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Volume 1

"It's like a comedy, isn't it? Having a mere con artist walk into an academy full of psychics in the flesh?"

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

Jin Kirihara is on a bus with 30 seats filled with students. The bus is traveling to a location that is unknown to the students. The girl sitting next to him named Emma Licorice asks him what kind of situation does he think we are in. Jin answers by lying about the bus being stranded once or twice before during the trip. He also lies about bus driver being a pervert who enjoys bringing passengers to crazy places and lies about hearing all of this from his father who is the drinking buddy of the president of the bus company. Emma gets confused and starts to wonder if he's making everything up. Jin replies and says "Do you think that made-up stories could keep coming out like this?" (Verbal Deception + Fabrication)

"Hey, Jin-kun. What kind of situation do you think we are in?"

When she introduced herself, she called herself Emma Licorice. The disturbing situation and the bright atmosphere created by this orange-colored short-cut hair girl don't really mesh well.

He could have pretended to be asleep and gotten away with it, but there was nothing else to do until the bus stopped anyway.

Jin decided to answer her question for the time being.

"A~, I heard that driver is quite famous in his field."

"Is that so?"

"I've heard that the entire bus got stranded in the middle of nowhere more than once or twice."

"W-We are in trouble then!? The entrance ceremony is about to begin after all....."

Jin knew why the bus was taking this route, and in the first place, when there was a paved roadway, there would be no possibility of being stranded. It's just a matter of calmly thinking it through.

He found it a little funny that Emma believed his random made-up story so easily, so he decided to add another layer of lies to it.

"Right, I also heard another story about it."

Even he thought to himself that he really did have a mouth that turned a lot.

"Even though his destination was a neighboring town 30 minutes away, he got so lost that he drove for hours through grasslands and deserts, and was finally stopped by the security forces at the border. I don't know why they didn't just fire him."

"It's not at the level of having no sense of direction anymore, huh ....."

"Exactly. The fact is, he's a pervert who enjoys taking passengers to crazy places. He's particularly enthusiastic today, isn't he?"

"Who the heck did you hear that from?"

"My father. He's a drinking buddy of the president of the company the driver works for. He's been saying a lot about how he wants him fired as soon as possible."

"Eh? This is a made-up story, right? What should I do, I don't know what's the truth. ....."

"Do you think that made-up stories could keep coming out like this?"

He realized that it was a serious disorder to be able to mass-produce lies almost subconsciously.

Emma seemed confused as to whether the stories were true or not, but this seemed to make the anxiety and fear that had overshadowed her relatively diminish.

Emma decided to discard any unnecessary doubts. The other students in the cabin eventually regain their composure as well.

Jin, Emma, and everyone else leaves the bus and it’s revealed that they are dropped of in a forest. Emma looks at Jin and then says that there’s no way we would be stranded and asked why he lied to her. Jin replies "The place we're about to enter is a really harsh place, you know. Cheating and kicking each other down is an everyday occurrence. I just wanted to remind you.” Emma believes him and thanks him. Jin then says that they should work together and perfectly timed his smile at her. (Verbal Deception + Fabrication + Motivation + Emotional Facilitation)

On both sides of the forest road, which was barely wide enough for a bus to pass, were densely overgrown with trees. There were no buildings in the vicinity. It was hard to believe that this was their destination, but the students had no choice but to comply.

When she got off the bus, Emma looked back at Jin with a dubious expression on her face.

"Look, I knew it, there's no way we would be stranded!"

"Sorry, sorry. I'm just joking."

"Gosh, why did you lie to me like that?"

"The place we're about to enter is a really harsh place, you know. Cheating and kicking each other down is an everyday occurrence. I just wanted to remind you."

"Eh~, I didn't know you had that in mind. ..... Thank you."

"No worries. Let's work together from now on."

Jin timed his smile perfectly.

Jin tells Emma about the nature of the Screening Test and how they are being targeted by some students due to it. He saw that each student went into the forest every thirty second and realized that whoever enters the forest first has an advantage. He knows that they’re both being

targeted because they were the last ones to go to the forest. Emma asks why other students have to fight each other and that the teacher never said anything about it. Jin tells her that the bald guy told them that points would be given to each student depending on their results in the examinations. In order to advance, you need points from the weekly examinations and that the few students with the lowest points are expelled. Jin understood that the students who knew the nature of the test were going to carry out a one-sided attack on the students were enjoying themselves. (Connecting The Dots + Observation + Analysis + Analytical Thinking + Connective Thinking + Concrete Thinking + Critical Thinking + Linear Thinking + Non-Linear Thinking + Convergent Thinking + Vertical Thinking + Holistic Thinking + Synthetic Thinking + Reflective Thinking + Deductive Reasoning + Inductive Reasoning + Abductive Reasoning + Analogical Reasoning + Effective Reasoning + Cognitive Reasoning + Causal Reasoning + Systemic Reasoning + Decompositional Reasoning + Fluid Reasoning Index)

"Listen here, Emma. Are you aware that we are in the middle of <Screening Test> right now?"

"That's a given."

"Then, are you also aware that we're being targeted by some of the students right now?"

"Eh~! Is that so?"

"Wait, don't talk so loud", Jin rushed to cover Emma's mouth with his hand. "..... In this test, each student went into the forest every thirty seconds, didn't they?"

After making sure she nodded, Jin continued cautiously.

"That means this is a game where whoever enters the forest first has an overwhelming advantage. You can hide in the forest, watch for latecomers, and then ambush them when you see an opening. We were last in line, so it's not surprising that we've already

become someone's target. So to stand still near an entrance like this is ba-..... no, I just thought of words I shouldn't have said."

"B-But, you know? Why would students have to fight against each other? The teacher never said anything about that, did he?"

Since it came to this, Jin has no choice but to tell her the truth.

"The bald-looking old man explained it to us during the entrance examinations, remember? He said that points would be allocated to each student according to their results in the examinations."

"Well, in order to advance, we have to earn points in the weekly exams, right?'

"Yes. In the academy, the few students with the lowest points are expelled every month. Especially for the lower grades like us, the points are set so low that we're suddenly on the precipice."

"What does that have to do with our current situation?"

"Why do you think the instructor kept such a basic rule from us earlier?"

Emma thought about it desperately, but no clear answer seemed to emerge.

After a short delay, Jin cut in.

"Below the surface, the battle for points has already begun."

The biggest clue was that before the test started, the instructor went out of his way to declare the rule that [Every action that results in death is prohibited].

So some of the students understood the nature of this test and took the right to carry out a one-sided attack on the students who were enjoying their hiking in a relaxed atmosphere.

On the flip side, the school doesn't need any morons who don't even realize that.

"Do you understand now that we shouldn't stand still here?"

"..... Yeah. Thank you, I didn't realize that at all."

Emma asks Jin why he decided to become a member of the White Knights. Jin tells her that he was told by a fortune teller in a back alley that if he didn't graduate from Heliberg Academy and join the White Knights, he would go to hell within five years. He said that he was also forced to buy an expensive vase and he wonders if that vase helped him pass the exam because he's not a psychic. Emma knows that he's lying. But he wasn't lying about not being a psychic, which Emma thought was just a lie due to including it in his illogical story. (Verbal Deception + Fabrication + Misdirection + Concealment + Half-Truths)

"Jin-kun, why did you decide to become a member of the <White Knights>?"

"I was told by a fortune teller I met in a back alley. If I don't graduate from Heiberg Academy and join the <White Knights>, I'll fall into hell within five years."

"That's awfully specific ....."

"I was also forced to buy a ridiculously expensive vase, but I wonder if that's what helped me pass the exam."

"You're definitely being scammed! Wake up!"

"No, it's all thanks to the vase. I'm not a psychic after all."

"Even I can tell that's a lie ..... There is no way someone with no psychic abilities can enter the school."

It has always been Jin's bad habit to fabricate random stories and make things vague in order to prevent people from realizing his real motives.

However, there's no way he's going to tell others his true objectives here.

Jin and Emma found an area where the trees in a five meter radius had marks as if they were eaten by beasts, some being snapped off at the root and collapsed, and gouged trunks that were at a height that is out of reach of human hand. There was a boy that was knocked down near so Emma tried to help, but Jin stopped her. The reason why he stopped her was because Jin realized that it was bait and that the one who did this was nearby. Jin saw that the boy wasn’t bleeding and he hadn't stopped breathing. He was just unconscious, which is why he came to the conclusion that it was a trap. (Trap Evasion + Observation + Concrete Thinking + Effective Reasoning + Abductive Reasoning)

The trees in a space with a radius of about five meters had marks on them as if they had been eaten up by beasts, and some had snapped off at the root and collapsed. The gouged trunks at a height that was out of reach of human hands also indicated that whoever had done this was not a normal being.

"Ah, someone's knocked down. I have to go help. ....."

"No, wait."

Jin grabbed Emma's arm when she was about to rush forward and forcefully took her into the bushes.

As Emma demanded an explanation, Jin cautiously muttered to her, wary of his surroundings.

"The one who did that is still nearby. He uses the prey he hunts like that as bait. It's the basis of hunting. If you approach carelessly, you'll be taken by surprise and it'll be over in an instant."

"B-But that boy is hurt."

"Look carefully. There's no sign of bleeding, and he hasn't stopped breathing. He's just unconscious."

"Is that true?"

"Anyway, it means we need to hide for a while."

After confirming that Emma nodded repeatedly with exaggerated gestures, Jin let out a sigh.

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

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

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

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

There was no way to avoid it.

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

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

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

"Really?"

"You're persistent."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This means he has missed his last chance.

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

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

At that moment, the ground behind Tedd exploded.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It was quite natural for Tedd to make that decision.

"What, have you given up already?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—But does this guy really intend to attack me?

In fact, even when it seemed certain that this guy could finish me off, he shot at the ground to force me to surrender. Since he has no intention to kill, then there is no need to dodge the attacks. All I have to do is not move from my position and let the three spheres strike him at maximum speed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tedd's eyes widen in astonishment and he rants.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Bang!"

At that moment, Tedd's figure disappeared.

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

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

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

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

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

Tedd in the hole finally came to his senses.

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

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

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

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

Jin pressed the glowing tip against Tedd's neck.

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

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

Tricked? What do you mean?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Ahaha, right, of course."

Now he had all the information he wanted.

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

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

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

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

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

◆

Three Days Ago ◆

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Well, something like that."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

However, modern technology has not yet succeeded in shrinking the size of the cameras capable of capturing images, so the number of places where they can be

hidden is naturally limited. If there are no tall bushes around, and if there are protruding rocks on the ground surface that can easily create blind spots, then there should be no problem.

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

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

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

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

Gasta laughed as he exhaled purple smoke.

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

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

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

"Oioi, you know a lot."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"When the results of the entrance exam were announced, Tedd stood out among those who had gathered in the hall. He intimidated everyone around him for no reason, and

got angry that his posted rank was at the bottom of the list. ..... I thought that guy, with his overconfidence and lack of caution, would make a good first target."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I already know the name of the rubber balls he uses and the product name of the bag from the letter. All I have to do is to take advantage of the time when he is asleep on the

long trip and replace the bag containing the rubber balls with the fake one I prepared for him. Of course, there's a remote detonator inside those balls."

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

We meet a girl named Nina Stingray. She doesn't have psychic powers but she was feared as a powerful psychic to the point that she was exempted from the entrance exam to enter Heiberg Academy. (Deception + Concealment + Intimidation)

Nina let out a sigh for what might be the second time today.

She is not a psychic, so there is no way she could have moved that piece of debris.

Nina had no idea how real psychics could make objects levitate or explode.

She had never been able to create a psychic phenomenon, even though she had tried to put her power into her palms and concentrate her mind with a suitable expression on her face, just as she had seen the others do.

The reason why such a person was feared as a powerful psychic and was exempted from the entrance examination to enter the Heiberg Academy was only because she kept on accumulating small lies.

Nina was provoked by three boys, but Nina was able to make them scared from her expressions and lies about her psychic powers (Emotional Facilitation + Verbal Deception + Fabrication + Bluffing + Intimidation)

After all, the misfortune of the three boys who challenged her to a fight just a few moments ago was due to their doubts about the authenticity of the legend.

At first, it was supposed to be just a little prank.

They provoked a famous person who was exempted from the entrance exam, and then they showed everyone around them that they were strong and unafraid of anything, and they took the lead in the race for survival.

With the entrance ceremony scheduled to begin in 20 minutes, they thought there was no possibility of a battle breaking out, and even if it did, they were under the illusion that the three of them would be able to handle it.

It did not take long for them to realize that this was a big mistake.

Nina looked at the three of them as if she were sizing them up, and then muttered with a blank expression on her face.

"Do you truly understand what it means to make an enemy of me?"

She had beautifully braided platinum-colored hair and azure eyes that shone like works of art. Even her beauty was now nothing more than an element that accentuated the disconcerting nature of the situation.

As if to suppress her tremendous destructive impulse, Nina spoke on cautiously.

"Every opponent I've ever fought has had their limbs torn off, without exception."

The sun hid behind the clouds, casting an ominous shadow on Nina's face.

Her azure eyes glowed mysteriously as she unceasingly ogled the bodies of the three men. Her fractured smile gave the impression of a definite lack of humanity as a living creature.

The poor victims instantly understood that there was no way they could talk to such a person.

"Since it's pure psychokinesis, there doesn't seem to be any particular means of resistance. ..... Ah, it's not that they were in the wrong, you know? It's just that I still can't control my abilities very well. Of course, this time too, I will do my best to prevent you all from being killed. ....."

The three of them stopped breathing as they cowered under the words that sounded as if it were someone else's problem.

"Now that I think about it, it's strange that I've never been charged with a crime before. I wonder why? Could it be because my father has such a strong influence on the judiciary as well?"

Nina turned around and tilted her head like a child who doesn't understand how the world works.

No one could not help but shudder watching the expressions on her face change from one second to the next.

A monster with great power, yet unstable and uncontrollable. Moreover, she has a powerful background that can cover up her crimes.

Everyone present understood that it was a big mistake to get involved with Nina.

Three against one, you say? What makes you so naive to think that you can compete against her?

This monster is no longer in their realm ———.

It is an existence like an inevitable disaster, advancing through the battlefield as if it were taking a walk, producing countless corpses in its path.

It is only her whim that allows them to survive now.

"Shall we begin then? At least let me have a little fun, okay?"

With a smile that did not match her emotions, Nina held her palm out in front of her.

The three of them were in a state of panic, and in the next moment, they fell on their butts in disgrace. They slumped and backed away, making meaningless pleas.

"Hiih~, help me! Please help me!"

Nina's innocent killing intent gushed out from her entire body, like a young child trampling on ants. She turned to the three of them who were crawling away on the ground and said as if proclaiming.

"I've memorized your faces, gentlemen. I look forward to seeing you again."

Nina has a transcendent talent for acting, even when she was a child. She fabricated a story where her abilities were too powerful to control, and no one has ever discovered her secret. She wards off battles against her by using a variety of fear-inducing stories and her sophisticated acting skills. (Verbal Deception + Acting Skills + Fabrication + Concealment + Intimidation)

Fortunately, Nina had a transcendent talent for acting. She also created a setting where her abilities were too powerful to control, which also helped, and until now, no one has ever uncovered her secret.

With no psychic abilities, she had no other way to survive except to ward off all kinds of battles by using a variety of fear-inducing stories and her sophisticated acting skills.

Jin was able to demonstrate his “psychic abilities” in front of the three instructors at the final interview by correctly guessing personal stuff about them by hiring a detective to investigate the instructors. He was also able to guess that one of the instructors picked up a 100-el coin before coming to the venue by dropping the coin on his way to work and having a comrade check to see if he picked it up. (Information Gathering + Short Term Planning)

After passing the written exam without difficulty, Jin was to demonstrate his psychic abilities in front of the three instructors at the final interview.

What he did was a classic technique often used in psychic frauds.

Having correctly guessed the name of one of the interviewers' dog, the name of his favorite bar, and even the present he had prepared for his daughter's birthday, the interviewers identified Jin as a psychic with psychological abilities. Of course, the trick

was to hire a detective to thoroughly investigate the personal information of the interviewers.

Of course, he had an extra trick up his sleeve.

Jin was able to guess that one of the interviewers had picked up a 100-el coin just before coming to the venue.

A simple trick of dropping the coin on the interviewer's way to work and having a comrade check to see if he had picked it up. Still, no one doubted him.

So far, everything has gone smoothly, from the entrance exam to the <screening test>.

Heliberg Academy allows students to duel each other for points. Jin and Nina agreed to duel each other in two days. Nina was a little scared because she didn't have psychic powers and she thought that Jin had powers. So she came up with a plan to disguise herself as a girl named Kate. She wore a red wig, colored contact lenses, changed her voice pitch, she thoroughly crafted the pronunciation of each of her words, the timing of her breathing, the way she walked, and even the smallest of gestures. She did all of this to talk to Jin while disguised as Kate and convince him that it's a bad idea to duel Nina because of how dangerous she is and that her family can cover up crimes. (Short-Term Planning + Strategy + Verbal Comprehension Index + Emotional Engagement + Emotional Facilitation + Emotional Management + Self-Regulation + Disguise Mastery + Acting Skills + Direct Manipulation + Verbal Deception)

Jin was skeptical about "Kate" and he baited Nina into admitting that she was disguised as her by saying that she's Nina. Jin also knew there was three unnatural things about "Kate". Not many girls talk to Jin out of kindness and he's doesn't trust people easily. He saw signs of a deceitful person in "Kate" like her biting her lips, pursing her mouth a lot while she was talking, the depth of her breathing and the frequency of her blinking was consistent. The most crucial part was that she never looked down while she spoke to Jin. This was what made Jin know that she's Nina because before this when he argued with Nina in front of the fountain, he lied to her, saying that people who are hiding things tend to look downward a lot. It was just a random made-up line to drive Nina away at that time. So the fact that "Kate" was so careful to not look downward confirmed his suspicion. How could Kate have known about the false information that only Nina heard? And the last reason was that there shouldn't be any girls like her in their grade. There is one girl in class three named Kate but she's smaller and wears glasses. Nina asked Jin if he memorized every face and name in their grade and he said that he did. We can also say that he memorized every student in the entire high school, not just his grade. There are nearly 300 students enrolled in Heliberg Academy. This was one day after the entrance

ceremony. This means that Jin memorized nearly 300 people's faces, bodies, and names. This also means that Jin was able to visualize and process nearly 300 people when trying to find out if “Kate” was a student. Jin is able to memorize, visualize, and process nearly 300 faces, bodies, and names in a short amount of time. It’s most likely a couple of minutes given the scenario in the light novel, so it should be about 5-7 minutes. We can also infer that Jin was able to memorize all of those things in 5-7 minutes.

Jin memorized 300 people in just 5 to 7 minutes. For each individual, he committed to memory:
Facial features, including:

- Forehead
- Eyes
- Nose
- Mouth
- Lips
- Chin
- Skin features

Other features:

- Body type
- Height
- Size
- Hairstyle
- Accessories (for some people)

Names, including:

- 1–3 kanji characters

This gives us an average of 12 to 15 distinct features per person, depending on the number of kanji used and whether accessories were present.

Total Features Memorized:
300 people × 12–15 features = 3,600 to 4,500 features

Features Memorized Per Minute (over 5 to 7 minutes):

- If Jin memorized 3,600 features in 5 minutes, that’s 720 features per minute
- If Jin memorized 3,600 features in 7 minutes, that’s 514 features per minute
- If Jin memorized 4,500 features in 5 minutes, that’s 900 features per minute
- If Jin memorized 4,500 features in 7 minutes, that’s 643 features per minute

Conclusion: Jin memorized approximately 514 to 900 features per minute, or about 1 full person every 0.67 to 1.16 seconds, each with 12 to 15 unique attributes. This included detailed facial structures, physical characteristics, and Japanese names composed of multiple kanji.

Jin visualized 300 people in just 5 to 7 minutes. For each individual, he visualized:

Facial features, including:

- Forehead
- Eyes
- Nose
- Mouth
- Lips
- Chin
- Skin features

Other features:

- Body type
- Height
- Size
- Hairstyle
- Accessories (for some people)

Names, including:

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- If Jin visualized 4,500 features in 7 minutes, that's 643 features per minute

Conclusion: Jin visualized approximately 514 to 900 features per minute, or about 1 person every 0.67 to 1.16 seconds, each with 12 to 15 unique attributes. This included facial structure, physical profiles, hairstyles, accessories, and names composed of multiple kanji.

Jin processed 300 people in just 5 to 7 minutes. For each individual, he encoded:

Facial features, including:

- Forehead
- Eyes
- Nose
- Mouth
- Lips
- Chin
- Skin features

Other features:

- Body type
- Height
- Size
- Hairstyle
- Accessories (for some people)

Names, including:

- 1–3 kanji characters

This gives us an average of 12 to 15 distinct features per person, depending on the number of kanji used and whether accessories were present.

Total Features Processed:
300 people × 12–15 features = 3,600 to 4,500 features

Features Per Minute:

- If Jin processed 3,600 features in 5 minutes, that's 720 features per minute
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- If Jin processed 4,500 features in 7 minutes, that's 643 features per minute

Conclusion: Jin processed approximately 514 to 900 features per minute, or about 1 person every 0.67 to 1.16 seconds, each with 12 to 15 unique attributes. This included detailed facial structures, physical profiles, hairstyles, and names composed of multiple kanji.

