DESERTED ISLAND EXAM



ANALYSIS DOC

(above image is wrong btw. I used it only banner nothing else)

BEFORE WE BEGIN LET'S CLEAR MISCONCEPTIONS

1. Get the anime version out of the way — it's wrong on many levels.

2. "The protagonist has prior knowledge of his classmates' behavior."

Incorrect. Ayanokoji has only been at ANHS for **four months (the first semester)**. He mentions that he is still a loner, although he has managed to make a few loose friends. The quality of these friendships is not particularly strong, and he is still largely unaware of his classmates' personalities as a whole.

Horikita continually mentions that she isn't his friend, nor should Ayanokoji consider himself friends with her. He doesn't know much about her this early in the series.

Kushida hates both Horikita and Ayanokoji. She is only friendly because she wants to be friends with everyone. Furthermore, she has false accusations/evidence that she can use against Ayanokoji if he does anything that threatens her image, etc.

Hirata — Ayanokoji never properly talked or conversed with Hirata much because Hirata's popularity with the girls in the class caused him to spend less time with the boys, including Ayanokoji.

The idiot trio (Sudo, Yamauchi, and Ike) are loose friends with Ayanokoji. Overall, they cause more trouble for the class than they help. Sudo, for example, has issues such as failing exams and the Sudo trial, while their generally degenerate behavior creates additional problems. Ayanokoji doesn't know much about them on a significant level, nor do they particularly share much with him.

Sakura — She is the girl Ayanokoji helped. However, she isn't particularly helpful herself. She is shy, has difficulty communicating, and is generally sheepish.

There is a divide between girls and boys . as think boys are perverted and disgusting in their class and generally don't trust each other on matter

They aren't his allies who would simply support and follow him because he asked them to. That doesn't mean Ayanokoji has bad **SQ**; quite the opposite. He has good SQ this early in the story. The issue is that forming strong bonds is difficult for him due to the nature of the Class D students, his deliberate act/persona, and his desire to remain low-profile.

(I don't think it is necessary to include his true nature or WR drops, as that would complicate things unnecessarily. At this early point in the story, it hasn't revealed much of his backstory anyway, so I think the argument can stand on its own without including those elements.)

3. “Ayanokoji didn’t make the best of the situation here.”

Inaccurate.

He did make the best of the situation while ensuring that his “front” and persona weren’t questioned by anyone. He also minimized the possibility of Chae’s blackmail being used against him and worked to reduce the gap between Class D and the other classes.

It’s fair to think that the protagonist should show more of his capabilities and intelligence openly. However, context and background are far more important. Nothing exists in isolation within a story. There are sensible reasons why certain actions were taken, including the characters’ motives, personalities, circumstances, and goals. These factors are often ignored for unbiased—or sometimes biased—reasons.

Ignoring this context can lead to misleading interpretations and poor assessments of the characters and their decisions. And BAD TAKES

4. “It’s not particularly difficult or complex.”

I’d like you to drop the preconceived notions you may have regarding this exam and its characters. As I explain everything that happens during this exam, especially from the perspective of the class as a whole, you’ll be able to better understand why the respective actions and decisions were made during the exam.

Regardless, COTE and many other stories I know don’t always present complex situations or feats that are as mind-blowing as those in Usogui or 18LOH. Most of the time, their feats are **contextual within the story.** However, that doesn’t make them any less incredible to look at, analyze, or appreciate from both an SCD and storytelling perspective, despite the differences.

I would like to do the same here: **make you appreciate and analyze all the details that happen throughout this arc/exam.** That is my goal.

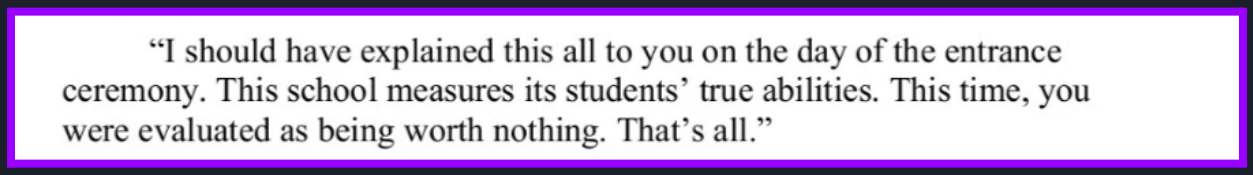
5. “Offscreen? Statements?”

Nope. Everything is presented upfront in this exam/arc

Format I Will Use to Explain

Author comment:
>> Insert thoughts here

Dropping scans/raws to explain the point or showcase something:


"I should have explained this all to you on the day of the entrance ceremony. This school measures its students' true abilities. This time, you were evaluated as being worth nothing. That's all."

Of

[Mashima sensei uttered a few cruel words, as if waiting for the atmosphere to change. "Well then. We shall commence the current academic year first special test. " vol 3 , pg 16]

(Different raws or TLs can be included side by side to demonstrate the scope or clarify differences.

)

Take mental note : [NOTED]

Explaining the reasoning:

Premise - X point(s) taken
C - conclusion

1 … X to explain the events

"***Word colored red*** " to signify thing (this will be done once)

“Sentence “ to showcase the lying ayanokoji did to others and in the text(this can be follow author comment: liar)

First, I will explain Chabashira’s blackmail of Ayanokoji.

Then, I will present the rules of the exam and explain what each class’s strategy/plan was, starting from Class A and going through Class D.

For Class D, however, I will explain everything Ayanokoji does during this exam in separate chapters for each day.

Finally, I will give my assessment of the feats that occur during the exam.

This structure is intended to follow the chronology of the volume and present the events in their proper timeline, making it easier to follow what happened and when.

Chasbhira ‘s blackmail on ayanokoji

Before the departure of the students for the Desert Island Special Test at ANHS, Ayanokoji already suspected that ANHS would include non-academic tests for the classes. In Volumes 1 and 2, during his confrontations with Horikita and the Sudo trial arc, Ayanokoji realizes that such tests could change the trajectory of the classes by affecting class points and the gaps between the classes, depending on the overall performance and abilities of each class.

During the first three months of the first semester at ANHS, Ayanokoji was called by his homeroom teacher, Chabashira-sensei, along with Horikita, to the faculty office regarding ***50-point entrance exam scores*** and class performance. During this meeting, Ayanokoji observes that Chabashira-sensei seems to have information not only about the students’ abilities and qualities but also about their pasts.

In Volume 2, Ayanokoji notices a sudden change in Horikita’s behavior toward him. He concludes that Chabashira is pulling the strings behind Horikita and has begun interfering in his life.

(Though it should be noted that the 50-point scores have a hidden ulterior motive for Ayanokoji, that is not relevant here, so I will not discuss the possibilities surrounding them.)

> This school wasn’t the only abnormal thing. The teachers were weird, too. Moments earlier, Chiyabashira-sensei had upset Horikita with just her words. It was almost as if the teachers knew every student’s secrets.

> I assumed that this change in Horikita’s behavior was Chabashira-sensei’s doing. She was probably pulling the strings here. I wouldn’t be surprised if she knew about my past.

"Why do you think Ayanokouji purposefully got scores of 50 points across on the board on his entrance examination? Why do you think Ayanokouji is helping you? Why do you think that Ayanokouji doesn't put himself forward as a superior student, despite having superior ability? Is Ayanokouji Kiyotaka really someone who 'dislikes trouble'?"

"Because I deemed it necessary. Now then, Ayanokouji, I'll explain why I called you here." Chiyabashira-sensei dismissed Horikita's concerns and shifted her attention to me.

"Well then, if you'll excuse me…" Horikita muttered.

"Wait, Horikita. It would be in your best interest to stay and listen. It may provide you with a hint on how to reach Class A."

She pushed us into the hallway. Why had Chiyabashira-sensei called both of us in together? She didn't seem like the type to do meaningless things.

This is what Ayanokoji knows about Chabashira's interest in him:

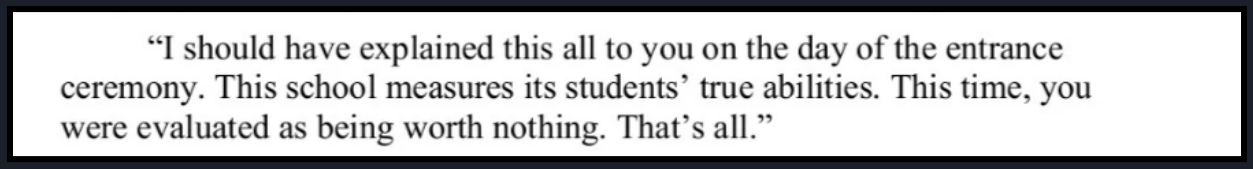
Premise 1: Chabashira, the homeroom teacher of Class D, has information about the students' abilities and qualities, and even about their pasts.

Premise 2: Chabashira-sensei appears to see through Ayanokoji's facade of being a Class D student who "avoids trouble."

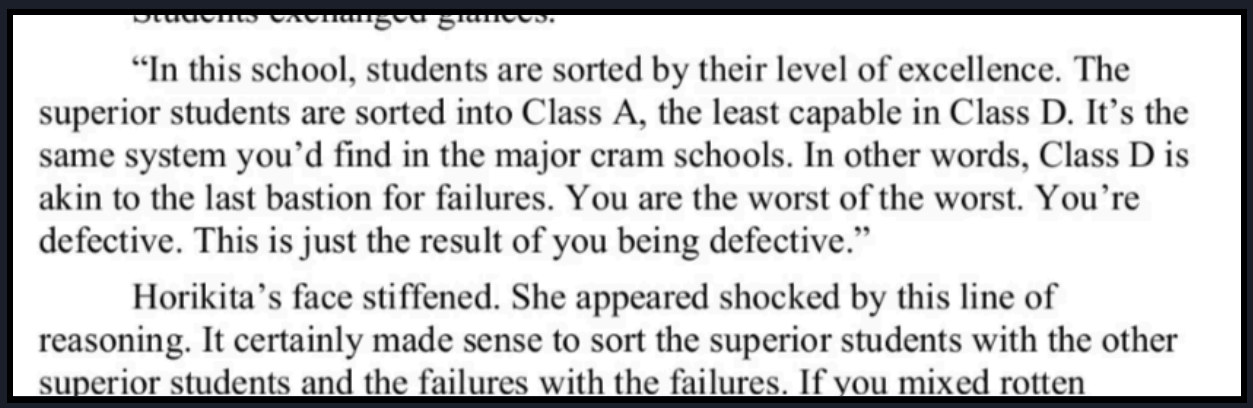
Conclusion: The teacher knows that Ayanokoji is faking his ordinariness for some reason and has information about every student's talents and abilities.

Premise 3: The teacher called Ayanokoji and informed Horikita about Ayanokoji 's all 50s in entrance exam in Volume 1 to nudge them toward solving Class D's problems, including the issue of wasting their class points.

Premise 4: She explained to Horikita why she had been placed in Class D in the first place in a crude way.



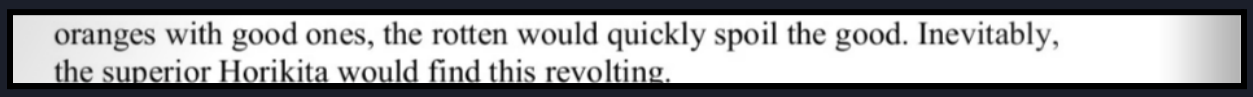
"I should have explained this all to you on the day of the entrance ceremony. This school measures its students' true abilities. This time, you were evaluated as being worth nothing. That's all."



Students exchanged glances.

"In this school, students are sorted by their level of excellence. The superior students are sorted into Class A, the least capable in Class D. It's the same system you'd find in the major cram schools. In other words, Class D is akin to the last bastion for failures. You are the worst of the worst. You're defective. This is just the result of you being defective."

Horikita's face stiffened. She appeared shocked by this line of reasoning. It certainly made sense to sort the superior students with the other superior students and the failures with the failures. If you mixed rotten



oranges with good ones, the rotten would quickly spoil the good. Inevitably, the superior Horikita would find this revolting.

Premise 5: The teacher knows which students can potentially uplift Class D based on the evaluations she has access to.

Premise 6: Horikita is connected to another Horikita, the student council president, Manabu. Chabashira ply knows about both of them.

Premise 7: Homeroom teacher Chabashira never fully informs the students about the school's system, nor does she properly warn them about it. For example, during the first month, when the deduction of class points was discovered and the midterm exams were held, Ayanokoji realized that Chabashira had never warned the students about it.

"I considered it when we learned that the test material was going to be different. However, I had a hunch back when they first told us about the midterm exam."

"Huh?! Way back then?"

"There was something very peculiar about the way Chiyabashira-sensei told us about the test. As our homeroom teacher, she had a clear understanding of everyone's grades and academic performance. Despite that, she seemed absolutely certain when she told us that there was a way for us to pass this test. In other words, she indicated that there was a surefire way for us to save everyone."

Conclusion: The homeroom teacher deliberately or unintentionally hides the full picture from her class despite having access to evaluations of the students. She can also pry into students' personal lives through her position, which she uses with both Ayanokoji and Horikita for her own reasons

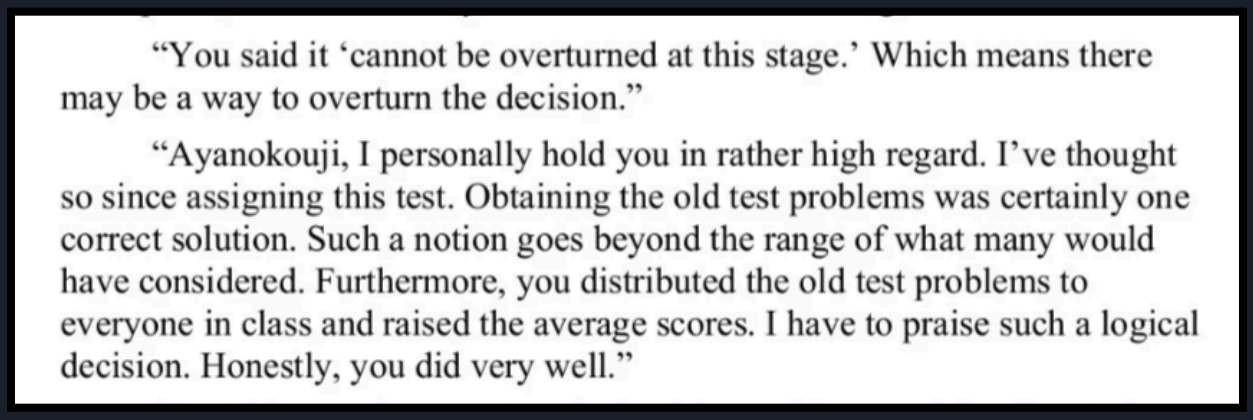
Premise 8: ANHS is a strange school where homeroom teachers from different classes also have to contend with the status of other classes and their class points.

Premise 9: Class A has the highest status in ANHS due to having more class points and more excellent students. Class A students to get to high prestige college on graduation also

Premise 10: All students strive to reach Class A. This must be similar for the homeroom teachers as well.

Conclusion: It is in the best interest of the homeroom teacher to nudge her class toward Class A without giving them unfair information that would violate the rules of ANHS.

Therefore, Chabashira is trying to reach Class A by using Horikita and Ayanokoji and nudging them by whatever means are available to her.

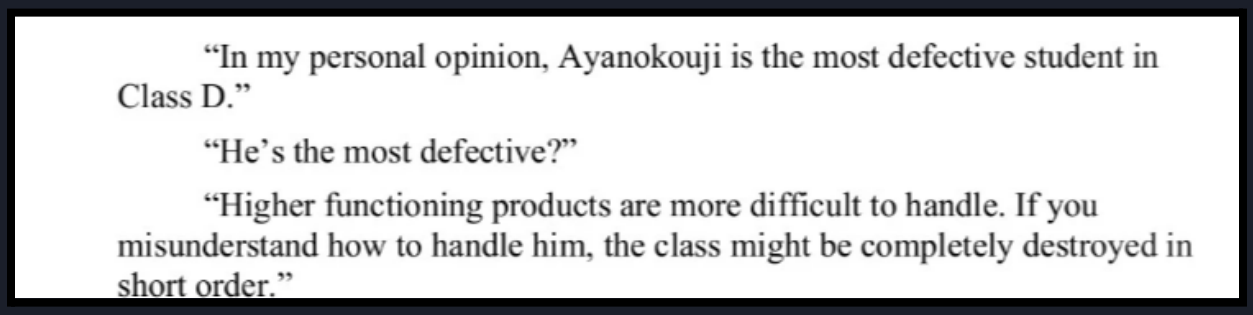


"You said it 'cannot be overturned at this stage.' Which means there may be a way to overturn the decision."

"Ayanokouji, I personally hold you in rather high regard. I've thought so since assigning this test. Obtaining the old test problems was certainly one correct solution. Such a notion goes beyond the range of what many would have considered. Furthermore, you distributed the old test problems to everyone in class and raised the average scores. I have to praise such a logical decision. Honestly, you did very well."

Premise 11: Chabashira can influence students because she knows their profiles and the fatal flaws that caused them to be placed in Class D, the "last bastion of failure" or the class of "defectives."

Premise 12: Chabashira-sensei has some idea of Ayanokoji's "fatal flaw" and abilities, which she holds in high regard. This could explain how she knew that obtaining the old test problems was Ayanokoji's idea.



"In my personal opinion, Ayanokouji is the most defective student in Class D."

"He's the most defective?"

"Higher functioning products are more difficult to handle. If you misunderstand how to handle him, the class might be completely destroyed in short order."

Premise 13: The change in Horikita's behavior suggests that Chabashira is pulling the strings behind the scenes and may continue interfering with Ayanokoji's normal school life.

Final Conclusion: Chabashira plans to use Ayanokoji in the future for the benefit of Class D and herself, using the authority and methods available to her through her position as a homeroom teacher.

These last two scans basically imply that Ayanokoji understands more about how "***defective***" he actually is than Chabashira or Horikita could ever imagine. They therefore have a false conception of his nature because of the persona he presents. Plus there's entire false persona

I knew more about me than anyone else. I knew just how defective, just how foolish I was. I was a horrible human being.

What was I getting worked up for? I had arbitrarily started analyzing Class D and considering the options. I didn't want to. I mean, *she* was the one who chose this school, right? Horikita and Ichinose were aiming for the top, not me. All I wanted was an ordinary, regular life where nothing ever happened. Otherwise? I couldn't do this.

This is significant because Chabashira has a false idea of Ayanokoji's student life and personality due to the ***persona*** he maintains, which becomes especially relevant when she attempts to blackmail him in Volume 3.

Chabashira knows my entrance scores → she recognizes that the scores are artificial → she knows something unusual about my circumstances → she has already influenced Horikita → therefore, she may continue manipulating my circumstances.

In this situation, Ayanokoji is justified in thinking that he may be underestimating how much his homeroom teacher knows about him and his past. Therefore, it would be reasonable for him to test this hypothesis and determine how much Chabashira actually knows.

BLACKMAIL

During the closing ceremony at the end of the first semester, Ayanokoji was called to Chabashira's faculty room again, this time alone.

"Ayanokouji. I have to talk to you before you leave. Come to the faculty room." Chabashira-sensei said immediately after homeroom had ended, before she left the classroom.

"Why? Did you do something?" asked Sudou, who was ready to leave with his bag slung over his shoulder.

"I don't remember doing anything."

"Yeah. You're not good or bad. You live a plain, boring, steady life."

"Why did you sound all sarcastic?"

"Sarcastic? I didn't mean to. Did it feel like it?"

During the first semester, Ayanokoji had successfully convinced everyone that his persona was genuine. He presented himself as ***a plain, gloomy student*** who simply avoided trouble and valued a peaceful school life and a low profile above everything else. Only Horikita and Chabashira knew that there was something else going on with him, although the information they had about Ayanokoji was ***unreliable and intentionally*** fed to them by Ayanokoji himself.

Ayanokoji had allowed Chabashira to believe that he behaved this way because he valued the peace of his school life and wanted to avoid unnecessary attention

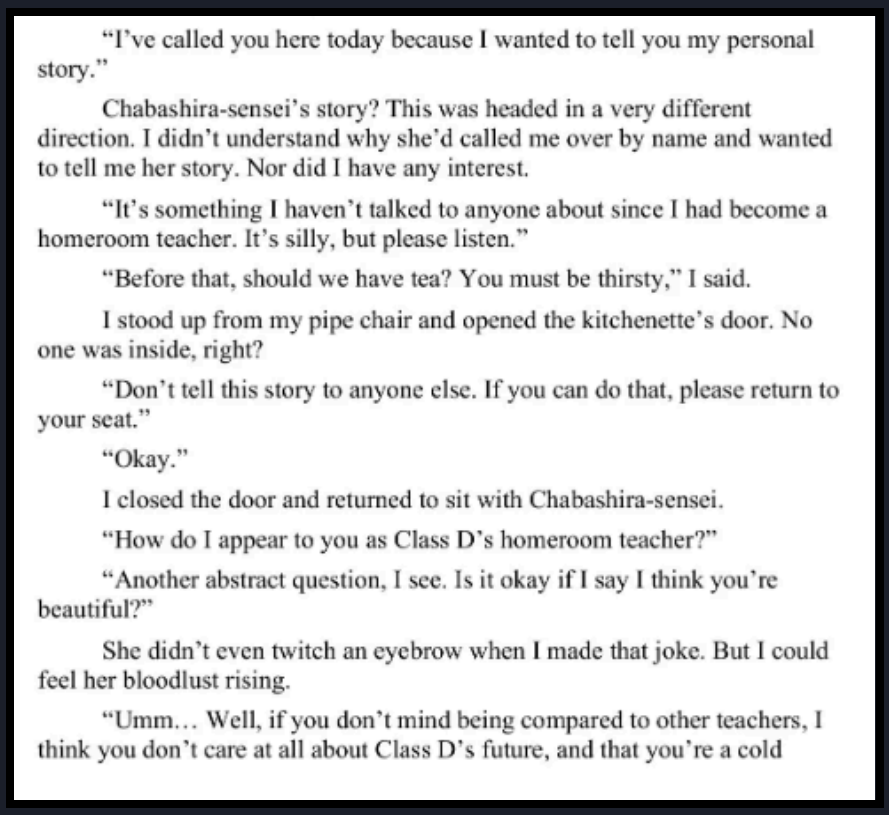
"Come in."

"I don't understand why you called me over."

"We'll talk inside."

My "incoming depression" meter rose steadily as she met my questions with such short answers. I'd hoped she'd called me here as a joke.

"You might expect bad things when you're asked to come to the faculty room, but contrary to your expectations, it's a fine place. There aren't eyes all around in here. Many things are better said with some personal privacy."



"I've called you here today because I wanted to tell you my personal story."

Chabashira-sensei's story? This was headed in a very different direction. I didn't understand why she'd called me over by name and wanted to tell me her story. Nor did I have any interest.

"It's something I haven't talked to anyone about since I had become a homeroom teacher. It's silly, but please listen."

"Before that, should we have tea? You must be thirsty," I said.

I stood up from my pipe chair and opened the kitchenette's door. No one was inside, right?

"Don't tell this story to anyone else. If you can do that, please return to your seat."

"Okay."

I closed the door and returned to sit with Chabashira-sensei.

"How do I appear to you as Class D's homeroom teacher?"

"Another abstract question, I see. Is it okay if I say I think you're beautiful?"

She didn't even twitch an eyebrow when I made that joke. But I could feel her bloodlust rising.

"Umm… Well, if you don't mind being compared to other teachers, I think you don't care at all about Class D's future, and that you're a cold

Ayanokoji had allowed Chabashira to believe that he behaved this way because he valued the peace of his school life and wanted to avoid unnecessary attention. This was obviously a lie. Ayanokoji already knew that Chabashira might try to use this against him. He was simply playing the role of the person Chabashira believed she had figured out while observing how much she actually knew about him and his past.

This is evident in the following conversation.

How?

Unlike the first time Chabashira called Ayanokoji to the faculty room, when their conversation was relatively formal, she behaved much more informally this time. She even called him by his first name and immediately mentioned that there were no cameras in the room.

Ayanokoji notices this:

[I noticed that the security camera, which should've been installed in a room like this, was missing.]

The absence of the camera gives him a sense of security and suggests that Chabashira wants their conversation to remain private.

[“Before that, should we have tea? You must be thirsty,” I said.

I stood up from my pipe chair and opened the kitchenette’s door. No one was inside, right?]

This is a direct throwback to Volume 1, when Ayanokoji was stuffed in the kitchenette door while Chabashira was scheming to coerce him into helping with Class D’s problem regarding the deduction of class points.

Ayanokoji checks the kitchenette to see whether Chabashira has involved another person, just as she did during their previous meeting.

This suggests that Chabashira is currently operating alone and has another motive for calling Ayanokoji there.

Chabashira then tells Ayanokoji that she wants to share a personal story about herself. This might partly be intended to make Ayanokoji more receptive to her and convince him to follow her demands and help Class D reach Class A. However, Ayanokoji immediately notices how unusual it is for Chabashira, who normally never shares personal details with her students, to suddenly open up to him.

Ayanokoji understands that this is being done to lower his guard.

Chabashira eventually changes the subject and asks:

[“How do I appear to you as Class D’s homeroom teacher?”]

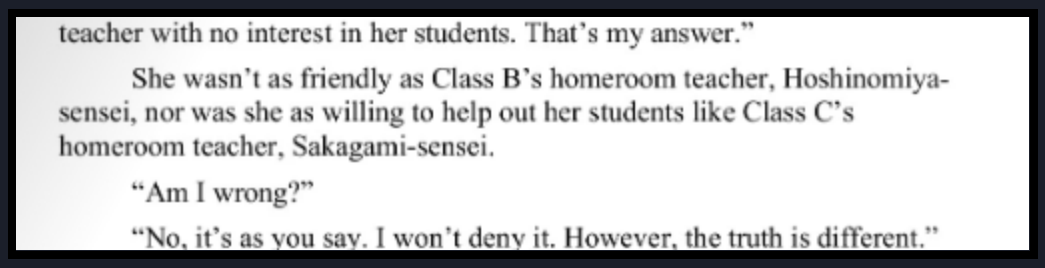
Ayanokoji immediately recognizes the abstract nature of the question and responds:

[“Another abstract question, I see. Is it okay if I say I think you’re beautiful?”]

He teases Chabashira to observe her reaction.

[She didn’t even twitch an eyebrow when I made that joke. But I could feel her bloodlust rising.

“Umm… Well, if you don’t mind being compared to other teachers, I think you don’t care at all about Class D’s future, and that you’re a cold teacher with no interest in her students. That’s my answer.”]



teacher with no interest in her students. That's my answer."

She wasn't as friendly as Class B's homeroom teacher, Hoshinomiya-sensei, nor was she as willing to help out her students like Class C's homeroom teacher, Sakagami-sensei.

"Am I wrong?"

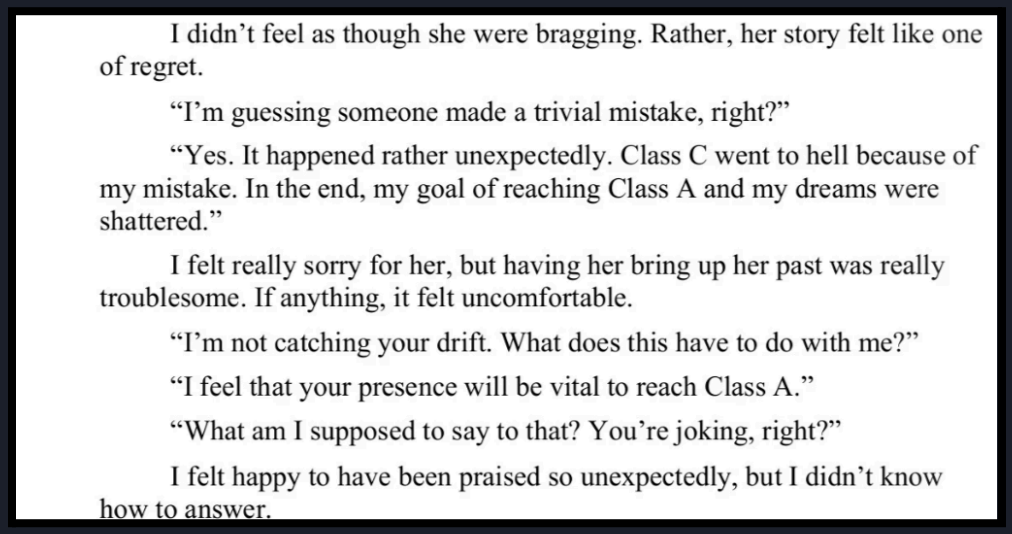
"No, it's as you say. I won't deny it. However, the truth is different."

[Chabashira-sensei paused and looked up to the ceiling, as if she'd just remembered something.

"I was once a student at this school. I was in Class D, just like you."

"I must say that's surprising. I would've thought you were more capable, Chabashira-sensei."

"Huh... Well, in my time, the class difference wasn't as extreme. You could say that we were in a four-way battle, not a three-way one. Up until we approached graduation in the third semester of our third year, the difference between A and D wasn't even 100 points. It was a close battle, where even one trivial mistake could knock you off balance."]



I didn't feel as though she were bragging. Rather, her story felt like one of regret.

"I'm guessing someone made a trivial mistake, right?"

"Yes. It happened rather unexpectedly. Class C went to hell because of my mistake. In the end, my goal of reaching Class A and my dreams were shattered."

I felt really sorry for her, but having her bring up her past was really troublesome. If anything, it felt uncomfortable.

"I'm not catching your drift. What does this have to do with me?"

"I feel that your presence will be vital to reach Class A."

"What am I supposed to say to that? You're joking, right?"

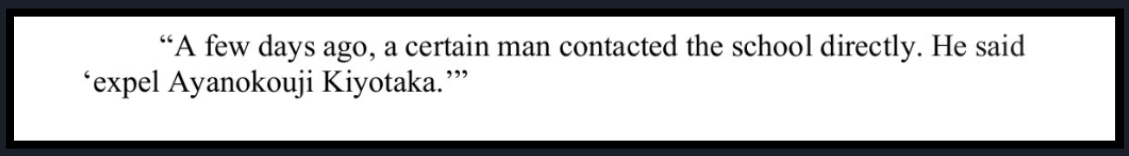
I felt happy to have been praised so unexpectedly, but I didn't know how to answer.

At first glance, it might appear that Ayanokoji is genuinely listening to Chabashira's story about her past. However, this is not the case.

Ayanokoji explicitly states:

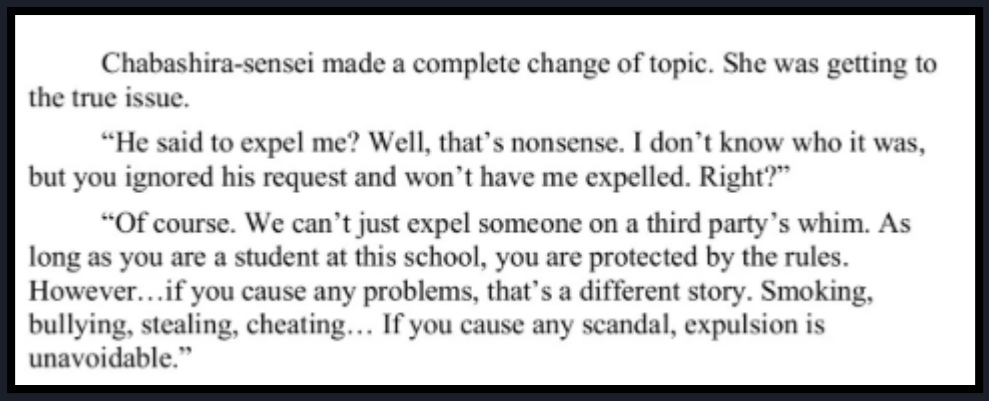
[“I didn’t understand why she’d called me over by name and wanted to tell me her story. Nor did I have any interest.”]

This shows that Ayanokoji is not emotionally invested in Chabashira’s story. Instead, he is pretending to be unaware of her intentions while continuing to play the role that Chabashira believes she has figured out.



“A few days ago, a certain man contacted the school directly. He said ‘expel Ayanokouji Kiyotaka.’”

Chabashira eventually changes the subject to expulsion and uses it as a threat against Ayanokoji. This is effectively her final card.



Chabashira-sensei made a complete change of topic. She was getting to the true issue.

“He said to expel me? Well, that’s nonsense. I don’t know who it was, but you ignored his request and won’t have me expelled. Right?”

“Of course. We can’t just expel someone on a third party’s whim. As long as you are a student at this school, you are protected by the rules. However…if you cause any problems, that’s a different story. Smoking, bullying, stealing, cheating… If you cause any scandal, expulsion is unavoidable.”

Ayanokoji continues playing along with Chabashira’s assumptions and asks whether she had ignored “that man’s” request to have him expelled.

Chabashira appears to believe that she has Ayanokoji cornered because of what she observed during their previous interaction in Volume 1. From her perspective, she has two reasons to believe that the threat of expulsion will work against him.

First, she knows that Ayanokoji appears to value a peaceful school life and wants to maintain a low profile. Therefore, if something threatens that peaceful school life, he should become defensive.

Second, the threat of expulsion appears to have particular significance for him. His reaction during the Sudo incident, in which he worked to prevent Sudo from being expelled because he considered the situation unfair, suggests to Chabashira that Ayanokoji is unusually resistant to what he perceives as unjust treatment and may react strongly when his position at the school is threatened.

"I'm sorry, but I don't intend to do anything."

"It has nothing to do with your intentions. If I determine that something seems like an issue, it will become reality."

"Are you threatening me?" I found her wording suspicious.

"Here's the deal, Ayanokouji. You are going to aim for Class A for me. I will follow up as extensively as I can in order to protect you. Don't you think that sounds like a good offer?"

I'd thought she had changed a lot from when I first met her, but I never could've imagined she would blackmail a student. I laughed.

"Can I go now? I won't listen to any more of this."

"That's too bad, Ayanokouji. You will be expelled, and once again, Class D won't reach Class A."

From Chabashira's perspective, she therefore believes that she has backed Ayanokoji into a corner.

But Ayanokoji recognizes the absurdity of Chabashira's idea and (laughs)** at the fact that she believes she can blackmail a student into helping her achieve her dream of reaching Class A.

However, the issue of chashiba calling shoots what is ***labelled as expulsion*** worthy is the one that stops ayanokoji.

Chabashira herself has already established that ANHS cannot simply expel a student because a third party demands it. A third party also cannot freely interfere with ANHS's internal system.

(To be clear, at this point in Volume 3, we do not yet know the full extent of Ayanokoji's circumstances. However, later volumes make it clear that even "that man" cannot simply interfere with ANHS's system whenever he wants and freely threaten Ayanokoji from the outside.

And Ayanokoji already knows enough about ANHS to understand this.)

Therefore, Chabashira's blackmail is a bluff against Ayanokoji, which Ayanokoji knows.

Her speech and behavior weren't just for show. She seriously intended to cut me. She was placing her unachieved dreams on my shoulders.

"Let me ask you once more. Will you aim for Class A? Or be expelled? You choose."

With my left hand, I reached over the desk and grabbed Chabashira-sensei's collar.

"I remember when Horikita said you made her feel uncomfortable. I wonder if she felt like this. It's like entering someone's home with shoes on."

