“Is that why you weren’t with Sudō and the others when we returned after finding Shinohara?” I asked.

Nanase nodded quietly.

“And then what?”

“Although I didn’t catch up with the person who ran away, I still managed to catch a glimpse of that unique hair.” Saying so, Nanase slowly pointed towards Amasawa.

“At that time, the person who was watching us was you, wasn’t it Amasawa-san?”

“Fufu... oops! So, you saw me?”

Rather than deny it, Amasawa simply confessed with a smile.

There was no wavering in Amasawa’s attitude, nor was there surprise that she had been discovered. The person who was secretly watching us at the time was none other than Amasawa.

“Did you hurt Komiya-senpai and the others?” asked Nanase abruptly.

“Hmm? That’s too one sided, isn’t it? Maybe I just happened to be there.”

“In that case, there was no need to run away, right?”

“Wouldn’t you run away when someone who has a terrifying look on their face chases you? I didn’t want them to suspect me.” Amasawa replied.

“I can’t believe it.”

“So you’re trying to make me out to be the one who attacked the seniors, Nanase-sama?”

“I am sure you are. It’s almost impossible for me to be wrong here....”

“You’re soooo sure, but you also feel the need to add the word “almost.” You don’t know the truth, do you?”

It was a deadlock between the two girls from the same group. They held each other in check with words.

“Then can you swear that you’re not the one who attacked senpai and the others?”

“I can promise, but whether that promise is the truth or not is none of your business, Nanase.” Amasawa simply said there was no point in doing such a thing.

“And even if it really was me who did that, then what would you do?” Instead of trying to get out of Nanase’s pursuit, it seems she keeps diving deeper and deeper.

Although Nanase seemed to be overwhelmed by Amasawa’s aura, she continued on in order to pursue the truth.

“Alright in that case, tell me why are you doing this? No, before that, explain how you were able to hide yourself from the GPS positioning system.”

To be perfectly honest, there was no need to confirm that last point with Amasawa.

“It’s not difficult to eliminate the GPS itself, just destroy the watch no?” Amasawa happily showed us the watch on her right hand.

“That’s right~ Whether it’s intentional or not, a malfunction is a malfunction and I can just get a new one from the school for free.”

“But if you break your watch, shouldn’t the school find out?” Nanase questioned.

“That’s true but until they find me, it is very difficult for them to determine the cause of the malfunction. Until then, I can do anything I want.”

There are more than 400 GPS signals on this island. The disappearance of one or two signals would not be detected for a short time. Furthermore, the teacher’s priority was to ensure the safety of the students and not continually monitor the number of signals.

“But the school will definitely trace it after a while, right? It’s only a matter of time before they find out.”

After Shinohara explained how she was attacked, the school would definitely get involved in the investigation. In the process, only Amasawa’s GPS signal had disappeared, making it highly likely that she was the culprit.

But therein lies the problem.

“If only Amasawa’s GPS signal disappeared when Komiya and the others were attacked, suspicion from the school is inevitable. However, it would be nothing more than just a suspicion as there is no other evidence to prove it. As long as there is no more direct evidence, it cannot be concluded that the culprit is her.” I inform Nanase.

“That—”

From Nanase’s point of view, she had seen Amasawa directly, so it would be correct to assume the culprit was Amasawa. However, to prove a crime is much harder than just making an assumption. The school absolutely had to avoid a lawsuit that would cause Amasawa to drop out of the school due to a wrongful conviction.

Initially, the watch was given to all the students in the uninhabited island exam to ensure everyone complies with the rules and so the school can maintain order. If it was easy to use, the purpose of the watch would fail.

To avoid trouble, the watch had to be strictly regulated. Watch changes caused by breakdowns could only be done once, with each breakdown consuming points. Too many malfunctions can lead to forced removal, etc.

But the stricter the regulations, the more likely a loophole will be found and exploited. For example, playing tricks on the enemy's watch to damage it accidentally. Moreover, if there is really an accident or any other situation on the schools' part that leads to expulsion, it would be unacceptable. This is something that must be avoided.

"It's customary that you try and poke holes in the rules, and if the school can't find any evidence, anything is fine." Even if this argument was wild, what Amasawa said was correct.

"That may be true, however, if there is no evidence I will act as a witness and prove that Amasawa was there." Counters Nanase.

"The end result would be the same. A simple GPS malfunction and being present at the scene of the incident alone will only end in suspicion."

If a violent person like Sudō or Ryūen had been involved with this kind of disturbance, the school would be more suspicious. But the girl standing in front of me was nothing more than a harmless-looking first-year high school girl. With such insignificant evidence, the school authorities would not have deep suspicions. Not to mention, there was no testimony from Komiya and Kinoshita that they had been attacked. Shinohara could only give an ambiguous answer like, "I was attacked by someone but I don't know who it was."

This is the same nature of the testimony, "Nanase saw Amasawa."

If there was no conclusive evidence, it would be impossible for the school to punish Amasawa.

"And there it is Nanase."

That said, I still don't know what the reason is for Amasawa's presence here. The atmosphere is merely filled with Nanase's pursuing questions and Amasawa's teasing words, and I don't see any progress at all. The idea of going to do something productive... seems to have become a luxury. As for whether or not Amasawa was the one who hurt Komiya and the others, we'll put it aside for now. To advance the stalemate, I'll ask the next question.

"What are you doing here, no, how did you find us?"

At this point, we were drenched in the rain. Considering we had to continue the exam tomorrow, standing in the rain any longer should be avoided. I wish I could set up my tent right now and get out of the rain.

“Don’t be so anxious, Ayanokōji-senpai. Aren’t you happy we met in the middle of an uninhabited island in such circumstances?”

“I’m sorry, but it’s raining a lot more than I would like, so let’s get this over with.”

“Then, how about we set up the tent together and the two of us will spend a wonderful night here?”

The fact that men and women can’t sleep inside the same tent is something the school emphasized, and there’s no way she didn’t know that.

What a meaningless conversation. Was she stalling for time?

“There’s no need to worry senpai. It’s no problem, even the school can’t monitor everything.”

Just as Amasawa was about to step closer to me, Nanase immediately moved to grab her arm.

“What are you doing with that hand?”

“You’re not planning to throw yourself at Ayanokōji-senpai, are you?”

“When did Nanase become Ayanokōji-senpai’s knight? Didn’t you once plan with Hōsen-kun to make Ayanokōji-senpai drop out of school?” Amasawa responded with a hint of annoyance.

“That... has nothing to do with you. What did you come here for?”

“I came here because I was lost and I needed help.”

She’s already telling unadulterated lies. Could it be that she came to see the duel between Nanase and I and the result afterwards? From Nanase’s attitude, I think Amasawa could tell that Nanase had completely fallen to me. No, if that was the case, there was no point in her nonsensical small talk.

“I have something to say to Ayanokōji-senpai. Can you please move aside?”

“Can’t you just tell me right here?” I question the meaning of Amasawa’s statement.

“No, because it is about the White Room.”

Perhaps thinking that there was no point in her hiding identity any longer, Amasawa just revealed herself.

Nanase looked at me with a surprised look.

Throughout the first semester, I had been aware of the existence of another White Room student, a White Room “enforcer”, but I had never been able to confirm this enforcer’s true identity.

I certainly didn’t think it would be in the form of “confession” that I would find out about her existence.

“Do you understand now? Irrelevant student~” Amasawa giggled while looking at Nanase.

If Amasawa is really a White Room student, then Nanase is indeed considered an irrelevant person in this situation.

“Let go of her hand, Nanase.” I tell her.

Despite her dissatisfaction, Nanase obeyed my instructions and released her hand.

“That’s a good girl, Nanase. I don’t hate this kind of loyal dog feeling~” Saying that Amasawa slowly approached me.

I think we can finally make some progress in this conversation.

“I’m sorry, but with just Nanase as a precedent, I’m not going to confirm your existence as one from the White Room just by hearing the word “White Room.”

“Okay I can prove it to you if you want. But... it would be a bad for Nanase to hear it. You understand, right?” It’s the usual little devilish smile that looks at me.

I wave my hand slightly at Nanase and give her the command for her to stay away. Although Nanase felt very resistant to the fact that Amasawa was getting closer to me, she obeyed my instructions. With the rain falling heavier and heavier, whispering a few meters away should not be heard by her. Standing on the muddy ground, Amasawa came close enough that I could practically touch her without fully extending my hand.

“So where should I start?” Amasawa looked thoughtful as if she was saying to me, “You can understand right?”

But her sudden appearance this time around was truly incomprehensible. The White Room enforcer had been lurking until today, working on getting me expelled. However, the Amasawa in front of me exposed herself without taking any action. Most importantly, it was strange that she was hesitant to say anything until now. I can only assume that she’s trying to stall for time.

Just when I was debating whether I should open the conversation by opening my mouth, Amasawa spoke up.

“The curriculum you received when you were ten years old was on the base 5 construction theorem. When you were eleven years old, you learned about the theory of relativity. I did the exam twice, so I remember it well.”

As if to show that we learned in the same classroom, she told me details about my past.

“Whether it was the interior or the hallway, or the room where we slept, everything was white in that world.”

It seemed that Amasawa knew the White Room much better than Nanase. It was also unlikely that she would find out about this from Tsukishiro. You can’t reveal anything about the White Room to people who have nothing to do with it. Even he knows that. In other words, it’s basically concluded that Amasawa was the enforcer. From the content of the conversation to her words and actions, all of them are in line with the aesthetics of a White Room student.

“What is the advantage of revealing your identity by making a deliberate appearance?”

“I suppose there is none, but I don’t care about that. I just wanted to show you that I’m not your enemy senpai.”

“That is contradictory. The students in the White Room are enforcers sent to this school to have me expelled. It is inconsistent to say that someone like you is not my enemy. It doesn’t make sense.”

Although Amasawa was drenched in water, she continued to speak.

“The generations after the fourth generation harboured intense jealousy for you senpai. They thought if they used these White Room students with strong jealousy, it would be possible to make Ayanokōji-senpai drop out of school and there was nothing wrong with that. The superiors simply chose the wrong person. They did not see that I was just a young girl who had a longing to be with Ayanokōji-senpai.”

“Is that why you took the initiative to reveal your identity?”

Amasawa nodded.

“Then wouldn’t it have been better if you came and told me directly after entering school? You even managed to sneak into my room, so there were many opportunities to reveal your identity.”

“That may be true; however, no matter how much I longed for you before I saw you, it was just my self-imagination. It takes a certain amount of time to meet directly, talk, and come to a conclusion that, “Ahhh, it’s great to long for this person.”

In other words, if I'm not the ideal person that Amasawa thought I was, she would reject me. As the conversation progressed, this reason was tentatively established.

"Do you understand now?"

"Yes. The only people who can talk about the White Room in detail are the ones who lived there."

"Yup that's it. It feels amazing, to be an ordinary high school student who lives like this. I feel privileged to have experienced this special feeling until now. But I am more interested in allowing the other students in the White Room to have this same experience."

"If you feel the same way as I do, you should also be aware of how interesting this place is...."

"I understand exactly what you're trying to say senpai. I've wondered many times if I could be like a normal student and living a fun student life. I'm not good at making friends, and I don't have that many people to talk to." Amasawa replied with a twinge of sadness in her voice.

How do I put it? It's really very similar to what I think.

Although I had talked to Horikita, Ike, and others, there was still kind of a distance between us. I remembered a certain period when I couldn't even consider them "friends" honestly.

"But I don't lack the communication skills like my predecessors." Amasawa said as if reading my thoughts.

"Basically, I learned the same curriculums as my senpais. But on the other hand, I also learned exclusive things for the fifth generation."

Seeing as I didn't intend to intervene, Amasawa continued on.

"That is, communication and collaboration skills. Until the fourth generation, due to the culture of individualism, the children who failed came out of there broken. And it was impossible for them to communicate with children with poor grades. They are excellent and, of course, they have only been allowed to interact with people with the same excellence."

If this is true, it explains why it is not difficult to understand why she can make emotional expressions. In my case, I can play specific acting roles for a short period. However, it was difficult to break the habit of living without emotion most of the time.

"Still don't trust me?"

"I believe your origins, but I cannot accept the reason why you would tell me your identity."

“As expected of a White Room student, you really are calm and collected. Don’t you think I would threaten you, senpai?”

Seeing that I couldn’t answer that question, Amasawa laughed it off.

“Fufu, so, I’ve said everything I wanted to say. I’ll be taking my leave now, okay?” Amasawa turned around.

It seemed her visit was to let me know that she was a White Room student.

“What are you thinking, Amasawa?”

“Didn’t I already say? I’m longing for you Ayanokōji-senpai.”

She turned around and caressed my cheek with the tips of her wet fingers.

“So, senpai is not allowed to be defeated without my permission.” She whispered into my ear.

Saying that she took her finger away from my face and started to walk away.

Not allowed to be defeated? By who? Tsukishiro? Or perhaps the group of first-years who were given a 20 million bounty? Or is it...

“Ayanokōji-senpai, are you okay? Did something happen to you?” Nanase walked back up to me with a concerned look in her eyes.

I told the worried Nanase that she had nothing to be concerned about and looked at my backpack.

“We’d better hurry and set the tent, we need to get out of this rain.” I told her.

Although I would like to organize all the information I just learned, there was a priority.

“Well then, let’s work together and set up these tents quickly.” Nanase said as she started to get to work.

“Yes, let’s hurry.”

I answered that, but there was just one thing I had to confirm first. I had to confirm the footprints of the departing Amasawa.

“Senpai...?” Nanase called out to me.

“If I don’t hurry the rain will wash away the tracks.” I say this as I can already see the footprints start to lose their shape.

“Footprints? What about Amasawa’s footprint?” Nanase asked.

“When Komiya and the others were injured, there were tracks left at the scene. Now I know they were the same size as Amasawa’s.”

In other words, just like Nanase witnessed, Amasawa had been there.

“She really wasn’t there by coincidence, she really was the one who pushed them down right?”

“I can’t say for sure. At that time, Amasawa was simply watching you and Sudō. There still isn’t any proof she was the attacker,”

Nanase didn’t seem to immediately understand what I was trying to say.

“Perhaps there is no definitive evidence but I think it should be possible to directly infer that she is the culprit, right?”

“From the information we have now, Amasawa would indeed seem to be the culprit.”

“I think so, too. Although I’ve said it several times, I did see Amasawa-san.”

Of course, I didn’t doubt that.

“But you didn’t see her pushing them down.”

“That... well, but just now she confessed.”

“Whether that can be called a confession is still difficult to say at this stage. In the end, Amasawa simply said, “If I am the attacker.” She never said directly confessed by implying that she was speaking hypothetically.”

“Perhaps she was afraid of being recorded?”

“With this rain, and catching us off guard like this, do you think it’s necessary for her to be very alert?”

A quick glance shows that this is not a recordable environment at all.

“Even so, it is not absolute. Especially since she is also the object of Ayanokōji-senpai’s vigilance, it would be appropriate for her to consider the highest level of caution.”

“The victims were two students. If they are deliberately injured and as a result of that they’re placed in danger, the attacker must quickly escape after committing the crime. Why should the attacker go back to the scene and let someone see themselves?”

Nanase retrieved her backpack while thinking.

“Then... maybe she was worried about the injuries of Komiya-senpai and the others. I think this is the same psychology of how arsonists return to the scene of the crime.”

Indeed, it is said that arsonists will return to the scene. There are various explanations for this mentality, but it can't simply be applied to this incident. If you look at Amasawa as the culprit in this way, you will only see the surface of the incident.

"It is impossible for the White Room student sent by Tsukishiro to make this kind of mistake without being aware that, whatever happens, you do not run the risk of returning to the scene and the corresponding measures that surround it. In fact, Amasawa knew that Nanase would discover her at that time."

To not miss anything, I continued to trace the tracks that were about to be destroyed.

"Why would she give away her whereabouts even though she was being chased?"

"I think she thought that since she couldn't hide the fact you saw her, she came to contact us on her own initiative. If we report it to the school, even if we can't prove it, it will be a problem for the school. And if we entrust the matter to Acting Director Tsukishiro, it will become dangerous.

"Regarding this logic, it also contradicts her return to the scene of the crime."

"Can't it just be pinned on her careless nature?"

"Impossible."

Perhaps Amasawa had deliberately let Nanase discover her for some reason. With that, I managed to get a new hint from the tracks that I followed.

"Sure enough, there are some points of Amasawa's actions that can't be ignored."

"Something that can't be ignored?"

I followed her tracks that were about to be washed away by the rain.

"It seems to be perfectly close towards my back, so if I trace it from there...." I mutter in my breath.

"Hey, senpai."

At this moment, Nanase also noticed a peculiar change for the first time.

"There are someone else's footprints."

"Yes."

These footprints were slightly larger than Amasawa's. But because it had been completely deformed at this point due to the rain, the exact size can't be determined.

"This person got very close to us at one point, and that's where the footsteps are ruined. This is where that person's footsteps converged with those of Amasawa. Then, from here, those enigmatic footsteps started to turn back.

"In other words, before Amasawa contacted us, there was another...." Nanase realized that another mysterious individual had been following us.

Whether it was a student or someone from the school, it would be impossible to determine it from the information we have at the moment.

"Can you go get the thick wooden stick that Amasawa left behind?" I ask Nanase.

"Yes, okay." Nanase brings me the stick that Amasawa had dropped.

Looking at the stick, I finally got an answer to one of my speculations.

"Did you find anything?"

"Have I found something? I can tell this stick would inflict reasonable amounts of damage to whoever got hit by it."

Nanase takes the stick from my hands and studies it for a while until she notices something.

"I don't think she picked up this stick from around here."

"Look. In order to make this stick a better weapon, excess parts were cut off. The current state of this wooden stick is too unnatural."

"Did she intend to use this stick as a weapon to attack Ayanokōji-senpai?"

"If Amasawa wanted to attack me, she would launch a surprise attack from the shadows. However, even though she had this weapon, she didn't show any hints of hostility towards me. Not only that, she deliberately tried to get me to notice her."

More can be inferred from these statements.

"In other words, she did not plan to attack me from the very beginning. It wasn't Amasawa who held the stick at first, but the person who was about to leave, right?" Nanase asked me.

The tracks approached us at a slow pace but then grew faster and faster as it turned backwards. Was the person avoiding detection, or were they running away?

"But what's the reason for this?" Nanase continued to ask.

“According to Amasawa, I am the existence she longs for. That’s why it seems reasonable to think that she stopped this planned assault on me.”

“Isn’t it too dangerous to consider her our ally just by that...?” Nanase did not seem to be sold on the fact Amasawa may be on our side.

“Of course. But I can’t imagine who could be the owner of these tracks and they would want to attack me.”

“Maybe... is it someone related to the school or something?”

“That is possible, since I am a hanging bounty.”

I fully considered if this footprint belonged to one of the students who was looking for that reward. It was entirely conceivable that someone would take that risk to force me out of school.

“Oh yeah!” Nanase seemed to have a thought of something and raised her voice.

“Senpai, let’s do a GPS search now! It hasn’t been long since Amasawa-san’s departure. Even if there was someone running at full speed, in this bad weather, they couldn’t get too, far right?”

In fact, if we were to use the GPS search now, as long as there was an answer in the vicinity, all the suspects could be discovered at once. The answer could be close to us; we just need to find out who it is by examining all the possibilities in order.

“Ah, but if that person destroys the watch like Amasawa-san, we won’t be able to find out right?” Nanase seemed to doubt her previous thought.

“No, that is not the case. If you damage the watch, the GPS signal will disappear. What if there is another GPS signal other than Amasawa that disappears if I searched?

“...Then we’ll be able to determine that person is the culprit.”

“Then, the person who wanted to attack me would definitely not break their watch.”

“In that case, wouldn’t it be a good idea to pay an extra point for the scan?”

It had only been fifteen minutes since Amasawa had spoken to me. Not only do they need to escape the scene, but they also need to do whatever they can to get out of the area. With a little bit of luck, we might be able to find a slight trace of that person. Because of this, if I follow Nanase’s suggestion to do a GPS search now...

“Do not use a GPS search.”

“Ah, why?” Nanase asks, confused.

“No matter who the other party is, it is not surprising to develop a plan that allows us to use GPS scanning to locate them. There is a chance that a complete outsider may show up on the scan.”

They are likely to use an insignificant person to lure us into pursuing in the wrong direction. Like the incident where Amasawa’s figure was witnessed by Nanase and the appearance of Amasawa here, we should be wary of being unilaterally fed information by the enemy.

“It feels like such a waste.”

“If it were me, I wouldn’t be stupid enough to be seen. If this person forgot to consider a GPS search, then I don’t need to be afraid of this person at all.”

Nanase didn’t seem to understand, but she obeyed my decision. In any case, even after organizing my thoughts, I could not continue in this situation. I stopped the conversation and decided to quickly pitch the tent with Nanase. It had now changed from light rain to heavy rain.

Nanase and I put our tents together face to face after we finally set them up, and we fled inside our tents to get away from the rain. We took off our wet sportswear uniforms, jackets, underwear and I wiped my body with a towel. I changed into reserve clothes and opened the zipper of the tent to look outside. Although it was just early in the morning, the surrounding area was as dark as night. It would be challenging to move at least for one day.

As the raindrops barged unceremoniously into the tent, I had to zipper up, lie down, and start thinking quietly. I learned Nanase’s past and established the fact that Amasawa was a White Room student.

However, not all the secrets hidden in the darkness have come to light.

Part Two

In the midst of the continuing downpour, the school sent out an email. It was something that I had been expecting for a long time, and it was that today's exam was to be suspended. The report also said it would be difficult to turn things around if the basics of getting around and events disappeared. Still, ways to compensate were being considered to avoid putting students in a difficult situation. However, no matter what the school did to make up for it, the fact is that the exam is suspended today, and that would not change. While the compensation was effective from a total score point of view, the strategic plans developed by the teams would have to be reversed and reworked.

For me, the suspension could not have come at a worse time.

I had intended to peak into the second half of the race as a way to catch up with and earn points from groups that ran out of energy in the first half and couldn't keep up the pace anymore. But since almost the entire 7th day was empty, everyone would be able to use the break to recover their strength.

Of course, since the environment was not optimal, fatigue could not be fully recovered. Still, the ability to rest made a big difference.

"... pai?"

"Hmm?"

Outside the tent, the rain was pouring down, and the sound was very loud, but there was a hint of a human voice wrapped up in it.

"Sen...pai?"

The voice that had previously called out to me sounded once again. The one who called out was probably Nanase in the tent across from mine. I opened the zipper again and peeked out through the mesh. Although the view was poor, it was not difficult to see the tent in front of me.

"I have something I would like to talk to you about. Can I come over to senpai's side for a while?" Nanase proposed so through the tent.

Nanase should know very well that the idea of a man and a woman crammed into a narrow tent is not appropriate; perhaps she's forgotten? Then again, as far as the rules are concerned, it is only forbidden to share a bed and there is no problem if you are only spending a short time together. As long as the students don't lose their rationality, there was no moral problem.

That said, it was raining very hard. Even if the entrances are less than two meters apart, one will inevitably get wet.

“I’m fine with it. Why don’t I come over to your side?”

When I said that, Nanase shook her head and opened the entrance to her tent. She spread her towel to protect her head and got ready. I hurriedly opened the entrance to welcome her.

After waiting for the right moment, Nanase jumped out of the tent and quickly ducked into mine. In less than one second, she was drenched, but the damage was kept to a minimum.

“I’m really sorry for disturbing you while you’re resting, senpai.”

“No, it’s okay.”

Nanase was the one that was suffering at the moment. In addition to the forced march to reach this area, even if the cause was a misunderstanding, she had just fought a fierce battle with me. Although I thought she had something to discuss with me, she didn’t open her mouth right away. It seemed like she couldn’t say anything, which was understandable. For a while, we just sat in silence.

“I’m a bit shameless, aren’t I?” Saying that Nanase lowered her head in apology.

“Until recently, I was hostile towards senpai and even said some excessive things... but now I greet you with such intimacy. It just annoys you, right?”

Only now has Nanase started to face this guilt.

“I don’t care, and you don’t need to apologize anymore. At the very least, you should understand that there is no need for us to be hostile towards each other any longer, right?”

Although there were some parts that were a bit difficult to address at the moment, we are in the middle of a special exam. Mental confusion can be detrimental to actions and thoughts during the test.

“I understand.” Nanase once again bowed her head to me in acknowledgment.

“So what? You must have something you want to tell me after going through the heavy rain?”

“Ah, yes!” Nanase remembered what she came for and spoke up.

“The sudden appearance of Amasawa-san was haunting my mind... When I think about how hard you are working, I can’t help but want to push her away.”

It looked like rather than having any purpose in coming here, she was simply worried about me. Although it seemed a bit problematic for her to care more than I, the person in question, I appreciated her consideration.

“I decided that Amasawa-san was the one who pushed Komiya-senpai and the others down. I always thought the reason why Amasawa-san didn’t show us her true self was a way to hide the truth. However, Ayanokōji-senpai, you said that it wasn’t necessarily Amasawa-san that was the one who pushed them, which I found a bit confusing....”

“Because as of now, the truth is still in the dark,” I replied.

Amasawa, the “suspect,” is infinitely close to black gray, but she isn’t yet utterly dyed black.

“What matters to me is the objective of the culprit. Whoever it is, what was their reason for doing something so dangerous?”

“Perhaps it wouldn’t be so difficult if we don’t assume the answer first,” I suggest. “Let’s start over without the assumption Amasawa is not the culprit and argue from there.”

By repeatedly exchanging opinions, it was sometimes possible to see things that would otherwise be invisible.

A certain person pushed Komiya and the others down. Judging from the watch’s lack of a GPS response, it was clearly not an unexpected event but a planned act.

“Huh... but isn’t that a little strange?”

Not long after the conversation started, Nanase ran into something incomprehensible and frowned.

“Are you saying that it would be strange if Amasawa-san really had nothing to do with this? Are you implying she simply happened to come across the attack on Komiya-senpai and the others when her watch broke by chance and happened to witness the whole thing from the sidelines by chance? She then happened to find us again by chance?”

“It is difficult to call it a coincidence if there are several stacked matches. That is, if Amasawa had reasoned about Komiya’s case as if it had nothing to do with her, we could solve this case quickly.”

The idea arose that it was someone close to Amasawa who put pressure on Komiya and the others.

“Even if the real culprit was not Amasawa-san, it might be someone she knew, right? So, is it possible that Amasawa-san is simply an accomplice again?”

“I think that’s it. The footprints we observed may also belong to the real culprit.”

If you consider that she was acting to help the real culprit, it would explain Amasawa’s actions.

“Since the intention was to exercise violence, I guess their means are similar.” Nanase repeatedly nodded as she felt the clues to her reasoning were coming together.

“But...”

At this point... How can I put it? I was starting to worry about something completely unrelated.

“But what?” Nanase looked at me, puzzled, but I didn’t dare bring it up.

Mostly since I was too embarrassed to ask her.

It was the 7th day of living on the uninhabited island. During this period, Nanase has been moving with me constantly, and there wasn’t really any free time to properly clean the body. But she did have the opportunity to rinse off the sand when she changed into her swimsuit at the beach for capture the flag, and she must have taken a shower after the time she swam in the ocean.

That said, the sweat that erupted after a day was disconcerting.

Because of the small space in the tent, Nanase’s body odour, although slight, is gradually spreading; however, it is not an unpleasant smell. The smell of sweat can be covered up by frequent wiping, but this is strangely a nice smell. I wanted to ask about the principle of it, but it most certainly would not be “good senpai behaviour.” It would most likely be classified as “perverted senpai behaviour.”

“Nothing, it’s just a misunderstanding on my part. Don’t worry about it.”

“Is that so?” Nanase didn’t elaborate on my statement; she just nodded her head.

Even though I have a girlfriend, I'm just a beginner. When it comes to topics like these, there are many things I don't know about. Antiperspirants and deodorants and things like that are pretty cheap, so she probably bought them. That's the only answer I can think of right now.

Although I started it myself, the topic became inexplicably awkward. Nanase didn't seem to care, but it's best I don't ask her again.

"Although I can't confirm exactly what Amasawa did to Komiya and the others, I can roughly guess who is with her on her daily schedule." I inform Nanase.

Nanase didn't seem to understand what I meant by that and looked puzzled. I took out the tablet and tapped on the screen to show Nanase.

"Doesn't... that have your personal information Ayanokōji-senpai? Is it really okay for you to show me this?" Nanase asked out of consideration.

By personal information, she meant the scores I had. Points and rankings outside of the top 10 and bottom ten would not be publicly disclosed, so this was crucial private information.

"I thought that you and I had built a relationship in which we can trust each other, but it seems like it's my mistake...." I said bluntly, to which she quickly looked up.

"What?! I'm super grateful that you trust me!" She replied somewhat shy, somewhat happy, and somewhat apologetic.

It was an expression of shame that she hadn't been able to show up until now.

"And since we've been together this entire time, you can probably guess how many points I've accumulated just by taking into consideration my movements, right?"

Although there was also a part of the exam I had challenged alone, Nanase would probably assume I got first place. So, I didn't mind all that much showing her my score.

"On the subject of past movements, it should be possible to know who Amasawa was with based on her daily schedule." I concluded.

Nanase, however, had noticed something suspicious.

"Eh? Shouldn't senpai's score... Shouldn't it have more points?"

"What do you mean?"

Nanase asked this while running numbers through her head.

“Reaching the bonus, the finishing points, and the event points... Minus the penalties, and I think you got 1st place in the event you participated while I was resting....”

Nanase’s memory was pretty good. This would be useful in the future.

“You may have realized that my score should have been 88 points.”

“But now it’s 78 points, 10 points less. And I don’t think it’s due to a penalty...”

“So how and why have those 10 points disappeared? Allow me to explain. Where we are going in this exam is posted four times a day along with the designated area. That is, from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. I used the GPS service from 7 in the morning on the 6th day, when it was de-prohibited, and I used it a total of 10 times, once per hour, not counting the break from noon to 12.”

“What could be seen doing this?” Was the reaction on her face. Nanase still didn’t seem to understand.

“The GPS search is a very convenient tool to know the location of all the students throughout the island. However, if you only use it once, you can only know their current position, and its usefulness is poor. But if you divide the day into 10 parts and search repeatedly, you can see many things that you could not before.”

By connecting the dots on a line, the trajectory of the person in one day can be traced. So, if someone used the search ten times, they might discover the fact that Nanase and I often moved together.

“So that was the purpose for using your points. I see. Now we can know everyone’s destination every hour. Through that, we could find out who has the same itinerary with whom.” Nanase nodded as if to demonstrate her understanding.

“But on the sixth day, senpai didn’t seem to be using the tablet at all. Wouldn’t you forget everything? It would be hard to remember everything just like that, right?”

“Impossible. It takes a long time to confirm the name and location of each person.”

I opened the photos folder to show her my images saved there.

“After using the GPS search, I save screenshots. This way, I can use my free time to observe them and know what the others have done that day.” I told Nanase as she peeked over my shoulder to look.

You cannot send messages or photos to others during the exam.

However, saving screenshots is a standard feature of the tablet, and it is certainly available for use. By repeatedly using the map, zooming in and out, everyone's locations can be recorded in detail.

"Compare them at different times, and the actions of everyone else throughout the day are available as information that can be viewed at any time."

Instances such as before going to bed, in the morning when the test begins and during breaks. These moments are idle and are perfect for confirming locations. As the map has a detailed distribution of the events for that period, starting from the sixth day, I was able to record information about the groups, what events each student took, etc.

"Wow senpai, you really did something like that? I didn't even realize it."

"Well, I wouldn't let you notice it. I couldn't have risked a potential enemy figuring out what I was doing since by the sixth day, I still didn't know what kind of person you were." I give Nanase my honest thoughts.

It would have been foolish to let Nanase, an enemy, know that I was using the GPS search. From confirming locations to checking event details, the tablet had a wide variety of uses. It didn't seem unnatural that I was continuously using it.

It was quite a simple process but very effective. Just follow the instructions for the specified area and corresponding event, and do a GPS search every hour, taking a screenshot.

"With all due respect senpai, may I ask if this is worth paying 10 points for? Since it takes quite a long time just to analyze a person's behaviour pattern. Maybe if you could share these images with others they might become worth something."

The value of these images would be apparent if they could be easily emailed to friends. More people could use GPS searches at shorter intervals, and we could confirm this outside of exam hours. It would not be surprising if all the classes would do something like this.

"Even with individual users, its value depends on how it is used. I think we can say for now that whether this is worth more or less than 10 points will be decided in the future."

“Then, in that case...”

“Actually, there’s also one more piece of information you can find while looking at repeated GPS searches.”

If you look at the GPS by differentiating the grades, you can discover something new. Especially with the 3rd years, you can notice strange movements in their group actions.

“For example, a part of the 3rd year groups behaved strangely throughout the day. And this strange group has to be related to Nagumo’s group as well as Kiriya’s group. Through that research, I found something interesting.”

Starting at 7:00 A.M. on the 6th day, I targeted only Nagumo’s group, observing their movements every hour.

“First, at 7 in the morning, Nagumo’s group was in B8.”

“Could that mean that their last area at the end of the 5th day was B8?”

“That possibility is very likely, but they were in the southernmost part of the B8 area, perhaps the last area of the previous day was B9. In any case, when they came out, they only had the GPS signals of their own group members.”

An hour later, at 8 A.M., various groups began to gather around Nagumo. At 9 A.M., this trend became even more apparent as the other groups visibly gathered around Nagumo. From then on, the large group began to move together. The observation at 10:00 and 11:00 in the morning, the hours before lunch, revealed something different.

“Many groups got together and moved together... It’s almost like a school of fish.” Nanase observes.

“The general effect of this isn’t that deep, but if you look at the small things you will see something completely different.”

Hearing that, Nanase nodded twice. Then I showed her the maps until 3:00 in the afternoon.

“Hold on... Is it possible to monopolize that event?”

“No matter what the event is, as long as the 3rd years are properly organized, Nagumo can easily get first place.”

It’s not complicated. It’s a simple strategy and very powerful.

“But, in that case, no group other than Nagumo’s will score, right? Those groups cannot all be on the same schedule either. Cooperate with each other to allow a specific group to win... Although it is an idea that everyone has thought of before, it’s impossible to actually do it...”

Other groups have other designated areas to go to. If they all dedicated themselves into getting Nagumo first place, they wouldn't get high points in the special exam.

"Yeah, if we were to implement this strategy, we would have to ignore the general premise of the uninhabited island exam. Speaking of which, why couldn't we work together to accomplish this strategy?" Nanase asked.

"That's because it has to do with class points as well as expulsions, of course." I showed Nanase the members of the groups that had gathered around Nagumo.

"This... the groups that serve as plates are the senpais of the lower classes..."

"There is not a single class A student in those groups."

"The difference in class points in the 3rd year classes is really exasperating. In other words, if class B or D loses, it will not have an impact on the general battle of the 3rd year."

Neither the first-year students nor the second-year students had entered the final stage of their class showdowns. It is the obsession of wanting to move up to A class that keeps the battles going.

"The third years, however, can ignore the framework and make the 4 classes work together."

"The advantage of this strategy is that the group at the bottom can do whatever they want on the exam. Regardless of the score, even if they only get 1 point, their status as one of the lower classes will not change. They will only lose class points, or someone will be expelled."

"Wouldn't their points be close to 0 if they fully support a designated group? It's true that many of the third-grade groups are at the bottom, but they still have 20 points and 30 points."

If you ignored the designation of the assigned area and all the exam events, of course, you wouldn't be able to receive points. According to Nanase, it wouldn't be surprising if they would be penalized until they approached 0 points.

I didn't answer, prompting Nanase to think, and little by little she, started to realize it. In order to help her, I started to add something.

"Once a strategy is recognized, its effectiveness decreases. How can they prevent this strategy from being detected?"

“If there are 2-3 groups with 0 points, it is obvious that they did something, and this will be noticed by the other years. So, in order not to be noticed, they allow those groups to get some points.” It seems Nanase came to a conclusion on her own.

It was due to this that we can see how extraordinarily remarkable Nagumo’s power is. Several groups with 0 points would have been too revealing, and the time to find out Nagumo’s plan would be significantly reduced if he let them earn some points.

“There are many people supporting Nagumo, but each group has at least one person who steps on the designated area.” I told Nanase.

“To avoid stacking penalty points, right?”

If you do this, you will be able to accumulate the minimum number of points.

“Among the teams supporting the Nagumo group, there is also competition. As long as the first place is awarded, the second and third place can be obtained by others at their own initiative, so that the bottom group will have a change of ranking from time to time. It’s like they’re really struggling to get by, although that isn’t the case.”

This strategy would have been impossible to see through without scanning ten times with GPS. It turns out that even if you think it’s strange, it will just stagnate on suspicion.

“Are they ready to help President Nagumo by dropping out of school? Don’t they think they should try to avoid dropping out even if they don’t get promoted to A class?” Nanase asked with a confused look on her face.

“There may be fanatics in there, but basically it’s like you say. In this scheme there must be compensation for those students that follow Nagumo.”

“Compensation from President Nagumo...?”

“The classes below the third year B class will not be able to graduate in A class if they just accumulate points in the special exam. But what if being helped by Nagumo gives them the possibility of moving up to Class A?”

“If that’s the only way, maybe people would choose to help...”

If the choice is between graduating in Class B or lower and graduating from Class A, it is no wonder that most people would be willing to enlist with Nagumo.

“I can’t seem to figure out whether it’s the school administration or the student president who’s running the exam...” Nanase questioned.

“You aren’t wrong, Nanase. Nagumo has complete control over his whole year. He doesn’t follow the rules; he makes and dictates them.

The person who can create such a situation like this is really not someone to be underestimated. When you look at the history of the school, it isn’t an exaggeration to say that he is the first person, and the last person, who is capable of something like this.

Of course, we 2nd years are not at the mercy of Nagumo, and he doesn’t get to control us as he pleases.

On the fifth day of the special exam, I made a proposal to Ryūen and Sakayanagi. All 2nd year students would work together during a part of the exam and would work together to complete a specific project. Simply put, it was similar to Nagumo’s strategy. But it’s not like Nagumo’s plan where only a specific group can get points. Because there is competition between the second years, if there is disagreement about the score, there is no unification. Therefore, the cooperation is based on conditions other than the score. Sakayanagi and Ryūen had a group of various students that made them feel uncomfortable. Both parties reached an agreement through negotiation in the form of mutual support. For example, although we had an adverse relationship with each other, we did not hesitate to work together whenever the stakes were the same, which is one of the things that makes 2nd year leaders so good.

I think if it had been our first year, this plan might not have been possible. This is a plan that can be accomplished because of the experience of fighting together for one and a half years.

“I get it. So, you mean that, for you senpai, exchanging 10 points for this information is not a big risk, right?”

“Nor have I given up my goal of reaching the top. I’m lucky that Kōenji is still fighting. What I want are resources to support my peers at all times.”

“Kōenji-senpai is really powerful, surpassing the group of Student Council President Nagumo by himself.” Nanase remarked.

Kōenji is indeed very powerful. But this is slightly different from the truth. Kōenji and Nagumo's group formed a tug-of-war, as every student who looked at the high-ranking rankings would assume. "One person was evenly matched with Nagumo's team" or something like that. But in reality, it was nothing more than an evenly matched performance by the Nagumo team. After the end of the two days in which the rankings are confirmed, Nagumo will maintain his leisurely status of second place. Then he'll sprint the remaining two days in which the rankings aren't confirmed.

This way, he can surpass the exhausted Kōenji who has been pushing himself for the entire exam and come out on top. This method will not expose his "fixed" team that uses the other squads to gain points. When Nagumo decides to match Kōenji's pace, there will most likely be no chance of victory for us.

"Let's first use this information as a basis to investigate what moves Amasawa made on the sixth day."

From this statement, Nanase would understand that there is extra value in using these 10 points.

"It seems that Amasawa was not in her designated area during the morning."

Normally, there was nothing special about spending the night in the same designated area as us since she followed the same path.

But there was still a GPS signal two areas below us. This person seemed to be camping alone overnight as there were no overlapping signal points nearby.

"This is an hour after the announcement of the designated area at 8:00 A.M."

"Our target was B6 right?"

"It seems that Amasawa is going to B6 using a different route."

Considering the distance she covered within the hour; means she was moving at a very fast speed. A lot faster than the average walking speed. Or perhaps she found another more efficient route. In any case, I didn't think before she was a girl who could move alone in the forest.

Confirming with the map for the next hour, Amasawa had reached C6, to the right of the designated area. She should have now left for the event next to the designated area, with time to spare.

"It's amazing, you can see everyone's movements clearly on this map."

It seems up until the sixth day; she had been completing the exam as seriously as the other students. I kept following her path from the 3rd screenshot to the 7th. There were no particularly strange actions, and about three more events were completed after making sure to reach the designated area. Whether she got a ranking or not could actually be found out through the tablet, but it didn't matter.

"At least, at 5:00 P.M. on the 6th day, Amasawa did not approach us, and there is no sign of anything suspicious." I conclude.

"Unfortunately, we haven't made any progress then."

"No, it's enough, at least in my opinion. Amasawa is facing the test with a serious attitude. She didn't let us discover her vulnerability under the GPS signal."

In other words, the time when she launched her operation was non-exam time. Although these time slots can also be scouted using GPS, it is already nothing more than a loss of points. We later received a notice from the school that the point scoring was disabled and the suspension of today's special exam.

[Due to bad weather, the arrival bonuses on the 7th day, as well as the events, were only a quarter completed, so the arrival bonus on the last day, the arrival payment and the event rewards go to be double. The weather forecast indicates that the weather will return to normal tomorrow morning.]

However, the last day lasted the same as the first day, with only $\frac{3}{4}$ of the normal time being useful. In that sense, would this be a correct way to distribute the time for recovering points?

"This could be a factor for an investment."

If the score is doubled on the last day, this will be considered the day that determines the winners for most people, and therefore setbacks are likely to occur.

"The decision to give the news of the doubling of the score on the last day well in advance is correct. This allows us to re-examine the actions of the students in the second half of the exam."

