“Gasta could not help but feel sympathy for the boy who fell prey to Jin's deception. He would never have guessed that he had been targeted weeks before he enrolled in the school.”

(The texts in black are directly from the Light Novel)

The Forest Exam Plan was a plan that Jin Kirihara created to pass the first exam of Heiberg Academy, which is a high school full of students with psychic powers. Jin doesn’t have psychic powers, but instead he has intelligence and deception. He provoked a guy named Tedd before the forest exam started so that he would target him during the exam.

Tedd was chasing Jin while using his psychic ability to control spheres. The spheres were above Jin’s and Tedd was about to attack him with them. Jin started to talk to Tedd. He said that he wouldn’t go easy on him in a real fight. Tedd knew that he was lying so Jin formed a gun shape with his finger and pointed it at Tedd. Tedd wasn’t afraid and went towards Jin. At this point, Tedd had fallen for Jins trap. The ground behind Tedd exploded and white smoke rised from Jins finger. Tedd understood that this was caused by Jin’s ability. Tedd abandoned his pride and decided to run away. He ran down the slope while the sounds of explosions were echoing. The ground was rumbling and the fear of death was overtaking Tedd. Tedd ran into a dead end. A bunch of rocks were limiting his escape route to one. Jin slowly walked towards him with a fearless smile and asked him to surrender. But Tedd refused. He realized that Jin shot at the ground to make him surrender, but didn’t have an intent to kill. All he had to do was stay in the same position and let the three spheres strike him. He then did that. He sent the spheres rushing at a speed that would kill someone in a direct hit at Jin. But the spheres bursted above Jin’s head before hitting him. Jin told him that he knew they were rubber balls hardened by his psychic ability. That’s the only way he could hold three of them in his bag. Tedd then ran away from him but Jin pointed his finger at him and said bang, which caused the ground to collapse. He was now waist-deep in mud. But what actually got him stuck was just a pit. Jin picked up the black stick he had hidden in a bush as he planned and pressed it against Tedds neck, causing him pain. Jin then said "If you don't get out of this forest within the time limit, your memories will be erased and you will be expelled. How is someone with no memory going to report what happened here? ..... I mean, you're not even aware that you've been tricked all this time, aren't you?" (If you don’t finish a examination in time, you’ll go unconscious and wake up in a hospital, which your memories of the school erased, which is why Jin said that his memories would be erased) (Trap Setting + Misdirection + Trickery + Cunning + Event Manipulation + Strategy Effectiveness + Strategy Execution + Strategy Shielding)

The distance between them has already closed to about three meters.

Tedd, looking completely triumphant, swirled the three spheres above Jin's head. The spinning spheres, mocking the sacrifice that had lost its escape route, descended, gradually narrowing their radius.

Now, everything was set to end with a single signal from Tedd.

There was no way to avoid it.

It was obvious that Jin would be hit by the black spheres one after another, and his entire body's bones would be shattered.

"Oh, by the way, Tedd-kun. Is there an option to overlook me .....?"

"There's no such an option, you idiot."

"Really?"

"You're persistent."

"Come on, let's really talk this through. I'm saying this for your own good. I can't guarantee I'd go easy on you in a real fight."

"Are you serious? You're still lying even after all this.....?"

"I'm not lying. It's true. There is no one in this world as honest as me."

Jin formed a gun shape with his right hand, pointed at Tedd's heart, and used his index finger as its muzzle.

"..... You think you can scare me with such childish threats?"

"Then why don't you give it a try? If you want to get out of here, this is your last chance."

After letting out a long sigh, Tedd took another step forward with the expression of a heartless monster.

"Cut the crap and just die. Fucking bastard."

This means he has missed his last chance.

Taking pity on the guy who had lost his cool and fallen into the trap, Jin said.

"Well then, sorry to say this but you're done for."

At that moment, the ground behind Tedd exploded.

The sudden sound of the explosion caused his body to stiffen, and the rolled-up soil of rotting leaves fell on him.