"Right." Chabashira-sensei, who'd behaved with confidence until then, laughed in self-deprecation. "I surprised myself. I realize now that I still haven't given up on reaching Class A."

However, Ayanokoji acts as if he is disturbed by what Chabashira has just told him, which is exactly what Chabashira wanted.

Ayanokoji reacts as if he is uncomfortable, almost like someone has crossed a personal line and grabbed him by the collar. He does this to give Chabashira a particular impression of him and to observe her reaction.

Her eyes had gotten slightly misty. Her usual cold indifference was gone. When she grabbed my left arm, my hand still grasping her collar, I saw the forceful determination had returned to her eyes.

"I'd thought you would lead Class D voluntarily, but we don't have any time to waste. You have to decide here and now. Will you help me or not?"

Luke, *Star Wars*' protagonist, originally chose to return to his uncle's farm and reject the call to adventure. However, he was eventually dragged into the horrors of war. That was his destiny. You might say I should've taken this woman's story with a grain of salt. I didn't know how much of it was true.

"You'll probably regret trying to use me."

"Relax. My life is already full of regrets."

That was the troublesome event that launched my summer vacation. It was something I didn't like to think about. At any rate, I couldn't lose my current school life. Throwing away your freedom in order to protect it… How ridiculous.

Ayanokoji notices Chabashira's determination to use him to fulfill her dream of reaching Class A through the expression she gives after seeing his reaction, which is unusual for her.

This could either show that Chabashira's determination to reach Class A is extremely strong, or that Chabashira knows what she is doing, even if she is not particularly good at it.

Ayanokoji infers from this that Chabashira's personal story may have been fabricated, at least to some extent. That's why he would take Chabashira's story with a grain of salt until he knows how much of it is actually true.

Despite this, Ayanokoji is still unsure about what details Chabashira is hiding. If she has made contact with someone regarding his circumstances, then who did she contact?

And the possible threat of Chabashira making an issue related to expulsion.

For the time being, Ayanokoji decides to play along with the idea that Chabashira has successfully blackmailed him and continues to give her the false impression that she has figured her student Ayanokoji out.

Even though the blackmail is basically ineffective, Ayanokoji still has to play along because he needs more information about the situation if someone did order Chabashira to have him expelled.

And Chabashira's possible expulsion threat, which is just an ***information gap advantage*** over Ayanokoji.

https://www.reddit.com/r/IntelligenceScaling/comments/1wu7dz9/underrated_ayanokojis_chabashiras_blackmail/

(This is confirmed in Volume 4, when Ayanokoji is concerned about whether somebody actually did contact Chabashira or not.)

Plus, even without the blackmail, Ayanokoji was already assisting Class D through Horikita in Volumes 1 and 2 anyway.

Minor Feats:

1. **Ayanokoji's false persona** — He feeds Chabashira the wrong idea of " flaws" and information about himself, while getting more information out of her than she gets from him.
2. **Basically seeing through Chabashira's whole act** — Ayanokoji sees through Chabashira's act and recognizes the blackmail tactic she is trying to use against him.
3. **Convincing Chabashira that she has him under blackmail** — Ayanokoji plays along and convinces Chabashira that she has successfully put him under her blackmail. For ulterior motives

Chabashira's blackmail was put into action during the Special Exam.

However, her blackmail was weakened by the end of the Special Exam.

This will be explained in the Class D section, where I will show how and why her supposed leverage over Ayanokoji ultimately became ineffective.

Deserted Island special exam rules & info

During the exams, cell phones are prohibited and will be taken away.

Mashima-sensei, Class A's homeroom teacher , narrates the rules and info about the special man exam

[Mashima-sensei uttered a few cruel words, as if waiting for the atmosphere to change. "Well then. We shall commence the current academic year's first special test."]

→ The test would last 7 days on the deserted island . This test will decide if students can live on a deserted island together as a group.this special test is both practical and realistic, designed based on real-world corporate training

→ The student can't board the cruise during a special exam without a suitably justifiable reason.

→ Once the test starts, each class will receive two tents, two flashlights, and one basic cupboard toilet . You will be provided with one box of matches. There is no limit to the amount of sunscreen you can have. Each student will be provided with one toothbrush. As a special case, girls will be allowed to have as many feminine sanitary products as they'd like, without any restrictions. Ask your respective homeroom teachers for those.

→ The theme of the special exam is "***freedom***"

→ In this special exam, classes would be distributed 300 special points .Can be spent to purchase items for the exam and survive. Classes would also be provided with a manual which lists where to get water and food, how to prepare equipment like bbq tents ,ingredients , what they can buy with points and exam info & rules.

→ Each class will receive one copy of the manual. If the manual is lost, you may have another copy. However, it will consume points,

→ students would be equipped with wristwatches. The students can't take them off if they did without permission they would be punished . The watch monitors students ' health like body temperature, pulse, and even your movements. The watch is equipped with a GPS. In emergency situations, use this watch to notify the school. They are waterproof.

Penalties Listed in the Manual

On the final page of the manual, a single line reads:

These penalties will be applied to anyone who falls under the following conditions."

→ Anyone deemed unable to continue the test due to significant deterioration in health or serious injury will be penalized by thirty points. That student will then retire."

Penalty: −30 Special Points & Student retires from the exam.

⟶ In the event that a student is absent during the 8:00 AM or 8:00 PM roll call, five points will be deducted for each student absent

Penalty : -5 Special Points per absent student

→ In the event that a student has polluted the environment, he or she will be penalized twenty points.

Penalty: −20 Special Points

⟶ In the event that a student is found guilty of an act of violence toward another class, robbing another class, or causing damage to another class's property, etc.,

the offending student's class will immediately be disqualified, and the individual will forfeit all of his or her Private Points.

Penalty: Immediate class disqualification and All of the offending student's Private Points are forfeited

—----------

(not in the manual)
The Special Points in this exam cannot go below zero.

Roll call will be held by the homeroom teachers at the base camp once the classes have finalized their locations. The base camp location can't be changed without a suitably justifiable reason.

Additional Rules Explained by Chabashira

There are several designated "spots" on the island. These spots have rights of exclusive possession, and only the class that occupies that spot may exercise those rights.

The class that obtains those rights is entirely free to determine how they wish to exercise them. However, the rights of exclusive possession are only valid for a period of **eight hours** after being invoked, after which they are automatically revoked.

Another class can acquire those rights at that time. Upon occupying a spot, the class can gain **one bonus point.** These bonus points are not counted as Special Points and can't be used in the exam.

Bonus points are calculated and added to the class's total after the test has ended.

In the Manual

There are apparatuses installed near the spots that show the rights of exclusive possession.

→ A specialized key card is required to occupy a spot.

→ A class can earn one point by occupying a spot each time. Occupied spots can be used freely.

→ The class will receive a **fifty-point penalty** if it uses a spot occupied by another class without permission.

→ Only a designated leader can use the key card.

→ It is impossible to change the leader without suitable justification.

On the **seventh day,** the last day of the test, the class has the right to guess at the identity of another class's leader during roll call. If the class manages to get it right, then it can obtain **fifty points** for each correct guess. Conversely, the other class would have to pay fifty points as compensation.

If a class moved to acquire a spot without caution and its leader was discovered, then it could lose a great number of points.

So, high risk, high reward.

In addition, a class whose leader had been found out would lose all of the bonus points they had saved up until then. This rule made it so that if a class didn't have much confidence, it would be hesitant to join the battle to occupy spots.

The manual included a simple map of the island, with only its size and shape drawn. Things like the total area of the forest and the topography were completely unknown.

Like a blank sheet of paper. [Take NOTED 1]

Classes’ Status in the beginning of the exam

Class A: 270 Special Points

Mashima-sensei:
“The student who was marked absent from this trip was from Class A. According to the rules of this special test, should any student have to leave due to illness, there will be a thirty-point penalty to the class as a whole. Therefore, Class A will be starting with 270 points.”

Penalty: −30 Special Points

(That student is Arisu Sakayanagi btw.)

Class B: 300 Special Points

Class C: 300 Special Points

Class D: 300 Special Points

CLASS A ‘s strategy in the island

Zero special points spend alliance strategy

Katsuragi, who is one of the leading students in Class A, forms a temporary alliance with Class C leader Ryuen.

In this alliance, Class A would minimally use their special points in this exam. Instead, they would use Class C’s special points for their needs, while capturing the spots and gaining as many bonus points as they can.

In exchange, Katsuragi and Class A would provide Ryuen with a place to stay at their spots/camps without anyone knowing about it. This would be part of Ryuen’s strategy, with Class A covering for him.

Ryuen would figure out the true identities of the leaders of the different classes through his strategy and would also give the names to Katsuragi.

The reason of alliance and when it ends is currently unknown in vol 3

(it’s because of arisu sakayanagi and katsuragi fight over leadership of class A)

However, Class A has a ***schism*** between Katsuragi and Arisu Sakayanagi over leadership. This has led to the creation of factions within the class, with some students secretly favouring and remaining loyal to Arisu, while others support Katsuragi.

Katsuragi, being the one leading his class in the exam, can't openly trust anyone, even when choosing the leader for this special exam. So, he would also have to hide the identity of the leader and Katsuragi's strategy from his own class.

CLASS B ‘s strategy in the island

being more united with no schism(default)

Ichinose Honami, who is one of the leading students in Class B, plays the special exam with better resource management and proper communication than any other class.

Ichinose Honami, along with Kanzaki, leads their whole class. Early on, they tried to figure out the leaders of the other classes, but quickly gave up due to the lack of information and secrecy surrounding the leaders of the other classes.

They formed a mutual information alliance with Class D to share information with each other, such as exam information, class information, and other useful information.

Ichinose and her class were also able to perfectly hide the identity of their leader during this exam.

>> Other classes are coming up with their best strategies to maximize points, while Class B is winning through simple resource planning. (¯V¯)

CLASS C ‘s strategy in the island

Zero point leader guess(interloop) alliance strategy

Ryuuen, who is one of the leading students in Class C, formulates the strategy immediately and forms a temporary alliance Deserted Island exam Doc with Class A leader Katsuragi . (alliance reason is katsuragi fighting class leadership against arisu sakayanagi)

On the first day,

Ryuuen first chooses the leader with his most trusted members, which is himself. Then he selects some of his members and bruises them badly to make it look like they had a fight within Class C over this special exam.

He then provides the selected members, now acting as “interlopers,” with cameras and walkie-talkies in a bag to communicate and get evidence of other classes’ leader key cards as photo proof.

He then sends these interlopers into the other classes. These interlopers would make it seem like Ryuuen kicked them out and that they have no place to stay. They would make the other classes feel guilty for helping them.

The interlopers would try their best to remain normal and gather evidence of the leaders of the other classes in this exam and get photo proof about it .

On the second day,

Ryuuen makes sure to give the other classes the impression that his class doesn't have any weight in this special exam, where there are no consequences and no real point losses, since the Special Points in this exam cannot go below zero.

He makes it look like Class C is simply enjoying their freedom and spending as much as they can with their points. And those Class C students that other classes took in are fools for not enjoying the freedom this exam has given them, implying that this is the reason why they were beaten up.

On the third day,

Ryuuen and Class C leave the island using the rule: "The student can't board the cruise during a special exam without a suitably justifiable reason." Their justification would be that they ran out of points, and physical exhaustion etc

Except Ryuuen stays on the island. With his alliance with Class A, he stays at their spot, where he can monitor and

communicate with the other interlopers through walkie-talkies, while Class A provides him with cover.

During these past three days, Ryuuen provides Class C's Special Points to Class A for them to spend. As part of their alliance, Class A would try to spend zero points of their own and use Class C's Special Points instead.

Days 4–6

Ryuuen would simply survive on his own while keeping tabs on his interlopers and monitoring their status, especially whether they have discovered the other classes' leaders.

On the 7th day,

Ryuuen and Katsuragi would write down the names of the leaders they found through the interlopers.

(mind you ryueen made with alliance class A and this strat ply during the cruise was circling the island)

CLASS d ‘s strategy in the island

Class D has two strategies in this exam. However, since they are the main POV, I can explain and share the details of each strategy day by day to show what was happening, since everything was connected.

For now, I’ll share who actually created these strategies, but I won’t explain each in detail right now

Hirata’s strategy - 120 special point saving pacifist strategy (pretty straight forward as name suggests)

Ayanokoji’s strategy - leader swap strategy

(this one needs good explanation explaining every part)

Before the commence of the special exam:

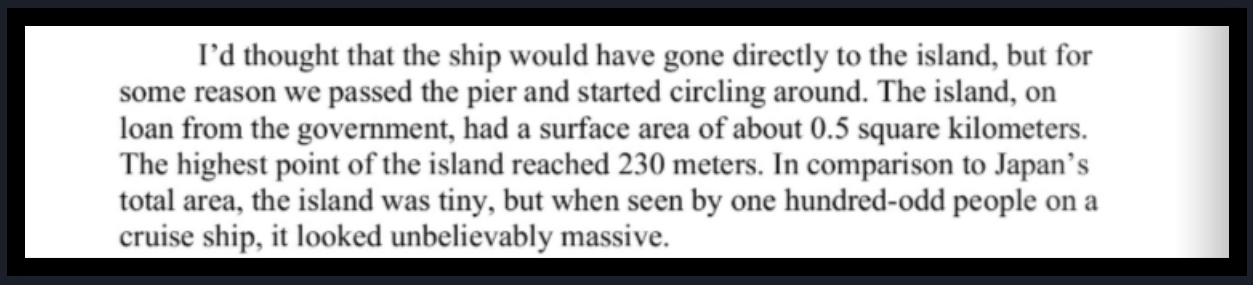
A few days after Chabashira's threat, at 5:00 AM, the first-year students boarded buses and departed for Tokyo Bay. Once the students arrived at the port, they boarded the passenger ships. After eating breakfast in the lounge, the

students were permitted to move freely throughout the entire vessel.

The school—Advanced Nurturing High School—had arranged an extravagant two-week trip: a cruise on a luxury liner during their summer vacation.

Ayanokoji notes - At our government-sponsored school, there was absolutely no need for us to pay for tuition or other miscellaneous expenses—which, of course, included this trip

Eventually, the ship sailed closer, and the island became clearer. Ayanokoji observed that the ship circled around the island instead of heading toward it directly, taking note of the island's layout and details.



I'd thought that the ship would have gone directly to the island, but for some reason we passed the pier and started circling around. The island, on loan from the government, had a surface area of about 0.5 square kilometers. The highest point of the island reached 230 meters. In comparison to Japan's total area, the island was tiny, but when seen by one hundred-odd people on a cruise ship, it looked unbelievably massive.

During this time, an announcement broadcasted from the ship's PA system:

["Attention, students. Please assemble on the deck. You will be able to see the island soon. This is a good time to take in *some rather significant scenery*."]

This was immediately followed by another announcement:

["We will disembark in thirty minutes. Please assemble on the deck. All students should have changed into their jerseys. Make sure to check your designated bag and your luggage, and do not forget your cell phone. Please keep all other personal items in your room. There is a possibility that you will not be able to visit the bathroom for some time, so please do so now."]

Thirty minutes later, the final announcement was made:

["We will disembark now, beginning with the students from Class A. Cell phones are prohibited on the island. Please hand your phone to your homeroom teacher as you leave."]

Moments later, the entire freshman class made their way to the deck.

Moments later, the entire freshman class made their way to the deck.

As Ayanokoji finally met up with Horikita, he noticed a subtle shift in her behavior. Normally meticulous about her appearance, today her hair was slightly disheveled, and she was unconsciously rubbing her arms while waiting to disembark and set foot on the island. Notably, she hadn't been present on the cruise ship earlier, having secluded herself in her room to read a novel -a detail Ayanokoji found somewhat suspicious.

"She wasn't saying anything, and it would be silly to investigate further. Best just to drop it."

liar

All students disembarked and stepped onto the island, where the rules of the first special exam were officially explained.

Deserted Island exam Doc

Read/skim the days tab, then go to Class D’s strategies tab to see the feats that happened. This will help you see the entire picture of the exam and what Ayanokoji was doing.

If you have any questions, DM me, since a few things are connected to Volumes 1 and 2.

Deserted Island exam Doc

Deserted Island exam Doc

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Deserted Island exam Doc

Deserted Island exam Doc

DAY 1

Class D approached Chabashira to receive their wristwatches. During this interaction, Chabashira informed them about the two tents that would be provided for each class, each large enough to accommodate eight people and weighing close to fifteen kilograms.

Furthermore, Chabashira explained the mechanics of the basic cardboard toilet provided to the classes. The mere thought of using a cardboard box left Class D's students, especially the girls, completely perplexed and disturbed.

Shinohara immediately voiced her strong objections to using a cardboard box. Ike tried to step in and counter her complaints, but only ended up making a fool of himself instead.

Hirata, who had been entrusted with the manual, was questioned by the girls regarding the toilet situation. At first, Hirata suggested that they would simply have to grin and bear it, but the girls refused to back down. Pressured by the situation, Hirata checked the manual again and found a solution: a temporary toilet that could be purchased using special points for 20 points.

The girls immediately agreed to spend the 20 special points on it, ike tries to object again saying 20 points is too much . Shinohara ignored Ike and pleaded with Hirata to buy a temporary toilet.

Shinohra stops hirata who was trying to consider other opinions and urge other girl - Karuizawa defacto girl representative in class D on this matter

Karuizawa supported the idea of grinning and bearing the situation instead.

Another boy, Yukimaru, joined the discussion and argued that this Special Exam was a once-in-a-lifetime chance to bridge the point gap with the other classes, and that they couldn't just spend valuable points on personal matters like this. They should decide on a policy instead.

Shinohara objected, saying, "Are you trying to say that I'm not considering anything?" Yukimaru got triggered by her bullshit and said that girls argued emotionally.

Hirata stepped in, trying to moderate the situation.

Ayanokoji notes: Hirata didn't know what to do, yet frantically tried to mediate while doing his best not to show his mounting concern.

Horikita, who was standing next to Ayanokoji, says that the test was going to be more complex than she had thought.

Horikita adds that the exam falls outside her academic strengths. Sudo, Ike, and the others whom she thought were hindrances are key players in the exam.

"Class D has no leadership, which worries me. Besides, Hirata's a pushover. He can't even make one decision, can he?"

"I wonder. At this stage, I'm not optimistic enough to say it'll be easy. I'm the same as the others. I've never lived in such an environment before, so I can't really make any predictions. I realize now that this test is more complicated than we thought, and our position more precarious. I *do* want to increase our points, but I can't come up with a good solution. What an unpleasant test."

Ayanokoji notes that different groups were present.

One group wanted to use points, one group didn't want to use points, and one group wanted to use points only when necessary.

Furthermore, there were some minor differences even within those separate factions.

Class D finally decided to put the matter aside and try to search for a spot for their camp that the other classes had already found or were in the process of finding.

During the search, Ayanokoji notes that Horikita is trailing behind the party.

Ayanokoji asks, "Not in a good mood?" to which Horikita replies that she is just depressed about the nature of the exam.

Ayanokoji notes that normally enthusiastically joining in a group effort was far beyond Horikita's capabilities.

Ayanokoji notes enthusiastically joining in a group effort was far beyond Horikita's capabilities.

["I thought it would've been good to make an effort to fit in, but it would've been pointless to say that to her. I relented."]

Liar [noted 3]

Horikita adds that the exam falls outside her academic strengths. Sudo, Ike, and the others whom she thought were hindrances are key players in the exam.

["Maybe. More importantly though, are you okay?" ayanokoji

"What do you mean?" horikita

She glared. I quickly said "Nothing," and averted my gaze.

What's the matter?" Horikita asked.

"Oh, nothing." Maybe I was being too nosy. I turned back around.]

Horikita adds that she's worried that the class difference will widen, with a serious expression.

Ayanokoji: "Aiming for the top is tough."

Which makes horkita to mention

[“I thought what Chabashira-sensei said back then was a joke, but are you really not at all interested in moving up?” Horikita asked.

Chabashira-sensei had probably said something about that back when she encountered Horikita and me in the guidance room.]

[“People who come to this school do so to make use of the privileges it offers.” Rather than dissatisfied, Horikita appeared puzzled. At the time of our enrollment, access to elite universities and job opportunities were supposed to be guaranteed. Many students expected it.

“Why did you choose this school?” she asked me.

“Well, can’t I just say the same thing? To shamelessly make use of the privileges the school offered me.”

“I see.” This time she sounded blatantly dissatisfied, and regarded me with a sharp side-eye. I thought that Horikita had enrolled here to be at the same school as her older brother. She wasn’t aiming for Class A for her own sake, but rather, sought her older brother’s approval. Her ambition differed from most others.(profiling)

“It doesn’t feel good to have someone pry into your past,” she said, forestalling me. I’d intended to dig deeper, but it looked like she’d immediately understood my true intentions. I’m trying to understand my past, or should I say this person’s past, by thoroughly analyzing and breaking down people.

“I’ll tell you this: Chabashira-sensei leaked the information. Don’t misunderstand me. All right? Besides, we’re still not friends. Don’t forget that.”

“Don’t worry. I’m not really thinking about friendship, anyway.”]

After a while, the party stopped under the foliage of the trees, where no one could hear them. Their conversation resumed. Hirata navigated the conversation, saying that spending points on a toilet was a necessary expense and that the other classes had probably spent points on necessary expenses as well.

After that problem was solved, Hirata brought them to search for a camp and asked for recruits with survival skills to search in the forest.

People participated, including Ayanokoji, in the search for a camp. There were a total of 12 people.

They were divided into groups of three, of which we know three groups:

Idiot trio
Ayanokoji, Sakura, and Koenji
Kushida's group

Ayanokoji, along with Koenji and Sakura, went into the forest to search for a base camp spot. Sakura was going too slowly, while Koenji was going too fast, which meant that they could also lose sight of Koenji, who had been pushing forward relentlessly.

Ayanokoji realizes that, given Koenji's pace, he was rushing ahead without hesitation, as if he already had a plan.

[“In the first place, I can’t believe he’d…”

“What’s the matter?”

“No, I…”

What in the world was he up to? Was it a coincidence? No, Kouenji walked without hesitation. Even if our team was free to choose the base camp’s location, you’d expect him to be looking around as you went. Kouenji walked straight ahead, almost as if he had another purpose.

More than anything else, his progress surprised me. It was possible that Kouenji wasn’t simply pushing ahead recklessly. Maybe he had a goal in mind. However, the problem was that Sakura, in trying to keep up with Kouenji, was running out of breath.]

Ayanokoji called out to Koenji, warning him that rushing ahead blindly risked getting them lost. Koenji casually brushed off the concern, arguing that getting lost would be their own fault and asserting that the forest wasn't entirely natural, making the probability of getting lost low.

Koenji then paused and vaguely challenged them, asking if they had noticed anything unusual about their surroundings.

“In the face of Kouenji’s sharp gaze, Sakura hid behind my back. What did I think about this place? I tried scanning my surroundings. While I did so, Sakura also looked around. However, nothing seemed especially notable. It was just a forest. What in the world was he trying to get at?”

Liar

Receiving no satisfactory answer and dismissing them as ordinary people, Koenji dashed forward once again.

(Koenji had implicitly deduced that the forest’s trees were arranged in deliberate patterns and ***paths***, ensuring students wouldn’t easily get lost during daylight hours.)

[“If you honestly believed everything Kouenji said to you, you’d go mad. He was the sort of man who would play any number of games. However, it was possible we were missing something. In any case, we didn’t have the time to search at our leisure.”]

Liar

Ayanokoji asked Sakura if she had a handkerchief. When she replied affirmatively and handed it over, Ayanokoji tied it to a nearby tree branch as a marker.

Just then, Sakura called out, pointing out that Koenji was pulling too far ahead and that they were about to lose sight of him. She tried to chase after him, but her physical condition was already exhausted. Even if she pushed herself, she couldn’t keep up with Ayanokoji’s pace, let alone Koenji’s. Noticing her struggle, Ayanokoji deliberately intervened to give her a breather:

“This is a bit too physically demanding. Do you mind if we slow down?”

Even though Ayanokoji suspected Sakura saw right through his ploy, he knew she wouldn’t call him out on it. By the time they slowed down, they had completely lost sight of Koenji.

With that, I slowed my pace. That way, Sakura wouldn't feel like the problem. She probably saw through my ploy, but I didn't mind. It wasn't as though she could call me out on it. By this point, we'd lost sight of Kouenji. Far ahead, I could occasionally make out the rustle of grass and the footsteps on the earth.

"Wow, he's a man of many talents. Kouenji, I mean."

Leaving Koenji behind, the two of them continued their search alone for a while longer without encountering anything else of note, until they somehow found a path (Ayanokoji did).

["This is a ***path***, isn't it?"

"Looks like it."

In the middle of a forest on an uninhabited island, someone had created a path. It wasn't paved or anything, of course, but trees had been chopped down and the path was well-trod. If the school had prepared this, then perhaps a spot lay further ahead.]

They moved forward and found an opening inside the mountain.

Soon we arrived at what appeared to be a large hole in the mountainside: an entrance into a cave. At first glance it appeared to be a natural cave, but upon closer inspection the inside appeared properly reinforced. Perhaps the hole itself had been created by human hands.

"Could this possibly be…a spot?"

"Maybe."

Liar

Ayanokoji and Sakura approached the cave to check the spot. However, they stopped on their way when they saw someone coming out. Ayanokoji immediately stopped Sakura and hid her from view.

The person stopped at the entrance, and quietly looked to the southwest. He stood there for a minute or two. He'd wasted absolutely no time in securing this spot. It seemed like he'd gone straight to this cave without any hesitation. That aside, the man was tightly holding onto what looked to be some kind of card. Then, we heard a voice coming from inside the cave. Panicked, I hid my face.

"In a cave this size, we should have enough room for two tents, Katsuragi-san. We sure were lucky. We secured a spot really quickly."

I listened carefully, trying to grasp the situation.

"Luck? What are you talking about? I figured that there was a cave here even before we landed. Finding it was inevitable. Be mindful of what you say and do. We don't know if anyone is out there listening to us. As the leader, I have a responsibility. Be sure you don't make even the slightest mistake."

"Before the ship docked at the pier, it had already taken a trip around

the island as a detour for some reason. That was probably a deliberate move by the school to give the students some hints. From the ship's deck, I noticed a path that cut through the forest. All I had to do was take the shortest route from the pier after we'd landed to the path."

"B-but it might've been just a chance for us to enjoy the scenery."

"That was far too long of a roundabout for sightseeing. Besides, the announcement was strange, too."

"I didn't notice anything at all, and yet… Katsuragi-san, you managed to see the school's true intentions. Because of that, you understood there was a cave here. Just as we'd expect from you!"

"Let's go to the next one, Yahiko. It's pointless to linger here after we've claimed the spot. There's a path to two other places that I noticed from the ship. There should be some kind of facility up ahead."

"Y-yeah! If we leave it like this, Sakayanagi will have no choice but to be quiet!"

"If you only look straight ahead, you might overlook things."

"You say that, but isn't it enough just to be cautious of Class B? I mean, Class D is just an assortment of failures, right? They're defective. Considering the point difference, it's probably fine to ignore them, right?"

I'd heard talk like that on the ship earlier—that Class D was basically beyond Class A's consideration. They treated us like pebbles in their path.

"That's enough chit-chat. Let's go, Yahiko."

Ayanokoji notes that those two guys seemed like they were from Class A, based on what they were saying.

> Inside the cave, some kind of terminal device with a monitor was embedded into the wall. The words "Class A" were displayed on the screen, along with a countdown timer that showed seven hours and 55 minutes remaining. Was this the proof that they owned this spot? We couldn't do anything to interfere until the countdown reached zero, and we couldn't force our way in.
>
> That's why those two had left this place without worry. But that wasn't the only problem. As long as the rights of ownership weren't snatched by another class, Class A would keep acquiring one point every eight hours. Although they'd lost thirty points because of one student's illness, they were earning it back. Besides, that Katsuragi guy seemed to have determined there were a few other facilities. If a spot happened to have food and water, could they widen the gap between the other classes?

Ayanokoji informs Sakura that he will report this to Hirata.

Ayanokoji and Sakura returned to Hirata. They found that the Idiot Trio had found a spot near a river; however, two teams had not returned.

Ayanokoji informed them that they had lost Koenji and split up. Hirata informed them that Koenji had come back a little while later and then left to go swimming.

After a while, when the two teams arrived, they went to the place the Idiot Trio had mentioned. It was a riverbed 10 meters wide, a flat piece of land surrounded on all sides by trees.

They confirmed that this was a designated spot the school had prepared, and that unauthorized use was prohibited, as a sign near the river read.

They discussed merits and demerits on occupying it:

- Merits: River access and gain some points by holding this area.
- Demerits: Maintain eight hours update, and since the designated leader is the only one who can handle that operation.

Ike agreed to make this spot.

> We were surrounded by forest on all sides. We couldn't notice a spy in the brushwood.
>
> "Hmm, so if we stay hidden and protected, it'll be fine, right? We can keep the area surrounded."
>
> Although there were risks, Ike was correct. If we made our base camp in this area, there was no way to pin us down. If students from another class took this place, it would become impossible to use the river. Both guys and girls agreed with Ike on this. I think that Hirata had wanted to agree anyway, but being a font of neutrality, he'd wanted to collect a lot of opinions.
>
> It was true that obtaining the rights of exclusive possession was something of a double-edged sword, with both risks and rewards. However, as with Class A occupying the cave, it was possible for the class to act together to protect ourselves. It went without saying that Classes B and C would most likely have done the same thing. In other words, it was an acceptable risk.

At least everyone agreed on Ike.

Ayanokoji commented that Hirata had probably wanted to agree anyway, but because he was a figure of neutrality, he wanted to gather everyone's opinions first.

After that, they moved on to the next question:

"Who will be the leader?"

Kushida asked everyone to form a circle. She said that she had thought about it and believed that Hirata or Karuizawa shouldn't be the leader, since they already stood out too much.

This was because Hirata and Karuizawa were the de facto leaders of Class D.

She suggested that they choose someone who could take responsibility and nominated Horikita for the role.

Hirata agreed and asked Horikita what she thought about it. Horikita accepted the role.

Ayanokoji thought:

["Personally, I was relieved that someone like Sudou or Ike wasn't the leader. Hirata immediately went over to Chabashira-sensei to pass on Horikita's name. Before long, he returned with a card and entrusted it to Horikita. Taking into consideration the possibility that we were being watched, we had everyone touch the device without it activating. This was to camouflage the leader, so a spy wouldn't know who he or she was."]

Despite reaching a resolution, Class D remained divided over the expenditure of 20 special points on toilets, as Shinohara's group refused to back down regarding the purchase. This ongoing disagreement left Ike thoroughly frustrated.

Visibly annoyed, Ike skipped a flat pebble across the surface of the river. The stone skipped five or six times before effortlessly striking the opposite bank. Ayanokoji noticed this and tried to chat with Ike.

"Hey, you're surprisingly really good at outdoorsy stuff."

"Hmm? Oh, I wouldn't really say that. It's just that I used to go camping together with my family back when I was little. I'm not opposed to drinking river water. I can tell if the water source is clean just by looking."

Ike sounded honest rather than boastful.

"Well then, wouldn't it have been a good idea to tell us about your camping experience from the beginning? If you'd gained people's trust, things might've gone more smoothly."

You had to give an explanation for your actions. Your abilities weren't as easily observed as test scores, and not as immediately recognizable by others.

"If I'd been in the Boy Scouts, I'd have legitimate bragging rights. But just going camping isn't anything to brag about. Even if I said anything, it would've been pointless, anyway."

He'd apparently gotten rather discouraged after being so harshly criticized by the girls. For Ike, who normally only cared about being attractive to the ladies, that had to hurt. However, if he'd only changed the way he handled things, the situation might've gone differently. It might have encouraged the class to see him and Hirata working together to take the lead.

Ike adds that it's like the first time camping for everyone, which is not unreasonable and not what he expected. To cool his mind, he went swimming in the river.

Horikita, who stood next to Ayanokoji, asked him to follow her. Ayanokoji asked why. Horikita added that Ike might be a vital player in the exam due to his knowledge of survival, unlike Koenji.

Ayanokoji asked why Horikita didn't persuade Koenji. Horikita bluntly replied, "Do you think I can persuade Koenji?"

Horikita followed up by saying that she was relying on Ayanokoji because he was the one she could count on.

Ayanokoji replied, "Because you don't have anyone else for that."

Horikita condescended to him, saying that it must be reassuring to be under such an unreliable and underachieving[person.

Ayanokoji replied, "I'll talk to him, but leave the timing to me."

We left it at that, with my acceptance and the realization we had nothing left to say to one another. I wondered if this week would show Horikita how difficult it was to live life as a hermit. Alone, she was amazing…but only alone.

In an academic setting, she could quietly continue her race to the top without relying on anyone. But this test proved that there were some things you couldn't do alone. Horikita now probably felt powerless for the first time. It was probably why she'd come to rely on me so quickly, at this early stage. If you didn't have any friends, you'd have no one to talk to. Without communication, there could be no cooperation or trust. An academically brilliant girl was less useful than a normal student in a situation like this.

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"The school probably factored that into their calculations, too," I muttered.

This week would test Horikita Suzune's limits, and show her at her worst. The school had made her isolated life impossible.

Night

Class D set up their tents, but both tents were placed right next to each other. Shinohara and the girls decided that they would occupy both tents, meaning the boys were forced to sleep outdoors without any prior experience doing so.

Hirata, who had set up the tents, approached the boys' side and asked Ayanokoji to collect branches for the bonfire because flashlights weren't enough.

Ayanokoji's Notes: Hirata appeared sheepish and apologetic, and apparently, Ayanokoji had somehow been singled out as the most qualified guy for this task.

>> Almost like he had raised his hand regarding survival skills early on, while the rest of the class had no idea that Ike was actually good at camping because of his usual behavior.

Ayanokoji agreed, and Hirata urged him to invite someone else to come along with him.

Fair point. I set out to look for a partner. Horikita was standing completely still, gazing up at the sky. She must have noticed that I was looking at her, because she came over.

"You're normally incredibly uncooperative, but you're being rather generous by going along with his favor," she said.

"Didn't you just ask me for a favor, too? Besides, this is just something to help Hirata. The work isn't really a big deal or anything. Just picking up branches."

"For someone like Hirata, who's positioned as the center of the class, to rely upon you is kind of pathetic."

"Class D's real leaders are Hirata and Karuizawa, for better or worse. No one else has their ability to rally others. No one else is as qualified."

Ayanokoji asked her why she didn't become Hirata's assistant during this exam. She insulted Hirata in response. Later, she clarified that she would only help in times of need, such as when there was a presence of an enemy, and that she wasn't sure about the issue of spending points.

Horikita rejected the invitation.

Sudo rejected the invitation.

Yamauchi rejected the invitation.

(Ayanokoji didn't mention that Hirata had told him to pick branches to the last two.)

Sakura accepts the invitation. Seeing this, Yamauchi accepts the invitation as well, which Ayanokoji finds odd.

They decide to pick branches from nearby so they won't get lost. Here, Yamauchi tells Ayanokoji that he's going for Sakura because she was his second choice after Kushida, whom Yamauchi initially went for but then changed his mind because Kushida was too popular.

Ayanokoji says he will help him get to know Sakura, but right now they need to find branches for the bonfire.

While collecting the branches, they find a girl under a tree.