(Trap Setting + Seeing Through People + Connecting The Dots + Observation + Analysis + Analytical Thinking + Associative Thinking + Connective Thinking + Concrete Thinking + Critical Thinking + Synthetic Thinking + Holistic Thinking + Linear Thinking + Convergent Thinking + Vertical Thinking + Reflective Thinking + Fast Thinking + Inductive Reasoning + Visual Reasoning + Analogical Reasoning + Effective Reasoning + Cognitive Reasoning + Causal Reasoning + Systemic Reasoning + Decompositional Reasoning + Fluid Reasoning Index + Perceptual Reasoning Index + Visual-Spatial Index + Working Memory Index + Processing Speed Index + Cognitive Proficiency Index)

Later in the LN, it's revealed that Jin can sense malice by looking at the eyes of a person, yet Jin wasn't able to automatically know that Nina didn't have psychic abilities. This means that Nina's emotional management, engagement, and facilitation are so good that people who can sense emotions just by looking at your eyes can't tell that she's acting. (Emotion Management + Emotional Engagement + Emotional Facilitation + Acting Skills)

She naturally walked next to Jin, who was under the eaves of the building.

"By the way, may I ask you a question?"

With eyes as sharp as blades, Jin asked a decisive question.

"What on earth is your purpose, Nina Stingray?

"……Haa?"

She desperately suppressed her urge to scream out.

Right now, she didn't have any other choice but to respond calmly.

"You better go get your eyesight checked. Take a good look. The color of my hair and eyes....., and even my voice is totally different."

"Indeed", Jin interrupted. " Your looks, your voice, everything is different. Even with you in front of me, I still can't believe that you and Nina Stingray are the same person."

"Listen here, do you even understand what I'm talking about?"

"I know, no matter how I look at it, I can't bring myself to believe you're the same person at all."

"If that's what you think, then that's what it is. Is your head screwed or something?"

There would be no way he could ever imagine she and Nina Stingray were the same person.

The common citizen is probably not familiar with the existence of wigs and colored contact lenses that are so elaborate. For that matter, something of such high quality must still be used only in limited parts of the theatrical world. And even her voice was chosen from a teenage girl's pitch, the one that is most distant from the image of Nina Stingray.

Of course, it's not just the voice. She had thoroughly crafted the pronunciation of each word, the timing of each breath, the way she walked, and even the smallest of gestures.

As she examined the factors that contributed to her mistakes one by one, she noticed something strange.

No, this is more like an anomaly. This is not a level that can be put away with such vague words as "strange".

—Then, at that moment, her hands were handcuffed.

"When did you....."

"I've never seen anyone impersonate another person with such precision. It's all so seamless at that"

Nina could only squeeze out a helpless question.

".....How did you know?"

A smile like that of a miner who has struck gold appeared on Jin's lips.

"I have to admit, I was skeptical until the moment you just admitted it yourself."

"Ha?"

"That's why I really can't believe that the person I see in front of me is Nina Stingray. I've seen a lot of people doing similar things, but you're on a completely different level compared to those guys."

"No way, you were just baiting me.....?"

"No, actually, there were a number of unnatural things."

Jin continued calmly.

"First of all. I know I say this myself, but not many girls talk to me out of kindness. Emma is an exception, obviously, so I figured anyone who would try to help me at a school like this would have some kind of motive."

"But there's a possibility that she's really sincere, right?"

"Unfortunately, I don't have the kind of life where I can easily trust people. And secondly. Your disguise was certainly perfect, but I saw signs of a deceitful person in everything you did and said."

"Signs, huh....."

"You were biting your lip and pursing your mouth a lot while you were talking. That's a sign of dry mouth due to stress. If that's all it was, then maybe you were just nervous because you were talking to someone you had just met, but even so, the depth of your breathing and the frequency of your blinking were remarkably consistent. That was unnatural. I could only assume that you were controlling it by acting."

Jin's points did not end there.

"What was most crucial was the fact that you never once tried to look downward while we were conversing."

Nina's expression rapidly froze.

"When I argued with Nina in front of the fountain, I lied to her, saying something along the lines of [people who are hiding things tend to look downward a lot]. It was just a random made-up line to drive Nina away at that time. So why were you so careful not to look downward? How could Kate have known about the false information that only Nina Stingray was supposed to have heard?"

After looking with satisfaction at Nina's inability to say anything back, Jin continued.

"Then there's the third reason."

"No way, there's more?"

"I mean, this is the biggest reason. There shouldn't be any girls like you in my grade. There is one girl in class three named Kate, but she's a bit smaller and I believe she wears glasses."

"..... Don't tell me, you remembered every face and name in our grade?"

"Of course."

Jin said it casually, as if it were a matter of course.

Nina was at a loss for words.

It was only one day after the entrance ceremony, and while the other students were still getting used to the school's system and even getting excited about last night's welcome party, this boy was the only one who was moving ahead of the rest of them.

Nina’s disguise was so good that Jin thought that her psychic power was to alter her appearance. She can also use 16 different kind of voices, even male voices. (Disguise Mastery + Verbal Comprehension Index)

"I'm not altering my appearance. This is just a disguise."

In front of Jin's eyes, she removed her wig and colored contacts. Her neatly braided platinum-colored hair and azure eyes match the features of Nina Stingray, although her impression differed considerably due to her skillful makeup.

"No way, what kind of disguise technique is that? You really turned into a different person....."

Even after revealing the truth, Jin's surprise did not seem to subside.

"Then the change in your voice isn't due to psychic abilities either?"

"Yes, that's just my talent. I can use about 16 different kinds of voices. Would you like to hear them?"

Jin laughed in amazement when Nina said that in a thick, male voice.

The disguise is something Nina has done only a few times before, and even then only for fun. And yet, she had managed to deceive even Jin, who had such extraordinary insight. Nina laughed self-deprecatingly, saying that this was a talent that the daughter of the Stingray family did not need at all.

Jin can make his expression unreadable by having multiple emotions contained in his face at the same time. (Emotional Management)

Nina could not quite read through the expression on Jin's face at that moment.

Relief, malice, pity, hatred, conflict, liberation - so many different emotions were contained within it that it was impossible to describe in one word.

Jin and Nina teamed up together after realizing that they both don’t have psychic abilities. Jin created a plan to fool the students into thinking that they did the duel. Jin told Nina to come to the wooded area where the duel will take place at 1 A.M. When Nina arrived, she saw four men digging holes in the ground and placing gunpowder there to make a lot of noise and smoke for the duel. Jin hired some landscape contractors he had been using for a while. They implanted a device that generates explosions and smoke in the forest, to make the people watching the duel to believe that it was caused by Nina's ability. Jin told Nina to spend the day pretending to be Kate and spread rumors all over the class that when two powerful psycho-powers collide an explosion occurs, that Jin hid his abilities during the entrance exam, that removing the brooch on her uniform is a condition for releasing Nina’s abilities, and so on. (Short-Term Planning + Preparation Process + Tactics + Cunning)

◆ Sixteen hours before the <Duel> ◆

When they parted ways in the courtyard, Jin told her, "I want you to come to the wooded area where the [duel] will take place at 1:00 a.m.".

Since she was good at hiding her presence, sneaking out of the dormitory in the middle of the night was an easy task. Nina carefully made her way along the path at night, trying not to get her feet caught in the muddy ground after the rain had stopped.

There were no streetlights near the wooded area, and it was forbidden to bring a flashlight. All she could rely on was the light of the moon in the night sky.

It felt strange to walk outside in her silk nightgown, and she was a little nervous about meeting a male student alone in the middle of the night, especially considering the fact that the other party was an incomprehensible fraudster.

Once she arrived at her destination, Nina was taken aback.

"Let's see ..... Huh? What does this mean?"

Her eyes, which had grown accustomed to the darkness, caught sight of four men silently going about some sort of work.

Almost all of them were adults, dressed in dark-colored work clothes and expertly blending into the darkness.

They were digging in the ground or setting up some kind of device on a tree trunk, the purpose of which she had no idea.

After a momentary loss of words, one of the four stopped working and approached her.

"Why are you in your pajamas? You can't work wearing that."

The man who looked the youngest was actually Jin Kirihara, dressed in his work clothes.

His bangs, which normally hung down, were pulled up and tucked into a towel wrapped around his forehead.

With a troubled expression on his face, Jin offered a shovel to Nina.

"Look, don't just stand there, we got some work to do. For now, can you dig a hole in the arranged spot for me?"

"Hold on a second, I really don't get it! Why are we doing civil engineering work this late at night? And since when did I get sold off to a contractor?"

"You're overthinking things ..... All you have to do is just dig a hole and fill it with gunpowder."

"G-Gunpowder!? No way, are you trying to make me participate in terrorism .....?"

"Calm down, it's not like we're going to kill someone. It's just a toy that makes a lot of noise and smoke."

"You're trying to catch me off guard and frame me as the main culprit, right!?"

"..... Am I that untrustworthy?"

"On the contrary, I wish you would tell me how I can trust you."

Nina threw her next question with a sigh.

"..... Besides, who are these people?"

"They're the <landscape contractors> I've been using for a long time. They are expensive, but they do a good job even if hired at a moment's notice. That scary-looking old man is Gasta-san, their president."

"..... I can't keep up with the tsukkomi any longer. Using them for a long time, you say? Weren't you supposed to be a student?"

"Huh, didn't I tell you? I've never been to school, you know?"

"Haa? Don't keep throwing in new facts that don't make any sense one after another."

"I've been wandering around the country helping an old fraudster with his business."

"Another stupid lie....."

"It's true, it's true. I've probably made about 300 million els so far."

"Don't make up stories like that. I mean, what does that have to do with these people?"

Heiberg Academy maintains a level of secrecy to the extent that students who leave the school are subjected to memory-sealing measures. Naturally, the security system is not so lax that a suspicious contractor can break in with ease. There is only one entrance, which is guarded by a gatekeeper, and there is even barbed wire attached to the fence surrounding the property.

"That's because Gasta-san and the others are professionals."

"That doesn't explain anything....."

"They have broken into a prison on an isolated island before. That's why, they can break through this level of security easily."

"Hey, what are you going to do with these criminals? I really want to go back."

"Whatever, by the way, your personality sure is different from when you're in the classroom, huh....."

With his mouth agape, Jin began to talk about his plan to get over their predicament.

It was a strategy that, upon hearing the outline, seemed like child's play.

They implanted a device that generates explosions and smoke in the forest, and made onlookers believe that it was caused by Nina's ability. With the assumption that no one

would be allowed to approach them for any reason, they would be able to avoid any major problems.

Of course, that alone would not be enough.

"The success of this plan depends on your acting skills."

Eyes darker than the surrounding darkness stared intently at Nina.

"Tomorrow, I want you to spend the day pretending to be that Kate or whatever she's called and spread rumors all over the class. I want you to tell the class that when two powerful psycho-powers collide an explosion occurs, that I hid my abilities during the entrance exam, that removing the brooch is a condition for releasing your abilities, and so on....."

"Eh~? Is it safe to spread such blatant lies?"

"I don't care about the content or whether it's true or not. Anyway, what's important is to create the fact that we two are the kind of existence that is talked about through groundless rumors."

"What do you mean? Just what in the world is the point to doing that?"

"If you circulate a lot of meaningful rumors, the information will be rearranged on its own and will spread rapidly. That way, when there is an explosion among us, for example, someone will come up with a plausible theory."

"What's that? It's almost like incitement! You really are a scoundrel, aren't you?"

"What, you just figured that out now?"

Jin and Nina started the duel. The explosions and smoke were set off to make the students believe that it was their psychic abilities. Nina removed her brooch to make the students believe that she did it to unleash her powers. (since Jin told Nina to be disguised as Kate and tell everyone stuff about the duel including that removing her booch unleashes her powers) After she did that, Jin did some acting. He kneeled to the ground and screamed out in anguish. They also set up a tin doll on the ground (because during a duel, a magic tin doll cat named Jake has to watch them if they sign any written pledges) to make the students watching them from the school building to not be suspicious of Jake not being there. (Strategy Orchestration + Strategy Execution + Strategy Effectiveness + Acting Skills + Concealment)

No one could take their eyes off the full-scale battle that had finally begun.

Explosions echoed intermittently, and white smoke began to rise throughout the wooded area. Yet the two remained motionless while facing each other.

"I bet it's their psychic powers clashing ....."

"I-It's safe here, ... right?"

"Look, Nina removed her brooch! That's the signal to unleash her powers!"

I had never heard of such a phenomenon of invisible powers colliding with each other among people with psychic abilities, but maybe it is common knowledge that I just don't know about.

Before Emma could put her doubts into words, the students quickly evacuated into the classroom.

Only Bennett, with an incomprehensible smile on his face, was staring at the figures facing each other in the wooded area.

◇

In the wooded area, filled with white smoke and the smell of gunpowder, Nina and Jin were facing each other.

As instructed, she removed the brooch from her chest, and for some reason, Jin kneeled on the ground and began to let out a cry of anguish. When she held out her right hand toward Jin, he began to scream, even breaking out in a sweat.

His acting was a little too exaggerated, and there were many rough edges. But even this should be sufficient for the students, who can only see him from afar through binoculars.

Naturally, they were not aware of the fact that the two had not signed any written pledge, nor that it was just an ordinary tin doll on the ground, not Jake, who was present to witness the duel.

"Look, the class is fleeing into the classroom"

"I guess ..... it went well."

"Looks like the rumors you spread are working. As expected of a great fraudster."

"I don't want to be told by you ....."

The plan was going well, but it was still too early to relax.

At least for another three minutes or so, they have to continue acting out the fight to the death according to the script.

Nina's acting skills are comparable to a top class stage actress in a high quality romance. (Acting Skills)

Nina closed the distance between herself and Jin while saying in a seductive voice. It was a well-done act, even for herself. With this acting, she could easily be compared to a top-class stage actress playing a high-quality romance.

Jin was described as an incomprehensible fraudster. (Unpredictability)

It felt strange to walk outside in her silk nightgown, and she was a little nervous about meeting a male student alone in the middle of the night, especially considering the fact that the other party was an incomprehensible fraudster.

Jin came up with the idea to spread rumors about Nina so that nobody would challenge her to a duel. Jin dressed as someone and pretended to be killed by her when Nina was acting as his "murderer" to scare a student into surrendering to her. (Acting Skills + Intimidation + Influence Building)

"It's your own fault, you know? You should have known better before you pointed your psychic abilities at me."

Nina said so in a cold tone as she looked down at a blonde-haired male student cowering on the ground.

She lightly kicked him in the shoulder, and the blood-soaked boy screamed so loudly that his throat went hoarse.

"Gyaaaaa~! P-Please, no more!"

"Ahaha, you're overreacting. I just stirred your internal organs a little bit. It shouldn't hurt that much."

Nina seemed to have already lost interest in the male student who was still groaning. She looked at him as if he were a broken toy and laughed cruelly.

"Look, it seems the next person has arrived. Since you're in the way, could you please get the hell out of here?"

Nina casually snapped her fingers, and the blood-soaked boy suddenly began to roll on the ground.

The boy rolled three meters through the copse of trees while screaming and finally stopped when he crashed into the trunk of a spruce tree.

His body did not move a twitch after that.

".....My apologies. Our previous guest took a little longer than usual."

Nina turned a perfect smile to the male student hiding behind a tree a short distance away.

"A..... Aa....."

Nina could imagine precisely the fear he was feeling right now.

When he arrived at the <duel> location at the appointed time, he found an unknown male student being mercilessly beaten up. Anyone with a sane mind and imagination would be convinced that they too would be beaten to death upon witnessing such a scene.

"Why have you been hiding all this time? Even though you were the one who challenged me to a <duel>. Are you perhaps a shy person?"

She decided it was time to end this.

"I'm bored of waiting, so can I attack you now?"

"Wait....., stop! Surrender! I surrender!"

The male student, who had been hiding behind a tree, fled the scene, abandoning all semblance of pride. Without once looking back at her, he cried out loudly and disgracefully.

A series of numbers suddenly appeared in Nina's mind.

It meant that she had succeeded in taking half of the points from the student who had just fled.

[Grue Haysworth has conceded defeat. According to the rules, you are the winner. You are awarded half of Gru's points, thirty-four points.]

"Well, with this, there won't be any more fools who would challenge you to a <duel> for a while."

For their plans to proceed smoothly, it was necessary to spread rumors so that no one would carelessly challenge them to a <duel> - Jin had suggested this only two days ago.

The scheme was a success, but it was by no means without dissatisfaction.

"Don't you think everyone will think I'm some kind of freak murderer or something? What I just did was definitely going too far."

"The more extreme the fear, the more vividly it will be remembered. So give it up."

"But pretending to be a murderer is a bit....."

"No, no, I was just playing dead. I even went to the trouble of staining my uniform with paint. No matter how much that guy claimed what he saw, nobody can find any evidence of murder."

Once a month in Heiberg Academy, there is an ability assessment where you have to demonstrate your psychic powers in front of the instructor. Jin came up with the plan to blackmail their instructor named Rudy. He had information about him like how he has a gambling addiction and is in debt and is forced to pay his debt every month. (Formulations Speed + Information Gathering + Information Control)

"First of all, next week, we'll have to go through the first hurdle, which is called <Ability Assessment>. Once a month, we have to demonstrate our psychic abilities in front of the instructor. Then on Friday, the <Practical Exam>, which is the best opportunity to earn points, begins. This one comes once every two weeks, I think."

"<Ability Assessment>, huh? Doesn't it sound bad? How are we going to get through that?....."

"You never thought of that before you enrolled?"

"......Ugh, I can't say anything back."

Jin, who has the psychological type's psychic ability (or so the instructors think), can be fooled as much as he wants, but for Nina, who has to perform psychokinesis alone with the instructors, it's a different story. Paranormal phenomena such as levitating or destroying objects are beyond the scope of what can be covered by lying or acting.

"Well, we can't keep fooling the instructor with tricks every time."

"Huh? What should we do then?"

"We have to blackmail the instructor."

"Black-....."

——— Blackmail.

The word Jin casually said brought an unpleasant feeling to her eardrums.

Nina hurriedly objected.

"Don't say anything strange! I don't want to help you with that kind of crime!"

"I misspoke, actually it's that. We're just going to talk peacefully with the instructors and ask them nicely so that we can go through the <Ability Assessment> every time."

"That's definitely a lie! There is no way you are willing to have a peaceful discussion with them!"

"I wish you would believe me there. I was on the student council in middle school, so I'm used to having discussions with adults."

"Didn't you mention that you never went to school before!?"

"Of course not. Even this country has at least a compulsory education system."

"I-I can't..... I don't know what the truth is anymore ....."

Ignoring Nina, who had her head in her hands, Jin began to explain.

"In the <Ability Assessment>, about five instructors per class are supposed to check the students' psychic abilities. So, we only need one sla- ..... I mean, instructor, to cooperate with us. We just need to ask that one instructor to be in charge of us every time."

"You were about to say [slave], weren't you?"

"......And, I have some information about the instructor we'll be targeting."

Nina had no idea where he got the information from, but he handed her a memo with detailed information.

The instructor's name is Rudy Beumer. He is a thirty-six-year-old male. He was teaching history in their class just a few minutes ago.

Although he is not a psychic himself, he was hired as an instructor at the Heiberg Academy because of his leadership skills in the military, to which he once belonged.

He has a gambling addiction, which led to his divorce three years ago. As a matter of course, he is in debt, and is forced to repay his debts every month, even though he has a stable job.

Incidentally, he has been hiding these facts from the school for a long time. ——

".....You sure investigated a lot, huh?"

"Stop it, you're making it sound like I'm omniscient and omnipotent."

"I never said that!"

After instructing her to rip up the memo and burn it once she had memorized its contents, Jin flashed a wicked grin.

"It's an ironclad rule of fraud to target people with guilty secrets."

Just like that, Jin began to outline the plan in a sing-songy tone.

While listening to this, Nina was so stunned that she had long passed the point of anger and confusion.

Beginning with the information on Instructor Rudy's background and the outline of the <Ability Assessment>, then laying an ingenious trap for him, and finally formulating a plan to blackmail him.....

Just how much time had Jin spent preparing for all of this?

Of course, as he explained his plan with a grin on his face, Jin seemed to be truly enjoying the act of deceiving people.

But could he really go to such lengths for such a reason?

"Nina, this plan depends on your acting skills."

Various questions were swirling in her mind, but Nina could only nod her head for the time being.

Jin plan was to have a “debt collector” (it was actually his friend that borrowed 100,000 els from Jin in a gambling den three months ago) to tell Rudy that he has to come up with 30,000 els by the end of the day. While Rudy was teaching his class, Nina disguised as Kate fabricated that she lost her wallet that had 30,000 els when she was going to her classroom from the store. Nina disguised herself as Kate at a time that wouldn’t be suspicious for this to work. Emma and “Kate” agreed to look for the missing wallet. Rudy overheard that Emma and “Kate” were going to split up and search along the route from the classroom building to the store, so he followed the path to the store to get the wallet that contained the 30,000 els. “Kate” parted ways with Emma by lying to her so she could take off her disguise and become Nina again. Emma went up to Rudy and said that she found a wallet near a store and gave it to him because he’s a “trustworthy” teacher that will give it to the student who owns it. Emma then walked away. Rudy walked to the back of a street and pulled the money out of the wallet. Jin followed him and confronted him about the money. Jin made Rudy believe that he could read minds due to him knowing that Rudy is a gambler and in debt. Jin said that he would tell someone about him stealing the money and that he’s a gambling. Rudy started to think that nobody would believe him because the mechanism of psychic abilities has not been fully solved, so there’s no way to verify the truth of what a mind reading psychic is saying. But then, Nina was standing behind Rudy and asked if everything that Jin said was true. Rudy said it was all false, but Nina asked to see the wallet she gave to him and checked his pockets, exposing that he stole the money. Rudy knew that Nina’s family is a well known family that has a strong connection to the upper echelons of the academy, so he would be done for. Rudy started to kneel and beg saying that he would do anything if they don’t tell anyone about his secrets. Jin manipulated Rudy’s mind to tell him and Nina the idea of cheating from his own mouth due to the blackmail. After that, Rudy tampered with the personnel list and the evaluation sheet. Now Jin and Nina did not have to worry about their true selves being discovered at the Ability Assessment. (Strategy Execution + Strategy Fortitude + Blackmail for both Jin and Nina)

(Short-Term Planning + Planning Accuracy + Strategy Effectiveness + Trap Setting + Blackmailing + Verbal Deception for Jin)

(Disguise Mastery + Acting Skills for Nina)

That day, Rudy Beumer had a frustrating morning.