Seeing the white smoke rising from the tip of Jin's index finger, Tedd understood that this was a phenomenon caused by Jin's psychic ability.

"Unbelievable, I didn't see anything ....."

"Hey, Tedd-kun. Are you sure you're okay standing still?"

The index finger was pointed at him again, and Tedd felt his whole body stiffen.

Even if he let the spheres attack Jin, he would probably take five hits in that interval. That's how fatal the difference in speed is.

Abandoning his pride that he had been given the mission of gatekeeper by the headmaster, Tedd decided to run away.

He ran down the slope, almost rolling, trying to gain as much distance as possible.

The sound of explosions kept echoing, the ground nearby rumbled, and the fear of death was slowly overtaking Tedd.

"Damn it! I can't move forward, the rocks are in the way....."

In this area, a large number of rocks were protruding on the ground surface, limiting his escape route to only one. Perhaps because his movements had been read completely, the attacks were also gradually becoming focused on him.

If I can't escape anyway, I have no choice but to expose myself.

It was quite natural for Tedd to make that decision.

"What, have you given up already?"

Jin slowly made his way towards him with a fearless smile, just as he had done when they first met.

"Then, will you surrender quietly? I won't be angry with you."

"..... I've been handed a mission by the headmaster. If I don't crush you here, I won't be able to enroll with pride."

"Wait, wait. Why are your pupils so dilated? Can't you calm down for a moment?"

"Listen, Easterner. I'm going to kill you for sure. I'll crush you with everything I've got."

Even with an index finger pointed at him, Tedd glared at Jin without fear.

Indeed, there would be no way to sneak past an attack so fast that one couldn't even see its trajectory.

—But does this guy really intend to attack me?

In fact, even when it seemed certain that this guy could finish me off, he shot at the ground to force me to surrender. Since he has no intention to kill, then there is no need

to dodge the attacks. All I have to do is not move from my position and let the three spheres strike him at maximum speed.

In the end, it's the same as always. It's just the start of a one-sided violence.

"It's a pity that we had such a well-matched psychic ability."

Again, bursts of sound could be heard, but all of them were coming from the wrong direction.

—I knew it, this guy's not prepared to attack human beings.

Tedd grinned and manipulated the trajectory of the spheres floating in the sky. At a speed that would surely kill someone instantly if a direct hit was made, he sent it rushing towards Jin who was standing in front of him.

".....I've been meaning to tell you this for a long time", said Jin, who did not lose his fearless smile even in the face of the looming presence of death. "You're quite naive, aren't you?"

Above Jin's head, an ear-splitting explosion rang out.

Of course, this happened just before the spheres slammed into Jin. Suddenly, the three spheres burst above Jin's head, sending countless black shards flying all around him.

Tedd's eyes widen in astonishment and he rants.

"What happened .....! T-Those spheres were as hard as iron, you know!? You, how did you .....!"

"They're just rubber balls that have been hardened by your psychic ability, right? Otherwise, there's no way you could carry three of them in your bag."

"How the fuck .....! Damn it!"

Tedd, having completely lost his chance of winning, turned his back on Jin this time and started to run.

"A~a, you can't go that way. That's dangerous."

Jin pointed his index finger at Tedd, who was running away through the rocks and tree roots. With his thin lips twisted into a sarcastic smile, he said in a mischievous tone of voice.

"Bang!"

At that moment, Tedd's figure disappeared.

Of course, it wasn't that he had actually disappeared. Nor has his body been caught in the explosion and shattered into pieces.

It was just that the ground beneath his feet suddenly collapsed and he was dragged underground at a tremendous speed.

When Jin reached there, Tedd was waist-deep in thick, viscous mud and in a state of complete helplessness. His thought processes had short-circuited, and he had no idea as to what had happened to him.

He would never be able to realize that what had dragged him underground was just a pit.

Jin picked up the black stick he had hidden in the bushes nearby, as he had originally planned. He knew from prior reconnaissance that there were no surveillance cameras set up in the area.