Since today has been a full rest day, the pace of distribution of physical force will change from tomorrow, and there are groups that will consider sprinting on the last day. It wouldn't be surprising if someone took advantage of this slow time slot and increased their pace from day 8. But, for me, neither the bad weather nor the notice of double pay on the last day was the way I wanted it to unfold.

I suddenly noticed that Nanase, who had become silent, seemed confused while staring wide-eyed at the tablet. I'm not sure if it's her regular daze, but her eyes keep opening and closing.

"Although it's still daylight, wouldn't it be better to sleep a little?" I suggest.

"After forcing up that mountain during the morning, and fighting with me, Nanase's strength should be exhausted. She had already exceeded her limit two or three times. The feeling of fatigue must have hit her already."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Please forgive me."

She panicked and tried to straighten her posture, but drowsiness is not something that could be chased away so easily. Not to mention the fact she was covered in sores.

"In that case... I'll go back to my tent to sleep."

You are the only one who knows the best state of your own body. Continuing to doze off here would only be an inconvenience.

"Good idea."

Because of the rain, I don't think I can move freely. In that case, I should just lie down and rest. I say that, but the tent wasn't exactly a comfortable and quiet sanctuary. Easier said than done to properly rest in a place like this.

Nanase, who was about to leave, turned around and came towards me.

"When it stops raining, I will go after Amasawa, since I know she is a White Room student. I am concerned about her movements."

In fact, even though she had been following me all this time, I never noticed it. Since they were in the same group, Amasawa couldn't be that harsh on Nanase.

"It is a fact that Amasawa, as a student of the White Room, was able to pass all the tests at that age without any problem. In short, she is threatening. Don't underestimate her based on factors like her gender, or her age." I utter a word of caution.

"I don't know the details, but she's an extremely strong opponent, isn't she?"

She could surpass Sudō and Ryūen in pure combat power alone. Even if she can't match them with her arm strength, her skills are unmatched by others. Nanase can't win no matter how hard she tries.

"Hōsen-kun is in your group. Can't he be of any use?" I point out to Nanase.

“He is also, if measured by pure combat power, not an opponent that I can keep in check and balance.”

Nanase nodded in agreement, but it’s not just arm strength that’s dangerous. Rather, Hōsen was not an opponent who acted solely on strength.

“I think it’s highly unlikely that Hōsen is a White Room student, but the whole Amasawa thing made me lose my certainty about it. Anyway, my business comes second. You have to protect yourself first.”

After our previous confrontation, forcing me to drop out of school might not be his main goal anymore. That idea has become entirely possible.

“I’m not afraid of dropping out of school. I’ll do anything to protect Ayanokōji-senpai,” Nanase said with a look of pure determination. I tried to give her advice, but Nanase wouldn’t accept my words so easily.

“Then let me put it differently, Nanase you might put me in a dangerous situation by acting without thinking, I want you to avoid risky actions as a favor to me.”

I told Nanase that I wasn’t worried about her but about myself in the future. Saying that Nanase’s brave expression became as soft as a puppy.

“That... I can’t have that. I won’t give you any more trouble Ayanokōji-senpai.”

“It’s good that you think so, in any case, you have to act carefully now, understand?”

“Of course. I’ll listen to you.”

Saying this, I hoped Nanase wouldn’t do anything unfavourable. It probably didn’t occur to her that she had already done something quite troublesome.

After Nanase went back to her tent, my eyes fell once again toward the screen of the tablet. I wanted to confirm the scores for the higher-ranking groups as well as the lower-ranking groups. Then based on the score, I will begin to organize the current situation.

【List of top ten groups】

1. Kōenji – 168 pts. (2nd year)
2. Nagumo – 166 pts. (3rd year) [Group]
3. Kiriyaama – 150 pts. (3rd years) [Group]
4. Misoe – 133 pts. (3rd years) [Group]
5. Ochiai – 133 pts. (3rd years) [Group]
6. Ryūen – 128 pts. (2^{ns} year) [Group]
7. Sakayanagi – 127 pts. (2nd year) [Group]
8. Takahashi – 115 pts. (1 year) [Group]
9. Kanzaki – 104 pts. (2nd year) [Group]
10. Kuronaga – 101 pts. (3rd years) [Group]

Then I was in 49th place with 78 points. There is a 90-point gap between me and the first place Kōenji. Although it seemed like there was no way to reverse the score difference between us if I get first place in placement points and bonus points... since there were four per day, I would be extremely close if I get first place nine times in a row. Of course, this was only possible if there was no conflict with my opponents. If Kōenji doesn't slow down and continues to score at the current pace, his final score would be around 350 points. If I wanted to achieve that, I would have to earn about 40 points a day. If it were the other groups, they would surely think “no way” and give up. But even Kōenji, who was different from the rest, should slow down in the second half.

“Tenth place has 101 points? Huh?”

When the uninhabited islands examination rules were explained, I would have expected that the overall group points should have been higher at this tipping point. Scores for the top ten groups, including my current score of 78, which ranks 49th, gave the impression of stagnation during the initial-mid period of the exam. It reached its peak on days two and three, and as fatigue began to make an appearance, the number of lost points, penalties and non-participants in the tests increased as they focused on reaching their designated areas.

However, as the groups began to merge, the total number of groups decreased. This should not be forgotten either. It will take a significant improvement in my score in the second half of the exam to get to the top.

And now, the 10th place score became even more critical. It was a good choice to not push myself in the first half and conserve my strength silently.

My strategy would have started to work on the eighth day, which is tomorrow, but since exams were suspended on the seventh day today due to heavy rain, it gives the students who were starting to show their fatigue a day to rest. I can expect the eighth and ninth days to be another boom in point earning. This is a special exam where you can't seem to win if you go alone. But in this exam, the rules of basic movement and event distributions seem to have contradictions.

If you aim to get to the designated area the fastest, you risk missing the event, and if you aim to get to the event, you have a high chance of missing the placement bonus. This is the same for both individuals and groups.

Whether it is the arrival order reward, waiting for the last person in the group to set foot in the designated area, or that you must score first to score any points, the ways to score points vary.

I don't know if the rain will stop, but I'll be using a new strategy for the second half of the exam starting tomorrow. I'm a little worried about Nanase and the other girls who I haven't heard from in a while...

Chapter 2: Blanket of Silence

THE HEAVY RAIN that lasted until dawn cast an uneasy gloom over the students' minds. But by 6 a.m., the clouds and rain disappeared as if in mockery, and it was as clear and sunny as the day before. That said, it took me some time to get back to the muddy trail because I was still in the forest where I couldn't see the direct sunlight.

"I need to solve my food problem soon..."

As a high school student, I have no longer been able to maintain my daily caloric intake, and I'm slowly starting to run out of energy. It's the first time I've been hungry in a long time because I've never trained in intentional starvation. It is possible to be active even without minimal hydration, but it isn't something I want to do. It would leave me with a low immune system, and all sorts of illnesses would ensue. Of course, I could have chosen to eat wild animals or insects to fill my stomach, but that's just an ultimate resort.

You can also buy resources at the start location if you have any leftover points, but that can only be considered an emergency measure. In other words, there are only two ways to get a diet: getting a good score in an event or using points to buy it at the start location. However, the competition for events where food is a reward will naturally become more competitive in the future.

"I'm ready to go." Nanase, who had packed up, came towards me with her backpack on her back.

"Amasawa is basically just moving towards her designated area, right?"

"From the number of points she acquired, it seems so. In that case, if I'm not bothering you, can you let me walk along to the next designated place?" Nanase asks me with a kind tone.

I silently nod my head in agreement. Since we're heading towards the same place, there isn't any reason to part ways here. Not long into the walk, Nanase opens her mouth.

"Amasawa followed us in the morning of the seventh day after the sixth night, right?"

Wouldn't you assume that she found us on the morning of the seventh day by scanning?"

Since there is no way to see the usage history of the GPS scans, there is no evidence that Amasawa used one. If we could know the score of their group, we could determine if Amasawa or Hōsen used a scan. Since their group was neither in the top ten nor the bottom ten, the only person left who could confirm the point situation was Nanase, who was in the same group.

"Of course I checked the tablet. But... from what I remember, we didn't lose a single point that we had accumulated as of the morning of the seventh."

This means Amasawa did not use the GPS search.

"Although we don't know where Amasawa-san was on the morning of the seventh day, we were moving pretty fast, so it would have been hard to catch up without being near us, right?"

"Since it's Amasawa, it might not have taken that much effort."

Unlike Nanase and I, who were carrying a load, Amasawa was lightly loaded. Even if there was a certain distance, she should have been able to catch up.

"Or perhaps, she learned of our whereabouts somehow."

"Does that mean Amasawa asked someone about Ayanokōji-senpai's location?"

"Possibly."

No matter what method she used, it's hard to get conclusive proof at this stage.

Part Two

“Senpai, I guess this is where we say goodbye...”

After moving from the D3 area to the E3 area and gaining a few points each, Nanase told me with a look of sadness.

“How are you planning to rendezvous with Amasawa and Hōsen?”

GPS scanning is a very convenient way to find the enemy, but it’s hard to say whether it’s suitable for meeting up with teammates. Radio transceivers that you can use to talk with them directly may be more appropriate.

“I don’t think I can find them if I move blindly, but I can’t use the points that I collected for a selfish action. For the moment, I will track the GPS location using only the points I just obtained. Then I’ll have to take my chances by going to the next designated area.”

This would be the least time-consuming way to do it. Any further search to look for Amasawa and Hōsen will be saved when for she has time. Since it makes no sense to ask about Amasawa’s position here, I’ll keep listening to her.

“If I want to find out the whereabouts of the first-year students, I need to be a first year. If I find any disturbing movement, I’ll rush back to Ayanokōji-senpai to report it.”

Nanase is very enthusiastic, but it is quite dangerous to be alone in a situation like hers.

“Don’t force yourself.”

Nanase bowed her head and left with her tablet in her hand. I wished she could join me again soon, but it depends on where the other two are. It would be easy if they were to just wander into the designated area. Still, since they’re two separate parties thinking and acting on their own, they will most definitely have different trajectories.

After watching Nanase’s back disappear into the forest, I took out my tablet. At this point, I was finally one person again, and the second half of the game could begin.

“It seems there aren’t any events in the vicinity...”

Although there was an event only 400 meters away from here, 20 minutes had passed since it started, and 35 minutes would have had passed in total, including the 15 minutes it would take me to arrive. And there were only five groups that could participate, which wasn’t that much.

The situation is difficult, so I decided to be realistic and chose to take a break so I could avoid over-exerting myself. I'll wait here for the announcement of the next designated area and regain my strength by resting.

By nine o'clock, it was time to move. I took out my tablet and looked to see where the designated area was located. Depending on how far it is, I may have to alter my strategy to get there.

Today, the random zone was the second designated area. It was E6, which isn't too far. I immediately start to move while checking the current tablet to identify the event and set a direction.

The key to getting as many points as possible is "efficiency." To achieve maximum efficiency, you need to eliminate the elements that will influence "luck."

Part Three

By 4:00 P.M. I had finished the event I was participating in. As I was getting ready to leave, I heard someone call out to me.

“A-Ayanokōji-kun?”

For the first time since we parted ways on day one of the special exam, Horikita and I met again. Although she looked surprised to see me, she didn’t seem particularly tired.

“It’s been eight days.” I call out back to her.

“So it has.”

We had met in the F7 area for the first time since the exam started.

“I came here to participate in this event. Where are you going?”

“I’m going to G8. I was just passing through here, and you?” She replied.

She seems to be heading in the same direction as me.

“I’m headed to F8. The general direction seems to be the same.”

Since there isn’t anything more inefficient than standing and talking, we naturally started walking side by side. Since our route was the same for a while, going together made sense.

“You’re more energetic than I thought. It looks like you’re still alone?” I question her.

“Yeah. There are many difficulties, but there are equally as many easy aspects if you’re alone.”

It’s true that if you’re alone, you don’t need to care about other people and match your groups pace. I hadn’t seen Horikita in the bottom ten once, so she should be accumulating points smoothly. I was honestly surprised that she didn’t look tired.

“Is it so strange to see that I’m doing well?”

“Many students in our class seem to be tired.”

“Has anything strange happened?”

“Strange...? Oh, have you heard anything about Shinohara and her group?”

“Yes, I only heard about it today.”

Horikita had stopped near the starting point where she was called by a second-year student from Class A. After Sakayanagi had shared my strategy with her, someone told her about Komiya’s exit from the exam.

“You didn’t say no, did you?”

“There was no reason to refuse. It was necessary to avoid Shinohara-san’s withdrawal from school. I heard that you were the first to find out about their accident, do you know the circumstances of what happened?”

As someone who had witnessed the scene first-hand, I stated my opinion.

“No, not particularly. I think it was an accident but there could be more than what’s on the surface.”

Of course, I concealed the fact that Amasawa was hiding nearby.

“Shinohara’s group dropped in one breath and is now in the bottom seven. If this continues, they will be in danger of being expelled from school. We have to hurry up. If they don’t find a group to merge with, I’ll help her. Before I met with you, I was lucky enough to complete an event that granted me spots for additional members, and now there are three vacancies.”

That is good news. There are only a few challenges that raise the maximum quota for a group, and they’re usually the most competitive ones. Achieving first place in one of them is not an easy event.

“But if that happens, Shinohara and you will be the only ones who can accumulate points. If possible, I would like to work with Sakayanagi in a better way and let them be absorbed into a healthy group.”

Horikita agreed and nodded gently.

From when I was walking around the island during the last eight days, I could notice many more groups with walkie-talkies, more than I had imagined. As Sakayanagi communicated the matter of Shinohara to her class A members, I noticed the communication in various places.

“I’ve seen a tendency to utilize walkie-talkie’s in the upper classes as a method of communication and a unified leader to give out instructions. The walkie-talkie’s can transmit information over long distances and can sometimes be surprisingly rewarding depending on how they are used.”

“If... If we had trusted each other a little more, I wonder if we could have done that.”

Perhaps this was quite hard to imagine as Horikita pursed the lips of her mouth tightly.

I took out my tablet and checked if any new events had appeared. To my luck, an event appeared nearby where you will be awarded food just by participating. The number of accepted groups was also quite large, fifteen groups in total for this challenge.

“Food is getting scarce. I’m going to take this event, what about you?”

If you were aiming to get placement points, it would be more efficient to give up on this event and proceed to the designated area.

“I don’t have much food left either, so I suppose I’ll participate in this too.”

Since our priorities are the same, we simultaneously changed our route and headed for the event. An event like this is quite rare, so the competition to fill up the slots would be quite fierce.

Horikita and I both picked up our pace and headed towards the event location. On our way, we encountered first-years and third-years with the same mindset. Of course, the probability of the second-year groups appearing became higher, as all of them are flocking in the same direction. At this point, most of them have started running. When surrounded by enemy teams, they most likely feel the pressure and have a stronger desire to reach the event before others.

“Don’t worry about me Horikita. Go on and run.”

“If you don’t have food either, shouldn’t you run too?”

“I don’t have the strength to run anymore.”

“Well it’s the same for me.”

Although anxious, she seems to be following the same principle as me of not consuming physical strength at will. Horikita, who was able to move alone with some ease, must have been completing the uninhabited island exam at about the same pace as I was.

After that, we caught up with the event and talked for a while with classmates whom we hadn’t seen for a long time. Even if we start running to the designated area now, the placement payoff is no longer necessary. The time saved to share information with classmates here will be more beneficial for the second part of the exam. Furthermore, many of the students still don’t know about Shinohara’s situation so it’s best we fill them in.

Today, I earned 4 points for basic movement and 14 points for participating in the event. I've earned a total of 18 points today. That gives me a grand total of 96 points, and puts me in 23rd place. The students became a lot more active today than on the fifth and sixth day, but there were still groups that didn't move. Today was essentially the day to draw the line of distinction between the groups that have started pushing and the groups that are still warming up for the second half. The eighth day of the special exam battle was expected to be fierce, but in reality, it turned out to be quite a good day. The top ten groups score points did not change significantly.

Tenth place still belongs to Kuronaga's group with 111 points as of today.

Tomorrow I want to move up into a more desirable ranking, and I would like to see Sakayanagi in the near future if I can. I decided to fall asleep in the hopes that the designated area would head towards the starting point.

Chapter 3: The battle against loneliness

I BRUSHED AWAY THE COBWEBS that covered my clothes and slowly lowered my backpack. The ninth day of the uninhabited island exam would be another hot day.

Breathing heavily, I arrived at the fourth designated area without any incident. Finally, I had reached my destination as planned. Sweat flowing from my forehead came running down onto the bridge of my nose, so I wiped it away with my wrist. The fourth mandatory movement started at 3:00 P.M. It was a significant transfer from H9 to D5 area. It took me a lot of effort to reach the designated area within the specified time. I had bumped into an event on the way here, but I had chosen to ignore it to reduce the risk of being penalized.

Since it took almost two hours to reach this area, very few groups arrived, and I managed to get third place in placement points. I wasn't unhappy with these results, but my wish to see Sakayanagi at the starting point hadn't come true.

I didn't want to mess around with the fact that I would overexert myself if I moved down there now. Although I had brushed shoulders with several groups of second-year Class A students, none of them were carrying radio transceivers. Perhaps I should force my way there tomorrow morning? No... that would be tricky. I suppose I'll have to put the Sakayanagi case on hold for the time being and summarize the gains and losses of today.

"All the points gained today add up to a total score of 112 points."

Kuronaga, who held 10th place, had a total of 123 points. With a difference of only 11 points between us, I had moved up to thirteenth place. Considering it'll soon be 5:00 P.M., the possibility of ending the day with this point difference is very high. Although my ideal ranking is eleventh place, an 11-point difference is still within my tolerance range. Although this result arrived slightly later than I had planned due to the Nanase incident and the bad weather, I've still reached the excellent position I had been planning for since the start of the exam.

My plans revolved around getting a high ranking on the point board. Although it's only thirteenth place right now, and there's some discrepancy, it doesn't make a huge difference. What's important is the matter of "staying below tenth place." To get on the podium, it's inevitable you're going to need to accumulate points. But whether it's a group of one person or a group of seven people using booster cards, you'll be revealed the moment you hit the top ten rankings.

The ideal ranking to avoid becoming noticed and still get a high placement is eleventh place. There are, however, several drawbacks to this strategy. The issue of managing your score becomes quite difficult, and if you don't control your scoring well, you'll be thrown onto the top list, even if it's just for a second. In that case, the strategy will have become a complete failure.

The most significant disadvantage is that it's very dependent on the tenth-place scorer. The closer the tenth-place score is to the first place, the easier it will be to reverse it. The more significant the score difference is, the more difficult it will be to change it.

That's why the leading groups need to have an advantage over the rest. Demonstration of those "advantages" has been slower than expected, and now some groups are acting better than I assumed. It's not a substitute, but the relative advantage of the second years is that there's no resistance from the lower classes and no pressure from the upper classes. The act of obstruction can also be seen as self-sacrifice, and there is no way to perform it without a certain margin of score.

What I care about most of all right now is the movement of Nagumo. You would assume he would do something against Kōenji, who is fighting for the top spot, but his GPS movements don't seem like he's planning anything at the moment. This might be better in the sense that they're more focused on scoring points than taking down their rivals.

"Even if I don't win, it'll be fine if Kōenji comes first or second."

If I stay around 11th place, I won't be exposed. Even if I'm delayed by encountering Amasawa or any other first-year hindrance, I don't have to worry about dropping in ranking. I need to stay hidden in the high range until the end of the twelfth day.

After resting in the shade of a tree for a while, I put on my backpack and left this area for the next one, which is just a little further. I had been thinking about finding an open area just slightly away from the borderline.

By the time the sun had set, and when I had to decide where to camp for the night, I saw a single tent for one person in sight. Since the entrance was zipped up, I assumed it's unoccupied at the moment. I had planned to go to the bathroom, but before that, I got up and looked at my surroundings.

"Nice place, huh?"

Such an open and flat place is hard to find on this island. It would have been great if I could lay out my tent here, but I was an only male now, unlike when Nanase was here. If this other person was a female student, it would be a source of dispute again.

But why is there a single tent?

Did this person act separately from the group, or was it just one person? If it's the latter, it could be someone I know, right? Before I pitched my tent, I wanted to know who else was there. I decided to stay here for a while to see what would happen. If the owner is out for a walk, they'll definitely be back before sunset. Or if they're sleeping right now, and I hear noises, I'll try to talk to them.

I suppose it would be more efficient to say something right now... but I would instead observe and let them take the first initiative.

I waited about ten minutes, but there was no sign of anyone coming back, nor was there any noise from inside the tent. It may be possible this person is sleeping as there is no group to keep pace with.

"Is anyone there?"

I held my breath and waited for a reaction, but I didn't hear anything.

"I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to set up a tent nearby. Let me know if there's any problem."

With the premise that the other party isn't there, I can have an excuse if they do come back and tell me to leave. Of course, it's desirable to keep an adequate distance from that tent.

Not too long after, I finished setting up my tent, although I was still curious about who the other person was. Once again, I'm pretty impressed with my skills of pitching tents compared to last year on the other uninhabited island. Not only that, but I like one-person tents because I don't need to worry about anyone else.

Well maybe it's because I think like that, I don't have many friends. A cheerful person would say something like "A small tent-like this is boring." I wonder if there will be a day where I feel the same way.

"I can't imagine what it would be like..." I mutter to myself.

It's a future that will never come.

"I thought some weirdo had come along but it's just you."

As I was getting ready to change my clothes, someone called out behind me. Apparently, the owner of the lonely tent was Mio Ibuki of second-year Class B.

"Did I disturb you?"

"Not really."

After answering me briefly, Ibuki started glaring at me. I thought she would say something to me, but she immediately went back to the tent. Thinking she was acting a little strange, I decided to go see what she was doing.

"Do you have a moment?"

No answer.

"I have something I want to ask you."

I called her once more, but there wasn't any response. However, I could hear a faint noise from inside the tent. I had assumed she was simply ignoring me, but she seemed to be doing something.

"I'm going to open it if you aren't protesting..."

Just in case, I waited thirty seconds before opening the curtain to Ibuki's tent.

"...What?"

When I looked inside, Ibuki seemed to be biting something.

"You're really— No, what are you eating?"

"Jerky," she replied.

"Jerky? I didn't see that in the uninhabited island manual they distributed..."

That means she bought raw meat and cooked it herself. But making beef jerky alone should take a lot of time and effort. Above all, in the beginning, Ibuki had left challenging words for Horikita and immediately headed for the designated area. If you carry raw meat with you, it's evident that it will go bad in a few hours due to this heat. So, I have to assume that the entire sophomore class B had a line for making jerky.

TL Note: Jerky is lean trimmed meat that has been cut into strips and dried to prevent spoilage. Normally, this drying includes the addition of salt to prevent bacteria growth before the meat has finished the dehydrating process. It's a good source of protein.



It would most definitely save considerable amounts of points. The efficiency of homemade jerky as a portable food item is great. More importantly, the number of points needed for foods like beef jerky that are already seasoned and can be kept for a long time would be so huge that it simply wouldn't be cost-effective. The same amount of jerky prepared from raw meat consumes a great deal of time and energy, but it can save a lot of points. Even if they're full for a few meals and hungry for the next few meals, second-year Class B can ignore the highly competitive food events.

"It doesn't matter, it's none of your business." Ibuki replies with a cold tone.

This is what I assume Ryūen's strategy is since Ibuki wouldn't ever tell me anything about it.

Having said that, although Ibuki had decided to tackle this exam on her own, she didn't ever fall into the bottom ten as far as I can remember. She should be barely scraping by and accumulating a decent amount of points thus far. For Ibuki, it's basically impossible to get the top three in any event that requires academic ability. Her only option to continuously score points is to go after the placement points or to go after the events that require athletic ability.

Of course, by doing this, she should have definitely accumulated more fatigue than the other students. As a result, it's clear that she's taken a lot of psychological damage as well.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say she has exceeded her own limits.

"How many people have you spoken with since the exam started?"

"What?"

I would assume she also hasn't been sleeping at night, given the dark circles under her eyes.

"...Horikita. I won't lose to her, didn't you hear? I mean, we haven't had a conversation since the start of the exam."

At best, she's probably only opened her mouth to answer yes or no at the assignment table.

"It would be nice to talk with someone for a bit."

"I don't have any reason to talk with my enemies."

"Then what about your classmates? You should meet people just by walking around the island."

"I don't consider the guys in my class as friends."

She's practically locked herself in this shell and has become what she is today. I'm surprised Ibuki has continued in this state for nine days. But there were still five days left in the exam. If you cut off the threads of tension that hold her, even for just a moment, she'll collapse in one breath.

Of course, if Ibuki, who is alone, withdraws, then it's a guarantee she'll be expelled from school. However, in this special exam, it is common to understand that whenever possible, we do not want to have a group of students expelled from the same grade as us. The best strategy is to take a day off, not counting the seventh day, which was affected by bad weather. Doing nothing for a full day should restore most of your strength. Then you can use the remaining four days to get through the exam in one go. It would be incredibly beneficial if Ibuki implanted this strategy.

However, reality isn't that easy. Resting through a whole day is easier said than done. Even if you force yourself to take a break, your mental state might continue to degrade. You'll have to rest with the knowledge that while you're recuperating, others are accumulating points. The pressure of being overtaken and squeezed into the bottom ten will slowly eat away at your psyche. Spending time alone like that is something that no ordinary person can do.

Furthermore, skipping all the designated areas will only result in stacking up penalties. If the penalties stack up, they'll cause you to suffer the next day and beyond.

"Get out of here." Ibuki spits out at me.

"...Sure."

Even if the other party is Ibuki, a girl is a girl. At this time of day, when it's just getting dark, peeking into the tent of the opposite sex is definitely not something I want to be caught doing.

Even if Ryūen was here right now, I doubt he could have solved Ibuki's problem.

I left Ibuki's tent and started to organize my clothes again. The wind is relatively strong today, so I should be able to spend a cool night.

"Hey you." Ibuki called out to me from outside the tent.

After I tidied up, I looked outside to see Ibuki's figure appear outside the tent. She staggered and almost tripped for a second, but she quickly straightened up and walked towards me.

"How many points do you have right now." Ibuki asked with her hands in her pockets.

I was happy she had come out to talk, but the question was a rather bold one.

“We’re enemies.”

“So, you won’t tell me?”

She muttered “cheapskate” under her breath, but I still won’t tell her. At this point, no one on the island would benefit by knowing that I’m in thirteenth place. She probably won’t believe me anyway.

“That’s what I mean.”

“At least tell me if you’re above or below me. My score is-”

I put up my hand to stop Ibuki, who wanted to tell me her points without asking for my permission.

“Sorry, but I won’t answer your question no matter what form it takes.”

Even answering “above” or “below” gives her a hint. It would be the same if I lied. I may get out of trouble by answering lower than her. Still, once others learn that I am fighting to secure a score, groups will come to force me into a desperate situation. I must be careful not to let information like that spread around.

Ibuki clicks her tongue and puts her hands back in her pockets.

“Whatever. You’re a waste of time.”

“Exactly. Besides, your real rival is Horikita, right?”

As soon as I mentioned Horikita’s name, the bored Ibuki developed a fierce expression. She proceeded to take her hand out of her pocket and raise her middle finger at me.

“If you see her, tell her I’m not going to let her beat me.” Ibuki says while scowling at me.

“That’s fine, but why are you giving me the finger? I’m not your rival.”

“You’re the same. Aren’t you on good terms with Horikita?”

Not really. But even if I told Ibuki that, her opinion of me probably wouldn’t change. I assume at this point, Ibuki had only come here to ask about my point situation.

“Wait a minute.” I call out to her.

I reach out to grab Ibuki’s arm, who clearly doesn’t trust me, and doges it with full alertness.

“Ha. You want to fight?”

She assumed I was coming to provoke her, and she balled her fists.

“No, I don’t want to fight you.”

Once again, I quickly reach out for her wrist and grab it without leaving any room for error.

“What the hell are you doing?!” Ibuki yells at me.

I defended my side against Ibuki, who kicked me in a panic. I thought she would resist for a while longer, but she let out a sigh as if her anger had run out.

“I admit I can’t beat you but one day I’ll kick your ass.”

I really wish she wouldn’t set such a ridiculous goal.

“So, what? Did Horikita send you to sabotage me?”

On top of misunderstanding my intentions, she even made up some up non-existent facts. Even if I had argued, I was in the same class as Horikita. For Ibuki, that’s more than enough to disregard reason.

Relatively speaking, Ibuki will not accept my recommendation of rest.

“Your pulse is fast.”

“What?”

“And your mouth is also pretty dry. I can tell by the cracking on your lips it’s pretty serious. You’re obviously dehydrated.”

If this goes on, her wristwatch alarm is bound to ring soon.

It may already have sounded out once.

The reason she sat quietly in the tent was probably because she was exhausted. Still, she also wanted to suppress the alerts caused by an abnormal pulse.

“I’m... I’m not that thirsty.” She said as I let go of her wrist.

“Mind your own business, I don’t have any problems that I can’t take care of.” Ibuki said while looking at me with a withering look.

After Ibuki said that, she turned around and headed back to her tent. I immediately ran by her and straight into her tent.

“H-Hey! What are you doing?!”

She clearly would never listen to my words, so I need to employ more forceful tactics. I rummaged around until I found her backpack.

“Let me see what’s inside.”

“Ehhh? That’s not something I can show to boys! I don’t even show it to girls.”

“Thought so.”

Since it was impossible to get her permission, I opened it anyway and started to check the contents.

“Who do you think you are?!”

The only things in the bag were clothing items and disposable toiletries and what little jerky she had left. Plus, a 500ml mineral water bottle that was already empty. Since there was a garbage collection device where the event was done, the useless stuff had already been discarded. There was not even a drop of water left inside the bottle, which means it should have dried out a long time ago. There was also no walkie-talkie that could be used for long range contact.

“How long have you gone without water?”

“I don’t need to answer you.”

“How long have you gone without water?” This time, I asked her with a stern look and a more assertive tone.

“...A whole day. And little more.”

“Were you running around in that state?”

“I haven’t been running anywhere, I was here resting all day.”

“That’s a cheap lie. There wasn’t any GPS responses at this location in the morning.”

“So, you ran a scan?”

Of course, I didn’t, but this bluff seems to be working. Ibuki wouldn’t simply choose to rest when she needed to defeat Horikita.

“Has the emergency alert been triggered yet?”

“...An hour ago. So, I had no choice but to take an early break.”

The watch’s warning bell will stop chirping when physical abnormalities stop occurring continuously. After a while, it’ll stop ringing the emergency alert and go back to the warning alert.

“If you don’t rehydrate, it’ll keep ringing even if you’re resting.”

If you can’t stop your fast-beating pulse, it will be transferred back to the emergency bell. By that time, the dehydration symptoms will also have worsened. Once you undergo the medical examination, you won’t be allowed to partake in the exam anymore.

“I’ll do something about it tomorrow. I’ll go to the starting point in case of emergency, so leave me alone.”

“That’s more than two kilometers from here. If you try and cover that, you’ll definitely collapse.”

“Then I’ll complete an event or whatever.”

“It’s because you can’t do an event that you’re in this situation right?”

The only way to calm down Ibuki is to counter her flawed reasoning with a good argument. I grab my backpack from my tent and pull out two 500ml plastic bottles that I got from completing today's challenge.

"Let's negotiate."

"What?"

"I have trouble finding food. On the other hand, I have an excess of water. That's why I want to negotiate with you, because I can make an equal exchange."

Ibuki clears her throat when she sees the plastic bottle of water, even though it isn't cold anymore.

"What are you going to do? Again, this is a fair deal. You're going to have to give me a certain amount of food for this water."

"Who do you even think you-"

"You can say no, but that will be the end of our negotiations."

Ibuki's rebellious words won't stop if I don't maintain a strong attitude.

"If you withdraw from this exam due to dehydration, you will surely lose to Horikita. I met her a while ago, she looked great, and didn't seem to need food or water."

Mentioning her competition, or even Horikita's name for that matter is the keyword for Ibuki. Threatening her wouldn't get me anywhere, but bringing up the only thing she cares about right now, Horikita, will get her to listen to me.

"In that case, I'll accept your deal. How much food do you want?"

Ibuki's food supply will run out in less than two days at this rate. If I took only a short amount of supplies, it can't be called a fair trade.

"Give me half."

"Is that all?"

"It's better than being stuck with nothing to eat but weeds."

That was the deal Ibuki, and I made for water and food. The second I handed her the bottle, Ibuki drank half of the mineral water in one gulp. Usually, I would have reminded her that she should drink slowly. However, considering that she already has symptoms of dehydration, she needed to rehydrate as soon as possible.

I think she was dissatisfied with how I was looking at her, and she resumed with her murderous look. Although the dehydration symptoms have more or less improved, Ibuki's spirit is obviously not in a normal state. She's been maintaining a tense state of mind without having much energy to spare.

How much longer could she hold on, I wonder. Will it be a few hours or few days? I wish she can hold on until the end of the exam. After this, I probably won't see her again since we don't share the same path. I had to try one last time to convince her.

"I won't thank you. It was a fair deal, right?"

"I never asked you to thank me."

I'm sure she's been in a sensitive state with people because she's been so tense all day. It would be fine if it was a short-term battle, but in a long-term exam like this, it's just asking for trouble.

"If you haven't sunk to a lower level yet, it wouldn't be a bad idea to spend a day or so until tomorrow to regain strength, right? Or you could switch to a strategy of just going after food and water."

"Throw away my score? Ha, you must be kidding me." Ibuki said as she stormed out.

"I don't make an effort because I don't want to be expelled. I only care about beating that Horikita chick."

I know that.

That's why I'm giving her advice that will help her win.

Ibuki has hated me ever since she found out I'm X. Due to that unnecessary filter, my true intention can't even be conveyed.

"Why am I still here? I don't have to talk to you anymore." Ibuki said, clearly annoyed. She left me and went back into her tent.

I knew persuading her like this would be futile, but I wanted to warn her anyways. At the very least, her health should be fine today and tomorrow. After that, she'll have to rely on her determination. Since she's acting alone, I'm a little worried about her score. But seeing as she wants to compete with Horikita, her ranking shouldn't be that low.

Although the day isn't quite over yet, I used too much energy today, so I'll rest. It'll be nice to calm down and spend the night quietly.

Part Two

When I returned from the bathroom in the morning, I came back to see Ibuki looking through my tent.

“What are you doing?”

“Ah!” Ibuki jumped at my words.

Looks like she was rummaging through my backpack and was surprised to see me return so quickly.

“Do you want to see my tablet? Or is there something in particular you want?”

Unfortunately for Ibuki, I had set the screen lock, so no one else could see the data inside.

“Of course not! I just wanted... to make sure our deal was really fair. That’s all.” Ibuki said as she stepped away from my backpack.

“There’s only one bottle of water left in your backpack. How the hell do you have an “excess,” huh?”

I left for only a minute, but it looks like I was too careless. It was enough time for Ibuki to go through the contents of my backpack. However, I have no right to blame her. Yesterday I went through Ibuki’s backpack without permission. Even if I falsely claimed it’s because I drank all the water last night, she’ll only ask me where the empty plastic bottles are. And it’s against the rules to dump trash on an uninhabited island.

“I see. You wanted me to owe you right? Is that why you helped me?” Ibuki scowled at me.

“If you hadn’t checked my bag, would you have known I was selling you a favour?”

“Well...”

Ibuki seemed to understand what I was implying.

“In other words, it was a fair exchange no matter what the truth is.”

“It’s hard to accept but I suppose I don’t owe you anything, then right?”

“Would you give me something even if you did?”

“No way.”

“Thought so.”

I stopped the conversation there and went back to my tent.

The time was now 6:30 A.M. and I could hear the sound of Ibuki moving about. I opened the entrance to see what was going on and saw that her tent was all packed up. If this had been the second or third day of the special exam, I might have thought that she was really motivated. But since there's an atmosphere that gives me the impression she doesn't want to talk, I once again retracted my head inside the tent.

Finally, at seven o'clock, the first designated area had been announced, and it was the E4. I didn't hesitate to use a point for a GPS search, and I got the location of all the students at seven o'clock. In reality, spending a point here only brought me benefits. Since my points were very close to the 10th place Kuronaga group, I could use this method to widen the gap. Also, if I use one point, my point gap with the Kuronaga group will increase to twelve points, and if I get first place in placement points which will earn me 11 points, I won't surpass the Kuronaga group.

As of now, there are three groups on the map that will most likely compete for the reward of placement points. Unfortunately, there's a person among these groups that is a "strong enemy," and they're in a perfect position to hinder my success. Depending on the situation, I was planning on dropping the events and give resupplying my resources top priority. Based on this scan, I can also get a clear picture of how many students were gathering around the event I was targeting. That means I can predict the competition rate of the event at a much earlier stage.

When I left the tent after completing my preparations, Ibuki was nowhere to be seen.

There isn't much advantage in moving before the exam started, so perhaps she just wanted to escape my presence.

Part Three

Although the designated area was close to the location of my campsite, it still took me an hour and a half to reach it. From the watch came a message that I had reached the designated area, but of course, there was no more placement point payout, only 1 point for arrival points. Since I went about doing some events halfway, I wasn't upset about the result. From this higher point in the island, you can see the general view of the uninhabited island.

"My my, you're really quite late Ayanokōji." I heard a voice call out to me.

Standing to my right side was Fūka Kiryūin of third-year Class B. She appeared to be looking down the cliff and observing the island.

"Seems so."

Kiryūin was the most troublesome person who was the closest to me at the moment. I was able to find her location beforehand through the GPS scan.

"I thought I had a tough competitor for the placement point reward, but it was only you?"

"I don't think there's anything wrong with that. It isn't uncommon for there to be different groups in the same area. Besides that, I thought that Kiryūin-senpai wasn't interested in the top ten groups."

Kiryūin has risen from whatever place she was all the way to 9th.

"This uninhabited island test was more fun than I thought it would be, and I'm thrilled beyond my age" She replies even though she's just a year older than me.

"I'm going to continue with my current rhythm for a while longer."

"Shouldn't you aim for number one?"

"Everyone is competing with each other for the podium. I can't keep up with that game. However, if Miyabi Nagumo collapses, the story could become a little different."

"I don't think the President is anywhere close to collapsing."

"Do you really think Nagumo is going to leave Kōenji as he is?"

Apparently, Kiryūin also has some idea of what is going to happen next.



“In terms of pure combat power, you can’t say that Nagumo will definitely win. You’ve been watching the developments, haven’t you? Nagumo is almost ready to make his move. In other words, there is a good chance that Nagumo will make a move to dethrone Kōenji. Depending on how the situation unfolds, it’s possible that both sides will cease to score points for a while.”

It’s also possible that one of them will sink and fall down the rankings.

“Hitting your opponent is an important part of battle.” She adds.

I don’t know when they’re going to do it, but they’ll definitely face each other at this rate.

“Don’t you want to be in the top ten?”

“Unfortunately, I don’t have any desire to be in the top ten.”

“Is that so? I thought you were supposed to have accumulated nearly the same number of points as me.”

How interested was she in me? No, I’m not exactly sure I’m the only one. I’m sure that the Kiryūin has analyzed the strategies of everyone in the school.

“Several groups will soon lose their performance. We just have to keep trying and not give up.”

I hadn’t heard of this student until recently, but I can see now that she’s pretty talented. She’s a third-year student with excellent insight and intuition that even the OAA system can’t fully express her excellence.

“That said, from what I see in the table so far, what do you think of the fact that no group has withdrawn?”

“All I can say is that you can’t let your guard down, not even for a moment.” I reply.

“Yesterday I went through the starting point to obtain information. It seems that groups that have started to suffer from food and water shortages are trying to get ahead by separating some of their members to avoid joint collapse.”

“That’s a smart decision.”

No matter how many points you accumulate, you will be disqualified and expelled from school if the whole group withdraws. It is safer to send one or two people to the starting point, even if that reduces efficiency. Water is abundant, and hygiene is protected, making it easier to avoid diseases.

“I’m sure the bottom ten groups still carry some hope, that at least some groups will be forced to withdraw.”

“People who have nothing left to lose are capable of anything, so you can’t be careless.”

“Isn’t that something that a girl should worry about, Kiryūin-senpai?”

“Hmmm, that is true. As a pretty and merciful maiden, I should feel a sense of danger.”

Although it was just a joke, she unexpectedly took it very seriously.

“Well, if it comes to that, I’ll just have to beat them up.” Kiryūin said with a grin and slammed her fists.

That answer was not something a maiden would say.

“Are you being serious?”

“Fufu~, sorry for taking up your time. After all, every second of my time with you is a precious second that I should be using elsewhere.” Kiryūin said as she raised her hand and started to walk away towards the event.

“Aren’t you going to go? Maybe now you still have a chance.”

“I don’t think I can compete with Kiryūin-senpai and win. At this time, I believe that there are at most only two spots left for the event. If there are more than three rival groups headed there, not to mention Kiryūin-senpai. At this point, there’s little chance I’ll be able to participate.”

Kiryūin abruptly stopped back and looked my way when she should be hurrying.

“So that’s... no, I dare you to go there and see for yourself.” She said with a smirk.

As if she had realized my strategy, Kiryūin left with that challenge.

Part Four

The sun has now set on the tenth day, and it's just after 9 P.M. It was when I was checking the group rankings and the GPS screenshots I had saved, when I saw a bright light flicker outside the tent.

"Someone's moving at this time?" I mutter to myself.

Although it was dangerous, there were definitely people who would choose to reach the final designated area at night with the moonlight.

Without thinking, I looked out from the tent to the light source area. It wasn't intentionally shining towards me; it was sweeping the perimeter as the person walked. The movement of the flashlight beam was very erratic, and they seemed to be looking for something. A little concerned, I decided to go out of the tent to find out what was going on.

Sure enough, I saw someone trying to find something.

Was Amasawa looking for me so she could set a trap for me? No, it would be very unwise to use a flashlight so carelessly. She would use the GPS to determine my location then secretly approach.

"Yume... Yume-chan!" I heard the person faintly cry out.