He woke up 30 minutes later than usual because his alarm clock had malfunctioned, and he had to leave the house in a hurry before he could eat breakfast. He had to take a different bus than usual because of a slight delay in his commute, and while he was waiting at the bus stop, he ran into a debt collector.

Although he managed to somehow get out of it on the condition that he would come up with 30,000 els by the end of the day, there would be no way he could come up with such a sum in a hurry. He has put all his savings into gambling, and his payday is still a long way off. There is no system in place at the academy to allow him an advance payment of his salary.

While giving a history lecture, Rudy kept thinking only about how to get the money.

It doesn't even matter. In a school that emphasizes actual combat, no one would take a lecture like this seriously.

"Huh, my wallet is gone!"

Shortly after the hour-long lecture, a female student raised her soft cry, which Rudy didn't miss.

A red-haired girl with strikingly black eyes.

Rudy could not remember many of the students' names, but she strangely left an impression on him as she continued to listen to the tedious lecture with serious eyes.

The red-haired girl's friend called out to her with a worried expression.

"Kate-chan, is everything all right?"

"No, it's not all right at all. I was planning to go shopping this weekend, and I left about 30,000 els inside my wallet....."

"Thirty thousand el!? L-Let's go look for it together! Do you remember where you dropped it?"

"Hmmm—..... I still had it when I went to the store at the back of the classroom building, so I think I dropped it when I came back to the classroom. It's a light blue-colored long wallet."

"L-Let's hurry and look for it!"

30.000 els— , the amount of money was the same as the amount of money he had to pay to the debt collector by the end of the day. Is it possible for such a coincidence to occur?

From what he overheard, the girls were going to split up and search along the route from the classroom building to the store.

—*I have to hurry.*

Rudy, flatly dismissing all reason, followed the path to the store at a brisk pace.

".....What was I planning to do?"

When he reached the vicinity of the store, Rudy finally came to his senses.

No matter how urgent the situation, it was unbecoming of an instructor to steal a student's lost wallet. No, it would be unbecoming of a human being.

Anyway, it would be impossible to have the 30,000 els ready by the end of the day.

The debt collector would be upset, but it was the same company from which he borrowed money for the first time three months ago, and the overall amount was not that big. Apologies were his forte. So he believed if he did what he always does, it wouldn't be too serious.

Furthermore, there will be a <Ability Assessment> tomorrow morning. It's a much more nerve-wracking job than the usual lectures, and he'd better go home and get some rest.

Just as Rudy was about to turn on his heel, someone called out to him from behind.

"Rudy-sensei. Are you on your way back to the instructor's office now?"

—Nina Stingray.

Even Rudy, who was usually negligent in his duties, knew about her, who was feared for her psychic abilities and was called the <Queen of Calamity>. Her clear azure eyes are beautiful and at the same time seem to radiate an inexplicable pressure.

And even if Rudy is an ex-military man, it would be impossible for an ordinary student to get this close to him without alerting him to her presence.

Rudy tried his best to hide his agitation as he squeezed out a response.

"Y-Yeah. I have a meeting to attend. There's still time, though....."

"If that's the case, then please take care of this one for me."

Nina handed him a light blue-colored long wallet.

He recognized it at a glance and knew the student who had lost a wallet with the exact same characteristics as this one.

"I found it near the store there just now. I don't know who dropped it, so, may I leave it with you for the time being?"

"..... Sure, I'll see if I can find the owner."

As Rudy watched Nina's back walking away, a conflict was raging in his brain.

Did Nina see the contents of the wallet?

No, she must not have seen it. She said she had found the wallet only [just now].

Inside were three 10,000-el bills and some coins. If someone pulled out the 30,000 els, would anyone be able to tell that I am the culprit?

No, I simply had to testify that there was no money in the wallet when it was delivered to me. Since the school does not know about my gambling addiction and debt, it is impossible for me to be suspected.

This way, he would no longer face remorse in his conscience.

Rudy walked to the back of an unpopular street and pulled the bills out of the wallet while keeping a wary eye on his surroundings.

".....Thank God! You saved me! Seriously, you saved me!"

Guilt? To hell with it.

The worst thing that could have happened to someone is to be so stupid as to lose his or her wallet in the first place. I did the right thing by giving her a lesson.

He walked toward the building where the instructor's office was located, trying to hold back the laughter that was rising within him.

On the way there, Rudy noticed a strange feeling that he could not ignore.

—Don't tell me, am I being followed? By who?

"Sensei, there's something I'd like to ask you."

When he turned around, as if he had been hit by a bullet, standing there was a young boy who appeared to be an immigrant from the East. Through a gap in his unkempt black hair, he looked like a bird of prey lurking in the forest at night.

He was one of them, Rudy thought.

Gamblers who frequent gambling dens, fraudsters who approach with the scent of money, debt collectors, brawlers, and other underworld denizens - how could a boy like this have the same presence as them?

Still wrapped in a whirlpool of questions, the boy smiled fearlessly.

"What on earth are you planning to do with the 30,000 els that you just stole from that wallet?"

"Wha....."

What is this guy talking about?

When I took the money out of the wallet earlier, I made sure there was no one around.

Could it be that he was using some kind of psychic ability to see? It would take more than just good eyesight to be able to accurately guess the amount of money.

"A light blue colored wallet. You have it in your coat pocket right now, don't you?"

"Y-Yeah. I was about to take it to the lost and found now."

"You can't fool me with that kind of random lie. Well, putting that aside....."

The pressure emanating from the apparently powerless boy made Rudy completely stiffen.

"How are you doing on your debt repayment, Sensei?"

"W-What are you talking about.....?"

"There's no use in playing dumb. I can read people's minds. There are a lot of conditions, though. Right, please check the admission documents for more details."

"You brat ..... what the hell do you want?"

"Wait, wait, you misunderstand me. Do I look like the kind of guy who would threaten people? Do I?"

The boy turned around and put on a cheerful smile.

Rudy had no idea what he was thinking. This made him feel more and more uneasy.

".....Ah! But from Sensei's point of view, it must be worrisome. A student knowing about your gambling, debt, and theft habits is surely not something you'd be comfortable with. And who knows, maybe I'll accidentally tell someone."

"Damn it, don't get carried away-....."

"Huh, did you say something?"

Rudy kept his mouth shut in a panic and let his thoughts run wild.

Who in the world would believe the testimony of such a lousy kid?

Now that the mechanism of psychic abilities has not been fully solved, there is no way to verify the truth of what a mind-reading psychic is saying.

Let's shut him up with threats of expulsion from the school.

By the time Rudy thought of this, it was already too late.

Nina Stingray, who had just entrusted him with the wallet, was standing behind him with a blank expression on her face.

"Is what he just said true, Rudy-sensei?"

Clad in despair, she looked so unstable that she seemed ready to destroy everything at any moment.

"......Y-Y-Y-You've got it all wrong! This kid is just spouting bullshit!"

"Then, may I see the wallet I just handed to you?"

"L-Look! I still have it!"

"Still?"

"Ah, no....."

"Huh? Where did the 30,000 els that were in here go?"

".....Ugh."

"Now, allow me to check your pockets."

"Awawawa....."

All possibilities collapsed with a resounding crash.

The Stingray family is a well-known family that has a strong connection to the upper echelons of the academy. Even if he were not crushed by the psychic ability, it would be obvious that his head would be on the chopping block.

Rudy found himself kneeling on the ground, pleading.

"All right! I'll-..... I'll do anything you want, just don't tell anyone about this!"

"Whoaa~, I knew you were used to apologizing. I'd give you points for your artistry."

For a really brief moment, Rudy saw the boy's mouth twisted into a crooked smile.

It was a smile, like a hunter staring at his prey caught in a trap.

"..... Now, why don't we discuss this in a quieter place, Sensei?"

◆

By the time they returned to their usual fountain after a peaceful discussion, the sun was almost setting.

After all, deceiving people never felt good, no matter how many times one did it.

In contrast to Nina, who let out a sigh, Jin had a big smile on his face.

"I'm glad it worked out. It was a pretty primitive kind of scam, though."

"..... Really, what a scoundrel you are. That's definitely not the kind of expression one would have after having scammed people."

"No, no. He did feel grateful to us in the end, remember?"

Nina thought back to their discussion in the back of the deserted building.

Jin, as originally planned, had secured an appointment to cheat in the <Ability Assessment> that would begin later in the week.

Rudy had tampered with the personnel list and the evaluation sheet, and now the two of them did not have to worry about their true selves being discovered at the <Ability Assessment>.

What was most frightening was that Jin had never asked Rudy to do so.

He cleverly manipulated Rudy's mind and made him tell us the idea of cheating from his own mouth. Rudy even expressed his gratitude, perhaps because we were more than willing to go along with his idea.

Of course, Rudy did not even suspect that the two were actually not psychics.

"But you know, Nina is the real villain here."

Jin laughed as he held out a paper bag he had hidden behind the fountain. Inside were an elaborate wig and makeup kit.

"Thanks to you playing a double role, this whole plan is a success."

"..... ugh."

Nina could not say anything back.

She began by transforming herself into Kate at a time that would not look suspicious to the other students, then controlled her presence during the lecture to bring herself to Rudy's attention and make him listen to her fake story about dropping her purse.

Once she parted ways with Emma by lying, she would then revert back to Nina Stingray and contact Rudy. —

Not only is she not qualified to criticize others, but she is now the main culprit.

".....Anyway, how did you even know how much debt Rudy-sensei had?"

"Oh, of course, it's something I planted!"

"Planted.....?"

"The businessman who blackmailed that man to prepare 30,000 els by the end of the day is one of my friends."

"Wha....."

While Nina was still in shock, Jin slowly explained how he had done it.

"I already had my eye on him even before I enrolled here. I think it was three months ago that I approached a buddy of mine at a gambling den and got him to borrow 100,000 els from me at a low-interest rate."

"T-That long....."

"The greater the time interval between [planting] and [collecting], the less likely the other party will suspect it. If you want to fool people perfectly, you have to work out a long-term plan."

A Practical Skill Exam called Chase Tag was going to happen in three days. The rules of I Chase Tag: On a field the size of a gymnasium divided into two, obstacles made of pipes and wire mesh were placed. The basic concept of the game is to use these obstacles in a three-dimensional way to play a one-on-one game of tag. The players take turns playing tag three times, and the winner is the player who has the highest total number of seconds to escape. The instructor Isabella will be present to witness it. Jin had a plan for this. According to the information that Jin had obtained before enrolling, the pairings for these one-on-one games were decided by lottery. A box containing numbered plates would be prepared, and the two people who picked up the same number from the box would fight. The pairings could be easily manipulated by picking out a plate in advance and pretending to pick that same plate from the box on the day of the game. If Jin and Nina are paired, they can pull off any number of theatrical acts. Nina just has to pretend that she's using psychokinesis to stop Jin. Jin had stolen the number 14 plate from the instructor's office while they were on a lunch break. (Formulation Speed)

This morning, Isabella, the instructor in charge of Class 6, announced the contents of the exam that would be held three days later.

The game was called <Chase Tag>, and the rules themselves were quite simple.

On a field the size of a gymnasium divided into two, obstacles made of pipes and wire mesh were placed. The basic concept of the game is to use these obstacles in a three-dimensional way to play a one-on-one game of tag. The players take turns playing

tag three times, and the winner is the player who has the highest total number of seconds to escape.

There is a rule against destroying obstacles, but this is probably irrelevant to those who cannot use psychic abilities in the first place.

"The level of difficulty in this case is on a different order of magnitude from that of a <duel>, in which the students are free to do as they please. The instructor will be present to witness it."

"Can't we rely on Rudy-sensei again?"

"Impossible. The witness for the <Practical Exam> will be Isabella, the instructor in charge of our school year."

"Eh, what shall we do then? There's no way to cheat, is there?"

"Well, for me, as long as I can avoid dropping out in the early stages, that's all that matters. But Nina, you have to stay on top. If by any chance you lose to someone else, ... ah, I'm afraid, I can't talk about it from here on out."

"Hey, stop it! Don't scare me!"

"Moreover, it's not enough for you to just win. You have to make them think that you have stupidly strong psychic abilities, and then you have to crush them completely."

"W-W-W-W-What should we do then? We can't even use gunpowder this time, can we?"

"All right, we'll just have to overcome them by acting!"

"I-Impossible! My acting isn't magic!"

"Ah, it's a complete dead end, then. What are your plans for your second life?"

"Wait, please don't give up on me so easily! Look closely and you'll see that I have a lot of good things to offer, too!"

Jin said in a tone that was almost choking with laughter.

"I'm just kidding. I have a plan ready for you."

Just as she was about to pat her chest and say, "Thank Goodness", Nina hurriedly came to her senses.

It reminded her of a certain fraudster who takes advantage of the weak and vulnerable, making people feel anxious to the limit and then offering a solution to reassure them.

She almost danced right on the palm of his hand.

After smiling lightly when he saw Nina's alarmed expression, Jin began to talk about his plan.

"It's a lottery match-up, Nina."

According to the information that Jin had obtained before enrolling, the pairings for these one-on-one games were decided by lottery. A box containing numbered plates

would be prepared, and the two people who picked up the same number from the box would fight.

In other words, the pairings could be easily manipulated by picking out a plate in advance and pretending to pick that plate from the box on the day of the game.

"If the two of us are paired against each other, we can easily pull off any number of theatrical acts. All you have to do is pretend that you're using your psychokinesis to stop me."

"That sounds like a total dumb spectacle....."

"From the perspective of the person doing it, yes, but as long as it doesn't look suspicious to the instructor, that's all that matters. Oh, and I have to earn something for my labor too, so can you pretend that you're moderately having a hard time?"

"......I'll try, but..."

"Are you still worried about something?"

"How do you steal the plate in the first place? After the briefing was over, the teacher took that box back to the instructor's office, remember?"

"Oh, that's already taken care of."

Jin casually said so and tossed a circular white object to Nina.

When she looked closely at it, she saw that it was a plate with "14" written in the center.

"Eh, when did you get this?"

"Instructors are out of the office during lunch break, so the security in the instructor's office is lax. Not to mention important documents, it's easy enough for me to tamper with a box randomly placed on a desk."

Jin can sense people's malice just by looking at their eyes (Seeing Through People + Emotional Perception)

Jin peered into Bennett's eyes, smiling wryly, but could not see any trace of malice there. It is one of Jin's special skills to sense people's malice

Nina met a guy named Bennett, who suggested that the two of them should form an alliance. Nina couldn't accept his offer. Bennett knew that she couldn't accept the offer because of Jin. He knew that Jin was taking advantage of her from observing their duel. (Observation)

On the way home that day after she roped in Rudy-sensei in the <ability assessment> fraud, Bennett, whom she met near the dormitory, suggested that the two of them should form an alliance.

Bennett has several C-rank students in his employ through his charity work, and he is leading the race for survival at the school.

Besides, having talked to him so many times, he seemed to be a good guy.

That is, not to mention the fact that compared to that villainous person who enrolled in the school under the disguise of being a psychic and is trying to survive by committing fraud upon fraud.

Still, Nina could not accept this offer.

".....My apologies. About that..."

"Ah, are you perhaps feeling bad for Jin Kirihara?"

Nina couldn't hide her shock at Bennett, who seemed to have predicted that she would refuse.

"......I-It's nothing to do with that man!"

"Sorry, I didn't mean to offend you. Of course, I know there is nothing going on between you guys. I just thought you might be having trouble dealing with his advances."

She felt like she was being tremendously misunderstood, but Bennett's eyes were serious.

After last week's <duel>, they avoided getting involved with each other in the classroom as much as possible, so she wondered if Bennett had caught them together somewhere.

"You were cutting corners during your <duel> against Jin, weren't you? .....I know you're not the monster everyone says you are. He is taking advantage of you and using you. It's okay to discard someone like that."

The matchup system in the Chase Tag exam changed. Students are allowed to pick their opponent instead of it being picked from lottery. Jin manipulated his opponent's mind to win the Chase Tag. (Direct Manipulation)

Three days had passed since an unexpected situation arose in <Chase Tag>.

Jin won eight points by skillfully manipulating his opponent's mind. It seemed to be a rather modest victory, and Jin, who was standing in front of the deserted fountain, did not seem to be in a state of agitation as he talked about his next plans.

Jin fabricated a story on the dot about him and Nina being siblings that were separated at birth and were on their way to see their parents when an old woman asked if they were on a date. (Verbal Deception + Fabrication)

"Are you two going on a date to the town down at the foothills?"

".....Eh~ah~!?"

Nina almost jumped when the elderly woman sitting in front of her suddenly spoke to her.

"N-No, we don't have that kind of a relationship."

"We are siblings who have been separated by birth", Jin said, helping her out. "We were reunited by chance at the Academy for Psychic....."

"Ara~, I didn't know such a miracle existed."

"We're surprised ourselves."

Nina had never seen such a suspicious smile before in her life.

"We are on our way to see our parents, arguing over who was born first."

Nina couldn't help but be amazed at Jin, who lied as if he was breathing, but the woman who was being deceived nodded her head in satisfaction. At this, Nina had no choice but to smile and nod.

After getting off at a bus stop in the center of town, she decided to point it out.

"Do you always tell such meaningless lies? It's okay though, because it didn't harm anyone."

"It was you who improvised and added that perfect touch, though. You did a great job of conveying the feeling of looking forward to seeing our parents again."

"Ah, that was a reflex ....."

"Haha, we're both severely screwed, aren't we?"

Nina was six years old when she realized that she had a talent for acting. She also memorized and can vividly recall every line of dialogue and every change in the actors' facial expression from that play which she saw nine years ago. We can also infer that Nina recalled the entire play including the lines of dialogue and change in facial expressions when Jin asked her the question, which would be 2-3 seconds.The reason why she recalled the entire play is because she said that she can vividly recall every line of dialogue and every change in the actors' facial expressions. Nina saying that she can vividly recall every line and every facial expression implies that she just did because no one would claim such perfect recall unless they just mentally accessed it. The mind can't verify such a sweeping claim. How would she know that she remembers every detail unless she just recalled them? Also, Jin has an unrealistic full scale IQ feat where he recalled the bodies of nearly 300 people in the light novel, so Nina being able to recall every line of dialogue and facial expression in 2-3 seconds isn't unfit for the narrative.

Nina memorized an entire theatrical performance at the age of six. The average length of a play lasts between 90 and 120 minutes, and included:

Dialogue:

- 5,000 to 10,000 words (the average amount of words in a play)

Facial Expressions:

- 10 actors (the average amount of actors in a play)
- Expression change every 1.5 to 3 seconds
- Duration: 5,400 to 7,200 seconds
- Expressions per actor:
    - 5,400 ÷ 3 = 1,800 (minimum)
    - 7,200 ÷ 1.5 = 4,800 (maximum)
- Total expressions (all actors):
    - 10 × 1,800 = 18,000 (minimum)
    - 10 × 4,800 = 48,000 (maximum)

Total Elements Memorized:

- Dialogue: 5,000 to 10,000 words
- Facial expressions: 18,000 to 48,000
  → Total: 23,000 to 58,000 memorized elements

Conclusion:

At just six years old, Nina memorized and can vividly recall 23,000 to 58,000 individual elements from a single theater performance. This included every word of dialogue and thousands of facial expressions from multiple actors.

Nina’s Recall feat — Complete Visualization, Remembrance, and Processing in 2–3 Seconds

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Recap of Input Data:

- Dialogue elements: 5,000 to 10,000 words
- Facial expressions: 18,000 to 48,000 changes
- Total memorized elements: 23,000 to 58,000
- Time to visualize, recall, and process all: 2–3 seconds

Visual-Spatial Index (VSI):

Nina visualizes between 23,000 and 58,000 elements in just 2 to 3 seconds.
This means she processes approximately 7,667 to 29,000 visual elements per second.

Working Memory Index (WMI):

She holds, manipulates, and integrates all 23,000 to 58,000 features in that 2–3 second timeframe.
Her working memory processes roughly 7,667 to 29,000 features per second.

Processing Speed Index (PSI):

Nina retrieves, analyzes, and verbalizes the entire set of data within 2–3 seconds.
Her processing speed is about 7,667 to 29,000 features per second.

Interpretation:
In just 2–3 seconds, Nina can visualize, memorize, and process tens of thousands of detailed dialogue and facial expression elements

(Acting Skills + Visual-Spatial Index + Working Memory Index + Processing Speed Index + Cognitive Proficiency Index)

"Speaking of which, Nina, when did you realize that you have a talent for acting?"

She was a little taken aback, as it was the first time she had ever been asked such a question.

"Let's see, when I was six years old, I guess."