A lone girl sat with her back up against a large tree. She wasn't a Class D student. When she noticed us, she looked up and then quickly averted her eyes. Since she was from another class, it'd be fine for us to leave her alone, but the state she was in suggested that this was no trivial matter.

There was a red, swollen mark on her cheek. Someone had hit her pretty hard. When Yamauchi started to pass the girl, I grabbed him by the shoulder.

"What?"

"Oh, uh…sorry. It's nothing."

I was going to say something, but he finally noticed the girl.

(Ayanokoji was initially trying to stop Yamauchi).

"Hey. What's the matter? Are you okay?" Yamauchi called.

"Just leave me alone. It's nothing."

"Doesn't look that way. Who did this to you? Should I call a teacher?"

Considering the swelling, it was easy to see that she was in a fair amount of pain.

"Just a class dispute. Don't worry about it," answered the girl, laughing in self-deprecation. Her voice was boyish, her tone tough, but it was clear she wasn't feeling well. She seemed rather shaken.

"So, what are you going to do? We just can't leave you here."

This was not our school campus. We were surrounded by jungle on all sides. In a couple hours, the sun would begin to set. If she were out here alone in the dark, it could be disastrous.

"We're Class D students. Why not come to our base camp?"

Yamauchi turned to Sakura and me for approval. We nodded in agreement.

The girl informs them that she's from Class C and guilt-trips Yamauchi, asking why he's helping another class's student when, in this exam, she is his enemy. Yamauchi tries to argue, but the Class C student says that leading her to their base is not a good idea logically.

Yamauchi was taken aback. If you knew the location of someone's campsite, you could start to get a read on how they planned to conduct themselves throughout the test. You could get into their heads and anticipate their strategies. In Class D's case, announcing our spot was a reason to be concerned. But I spoke up.

"Don't worry. I don't think it'll be a problem," I said.

Ayanokoji steps into the conversation. Yamauchi introduces himself, and the girl says her name is Ibuki.

Yamauchi lets Ibuki into the camp and carries her bag, which makes a heavy thud when it falls down from the branch, something Ayanokoji notices.

They return to the camp with the branches, with Ibuki staying behind to cause problems. Hirata isn't there, so Ayanokoji, Sakura, and Yamauchi have to start the fire on their own.

Yamauchi uses the matchbox he got from Hirata, signaling that's how it's done and trying to look cool.

"Maybe we need to carefully get the fire onto the branches themselves? Right now it seems impossible."

"Okay, I'll try that next time. Ah, jeez, that one failed too. Are these matches defective or something?"

We were having such a hard time lighting a fire with one match, we wondered whether we'd be able to light a bonfire at all. Yamauchi was getting increasingly frustrated, and began striking the matches more forcefully against the strip. As a result, he broke several.

"If I keep messing up, we're gonna be in trouble."

Three broken matchsticks lay at Yamauchi's feet. He tried to regain his composure.

"Don't worry, don't worry. It's going to be all right. We still have more."

He opened the matchbox and showed it to me. It looked light, but there were about twenty or more in there. However, at this rate we might run out before the week was through.

"All right! This time I got it for sure!"

He carefully lit the match and slowly brought it toward the branch. Though it seemed like the fire was desperately trying its best, it didn't develop as desired. It ended up only smoldering a little, causing more smoke.

"What the hell?! What am I doing wrong? I'm going to go ask the teacher."

[Sakura crouched next to me, looking at the burned branches with a puzzled expression.

"I thought since they're wood they'd burn easily, but I guess fire is weaker than I initially imagined," I said.

She didn't seem to understand what I meant by that, so she tilted her head slightly quizzically.

"Well, when you see bonfires in movies, you typically see these large branches, right? That's why we picked these up. But maybe you can't start a fire with large branches?"

I separated the branches, snapped off a thin one, and showed it to her.

"I feel like next time, we should line up branches of this size. Also, a lot of the branches are damp."

Trying to set a fire with damp wood was the mark of an amateur. Even if Yamauchi had used dozens of matches, the fire likely wouldn't have spread.]

>>Doing the opposite on staring fire here

["It's going to require a little work on our end, but I think we should head back into the forest to get dry, thin branches, and leaves that'll burn easy."

"Huh? What are you guys doing over there?"

Ike, who'd gone for a swim, had returned just as we ran through our trial and error.

"We're in the middle of trying to start the bonfire. It's not going so well, though. We're having a tough time."

"A bonfire? Wait, these thick branches aren't going to catch on fire. You need to start with smaller branches, you know? The branches you got here are way too big. Also, a bunch of 'em are damp, too. This is no good at all!"

"Ah, but, Ayanokouji-kun…"

I interrupted Sakura as she attempted to speak up for me.

"I see. If you don't mind, could you tell us what to do?"

"Jeez, guess I don't got a choice, huh? Okay, time for a brief lecture. Wait a second, I'll go collect some good things from around here."]

Ike properly set up the bonfire place starts fire with matchbook that Yamauchi had set down and comment it's basic in camping training

"H-hey, Ayanokouji-kun… Even though you'd figured it out, was that okay? To not tell them?" Sakura asked.

"I didn't know whether I was correct or not, so it wouldn't have mattered. Besides, building up Ike and displaying his usefulness will be more helpful to the class."

Maybe I was rambling, but I just said what I was thinking. Sakura gave me a certain look, like she was moved by my words. For some reason, I felt stupidly embarrassed.

"Sorry. I'm a little tired, so I'm going to rest. Thank you, Sakura."

I went a short distance from the campsite. Chabashira-sensei, who was preparing a personal tent for herself nearby, stared in my direction. I pretended not to notice.

Hirata and the others returned to the camp. Hirata had joined Kushida's group to search for berries. Ike commented that they had found edible berries.

Hirata noted that Ayanokoji had gotten the bonfire going. Ayanokoji replied that Ike had gotten the bonfire going, and Hirata should be thanking Ike instead of him.

(Noted 4: Smoke signal bonfire)

The smoke billowed, large enough to make a good smoke signal. Ike explained, "If you can see the smoke, you'll be able to find the campsite even if you get lost, right?"

"Yeah, that's how we returned to the camp so quickly. It's all thanks to you, Kanji-kun!"

This also meant we ran the risk of other classes finding us, though. Kushida and several others realized this, and nodded in understanding. I would've thought that so much attention and respect would've given Ike a big head, but he wasn't looking for praise from Kushida. Instead, he looked at Shinohara.

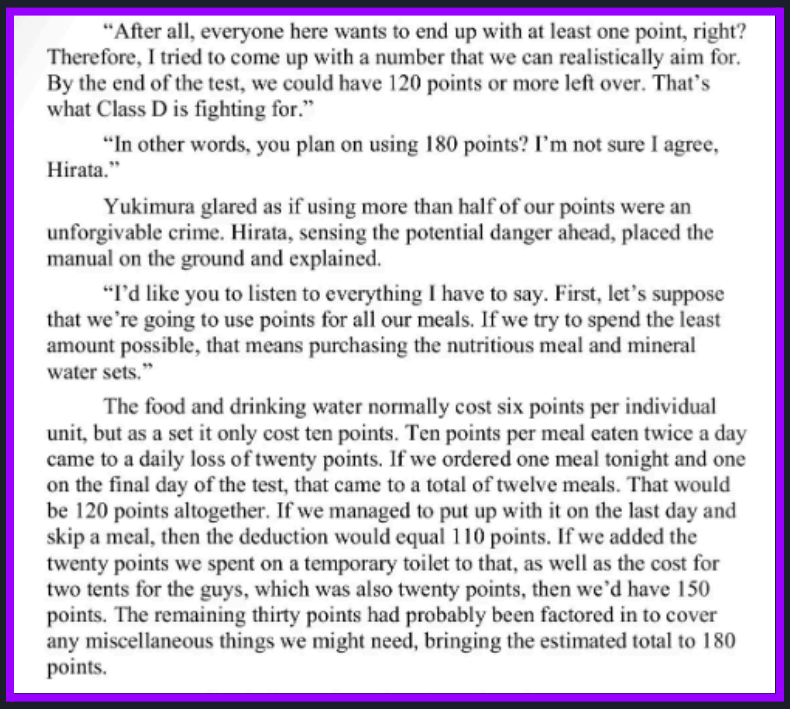
"Hey, Shinohara. I spent some time thinking about how I acted today, about the toilet and stuff and how stubborn I was. I was pushy because I wanted to save points. I'm sorry."

"Wh-why are you apologizing to me all of the sudden?"

"I just remembered the first time I went camping. The toilet was awful, and of course there were bugs crawling around everywhere. Just about everything was dirty. I remember going to my parents, complaining how much I hated going to the bathroom and telling them I wanted to go home. I'm sure it's even worse for a girl…"

Ike was amazing. He'd grasped the situation himself and handled things calmly. He had the potential to go far, unlike an ordinary person like me. It definitely took courage to say what he'd said. The courage and the apology came slowly, but Shinohara responded apologetically as well.

Hirata called for an announcement, telling everyone that he had come up with a goal that everyone could strive toward.



"After all, everyone here wants to end up with at least one point, right? Therefore, I tried to come up with a number that we can realistically aim for. By the end of the test, we could have 120 points or more left over. That's what Class D is fighting for."

"In other words, you plan on using 180 points? I'm not sure I agree, Hirata."

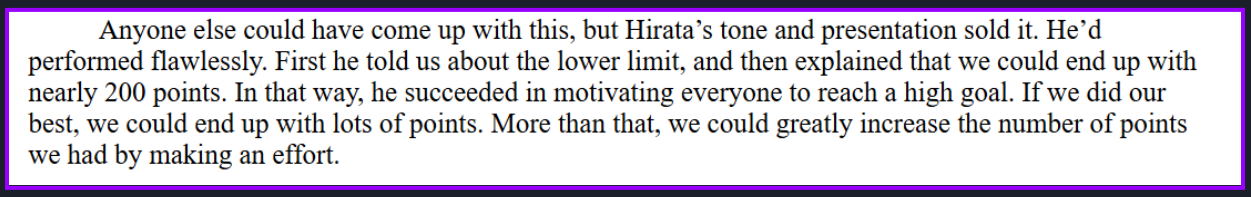
Yukimura glared as if using more than half of our points were an unforgivable crime. Hirata, sensing the potential danger ahead, placed the manual on the ground and explained.

"I'd like you to listen to everything I have to say. First, let's suppose that we're going to use points for all our meals. If we try to spend the least amount possible, that means purchasing the nutritious meal and mineral water sets."

The food and drinking water normally cost six points per individual unit, but as a set it only cost ten points. Ten points per meal eaten twice a day came to a daily loss of twenty points. If we ordered one meal tonight and one on the final day of the test, that came to a total of twelve meals. That would be 120 points altogether. If we managed to put up with it on the last day and skip a meal, then the deduction would equal 110 points. If we added the twenty points we spent on a temporary toilet to that, as well as the cost for two tents for the guys, which was also twenty points, then we'd have 150 points. The remaining thirty points had probably been factored in to cover any miscellaneous things we might need, bringing the estimated total to 180 points.

>> BS plan/strat

Hirata argued that 180 points wasn't something to dwell on, noting that even superior Class A wouldn't have an addition of more than 100 points, and emphasizing that other tasks could yield bonus points. Eventually, the class agreed with Hirata's plan.



Anyone else could have come up with this, but Hirata's tone and presentation sold it. He'd performed flawlessly. First he told us about the lower limit, and then explained that we could end up with nearly 200 points. In that way, he succeeded in motivating everyone to reach a high goal. If we did our best, we could end up with lots of points. More than that, we could greatly increase the number of points we had by making an effort.

Ayanokoji tried to bring up Ibuki, who was still staying further behind. However, Hirata's popularity caused Hirata not to hear Ayanokoji's request.

"Sorry. Can you wait a little longer? I'm going to talk to him about you."

"You don't need to force yourself. I'd probably end up just getting in the way."

Ibuki pulled up a handful of grass, looking pissed.

"After all, they'll chase me out anyway. Am I wrong?"

"I don't know. Hirata is an exceptionally good guy."

I couldn't imagine that Hirata would kick her out if he knew about her situation.

"Oh, I never introduced myself before. My name's Ayanokouji."

"So, should I introduce myself once more then?"

"Nah. You're Ibuki, from Class C. I remember."

We faced each other through the introductions, but Ibuki wouldn't look me in the eyes.

And so we settled on our goal of catching fish from the river and foraging for berries in the forest. If we were successful, we'd decide whether or not to purchase a set of cooking utensils for an additional five points. Also, we decided to spend another twenty points to install one shower. We expected opposition, but our health might worsen if we only used cold water. The guys were only allowed to use the shower in the middle of the night, though. All of the girls seemed to agree that they'd drink water from the river. So, with the opposition convinced, the motion passed.

While Class D resolved their issues regarding drinking water and food by purchasing meal sets once and investing in fishing rods, the issue of Ibuki was raised by a girl named Satou when talking to Hirata. Yamauchi informed Hirata that there might be some trouble in her class, explaining why she was isolated, to which Hirata insisted that they couldn't just leave her.

"But, Hirata-kun… Couldn't she be a spy? I mean, if she can spot the leader…" Yamauchi, who'd only just realized this, held his head in his hands.

"Ah, that's right. I suppose it's possible. I'll check on it. Is that okay, Yamauchi-kun? Ayanokouji-kun?"

Hirata headed over to Ibuki. Had he excluded Sakura because of his pretty-boy thoughtfulness? Sakura seemed relieved to not be noticed.

"Do you have a moment, Ibuki-san? I wanted to talk to you," Hirata said.

"I'm probably just getting in the way. You've already taken good care of me."

She quickly stood, as if she wanted to run.

"Wait a minute. I wanted to ask what happened. I want to help."

She stopped at Hirata's words. After seeing her swollen face, Hirata had likely surmised that the issue wasn't trivial.

"Nothing will change if I stay. I don't want to waste time just sitting around."

"This is a test, so of course some students will doubt you. However, you're hurt. I don't want to chase you away if you can't go back to your own class. I think that's why Yamauchi-kun brought you here. So, tell me about your situation."

"This isn't something I can just talk about. Besides, I've heard all your plans. You'd hate it if more of your strategies were leaked, right?"

Ibuki started walking away. Hirata stopped her in her tracks.

"If you really were a spy, you wouldn't want to be chased out, would you? Am I wrong?"

"Enough. I'm just looking for a place to sleep."

As I expected, she wasn't going to return to Class C. The sun was setting, and it'd be night soon.

"It's crazy for a girl to sleep alone in the woods."

"Even if it's crazy, I don't have a choice. Helping me won't gain you anything."

"This has nothing to do with losses or gains. We can't just leave someone in trouble. We all think so."

Her expression cleared, and she turned toward us without hesitation. Something like that was designed to melt even the toughest exterior. Ibuki seemed to believe Hirata, and it gave her confidence.

"I had a fight with a boy in my class. He hit me and chased me away. That's all."

"That's horrible. Raising a hand against a girl, I mean."

I hadn't expected it, either. I'd thought for sure she'd been in a fight with another girl.

"I won't say anything more on the subject. I didn't think you'd take me in and give me shelter, anyway. See you."

"Wait. I understand that you're really in trouble. Please give me a little time. If you can do that, I'll tell the other students about your situation and see if we can find a place for you. Ayanokouji-kun, can you watch Ibuki-san? I'm going to go talk to everyone."

Hirata left us and returned to the group. I wondered if Hirata had left me with her because he trusted me, or at least trusted me more than Yamauchi. I was a little curious.

Hirata assigned Ayanokoji to look after Ibuki's place. Hirata convinced his class to take Ibuki in; in return, the class made Ibuki promise not to go near the leader device. After that, everything was settled, and Ibuki was provided with food by Kushida.

Ayanokoji noted that, unlike the boys who held together, the girls' groups had clear factions and walls separating them:

The Empress Team, led by Karuizawa

Kushida-chan's Friendship Team

Shinohara's Arrogant Team

Horikita and Sakura, who were by themselves

Then a question arose in Class D: Where is Kouenji?

["Oh, Kouenji complained about being in poor physical condition and returned to the ship. Of course, that means that you've had thirty points deducted. Those are the rules, so there's nothing to be done. Kouenji has retired, and he's obligated to stay onboard the ship for one week for medical treatment," said Chabashira-sensei.]

This upset Class D and caused a massive uproar over Kouenji's behavior and the severe penalty it brought.

Penalty: −30 Special Points

DAY 2

Ayanokoji “supposedly” woke up early due to the heat and went to investigate Ibuki’s place and bag.

I woke up much earlier that morning than I’d anticipated. The heat and humidity had made me toss and turn in my sleep. It finally roused me, and I wasn’t very well rested. My bed felt warm, and I remembered that we’d kept the lamp on throughout the whole night. Our tent stank like sweat. Fortunately, we’d formed the tent with a mesh material because it allowed for the night breeze to blow through. But once the night had ended, the temperature rose significantly. I carefully slipped out of the tent so as to not wake anyone else, and approached our mountain of piled luggage.

We’d kept the luggage outside in order to make the tents as spacious as possible. After looking around to make sure I was alone, I found a singularly colored piece of luggage. It was Ibuki’s bag. Since her bag was different, it was easy to spot. I grabbed it without hesitation and checked inside. If someone saw me doing this, I’d be instantly labeled a pervert. Inside, I found the same kinds of things that everyone else had, like towels, a change of clothes, underwear, etc. However…

“A digital camera, huh?”

That explained the dull sound I’d heard yesterday when she dropped the bag against a tree. This item wasn’t appropriate for a deserted island. On the bottom of the camera, I found a rental sticker. Why did Ibuki have this? I considered the possible reasons, trying to think from her perspective. After conjuring up an image of her in my head, several possibilities suggested themselves.

I checked the camera’s power source. It had no data, and no sign that it’d been used. After I finished my inspection, I returned the item to the bag, and went back to the tent.

There, Hirata found Ayanokoji awake early. Ayanokoji excused himself, saying he had trouble sleeping the previous night and that his back was still hurting. Hirata replied that he had also woken up early because Koenji’s retirement penalty had hurt the class and affected his goal.

"If you include Kouenji-kun's penalty, we spent almost 100 points yesterday. I told everyone that in the worst possible outcome we'd be left with 120 points, but now I'm not even sure about that. I guess the anxiety woke me."

Hirata took out the manual to confirm his fears. Kouenji's retirement had been a pretty serious blow.

"This is tough, even for the class peacemaker." I couldn't possibly fathom carrying this kind of responsibility. I peeked at the manual, and Hirata adjusted his position so that I could comfortably look at it. I was grateful for such small acts of consideration.

"I'm only doing this because I like it. If my hard work makes everyone in class happy, then I'm satisfied. But it's surprisingly difficult. How many points we have after this special test will have a huge impact on our lives. I think it's wrong to freak everybody out."

Ayanokoji adds that Hirata's thinking is impossible since the ANHS system dictates otherwise.

Then Ayanokoji questions Hirata about the groups in the class:

Those who want to reach Class A
Those who want to stay in Class D
What would he do about this?

Hirata remarks that it's a hard question and that he needs time to think about it. Ayanokoji wonders if Hirata has already thought about it. Hirata asks the same question to Ayanokoji, who replies that it's impossible to reach Class A. Hirata agrees with that and adds that if Class D comes together during the Special Exam, then they can focus on what to do next time.

The conversation ends when Hirata invites Ayanokoji to freshen up at the river. Hirata puts the manual in his plastic bag. On the way to the river, they find Class B students, one of whom is Kanzaki, looking over.

Kanzaki chats that the first day is already over and that Class D has a good spot. Hirata asks if Kanzaki is from Class B, if he remembers. Kanzaki replies that he's not here to cause any trouble and apologizes for surprising them.

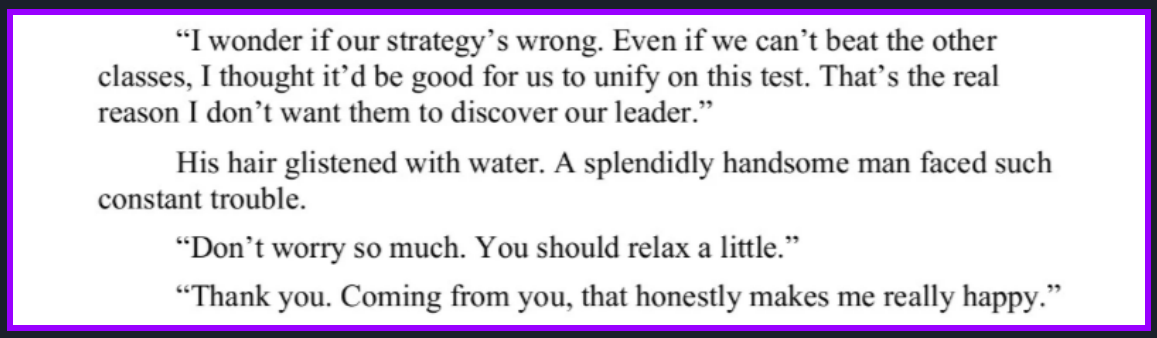
Ayanokoji immediately asks, "Kanzaki, where's Class B camping?" Ayanokoji thought he wouldn't answer, but Kanzaki answered without hesitation, giving them the location of Class B's spot, and telling them to go there.

Kanzaki and the other students leave the scene. Hirata asks if Kanzaki is Ayanokoji's friend and what "go there" means. Ayanokoji dodges the question and adds that Hirata probably thinks Ichinose and Kanzaki are friends because they helped with the Sudo case.

Hirata adds that Kanzaki and the others were probably there to check Class D's campsite as part of their reconnaissance and to estimate how many points they had.

Ayanokoji thought that was only one possible reason. You could normally estimate a class's points by looking at its tent arrangement and other factors. However, Kanzaki might also have been trying to discover the leader by observing the eight-hour right of possession expiration that occurred every day. By doing so, he could potentially calculate the renewal time and determine the interval between renewals.

However, Class D had already planned for that loophole. They had posted the second update the previous day and used the crowd to camouflage the leader and conceal the timing.



"I wonder if our strategy's wrong. Even if we can't beat the other classes, I thought it'd be good for us to unify on this test. That's the real reason I don't want them to discover our leader."

His hair glistened with water. A splendidly handsome man faced such constant trouble.

"Don't worry so much. You should relax a little."

"Thank you. Coming from you, that honestly makes me really happy."

>> Yes, Hirata. Your strategy is wrong.

After that, Class D woke up. Hirata assigned roles to reliable students for the plan to save points, such as Kei and Kushida, the Idiot Trio, and others, while less helpful students like Horikita and Ayanokoji were given independent roles.

During this, two students from Class C came to the camp and started insulting them for living like insects, as expected from a class full of defectives, while stuffing themselves with chips and soda.

Ayanokoji remarks that they're living the high life in Class C. Ibuki immediately replies, asking if Ayanokoji knows Ryuuen. He replies that he has heard he's some guy and kind of clears it. Ibuki adds that he is crazy and that these two are his underlings.

Ayanokoji recognizes these two from the Sudo trial. They were probably taking orders from Ryuuen back then and even now, instead of starting a fight.

They didn't leave, but continued snacking as if trying to harass us. Ike snapped at them, but they didn't seem to care. The provocation continued for at least ten more minutes, until Hirata's group returned and Class C decided to call it quits. They headed back toward their campsite.

"I don't think they were looking for me," Ibuki said.

"Yeah. Guess they wanted to harass us."

"They said something about sharing their luxuries. Any idea what they were talking about?" I asked.

"I wonder if things are heading toward that worst-case scenario I imagined…"

Ibuki said nothing more, but headed toward a tree on the camp's periphery. The worst-case scenario she'd imagined, huh? Telling Horikita about this seemed like a good idea.

"Hey, Horikita, you around?"

After breakfast, Horikita had immediately returned to the tent, and I saw no sign of her. I called for her in front of the girls' tent. Although she didn't reply, the tent shook slightly, and I heard the sounds of cloth rubbing together. Horikita slowly stepped outside.

Ayanokoji invites Horikita to see the status of the other classes. Horikita denies that she's the leader and doesn't want to do anything today. Ayanokoji convinces her that if she stays, the situation won't change. Since she's the student council president's sister, she would be targeted no matter what. Horikita agrees to join Ayanokoji in the search.

Even if someone didn't know a leader's identity for certain, they might guess correctly if they noticed suspicious behavior. The more conspicuous a person, the more attention they would draw.

"I understand how you feel, but even if you stay in here, the situation probably won't change, right? You've got eyes on Ryuuen, and you've even been observing Ichinose. People will remember that you're the student council president's younger sister. No matter what you do, you'll be a target."

At any rate, the penalty for a wrong guess was fifty points. When we'd appointed someone as leader, we'd taken a gamble, and precautions were necessary.

"You're right. I suppose I can't say what's correct. Fine. I'm rather concerned about the state of the other classes. Let's go."

Horikita and I set out for the beach, where Class C awaited. Her heavy footsteps seemed to belie her casual indifference.

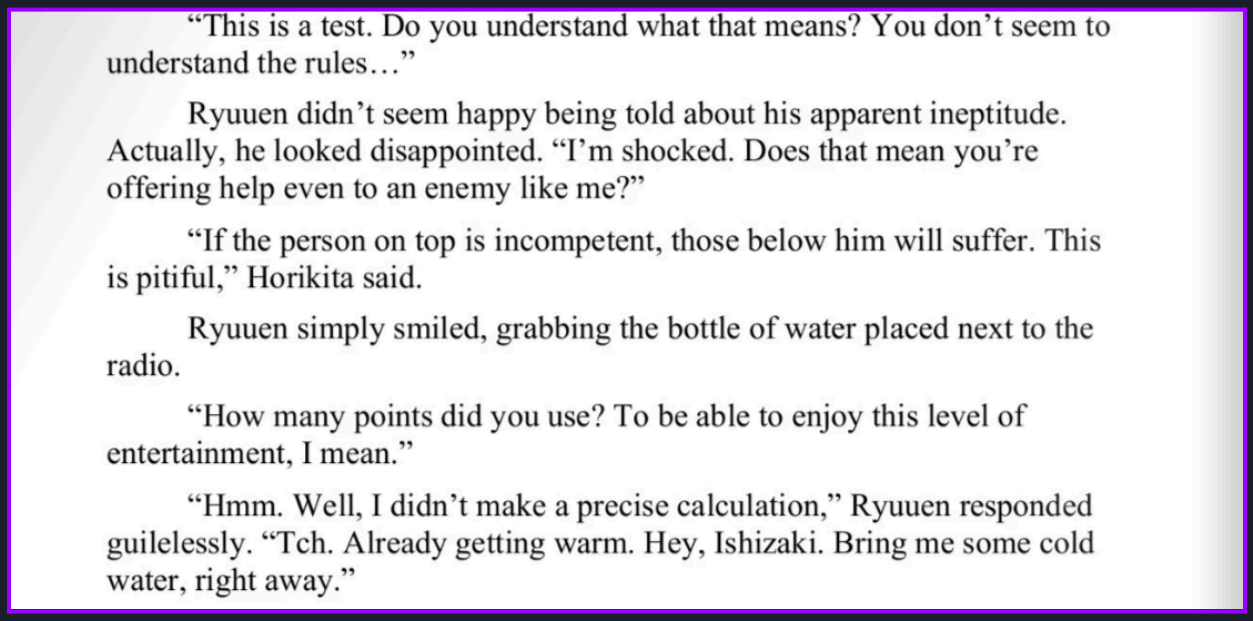
Class C

When Ayanokoji and Horikita arrive at Class C's spot, the beach, they are shocked that they are spending their special points so casually.

They are asked to meet Ryuuen. Horikita adds that Ryuuen rules the others like a king and asks what they should do. Ayanokoji dodges the question, saying it's up to Horikita.

Ryuuen welcomes them and asks why they are here, to enjoy themselves with Class C? A conversation between Ryuuen and Horikita begins, where Ryuuen says the exam is

about having freedom, so why not use it after all? Horikita questions him as the leader.



"This is a test. Do you understand what that means? You don't seem to understand the rules…"

Ryuuen didn't seem happy being told about his apparent ineptitude. Actually, he looked disappointed. "I'm shocked. Does that mean you're offering help even to an enemy like me?"

"If the person on top is incompetent, those below him will suffer. This is pitiful," Horikita said.

Ryuuen simply smiled, grabbing the bottle of water placed next to the radio.

"How many points did you use? To be able to enjoy this level of entertainment, I mean."

"Hmm. Well, I didn't make a precise calculation," Ryuuen responded guilelessly. "Tch. Already getting warm. Hey, Ishizaki. Bring me some cold water, right away."

>>Horikita is wrong about the test's nature. Ryuuen at least knows the test is about "freedom."

Ryuuen continues the conversation, saying that he loathes hard work and patience. Horikita questions him about Ibuki. Ryuuen replies that Ibuki was helpless, so she went to the others, and it was decided that Ryuuen would rule in his own liking. So, he gave Ibuki a little punishment, along with the other boy. He mentions that he has used all the points, but since they don't go negative, there's no real danger.

Horikita leaves the conversation and tells Ayanokoji that Ryuuen's class is doomed.

Ayanokoji replies that it seems that way, but they won't face any problems. Horikita asks about it.

Ayanokoji explains that they could do what Koenji did, retire due to physical exhaustion, and leave the island. Since there are no negative points, it won't affect their class ranking that much. After all, the Special Exam is designed to spend the points.

However, Ayanokoji is giving the wrong picture. The real picture is...

His strategy was to be at zero points to negate negative elements. It was certainly unexpected, but it came at a high price. With no points, Class C would have the lowest rank. Even if they managed to guess every other class leader's identity, they could only achieve a maximum of 150 points.

"The test is literally about freedom. Ryuuen's way of thinking is one way to approach it. It seems like Ibuki and another student rebelled, and because of that Class C will lose twenty points a day. Since he knew he'd be losing that many points every day no matter what, he came up with a drastic strategy."

Since I didn't know when Ryuuen had decided to spend all of Class C's points, I could only guess.

I suppose that was true. It was certainly true that we couldn't predict the actions of Ryuuen, whose plans were likely geared to a very unusual purpose, if his words earlier were true. Any rational person would regard Ryuuen's bizarre schemes with some anxiety. After we passed the beach, I turned back and scanned the shore once more.

"A zero-point strategy, huh? I see. That's really interesting."

If we could simply shut down dissenting views from our classmates, it'd be a rather interesting method. After all, this test wasn't just about saving points within our own group. We had to strategize if we wanted to win.

THE CLASS A& B

Ayanokoji and Horikita continue their search and go to Class B, as Kanzaki instructed them to.

They find that Class B's entire way of living is different from theirs. They make practical use of their spot and the environment.

Ichinose greets Ayanokoji and Horikita.

Horikita suggests to Ichinose that they should form a cooperative relationship like they did last time during the Sudo trial and share key information with each other, like points spent and so on.

Ichinose shares that they have spent 70 points.

> "Hammocks. Cookware. Small tent, lantern, and temporary toilet. Fishing rod, a water shower… If we combine those items with the food we purchased, the total comes to exactly seventy points."

> Ichinose and her class weren't just relying on tools; they were making good use of their knowledge to improve the campsite. After receiving this information, Horikita carefully explained our situation. She left nothing out in the spirit of fairness.

Ichinose explains about their spot, their spending, and how they operate. Horikita also explains the Class D situation and Koenji's retirement.

At least, both agree to continue their cooperation and give up on finding each other's leader.

Horikita asks Ichinose about Class A information and if she has any. Ichinose informs Horikita about Class A's spot and location, and they discuss scouting Class C.

(Ayanokoji doesn't give the location of Class A to Horikita.)

During this, Ichinose is interrupted by one of her students, where Ayanokoji and Horikita learn that Class B has also taken in a rebellious student from Class C.

They discuss Ibuki and Class C and what might possibly be happening in Class C that caused those rebellious students to be outcasts.

After the conversation, they head toward Class A's location that Ichinose gave them.

They arrive at Class A's spot.

We saw a cave opening that looked like it cut deep into the mountainside, like a demon's mouth. There were two temporary toilets and one shower room near the entrance.

"I can't really see the inside from here…"

Trying to confirm what was in the cave while keeping our distance was probably next to impossible. Neither Horikita nor I knew anyone in Class A. Even though we intended to sneak around, stay hidden, and gather information, we wouldn't get anywhere. I stepped over Horikita and headed up the road to the cave.

"W-wait."

"Let's go. I mean, it's Class A, so of course we're going to be scared. There's nothing we can do about that."

Horikita and I both headed toward the base camp.

"What are you planning? We gain nothing by carelessly exposing ourselves."

"And what do we gain by trying to peek from our hiding spot? We can barely see, and there's no one around. There's not much we can see unless we enter the cave."

"You're awfully calm, aren't you? Did you have something in mind?" Horikita asked.

"I haven't thought of anything. Come on, don't worry."

"Ugh, what an unintelligible, half-assed answer."

However, they are caught by two Class A students, one of whom is Yahiko, whom Ayanokoji recognizes from Day 1.

Horikita introduces herself and explains that she's from Class D. Hearing this, Yahiko returns to calling them defectives.

Horikita tries to barge into the cave, but Yahiko tries to stop her from doing so. Horikita reasons that there is no reason to stop her unless they have occupied this place and have a device and other reasons. She also argues that the rules don't allow them to force a monopoly over a place, only possession of a certain area.

Horikita tries to take a look inside the cave, but Katsuragi appears and asks Yahiko when he gave permission to invite guests inside the cave.

Katsuragi and Horikita then have a conversation over whether Horikita can even look inside the cave and whether touching the vinyl sheet could count as entering the occupied area. Katsuragi counters that the rules effectively make it halfway to a monopoly and argues against Horikita's interpretation.

"Yahiko, don't respond to cheap provocation. Her goal was to force her way in and look around. If you thrust you righteous superiority in their face, the other side will back off."

"S-sorry."

They'd stripped Horikita of all other options except retreat. Wonderful, wonderful.

"It seems like we have to leave Class A alone. We definitely can't investigate them."

Once they'd claimed the spot, they hid much of it away behind an impregnable wall. However, despite their efforts, we were able to glean something from the interaction.

DAY 3

Ayanokoji goes to check the tied-up handkerchief marked on the tree before leaving the camp. Sakura follows him and asks whether she can join him as well. Ayanokoji asks if she's okay with going alone with a boy, since it might start rumors. Sakura replies that she has no issues with that.

Ayanokoji agrees, but places one condition: if they get into trouble, she can't blame herself for it.

They continue their conversation, with Ayanokoji asking whether Sakura has made any friends yet and how she's doing with sports. Ayanokoji assures her that she's making progress.

(This is a callback to the last volume, where Sakura was struggling with her self-esteem and Ayanokoji was one of the people who helped her with it. That's why Sakura feels safe around Ayanokoji.)

> After our break, we chatted amiably and arrived at our destination with the help of my handkerchief acting as a marker. It had taken less time than I thought to get there, only about twenty minutes in total. At any rate, I carefully retrieved the handkerchief and returned it to Sakura, then observed the surroundings from where I thought Kouenji had been standing before.
>
> Nothing in these woods stood out at first glance. There wasn't anything else here. What in the world had he been looking at?

Ayanokoji and Sakura continue their search, and after a while, they find the tree with the handkerchief that Ayanokoji had placed on Day 1. Ayanokoji and Sakura continue walking forward to search the area and eventually find a huge cornfield.

Ayanokoji remarks that this is an artificially set-up area.