Tedd in the hole finally came to his senses.

".....W-What the hell is this!? How were you able to destroy my iron ball.....!? What's your psychic ability!? Tell me!"

"You ask too many questions, I don't have the energy to answer them."

"A stun-stick!? Isn't that a violation-....."

"No, no, no. Have you forgotten the rules?"

Jin pressed the glowing tip against Tedd's neck.

Looking down at the guy who was screaming out in extreme pain, Jin proceeded to say.

"If you don't get out of this forest within the time limit, your memories will be erased and you will be expelled. How is someone with no memory going to report what happened here? ..... I mean, you're not even aware that you've been tricked all this time, aren't you?"

Tricked? What do you mean?

Don't tell me I was led here all along?

The questions that kept coming up one after another were drowned out by the electric currents coursing through his body.

The last thing Tedd saw in his fading consciousness was a heinous gleam in the depths of Jin's dilated eyes.

"You're finished, heretic. You weren't worth deceiving."

Jin convinced a psychic that was a first-year at Heiberg Academy to do an interview by showing him previous interviews he did with famous psychics who graduated from the same school on a newspaper. Those photographs he showed him were cut and pasted from small articles and the text and layout were fakes made by a printer he knew. Jin knew that people with psychic abilities tend to have a massive desire for self-expression. He knew if someone coaxed and flattered them belatedly, they would spew out as much information as they can. (Trickery + Emotional Understanding)

He contacted a boy who was a graduate of that middle school and also a first-year student at Heiberg Academy, and asked him for an interview as part of a project for the school newspaper.

At first, he refused for reasons of confidentiality, but it was enough to persuade him by showing him previous interviews with famous psychics who had graduated from the same school.

The photographs used were simply cut and pasted from small articles in the state-run newspaper, and the text and layout were nothing more than fakes made by a printer he knew, but there was no way the boy would recognize them. Of course, he had no way of knowing that Jin was neither a middle-school student, nor that the uniforms were from a thrift shop in town, nor that he was using a fake name.

In the end, he agreed to be interviewed on the condition that it would not involve any of the students' personal information or the school's internal affairs.

However, people with psychic abilities tend to have a massive desire for self-expression. If one properly coaxed and flatters them belatedly, they will spew out as much information as they can.

Jin had a plan to get through the entrance examinations of Heiberg Academy. He asked the psychic for information that would not be leaked outside the academy, like where the Screening Test was being held and the details of the annual examination. Jin asked if students were allowed to enter the forest, which the psychic replied with that it’s not off limits because there is no confidential information hidden in the forest and it’s a bit far from the academy. Jin now had all the information he wanted. (Information Gathering)

"..... Can I ask you for more details? Of course, we won't write it in the article."

There was a plan to get through the entrance examinations, which were due in a week's time, but no matter how well the plan went, it would be inevitable that he would be among the lowest-graders.

So Jin asked for information that would not be leaked outside the academy, such as where the [Screening Test] was being held and the details of the annual examinations.

"..... Come to think of it, the entrance ceremony is already next week. I hate that this year's new students are full of famous figures again. You see, I heard that the daughter of the Stingray family is enrolling as well."

"Nina Stingley, huh? I've heard a lot about her."

It gives me goosebumps to think of having a monster like that in my class. Well, it's none of my business as I'm about to drop out. ..... Oh, by the way, you are also a psychic, right?

Are you aiming for the Heiberg School after all? Do you want to join the <White Knights>?"

"No-no, it's outrageous for an ordinary person like me. I'm aiming for a private training school somewhere."

After stating this in a blunt manner, Jin changed the angle of his question.

"By the way, are students allowed to enter the forest you were talking about earlier? After all, it's off-limits, isn't it?"

"No, it's not. There is no confidential information hidden in the forest, it's really nothing more than a forest. And it's a bit far from the academy."

"Ahaha, right, of course."

Now he had all the information he wanted.