"Hee. That's quite early."

"I think it was around the time when my butler took me to see a play."

"I thought butlers were imaginary creatures."

"Well, we weren't that close", she continued with a wry smile. "I still remember the play very well. The play was about a one-night adventure of a princess who was bound to the royal palace. I can vividly recall every line of dialogue and every change in the actors' facial expressions. It was such a thrilling experience."

"So you went home and started practicing your acting?"

"Yeah. I was often taken to social gatherings, where I practiced my acting skills. That's when I thought maybe I had the talent."

Jin would narratively be above Nina in full scale IQ, due to him being stated as being ahead of the students in the school, which includes Nina. This quote is referring to full scale IQ because the context of the quote was during when Jin memorized, visualized, and processed every student in the school. This upscales Jin's visual-spatial index, working memory index, and processing speed index to be above Nina, who was able to recall an entire play with 23,000 to

58,000 elements in 2–3 seconds. (Visual-Spatial Index + Working Memory Index + Processing Speed Index + Cognitive Proficiency Index)

"..... Don't tell me, you remembered every face and name in our grade?"

"Of course."

Jin said it casually, as if it were a matter of course.

Nina was at a loss for words.

It was only one day after the entrance ceremony, and while the other students were still getting used to the school's system and even getting excited about last night's welcome party, this boy was the only one who was moving ahead of the rest of them.

Jin enrolled in Heliberg Academy to avenge his father. Jin’s plan was: once he graduated from the school at the top of the class, the White Knights>will come to recruit him. Then he’s going to reveal that he was never a psychic in front of many people at that time when the whole nation is paying attention to him. People will then think that Heiberg Academy is such a crappy place that a ordinary person can make it to the top, which would shatter their authority. Both the Heiberg Academy and the White Knights would lose the trust of the people, and fall at once. (Determination + Perseverance + Emotional Engagement)

".....Let me change the question. Why did you decide to enroll at Heiberg Academy?"

"I've told you a million times. I'm aiming to reach the top there....."

"That's your goal, right? I'm asking about your motives."

She decided to throw out a guess.

"Are you perhaps infiltrating the academy for revenge?"

"Haha, how could you come to that conclusion?"

"You seem to always enjoy deceiving people. But is that really the reason you would walk such a dangerous tightrope? It doesn't seem like it's about making money either."

"Wait, wait, isn't it a little too early to conclude it as revenge?"

"Are you sure? Because, Jin, you hate psychics, don't you?"

Jin sometimes used the derogatory term [heretics].

When he talked about psychics, he would sometimes exude hostility in every word he said.

He was not fooling around with some random made-up story as usual, which proved that maybe what Nina had said was not off the mark.

After a long, really long silence, Jin quietly opened his mouth.

"..... It's better not to ask any further questions", Jin's heavy gaze fixed on her. "If you want to continue being an accomplice with me that is."

She tried to search for emotion in the depths of his eyes, but there was only a hollow void.

Perhaps sensing that Nina was still not backing down, Jin muttered with a sigh.

"My real goal is to destroy the <White Knights>."

Nina involuntarily stiffened as the words came from an unexpected direction.

The White Knights.

A special agency under the direct control of the government and one of the most important forces in the country. They are the heroes of the nation and the object of admiration of all the students at Heiberg Academy.

And above all, Nina's two older brothers belong to it.

"I lost my father to them."

The memory of the time she and Jin ran into each other in front of the fountain after escaping from the party came back to her.

During the exchange of verbal abuse, Jin hinted at the existence of bad rumors about Nina's family.

Nina did not know what the <White Knights> had been doing behind the scenes of their glory. On the other hand, she also knew that they were not just innocent heroes, but a powerful and violent organization.

What if the truth, never told and buried in the darkness, had robbed Jin of something precious?

As a member of the Stingray family, am I qualified to stop Jin?

".....But how are you going to do it? They are the heroes of our nation, a group of people with psychic abilities, one of the best in the country, and there is nothing a mere commoner can do against them."

"Just turn everything into a farce."

Both eardrums caught the words, but Nina couldn't quite grasp their meaning.

Turn everything into a farce?

What on earth was Jin talking about?

"Once I graduate from the school at the top of the class, the <White Knights> will surely come to recruit me. I'm going to reveal the truth in front of many people at that time when the whole nation is paying attention to me. I will tell them, I'm actually not a psychic."

"What on earth are you doing that for.....?"

"I'm sure they'll be shocked. If Heiberg Academy is such a crappy place that a mere ordinary person can make it to the top, their authority will be completely shattered. Both the Heiberg Academy and the <White Knights> would lose the trust of the people, and fall at once. All at the hands of a single fraudster. ..... Isn't that an insanely amusing turn of events?"

"But ..... if you do that, you will..."

You will be killed.

Nina hastily kept her mouth shut. She didn't even dare to imagine such a horrifying thing.

"......Don't worry, I won't die. I have a plan in place to ensure my escape."

—That's a lie.

For once, Nina was able to say it with certainty.

Jin planned to die after revealing his identity and turning the whole thing into a farce.

Because his eyes never focused on the future. His dark eyes have been chasing the past, the past of his father's death at the hands of a psychic.

Even if he thought he was cleverly hiding it, Nina's eyes, which are first-rate liars, cannot be fooled.

Jin was able to pickpocket and swapped Bennetts matchbox with a different one by reading his line of sight and center of gravity. This degree of skill is child play to Jin. (Observation)

Therefore, Jin decided to take immediate action.

At lunchtime today, he approached Bennett from behind on his way to the cafeteria and succeeded in inserting his hand into the pocket of his coat, which contained a matchbox.

Outstanding pickpocketing skills. Taking advantage of the crowd, he read his opponent's line of sight and center of gravity, and then took advantage of the moment of greatest distraction to complete the job. This degree of skill is nothing less than child's play to Jin.

Bennett spreaded misinformation about himself to misled students into believing his fake weaknesses. The misinformation he spread about himself was that he can only summon a fire puppet if he stares at his match of a specific brand for 10 seconds and his weakness is that if the match is extinguished, the fire puppet disappears. This ruined Jin’s scheme. Bennett’s flame covered half of Jin’s body, with the pain feeling like the marrow of his bones were being melted. Jin endured this and when Bennett’s turn was over, Jin surpassed the urge to run away and calmed himself to think about the situation calmly. He then came to the conclusion that Bennett had spread misinformation about his psychic ability and had misled those around him into believing his fake weaknesses.

(Misdirection For Bennett)

(Composure + Stress Tolerance + Impulse Control + Cognitive Discipline + Mental Fortitude + Emotional Management For Jin)

Jin walked to the front of the gymnasium, where everyone was assembled, and tried to sort out Bennett's abilities.

- Psychic ability to summon a fire puppet that can think autonomously.
- Not only does the puppet automatically chase after its enemies, but it can also change its shape at will.
- The condition for activation is to keep staring at the light of a match of a specific brand for at least 10 seconds.
- The only weakness is that when the match is extinguished, the fire puppet also disappears with it.

"Let me give you a prediction. Your psychic abilities won't work on me."

"Haha, on what basis .....?"

"If you're not sure, why don't you try it? Look, I'm not going anywhere."

Ten seconds after lighting the match, Bennett looked downward. He was probably in a desperate situation because there was still no sign that his puppet would be summoned.

"I guess I hit the mark after all. I'm honestly surprised myself. So what are you going to do, Bennett? Are you going to go after me yourself?"

Bennett hung his head and his shoulders seemed to be trembling. Is he that frustrated?

—*No, he is not.*

Jin noticed a fatal fact.

Bennett was now desperately stifling a burst of laughter.

"It's hilarious..... very hilarious, Jin. You don't even know that you've been fooled by me this whole time."

A blazing fireball formed in front of Bennett's eyes.

The fireball kept growing like a living creature, and in no time at all, it transformed into a human form.

".....Are you kidding me?"

The scheme that Jin devised during the lunch break had been for naught.

The <Executioner of Immolation> which was summoned without a hitch, rushed at him, scattering sparks of fire.

"Uwaaaah!"

The spot touched by the fire sparks was hit by an intense pain that felt as if it melted the marrow of the bones.

Even rolling on the ground was not enough to extinguish the fire. The spark of fire, which was once very small, spread rapidly, covering Jin's entire left arm in the blink of an eye.

When Bennett, who had approached him before he knew it, tapped him on the shoulder, he could think of nothing else to do but endure the pain.

"Calm down. It's not like you're going to die"

Bennett told him in the most heartless way possible.

"Those flames are a little special. Not only can I control its temperature and shape, but I can also control its lethality. With the current configuration, you won't get burned, even if your whole body is engulfed in flames. .....Unfortunately, though, the pain is the same as that of ordinary flames."

The fact that Bennett spoke with a tone of voice that even sounded compassionate was unnervingly frightening.

A flame that never kills when touched is not something pacifistic.

Never kill the opponent, only continuously inflicting pain — what a torturous ability.

Bennett blew out the match, and the flames that had covered half of Jin's body disappeared.

"Now it's your turn."

Suppressing the urge to run away, Jin's thoughts drifted back and forth.

Calm down. Think about the situation calmly.

Even if he could summon the puppet without any problem, it would still take him 10 seconds to activate his ability.

All I have to do is touch any part of his body before then.

".....Ha?"

Even so, his faint hopes were easily shattered the moment after the whistle blew.

Less than two seconds after Bennett lit the match, the <Executioner of Immolation> was summoned again.

When one thought about it, it was rather unnatural that such sensitive information about the activation conditions of psychic ability was being circulated.

It was more reasonable to assume that Bennett had spread misinformation and had misled those around him into believing his fake weaknesses.

Bennett used manipulation tactics on Nina into giving information about Jin to him. He was saying that Nina shouldn't feel bad about it because she was just too kind and was being deceived by Jin. (Direct Manipulation)

"You needn't feel bad about it, Nina."

"......I don't know what you're talking about."

"What you did to Jin Kirihara was not a betrayal."

Unpleasant moisture clung to her long hair. It might be raining soon.

"This is a race for survival to become a member of the <White Knights>, Nina. You are someone who must aim high. To fly high, you have to detach yourself from your bulky baggage. You did the right thing for your own cause."

"I'm sorry, but I'm not in the mood to stand around and talk right now. Shall we head back to the dorms early, before it rains?"

"Listen, it's not your fault."

Bennett's words certainly had a sincere ring to them.

"You are just too kind, you were deceived by that man, you know? In other words, it was self-defense when you gave me the information. Besides, there was always the option of not giving me the information. If that still doesn't make you feel better, I'm always willing to listen."

"Why are you going to such lengths for me?"

"Because we are comrades."

Bennett was able to gain over 20 subordinates from the meetings he held in two weeks after enrollment. He did this by secretly carrying out “C-rank hunts” where he lures students into doing duels to get their points which would cause them to get expelled due to them having no points left. He then held meetings where he made speeches about there being C-rank hunts and the weak can become strong themselves. He made rules that each person in the meetings will give out 5 points each, and that the top three will win all the points in the tournament. The condition for winning is to hit your opponent with a rubber knife. This was his secret plan to survive in his school, by being the leader of a group of 20+ people with psychic abilities. Bennett’s acting skills during the meeting was so good that Jin, who could see malice in a person's eye, couldn’t sense any from him. (Short-Term Planning + Strategy + Social Skills + Social Effectiveness + Leadership + Charisma + Emotional Management + Acting Skills + Direct Manipulation + Mass Manipulation + Concealment)

Bennett looked over at his obedient subordinates with a satisfied expression, cleared his throat, and then began his speech.

"First of all, thank you for gathering here. This is the second time we've done this activity, and it looks like we have quite an increase in numbers. Let's see..."

"Including those who were not notified in advance, there are a total of twenty-three of us."

"Thank you for your report. I see.....There are already 23 participants, huh? It seems like our activities are getting bigger and bigger, and I'm even a little bit scared."

Jin peered into Bennett's eyes, smiling wryly, but could not see any trace of malice there. It is one of Jin's special skills to sense people's malice, but has his sense become dull due to living in a school where only people of his own age are present?

Suddenly, Bennett's blue eyes caught Jin's gaze head-on.

".....Since there are some newcomers, let me explain once again the purpose of this activity."

He continued in a sagacious yet powerful voice typical of someone who was used to being in front of an audience.

"Those with quick ears may already know this, but six first-year students have already been expelled from school. And that's before the end of each month, when the

<elimination> date is still to be decided. This would be impossible without a <duel>, with all the points on the line."

Bennett's tone of voice dropped a notch as he continued.

"But the question remains. Is it really necessary to take such a risky gamble this early on?"

The other party was obviously looking at Jin as he spoke, so he had no choice but to answer the question.

"C-rank hunting, right? I've heard rumors of it."

"That's right."

Bennett snapped his fingers in affirmation. Jin found this gesture rather annoying.

"The six who were expelled were all C-rank students just like you. Although they were lucky enough to pass the <screening test>, if they did not do anything, they would have been candidates for the monthly elimination, in which five students are eliminated each month. Someone is taking advantage of this situation.

Perhaps that someone is luring them into a <Duel> with unreasonable conditions, because they want points so badly that they are desperate for them. Perhaps whispering that they would give up all their points if they could win. They could even be using their psychic abilities to intimidate them."

"I thought it was just a rumor. Is there really such a villainous person?"

"There is no proof, of course. The result of the duel will not be made public unless the person himself tells everyone about it. At the very least, I think it's too much to be true that a single villain is hunting down C-rank students. But some individuals are taking advantage of C-rank students' weakness and earning points ─ that's probably the truth."

According to the information Jin has gathered so far, the average number of points held by first-year students is around 200, and although he does not know the level of the C-rank hunters, he doubts that they are below average.

The culprits are definitely among the top scorers.

"Well, it is true that they are just acting according to the rules. It's the school system that is at fault, the one that allows C-rank students to be preyed upon."

Some of the students listening to the speech seemed enthralled by Bennett.

"I am sure you are all aware of this. This academy, which encourages the survival of the fittest, is so cruel. It is not an educational institution, but only a battleground. Even the rule of filling out a pledge with the consent of both parties is meaningless if you are threatened with psychic abilities."

"That's right!" A voice, raised in terror, rose from somewhere.

"You can tell this from the fact that the instructor was not present at all, and instead, sent only those dolls to the <duel> between the students. There is nothing here to protect you from the attacks of the powerful. .....If so, there is only one thing for you to do. You have no choice but to become strong yourselves!"

Almost everyone present applauded in agreement with Bennett as he spoke more eloquently.

After waiting for the applause to die down, Bennett declared in a loud voice.

"The rules here are simple. Each of you will give out five points each, and the top three will win all the points in the tournament. I'll give you 10 points, which is not a lot. The condition for winning is to hit your opponent with this rubber knife. Simple enough, right?"

Bennett smiled at Jin, as if he could see right through his doubts.

"..... Oh, and of course, no students above B-rank, including me, are allowed to participate. In other words, everyone here has a chance! I'll be responsible for cracking down on any dishonest behavior. Well then, let's get started. You decide on the pairings so that there will be no complaints."

The participants began their preparations with expressions full of ambition and hope.

In a school like Heiberg, where it is difficult to turn the tables for the bottom scorers, this seemed like a revolutionary move. The five-point entry fee is not that much, and if one wins the tournament, the reward is huge. This is a genuine charity.

Even so, Jin was still unable to acknowledge this.

Because there was no benefit for Bennett in this deal.

".....You look dissatisfied."

As he was about to leave without being noticed, he was stopped by someone from behind.

He thought about ignoring it, but that wasn't going to happen because Emma had already looked in his direction.

"No, I just thought I'd refrain from joining today. I haven't made any preparations after all."

"Are you perhaps the type of person who can't believe in unconditional goodwill?"

As if to counter Jin's argument, Bennett went on.

"In that case, you can rest assured. I have an objective, as well. .....As I mentioned earlier, the nature of this school is a survival battle between the weak and the strong. If that's the case, then my strength alone will eventually reach its limits. That's why, I wanted a group of people with whom I could work together in friendly rivalry."

"Why did you go out of your way and choose C-rank students?"

"Haha, you call it [choose]? Do I look like such an arrogant guy? .....They were the first to ask me for advice. I thought the situation they were in was terrible, so I just helped them out this way. To be honest, the objective I just told you about was an afterthought to reassure you."

His rational argument is flawless. There is not even a hint of malice.

"Well, I'll still go back to the dormitory quietly for today. Right, Emma?"

"Eh, let's at least observe-..... Ah, wait!"

Bennett did not try to stop Jin from leaving.

With the occasional cheer at his back, Jin clenched his fists and headed back toward the night path.

Impatience swirled in his heart.

—That guy is dangerous.

Even if Bennett was really hosting the meeting out of goodwill, the fact that he had more than 20 subordinates after only two weeks or so of enrollment was undeniable. Moreover, all of them are truly grateful to Bennett, and some of them are even enthralled by him.

He turned on the light in his room and sat down on the comfy sofa by the window. There was a candle on a platter on the table, but it had completely melted because he had left the room without extinguishing it. There were still some in stock, but it might be time to have them sent from his parents' house.

Everything is going well, he thinks.

He was exempted from the entrance exam and was able to enter the Heiberg School, and the management of the fighting competition, which he had envisioned from the beginning, is progressing well.

They are sometimes ridiculed as C-rank students, but they are still psychics even if they are incapable.

Since he has so many people with the qualities to become human weapons in his ranks, it is safe to say that the foundation for survival in this school has already been completed.

"..... Haha."

Since no one is in the room, there is no need to put on an act.

Therefore, there is no need to stifle the laughter that rises up from the depths of his throat.

"Hahahahahahaha!"

Subordinates who are humble toward their classmates, those who think that the competition is just a charity event, and the adults who created the flawed school system are all irredeemably stupid.

Even at the academy, where promising psychics are gathered from all over the country, the end result is the same as the previous 15 years. For Bennett, who is destined from birth to rise above the rest, it would be too easy to turn this place into his own kingdom.

They are too stupid to know what Bennett is doing behind the scenes.

They have no idea that the [C-rank hunt] that gave him the excuse to organize the competition is actually being carried out by Bennett himself.

He has already beaten up and expelled five students for both pleasure and benefit.

Bennett replayed the blissful moment on the back of his eyelids.

The prey are chased by the [Executioner, of Immolation], screaming and scurrying through the forest at night.

The screams of the losers, caught alive in the fire, as if they were spitting out their entire existence.

After all, Bennett believes, the adults who created the school system are the villains.

Even the level of torture prohibited by the laws of war is affirmed here. The reason is that as soon as the expulsion is confirmed, the victims are put into a hypnotic state and their memories of the school are sealed.

Above all, the cat doll made by the principal which was present at the <Duel> that Bennett has arranged for his pathetic victims is useless.

In the academy, any kind of criminal act is allowed. Perhaps even killing people.

After all, that is how the world is.

All is forgiven to the strong. It is affirmed to eat, hurt, and dominate the weak.

Jin had already devised a plan to trap Bennett before he even enrolled. His plan is based on a number of predictions and he adapted it to include Nina. (Planning Versatility + Prediction)

"Don't worry, I was planning to clash against Bennett at some point. It's just that my plan has been accelerated a little bit. I had already devised a plan to trap him before he even enrolled."

"Before he enrolled? ..... You're bluffing again, aren't you?"

"Don't you dare underestimate my preparations. It's essential to take measures for those who are exempted from the entrance exam."

".....Eh, don't tell me, are you planning to fight against the other four as well?"

"In the worst-case scenario, yes. Well, I'd like to limit it to two or three."

"What's that, a prophecy? It's kind of shady."

"I'm just making a plan based on a number of predictions. You're making it sound like it's someone else's problem, but Nina, you're part of the plan as well, you know."

Jin was able to endure and stay composed when his entire body was showered down by Bennett's fire, with the pain being stated as being worse than death. Despite the fact that the pain was worse than death, Jin was still sane and didn't face any effects. (Composure + Stress Tolerance + Mental Fortitude + Cognitive Discipline + Emotional Management)

At Bennett's signal, the flaming puppet swung its arms out horizontally.

The sparks of fire carried by the hot air showered down on Jin's entire body, causing him to let out a cry of anguish from the back of his throat.

Seeing Jin still trying to escape, Bennett kept on shooting fire sparks at him two or three times.

"..... Hurry up, just give up. Why did you have to go this far?"

The fire sparks were still dancing through the air, and the cries of anguish turned into screams.

"..... Such a handy ability you have there, Bennett."

While gasping in pain, Jin squeezed his voice out.

"You can keep inflicting pain worse than death without ever killing your opponent..... What's more, your victim's memory would be sealed and he or she would be expelled from the academy. I can think of a million ways to abuse this ability of yours."

Jin started a duel with Bennett. He had a plan to win the duel. When the duel started, Jin hid behind a large tree that was 30 meters away from Bennett. Two days before the duel, Jin was paided 13 landscapers to build a pit filled with water according to the layout he gave them. Now going back to the duel, Bennett was walking towards Jin, but then Nina appeared behind Jin and handcuffed him. Nina and Bennett had joined forces. Before the duel, Nina knew that Jin was going to manipulate the stage. Nina tailed Jin to the place where the water pits were going to be placed for the duel. Jin knew that Nina would tail him, so he purposely mentioned the pitfall in a loud voice to one of the landscapers. Jin knew that Nina would try to take advantage of the workers and steal the layout map. Jin wanted this to happen, so he had everyone's layout maps and luggage placed some distance away from the work area. Nina had taken the bait. The layout on the map was a complete fabrication. Going back to the duel, Bennett was approaching Jin who is now handcuffed. If Bennett walks a little further straight, he would fall into the pit that was not shown in the fake layout map.