Although I don't know who the person was, I know there's only one person in this school named "Yume."

There is no doubt that they're referring to Yume Kobashi of second-year of Class C. It would be logical to assume that the owner of the voice is a member of that class. I'm sure there was a girl in Kobashi's group; it must be Chihiro Shiranami of second-year Class C.

Anyways, the owner of this voice is about to break down in tears at any moment. Although I could have just ignored her, the second-year Class C students are now in partnership with the second-year Class A, Arisu Sakayanagi.

I use my tablet, which has a built-in flashlight. It's not bright enough to use as a navigation light, but it's bright enough for the other party to notice. I point the light towards the voice, and not long after, I hear them call out to me.

"Yume-chan?!" I hear them say in a panicked voice.

Slowly, I heard them coming closer, then soon after, I saw their dazzling flashlight.

“Yume-chan!”

“No, sorry, I’m not Yume.”

The person who had been calling out was indeed Shiranami.

“Oh... Ayanokōji-kun, good evening.” Shiranami said with a relieved sigh.

Even though we aren’t close at all, she already seems to be at ease. I wonder how dangerous her situation is.

“It’s quite dangerous to go out alone in the middle of the night. What happened to Kobashi and Takemoto?”

“Oh, I lost track of where I was... I was in a hurry and didn’t know where I was going.”

I wasn’t about to ask a girl why she was alone in the woods during the middle of the night.

In this forest, it looks the same wherever you look. Sometimes you’ll think you’re headed the right way, only to find out you were going the wrong way. Then you’ll try and backtrack, only to go the wrong way once more. There’s a high probability anyone would get lost like that.

That’s most likely how Shiranami found herself lost in the woods.

“How long have you been separated?”

“I’m not really sure... fifteen minutes... or maybe twenty minutes?”

That means they aren’t that far off; she should easily be able to return. Voices, however, can’t be heard this far away.

“Wandering aimlessly and simply calling out their names will only make things worse.”

“I guess...”

I take the lead and tell her to stay close to me as I light the way back to my campsite. It would be troublesome if she got lost again and if I got lost looking for her. Also, I really don’t like the idea of leaving my stuff alone and going to search for her group.

I assume there’s been many people who’ve found themselves in similar situations as Shiranami.

At this point, it’s just a matter of knowing if you can get back on the path you were previously on. If you can’t go back, you’ll most likely be forced to spend the night in the woods, which isn’t an easy thing to do.

Even if your body can stand it, you're bound to become mentally exhausted.

Shortly after returning to my camp, I call out to the restless Shiranami.

"There are a lot of bugs. You may want to go into the tent first."

"Ehhhh?!" Shiranami said with a somewhat fearful and surprised tone.

"I won't go in, so please don't worry."

Although my explanation was slightly problematic, I herded the puzzled-looking Shiranami into my tent.

"I'm sorry... you were resting and..." She said from inside the tent.

"No worries. Are Kobashi and Takemoto in good health?"

"Yes."

If that's the case, they're probably panicking right now since Shiranami hasn't returned yet. I need to decide if we should go look for them or stay where we are.

"Did you guys make a plan in case someone gets lost?"

I asked, but Shiranami just shook her head from side to side.

"Then there's a possibility that Takemoto will go out to look for you, but there's also the possibility that'll become an additional disaster. On the other hand, it would be quite risky for both of them to leave their tents and luggage and go out looking for you. They should also realize if they carry their luggage with them, it'll cause problems if you were to return and find no one there."

If they valued safety over everything, they wouldn't leave the campsite but simply wait for Shiranami to hear them calling out her name and rely on the strong light to find her way. However, if their group didn't even think of a countermeasure to prevent these things from happening, it's hard to imagine they're in a good mental state right now. That makes it very likely they're going to run out recklessly and look for Shiranami soon.

"What should I do..." I whisper to myself

Although they may think they're doing the right thing, they're making a major mistake from anyone else's perspective. People tend to become irrational when attacked by impatience.

The question right now is what are the other two going to do. Depending on the situation, there's a high probability that something serious will happen that cannot be anticipated.

“Is your group still three people? Or has it increased to more than four?”
I ask Shiranami.

“That...”

Shiranami, who had explained the situation in detail so far, was left speechless. She clearly knows her group very well, so the hesitation stems from elsewhere.

Ichinose’s class now cooperates with Sakayanagi’s class. Of course, some friendship groups transcend these borders, but most of them are created by the agreements of the central nucleus. Telling me the details of what happens in the group can be classified as leaking information. In this sense, it can be said that Shiranami made the right decision by not talking about whether her group has been changed or not.

“That’s fine, you don’t need to tell me the details of your group. Just listen to what I have to say,”

I continue on.

“If I were a member of Shiranami’s group, I would be aware of the current situation. I would have concluded that my companion was wandering alone through the dark forest without being able to return.”

Shiranami nodded in response to my words.

“Of course, I wouldn’t leave you be. I would first call out to see if you can hear me and come back. However, as I said before, if there isn’t any reaction from this, we would have to make the next move. Suppose Kobashi got lost alone, what would you and Takemoto do?”

“I don’t know... I think we would go look for Yume-chan...”

“Even if it could lead to additional disaster, the risk of becoming injured, and ultimately retiring?”

“I couldn’t just leave her behind... she’s my friend.”

The typical response from Ichinose’s class. The first thing they consider is the well-being of their comrades. Even if Takemoto of Class A stays behind in the tent, he’ll definitely join the search sooner or later.

The most reliable option would be to wait in my tent for them to find us. Maybe they’ll even use a GPS scan to locate Shiranami. However, in this darkness, I don’t know how well that method would work even if they used two searches.

“Can you afford to give out points? If you use it twice, would you be hesitant to use it for a third time?”

“I... No, I don’t think that would be a good idea.” Shiranami replies solemnly.

Not that high in the ranks, I assume. It makes sense to be wary of losing points right now, as they might play a bigger role after the exam is over.

For someone like Shiranami, it would break her heart if they spent points on looking for her.

At this rate, it would be better to wait and let things unfold naturally. There’s also the possibility, however, where they don’t come to look. That would mean I need to spend the night outside. In that case, it’ll deeply disturb my rhythm I’ve carried thus far.

If I want to act, it needs to be now.

“Do you still have strength?”

“Huh?”

“I’m asking if you still have the strength to walk.”

“Well yeah. I can still walk but...”

I urged Shiranami to leave the tent.

“I’ll take you to your group now.”

“But how?”

“Searching haphazardly isn’t an option, we’re going to use this.” I showed her the tablet in my hand.

“We can use the GPS scan to determine which direction they’re in, and to grasp their approximate distance.”

It still won’t be easy. It’s going to be very difficult moving in the forest when it’s this dark. For average students like Shiranami, it would be impossible without using repeated GPS searches.

“Why... Why are you helping me?”

“Why do you think? This exam is considered a battle between the years. That’s the main reason I’m helping you.”

“But you’re going as far as spending points...” Shiranami pointed out.

That’s true, but sparing one or two points wouldn’t significantly impact me. I can maintain my position relatively easily. Of course, I can’t talk about this with her, so I’ll try using another reason.

“If I had to say... maybe because you’re in Ichinose’s class.”

The moment I answered that I turned around and saw Shiranami's face seemed to become a little stiff.

"Do you..."

Did I say something to make her feel uncomfortable?

"Hmm?"

"Is it because... Ayanokōji-kun and Honami-chan are..." Shiranami said with a flustered look.

Right after she said that Shiranami shut her mouth. Although I was slow, I slowly understood what she was trying to express. After all, there was that incident the other day where I met up with Ichinose's classmates.

"There isn't anything going on between me and her."

Although I tried to remedy the situation, Shiranami's expression remained rigid. It would be best if I ended the topic and started scanning. The fact that Kobashi and Takemoto's GPS signals were still overlapping indicated that they were still together. We continued to walk, looking for Shiranami's group.

I must have walked in the direction of their GPS signals for about ten minutes.

"Chihiro-chan!!" I heard a voice call out.

As we made our way through a gap in the dark forest, Kobashi, carrying a backpack, spotted us. From the fact that she was also holding her backpack in her hand, it seems that they have brought all their bags out to look for Shiranami.



Considering the fact, they were coming directly towards us, they most likely used a GPS search too. As a result, we all moved to where I had previously set up my tent.

Thank you very much, Ayanokōji-kun, for helping Chihiro-chan.” Said Takemoto.

“No, you would have found her eventually even if I did nothing. It wasn’t that big of a deal.”

“Yes it was. If she had wandered farther, she might have gotten hurt and it would have been even harder to find her.”

Even Takemoto, who was in a different class, was relieved to find Shiranami. If it became a one-sided search, it might have been more than just a point or two spent.

“I would like to ask, do you have a radio transceiver with you?” I asked Takemoto.

“What? A walkie-talkie? I have one, but...”

Since they owe me a favour, he should be willing to lend it to me.

“If you don’t mind, can I talk to Sakayanagi? I’m a little concerned about the students from Class D who went to the starting point.”

“I’ll help you with that. Give me a minute.” Takemoto says as he pulls the walkie-talkie out of the backpack.

Thankfully, he didn’t say no. I think he wanted to express his gratitude to me.

The walkie-talkies that are available for purchase are digital and have the feature of carrying confidential calls. This means that there isn’t any need to worry about someone tuning into your call. The group that prepared the walkie-talkie for this exam should have also prepared a personal access code to prevent information from leaking.

Takemoto calls Sakayanagi and waits for her to answer.

Not long after, there was a reply from Sakayanagi, and he hands me the walkie-talkie.

“Please let me talk to her in private.”

The three of them nodded, so I pulled away from their group. I purposely stood where they could see me in order to let them know I wasn’t doing anything wrong.

After talking with Sakayanagi for a while, I returned the radio transceiver to Takemoto.

“That’s all, Sakayanagi. Sorry to bother you at this time of night.” Takemoto speaks into the walkie-talkie.

I could hear Sakayanagi respond from the other side, which eased Takemoto’s tense face. I think he might have thought he’d be in trouble for disturbing her. The call ended with an exchange that showed everything was fine, and the conversation was over.

“You saved me, I’ve really been wanting to speak with Sakayanagi for a couple days now.”

“That’s good, and Sakayanagi asked me to give you this”, Takemoto says as he hands me the walkie-talkie.

“Ah, thank you very much.”

“We’re the ones who should be thanking you.” I hear Kobashi say from the background.

“Thank you for helping me Ayanokōji-kun.” Says Shiranami.

I was once again thanked by the three of them, and the four of us decided to spend the night together.

I fell asleep listening to the stories of Class A and Class C, which I don’t usually listen to.

Chapter 4: Kōenji vs. Free Groups

KŌENJI HAD NO change in his pace even when he entered the second half of the exam. As of today, the tenth day, he was racking up points to stay above the Nagumo group. After 5:00 P.M., when today's portion of the exam ended, Kiriyama, who had finished speaking into a walkie-talkie, quietly closed his eyes. In the four days since the top ten were made public, although Nagumo and Kiriyama were more or less surprised that he had remained on the list, they didn't put much thought into it.

Everyone knew that taking this exam alone would definitely set a low cap to which you'll be able to score points.

"Kiriyama. Don't you think Nagumo's actions so far are messed up? Wasn't he supposed to take control at the beginning of the second half of the exam? It's because he hasn't implemented the plan yet, that his score with Kōenji is completely tied up." Said Mikitani, a student from third-year Class B tells me while showing his tablet.

The overall score of the tablet shows that Nagumo's group has 236 points, while Kōenji has 230. The difference between the two is 6 points. Nagumo could quickly reverse their positions if he got first place in placement points. Nagumo's group, which is now much more extensive than when he initially started, can secure 7 points in placement points as long as they arrive on time because of the booster cards. The Kōenji group can only score 1 point, but that makes him the only group which can easily get a reward for finishing first.

"Even if Nagumo manages to overtake him, you'll finish third if you aren't careful. If you lose to a loner sophomore, our reputation as your supporters will take a nosedive."

Kiriyama and his team now have a total score of 188 points. The difference between them and Kōenji begins to widen slowly.

"Speaking of which, I heard a rumour when he entered school last year. Something about asking the second-year and third-year students if he could purchase their points. What do you make of that?"

"All I can say is don't get carried away just because you're wealthy."

His academic ability was moderate. His physical ability appeared to be high, but he had no outstanding grades, and his family was wealthy. That was undoubtedly the image that all the students of this school had.

Mikitani nodded once at Kiriyama's reply.

The main reason why Kōenji hasn't been noticed is that he never takes a sincere attitude towards things. He never takes things seriously and goes against his duties as a student. He's also had a strong attitude of dropping out of exams at the very beginning.

Not only the second-year students knew this, but also the third-years. If Kōenji had been a serious and sincere person, he would have been recognized as an enemy to be watched by Nagumo long before.

"I don't know what happened, but Kōenji has literally gone all out in this special exam on the uninhabited island. And the result is that he's become the strongest opponent out of all the students. His stamina, especially his tirelessness, is terrifying. I think he could go all the way like this."

He's taking advantage of his ability to move alone, and he seems to have an endless supply of energy. If this continues, our third year will have to consider countermeasures. If we don't, Kōenji will undoubtedly finish in the top three.

He may even beat Nagumo if everything works in his favour.

Losing to the juniors is one problem, but losing to a single person is a disgrace. He must be treated as a strong enemy that has to be defeated and needs to be dealt with as soon as possible.

Of course, violence should be avoided as much as possible.

If a third-year student had attacked Kōenji by surprise, injuring him and forcing him to drop out, it would naturally cause issues. If someone used forceful methods to make Kōenji drop in ranking, they would inevitably face expulsion. It's essential to sink Kōenji as quietly as possible.

"Kiriyama, have you decided what you're going to do?"

"I'm going to utilize the Free Groups."

Free Groups. It's a group of three people selected from among five groups in each class, Class B to Class D. This was prepared by Nagumo to act as his hands and feet. There are a total of 15 groups, and two of them are assigned to follow Nagumo's instructions, while the remaining group is assigned to follow the designated area in order not to receive any penalties.

That means two students per group can move freely.

"I see. How many groups are you going to use then?"

"All of them. I'm going to mobilize all six groups I have."

"Six?! Are you serious? You're dealing with just one person; even four groups would be more than enough-"

Interrupting Mikitani, Kiriama continued.

"The only threat here is Kōenji. It should be easy to crush him, then come back to support me. You can check the top ten scores until the twelfth day. Within two days from tomorrow, we need to fully contain Kōenji. Once he loses his momentum, he won't surface again."

Even if he joined some other group, the result would be the same.

"Didn't Nagumo say that there were other groups which interested him? If we attack Kōenji with all the available Free Groups, we won't have enough personnel to dedicate towards other groups..."

Although Mikitani didn't mention which group, one would assume he meant Ryūen's second-year group, Sakayanagi's group second-year group, or the first-year Utomiya's group.

"Don't worry about that. Nagumo's fears are illogical."

Of course, Kiriama knew which group Nagumo was truly looking out for. But "that" group hasn't appeared in the top ten days even once.

Even if we speed up and accumulate points now, we still can't stand on the podium in the end.

"This mistake is on Nagumo."

"It's really rare that Nagumo would have misjudged things."

"Nagumo is currently bounded by invisible shackles, I'm not surprised."

The only person Nagumo cared for. The only thing left of Manabu Horikita.

It's no wonder that the eyes of Nagumo, who can see the battlefield with an eagle's eye, are completely clouded.

“So, we’ll let the six groups take care of Kōenji, and we’ll continue to score points as usual?”

“No, I will directly command the plan to contain Kōenji.”

“You? Wouldn’t that be inefficient? Let me do it.”

If Kiriya’s team, which was now in third place, joined the strategy of blocking Kōenji, it will most definitely affect their ranking.

“You’re asking me to leave all command of this operation to you?”

“I’m at a critical moment right now. Unlike you, I need to earn high praise from Nagumo, so please, let me do it.”

Mikitani said this, but Kiriya didn’t seem to hear it.

“That’s no good. There are six Free Groups in play here; if you fail, it’ll be extremely devastating.”

“But if you don’t get second place, it’ll be devastating for you too. Don’t waste your time on unnecessary things.”

Mikitani, who was eager to get the credit, insisted.

“There isn’t anyone who can stop Kōenji besides me and Nagumo. That’s the end of this discussion.”

When Mikitani heard these words, he slightly frowned and made a disgusted face. Kiriya didn’t notice because he wasn’t even looking at Mikitani anymore.

In order to stop a single student, Kiriya led out six Free Groups at evening. If the opponent was an ordinary student, it would be fine, but even Kiriya had no idea what to expect when facing Kōenji.

The question now was, where would the designated zone be at 7:00 A.M. tomorrow on the eleventh? Depending on Kōenji’s movements, the scope of the siege will change. That’s why the operation started in the evening, in order to encircle Kōenji by 7:00 A.M. tomorrow morning.

Fortunately, Kōenji was in B3, which wasn’t too far from the E3 area where Kiriya and the others are.

Since the top ten group rankings could only be monitored until the end of the twelfth day, there were only two days left in which they would be able to see if they made any progress in surpassing Kōenji.

“How far do you plan on going today?”

At the beginning of the long journey, Mikitani asked Kiriya to ease his boredom.

“As far as we can. I know it’s risky to move at night, but I want to get to an area where we can surround him. We have to reach him before seven in the morning.”

Once he starts moving, the difficulty of this operation will raise two or three levels.

“I think it’ll be easy to dethrone him if we have two days. There are seven groups here, including the six from Kiriyama, making a total of 18 people.” Mikitani says as he turns around to survey the sixteen third-year students.

“Don’t be careless. In a forest this big, there are many possibilities for him to evade us.”

“I know he’s not normal, but he’s still a year younger than you.”

But neither Kiriyama nor Mikitani had seen Kōenji directly, so there wasn’t any way to properly evaluate his skills. Even so, from the information provided by the third-year students who had participated in events with Kōenji, they all said how his physical capabilities were beyond that of an average student.

“That’s irrelevant. Recognize your opponent as your greatest enemy.”

“The greatest?”

Kiriyama said in his mind, “I knew I couldn’t trust someone like Mikitani to handle this.”

Completely crushing this enemy has become the top priority, as it determines whether we will succeed in this exam or not. If we do it in a half-assed way, the chances of failure will be very high.

Part Two

It was the eleventh day, a little after 6:30 A.M. The Kiriya group followed by the six Free Groups, had succeeded in successfully surrounding Kōenji.

“What’s the situation?”

“There doesn’t seem to be any movement in the tent yet. He’s sleeping soundly. It would be so much easier for us if he got sick and stayed in bed all day.”

Mikitani turned around and faced the members of the Free Groups.

“Hey, why don’t we circle him and block him before he leaves the tent? If we make it impossible for him to leave this area, Kōenji won’t be able to go anywhere.”

The members of the Free Groups agreed with Mikitani’s suggestion.

“It’s true that if we prevent him from packing up and leaving, it will slow down his pace to the designated area. But how will we explain if a third party sees us? We can’t adopt a strategy that can be seen by others at a glance.”

Even if you’re breaking the rules, you should eliminate the risks as much as possible.

“Just use a GPS scan to see if anyone’s coming. We have points to spare.”

“Our tablets don’t tell us where the teachers are. Don’t forget that the search isn’t absolute either. As originally planned, we’ll be moving in when Kōenji clears the tent and starts moving. If you come across a freshman or sophomore, or an adult on your way to set a task, immediately open a distance of at least two meters from Kōenji.”

“Do not under any circumstance, get to the point where you’re in reaching distance.” Kiriya adds with a stern tone.

It was close to seven o’clock when the situation began to change.

“Kōenji’s moving!”

He had no idea that we were watching him. He hummed as he began to take down his tent. At the pace he was moving, he would depart well before seven o’clock.

“Go.” Kiriya instructed.

Kiriyama, who judged this was the time to move out, began to walk towards Kōenji. Mikitani and the other members of the Free Group followed close behind.

Even if he realized that Kiriyama and the others were approaching him, Kōenji didn't look up from his tablet. After being surrounded by eighteen people, Kōenji continued to act as if he was oblivious to their presence.

“Do you have a moment, Kōenji?”

Although they called Kōenji's name, his gaze remained on his tablet.

“Do you want something from me?” Kōenji replied absentmindedly.

Although this was no way to address a senior, Kiriyama didn't care and continued on.

“We didn't expect that you could be active to this extent in a special exam. If you had such strength, why didn't you ever use it before?”

“Is this something we should talk about right now? It's almost seven in the morning. Shouldn't you hurry up and get ready to go to the designated area.” Kōenji replied.

“I'm sure you understand what I mean Kōenji. You've gained too many points.”

Although he looked like he didn't know anything, Kiriyama assumed he was just playing dumb.

“I want you to stay here all day.”

“Does that mean you don't want me to gather any points...?”

“That's right.”

Of course, Kōenji would never nod and say yes to Kiriyama's proposal.

“Although I don't know who you are, I only need to think a little to understand that this request you've made is completely unreasonable. But even so, the fact you brought so many friends means you intend to interfere with my plans if I ignore your wishes, correct?”

“Even if you continue with the special examination at this pace, it's impossible to get the first place. Nagumo's group in second, has seven people, and we had six people in third place, while you're only one person. I acknowledge that you have made great progress so far, but your results will most likely drop in the second half of the exam as you get tired.”

“If that's the case, why worry about me?”

“It’s a matter of precaution. Furthermore, if we continue to compete with one person, we’ll lose face as third-years. Of course, if you’re ready to listen to us sincerely, we won’t treat you badly. If you become friends with President Nagumo, your school life will also be more pleasant, right?”

There’s two options here for Kōenji; he can be held back by force, or he can obey and side with Nagumo.

The time is now exactly 7:00 A.M., and the first designated zone of the eleventh day appears on the tablet.

Kōenji confirms the location and puts the tablet back into his backpack.

The tension in the atmosphere rises as Kiriyama and the others silently wait to see what Kōenji will do.

“If you’ll excuse me, I must hurry.”

As soon as Kōenji’s words of rejection were spoken, he took off with immense speed and rushed towards the edge of the encirclement.

“He-Hey!”

Although they had surrounded him, there were still gaps big enough for Kōenji to run through. It would be a lie to say that everyone, including Kiriyama, hadn’t been caught off guard; they had underestimated the likelihood that he would ignore the orders of the third-year students and flee.

“I’m going after him!” Mikitani yelled as Kōenji found an opening and disappeared into the depths of the forest.

“Don’t panic, you’ll only hurt yourself if you try and match Kōenji’s rhythm.”

“We can’t take it easy right now, he got away!”

“He may be able to achieve the placement reward, but that’s about it. If Kōenji chooses to flee, he won’t be able to take his time to participate in the tasks. On the other hand, if he chooses to take part in the tasks, we can chase after him then.”

Kiriyama knew that it would be dangerous to determine which area Kōenji was heading to based solely on the direction in which he fled, but he also knew that it would be impossible to hide from a GPS search.

Even so, Mikitani started to run after Kōenji.

Part Three

Kiriyama and the rest of the Free Group, led by Mikitani, were following Kōenji.

“What’s Kōenji’s position right now?” Kiriyama asks.

“It still hasn’t moved. I’ve scanned it three times now.” Mikitani says while looking at his tablet.

It isn’t a break right now, so it’s not natural for him to be still for so long.

Kiriyama decided that Kōenji, whose movements were unpredictable, must have encountered something on his path.

“There doesn’t seem to be a task nearby.”

“In any case, we’ll reach Kōenji in about 200 meters. Don’t be careless this time. Make sure you completely surround him.”

“I don’t need you to tell me that.”

Kōenji had managed to elude them thus far, but after six hours of chasing him, they were reunited once more.

It turns out the reason why he wasn’t moving was because he was fast asleep in broad daylight.

The third-years looked at each other in disbelief as Mikitani approaches Kōenji as the representative of the group.

“Get up, Kōenji! Even though we’ve been chasing you all day, you still decide to take a nap? You’ve been running for ten days straight, you must be really tired if you’re falling asleep during the middle of the exam.”

Mikitani falsely believed that the reason for Kōenji being asleep in the open was that he was tired of running and had given up. That he had chosen to rest because he couldn’t bear it any longer.

With a smile on his face, Kōenji slowly opened his eyes.

“I’m sure you can understand. After all, I am a human being like you.”

“If that’s the case, then go ahead and take the rest of the day off. You must be exhausted from all this. You must listen to the kind advice of your elders.”

“Take the whole day off? You really know how to say strange things.” Kōenji said as he stood up, unfazed by the situation around him.

Mikitani, who had been looking down at the resting Kōenji, instinctively backed up when Kōenji, who was more than six feet tall, stood up in front of him.

Kōenji's eyes seem to be full of energy.

"Don't... push yourself. You just have to sit and rest a little, then no one would have a problem."

Although Mikitani was feeling intimidated, he approached Kōenji.

"Please don't worry. My body has been restored to its perfect state. Please don't compare me with ordinary people."

Kiriyama considers that was just a bluff. It would be impossible to restore energy so quickly.

"You do look in good shape. But as Mikitani said, you have been working harder than anyone in the past ten days or so. After all, you've been repeatedly acquiring first place in placement points. But no matter how much of a monster you are, you should have reached your limit by now."

"I haven't reached my limit because I'm beyond the realm of normal people. So please, once again, do not think of me as normal."

"You mean you still have stamina left?"

Kiriyama's suspicion intensifies, but Kōenji responds immediately.

"I possess an ultra-short sleep system, a system with very little REM sleep."

"Huh? What's an ultra-short sleep system?" Mikitani asked who was confused at Kōenji's words.

For the first time, Kiriyama's expression hardened.

"Short REM phases?... If that's true, then we have a serious problem."

"What's going on Kiriyama?"

"Normal people need seven to eight hours of sleep a day. In order to maintain health, it is generally not advised to exceed this time, nor should it be lower than it. However, people with short REM phases can drastically reduce the time it takes to recharge the body."

Sleep is an alternate cycle of REM and non-REM phases. The REM phase is the stage in which the brain is active and awake, so to speak. On the other hand, the non-REM phase is when the brain is "asleep." Because of very low REM cycles, a person with an ultra-short sleep system only needs to rest for a while to recuperate from the exhaustion of the brain and body.

"Now I understand why you were sleeping during the middle of the exam..."

TL Note: REM stands for rapid eye movement. During REM sleep, your eyes move around rapidly in a range of directions, but don't send any visual information to your brain. Your breathing becomes faster and irregular, and your heart rate and blood pressure increase to near waking levels.

Kōenji has extraordinary physical strength, but even so, fatigue often appears after a long period of intense travel and repeated challenges. He uses any time he has left after reaching the designated area or when there aren't any events nearby to sleep. This way, he can steadily maintain his stamina. Suppose his claim that he has a super REM phase is true. In that case, it means that Kōenji is not only physically stronger than an average person, but his resilience is also beyond normal.

It was now, for the first time, that Kiriyama had started to feel a hint of anxiety.

Considering the pace of this exam, everyone was more or less exhausted at this point. Even by just walking, your feet start to hurt, and your heart will cry out for a break. This is a common feeling that all students share right now.

Therefore, it shouldn't have been hard to contain Kōenji.

If this premise wasn't true in Kōenji's case...

"By the way, is my presence required here any longer?" Kōenji spoke up.

"I don't care if you're physically strong or not, shut up or-"

"No, we don't need anything from you so please don't mind us."

Kiriyama said, interrupting the annoyed Mikitani.

One should avoid direct conflict and advance the plan through other methods.

Mikitani was even more dissatisfied with Kiriyama, who had such a soft attitude but still obeyed him.

"Fufu~, although you say so, it still seems you're quite belligerent."

It didn't seem like he would take heed of the third-year advice or threats.

Halfway through the conversation, the third designated zone for the day was released. Kōenji took one look at his tablet and immediately started walking in that direction.

"I don't think he'll ever listen to us, Kiriyama."

"I suppose you're right."

"And he's probably bluffing when he says he has a super short sleep."

But it's a fact that Kōenji is still taking the exam at a pace that isn't much different from his initial pace at the beginning when most students are starting to lose their efficiency.

What is certain is that he's been exercising his strength constantly throughout our entire time chasing him, and it's entirely possible that he's using this whole exam as an exercise for himself.

"It's useless, I'm going to change the strategy."

At this point, Kiriya finally made up his mind and instructed them to hunt down Kōenji.

However, Mikitani's lips pursed in dissatisfaction.

"Remember who's in charge, Mikitani. Do not overstep your authority."

"Tch..."

While they were puzzled by Kōenji's steady pace, the third-year students began to expand widely. The 18 formed a circle with Kōenji in the centre, and Kiriya kept in contact with them through walkie-talkies.

Kōenji didn't seem to care about what the third-years were up to as he kept on walking.

There were three plans Kiriya had set in place. The first plan was to convince Kōenji to give up the competition for first place. Of course, the circle was a key part in trying to pressure him to do so. The second plan is the plan to restrict Kōenji's movements by encircling him. Then the third plan was to finish all the subjects he had his eye on before he could.

With seven teams, including Kiriya's group and Free Groups, working together to hinder Kōenji, the difficulty to reach the events will rise significantly. And if the whole team is there to crush Kōenji, his chance of winning the event will also plummet.

Although there are various conditions for participating in the event, the format is the same.

There are two types of events: "individual events" and "group events," In the latter case, a Free Group that doesn't have all its members together doesn't meet the participation requirements to enter. But most tasks that require group participation basically require two or more members.

In other words, Kōenji, who is working alone, can only participate in assignments that require the participation of one person, so the third-year students here can participate along with him.

For a time, the third-year students followed him without any issues, but gradually they grew impatient. Kōenji's pace was so fast that it could be mistaken for a race, and just keeping up with him consumed a lot of stamina. By just following him, the third-years were already showing fatigue.

Because they had to keep up with his unaccustomed walking speed, they started to feel waves of exhaustion.

It would have been easier if he just ran at his full speed.

“Kōenji! Are you trying to act tough or something?” Yelled the impatient Mikitani, assuming that Kōenji was desperately trying to prove he isn’t exhausted.

“Well, well, they’re getting noisy again. It seems I need to pick up the pace a bit.” Kōenji said as he started running again.

“Don’t let him get away this time, surround him!”

The third-students who had been chasing him while maintaining a reasonable distance simultaneously started to close the gap to Kōenji.

However, the moment they were about to surround him, Kōenji rushed by them.

“You’re joking right?”

The third year’s words drifted away with the wind. Kōenji’s was moving as he was running on a well-kept field. He was as fast as a sprinter as he glided through the trees.

Most of the twelve people who formed the free group were students who were confident in their physical strength. They were all students with B or higher physical ability OAA rating.

These are the soldiers, so to speak; Nagumo and Kiriyaama have brought together to monopolize many of the tasks.

“Chase him! Don’t let him escape no matter what!”

“Wait, Mikitani, don’t take action without my permission!”

“Shut up! There’s no way I’m letting him get away twice, I’m going to catch him and drag him back here!” Mikitani yelled back as he chased after Kōenji with the others.

“Idiot...”

For a moment, Kiriyaama wondered if he should pursue him. He calmly looked down at his tablet and rethought his strategy. It was hard to believe that Kōenji had started running for no reason. He was aiming for either the designated area or an event.

“The closest area to the subject that Kōenji can participate in is only E3, but the first place will only give eight points...? It wouldn’t be surprising if he’s also aiming for the placement reward. I wonder where his designated area is?”

By the direction he ran off in, Kōenji may be going to the D4 area, but it could be any other random zone.

“This is harder to analyze than I thought...”

Kiriyama painfully understood that this is an opponent who cannot be seen using common sense. It’s nearly impossible to know what Kōenji is going to do next.

Part Four

It turns out, Kōenji's goal was to participate in an event at E3. He reached the location of the subject in the blink of an eye, stopped, and entered the event.

After a few minutes, Mikitani and his team were able to catch up with Kōenji. But the event was already full, so they had to wait for Kōenji to finish. The event was an English test. There were first-year students to third-year students taking it, but the difficulty was the same for all.

Dodo Michimichi, one of the most gifted third-year students, took first place, but Kōenji came in a close second and was awarded four points.

With the teachers' eyes on him, Mikitani and his team planned to approach him as soon as he left the event area, but Kōenji while still in sight of the instructor, ran off. Since Kōenji's speed was hard to match, they panicked and ran right behind him.

They didn't meet Kōenji until just before 3:00 P.M., where they circled him for the third time.

"You lot seem to be working quite hard." Kōenji said.

"We can't afford to lose here."

On the eleventh day, they had tried to anticipate his tasks in advance but had failed to stop him even once.

It's no exaggeration to say that the pride of these third-year students had been shattered. When Nagumo finds out about what happened, he's going to be extremely disappointed.

Calm is no longer a word that has any meaning in this situation.

"This is your last warning, Kōenji." Kiriyama said.

"Just tomorrow will be fine. Tomorrow you will obey us and do nothing. That's all we ask."

As long as he's inactive for even one day, Nagumo will definitely take first place. The important thing is not to let Kōenji take back first place again.

"Hey, hey, didn't Nagumo say we need to suppress him for two days?"

"The day after tomorrow, we won't be able to see the top ten groups. I don't think there's any group that's going to come after us strongly, but we should concentrate on improving our own score instead of retaining the others."

This is the judgment of Kiriyama, who has observed Kōenji from close up.

“It’s not a good idea to dedicate a total of three days to Kōenji.”
Kiriyama adds.

“Why don’t you just use the minimum number of guards to monitor Kōenji’s movements for the next two days?”

“Do you think Kōenji will accept that?”

If we stop him for just one day, there’s a chance that Kōenji will still come in second or third. But if we stop for two days, there’s a chance we won’t be able to get on the podium.

“It depends on how you go about doing it.”

Mikitani, who had been holding a grudge against Kiriyama, finally turned on him.

“... can you do it?”

“I can. And then I’ll get a ticket to Class A,” Mikitani said as he pushed away Kiriyama and walked towards Kōenji.

“You heard us, right? Please stay here tomorrow and the day after.”

“Are you asking me for a favour?”

“No, I’m giving you an order.”

“What an arrogant request. What will happen if I refuse?”

“In the worst-case scenario, you’ll drop out of school.” Mikitani said as he beckoned his partners to come closer.

Their intention was clear: if they couldn’t talk it out, they would have to resort to violence.

Even though he was threatened, Kōenji continued to wear a fearless smile and waited to see what the third-years would do next.

“If you aren’t answering, does that mean you’re going to listen to me?”

“I don’t listen to anyone.”

“Then I’m going to make you listen. You understand? Kiriyama?”

Mikitani said as he turned around to face Kiriyama.

“As long as you can get Kōenji to obey, I’ll leave it up to you.”

Mikitani maintained a tough stance, but as soon as the last designated area of the eleventh day was released, Kōenji stood up.

Before Kōenji could escape once again, Mikitani gave instructions to surround him.

“I told you to stay here.”

At this point, the third-years were so close that they were practically touching each other. The only way for Kōenji to move would be to forcefully shove the third-years.

“I don’t know if you know, but I don’t like male sexuality.”

“What are you going to do Kōenji? If you push any of us, we’ll consider you to have started this fight.”

“Fufu~ Is that so?” Kōenji said as he took a big step forward.

Of course, it was a step big enough to touch Mikitani, who was in front of him. Because it was just an ordinary walk, at most, it was just a shoulder bump. In other words, he was going to try to break through forcibly with his body instead of using his hands.

Mikitani had considerable confidence in his physique. Now was the time to prove that being fast and being strong was not equal.

But it was as if a boulder was pushing him over, and before he knew it, he was forced to move to the side.

Kōenji acted like nothing had happened and kept on walking silently.

“Hey, wait!” Mikitani said as he rushed and grabbed Kōenji’s shoulders.

But, as Mikitani should have realized by now, it’s impossible to stop Kōenji with half-assed force.

If Kōenji is allowed to escape now, it would be a repeat of the stupidity they had experienced twice today.

Mikitani wanted desperately to avoid this, but he simply could not stop Kōenji from walking.

Mikitani yelled to the group for assistance.

One of them got in front of Kōenji, and of course, they were pushed backwards.

Morooka, who had been pushed over, exaggeratedly fell to the ground and pretended to look like he was seriously injured.

“Shit! I think I broke my arm!” Morooka yelled like he was a soccer player.

“You have done something terrible Kōenji.”

“How disgraceful.” Kōenji said as he turned around.

“No matter what you say, the fact that you knocked down Morooka doesn’t change.”

The soft strategy the third years had decided to implement had disappeared. The third-years were slowly getting more and more desperate every minute.

“Now it has become an unfolding of events that I can’t ignore either, so where do we go from here?” Kōenji asked in a slightly annoyed tone.

“It seems that you’re willing to hit us, your senpai’s. But if you did, you’d be in big trouble, right?”

Mikitani and the others emphasise that they didn’t do anything, implying Kōenji is the wrong one in this situation.

But Kōenji’s attitude didn’t change one bit.

“I don’t intend to spare those who stand in my way, let alone those of you who deliberately showed your fangs to me.”

Mikitani’s expression froze for a moment after hearing the statement that Kōenji was willing to resort to violence.

“What happens if we report it to the school?”

“Why do you ask such silly questions? The school will only punish you, the third-year students, who tried to sink a lone kouhai, right?”

There was no need to check if Mikitani’s watch was working properly; otherwise, they wouldn’t have been able to adopt the strategy of filling up the events before Kōenji.

“Are we finished here? It’s evident that you and your group have put a damper on my chances of earning placement points.”

More than ten minutes had already passed since the announcement of the designated area. It’s clear that Kōenji’s rivals have gotten a head start. It’s not entirely impossible for him to regain pace, but what will happen now is unclear.

“I’m sorry, but we won’t let you go.”

In other words, Mikitani would not hesitate to retaliate if Kōenji used violent means.

“We can only be gentle with you for so long.”

“Is that a declaration of war?”

The third-year students had been confused by Kōenji’s attitude up to that point, but they remembered their role. They knew it was an embarrassing situation for so many older students to surround a single kouhai. Still, if this was the only way to survive, they didn’t have any other choice.

Normally the opponent would realize this desperate atmosphere, but Kōenji was different. This man, who has no interest in anything other than himself, will only consider how to settle things here that will fit his aesthetic. Kōenji stroked his stunning blonde hair, which he had not forgotten to groom even on the uninhabited island, with a smile on his face.

Mikitani, who felt fear for a moment, pulled away from him.

“Well... if you insist. Time is money, come quickly.” Kōenji said as he slowly spread his arms and gestured to come at him.

“Do you think it’s possible to beat him?” Whispered one of the third-years to Mikitani.

“Even if we can’t beat him, I’m going to go down with Kōenji in my arms. Fuck him.”

At the same time, three third-year students rushed at Kōenji at once. One tried to grab Kōenji’s arm from behind, while the other two would get him from both sides.

At first glance, this was a difficult situation to deal with. Still, even if all three were particularly good fighters, it could not be said that they had good coordination.

It was just a matter of rushing towards Kōenji at the same time. No one had any intention of actually doing anything, and they were each thinking of leaving it to someone else.

Kōenji dodged them all with one spectacular stride, causing the surprised third-year students to collide head-on.

“Shit! What are you doing? Watch out!”

“You too!”

The third years continued to shift the blame on each other. This wasn’t a pretty sight to behold.

“You idiots, stop arguing! The target is Kōenji!” Mikitani yelled.

With that, they got up and rushed at Kōenji once more.

Part Five

Not long after, the exhausted third-year students were around Kōenji, on their knees, breathing heavily.

He had broken their spirits by continuing to nullify their attacks without sending out a single fist.

“Ha, ha... damn, what kind of monster are you? Wouldn’t it... wouldn’t it have been easier for you to fight back?” The exhausted Mikitani asked.

“You bunch have been pestering me for quite some time. And I don’t particularly enjoy a bunch of dead leaves trying to attack my beautiful face.”

Hearing this, Kiriyama calmly analyzed the situation despite being in a difficult one himself.

“I see. It’s true that Mikitani was prepared to go after you until the end. If you had shown overwhelming skill difference, but still put up a fight, his spirit might not have broken. You are the only one who can devise and perform the trick of breaking your opponent’s heart without counterattacking.”

“Even if I have to drop the reward for reaching the designated area, here I will nip the counterattack of third year students in the bud.”

Kiriyama and the others were surprised by Kōenji, who made that statement.

“Are you okay, Mikitani?”

“Yeah, yeah. I’m not hurt.”

Although there were students who fell and punched the ground in a fury of incompetence, most of them were fine. At most, there were just some bruises.

In the face of such overwhelming power, it didn’t even take a fist to show the difference.

“Can I go now?”

“Do what you want, Kōenji.”

“Adieu.”

There was nothing anyone could do to stop Kōenji from leaving.

TL Note: Adieu is French for “Good bye.”

“What kind of person is that guy? Is he really a high school student?” Mikitani muttered sadly.”

“It’s not out of the ordinary to meet an out-of-spec opponent, just like Nagumo. In the end, to him, we’re like ants, crawling on the ground.

Mikitani hit the ground out of frustration.

“That monster! He made me look like an idiot!” Mikitani said in a trembling voice.

“Shit... shit”, Mikitani whispered under his breath.

Mikitani’s anger was not unfounded. After all, Kōenji had utterly crushed his spirit.

But the fight wasn’t over yet.

Kiriyama looked towards the direction where Kōenji had disappeared and took out his radio transceiver.

“Are... are you going to report my failure to Nagumo?”

“What good would that do me? I’ve already decided to win. Don’t worry, Miki, I had already anticipated that Kōenji was a monster from the very beginning. But no matter who the opponent is, there will definitely be weaknesses that exist within them. You know what they say, “The bigger they are, the harder they fall.”

Mikitani nodded quietly while feeling grateful for Kiriyama’s words.

Kiriyama, for his part, was not the least bit upset because he had expected this to happen from the beginning.

This purpose of this strategy was to fool Kōenji.

Despite the large number of people who interfered, almost no real damage occurred. As a result, Kōenji must have gotten a strong impression that third-year students were no big deal.

That was precisely what Kiriyama wanted.