While sorting out the rest of the questions, Jin started to formulate a strategy to pass the Screening Test. He asked Gasta (a landscape gardener he knew for six years) to implant explosives that can be remotely detonated throughout the forest and to create a pit there. This was a gimmick to give Jin the illusion of that he's a psychic with a gunpowder ability. (Foresight + Trap Setting + Event Manipulation + Long-Term Planning + Preparation Process + Formulation Speed)

While sorting out the rest of the questions, Jin had already begun to formulate a strategy to pass the [Screening Test].

If the objective is just to survive, the content of the test will not be that difficult.

However, if one were to think about their future life at the school, they would have to make a strong impact on the students while earning as many points as possible. If he could gain some recognition here, it would make it much easier for him to proceed with his future plans.

So, first of all, he needs to prepare a duck that enjoys standing out and is easy to deceive.

◆

Three Days Ago ◆

".....Certainly, I've received the payment. So, what the hell are you doing this for?"

The question asked by the man in his work clothes in the middle of the night in the forest was a fairly natural one.

When one receives a request that makes no sense whatsoever, which is to implant explosives that can be remotely detonated throughout an empty forest, and even to create an elaborate pit

— it is only natural that one would want to confirm the client's true intentions. The three employees who were working on it also had a dubious look on their faces.

"It's the same as always, Gasta-san. I've got some people I want to deceive."

"Are you talking about infiltrating the nest of heretics? ..... I see, so this is just a gimmick to give the illusion that you're a psychic who specializes in using gunpowder."

"Well, something like that."

Jin couldn't help but smile wryly at this man's good intuition, which was unbefitting of a rough man in his forties.

Jin has known Gasta, the <Landscape Gardener>, for more than six years now.

He has worked on a wide range of projects. This is not the first time he has installed gunpowder and booby traps, as he did this time, and he has also been commissioned to build a gambling hall and a ticket booth in one of the buildings, and even provided extras for a major project.

He is one of the people who knows Jin's true identity and is willing to help him in his race for survival at the academy for a fee.

Jin got a bunch of information about his target. Tedd. He practically knew everything about him from the information he got. He knew about his psychic ability, knew that the spheres he controlled were rubber that gets hardened, knew that he used his ability to commit a robbery, with everyone close to him keeping quiet about it because they were scared Tedd would kill them. During the entrance exam he noticed that Tedd was overconfident and had a lack of caution, so he picked him as his first target. Jin would be less likely to be criticized by those around him if he took out the attention seeker (Tedd) first. (Information Gathering + Hot Reading)

"With so many obstacles in the way, your escape route will be limited, so if you run away without thinking, you're sure to fall into this pitfall."

"We had a really hard time finding a good spot, you know."

Even though only failed candidates took part in the test, it was unlikely that the management would not provide any surveillance at all. At the very least, there must be a number of cameras installed for surveillance purposes.

However, modern technology has not yet succeeded in shrinking the size of the cameras capable of capturing images, so the number of places where they can be hidden is naturally limited. If there are no tall bushes around, and if there are protruding rocks on the ground surface that can easily create blind spots, then there should be no problem.

Although it was quite laborious, it only took half a day's walk through the forest.

"So you will pretend to run away from the enemy and lure him/her here? But will it work that well? The other party must have psychic abilities, right?"

"A~a, don't worry. I've spent a lot of time in the last few weeks training my duck."

"..... He hasn't even enrolled yet, has he? What a terrifying kid."

Gasta laughed as he exhaled purple smoke.

"So what's your poor victim's name?"

"Tedd Lieber. Born and grew up in Ibrick, his birthday is August 2. His favorite food is rib steak, and since he was a kid he's been the biggest and fiercest kid in his class.

His psychic ability is <Anti-Gravity Satellite>. It is an ability to manipulate three black iron balls at the same time, but that is only on the surface. In reality, it's just an ability to manipulate rubber balls after hardening them like iron. He carries the rubber balls in a custom-made black bag, so he often bumps into things."