"What a long introduction. Let's get on with it." Jin said so, sounding fed up.

"Indeed. Let's get started then." Bennett replied with an exemplary smile.

[All right, let the games begin.]

Before Jake could finish his declaration, Bennett pulled a matchbox out of his coat pocket. This small object that fits in his palm is all he needs to activate his psychic ability that summon an evil demon.

The match was scraped against the side of the box and the tip was lit.

A small spark is created in front of Bennett, as if the air itself is spontaneously ignited. The spark eventually grew into a fireball, which quickly increased in volume and intensity.

When the fireball began to change into the shape of a person, Jin ran away at once.

"..... Hahaha. What's the matter, Jin Kirihara!"

Bennett called out while holding back his laughter.

"Where was all that bravado you had just now go? Don't you have the will to fight me head-on?"

Although he seemed to be criticizing Jin, Bennett's face was filled with glee.

It was like the smile of a hunter chasing after fleeing prey.

Feeling the dense presence of death behind him, Jin ran through the trees.

Under the guise of a seemingly foolhardy escape, he was heading toward a location he had decided upon in advance. He hid behind a large tree about 30 meters away from Bennett, who was walking slowly, and checked on his opponent.

He is not negligent in his strategy.

He already prepared a plan to defeat his opponent, who can manipulate a fire monster at will.

◆ Two days ago ◆

On the tree-lined avenue where the duel would take place, 13 landscapers were at work. It was already around 2:00 am.

When Jin arrived, Gasta laughed with a cigarette in his mouth.

"What, you're alone this time? Have you broken up with your girlfriend now?"

"It's not like we're in a relationship to begin with."

"So there are a lot of things happening in the world of kids, huh? By the way, what is the purpose of this job?"

Gasta's question is understandable.

The work started the day after Jin made a phone call to the company and had to be completed in just two days. Even though he was being paid extra for the work, Gasta would never have taken on the job had it not been for Jin's long-standing relationship with the company.

"Because of the urgency of the request, I called on my colleagues and somehow managed to get a headcount together. To be honest, I'm nervous about working with people whose faces I don't even know."

"All you have to do is build a pit filled with water according to the layout I gave you yesterday, though."

"I mean, isn't it too simple? Your opponent this time is quite a monster, right?"

"Obviously, I've got a lot of plans."

Bennett is not just a monster with a powerful psychic ability. He is much more cautious and sensitive to lies than Tedd, whom he defeated using the same pit method. If he wanted to deceive such an opponent, he would have to put up a clever and multi-layered scheme.

However, since Jin has a pretty good idea of what Bennett is up to.

Then all he has to do is to take advantage of it. There is nothing more fragile than a person who thinks he has seen through his opponent's trickery.

Whether he was convinced by Jin's confident expression, Gasta snorted once and then changed the subject. A whisper that no one but Jin could hear. A serious one at that.

"So, this kid Bennett or whatever he's called is the Shepherd's Dog?"

After a swift sweep of the surroundings, Jin also whispered back.

"I'd say the odds are 50-50. Although it's a little too obvious, in terms of ability, he's perfect. His movements so far have been quite suspicious after all."

"Then, there's no turning back now."

"Why are you asking me this now? I am already prepared for that before I even try to take the entrance exam."

"I see. Looks like, I asked a silly question."

Laughing loudly, Gasta slapped Jin hard on the back.

"Well then, you little shit, do well. ..... Right, you coming to work tomorrow?"

"I have some other business to do. I'll pass."

"Ha~, scammer sure are busy folks, huh?"

With a flick of his hand, Jin's oldest accomplice went back to his work.

◆

While hiding behind a tree, Jin checked on his pursuer.

Bennett, walking with a fire puppet by his side, showed no sign of urgency. His unwavering smile indicated that he would be able to catch Jin easily if push came to shove.

"What's the matter, Jin Kirihara!? Are you planning to stay hidden for a long time? Haven't you already prepared something to defeat me?"

Bennett, who did not even doubt his own victory, showed no sign of alarm. But that was probably an act. It would be impossible for such a cautious man not to suspect the possibility of a trap.

In order to disturb his opponent's thinking as much as possible, Jin moved the tip of his tongue.

"I always fight fair and square, no matter who I'm up against. Do you think I have any secret plans?"

"Fair and square, huh? That's the least fitting word for you. Oh, by the way, ——"

Bennett's voice was frosty, a complete change from his elegant tone.

"Are you sure you don't need to watch behind you?"

By the time Jin turned around, it was all too late.

Jin's hands were handcuffed, his legs were swept away, and he was rolled to the ground.

A brief glimpse of his former accomplice appeared in his vision. Nina Stingray was approaching from behind, completely invisible.

"I'm sorry, Jin."

When Jin looked up from his slumped position, Nina was staring at the void with a somber expression on her face.

— I didn't think she'd gone this far.

Jin had taught her the basics of the art of tailing when they had framed their previous instructor, Rudy, but when combined with a level of acting ability that allowed her to control even her own presence, her performance had actually reached this level of ferociousness.

"Thank you, Nina. You did a perfect job."

An exaggerated round of applause cut through the silence.

A loud laugh, full of insanity and relish. Bennett no longer even wore the mask of an honor student.

"You're so pathetic, Jin. To be betrayed by your one and only accomplice, and ended up crawling on the ground. Can you tell me how you feel now?"

Of course, he had expected Bennett to join forces with Nina.

Still, he had not expected to be restrained after being approached from behind. Nina's ability was far beyond Jin's perception.

"I'm listening. You've installed several water-filled pits in this area, haven't you? Surely that's the best way to counter my abilities. Too bad it would be the end once I knew where they were located."

A desperate situation. Even so, Jin's smile did not fade from his mouth.

Yes, so far, everything is still within his expectations.

Nina, who knew about the existence of the <landscapers>, would have immediately thought of the possibility that Jin might manipulate the stage. With her tailing skills, as she had just demonstrated, it would be easy for her to hide in the dark and watch the work being done.

That was why Jin had deliberately mentioned the existence of the pitfall in a loud voice at that time.

Hearing this, Nina would try to take advantage of the workers and steal the layout map. Of course, to make it easier for an amateur thief like Nina to steal, Jin had everyone's layout maps and luggage placed some distance away from the work area.

In other words, Nina had taken the bait.

She wasn't even aware that the layout on the map was a complete fabrication. ———

Three meters to go.

Bennett, approaching with a cruel smile on his face, would have fallen into the pit if he had gone a little further straight. That, of course, was not what was shown on the fake layout map used as bait.

If Bennett still believed himself to be on the winning side, he would not be able to avoid this trap.

"You should be feeling the heat from the [Executioner of Immolation] by now. How are you feeling?"

Two meters to go.

"But I'm disappointed. I thought you'd entertain me more. ....."

Bennett was walking towards Jin. In just a couple more steps, he would fall into the pit that was not shown in the fake layout map. But he started to walk around the outside of the pit. Two days

ago, when Nina picked up the fake layout map, Nina had a gut feeling that Jin wouldn’t do such a careless thing and that he would set up double or triple traps to outsmart them. She knew that the layout was fake. The next day, Nina brought work clothes and knew that the work would be done again tonight due to the short deadline. Nina disguised herself as a man to blend in with the landscapers that were making the pitfall. She changed her voice and acted as if she had been there from the beginning. Once she had the location of the pits drilled into her head, she carefully left the scene.

One meter to go.

He still didn't doubt his victory.

With a graceful movement, Bennett stepped forward ─ and stopped abruptly.

"......Wha?"

A shocking sight appeared in Jin's eyes, as he raised his voice in a dazed manner.

Bennett began to walk around the outside of the pit.

A move that could only be explained if he had a perfect grasp of where the real pit was.

"But it was a clever move. A fake layout map."

"What do you mean ......?"

Nina's voice came down from overhead, interrupting his bitter rebuttal.

"I'm really grateful to you. Jin, meeting you and ..... realizing that I'm not the only one suffering and fighting has certainly brought me relief."

"Your actions don't match your speech, are you sane?"

"You kept pushing me around, but I still had fun. I will never forget the month I spent feeling so much freedom and hope."

"If that's what you think, then get the cuffs off me."

Nina shook her head tiredly.

"No, Jin. Our accompliceship is over. I'll get you out of this hellhole."

◇ Two days ago ◇

Nina picked up the layout map on top of the luggage, while the landscapers continued their work.

Then a gut feeling came over her like an electric current.

There would be no way that Jin Kirihara, a fraudster who had turned the world into his enemy, would do such a careless thing.

He would surely set up double or triple traps to outsmart them.

This layout is definitely a fake. At the very least, she should check it first.

The next day, Nina took a day off from class and went into town. The purpose was to procure work clothes. During last night's reconnaissance, she had confirmed that the clothes worn by the contractors were inconsistent. She also knew that due to the short deadline, they had asked for reinforcements from contractors whose names and faces did not seem to match. And that the work would be done again tonight.

So Nina decided to brazenly infiltrate and see for herself the placement of the pitfalls.

Without a doubt, this was the most difficult performance to date. She disguised herself as a man and tried to blend in with the landscapers, even if it only lasted a few minutes.

But Nina pulled it off.

She changed her voice and acted as if she had been there from the beginning, and disappeared as soon as she had the location of the pits drilled into her head. She was careful to position herself out of sight of the cautious Gasta.

Nina was probably unaware of it, but there would be no other person in the entire empire who could perform such a divine feat with such ease.

Nina pickpocketed Bennett's matchbox that was in his pocket when he was focused on Jin, which extinguished his fire ability. Jin had a wire hidden in his sleeve the entire time and broke his handcuff with it. Nina and Jin created elaborate lies for the sole purpose of convincing Bennett of his victory and stripping him of his focus so that Nina could steal his matchbox, which makes him powerless. Nina pretended to be on Bennett's side and pretended to be influenced by him, and then told him about Jin's fake strategy. Nina used method acting on Bennett, which is a type of acting where each action, word choice, and thoughts all follow the initial setting. If someone were to look into her mind, they wouldn't realize that she was acting. (Preparation Process + Tactics + Strategy Execution + Strategy Fortitude + Strategic Deception + Strategic Manipulation + Event Manipulation + Misdirection + Concealment + Cunning + Trap Setting For Both Jin and Nina)

(Strategy Complexity + Strategy Effectiveness + Strategy Orchestration + Indirect Manipulation + Fabrication For Jin)

(Verbal Deception + Direct Manipulation + Emotional Manipulation + Triangulation + Acting Skills + Social Engineering + Social Effectiveness + Self-Regulation + Emotional Management + Emotional Engagement + Emotional Facilitation For Nina)

"..... Haha."

When Nina finally came to her senses, her accomplice, who was still lying on the ground, was smiling slightly.

"Nina, I was not mistaken after all."

Looking up at the hell that was just around the corner, Jin continued.

"If you and I work together, we can even fool the world."

In contrast to Jin, who began to laugh deep in his throat, Bennett's face was completely frozen.

He finally realized.

The fire was already extinguished by Nina, who approached him through his blind spot.

He realized that he was the one who had actually been betrayed.

"Wha....."

As if everything had been only a faint illusion, the <Executioner of Immolation> vanished in an instant.

Bennett, whose gaze wandered as he searched for an answer to this impossible reality, was told by Jin in a tone of voice that seemed to hold back laughter.

"Misdirection ─ It is a basic technique of deception. That's what happens when you're focused only on me."

Before he knew it, Jin had removed his handcuffs and was standing up, brushing dirt off his clothes. Little did Bennett know, of course, that Jin could break the handcuffs with the wire he had hidden in his sleeve.

"..... Since when?" Bennett asked, desperately gasping for oxygen. "Since when on earth have you been deceiving me ..... Nina!"

Bennett, who was completely enraged, was amusingly vulnerable.

Nina used the pickpocketing technique that Jin had previously taught her and snatched the matchbox that was kept in his pocket.

Nina felt a little sorry for Bennett, who was oblivious to such things, so she decided to give him an answer.

"I'm not trying to deceive you, Bennet-san. I really thought it was the right thing to do to get rid of Jin from the school, and I thought the best way to do that was to cooperate with you. I can assure you that all of my feelings were true and genuine."

"If that's the case, then what the hell are you doing now .....?"

"When I saw you tormenting Jin, I realized that I made the wrong decision."

Nina wore a sad expression on her face.

"If things continue as they are, Jin will never be saved. It could be far worse than having his memories sealed and being expelled from the academy - that's what I thought, and my body was moving on its own. What do you think? It all makes sense, doesn't it?"

"..... Make sense? I really don't understand. What does it have to do with anything?"

"It's called <Method Acting>, apparently."

Nina smiled with perfect social grace.

"To play a fictional character, I have to abandon my own personality and become someone else. While acting, my actions, each word choice, and even my thoughts all follow the initial setting. If someone were to look into my mind, I am confident that they would not realize that I am acting. ..... Because, I was genuinely tracing the exact narrative I just told you, of my own volition."

"..... That's impossible."

"You can interpret it however you want, but it doesn't change the fact that it happened right in front of you. You are surrounded by us, robbed of all your matchboxes, and rendered completely powerless."

Nina said so as she pulled a stun gun from a hidden pocket in her skirt.

"A truly elaborate lie is a kind of art. How did you like it, Bennett-san? I hope you enjoyed it."

Nina and Jin crafted elaborate lies for the sole purpose of convincing Bennett of his victory and stripping him of his focus and attention so that they could steal the matchbox.

It all started that day when they went to town together.

Jin took Nina's brooch and dropped it where Bennett was going. Jin had also passed the information about the duel between Nina and Jin to the 5th class, where Bennett was. This was all part of his script. To get Bennett involved with Nina. (Planning + Tactics)

"He's one of the suspects. That's why I targeted him first."

"Eh, you targeted him? It wasn't a coincidence that he caught your attention?".

"Nina. Who found the brooch you wear on your uniform?"

"Brooch? What on earth are you talking about? ... ah!"

The moment she realized the truth, Nina's breathing stopped for a moment.

She couldn't believe that everything was Jin's scheme from the very beginning.

In the first place, Nina became deeply involved with Bennett after he came to the dorm to deliver her a brooch that had been lost.

She had her doubts. Even though she had changed her clothes in a hurry to fool Rudy-sensei, would she make the mistake of accidentally dropping such a luxurious item?

Looking back on it now, it would be more natural to assume that Jin secretly retrieved it and dropped it where Bennett was going.

This would explain why Bennett was in the classroom when Jin and Nina had their <duel>. It was probably because Jin had passed on the information to the fifth class where Bennett belonged.

Bennett's desire to get his hands on Nina and his decision to get rid of Jin, who had gotten in the way, were all in accordance with the script that Jin had written.

Jin plan for hunting Bennett was to deliberately lose to Bennett in Chase Tag, which would make Bennett realize that Jin was an insignificant opponent and he would move even closer to Nina. Jin knew that when he asked Bennett for another duel, he would request for Nina’s cooperation. He knew that Bennett was the type of person who focuses on destroying his opponent, so he would create a situation where Nina betrays Jin. Nina would act as if she betrayed Jin and snatch Bennett’s matchbox when he was most vulnerable. The most important part is to use the layout of the pitfalls to make Bennett think that he has seen through Jin’s plan and not let him realize his true plan. Nina had to use method acting, where she imagines all the information about the character she’s acting’s personality, relationships, past events, beliefs, etc., and melds herself into the role. Nina is able to do this with near self-brainwashing precision. (Strategic

Thinking + Strategy Foresight + Tactics + Planning + Prediction + Anticipation + Emotional Understanding + Hot Reading For Jin)

(Social Engineering + Social Effectiveness + Self-Regulation + Emotional Management + Emotional Engagement + Emotional Facilitation + Emotional Manipulation + Acting Skills For Nina)

"I'll tell you the plan for hunting our first target ..... Bennett Lohr."

Jin had given her the most impossible task to date.

First, Jin would deliberately lose to Bennett in the <Chase Tag>. This would make Bennett realize that Jin was an insignificant opponent, and he would move even closer to Nina.

When Jin asked for another <duel>, Bennett would probably request Nina's cooperation. That type of person always focuses on completely destroying their opponents, so they will probably create a desperate situation in which Nina betrays them right in front of their eyes.

From that point on, it would be Nina's task.

She would act as if she had completely betrayed Jin, only to snatch the matchbox from Bennett at the moment when he was most vulnerable.

The most crucial part is to use the layout of the pitfalls to make Bennett think that he has [seen through Jin's plan] and not let him realize what he is really after.

Of course, Bennett, who has lived his life as a dominator, is an unusually skeptical person. To deceive such a person, a half-hearted performance is far from enough.

They must be prepared to deceive even the world.

"Do you think we can do it?"

"Of course. Who do you think I am?"

There is only one way out of this situation.

Method acting — a technique that has not yet been fully systematized in the theater world, but Nina is perfectly capable of utilizing it.

It is the same as when she has been impersonating a female student named Kate and manipulating her.

She thoroughly imagines all the information about the fictional character's personality, relationships, past events, beliefs, etc., and melds herself into the role. By cultivating the image overnight, Nina is able to do this with near self-brainwashing precision.

Thus, this time, Nina should portray this character :

- **She believes that the best way to save Jin from destruction is to expel him from the school.**

- **To do so, she decides to team up with Bennett. She also believes him to be a good person.**
- **On the day of the duel, she witnesses Bennett's madness and begins to regret her betrayal.**
- **She comes to the conclusion that the only way to save Jin is to defeat Bennett.**

Nina was determined that she could do it.

She believed that she could fool the world, even herself, and pull off this most difficult task.

It was revealed that Bennett lied about lighting a match being the only way to activate his power. He never trusted anyone from the beginning. (Concealment + Misdirection)

Bennett was not hanging his head in despair. He was lying face down so that she would not be able to read his expression.

—*Bennett is desperately trying to hold back his laughter.*

His trembling body confirmed this hunch.

"I have one last thing to say, may I?"

"No, rejected. Nina, hurry up and use the stun gun ....."

"Jin, you better watch your back after all."

..... No way.

Lies, it can't be true.

The matchboxes were all confiscated, and Bennett showed no sign of acting strangely.

Then why was the <Executioner of Immolation> approaching from behind?

And why was Jin being held by a reddish-orange burning arm on his shoulder?

"Damn it!"

Jin, who had dived to the ground as quickly as possible, was barely able to avoid being engulfed by the flames.

Even so, the intense pain of his body being burned must have relentlessly assaulted Jin. Nina could not even imagine how much pain he was in right now.

"Bennett! Don't tell me, you..."

The part of the clothing that was touched by the fire puppet was completely scorched, and the skin that could be seen behind it was burnt.

So this is not an illusion that only brings pain.

Bennett is really trying to burn Jin to death.

"..... Why?"

Jin's expression was blank, as though he was in a daze.

"Why are you able to activate your psychic ability? This kind of development wasn't part of the script ....."

Bennett kept a gentle smile on his face and instead of replying, he called another puppet in front of him.

Next to it, a fireball the size of a human head was further generated.

"No, no, ... It's a lie, right?"

The fireball grew, changed shape, and eventually transformed into a puppet.

Nina had long forgotten about her acting and collapsed to her knees.

—This is a foul play.

He didn't even need to light a match or make a preliminary move to activate his ability.

He was able to control three of these terrifying monsters at the same time.

"Nina, your acting was certainly perfect. I was completely fooled. I even thought you were in love with me. ..... But unfortunately, you guys miscalculated on one thing."

The flickering flames made it impossible to see Bennett's expression.

"I've never trusted anyone from the very beginning. Lighting a match is a prerequisite for activation? Only one [Executioner of Immolation> can be activated? Why did you guys keep believing those lies?"

Bennett snapped his fingers.

With that as a signal, all three monsters come running toward them at once.

"I hope you don't put up any resistance so you can burn to death as fast as you can!"

Bennett “killed” Jin with a fireball and forced Nina to enter his dormitory. Once he and Nina entered, 20 students from the tournament that Bennett hosted were in there. A student threw several photos of Bennett attacking other students at Bennett’s feet. The crowd of students split in two and in the middle was Jin. The reason why Jin wasn’t killed was because he jumped into a pit that Nina prepared for him the moment before the fire had hit him. He had been aiming at that particular spot from the beginning. After that, all he had to do was crawl out of the hole while Bennett was distracted by Nina and get to the student dormitory ahead of him. Jin also had a voice recording of Bennett tormenting some students, which he played in the room. Jin had a hunch that Bennett’s charity meetings were suspicious. He thought that there was no way that an elite with a super powerful psychic ability would be doing charity work to help the weak. He suspected that the C-rank hunt was a staged act of his making. Jin looked into Bennett’s background six months before the entrance exam. Bennett was the only son of a wealthy man and had an arrogant personality. There were also cases that his family had covered up. Bennett was a psycho who loves to dominate by force. There is no way that a man like that would change his mind and devote himself to charity work the moment he enters the academy. Jin gained the photos of him tortmenting the students by contacting several of the C-rank students surrounding Bennett. If Bennett wanted to make his men more unified, more willing servants, he would first choose one of them as a target for the hunt. Jin came across a pair individuals who harbored distrust of Bennett’s methods. Jin knew that bringing two rebellious students to their knees was just the kind of thing a sadist like Bennett would love to do, so he offered the two students a deal. In exchange for a large amount of money, they had to challenge Bennett to a duel. During the duel, Jin hid in the bushes and was filming the whole thing after strapping a recording device to a tree near the starting point. Bennett had 21 men working for him. It would be impossible for Jin, who was being watched closely by Bennett, to take any conspicuous action, such as contacting them one by one, so he asked Emma for her cooperation. He put a copy of the evidence and a memo in an envelope with the following instructions: [Meet at the dormitory at 1:10 p.m.], [Hide in another place until the time comes so that Bennett will not know you are there], and [All the points taken from Bennett will be divided among all of you]. Emma's communication skills and kindness were the trump cards that would make this work out.