Part Six

It was just before 5:00 P.M. on the eleventh day. I had barely made it in time for the last designated zone, J10, when my eyes caught the amazing sight in front of me.

Although it was also important to collect points and items from the events, I also had to keep my score under control. It was unexpectedly hard to stay near the eleventh place for an extended period. I had to pay extra attention to two things: avoid being penalized for missing the designated area and match the tenth-place score to gain points. Yesterday on the tenth day, the third designated zone was a random move from F4 to B9, so I opted out early. Then I wasn't able to reach the fourth designated zone either, so I had missed the designated area twice in a row. Just as I managed to catch this morning's zone in C8 to avoid another score penalty, there was another random move to area H9, which of course, I missed again. Then I spent the rest of the day working towards reaching I9.

Once you receive an area that is long-distance, the areas after it will be equal if not more distance from where you currently stand. I realized once again the main reason why my overall score was not increasing.

As I reached the end of the steep and rocky road in the J10 area, I heard the faint sounds of people talking. Maybe it's just the wind blowing, but because the voices sound vaguely familiar, I decided to take a look. The voices were coming from the west side, which is the direction of the sea.

There, I met three girls from Class B from the second year, consisting of Isoyama Nagisa, Morofuji Rika, and Shiina Hiyori.

There were also three more from another group of second-years. I haven't seen them since the first day of the special exam.

It was Ishizaki Daichi, Takeko Nishino, and Hitomi Tsutsube.

I'm sure our tables are different, but perhaps the designated areas are now overlapping?

"My, my if it isn't Ayanokōji-kun." Hiyori said with a cheerful smile.

The other five were still talking when Hiyori noticed my arrival. As soon as she saw me, she waved her hand at me.

"You seem to be more energetic than I thought you would be." I tell her as I approach.

“Because we’re all working hard, we’ve expanded to a group of six people.”

So that’s why Ishizaki and the others were here.

To be perfectly honest, many of the students lack ability, but Hiyori can bring a lot in terms of brains. She most likely acts as the pillar of support. However, her physical capability isn’t all that high. Considering the other group members, I would say that they more or less function in a balanced way.

“Did you decide to rendezvous with Ishizaki and the others from the very beginning?”

“That’s about right. I had several candidate groups, and they were one of them.”

She affirmed my words, and as far as I could see, they seemed to be getting along quite well. They talked and laughed while watching the sun quietly set, which must have been curing their fatigue.

They most likely get along well with each other since they’re basically a group made up of second-year Class B. The only one from a different class, Tsutsube, seems to be fitting in with them as well.

“What about you, are you feeling well Ayanokōji-kun?” Hiyori asked with a concerned tone.

Even though we’re supposed to be enemies, both in this exam and because of different classes, Hiyori has always treated me as a friend.

That’s just who she is.



“Yes, so far, so good.”

“Although I don’t think I need to worry about you, please be careful. After all, one injury and you might be out.”

“I know.”

She motioned for me to sit next to her.

“Only three days left.” She told me.

“Indeed.”

I don’t think she had any deep meaning when she said that. We sat in silence and quietly looked at the ocean to refresh ourselves.

In most cases, when I meet a friend or someone close to a friend, they ask me how I am doing. As it’s a battle for survival, curiosity cannot be avoided.

That said, Hiyori showed no intention of asking me what my score was. It’s not so much that she isn’t interested, but that she thinks it’s impossible for me to get expelled.

“Yo! Ayanokōji!” Ishizaki yelled out to me.

I’m not sure if he finally noticed my presence or not, but for some reason, Ishizaki smiled at me in a thrilled way. The rest of the group seemed to notice immediately and grabbed Ishizaki by the shoulders as he tried to approach us.

“What the hell? What are you doing?”

“Don’t disturb them, idiot!”

“Huh? Ayanokōji doesn’t dislike me though...” Ishizaki replies, confused.

“That’s not it...”

“I guess that’s one of the better things about Ishizaki.”

“It’s his inability to see the atmosphere.”

“That’s undeniably true.”

Nishino and Tsutsube have become good friends with each other. This would be a common sight for many groups in a prolonged battle on an uninhabited island. If they work together as much as they can to avoid being kicked out, they can easily overcome the hardest challenges.

That’s also why it’s so cruel.

After this special exam is over, the class war will resume again, and we’ll return to trying to getting each other expelled.

At that time, students who are unable to make correct judgments anymore will definitely appear.

“Sorry to disturb you.” I said while standing up.

I didn’t think they would appreciate someone from Class D hanging out with their group.

I was about to leave when Ishizaki came running up and grabbed my shoulder.

“I’m sorry I embarrassed you Ayanokōji, stay here for a bit!”

“Stay here?”

“Today’s exam is over, and you were planning on camping near I9 right?”

My designated area, J10, wasn’t suitable for pitching a tent due to the strong wind and rocky ground. In that sense, I would try and set up camp by the seashore, as Ishizaki said, and I would go by I9.

“What a wonderful idea!” Hiyori said as she clapped her hands.

These two, however, were relatively close to me, so they wouldn’t have many problems to begin with. I’m not too sure what the others think.

“It’s all good, Ayanokōji-kun looks harmless.”

“Yeah I think it’s a great idea.”

No one seems to have any objections.

It seemed like they had forgotten about the special exam that was going on, and we were hanging out like friends on an average day.

Most of the groups with this kind of atmosphere are in Ichinose’s class, but it seems that Ryūen’s class is slowly changing.

Part Seven

“Ayanokōji-senpai, Ayanokōji-senpai!”

It was the middle of the night, and everyone had gone to sleep when I heard someone call out my voice. I opened my eyes. The voice was extremely quiet, so it definitely couldn't be heard by the others. It was coming from outside my tent.

I looked at my watch and saw it was 2:30 A.M.

“It's me, Nanase!”

I immediately got out of the tent, and by the faint light of the tablet, I saw the somewhat panicked figure of Nanase.

“What's wrong? Why are you here at this hour? You're not hurt, are you?”

“I'm fine, after all, I was in the I9 area just like you senpai. I actually saw senpai from afar in the evening, but I didn't come to say hello because Hōsen-kun was next to me at the time.”

“So why are you here?”

“There is something I need to tell you as soon as possible... Today... well, the date has already changed, so it was yesterday to be exact, but Hōsen-kun told me that on the twelfth day, the first years will make a great move to take down Ayanokōji-senpai.”

“A great move? Did they invite you to join them?”

“Ah well you see... no, how should I put it... let me tell you in order.” Nanase said as she started to control her breath and calm down.

“Although I don't know which day it was, Hōsen-kun ignored the invitation to a meeting set up by Takahashi, Yagami, Tsubaki, and Utomiya. However, on the ninth day, a student who appeared to be an errand boy for one of the group members showed up with a walkie-talkie and again asked for Hōsen's help.”

Nanase continued on.

“The plan was to make you drop out on the final stage of the uninhabited island exam. And they're also planning to target the seniors who are acting alone, trying to get them to drop out as well. They are going to contact him on the day of the plan, since now Hōsen-kun has the walkie-talkie with him. But, Hōsen-kun told me that he didn't care about their plan at all, he's just pretending to assist them so he can use them.”

I was sure that they were planning to target me in the final stages of the exam. Luckily, I had been preparing in advance.

“I suppose they did the right thing by not informing me too early about the implementation date and the specific contents of the plan.”

It’s true if I had known the date and specifics, my comeback would have been much easier.

“It’s not just me though, Hōsen hasn’t even received the details of the plan yet.”

“Who’s in charge?”

“I don’t know. But it was mostly Tsubaki-san who spoke on the radio transceiver.”

“She doesn’t seem like the type to show her face.”

“I agree with you, because I had the impression that Class C was mostly centred around Utomiya. But Utomiya and Hōsen don’t get along, and when it comes to arguing, they quickly get into quarrels, so Tsubaki may have been deliberately chosen to act as an intermediary.”

There is also the possibility that someone like Yagami or Takahashi is pulling strings behind the scenes.

It’s valuable knowing they had a meeting. It’s good to know what’s going on.

“Even if you don’t know the details, just telling me that they had a meeting is of great value. I appreciate it, but you shouldn’t stay here too long. If they know you leaked information to me, it’ll get very troublesome for you.”

Leaving aside my business for the moment, if things were to fall through, it would greatly impact Nanase’s future school life. For better or worse, she was in the same class as Hōsen, and that couldn’t be changed.

“Alright, I’ll come back to you if there’s any more developments.”

“No, I’m grateful, but you’ve done enough for me on the uninhabited island exam. Even if you notice any suspicious movements in the first year, you don’t have to inform me, and you don’t have to think about helping me all the time.”

“But...”

“Nanase, you have given me enough information. Now you need to act like a part of Hōsen and Amasawa’s group.”

If they start to suspect Nanase because of this, I won't have a source of information for future first-year issues that may arise.

If that happens, Nanase's value will be reduced.

"If Ayanokōji-senpai says so, I'll obey...."

After bowing deeply to me, Nanase disappeared into the moonlight. After I couldn't see Nanase's figure, I took out my tablet to start thinking.

My sleepiness was long gone at this point.

The information that Nanase told me I assume is accurate, but would it actually go according to plan? Although I wasn't sure about the status of the first-year Class D, Hōsen was a man similar to Ryūen, and their method of suppressing the class is nearly identical. However, the difference is that Hōsen tends to take the initiative to try to overcome obstacles. In the midst of the first-year special exam to get me expelled, Hōsen has kept Nanase by his side.

It's true that Nanase has a strong and tough mindset that most high school freshmen do not have. With her academic ability and physical prowess, there is no question that she's a valuable asset.

However, the extent to which Hōsen trusts her is completely unknown.

If he didn't trust her, would he let her know about the surprise attack that the first-years are planning? I don't think Hōsen alone can sustain the idea that Nanase is on my side, but I wouldn't be surprised if he felt some kind of discomfort.

If Amasawa is advising him, there is a chance that he may see the truth...

In any case, the first-year student's plan of attack was not something that should come as a shock. I had thought from the very beginning that someone would attack me since I still had a bounty on my head.

Although I was grateful for Nanase's report, my plan was still going perfectly.

Part Eight

After a brief sleep, I launched a GPS scan just as it turned 6:00 A.M. If they were planning to make a move, I should see some unusual activity among the freshman, including Hōsen.

“Seems like their location hasn’t changed.”

Only Hōsen, who shared the same table as me, was in my vicinity, but everyone else was more than three frames away. There’s not much movement yet. I guess they wouldn’t want to attack me in a place where they’re witnesses, so at least I’m safe when Ishizaki and the others are around.

Hiyori and Ishizaki have most likely woken up by now and are starting to prepare for the exam.

When all of us were ready, we started walking together.

“It’s so annoying we need to start hiking here first thing in the morning.” Ishizaki complains still groggy after waking up,

“There’s no way around it, we need to start moving early in the morning.” Nishino says to the complaining Ishizaki.

Since this type of conversation must have taken place for the previous ten days, the others acted like it wasn’t even happening.

“Ayanokōji-kun, do you ever feel lonely in this exam?” Hiyori asked as she started walking next to me.

“Not particularly. I feel rather relaxed to be perfectly honest with you.”

“I’m... I feel a bit lonely and scared.”

“Scared, huh? I can’t imagine Hiyori being scared.”

Since she’s always so relaxed, it gives me the impression that she’s insensitive to these issues. Even if she experienced something traumatic, she would probably clap her hands and say, “This is wonderful~.”

“But I’m still pretty scared. So, I think that Ayanokōji-kun is pretty powerful.”

“Aren’t Horikita and Ibuki more powerful than me?”

If a person fights with solitude for a long time, their mental state will gradually become weak, and they’ll start to think about things they didn’t need to think about.

That person would start to care about the sound of the wind, the swaying of the trees, and things that simply do not exist.

“Indeed... living alone as a girl on an uninhabited island would... not work for me.” Hiyori said as a scared expression appeared on her face.

Thanks to this uninhabited island exam, I was able to see this rare sight and learn Hiyori better.

“You guys are really close, aren’t you?” At some point, Ishizaki, who was walking in front of us, turned his head towards us and said so.

“Please don’t get involved in unnecessary things.” Nishino told him.

“Why don’t they go out? They can be boyfriend and girlfriend, and that’s how you’ll come to our class, right Ayanokōji? Come on, I know you want to- hey!

“Shut up bum!”

Ishizaki received a solid punch to the head from Nishino, and then he immediately screamed, holding his head.

“Ishizaki-kun is really funny.” Hiyori replied with a giggle.

Well, it would be unbearable if people always accepted Ishizaki’s words in their entirety.

I’ll pretend like I didn’t hear that.”

“Ouch, that hurts. Don’t you think it’s necessary to get Ayanokōji in our class?”

“I don’t think so at all. You’re the only one who’s obsessed with Ayanokōji-kun.”

To Nishino and the girls, who don’t know the details, Ishizaki is the one who seems strange for thinking such a thing.

“Well what can I say... Ayanokōji and I... we basically see eye to eye.”

“Eye to eye? I don’t think there’s anyone who’s ever going to see eye to eye with you.”

Ishizaki looked at us to help him against Nishino’s words.

“Oh, that’s not true. Don’t look at Ishizaki like he’s “that” type of guy.”

TL Note: When Hiyori said “that” type of guy she meant gay.

Hiyori said so, but it seems like no one understood what she meant.

“What do you mean by “that” type of guy?”

“That” means “that” is all I can say.”

“... sure. In any case, it’s good you got praised by Shiina-san.”

“Yeah, that’s right! Although I don’t know what “that” is, at least I know Shiina-san is on my side!”

I remained quiet because there was no way I could respond to something so cruel.

After that, my first designated area of the day at seven o’clock was the H10 area. Hiyori and her friends seemed to be in a different designated zone than J9, so it seemed like we weren’t going to compete with each other. I like that since it’s not good to compete with other students in the same year.

“I suppose this is where we part ways, good by Ayanokōji-kun.”

“Well, this exam is almost over, so keep up the good work and don’t be careless.” Ishizaki said as he came up to me.

At Ishizaki’s request, we bumped our fists and then went on our own paths.

After walking a few steps, I heard a loud noise from behind. I turned my head and saw that it was Ishizaki and Hiyori waving at me.

I waved back and headed for H10.

Although I had conducted GPS scans every hour today at the expense of points, I hadn’t noticed any strange movements of the first years, and it was nearly 5:00 pm.

All I know for sure is that the news that Nanase risked so much to inform me about was probably false. Did Amasawa leak information about Nanase’s betrayal, or were they originally planning to act today, only to encounter some complication and ended up terminating the plan?

In any case, I can’t let my guard down tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. Today’s designated areas were random, and I missed the third and fourth designated areas in a row. Because of the GPS scans, my ranking dropped to 16th, but that wasn’t too bad.

Tomorrow, I have to step into the designated areas at all costs.

Chapter 5: To Each Their Own

THE TIME GOES back to the ninth day of the uninhabited island exam, the day after Nanase left Ayanokōji.

Although he was in a group of three, Hōsen, had been alone since day one. He was lying in his tent when the designated zone was announced at 7:00 A.M.

Shortly after 8:00 A.M., a shadow approached Hōsen and called out to him.

“Good morning, Hōsen-kun.”

“Huh?”

“It’s me, Nanase.”

“I know from your voice. I’m asking you what’cha doin’ here?”

“Why are you asking me? We’re a team, so it should be natural I come see you, right?”

It was a serious answer, but Hōsen laughed when he heard it.

“I don’t know if you can say that. Ain’t you been having fun with Ayanokōji? Where are the results?” Hōsen asked suspiciously.

“I... I’m no match for him.”

“Ha, I bet you didn’t even use your women’s weapon against him.”

“A women’s weapon?” Nanase asked with a look of confusion.

Hōsen felt a little dumbfounded that Nanase didn’t know what he meant.

“You have big breasts but you don’t got any brain. Pretty sad ain’t it?”

“I don’t know what the size of my breasts has to do with my brain.”

“Shut up. So? Is that all you came to tell me?” Hōsen said as he pulled out his tablet and ran a GPS search without hesitation.

Because he didn’t know if anyone would follow Nanase, Hōsen judged it necessary to scan the surrounding area. But there wasn’t a single person scanned around them.

“It was a mistake for me to try to expel Ayanokōji-kun by myself. So, I have come to ask for Hōsen-kun’s help. If you have a plan, let me hear it.”

Instead of saying that Hōsen didn’t trust Nanase, who acted without permission and now was asking to be his partner, it would be better to say that Hōsen had never trusted anyone from the beginning.

“Get out of here. I’mma do it myself.”

“I’ll wait until you change your mind.”

“Alright bitch, if you want to be useful get your ass to the designated area to help me avoid penalty points.”

Hōsen tried to get rid of her, but Nanase showed no signs of leaving.

Hōsen ignored her and closed his eyes.

About ten minutes later, Nanase spoke up again.

“Hōsen-kun.”

“Why are you still here? I said I don’t need you.”

“It seems we have a visitor.”

When Hōsen opened his eyes, he saw that there was another silhouette besides Nanase.

“I-It’s me Hōsen-kun...”

“Who the fuck are you?” Hōsen uttered an intimidating statement to the person who didn’t introduce himself.

“I-I from Class C... Katagiri.”

“Never heard of ya before.”

“Let me talk to him for you,” Nanase suggests. “What can I do for you?”

“I’ve brought something for Hōsen-kun.”

“You need to give him something? What is it?”

“Well... they told me “don’t tell anyone but Hōsen.”

Hōsen, who was listening in without interest, left the tent to see what was happening.

When he stood in front of Katagiri, it seemed like a giant staring down at him.

“I’ll beat the shit outta you if it’s boring.”

“Eek!” whimpered Katagiri as he handed Hōsen the walkie-talkie.

“A walkie-talkie? What for?” Hōsen questioned.

“Y-Y-You can use it to talk to Utomiya-kun.”

Although the trembling Katagiri was very much afraid of Hōsen, he carried out his mission.

“Haha, they contacted me usin’ a little boy!” Hōsen roared as he picked up the walkie-talkie.

“What the hell are ya tryna talk to me for Utomiya? You want to fight or something?” Hōsen spoke into the walkie-talkie, although there was no response.

In the meantime, Hōsen quickly took out his tablet and confirmed Utomiya’s location on the map.

“Listen here retard, I don’t care if you’re ignoring me or if you ain’t even there but this is your last chance, ya hear me?”

A voice appears on the other side.

“I didn’t want to contact you, but for the smooth implementation of the plan, we can’t get around you.”

“Plan? What the hell are you talkin’ about?”

“Have you already forgotten about the sixth day?”

“If it was about a secret meeting then I think I forgot. What about it?” Hōsen said with a smirk on his face.

Nanase, who was not aware of this, hardened her expression. She had been traveling with Ayanokōji at this time.

Since Hōsen didn’t bother to move to a private location, she is standing next to him, listening in to his conversation.

“We took into calculations that you would ignore us.”

“Is that so? And what?”

“We’ll be conducting a relief operation for the first years so-”

“Save the first years? The fuck you mean?” Hōsen interrupted Utomiya.

Nanase hurriedly took out the tablet from her backpack and pulled up the list of the bottom ten groups in the special exam.

There were now four groups of first years that were in danger of being expelled from school.

“We have two groups from Class D as well.”

“Don’t make me laugh, I don’t care if that shit disappears. Don’t tell me ya thought I woulda made a move to save my teammates?”

“Don’t be careless. I’m afraid they’re up to something.”

“Shut up.”

Hōsen turned the radio off but considered for a moment Utomiya’s words.

At this point, “they” probably should have been making a move. Considering this, he turned the radio back on.

“I don’t know what you’re planning, but what does it have to do with me?”

Nanase feels that some kind of negotiation has already started.

She listens quietly, but they must have already known she was there from a GPS search.

They have certainly must have done some research on Hōsen's area before speaking. The other side also deliberately did not mention this.

"We... we need you to save us."

Although Nanase could not see Utomiya's expression through the walkie-talkie, she got the feeling that he was hiding their true purpose.

Hōsen senses the same thing. This is a trick Hōsen can see through.

"Who told ya that? Ain't that interesting?"

"If you want to refuse, just do it. I'm only talking to you to show that I'm reasonable, and I originally wanted to do this without you."

"Then I guess that's the end of it. I refuse." Hōsen said as he cut off communication.

Hōsen patiently waited for an answer, clutching the walkie-talkie in a position where he would drop it if the response wasn't to his liking.

"Hōsen..." Utomiya calls out in frustration.

Hōsen's only answer to that is silence.

"I'm not going to get any help from you, am I?"

Given Utomiya's character, he shouldn't have pestered Hōsen after he refused. The reason he pushed on was because someone was beside him and was influencing his words.

"Wait a minute. I didn't say I wouldn't help anyone."

"What the hell do you mean...?"

On the other end of the walkie-talkie, Utomiya was a bit flustered. He was expecting the call to already be dropped at this point.

"Listen, I'm reasonable, just come over here and beg on your knees. I'll give ya a hand, okay?"

"Don't be ridiculous. Who wants to bow down to someone like you?"

"Then let's pretend I didn't say that, is that okay? Tsubaki?" Hōsen tells Tsubaki, who is probably listening to the conversation on the other side of Utomiya.

"Did you realize? Or did you do a GPS search?" Comes Tsubaki's voice from the other side.

"I wouldn't spend a point on something so obvious. I've always known you were a stinky bitch."

That was a lie. He had realized that Utomiya and Tsubaki were in the same place thanks to the GPS search he had just used, but he told her as if it were his own intuition.

“I guess, after all, I can’t leave it to Utomiya-kun.”

Hōsen laughs a little when hearing the exchange between Utomiya and Tsubaki.

“Are ya saying you don’t trust Utomiya?”

“No, that would just be Hōsen-kun. It’s a known fact that the two of you are on bad terms, and I am not willing to let the negotiations break down due to unnecessary emotion.”

“Whatever. What’s this plan ‘bout rescuing the first years?”

“You should already know, right? It’s the four groups of first-year students in the bottom ten. And there are two more groups that are members of your class. If we end this special exam like this, our first graders, especially your class D, will definitely become miserable.”

As the first-year D class leader, Hōsen should have been the most active in this matter.

It would be strange if the leader of Class D weren’t in a rush to do something about this since it would greatly impact their class situation.

However, Hōsen didn’t react to Tsubaki’s words.

Simply because he didn’t care.

“So? You want me to rescue all the first years who fell into the bottom ten, do you?”

“Before I answer, let me confirm one thing. Can I consider Nanase-san to be our partner?”

Tsubaki mentioned Nanase for the first time here. She intended to gather information from the series of reactions from Hōsen and the others.

“Let’s just say, at least in Class D, which is full of shit, she’s someone who can be useful.”

“Is that so? Then I can say whatever I want. You’re right, we do plan to rescue all the first-year students who fall into or are about to fall into the bottom ten.”

“You talk a lot but can ya back it up? Obviously, nothing outta the ordinary has been done so far. I won’t spare you if you take away my precious time for no reason.” Hōsen threatens.

“Taking up your precious time? Then your precious time is really cheap.”

Tsubaki's words indicate that she had been monitoring Hōsen with the GPS from the beginning.

"Hey, just for fun, should I send your errand boy back half-dead?"

Seeing that Hōsen was serious, Katagiri in front of him began to shrink.

Hōsen has the type of power to make most students cower just through his aura.

"I swear if you put one hand on Katagiri, I'll personally come see you Hōsen..."

"Shut the fuck up Utomiya, you had your chance to fight, don't talk to me anymore."

"But-"

The other side started a quarrel, and the communication was temporarily stopped.

"What the fuck are they doing?" Hōsen said, annoyed. "Hey little boy, what'cha think about what I said?"

"..."

Katagiri was speechless, and quite frankly, wanted to run away.

"Tch, you're boring. Get outta here."

"B-b-but the w-walkie-talkie..." Katagiri stammered.

"I'll take care of it for ya."

"But..."

"...Katagiri-kun, don't worry about it. I think you should leave this place and leave the walkie-talkie to Hōsen-kun." Nanase intervenes and tries to convince him to do so.

With a warning look, she indicated that Katagiri should not be ungrateful.

Katagiri took one look at Hōsen, who was standing behind her. Hōsen glared at Katagiri, which was enough to make him run away in fear.

As he was running away, he tripped and fell.

"What an idiot."

"You didn't need to act so tough."

"That's how I do things. You should already know that."

After the exchange from those two, Tsubaki's voice appeared in the walkie-talkie.

"I'm sorry I made you wait. Can we resume our discussion?"

“Sure, but your little errand boy gave me the walkie-talkie and ran away.”

“You threatened him, right?”

Tsubaki didn't even need to consider it to know it was true.

“People who ain't good at fighting really have a hard time determining the outcome before the winner is decided. You're the same as that little bastard, aren't ya Tsubaki?”

“That's true, I'm really not good at fighting. But, it's different here.”

“Here?”

“Here, it's about using your brain, not your muscles.”

Although Tsubaki was serious, Hōsen laughed it off.

“Ha... if you're more pissed off than me, then I guess you really are serious.”

“We have the method to forcefully rescue the group in trouble. For that we need as many people as possible to assist. It seems that there are already seniors who are using this strategy, so we want to use the power of the first year Class D.”

That's why Tsubaki has come to ask Hōsen for help. However, Hōsen is a person who does whatever he wants. This is clear in how he has taken the special exam thus far. Tsubaki was well aware of this.

“Listen, I would love to help ya, but I got things to do. I'm very busy.”

Hōsen, who doesn't even want to go to the designated area, should have a lot of free time, but here, he was deliberately saying he doesn't have time as a way to test Tsubaki's reaction.

“Busy...? Are you trying to expel Ayanokōji-senpai out of school?”

“That's what I mean. I don't care if the trash from my class disappears.”

“But how are you going to get him to drop out of school? Up to the morning of the eighth day, Ayanokōji-senpai was also acting alone. But he didn't fall into the bottom ten. There are only two conditions in the rules that will lead to withdrawal; one is that the whole group is out, and the other is to fall into the bottom five.”

This is a situation where you can't expect him to fall into the bottom five.

“There have been some students who have withdrawn this week, but so far there has been no group eliminations. It’ll be a difficult scenario for the rest of the week, and we could see few groups get eliminated.”

“It’s true. Some groups are already facing a food shortage.”

Utomiya, who was next to Tsubaki, joined in the conversation. Utomiya and the others had already reached out to the first years who had run out of food many times.

“If the last five groups are defeated, it will be practically impossible to get Ayanokōji-senpai to drop out of the school. You can think that rescuing the first years will also help Ayanokōji-senpai get expelled.”

Only here does Hōsen’s smile fade, and he begins to develop a serious attitude.

“Saving the first years. Doesn’t sound that bad. Let’s hear your plan.”

“As I said before, we are going to stay together as one in our grade, like all the other students in the upper grades. We will absorb the sinking groups from the bottom and pick up where we left off with the groups we can afford. If necessary, we can also take away the events from the students who have fallen to the bottom in the second or third year.”

“If it were that easy, ya wouldn’t have to work so hard, right? And there are still classes A and B. I don’t think they’ll come to help us in classes C and D.”

“You don’t need to concern yourself with that. We’ve been talking about working together for a long time. We’re just waiting for Hōsen-kun’s agreement. If we unite with Class D, we’ll be in a position to implement our plan.”

“Whatever. It sounds good, but there’s no guarantee it’ll work. Using the same strategy as the seniors will only get us to the height of the seniors. With our inexperience as first years, there’s a chance we’ll lose in the end.”

While he seemed to listen to the conversation on the sidelines, his mind was already simulating the battle. He came to the conclusion that even if the first year’s rescue rate increased, their handicap could not be eliminated.

“Yes, even if this plan is implemented, the sacrifice of the first year may not drop to zero.”

“Ain’t that a strange thing to say? Ain’t ya trying to save all the first-years?”

“If the same strategy is used for the whole year, it’s the first years that will be disadvantaged. It’s just like what Hōsen-kun says. So why don’t we just let the groups at the bottom withdraw before the last day?”

This is where Tsubaki’s true nature and her goals come to light. She was planning to make the other years drop out using the first-years.

“After all, there are still several people in the upper grades who are acting alone, so it’s just a matter of getting rid of them.”

“So, if we get rid of the five people who’re taking the exam alone, the first years will be saved.”

“I thought the right time to move was when everyone started to get tired. We originally planned to do it between the eighth and the tenth day of the second half of the exam, but... unfortunate events caused a delay.”

The fact that Hōsen didn’t show up on the sixth day.

The fact that the seventh day was completely destroyed by bad weather and students were given a day off to rest.

These thoughts immediately crossed Hōsen’s mind.

“So, what? What do you need me to do for you?”

“The organizers of the special exam have made a proposal. They said they wouldn’t mind you bringing him down with an act of violence. Hōsen-kun, you’re planning to forcibly defeat Ayanokōji-senpai, right?”

“Well it’s the only way.”

That’s what Hōsen replied, but his true intentions were different. Even if they had other strategies, when it comes to crushing Ayanokōji, using his hands is the only acceptable option.

“The issue is that Ayanokōji-senpai is always moving alone. That’s why Hōsen-kun has no chance to properly corner him. But, if we form an encircling network, things will be different.”

Tsubaki implied she would take on the responsibility of arranging the encircling network.

“I have been investigating how many of the first-year students, including Utomiya and Hōsen, trust their ability to fight or use violence. If you surround him well, you can block his escape routes.”

“So, you’re the one who sets the stage and then lets others take care of the dirty work?”

“That’s one way to put it, yes.”

“Are they willing to take that risk? I really don’t think Utomiya is working with you for free.” Hōsen questioned Utomiya’s loyalty to Tsubaki.

“Of course, I promised them 500,000 points each if they succeed, so your reduced share will be a necessary expense.”

A proposal to share the private points obtained by expelling Ayanokōji from the school.

“Wait a minute, Tsubaki. Violence is generally forbidden, do you think they’re going to listen to you for just 500, 000 points?” Said Utomiya from the background.

It seems that this is the first time that Utomiya has learned the details of the mission. Hōsen understood that Tsubaki had deliberately not informed Utomiya. Normally, the radio transceiver must be pressed for the other party to hear you. If there is any issue, Tsubaki can release the button and discuss it with Utomiya without letting Hōsen hear.

She took the initiative to reveal that it was her dictatorship.

“Of course, this kind of thing is impossible to do in the beginning of the special exam. The second half of the test has been tough, both physically and mentally. Student stress is considerable. We are all in a state of conflict between our desire to be comfortable and our desire to be radical. Of course, any initial attack will be met with strong resistance. That’s why I want to ask Hōsen-kun to take the lead.”

Tsubaki analyzed the specific plan for Hōsen and said it wasn’t difficult to achieve.

“When there’s very little traffic, there must be many people who want to ignore the red light and run through the intersection. People by nature, are concerned on what others will think of them, and they don’t take that initiative. However, if there’s a leader who’s willing to take that step, the situation drastically changes.”

Tsubaki wanted Hōsen to be that leader.

“I don’t hate the plan but the school isn’t retarded.”

“When the time comes, it’s going to be a matter of both sides losing. Both the striking party and the struck party will drop out of school. I’ll be the one in charge, so I’ll take the responsibility for the fallout.”

“Huh?”

“Because I’m not obsessed with this school. So, it doesn’t matter when I get expelled. I’ve already prepared half reduction cards for those in my group.”

Tsubaki said that she was not only planning this plan, but she had also prepared for the consequences so that even if she was expelled, it would not affect the original group too much.

“People who’re willing to self-destruct are pretty scary. Maybe I got the wrong impression about you.” Hosen says as he’s impressed with Tsubaki’s words.

“I haven’t asked you yet, Utomiya-kun. Do you object to this plan?”

“... no. I thought that making bad plays was pointless. However, from what I’ve seen, it’s no coincidence that Ayanokōji-senpai was given a bounty of 20 million points. He’s obviously an abnormal existence, that’s why he was targeted. Even if the rules don’t allow it, there must be a loophole to exploit. Since you’ve already made your up mind, there’s no reason why I should stop you.”

Utomiya was not against violent behavior; he was just afraid of the consequences that would follow it.

If Tsubaki took full responsibility, in the end, Hōsen and Utomiya were nothing more than her lackeys in the school’s eyes. Although there is a possibility of some kind of punishment, neither of them believes the school will expel more than ten people in one breath.

“It’s hard to take down Ayanokōji-senpai from a frontal attack, so I think that the uninhabited island exam was prepared precisely for our plan.”

“I see how it is. You mean that this uninhabited island is a setup.” Hosen said as he switched his tablet from the map application to the recording one.

“The plan to use violence to get Ayanokōji to drop out of school was your idea alone, right, Tsubaki?”

“That’s correct.”

“As long as we obey your words, there will be no dropouts in our first year, can you guarantee that?”

“I promise. If anything happens, I’ll take the blame.”

With this, Hōsen was satisfied and turned off the recording.

“Have you collected the evidence? Now that you have my testimony, you should be satisfied, right?”

Hōsen smirks at Tsubaki’s words which had seen right through him

“Whatever. When are we doing it?”

“I cannot easily divulge that information. I’ll tell you on a need-to-know basis.”

“So, you don’t trust me eh? If you don’t tell me, how am I supposed to tell you?”

“Well that’s why you now have a walkie-talkie, right?”

The walkie-talkie that was taken from Katagiri was prepared for Hōsen from the beginning. Even if he didn’t steal it, the result would have been the same.

“I see how it is.”

“I’ll get in touch with you when the time comes.” Tsubaki said and promptly ended the communication after that.

“That’s one crazy bitch.” Hōsen said, laughing, as he put the walkie-talkie in his pocket.

“What will we do now?”

“I ain’t too sure on Tsubaki’s strategy but there’s nothing to lose if we just follow it for now. I don’t give a shit what they’re planning to do, I’m going to crush Ayanokōji by myself.”

Normally, this would have required repeated GPS searches. If Tsubaki was going to provide him with this, it would be in Hōsen’s best interest to follow her.

“We can do whatever we want and Tsubaki gets all the crap for it, it’s too good to be true.”

“To me, it seems like she’s using us...”

“I don’t give a shit, let her use us.”

“I’m willing to help...”

“Huh?”

“Well... it’s because I want to protect our classmates. Please let me accompany you until I get more information from Tsubaki-san.”

Hōsen simply shrugged as to say, “Do whatever you want.”

Part Two

The time shifts to the thirteenth day of the special exam, at 6:51 A.M. Utomiya finds Tsubaki looking up at the sky near her tent.

“What are you thinking about Tsubaki?”

“I was doing a final review in my head. Is something wrong?”

“No, I just wanted to talk to you before the operation started. Maybe this is the last time I’ll talk to you.”

“I see.”

Perhaps because this might be their last conversation, both sides spoke freely.

“Why didn’t you use a walkie-talkie to communicate with me?”

Utomiya asks.

“Because I can tell what the other person is really thinking just by seeing their face. Shouldn’t you have understood that after listening to my conversation with Hōsen-kun?”

“I guess so. I couldn’t tell what he was thinking, and I still don’t trust him at all.”

“Or is it because you just don’t trust him because he’s Hōsen-kun?”

Utomiya turned away a little angrily since Tsubaki had hit the bull’s eye.

“In the first year, the only person I can trust is you, Utomiya-kun. I wanted to meet you directly in person and have you tell me what you think about the battle plan.”

Tsubaki showed a somewhat self-deprecating expression and then immediately returned to her expressionless face.

Utomiya, who was trusted by Tsubaki, suddenly remembered that there was something else that he had to confirm with her.

“How are the preparations going?”

“Do you want to see the screenshot of the GPS scan just now?”

With that said, Tsubaki opened her tablet and showed Utsunomiya a picture. Ayanokōji’s campsite was E5. The first-year students were on standby in areas D4 and E6.

“It’s perfect, just like you planned.”

“Well, after all, we have been seriously preparing up to this point. Even the terrain is in our favour.”

Utsunomiya looked down at the tablet as Tsubaki slowly looked up.

Someone was approaching the two of them.

“Tsubaki-san, can we talk?”

It was Takuya Yagami from freshman Class B. Yagami was in the same group as Utomiya.

“Everything is ready, so we have some time to talk.”

Tsubaki, who was slightly surprised, showed a look of dissatisfaction towards Yagami.

Yagami, who had a suspicious look, addressed Tsubaki.

“Actually, I have something I need to tell you.”

“I’m sorry, please wait for a moment, before that I also have something I want to say to Yagami.” Utomiya interrupts Yagami with a firm tone.

“What?” Yagami turns towards Utomiya.

“Where did you go yesterday?”

“Sorry, my watch suddenly broke down yesterday, so I immediately rushed to the start location.” Yagami said as he lifted his left hand to show his watch.

“It broke down? For the second time?”

Utsunomiya didn’t feel something was quite right and increased his vigilance against Yagami.

“What are you doing Yagami?”

“It’s outrageous to be suspected of conspiring something just because your watch malfunctions. Utomiya-kun also had a watch failure a few days ago, right? Doesn’t that mean that you’re also suspicious?”

“I just got unlucky.”

“Then so did I.”

Utsunomiya glared angrily at Yagami, who was always smiling.

“Hey hey, you two, don’t jump at each other’s throats at a time like this, aren’t you boys friends?”

“I’m... sorry. Maybe I’m getting nervous before the plan starts.”

“I also stepped out of line, I apologize.”

“Did you spend a day changing your watch? Or do you have something else you wanted to tell me?”

“It’s something related to today’s battle. I’ve prepared a gift for Tsubaki-san”

“A gift?”

“Your strategy to hunt down Ayanokōji-senpai isn’t guaranteed right?”

Just before the start of the operation, Yagami started to say disturbing things.

It wasn't Tsubaki who overreacted to this, but Utomiya who was next to her.

“What are you talking about, Yagami? I don't think this battle will-”

“I am not going to run an operation with the intention of failing.”

Tsubaki interrupted Utomiya and interjected with a strong tone.

“Of course, Tsubaki's strategy is perfect. It's an alignment that leaves no room for ants to crawl out of bounds. We're challenging Ayanokōji-senpai with the greatest strength that we can prepare as freshmen. I'm not doubting you guys, but do you think it's really necessary to play all your cards?”

After listening to Yagami's long speech, Tsubaki asked quietly.

“I want to be as accident-free as possible, so tell us your proposal.”

Whether or not Tsubaki would listen to Yagami would depend on what Yagami said.

“Now, Tsubaki-san's method of hunting Ayanokōji-senpai is going to cost a lot of score points, right?”

“That's why we have a group of reserve tablets.” Utomiya added.

Yagami, however, was already well aware of this fact.

“But it's not very efficient at all, do you know why?”

“Because we don't know Ayanokōji-senpai's designated area, so there's no way to predict his actions.”

Yagami nodded once as if satisfied with Tsubaki's answer.

“That's how it is. Is Ayanokōji-senpai going towards the designated area, or is he going towards an event, or is he simply just running away? We don't know what his priority order is... If we could know the purpose of his actions, then the efficiency of the plan would increase by leaps and bounds.”

“If it were that easy to know, then we wouldn't have to work so hard. That's why so many tablets were prepared to scan his whereabouts countless times.” Utomiya interjected.

“Through my own methods, I spent a lot of time researching to see if there was anything I could do to help. So, among the twelve tables, which table does Ayanokōji-senpai belong to?”

Tsubaki fiddled with her hair in a bored manner.

At the same time, Utomiya realized what Yagami meant.

“Are you saying you know his table?”

“Yes. Well, to be precise, it’s not that I know, but the “tablet” knows.”
Yagami said as he pulled out a tablet.

“What is this?”

“I borrowed this from my classmate. The owner of this tablet has the same route as Ayanokōji-senpai.”

“That means with this we can follow Ayanokōji-senpai’s movements today...”

Yagami nodded gently.

“If we can know Ayanokōji’s designated area simultaneously, we may be able to get a head start.”

“How can you be sure that this tablet really is from the same table as Ayanokōji?”

The excited Utomiya even forgot to add the word senpai, Yagami and Tsubaki continued the conversation.

“Do you want to know how I found out-”

“Repeatedly using GPS scans to confirm it.” Tsubaki said without even thinking about it.

“... Indeed. Was it an unnecessary action?”

Yagami, who originally wanted to surprise Tsubaki, was surprised by Tsubaki in turn.

“I would appreciate it if you could lend me that tablet. Considering the points that I am going to consume, I would like to refrain from wasting as much as possible. Is that okay with you?”

“We are all in this together. Tsubaki’s success will lead to my success as well. And since the first-year group that includes me and Utomiya can’t seem to make it to the top three no matter how hard we try, we might as well focus on more constructive things.”

Yagami realized that earning points had lost meaning, so he came here today. It was futile trying to get to the top.

Yagami continued,

“And if you don’t accept my proposal, I can’t provide insurance for you either.”

“Insurance? What exactly are you referring to?” Tsubaki idly said.

“The highest priority right now is to force Ayanokōji-senpai to drop out of school. But there are still several possibilities of failure, such as not being able to launch a sneak attack because someone is traveling with Ayanokōji-senpai. We need to avoid interference from a third party.”

“There’s no need worry about that right? He’s basically been alone after the eighth day.” Utomiya argues that he hasn’t done his research, but Yagami shakes his head.

“That doesn’t mean it’s the same case for the thirteenth day.”

“Okay, so what?”

“If something unexpected happens that leads to failure, we’ll adopt the strategy of making him miss all of the designated areas to take away his points, and then tomorrow’s day also has three zone moves, all of which we’ll make him miss as well.”

“Do you mean making him gain 5 penalty points?”

“No, we’ll make him gain seven. Ayanokōji-senpai missed two designated zones yesterday. The D4 area was too far for him, which is why he also missed D2. We already confirmed that he switched to the strategy of going for the events.”

“Seven penalties will result in him being down 28 points. Even a stupid person wouldn’t accumulate that much penalties.”

There are two days left in the exam. The loss of twenty-eight points during this period is quite severe. Utomiya realizes the magnitude of the insurance strategy Yagami had in mind.

“Ayanokōji-senpai is still alone right now. We don’t know how many points he has, but since he’s alone, it won’t be many. And he definitely needs to use GPS scanning during our attack phase. If we get ahead of him and seal his events as well, there’s more than enough chance that he’ll sink into the bottom five groups.”