> I wondered if the corn only grew in this area. I didn't know much about plants, but it was obvious that this was unnatural. The soil here was a different color from the surrounding forest soil, proof that the corn had been cultivated artificially. It was also strange because bushes surrounded the corn on all sides, making it difficult to find due to the weeds.
>
> "So, this is what Kouenji saw…"
>
> He'd noticed the corn at first glance, and said nothing due to his awful pride. In any case, I was absolutely certain that school officials had been coming and going on this deserted island. This cultivated spot made that clear. I inspected the corn, which was rather beautiful thanks to careful management and cultivation.

Ayanokoji decides to carry some corn back to the camp, using his shirt as a bag. While they are collecting the harvest, they meet up with Katsuragi and Yahiko. Seeing Katsuragi makes Sakura nervous. Katsuragi assures her that he's not there to cause trouble and has no bad intentions. However, Yahiko reacts to Ayanokoji, calling him a spy after their encounter yesterday.

"Hey, you're the spy from yesterday!"

Yahiko raised his voice, shouting angrily. Sakura once again jumped in surprise and curled into a ball. Seeing this, Katsuragi dropped his tightly clenched fist onto Yahiko's head. We could hear the dull, painful thud from where we stood.

"My name's Katsuragi, from Class A. He's Yahiko. Since this is the second time we've met, a self-introduction should be fine, yes?"

"I'm Ayanokouji, from Class D. This is Sakura."

After we'd exchanged a brief greeting, Katsuragi glanced at the large amount of corn.

"You found this. Don't worry, we have no intention of snatching it away from you. But if someone else finds this spot, they'll likely take it away."

(Note Katsuragi's reaction, which Ayanokoji notices.)

Yahiko and Katsuragi argue with each other over Yahiko's reasoning that one of Ayanokoji and Sakura should stay behind and hide the existence of this place. Katsuragi finds this idea stupid and objects to it, instead suggesting that they work together with Class D.

That was why Katsuragi didn't go alone into the forest.

"We'll help you."

"A-are you serious, Katsuragi-san? But, working together with Class D is—"

Yahiko obviously wanted to refuse, but he stayed quiet after Katsuragi shot him a sharp look.

"We appreciate the offer, but our class told us to be careful. They'll get mad if they find out we relied on Class A for help. I'm sorry, but we have to decline."

It was a lie, but Katsuragi had no other choice but to withdraw.

Ayanokoji and Katsuragi agree. Katsuragi suggests that they leave and that he will make use of the cornfield, which Ayanokoji sees as no problem.

Ayanokoji and Sakura return to the camp with a bag full of corn. The students of Class D are happy to see the harvest.

Ayanokoji reports the cornfield to Hirata.

Yamauchi ranted and raved while I went to report to Hirata. Soon afterward, we organized students into a tean which departed from the camp to bring back the corn. In addition, we set the goal of exploring other places and look for more food. Around one o'clock in the afternoon, everyone returned from harvesting the corn.

"We've got lots of food!"

The bag appeared to be absolutely filled.

"It was pretty dangerous, though. That guy from Class A, Katsuragi, was nearby."

Apparently Katsuragi hadn't made off with the corn after we left. Instead, he stayed there so that he could wat us. Whether Katsuragi had good or bad intentions, we didn't know for sure.

>> liar

DAY 4

Ayanokoji opens his thoughts on Hirata's strategy and the nature of the exam.

Currently, we'd spent a total of about 100 points, including setbacks like Kouenji's retirement. If we kept things going like this, we'd end the test with a quite a few points left over. If you looked at the state Class D was in before, the numbers were simply phenomenal. Even Yukimura, who'd resisted the most at the start, had no complaints. Every single person was satisfied with our results.

I'd started to figure out more about this test. If I were to break it down, eighty percent of it was defensive, determining whether your class could form cooperative relationships. Therefore, I determined that the remaining twenty percent of the test was offensive, judging whether you had the ability to scout around and gather information. However, this 8:2 proportion wasn't reflected in the test results. Rather, that twenty percent influenced the outcome even more.

We already understood each class' plans. In that case, we knew what we had to do, which was attack the other classes. So, I began to move toward Class A's area. As Class D was based around the river, Class A had most likely centered their activities around their cave. The true appeal of that spot wasn't just that it offered shelter from the elements; the place itself had meaning.

Ayanokoji begins exploring

I started to get a prickly feeling in my head, which was throbbing. I borrowed a ballpoint pen, put it in my pocket along with the folded-up piece of paper from before, and left base camp.

During the search, Ayanokoji stops mid-track.

"Whoa…"

I applied the brakes and came to a full stop before a cliff's edge.

"I definitely saw something from the ship. It was below here."

I spotted several facilities located rather close to the cave. It didn't seem like there was any kind of detour route, but as I walked along the cliff, I noticed a ladder set up in a blind spot. Anyone would've missed it upon first glance. I grabbed onto the ladder with all of my strength. It seemed sturdy, so I used it to climb down to the bottom of the cliff.

Shortly after getting down, I found a small hut. Near the entrance, I saw a device—proof that this was a spot. When I peered through the window, I saw fishing tackles. In other words, occupation of this spot meant you would able to catch fish without having to borrow equipment from the school.

When I checked to see whether the spot had been occupied, I saw the words Class A displayed on the device. It seemed they had four hours remaining. I didn't doubt that Katsuragi and the others had come here and taken possession of the area after they'd held down the cave. You wouldn't have known about the spot's existence unless you discovered it back when we were on the boat. Since the small hut was located right under the cliff, you didn't have to worry about anyone in the surrounding area seeing you.

The tools inside looked unused. Dust had accumulated on them. I took the map out from my pocket and wrote down some notes about the little hut's location. I only wrote down the approximate position, of course. Measuring it accurately would've taken an insane amount of time.

After I finished marking it on my map, I refolded the piece of paper and put it back in my pocket. Since there didn't seem to be anything else, I climbed the ladder back up the cliff.

Ayanokoji finds another spot, and the device shows that it is occupied by Class A. Ayanokoji notes this spot on a blank sheet as a map and continues to search for another place.

He sees one of the towers on the island that he had noticed from the cruise.

"When we circled around the island, I saw a tower over there…"

While scanning the area, I relied on my memory. I shifted my gaze toward the ground that had been trodden on by people. Then I continued into the forest, following the path. Eventually, I reached higher ground. Was a spot here, I wondered?

Although it seemed possible to look out over the whole beach by going up the installed ladder, the facility didn't seem that useful. It seemed like some spots were better than others.

I drew closer to confirm the equipment on the wall of the facility. Unlike the last place I'd checked, this place didn't seem to be occupied. The facility itself was rather large, so even though the place was well in the backwoods, it would've been easy to find. In other words, that meant I didn't know who had been monitoring the area. The fact that no one was occupying the tower showed that holding it ran the risk of being observed by the enemy.

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I drew closer to confirm the equipment on the wall of the facility. Unlike the last place I'd checked, this place didn't seem to be occupied. The facility itself was rather large, so even though the place was well in the backwoods, it would've been easy to find. In other words, that meant I didn't know who had been monitoring the area. The fact that no one was occupying the tower showed that holding it ran the risk of being observed by the enemy.

Katsuragi was a cautious man, reliant on solid, secure strategies. He wouldn't carelessly take the bait, even bait this sweet and this close. The bushes nearby rustled despite the absence of wind.

"So, you won't occupy this spot out of more than a sense of prudence?"

"What are you doing here? This place is being used by Class A."

Two guys sprang out of the bushes as if they'd been waiting for someone to fall into their trap. I was surrounded. One of the guys immediately went over to the terminal to check on its status. He was likely checking to see whether I'd claimed the spot or not.

(Different TL of the same page)

Two guys hold Ayanokoji, took out his map, and questioned him. Ayanokoji resisted answering and added that if he answered, he wouldn't go back to the camp. The two students called him an underling of Class D. They asked him to give them the identity of the leader in exchange for 200k points and a memorandum.

The map had a rough sketch of the island, as well as my notes about the occupied points.

"Give it back."

I reached out, but they didn't offer it. I ended up only grabbing at the air.

"What's your goal? Are you acting alone?"

As they barraged me with questions, I fell silent. Three seconds, four seconds. I cleared my throat.

"I can't say."

"I see. So you can't talk about someone in Class D who's pulling the strings? Is Class D as a whole planning something? Or are only some of the students plotting?"

They asked me a series of rapid-fire questions, like an interrogation.

"I can't say. If I did…I may not be able to return to my class."

"Being an underling sounds tough, Ayanokouji. Well, whatever. I don't know what you were asked to do, but don't make unnecessary trouble. It'd be better for you to just quietly sit back at base camp."

Class A's strategy essentially had no risks. It was a simple method, which you could implement so long as you possessed an abundance of funds. Although the possibility of it working was low, you couldn't dismiss the possibility that some students might be dazzled by the money and sell out their friends.

Ayanokoji asks if he can have someone trustworthy, like Katsuragi. Hearing this, the students ask why he said Katsuragi. Ayanokoji mentions that he heard rumors that Katsuragi is the class representative.

have any cell phones here, right?"

"It's certainly true we can't do it now. If necessary, we wouldn't mind writing a memorandum."

In other words, they intended to sign a contract now, and transfer private points after the test.

"A memorandum, huh? Let me ask you something for my own reference… Can you tell me how many points I'd get if I did tell you something?"

"That depends on your attitude."

"Could I have someone trustworthy settle things? For example, someone like Katsuragi. Or perhaps Sa—"

The moment I said the former's name, one of the boys' expressions changed.

"Why did you say Katsuragi?"

"I've heard rumors that Katsuragi is Class A's representative."

"Don't make me laugh. Sakayanagi is the representative of Class A. Not Katsuragi. You can go now."

From what they'd just said, it sounded like they had no more use for me. They made way for me to pass. It seemed like those two guys were Katsuragi's enemies. If that were true, were they working under Sakayanagi's orders? Was Sakayanagi the one leading, not Katsuragi? I needed to clarify that.

Ayanokoji goes to Class C's beach to check upon it, where he meets Ichinose and Kanzaki. He tells them that he was searching for food.

"Did you come here to spy around too, Ayanokouji?"

It was Ichinose and Kanzaki from Class B. I wondered if they had come here to see how Class C was doing, too.

"I'm in charge of finding food. I was searching around the forest, and ended up here."

"Even though it's the middle of the day, I think it's dangerous to be running around alone."

There is no one at the beach, and Ichinose and Kanzaki note that they have withdrawn.

"Oh wow, there's no one around anymore. It's just like you said, Kanzaki-kun. Seems like their strategy was to retire."

Ichinose scratched her cheek and sighed in disappointment.

"We thought we could at least find out who Class C's leader was. Was it pointless, though? If they've all withdrawn, we won't be able to find any hints."

"Didn't Class C already use up all of their points? Even if we found out who their leader is, doesn't that mean they won't get a penalty?"

"They said that we wouldn't see any negative effects during the second semester, so our points shouldn't be able to go below zero."

"I don't want to compliment a strategy where you use up all your points, but it's pretty amazing."

"No matter how I look at it, it doesn't seem like it's going to work. This test is about stockpiling points so you come out positive. Ryuuen lost when he abandoned that idea."

Ichinose and Kanzaki both looked sad as they gazed upon the uninhabited beach.

"So, trying to find out who their leader is will be incredibly difficult. It's just impossible. Impossible!"

>> Both didn't grasp the theme of test - "*freedom*"

Ayanokoji uses this opportunity to ask them about Class A's apparent split.

I didn't know if those two were lying or telling the truth, but they weren't hiding their plans from me at all. Ichinose and Kanzaki had realized that spying on Class C was meaningless. This was the perfect opportunity. I'd reluctantly planned to ask Hirata and Kushida about Sakayanagi, but those two didn't seem well informed on the subject. Also, I wanted to avoid the students in Class D knowing about my movements as much as possible.

"I just happened to hear a little bit about this, but do Katsuragi and Sakayanagi in Class A have opposing groups?"

"It's said they really don't get along. It seems like they've quarreled pretty intensely. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing. Horikita just gave me an order. She said if I had time, to go and find out something. She wondered if this would be our chance to get back at Class A. Well, even though it's said they quarrel intensely, I imagine they'll come together during the test."

"Well, rather than coming together, I think Sakayanagi-san is taking it easy during the test. That's why everyone thinks Katsuragi-kun is the leader. Right?"

"Katsuragi is a clever guy. But even though Sakayanagi isn't around, there probably won't be anyone under her who'll put up resistance. They probably wouldn't do anything to deliberately cause a rift. There wouldn't be any merit in doing so."

If I accepted that story without question, then the two guys I ran into before were doing exactly as Katsuragi had instructed.

"Yeah. That seems like it's true. But wouldn't the students working under Sakayanagi-san be really unhappy? I mean, those two are complete opposite types. I would imagine their opinions would be clearly different, too."

"Complete opposites?"

"Liberal and conservative? Offense and defense? Persecute and protect? Those kinds of things. That's why they always seem to be clashing with each other. It's scary to think about Class A going all out in that situation. If they managed to come together, Class A would really demonstrate their true powers."

"I see. Well, I'll tell Horikita later. Ah jeez, she told me to investigate on my own. She gets flustered working with others. Well…please pretend that you didn't hear that last part. It's going to be bothersome if she gets angry with me."

"Ha ha, don't worry, we'll keep it secret. But I have to say, Horikita has a point. Supposing that two people are completely opposed to and in conflict with each other, it wouldn't be strange for them to end up destroying each other. Well, it's not like we can really do anything at this stage."

Kanzaki checked his wristwatch to confirm the time, and then suggested to Ichinose that they head back.

"It's about time for me to look for food. They'll be angry if I return empty-handed."

"Well, let's both be careful not to get hurt. Please don't do anything reckless."

I thanked Ichinose for her concern.

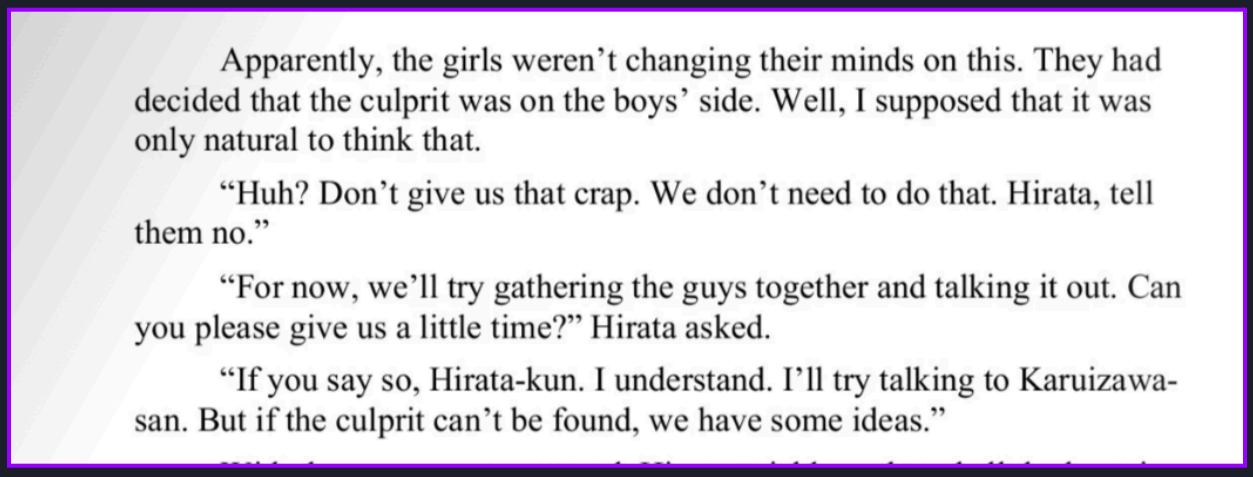
DAY 5

Ayanokoji wakes up to the sound of girls' voices outside their tents. The girls call all the boys together to investigate the issue and urge Hirata to gather everyone at the campsite.

All the boys assemble, and the problem troubling the girls is revealed: someone has stolen Karuizawa's underwear.

The girls suspect that one of the boys is responsible, based on their previous interactions with them and the impressions they formed during their first semester. However, the boys deny the accusation. Hirata volunteers to check the boys' bags to determine whether the girls' suspicions are true.

During the search, Ike finds the underwear in his bag. He immediately denies stealing it and insists that someone must have planted it there. Of course, the other boys make fun of him because of the situation. Ayanokoji agrees with Ike and believes that he isn't the culprit.



Apparently, the girls weren't changing their minds on this. They had decided that the culprit was on the boys' side. Well, I supposed that it was only natural to think that.

"Huh? Don't give us that crap. We don't need to do that. Hirata, tell them no."

"For now, we'll try gathering the guys together and talking it out. Can you please give us a little time?" Hirata asked.

"If you say so, Hirata-kun. I understand. I'll try talking to Karuizawa-san. But if the culprit can't be found, we have some ideas."

I concluded that someone other than Ike was the culprit, and that person had planted evidence to frame Ike. Unless Ike really was that stupid and simple…but he couldn't be, right?

"Ayanokouji, you believe me, right? That I didn't steal them?!"

"Well, if I think calmly, no solid evidence suggests you're the culprit, Ike."

"Ayanokouji!" he cried.

"It's unlikely that Ike is the culprit. If he were, this would be far too stupid of him."

"Well, that sounds right, but… Wait, what? You mean someone put the underwear in Kanji's bag?"

"We just have to figure out who!" Ike cried.

"Hey, hurry up!" one of the boys by Hirata cried.

"Wh-wh-wh-wh-what am I gonna do? I'm in serious trouble!"

When Hirata approaches Ike and his group, Ike panics. With no other choice, he secretly puts the underwear into Ayanokoji's pocket, trusting that Ayanokoji won't betray him.

The girls suspect that the boys might be hiding the underwear in their pockets, so they ask Hirata to check each boy individually. Ayanokoji accepts the possibility that he might be labeled a pervert, but to his surprise, Hirata keeps the discovery to himself.

After the girls leave, Ayanokoji immediately asks Hirata why he didn't tell them about the underwear.

Hirata explains that he doesn't believe Ayanokoji is that kind of person. He trusts Ayanokoji and also believes that none of the other boys stole it. Hirata then takes the underwear, saying that even if he is blamed for the incident, it won't be much of a problem because he is Karuizawa's boyfriend, after all.

Ayanokoji reasoning

No matter how you looked at it, if a student from another class had been loitering around, we would've seen them. After exiting the tent, I scanned my surroundings. Our bags were individually wrapped in vinyl and placed in front of our tent. The girls' tent was a few meters away, where Karuizawa and the others slept. Until this whole incident, the girls' luggage had been piled up out front, unprotected, like ours. If you wanted to steal something, you easily could do so. I was easily able to rifle through Ibuki's bag on the first day.

When had the underwear been stolen? Since there were no problems up until it was time to take a shower, the crime had happened sometime between eight o'clock last night and seven o'clock this morning. If that were the case, anyone in our class could have done it. However, I doubted that the crime had been carried out in the middle of the night. If the culprit were rifling through luggage with a flashlight, someone would have noticed.

In that case, it was very likely that the crime had been carried out around sunrise, after five o'clock in the morning. Even if I'd narrowed down the crime's timeframe, it was still difficult to narrow down the list of culprits. What if I tried changing my perspective? Say Karuizawa stole her own underwear and hid it in Ike's bag. But what reason would she have for doing that?

Hirata asks Ayanokoji to find the culprit. However, Ayanokoji realizes that Hirata has a different reason for wanting to uncover the truth.

"I think people, both guys and girls, will be uneasy until the thief's found. To be honest, it would probably be best if *I* found the culprit, but it looks like it'll be difficult to get everyone together…" A class star like Hirata had certain restrictions.

"I don't think it'll be easy to find someone who would hide things in Ike's bag."

Hirata should have known that finding the criminal would be difficult.

"Well, I'll do what I can. Just don't expect too much of me."

"Thank you! Thank you, Ayanokouji-kun!" said Hirata, almost hugging me and bowing his head deeply. I understood Hirata was thankful, but felt his reaction was a bit excessive. Perhaps the underwear theft was really bothering him, in particular. As a leader, he had to respond seriously to the crisis and try to find a resolution for the class.

"If you do happen to find the culprit, I want you to tell me first. I definitely do not want you to tell anyone else."

His ability to widen his eyes while making such a sincere appeal pretty much destroyed my ability to say no. He looked almost too calm. It was a little eerie.

"If that information becomes public knowledge, our class will suffer a huge blow. I want to avoid that. That's why I want to find a peaceful method of settling things with the culprit. If it's coming from me, I think that we'll be able to resolve the issue through talking."

"So, in other words, you're going to hide the truth?"

"Hide it? That's a poor choice of words, but there's nothing I can do about it if people take it that way. Even if one of the guys turns out to the be the culprit, I think it's better that the truth be concealed."

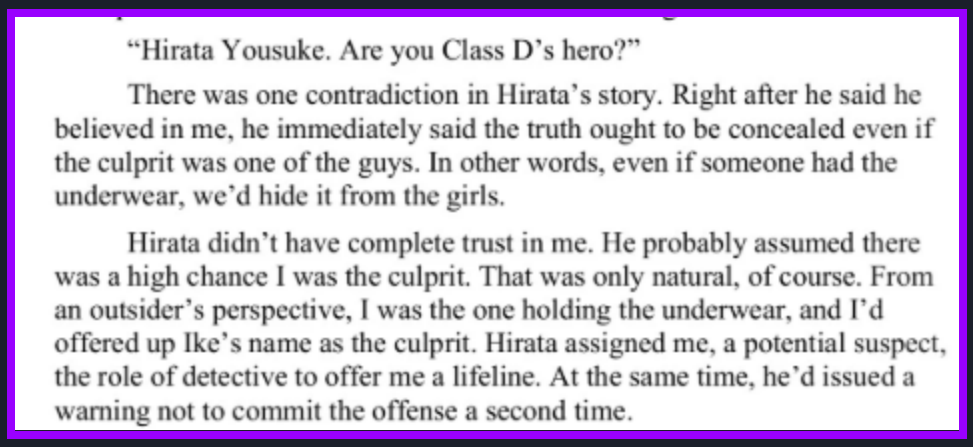
He focused on me. It was almost as if he meant to protect the culprit.

"I understand. I'll report to you first. Is that good?"

"Thank you. Well then, I'll be getting back to work."

Upon exiting the tent, Hirata called out to the other students. I saw multiple silhouettes on the other side of the sheet begin to recede.

Ayanokoji notices a contradiction in Hirata's behavior and realizes that Hirata may not trust him as much as he initially claimed. Instead, Hirata seems to have assigned Ayanokoji this role as a second chance, giving him an opportunity to prove himself.



"Hirata Yousuke. Are you Class D's hero?"

There was one contradiction in Hirata's story. Right after he said he believed in me, he immediately said the truth ought to be concealed even if the culprit was one of the guys. In other words, even if someone had the underwear, we'd hide it from the girls.

Hirata didn't have complete trust in me. He probably assumed there was a high chance I was the culprit. That was only natural, of course. From an outsider's perspective, I was the one holding the underwear, and I'd offered up Ike's name as the culprit. Hirata assigned me, a potential suspect, the role of detective to offer me a lifeline. At the same time, he'd issued a warning not to commit the offense a second time.

The incident causes an uproar among the girls, who demand that the boys and girls be separated completely until the culprit is identified. The girls also begin questioning whether they can trust Hirata with the investigation, since he could potentially be the culprit himself.

Horikita objects to Karuizawa's trust in Hirata. She agrees that separating the boys and girls is reasonable, but she doesn't believe Hirata should be automatically trusted or excluded from suspicion.

Karuizawa insists that Hirata would never do such a thing and argues that Horikita wouldn't understand because she has no friends or boyfriend. Horikita remains calm and says that personal beliefs are not proof of innocence.

Horikita suggests that another trustworthy boy should help monitor the situation. Karuizawa becomes angry, saying that her underwear was stolen and she was humiliated. Horikita suggests that the theft may have been motivated by someone holding a grudge against Karuizawa.

Karuizawa is on the verge of losing her temper with Horikita, but Hirata stops her. He agrees that it would be better if the girls chose another boy to help with the situation.

The Idiot Trio raises their hands, but the girls quickly reject them because they are among the most suspicious candidates.

Horikita then chooses Ayanokoji.

I regarded the male students. Was there any guy who could put her ease, next to Hirata? Yukimura was brilliant, but had his share of dispute with the girls. Who could it be?

"You. Ayanokouji-kun."

Huh? Why me? *How* me? My mouth fell open, and I stood there, flabbergasted.

"Ha ha ha! Don't make me laugh. He's your only friend, isn't he? There's absolutely no way I can trust such a gloomy, lecherous wallflow Karuizawa said.

The girls immediately object, saying that Ayanokoji is also suspicious because of his strange behavior and the fact that he appears to wake up at night.

However, Sakura vouches for Ayanokoji, reasoning that he doesn't seem like the type of person who would steal underwear. The girls immediately begin insulting Sakura for defending him.

"I suppose I'd say that Ayanokouji-kun is… Well, as for his looks, he's probably better than most other guys, but isn't he awful in every other way? You're probably just jealous. That's what I think."

"You're naïve, Karuizawa-san."

"It's shameful to be so jealous."

I'd heard that the behavior of the collective could bring out an individual person's position, personality, and psychological state. Some things that couldn't be voiced in our daily lives at school had started to come to the surface here. This was especially true for Horikita, who was often alone. The other girls in our class treated her poorly, but she managed to get along because, well, she just didn't care. Both parties ignored each other. Since everyone had to live together now, a clash of tempers was inevitable.

"It's certainly true that Ayanokouji-kun has many unlikable qualities," Horikita said.

Hey…I thought you would've backed me up…

Horikita interrupts the girls when they start insulting Sakura. Karuizawa then insults Horikita, claiming that she is simply jealous of Hirata and that Ayanokoji is terrible compared to him.

Horikita explains that she chose Ayanokoji through a process of elimination and considers him the most trustworthy option available. Karuizawa argues that Ayanokoji only seems harmless.

Horikita agrees and says that if Hirata is comfortable with Ayanokoji, then there is no reason to reject the choice.

Hirata avoids answering directly and says that it is wrong to suspect anyone without evidence.

One of the girls finally puts aside her hatred and disgust toward the boys of Class D and suggests that Ibuki could be the culprit.

However, the idea is quickly shut down by the other girls, who are convinced that the culprit must be one of the boys.

"I understand what everyone wants to say here, but I disagree with suspecting a classmate without evidence. There shouldn't be anyone in our class who'd do such an awful thing," said Hirata, unable to stay silent about our worsening situation.

"You're way too kind, Hirata-kun. So you're saying someone else stole it?"

"I don't know, but I don't want to doubt my classmates."

The guys probably felt lousy being thought of as criminals by the girls.

"Hey. What if it was that girl, Ibuki?" someone muttered, shooting a look over at Ibuki, who sat at the far edge of the camp.

Instantly, everyone's doubts were aimed at Ibuki. The collective had found new prey.

"Ibuki-chan is from Class C, right? It wouldn't be strange if she were working to sabotage Class D. She could be using tricks to make us doubt each other."

"Knock it off, you guys. The boys are without a doubt the prime suspects."

Shinohara remained highly suspicious of the boys. She kept her distance, gesturing with her hands for us to leave.

"Until the culprit is found, we definitely can't trust the boys. Right, Karuizawa-san?"

"Naturally. One of the boys definitely did it."

And so it was decided that the guys and girls would live separately.

So, Ayanokoji is chosen to handle tasks on the girls' side, along with Hirata.

I've said it again and again, but Hirata Yousuke is a really cool guy. I don't even mean his appearance, but rather, his principled actions. He took the initiative to do troublesome things that ordinary people didn't want to do, and he conducted himself respectfully even when responding to opponents. Hirata, in cooperation with the girls, was setting up their two tents further away from the guys. Meanwhile, I was tasked with carrying the stakes for the tent, driving them into the ground, and fixing them in place.

Although I had a hard time at first, what with the stakes slipping loose, I'd soon managed to secure the first tent. It was surprisingly easy. Currently, I was sweaty and pounding in the stakes for the second tent with a hammer. Hirata came around and helped by stretching the rope out and giving me a hand driving in the stakes.

"I'm sorry. I've put you in a tough spot again."

The other guys were outside, either playing around or fishing.

"Ah, it's okay. You don't have to apologize, Hirata. If anything, I'd feel bad to leave it all to you."

"Oh, it's not all bad. I do it freely." His sincere smile only enhanced his coolness.

Ayanokoji asks Hirata why he works so hard. Hirata replies candidly that he simply does what needs to be done. He also sees this Special Exam as an opportunity for everyone to become closer, and he is glad that he is working toward that goal.

However, the girls soon pull Hirata away, leaving Ayanokoji to handle the tasks alone.

Seeing Hirata's troubled face, I let him go, even though I thought it'd be a bother.

"I can do this. Go."

"No, but it's hard for one person to¾"

"It's okay, there's only a little left."

"S-sorry. Thank you. I'll be right back."

Although I kind of got the impression the girls had an ulterior motive, they went ahead and pulled Hirata into the woods so fast he didn't catch my words. He probably wouldn't be back right away. I watched Hirata walk off, then took the hammer in hand and hoped I'd get another chance to plumb his many mysteries. I continued my work, and managed to finish it all myself before Hirata returned.

After finishing the work, Ayanokoji decides to take a break. Just as he does, Ibuki approaches him and starts talking about the incident that happened in the morning.

"Do you have a minute?" Ibuki asked.

I'd thought I'd rest for a while, but I guess that wasn't to be.

"What you were talking about this morning sounded really serious. The underwear incident, I mean. I mean, Class D isn't a monolith."

"Well, I guess. Our various troubles are never-ending."

"Whatever the reason, stealing a girl's underwear is unforgivable."

Right, but why was she talking to me about this? Yamauchi had taken Ibuki in, not me, and Kushida's group was looking after her. We'd only spoken a little before, so there shouldn't have been any particular reason for her to talk to me.

Ibuki asks Ayanokoji whether he suspects her and whether he is the culprit. Ayanokoji replies that he is not.

Ibuki seems pleased with his answer. She says that she has no evidence either, and since the other girls trust Hirata and Ayanokoji, the chances of either of them being the culprit are low.

Ayanokoji then questions her about the same matter and takes note of Ibuki's key behavior.

She'd probably come to that conclusion after hearing the exchange between Karuizawa and Horikita.

"Do you have any idea who the culprit is?"

"Right now, no. I really don't want to doubt the other guys."

"So who do you think did it?"

She'd asked that question as if she were testing me. Ibuki glanced at me out of the corner of her eye when she said that. When I didn't respond, Ibuki continued talking.

"If a boy isn't the culprit, then they'll suspect me—the stranger—next. I'm absolutely certain some people have already said something about me. After all, I could've just made it look like the guys stole the underwear. Right?"

Ibuki laughed self-deprecatingly, perhaps because she was fully aware she was already a suspect. In response to that, I spoke impulsively.

"I think I trust you, at the very least. I doubt you're the culprit."

I'd answered Ibuki without hesitation. She looked a bit surprised, like she wanted to verify what I said was true. When our eyes met, she looked away.

"Thank you. I didn't think you would say something like that."

"I just gave you an honest answer."

I was able to understand Ibuki just by looking into her eyes.

I concluded that Ibuki had stolen the underwear from Karuizawa's bag and hidden it in Ike's luggage.

NIGHT

The incident causes Class D to become divided. Everyone becomes suspicious of one another.

It was the end of the special test's fifth day, and Class D was depressed. It was like we were holding an all-night vigil over a dead body. A whole day had passed with everyone jumping at shadows. Everyone was suspicious, and no one knew who the culprit was. Despite the oppressive atmosphere, it was my turn to get the fire going. As I watched the fire's condition, I occasionally tossed in some branches. It was monotonous, easy work. We had other problems, though.

"Hey, Ayanokouji-kun! Didn't we tell you to move the tent properly?"

"I moved it like I was told."

"It needs to be more to the left. Otherwise we're too near the guys."

"Okay."

The girls made unreasonable requests of me, and I had to reluctantly accept. The girls seemed resentful.

"It must be really *tough*, being forced to do routine chores," Horikita said.

"That's rich, coming from you. This wouldn't have happened if you hadn't had recommended me unnecessarily."

"There was no other way. Hirata-kun can't be trusted, and I needed insurance."

"You're the only one in class who doesn't trust Hirata. Life's better when you stop believing that all people are two-faced."

"At any rate, you seem to trust Hirata-kun very much," she said.

"Yeah. Well, I can count on him, at the very least. He's really reliable."

"Count on him? Can you say that he's had a positive effect on the class just by being around?"

Horikita must have had something on her mind, judging by her snappish words. She probably thought I was holding onto information she didn't have. I answered her with an audacious smile.

"Well. Hirata is a man of many talents. He helps when we can't bring guys and girls together during a dispute. Don't you think that he's working hard to bring students together when no one else can?"

Horikita argues that people have different personas, which is why she doesn't trust others easily. She claims that she doesn't have a persona herself and always stays true to who she is.

Horikita then shows Ayanokoji that Hirata had been hiding something. Hirata had been bringing anything the girls requested to their tent, such as an inflated air mattress.

Horikita adds that she wants to find the culprit as soon as possible because the incident could hinder their progress in the exam. Due to the division between the boys and girls, Horikita has also been forced to handle everything on her own.

"Understood. I don't know if I'll be useful, but I'll help."

Horikita seemed confused by my frank answer.

"I'm trying to understand you… Do you have some other intention?"

"It's better for you to just accept favors in a straightforward way. As a guy, I'm rather upset that the guys are being treated like thieves. That alone should be sufficient motivation. We're united in a common goal."

Earlier, Hirata had asked me to help him, too.

"Well, whatever. It's settled then."

The culprit wasn't stupid. It wasn't likely they would show their true colors while suspicions ran high. Horikita probably thought that things would turn out all right. Any more disturbances during this test would probably start affecting our points as well.

About the culprit, though… Well, Ibuki would most likely take action again. No, she would *definitely* take action. She hadn't yet reached her goal.

"You have such a serious look on your face. Do you really hate being treated like a criminal that much?"

"Our class is all messed up because of this. It's a shame, because we were doing really well."

"Our cooperation was a complete coincidence. Class D didn't really have any sense of teamwork to begin with. It's ending rather badly, though, especially because of the broken trust between the guys and girls. Of course it would've been better to stay united until the end of the test."

Ayanokoji remarks that the culprit might have a "hidden agenda," intending to put Horikita on her guard.

Horikita replies that they shouldn't put themselves ahead of the group and then heads toward her tent. However, she suddenly stops after noticing that she is breathing shallowly.

Ayanokoji tells Horikita that he has known she was ill since the first day.

"Your health has gone rapidly downhill since the test started."

She'd looked ill even before we started traveling, but it hadn't been that noticeable. Due to Horikita's loner personality, she'd likely planned keep to her room and avoid socializing.

"Not really any more than usual."

"Liar."

I'd caught Horikita in a lie, and extended my hand to touch her. Feeling her forehead, it was clear she had a fever. Horikita tried to escape, but her movements were dull. I was easily able to stop her.

"When…did you notice?"

"On the deck of the ship, when I asked you what you'd been doing."

"Yeah, and I told you I'd been reading in my room."

"You were really sick then, so you were actually sleeping, right?"

"And on what evidence do you base that conclusion?"