(Short-Term Planning + Planning Intricacies + Planning Accuracy + Preparation Process + Strategy Length + Strategy Logistics + Strategy Complexity + Strategy Alignment + Strategy Fortitude + Strategy Effectiveness + Strategy Execution + Strategy Shielding + Strategy Foresight + Strategic Deception + Strategic Manipulation + Tactics + Event Manipulation + Indirect Manipulation + Cunning + Trap Setting + Trap Evasion + Two Steps Ahead + Anticipation + Preclusion + Intuition + Hot Reading + Emotional Understanding)

When he was nearing the end of his patience, he finally arrived at the front of the dormitory.

To the current Bennett, the plain wooden door seemed like a gateway to paradise.

Since it was weekends, there might not be many students left, but right now he didn't want to run into anyone. He didn't want anyone to tarnish his blissful moment.

He turned the doorknob and opened the door toward him.

He held the door and urged Nina to enter, but she did not respond at all.

Perhaps frozen by the fear that had become so tangible, she remained motionless as she turned her head toward the entrance.

"Come, hurry up and get in. Your fate won't change anyway."

There was no need to wear the mask of a gentleman anymore.

Bennett forced Nina to her feet, kicked her in the back, and forced her to jump into the dormitory. Then he closed the door and slowly followed.

There, he finally turned his attention to the entrance.

—Bennett instantly realized.

Nina was frozen, not because fear had taken over her.

She was simply stunned by the bizarre scene that unfolded before her.

About 20 students had gathered at the entrance.

Their faces were familiar. They were the participants of the <tournament> hosted by Bennett. Emma Licorice, Jin's only remaining collaborator, was also there.

Most puzzling of all, they all looked at Bennett with hostile eyes.

".....Ha?"

What does this mean?

Why are there so many students here on the weekend?

In the first place, no one was here when we left the dorm a while ago.

And why are they glaring at me?

He hurriedly turned to look at Nina, but she was just as puzzled as he was.

Her gaze was completely dazed, and it was clear that she was so confused that she couldn't take a step forward until someone provided her with an answer.

In other words, Nina was not involved in this situation at all.

If so, then who?

On whose orders were they brought together here?

"Bennett-san ..... is this true?"

Someone threw several photos at Bennett's feet.

He felt his feet becoming unsteady, as if he were on a board stretched over water. The mere act of bending down to pick up the photos seemed terribly difficult at the moment.

He somehow managed to pick up the photos and inspected them one by one.

–What was captured in the three photos was the most intense hell.

Two boys were being chased by a blazing fire puppet.

The screams that were supposed to be trapped inside the photos were heard beyond the dimensional barrier.

The figure laughing while holding his stomach on the other side of the picture was undoubtedly Bennett himself.

".....Who?"

Bennett glared at all the students gathered at the entrance.

Who took these photos?

I don't recall letting anyone escape. Anyone who knew who was responsible for the C-rank hunt should have been expelled from the academy.

Who the hell is ——.

"The scam is ninety percent successful once you've planted an assumption in their minds."

The crowd split in two, and the figure hiding in the back emerged.

Eyes the color of the deepest part of the night, and an eerie smile that did not reveal his true motives. A being foreign to everything in this country, including the color of his skin - Jin Kirihara - is walking toward Bennett.

His clothes and skin were stained with soot, and he had a fresh burn on his left shoulder, but no matter how one interpreted it, he did not appear to be a dead man.

How did he gather all these people?

When were these photos taken?

No, in the first place, how is this guy ..... still alive?

Various questions come flooding in like a wave, making it impossible to maintain a calm mind.

The only thing he knew was that everything up till now had been nothing but a farce.

In other words, the <duel> had no meaning whatsoever.

Jin did not have a shred of hope that he would win.

His real objective was to create this situation.

"You lost, Bennett. This is what happens when you fail to understand the board you're supposed to be playing on."

Bennett's subordinates were filled with despair and seething anger after being betrayed by the one they had trusted. Emma, who seemed to have not quite grasped the full picture of what had happened. Nina gazed at her accomplice, who had miraculously survived, with an almost tearful look on her face. A couple of students at the entrance of the dormitory were watching intently as they waited to see the outcome as it unfolded.

Jin, under all their gazes, approached Bennett step by step.

"……Why are you alive?"

A tremor filled Bennett's voice.

"Surely, you should have been engulfed by the flames!"

"Well, I wonder why. Will you give me an earful once you know the answer?"

At the moment the fire that imitated a giant's arm attacked, Jin jumped into the pit that Nina had also secretly prepared for him.

It seemed as if he was fleeing aimlessly, but Jin had been aiming only at that particular spot from the beginning.

All he had to do was crawl out of the hole while Bennett was distracted by Nina and get to the student dormitory ahead of him.

Of course, Jin had no intention of revealing such a simple trick.

"Oh, and it's not just those photos I'd like to show you."

Jin instructed a nearby student to press the button on the playback device on the sofa at the entrance.

A rough sound peculiar to magnetic tapes ran through the silent room.

[Hahahahaha! Run, run! If you don't run faster, my monster will devour you!]

[Your memories will disappear anyway. There is no way this torture will be a crime!]

[Still not enough ..... The ones I killed in the past were more amusing.]

[Oh, have you passed out already? It's too soon this time. I'll have to find another target then. .....]

Even without any visual images, everyone present could vividly imagine Bennett's madness.

The excessive amount of violence, abusing the memory sealing measures of the expelled students. Moreover, he even made a remark that implied a murder in the past.

Not to mention the rules of society.

Bennett Lohr is a true villain.

"Y-You .....!"

"Looks like you're suffocating. Do you perhaps need some oxygen? Oh, well, you've brought this on yourself though."

"Just answer my question, Jin! How did you know all about this!?"

"Oh, can I take that as your confession? ..... Well, aside from me impersonating a police officer, it was relatively early on that I realized that you were the C-rank hunter. You know how Emma and I once attended a meeting you hosted? By that time, I already had my suspicions."

"Don't be ridiculous! On what basis you-....."

"A~, there's no basis whatsoever."

Jin stated nonchalantly.

"I just had a hunch it was suspicious. There is no way that an elite with such a powerful psychic ability would be doing charity work to help the weak. He must be doing something very bad behind the scenes."

"..... For such a vague reason."

"I'm a skeptical person after all. So I started my investigation after I first suspected that the C-rank hunt was a staged act of your own making. If I was mistaken, I thought if I apologized later, you'd forgive me."

Bennet's expression could be seen becoming distorted.

Was it anger or despair that was swirling inside him?

"First, I looked into your background."

Jin continued while observing the other party's facial expressions.

"Bennett, you were born into one of the largest landlords in the Ruskett region. Your father seems to run a wide variety of farms and candle factories on his vast land. As the only son of a wealthy man and possessing a powerful psychic ability, you have had an arrogant personality since you were a child. You are the type of person who wants everything to go your way. If we include the cases that your family covered up, you had a bad reputation."

In truth, the order was reversed.

It was six months before the entrance examination that Gasta, who has contacts throughout the country, made contact with a detective in the Ruskett region through an intermediary. Jin, who believed that there was a <shepherd's dog> among those who were exempted from the entrance examination, had already investigated as much as possible about the profiles of all six students in advance.

However, it would be more effective not to tell the other side of the story on this occasion.

"Your true nature is that of a genuine psycho who loves to dominate by force. There is no way that a man like that would change his mind and devote himself to charity work the moment he enters the academy."

"......How did you get these photos?"

Bennett asked again, no longer trying to mend anything, but Jin couldn't just answer that question.

Every time he looked at those photos, Jin felt an unbearable dull ache in his chest.

It was the kind of pain he would have to carry for the rest of his life.

First, Jin made contact with several of the C-rank students surrounding Bennett. If Bennett wanted to make his men more unified, more willing servants, he would first choose one of them as a target for the hunt.

If someone close to them were to be the casualty, the threat would become more tangible. All that remained was for a powerful leader to create a virtual enemy and show them a countermeasure that they might be able to employ, and the weak would feel vaguely relieved.

This is a technique often used in state-sponsored brainwashing programs. Bennett used it without even realizing it.

As Jin probed the inner workings of the situation, he came across a pair of individuals who were likely to be his next targets.

Both were students who harbored distrust of Bennett's methods and had the potential to become insurgents if left unchecked.

At the time, it was the perfect time to eliminate any future uncertainties without being perceived as an example to the others. Besides, bringing two rebellious students to their knees was just the kind of thing a sadist like Bennett would love to do.

So Jin offered them a deal.

In exchange for a large sum of money, he asked them to challenge Bennett to a <duel>.

Although he had fully explained the risks involved, the two students, who were originally tired of competing for survival at the school, seemed to have made up their minds as soon as Jin handed them the paycheck. They laughed and said that they might be happier if they could go to an affiliated school with a large sum of money in their hands.

As long as they knew the date, time, and location of the <duel>, the rest was up to them.

Jin, who was hiding in the bushes, kept filming the whole thing after strapping a recording device to a tree near the starting point.

The two were rescued by a rescue team called by Jin, but were forced to stay in the hospital for about a week. Bennett will never understand the frustration of having to simply watch the scene of violence by heretics who have abandoned their hearts.

Having already lost their memories of the school, they no longer remember the horror they felt at that time. That's the only saving grace, Jin told himself over and over again.

From that point on, things went very smoothly.

After obtaining the evidence, Jin first asked Emma for her cooperation.

Bennett had 21 men working for him. It would be impossible for Jin, who was being watched closely by Bennett, to take any conspicuous action, such as contacting them one by one.

Therefore, Jin put a copy of the evidence and a memo in an envelope with the following instructions: [Meet at the dormitory at 1:10 p.m.], [Hide in another place until the time comes so that Bennett will not know you are there], and [All the points taken from Bennett will be divided among all of you].

Emma's communication skills and kindness were the trump cards that would make the impossible possible.

—Looking at the current situation, it seems that my decision was the right one.

Jin walked toward Bennett and thanked the two students who had risked their lives to fish him out, Emma for persuading Bennett's men, and the other 21 students who had made the crucial decision.

"You won't just be expelled from the school. You're going to be handed over to the police as a psychic with dangerous intentions. If you can think of a clever excuse, please let me know."

Bennett was going to kill everyone in the room with his ability. If there were no witnesses, then he couldn't be arrested for his crimes. The first person he targeted was Jin. He summoned five fire puppets at Jin. They all jumped at Jin. Jin held up his right arm and said "disappear" which caused the fire puppets and heat in the room to transform into nothingness, which made everyone think that he could nullify abilities. This was all anticipated by Jin. He knew that Bennett would try to kill everyone. Jin was able to "nullify" Bennett's ability by deducing his condition to activate his ability. Jin noticed that Bennett was extremely averse to other students entering his room in the dormitory. For example, Bennett's C-rank hunts were always held in tree-lined areas not far from the dormitories. And whenever a practical exam was held in the gym, which was quite a distance from the dormitories, one of the private restrooms nearby was always occupied. Jin came to the conclusion that Bennett's <Executioner of Immolation> can only be activated if some sort of preparation is made in his room beforehand. In order to activate it away from the dormitory, he would have to use a place where no one could find it instead. A private bathroom would be the perfect place for that. During the second chase tag, Jin

investigated the private bathroom, and there was no sign of anyone there at all. After Bennett had made some preparations in that room, he tampered with the lock so that it could not be opened from the outside. He then proceeded to the meeting place. Another clue was that Bennett's dad was a wealthy man that made his way up from being a candlemaker. If we consider that psychic abilities can be influenced by one's upbringing and traumas, we can assume that the real condition for activation of the <Executioner of Immolation> is having a candle lit by oneself nearby. The reason why the place for the duel is always the tree-lined area is probably to avoid being too far away from the dormitory where the candles are located. The second time Jin faced Bennett in the Chase Tag, he pulled a scam on him, after Nina told Bennett that his matchboxes had been replaced. He didn't actually replace his matchbox at that time. He reached into my pocket so Bennett would notice, but in reality, he put the matchbox back in its place once he pulled it out. He didn't do anything to the matchbox at all. And yet Bennett said things like, "Before this game started, I replaced the box with a spare one", "While I was in the bathroom, I was testing it first", "Sure enough, when I lit the match you replaced it with, it didn't trigger my ability", and so on. This confirmed Bennett's activation condition. On the day of the duel, Jin saw Bennett leave the dormitory, so he snuck into his room and took a candle from there. He put it on a table in the corner of the entrance and tied a string around it and put a bucket of water right under it. When the string was pulled, the candle would fall into the bucket and the fire would be extinguished. And with all of the people gathered, no one would notice the thin string lying on the floor. (Fluid Reasoning Index + Deductive Reasoning + Inductive Reasoning + Analogical Reasoning + Effective Reasoning + Cognitive Reasoning + Systematic Reasoning + Linear Thinking + Non-Linear Thinking + Convergent Thinking + Vertical Thinking + Lateral Thinking + Holistic Thinking + Synthetic Thinking + Reflective Thinking + Concrete Thinking + Critical Thinking + Connective Thinking + Associative Thinking + Analysis + Observation + Connecting The Dots + Short-Term Planning + Preparation Process + Strategy + Tactics + Methods + Information Gathering + Preclusion)

"Of course, you're the first one I'm going to kill, Jin. I'm telling you, this is not a threat. I will definitely kill you. I will not even allow you to escape by suicide. I will put my own pride on the line and make sure you are obliterated."

The five < Executioners of Immolation> all bent down at once. They seemed to be ready to leap at once, their bodies bent down like a spring.

At the edge of Jin's vision, Nina was shouting something.

She was probably saying something along the lines of, "give up on everything and run away".

—But still, Jin did not move.

He has a fierce smile on his face, his eyes wide with joy and excitement, welcoming the madness of this game.

"You both, are monsters——."

Nina muttered quietly.

Indeed. Jin was not sane from the beginning.

The very idea of a mere human being trying to fight monsters with nothing but lies and trickery is insane. It was as if he was enjoying a thrill from the bottom of his heart.

If there is an existence that can compete with Bennett's demonic power, it is probably only a monster with a mind like Jin's.

So Nina decided not to look away any longer.

As an accomplice, as a friend who would deceive the world together, she decided to face the consequences head-on.

"Now, be obliterated!"

Bennett's signal triggered the five monsters to fly out like bullets.

Scorching the atmosphere, the puppets spread their arms and legs to their fullest. It would be impossible for anyone to survive, let alone avoid the first blow.

Hot winds pounded into his entire body.

Hot enough to cause burns even without direct contact.

The presence of death has increased in density to the point of inducing dizziness.

Beyond that, Bennett's distorted smile was visible.

Jin held up his right hand in front of him with an expression of acceptance.

"——Disappear."

Engulfed by the fire, Jin let out a desperate scream. In a short time, he ceased to exist, and was transformed into an ugly burnt corpse. Bennett looked satisfied and began to search for the next victim among the surviving students.

That was the ending that everyone was prepared for, however, did not become a reality.

The moment the onrushing <Executioners> attempted to touch Jin, everything was transformed into nothingness.

An army of terrifying monsters,

the radiant heat that was produced as a side effect,

as well as the dense madness that filled the entrance,

disappeared as if nothing had ever existed in the first place. There was nothing left but silence, as if everything had been nothing more than an illusion.

In the stillness of the world, someone's muttering echoed through the air.

"Did he nullify, the psychic ability .....?"

People with psychic abilities tend to possess an independent physical law within themselves.

It has been considered impossible to interfere with it from the outside, as evidenced by scientific research that has barely made any progress in this subject.

What Jin has just accomplished is a supernatural phenomenon that directly contradicts such beliefs.

Even in the Heiberg Academy, where monsters abound, no one has ever heard of anyone being able to nullify another person's psychic abilities.

"Son of a b*tch, how .....!"

"Eh~, Bennett-kun. Looks like this time you've completely lost your composure."

Jin slowly approached Bennett, who was kneeling with a pale expression on his face.

Everyone could only watch the outcome without saying anything.

"So what was it again? If we all get obliterated, everything will be resolved. What kind of thought process could have made you believe in such a thing?"

Like a prison guard making an ominous sentence to a criminal, Jin concluded in a voice devoid of warmth.

"You're finished, heretic. You were not worth deceiving."

Bennett clutched his own head as he was pummeled with a defeat so merciless that it was so perfect, leaving no loophole prepared for him at all.

His reaction was also already anticipated by Jin.

There is no way that a man who has only known nothing but life as a victor could endure such a decisive humiliation.

"Jin, I can't believe you are also a psychic."

"Hmm?"

"Could it be that I'm the only one who is really just an ordinary person?"

Although she felt a little lonely, Nina was actually not that angry.

She knew that Jin's way of deceiving even his allies in order to achieve his goal, and moreover, he could not defeat Bennett otherwise.

On the cobblestone pavement, where no one else was around besides the two of them, Jin answered in a hushed voice.

"A~, it's all a lie. It was just a trick."

".....Huuh?"

"If I could use such a ridiculous power to nullify other's psychic abilities, I'd have a much better life."

"B-But how in the world?"

Jin showed his signature mischievous grin.

"Bennett's psychic ability to create an inexhaustible fire monster was not invincible. There was a real condition for activating it, apart from lighting the match."

"What was that?"

"There have been a lot of hints dropped over the past month, you know."

Jin began to explain everything with ease.

"For example, Bennett was extremely averse to other students entering his room in the dormitory. For example, Bennett's C-rank hunts were always held in tree-lined areas not far from the dormitories. And whenever a <practical exam> was held in the gymnasium, which was quite a distance from the dormitories, one of the private restrooms nearby was always occupied."

"..... Hmm? I don't understand what you're trying to say."

"One thing can be deduced from those hints."

Jin raised his index finger and continued.

"Bennett's <Executioner of Immolation> can only be activated if some sort of preparation is made in his room beforehand. In order to activate it away from the dormitory, he would have to use a place where no one could find it instead. A private bathroom would be the perfect place for that."

"..... Is that why you realized that the activation condition wasn't about matches?"

"Actually, during the second <chase tag>, I investigated from the adjacent private bathroom, and there was no sign of anyone there at all. After Bennett had made some preparations in that room, he tampered with the lock so that it could not be opened from the outside. He then proceeded to the meeting place with a nonchalant look on his face."

"Who would have thought..."

"Of course, that's not the only clue. Bennett's grandfather was a wealthy man who had made his way up from being a humble candlemaker."

"Candlemaker ....."

"If we consider that psychic abilities can be influenced by one's upbringing and traumas, we can assume that the real condition for activation of the <Executioner of Immolation> is [having a candle lit by oneself nearby.] The reason why the place for the duel is always the tree-lined area is probably to avoid being too far away from the dormitory where the candles are located."

"But that's just a guess, right? It's dangerous to go into a duel with only that information."

"Do you think I, a skeptical man, didn't verify it thoroughly?"

Jin's eyes, which were the same color as the night, flashed with a mysterious glint.

"The second time I faced Bennett in the <Chase Tag>, I pulled a scam on him. Nina, do you remember that time when you told Bennett that the matchboxes had been replaced? Actually, that was a trap in and of itself."

"I've heard that before. That was a deliberate attempt to catch Bennett off guard by making him see through your scheme, right?"

"That's merely the cover, Nina. A good lie will always have two or three layers of trickery."

Forgetting to take a breath, she found herself waiting for Jin's next words.

A truly elaborate lie is a kind of art,—— Nina secretly recalled the words he had told her on one occasion.

"I didn't actually replace his matchbox at that time. I reached into my pocket so Bennett would notice, but in reality, I just put the matchbox back in its place once I pulled it out."

"Ah....."

Nina began to see the full extent of the trap that Jin had set.

She had spent her days as his accomplice, and she had acquired the mindset of a liar.

"I didn't do anything to the matchbox at all. And yet Bennett said some pretty crazy things. He said things like, [Before this game started, I replaced the box with a spare one], [While I was in the bathroom, I was testing it first], [Sure enough, when I lit the match you replaced it with, it didn't trigger my ability], and so on."

"So that's how you became convinced that the activation condition was a complete lie."

"Yes, that was really a careless statement on his part. If the condition was really to light the match, there is no way that his psychic ability would not be activated."

"The rest was easy. On the day of the <duel>, I saw Bennett leave the dormitory, so I snuck into his room and took a candle from there. I put it on a table in the corner of the entrance and tied a string around it. Of course, I had a bucket of water right under it."

"I see. When the string was pulled, the candle would fall into the bucket and the fire would be extinguished, huh?"

"Exactly. With that many people gathered, no one would notice the thin string lying on the floor. It's a pretty simple trick, isn't it?"

He reads his opponent's aims and weaknesses from trivial information, weaves together a number of tricks to steer his opponent's thinking, and makes sure that he pulls off the final move.

The opponent does not know where Jin's true aim lies, or on which side of the board he has been deceived.

This is precisely what makes Jin's skill as a fraudster so amazing.

He has truly defeated a monster with power beyond human understanding with only lies and deception.

".....You really have fooled the world."