“It certainly is.”

“If we succeed in getting Ayanokōji-senpai expelled with this insurance, how about I split five million points and Tsubaki-san splits ten million points? If the remaining five million is given to the losing team, they’ll accept it, right?”

In contrast to Utomiya, who was surprised by Yagami’s proposal, Tsubaki only gave a silent reply.

“That’s a good idea, what do you think, Tsubaki?” Yagami adds.

“In all honesty, having a tablet with the same table as Ayanokōji-senpai would be really valuable. So, there’s no reason not to do it but...”

“That’s correct, so I really think Tsubaki-san should accept my-”

Yagami choked on his words once again when Tsubaki pulled out a tablet.

Another tablet, and another tablet on top of that. Three tablets in total.

“What are those?” Yagami asks in disbelief.

“Tablets that follow the same table as Ayanokōji-senpai.”

“What... When did you...”

Yagami didn’t need to confirm it, but he knew Tsubaki already had everything she needed to carry out Yagami’s strategy beforehand.

“Tsubaki-san is really several times more powerful than I thought. So, you’ve thought of this insurance strategy too...” Yagami was at a loss for words.

“Why didn’t you say so earlier?” Yagami questions.

“I was angry. I didn’t think that Yagami-kun would also think of a strategy to make Ayanokōji-senpai miss the designated area. I was going to keep playing dumb, but our two plans are just too similar.”

At Tsubaki’s childish statement, both Yagami and Utsunomiya looked at each other speechlessly.

“If that’s the case, then I can’t ask for payment. I won’t be asking for five million points. I’ll be watching this unfold from a distance.”

“Thank you, honestly I can’t really do anything with someone I can’t trust around me.”

Yagami didn’t look displeased with Tsubaki’s bluntness.

After Yagami moved away a little, Utsunomiya talked to Tsubaki.

“Tsubaki. If we use violent methods, will they really expel us?”

“It is a method of force, so it cannot be without problems. Assuming the worst, we, the first-year students who are implementing the plan, will get expelled from school.”

“If the group that’s currently implement the plan was expelled, then the number of expelled students is already quite horrible...” Utsunomiya’s expression stiffened, just imagining a scenario where only first years were kicked out.

“But the probability that it will turn out this way is just infinitely close to zero. The person who will be punished most severely should be me, the planner. The school wouldn’t expel a dozen first-year students at once.”

“But that’s also the problem. Are you really going to take the blame alone?”

“Originally, when the special test was disclosed. I was the one who suggested that Ayanokōji-senpai be kicked out. You just went along with me, didn’t you, Utomiya-kun?”

“That’s true but...”

Utomiya remembers the special exam for which he was paired with a sophomore earlier in the school year. That special exam was designed to earn 20 million points if Ayanokōji Kiyotaka was expelled from school. At that time, Utomiya, who was extremely disgusted with this exam, proposed that Class C shouldn’t participate in it. But Tsubaki finally brought Utomiya into the fold after numerous attempts to convince him. If Class C aims for Class A one year, the 20 million points is an asset that cannot be underestimated.

When Utomiya had asked her what kind of trick she would use to get him expelled, Tsubaki responded immediately.

Tsubaki said she would try to team up with Ayanokōji in that exam and then take the self-destructive method of deliberately giving up on the exam.

This would result in Tsubaki being expelled from school.

Then the 20 million points would be transferred to Utomiya, the helper. She cautioned Utomiya to make sure to use those points for the future development of the class.

“When I first heard about this plan of yours, I don’t think I asked you the reason for wanting to drop out of school, right?”

“Why should you care? Even if I drop out of school, it shouldn’t matter to you.”

“I would be lying if I said I don’t care. It’s not natural that you want to drop out of school as soon as you enter.”

“Well, I admit that Class C is a more comfortable class than I thought it would be. So, I decided that if I am going to drop out anyway, I’ll do my best for the class and then quit.”

That was all Tsubaki said, but she still never told him the reason for wanting to drop out.

Utomiya decided it was best not to ask her too much and looked towards the forest in front of him.

“Are you sure you don’t want me to get him? I should be able to defeat Ayanokōji in a one-on-one.”

“That’s not going to work. Utomiya-kun is an indispensable talent for the first-year Class C. And if I take the blame, the probability of you being implicated after me will increase greatly. Leave Ayanokōji-senpai to the other students.”

“If it were an ordinary opponent the other students might be enough, but Ayanokōji-senpai has a 20-million-point bounty on his head, he’s definitely not a simple man. If Hōsen as the first resort fails, it will be necessary to play all the cards right.”

“I suppose your right. It is Hōsen-kun after all.”

Even though Tsubaki said this, she rejected Utomiya’s proposal and instructed him to stay clear of the action.

“I.. I see. I’ll stay close and simply observe the fight.”

“Hey, Utomiya-kun.” Tsubaki said to Utomiya, who was ready to walk away so as not to disturb her.

“You seem quite strong, where did you learn to fight? You aren’t a criminal, are you?”

“It’s not a big deal. I don’t meddle in your affairs, you shouldn’t meddle in mine.”

“That’s true. But let me ask you this. Are you sure you aren’t hiding anything from me? Do you plan on doing something behind my back?”

“Am I hiding something? Nothing. I’m a guy who’s only job is to fight.”

At 7:00 in the morning, the test began. Tsubaki, who had a walkie-talkie in one hand and a tablet in the other, began to give out orders. The tablet indicated the designated area for Ayanokōji, which was the C3 area.

“Attention all teams, the target is moving in the direction of the designated area C3. D4 area teams standby for the time being, E6 area teams go north and start encircling the target. Even if you see the target, you are not allowed to make contact until I instruct you to.”

After giving out the instructions, Tsubaki closes the walkie-talkie.

“After eliminating Ayanokōji-senpai, we’ll take down a few groups of seniors who are acting alone before the school finds out. I wonder who we should target...”

Part Three

I noticed something unusual when the designated area C3 was announced at 7:00 in the morning. I've been doing the usual GPS scans for the past few days, and I started by looking for opponents who would compete with me for the placement point reward.

But instead, I found Utomiya, Yagami, and Tsubaki, the main members of the first year, together. Utomiya and Yagami are in the same group, so it isn't that surprising that they're together. However, the fact that Tsubaki is also present makes me think about it more. Moreover, no other members of the same group were found.

I remembered what Nanase had come to report to me the day before. Today is the day where the first-years will implement their plan to take me down.

The group of first graders is naturally scattered across the island. Still, the position has changed significantly since I confirmed it last night. There are quite a few groups in D4 and E6 that surround me.

"Should I make my move?" I mutter to myself

Although it was on this vast uninhabited island, since they could use GPS scanning, I won't be able to hide from them. I had been moving with Nanase for so many days; I should have tacitly assumed that they already knew my route.

In this case, I must avoid going directly to the C3 area, but I also need to avoid penalties for missing the designated area. Yesterday I missed two designated areas in a row. If I miss the designated area seven times in a row, how far will my ranking drop?

I don't know if they realize that I missed the designated area twice yesterday or if they're just blind, but it would really be the best time for them to attack right now.

It seems they know basic methods of fighting. It was the right choice not to attack me at night or in the morning.

If they attacked me at night when their vision was blocked, and I happened to escape, it would be impossible to catch me no matter how they used their scans. If they choose to do it in the morning, it would have been difficult to formulate a course without knowing my designated areas.

But there were so many of them.

Although I thought that it would be a group of powerful people like Hōsen that would come, this scale is beyond my imagination.

Hōsen hasn't moved from D4 since yesterday. If I went to the designated area, I would probably meet him.

If I was attacked by large amounts of first-years, the school would most likely be on my side. But then the whole school would know that I'm an unstable and strange character. That would be the end of my desire to live a normal school life. Even the teachers who didn't know the details would think that I wasn't an ordinary student.

There is definitely a teacher at the event area, so safety would be guaranteed, but it's not a wise choice to be followed there by many. There would be a way to seek refuge with other students, but I must consider that not only the first-year students but also the third-year students, who are under Nagumo's control, are my enemy.

Running away until the first years are exhausted is my only option right now.

After I spent ten minutes putting away the tent and packing up my things, I ran another scan and saw the GPS responses of the first years coming towards me one by one.

Nanase's words that I would turn into a "victim of violence" once I was caught might be about to come true. The person who was directing this strategy wasn't afraid of dropping out of school. Maybe this person is mentally prepared to take full responsibility if things go wrong.

If that's the case, I'll have to avoid engaging them to the maximum extent possible. It doesn't matter if I will miss the designated area six times.

Surrounded by the river and the mountains, it is tempting to escape across the mountains, but it is not a wise option due to the terrain. It would be better to go on the south side even if it's a little dangerous.

If I decide to move away from the designated area, they might not catch me.

I took something out of my backpack and started to move.

Part Four

“What’s the situation, Tsubaki?”

It’s 8:00 A.M., and if all goes well, it’s about time that a first-year group will get in contact with Ayanokōji.

Yagami asked who was concerned that a good report hadn’t come from the walkie-talkie yet.

“Don’t panic, my plan is still unfolding. It’s going so well that it scares me.”

“That’s good.”

Ayanokōji was continuously changing his direction so as not to get caught by the first-year group that is closing the distance. Although Tsubaki didn’t know how often, it was clear that he was using GPS scans periodically. Well, the more points he loses, the better. Tsubaki doesn’t hate using violence to solve problems, but she thought it would be ideal if she could crush him without doing so.

If you let him fall into the cycle of missing designated areas, that’s a way to beat him without ever touching him.

If, however, they can’t force that to happen, then they would have no choice but to deliver a final blow and crush him for good.

Tsubaki did not regret using her well-saved points every ten minutes to perform a GPS scan. In the past twelve days, Tsubaki didn’t save up her points to win the special exam. It was to prepare for this operation.

The time had just passed nine in the morning, and it was confirmed that Ayanokōji had missed the designated area for the third time.

The tablet then indicated that Ayanokōji’s designated area was D2; Ayanokōji, who was fleeing towards C6 at the time, would have had a hard time stepping on the designated area, even if he wasn’t being chased.

Currently, there are two teams in pursuit of Ayanokōji Kiyotaka.

Since Tsubaki scans every ten minutes, she has a very clear image of Ayanokōji’s movements.

If this continues, Ayanokōji will most likely go straight north through the B4 and C5 areas.

For this reason, she instructed the remaining three teams to assemble in the C4 area and stand by. Tsubaki stopped scanning for an hour after that and took a break. After ten o’clock, she started scanning again to confirm the location of all members.

Ayanokōji was on the path to cross the B4 and C5 areas as Tsubaki had thought. The two groups of pursuers had also entered the B5 area.

“Don’t let him get away.”

Tsubaki gave instructions to the group that had entered the C4 area to block Ayanokōji, where he was supposed to go down the mountain. This was to cut off his first path and then push him towards the B4, B3 area.

From here, Tsubaki resumed the operation of scanning every ten minutes, and as she expected, Ayanokōji was successfully lured by her to the direction of B4, and he continued to head north. Tsubaki saw this and instructed the three teams standing by in C4 to chase Ayanokōji up north and asked not to lose him.

“Can I bother you for a moment, Tsubaki-san?”

“... what?” Tsubaki asked with clear annoyance.

Yagami, who was also operating the tablet a little further away, looked over to Tsubaki.

“Wouldn’t you be able to block Ayanokōji-senpai if you conveyed some more detailed orders? I think this progression is a bit tedious.”

“You’re so annoying.” Tsubaki muttered in a low voice and chose to ignore Yagami.

After thirty minutes, there was finally an unexpected situation. The three groups that Tsubaki ordered to move north from the C4 area had now suddenly stopped moving.

This was unnatural. Even if one group ran into trouble, why did all three stop at the same time?

This time, Tsubaki waited only five minutes to scan.

“They... aren’t moving at all.”

Ayanokōji is obviously almost through the B3 area, but they haven’t even left the C4 area yet. If this continues, he will most definitely escape through C3.

“What’s wrong? What’s happening?” Tsubaki mutters to herself.

She tries to use the walkie-talkie, but there’s not a single response.

“How strange...”

Tsubaki began to realize that this wasn’t a simple problem, someone was interfering.

“What’s wrong Tsubaki-san?”

Although Yagami saw Tsubaki’s gloomy expression, he still didn’t realize something was going wrong.

“Three of the five groups that were listening to my command are now stationary. The three groups that stopped moving only have one thing in common; they all crossed paths with the second-years.”

If you’re taking an exam on an uninhabited island with more than 400 people, it’s not surprising that you’ll occasionally pass by some people.

For this reason, Tsubaki didn’t care about their presence until just now.

“Please answer.”

Tsubaki once more spoke into her walkie-talkie but got no answer no matter how long she waited.

“Could it be that there was simply an accident? On this uninhabited island, there are often many groups moving towards the designated area or an event, so wouldn’t it be dangerous to directly characterize them as Ayanokōji-senpai’s helpers?”

“Something must be wrong... there’s three groups being blocked by the second-years.”

“That’s right, you’re right...”

For another 5 minutes, Tsubaki, who held on while suppressing her anger, launched another scan.

“They’re starting to move but it’s so slow...”

“They must be under pressure from the second-years.”

In the meantime, Ayanokōji crossed the B4 area in the B3 area and had made his way down the hill. He seems to be ready to go to the C3 area.

The only option now is to tell the two groups behind Ayanokōji to pick up the pace. However, Tsubaki had now realized that those two groups chasing Ayanokōji had also stopped at one point.

Likewise, a group of second-years is present.

“It certainly seems like they’re intentionally being pestered by the second-years... but who the hell...”

As Tsubaki was saying this, Yagami took the liberty of touching Tsubaki’s tablet without permission for the details.

“Get out of my way.” Tsubaki said to Yagami as if she were getting rid of a bug.

“What?”

“We’re considered partners for the moment, that’s why I let you stay here, but I don’t think I remember giving you permission to interfere, right?”

Shocked by Tsubaki's eyes full of anger, Yagami takes a step back.

"... I know, but please let me voice my opinion. Shouldn't we confirm who the second-years pestering the groups are?"

"I already know that."

Even without Yagami's reminder, Tsubaki originally intended to do so, and immediately after she opened her tablet, she ran a scan.

There listed the second-year students who appeared to be interfering.

However, there wasn't a single noteworthy student in those groups.

"The leader of this obstruction isn't present."

"There's a variety of students from Class A to D, but no one is conspicuous."

"So you're saying that it's not one class, but the whole second-year who's behind this?"

It was as Yagami said, but there was one thing that caught Tsubaki's attention.

She didn't think the entire second year would unite to protect Ayanokōji. Surely that would be absurd...

"In a way yes."

Tsubaki drew a conclusion from the current situation.

"These five groups don't know the real reason why they were assigned to block the first year's group."



“You’re saying they’re assisting Ayanokōji-senpai without knowing anything?”

“It could be for any reason, I suppose. Perhaps this is a light assignment in which they were asked to interfere with the movements and tasks of the freshmen to protect a sophomore.” Tsubaki said as she went to check the records of Today’s GPS scan.

She went through the screenshots to confirm the movement of the second-year students.

“He’s too good at what he does. We can only assume that he knew all along that we were going to attack him today.”

“There are only two days left for the special exam. It’s possible that they’ve become more vigilant. As you know, Ayanokōji-senpai is on a bounty, so he must have made the connections beforehand.”

Yagami judged that because the exam is close to ending, Ayanokōji was naturally more on guard.

“We just need the right time to attack Ayanokōji-senpai. But the second-year students can’t protect him all day long, right? After all, they have a special exam to do.”

With only two days left, that means they’ll definitely be thinking about racking up as many points as possible.

“That’s true...”

“There’s one more thing I’m concerned about, and that’s why our group was blocked so easily. Even if the other side spreads out, it should still be pretty hard to block all five groups.” Yagami said as he put his hand to his mouth in contemplation.

Yagami didn’t understand what was really going on.

“Why can’t you figure it out? That’s proof the other side has a secret commander.”

“Are you saying that the other side also has a character like Tsubaki-san who is commanding them...?”

Tsubaki nodded and then opened the map of the entire island.

Somewhere on this island, there must be hiding a character like Tsubaki, who is now looking at the whole situation unfold.

This is the same person who ordered the second-years to block her first-year group.

“In my opinion, Tsubaki-san should consider suspending the operation.”

“Why?”

“Do you want to get past them by force? That’s too dangerous.”

“I won’t do that. And the students who are blocked now can’t do that either.”

“Then... why don’t you stop the plan?”

“No matter what I do the result will be the same.”

“The same...?”

This situation was something Tsubaki had foreseen from the beginning. In fact, she was thankful for the appearance of these obstruction teams.

“Although I don’t know who’s commanding the other side, I’ll show you that what you see in front of you is not necessarily the whole truth.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m afraid that the commander of the other team had already noticed these five groups of first year students last night.”

“So they were doing repeated scans as well?”

“As I said before, there is most likely a second-year exam for second-year students. As we have five groups, they will try to have five groups as well to counter us. If they try to take advantage by sending six or seven groups, they would be neglecting the uninhabited island exam.”

“But it’s not surprising that the other team would send six or seven teams just in case.”

“Yes. But as of now, it seems that the only second-year teams with unusual movements are these five. Maybe they’re confident enough to decide that they can deal with the same number of groups? But that’s where they make a critical mistake.” Tsubaki took out the radio transceiver and sent a new command.

“Now there is no one who can interfere. Go do whatever you want.”

“Who did you contact? There are no more teams that can be deployed in that area...”

“I told you, didn’t I? Not everything you see is the truth.”

After giving instructions, Tsubaki began to think again, and she was now wondering who was actually commanding the battle.

“Did Ayanokōji do it while escaping? No, that’s really unlikely. It’s not like he has a leadership that can command the other classes, and he doesn’t have that kind of time...”

The words Tsubaki said were inaudible even to Yagami, who was standing right next to her, so she was really just mumbling to herself.

When Tsubaki thinks, she tends to speak her thoughts in a sound that's inaudible to people around her. No matter how small the sound is, speaking out loud clears the mind and affirms thoughts.

It would be like taking out clothes from a messy closet one at a time and putting them back in order.

“Presumably, Ayanokōji contacted the people involved in this situation and asked for their help. So, he could have prepared for this moment from the very beginning...”

“Hey? Did you say something?” Yagami asks, a little confused.

“Nothing, please don't mind me.”

Tsubaki, who had been muttering, finally alerted Yagami, who was nearby.

Tsubaki replied, a little annoyed, and looked back at her tablet.

Part Five

Gazing at the dazzling diamond-shining sea, Sakayanagi took a sip of water. Rather than hydrating, she drank the water to return her dry and cracked lips to a moist state.

It was 7:05 in the morning. It was just the right time for the first-years to start carrying out their operation.

“It’s time to start moving.”

Sakayanagi, whose eyes fell on her tablet, took the walkie-talkie and sent out a series of instructions.

Sakayanagi conducted GPS scans on the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth nights. If they were going to surround Ayanokōji, it would be best to act outside of exam time.

“It seems that the waiting time is over, so let’s get started.”

“Yes, but even if we enter the same area, we won’t necessarily meet, right?” A somewhat tired voice came from the other end of the walkie-talkie.

Sakayanagi was talking to Tsukasaki, who was in the same class. Right now, Sakayanagi was ordering them to rush over and intercept those first years on the grounds that they were going to block the second-years’ subjects.

“During the past twelve days, the topography of the uninhabited island has slowly changed. Do you know why that is?”

“A change in terrain...? Do you mean that the terrain changed because of all the people walking on the island?”

“That’s right. Because there are many people walking around every day on this uninhabited island. In fact, right now, in order to get to the destination safely and quickly, isn’t Tsukasaki-kun subconsciously looking for the path that the other students took?”

Although this change is very weak, many roads clearly showed traces of people passing through.

“In other words, it wouldn’t be hard to intercept their path if you know where they were headed.”

“You obviously haven’t seen these scenes directly, but it’s like you’re actually looking at the island with your own eyes.”

Although it was only on a flat panel, Sakayanagi watched the entire uninhabited island in three dimensions.

All that was left now was to determine the person who is painting the picture. She already had a realistic simulation of who they are and what they're like.

After that exchange, Sakayanagi, who had spent half an hour looking at the sea, picked up her tablet again.

"Well well, during the time when everyone was supposed to be going to designated areas and completing the events, there were a few people who didn't do anything at all."

And if the only people in question were the first-years, she could instantly find out who the culprit was.

She found three people who hadn't moved since 7:00 A.M.

"Takuya Yagami-kun, Riku Utomiya-kun, and Sakurako Tsubaki-san. I wonder who my opponent is? Or is it all three of them?" Arisu happily said.

Sakayanagi remembered the man who brought her into this interesting fight.

It was three days ago, back in time to the night of the tenth day of the special examination.

Sakayanagi received contact from Takemoto, who was carrying a walkie-talkie.

"What's wrong with you contacting me at such a time? Is there something bothering you?"

Sakayanagi thought that something unexpected had happened, but it wasn't quite the case.

"No, we're fine right now. Actually, it's Ayanokōji who wants to talk to you."

"Ayanokōji-kun?"

An unexpected name appeared on the call, making Sakayanagi, who had been drowsy, sweep away her sleepiness at once.

"Because I owe him a little, if you can talk to him, it would be a big help."

"Of course, there is no problem. Give him the walkie-talkie."

"Just wait a moment."

After a minute of silence, a familiar voice came from the other side.

"Is this Sakayanagi?"

"Good evening, Ayanokōji-kun."

Sakayanagi begins with an elegant greeting that makes it hard to believe they're in the middle of an exam on an uninhabited island.

“It seems that the class cooperation seems to be going well.”

“Well, I’ve been in touch with Ryūen-kun and Horikita-kun, it’s going well so far. I didn’t ask for details, but you seem to be helping Takemoto and the others.”

“Sakayanagi’s group is also advancing well, and is now in fifth place, right? That’s a pretty high ranking.”

“Much appreciated. There is something, however, that concerns me quite a bit.”

“Is that so?”

“Have you seen Ichinose?”

“I haven’t seen her once during this exam. Did something happen?”

“I got a call saying she was acting a little strange. She’s been lost for several days and I’m a little worried.”

This is a long special exam; physical breakdown or mental breakdown is possible.

“In any case, what do you want to talk to me about?”

“There’s something I want to ask you Sakayanagi.”

“Please say it. Consider it a gift in return for helping my classmates.”

“It’s about the White Room.”

“My my, how interesting.” Sakayanagi says, fully intrigued.

Ayanokōji explains that Nanase was one of the assassins sent by Tsukishiro since Sakayanagi knows the story of the Acting Director. However, other than that, there are White Room students lurking in the school. The chance that Ichika Amasawa is one of them is very high.

“If only you had told me earlier...” Sakayanagi says with regret since she had missed an opportunity to have fun.

“This isn’t a matter that should be taken lightly.”

“So you want me to destroy the person known as Ichika Amasawa?”

“No, that’s not it.”

Ayanokōji felt surprised at Sakayanagi for saying absurd things.

“Actually there is one more thing. I have another big problem.”

Ayanokōji reveals to Sakayanagi the bounty that Nagumo and Tsukishiro had placed on him.

Sakayanagi is the only one of the second-year students who has known Ayanokōji since childhood, and she is the only one who knows him thoroughly.

But the problem that Ayanokōji faced was extremely complicated, and he didn't know whether Sakayanagi was an enemy or a friend. That's why he didn't talk to Sakayanagi about it until now.

Ayanokōji has always been wary that Sakayanagi would use the fact he was a White Room student to win.

This time, however, the situation was a little different.

Compared to the new problem Ayanokōji was facing, that risk was outweighed. Now there's a chance in which he can benefit by informing Sakayanagi.

"Do you mean in the near future, the first-year students are planning to take action against Ayanokōji-kun?"

"That's right. That's why I want to ask you to help me, Sakayanagi."

"But I don't think those ordinary students will be able to do anything to you, or the White Room students for that matter."

"I'm afraid the first-year students will have some kind of forceful tactics. In order to get me to drop out of school they should target my shortcoming of acting alone during this exam. If this is the truth, they might attempt to monopolize the subject I'm aiming at, and furthermore, they might even hinder me from going to the designated area."

Sakayanagi felt that no matter how many people came, it would not be difficult at all to solve if Ayanokōji adopted a forceful method of his own.

But that's definitely not the way he likes to handle things.

"If the first year's find out that you're a man they can't beat even if they give their best, Ayanokōji-kun's name will definitely spread throughout the school. For me, I suppose it's both something to be happy about and something that will make me feel sad. It makes me feel very complicated."

"I hope you'll feel sad if you can. And it's possible that Tsukishiro is planning something. I'd like to concentrate on him."

"I understand what you're going to say."

"Sakayanagi's burden will inevitably increase. If you keep monitoring their movements, you need to use GPS scans regularly, and there is a risk of losing your ranking."

After this, Ayanokōji will undoubtedly have to owe Sakayanagi a favor.

"Don't worry. I've got the scores of the groups to which all the members of Class A belong."

"So... you've really been making thorough contact."

“After all, after the twelfth day, I couldn’t check the list of the bottom ten groups, so I had to get a grasp on which groups were in danger and which ones had room to spare. There are a few groups that have margin in scores, but not enough for the top ten. If I let these groups take turns to scan, it will reduce the strain on my points.”

This is a strategy that can only be accomplished by joining forces with Sakayanagi, who has achieved complete unification of Class A, and Class C, led by Ichinose, who will never betray anyone. In the case of Class D, it seems to be a strategy that can’t be accomplished. After all, the cost of the walkie-talkie alone was already unaffordable.

“I just need to stop the first-year students who are aiming at Ayanokōji-kun, right?”

“Does that mean you’re agreeing to help me?”

“The exam has been boring so far so I would like to enjoy myself a little bit. Also, this seems like something that will inevitably benefit me.”

“What do you mean?”

“If it’s just a gift for helping Takemoto and the others, it’s too big a gift. That means you owe me a “favor,” right?”

“It’s not a nice thing to say, but I’ll say it anyway, I won’t owe you a favor until you’ve done something.”

“Then I’ll start preparing.”

“One more thing, if you don’t mind, let me keep this walkie-talkie.”

“I was going to do that. It would be more convenient if we could communicate with each other. Then could you please return the radio transceiver to Takemoto first? I’ll let him give it to you after I tell him the reason.”

-- Sakayanagi remembered the fond memories of the tenth night and couldn’t help but smile.

Sakayanagi saw on the tablet that the five teams she had dispatched had held back the first years.

“Now that we stopped these groups in their tracks, let’s see who’s planning this attack.”

Sakayanagi took the radio transceiver in her hand and made contact with the students in Class A.

Part Six

“Hey, Tsubaki-san.” Yagami approached Tsubaki.

“What do you want?”

“Although I don’t know what else you have up your sleeve, I think it’s time to give some detailed orders to the five groups that are blocked. Before the second-year students surround them, they should still be able to escape as long as they have your command.”

Five groups of first-years were sent to the battlefield, and even if the other side had marked anyone individually, it would not be that easy to catch them on this vast uninhabited island. Yagami believes that the reason why these five groups were caught so easily was because of the commander’s strategic mistake.

“Even if they panicked and fled out, their behavior could be explained afterwards by simply making the excuse that they got scared after being pressured by the seniors. If you had consulted me before...”

“Are you saying that it turned out like this because I made a mistake?”

“If I wanted to be honest, that’s exactly what I think.”

Seeing a disgruntled Yagami, Tsubaki replied with a serious tone.

“Well, you would have known after it was over... but I guess I’ll just tell you now. It’s the opposite of what you think.”

“The... the opposite?”

“It’s not my group that’s being pestered, it’s the opposite group that’s being pestered by me.”

“I... I’m sorry, it seems I can’t keep up with your thinking.” Yagami replies once again, amazed by Tsubaki’s statement.

“The five groups sent to expel Ayanokōji-senpai. Even if you can hunt him down to a position where you can see him, if there is a big difference in his physical abilities, he will be able to escape, right? Rumor has it that his strength is similar to Hōsen-kun’s. It means that he didn’t want to face the current group from the beginning.

As Tsubaki spoke, Yagami nodded his head.

“If you put it like this, it’s like saying that the five groups that we sent from the beginning were never meant to beat Ayanokōji. This strategy doesn’t make sense.”

“There are two purposes of this strategy. One is to find out how Ayanokōji-senpai thinks and what he likes and dislikes.” Tsubaki said as she tapped the tablet with her index finger.

“He disliked contact with the early years more than going to his assigned area. And there was a deliberate avoidance of places with second and third years and the teachers. The message I got from this is that he hates attention, even if he has to carry penalty points.”

“If you want to simply learn about behaviour patterns, it doesn’t mean you need to catch the person in question. That’s why the groups had a more important responsibility. They were sent to harass the groups which were designated to protect Ayanokōji-senpai.”

Tsubaki had completely turned the tables on the second-years.

After hearing those words, Yagami froze in shock.

“What we should avoid is someone who interferes in the process of hunting down Ayanokōji-senpai. And the only person who can do such a thing is Hōsen-kun if not Utomiya-kun.”

Finally, understanding Tsubaki’s true goals, Yagami frantically turns on his tablet and performs a GPS search to see where Hōsen was right now.

However, there was no trace of him anywhere.

“When you said that there’s more than meets the eye... is this what you meant?”

After finishing her explanation, Tsubaki ignored Yagami to discard any unnecessary distractions.

“Let me ask you one last question. If Hōsen-kun had not entered this battle, do you think this operation would have been impossible?”

“Hmm, not exactly. It’s correct to say that we decided to carry out this operation because we were absolutely sure that Hōsen-kun would come on board. It seems that he was always willing to fight alone. Still, if he didn’t accept the mission, I would just let Utomiya-kun go. Either way, I made sure the atmosphere was perfect for one-on-one. Now it only remains for the two to face each other, it doesn’t matter who wins or loses, everything will be fine.”

Ayanokōji, acting alone, has no choice but to withdraw.

Part Seven

A man with a great body, especially among the students, ran vigorously through the forest, with only one goal: defeat Ayanokōji Kiyotaka, of second-year Class D.

He was planning to commit an act of violence that would not be respected in this uninhabited island exam, no, not in any scenario.

However, unlike schools with security cameras everywhere, there are no eyes watching people on this uninhabited island. With just a single watch that emits a signal, it's unlikely that one would know exactly what is happening.

Sakurako Tsubaki conceived the siege on Ayanokōji.

Originally, this man would not have been interested in such a plan, but he found a reason to join the battle.

It isn't easy to precisely locate a single person on a vast uninhabited island.

It would take repeated GPS searches to achieve this, and the plan would be ruined if unrelated people got involved. The presence of a person to help direct the operation is very helpful to avoid these troubles.

It was because of this thought that Hōsen pretended to obey Tsubaki's command. Find Ayanokōji without any effort, and finish him off in a one-on-one without anyone getting in the way.

When the distance to Ayanokōji was within reach, Hōsen dropped the walkie-talkie he had been carrying in his hand.

This was a sign to show he will not follow Tsubaki from now on.

He takes out his tablet and performs a GPS search to do the final fill. A GPS signal emitting from Ayanokōji Kiyotaka came from 300 meters away. Hōsen was closer than any of the other first-year students.

Just a few more minutes.

Hōsen was already trembling from the joy of getting to participate in a serious fight. However...

As if to get in Hōsen's way, a single GPS signal blocked his path.

Thinking it was a mere coincidence, Hōsen didn't even try to see who it belonged to.

In front of his eyes appeared the figure of Ayanokōji Kiyotaka.

“Yo! Ayanokōji-senpai! I finally found ya!”

Ayanokōji heard the cry of Hōsen, who couldn't contain his excitement.

“Hōsen.” Ayanokōji said as he calmly looked at Hōsen, who had stopped walking.

“I’ve been waiting so fucking long for this moment!”

“I thought you’d come to me earlier. You’re calmer than I thought.”

“Ah I had to wait for the right time. It would be shitty if someone interrupted our fight yeah?”

“What are you referring to?”

“Stop pretending. I know Nanase tipped ya off, that was my warning for you.”

“I see. You had Nanase come to me a day early to tell me so I would have time to prepare.”

“Damn right. I don’t like doing things like that, but it was to my liking so I made an exception.”

Hōsen clashed his two tightly clenched fists together and grinned in anticipation. He believed that there were less than ten seconds left before he could fight with his real skills.

“He really believes that he has the upper hand here, doesn’t he?”

“Oh?”

In this place, which was supposed to be a one-on-one fight, a man appeared from the shadows.

“Get out here, you’re in my way.”

The man had been waiting here for a while for this very moment.

Ayanokōji made light eye contact with the man and disappeared into the depths of the forest.

Although Hōsen wanted to catch up with him immediately, he could not leave the man in front of him alone.

“What’cha doin’ here Ryūen?”

“That’s my line Hōsen. You shouldn’t have any business in a place like this, yeah?”

From that statement, Hōsen immediately understood what was going on.

“Hahaha, it seems my team’s plan of action has been leaked.” Hōsen said as he smiled in amusement.

“That means it’s no coincidence that the other first year students were blocked by the second-year students.” Ryūen responded with his own grin.

The students that Tsubaki sent out to chase down Ayanokōji are now in position, and the GPS signals are overlapping with a group of second-year students.

Everything showed that, just as Tsubaki controlled the first year, there was someone in the second year who also controlled the grade.

“Is it you? Are you the leader? Nah...”

If Ryūen was in command, both the tablet and walkie-talkie were essential. But he wasn’t even carrying a backpack right now.

And it would be too difficult for a person fighting on the front line to also be in charge of commanding the team.

“So you finally understand what’s going on?”

“Nah but why do you care? It ain’t got anything to do with ya.”

Although Hōsen understood the situation, he didn’t understand why Ryūen was part of the effort to stop Ayanokōji from leaving school.

“Unfortunately, it has a lot to do with me.” Ryūen said as he took a step towards Hōsen with a grin still on his face.

“I have a lot I need to accomplish but my pockets are a little bit empty. I’m just answering a call, call me a mercenary.”

“So you mean money. What makes ya think you can stop me though?”

“Kukuku, you don’t think I can?”

The distance was very short between them. They creepily smiled at each other.

It was Ryūen who made the first move. Without taking his gaze off Hōsen, he threw his left fist at Hōsen. The difference in strength and stamina between the two could be seen from their physiques, so Ryūen aimed at his jaw.

“Ha, that’s a pretty daring left hand you got there.”

Although Ryūen had taken the initiative to attack first, Hōsen had been in combat position from the start. He lightly caught Ryūen’s left fist in front of his chest and opened his mouth to laugh.

“Your breath really stinks, gorilla.”

“You talk a whole bunch don’t ya? How ‘bout you show me your strength and skill as a sophomore?”

Hōsen released Ryūen’s wrist for a moment but immediately tightened his grip again and drove Ryūen’s body into him.

Hōsen and Ryūen’s foreheads bashed together.

“Shit!” Ryūen said as he staggered violently at the unexpected blow that shook his brain.

It would be false to say Ryūen was inexperienced.

In fact, it would be correct to say he has more experience being upfront in fights and fighting more than the average criminal.

Hōsen, however, was several times higher in that regard.

“Guh-”

Ryūen, who was already unbalanced, received a solid kick from Hōsen, which hit him square on the abdomen. He flew back and landed on the ground, making a wide gap. Hōsen, however, was unfazed and didn’t move from his spot.”

“You’ve been barkin’ and howling for less than ten seconds. Acting like ya had some real skills, don’t make me laugh.”

“Fuuu... your head is harder than a stone. Let me guess, it’s filled with rocks, right? Damn gorilla.”

Ryūen stood up and immediately tried to provoke Hōsen again.

After hearing this, Hōsen felt a little speechless as he scratched the back of his neck.

“I guess I was expectin’ too much. You ain’t all that after all.”

“I don’t think you’ll ever find anyone whom you’re happy with.”

“Don’t lie. Isn’t Ayanokōji walking up ahead? Let me catch up to him.”

“Huh?” Ryūen said as his smile disappeared.

“What, do you also know something, Hōsen?”

“Know what? That he ain’t normal?”

“Not many people know the true nature of that guy, but I didn’t think we would have that in common.” Ryūen said as if he was speaking to himself.

“For the first time, I’m interested in you, Hōsen. When did you fight him, and how did it go?”

“So you’re also obsessed with Ayanokōji?”

The main reason Ryūen was still even in this school was to get revenge on Ayanokōji. As long as he had that goal, he would not allow Ayanokōji to lose to anyone but himself.

No matter who it was.

Even if the person standing in front of him was a master fighter with a body beyond the frame of a high school student.

Feeling Ryūen’s murderous aura, Hōsen replied as if in mockery.

“Don’t worry. I haven’t finished with that guy yet, or I should say, I ain’t even started.” Hōsen said as he cracked his neck and started walking towards Ryūen.

“I’ve never seen someone who could catch my fist with a calm face before. And I’m sure that I’ll never see someone calm after being stabbed with a knife.”

From the words “knife” and “stabbed,” Ryūen understood what Hōsen was talking about.

He remembered the time when Ayanokōji had a bandage on his hand, and now that there was a deep scar.

“Tch, you guys were having fun without me?”

Even though Ryūen had been hit twice by Hōsen, his attitude towards him didn’t change at all.

Not wanting to drop his guard in this strange situation, Hōsen kept advancing. He had always been in a fighting stance, without any thought other than maintaining proper guard.

The enemy in front of him was Ryūen Kakeru, who had been notorious at school for getting into fights.

He was the only man Hōsen ever thought he could respect.

That’s why he had to crush him.

Hōsen kicked off the ground, and with speed unimaginable for his huge body, approached Ryūen, who was in a defensive stance.

Hōsen sent his fist towards Ryūen’s face, followed by Ryūen raising his hand to block the flying hand. If Ryūen hadn’t raised his arm in time, he would have surely broken his nose from the attack.

Without getting a chance to regain posture, Hōsen once again knocked him back to the ground.

Hōsen understood through his punches the difference in strength between Ryūen and himself.

Although Ryūen immediately straightened his upper body, in an instant, his face was the victim of a kick by Hōsen, and Ryūen’s entire body flew backwards.

“You’re sleepin’ and getting’ up at the same time? You’re quite busy aren’t ya?”

The fight had only been going on for less than a minute, but it was already very clear who was winning and who was losing.

“Shit, that hurt...”

“Haha! Just like I thought, Ryūen! That’s the extent of your capability!”

Hōsen screamed with joy, but at the same time, it was a scream of unrest. He had a strength that was impossible for Ryūen to overcome.

And, despite this, Ryūen’s will to fight showed no sign of breaking. Ninety percent of the people Hōsen fought had broken spirits after a single hit. The remaining ten percent would make a show of bravery. And that remaining ten percent would hit despair as soon as the second or third hit landed.

The Ryūen in front of him was extremely damaged, but there was no change in the color of his eyes. In terms of mentality, Ryūen was one step ahead of Hōsen.

“You seem to be very happy, do you think you have won?”

Although Ryūen felt no part of his body that didn’t hurt, he smiled again and prepared to get up.

“Don’t make me laugh. Do you really think you’re at my level?” Hōsen walked up to Ryūen’s body, grabbed his collar, and lifted him up.

“At the end of the day, you’re a man who can only get ahead with the help of the little fish.”

“In this era being able to win one-on-one is no longer a big deal. In fact, in high school, the public’s opinion of you and me was the same.”

Ryūen tried to unhinge Hōsen with such a fact.

“So that’s why you never wanted to go head-to-head with me eh? You probably tried really hard.”

Although he wasn’t completely unbreakable, simple words like these had no impact on Hōsen.

Hōsen had already won an overwhelming victory in a one-on-one battle.

The restrained Ryūen swung his left hand and shot a handful of dirt into Hōsen’s eyes.”

It was an unexpected attack, but Hōsen blocked it with his empty hand.

“You’re so pathetic.”

“Is that so?”

“This time, Ryūen swung his right hand, and the sand held inside his hand flew towards Hōsen’s eyes.

“So pathetic!” Hōsen roared as he stopped this attack once again with his wrist. He had already noticed Ryūen picking up the sand and dirt when he had lifted him into the air.

“The week always fall first in a fight.” Hōsen said as he dropped Ryūen to the ground.

Hōsen raised his fist and brought it down on Ryūen’s face. A jab that focused on speed rather than power.

Hōsen brought down another fist and another fist after that, alternating between the left side then the right.

It was as if a boxer was practicing against a punching bag.

While receiving the powerful impacts which were about to send his consciousness flying, Ryūen’s eyes crossed Hōsen’s for just an instant. The killing glare Ryūen shot out was enough to disorient Hōsen for an instant.

“Shit!”

Ryūen was curling his body while being hit and unleashed a spinning kick at Hōsen. Although it was only a blow that lightly grazed Hōsen’s jaw, Hōsen, who had no intention of taking a single hit, became angry and grabbed Ryūen’s bangs with his left hand.

“Who said you could touch me? Give up already! I’m going to kill ya!”

Before Ryūen could raise his guard, Hōsen raised his right fist and sent it towards Ryūen’s abdomen.

“There’s no one who can beat me in a fight!”

After the seventh fist connected, Ryūen’s alert from his watch started to ring.

“Hahaha! Although you pretend to look fine, your body can’t take it anymore, right? Your watch seems to be more honest than you!”

The watch that detected an abnormal heart rate rang a warning bell.

“You really are a gorilla... I’ll admit that you’re strong in a fight...”

Hōsen, who saw the compliment as a surrender, loosened his grip on Ryūen’s bangs with a triumphant smile. Unable to stand upright, Ryūen collapsed to the ground.

Warning bells ring through the forest.

“That’s the warning sound. You should be hittin’ your limit about now right? Why hide it, just admit ya can’t beat me.”

“Don’t try and make jokes, they aren’t funny. It’s just a simple broken watch.” Although Ryūen was smiling and looking at his watch, anyone could see the terrible state he was in.

Looking at Ryūen’s miserable appearance, Hōsen spit on the ground as if he was bored.

“Goodbye, Ryūen. You’re no fun to play with.”