"Oioi, you know a lot."

"He's always had no enemies in his hometown. He's been so wild that a year ago he used his psychic abilities to commit a robbery. Everyone close to him knew Tedd was the culprit, but they kept quiet about it because they were afraid he would kill them. Apparently, in the countryside, there are no policemen with psychic abilities, so he was completely free to do whatever he wanted."

"Whoa, how did you know so much? Did you hire a detective?"

"No", Jin pulled some white letters out of his pocket. "The man himself told me."

Gasta shone his flashlight on the letters and scanned over the scribbled words.

[How can I increase the output of my psychic ability? Please give me some advice!]

[The people around me are really idiots. I can't wait to enroll and receive your guidance.]

[Headmaster, I will definitely live up to your expectations in the <Screening Test>!]

He didn't have the energy to read through all of them, but he was certain that the crude handwriting that seemed to be written by a rough boy and the sentences that seemed to be infatuated with the other party didn't mesh well together.

"When the results of the entrance exam were announced, Tedd stood out among those who had gathered in the hall. He intimidated everyone around him for no reason, and got angry that his posted rank was at the bottom of the list. ..... I thought that guy, with his overconfidence and lack of caution, would make a good first target."

"If you take out the attention-seeker first, you'll be less likely to be criticized by those around you, huh?"

"That's the point. You're a perceptive guy after all."

Jin wrote a fake letter with the headmaster's signature telling Tedd to server as the gatekeeper and slipped it in Tedds pocket. Jin continued to exchange letters with Tedd while pretending to be the headmaster and extracted his personal information and weaknesses. Jin lived in a hotel that was near the school for nearly two weeks and had the letters sent from there so that Tedd wouldn't be able to verify the authenticity of the address. (Indirect Manipulation + Catfishing + Trap Setting + Information Gathering)

"I slipped an envelope and a letter with the headmaster's signature on it in his pocket. I wrote a brief outline of the <Screening Test> and a request for him to serve as a gatekeeper there.

Speaking of the headmaster, Jill Will Weiser, there is not a single person in this country who doesn't know about his psychic abilities, right? If a letter from someone like that suddenly appeared in his pocket, he would surely think that he was being highly expected. All that's left to do is to continue exchanging letters and extract his personal information and psychic ability weaknesses."

"Exchanging letters, you say? ..... Don't tell me you've been pretending to be the headmaster all this time and communicating with Tedd? Wouldn't he find out?"

"It's called the prestige effect. That type of person will never doubt the word of an authority figure."

"But what about the address? There's no way you could have it sent to the headmaster's house."

"I lived for nearly two weeks in a cheap hotel near the school. I had the letters sent from there. Tedd probably thought they were delivered to his mansion on the outskirts of town. It's so far away, there's no way to verify the authenticity of the address."

Jin sent Tedd a train ticket in the name of the headmaster for 6:24 A.M. Jin took advantage of the time when Tedd is asleep on the long trip and replaced his bag containing his rubber balls that he controls with fake ones with remote detonators in them. (Strategy Effectiveness + Strategy Shielding)

"I'm impressed. You've grown up to be a great con artist. ..... So, how are you going to trap him on that day? No matter how many traps you set, it won't be enough if you get crushed by his psychic ability."

"At 6:24 a.m. on the day of the entrance ceremony, Tedd will board steam train No. 5, which departed from Ibrick. I sent him a train ticket in the name of the headmaster."

"Why would you go through all that trouble yet again?"

"It's a trade, Gasta-san."

Jin chuckled lightly, as if welcoming the thrill that was about to come.

"I already know the name of the rubber balls he uses and the product name of the bag from the letter. All I have to do is to take advantage of the time when he is asleep on the long trip and replace the bag containing the rubber balls with the fake one I prepared for him. Of course, there's a remote detonator inside those balls."

"I see. The moment he confront you who would be unarmed and convinced of his victory, his prized iron balls would be destroyed to pieces. It's like a nightmare."