A black hooded person had just emerged from Bennett's room. She knew that Jin would go to his room to obtain useful information, so she prepared a present for him in the room. It was a piece of paper with just one sentence on it, "Nice to meet you". The black hooded figure knew what Jin was really after. The hooded figure felt something strange about Jin's actions. It was foolish of him to target the group exempted from the entrance exam first in the race for survival at the Heiberg Academy. Furthermore, in the battle against Bennett, Jin only gained 53 points in the end. There were plenty of easier opponents for him to win against, whether it was to gain a large number of points or to gain a solid reputation. Such a hasty move did not match the impression he had left when she first met Jin. It was clear that he had some other objective in mind. For example, it was to find the Shepherd's Dogs that were supposed to be lurking in each grade. Deception just happens to be the black hooded person's specialty. That black hooded person was revealed to be Emma, the character that Jin first talks to in the beginning of the story. This means that Emma was acting for the entirety of volume 1, with her acting being so

good that Jin, who can sense malice from looking at someone’s eyes, was not able to notice that she was acting. (Acting Skills + Emotional Engagement + Emotional Management + Self-Regulation + Observation + Analysis + Connecting The Dots + Analytical Thinking + Concrete Thinking + Critical Thinking + Convergent Thinking + Vertical Thinking + Reflective Thinking + Holistic Thinking + Abductive Reasoning + Cognitive Reasoning + Systemic Reasoning + Decompositional Reasoning)

A figure wearing a black hood moved through the silent night forest.

The figure had just emerged from Bennett Lohr's room.

Having been expelled from school, Bennet's room is to be vacated in three days. Before then, Jin Kirihara was bound to pay a visit to Bennett's room. Jin probably believed he would still be able to obtain useful information although the odds were almost nil. Therefore, he would surely come searching for it.

Hence, the person in the black hood has prepared a present for him.

A piece of paper with just one sentence on it, [Nice to meet you].

That alone should be enough for Jin to understand. The black hooded figure knew what Jin was really after, and she knew everything about him. Even after being aware of this, she was still merciful enough to play along with his silly game.

To begin with, the hooded figure felt something strange about Jin's actions.

It was foolish of him to target the group exempted from the entrance exam first in the race for survival at the Heiberg Academy. Furthermore, in the battle against Bennett, Jin only gained 53 points in the end.

There were plenty of easier opponents for him to win against, whether it was to gain a large number of points or to gain a solid reputation.

Such a hasty move did not match the impression he had left when she first met Jin.

It was clear that he had some other objective in mind.

For example, it was to find the <Shepherd's Dogs> that were supposed to be lurking in each grade.

If he acted in a grand maneuver involving that many students, everyone would recognize that [Jin Kirihara is actively trying to destroy the group exempted from the entrance examinations]. Once it was obvious that Bennett was a fake one, Jin steered the course to stand out anyway.

As soon as the possibility arose that Jin's fangs could reach <Shepherd's Dogs>, they would have no choice but to approach Jin. To determine whether he was really a dangerous person who needed to be purged. To see how much information he knows.

In other words, Jin would be able to suspect everyone who approached him from henceforth. A game of deception is about to begin, in which both sides will be able to probe each other's gut without revealing their true faces, and this will be full of malicious deceit.

If this guess is correct, it can be assumed that he is a great schemer.

The hooded figure sensed something unfathomable about Jin, including his ability to nullify psychic abilities. At least for now, she couldn't simply brush off these speculations as overthinking.

"..... Interesting."

She found her voice leaking out.

In the darkness, where she couldn't see a millimeter ahead, she didn't have to worry about anyone overhearing her. So there would be no problem if she took off this hood and mask.

"Deception so happens to be my specialty."

The pale moonlight shone through a gap in the trees.

Her orange hair and dark green eyes were briefly revealed and soon melted away into the darkness.

She laughed deep in her throat as she sucked on a stick of candy she had taken out of her pocket.

Volume 2: WIP

Emma acts as a harmless classmate who is amiable and a little ditzy, but behind her mask, she’s observing Jin’s facial expressions closely. (Acting Skills + Observation)

She is a harmless classmate who is amiable and a little ditzy.

That's how she must appear to everyone now. No one knows that behind her harmless mask, she is observing her target's facial expressions closely.

Jin’s eyes are sensitive to malice. (Emotional Perception + Seeing Through People)

However, the eyes of her accomplice who was sensitive to malice could not be fooled.

There was another practical examination. It was hide and seek. The rules are:

Rule #1: The test will be held inside the old school building. Anyone who takes even a single step outside the building will be disqualified.

Rule #2: Participants will be divided into pairs, and a total of three pairs will enter the building at different times.

Rule #3: Each team wears a helmet with color-coded balloons.

Rule #4: The team whose balloon is not popped until the end is the winner of the game.

Rule #5: Direct attacks on the human body by psychic abilities are prohibited.

Nina teamed up with Emma. During the match, Nina met someone who was trying to distract Nina and Emma so that the other players would aim for her balloon. When she met him, Nina removed her brooch. The excessively powerful psychokinesis that had been sealed up in it was released, which destroyed everything around her. This was the first Lie that Nina and Jin had created for the exam. After that, she intimidated the other students and said that she would destroy the old school building and crush them to death. Explosions could be heard from the top of the school building. All of the students in the match were scared and surrendered to Nina. (Acting Skills + Intimidation + Bluffing)

[Practical Examination <Hide and Seek>]

◇ Rule #1: The test will be held inside the old school building. Anyone who takes even a single step outside the building will be disqualified.

◇ Rule #2: Participants will be divided into pairs, and a total of three pairs will enter the building at different times.

◇ Rule #3: Each team wears a helmet with color-coded balloons.

◇ Rule #4: The team whose balloon is not popped until the end is the winner of the game.

◇ Rule #5: Direct attacks on the human body by psychic abilities are prohibited.

"We'll have to find our opponents first!"

"..... Ah, that won't be necessary."

Nina quickly became immersed in her acting.

"Since everyone seems to be gathering around us already."

She made a vicious smile and tried to intimidate them, and then noises indicating unrest could be heard from several directions.

As Jin had predicted beforehand, the two pairs must be joining hands to target Nina and Emma.

"..... I'm surprised. How did you notice?"

The voice of a boy who seemed to be desperately trying to hide his fear could be heard from ahead.

It was probably a diversion. While he distracting Nina and Emma, the other three would aim for Nina's balloons.

"It's not even a psychic ability, you know? It's just a predator's instinct ..... No matter how hard you try to stifle your breath, there's still a delicious scent wafting through the air."

"You're bluffing .....!"

"By the way, why haven't you guys attacked us yet? I'm getting bored."

Nina reached for the brooch that glowed red on her chest.

When she removed the brooch, the excessively powerful psychokinesis that had been sealed up until then was released, thoroughly destroying everything around her - it was the first Lie that Nina and Jin had created.

"Everyone, stand back! She's about to activate the <Queen of Calamity>!"

"Bullshit! There's a rule that prohibits direct attacks....."

"This monster doesn't give a damn about minus 30 points.....!"

The students who had been hiding could be heard running away all at once.

—*Here is where the problem begins.*

Originally, the plan was to have Emma, whose physical abilities had doubled, chase after them.

However, due to the previous activation of Emma's psychic ability, the <ferocious sweetener>, which has a use limit of once a day, could no longer be used.

In other words, Nina would have to do something about it using only her overwhelming acting ability.

"It would be troublesome if you guys keep running away from me like this. ..... Ah, right. I've come up with a good idea."

A cruel idea was spoken in a voice as innocent as that of a child who did not know the rules of the world.

"How about I use my abilities to clear out the old school building? I remember that the instructor could restore the old school building with his ability as much as he wanted, right? Besides, even if the building collapses, only I, who can use psychokinesis, will be alright.

Well, you will all be destroyed though, which is fine with me. It would be quite exhilarating, and it wouldn't be against the rules."

"Ni-Nina-chan? Your face scares me. ....."

Nina replied with only a glance, "It'll be all right", as she slammed the finishing move onto the board.

"If you don't want to be crushed to death, I recommend you surrender as soon as possible."

With that statement as a signal, an explosion could be heard coming from the top of the old school building.

As if to pursue the screaming students who were running away, intermittent explosions gradually shattered the brick exterior walls.

It took less than a minute before all the opponents with blue and green balloons attached to their heads surrendered.

"W-We surrender ..... please at least spare our lives ....."

Everyone wore an expression that seemed to say, "This is a violation of the rules."

Their dissatisfaction is understandable.

Given that direct attacks on their bodies were prohibited, and that the test emphasized stealth and surveillance skills rather than simple brute force, it was understandable that they felt that they had a chance to defeat the strong.

However, they would never have imagined that there would be a monster who would think of destroying the examination site itself.

"It's a little bit unsatisfactory, but oh well, I suppose it can't be helped."

Finally, with an innocent smile, Nina declared so.

"Now then, everyone. Could you please pop your own balloons on my signal?"

Jin paided Gasta to install explosives in for the practice exam. (Short-Term Planning)

After making sure no one was around, he muttered into the small walkie-talkie hidden under the collar of his uniform.

"Good job, Gasta-san. Nina passed the exam flawlessly."

[That's good to hear. Can I go home now?]

"I still have my turn. I'm sure I've already paid you for it, no?"

Gasta, the <landscaper> who will take care of all the work necessary for the fraud for a fee, laughed heartily with a voice tinged with alcohol. He was probably still grinning at him from afar.

[But aren't you being too cautious? It's one thing to simply install explosives, but is it really necessary to observe from a distance with binoculars?]

Casper wanted to contact Nina to have an alliance. Casper is a suspect of a candidate for the shepherd's dog by Jin and Nina. The next day, Casper met up with Nina. He wanted it to be a surprise date. Nina and Casper were chatting for an hour about random stuff. Nina had to keep on interweaving lies into her conversation and find out some stuff about Casper. (Information Gathering + Verbal Deception + Fabrication)

"..... So, Jin. Who is it that's trying to contact me?"

"Casper Crawford. Last night, he suddenly sat down in front of me in the cafeteria."

—*That man, huh .....*

He regarded the tension-filled conference room as nothing more than a hook-up spot, and it was easy for her to imagine him approaching her with a nonchalant look on his face.

"Certainly, that man is suspicious."

"Right? Casper-kun is the first suspect I've identified."

"..... So, what do you want me to do?"

"Well, for the time being, I guess you'll just have to do what he wants."

Jin said so in a voice that contained a hint of dismay.

"He wants an alliance with you."

The next day. As soon as they arrived at the only café in the school, which had been designated as the meeting place, Casper came up to Jin. He aggressively crossed his shoulders and yelled in his ear.

There were many people in social gatherings who changed their attitude depending on whether the other person was of the opposite or same sex, but Nina had never seen such an extreme example before.

"What? You're the one who told me to bring Nina here, didn't you? ....."

"I didn't ask you to come along! Do you know what the word "date" means? A date is not a date if the same sex is present!"

"A-A date!? Why I haven't been told of such a thing?"

"A~a, sorry Nina-chan. Looks like there's an unfortunate miscommunication because of this idiot....."

"You did tell me that you wanted to form an alliance with Nina, though?"

"That was just an excuse, of course! You should have guessed that much! Don't tell me, you have never experienced love before!?"

"..... Alright, alright. So should I just go home?"

"Yeah, get the hell out of here."

When Jin shrugged his shoulders and was about to leave, Casper began to tremble for some reason.

"..... Hey, wait a minute. I just realized something outrageous."

"Haa ..... What now?"

"Why the hell are you calling Nina-chan by her name!?"

Casper ran off screaming and sat down holding his knees a short distance away. It seemed that he had completely lost it.

—Is such a person really a candidate for the <shepherd's dog>?

It's hard to believe that the headmaster, who is so cautious that he doesn't even show up at the entrance ceremony, would appoint such a messed up person as a spy.....

As Nina resisted the urge to leave, Jin whispered an instruction to her.

"Look, you have to comfort him."

"Hah? Me?"

"Who else is there besides you?"

"Can we just ignore him for now? I mean, this guy doesn't seem suspicious at all."

"Nina, I have a word of advice for you", Jin said as he casually walked away. "There is nothing more dangerous in the world than a seemingly harmless fraudster."

Watching Jin's back as he moved away, Nina suddenly felt uneasy.

Indeed, Jin might be right.

Now she found herself thinking of Casper as an insignificant opponent. ..... Even though the other party is a psychic with psychic abilities so powerful that he was exempted from the entrance examinations.

No, that's not all.

Casper is the only one among the group exempted from the entrance exam that has not disclosed any of his psychic abilities. From this fact alone, it could be inferred that he has been cleverly manipulating his information.

—It could all be an act to catch us off guard. I have to stay sharp.

Nina told herself so as she approached the crouching monster.

She wasn't sure what to do, but she decided to comfort him by patting him on the shoulder.

"Casper-san, cheer up."

"Huh? A goddess?"

"..... I already told him to go back to his dormitory. So be at ease."

"Are you and that guy lovers?"

"..... No, of course not."

"What kind of relationship then? Don't tell me, Nina-chan, you have feelings for that guy....."

"I-It's just some kind of partnership ..... right, he's just a servant! I don't have any strange feelings for him at all!"

When she hastily explained herself, Casper looked up at her with a big smile on his face.

"Nah, figured so! I worried for nothing!"

Seeing Casper recover in an instant, Nina did her best to hold back a sigh.

◇

—*What time is it now, I wonder?*

Nina and Casper had been chatting for an hour in a corner of the café, which was sparsely populated with customers.

Life at the Heiberg Academy. Memories of their childhood. Food preferences, hobbies, and so on.

None of these topics seemed to have anything to do with the alliance. It seemed that Casper was really here with the intention of going on a date.

Even though Casper was talking continuously to her, Nina was getting tired of having to keep interweaving lies into her conversation. She had to be careful not to let her guard down and say something unnecessary.

"Come to think of it, Nina-chan, why did you decide to come to the Heiberg Academy?"

"Of course, that's because my two older brothers are both graduates of this school. I also wanted to be like them who belong to the <White Knights>."

"Oh, the famous Stingray brothers. My father used to talk about them a lot."

Jin had a detective investigate Casper. The information was stuff like Casper being from a family that has been producing top-level officers in the Imperial Army and his father sometimes being involved in joint operations with the White Knights. (Information Gathering)

According to the information that Jin had the detective investigate, Caspar Crawford came from a prominent family that has been producing top-level officers in the Imperial Army for generations.

His father, in particular, was sometimes involved in joint operations with the <White Knights>, and his only son, Caspar, has all the qualifications to become a <shepherd's dog>.

Jin anticipated that Casper would try to be alone with Nina, so he gave her a transceiver to hide in her ear. Nina asked Casper if he were aiming to be a member of the White Knights. When he answered, Jin knew that he was hiding his true nature, because all he does is ask questions and dodges the topic at the most appropriate time when it comes to talking about himself. (Information Gathering + Emotional Understanding)

Jin's voice could be heard coming out of the tiny transceiver plugged into her right ear. Jin, who had anticipated that Casper would try to be alone with Nina, had given it to her before coming here. The transceiver was hidden by her platinum-colored hair, so there was no risk of it being discovered.

Of course, the contents of their conversation were also transmitted to Jin through a bug hidden in her bag. Even though she can only receive instructions from him in one direction, it is still a very reliable means of communication.

After secretly regulating her breathing, Nina carefully interjected

"So, Casper-san, are you also aiming to become a member of the <White Knights>?"

"Hmm, about that. I haven't decided what to do yet."

"......Pardon?"

"You see, I just happen to have been born with a powerful psychic ability. That's why I somehow ended up enrolling in this Heiberg School, which is the best in the country, but to be honest, I regret it."

"Eh, is that so?"

"I had heard that it was an intensely competitive environment, but I didn't expect it to be this bad. I was even exempted from the entrance exam, which made girls wary of me and wouldn't approach me. Right now I'm on the least popular moment I've ever been in my entire life....."

"Well, that's only natural....."

As shown by Bennett's previous attempt to burn nearly 20 students to death, this school is not structured for the enjoyment of a proper youth. It is a battlefield where anyone who is not careful can be outwitted, exploited, and ultimately killed in an instant.

How naive Casper's thoughts were.

Of course, the fact that he is able to survive even with such a mindset proves his ability.

"..... Now I see why your points barely moved."

"Haha, I'm just doing the <practical exam> and turning down all those <duels>."

"What are you going to do if you are dropped from the race for survival?"

"Well, I guess it doesn't matter. With my psychic abilities, I can survive anywhere in the world."

Hearing this, Nina's heart was suddenly filled with sadness.

The only reason Casper can take this stance is because he is a psychic who boasts overwhelming power.

He is able to choose from the countless options spread out on the table, the one that suits his current mood each time. He is definitely different from her, who has been playing the role of a monster ever since she was a child and finally had no choice but to drift into this abnormal academy.

[.....As expected, this guy is suspicious.]

Jin's doubtful voice shook her eardrums.

[It's obvious that he's hiding his true nature. All he does is ask questions, and when it comes to talking about himself, he dodges the topic at the most appropriate moment. Normally, men who are trying to seduce the opposite sex would be more confident in disclosing themselves. ..... Or maybe, he meant everything he just said.]

Nina is threatened into becoming a spy for Karen. She runs to Jin for advice. Jin, however, sees this as a golden opportunity and tells Nina to pretend to accept the proposal in order to gain access to Karen's side. At the same time, he instructs Nina to continue her alliance with Casper and secretly collect intel on both targets while playing them against each other. Jin lays out the current operation in logical order: The goal is to uncover the secrets hidden by the school and expose the identities of the shepherd's dogs, the spies planted by the headmaster.

- The primary suspects are Casper, Karen, and others who were exempted from the entrance exams.
- Direct confrontation would be too dangerous, so Jin and Nina became influential people whom the school had to mark after defeating Bennett to lure the spies into making the first move.

- Now that both Casper and Karen have approached Nina independently, it is the perfect opportunity to play both sides.
- Nina is to form an alliance with Casper, claiming it's to counteract Karen. Simultaneously, she will pretend to work with Karen, reporting on Casper's abilities.
- By deepening relationships with both and gathering intel, they can triangulate which one is the shepherd's dog.

(Operational Planning + Strategy Vision + Strategy Alignment + Strategic Thinking + Influence Building)

"Uuu. ..... What do I do, Jin?"

When she snuck out of the dormitory after bedtime and came to the gym, Nina, who had been waiting for Jin ahead of time, came crying to him.

Since she is still in her school uniform, does that mean that she stayed here after school and never went back to the dormitory?

"..... Alright, so can you tell me what happened first?"

When told that Nina was being threatened to become a spy, Jin laughed as if he had heard a brilliant joke.

"I see, they initiated it themselves."

"I-Is it strange?"

"I've been thinking about it ever since Casper proposed the alliance. I thought that if we were going to get close to Karen, who was at odds with him, the best thing to do would be to tell her that you would be her spy. I was trying to think of several ways to make the proposal without degrading your dignity, but this saved me a lot of trouble."

"Y-You're not going to tell me to accept her offer, are you?"

"Why wouldn't I? An opportunity like this doesn't come around very often."

"B-But..." Nina looked anxiously at her accomplice. "if Casper finds out about this, we're going to be in big trouble.....!"

"You are still too naive. That's not the only thing we need to be cautious about. You have to find out whether Karen is a <shepherd's dog> or not."

"Ugh..... My head is starting to spin....."

"All right, let's sort things out."

Jin held up his index finger and began to explain.

"First of all, there are prerequisites. To uncover the secrets hidden by the school, we are in pursuit of the <shepherd's dogs> who are spies for the school's headmaster. The most likely candidates are Casper, Karen, and the others who have been exempted from the entrance examinations.

However, to uncover more information, we have to get close to them. It would be too risky to just grab them one by one and interrogate them.

That's why we beat Bennett in a spectacular way, involving a number of students, and we became influential people whom the school had to mark. This way, the <shepherd's dog> would contact us to find out whether we were a threat to the school or not."

"You mean Casper and Karen?"

"Most likely. Therefore, you need to deepen your relationship with them and cunningly wait for them to reveal their tails to you.

Tell Casper that you will form an alliance to keep Karen in check, but behind the scenes, you will also work with Karen to report information about Casper's psychic abilities. Then, at the same time, you will search for evidence that the two of them are <shepherd's dog> ....."

If Jin and Nina are caught lying or if they are suspected as being a danger to the school, they will end up dead. It’s a fraud of the highest degree of difficulty. Despite this, both Jin and Nina are determined to do this fraud. (Determination + Emotional Engagement)

"Nina. What we are going to do from now on is a fraud of the highest degree of difficulty. Our targets are two monsters. If either of us is caught lying, it will be the end of our lives. If either of us is suspected of being a danger to the school, it's game over. We'll

end up like my father, tortured to death. ..... Honestly, I've never done a job this difficult before either."

"Do you think we have a chance of winning?"

"Of course."

With a look of sincere enjoyment on his face, Jin continued.

"I'll write the script. And you'll play the role. We'll win the trust of these monsters and steal their information without anyone noticing... Don't worry, we can do it."

".....You really are out of your mind."

"Haha, why are you saying that now? It's a mutual thing, is it not?"

Nina went to the woods behind the first girl's dormitory to speak to Karen about the alliance. Jin had Nina carry a listening device to get a better idea of the characteristics of Karen. Jin knew that Karen had an intuitive and highly self-confident personality from the fact that Karen's tone was clear and direct, and that she suddenly tried to get right to the point at the very first word. Jin knew that she was cautious and wanted to draw a line between her and the other party from the fact that she stubbornly referred to Nina by her family name. Jin knew that Karen has a high level of competitive spirit because she tried to gain an advantage over Nina in the number of points that should be distributed. Jin knew that Karen had no intention of betraying Nina because she was careful. (Information Gathering + Emotional Understanding + Emotional Perception + Psychological Insight + Mind Reading + Cold Reading + Profiling)

Jin plopped down on his desk and pretended to be asleep while thinking back to the conversation he eavesdropped on this morning.