“Wait a minute. Who gave you the permission to think you’d won?”

“Huh?”

“Did I admit my loss?”

Hōsen was a bit dumbfounded by such a statement, but it made him regain his spirit. Although it was one-sided abuse, as Ryūen said, his eyes hadn’t given up yet.

“Alright so you got will power. I’ll give ya that. But you can’t keep it forever!”

Humans are creatures who are very afraid of pain. No matter how brave the opponent is, Hōsen’s powerful punch after punch must have made Ryūen feel considerable pain.

Now it’s a matter of just how many hits he can take.

Since he was already beaten into this state, it was completely impossible for Ryūen to cross this overwhelming strength gap and turn the tide. Even though a second warning bell had rung out, Ryūen hadn’t lost his composure, but it showed how much pain he was enduring right now.

After being mercilessly beaten by Hōsen again and again, Ryūen’s wristwatch finally turned into an emergency alert. If left like this for five minutes or more, staff and medical equipment will come to the scene.

“Your body is tellin’ you something. It wants you to give up and accept your defeat.”

“Really? But your attacks just feel like you’re scratching me...”

Ryūen didn’t care about the ringing on his watch and stood up with a creepy smile.

For the first time, Hōsen realized Ryūen’s true strength. Not from his body but from his unyielding spirit power.

“What the hell is wrong with you? You can’t even stand up, why are ya actin’ like this? It won’t do you any good to be bent on your ideals.”

As if to use the emergency bell to snap back into consciousness, Ryūen put his watch close to his ear.

“You’re saying I’m bent on having my own way? Ha, your idea itself is wrong.”

Hōsen thought that Ryūen would immediately turn off the emergency alert. However, without turning off the emergency alert, Ryūen lowered his arm and put his hands in both pockets.

“We haven’t decided on a winner yet.”

“Are you sane? You’ll be outta the exam if the teachers come here.”

“So then what would become of you?”

Ryūen was asking what would happen to Hōsen if the school saw this scene.

Hōsen was only lightly kicked in the jaw, so it can be said that he was unharmed. The school could not ignore the fact that Ryūen had been violated unilaterally.

“You’re going to play the victim just ‘cause you can’t compete with your enemy? You’re pretty lame Ryūen.”

With this, Ryūen may be able to turn the tide, but there’s no possibility that a simple threat like this would scare Hōsen. Originally, Hōsen came here to defeat Ayanokōji by force. The point of being scared of the consequences has long passed.

“If you’re afraid I’ll play victim why don’t you hurry up and leave?”

“I’mma have to pass. I ain’t done here yet.”

Hōsen decided that Ryūen was deliberately trying to convince him to leave by not turning off the emergency bell, but unfazed, Hōsen chose to move forward again.

“My GPS was already turned off before I got here. There ain’t no problem killin’ you before the teachers get here.”

Even if the school comes this way as fast as they could, it will take at least 30 minutes.

“Kukuku, that’ll be the only way I’ll lose.”

Unfazed by Hōsen’s threats, Ryūen kept his hands in his pocket as if inviting Hōsen to crush him completely.

“If you don’t feel like protecting yourself, I’ll put your body to sleep for ya!”

Not wanting to waste any more time here, Hōsen clenched his right fist tightly.

Ryūen also removed both his hands from his pocket, which were also clenched shut.

“Whatever trick you have, it won’t work on me!”

Hōsen’s intuition sensed that Ryūen must be squeezing something inside his palms, but that didn’t stop him. In order to completely break Ryūen’s steel will, Hōsen launched his full body towards Ryūen.

Seeing that, Ryūen caught him from the front without opening the two fists he was holding. Hōsen tries to break the guard, but immediately after, two figures rushed out from the bushes and grabbed Hōsen’s back.

“Woah!”

Hōsen didn’t quite understand what was going on. He had done a GPS scan a few minutes ago, and no one besides Ayanokōji and Ryūen showed up. Even if they run straight to this place right after the battle started, it is simply too late to catch up. No matter what the truth is, the two men who clamped down on Hōsen’s arms appeared beside him like ghosts.

If it was only Ishizaki holding Hōsen down, it would have been fine. However, since Albert, who has a similar physique to Hōsen, was also holding him down, Hōsen was rendered completely immobile.

His right hand was held back by Albert, and his left hand was held back by Ishizaki.

“The fuck is going on here?”

Although Hōsen tried his best to break free, he couldn’t simply get rid of two men who were both physically strong.

Hōsen looked up to see Ryūen, laughing devilishly, standing on top of him with fire coming out of his eyes.

“You surely realize right? If you break your watch, the GPS won’t recognize it.”

At a very early stage, Ishizaki and Albert had already destroyed their watches and had come to support Ryūen.

Since Hōsen thought it was a one-on-one duel, he had fallen into Ryūen’s trap.

“You guys are really going to do a three against one? How-”

“Don’t bark so loud, gorilla. Your execution is about to begin.”

Ryūen said as he slammed his fists into Hōsen’s face without mercy.

The fists pounded left and right at Hōsen’s face until he dropped to both knees. Roaring, Hōsen endured the beating while trembling on his knees. There was simply no way for Hōsen to fight back.

Finally, the damage exceeded Hōsen’s tolerance level, and he fell to the ground.

Hōsen lowered his head into a position where Ryūen grabbed it with both hands and sent a knee into his face.

“Ack!”

An expression of pain came from Hōsen’s mouth, and he fell onto his back for the first time. Ryūen signaled Ishizaki and Albert to continue holding him down just as they had done when he was standing.



“Gorillas need to be handcuffed from time to time. You treated me quite nicely, didn’t you Hōsen? I was only returning the favour.” Ryūen said as he brushed his hair.

“You fucking bitch! Don’t take me lightly you weak piece of shit!”

“Weak? What do you mean?”

“I mean you’re just a shitty little fish who needs his shitty little fish friends just to stand a chance in a fight! There’s no chance you’ll ever beat me in a one-on-one!”

“Kukuku, don’t make me laugh. I’m not stupid enough to fight a gorilla on my own.” Ryūen said as he raised his fist.

Without hesitation, he attacked Hōsen’s face violently.

“Don’t worry Hōsen, you don’t need to cry. Even if you apologize and start crying like a baby, nothing will change here.”

Even though Hōsen was being beaten up in such a defenseless manner, he didn’t accept it. Rather, he was even more furious now. Albert and Ishizaki had to press even tighter to hold him down.

“Shit! Get out of my way you little bastards!”

“Shhh, please quiet down. This is just the beginning, right? I’m looking forward to beating you into a pulp.”

Ryūen swung several times, but Hōsen refused to beg for mercy. If anything, he only got more aggressive.

“I’m sure ya ain’t going to be bragging about this fight.”

Hōsen had proven that he could stand at the top of the fight, both physically and mentally. If they had started in a three-to-one situation, Ryūen knew that it would be the three of them at a disadvantage.

This was proof that Hōsen Kazuomi’s strength is beyond that of a normal human.

But on the battlefield, often, a split second of judgment can affect the entire battle. A punch or a fall can make the difference between light and dark. A moment of carelessness or pride can be the key to reversing a position.

After that, Ryūen’s one-sided attacks were repeated, and even the mighty Hōsen lost the strength of his body.

“Ugh, my hand is starting to hurt now.” Ryūen laughed as he blew on his bruised fist.

“Ha, ha... damn...” Hōsen tried to pull his right hand out of Albert’s grip, but it was futile.

“I didn’t think someone like him would ever bow down to you. That took me by surprise.”

In terms of pure strength, Albert is equal to Hōsen. Although power alone cannot defeat every opponent, Albert should be able to crush Ryūen in a one-on-one.

“Yo, fat pig... Why they hell do you bow to Ryūen?”

“Well it’s true that Albert is an opponent that I can’t win against no matter what.”

“So why?”

“You don’t understand do you Hōsen? To stand on the top, you don’t just need strength.”

Even with that explanation, Hōsen, who had always fought alone, was far from understanding.

“Kuku, well, in Albert’s case, I’d say it’s just camaraderie.”

Albert doesn’t like to get into unnecessary fights and has decided that the best way to keep the class together is to follow Ryūen. Because of this, he would not hesitate to help Ryūen with some dirty work. Even if he had instructions to hurt his classmates for a while, he would believe that it was ultimately for the sake of the class as a whole in the long run and would completely follow Ryūen. By nature, he is a kind-hearted man who does not like violence.

“Don’t think you’ve won Ryūen!”

“I’m sure you’re not happy with how things turned out. You never thought you’d lose like this. But for me, the process doesn’t matter. The last man standing is the winner.”

To Ryūen, who didn’t have the aesthetic of necessarily going one-on-one in the first place, Hōsen’s provocation was simply something meaningless. Rather, he took it as the cry of pain from a defeated man, which brought him great pleasure.

“Ah shit...”

Hōsen, who had been hit countless times, was finally reaching his limits. Even if Ishizaki and Albert let go, it would be difficult for him to defeat Ryūen now.

“Remember this... even if you win against me here, the next time I see you, I will immediately kill you.”

“Revenge of the gorilla eh? Well, if you want to try, go ahead. Winning isn’t as simple as it seems. If you were expelled because of violence I would win in the end.”

“You skipped the sh-” Hōsen never got to finish his sentence.

Ryūen landed his last punch and ripped Hōsen’s consciousness out. Making sure Hōsen was out, Ryūen stood up and dusted off his clothes.

“Man... what a bruising battle.”

Wiping away the bloodstains on his fist, Ryūen looked up at the sky and exhaled wearily with a sigh.

“This guy... he really is a monster. Facing him alone would be suicide.” Ryūen said as he turned towards his classmates.

“I suppose I need to thank you guys.”

“No, no! We were just helping Ryūen-san, you did all the hard work!”

Neither Ishizaki nor Albert was seriously injured. When Ryūen decided to involve them in this battle, he had to make sure they wouldn’t get hurt. If the amount of people with injuries increases, the situation wouldn’t end as a simple one-on-one incident.

“It’s almost time for you guys to go. I expect the teachers to show up any minute now.”

A considerable amount of time has passed since Ryūen’s emergency bell had rung.

“Then... what about Ryūen-san?”

“Well, I’m in no state to continue the exam, right? That’s what the school will certainly think.”

Along with Hōsen, who was lying on the ground, their injuries were quite serious.

“Me and gorilla here are probably out of the running now.”

“Are you fine with that?”

“I’ve asked Katsuragi to prepare everything. Even so, I don’t think I’ll make it to the top three.”

If they left Hōsen here, it was highly likely he would resume his chase towards Ayanokōji. And that’ll be a problem if Ryūen, the one who hurt him, was no longer in sight.

It is essential that the school sees this simply as a one-on-one fight between Ryūen and Hōsen.

“... I’m sorry to hear that.”

Yesterday, Ryūen's group had climbed up to fifth place, and it was quite possible to sprint to the top three. Ishizaki felt great pity about it.

"Nah, don't worry about it." Ryūen laughed softly as if remembering something.

Ishizaki and Albert, who couldn't understand what Ryūen was laughing at, looked at each other.

"I'll tell you the reason when the time comes. Now get out of here."

Ishizaki and Albert should indeed run away now if they want to stay within the group until the end. It's crucial that they run to the start and change their watches so they can reunite with their groups.

After they both ran towards the starting point, Ryūen sat down to use Hōsen's unconscious body as a bench.

Part Eight

“Thanks for the report, you can go back and continue the exam,” Tsubaki said as she closed the walkie-talkie after hearing the report.

“It didn’t go very well, did it?”

Yagami decided so after looking at Tsubaki’s expression.

“When they went to check the place where Hōsen-kun was going to fight Ayanokōji-senpai, they happened to see the teachers taking Hōsen-kun back to the starting place. I heard that he fought with Ryūen of second year Class B and both of them were seriously injured. But I don’t understand why Ayanokōji-senpai never stopped moving.”

If Hōsen had drawn him one-on-one, the GPS would have had to stop moving on the spot.

“Even though I don’t know much about that person, how could he stop Hōsen-kun?”

Tsubaki, who couldn’t accept it, pouted as she pondered the reason why this battle had failed.

This was because Ayanokōji’s designated areas were C3 and D2, and these were the perfect places to surround him. However, this factor also gives the opponents an advantage.

“We won’t give up on the plan to expel Ayanokōji-senpai right? If we want to help the other first-year students, we also need to attack a group that acts alone other than him. If you have any other plans, please tell me right now.”

Tsubaki kept muttering to herself without even looking at Yagami.

“I don’t think we should increase our risks. If we force ourselves to help a group of people who are falling here, sooner or later they are destined to disappear.”

“... So you’re backing out now?”

“I have a bad feeling. Maybe my plan was never going to work in the first place.”

“What do you mean?”

“Ayanokōji-senpai is going to act alone even with a bounty on his head, which probably means his vigilance is very strong. Not to mention that our first-year students don’t trust each other at all, so it’s no wonder the plan failed.”

Instead of Tsubaki being depressed over the failure of the battle plan, rather, she hated the unsettling sense of chaos.

“I regret not doing this on my own.”

She strongly believed that everything would have gone well that way.

After that, she looked down towards the tablet and noticed something.

“Huh?”

Tsubaki noticed that Utomiya-kun was no longer in the area.

“What’s wrong?” Yagami asked.

“Where is Utomiya-kun?”

Hearing Tsubaki say that, Yagami also noticed that Utomiya was no longer present.

“He was here about thirty minutes ago...”

Utomiya had disappeared while Tsubaki was fighting an unseen enemy.

Tsubaki felt unrest, and she pulled up the map from ten minutes ago to look for Utsunomiya’s GPS signal. She found Utomiya about four hundred meters away from her in the southwest direction.

“What the hell is he doing...”

There was only one other GPS signal in the same vicinity as Utomiya, Hayato Kitō of second-year Class A.

The moment she saw this, Tsubaki pulled out her walkie-talkie.

Part Nine

A man with a large build weaved through the poorly lit forest. His goal was to reach the campsite where Tsubaki Sakurako, Yagami Takuya, and Utomiya Riku were situated. Sakayanagi had instructed him with the task of unmasking the person who was in charge of the first-years plan.

As Kitō approached the camp, he saw another student's silhouette not too far away from him. The student was standing still as if to block Kitō's way. Kitō did not recognize the face of whoever it was but immediately realized that they were not an ally. He tried to change course while there was distance, but when the other student saw it, they began to move as well.

Kitō recognized the person as an enemy, and he stopped running away and turned towards the student.

"What are you doing here?" Utomiya said in a hostile tone.

Although he was facing a senior, he didn't use honorifics.

"Aren't you Kitō Hayato-senpai from second-year Class A?" Utomiya said, calming down and remembering to add honorifics this time.

Utomiya remembered that Kitō was acting alone but had decided to join a group later on. However, acting as if he knew from the beginning would be suspicious, so he pretended like he didn't know.

"I'm busy right now."

Kitō uttered these words of rejection and tried to move past Utomiya. However, Utomiya grabbed him by the shoulder and pulled him back.

"What are you doing?" Kitō said as she shot Utomiya an annoyed look.

"I'm sorry, but you aren't going to go any further." Utomiya said, returning the look with a sharp stare.

"What did you say?"

Utomiya clenched his fists as Kitō moved back, away from Utomiya's grasp. He shot his hand out and grabbed Kitō by the collar of his jacket.

"What the hell are you doing?" Kitō asked, even more irritated now.

"I said, you aren't going any further."



“What’s your name?” Kitō calmly asks.

“Utomiya, first year Class C.”

Utomiya. One of the students, Sakayanagi, had told him to investigate. If he was here, it was very unlikely he was the commander.

Utomiya guessed that Kitō had received instructions to find out who was leading their operation.

“Who told you to come here?”

Utomiya asked, but Kitō showed no signs of answering.

“I’m not going to show any compassion, even if you are a senpai.”

After hearing these words, Kitō’s eyes became sharp, and his fists flew towards Utomiya’s neck. Utomiya didn’t panic; he simply pulled away, easily avoiding the attack. In the process, however, Utomiya’s walkie-talkie fell out of his pockets?

“Not good...”

Utomiya wanted to rush in, but he couldn’t have gotten past Kitō, who was maintaining a defensive stance.

They stared at each other, waiting for someone to make a move until a voice broke the silence.

“Utomiya-kun? What are you doing?”

“Tch...” Utomiya looked down at the walkie-talkie.

“Weren’t you supposed to listen to my orders?”

Tsubaki realized there would be no reply and gave up trying to get through. Just as Utomiya was about to rush towards Kitō, Kitō held out his hand to show a sign of peace. He picked up the walkie-talkie and tossed it towards Utomiya.

“Why are you...?” Utomiya says in a discouraged voice.

“I got what I came here for.”

Kitō saw no need to fight any longer, so he turned around and left. He had already heard Tsubaki’s voice from the walkie-talkie, which was all the proof he needed.

Utomiya saw that Kitō’s back was completely defenseless.

“Utomiya-kun please calm down. There’s no reason to fight Kitō-senpai here.”

Utomiya did not reply as he watched Kitō disappear into the forest.

When he was alone, Utomiya raised the walkie-talkie.

“He just left...”

“Why would you do something like that? You want to be expelled too? Or are you trying to keep the second-year students away from me?”

“That’s not true... Sorry. I acted without permission. Even if the strategy didn’t work, I didn’t want them to learn everything about us. I wanted to prevent them from reaching you.”

“I don’t want to talk about things that already happened, but is this really what you thought, Utomiya?”

After a short silence, Utomiya raised the walkie-talkie.

“No... yes, yes. It was just something I decided to do over an impulse.”

Tsubaki could tell Utomiya was shaken, and Tsubaki fell silent.

“I see. Anyway, if you can still move, please hurry back.”

“Alright.”

Closing the walkie-talkie, Utomiya looked at his tablet. He picked up the walkie-talkie and changed the communication code.

“I got rid of the second-year nuisances. They should be satisfied now that they know Tsubaki is commander.”

“You’re really something, Utomiya-kun.” Came a voice from the other side.

“So, how did Tsubaki’s plan go?”

“It failed, just as expected. Even if I hadn’t tipped off Ayanokōji-senpai in advance, I think it was a rotten strategy that couldn’t have worked.”

“Alright. I’m hanging up,”

Utomiya was careful not to let the call stretch on and turned off the walkie-talkie.

He turned around and started to walk back to camp.

Chapter 6:

The man known as Tsukishiro

In the morning, I woke up on the right side of E3 and tried to check the map on my tablet. As a result of evading the first year's siege on me all day yesterday, I ended up not stepping on a single designated area yesterday. Sakayanagi informed me that they had retreated immediately in the afternoon, but I didn't dare go to the designated area. I just participated in the challenges while I was on the run and scored the minimum amount of points.

The randomly designated area that was announced at 1:00 p.m. yesterday was F3, followed by G3 at 3:00 p.m.

I opened the map and loaded the image from yesterday's GPS search at 1pm. There were a total of five groups of first-year students who had been following me and only Hōsen was coming towards me with his GPS turned off. There was no doubt about it. And after Hōsen was sidetracked with his confrontation with Ryūen, it was clear from the subsequent searches that all the groups withdrew and returned to the special exam.

However... While Sakayanagi and I were focused on those enemies, several other groups of first-year students who had been scattered had gathered and were moving ahead of me to the designated area. The reason I thought these groups were suspicious was because as soon as 3:00 p.m. came around and my fourth designated area, G3, was announced, they started moving west towards F4. The road here is narrow, and it's difficult to escape if the road is blocked, but if you avoid it, you'll be forced to take a troublesome detour.

I avoided the risk just in case, but that cost me a lot on the previous day. As a result of avoiding risks, I've missed six designated areas in a row and have four consecutive penalties have accumulated. I need to get out of this situation as soon as possible. If you take three more penalties in a row, you will lose another 18 points from here.

The total score displayed is 119, but it's far from the safe zone for avoiding expulsion. The safety line I had set for myself was around 105 points. If I dropped below this point, it would not be surprising if I was expelled. That's why I forced myself to move in the middle of the night, and I succeeded in getting within range of G3, the area designated for the fourth time yesterday.

Since I couldn't see the rankings anymore, I had to imagine how I would do on this last day. There are 157 groups in total, which may seem like a good number, but in reality, many of the groups have already merged. In other words, the number of groups has already been reduced by quite a few. Of course, on this last day, it is clear that some groups will move to rescue lower groups. If a group with almost 200 points picks up a lower group, they will surpass me at that moment.

Furthermore, on this final day, the impact of doubled scores cannot be ignored. The strategy of the first-year students is slowly driving me to the path of expulsion. There is still a possibility that the first-year students are still waiting for me, but the GPS search is no longer a possibility for me. I need to save every point I have.

At 7:00 a.m., the designated area was H3, which wasn't a great location because of the mountains, but there was nothing I could do about it. Even if I took the shortest route from here, it would take me almost two hours. There was no time to dawdle. On a day when many students would be taking on a task that had doubled in reward, I was going to have to fight to make it to the designated area. By noon, I might have dropped even further down the rankings.

As I was packing my bags and leaving, I received a call on my walkie-talkie from Sakayanagi.

"Good morning, Ayanokōji-kun. I'm sorry you had to go through so much yesterday."

"Thankfully it wasn't as bad as it could have been because you were there to help out."

"Will you be okay with the penalty? It looks like you moved around quite a bit during the night."

Seems like Sakayangi kept a watchful eye over me with the GPS.

"The first designated area is H3. There's not much room, but I think I can make it."

"H3... "

Since I didn't want to waste time, I started to move while talking to Sakayanagi.

"Ayanokōji-kun, I don't mean to burden you, but I have a slight issue. It seems today at dawn, Ichinose-san disappeared."

I don't think you can classify that as a "slight" issue. This is a major problem, especially on the last day.

“What do you mean she disappeared? Was this accidental?”

“No, it seems to be a spontaneous action. She has been acting strangely for the past few days.”

That’s what Sakayanagi said, but there was still another problem at hand here.

“Why did you contact me? I don’t think there’s anything I can do to help you.”

“I did a GPS search to find Ichinose-san’s location and found out that she was in E3, the same location as Ayanokōji. However, she was near the border of D3.”

Even though we are in the same area, there certainly is a distance between the two ends. And now, I’ve already stepped into F3.

“What was the last designated area for you and the others yesterday?”

“D5. I’m not sure what to do.”

“Why would Ichinose leave the group early in the morning without telling anyone and end up in E3? When did you find out?”

“In the morning, I noticed that I had lost a point. I checked with the people in our group, but there was no sign that anyone had used the GPS search. It seems that Ichinose-san used it, and although we currently don’t know if she was heading for E3 or an area further away, it’s normal to assume that she went to meet someone.”

“I suppose so. If she had stepped on the fourth designated area yesterday, that’s the only reason she would have moved early in the morning.”

“I thought it might have been to meet Ayanokoji-kun, which is why I thought I should bring it up...”

“I’m sorry, but I have no idea. I haven’t once seen Ichinose in this exam, and I don’t have a clue what she might want. What are you going to do?”

“The first designated area for us to head to is E6. I’m not sure what to do, but I’m going to have to ignore Ichinose-san for now. If she retires in the worst-case scenario, it won’t have a significantly negative impact since it’s the last day.”

Having said that, the Sakayanagi group is a precious seven-member team. By the end of the 12th day, they were in fourth place, a perfect position for a podium finish. It would be a blow to lose Ichinose here.

On the flip side, she was acting arbitrarily on such an important final day. It's an inexplicable action that Ichinose, who acts more for his friends than anyone else, can't imagine.

"You're in trouble it seems."

"Accidents happen, you know. Well, even if I leave her alone, the special exam will be over in half a day, so I don't think there will be any problem. If you do see her, please ask what happened.

Sakayanagi ended the communication, saying that anything further would be a hindrance.

"Where is Ichinose headed...?"

I put the walkie-talkie away in my backpack as I walk, and take out my tablet this time. It's the last day, and I don't need to think about charging anymore. With thirty-one percent left, I should be fine. The map on the screen shows the designated areas I need to go to and the challenges scattered around.

For the past two weeks, challenges had been popping up all over the deserted island. However, on this last day, I can see that there are no challenges at all in the northern areas of the island, from 1 to 3. On the contrary, the central and southern areas, from 5 to 10, and even more so from A to E, are where most of the challenges are concentrated. This makes sense when you consider that this is simply the last day of the exam and they are trying to get you to return to the starting point. It is wise to quickly step on the designated area and take on a task. I was tempted to use the GPS search to find out Ichinose's location, but I was now in danger of being expelled from school.

I need to save my points to increase my survival rate as much as possible.

Part One

My second destination of the day was I2, the northeast end of the deserted island. Now that I've managed to stop the penalty, I can head there with some peace of mind. After the exam ends at 3:00 p.m., we'll basically walk back to the starting point, but in some cases, they have a plan to collect the students on a patrol boat. If you're in the area, the patrol boat will come to J6 at 5pm.

"The ending of the exam is nearing, and yet they've given me such a troublesome zone..."

How could the designated area be the most northeastern, when the testing environment remains the same, with the challenges concentrated on the south side of the island? I was tempted to bemoan the fact that it was a mistake on the school's part, but I had no choice. It would have been easier if I could just let it go, but I was beginning to feel something disturbing here.

Since this morning, I had not seen or passed any of the other students. Even though the island is large, there are still many opportunities to see or hear from them as long as you are on the move. Of course, since I didn't make it to the last designated area yesterday, I don't know why I didn't bump into any of the students following the same table as me.

This indicates that many students have already gone down to the south side where the assignments are gathered. After stepping on I2, it might be a good idea to ignore the final designated area and head for the task.

H3 has a narrow river dividing the area. This river cannot be used as a shortcut, so it is a troublesome place that you are forced to go around. The saving grace is that you can just walk along the river and don't have to worry about getting lost. No need to panic, just walk down the river to the southwest, reach the point where you can cross, and head northeast. You can walk alongside the water until you hit the mountains. That's how I got to the other side of the river, near the center of H3.

"Ayanokōji-kun——!"

As I was walking along, listening to the sound of the water flowing by, I heard a voice calling my name from afar. The north side of the river that I had just bypassed.

There, covered in mud, Ichinose was staring at me, out of breath.

"Ichinose... what are you doing here all the way in H3?"

As I recall, according to Sakayanagi, Ichinose was in E3.

It was just after ten o'clock now, so if we take the time when the sun started to rise to be around 5:30, then Ichinose had walked for about four and a half hours to get here. That's a pretty quick pace.

"I... I-I came to see Ayanokōji-kun!" Ichinose shouted from across the river, her words cut off by visible exhaustion.

"I'm coming over there now!" With that, Ichinose starts running along the river even though she's clearly not in a good state. She throws away her heavy backpack as if it was in the way. Her steps were unsteady. Ichinose's physical strength was probably at its limit, and it would take a lot of effort to get here. I turned back the way I had come and hurried to meet up with her.

We ran along the river for about five minutes and arrived at a point where we could meet up. Since I couldn't let Ichinose push herself too hard, I crossed the river to the north side first.

"Hey, I'm finally... finally catching up with you... Wait for me, I'm coming!"

I wondered if she felt responsible for chasing me this far and calling me off. Out of breath, Ichinose reached in front of me, but she couldn't stand and fell forward.

"Ah!"

I hold Ichinose, who is about to fall.

"Gosh, I'm sorry! Oh, that? Why? My legs aren't... doing what they're supposed to..." She hurriedly tries to pull away, but her knees are shaking and she can't seem to stand properly.

"What's wrong with you, Ichinose?"

Ichinose looks up at me and opens her mouth, desperately trying to sort out the situation.

"I really need to tell Ayanokoji-kun something!"

"To tell me?"

"I've been worrying, worrying, worrying about... my friends, a-and I have to protect my classmates..."

What is she talking about? I don't know what it's about, but I'm pretty sure she's trying really hard to get the right words out.

"But even so, I was worried about Ayanokōji-kun, so... I thought why not?"

During this special exam, I didn't have any particular contact with Ichinose. It seems that something unexpected happened. In order to tell me whatever it was that happened, she's been walking for over four hours, desperately trying to get here.

"My watch broke, so I was going to go back to the starting point to get it replaced... That's when I saw two people, Acting Director Tsukishiro and Sensei Shiba. T-they were there...!"

Ichinose speaks in a faltering voice, she's exhausted to the point where she still hasn't calmed down her breathing. Depending on what the severity of the situation is, she probably spent a few days worrying about it. This only adds onto her weak physical condition by giving her mental strain.

"They said if Ayanokōji-kun is safe until the last day, they'll call you to I2 and bury him."

The words "I2" and "bury him." It's true that if you only hear those words, you'll think it's quite a disturbing turn of events that will take place. The reason why Tsukishiro and the others were so carelessly overheard by Ichinose was because her watch were broken and they could not trace the GPS response.

"Does protecting your classmates... mean that Tsukishiro threatened you?"

Ichinose nodded repeatedly, though she seemed momentarily surprised by my guess.

"If I told Ayanokōji-kun about this, he... said he was going to expel my classmates, but I just couldn't leave you alone...!"

"Don't worry about it, you turn your head the other way. I'm your enemy, you know."

When Ichinose heard those words, she shook her head strongly and violently, saying no.

"You can't! Ayanokōji-kun, Ayanokōji-kun is... not my enemy!"

Ichinose clutches the shirt near my chest.

"I think I'm an enemy, though."

"No! Because... for me, Ayanokōji-kun is..."

The hand that gripped the shirt tightly is squeezed even tighter once more.

"I'm... I'm in love with you, Ayanokōji-kun.!"

The words must have been something Ichinose herself had not expected to say.

After the words came out, she averted his gaze as if to cover her own mouth.

“W-what?! I-I didn’t... I mean I did... but what?” She repeatedly shook her head from side to side in panic, as if she hadn’t been able to catch up with her own understanding.

“What did I just say?”

As if her memory of what she had said had flown, she started to panic when she couldn’t understand.

“Are you sure you want me to repeat it? What you just said to me?”

“Uh, yeah... Oh, no, no! I’m not sure what I said exactly but I remember more or less! Yes! But you see I-”

“Thank you, Ichinose.”

“What, what, what?”

I had to thank her, for looking out for me. She put me ahead of her classmates, ahead of the group and the exam she was trying to win.

I don’t take that feeling with contempt.

“If Ichinose hadn’t warned me, I don’t know what would have happened to me.”

This is probably a big turning point for me. If I hadn’t met Ichinose here, I wouldn’t have gone to I2, assuming Tsukishiro was there waiting for me. It’s most definitely true that Tsukishiro threatened Ichinose. But here she is, right in front of me.

And she told me everything, without regard for the danger.

“Is it true what you said earlier?”

“Well that would mean... so, uh, no, it’s not, you know?”

“If it’s not, deny it now. I’ll get the wrong idea.”

“Ah.... misunderstood.... well maybe not....”

Ichinose was about to deny it, but she decided that she could no longer hold it in any longer.

“I like... you.”

She admitted in a small, snatchy voice that seemed to fade away.

“I think I just realized that you probably won’t feel that same way about me. I’m sorry.”

There was nothing to apologize for.

“To be honest, I was surprised that you felt that way about me.”

“Gosh, I’m sorry. You don’t like me, do you?”

“That’s not true. It’s just that I can’t respond to Ichinose’s feelings right now.”

“O-oh yeah, because I’m not good enough for Ayanokōji-kun...”

“That’s not it. There are still several things that need to be resolved, and I couldn’t answer yes or no in this situation.”

Besides, I had to avoid telling her about Kei’s existence here. Even if it would cause more harm and resentment if she found out later, she was in the middle of a deserted island test. There is still time left, so I shouldn’t do anything that will take away her will to fight.

“It may not make sense to you, but that’s the best I can do for you right now.”

“Yes... I understand.” Ichinose nodded her head in response, neither displeased nor dissatisfied.

“I’m going to head to I2 now. I have some things I need to do there.”

“No, you can’t! It’s dangerous!”

“If I don’t, you won’t be able to protect your precious classmates, will you?”

I’m sure she knows that because she’s been through so much. It’s not hard to imagine that if she contacts me and tells me, Tsukishiro will find out about it. But I think I need to tell her that this isn’t a last-ditch effort, it’s a comeback.

“You need to take a long break and then try to meet up with the group. Understood?”

Patting the head of the obeying Ichinose once, I decided to head to I2.

Part Two

There was a rocky area near the border between I2 and I3, with some bushes higher than my knees near it.

“Let’s just stick to this area.” I lowered the backpack I was carrying and hid it in those bushes.

Not knowing what awaited me from here on out, the pack on my back would only be a hindrance. I decide to leave everything behind, including my tablet. If I can make it back from I2, I won’t have any trouble finding my way back to this rocky area. Perhaps the group with the same table as me was given a completely different designated area. I’d rather not lose a point by searching now just to find out for sure. In addition, now that I know Ichinose is involved, the option of not going is gone. If I chose to ignore this situation, it’s hard to tell how much punishment he’ll give her for revenge.

As I finished my preparations, I started to walk towards I2.

“Yo, Ayanokōji. What a coincidence.”

Miyabi Nagumo, who was holding a tablet, was looking at me with an interesting look in his eyes. Given the situation I was in, it was unnatural for whoever it was to be in this nearby area. Is this man involved in Tsukishiro’s case, other than the bounty?

No, the title of student council president probably doesn’t mean that much to Tsukishiro. The fact that he showed up here doesn’t seem like it needs to be connected to that case, but I’ll be on the lookout.

“Why is Student Council President Nagumo in this place?”

A quick look around didn’t reveal a single student in the vicinity that could be considered a member of Nagumo’s group.

“Don’t worry. You and I are the only ones here.”

Perhaps using a GPS search, Nagumo said and tried to push my guard down.

“There are no challenges near here, where have you been?”

The direction in which Nagumo appeared was southeast.

“I was playing on the beach in I4. This is an island after all.”

How could he be playing on the beach on the last day, when almost all the students were collecting scores with bloodshot eyes?

“Is that what you call the margin of champions?”

Nagumo laughs, not answering that question.

“But I’m going to return your line from earlier, Ayanokōji. What are you doing here in a place like this with no designated area or assignment. Have you been meeting with Honami?”

It wasn’t surprising that her name would come up here. Even if she didn’t see Ichinose directly, it would be obvious that she was in a close position if he was doing a GPS search.

“If so, is that a problem?”

“No? If you were still with her, then there’s a lot to say, but you’re here alone now. That means you have another purpose. What’s in store for I2?”

When I decided to ignore the question, Nagumo continued as if to change the subject.

“You’re done with the exam, right? I just thought I’d have a word with you. There aren’t many situations in school where you and I, the student council president, can stand around and talk alone.”

“I suppose that’s true.”

I’m just a shady student. The other person is the head of the student council, so there’s a clear imbalance. But I don’t think he came here just to make small talk.

“You knew that the first-years were going to attack me, didn’t you?”

“You’re not so bad at guessing, are you?”

There was talk of a bounty of 20 million points if I was expelled. Even though it was led by Tsukishiro, it was an undeniable fact that Nagumo was in the middle of it. If Nagumo is as good as I think, it would not be surprising if he was observing the situation with a GPS search regardless of the date. If he had seen the movements of me and the first-year students yesterday, it would have been obvious that I was going to be attacked. I’m sure that Nagumo is as aware of the whole picture of this special exam as I am, if not more so.

“Don’t feel bad about the bounty, okay? It wasn’t originally my idea.”

“You’re working with Acting Director Tsukishiro, right?”

“If you know that much, then it’s a quick story. The money all came from the acting director. I’m just lending my name as the student council president.”

Regardless of whether he wanted to or not, if it was an order from the acting director, Nagumo wouldn't be able to resist it.

"If it's an order from the acting director, I'll agree you had to accept it. But I thought that the student council president I know would kick such an offer to the curb."

"When the bounty was mentioned, if it had been any other student but you, I wouldn't have accepted it. But the one who was nominated was none other than you. You're the only man who was recognized by the senior student, Horikita."

As I thought, Nagumo was only looking past my shoulders, towards Manabu Horikita who is standing behind me.

"Answer me, Ayanokōji. What do you intend to do in the future?"

It would be easy to say, "Don't worry about me, I'm insignificant." However, Nagumo would not be deterred by that. As long as I don't know what awaits me in the future, I want to make the most of my time.

"This is none of your business, Student Council President Nagumo. Shouldn't you be concentrating on the last special exam without worrying about me? The difference in scores between you and Kōenji should be close. If you don't go back, you won't get any rewards. You'll continue to be unable to participate in some of the tasks as well."

"Don't worry. On this last day, I've got Kōenji completely under control."

Saying that, Miyabi Nagumo took out a walkie-talkie from his back pocket. So even though they were far away, he could still give instructions, and that would be enough?

"I'm also wondering what you're going to do, but if you can't answer, I'll change the question. Let me see if you're as good as the senior Horikita made you out to be. Let me see what you're really made of."

That's the main reason why he's come all the way here?

"Don't tell me you want me to fight with the student council president here?"

"I don't mind a fistfight, but I prefer a more straightforward fight. Even after this exam is over, there will still be an opportunity to fight across grade levels, so I'll take you on there."

So, it was the student council president's direct request.

“Didn’t you learn that from this exam? You can’t compete with me, the student council president.”

In fact, Nagumo had consistently maintained his first and second place finishes in this exam. Kōenji, who was in a close race, would have a chance to turn the tables, but it would still be a tough fight.

“You’ve got one, and we’ve got seven. It’s weird that it’s a match.”

“Kōenji is good enough to win, he’s a freak, but he’s undeniably talented. In contrast, I’ve never been able to get into the top ten groups.”

I urge him to go to Kōenji if he’s looking for a strong opponent.

“Well, that *thing* is certainly more than I imagined. He’s the only one that made me make an offensive move in this test.”

I shrug my shoulders, though I somewhat approve of Kōenji. I guess the offensive move refers to the fact that Nagumo is using the walkie-talkie right now.

“Using the entire third grade to get ahead in the order of arrival and monopolize the assignments is probably a trick that only the student council president can do, right?”

Unlike the freshmen and sophomores, almost the entire third year group is under Nagumo’s control. If he wanted to reliably contain Kōenji, he could certainly do so by mobilizing all the third-year students. It doesn’t matter how strong, fast, or skilled they are at completing their tasks. A group of them will reap what they sow. As a result, Kōenji could only get the arrival bonus from the basic movement. In the meantime, Nagumo and the others were just piling up arrival bonuses and the point gap was widening.

“Quicksilver, as expected, you’ve seen through that much. When did you notice it?”

“I knew it was suspicious from the Beach Flags stage. I didn’t dare to fill the empty slots left by Kiriya. That seat was reserved for the student body president.”

But since I arrived first, I had no choice but to enter with the vacant members. This meant that Nagumo was leisurely playing around and waiting for Kiriya and the others to finish their assignments.

“I had always thought that you and Vice President Kiriya were enemies, but it seems that you’re not as distant as I thought.”

“He’d join forces with me, even though he hates me, if it meant he could graduate as an A student.”

“So, aside from the out-of-this-world Kōenji, ordinary students are helpless.”

When I replied with that, Miyabi Nagumo laughed, as if something was wrong.

“You don’t really mean that, do you? You don’t think I’m a great person at all.”

“That’s not...” I tried to deny it, but Nagumo stopped me with his hand.

“I know you think that I just mobilized all three years and won by force alone, but that’s not true. Now I’m going to show you my psychic powers.”

“Psychic powers, huh?”

“I’m going to guess your group ranking at the end of the twelfth day.”

The only groups that had been released were the top ten groups and the bottom ten groups. Excluding those 20 groups from the total of 157 groups, there were 137 groups without the merge. Of course, I was the only one who knew my exact ranking. At the last minute, before the date changed, I was in 16th place.

“Your rank is... 11, right?” Nagumo replied confidently, but he missed the rank slightly.

On the twelfth day, I repeated the GPS search in preparation for the attack from the first years. If I hadn’t spent those extra points, I could have finished 11th. The rules made it impossible to keep track of the rankings of all the groups. In other words, there was a good reason for what Nagumo had said.

“Ah, but not anymore. Now, you’re in about fifteenth or sixteenth place, right?”

“Yes, I am. I’m honestly impressed.”

I admitted honestly, and presumed Nagumo would calmly accept the fact.

“I know I said something about psychic powers, I was only joking. But I just stepped on the fact that if you really had hidden abilities, you would be ranked around there.”

Apparently, this Nagumo guy is much more talented than I thought.

“You were inconspicuously ranked a little lower than tenth, and you were always in a position to outperform the top, right? If I or Kōenji were to clash with you and drop down the rankings, you could turn the tables.”

I avoided standing out, and worked to stay hidden until the end of the 12th day. At the end of the day, when the pace of scoring points at the top slowed down due to fatigue, I had left a line to aim for the podium with a quick score, depending on the situation. No, I thought I had.

“Did you notice? That it was impossible from the start.”

It meant that the strategy I had planned had been nullified by Nagumo from the very beginning.

“The tenth place has always been the third-year Kuronaga, right? That’s because I was the one who kept him in tenth place. I was keeping him in tenth place so that I could shut down the guys who were trying to turn the tables by gaining points unseen.”

The score between tenth and ninth was widening, and it was getting harder and harder for me to get to the top. All of this was going according to Nagumo’s plan. He forcibly eliminated the invisible enemies and narrowed it down to only the visible ones.

“I’ve always doubted whether you were capable, but now it’s clear. You’ve earned the right to be beaten to a pulp by me, and you should be happy about it.”

“Is it part of your strategy that the student council president went out of his way to take command and target Kōenji on the last day?”

“I could have earned 400 or 500 points if I wanted to, but that would have been somewhat problematic. However, it’s not very interesting, is it? I gave him hope he could beat the first and second years. Besides, if we lose in a close game, I might be able to see Kōenji’s disappointed face.”

Nagumo had been fighting as the strongest group for the past two weeks. And now, on this last day, he wants to show off his presence by sinking Kōenji and taking the top spot himself. If Nagumo is serious, he can find out all the scores that a particular group gets, whether they got the seating rewards or not, and how they did in the challenges, using GPS search and the eyes of his friends. Even now, on the last day of the tournament, when the scores are unknown, Nagumo knows exactly how many points Kōenji has. In other words, it’s possible for him to pull off a dramatic victory like winning by one point.

