(Notes: Souichi is in Perfect Mode and will remain as such throughout the entire match. Likewise, this is Akane Kurashiki after the events of Zero Escape 999. Leap Second will not be a factor)

The Obelisk stood tall against the morning sun, shrouding all those that stood beneath it in its shadow. Of all the people gathered there on this day, none of them had gotten any amount of sleep for quite some time yet they could not be more alert. They were invigorated, energised by the sheer excitement of the match that came before, mere hours ago. They were even more excited for the match that was to come.

Emerging from the horizon, the referees spotted her. The woman who had won her claim to this match through sweat and tears, the young lady who had come to threaten the existence of Kakerou itself. Yet still, the referees waited with an exterior of perfect politeness, and an interior of feverious elation.

The referees began murmuring amongst themselves.

"There she is, The God Slayer herself"

"To think that there was somebody out there who could defeat Usogui..."

"Air Poker...that was a gamble I will never forget..."

"Leader." Yakou spoke up as he turned to Souichi, the leader of Kakerou. "She'll be arriving soon. I simply wanted to ask, are you sure about me being the referee for this match?"

Kiruma Souichi stood in front of all the referees, a symbol of his power. He turned back to address Yakou. "Of course, Yakou-san. You, above all others, are the most suited to preside over this Surpassing The Leader. After all, this is the woman who took Baku Madarame, who you seemed to treasure a lot, away from you."

With that, Souichi turned back to face his enemy.

Quietly, Yakou said to himself.

"You seemed to treasure Baku Madarame more than I ever had, Leader..."

The young lady lay only a few steps away. With that, Souichi began to address her.

"The owner of Crash Keys, Akane Kurashiki, you have met all the conditions required, even having taken down the legendary gambler Usogui, indeed, you are remarkable."

Akane was taken aback. "O-oh! Thank you..."

Yakou whispered into Souichi's ear. "Leader, the agreed upon time has come."

Souichi once more focused on Akane. "It is time. Come, let's begin."

Akane raised her hand. "Um, before we start. Is there any reason for there to be so many referees? I thought only one was required..."

Souichi found himself...shocked. Akane Kurashiki, the woman who had defied all odds and had beaten Baku in a gamble, the woman who saw through Usogui's threats as if they were nothing, the woman who didn't so much as flinch at the possibility of drowning during her match, yet she seemed to be intimidated by the presence of the referees.

"Akane Kurashiki...just what kind of person are you?"

Yakou spoke up. "No need to fear, Kurashiki-san. I will be the only referee presiding over the match, the rest are here to observe and watch the match for themselves. They will be in a separate monitoring room, only the 3 of us will be entering the Obelisk."

She relaxed. "Oh, that's a relief."

Silently, the trio walked up the stairs of the Obelisk, reaching the top floor of the arena that will decide their fates. Yakou gave an explanation for how the game works,

they were about to decide who Drops first until Akane raised her hand again.

"Um, just to make sure I'm not misunderstanding something. All I have to do is win this game and I get your organization and all its capital, correct?"

Yakou let out a slight chuckle. "Of course, naturally..." his expression turned cold, emphasizing the point he wanted to make. "...Should you lose your life in this gamble, Leader would take over your organization as well."

Akane, unbothered, replied bluntly. "That's fine. It's only fair, after all."

Souichi stared intently at Akane, gauging her every reaction.

With everything out of the way, the match could finally begin. They started with playing rock paper scissors in order to determine who would Drop first. Akane wins and chooses to Drop first.

Both players readied themselves, moving into their respective spots. Yakou stood to the side of both of them, staring at his watch. "The game will begin at 8:12:00, on the speaker clock's signal..."

Both players fell into deep contemplation.

Souichi: *"You...you're a walking inconsistency. I could see it in your eyes, during the match against Baku, you stopped being nervous the moment you felt the water envelop you. So what about now? Now that this match has started, what kind of eyes are staring at my back right now?"*

Akane: *"Junpei... You remember this game, right? We used to play something similar when we were in grade school. Oh how I miss your voice right now... But now's not the time for nostalgia, I must push forward."*

Souichi: "What kind of person are you? You, who emerges from nowhere and threatens the very foundations of Kakerou...You, who killed my only friend..."