"When you joined us on deck, your bangs were all disheveled. Proof you'd been lying on your side. Also, it was incredibly hot on the boat, but you seemed like you were cold. Even now, you're wearing long sleeves, and you're zipped all the way up. Even an elementary school student could figure it out"

Ayanokoji then checks on Horikita.

It was pretty clear that she had a fever, close to 38°C. Still, she was hiding it for a pretty simple reason. If you reported illness, the class would be hit with a bigger penalty. The test's timing was rotten luck on her part.

"I just need to hang in there for another few days. If I give up now, it'll all be for nothing. Goodnight."

So she intended to soldier through to the bitter end. She had an iron will.

"Liar."

DAY 6

Ayanokoji wakes up early at 6:00 a.m.

"So, am I lucky or unlucky?"

Trouble seemed to be at hand as the curtain rose on the sixth day of our special test. It was overcast outside, the skies cloudy and gray. It must have rained last night, because puddles and patches of mud were here and there on the ground. It looked like it was going to start raining hard, probably in the early afternoon.

Of course the weather got stormy right at the end of the test. Just a light rain would have been fine, but there might be heavy rain and strong winds. In the worst-case scenario, we'd have to move. Many things would need to be done, like re-checking the tent stakes and handling our luggage.

As more people noticed the weather, they began to panic. Eventually, we combined the food we'd collected with the emergency food we bought using points. There'd been a lot of grumbling over living such a frugal life, but since it was the penultimate day, everyone appeared to want to power through.

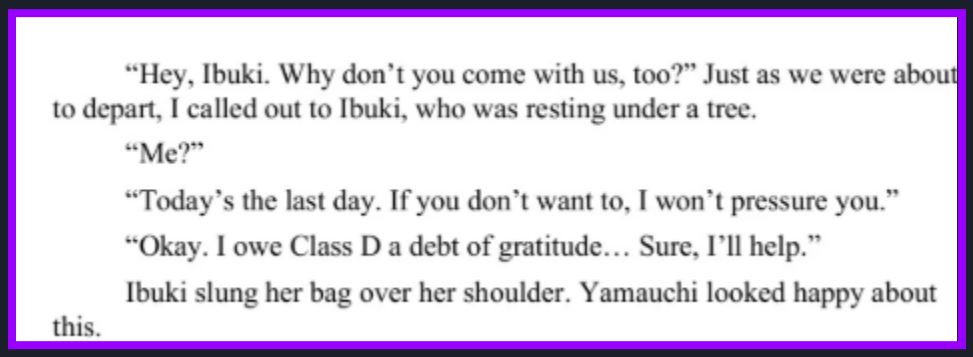
Hirata begins sorting people into groups to prepare for the possible storm and make one last effort to gather supplies.

He also started sorting people into teams to go out and search for food one last time, so we could get through the day. If we got enough food today day, we wouldn't need to use points. You could call this a critical moment. We all gathered around Hirata.

After settling on a course of action, Hirata set up groups by having volunteers raise their hands. Of course, I didn't raise my hand, but he decided that I would participate as a backup. The members of the group were Horikita, Sakura, Yamauchi, and surprisingly, Kushida. Horikita's physical health still seemed to be as poor as ever, but she held up well. The people around her weren't aware that she was feeling ill.

Horikita notices that Kushida's group isn't doing anything and asks why they aren't helping. Kushida quietly whispers that the reason is because one of the girls is on her period. Ayanokoji happens to be nearby, so he is able to hear Kushida's whisper.

Ayanokoji calls out to Ibuki and asks her to help with searching for food supplies.



"Hey, Ibuki. Why don't you come with us, too?" Just as we were about to depart, I called out to Ibuki, who was resting under a tree.

"Me?"

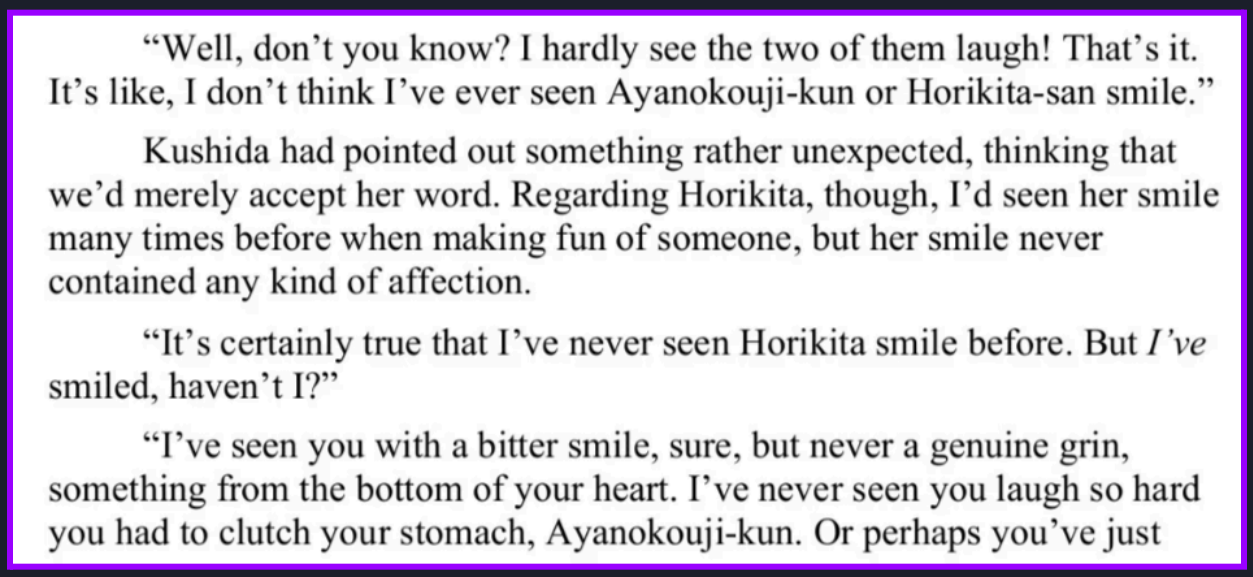
"Today's the last day. If you don't want to, I won't pressure you."

"Okay. I owe Class D a debt of gratitude… Sure, I'll help."

Ibuki slung her bag over her shoulder. Yamauchi looked happy about this.

Due to the changing weather and strong winds, they search for food supplies as quickly as possible.

During the search, the topic shifts to how Horikita and Ayanokoji get along because neither of them smiles much. They both maintain a similar front, according to others.



"Well, don't you know? I hardly see the two of them laugh! That's it. It's like, I don't think I've ever seen Ayanokouji-kun or Horikita-san smile."

Kushida had pointed out something rather unexpected, thinking that we'd merely accept her word. Regarding Horikita, though, I'd seen her smile many times before when making fun of someone, but her smile never contained any kind of affection.

"It's certainly true that I've never seen Horikita smile before. But *I've* smiled, haven't I?"

"I've seen you with a bitter smile, sure, but never a genuine grin, something from the bottom of your heart. I've never seen you laugh so hard you had to clutch your stomach, Ayanokouji-kun. Or perhaps you've just

Ayanokoji agrees that it could be genetic and says that his smile is simply like that, although he doesn't reveal the real reason.

"A lot of it's due to genetics. It's the difference between people who smile often and those who don't smile at all."

"Hmm. I don't think I really like that reason, even if it's true."

Well, genetics probably weren't everything. Happiness could also be influenced by the environment in which someone grew up.

"How about we practice smiling just once? What do you think?"

"For the time being, let's begin with the area," said Horikita.

"Huh? Of smiling?"

"How long do you want to travel? We need to search for food, right?" said Horikita sternly. Her tone was forceful. She'd instructed us all to spread out immediately.

"Don't make any moves alone. Search in pairs. Be especially careful. Let's go, Ayanokouji-kun."

Horikita called me, and I started walking with her.

"Ah… Ah…"

"Hmm?" Sakura seemed to be trailing behind us with her shoulders slumped.

"Come search with us, Sakura!" Yamauchi yelled.

He flashed me a thumbs-up gesture. I guessed he dreamed of taking advantage of this opportunity.

"I'm looking forward to working with you, Ibuki-san!"

Kushida, the last one remaining, paired up with Ibuki. Ibuki was a rather blunt, antisocial girl herself, but if she were with Kushida, there likely wouldn't be problems.

"Horikita, how are you going to handle the key card issue?" I asked.

Well, genetics probably weren't everything. Happiness could also be influenced by the environment in which someone grew up.

Ibuki gets paired with Kushida after this conversation. During this time, Ayanokoji asks Horikita about the key card issue.

"I always have it on me."

Horikita put her hand in her coat pocket to show me she had it.

"When we update the device, I'll slip in among the students Hirata-kun's gathered so I can be undetected. Ibuki-san and the other students aren't supposed to know."

Well, I wasn't really worried about her handling that part. Since it required being conscientious, she'd probably handle it well.

"Can I see it for a second?"

"Huh? Here?"

"It's actually convenient to do it here. It'd be too suspicious at base camp."

"Maybe, but what do you plan to do after I show you?"

I explained the situation to Horikita while she looked suspiciously at me.

"To be honest, I'd been keeping quiet. I was with Sakura earlier so she can back me up, but on the first day we saw students who had something like a key card."

I told Horikita about seeing Katsuragi in front of the cave, and his card.

"But I don't know if that was really the key card. I didn't see it well. I mean, you'd probably laugh if I made a joke about him picking up a telephone card, right?"

"Er, right. If you have proof, that would be a huge achievement."

Horikita, satisfied with my reasoning, turned her back on Ibuki and stealthily took out the card. I accepted it, and checked the front and back. The reverse side sported a typical magnetic strip. Just as Chabashira-sensei had said, on the front side was the name "Horikita Suzune", proof that she was the leader.

Even if I tried, I wouldn't have been able to peel the name off and substitute another.

"Well? Is this the same card that Katsuragi-kun had?"

"No. I wonder, though. I thought I'd know by looking, but…it seems like it's a different color than I remember."

"The keycards might have a different color scheme based on the class."

"Yeah, but we don't have enough evidence to make a solid judgment. If we make a mistake, we won't recover from it."

When I tried to return the card to her, I accidentally dropped it. The card hit the ground.

"Ah!"

I let out a panicked shout, but Horikita quickly snatched it up. She slid the card back in her jacket, but we'd attracted attention.

"What's wrong?"

Kushida looked worried. Ibuki, too.

"Oh, it's nothing. There was a bug that surprised me. Sorry, sorry."

While I apologized, Horikita shot me a terrifying glare.

"S-sorry…"

Horikita furiously kept her distance from me.

"Did she dump you?" Yamauchi asked with a grin.

>>liar

"Did she dump you?" Yamauchi asked with a grin.

"Look, Yamauchi. I need to ask you something. Could you come here for a second?"

"What is it? You know my love consultation fee is high, right?"

"The ground in this area is all muddy because of the rain, right? I want you to take this mud and smear it on Horikita's hair. Can you do that for me?"

"Huh? B-but if I do something like that, I'll be killed! No way!"

Of course, I knew he wouldn't immediately agree. But this was far too unnatural for me to do myself. I'd thought that a prankster like Yamauchi would try pulling this stunt.

"Listen here, dude. No matter how angry you say you are at Horikita, trying to get revenge on her is uncool!"

"If you do this, I'm prepared to offer you Sakura's e-mail address."

"Whaa?!"

The boy who lived for love had decided to die for love. That decisiveness was amazing.

"You're absolutely going to do it? If you're lying, I won't agree."

After I nodded, Yamauchi gathered up a lot of mud and approached Horikita from behind. Had she not been feeling ill, she probably would've noticed him, but right now she couldn't pay attention to her surroundings. Kushida and Ibuki noticed Yamauchi's strange behavior and watched him with quizzical expressions.

Yamauchi did it. He covered Horikita's beautiful black hair with mud. Then he patted and smeared it on her with both hands. Well, he didn't really need to go *that* far…

"Ha ha ha ha! You're all covered in mud, Horikita! Hilarious!"

Yamauchi laughed and pointed at Horikita, like a little kid. Horikita, almost as if she weren't able to grasp the situation, didn't move for a little while. Then she stood up, grabbed Yamauchi's pointing arm, and acted without saying a word.

Yamauchi let slip a quick, confused "Huh?" as Horikita threw him.

They eventually return to the base camp. Horikita rushes to wash herself as quickly as possible, but due to the long line at the showers they installed, it is impossible for her to do so.

Ayanokoji suggests that Horikita go near the river to wash the mud off herself. Sakura also wants to go to the river to swim and get rid of the sweat. She asks Ibuki if she can accompany her, but Ibuki refuses.

Quite a few students were swimming in the river, and it looked as though they were having fun. A few minutes later, Horikita and Kushida appeared in their swimsuits. I went to the boys' luggage pile, then wandered around looking for privacy. When I returned about five minutes later, I saw Horikita washing herself while standing in the river. The cold river water must have felt horrible on Horikita's sick body, but she must have been happy the mud was gone.

"Whoa, looks like it's moving now."

I nodded at Ibuki, who was waiting at the tail end of the shower line.

After fifteen minutes, Horikita meets up with Ayanokoji.

"Ayanokouji-kun. Could you please come here for a moment?"

First, I turned around and checked to see if Ibuki was still lined up for the shower.

"What's wrong? Did something happen?" I asked Horikita.

"Follow me. We can't talk here."

With that, Horikita walked toward the forest.

"What's wrong? Are you planning to search for more food?"

Horikita walked without answering me. She stopped once we'd gotten far enough away that we couldn't see the camp anymore. Horikita turned around and looked ready to speak, but then hesitated as though having second thoughts.

Horikita reveals that the key card is gone and admits that it was due to her own carelessness, a complete blunder on her part. Horikita tells Ayanokoji that she trusts him, which is why she is sharing the matter with him and asking for his advice.

I felt honored that she trusted me, but I couldn't exactly rejoice in front of someone so depressed.

"Such a huge failure."

"No, the one who stole it is to blame. Right?"

"Even so, this is an issue of responsibility. It has nothing to do with me being sick or covered in mud."

Horikita hung her head. If this got out, it could cause us massive damage.

"I wasn't supposed to let go of the card for a single second. But I…"

"Don't blame yourself. I doubt this'll be any consolation, but I think you did your absolute best."

I didn't know if she heard me. She merely bit her lower lip, as if overwhelmed with regret.

"It's probably better if we don't make this information public. We should get to the truth first."

"Yes. I think so, too."

Everyone would panic if they knew. I wanted to avoid that at least.

"I suspect two people. Either Karuizawa-san, or Ibuki-san."

The former might have done it simply out of hatred. Karuizawa could have stolen it because she wanted to see Horikita panic after losing the card.

"Unfortunately, the chances of that are low. Karuizawa was in front of the shower the whole time."

"You're sure about that?"

"Yeah. Same goes for her flunkies, too."

"If that's the case, it's highly likely Ibuki-san is the culprit. It's possible she came to know about the card this morning, and the timing is just far too good. But, wouldn't stealing it be an extremely dangerous gamble? Since the leader's name is engraved on the card itself, just looking at it would be enough. Maybe she carried out the crime so she'd get a penalty."

"If that's the case, it's highly likely Ibuki-san is the culprit. It's possible she came to know about the card this morning, and the timing is just far too good. But, wouldn't stealing it be an extremely dangerous gamble? Since the leader's name is engraved on the card itself, just looking at it would be enough. Maybe she carried out the crime so she'd get a penalty."

She looked at me, her eyes full of anxiety, as if searching for an answer from me. I placed my hand on Horikita's shoulder.

"If we examine the timing and talk with Ibuki, we can understand what happened. If we suspect Ibuki, we shouldn't take our eyes off of her. Her escape would probably be the worst-case scenario, right?"

"That's right. I'm sorry, but can you go back to camp first? That way you can start following her immediately."

"Sure. I understand. I'll keep an eye on her."

I felt like Horikita probably wanted to be alone to throw up. I left her and returned to the base camp.

Afterward, the entire Class D returns to their base after noticing a huge cloud of smoke. Someone has started a fire at the temporary campsite.

Horikita initially thinks it was Ibuki's work. However, Ibuki is also there, looking at the fire.

Ayanokoji investigates by himself and finds the source of the fire. The manual is burning.

Hirata steps in to moderate the situation and takes responsibility, explaining that the manual was in his bag. Ayanokoji acknowledges this, although he does not focus on who actually started the fire.

Hirata desperately tries to put out the fire by spraying water from a bottle. His behavior is completely different from usual, which Ayanokoji notices.

Ayanokoji comforts him, saying that Hirata probably shouldn't take that much responsibility upon himself.

However, this causes an uproar within the class. The students begin to suspect that there is a traitor among them.

Hirata handles the situation while Ayanokoji is told to help put out the fire.

During the heated discussion among Class D, they notice that Ibuki is missing. They connect her disappearance to the possibility that she was the one who started the fire and stole the underwear.

However, it is already too late.

Heavy rain begins to fall.

All of this causes Hirata to become increasingly unstable. The other students notice that he has changed, and they can hear him murmuring to himself.

Horikita returned about ten minutes later, rejoining the campsite's unsettling atmosphere. The cause was dark smoke coming from behind the temporary toilet. It was far too early for the bonfire to be lit, and the location was rather strange.

"What's that smoke? What in the world happened?" Ike cried.

As I joined up with Horikita, I also caught up with Ike, who was clearly in a panic. I asked what was up.

"This is serious. There's a fire! Fire! Something is burning behind the toilet!"

All of the girls who'd been lined up in front of the shower room were gone now. They must have left as soon as they heard the uproar.

"I can't see Ibuki. The fire might have been her handiwork. Where is she?" Horikita asked.

"She noticed the fire, and now she's just walking around."

I rushed toward the area behind the temporary toilet and saw Hirata and some of the others. Ibuki was also there. Horikita looked ready to call out to Ibuki, but hesitated when she saw her. Ibuki's expression was just so genuine. She couldn't hide her confusion about the fire.

"Does this mean she didn't do it?"

Horikita was overwhelmed by doubt. If the keycard had indeed been stolen, Ibuki must've done it. If a fire had started, then Ibuki must've caused it. Even so, Ibuki remained at the scene, and appeared surprised by the fire. When I examined more closely, the source looked like a bundle of paper. Some of it was still legible, but most of it had turned into soot. I didn't know what it was for a moment.

However, looking at the legible parts, I finally understood.

"Did the manual get burned?" Horikita asked.

"Yeah. It looks like it. Who would do this?"

"It's just one thing after another…" Horikita muttered in a low voice,

lowering her eyes.

"I'm responsible for this. The manual was in my bag. We piled the bags up in front of the tent and I didn't think that someone would steal anything in the daytime. But first, we need to extinguish this fire properly…"

Rather than searching for the culprit, Hirata headed to the river to douse the fire. While he drew water in our plastic bottles, he muttered to himself, his expression dark.

"Why? Who could do something like this? Why can't we all just get along?"

Hirata spontaneously crushed the plastic bottle with all his might. The shift in his personality was rather terrifying. Hirata, the eternal leader of our class, the one who toiled tirelessly to play peacemaker, was carrying a terrible burden.

"I don't think you need to take so much on yourself." I tried comforting him. He stood and responded with a quiet "Thank you."

"We need…to discuss this incident properly."

"Right. Most of Class D witnessed the fire. I'm sure they'll want to know the truth."

Depressed, Hirata took the water he'd scooped up and returned to the campsite.

The fight would never be resolved. It would just keep going on forever. Hirata should've stepped in and stopped this, but for some reason he just stood there in a daze. Was he wondering who the culprit could have been?

"Hey Kanji, I can't see Ibuki anywhere."

Yamauchi had noticed Ibuki was gone. I noticed that one of the bags was also gone.

"Perhaps the person who started the fire…"

"It's rather suspicious. If a fire broke out then, that would mean…"

The guys directed their suspicions at Ibuki, and even the girls began to voice their doubts. However, before we could reach a resolution, the rain started to fall, and fall hard.

"Oh no, this isn't good. Let's discuss this later. It'll be awful if we all get soaked."

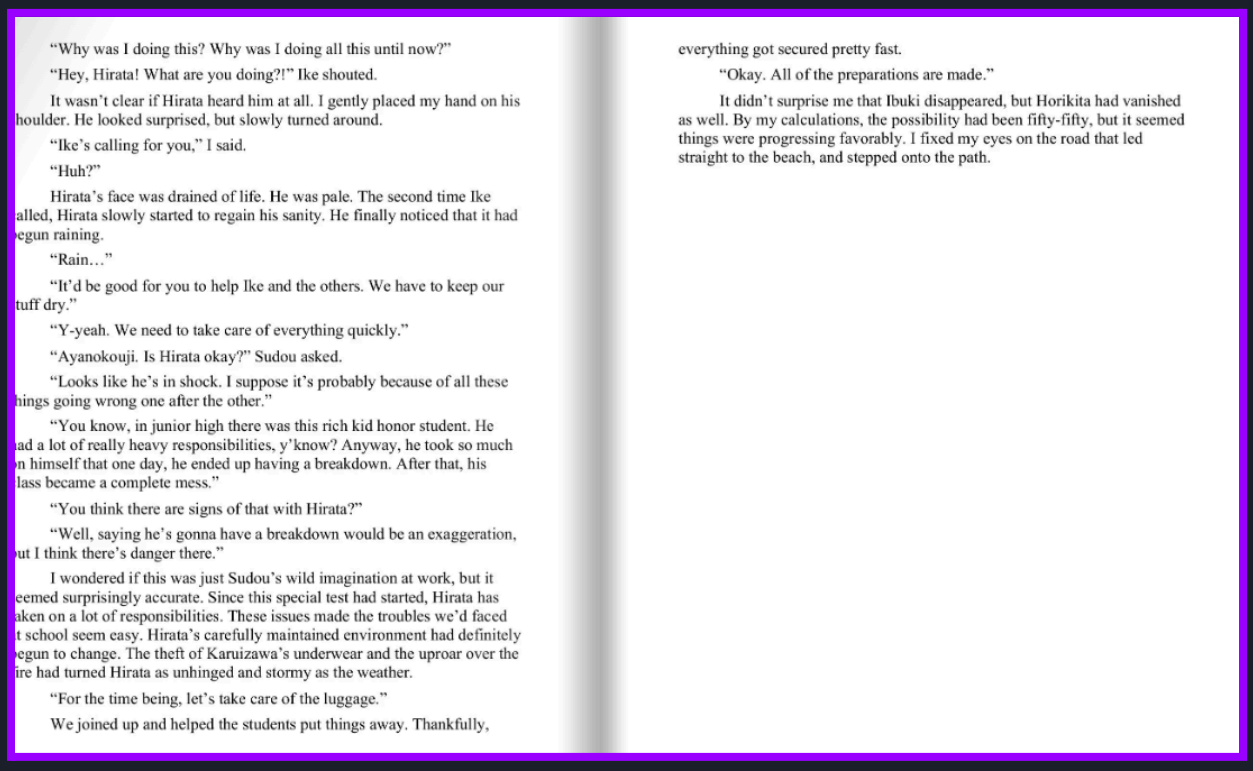
Ike and the others, panicking, began shoving food and luggage inside the tents.

"Hirata, tell us what to do!"

Ike called for Hirata, but he just stood in the same place. Hirata continued staring off into nothingness and didn't budge an inch. Meanwhile, the sound of rain kept growing louder and louder. I was a little worried about the situation. I approached Hirata, but there wasn't any sign that he noticed me.

"Why…why is this happening? It's just like back then…"

He muttered something in a low voice. I couldn't understand what it meant, but it certainly wasn't trivial. This wasn't like the calm and composed Hirata at all.



"Why was I doing this? Why was I doing all this until now?"

"Hey, Hirata! What are you doing?!" Ike shouted.

It wasn't clear if Hirata heard him at all. I gently placed my hand on his houlder. He looked surprised, but slowly turned around.

"Ike's calling for you," I said.

"Huh?"

Hirata's face was drained of life. He was pale. The second time Ike alled, Hirata slowly started to regain his sanity. He finally noticed that it had egun raining.

"Rain…"

"It'd be good for you to help Ike and the others. We have to keep our tuff dry."

"Y-yeah. We need to take care of everything quickly."

"Ayanokouji. Is Hirata okay?" Sudou asked.

"Looks like he's in shock. I suppose it's probably because of all these hings going wrong one after the other."

"You know, in junior high there was this rich kid honor student. He ad a lot of really heavy responsibilities, y'know? Anyway, he took so much n himself that one day, he ended up having a breakdown. After that, his lass became a complete mess."

"You think there are signs of that with Hirata?"

"Well, saying he's gonna have a breakdown would be an exaggeration, ut I think there's danger there."

I wondered if this was just Sudou's wild imagination at work, but it eemed surprisingly accurate. Since this special test had started, Hirata has aken on a lot of responsibilities. These issues made the troubles we'd faced t school seem easy. Hirata's carefully maintained environment had definitely egun to change. The theft of Karuizawa's underwear and the uproar over the ire had turned Hirata as unhinged and stormy as the weather.

"For the time being, let's take care of the luggage."

We joined up and helped the students put things away. Thankfully, everything got secured pretty fast.

"Okay. All of the preparations are made."

It didn't surprise me that Ibuki disappeared, but Horikita had vanished as well. By my calculations, the possibility had been fifty-fifty, but it seemed things were progressing favorably. I fixed my eyes on the road that led straight to the beach, and stepped onto the path.

It didn't surprise me that Ibuki disappeared, but Horikita had vanished as well. By my calculations, the possibility had been fifty-fifty, but it seemed things were progressing favorably. I fixed my eyes on the road that led straight to the beach, and stepped onto the path.

Ayanokoji goes to search for Horikita and chases after Ibuki with a flashlight. Along the way, he notices two sets of deep footprints leading into the forest.

As the heavy rain continues to pour, Ayanokoji suddenly notices a bright light in the distance. He turns off his flashlight and observes that the other light is blinking on and off like a signal.

Ayanokoji hides himself and listens carefully. He hears a muffled conversation nearby. He remains hidden until both the conversation and the light stop.

He then cautiously approaches the area.

Ayanokoji finds Horikita near a tree, with the key card thrown at her.

This confirms something important to Ayanokoji: others and Ibuki have figured out that Horikita is the leader of Class D.

Horikita begins reflecting on the fact that she was discovered and on the choices she made after arriving at the island.

Ayanokoji tries to console her, but Horikita eventually loses consciousness.

Ayanokoji has no choice but to carry her to safety. However, the heavy downpour makes it extremely difficult to move through the forest.

Horikita regains consciousness for a short while. Ayanokoji tells her that he lost his way while searching for her and thinks that she should retire from the exam, taking her condition into account.

Horikita refuses. She argues that retiring would result in a huge loss of 80 points.

Even in her sick state, Horikita insists that she will be fine and argues that she would rather miss the roll call than retire from the exam.

However, Horikita loses consciousness again.

This time, Ayanokoji carries her all the way to the beach and then to the pier where the teachers were stationed on the first day.

Ayanokoji arrives in time and submits Horikita for retirement from the exam. He then attends the roll call for Class D, but he misses his own roll call.

any effect on roll call, correct?

It was 7:58. I was cutting it close, but we should be safe. I needed to get the teacher's promise, though.

"You are certainly right. It is quite close. However, you're out."

"I understand. Oh, one more thing. I'd like to return this keycard."

I took the keycard from my pocket and handed it over.

"Well then, I'll be heading back."

I couldn't stay any longer, so I went back to the beach while the rain was still falling. With this, Class D would lose thirty points due to Horikita's retirement, and an additional five points due to my absence during roll call.

Afterward, Ayanokoji heads back toward the Class D base camp.

−30 Special Points & Horikita retires from the exam.

DAY 7

The last day of the exam arrives. According to the rules, the leaders of each class are given an opportunity to guess the leaders of the other classes in exchange for additional Special Points.

Deserted Island exam Doc

The students from each class are asked to gather at the rest area, where provisional tents, chairs, and tables have been prepared for them to rest.

To everyone's surprise, Ryuuen was there. Ryuuen began provoking Class D when he met up with Hirata.

Before revealing the results, Mashima said:

["Over this past week, we, your teachers, have closely watched your efforts in this special test. There were some students who took on the challenge honestly, head-on. There were some who devised schemes to tackle the test. Many things have happened, but overall, the test results were splendid. Good work."]

Hirata remarked that Class D should have around 125 points remaining.

Ryuuen responded with a vomiting gesture, mocking them and seemingly amazed that they could be satisfied with such a small number of points. He then revealed that he had identified the leader of Class D for the special exam and given everyone the information.

Mashima announced the final results:

Class C: 0 points
Class A: 120 points
Class B: 140 points

Class D: 225 points
Ryuuen was shocked when he saw the results.

The exam finally came to an end. The students returned to the cruise ship.

The Class D students congratulated Horikita and began to make amends with her, acknowledging how much she had done for the class and everything she had gone through during the exam.

Class D ' strategies explained

1. Hirata's Strategy (which I nicknamed the "Pacifist Strategy")

On Day 1, Hirata decides on the strategy (which he continually calls a plan/goal) of conservatively saving Special Points and spending Special Points only on necessary things, like the temporary toilet and meals.

Hirata believes his strategy could save up to 120 points over these seven days.

However, Hirata's strategy is wrong and is driven by other motives, as we see later.

First, Hirata, the de facto leader (the hero of Class D, as Ayanokoji sees him), doesn't fully grasp the theme of the exam, which Mashima-sensei literally spells out:

Freedom

Not point saving.

Points will be spent regardless because of the way the exam and the island are designed. This is something Ayanokoji shares with the readers.

This exam is not about simply saving and gaining points, but literally using them to your advantage and doing whatever you wish, either using points or not.

Second, due to Hirata's nature and intentions, which are to use this exam to bring Class D together under him as the de facto leader, he avoids every possible conflict in favor of being a pacifist and staying neutral toward others.

In one way, he has to do this because there is already a split within Class D. However, as we and Ayanokoji can see, he isn't actually solving any of the issues completely.

Because of this, his whole strategy is simply wrong for this exam.

If there wasn't another strategy being played at the same time, Hirata's strategy would have failed.

2. Ayanokoji ‘s strategy - leader swap and guess

Ayanokoji's strategy was best for this exam, which matched the theme of the exam - freedom - and what Ayanokoji was doing.

He was also under Chabashira 's blackmail during this exam and had to keep the whole strategy secret from everyone, including Horikita, his allies, and the other classes, without giving them any idea about it.

So, the adversity - being under blackmail + keeping the secrecy of this strategy + learning about the classes' secrets, strategies, and leaders without giving any hint about Class D or himself + misdirecting his class and the interloper + helping his own class survive these 7 days + maintaining his front the whole time and leaving no trace of his involvement (partially failed).

Ayanokoji formulated this strategy during Day 1.

The strategy was essentially:

Find the leaders of the other classes as soon as possible
Or find key spots as soon as possible
while concealing the entire process from everyone.
Swap the leader through retirement.
Guess the leaders on the last day and win points.

(profiling and full reasoning will be explained at last)

The key points explained

Find the location/leaders

Ayanokoji would first try to search for key locations before everyone else.

From the clues he gathered, Ayanokoji took an interest in the cave because its location allowed it to connect the hut and the tower, two locations that could be used to exercise control over the island.

"When the special test was announced, I didn't focus on anything except for the additional rules. I roughly understood how to manage the 300 points, but you couldn't manipulate them as an individual."

"Yeah. First of all, I volunteered to join the search for the base camp. Able to move freely, I planned to search out spot locations ahead of everyone else."

"That's not true. You didn't understand because you were ill and holed up inside the ship, but the school already gave us hints about the locations when we were sailing around the island."

Katsuragi had also noticed this when the ship circled the island at an unusually fast speed. Horikita fell silent. The ship had been traveling nearly three times faster than a usual cruise ship. Besides, if it were just for sightseeing, it wasn't normal to use a strange expression like "significant scenery."

Katsuragi and Ayanokoji both wanted to acquire that spot for the same reason. However, the leader of Class A, Yahiko, was careless enough to acquire the location.

(Therefore, the argument that Ayanokoji was simply lucky to find the key card is false.

Both Ayanokoji and Katsuragi wanted to acquire the cave because it was one of the most optimal locations on the island.

Ayanokoji figured out the optimal location for controlling the island, studied the paths and patterns within the forest, and, even though he arrived late to guard the position, he was still able to notice Katsuragi and another student who had the same strategy for acquiring the location.

He then had to determine which of them was the leader.)

There were no spots close to the river or the well. However, there were two spots near the cave: the hut and the tower. It was the perfect place to exercise control. Horikita looked like she understood once I explained.

"But what advantage is there in going into the cave if you don't have a keycard?"

"Well, I'd intended to explore various things, but in the end I discovered the leader's identity."

"Well, I suppose that Katsuragi-kun *was* careless."

No, that wasn't it.

"There was that guy, Yahiko, remember? The one following Katsuragi around? *He* was the leader. I saw Katsuragi and Yahiko at the cave, but I didn't see the moment they occupied it. After the two of them walked away, I checked if the cave was occupied or not."

The leader swap

Ayanokoji then swapped the leader on the last day through retirement, causing that class to believe that they had correctly identified the leader.

(Ayanokoji was lucky because Horikita happened to be the leader.

Horikita would not have voluntarily retired regardless of whether she was the leader because doing so would cost 30 points. In fact, her stubborn nature made things worse and caused her to almost be late.

Furthermore, the other students made Horikita the leader because Hirata and Karuizawa were too obvious, while Kushida would have stood out too much because of her activities.

It would have been luck if Ayanokoji himself had been made the leader.

If someone else, such as Sudo, had been made the leader, Ayanokoji could simply have adapted his strategy to force that person into a physical retirement, similar to what Koenji did to himself, or drive them into a corner on the final day, as he did with Horikita.

Even when Horikita was sick, she was not inclined to voluntarily retire until she lost consciousness.

Therefore, Ayanokoji's success was not simply the result of being lucky that Horikita was the leader.)

Now , let's see how & where strategy begins

While the cruise ship was circling the island, Ayanokoji took note of various details, such as the cave formations, the tower, the plains, and the approximate measurements of structures and other features on the island.

He already believed that the ANHS wouldn't arrange such an expensive trip without a reason.

> I'd thought that the ship would have gone directly to the island, but for some reason we passed the pier and started circling around. The island, on loan from the government, had a surface area of about 0.5 square kilometers. The highest point of the island reached 230 meters. In comparison to Japan's total area, the island was tiny, but when seen by one hundred-odd people on a cruise ship, it looked unbelievably massive.

> Speaking of unnatural, there was a helicopter parked on the stern of the boat. While it was true that some things were bothering me, I was probably overthinking it. If students *did* bring their cell phones to the beach, someone's phone might get wet and break. And they probably didn't want personal items because they were worried about people polluting the beach with garbage. And if someone suddenly got ill, the helicopter was there for dispatch, right?

And, taking the rules and the information given by Mashima-sensei into account, Ayanokoji concluded that the Special Exam was being conducted on an artificial island maintained by the ANHS.

Premise 1: **T**he Advanced Nurturing High School had arranged for an extravagant two-week trip . No ordinary cruise liner , The cruise liner and its facilities were of the highest possible quality. This ship was fully equipped with everything from prestigious restaurants to a theater, and even an upscale spa. On my own, this would probably have cost me about 100,000 yen, even in the off season. For a governed sponsored school to pay for this .