“Well, I don’t care about Kōenji anymore. The last thing I’m going to do in this school, is defeat you, Ayanokōji.”

Nagumo, who has always been chasing the shadow of Horikita Manabu, is trying to see that figure in me. I guess he wants to defeat him completely and make it black and white, even if it's in a different way.

"The leader of the second year D class is Horikita. Even if there was a special exam where I had to compete with the third-year students, I wouldn't be fighting against the student council president Nagumo."

"Then I'll have to force you to come to the front? Including the bounty."

So, he's threatening to reveal everything about me?

"I'm sorry, but I'm going to hurry ahead. Please leave the rest of this story for another time."

"You think I'm going to let you off easy? I'm not leaving until you say you'll fight me, okay?"

Nagumo walks behind me, as if he intends to follow me.

If there's something waiting for me down the road, I'll be forced to involve Nagumo. We're dealing with Tsukishiro. In the worst-case scenario, Nagumo will lose everything he has built up and may even be expelled in the name of power. Even if I tried to persuade him with words here, he would not respond. Of course, I couldn't just lie and take the easy way out. I stopped and looked back at him.

"So have you decided?"

I pressed hard without warning on the chest of the misunderstood and delighted Nagumo. I'm sure he didn't expect to be touched by a younger kohai, and without any resistance, he fell to the ground on his buttocks. The tablet he was holding and the walkie-talkie in his pocket spilled out and fell to the ground.



“What...?”

He doesn't understand what happened to him, or so it seems. Before his understanding catches up, let me finish what needs to be done.

“Miyabi Nagumo, the Student Council President. Even with this, I still think I'm underselling you. You have different abilities than that of the student council president Horikita, and you have successfully reached the top of this school. In fact, it's not an exaggeration to say that you've not only maintained a comfortable top position in this special exam, but you've also completely dominated it.”

I continue my words before he can recall his calmness, or his anger.

“There are just some areas that you shouldn't step into. Please pull back here.”

“Ha... don't be silly Ayanokōji. Are you trying to order me around?”

“It's because I have great respect for you as my senior, that I'm not going to show mercy here.”

“Ah? Who the hell do you think you...?”

I look into Nagumo's eyes with all the killing intent I can muster.

“Don't you understand that I told you to back off?”

Nagumo stood up forcefully, refusing to admit that fear had been instilled in him.

“Enough of this, okay? You're the first person who's ever treated me this hard, Ayanokōji...”

At that moment, a call came over the walkie-talkie that had fallen beside Nagumo.

“We've made our way up, Nagumo. This is the third time in a row that I've prevented a challenge from Kōenji. Give me your next instructions.”

I hear the voice of one of the delighted third-year students. The strategy to seal off the Kōenji seems to be going well. Nagumo makes no attempt to react to the voice and glares at me.

“Hey, Nagumo, the senpai's won't move unless you tell them to. Didn't you have to keep attacking Kōenji until the end of the exam if you wanted to make sure he'd drop to second place?”

“Pres, are you there?”

Even though the conversation was only audible, I could tell that it was important to Nagumo. Nagumo takes the walkie-talkie in silence and turns the power knob to off.

“It’s not Kōenji that’s important to me.”

Without even trying to wipe the dirt, Nagumo comes closer to me.

“I’m going to fuck you up. That’s the last thing I’m going to do as student council president.”

Willfulness, I wondered. He inspired himself as the student council president and shook off my intimidation.

“Me...?” Without hesitation, I slammed my fist into Nagumo’s chest.

“Shit...!”

He instantly lost his ability to breathe, and Nagumo temporarily collapsed on the spot as if he was losing consciousness. I catch Nagumo and lean him against a large tree where the sun doesn’t shine. Since he wouldn’t listen to my advice, I had no choice but to do what I had to do here.

Nagumo’s watch detected an abnormality and sent out a warning alert, which sounded for five seconds. It shouldn’t be long before he wakes up. Maybe twenty minutes, maybe thirty. At any rate, I wouldn’t have to involve Nagumo in what was to come. Of course, there would inevitably be other issues that would come up after the exam was over. But for now, it’s just a small matter.

If I don’t solve the problem of Tsukishiro, there’s no point in thinking about the future anyways.

Part Three

A little after 10 a.m. on the last day of the exam, I, Suzune Horikita, was heading north along the border between I4 and I3, aiming for I2. It was the last day of the special exam, and I was trying to muster up my last bit of energy. Fortunately, until just before midnight last night, the second year Class D had not been listed in the bottom 10 groups. The bottom five groups, the range of expulsion, were all third-year students.

However, we cannot be absolutely sure. At the end of the day, if these five groups were to join forces with another group, their scores would inevitably increase, and there was a possibility that they would switch places with the group just outside the sixth and seventh positions. In extreme cases, if all ten of the bottom groups are paired with the top group, then all ten of them could be out of the bottom.

My tablet shows that my designated area is I7, which is the exact opposite of I2, where I am headed. It was an outrage to ignore the designated area that I was heading to. The answer to why I am doing this lies in a piece of paper in my right hand. This was folded and tucked away in my tent when I woke up this morning. I unfolded it and saw that it had four words written on it in an irregular pattern: “Noon,” “K.A.,” “Expelled,” and “I2.” The first time I saw it, I knew I was in trouble.

As I inquired further, I thought of two things. The first was that the person who wrote it had such beautiful handwriting that I wanted to use it as a model. The other is that paper and pen are not part of the free supply.

“I wonder how many points the notebook and pen were...”

I vaguely remember it being mentioned in the manual for the deserted island, but I don’t remember the detailed point prices because I decided it was worthless. I may need the note if my tablet runs out of battery or breaks down in a hurry, though. Anyway, some drunk guy bought a notebook and some notes, and then sent me this little cryptic thing.

“No, it’s too easy to call it a cipher.”

I2 is the area of the deserted island, and noon is the time. This indicates that there is something going on here today, the fourteenth day, since it was the last day when he sent the note. If I say it was just a prank, that’s all. But the two words that remain are not.

Aside from the former expulsion, it is the K.A. that is the problem.

If other students had seen this note, they probably wouldn't have understood what it meant. The moment I saw it, I knew the meaning. It was the initials of Ayanokōji Kiyotaka.

"If you consider the meaning as it is, Ayanokōji-kun will be expelled from the school today at noon, I2...."

You've got to be kidding me, I thought.

So, when the 7 a.m. designated area was announced, I was going to ignore it. But I was a little concerned about the fact that Ayanokōji-kun's GPS was on E3. But if time goes by and he gets closer to I2, it might not be just a joke. If it was someone's trap to waste points, then I had fallen for it. The result - Ayanokōji-kun had made his way from F3 to G3. If he continues to head to I2, he will be able to get there quite soon...

I had such a premonition that I decided to head north to find out for sure. There is a bounty on his head. The probability that it is a suggestion cannot be dismissed. There was still some time before noon, but I wondered how far Ayanokoji-kun had gotten. Of course, it's possible that it's just a coincidence and he's already on his way to another area. I feel the urge to do a GPS search, but I hold it back. My score is good enough to be in the top 50%. However, if I abandoned the designated areas and tasks from here on, and even used the search, I wouldn't know that. If I'm wasting my time in any way, I might as well head to I2.

"Ah! I'm finally catching up! You better wait for me Horikita!"

Such a voice came from behind me as the end of my vision opened up and I could almost see the river.

"How... did you end up here?"

Mio Ibuki-san, who is out of breath and glaring at me, shows up. From the fact that it doesn't feel like she just appeared by accident, it looks like she went to the trouble of GPS searching to follow me.

"Score, show me your score."

"Hold on. What the hell are you talking about?"

Showing up out of nowhere and asking me, the enemy, to show you my scores is a behavior I don't understand.

"I told you. I'm not going to let you beat me in this special exam."

She sticks her forefinger in front of my eyes.

"You don't need to confirm that now. Couldn't you have waited until it was over?"

“I mean, there’s no guarantee that all the groups’ scores will be announced after the special exam.”

“Sure, that might be true. It’s the top and bottom groups that matter.”

There was no guarantee that all students would have immediate access to the rankings of the many groups that existed. Of course, there’s always the possibility that they’ll be made public as a matter of course.

“So why don’t you let me check here and now?”

She wants it to be black and white as to which of us collected more points on the last day.

“That’s a silly and unbelievable statement, but... you’re serious if you’ve come all this way. How many times did you use the GPS search?”

“Three times. Since you were so close, I figured it was now or never.”

The greater the distance, the more difficult it becomes to meet the person you want. That meant Ibuki-san had used the GPS search three times to get here.

“Well, that’s a lot of work, isn’t it?”

“I don’t need that kind of pity, just tell me your score. I got a 131!” She declared forcefully, as if to say, “What do you think?”

“Thanks for telling me, even though I didn’t ask. But I do have two things to say. First of all, there’s no guarantee that you’re telling me your real score.”

“Huh? Then why don’t you just look at it?”

I stop Ibuki-san as she tries to take her tablet out of her backpack.

“Secondly, even if you disclosed your real score, I won’t tell you.”

“What? What’s that? Are you going to say the same thing as that guy?”

That guy...? I was a little curious, but I kept talking.

“Even though we’re both second-year students, we’re enemies. I don’t want to take the risk of disclosing any information.”

I don’t think I’m in the bottom ten groups at this point. But the scores will fluctuate until the very end. Even if it’s the last day, there’s a non-zero chance that I’ll be caught flat-footed by the information I give to Ibuki-san.

“All right. So, you freaked out when you heard my score, huh? You’re losing, right?”

“I’m not even going to answer that question. It’ll give you an implication to whether you’re winning or losing.”

Even though I repeated that I wasn't going to give any information, Ibuki-san kept pushing on.

"Why don't you just admit it honestly? That you couldn't beat me in points."

"I'll leave it at that, and you can go back to your exam."

I try to match Ibuki-san, if that makes her happy.

"Holy shit you piss me off. Show me your real score."

"I basically admitted defeat, but you're not satisfied?"

"I want to know what your real score is. And I want to know how much I beat you by."

"This is silly..."

"It's important to me."

"I'm sorry, but we have to move on."

"Are you trying to escape?"

"I'm on my way to the designated area. It's funny that you would describe it as running away." I turn my feet to hurry to I2. Ibuki-san must have taken that as running away, because she followed me.

"Do you have a designated area to the north of you? Or are you simply following me?"

"What I want to know now is your score. If I knew that, I'd go back to my assigned area too."

So she's obsessively concerned about me. I honestly don't want to be stranded here. I don't want to waste my time when I'm being swamped by a single piece of paper.

"I've lost."

"Oh, you admit it? So, you're finally admitting defeat, huh?"

"No, I don't. I'm saying that I lost to that kind of obsession of yours. I've collected 145 points. You came close, but I won the game."

I disclosed information that should have been hidden. That's why I declared my defeat.

"You're beating me? If you're going to say you're winning, then show me the proof, the proof."

Of course you will. But I'm not going to stop walking. I want to get to I2 as quickly as possible now to make sure he's safe.

"Okay."

This is efficient, though I don't think it's the right answer.

In any case, even if Ibuki-san knows the score I have on the last day of this exam, it won't have a big impact. Right now, every minute or second counts. I take down my backpack and reach for my tablet, which I keep inside. Ibuki kept her stern face and waited for me to tell her how many points I had. I took out the tablet and was about to press the power button. Almost at the same time, Ibuki-san and I felt a strong presence from ahead that we didn't even try to hide, and we looked up.

“My my, what do we have here~!”

An innocent voice, like that of a child meeting a playmate.

“Hi, Horikita-senpai!”

Looking at the female student who had appeared before she knew it, Ibuki-san expressed her dissatisfaction without even trying to hide it.

“Who...?”

“It's Amasawa Ichika-san from 1st year Class A.”

It's possible that we just happened to show up at the same place, but she's acting kind of strange.

Still wary, I turn to face Amasawa-san, tablet still in my hand.

The first year's bounty and what was written on this morning's paper flash through my mind.

“Don't worry about me, you can do whatever you were doing, okay?”

“Not so fast. We were just talking about various private matters.”

Ibuki-san is well aware that I don't want to tell her my scores as much as possible. She'll also understand that I don't want to show her the scores on my tablet here to see if I won or lost. I tried to gently urge her to leave, but she didn't move.

Ibuki-san, who seemed to have lost her numbness at the sight of her, said irritably,

“You're in my way...”

“So Horikita-senpai, how is Sudō-senpai doing~?”

“Huh? Did you just ignore me?”

It's impossible that she didn't hear Ibuki-san's question, but Amasawa-san ignored her. She turns her shoulders, setting down the backpack she was carrying, as if she wasn't planning to leave right away.

“Yeah. I'm sure he's grateful that you saved him.” She smiles, and there is no hint of an apology to me.

The longer she stays here, the longer I'll be delayed in getting to Ayanokōji-kun. Unless these incidents are somehow related...

“Amasawa-san, you’re in my way. I have a prior engagement over here, so please go away.”

“Prior engagement? Didn’t Ibuki-senpai just barge in on her own too?”

It was as if she had heard our conversation from an early stage.

Something isn’t right.

“Even if that’s the case, it doesn’t matter, now please go.”

With a stronger tone than previously, Ibuki from my side tells Amasawa-san,

“Go away. Now.”

If I go any further, Ibuki-san might actually do something about it.

Even with such a threat, Amasawa-san just smiles in amusement.

“I wonder what your goal is, Amasawa-san.”

Putting aside Ibuki-san for the moment, I turn my attention to Amasawa-san. I don’t want to spend any more unnecessary time on her, but I have no choice.

“Tsk.” Ibuki-san is irritated by this, but she waits for me as if she has no choice.

“I want to ask you one thing, where is Horikita-senpai going to go from here?”

“I’m standing here talking to Ibuki-san right now, but as soon as I’m done, I’m heading for the F3 area.”

A lie, of course. I’m in a situation where I’m about to abandon my own designated area. But there’s no advantage in telling Amasawa-san that. She’s colluding with the other first-year students to try and get the bounty of expelling Ayanokōji-kun. It’s safer not to talk about unnecessary things related to Ayanokōji-kun. I thought that was my decision, but I soon realized that it was a mistake.

“You’re a liar Horikita-senpai. Your designated area isn’t over here, is it?”

“What do you mean? Are you trying to trap me with some strange trick?”

“There’s no point in trying to deceive me. The designated area that you should be heading to is I7, right?”

Amasawa-san’s immediate response was the designated area where I should be heading next. There was no way she could have guessed this by mere coincidence.

From the look on her face, I could only assume that she was trying to hook me from the start.

“We second-year students have our own way of fighting. We can’t tell the truth about everything.”

After saying that, I quickly continue.

“Isn’t it inevitable that we should be wary of the person who tried to bring down Ayanokōji-kun?” I smoothly switch the conversation here.

The first year is the enemy, there’s no harm in showing some ill will.

“Hmm. Well, I guess that’s true too.” She said this, but it didn’t seem as if she was listening to my words.

I couldn’t help but feel that she was already here with a conclusion in mind.

“Where are you going, Horikita-senpai? You don’t think it’s... I2, do you?”

Apparently, that thought of mine had hit me in the wrong direction.

“You know a lot of things, don’t you? But it was only this morning that I decided to go to I2. You’re very perceptive, aren’t you?”

Even if she had used the GPS search to pinpoint my location, it wouldn’t have been easy for her to get ahead of me like this. If that’s the case, then I should assume that Amasawa-san is also involved in this piece of paper today. As I was wondering if I should ask her about it, Ibuki-san stepped forward.

“Hey, how long are we talking about this?”

I felt the same irritation. I’m going to be forced to deal with Amasawa-san more than I’ll be able to deal with Ibuki-san.

“Ibuki-san.”

I turned on my tablet and showed the screen of my score to Ibuki-san, knowing that the information would leak out. She would inevitably see the three group expansion slots I had obtained, but since I didn’t have to use them until the end of the game, there was almost no harm done.

I’m sure she doesn’t care about the maximum group quota part, though. The moment she saw the score, I heard Ibuki-san’s faint click of her tongue. Then she scratched her head and said loudly in frustration.

“Huh? Seriously? That sucks.”

It’s a somewhat cruel answer to her hard work for the past two weeks so far.

Nevertheless, I think Ibuki-san did well. The fact that she's scored enough points to compete with me, even with her low academic ability, is enough to make me look back at her.

"If you're done, you can head to the designated area. You've got double the points this last day, so you still have a chance to turn things around."

"That's true, but... what do you mean you're trying to abandon the designated area?"

She asks, as if Amasawa-san's words from earlier are bothering her.

"This is your chance to leave, Ibuki-san. I'm in a situation where I can't score any points right now for some reason."

I don't have to explain everything from scratch, you understand, right? I appeal with my eyes.

"Yeah well, the game is on until this exam is over. If you say you're going to stop, I'll just turn the tables on you without reservation." In disgust, Ibuki-san turned her back and walked away, as if she was satisfied with the situation.

With this, I succeeded in parting ways with Ibuki-san. As I put away my tablet in my backpack, I focused on dealing with Amasawa-san.

"I'm heading to I2 now, but what about you?"

"Why are you ditching the designated area to go to I2 where it doesn't matter? I don't care about *that* assignment. It's not like we're doing it during a special exam, is it?"

"Don't you think you know that better than anyone?"

"What do you mean?"

"Don't be silly, you threw this paper into the tent while I was asleep. What's the point of that?" I show her the small folded paper, holding it between the thumb and forefinger of my left hand.

"Paper? Can I see that please?"

You do your best monkey business imitation. Well, I have no use for this piece of paper anymore anyway. I give the paper back to Amasawa-san, who I think is the original owner.

After receiving it, she opens it and checks the contents. "Irregularly lined up letters: "Noon," "K.A.," "Expelled," "I2." She reads it aloud, then closes his eyes once more.

"Damn it..., I didn't realize how much you liked to play games..."

“Games? What are you planning to do by involving me and Ayanokōji-kun?”

“I don’t know about that. It seems that I’m just one of the participants, just like my senpai.”

“Don’t try to fool me. The fact that you appeared in front of me proves that you are the owner of that paper.”

Laughing somewhat annoyed, Amasawa-san tore up the paper. She tore it seven or eight times, and when it was unreadable, she threw it away.

“Did you see something disturbing in those four words?”

“Ayanokōji-kun might be expelled from school. It’s not unconventional to read it that way.”

“Hmm.” She continues to talk as if she has a better grasp of the situation than I do.

Anyway, it’s a waste of time to keep up with her word games any longer. I put my backpack back on and start walking towards her.

“I’m not happy. I don’t know anything about Ayanokōji-senpai, but I don’t think it’s right for you to pretend to be his friend just because you’re classmates.”

As we stood side by side, Amasawa-san said those words.

“You don’t know anything about Ayanokōji-senpai, right, Horikita-senpai?”

I didn’t like that for some reason, and I stopped in my tracks.

“Then are you saying that you know more about him than I do?” I just looked at her and she forced me to meet her eyes and smiled widely and triumphantly.

“Fufu~ I know a lot about Ayanokōji-senpai. I know why he’s so good-looking, smart..., and stronger than anyone else.”

It was hard to believe that a freshman who had just entered the school would know so much about Ayanokōji-kun. Does that mean they’ve known each other since before middle school? Just like me and Kushida-san, who were in the same junior high school?

Amasawa-san continued her words unconcernedly.

“So, what do you know, Horikita-senpai?”

What do I know? I’m... the... first friend Ayanokōji-kun has made since he entered this school. Yes, I guess you could say we’re friends in a way. Our seats happened to be next to each other, and we started to talk... a lot.

I thought he was just a normal student at first, but he was actually much smarter than I imagined. My brother was one of the first to approve of him, and he's also an expert in martial arts. However, he usually hides this side of himself and prefers to lead a quiet school life. There are still very few people who know about his abilities, but other than that, the information he has is probably not much different from others.

"Yes, it's true, I may not know everything about him, I can't deny that."

Thinking about Ayanokōji-kun again, I couldn't help but come to that conclusion. Maybe Amasawa-san knew exactly what she was talking about. I don't know.

At my words that could be considered a declaration of defeat, Amasawa-san smiled happily.

"However..."

"However?"

Surely that's not what's important. I think it's not how much I know about him now.

"I want to continue to know him for the rest of my life, until I graduate. As a classmate, as a... friend, far more than you are now."

That's what I wish for right now, and that's how I feel. He is an important friend and an indispensable member of the class that we cannot afford to lose. If he was in danger right now, I couldn't help but run to him. That's the reason why I'm leaving the designated area and heading there. Now, I was able to reaffirm what I was trying to do. This choice is not a wrong one. If it turns out to be just an unfounded fear, so much the better.

"Do you think you can help him? You're not good enough yet."

"I may not be good enough as you are right now. But I'm going to be the one who can help him when he's in trouble."

This school life had only just begun to turn around. This conversation, which could have been considered a waste of time, might have had a great meaning. I suppose I should thank her for making me realize that. As I was about to walk away, Amasawa-san's outstretched right hand stood in front of me. When I look at her face again, I see that she has already lost her smile and is looking at me with intense murderous intent.

"I've learned something from talking to you. Something is actually about to happen on I2. If not, you don't need to try so hard to keep me here."

I can't afford to waste any more time here.

“Where are you going?”

“Can’t you see how this is going? I’m going to I2 to help Ayanokōji-kun.”

Exactly what I said earlier, a step towards becoming someone who can help him in times of trouble.

“Don’t make me laugh. There’s no way Ayanokōji-senpai would ask Horikita-senpai for help.” She says that just to correct me.

“At least for now, yes.”

“Only, it’s different in the future?”

Nodding, I look back once.

“And there’s another thing I’ve figured out. I really think you don’t want me to go to I2. In other words, you were not the sender of this paper.”

As I tried to avoid the outstretched hand, Amasawa-san stood in front of me once again.

“I won’t let you go, Horikita-senpai.”

“The more you stop me, the more I’m definitely going to have to go to I2. The way you’re talking about it, it means he’s in trouble now, doesn’t it?”

It didn’t matter how much I knew about the situation. All I could be sure of was that something was clearly going on with Ayanokōji-kun right now.

“Do you think you can go?”

“Yes, I think I can go.”

Even if I have to forcefully remove the obstacles that stands in front of me.

“Hmm, I can just feel your determination. I’ll just wait for you to put your bags down.”

That meant that she would restrain me even by force. It would be better not to think of it as a mere verbal threat. I took her words in stride and slowly set my backpack down at my feet.

“Just so you know, I’m an experienced martial artist.”

“I know.”

“You’re pretty well-informed, aren’t you?”

I wondered if she knew more about me than just Ayanokōji-kun.

“I’ll go ahead and say it too, but I’m super strong, so you’d better be prepared for that.”

From the moment she showed her anger. I knew firsthand that she was no ordinary girl. I'm sure this isn't some kind of stunt. The fatigue from the desert island exam has naturally built up. The same is true for Amasawa-san in front of me. However, I'm not as tired as one may think, so we're evenly matched as far as condition goes. If that's the case, I won't be defeated so easily.

I took a slow stance and observed the behavior of Amasawa-san in front of me. She doesn't seem to be taking any particular form, and only has an eerie expression on her face.

"If you say you're going to see Ayanokōji-senpai, let's play for a bit to stop that."

The Amasawa-san in front of me stepped to the left and...

"Ack!"

I was on full alert, but immediately after I saw it start to move, I sensed danger and ran away, jumping backwards. The outstretched arm was not strong enough to grab me, or was it? In any case, I thought I had avoided the initial blow, but the next thing I knew, I was grabbed by the chest and the clothes on my right arm.

"Damn..." In the time it takes me to mutter such words, my vision is spinning around. Realizing the pain in my back, the fact that I was thrown on my back followed.

"Oh no... what a surprise."

Unable to breathe, I let out a labored gasp.

"No, you can't let your guard down. Yes, I'll give you a fresh start, so stand up, stand up." Looking down at me, Amasawa-san gives me an evil smile.

I don't think I need to put into words again how humiliating that is. Just one contact is enough to know. Amasawa-san's ability is considerable. As we were both women, I thought that even if there was a difference in our abilities, it would be slight. Ingenuity, resourcefulness, inspiration, and luck were all factors that could turn the tables. But I may have been naive in my thinking. Anyway, the damage to my back was not something to be laughed off. It was fortunate that the ground was dirt, but it would take some time to recover from the damage.

If the other side is proud of their overwhelming advantage, I'll take full advantage of it. I decided to spend tens of seconds on one process of getting up.

“Don’t worry, I’ll wait for you; you can rest for five or ten minutes.”

“If your goal is to keep me from going to Ayanokōji-kun, then so be it.”

“If you don’t want to fight, that’s the best way, right? Even from Horikita-senpai’s point of view.”

That’s for sure. We’ve been going through the deserted island test without a hitch up to this point, and now we’re starting to fight and quarrel at the end of it. If I’m not good enough, I’ll be retired and I’ll even be expelled as the sole student.

“Not yet...” Once the pain in my back is gone, I take another stance. The same stance as before.

Just because I have a background in martial arts doesn’t mean I’m any good at street fights. I can only demonstrate my abilities as I have learned them. I was surprised at how fast Amasawa-san was moving, but I had an idea of how to fight her with my judo skills. One time, a karate master taught me carefully what to do when a man grabs a woman and tries to push her down. I remembered this in my mind and practiced it again. I was wary of going easy on my instructor, but if it is Amasawa-san, I wouldn’t have to worry. I throw away the idea that she’s younger than me and switch to the feeling of fighting a superior opponent.

“Fufufu~!” She laughs aloud, perhaps amused that I’m focusing on the slight changes in Amasawa-san’s legs and shoulders instead of her face.

“Yeah, yeah, I know what you mean, Horikita-senpai. I know exactly how you feel. But you know what?”

I don’t go along with her play on words. Right now, I’m focusing all of my attention on seeing through her first move...

After another shock and pain, I realized that the left foot that was coming at me at high speed had hit a little above my armpit as I tried to match the right foot that she had stepped on.

“Ack!” I was kicked to the ground in agonizing pain, almost to the point of tears. I was kicked to the ground, and all I could do with my arms, which couldn’t even defend themselves, was catch myself. I rolled around on the ground two or three times, confused even though I knew how it happened.

“You thought it was mainly judo, didn’t you? You’re not thinking straight.”

“Ugh, ugh....!” I hold my right side where I was kicked and close my

eyes.

The pain is so intense that it almost breaks my heart in an instant. This is the second time I've felt such deadly strength since the time I faced off against Hōsen-kun... It was only recently that I started to lose confidence in a number of ways.

"This year's first-year students are not all that cute..."

"Does that mean that last year's Horikita-senpai was a cute girl, unlike me?"

I know it's a mean question, but it's a painful reply. I may be a different type of girl, but I'm sure I'm no less cute than you. I tried to stand up, but as I put pressure on my legs, I felt them slipping away. With a back throw and one kick, my strength has been drained more than I thought possible.

"What are you? You seem to know the old Ayanokōji-kun..."

One thing was for sure, this Amasawa-san possessed a strange strength just like him. A glimpse of the strength that Ayanokōji-kun showed when he faced my brother, when he faced Hosen-kun.

"There's no way I'm going to tell a senior something like that."

"Well, you don't seem like the kind of person who would give me an easy answer."

Anyway, it's one of the few good things that the other side is playing with me. It's just a matter of keeping me from going to Ayanokōji-kun, so I guess it doesn't matter how much time we spend here. I need to let some of the damage I've done go in order to move forward.

"What can I say, I'm disappointed about a lot of things. Senpai isn't as good as you think you are, you know? That's why Ayanokōji-senpai doesn't ask you for any advice."

As if peeking into my heart, Amasawa-san's eyes look into my inner thoughts.

"You say you want to help, but really you want to know what he thinks of you, and you're scared to find out that he doesn't trust you."

"Yeah, I guess that could be it."

"As I said before, Ayanokōji-senpai won't be able to rely on Horikita-senpai."

"Even if that's the case, I want to hear it from him, not from you."

"Can't you see that's not cool?" Without even trying to hide her

annoyance, Amasawa-san approached my side.

“Kushida-senpai still has better eyesight than you.”

“Kushida-san? How come Kushida-san’s name came up here...?”

“Stand up, Horikita-senpai. Talking to you is only irritating me, so I’ll end it.”

As a mercy at least, she gives me a reprieve to regain my stance. Then, as for me, I can’t just give up the fight until the end. I stand up and focus all my attention on seeing through Amasawa-san’s attack. I know I’m repeating myself, but as long as I can only do this, I have no choice.

“Bye~!”

Amasawa-san runs out with light steps and comes at me. Do I catch her? Avoid her? I’m sure neither of them will succeed.

If that’s the case, at least give me a shot...!

Pan! The sound of a dry fist rang beside my ear.

But the pain doesn’t come, and a shadow forms in front of my eyes, hiding my vision.

“You, why?”

A student catches her fist in front of me and spits it out without even looking at me. The small back was Ibuki, who was supposed to have left.

“I guess that wasn’t a bad punch.”

“Nice catch~. I was a little surprised by your unexpected appearance.”

When I couldn’t swallow the situation and couldn’t move, Ibuki-san turned around and stared at me.

“I’m the one who’s going to beat you. I don’t want to see you get defeated by a freshman from who knows where.” She said and shook off the fist she had grabbed. Amasawa-san distanced herself again.

“I’m Ichika Amasawa~. Please remember my name, Ibuki-senpai.”

“I’m not good at remembering personal things. If you want me to remember, can you leave that much of an impression on me?”

“Fufu, that’s kind of funny.”

“I’ll play with her, and you can go wherever you want.”

“What are you talking about? You’ve worked so hard on this special exam to beat me, haven’t you?”

“You’re throwing away the designated area too, aren’t you? There’s no point in turning the tables like that.”

That’s why you came back? I swallowed the words.

“She’s incredibly strong, you know. You might end up regretting it. Would you still be okay with that?”

“What’s that? Are you saying I’m going to lose?”

“That’s how strong your opponent is.”

“I don’t think I can lose to Ibuki-senpai.”

“You guys really think I’m not good enough eh?”

A bad threat seems to have the opposite effect, igniting Ibuki-san’s feelings.

“Even if you were to win against Amasawa-san, if you were to overdo it or sound an emergency alert in the process, you may well be retired. As the lone you, there’s also a chance you’ll be expelled.”

“So it’s the same for you, right?”

“What? Yes, I suppose so.”

“I’m sure I’m stronger than you.” She gestured with her hand for me to leave.

“Which one of you is going to fight? You’ll have to decide quickly!”

“I’ll take her.”

“What kind of line is that coming from the chick who almost lost earlier? You’re in my way, so back off.”

“This is my fight, it’s none of your business.”

“What the hell are you talking about? You must have hit your head and gone crazy.”

“That’s...”

It’s not possible to stop Ibuki-san with a half-hearted attempt. But I can’t do something here that I would leave to her. I grabbed Ibuki-san by the shoulders and forced her to step back.

“What are you doing!”

“I’ve been trying to be obtuse, but I have to tell you. You can’t beat her.”

“Don’t be silly. Don’t make assumptions before you even try.”

“It’s true. You can’t beat her because I couldn’t even get my hands on her.”

If the fire has been lit, I will stoke Ibuki-san’s fire to the utmost.

“Then I guess I’ll just have to prove you wrong...”

I hold out my left arm toward Ibuki-san.

“What?”

“I don’t want to fight a losing battle, and if you’re going to break into this fight, you’re going to have to show a certain amount of resolve as well. You’ll be in the same group as me. And if one of us is incapacitated, you can leave and prevent the group from retiring.”

“You’re kidding. Why would I want to be with you?”

“I told you. I asked you to be prepared. You don’t get into this fight without being ready.”

“I don’t like it...”

“You don’t have to like it. But if you’re going to join, I want to be able to count on you.”

“Seriously, that sucks to death. But it wouldn’t be any fun if you got kicked out of school by a freshman.”

We both know that our intentions are repulsive. But the watches stop where they meet. The link requires ten seconds. If she wanted to stop us, Amasawa-san could do so easily, but there is no sign of movement.

Amasawa-san is only enjoying observing what we do from above.

“That’s not a bad strategy. If single people work together to form a group, you can certainly escape expulsion even if the other person is a big monster.”

Turning her back to us, Amasawa-san quietly distanced herself from us. I don’t think she felt the danger of being in a two-on-one situation and pulled away. After some distance, she stops and looks back at us.

“But there’s one miscalculation, Horikita-senpai.”

“Miscalculation? What exactly are you talking about?”

“The fact that it’s okay if one of you retires means, on the other hand, that there’s no problem if one of you breaks.”

She smiles a wide smile of pure evil that she has never shown before.



“So you’re saying I already pissed you off? You’re not good enough.” Even though she must have felt her opponent’s strength firsthand, Ibuki-san seems to be enjoying herself.

And at this point, the signal for the completion of the link rings out.

“I wonder, which one should I break first!”

After taking the first step, the expression of Amasawa-san, who ran out at once, was full of passion. There is no stance or anything, just the desire of grabbing as she extends her hand towards us.

“Kuku! Kukukuku!!!” She was smiling so much that she looked distorted and inhuman.

Is it me or Ibuki-san? I’m probably more hateful to her, but that doesn’t mean I shouldn’t think that I have a higher chance of being targeted.

“Let’s go, Ibuki-san! You, to the left!”

“Don’t order me around!”

However, the moment I said to move, Ibuki-san starts moving to the left. I also move to the right side at the same time and check the aim of Amasawa-san who is coming towards me. She seemed to be running straight towards us with no intention of playing tricks. It was clear she was trying to stop me from making the correct judgment with her unrelenting advance.

However, even then, I could see it clearly. As both sides took action, the distance was instantly closed and we collided. Because my fists and Ibuki-san’s could not possibly work in tandem, the timing of our attacks would naturally diverge. But even so, it would be impossible to respond to it easily.

Nonetheless, Amasawa dodged as easily as if she were training.

We continued to attack without resting our hands, as we were being hit repeatedly.

“Yes, let’s stop for a while.”

Amasawa-san interrupts our attack without any hesitation.

“What’s with this chick...!”

“Totally...”

We lined up and stared breathlessly at Amasawa-san in front of us. As an impromptu duo, we’re choppy, but it’s still two against one. If it were a normal situation, we should have been able to overpower her. Instead, it was the other way around.

It’s more than I imagined... No, it’s beyond my imagination.

Furthermore, we also had to be wary of our movements. If we did as we pleased here, the risk of expulsion wouldn't be minimal.

"Ibuki-san, don't you dare touch her."

"Let go of me!" As if she couldn't stand the restraining condition, Ibuki-san stretched her flexible body to the limit and unleashed a kick. It was the first time I had ever seen a woman in such a position.

"Ah!"

"I said stop, didn't I?"

At this moment, I felt an inexplicable sense of discomfort in the midst of a war that was being pushed. A clear difference in power. Does this mean that Amasawa-san is playing?

She seemed to be fighting with minimal movement since a while ago. What if she wasn't waiting for me to recover when she was fighting me one on one? But it's not an answer that fits. It should be easy to subdue me with her strength. I can think of one strategy I'd like to try. I need to get out of this once and for all anyway.

"Ha!" I thrust my left fist into her body, but like Ibuki-san, it was lightly swatted away.

"Yes, let's start over."

Looking down at us and smiling, Amasawa-san distances herself once more.

"You're going through the same thing I did."

"Unlike you, I set myself up for this to happen... to start over."

"Excuses are dumb."

That would probably refer to both of us to anyone looking at the current situation.

"If you think I'm licking my chops, I'm going to remind you..."

I get up and grab Ibuki-san's arm to stop her from setting one of us up.

"What are you doing?"

"Now that we're on the same side, you're going to follow my instructions. Can you do that?"

"Huh? I can't do that."

"There's no point if you don't do it. You know full well how strong Amasawa-san is in front of you, I can't win by myself nor can you."

"Even if I can't, I'm not going to follow your orders."

I think about it. I wondered what the best way to treat Ibuki-san would be. What would Ayanokōji-kun do if he were here and in the same situation

as me? How can two people who don't really get along work together, even if it's just for this occasion?

"Ibuki-san."

"I told you I don't want to."

"I'm well aware that you and I are water and oil, and even though we got into a bit of a tussle during the island exam a year ago that led to our current relationship, there's one thing I do approve of about you."

Yes, I'll do what I need to do now, without hesitation.

"Your fighting sense is second to none to mine. No, I'd say it slightly surpasses mine."

"Ha, what a rush. Are you trying to lift me up with that?"

"But your fighting style is specialized for one-on-one combat, and I know better than you how to move against a strong opponent in a two-on-one fight. Cooperation may have been the wrong word for you. Lend me that strength of yours."

Ibuki turned her attention to me for a moment as I said this.

"You are stronger in terms of physical strength. But that's all. Other than that, you're on a whole different level. You can't study, you can't organize a class, you can't join hands with anyone. I'm sorry, but calling yourself my rival is a bit conceited."

If I offended her, that was it. But I'm not going to stop mid-sentence.

"I think it's time for you to come out of your shell. Ibuki Mio-san."

"What's...?"

"If you continue to push forward in solitude as you are now, you will surely face the danger of being expelled from school somewhere down the line."

"No, I don't care if that's what happens."

"That would mean a complete and utter defeat for you, but that's okay, right?"

"Huh?"

"Dropping out at the halfway point isn't even close to being a rival. You'll have to hang on until the very end, and grow into a rival who I'll be able to fear."

"Oh, I get it, I get it, shut up. I'll obey you for this moment. That's it, right?"

"Very well."

"So, what do I do?"

“Just like before, attack Amasawa at the same time. But don’t worry about hitting her. I want you to stand around so that you will never be caught. And I want you to keep attacking endlessly.”

“Hitting is secondary? What’s the point in doing that?”

“If my readings are right..., I’m sure there’s a winning strategy here. When I give the signal, attack with everything you’ve got.”

Ibuki-san moved away from me, though she didn’t seem convinced.

“Conference meeting is over? Well then, let’s start round two, shall we~?”

We started running at the same time, splitting left and right as we headed towards Amasawa-san. In order to avoid being caught, it is strictly forbidden to get too close. I timed my fist thrusts from a distance where they might not connect. Of course, if Amasawa-san does not take any action, the attack will hit her. So, as for her, she needs to keep responding to every attack with some degree of nervousness.

Don’t rush, stay calm, and if you sense danger, quickly get away.

If I were alone, she wouldn’t be able to escape, but now that she’s dispersing her consciousness in two directions, it’s a fighting style that works.

There is no time to lose.

Quickly, quickly, before I tire out...!

By continuing to attack dangerously, the sharpness of Amasawa-san movements begins to slow down. Although her expression was smiling, she was clearly starting to lose her breath.

“Now!!!” I swing my right fist with all my might at Amasawa-san so as not to miss this once in a thousand chance.

If it had been just a moment ago, I would have been able to stop her with one hand with room to spare, but she took a defensive posture. My fist didn’t hit her directly and was blocked, but Ibuki, who was behind me, kicked the ground and shot a clenched fist into Amasawa-san’s face as she turned and tried to respond.

The first time the attack hit, Amasawa-san’s body shook.

“Haaaaah!”

As Amasawa-san drops her hips deeply, Ibuki unleashes a powerful thrust at her abdomen. Exhaling, Amasawa-san collapses. I straddle her at that moment, blocking her body from getting up.

“My... my. It seems that one worked quite well senpai.”

“It seems so... This is it, Amasawa-san... I admire your strength, but you have a fatal lack of stamina.”

I was able to exploit her too unexpected weakness and managed to turn the tables on her.

“Fufu, did I give it away? I’m so frail.”

Despite being defeated, she was in no hurry to laugh, sticking out her tongue a little. I couldn’t believe my eyes when I saw her skin peeking out from under her gym clothes. Without thinking, I grabbed her gym clothes and forcefully pulled them up to her navel.

“Ah, senpai. I didn’t know you felt like that~”

A strong bruise-like mark. In fact, the marks of several blows can be outlined. A wound that looks like a punishment, quite different from the regular fist punch I had given her only one blow.

It was a wound that she had received before the fight began.

“I’ve just had a little fight before the seniors, you know.”

Normally, her face would be contorted in pain, and she would have trouble walking. And yet, she was in such a ragged state, but she had the upper hand against the two of us.

It wasn’t that she didn’t have stamina. She had been fighting on the verge of severe collapse from the start. She was fighting in a situation where she needed to recover even more than I did... The truth of the matter almost makes me dizzy.

A person who can inflict such injuries against Amasawa-san, who is in perfect condition. Even if we were to include boys, the only person that came to mind was Hōsen-kun.

“Do you want to know who did this to me? It might have been Hōsen-kun.”

There was no doubt that Hōsen-kun’s ability was extraordinary. He could probably get the upper hand against Amasawa-san, who had unrealistic strength. But there are things about her character that can be seen even after just a little relative contact. I don’t think she will answer honestly. It’s just that she presented me with one answer that made sense to me. If that’s the case, does that mean there is someone else who can overpower Amasawa-san? Even if I apply myself to all the students in the school, I can’t think of anyone that comes to mind.

Maybe Yamada-kun, no, but there's no advantage for him to do that.

"I'm sorry, but I don't believe you. Who is it really?"

"I'm afraid I can't answer that senpai~"

Seeing that I was careless because I was deep in thought, Amasawa-san seized the moment and jumped out of my grasp.

"Hey, what are you doing! You let her get away"

"You're right, I was careless."

She let Amasawa-san escape from what could have been a one-time opportunity.

"Well, now we're back to square one, both of you."

The other side was in a full-body wound. But the situation was reversed again. I'm not sure if I'll be able to hold her off again... to be honest.

But I have to try.

At least, I thought as much until she went to her backpack and pulled out her tablet.

"Looks like I'm done. It's getting a little interesting, but I think my time is up."

"What do you mean?"

"It means we're done here. If you want to go through, be my guest~"

She said, opening the path that had led her to show strong resistance and refused to let me pass through earlier.

Is this some kind of trap? While we were unable to grasp the situation, Amasawa-san started walking somewhere.