Akane: "This is more than just a mere game, the rewards from taking over Kakerou will be the stepping stone towards a brighter future!"

Souichi: "For his sake...and for the sake of Kakerou-"

Akane: "For the sake of the entire world-"

Both: "I will win!"

[Beep...Beep...Beep...]

[DONG!!]

Drop The Handkerchief: 1st Round, 1st Half

(D): Akane Kurashiki



(C): Kiruma Souichi



Souichi: *"So I have to find the handkerchief first, then. In many ways, this is the worse position to be in. However, right now at the beginning of the match, being assigned to C first might be to my benefit."*

Akane: *"When should I drop it? Really there are only three options; Drop at the beginning, middle or end of the 60 seconds we're given. In this game, I can imagine that the layman would assume that holding onto the handkerchief for as long as possible, waiting for your opponent to turn around and suffer a Near Death, is the best move. In that case, I should drop it right now, at the beginning... No! This man in front of me is not a layman. He will turn around eventually, he has to!"*

Souichi focuses intently. Through the beeping of the speaker clock, his ears pick up the faintest of noises...

Souichi: *"Is that...your heartbeat? I can hear a heavy breath. It's just as I thought, you're nervous, aren't you?*

Akane: *"30 seconds have passed, he will turn around at around 45-50 seconds. He has to..."*

Souichi: *"The constant beeping...If only I could get rid of it..."*

Akane: *"NO!! He's waiting until 60 seconds! Damnit, he got me! I have to drop it now!"*

[Beep...Beep...Beep...]

[DONG!!]

Results for 1st Round, 1st Half:

==========

Drop: 49 Seconds

Check 60 Seconds

Result: Check Successful

Accumulation: 11 Seconds

Souichi Squandered Time: 11/300

Souichi Near Death: 0/300

Akane Squandered Time: 0/300

Akane Near Death: 0/300

==========

Yakou reset his watch. “The check was successful, the next round will start at 8:14:00”

Akane was still breathing quite heavily, shaking off the unsatisfying results of the first drop. “Oh jeez…”

“Kurashiki-san.” Souichi interjected, his gaze focused and intense. “My instincts were correct, you really weren’t faking your nervousness. You are a person who wears their

heart on their sleeve. To think that someone like that could've beaten Usogui in a gamble, it's hard to believe."

Akane gulped. "You mean Baku Madarame-san? You were his ally during that Air Poker game, weren't you? You guys must've been pretty close, I'm..."

"It was our destiny to stand before each other in this moment, until you came along." Souichi interrupted.

"I know, I'm so..." Akane hung her head low, looking at her feet. "I'm so sorry..."

"So she feels remorse, how pitiful. The winner of a gamble never needs to feel sorry for the loser." Souichi thought to himself.

He spoke up once more. "No need to apologise, you earned the right to be here today. You've taken Usoguis place as the final tribulation I must defeat." His gaze toughened once more, the aura that emanated from Souichi had only one name, killing intent. "I will kill you myself."

Akane didn't so much as flinch. Souichi gauged her reaction to his provocation and didn't find so much as a nervous blink from her. *"It's unmistakable, you are timid and you are shy. However...when it truly counts... You're as immovable as a mountain, Akane Kurashiki."*

Yakou raised his arm and held his finger over his watch's start button. "The 2nd half of the 1st Round will begin soon, please return to your positions."

[Beep... Beep... Beep...]

[DONG!!]

Drop The Handkerchief: 1st Round, 2nd Half

(D): Kiruma Souichi

(C): Akane Kurashiki

Souichi: *"It's as I thought, the position of D is both advantageous in terms of the boundaries of the game, but it is also advantageous for its literal, physical position. Her breathing, body language, posture, movement, I can gauge all of them from where I'm standing. That provocation I gave her earlier has made her more tense than usual. It's too easy, I have seen through you completely."*