According to the schedule, we would spend our first week staying at a fancy summer lodge on a deserted island. After that, we would enjoy the cruise ship for another week**.**

Premise 2: After the announcement, instead of docking directly at the summer lodge, the cruise ship circled around the island, showing the students all the different locations + the presence of a helicopter on board + disembarking without personal phones while other personal items were allowed + the homeroom teacher taking roll call, making it feel more like a training camp than a summer lodge.

Premise 3 : Mashima commenced the first Special Exam and explained the rules + ensured that the students could enjoy themselves and mentioned the theme of “freedom” + explained that the exam was based on tests used in corporate training and group training + emphasized that it was practical and realistic + students received wristwatches to monitor their condition, as cameras could be placed almost anywhere + Chabashira mentioned that she couldn’t provide much information that could affect the results, such as questions about wild animals.

Premise 4 : Additional rules - designated spots, equipment, and devices + additional rules showed that the spots were a key priority + the exam revolved around these spots.

Conclusion → The deserted island was artificially set up and maintained by ANHS for the purpose of their Special Exam. The presence of designated spots and the rules related to the devices confirmed the island’s purpose and design

Circling around the island and giving the students a blank map provided a clue about the potential locations of the spots.

Chabashira refused to answer, as doing so would affect the results by giving them hints.

The spots and the additional rules relating to them could be used to exercise control over the island.

The cave location was the most optimal, as it was near both the tower and the hut, which could be used to exercise control over the island

Feat - figuring out that the island was artificial and identifying the optimal spot for controlling the island + understanding the rules and design of the exam.

This is a confirmed feat.

When Ayanokoji volunteered to search for the spots, he was paired with Koenji and Sakura.

When Koenji mentioned that the forest wasn't natural and that getting lost during the daytime was probably impossible, he questioned whether they had noticed anything particular about the forest.

(Which were the pathways and patterns)

Ayanokoji dodged the question. However, later, Ayanokoji asked Sakura for a handkerchief to mark a tree.

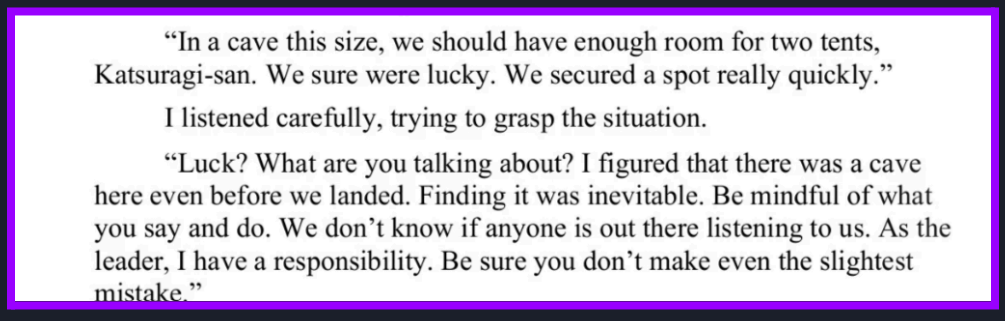
This eventually caused them to lose Koenji and split up from him.

While searching for a spot without Koenji, they found a ***pathway*** after venturing through the forest for a while. This pathway led them to a cave.

(So Ayanokoji did notice the patterns in the trees and pathways. He used these patterns to find the pathway that led to the cave spot.)

Sakura and Ayanokoji found the cave. However, they quickly hid themselves when they noticed people inside it.

Those people were Katsuragi and Yahiko. Yahiko remarked that they had been lucky to find this spot, while Ayanokoji noticed that Katsuragi was holding a card.



"In a cave this size, we should have enough room for two tents, Katsuragi-san. We sure were lucky. We secured a spot really quickly."

I listened carefully, trying to grasp the situation.

"Luck? What are you talking about? I figured that there was a cave here even before we landed. Finding it was inevitable. Be mindful of what you say and do. We don't know if anyone is out there listening to us. As the leader, I have a responsibility. Be sure you don't make even the slightest mistake."

After Katsuragi and Yahiko left, Ayanokoji and Sakura investigated the cave and found that it had been taken by Class A, as indicated by the device and its timer, as mentioned in the manual.

For now, Ayanokoji didn't have proof that either of them was the leader, but he promised Sakura that he would tell Hirata about it. (He didn't.)

They returned to the main camp and informed Hirata that Koenji had split from their group. Hirata informed them that Koenji had come back to the camp to swim for a while before going off on his own again. Hirata also informed them that the Idiot Trio had found a good base spot and were waiting for the others to arrive.

Here, there is some proof that Ayanokoji knew Koenji had a plan.

[What in the world was he up to? Was it a coincidence? No, Kouenji walked without hesitation. Even if our team was free to choose the base camp's location, you'd expect him to be looking around as you went. Kouenji walked straight ahead, almost as if he had another purpose

More than anything else, his progress surprised me. It was possible that Kouenji wasn't simply pushing ahead recklessly. Maybe he had a goal in mind. However, the problem was that Sakura, in trying to keep up with Kouenji, was running out of breath.

.]

After a while, every search party returned.

Class D assigned the river as their base spot and elected Horikita as the leader, as Kushida suggested, due to Hirata and Karuizawa always being in leadership positions in their class and Horikita being considered responsible.

Horikita was made the leader.

Ayanokoji's leader-swap strategy began.

Now, Ayanokoji had to make the leader retire, even if it meant backing her into a corner.

We left it at that, with my acceptance and the realization we had nothing left to say to one another. I wondered if this week would show Horikita how difficult it was to live life as a hermit. Alone, she was amazing…but only alone.

In an academic setting, she could quietly continue her race to the top without relying on anyone. But this test proved that there were some things you couldn't do alone. Horikita now probably felt powerless for the first time. It was probably why she'd come to rely on me so quickly, at this early stage. If you didn't have any friends, you'd have no one to talk to. Without communication, there could be no cooperation or trust. An academically brilliant girl was less useful than a normal student in a situation like this.

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"The school probably factored that into their calculations, too," I muttered.

This week would test Horikita Suzune's limits, and show her at her worst. The school had made her isolated life impossible.

Minor feats

Feat :<u>seeing thorugh kanazaki true purpose at class D:</u>

Hirata thought Kanzaki and the other students were there to check out Class D's spending. However, that was only one reason, as Ayanokoji stated.

The real reason was to figure out the leader through timing. Kanzaki arrived early at Class D's camp, around the same time as roll call and when the Right of Possession needed to recharge.

By observing the eight-hour Right of Possession expiration that occurred every day, he could potentially calculate the renewal time and determine the interval between renewals.

However, Class D had already planned for that loophole. They had posted the second update the previous day and used the crowd to camouflage the leader and conceal the timing.

Instead, Ayanokoji got information about Class B's location from Kanzaki.

[Thinking]

Feat: Misdirecting Horikita

Ayanokoji convinces Horikita to go and check the other classes' camps.

At Class C, he feeds Horikita the idea that Class C's strategy is to enjoy themselves and then retire, like Koenji did, by using the additional-rule loophole. He explains that Ryuuen had outcast the students who rebelled against him, and their absence would cause Class C to lose 20 points every day. So, they supposedly decided to spend their points, enjoy their time on the island, and eventually force themselves to withdraw.

Totally wrong.

The zero-point strategy was about negating negative elements and using the freedom that the exam offered to their advantage, which both Ryuuen and Ayanokoji understood. He also didn't inform Horikita about the interloper strategy or that Ryuuen was the only possible leader.

At Class B, the same thing happened. Horikita fed Ichinose the false idea of the zero-point strategy, which led them to discuss a false interpretation of the zero-point strategy.

Ichinose and Horikita formed mutual cooperation, shared useful information with each other, and promised not to look for the leader in each other's classes.

Ichinose gave Horikita the location of Class A's base before they returned to their respective camps.

(Ayanokoji didn't share Class B's location with Horikita, nor did he tell her about the "paths.")

At Class A, Horikita's interaction with Yahiko and Katsuragi didn't give her any useful knowledge about Class A.

Only that they were serious about hoarding points through designated spots and saving points.

Except Ayanokoji got useful information from the same interaction.

Feat: <u>Information Gathering</u>

Ayanokoji gathers information on the spots without letting anyone know what his true intentions are with them.

He also keeps Class A's strategy in mind and uses the weakness of his own class's spot to his advantage without letting anyone notice.

He keeps track of Class C, B, and A's spots, their distances through the paths, and their positions on the blank sheet and mentally.

Finding optimal paths for travel.

Discovering new areas through the paths and patterns.

Figuring out spot locations and their general characteristics.

While completely concealing his true intentions from his allies and not providing any hints to the other classes about why he was scouting so much.

He fully took advantage of the independent role Hirata assigned to Horikita and Ayanokoji.

Feat: <u>Finding out schisms between people and using them to his advantage</u>

Ayanokoji was able to notice the schisms and factions within his own class, like:

One group wanted to use points.
One group didn't want to use points.
One group wanted to use points only when necessary.
There were also those who wanted to go to Class A and those who wanted to stay in Class D.

Girls' factions:

Kushida, Karuizawa, Shinohara, and Horikita, with Sakura being relatively independent.

He also fully understood Class A's Arisu–Katsuragi schism and its role in their plan.

He fully understood Class C's false interloper story and how Ryuuen was using them.

Feat: Understanding the theme of the exam — freedom, rules, and their loopholes. Field Skills

Only Ayanokoji and Ryuuen truly grasped and utilized the freedom given by the exam and exercised the field skills necessary to take advantage of it.

Both Ayanokoji and Ryuuen focused on the additional rules and the loopholes within them, which could be exploited to an extreme degree.

Like forced withdrawal, the zero-point approach, the halfway monopoly of spots, the interloper exploit, roll-call timing, Right of Possession expiration calculations, and the most extreme one: the leader-swap exploit.

All of this was understood by Day 1.

Feat: Concealment

This is the last minor feat, although it's arguably the best one because it's about his ability to conceal his actions and hide his traces. Even though it falls short because of Horikita and Hirata, he still shows good concealment throughout the entire exam.

Ayanokoji, throughout this whole exam, was showing good concealment. Like concealing the paths and patterns he discovered and using them to find the spots, taking advantage of Class D in his strategy, using Class D's timing for many things like figuring out the culprit's timing, wasting

matchsticks and starting a small fire, burning the manual, investigating Ibuki's bag, and backing Horikita into a corner for his leader swap and final guess.

Basically, he left no trace of his direct involvement for the entire seven days.

If you don't take Horikita and Hirata's inquiries into account, you can basically get Ryuuen's POV: Class D won somehow, and there might be an X controlling things in secret.

Now major feats:

Figuring and profiling Katsruig leader reasoning :

Day 1

Premise 1 : The ship circling the island and the announcement about "significant scenery" already provided hints about key locations that could be used to exercise control. Combined with the additional rules, especially the Right of Possession, this confirmed their importance The cave was the optimal location on the island, as it connected to the tower and the hut, both of which could be used to exercise control.

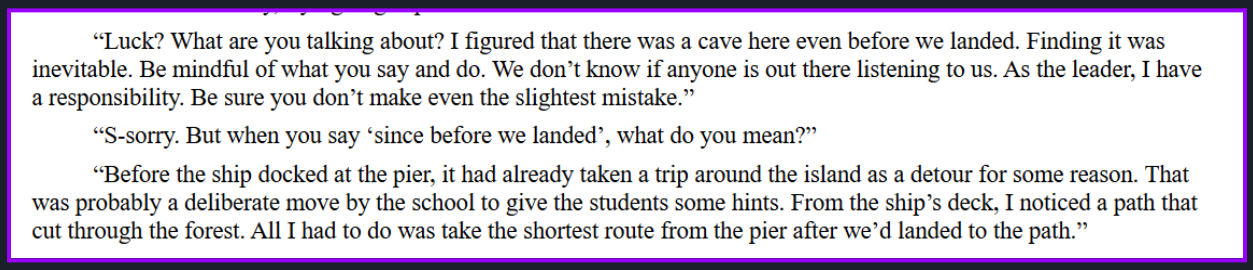
Premise 2:When Ayanokoji went to search for the cave location, he found Yahiko and Katsuragi there. Ayanokoji and Sakura arrived late because of Koenji.

Ayanokoji hid himself in the foliage and saw Katsuragi standing at the cave entrance, holding the card for a minute or two.

Conclusion →They went to the cave without any hesitation and also knew about the clues ANHS had given them.

Premise 3:After a minute or two, another student arrived - Yahiko. Yahiko described being lucky to secure this spot.

Katsuragi objected to Yahiko, basically confirming that the school was giving them clues, pathways, and patterns.



"Luck? What are you talking about? I figured that there was a cave here even before we landed. Finding it was inevitable. Be mindful of what you say and do. We don't know if anyone is out there listening to us. As the leader, I have a responsibility. Be sure you don't make even the slightest mistake."

"S-sorry. But when you say 'since before we landed', what do you mean?"

"Before the ship docked at the pier, it had already taken a trip around the island as a detour for some reason. That was probably a deliberate move by the school to give the students some hints. From the ship's deck, I noticed a path that cut through the forest. All I had to do was take the shortest route from the pier after we'd landed to the path."

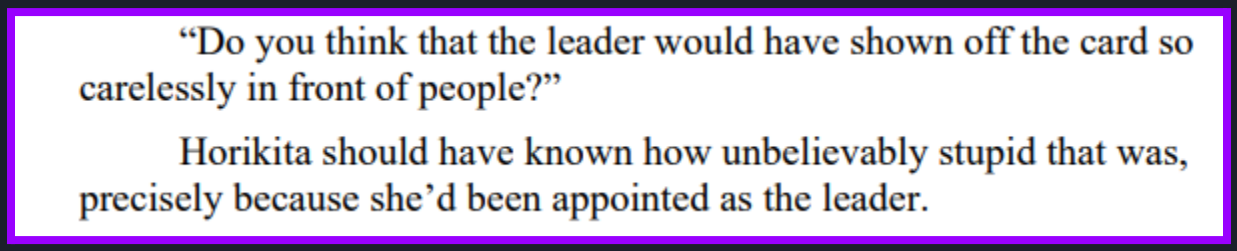
Katsuragi urged Yahiko to be mindful of what he said and did and not make a single mistake. Yahiko mentioned that Class B was no issue and that Class D was full of failures.

Katsuragi urged him to move after claiming the spot and mentioned Sakayanagi.

Conclusion → Katsuragi and Yahiko were playing for Class A, based on Ayanokoji's earlier observations that Class A didn't even consider Class D a serious threat.

Katsuragi or Yahiko had claimed the spot without hesitation. However, Katsuragi was holding the key card for a minute or two outside the cave, while also telling his classmate to be careful and cautious around there. Meanwhile, Yahiko was acting clueless and careless, unlike Katsuragi.

That didn't match their respective natures and actions. The leader wouldn't openly reveal their identity for that long.



"Do you think that the leader would have shown off the card so carelessly in front of people?"

Horikita should have known how unbelievably stupid that was, precisely because she'd been appointed as the leader.

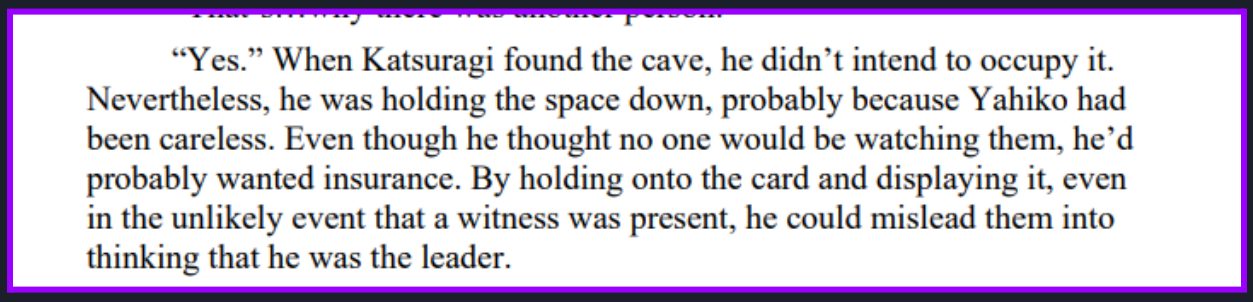
Katsuragi or Yahiko made a mistake.

Most likely, it was Yahiko, as Katsuragi was more cautious.

Katsuragi was holding the key card in the wild not due to carelessness, but to divert the suspicion of who the leader was. He also mentioned to Yahiko that he needed to be careful about what he said and did.

Katsuragi was covering for Yahiko, who was the leader and had made the mistake of acquiring the spot early without considering that someone could possibly be nearby.

By holding the card in the wild and acting like he was the leader, Katsuragi was trying to present himself as the leader to any outsider and cover up the timing, misleading others as a form of insurance.



"Yes." When Katsuragi found the cave, he didn't intend to occupy it. Nevertheless, he was holding the space down, probably because Yahiko had been careless. Even though he thought no one would be watching them, he'd probably wanted insurance. By holding onto the card and displaying it, even in the unlikely event that a witness was present, he could mislead them into thinking that he was the leader.

Premise 4: Searching inside the cave, Ayanokoji found the device with 7 hours and 55 minutes remaining, with Class A having acquired it.

This confirmed that Class A had acquired the optimal spot very early, with Yahiko being the likely leader who had done so without giving much thought to the possibility of being caught under the additional rules.

Profiling class A and katsuragi

During Day 2, Horikita and Ayanokoji went to Class A's location, which was the same cave spot that Ayanokoji had visited earlier. Ichinose had additionally informed them that Class A was very secretive.

Ayanokoji and Horikita went to Class A's spot, where Ayanokoji learned several key points about Class A.

Premise 1: Face-off between Yahiko and Horikita. This confirmed that Yahiko was careless and did not read the rules properly, as Horikita was able to barge in without much resistance.

Premise 2: Katsuragi stopped Horikita and immediately asked why she had not received permission to invite others:

"What are you doing? I don't recall giving you permission to invite guests."

Premise 3: Katsuragi stopped Horikita from arguing about entering the cave and then forced her to retreat.

Conclusion → Katsuragi was cautious and careful, taking the lead, while Yahiko was careless and offered little resistance.

Katsuragi said:

“Yahiko, don’t respond to cheap provocation.”

This confirmed that Katsuragi had to cover for Yahiko, who was careless. Katsuragi countering Horikita also showed that he knew the rules well and was able to identify loopholes and shut them down.

Katsuragi also set up vinyl sheets to hide the device from the other classes, taking the cave’s design into account.

During Day 3, when Sakura and Ayanokoji ventured into the cornfield near the cave location, they found Katsuragi and Yahiko there.

Premise 1: Katsuragi apologized for scaring Sakura and for Yahiko’s behavior.

Premise 2: Katsuragi mentioned that they had no bad intentions and that their intention was only to take some of the corn. He was also open to sharing the cornfield with Ayanokoji and Sakura after they discovered it.

Premise 3: Katsuragi objected again when Yahiko suggested that they travel alone with Sakura and Ayanokoji.

Conclusion → Katsuragi was generally concerned about safety when traveling through the forest. This was why he did not travel alone and instead traveled with Yahiko, along with some other intentions.

Premise 5: Even after leaving, Katsuragi stayed there and did not take any of the corn.

“You’re the one who doesn’t seem to understand the situation, Yahiko. Don’t dismiss the danger of moving through the forest alone. It’s difficult enough in groups of men, but when men and women are together, no matter what, there will be certain limitations to what you can do.”

That was why Katsuragi didn’t go alone into the forest.

“We’ll help you.”

“A-are you serious, Katsuragi-san? But, working together with Class D is—”

Yahiko obviously wanted to refuse, but he stayed quiet after Katsuragi shot him a sharp look.

“We appreciate the offer, but our class told us to be careful. They’ll get mad if they find out we relied on Class A for help. I’m sorry, but we have to decline.”

It was a lie, but Katsuragi had no other choice but to withdraw.

It was a lie, but Katsuragi had no other choice but to withdraw.

"I see. We can't force you. However, can you trust us? After you leave here, there's a chance we'll make off with all of this, right?"

"In that case, I'd have no choice but to give up what I'm carrying right now."

Apparently Katsuragi hadn't made off with the corn after we left. Instead, he stayed there so that he could watch us. Whether Katsuragi had good or bad intentions, we didn't know for sure.

—----------

Premise 6: On Day 4, Ayanokoji investigated the locations near the cave that connected the hut and the tower.

I spotted several facilities located rather close to the cave. It didn't seem like there was any kind of detour route, but as I walked along the cliff, I noticed a ladder set up in a blind spot. Anyone would've missed it upon first glance. I grabbed onto the ladder with all of my strength. It seemed sturdy, so I used it to climb down to the bottom of the cliff.

Shortly after getting down, I found a small hut. Near the entrance, I saw a device—proof that this was a spot. When I peered through the window, I saw fishing tackles. In other words, occupation of this spot meant you would able to catch fish without having to borrow equipment from the school.

There, he found a ladder set up in a blind spot connecting to a hut. The hut had a device showing that Class A occupied the location.

Conclusion → Katsuragi and Yahiko had likely gone there and set up the ladder. This matched Katsuragi's cautious and careful nature. Katsuragi was also trying to occupy the optimal locations around the cave, particularly the hut and tower.

When I checked to see whether the spot had been occupied, I saw the words Class A displayed on the device. It seemed they had four hours remaining. I didn't doubt that Katsuragi and the others had come here and taken possession of the area after they'd held down the cave. You wouldn't have known about the spot's existence unless you discovered it back when we were on the boat. Since the small hut was located right under the cliff, you didn't have to worry about anyone in the surrounding area seeing you.

Ayanokoji followed the paths that had been "trodden" by people and discovered the tower. He wondered whether it could be used to overlook the beach.

Premise 7: The device at the tower was unoccupied, and the location was largely open and easy to find.

Conclusion → Katsuragi would not occupy the tower because he knew that the leader could be discovered through the occupation and updating of the location. Katsuragi was cautious and would not take that risk. That was why the hut was occupied rather than the tower.

The hut was therefore occupied because it was a blind spot, unlike the tower.

Although it seemed possible to look out over the whole beach by going up the installed ladder, the facility didn't seem that useful. It seemed like some spots were better than others.

I drew closer to confirm the equipment on the wall of the facility. Unlike the last place I'd checked, this place didn't seem to be occupied. The facility itself was rather large, so even though the place was well in the backwoods, it would've been easy to find. In other words, that meant I didn't know who had been monitoring the area. The fact that no one was occupying the tower showed that holding it ran the risk of being observed by the enemy.

Katsuragi was a cautious man, reliant on solid, secure strategies. He wouldn't carelessly take the bait, even bait this sweet and this close. The bushes nearby rustled despite the absence of wind.

(Ayanokoji was later ambushed by Class A members camping at the tower. They offered him 100,000 points in exchange for revealing information, but he refused unless someone trustworthy, such as Katsuragi, was present as the Class A representative. This caused a reaction from Class A, who revealed that Katsuragi was not actually the leader of Class A—it was Sakayanagi.)

"Could I have someone trustworthy settle things? For example, someone like Katsuragi. Or perhaps Sa—"

The moment I said the former's name, one of the boys' expressions changed.

"Why did you say Katsuragi?"

"I've heard rumors that Katsuragi is Class A's representative."

"Don't make me laugh. Sakayanagi is the representative of Class A. Not Katsuragi. You can go now."

From what they'd just said, it sounded like they had no more use for me. They made way for me to pass. It seemed like those two guys were Katsuragi's enemies. If that were true, were they working under Sakayanagi's orders? Was Sakayanagi the one leading, not Katsuragi? I needed to clarify that.

(After leaving the tower, Ayanokoji went down to the beach to investigate Class C, using the pathways between the locations. There, he met Ichinose and Kanzaki, who were also investigating.)

I didn't know if those two were lying or telling the truth, but they weren't hiding their plans from me at all. Ichinose and Kanzaki had realized that spying on Class C was meaningless. This was the perfect opportunity. I'd reluctantly planned to ask Hirata and Kushida about Sakayanagi, but those two didn't seem well informed on the subject. Also, I wanted to avoid the students in Class D knowing about my movements as much as possible.

"I just happened to hear a little bit about this, but do Katsuragi and Sakayanagi in Class A have opposing groups?"

(Ichinose informed him about the conflict between Katsuragi and Sakayanagi.)

"Complete opposites?"

"Liberal and conservative? Offense and defense? Persecute and protect? Those kinds of things. That's why they always seem to be clashing with each other. It's scary to think about Class A going all out in that situation. If they managed to come together, Class A would really demonstrate their true powers."

"I see. Well, I'll tell Horikita later. Ah jeez, she told me to investigate on my own. She gets flustered working with others. Well…please pretend that you didn't hear that last part. It's going to be bothersome if she gets angry with me."

Premise 8: Katsuragi and Sakayanagi are complete opposites in their ideology.

Sakayanagi was absent during the exam, which was why Katsuragi was leading Class A during the exam. Despite this, not everyone in Class A completely supported Katsuragi. They followed him mainly because of his merits and position.

Under Sakayanagi's leadership, the students were happy, and there was little resistance or internal conflict because there was no merit in going against her rule.

Even though Sakayanagi was not present during the exam, the students would not go against her.

Conclusion → Katsuragi could not fully trust anyone in this exam, including his own classmates, because some of them would not go against Sakayanagi. She was his ideological opponent and the leader of the opposing faction.

Katsuragi did not occupy the tower because his classmates could betray him for Sakayanagi's sake.

Katsuragi only trusted Yahiko during this exam. This was why Yahiko and Katsuragi were together most of the time.

If sufficient people were present, finding the leader would become more difficult. Therefore, Katsuragi was extremely cautious during this exam and was desperate to deal with the Sakayanagi faction within his own class.

Premise 9: There was a digital camera with Ibuki, while Ryuuen had the same type of receiver device. If Ryuuen was the leader of Class C during this exam, then there would be little need for a digital camera purely for obtaining proof or evidence.

Premise 10: The pathways around the tower led toward Class C. The tower and hut were perfect locations to hide and communicate using walkie-talkies. Both locations were also close to the cave, which was Class A's base camp.

Premise 11: Class A started with 270 points. Katsuragi was not the kind of person who would casually spend points, nor would he willingly spend them without a clear reason. He was described as conservative, and his entire behavior throughout this exam confirmed his cautious and conservative nature.

Two temporary toilets cost 40 points, one shower cost an unknown amount, and the ladder also presumably cost points. Altogether, this could roughly amount to 100 Special Points.

Katsuragi would not normally spend that many points unless there was a strong reason to do so. Therefore, it was possible that he used another class's points or received assistance from another class.

Conclusion → Class A and Class C ***may*** have had some kind of negotiation or partnership with each other. Katsuragi may have formed a partnership with Ryuuen in exchange for providing physical proof and allowing Class C to use Class A's locations for their operations.

"That wasn't it. If the discussion only stayed within Class C, then there shouldn't have been any need for her to take a picture with the camera or steal the card."

In other words, that meant there had been people involved who didn't trust Ibuki's words alone; they'd wanted reliable evidence.

"From here on out, I don't have any evidence of what I'm saying. Think of it as my intuition, which I derived from the test results. At the end of the test, Class A had 270 points."

In other words, they hadn't used a single point during the test.

"Classes A and C were connected, working together behind the scenes. Class C sacrificed their own points and bought whatever Class A needed. Also, by taking all of C's tools, Class A was able to spend the week without using any points."

Premise: Later in the day 6, a key card was thrown at Horikita, confirming that multiple people had figured out the identity of the leader. Ichinose would be unlikely to betray a partnership with Class A, especially since Class C was also her enemy. Therefore, Ichinose could be ruled out.

Ryuuen wouldn't need physical proof from Ibuki.

Conclusion → This left Katsuragi as the only Class A member who could have been involved. His need for proof also matched his personality.

(Result at the end of the day - 170 points, which reflected that they had not spent any points. -150 penalty, which consisted of two penalties from Class D.)

Figuring out ryuen 's strategy and interloper profiling

(Only information Ayanokoji had prior to this exam about Ryuuen came from Ichinose and the court trial in Volume 2. Ryuuen was behind the Sudo trial, and Class C had caused problems for Classes B and D because of Ryuuen, while his involvement went unnoticed. He also didn't hesitate to hurt people. Class B helped in the Sudo trial because Class C was a common enemy.)

During Day 1,

Ibuki was found near the tree with a bag.

When they tried to convince her to go to the Class D camp, she denied it multiple times.

> She lightly caressed her red, swollen cheek. It must've been painful. She didn't look us in the eyes as she spoke. Maybe she wasn't good at social contact or something. I noticed a small amount of dirt under Ibuki's nails. If you looked to where she'd been sitting, you could see disturbances in the soil.

Plus, Ibuki had nails, and there were disturbances in the soil (the soil texture looked different, as if something had been dug up and filled back in).

When they finally convinced her, she dropped the bag for Yamauchi to carry, which made a heavy thud.

She flatly refused to let Yamauchi carry her bag, perhaps because she didn't want to rely on us. She let go of the bag, which fell and struck a tree, making a dull *thud* sound. The awkwardness increased as Yamauchi frantically apologized.

Ibuki says to Ayanokoji:

"After all, they'll chase me out anyway. Am I wrong?"

This happens when Ayanokoji mentions that he failed to tell Hirata about her because he was surrounded by the others.

"I don't know. Hirata is an exceptionally good guy."

I couldn't imagine that Hirata would kick her out if he knew about her situation.

"Oh, I never introduced myself before. My name's Ayanokouji."

"So, should I introduce myself once more then?"

"Nah. You're Ibuki, from Class C. I remember."

We faced each other through the introductions, but Ibuki wouldn't look me in the eyes.

A girl named Satou, who had finally noticed the interloper, eyed Ibuki with suspicion. Ibuki continued to quietly sit far away. Apparently there was no need for me to break the ice.

Ibuki and Hirata argue.

Ibuki argues that she shouldn't be allowed to stay in Class D. Hirata says that if she were really a spy, she wouldn't want to be outcast.

But Ibuki was instead suggesting that she be outcast from the camp.

She interrupts and says that she was only looking for a place to sleep.

Hirata says it's crazy for a girl to sleep alone in the woods.

Ibuki argues that it's fine and that helping her wouldn't gain them anything.

"This has nothing to do with losses or gains. We can't just leave someone in trouble. We all think so."

Her expression cleared, and she turned toward us without hesitation. Something like that was designed to melt even the toughest exterior. Ibuki seemed to believe Hirata, and it gave her confidence.

"I had a fight with a boy in my class. He hit me and chased me away. That's all."

"That's horrible. Raising a hand against a girl, I mean."

Ibuki accepts, telling Hirata that she didn't expect him to take her in and give her shelter. She tries to leave, but Hirata promises Ibuki that he will give her a place to stay at the camp, discuss her situation, and assigns Ayanokoji to look after her.

Hirata left us and returned to the group. I wondered if Hirata had left me with her because he trusted me, or at least trusted me more than Yamauchi. I was a little curious.

"He's seriously a good-natured guy, isn't he?" Ibuki asked.

"I think everyone here is, more or less. Are there not people like that in your class?"

"Not at all… There isn't really anyone in Class C like that."

Eventually, Class D accepted Ibuki for two reasons:

Ibuki's absence from Class C would cause them to lose points, which benefited Class D.

Ibuki promised not to go near the device and to stay with the girls.

(— Yes, they weren't that stupid. Taking Ibuki in was beneficial overall. Plus, there was the factor that Hirata didn't understand the theme of the exam — freedom. Instead of seeing it as simply saving and spending points, the rules necessarily played a role. So it wasn't just plot convenience.)

Ibuki sat down, bunched her knees against her chest, and lowered her head. Thanks to Hirata's persuasiveness, Class D agreed to look after Ibuki. Though some students were strongly opposed, every time Class C held roll call, they'd hemorrhage points. Once everyone saw it as an opportunity, they were finally convinced. Hirata's intentions had been pure, but the same wasn't true for others. The incentive of potential profit motivated them to take the chance.

However, maintaining exclusive possession of this place was an extremely delicate issue. We explained to Ibuki, and she promised not to wander near the device. If anyone realized that Horikita was the leader, the damage we'd suffer would be great. After that, we decided to purchase the necessary food and water sets for tonight, along with the guys' tents. Thanks to Hirata and Ike, the tents were set up smoothly. Just before the sun set, we finished all of our preparations, and the students began eating their meals.

Premise 1: Ibuki Was Cast Out and Bruised by Class C

Ibuki's behavior was prickly. She sometimes completely avoided eye contact when certain things were asked.

The location where Ibuki was found had a weird soil texture and visible disturbances.

Ibuki's bag also made a heavy thud when she dropped it.

(Ayanokoji was cautious and understood the rules of this exam, so it wasn't odd that he would investigate Ibuki's bag.)

Argument — why didn't they check the bag?

Because only Sakura, Yamauchi, and Ayanokoji were there when the bag was dropped.

Plus, there was the factor that nobody understood the theme and rule structure of this exam this early on except for Ryuuen and Ayanokoji.

Ayanokoji was cautious and understood the rules of this exam, so it wasn't odd that he would investigate Ibuki's bag.

Argument — plot-convenience movement.

No.

Ayanokoji, Sakura, and Yamauchi were collecting branches for the bonfire. Hirata instructed Ayanokoji to collect branches for the bonfire with the others.

He first invited Horikita, but she rejected the invitation.

If she had accepted it, Ibuki wouldn't have been there in the same way.

It was because of Yamauchi that this happened in the first place. Yamauchi was part of the Idiot Trio in Class D. Check Day 1 for more on that.

So, the movement itself wasn't really plot convenience.

There was a red, swollen mark on her cheek. Someone had hit her pretty hard. When Yamauchi started to pass the girl, I grabbed him by the shoulder.

"What?"

"Oh, uh…sorry. It's nothing."

I was going to say something, but he finally noticed the girl.

Conclusion → It was worth checking Ibuki despite her genuine reactions.

Her reactions could be genuine while her overall situation was still suspicious.

Premise 2: Ayanokoji investigated Ibuki early in the morning and found a digital camera and transceiver in her bag at the camp near the tree where Ibuki had been found.

Ayanokoji destroyed the digital camera using water.

our tent. The girls' tent was a few meters away, where Karuizawa and the others slept. Until this whole incident, the girls' luggage had been piled up out front, unprotected, like ours. If you wanted to steal something, you easily could do so. I was easily able to rifle through Ibuki's bag on the first day.

possible. After looking around to make sure I was alone, I found a singularly colored piece of luggage. It was Ibuki's bag. Since her bag was different, it was easy to spot. I grabbed it without hesitation and checked inside. If someone saw me doing this, I'd be instantly labeled a pervert. Inside, I found the same kinds of things that everyone else had, like towels, a change of clothes, underwear, etc. However…

"A digital camera, huh?"

That explained the dull sound I'd heard yesterday when she dropped the bag against a tree. This item wasn't appropriate for a deserted island. On the bottom of the camera, I found a rental sticker. Why did Ibuki have this? I considered the possible reasons, trying to think from her perspective. After conjuring up an image of her in my head, several possibilities suggested themselves.

I checked the camera's power source. It had no data, and no sign that it'd been used. After I finished my inspection, I returned the item to the bag, and went back to the tent.

The more we understood the rules, the less we could agree on a course of action. Our opinions were divided. At any rate, there were a wide variety of items for purchase in the manual: essential equipment for surviving, like tents and cookware; machines and tools, like digital cameras and wireless transceivers/walkie-talkies; items for amusement, like umbrellas, floaties, stuff for a barbecue, and fireworks; and food and water, the bare essentials.