"Where are you going?"

"Where? Hmm... I guess the designated area for now. I'll have to do the special exam, just in case."

Well... if she's called it off, then I best go check on Ayanokōji-kun's condition.

"Ah, that's right. I don't think you need to chase after Ayanokōji-senpai anymore."

"Why?"

"Well, it's highly likely everything is already over. If you think it's a lie, why don't you go?"

"What about Ayanokōji-kun?"

At that question, Amasawa-san slightly lowered her eyes.

"Why don't you see for yourself? There's always the chance you might

just end up regretting that you didn't make it in time."

Amasawa-san seemed to really be planning on turning back and slipped past us.

"What are you going to do? Are you going to go after Ayanokōji? That's why you're fighting Amasawa, isn't it?"

"Yes, I'm going after him."

He's already in front of me, I can't turn back without checking now.

"Then I'll go with you."

"Why?"

"If Ayanokōji says he's in trouble, I thought I'd stand by and laugh at him."

"You're a bottom-feeder, aren't you?"

We hurriedly reloaded our backpacks on each other and ran off to I2.

Part Four

I made it across the border to I2, but my watch didn't signal my arrival. Normally, I would have suspected a GPS error, but that was unlikely this time. So, I would have to move as close to the center of the area as possible to make up for the error in the watch. Of course, I hadn't experienced anything like this in the past two weeks, and I guess it was one of the inevitable factors, including the fact that the tip of the I2 island was near the center. Even if Ichinose hadn't come to me and I stepped in without knowing anything about it, it was designed to be reached.

I walked slowly along the path that I was not allowed to escape. In less than ten minutes, the deep forest began to release the light, and I could see the blue ocean and blue sky stretching out beyond my vision. Even though I had come this far, my watch did not show any response. Instead, I saw two adults sitting on the small beach in front of me, looking at me.

One of them was a man I knew well: Tsukishiro, the acting director. He was dressed in a jersey, which made him look somewhat out of place.

The other was Shiba-sensei, the homeroom teacher of the first year Class D.

It's a strange combination, but that's what it seems to be.

"You've decided to take a very forceful approach, Acting Director Tsukishiro."

I call out to him as I walk along the beach.

"I just can't seem to get things right. This is the best choice I can make."

I looked back at the 14 days of this special exam. It became clear that Tsukishiro's final "trap" was to lure me to I2. But there's still something I can't figure out. There are no designated areas or tasks around this northeast area, so it's unlikely that other students will come here. But at the same time, there must have been a future where I would abandon the designated area and go for the task. Or a future where he was working with someone else, such as Nanase.

There's no way that Tsukishiro would have set up this final event just by sheer luck. It means my arrival here was already predetermined.

After Nanase lost to me in our fight, she wanted to go off on her own so she could hide out around 11th place and plan to get to the top. Then there was also the first-years. The timing of the attack of the first-year students and the nature of their attack, all of which could have been planned by Tsukishiro's side from the beginning.

"So, what's going to happen to me after this?"

The small ship in the corner of my vision was at anchor, rocked by the waves with its engine running. This means that it is ready to go at any time.

"If possible, I would like you to follow the instructions honestly and come aboard with us."

"If it's in the form of a voluntary declaration of retirement, it will be a roundabout solution." Shiba-sensei added.

"Do you think I'll choose the option of going straight to the ship?"

"Certainly. There's no need for you to walk across the uninhabited island once again."

"By the way, I didn't have any particular connection with Shiba-sensei at school, but he was on the side of Acting Director Tsukishiro, wasn't he?"

From the fact that he didn't have any contact with me, maybe he was Amasawa's supervisor. Now that the need to do so has disappeared, he doesn't seem to be trying to hide it anymore. I was in the northeast, where there was nothing to see, which was probably a little suspicious, but I also saw Ichinose and Nagumo. I'm not sure what to make of it.

No matter which way you look at it, it's safe to assume that the people monitoring the situation are on Tsukishiro's side. But they don't seem to be carrying anything visibly dangerous.

"It would be easy to subdue you here if we used weapons and such, but unfortunately, you are a commodity. It's my duty to get you back safely, so I've decided that what I need is my fists."

Standing on the sandy beach, Tsukishiro smiled fearlessly and spread his hands lightly. In this situation, to resist at the last minute, it is necessary to fight with Tsukishiro? I'm not sure if I should continue to avoid attacks. However, Tsukishiro is most likely several levels higher than Nanase, so it's unlikely to work.

"So, I guess I have no choice but to take it in order to avoid expulsion."

"That's what it looks like."

“If possible, can you give me a break with this? I’m not saying that violence is a bad solution, but I’m a student at this school, and based on the normal rules, this is a foul.”

“That may be true. However, Ayanokoji-kun, you are an example of success and you have achieved extraordinary things even inside the White Room. Even if you were to fight within the limited rules, you would have no enemies. Don’t you think it’s silly to compete with others in this school? Or have you come to find pleasure in being the lord of the mountain?”

“If so, is it an evolution... or a degeneration that would disappoint that man?”

“No, no, no, not really. The White Room’s long-held desire is to take control of Japan, and by extension, the world. If you, the pinnacle of the White Room, feel that way, then eventually your desire will be shared and motivate other students to take over the world and enjoy the pleasure.”

From a small Japanese high school, the goal quickly spread to the seizure of the world. Even if someone were to hear such a dream-like story, they would probably just laugh through their nose.

The man in front of me, Tsukishiro, is probably skeptical about how realistic it is. He’s just trying to do his duty in an unobtrusive manner, faithful to his orders.

“Well, if I’m being honest, I didn’t think this school would be much of a challenge.”

“Of course. Because for you, the level of this school is a path that you passed through in your childhood.

“I’m only talking about the curriculum. I’m finally starting to see the direction of what I should and want to do in this school. I think I’ll be able to enjoy myself until I graduate, and there are plenty of talented people outside the White Room.”

Rather, it’s a treasure trove of talent that the White Room could never produce.

“I don’t mean to denigrate the students of the Advanced Nurturing High School in any way, but as you said, there are always talented people all over the world. Sometimes they outperform you in sports, sometimes in academics. But it’s not that part that’s important, it’s the people who can excel in all situations and lead others.”

Acting Director Tsukishiro glanced lightly at Shiba.

“Where are Nagumo-kun and Ichinose-san?”

“Nagumo has stopped moving, and Ichinose has already moved away, so I don’t think there’s anything to worry about.”

Me stopping Nagumo and Ichinose must have been part of his calculations, of course.

“And as for the unscheduled reaction, it seems that Amasawa is blocking their movements.”

Unscheduled reaction? There were no designated areas or issues in this vicinity. Was someone other than Ichinose and Nagumo approaching me? If an unrelated student appeared here, it would be a nuisance for Tsukishiro. It seemed that Amasawa was the one who was stalling that irregular presence.

“So, she’s done her due diligence, is that it?”

“It didn’t seem like Amasawa was in step with Acting Director Tsukishiro, though.”

“She is, simply put, a traitor. She was the one who was chosen to bring you back, but it seems that she had no intention of bringing you back from the start.”

Tsukishiro took a step forward, as if to say that the idle talk was over. It’s not a good idea to waste time by talking it seems. He closes the distance between us little by little. But we were still at least five or six meters apart from each other. Shiba-sensei slowly walks up behind me to make sure I don’t escape.

“You wouldn’t call two against one unfair, would you? You are, if anything, the White Room’s finest. Even with this, I’m even a little worried here.”

That being said, Tsukishiro had an overwhelming amount of leeway.

I can feel in my gut that he was convinced that he could hold his own even one on one, and that’s why he chose to fight with the two of them. No pride whatsoever, just a rock-solid stance. I move my gaze to the ship waiting on the shore. As far as I could see, there was only one person on board, the pilot. This means that even if they rush in, I only need to eliminate a maximum of three enemies.

“Don’t worry. It’s just me and him that will be fighting you.”

He wasn’t a simple enough opponent for me to simply take his word for it. The way he said it earlier, he was empty-handed, but the possibility that he was carrying a concealed weapon could not be dismissed.

I am fighting against two adults with unknown abilities, both of whom are agents of the White Room, so I have to be on the lookout for weapons,

reinforcements, and other uncertain factors.

Normally, my brain would be fried from multitasking, but I am not mentally disturbed. Fighting in absurd and disadvantageous situations has been drilled into me repeatedly since I was a child. It is the same as the unconscious process of breathing that is essential for human survival.

“You don’t have the slightest idea that you’re going to lose, you have a face like that.”

“Do I look like I have that look on my face?”

There’s no visible opportunity for me to leave anywhere. The only way to open the future is for me to grab it here. With my front and back taken, my opponent is still advancing upon me. Normally, I would want to make the first move, but it’s not a good idea to do it from here. The people in front and behind me were not students, but people from the school. If I were to raise my hand alone, I would be at a disadvantage in situations other than fighting.

“Even though you know it will be advantageous, you still can’t initiate it yourself? That’s just like you.”

Tsukishiro, who would have detailed knowledge of the education policy regarding the White Room, analyzes.

“Then.... let’s start from here without hesitation, shall we, Acting Director Tsukishiro and Shiba-sensei?”

As soon as I call out their names, the two adults start walking towards me at the same time. They calmly closed the distance on me as if they were advancing Shōgi pieces.

The distance between me and Tsukishiro, who was walking in front of me, was 7 steps, 6 steps, 5 steps, 4 steps....

Shiba’s two hands came to grab my face from behind, and I ducked a little to avoid them. The first move was from behind. In the middle of my evading action, Tsukishiro stretches out his arms in front of me and attempts to grab me as well as Shiba. I avoided him as if I were rolling along the beach, and then I got up and ran at the same time to escape the chase.

TL Note: Shōgi is a Japanese version of chess.

Dust danced in the sea breeze. The two adults didn't rush after me, but looked at me quietly. Now I understand what their strategy is. They're trying to figure out my skills from my practical movements, which they can't get from data. My feet sink into the sand. I wonder if I should have taken off my shoes earlier. Under the hot sun, the two of them start to walk again, closing the distance that had opened up. With my face and body facing them, I step back the same distance. With my back to the ocean, I try to get away from the soft sand and secure a foothold while at the same time avoiding being spun around.

"It's a good theory, but I'm not sure it's the right one, Ayanokōji-kun."

They will no longer be able to get behind me, but that will narrow my escape route. If I go lower, the waves will hit my legs, and that's where Tsukishiro and Shiba will come in. The outstretched arm keeps trying to grab my body. However, it seems that they do not intend to damage me with blows yet.

"You're very good at running away."

Both of them moved faster, and the space for me to avoid them was quickly taken away. After dropping so low that one of my feet stepped on the seawater, I couldn't take it anymore and ran away from the scene.

"Oh? Have you already given up on having the ocean protect your back?"

If the opponent is in a hurry, it's easy to invite a mistake. While I was thinking about this, Shiba and Tsukishiro kicked the sand and came towards me. Now it's two against one, and if either of them catches me, it's game over. All four arms extended one after the other, and the situation would continue to end if I showed the slightest opening. I tried to run and get some distance, but the two of them didn't move away and started to chase me.

Running around like this would only continue to drain my energy.

It was obvious that they were trying to take away my stamina with the blazing sun and bad foothold. I canceled my escape move midway, and using the spring in my body to the fullest, I stepped forward with my left foot, stomped on the sand, and flipped over to attack Shiba, who was directly behind me.

"Mmm!"

Shiba's movement stiffened slightly due to my movement, which showed an unexpected trajectory. I fainted with the left fist aiming for the chest on the right, but sensing the danger, Shiba didn't panic and kept his distance. This is evidence that he is prioritizing evading rather than grabbing.

"Oh no... that's a brilliant move against the two of us, Ayanokōji-kun."

I tried to counterattack while avoiding the attacks from both sides, but I couldn't get a clean hit.

"However, human strength is finite. Isn't it about time for you to start resting?"

"You're a difficult opponent to fight, Acting Chancellor Tsukishiro."

"It's my job to take the initiative in doing things that people don't like."

There's nothing clean or dirty about it, it's just a fighting style aimed at catching me and bringing me back. But I wasn't just throwing up my stamina for nothing either. What I've gained so far. It seems that there is a slight difference in combat ability between Tsukishiro and Shiba. If I had to rank them... 4 for Tsukishiro and 6 for Shiba. My hunch is that Tsukishiro is a cut below Shiba...

The balance of caution should be changed slightly from 5:5. I thought that the inferior Shiba had taken over the back, but it was the other way around. It's a way to outflank me. This makes me want to go for the inferior Tsukishiro, but even so, his ability is off by an order of magnitude. It's not something that can be easily finished off. In fact, if Tsukishiro realizes that I've done the analysis, he may become more conscious of his defense. I'm not going to let him know that I've noticed the difference in our abilities and finish him off with a single blow. In simple terms, the idea is to take one shot at each other with the intention of switching sides. The other side hasn't thought of hitting me yet, so now is my chance. If I'm lucky, I'll be able to damage him unilaterally.

Then, after neutralizing Shiba, I'll quickly deal with Tsukishiro on a one-on-one basis. A second or so of thinking time. Both of them attacked me with the same speed. But the fist that seemed to be grabbing me was clenched tightly and transformed into a blow.

I've been read... If that's the case, then it's time to attack in a way that outperforms...

I tried to turn my consciousness to trade damage with Shiba behind me, but something unexpected happened. I felt a cold mark on my neck and was forced to interrupt the counterattack. For the umpteenth time, I took evasive action to get away from Tsukishiro. The sound of Shiba's fist, swung slightly later, reaches my ears dryly. If I hadn't agreed to the damage exchange, I might have been stopped in my tracks. Shiba's strike definitely had the same power as mine if not more...

I looked at Tsukishiro's movements, which should be inferior to Shiba's, but they were both faster than I had expected.

"You're still a tricky person, Acting Director Tsukishiro." I evaded him just in time, and for the first time in years, I broke out in a cold sweat in a fight. If I hadn't trusted my instincts, what would have happened? Not only would I have been hit by Shiba's blow, but I might have been left unprotected by Tsukishiro's attack. The reading of Tsukishiro 4, Shiba 6 was itself a false information created by the other side. They intentionally saved their abilities and attacked beyond their vigilance.

"I was going to finish you off now, but your reaction time is not that of a normal person."

It's a good thing that I didn't discard the possibility that I might have been wrong. This was the only thing that helped me raise my guard at the last minute. They are both cautious and don't take risks as much as possible, but they will not hesitate to take a risk if they think it will benefit them.

The odds are slightly in their favor.

Even if I took down one of them, the other would be waiting for a counter-strike. It's hard to believe they got together overnight.

"Is your analysis going well? Ayanokōji-kun."

It had only been a little over two minutes since the fight began. They've already tried various patterns, but none of them have been decisive.

"It would have been easy to do if it was purely a brawl like a child's, a fight where only strength and power are clashed. But we adults don't hesitate to take the best measures to avoid losing. Even if it's muddy and not the flashiest thing to do."

Tsukishiro has read 99% of my thoughts as well. The way he fights is precise without hesitation, yet he doesn't let you read his thoughts. I'm not sure what to say, but I'm not going to show him the truth. Anyway, in the

current situation, I lack a decisive factor. If I'm going to continue to lose ground, I'm going to have to take a reasonable amount of risk.

"Acting Director Tsukishiro." The one who broke the stalemate was Shiba, who had so far responded with few words.

Immediately after his name was called, Tsukishiro seemed to have noticed the change. It was something that no one here had expected.

"I wonder what the acting director and homeroom teacher are doing with a student in such a deserted place. Would you be willing to tell me?"

It was an uninvited visitor.

"I believe you are..."

"She's Fūka Kiryūin from class 3B."

Why is she here? I'm sure I'm the only one who has this I2 as a designated area.

"It doesn't look like you're a lost kitten. What can I do for you, child?"

Once he broke his battle stance, Tsukishiro asked in his usual tone.

"Actually, I've been observing the situation behind the big tree for a little while now, but I just couldn't watch the two-on-one situation. That's how I ended up popping out."

Of course, there was no way that Tsukishiro and Shiba hadn't seen the GPS reaction.

"Could this be the reason? It looks like an accident caused the watch to malfunction. Oops." Kiryūin laughed as she dangled her watch that was shattered on the surface.

"Since there are people from the school in front of me, let me ask you this: there is nothing wrong with it, is there? Even if the watch is broken, it will only turn off the scoring function. I'm free to go wherever I want."

"Of course, there is no problem. But still, this is a test where there is no end to the number of watch malfunctions."

Tsukishiro didn't seem to panic at the irregularity of this situation. Normally, the situation should be to withdraw now that another student saw this incident. However, understanding that this is his last chance, Tsukishiro is still not going to back down.

It's probably just a matter of Kiryūin being written into the list of people to be eliminated.

"Ayanokōji, was my action unnecessary?"

There was no point in trying to mend things if she had seen the warped and snarled battle between teacher and student. Instead, she should make the

most of this accident that happened.

“That depends on what happens after this. Can I assume that you’ll be willing to lend me hand?”

Tsukishiro’s strength is quite impressive. With his fighting style based on experience and skill, I can say that he is one of the strongest opponents I have ever fought.

“Of course. I don’t know what’s going on, but as a senior, it’s natural for me to protect my junior, isn’t it?” Kiryūin laughs as she stands next to me saying that.

“But why did you come here?”

“Yesterday, you were running away from the first years. I was curious and wanted to talk to you, but I thought it would be better if I followed you around for a while.”

So, she went through the trouble of breaking her watch and approaching me so that I wouldn’t notice her.

“I’m glad my curiosity got the better of me, because I was invited to a very interesting turn of events.”

Well, it’s just that it’s not a development that would normally be possible.

“Shiba-sensei, I’ll leave it to you to deal with her.”

“From what I can see, it seems that the Acting Director and Shiba-sensei are at a ridiculous level of competence. I don’t know how much help I can be, but I probably won’t be able to last that long.”

With that, Kiryūin stood right beside me and held up his fist happily.

“If you can draw him away for a second or two, I’ll be welcome.”

“No need to worry Ayanokōji. I’ll hold out for a minute or two at least. But Ayanokōji, can you please try and match the occasion?”

“Match the occasion?”

“That sloppy expression on your face. Hold up your fists and try to create an air of urgency.”

I hadn’t expected to be told such a thing here. But under the strange pressure of Kiryūin, I had no choice but to strike a pose that looked like it. It’s like something you’d see in a fight scene in a drama.

“How about it...?”

“Huh, kind of clumsy. Oh well, let’s just say you met the minimum standard.” With a grin, Kiryūin also struck a fighting pose once again.

“Have you ever punched anyone before?”

“I’m a lady, you know. How could I have?”

“Are you serious?”

“Don’t worry. I’ve always wanted to hit someone.”

We both move away from each other, moving into a clear one-on-one.

“Let’s settle this, Acting Director Tsukishiro.”

“If it’s just me, I can win... you’ve decided that, haven’t you?”

Tsukishiro readies himself with his usual smile that shows no margin or urgency.

“Then let’s see what you’re really capable of in a one-on-one match.”

I greet the opponent standing in front of me as an equal foe. If I don’t, I’ll be the one who gets caught flat-footed. But it will still be decided in less than a minute. I’m going to get him before Kiryūin is held back by Shiba.

Tsukishiro came charging towards me. I dodged Tsukishiro’s attack without warning and hit Tsukishiro’s cheek with my left fist.

“Ah!”

I jabbed lightly and with speed, hitting hard. The power of each shot is slight because I concentrated only on hitting. As I repeatedly hit him, Tsukishiro’s smile faded.

My target was the bridge of his nose. Even light damage can trigger a certain effect in the human body.

That is “tears”.



Every human being induces tears when they are knocked on the nose. The tears overflow before the pain and take away visibility, which is crucial. It doesn't matter if you are an adult or a child, young or old. It's just how the human body works.

I let Tsukishiro's eyes water up, and then I swing my fist out in an uppercut towards his chin. Looking up at the sky, Tsukishiro must have bitten the inside of his mouth, and blood gushed out, though only slightly.

"When was the last time you felt something like that?"

Wiping the blood dripping from his lips, Tsukishiro smiles wryly.

"I'll admit it, considering that you're a high school sophomore kid in front of me. You are an undeniable masterpiece."

Of all the opponents I had fought with, Tsukishiro was without a doubt one of the best. It was enough of an acknowledgement that Tsukishiro had judged that he had a chance with me in a one-on-one fight.

"I'm not a fan of rough stuff to begin with, but I'm having fun."

Laughing amusedly, Tsukishiro set up again, but he didn't come at me right away. It could be seen as a way of buying time until Shiba defeats Kiryūin. I calmly try to follow the path of victory, which is to not rush in prematurely.

Tsukishiro looks at the sand at his feet for just a moment. I didn't care, I stepped forward and put all my strength into my right fist.

"You're absolutely brilliant...!"

I twisted myself and launched a body blow into Tsukishiro. It almost hit with full force. But even so, Tsukishiro's smile did not disappear. He grabbed a handful of sand from the ground with his left hand and threw it up at me.

Then, with his free hand, he plunges deeper into the hole in the sand and pulls something up. Even if his right fist, raised like an uppercut, hit me directly, it wouldn't do much damage if I was in a slumped position. I didn't receive counter from his fist, instead I pulled Tsukishiro's arm away and I immediately grabbed his other arm so he wouldn't move.

"Ah...!"

For the first time, Tsukishiro's smile disappears for a moment. My gaze ends at Tsukishiro's right hand, which is clenching a stun gun.

"How, how did you know?"

“I didn’t know until just before. But in a situation where you couldn’t show even a moment’s gap, you dropped your gaze once as if you were checking your feet for some reason. I felt uncomfortable with that. If your goal is to take away my vision with sand, you don’t need to bother checking your feet.”

Even as his left hand grabbed a handful of sand and launched it to me, my awareness was still high.

“And I also felt that it was unnatural that you were ready to deliberately take my blow.”

As long as our strengths were matched, to gain an advantage one of us would have to change the flow of the fight.

“I didn’t want to take such a risk if I could help it... It was meant to be an insurance policy, but your ability to hold me off for this long was enough to make me impatient.” He relaxed his right hand, and the stun gun fell from his head onto the beach, impaling him.

“Well, what do we do now? I’ve taken some deep damage...”

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Shiba restraining Kiryūin from behind and tightening her up.

At this point, Acting Director Tsukishiro raises his hand and sends a signal somewhere. Then the pilot of a small ship at anchor began to hold something in his hand and attempts to land. It was obvious that this was a last trump card in case they were defeated. But it was the same for us as well.

“I’m sorry, but your time is up, Acting Director Tsukishiro.”

Suddenly, the small ship stopped its landing preparations and blew its engines, leaving the Acting Director and the others behind as it rapidly departed. The reason for this was probably because they saw another small ship coming from the sea.

“I’m surprised. How did you call the ship? I’ve been laying the groundwork, of course. To stop you in case you resorted to getting help from the school’s side. Besides, I knew you’d avoid letting the school know about it, too.”

“It’s simple. If you look closely at the small ship, you can see it, can’t you?”

If you look closely at the end of the small boat, you can see Mashima-sensei and Chabashira-sensei. That gives Tsukishiro a hint.

“What if someone reports that a student from second-year Class A and second-year Class D has collapsed on I2 and is in danger? It’s not something that can be covered up very easily. We’ve already confirmed in an incident a while ago that homeroom teachers are included in the selection of people to rush to the rescue. I knew that Mashima-sensei and Chabashira-sensei would rush to the scene.”

This was simply a rule that the school had decided that the best homeroom teachers were those who could be identified at a glance. When I heard that it was second year classes A and D, I had no choice but to bring my homeroom teacher along even if I didn’t want to. If it was an emergency, there was no time to check the GPS one by one. If the information includes that the watch seems to be broken, they will definitely go to check the last known location even if there is no GPS response there.

“If you had had all the students’ GPS checked, would the rescue have come and changed the situation?”

“No. Right now, one student from Class A and one student from Class D in second-year are missing from the map, and the GPS response is missing from their watches. I think it was more of an increase in credibility.”

“You had planned from the beginning to buy time and bring this development about. That’s why you focused on escaping at first, knowing the disadvantage.”

“You made the mistake of threatening Ichinose halfway through. If you’re going to do this, you need to handle it thoroughly.”

As a result, Tsukishiro had given me a chance to ask for help from Sakayanagi before I came here.

“Well, I’m still Acting Director for the time being you know? I can’t do anything rash like that.” True or false, Tsukishiro laughed when he said that.

As if following the resigned Tsukishiro, Shiba immediately took his hand away from Kiryūin.

“Fuu... Thanks for the help, Ayanokōji. You fought as if you were fearless, interestingly enough.” Then she got down on one knee to rest her body.

I watched the fight between her and Shiba, albeit from the side, and she held her ground well, even when defending herself. It’s great that she recognized that he was clearly superior and tried to just hold him back.

If Shiba had joined in the battle against the well-prepared Tsukishiro, I don't know how things would have turned out for me. Eventually, the ship landed, and the teachers came down.

The walkie-talkie I borrowed from Sakayanagi came in handy until the very end.

"Can you accept that I won?"

"I suppose it seems that way."

Currently, Tsukishiro shouldn't have enough cards to turn the game over here. Even the fact that he changed the designated area only for me, if some pursued it, multiple things might start to unravel.

"Your score is quite a fine line, but I think it's just barely okay. As for me, now that it's out in the open, I can't avoid protesting if you're in the bottom five groups."

"Don't worry. I'm sure I can cross the safety line in my own way."

"That was an unnecessary concern. Then, I'll leave it at that for the time being."

"For the time being, huh? I don't want you to do any more of your brute force tactics. I think it's against the philosophy of this school. If the rules allow us to test our strength through strategic attacks, then we should welcome it in such a way."

Without erasing his smile, Tsukishiro looks at Mashima-sensei and Chabashira-sensei who are disembarking.

"Let me ask you one last thing, Acting Director Tsukishiro. Were you seriously trying to get me expelled? I'm sure there were strong restrictions, but if I were in your position, I would have prepared a more reliable method and carried it out."

I don't think the man in front of me is foolish enough to not think of that.

"You're buying too much into this. I followed my superiors' instructions and tried my best to get you expelled. But as it turns out, that didn't happen, and I had to fall before you like this."

One thing I've learned is that this Tsukishiro guy has yet to show his true colors. I don't know if there was any lie or deceit in what he just said, but I should assume that he had other intentions.

"Can I ask you to convey something to Amasawa-san for me?"

"Let's hear it."

“Ichika Amasawa, now that you have disregarded direct orders from your superiors, you are branded as disqualified from the White Room. There will be no place for you to return to. Whether you stay or leave this school, you are to do as you please.”

Truth? Falsehood? I can't see it in his expression. Even though he admitted defeat, it didn't feel as if the ground was wavering at all. If Amasawa really did abandon the White Room, I don't think that's the end of the story.

What I think, is that more troubles lie ahead for me.

“Please, let me see you fight to the end.” Slowly standing up, Shiro Tsukishiro raised his hands as if he had given up and approached Mashima-sensei and the others.

“Nothing much happened here. Me and Ayanokōji-kun were merely chatting.”

“Do you think that will be enough to cover for what you've done?”

“Whatever assumption you may have, it's been decided. There's nothing you teachers can do about it. In fact, you should be grateful that I don't resist.”

I looked at Mashima-sensei and responded with a nod of approval.

“Then let's leave, shall we? The students haven't finished their special exams yet.”

After confirming that the adults were heading back to the ship, I looked at Kiryūin. She was sitting on the beach, on one knee, looking at the ocean, probably exhausted from dealing with Shiba.

“That was brilliant, Ayanokōji.”

“No, Kiryūin-senpai was also very impressive against Shiba-sensei.”

“I can't even take that as flattery after seeing you fight. Oh, don't worry, I'm not going to tell anyone about you. But I'd like to hear what you have to say.”

It was unexpected that I had been seen, but thankfully it was Kiryūin.

“I have a bit of a complicated family situation. That's all.”

“Complicated family situation, huh? That doesn't sound like an easy thing to go into.” Standing up and lightly brushing the sand from her butt, Kiryūin starts walking towards the forest.

When I left I2 with Kiryūin and came back to I3, Nagumo was no longer there.

As I walked down the island, I ran into some unexpected students. As soon as they saw me, they looked at each other and were surprised.

“That’s an unusual combination, Horikita. Walking around with Ibuki. What’s next, is it going to snow today?”

“Are you... okay?”

“What do you mean okay?”

“Well you see... I was just wondering if you were having a little trouble with someone.”

This time, Kiryūin and I looked at each other and denied it almost simultaneously.

“No? There’s no one behind us.”

“Then what have you been doing here?”

“It’s been a very tiring two weeks. I was resting on a secluded beach, watching the ocean.”

“You’ve got a lot of time on your hands. Since it’s you, I’m sure you’ve scored at least some points.”

Horikita looks over at Kiryūin questioningly.

“I found a student who was skipping and I brought him back. I told him to be serious until the end.” Saying that, Kiryūin lightly pats me on the back and walks off.

“Then I’ll meet you on the ship after the exam,” Horikita stands next to me and confirms again in a whisper. “Are you sure you were okay...?”

“What?”

“I just... kind of heard something otherwise. And the little paper.”

“Paper?”

“No, it’s nothing, don’t worry about it. I don’t know what it is yet, so I’m going to do some research on my own and then I’ll tell you.”

I’m curious because I don’t know what she’s talking about, but I don’t want to prolong the conversation about I2. I can’t tell her about what happened with Tsukishiro.

“Well... why are you and Ibuki here? There aren’t any assignments in the vicinity, are there?”

Ibuki was about to say something, but Horikita stopped her.

“Ibuki had challenged me to a match, and we were checking each other’s scores because of that. Your GPS was in a strange place, so I just thought I’d check on you.”

“I’m going to call it a draw.”

“How can that be, I’m the clear winner, aren’t I?”

“You were too reckless, and you could have been expelled. I win”

“Whatever the risks were, if I’m ahead by even one point, I win.”

I’m not sure, but through this exam Horikita and Ibuki became friends. And not long after, the uninhabited island exam draws to a close.

Chapter 8: The Results

The long, long two-week deserted island test was over. On the last day, some of the students in the groups who tried to force themselves were injured, but eventually the exam was closed. At the starting point of the test, teachers welcomed the students as if to say thank you for their hard work.

A little after six in the evening, when the sky was beginning to turn red, we received a call that all the participating students had returned and were ready to be brought back on board. As we had been informed beforehand that the results would be announced on the ship, but perhaps because of the possibility of many students dropping out, it was decided that the lower groups would be notified in advance. The reality was that we would find out not long after we returned to the ship, probably before we went to bed. It doesn't seem like it will turn out to be a public execution in front of the whole school.

The bottom five groups will be called in beforehand, and the first thing they will be asked to do is to see if can take remedial action. Students who can be prevented from being expelled will be saved by paying the price here.

Students who do not have enough private points, or who have them but do not use them for some reason, will be expelled at this point and will have to pack their bags and board the small boat.

After taking my first shower in a few days, I decided to take a walk around the ship. Normally, I would have used my cell phone to communicate with my friends and loved ones, but since the school was still holding onto my phone, I wasn't allowed to do that.

I passed a few Class D students and exchanged a few words of appreciation with them, but I made my way to the deck. There, I saw an interesting combination of two people.

They were facing each other, talking. I didn't do anything to hide, so one of them noticed me right away.

His face was covered with scars, indicating that he had had a fierce battle with Hōsen during the exam.

"I'm sorry to interrupt, but don't forget your promise to me, okay? That and the money."

Bringing up the word “promise,” Ryūen only gave me a passing glance before heading back inside the ship.

“Of course, Ryūen-kun. Whenever the time comes, you can come and tell me.” Sakayanagi smiled happily at Ryūen’s back.

“Promise?”

“Yes, since the strength of the first-years was unknown. I prepared Ryūen-kun as a skilled mercenary soldier, but he’s not the kind of person who would cooperate for free. I told him that if he would listen to my request, I would grant him a wish.”

I see. So that’s why Ryūn appeared to fight Hōsen.

“By the way, do you know the result of the quarrel?”

“I can’t say I do. I know that both Ryūen-kun and Hōsen-kun returned to the starting point covered in wounds and were sentenced to retire after receiving medical treatment.”

So the fight ended in a painful split, with both sides retiring, though the winner of the fight was unknown. But it must not have been easy to convince Ryūen who was only focused on winning the deserted island test.

“Yes. It’s a promise that I don’t even know when it will come true, and besides... that wish is like strangling his own neck in the near future.” She smiled at me, and her eyes were as innocent as a child’s.

I could tell the promise wasn’t something as nice as a sweet date.

“I’m glad you’re okay. Did you have any problems with the timing of the GPS disappearance you instructed me to do?”

“It was perfect timing. I’ll be sure to pay you back.”

“I have only one hope for the future. It’s to have a serious match with Ayanokōji-kun without anyone getting in the way.”

“That’s a rather difficult proposal.”

“I know. Right now, Ayanokōji-kun wants to lead a peaceful life as much as possible. I’m well aware that I can’t do anything that would inadvertently make you stand out. There’s no need to be hasty. We still have almost a year and a half of school life left.”

Sakayanagi said that if there was an opportunity to compete somewhere before graduation, that would be fine.

“It’s almost six o’clock, time to announce the results, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it is.”

Which groups had won and which had failed? I think I’ll go check that out.

Part One

At the 7 o'clock dinner time, the members of Class D naturally started to gather together and started eating at the same place. Yesterday and today, the list of subordinate groups was unavailable for viewing, so the only way to find out which group had performed poorly was to ask them directly.

"First of all... I think it's a great thing that none of us, the second year Class D students, were able to finish the special exam without missing any group. The fact that all Class D students are here means we all avoided expulsion. I'm really happy about that." Looking around at his classmates, Yosuke just said that with all his heart.

I was a little concerned because I hadn't seen Yosuke once on the deserted island, but he seemed to be more preoccupied with his friends than with his own fatigue. If they were all here, it meant that the group with Akito was also safe.

I decided to take a quick look at the rest of the second-year classes. There didn't seem to be any students missing. The students were eating their first hearty meal in two weeks, but they couldn't stop enjoying themselves.

As the teachers begin to gather, the 8:00 p.m. signal is given and the microphones are turned on.

"Please stop eating and talking for a moment."

Such an announcement is prompted by Sasaki, the homeroom teacher of third-year Class A.

"First of all, I would like to thank you for your hard work on the special deserted island exam. We, the teachers and staff, are amazed that you made it through the two weeks without missing any group, even though a total of thirteen students retired."

He began with a word of appreciation for the labor.

"As some classes may have already noticed that some students are missing, we have penalized and withdrawn the bottom five groups as we had explained to them beforehand. If there is more than one person in a group, one name will be read out as the representative: the five groups will be: third-year Class D, Mutou; third-year Class D, Kawakami, third-year Class C, Katsumata; third-year Class C, Shinonome; third-year Class B, Mikitani, for a total of fifteen students."

The first and second year students collectively breathed a sigh of relief at Sasaki-sensei's explanation.

I had confirmed that there were indeed those names in the lower ranks at the end of the 12th day, but it was so unexpected that the group of all the dropouts was from the third-year. I had thought that Nagumo would be the one to bail them out and pick them up. I had also expected that some freshmen and sophomores would also fall through the cracks. But as it turned out, five groups of three third-year students were gone.

“Of these, there are no students who could have used remedial measures, so a total of 15 students have been confirmed to leave the school without any change.”

Given this result, had it been unofficially decided that the five groups of third-year students would be expelled? I thought so and looked at the faces of the third-year students, but apparently not. There was no room for doubt on the faces of many of the students, and they looked upset, as if they couldn’t believe it. They looked as if they were terrified of the outcome, as if they were being turned into an example.

I looked for Nagumo, but the profile I saw for a moment did not look any different from usual. Perhaps, his last-minute altercation with me might have affected the outcome.

The giant screen was turned on and a white image was projected, then another person came out.

“Now we are going to announce the top three groups in the results of the special desert island exam.”

It was Acting Director Tsukishiro. He doesn’t give the slightest hint about the fight with me, and proceeds with the same calmness as when he announced the start.

“Third place, second-year, Class A, Sakayanagi Arisu Group, 261 points.”

It seems that they took full advantage of the only group of seven sophomores allowed to participate, and slowly built up a solid score to slip into third place. On the last day, Ichinose left the team halfway through the day, but I guess that didn’t have much of an impact. In terms of scoring, the Ryūen and Katsuragi group also fought hard, but the retirement of Ryūen on the 13th day must have had an impact. With Katsuragi alone, there was a loss of order of arrival rewards and fewer challenges to participate in. It must have been a tough two days for him as he had to play it safe to avoid the risk of retiring.

The doubling of the score on the last day must have been a headwind. The students who were sent to stop the first-year students were all from outside Sakayanagi's group. The tablets she used were from another group, so she didn't take any big risks. She responded to the danger by sending out Ryūen. Sakayanagi should have been able to foresee that it would have been dangerous for him to have a fight with Hōsen. Did Ryūen go because his junior school connection with Hōsen or was it because of the "promise?" If it was the latter, then it would be more attractive than the increased rewards from the third place and the ordeal card. However, I was surprised to see that the Kiriya group stalled at the end of the game.

And the second place.

It's no exaggeration to say that this is where it all comes down to.

At the end of the 12th, it was clear that Nagumo and Kōenji were the two leaders. Even if they lost some points, as far as the third-place score was concerned, no disturbance would occur. It would be Nagumo who would bring the three years together, or Kōenji who continued to show breakneck momentum on his own.

"Second place, third-year, Class A, Nagumo Miyabi group, 325 points."

When Acting Director Tsukishiro read that out, there was not a cheer but a scream. Without a pause, the announcement of the first place was made.

"First place, second-year, Class D, Kōenji Rokusuke, 327 points."

The moment his name was called, Kōenji was instantly the center of attention and gaze of all the students. The result was a mere two-goal difference, something that could have been overturned by a single trivial incident. Still, Kōenji was able to achieve first place under the most difficult of conditions. He received the 300 class points that would have been distributed for first place, one million private points for each individual, and one protection point.

"You've really done it, Kōenji-kun."

Kōenji turned his gaze once to Horikita and asked, "You understand, don't you?"

Horikita would have no choice but to answer with a nod of her head. As she had promised, Kōenji was now exempt from all charges until graduation.

From now on, he will be able to live his school life as he pleases.

"I'm not at all honestly pleased, or maybe I'm just dumbfounded..."

“You can be happy now, can’t you? Getting 300 class points alone is extremely significant for moving up to Class A. It’s the second time you’ve confirmed your escape from Class D.”

Besides, if it’s Kōenji who originally did whatever he wanted, there wasn’t much to control in the first place.

“Yeah, you’re right. This means the scores will be quite close, from Class B to Class D, trivial matters might just make classes switch.”

“As long as we don’t drop too low this month due to poor behavior in our daily lives we should be fine.”

Because class points are subtly deducted for daily conduct and problematic behavior.

“Don’t say silly things.”

But once again, I think about the huge significance of this two point difference. It reminds me of Nagumo, who took the trouble to visit me today. I remember the voice of his friend that I heard from the walkie-talkie at that time. If Nagumo had answered that voice at that time, the results of the first and second place would have been reversed. And I wonder if there would have been a difference in the group that was expelled.

It’s not something that can be answered by thinking about it here. For now, this long special exam has come to a successful end. Miraculously, none of the second-year students were absent, and we were able to get through the summer.

I also found out that Amasawa is a White Room student. I don’t know why, but at least now she’s siding with me instead of the Tsukishiro. Whether this is a coordinated strategy or Amasawa acting alone after betraying the White Room is not clear at this point, but the information I have gained is not insignificant.

Still, there are some mysteries left to be solved. Perhaps this summer vacation will not end smoothly.

Afterword

Since last year, I've been working all the time with no time to breathe. Thank you very much.

...

I don't have anything to write about in my postcards! My left thumb has been throbbing awfully hard lately. (Maybe it's not gout.) The new hot curry shop in my neighborhood is so delicious that I can't help but go there. After staring at the website for an hour to order a lunch box for delivery, you end up riding your bicycle to pick it up yourself while thinking about the additional fees and delivery charges. I'm just going about my day without any new changes.

Well, okay. That's about it for a status report, I guess. Please understand that this is a postcard without much substance, as usual.

I'm going to talk about the second half of the desert island test.

This is the fourth volume of the series, but looking back again, I have to say that the upper and lower volumes were a lot of work! And even though there were almost 700 pages in total, there were still many arcs I wanted to write about. There were many battles between the main characters on the deserted island, and I wanted to write about them as well, but I couldn't do that because it would take away from the main storyline...

If there's a demand, I'd like to write down the arcs of each character separately, but I don't know if there's a demand or not, so I'll just ignore it for now.

In the main story of volume 4, the battle against Tsukishiro will end here for now, but the story related to the White Room will continue for a while longer. I'm sure those of you who have read it have some idea of what's going on.

The next installment will be about the summer vacation on the luxury cruise ship in Volumes 4.5, after being released from the special exam.

I hope you will pay attention to the details of the island exam and the arcs with the characters that were not mentioned.

There may or may not be any changes in the love lives of Ayanokōji and the other characters. In addition, the White Room relationship that I just mentioned....

It's going to be a summer vacation story, but it's going to have some intense developments just like the island test, so please look forward to it.

So, everyone, I'll see you again in four months at the latest.

I look forward to working with you all in 2021.

Translator Note

Hey, everyone it's Prince. So that's the end of the three novel long island exam arc. The novel was alright, and I thought I'd put this translation out after neglecting it for months.

My favourite scene was the Hōsen vs Ryūen scene, I was waiting for Hōsen to throw down with Ryūen from y2v1. I can't wait to see what he does in the upcoming novels.

Props to my editor Cast for putting in great effort with editing and proofreading, he helped me a lot. Thanks man.

As always, a shout out to Kinusaga (the author) for writing this novel in the first place, please do support him by buying one of the official copies of *Classroom of The Elite* somewhere down the line.

See you in the next novel!

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<https://royalmtls.wordpress.com>

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Discord - [Horikita Fan Club](#)