Akane: *"There is only one reason why he would say such a thing to me, it is to throw me off. In body language analysis, it is well known that there are no universal signs for deception, someone scratching their nose during an interrogation in no way indicates that they are lying,*

for example. What analysts have proposed is that instead of looking for singular signs, you should instead look for what the subject's "baseline" is. Once you know their baseline, it is said that when a person deviates from their baseline, that's the indicator for deception. If a person is naturally fidgety and nervous, the moment they become stiff and unmoving, that can be a sign that they're lying. Kiruma Souichi... I have no doubts that he's an incredibly emotionally aware man; By now, he would've already figured out what my "baseline" is, that threat of his was meant to throw me off and get me to reveal what I look like when I'm outside of my baseline. Now that he knows both, he should be able to estimate when I'm thinking of turning around... Calm down, think about the deeper intentions behind this move. If he's trying to read my body language to determine when I'll turn around, that would be useless. What if I decide to never turn around? He will have wasted his entire turn as D, just as I had during the 1st Half. The intention is clear, he only wishes to read my body language BEFORE the round starts! He thinks he can determine what move I'll make before even I decide on it! Given that he chose to provoke me before the round started, this can only mean that he reasoned that I would waste a lot of time mulling over his threat and intentions, he dropped the handkerchief instantly! Only 15 seconds have passed, how stupid do you think I am??!!

At 8:14:18, Akane leaps up from the chair and instantly swivels around, fully confident

in her decision. A chill ran up her spine as she saw what laid on the floor, or rather, what *didn't* lay on the floor. The handkerchief was nowhere to be found, nowhere except...

"Check: Failed." announced Yakou. "Akane, you'll take the 1 minute penalty and experience death for 1 minute."

Results for 1st Round, 2nd Half:

==========

Drop: N/A Seconds

Check 18 Seconds

Result: Check Failed

Accumulation: N/A

Souichi Squandered Time: 11/300

Souichi Near Death: 0/300

Akane Squandered Time: 0/300

Akane Near Death: 60/300

==========

"N-No way..." Akane meekly muttered out. *"This is the worst possible start, I take the penalty but I have no accumulation to reset as a benefit, Damnit!"*

Yakou's voice was calm and docile, his signature as a referee. "Kurashiki-san, please lay down and roll up your sleeve."

Souichi stood over Akane, looking down on her as Yakou injected the Near Death drug. "You disappoint me, I hope you can make up for it next time. Only *if* there's a next time." He leaned in closer. "'We are at peace now'. Please convey these words to Baku Madarame if you meet him."

Akane's eyes went hollow, marking the effects of the Near Death drug kicking into her system.

Yakou starts the 1 minute timer on his watch. "That was harsh, Leader." he remarked.

Souichi remained utterly silent, his expression cold and emotionless. He had turned away from Akane, almost disgusted to even look at her.

“The one minute of Near Death is over, beginning resuscitation now.”

...

...

...

Nothing. The 15 seconds of allocated CPR came and went, yet Akane didn’t budge.

“The next round will begin at 8:17:00. If Akane has not recovered by then, I will judge the game as your win, Leader.” proclaimed Yakou.

Souichi remained silent, not even finding the respect within him to look Akane in the eyes. He faced the wall, contemplating how to best use Akane’s organization after it’s assimilated into Kakerou.

8:16:10...

8:16:15...

8:16:20...

The seconds kept mercilessly ticking by, drawing ever closer to Souichi’s victory.

“Yakou?”

“Yes, Leader?”

“I’ll leave it up to you to Liquidate Crash Key’s assets, that organization is of no use to me.” said Souichi.

“Of course, Leader. After-” Yakou abruptly stopped talking.

“Hm?” Souichi swiveled around.



What he saw shocked him. Akane Kurashiki, the frail woman who laid dead on the floor mere seconds ago, was now stood tall, her eyes locked straight into Souichi’s. Souichi never even heard her stand up, it was as if she was an apparition.

"Those eyes of hers." **Souichi thought.** *"It's as if she's become...other, something out of this world. I see now, this is the woman who murdered Usogui."*

"Yakou-san." mumbled Akane in a low voice. "The next round will start at 8:17:00, correct?"

Yakou himself was almost at a loss for words. "Yes, Kurashiki-san."

"Then we don't have much time to waste. Sit, Kiruma Souichi. It's your turn to Check."

"..."

Drop The Handkerchief: 2nd Round, 1st Half

(D): Akane Kurashiki

(C): Kiruma Souichi

[Beep...Beep...Beep...]

[DONG!!]

(End of Part 1)