Two students from Class C — Komiya and Kondou — came to Class D's base camp and mocked them about their living conditions. They then left a message from Ryuuen:

If they wanted to live luxuriously, they should come to Class C's spot near the beach.

"Komiya and Kondou, huh?"

Like Ibuki, I recognized those guys. They were from Class C.

"Wow, you Class D rejects are really living frugal, eh? I guess that's what I'd expect from a class of defectives."

They were stuffing their faces with potato chips and drinking bottles of soda. Not water. Soda.

"Looks like you're living the high life, Class C."

"Do you know Ryuuen?" Ibuki asked.

"He's a Class C student. I've heard various rumors about him. He's pretty crazy, I hear."

"Not just 'pretty' crazy. Everything that guy *does* is crazy."

Ibuki sounded irritated, as if she were discussing a family enemy.

"Those two are Ryuuen's friends. I'd say they're more like his underlings, though."

I recalled the time those two had fought with Sudou. It'd seemed like they were acting on orders from Ryuuen, rather than just looking for a fight.

They didn't leave, but continued snacking as if trying to harass us. Ike snapped at them, but they didn't seem to care. The provocation continued for at least ten more minutes, until Hirata's group returned and Class C decided to call it quits. They headed back toward their campsite.

"I don't think they were looking for me," Ibuki said.

"Yeah. Guess they wanted to harass us."

Their bizarre visit aside, we'd obtained valuable information about Class C: they had luxury items, snacks and soda and so on. They'd been burning through points. In a test like this, where frugality was crucial, what in the world were they thinking?

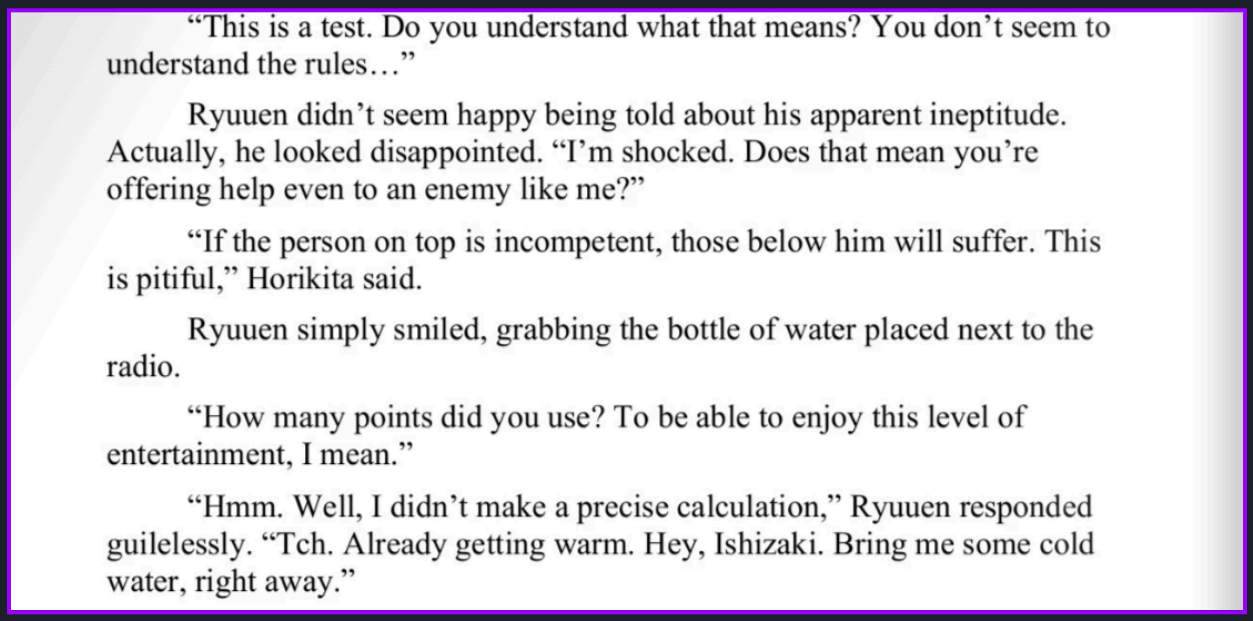
"They said something about sharing their luxuries. Any idea what they were talking about?" I asked.

"I wonder if things are heading toward that worst-case scenario I imagined…"

Ibuki said nothing more, but headed toward a tree on the camp's periphery. The worst-case scenario she'd imagined, huh? Telling Horikita about this seemed like a good idea.

To investigate the issue, Ayanokoji convinced Horikita to go along to the Class C spot, even though Ayanokoji never mentioned that Komiya and Kondou were the ones who had provoked them.

There, they learned about what Ryuuen was doing with the Special Points — spending them on luxuries.



"This is a test. Do you understand what that means? You don't seem to understand the rules…"

Ryuuen didn't seem happy being told about his apparent ineptitude. Actually, he looked disappointed. "I'm shocked. Does that mean you're offering help even to an enemy like me?"

"If the person on top is incompetent, those below him will suffer. This is pitiful," Horikita said.

Ryuuen simply smiled, grabbing the bottle of water placed next to the radio.

"How many points did you use? To be able to enjoy this level of entertainment, I mean."

"Hmm. Well, I didn't make a precise calculation," Ryuuen responded guilelessly. "Tch. Already getting warm. Hey, Ishizaki. Bring me some cold water, right away."

Ryuuen continued the conversation, saying that he loathed hard work and patience.

Horikita questioned him about Ibuki.

Ryuuen replied that Ibuki was helpless, so she went to the others, and it was decided that Ryuuen would rule in his own liking.

So, he gave Ibuki a little punishment, along with the other boy.

He mentioned that he had used all the points, but since they didn't go negative, there was no real danger.

Horikita left the conversation and told Ayanokoji that Ryuuen's class was doomed.

Ayanokoji replied that it seemed that way, but they wouldn't face any problems.

Horikita asked why.

Ayanokoji explained that they could do what Koenji did: retire due to physical exhaustion and leave the island.

Since there were no negative points, it wouldn't affect their class ranking that much.

After all, the Special Exam was designed to spend the points.

(Wrong information / interpretation.)

Ryuuen simply smiled, grabbing the bottle of water placed next to the radio.

"The test is literally about freedom. Ryuuen's way of thinking is one way to approach it. It seems like Ibuki and another student rebelled, and because of that Class C will lose twenty points a day. Since he knew he'd be losing that many points every day no matter what, he came up with a drastic strategy."

Since I didn't know when Ryuuen had decided to spend all of Class C's points, I could only guess.

I suppose that was true. It was certainly true that we couldn't predict the actions of Ryuuen, whose plans were likely geared to a very unusual purpose, if his words earlier were true. Any rational person would regard Ryuuen's bizarre schemes with some anxiety. After we passed the beach, I turned back and scanned the shore once more.

"A zero-point strategy, huh? I see. That's really interesting."

If we could simply shut down dissenting views from our classmates, it'd be a rather interesting method. After all, this test wasn't just about saving points within our own group. We had to strategize if we wanted to win.

Premise 3: Ryuuen Sent Komiya and Kondou

Ryuuen sent Komiya and Kondou, the same people who had fought with Sudo.

Komiya and Kondou followed Ryuuen's plans during the trial without hesitation, even when it resulted in them getting beaten up.

Ibuki reacted to Ayanokoji knowing a little about Class C and questioned whether he knew about Ryuuen.

Ayanokoji dodged the answer.

Ibuki described Ryuuen and Class C honestly and mentioned things heading toward the “worst-case scenario.”

Then she suddenly went silent and went toward the tree at the periphery of the camp.

Ryuuen gave the reason that he was spending points because it was basically a vacation, with no risk of negative points.

He also outcast people who didn’t follow his commands, like Ibuki.

But then there was something important:

Digital cameras and receivers could only be bought with Special Points.

Conclusion → Ibuki and the others followed Ryuuen’s commands to infiltrate other classes’ base camps.

This was evident from Ibuki having a receiver and digital camera — equipment that could only be bought with Special Points.

And these people were willing to get beaten by Ryuuen for his plans to work.

Ryuuen wanted to hide his true intention/strategy of reaching zero points.

That was why he put up the front of not wanting to work hard and spending everything luxuriously.

Ryuuen was the apparent leader.

Class C was following his commands during the test.

Ryuuen could also use Koenji’s forced withdrawal through physical exhaustion as a way to get out of the island.

But the presence of the receiver suggested that it could be used to communicate with the interlopers about the identities of the leaders.

The presence of the digital camera was troubling.

Ryuuen wouldn't need a digital camera simply for proof of his interlopers.

And he wouldn't choose people who wouldn't follow his commands.

So Ryuuen's strategy clearly had another intention/agenda.

—--------

Ichinose and Horikita discussed that Ryuuen was simply spending points and enjoying the luxuries of the island without worrying about going into negative points, while another Class C student was also present at their camp, showing that Ryuuen had sent his interlopers into the other classes to identify the identities of their leaders.

> Right. Ibuki had been picked up by Class D purely by chance. I'd been almost convinced until I heard about the guy named Kaneda in Class B. He'd been sent as a spy by Ryuuen. I wasn't so good-natured as to believe that two people just happened to be saved by two separate classes completely by chance.

Conclusion → Ryuuen was successful in fooling the others about his strategy and the true purpose of his interlopers.

—----------
Ichinose and Horikita's conversation revealed the surface-level explanation:

Ryuuen simply wanted points, and another Class C student was in their camp.

But this ignored the bigger picture.

Ryuuen was sending his interlopers into other classes to obtain the identities of their leaders.

Conclusion → Ryuuen was successful in fooling the others about his strategy and the purpose of his interlopers. No one was able to suspect his strategy this early on, and they instead came away with the wrong interpretation of the exam — that it was simply about saving points.

His apparent strategy was simply:

Spend all the points → enjoy the island → don't work hard → leave if necessary.

But behind that, he was using Class C students to infiltrate other camps and gather information.

So the "vacation" strategy could be seen as a front. The real strategy was likely hidden behind it. And there was another intention behind this strategy, which the digital camera suggested.

On Day 4, when Ayanokoji investigated the hut and tower, he went to Class C through the pathway and found Ichinose and Kanzaki. They exchanged information.

[Intuition] → Ryuuen and Class A's Katsuragi were in an alliance for some reason. (Read the Class A and Katsuragi reasons above.)

Katsuragi was covering for Ryuuen at this spot in exchange for using Class C's Special Points and obtaining physical proof of the leader.

Katsuragi was doing it for another reason.

> Then there was Class C. We were able to avoid damage because I'd been appointed as the leader. In addition to sending people off as spies to find out the identities of the other leaders, Class C had profited from some kind of negotiations with Class A. Ryuuen might be our number one enemy.

On Day 5,

When the underwear theft happened, it caused a split between the boys and increased the tension that was already there.

Ayanokoji and Hirata were seen as unsuspecting and were tasked with handling the maintenance of the tents.

Ibuki then approached Ayanokoji.

> "Do you doubt me, by any chance?"
>
> Ibuki had apparently seen Shinohara and the others treat me like a criminal this morning.
>
> "Are you the culprit?" she asked.
>
> "No, I'm not."
>
> "Okay, that's good. Well, it's not like I had any evidence or anything. It looks like some of the girls trust you and that boy Hirata. I think the chance of you being a villain is low."
>
> She'd probably come to that conclusion after hearing the exchange between Karuizawa and Horikita.
>
> "Do you have any idea who the culprit is?"
>
> "Right now, no. I really don't want to doubt the other guys."
>
> "So who do you think did it?"
>
> She'd asked that question as if she were testing me. Ibuki glanced at me out of the corner of her eye when she said that. When I didn't respond, Ibuki continued talking.
>
> "If a boy isn't the culprit, then they'll suspect me—the stranger—next. I'm absolutely certain some people have already said something about me. After all, I could've just made it look like the guys stole the underwear. Right?"
>
> Ibuki laughed self-deprecatingly, perhaps because she was fully aware she was already a suspect. In response to that, I spoke impulsively.
>
> "I think I trust you, at the very least. I doubt you're the culprit."
>
> I'd answered Ibuki without hesitation. She looked a bit surprised, like she wanted to verify what I said was true. When our eyes met, she looked away.

"Thank you. I didn't think you would say something like that."

"I just gave you an honest answer."

I was able to understand Ibuki just by looking into her eyes.

I concluded that Ibuki had stolen the underwear from Karuizawa's bag and hidden it in Ike's luggage.

Ibuki was already the spy, which Ayanokoji had concluded.

And every time Ibuki was made to answer something honestly, she diverted her eyes.

On first interaction — During her introduction, she avoided eye contact.

On Ryuuen — When Ayanokoji asked about Ryuuen, she lied because of Ryuuen's command.

On the culprit phase — When she laughed self-deprecatingly, there was no guilt behind it. But when Ayanokoji genuinely trusted her, she avoided eye contact.

Conclusion → Ayanokoji could make the conclusion pretty easily:

Ibuki was comfortable with lying.

But when she was faced with genuine sincerity from Ayanokoji, she folded.

Her body language changed depending on what kind of lie she was telling and what kind of response she received from Ayanokoji.

These were very small details, but Ayanokoji was able to pick up on them.

"If a boy isn't the culprit, then they'll suspect me—the stranger—next. I'm absolutely certain some people have already said something about me. After all, I could've just made it look like the guys stole the underwear. Right?"

Ibuki laughed self-deprecatingly, perhaps because she was fully aware she was already a suspect. In response to that, I spoke impulsively.

"Besides, Ibuki has a habit of looking people in the eye when she's lying."

You could say that the bigger the lie, the more obvious the habit.

"Wait, when she lied she would look the person in the eye? Isn't it usually the opposite?"

"Generally speaking, you avoid eye contact if you have a guilty conscience. However, it was the opposite for her. I think that she made eye contact to make the person think that the lie was the truth. She probably didn't even notice it herself."

Even when we were talking about the underwear theft, she looked me straight in the eye.

"Her goal was probably to find the keycard, but she might have intended to disrupt Class D at the same time."

Ayanokoji figured out Ryuuen's strategy and identified the interlopers.

He also figured out Ibuki's profile from small details that anyone else could have easily missed.

Afterward, Ayanokoji baited Ibuki into stealing Horikita's leader key card.

He caused a fire in the temporary toilet using a manual, creating an opening for Ibuki to escape and Horikita to chase her.

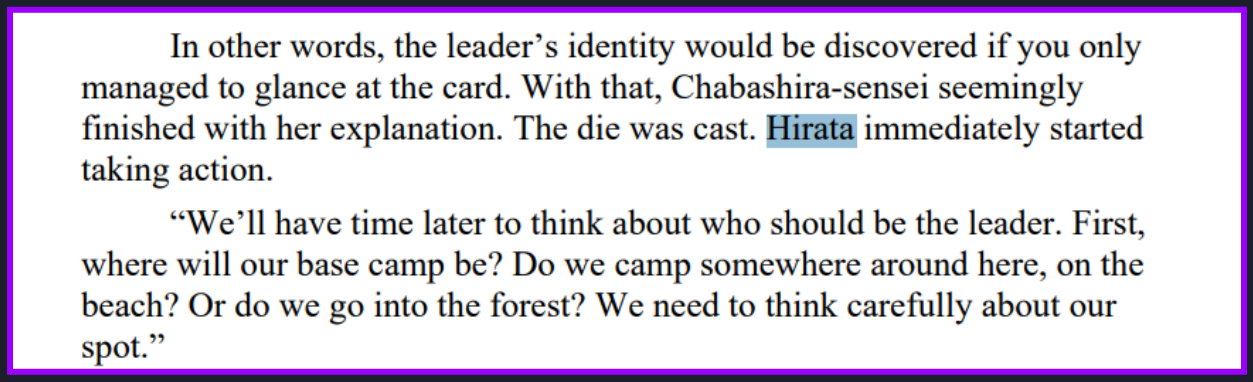
Ayanokoji hid behind cover, saw the signal, and muffled himself so he could observe what happened.

From this, he understood that the party involved was indeed connected to Ryuuen.

And through the process of elimination, he identified that person as Katsuragi.

Figuring hirata profiling

During Day 1, after the rules and additional rules were explained by Mashima and Chabashira, Hirata, the de facto leader of Class D, immediately took the lead.



In other words, the leader's identity would be discovered if you only managed to glance at the card. With that, Chabashira-sensei seemingly finished with her explanation. The die was cast. Hirata immediately started taking action.

"We'll have time later to think about who should be the leader. First, where will our base camp be? Do we camp somewhere around here, on the beach? Or do we go into the forest? We need to think carefully about our spot."

On the issue of spending 20 points on the temporary toilet, Hirata's answer was to grin and bear it.

Premise 1: Hirata immediately took the lead. However, when the issue of spending points arose, he answered by grinning and bearing it for both sides. Both sides argued against and in favor of spending the points. Hirata tried to moderate the situation, but he was shut down. Hirata was then handed the manual by Chabashira.

Horkita comments

"Class D has no leadership, which worries me. Besides, Hirata's a pushover. He can't even make one decision, can he?"

I stood a short distance away, watching the situation unfold. Horikita stood next to me. After realizing that it was unlikely any progress would be made, she sighed heavily.

Hirata unable control others

The desire to go and the desire to stay clashed. However, Hirata wasn't persuasive enough to stop Ike and the others.

Did Sudou and Yamauchi also intend to search for spots? They gathered around an impatient Ike.

"Are you going too, Ayanokouji?" Sudou asked looking me in the eye. I casually shook my head.

"I don't want you three to ever do anything alone. If you get lost, it'll be trouble." Hirata seemed to realize that he couldn't stop this.

The intense heat made some of our classmates started whining. Hirata also seemed to realize just how difficult camping on the beach would be. If this were a genuine camp with an umbrella, a beach tent, and plenty of options for swimming in the ocean and protecting ourselves from the sun, that'd be one thing. But our current situation made that difficult.

"For the time being, how about we find a place in the shade? We can talk while we move." Hirata took the initiative and started carrying the tent. The other guys followed suit.

After Class D moved into the forest to escape, the topic resumed. This time, Hirata suggested using 20 points on a temporary toilet, arguing that the other classes would also have to spend points on necessary things.

He explained that they would have to spend points to survive the exam anyway, so there was no reason not to spend them on necessary things.

Not even Yukimura could deny Hirata's impeccable reasoning. Hirata understood wanting to preserve our points, but he'd also deduced the downsides of a single toilet. Truth be told, our classmates had been given so much information in one go that they'd overlooked obvious things. Yukimura, who couldn't bear being stared at in silence, broke.

Conclusion → Hirata was only the de facto leader and had no real command over the class. Horikita's suggestion was an obvious conclusion that anyone could have made.

Our class was rife with personality issues, myself included. Poor Hirata.

Premise 2: Class D found a spot near the river and decided to make it their base camp for the test. Hirata thought it was an ideal location without considering its merits and demerits. He took everyone's opinions into account to maintain neutrality, as Class D had no unity and Hirata was the de facto leader whom everyone listened to.

Although there were risks, Ike was correct. If we made our base camp in this area, there was no way to pin us down. If students from another class took this place, it would become impossible to use the river. Both guys and girls agreed with Ike on this. I think that Hirata had wanted to agree anyway, but being a font of neutrality, he'd wanted to collect a lot of opinions.

"For the time being, let's table the water issue. It's only going to be painful if you fight," said Hirata, apparently desperate for peace.

Our problems would likely grow if we delayed things, but no one was really going to object to Hirata. Or so I thought, until a certain guy butted into the conversation.

Ayanoioji notes hirata looks sheepish and apologetic.

"For the time being, let's table the water issue. It's only going to be painful if you fight," said Hirata, apparently desperate for peace.

Way hirata convinced hirata everyone in class d which split on topic on spending points . ayanokoji notes

Anyone else could have come up with this, but Hirata's tone and presentation sold it. He'd performed flawlessly. First he told us about the lower limit, and then explained that we could end up with nearly 200 points. In that way, he succeeded in motivating everyone to reach a high goal. If we did our best, we could end up with lots of points. More than that, we could greatly increase the number of points we had by making an effort.

Hirata again asked for everyone's opinion on every matter instead of giving his own opinion, whether it concerned the 20 points, food, the river, or Ibuki.

On Day 2, during the interaction between Ayanokoji and Hirata, Hirata also woke up early because Koenji's retirement had caused problems for his overall strategy.

Ayanokoji this time profiled Hirata as the peacemaker of the class, which was backed up by this dialogue.

"This is tough, even for the class peacemaker." I couldn't possibly fathom carrying this kind of responsibility. I peeked at the manual, and Hirata adjusted his position so that I could comfortably look at it. I was grateful for such small acts of consideration.

Hirata explained that he did what he did to make everyone happy.

acts of consideration.

"I'm only doing this because I like it. If my hard work makes everyone in class happy, then I'm satisfied. But it's surprisingly difficult. How many points we have after this special test will have a huge impact on our lives. I think it's wrong to freak everybody out."

Make everyone in class happy, huh? If such a thing were possible, it would be amazing. But it was probably close to impossible. The school's system dictated as much.

"So, if we have students who want to aim for Class A, and students who want to stay in Class D, what do you do?"

While I knew that was a meaningless question, it accidentally came out sounding rather unkind. I guess I wanted Hirata's opinion, since he was basically just a mass of good intentions.

"That's hard to answer. Aiming for the upper classes means forcing everyone… I'm sorry, I need to think on it."

I wondered how often he'd thought about it. Hirata smiled faintly.

"So Ayanokouji-kun, do you want to get into Class A? Or are you fine as long as life at school is fun?"

"I guess if I had to pick, school life's my priority. Besides, I don't think it's possible to reach Class A."

"I see. I also don't think it's simple. Even if our class came together as one and aimed for Class A… I just think our first month's losses did too much damage."

Hirata was probably thinking about all the other students' limits. If Class A didn't fall in the rankings, making up the difference wouldn't be easy. Even if Class D managed to live conservatively during this exam, we could only gain 100 to 150 points. Right now, even overtaking Class C seemed like a pipe dream.

Hirata sharing manual with ayanokoji

At the very least, Class A had the cave. It was likely that Classes B and C also had spots somewhere. Even though we held the river, that alone might not be enough. Once everyone was asleep, I neatly cut out one of the manual's five blank pages. Then I took a ballpoint pen.

After I replicated a simple map of the island, I folded it into a small square and put it in my pocket. Soon after, Hirata peeked in the tent's entrance.

I accepted his offer. The tent's temperature was rising as the sun climbed higher in the sky. We took towels from our vinyl-wrapped luggage and headed to the river. Hirata put the manual inside his pack. The jingle of plastic accessories banging together sounded from Hirata's bag.

During the culprit phase,

Hirata failed to moderate and monitor the situation among the girls. He was shut down by the girls and followed their demands to search the bags. When he found the underwear, he didn't report it. Instead, he talked about taking responsibility himself.

In order to get us all to move, he had no choice but to take action. Still, there probably wasn't even one person here who thought Hirata was the culprit. Besides, you could say that stealing his own girlfriend's underwear made no sense. However, if one person opened his luggage, then the rest of us couldn't help but follow. Inevitably, the students who wouldn't open their bags would be suspected. Hirata's bag naturally didn't have the underwear.

Hirata, who didn't doubt me whatsoever, slowly started to search me, starting with my upper body. Then, Hirata put his hand into my back pocket, where I'd stuffed the underwear.

"Thank you! Thank you, Ayanokouji-kun!" said Hirata, almost hugging me and bowing his head deeply. I understood Hirata was thankful, but felt his reaction was a bit excessive. Perhaps the underwear theft was really bothering him, in particular. As a leader, he had to respond seriously to the crisis and try to find a resolution for the class.

"If that information becomes public knowledge, our class will suffer a huge blow. I want to avoid that. That's why I want to find a peaceful method of settling things with the culprit. If it's coming from me, I think that we'll be able to resolve the issue through talking."

"So, in other words, you're going to hide the truth?"

"Hide it? That's a poor choice of words, but there's nothing I can do about it if people take it that way. Even if one of the guys turns out to the be the culprit, I think it's better that the truth be concealed."

He focused on me. It was almost as if he meant to protect the culprit.

"I understand. I'll report to you first. Is that good?"

"Thank you. Well then, I'll be getting back to work."

Upon exiting the tent, Hirata called out to the other students. I saw multiple silhouettes on the other side of the sheet begin to recede.

"Hirata Yousuke. Are you Class D's hero?"

There was one contradiction in Hirata's story. Right after he said he believed in me, he immediately said the truth ought to be concealed even if the culprit was one of the guys. In other words, even if someone had the underwear, we'd hide it from the girls.

Hirata didn't have complete trust in me. He probably assumed there was a high chance I was the culprit. That was only natural, of course. From an outsider's perspective, I was the one holding the underwear, and I'd offered up Ike's name as the culprit. Hirata assigned me, a potential suspect, the role of detective to offer me a lifeline. At the same time, he'd issued a warning not to commit the offense a second time.

Which Ayanokoji noted. He understood that Hirata wanted peace at any cost, even if it meant hiding things and taking on stress himself. This was possibly because he saw this exam as an opportunity to bridge Class D's unity.

Hirata wouldn't make any worthwhile decisions.

(This was backed up in the next conversation, where Ayanokoji was given the task of maintaining the girls' tent. Ayanokoji knew Hirata wouldn't object to Horikita because he trusted Ayanokoji and wouldn't do anything to cause trouble, even if it meant hiding the truth.)

The girls' doubts had intensified, and I had become their next target. Doubters began to appear from the boys' side, too. Ike and Yamauchi feigned ignorance. Even if I stayed silent or tried to explain, the situation was going downhill. I opted to just keep silent. No matter how much the girls doubted me, Hirata was holding the evidence, and wouldn't make me out to be the culprit. However, despite knowing the truth, being suspected certainly felt terrible.

On the last day, this was confirmed when Horikita revealed why she didn't trust Hirata.

"Well. Hirata is a man of many talents. He helps when we can't bring guys and girls together during a dispute. Don't you think that he's working hard to bring students together when no one else can?"

"It's certainly impressive that he's able to take on such a role without being sullen about it. However, without good results, the action is meaningless. Depending on the situation, such actions might even lead to the worst-case scenario. Let me ask you something. Do you know how many points Class D has now?"

"Well, it seems like there were some unexpected expenditures. I can't give an exact number."

"Exactly. Trustworthy Hirata-kun has kept his mouth shut about it."

Hirata was spending points on anything the girls were asking for and hiding it from the others.

Ayanokoji mentioned that Class D's cooperation was conditional. Hiding things or facts to prevent the already fragile unity of the class from breaking down was better, which was what Hirata was doing.

"Our cooperation was a complete coincidence. Class D didn't really have any sense of teamwork to begin with. It's ending rather badly, though, especially because of the broken trust between the guys and girls. Of course it would've been better to stay united until the end of the test."

After profiling Hirata, Ayanokoji used the opportunity while the girls were in line for the shower, Horikita was busy washing the mud off in the river, and the boys and Hirata were still searching for fruit nearby.

He sneaked behind the boys' tent and luggage, took a manual and matchsticks from Hirata's bag, lit the manual on fire, and threw it at the temporary toilet just in time to draw the attention of Ibuki, Horikita, who had lost the key card, and everyone else.

This left Hirata in a worried state, trying to calm the situation between the boys and girls, who had become riled up again.

Hirata spontaneously crushed the plastic bottle with all his might. The shift in his personality was rather terrifying. Hirata, the eternal leader of our class, the one who toiled tirelessly to play peacemaker, was carrying a terrible burden.

"I don't think you need to take so much on yourself." I tried comforting him. He stood and responded with a quiet "Thank you."

"We need…to discuss this incident properly."

"Right. Most of Class D witnessed the fire. I'm sure they'll want to know the truth."

Depressed, Hirata took the water he'd scooped up and returned to the campsite.

"Stop jerking us around. As if we'd do something like this!"

"Wait a minute, everyone. Please, calm down. Let's talk about this," Hirata cried.

He gave me the water and I took his place, extinguishing the remnants of the fire. Hirata immediately went to the center of the circle and tried to play mediator. This might have been residual stress from yesterday's underwear theft incident, but both sides were heated up and showed no signs of settling down. It seemed like quite a few people in Class D wanted to start hunting the culprit right here.

"At any rate, we don't have to worry about the fire spreading."

I shook the empty plastic bottles twice, then three times. A few water droplets plopped onto the smoldering remains of the fire. I looked up.

And with the storm beginning when everyone was unprepared, the stress left Hirata in a catatonic state (the word I'm using for a state of extreme shock).

Ike called for Hirata, but he just stood in the same place. Hirata continued staring off into nothingness and didn't budge an inch. Meanwhile, the sound of rain kept growing louder and louder. I was a little worried about the situation. I approached Hirata, but there wasn't any sign that he noticed me.

"Why…why is this happening? It's just like back then…"

He muttered something in a low voice. I couldn't understand what it meant, but it certainly wasn't trivial. This wasn't like the calm and composed Hirata at all.



"Ayanokouji. Is Hirata okay?" Sudou asked.

"Looks like he's in shock. I suppose it's probably because of all these things going wrong one after the other."

"You know, in junior high there was this rich kid honor student. He had a lot of really heavy responsibilities, y'know? Anyway, he took so much on himself that one day, he ended up having a breakdown. After that, his class became a complete mess."

"You think there are signs of that with Hirata?"

"Well, saying he's gonna have a breakdown would be an exaggeration, but I think there's danger there."

I wondered if this was just Sudou's wild imagination at work, but it seemed surprisingly accurate. Since this special test had started, Hirata has taken on a lot of responsibilities. These issues made the troubles we'd faced at school seem easy. Hirata's carefully maintained environment had definitely begun to change. The theft of Karuizawa's underwear and the uproar over the fire had turned Hirata as unhinged and stormy as the weather.

Using Hirata's state to give Ibuki an opening to run away and Horikita a reason to chase after her, while Class D descended into chaos as their leader remained in shock.

Ayanokoji also learned that something might be going on with Hirata.

(Low-tier profiling, I know, but it plays into the whole scope, which is interesting.)

(Which ties into a future Year 1 arc.)

THE LEADER SWAP:

1. **Day 1, during the cruise ship's circle and Horikita's absence.**

   Normally, Horikita would participate in class matters, but she wasn't present on the cruise deck. After disembarking, Ayanokoji saw Horikita, who normally took care of herself, looking messy.

   Ayanokoji knew that Horikita was ill.

After the rules were announced, Horikita wouldn't leave or retire on her own, as doing so would result in a penalty of -30 points, which also went against her nature.

After Ayanokoji volunteered (see reasoning feat above), Class D decided to make Horikita the leader because she was considered responsible and wouldn't stand out as much as Hirata, Kushida, and Karuizawa.

The leader swap begins.

She wasn't saying anything, and it would be silly to investigate further. Best just to drop it.

"That's not true. You didn't understand because you were ill and holed up inside the ship, but the school already gave us hints about the locations when we were sailing around the island."

"I see." This time she sounded blatantly dissatisfied, and regarded me with a sharp side-eye. I thought that Horikita had enrolled here to be at the same school as her older brother. She wasn't aiming for Class A for her own sake, but rather, sought her older brother's approval. Her ambition differed from most others.

heat. Horikita finally joined us. At first glance, it didn't appear as though anything had changed, but there was a slight difference—something felt out of place. Even Horikita, normally so meticulous, was concerned about her appearance. Right now, though, her hair was disheveled.

She seemed a bit cold, unconsciously rubbing her arms as we waited to disembark and set foot on the island.

2. **At first, on Day 1 night, Ayanokoji tried to pick Horikita to collect branches for a bonfire. However, she refused to participate.**

However, by letting Ibuki into the camp with Yamauchi and Sakura and gaining both Ibuki's trust and Hirata's trust in Ibuki, he was able to advance despite the shortcomings.

3. **Ayanokoji invited Horikita to see the status of the other classes. Horikita denied that she was the leader and didn't want to do anything that day. Ayanokoji convinced her that if she stayed, the situation wouldn't change. Since she was the student council president's sister, she would be targeted no matter what. Horikita agreed to join Ayanokoji on the search.**

Even if someone didn't know a leader's identity for certain, they might guess correctly if they noticed suspicious behavior. The more conspicuous a person, the more attention they would draw.

"I understand how you feel, but even if you stay in here, the situation probably won't change, right? You've got eyes on Ryuuen, and you've even been observing Ichinose. People will remember that you're the student council president's younger sister. No matter what you do, you'll be a target."

At any rate, the penalty for a wrong guess was fifty points. When we'd appointed someone as leader, we'd taken a gamble, and precautions were necessary.

"You're right. I suppose I can't say what's correct. Fine. I'm rather concerned about the state of the other classes. Let's go."

Horikita and I set out for the beach, where Class C awaited. Her heavy footsteps seemed to belie her casual indifference.

Horikita still thought this exam was about points, as the rules placed heavy emphasis on points, which could easily be misinterpreted. (Only four people were known to exploit the rules: Katsuragi, Ryuuen, Koenji, and Ayanokoji.)

There, Ryuuen was able to give Horikita a false picture of his strategy, and then Ayanokoji gave her another false picture of the strategy. Basically, it was presented as being about points when it wasn't.

Ichinose and Horikita discussed Ryuuen's strategy based on this wrong interpretation. Horikita then went to Class A and tried to gather information, but failed.

The whole time, Ayanokoji was making Horikita take the harder path to deteriorate her health. After the conversation between Class A and Horikita, she gained nothing from it except for what Ayanokoji learned (read the explanations above).

On Day 2, Ayanokoji was able to figure out most of the plans of the other classes. As I stated, he did this using actual clues in the text. He also destroyed Ibuki's camera, forcing Ryuuen to rely on collecting physical evidence instead.

Day 3–4: Ayanokoji collected evidence on the spots and strategies of the other classes (as mentioned above).

Day 5: The underwear theft happened. Ayanokoji reasoned that the theft must have happened during a specific timeframe and identified Ibuki as the culprit, who was desperate to obtain the key card and was creating disturbances to cause confusion.

No matter how you looked at it, if a student from another class had been loitering around, we would've seen them. After exiting the tent, I scanned my surroundings. Our bags were individually wrapped in vinyl and placed in front of our tent. The girls' tent was a few meters away, where Karuizawa and the others slept. Until this whole incident, the girls' luggage had been piled up out front, unprotected, like ours. If you wanted to steal something, you easily could do so. I was easily able to rifle through Ibuki's bag on the first day.

When had the underwear been stolen? Since there were no problems up until it was time to take a shower, the crime had happened sometime between eight o'clock last night and seven o'clock this morning. If that were the case, anyone in our class could have done it. However, I doubted that the crime had been carried out in the middle of the night. If the culprit were rifling through luggage with a flashlight, someone would have noticed.

The culprit wasn't stupid. It wasn't likely they would show their true colors while suspicions ran high. Horikita probably thought that things would turn out all right. Any more disturbances during this test would probably start affecting our points as well.

About the culprit, though… Well, Ibuki would most likely take action again. No, she would *definitely* take action. She hadn't yet reached her goal.

Forcing Ibuki to steal the card from the leader as her only option, Ayanokoji used this opportunity to put pressure on Horikita by telling her that he had known she was sick since Day 1 and suggesting that the culprit might have a "hidden agenda."

"Hey Horikita, don't you think it's about time you confessed?"

"Confessed? Confessed what?"

Although Horikita pretended to be calm, she was sweaty. Enough was enough.

"Your health has gone rapidly downhill since the test started."

She'd looked ill even before we started traveling, but it hadn't been that noticeable. Due to Horikita's loner personality, she'd likely planned keep to her room and avoid socializing.

"Not really any more than usual."

"Liar."

I'd caught Horikita in a lie, and extended my hand to touch her. Feeling her forehead, it was clear she had a fever. Horikita tried to escape, but her movements were dull. I was easily able to stop her.

"When…did you notice?"

"On the deck of the ship, when I asked you what you'd been doing."

"Yeah, and I told you I'd been reading in my room."

"You were really sick then, so you were actually sleeping, right?"

"And on what evidence do you base that conclusion?"

"When you joined us on deck, your bangs were all disheveled. Proof you'd been lying on your side. Also, it was incredibly hot on the boat, but you seemed like you were cold. Even now, you're wearing long sleeves, and you're zipped all the way up. Even an elementary school student could figure it out"

It was pretty clear that she had a fever, close to 38°C. Still, she was hiding it for a pretty simple reason. If you reported illness, the class would be hit with a bigger penalty. The test's timing was rotten luck on her part.

So she intended to soldier through to the bitter end. She had an iron will.

On Day 6, there were signs of a storm, stressing Hirata and prompting him to tell everyone to prepare for the storm and gather food. Kushida's group wasn't able to participate because one of their members was on her period.

Kushida participated in collecting food with Horikita, Sudo, Hirata, Yamauchi, and Sakura. Kushida's presence added more pressure to Horikita's mental state, which Ayanokoji was trying to break without anyone noticing.

During the search, Kushida brought up how similar and close Horikita and Ayanokoji were. Kushida had always wondered why Ayanokoji was close to Horikita and not herself.

Ayanokoji called Ibuki to join them at the last moment.

Horikita seemed a little annoyed by Kushida's odd teasing. At any rate, I was going to search for food with the rest of the group.

"Hey, Ibuki. Why don't you come with us, too?" Just as we were about to depart, I called out to Ibuki, who was resting under a tree.

"Me?"

"Today's the last day. If you don't want to, I won't pressure you."

"Okay. I owe Class D a debt of gratitude… Sure, I'll help."

Ibuki slung her bag over her shoulder. Yamauchi looked happy about this.

"Hey, that's great, that's great! You know, this kinda feels like a harem or something!" he cried.

They discussed how Horikita and Ayanokoji didn't smile very often. Ayanokoji denied this, but everyone argued that Ayanokoji never smiled and only showed some kind of bitter smile.

We looked for food while walking quietly. Kushida alternated between looking at Horikita and me, while appearing lost in thought. Of course, Horikita ignored everything.

"What's the matter, Kushida-chan?" asked Yamauchi, who'd noticed Kushida's odd behavior.

"Ayanokouji-kun and Horikita-san have been on pretty good terms from the beginning, right? I was trying to think of what the reason might be."

"Good question. Why *are* you two close, anyway?"

Kushida had opened a troublesome subject.

"We don't really get along well, though," I said.

"You always deny it, but you *do* get along. You're walking side by side right now."

They could say it, but it wasn't like I was particularly aware of it or anything.

"Ah. I think I might have found something that Ayanokouji-kun and Horikita-san have in common," Kushida said.

"Something in common? What's that?"

"Well, look at them closely, Yamauchi-kun. Notice anything?"

"Hmm?"

Yamauchi got in really close, until he was about a centimeter away from my face. After that, he rushed over to Horikita, and peered into her eyes. *You idiot, if you get too close…*

Slap! Yamauchi's cheek got smacked. It was a wonderfully vicious slap, the kind you'd see from a humiliated actress in a searing drama. After being hit with such force, Yamauchi shuddered and shouted. He squatted low, cowering, and cried in pain. He didn't use any words, but his eyes seemed to ask Horikita, "Why would you do something like that?!"

"Wh-what're yuh doin'?!"

"You got too close. Remember to stay out of my personal space."

This was like the time Ike made a pass at Horikita. Really, anyone would feel uncomfortable if a guy you didn't like got extremely close to your face.

"Ha ha… S-sorry, Yamauchi-kun. I started trouble. Are you okay?" Kushida asked.

"Y-you're so kind, Kushida…"

Yamauchi took Kushida's outstretched hand and stood, his cheeks still red. Ibuki watched the scene with a slightly surprised expression. She probably didn't see this kind of idiotic exchange in Class C very often.

"Wh-what's the thing in common that you noticed, Kushida?"

"Well, don't you know? I hardly see the two of them laugh! That's it. It's like, I don't think I've ever seen Ayanokouji-kun or Horikita-san smile."

Kushida had pointed out something rather unexpected, thinking that we'd merely accept her word. Regarding Horikita, though, I'd seen her smile many times before when making fun of someone, but her smile never contained any kind of affection.

"It's certainly true that I've never seen Horikita smile before. But *I've* smiled, haven't I?"

"I've seen you with a bitter smile, sure, but never a genuine grin, something from the bottom of your heart. I've never seen you laugh so hard you had to clutch your stomach, Ayanokouji-kun. Or perhaps you've just never shown that side of yourself to me?"

She looked slightly dissatisfied as she peeked up at me. My heart started pounding. My pulse spiked. Even though we were on a deserted island, a lovely, perfumed scent tickled my nostrils. Embarrassed, I averted my eyes.

"A lot of it's due to genetics. It's the difference between people who smile often and those who don't smile at all."

"Hmm. I don't think I really like that reason, even if it's true."

Well, genetics probably weren't everything. Happiness could also be influenced by the environment in which someone grew up.

Well, genetics probably weren't everything. Happiness could also be influenced by the environment in which someone grew up.

"How about we practice smiling just once? What do you think?"

"For the time being, let's begin with the area," said Horikita.

"Huh? Of smiling?"

"How long do you want to travel? We need to search for food, right?" said Horikita sternly. Her tone was forceful. She'd instructed us all to spread out immediately.

"Don't make any moves alone. Search in pairs. Be especially careful. Let's go, Ayanokouji-kun."

Horikita called me, and I started walking with her.

"Ah… Ah…"

"Hmm?" Sakura seemed to be trailing behind us with her shoulders slumped.

"Come search with us, Sakura!" Yamauchi yelled.

He flashed me a thumbs-up gesture. I guessed he dreamed of taking advantage of this opportunity.

"I'm looking forward to working with you, Ibuki-san!"

Kushida, the last one remaining, paired up with Ibuki. Ibuki was a rather blunt, antisocial girl herself, but if she were with Kushida, there likely wouldn't be problems.

(Ayanokoji was likely given the wrong spot to search for food, further deteriorating Horikita's health.)

Seeing the group positions:

Sakura with Yamauchi

Ibuki with Kushida

Ayanokoji with Horikita

Ayanokoji brought up the topic of the key card and Katsuragi's key card issue, saying that he needed to verify whether it was true or not.

(Fact: It was the last day of the exam, and the next day was the leader-guessing phase, so bringing up this topic was the correct play.)

Horikita shared the key card with Ayanokoji so he could verify it. Ayanokoji checked it and confirmed it. While giving it back, he dropped it near Horikita, attracting Ibuki.

When I tried to return the card to her, I accidentally dropped it. The card hit the ground.

"Ah!"

I let out a panicked shout, but Horikita quickly snatched it up. She slid the card back in her jacket, but we'd attracted attention.

Horikita furiously kept her distance from me.

"Did she dump you?" Yamauchi asked with a grin.

"Look, Yamauchi. I need to ask you something. Could you come here for a second?"

"What is it? You know my love consultation fee is high, right?"

"The ground in this area is all muddy because of the rain, right? I want you to take this mud and smear it on Horikita's hair. Can you do that for me?"

"Huh? B-but if I do something like that, I'll be killed! No way!"

Of course, I knew he wouldn't immediately agree. But this was far too unnatural for me to do myself. I'd thought that a prankster like Yamauchi would try pulling this stunt.

"Listen here, dude. No matter how angry you say you are at Horikita, trying to get revenge on her is uncool!"

"If you do this, I'm prepared to offer you Sakura's e-mail address."

"Whaa?!"

"Well?"

"S-Sakura's e-mail address? Man! I-I guess I have to do this now, huh?"

The boy who lived for love had decided to die for love. That decisiveness was amazing.

"You're absolutely going to do it? If you're lying, I won't agree."

After I nodded, Yamauchi gathered up a lot of mud and approached Horikita from behind. Had she not been feeling ill, she probably would've noticed him, but right now she couldn't pay attention to her surroundings. Kushida and Ibuki noticed Yamauchi's strange behavior and watched him with quizzical expressions.

Yamauchi did it. He covered Horikita's beautiful black hair with mud. Then he patted and smeared it on her with both hands. Well, he didn't really need to go *that* far…

They eventually returned to the base camp. Horikita rushed to wash herself as quickly as possible, but due to the long line at the showers they had installed, it was impossible for her to do so.

Ayanokoji suggested that Horikita go near the river to wash the mud off herself. Sakura also wanted to go to the cold river to swim and get rid of the sweat. She asked Ibuki if she could accompany her, but Ibuki refused.

(Making Horikita even sicker.)

Quite a few students were swimming in the river, and it looked as though they were having fun. A few minutes later, Horikita and Kushida appeared in their swimsuits. I went to the boys' luggage pile, then wandered around looking for privacy. When I returned about five minutes later, I saw Horikita washing herself while standing in the river. The cold river water must have felt horrible on Horikita's sick body, but she must have been happy the mud was gone.

"Whoa, looks like it's moving now."

I nodded at Ibuki, who was waiting at the tail end of the shower line.

Ayanokoji went to the boys' luggage pile, where he took Hirata's bag and removed the matchsticks and manual. Using the bonfire technique he had learned from Ike, he set fire to the manual at the temporary toilet, allowing the fire to grow.

Then he returned to the front of the boys' tents.

After Horikita returned, she immediately informed Ayanokoji that she had lost the key card. Ayanokoji and Horikita reasoned that the thief could be Ibuki or Karuizawa.

I'd been waiting for about fifteen minutes in front of the boys' tent before Horikita appeared. She kept her eyes downcast, as if something was wrong. Then she slowly looked up and scanned the area. When her eyes met mine, her pupils trembled, like she was frightened. She approached me with heavy, plodding steps. Despite her seeming frailty, I couldn't think of her as simply weak.

"Ayanokouji-kun. Could you please come here for a moment?"

First, I turned around and checked to see if Ibuki was still lined up for the shower.

"What's wrong? Did something happen?" I asked Horikita.

"Follow me. We can't talk here."

With that, Horikita walked toward the forest.

"What's wrong? Are you planning to search for more food?"

Horikita walked without answering me. She stopped once we'd gotten far enough away that we couldn't see the camp anymore. Horikita turned around and looked ready to speak, but then hesitated as though having second thoughts.

"This happened because of my carelessness. I am aware that I made a mistake. Okay?"

"A mistake?"

"It was stolen."

"I wanted to talk to you because I trust you. I absolutely couldn't consult with someone who might be the culprit. This is so humiliating. I want to die…"

I felt honored that she trusted me, but I couldn't exactly rejoice in front of someone so depressed.

"Such a huge failure."

"No, the one who stole it is to blame. Right?"

"Even so, this is an issue of responsibility. It has nothing to do with me being sick or covered in mud."

Horikita hung her head. If this got out, it could cause us massive damage.

"I wasn't supposed to let go of the card for a single second. But I…"

"Don't blame yourself. I doubt this'll be any consolation, but I think you did your absolute best."

I didn't know if she heard me. She merely bit her lower lip, as if overwhelmed with regret.

"It's probably better if we don't make this information public. We should get to the truth first."

"Yes. I think so, too."

Everyone would panic if they knew. I wanted to avoid that at least.

"I suspect two people. Either Karuizawa-san, or Ibuki-san."

The former might have done it simply out of hatred. Karuizawa could have stolen it because she wanted to see Horikita panic after losing the card.

"Unfortunately, the chances of that are low. Karuizawa was in front of the shower the whole time."

"You're sure about that?"

"Yeah. Same goes for her flunkies, too."

"If that's the case, it's highly likely Ibuki-san is the culprit. It's possible she came to know about the card this morning, and the timing is just far too good. But, wouldn't stealing it be an extremely dangerous gamble? Since the leader's name is engraved on the card itself, just looking at it would be enough. Maybe she carried out the crime so she'd get a penalty."

She looked at me, her eyes full of anxiety, as if searching for an answer from me. I placed my hand on Horikita's shoulder.

"If we examine the timing and talk with Ibuki, we can understand what happened. If we suspect Ibuki, we shouldn't take our eyes off of her. Her escape would probably be the worst-case scenario, right?"

"That's right. I'm sorry, but can you go back to camp first? That way you can start following her immediately."

"Sure. I understand. I'll keep an eye on her."

I felt like Horikita probably wanted to be alone to throw up. I left her and returned to the base camp.

Horikita returned about ten minutes later, rejoining the campsite's unsettling atmosphere. The cause was dark smoke coming from behind the temporary toilet. It was far too early for the bonfire to be lit, and the location was rather strange.

Then when they returned to base camp , they saw the black smoke.

"I can't see Ibuki. The fire might have been her handiwork. Where is she?" Horikita asked.

"She noticed the fire, and now she's just walking around."

I rushed toward the area behind the temporary toilet and saw Hirata and some of the others. Ibuki was also the Horikita looked ready to call out to Ibuki, but hesitated when she saw her. Ibuki's expression was just so genuine. Sh couldn't hide her confusion about the fire.

Horikita was overwhelmed by doubt. If the keycard had indeed been stolen, Ibuki must've done it. If a fire had started, then Ibuki must've caused it. Even so, Ibuki remained at the scene, and appeared surprised by the fire. When I examined more closely, the source looked like a bundle of paper. Some of it was still legible, but most of it had turned into soot. I didn't know what it was for a moment.

However, looking at the legible parts, I finally understood.

"Did the manual get burned?" Horikita asked.

"Yeah. It looks like it. Who would do this?"

"It's just one thing after another…" Horikita muttered in a low voice, lowering her eyes.

"I'm responsible for this. The manual was in my bag. We piled the bags up in front of the tent and I didn't think that someone would steal anything in the daytime. But first, we need to extinguish this fire properly…"

Rather than searching for the culprit, Hirata headed to the river to douse the fire. While he drew water in our plastic bottles, he muttered to himself, his expression dark.

The storm began. Class D descended into chaos again. Seeing all of this, Hirata, who had been leading Class D and trying to ensure that everyone came together during the exam, broke down.

This gave Ibuki an opening to escape.

Okay. All of the preparations are made.

It didn't surprise me that Ibuki disappeared, but Horikita had vanished as well. By my calculations, the possibility had been fifty-fifty, but it seemed things were progressing favorably. I fixed my eyes on the road that led straight to the beach, and stepped onto the path.

Horikita chased after Ibuki. Horikita and Ibuki had a face-off, where Horikita, despite being sick, put up a fight to stop Ibuki.

Ibuki spoke without even turning around. Her calm voice cut right through the sounds of the falling rain.

"I noticed you following me. Why don't you just come on out?"

"When did you notice me?" I asked.

"Right from the start."

Her short answer felt ominous. My impression of her as being quiet and taciturn didn't change, but something was different.

My condition was bad before, but pushing myself so intensely had made things hopeless. But I couldn't collapse here. My attack was superficial, not enough to knock her down.

"I don't understand… I thought you were involved."

Ibuki-san stood, wiping mud off her face.

"Involved? In what?" I asked.

Ibuki-san seemed to hesitate, but then muttered, "I didn't burn the manual."

"You intend to keep lying even now?"

"What would I gain by burning it? It was inevitable that people would begin searching for the criminal after the uproar. Besides, people would suspect me rather strongly. There was nothing to gain and a lot to lose."

"That's…"

I certainly agreed with what Ibuki-san said. She'd stolen the keycard before the fire broke out. There wasn't enough time for her to deliberately burn the manual and fan the flames. But then, who did? What did burning the manual mean?

"I talked to you in a roundabout way to confirm something. You seem different. But I suppose this is probably really hard for you to swallow. Do you think he's in Class D? There's a guy who figured me out before you did."

Ibuki-san sighed as if exasperated.

"So. You can't mean…"

Right after I conjured the image of that person, I noticed that Ibuki-san had disappeared. In the next instant, a blunt instrument slammed me in the head, knocking me down hard.

Ibuki knocked the sick Horikita unconscious and gave a signal to Ryuuen through a flashlight.

Ayanokoji, who had followed them, hid behind cover when he saw the bright light being used as a signal. Ayanokoji then heard some muffled voices, and the situation became clear.

Ayanokoji came out to investigate the scene.

I could only see a few meters ahead because of the pouring rain. Also, if I wandered onto any of the side roads, I'd probably get lost. Thankfully, two pairs of footprints remained in the muddy ground and made it easy for me to follow after them. The footprints just suddenly stopped, though. No, on second glance, they didn't stop; they continued deeper into the forest.

The fact that the footprints suddenly took a sharp turn meant they hadn't gotten lost, but rather that they'd intentionally ventured deeper into the forest. When I pointed my flashlight toward the depths of the forest, I saw the two pairs of footprints going deeper and deeper. There was no reason for them to intentionally enter such a dangerous place.

Just to be sure, I tried shining the flashlight on the route that led to the beach, but there weren't any footprints. The ground was clear. I wiped away the rain dripping from my bangs, and followed the footprints deeper into the forest. Naturally, my visibility got even worse. It was like night had already fallen. The atmosphere was creepy and dark, but I pushed forward, relying only on the footprints.

I continued forward for about thirty meters. Suddenly, a bright light entered my field of vision. I immediately turned the flashlight off and held my breath. Looking in the direction of the light, I saw it shine once, then twice more. A flashlight. It was almost as if someone were sending a signal. Was it Ibuki and Horikita? No, that wasn't it.

Neither Ibuki nor Horikita should have had a light source on them. I quietly turned in the direction of the light and drew closer to the source. I heard people's voices, muffled by the rain, and hid myself. Their conversation sounded trivial. So as long as they didn't find me, getting a grasp on the situation was secondary.

Near a large tree lay a muddy Horikita. She'd collapsed, unconscious. A single keycard lay on the ground near her hand. On her injured body were traces of excavated soil. After examining the situation, I confirmed that more people than Ibuki had discovered Horikita's position as leader. After picking up the keycard, I lifted Horikita into my arms.

Sicken and barely conscious, Horikita laments the situation she found herself in due to her actions entirely

Even if I told her to sleep, Horikita wouldn't listen, all while her fever grew worse. She started to understand the situation little by little.

"I knew it…Ibuki-san stole my card."

"I see."

"I can't be dumber than Sudou-kun and the others."

She chastised herself and closed her eyes, as if lamenting a situation in which she was powerless.

"This isn't a test where you can just hide for twenty-four hours a day, right? No matter what you do, you can be open to attack."

I'd intended to keep going, but it seemed like anything more would just make the heartbroken Horikita even more depressed.

"I could've avoided this if I knew how to rely on someone…"

To seriously protect the leader's identity, it was necessary to depend on allies that you trusted from the bottom of your heart. If you did that, you could protect the card twenty-four hours a day. However, Horikita hadn't made a single friend.

She kept muttering, "I'm so pathetic" to herself quietly over and over.

"When I was losing consciousness, I felt like I could hear Ryuuen's voice… It's strange, I thought he'd already retired…"

"You were losing consciousness. Maybe you had a dream?"

"If it was a dream, it was a nightmare…"

I wondered if she really had heard Ryuuen's voice. Even if she were asleep or losing consciousness, her brain had probably heard something. It wouldn't have been strange if she picked up Ryuuen's voice when unconscious.

seemed to look through rather than at me.

"I should have understood this a long time ago…"

You can't live alone in the world. School and society are composed of a great many people.

"Don't talk. You're sick."

I tried to convince her to be quiet, but Horikita didn't stop. For Horikita, there had never been any choice but to rely on herself. She could have chosen no other option.

"I'm going to try to get up to Class A using my own abilities. I'll definitely recover from this failure…" Horikita weakly grabbed my sleeve as she appealed to me. "I'm prepared to be hated by everyone else… This was all my mistake."

"According to this school's system, if you fight by yourself, you won't reach Class A. We need to cooperate with our classmates. It's unavoidable."

Horikita closed her eyes, as if lacking the strength to keep them open. Her grasp might have been weak, but I still felt it.

"I can't accept that. No matter how hard it is, I'm still…alone."

"Ah, shut up already! Stop talking. Right now, you won't be able to convince anyone."

I embraced Horikita tightly.

"You can't bear every responsibility. You're not that strong, unfortunately."

"So you're telling me to give up? I have a dream to reach Class A, a dream for my brother to acknowledge me."

"No one said you have to give up."

I looked down at Horikita, who lightly groaned against my chest.

"If you can't fight by yourself, it's better to fight with a partner. I'll lend you a hand."

"Why? You're not the kind of person who would say such things…"

"Well, why then? I wonder."

Shortly afterward, her energy was spent, and Horikita lost consciousness again. I had to carry her without anyone noticing. It would be easy to have her retire, but I didn't know which button on the wristwatch was for emergencies. Besides, if the helicopter were suddenly dispatched, the sound would reverberate in the area.

"Hmm… Did I pick the wrong path? Oh no, oh no!"

Hiding, concealing his actions, Ayanokoji decided to take another route. However, he made a wrong turn due to the heavy downpour and ended up falling down a small cliff.

(However, I'd debate if he did it intentionally, to weaken an already weakened Horikita, as she was already physically and mentally weakened.)

Seeing this situation, Ayanokoji asked Horikita to retire on her own. However, Horikita wasn't giving up.

Trying to lessen her burden even a little, I held Horikita close to my chest. After some time had passed, Horikita woke up, sputtering out ragged breaths. Still in a daze, Horikita wasn't able to understand our situation.

"Why are you? I…?"

She didn't seem to remember what had happened. I explained the whole sequence of events. I had some doubts about whether she understood everything.

"I see… I remember."

"That's good."

"I remember my mistake, so it's probably awful."

Well, if she was able to crack self-deprecating jokes, then I could probably relax.

"It's already almost six o'clock, Horikita. You might think this will sound harsh, but you should retire. Your body is probably at its limit."

She had made it this far by pretending to be okay, but it wasn't possible for her to carry on.

"I can't do that. We can't afford to lose thirty points because of me… I was the one who confronted Karuizawa-san and the others about using points, right? It would make me look like such an idiot…"

The penalty for poor physical condition was severe. In points alone, it was more than what Karuizawa had used herself. Horikita covered her eyes with her arm, probably to hide her tears.

"Not just that… The keycard was stolen from me, too. You understand what that means?"

"Class D will lose another fifty points."

Horikita gave a slight nod. Class D would only be left with a few points.

"Just leave me here and head back. If you do, I'll be the only one absent from roll call."

"What are you planning to do?"

"By tomorrow morning, I'll…try to return by myself, somehow. If I can deal with my poor health during roll call, then I'll do something about retirement."

That way, we would be left with a five-point loss.

"Things aren't that easy. You're feeling really weak now, and our teacher isn't kind enough to let you act your way past her. It will be impossible for you to get back to camp on your own."

"Still, there's nothing else I can do… This is so Class D will have some points left."

Putting aside the keycard incident, we might retain some points for roll call and retirement. That certainly wasn't a small number.

"Go."

Although Horikita was weak, I felt her indomitable will behind her words. She could bear whatever burden she placed on herself, but couldn't seem to bear involving others. I rose, and rested her head against the tree. She wanted me to leave her.

"Well then, I'll leave. But if things continue like this, our classmates will blame you."

"Yes. That's the correct decision. Everything was my responsibility."

Horikita praised my cold, calculating decision. She was ashamed of herself for being weak. Trembling, she forced herself to endure the cold. This was the kind of hardship that solitary people faced. The weather was still stormy, with no signs that the rains and winds would stop.

"Can you really make it back alone by tomorrow morning?"

"Yeah… I'll be fine."

"Horikita. Do you really think that not retiring is the right decision?" I couldn't help blurting those words out.

"Of course I do. Retiring isn't an option for me."

Ayanokoji was trying to break Horikita's will and coerce her into retiring on her own, so he could hide his involvement.

She was free to exercise her indomitable will as much as she liked, but it didn't mean anything if she lost in the end.

"Hey. Why do you think that we've been backed into such a corner?" I asked.

"I failed due to my negligence. That's all."

"You're wrong. You're completely wrong."

Horikita Suzune had fought as hard as she could, and had tried to get to the end of the test without making mistakes.

"Go… Because I think of you as my friend, please listen to my request…"

After Horikita said that, she covered her mouth in surprise.

"I'm going to make this right… As if it didn't happen at all."

"No, this is the wrong choice."

"It's fine. I can… By myself… Ugh…"

Horikita suddenly stood, but the burden was too much. She closed her eyes in pain.

"Go, please…"

She lost consciousness again. I gently took Horikita into my arms and shifted my position to make her a little more comfortable. Standing, I looked up at the boundless darkness and let out a sigh.

"It would have been easier if you'd just retired of your own free will."

At last, Horikita didn’t retire on her own. Instead, she lost consciousness. Ayanokoji decided to retire her himself and carried her away.

Before that, he confessed everything he had done to the unconscious Horikita.

[

She lost consciousness again. I gently took Horikita into my arms and shifted my position to make her a little more comfortable. Standing, I looked up at the boundless darkness and let out a sigh.

The stubborn princess didn’t seem like she was going to throw in the towel.

Wonderful. Yes, I thought it was wonderful. *You were almost right. But unfortunately, Horikita, you were wrong about one thing. Right now, just for this moment, I’ll tell you.*

I have never thought of you as my friend. I’ve never cared about you as a classmate. In this world, winning is everything. Your methods don’t matter. I don’t care what I have to sacrifice. As long as I have my victory in the end, I’ll be fine.

You, Hirata—no, all other people are nothing more than tools. I was complicit in what drove you to this. So, don’t blame yourself, Horikita. You were useful to me.



(Literally, what he did throughout this whole exam: betray Hirata, betray Horikita, back her into a corner, and basically use the trope of “there’s a traitor” while being the guy who betrayed everyone.)

Ayanokoji finally made it to the beach where the teachers were and reported Horikita’s condition, confirming that Horikita was okay with retiring.

I walked down the muddy road, shining my flashlight on the path. My shoes were already covered in mud and filled with water. But I didn't care about that. First, I needed to get an understanding of the location.

When I went down the slope, I'd undoubtedly gotten further away from Class D's base camp. But I was sure that if I turned the other way, the beach would be near. I could press on and walk through the woods for several days, relying on the map in my head.

"It was close, after all."

Eventually, I arrived at the beach. The ship was floating in the water, and the lights were on. It took a few minutes but I returned to the place I'd left. Horikita had collapsed. She remained unconscious as I picked her up in my arms. Her beautiful face was splashed with mud.

I started walking toward the beach, rather than our base camp. Somehow, I had managed to make it on time. It was just around seven o'clock in the evening. The teachers' tents had been taken down to avoid being blown away by the wind.

I went up the ramp to the pier and reached the ship's deck. One of the teachers noticed and raced up to me.

"You're prohibited from entering here. You'll be disqualified."

"This is an emergency. She's got a high fever and has lost consciousness. Please let her rest right away."

Once I explained the situation, the teacher skipped the instructions and brought out a stretcher. I laid Horikita down.

"Is she okay with retiring?"

"Without question. However, allow me to confirm one thing. Because it isn't eight o'clock yet, this shouldn't have any effect on roll call, correct?"

It was 7:58. I was cutting it close, but we should be safe. I needed to get the teacher's promise, though.

"You are certainly right. It is quite close. However, you're out."

"I understand. Oh, one more thing. I'd like to return this keycard."

I took the keycard from my pocket and handed it over.

"Well then, I'll be heading back."

I couldn't stay any longer, so I went back to the beach while the rain was still falling. With this, Class D would lose thirty points due to Horikita's retirement, and an additional five points due to my absence during roll call.

When Horikita retired, Ayanokoji made himself the leader.

The leader swap was completed.

He went to Class D's base camp and informed them that Horikita had retired on her own. Ayanokoji then filled Hirata in on the roll call of everyone, while Horikita gathered the true identities of the leaders of the other classes.

On day 7

"Good work, both of you. Thank you for everything you did this week. You really saved us." Hirata appeared with words of gratitude. He handed me one of two paper cups he had. The cup cooled my palm. He handed the other to Sudou.

"I should be thanking you. You covered for me, the class loner. Also, you covered for me being late for roll call, and the fact that Horikita retired."

"I couldn't blame you when I heard the reason. Besides, Horikita-san gave us some really important information."

"Do you believe what she said?"

"She isn't the type to speak irresponsibly. That's why you get along with her, right?"

This guy would protect an ally even if it meant risking his pure reputation.

"I'd be lying if I said there wasn't any risk, but I had to help Horikita-san."

Hirata softly added, "That's a friend." It seemed like there was a faint trace of the smile I saw yesterday. Sudou tilted in his head in confusion, as if unable to understand what we were talking about.

"Wait, what did you say? What are you talking about?"

"I think you'll understand pretty soon. Anyway, Class C is really strange… They're on another level."

Because most of the Class C students had retired on the second day of the test, there wasn't anyone here. I saw no sign of Ibuki anywhere on the sandy beach, as if she'd retired as well. I saw a rather bizarre sight: Ryuuen alone, the only remaining student from Class C.

Mashima sensei greets them and announces the results

CLASS C : ZERO POINTS

(−50 Special Points ***of wrong guessing leader of class D*** **+**−50 Special Points ***of your leader being guess by another class(class D)*** +100 Special Point on guessing class B & A leaders ***)***

CLASS A : 120 points

(−50 Special Points ***of your leader being guessed by another class (class C)+***−50 Special Points ***of wrong guessing leader of class D +***−50 Special Points ***of your leader being guessed another class(class D))***

CLASS B : 140 points

CLASS D: 225 points

(+ 50 Special Points ***on guessing leader of another classes(class A)*** +50 Special Points ***on guessing the leader of another class(class C))***

The first special exam ends

The students boarded a cruise ship. Class D congratulated Horikita on everything, while Ayanokoji and Chabashira met up.

> I had walked to the other side of the ship, so Chabashira-sensei took the lead. We found a place where there weren't any people around and it was completely quiet before we started talking.
>
> "Is it safe to say that for the time being, you're satisfied?" I asked.
>
> "Yes. First, I'd like to say that you did wonderfully. I'm honestly impressed."

Chabashira shares information about that man when Ayanokoji questions the validity of the claim. Ayanokoji leaves Chabashira after receiving some information, while under Chabashira's blackmail over his actions, which could possibly lead to his expulsion.

After a while, Horikita urgently meets Ayanokoji, urging him to explain everything that happened.

> "What do these test results mean? What in the world happened?"
>
> "You look like you don't have any idea at all."
>
> "I just can't imagine it. I don't understand it at all. I have a mountain of questions."
>
> Horikita ordered a drink from an attendant. I started talking.

However, Ayanokoji places one condition:

"I'll tell you everything. However, my one condition is that you stay quiet on this matter. I won't compromise on this."

This was to hide his involvement in the exam from the others. Hirata wouldn't tell anyone, as Ayanokoji had already profiled him during this exam. By binding Horikita to silence, his partially failed concealment would only be known to Horikita and Ayanokoji.

Ayanokoji explains every detail and step to Horikita, even how he played Horikita into a corner to force the leader swap, though he gives vague answers at certain points.

Horikita, after hearing all of that, still has many questions. But the biggest one is:

why did he participate that much in the exam?

Ayanokoji ignores the question.

"The reason why you participated in this special test. Was it to fight alone? I don't care that you used me this tim I want to know why you put in the effort when you dislike trouble."

"I wonder."

Perhaps the explanation I had given so far had been less important to Horikita.

"I don't have any room for doubt. I understand your talents now. If you help me, aiming for Class A seems a realistic enough goal. But what are your principles? Why did you do this?"

Of course, I didn't want to talk to Horikita about my personal problems. I'd only participated because of a commitment I made to Chabashira-sensei.

"Because I was touched that you tried to fight all alone when you were ill."

"You wouldn't normally say that kind of thing. It's easy to spot the lie."

"Well, what I mean is I don't feel like explaining it."

Ayanokoji adds that he would help Horikita reach Class A on one condition—

I stood up and stretched out my hand.

"I don't mind helping you get up to Class A. However, I have one condition. Do not investigate me. If you promise not to touch on this subject ever again, I will help you."

Horikita took my hand without hesitation.

Horikita agrees to the condition without hesitation, confirming that Ayanokoji is, after all, a person who dislikes trouble.

"If you don't want to talk, there's nothing I can really do about that. If you'll help, I have no reason to refuse you. I'm not interested in digging things up that are better left buried. After all, you dislike trouble."

[Horikita's handshake was firm. I work for me. You do things for yourself. The battle to raise our class up from the very bottom was about to begin.]


I'LL HELP YOU MOVE UP TO CLASS A.
I ONLY ASK FOR ONE THING...
DO NOT LOOK INTO ME OR MY PAST.



(Putting the manga for this scene only. I didn't use the manga for the analysis, nor do I recommend using the manga for any analysis.)

(This basically relates to Chabashira's blackmail, how Chabashira informs Horikita about Ayanokoji's persona and asks her to investigate him, as well as the goal of ascending to Class A in Vol. 1 and Vol. 2.

Horikita has some information on how Ayanokoji probably thinks.

During Day 1, we saw this conversation, confirming that Horikita is involved with Chabashira regarding Ayanokoji.)

"Why did you choose this school?" she asked me.

"Well, can't I just say the same thing? To shamelessly make use of the privileges the school offered me."

"I see." This time she sounded blatantly dissatisfied, and regarded me with a sharp side-eye. I thought that Horikita had enrolled here to be at the same school as her older brother. She wasn't aiming for Class A for her own sake, but rather, sought her older brother's approval. Her ambition differed from most others.

"It doesn't feel good to have someone pry into your past," she said, forestalling me. I'd intended to dig deeper, but it looked like she'd immediately understood my true intentions. *I'm trying to understand my past, or should I say this person's past, by thoroughly analyzing and breaking down people.*

"I'll tell you this: Chabashira-sensei leaked the information. Don't misunderstand me. All right? Besides, we're still not friends. Don't forget that."

"Don't worry. I'm not really thinking about friendship, anyway."

This also tells how Ayanokoji analyzes people, like with Hirata, and how he breaks them down.

With this deal made with Horikita, Horikita has abandoned Chabashira's blackmail approach toward Ayanokoji and all the information surrounding it.

Thus, knowing Ayanokoji as someone who dislikes trouble means nothing here, as it is confined to his persona.

This volume also confirms the persona .Ayanokoji was never seen genuinely smiling by anyone. Yet in Vol. 1 and Vol. 2, he mentions that he was smiling.

And the most blatant example ,in storytelling, rain is used to symbolize the washing away of things, whether it be a state, a persona, or anything else meant to showcase a change.

That confession Ayanokoji gives to the unconscious Horikita is an example of this.

After the deal, Horikita was no longer involved with Chabashira's blackmail against Ayanokoji, cutting off Chabashira's access to control Ayanokoji through Horikita.

This weakens Chabashira's blackmail, though it is still active, solely due to her information advantage and nothing else.

THE END

1. adaptability
2. Thinking
3. Reasoning
4. Strategy/SQ
5. SQ/Strategy
6. Misdirection
7. Info gathering
8. Field skills
9. Knowledge application