In order to reply to Karen about the alliance, Nina went to the woods behind the first girls' dormitory. To get a better idea of the characteristics of the person he was about to deceive, he had Nina carry a listening device.

[..... So you come, Stingray. Can I hear your reply?]

Her tone was clear and direct.

The fact that she suddenly tried to get right to the point at the very first word showed how intuitive and highly self-confident her personality was. And the fact that she stubbornly referred to her negotiation partner by the family name indicated that she was cautious and wanted to draw a line between her and the other party. Although she never uttered a word until the very end, according to Nina, Karen seemed to have brought along her maid, Satya, as well.

Normally, it would be best not to target these types of people for fraud.

[Before we form an alliance, there are a few things I want to make sure of.]

As instructed in advance, Nina stated so.

[One is about how to distribute the points after defeating Casper-san.]

[Since I'm the one who actually fights him, 30% should be enough, right?]

Always trying to gain an advantage over the other party is a trait closely tied to someone with a high level of competitive spirit.

[How long do you want the alliance to last?]

[Until we destroy that idiot, of course. After that, the alliance will become invalid. The next person I'm going to target might as well be you.]

[I like your straightforwardness. I feel more at ease that way.]

Jin smiled wryly at Karen's insistence on provoking the other party at every turn.

However, the fact that she was so careful suggests that she has no intention of betraying Nina, at least not until the alliance is broken.

[Now, one last thing.]

Here, Jin had Nina plant a slow-acting poison.

[From now on, when we are going to meet, I would like to specify a place. It should be indoors, with no pedestrians around and preferably without windows, so that I don't have to worry about being watched with a telescope from afar.]

[Of course, we must not allow anyone to know about our alliance, but ..... do we have to go that far?]

[I got influenced by my brothers who are in the <White Knights>, I guess. Uninvited rats are lurking everywhere, you know. ..... Well, it's just a precaution.]

[I see your point, but I don't like the idea of using such a place you've designated. So I'll let Satya find a suitable place for us, is that okay?]

[..... Yes, that's fine.]

As if to say that her business was finished, Karen quickly left the place along with her maid Satya.

It is somewhat unusual for a spy who is required to act in secrecy to be so aggressive, but it is possible that this is also calculated to keep her connection to the academy from being known. As long as she is always seeking trouble and starting <duel> on a regular basis, she would not be prone to any unnecessary suspicion when it comes time to eliminate the academy's enemies.

In that sense, this alliance is a very clever move of her. She would be able to eliminate Casper, whose behavior is suspicious, and at the same time, investigate Nina.

However, there is only so much information that can be gleaned from the muffled audio. With the current cards I have, it is difficult to determine that Karen is the <shepherd's dog>.

I guess this big job will take a lot more time.

Emma’s emotional facilitation can make Jin, who is stated as being stone-hearted, worry about her. Emma is also stated to have better acting skills than both Jin and Nina and had never made even the slightest error in her acting when talking to Jin. (Self-Regulation + Emotional Management + Emotional Engagement + Emotional Facilitation + Acting Skills)

"This academy is really a tough place, huh....."

"It doesn't necessarily mean that all the students who dropped out of the school are unhappy. Apparently, once we lose our memories of this place, we can transfer to a private training school, and if we give up our dream of becoming a member of the <White Knights>, we can get a good-paying job."

"I see, that's true! I hope Kate-chan is doing well."

Even the stone-hearted Jin is beginning to worry, wondering if this girl will really be all right.

Even though she has the psychic ability to enhance her physical abilities, which is easy to use, it may be difficult for her to succeed at the Heiberg Academy if she is this pure.

Suddenly, Jin recalled the line he previously said to Nina.

—*There is nothing more dangerous in this world than a seemingly harmless fraudster.*

If Emma is a <shepherd's dog> and she is approaching us to find out how dangerous we are, then she is a very skilled fraudster.

Not only Jin, who has been distrustful of people since childhood, but also Nina, who is a first-rate actress, could not pull it off.

How could it be possible for someone to have been with Jin for such a long time and not show the slightest error in their acting?

Nina is stated to be a monster who doesn't ooze out her human nature. The term "human nature" is used to denote the essence of humankind, or what it means to be human. Human nature is believed to exist somehow independently of individuals, causing humans to simply become what they become. This, in turn, has been understood as also demonstrating a special connection between human nature and divinity, whereby human nature is understood in terms of final and formal causes. More specifically, this perspective believes that nature itself (or a nature-creating divinity) has intentions and goals, including the goal for humanity to live naturally. Such understandings of human nature see this nature as an "idea", or "form" of a human. This makes human nature a platonic concept. Since Nina doesn't ooze out her human nature while acting, this means that Nina's self-regulation, emotional management, emotional engagement, and acting skills are so good that the platonic concept of humanness doesn't show when she's acting. (Self-Regulation + Emotional Management + Emotional Engagement + Acting Skills)

The character portrayed by the task required of <shepherd's dog> is that of a perfectionist whose character is meticulous and careful, and who never leaves any stone unturned. Unless one is a monster like Nina, human nature will ooze out, even if one is performing an act a little bit.

Nina's platonically conceptual emotional skills also buffs her full scale IQ because Nina is stated to blend her imaginary persona into her mind. This means Nina platonically conceptually blends her persona into her mind, buffing her vsi, psi, wmi, and cpi to platonically conceptual levels. (Visual Spatial Index + Processing Speed Index + Working Memory Index + Cognitive Proficiency Index + Emotional Engagement + Acting Skills + Disguise Mastery)

This would also buff Jin since he's narratively stated to be above Nina in full scale IQ in volume 1. (Visual Spatial Index + Processing Speed Index + Working Memory Index + Cognitive Proficiency Index)

Basking in the afternoon sun, Nina walked alone through the Saturday hustle and bustle.

Yesterday, in the attic operations room, Jin had instructed her to disguise herself as Kate before coming to the meeting place.

She blended her imaginary persona into her body and mind, carefully selecting clothing that Kate, with her red hair and lively personality, would choose, and even differentiating her walk from her normal self. Looking at her current appearance, only some genius fraudster would realize that her true identity is Nina.

It has been two weeks since Nina had formed her alliance with Casper and Karen. Nina and Casper had weekly meetings at the same cafe with him. The only thing she learned so far was his hobbies on his days off. Nina had the transceiver in her ear, so Jin heard all of the conversations between them. Karen was busy with duels, so she had her maid, Satya, handle her communication with Nina. (Information Gathering)

Nina seemed to have already accepted the whole situation. While she was exploring the place, Jin was sticking imitation papers that he had taken out of the hidden storage on the wall.

On the imitation papers, black-and-white photographs of people and sticky notes are neatly pasted. The imitation papers themselves were also scrawled with notes, arrows, and other symbols. This would allow them to visually organize a complex operation.

"Now then, Nina. It's been two weeks since you formed an alliance with the two targets..... so let's summarize your progress."

"..... Casper and I have been having regular weekly meetings at the same café we were at back then. As you've heard through the wire, there's been no useful information at all."

"Well, you guys have been doing nothing but small talk ..... The only thing I could learn about him is what his hobbies are on his days off. Well, it could not be used as a potential breakthrough, though."

Jin put a sticky note next to a photo and wrote Casper's hobbies on it in bullet points.

"Okay, next is Karen ..... You haven't had any contact with her since then, have you?"

"Yeah. She's been busy with <duels>, so she had her maid, Satya, handle her communication with me."

"Satya is an important person", Jin put another sticky note on the wall.

"Hey Jin, which one do you think is more suspicious at the moment?"

"Well, I think both of them. Their every action is too unnatural."

Jin deduced that the reason why Casper was going out of his way to say that he’s not aiming for the White Knights is a bluff to make Nina believe that he’s not working for the school and that the reason for him forming an alliance is an excuse to get close to Nina, and the fact that he's approaching girls with no regard could be seen as part of his espionage activities. (Abductive Reasoning)

"First is Casper. He's been acting like a harmless guy for a while. The reason he's going out of his way to say that he's not aiming for the <White Knights> is a bluff to make us believe that he's not working for the school. The reason for forming an alliance is clearly an excuse to get close to you Nina, and the fact that he's approaching girls with no regard could be seen as part of his espionage activities."

"Now that you mention it, he also tried to get his hands on Satya ....."

"If he's the <shepherd's dog>, it seems natural that he'd want to keep an eye on Karen, who's been very conspicuous at the academy."

"Right, also Casper's abilities are still [unknown]. Couldn't you ask Rudy-sensei instead?"

"At Casper's request, the results of the <ability measurement> are not to be shared with anyone other than the instructor in charge of the test. I'm sure the higher-ups of the academy are aware of his abilities, but I can't dig that kind of information out of them."

"Eh, he's getting some kind of special treatment, isn't he? That's suspicious..... So what about Karen? How would you interpret the fact that she hasn't contacted me at all?"

Jin said it was unusual that a combat fanatic like Karen would even think about joining forces with anyone and that it’s possible that her usual behavior is an act. Satya’s psychic ability is the ability to heat up a cupful of liquid at will. It wouldn’t be surprising if the Heiberg Academy, which places emphasis on actual combat, eliminated her from the entrance examination. She also wasn’t present at the screening test. Jin came to the conclusion that Karen’s family has enough power to force a maid with only minor abilities to enter the school. (Critical Thinking + Convergent Thinking + Connective Thinking + Cognitive Reasoning + Analogical Reasoning + Inductive Reasoning)

"It's risky to go out of your way to contact her and get information out of her. Especially if she is the <shepherd's dog> with a huge secret of her own."

"And also, Karen's reasons for wanting to form an alliance were a little strange."

"I agree. It's unusual for a combat fanatic like her to even think about joining forces with anyone."

"Yeah, she doesn't seem like the type who would try to scheme like that."

"Well, it's possible that her usual behavior itself is an act."

"I see. ..... eh?"

Nina noticed a note pinned to a piece of imitation paper, and she couldn't help but speak up.

"Could that be..... Satya's psychic ability?"

"Your doubts are spot on, Nina. She's not at the level that would normally be allowed to enroll at the Heiberg Academy."

An ability called <Inexplicable Heat Source> that can heat up a cupful of liquid at will.

Although it may have some offensive power if heated to the point of boiling, it would not be surprising if the Heiberg Academy, which places emphasis on actual combat, eliminated her from the entrance examination. It is unnatural that she was not even present at the <screening test> that Jin was forced to take part in.

"It means that Karen's family has enough power to force a maid with only minor abilities to enter the school."

"Ugh, she is suspicious as well, huh....."

"There's no end to the suspicions. In any case, you should only think about gaining their trust and getting into their pockets."

Jin had connections with a detective named Heath and had him do background checks on Casper and Karen. There wasn't a lot of information about Casper, but the information about Karen was that she attends a dojo that teaches something called Eastern Breathing Techniques. (Information Gathering)

In the middle of his sentence, the sound of the plank being dislodged from under his feet rang out.

The mechanism had been activated and the rope ladder was being lowered down to the lower floor.

Nina covered her mouth with her hand and her eyes widened in astonishment.

"Don't tell me, the <shepherd's dog> sniffed this place out ....."

The man who climbed up the rope ladder was a man in his early thirties, blonde hair, blue eyes, and a man who could be found anywhere.

But he was dressed in the same military uniform as the instructors.

"W-What should we do, Jin? Isn't this bad? ....."

"Ah, don't worry. He's a colleague of mine."

"Eehh.....?"

The man dressed as an instructor smiled cheerfully as he retrieved the rope ladder to the attic.

"It's been a while, little genius fraudster. Has it been five years since we've seen each other?"

"I'm not a kid anymore, Mr. Heath. And could you please stop wearing such confusing outfits?"

"There's no way outsiders can walk around the school grounds unnoticed, is there? It's best to disguise myself as an instructor."

"Wait a second, please explain! Who is this person?"

Nina was finally able to interject, and Jin nonchalantly explained to her.

"He's a skilled detective, specializing in the underworld. He is the one who investigated Bennett's background last time."

"Your shady connections triggered once again....."

"I've requested a background check on Karen and Casper. Have you completed it yet?"

Heath, the detective, pulled a brown envelope from his pocket and tossed it to Jin.

"This is a midway report. I just wanted to come by and see you for the first time in a while."

"I wish I could ask this to all of you, but do you think I'm some kind of relative's kid or something?"

"The brat who used to stick with Rusty-san is now a big villain who picks fights with the empire. Isn't it natural that people would want to come and see if he's grown into a great man?"

Several of Rusty's former business associates, with whom Rusty had a close relationship of trust, have been cooperating with Jin for a fee after learning of his goals and the existence of the <shepherd's dog>.

Like Gasta, the landscaper, he does not take on work for free just because he is the son of a benefactor, perhaps out of respect for Jin, who has grown up to be a first-rate fraudster.

"......So, what's the result of your investigation?"

When Jin cut to the chase to hide his irritation, Heath finally began to explain.

"There wasn't a lot of information about Casper Crawford. As written there, on his days off he's either dating girls or playing his recently purchased guitar in his room. ......The interesting one is Karen Ashby."

"What kind of information have you uncovered?"

"Karen always goes out on her days off to the town of Akkas, at the foot of the academy. There, she diligently attends a dojo that teaches something called <Eastern Breathing Techniques>."

"That cautious-looking girl goes to such a shady dojo? Are you sure it's not just a rumor?"

Nina said that Karen goes to that dojo to concentrate her psychic ability with breathing techniques. Nina compared her fabricated psychic ability where she has to release her abilities by removing her brooch to Karen's psychic ability to come to this conclusion. (Connective Thinking + Associative Thinking + Analogical Reasoning + Abductive Reasoning)

In contrast to Jin, who was looking at her negatively, Nina was thinking about it with her hand on her chin.

"Breathing techniques, huh..... It certainly is possible."

"Nina, what do you mean?"

"Sometimes it takes a great deal of concentration to activate a powerful psychic ability. You see, I also have a setting that allows me to release my abilities by removing my brooch, right? The best way to quickly bring your concentration to the highest level is to have your body memorize a specific routine. That is exactly why I think breathing techniques would be the best option."

Nina, who has been playing the role of a psychic for a long time, has also mastered a whole range of knowledge on the control and application of psychic abilities. In this field, she is clearly far ahead of Jin.

"You see, Karen's psychic abilities seem even more difficult to control than my <Queen of Calamity>, don't you think? I wouldn't be surprised if she practiced breathing techniques."

Jin and Nina (disguised as Kate) went to the dojo that Karen attends. The mentor was a guy named Nathan, who was a fraudster that Jin along with Rudy crushed, which caused him to be wanted all over the country. Nathan was scared of Jin and begged him to not call the police on him. Jin threatened to tell the psychics he conned about him. Jin said for him to not tell anyone about his frauds, he has to take Kate as his apprentice. (Blackmail)

He crossed the small garden at the end of the gate and brazenly flung open the entrance door of the dojo.

"Who's that!?"

Waiting for the uninvited visitor was a mature man standing in the center of the wooden floor.

His thin but well-trained body was wrapped in an all-white robe, and he turned his sharp, hostile gaze toward them. Since Nina was not clad in her acting persona at this moment, she was almost overwhelmed by the sheer intensity of the man's presence.

"It's okay. You don't need to be scared of him."

Jin raised one hand while grinning.

"Yo, Nathan. It's been a while."

"H-How do you know that name.....?"

After pondering for a while as his body stiffened, the man seemed to have come to the worst possible conclusion.

"D-Don't tell me you're ..... that guy from Rusty's place....."

The momentum of his first impression was gone, and the man immediately ran toward the back door in the corner of the dojo.

However, the door would not budge even when he put all his weight on it and pushed.

"I-Impossible! Why won't it open.....!?"

"It's Kate's psychic ability here. You'd better give up trying to escape."

Of course, Nina had no idea what was going on.

Jin is a fraudster who will always be carefully prepared for even the slightest lie. Perhaps he had broken into the dojo grounds and blocked the back door with a piece of wood or something before meeting up with Nina.

"You shitty brat, what are you doing bringing a heretic with you .....!"

"I just wanted to be a good citizen and contribute to society."

"Y-You're not going to sell me out to the cops, are you?"

"Yeah, that's one way to do it. What shall I do, I wonder....."

"Give me a break! Please, I beg of you!"

Nathan folded his knees and sat down, rubbing his head against the floor and pleaded.

Nina thought she remembered reading about this in a book she had read sometime ago. This is a traditional way of apologizing from a certain country in the East.

For the time being, she decided to put on Kate's act and listened to the story.

"..... Jin, who the hell is this guy?"

"He's a fraudster who was very active until a few years ago."

"A fraudster?"

"A petty crook who specializes in fraud under the guise of a psychic. He was traveling all over the empire, making a fortune by claiming to be able to [turn ordinary people into psychics]."

"So, why is he so scared?"

"He just happened to be our target, so Rusty and I crushed him."

"Because of you guys, I'm wanted all over the country! I even had to get plastic surgery because of you....."

"It looks like you were quite stingy with the surgery expenses. You used to be so handsome, but now you don't look that way anymore."

"Hey, please let me off the hook! I'm serious about my business now! If my past gets out, I'll ....."

"Serious business? Do you mean dealing in shady products like breathing techniques?"

"I-I'm just exploiting a gray zone! All the efficacy claims are vague, and the customers are only those who can use their psychic abilities from the start! No one will ever suspect it even if it's not working!"

"Jin, this guy doesn't seem to have changed at all, though?"

"Shut your mouth, heretic! I'm talking to Jin-san right now!"

"He gives you an honorific before I know it....."

Although she had become numb to it because she was always with him, the world in which Jin had lived his entire life was a den of criminals.

If he had been living in such an environment since his childhood, it was no wonder he had such an extraordinary mental strength.

"Nathan, what do you think would happen if we accidentally slipped up and revealed your true identity?"

"I-I don't even want to think about it!"

"You would be lucky if it were just the police. Wouldn't it be worse if it were the psychics that used to be your customers whom you offended? Ah, you even have the famous Karen Ashby as your customer, right? A~a~, they'll kill you for sure....."

"W-What do you want?"

It seemed that he was able to draw out the desired response. The edge of Jin's mouth lifted up viciously.

"If you want to continue your serious business, take Kate here as your apprentice."

"I-Is that it.....?"

"Yes, that's it", Jin bent down, his eyes level with the man's. "At least for now."

At night, Karen went to the dojo and saw Kate (Nina). Nina introduced herself, but Karen had no intention of getting along with her. Nina used the slide technique, where she shifts the subject so naturally that the other party is unaware of it. This nullified Karen's insistence on not talking to her and won her agreement that she could talk to her if it was between training sessions. (Social Skills)

After exchanging a few words with the man who appeared to be her driver, Karen stepped into the dojo with a confident gait.

"..... Master, who's that girl?"

A suspicious look.

A chill ran down her spine, but Nina managed to hold it in. By their prior agreement, Nathan first introduced her.

"She's Kate Lambert, and she'll be joining us today for the breathing exercises. Go on, introduce yourself."

"Hi, I'm Kate."

After a brief introduction, Nina decided to close the distance at once.

"I've heard about you from Master. You're Karen ....., right? Is it true that you are a student at the Heiberg Academy?"

"I have no intention of getting along with you."

—It won't be easy, after all.....

Nina secretly clenched her fists.

To deceive the world from now on, the skill of a fraudster to win the trust of the other party to get into their pocket is indispensable. I can't afford to stumble at a place like this.

"Hee, you are stoic, aren't you Karen? Is that the secret of your strength?"

"Like I said, I have no intention of getting along with you....."

"It's okay, I'll focus once training starts. I'm good at switching on and off, you know."

"..... Suit yourself."

It will be a long time before the ice melts, but it doesn't seem to be a complete rejection.

So far, this is a success.

Perhaps this means that the deception techniques she learned from Jin have come in handy.

What Nina has just put into practice is the <slide> technique, in which she shifts the subject so naturally that the other party is unaware of it. Before one knew it, Nina had nullified Karen's insistence on not talking to her and won her agreement that she could talk to her if it was between training sessions.

Nina has been rushing to learn fraud techniques and has mastered them all. (Learning Ability)

Since deciding to commit fraud on both Karen and Casper, Nina has been rushing to learn practical fraud techniques, and it seems that she has already mastered them well enough.

Casper was jealous of Jin since he’s close to Nina and viewed him as a love rival. Jin was able to reassure Casper by fabrication about being childhood friends with Nina since elementary school and that they didn’t tell anyone because people would spread rumors about him getting into the school due to his connections, which would be troublesome. Casper wanted to know about Nina’s hobby so Jin fabricated that she’s into collecting knives, since her real hobbies doesn’t fit the character she’s acting. (Verbal Deception + Fabrication)

"Normally, I wouldn't even want to see your face, my love rival....."

"..... Wait, love rival?"

Jin didn't care about what everyone thought about his relationship with Nina, but he couldn't afford to have them get oddly jealous. Especially if the other party is a monster who was exempted from the entrance exam, he wanted to avoid any unnecessary conflict. Above all, we did not want to lose every chance to get in touch with Casper.

I think I should reassure him for now.

"Hey, aren't you misunderstanding something? Nina is just a friend."

"Ha? Are you trying to make me drop my guard down?"

"Of course not ..... you don't believe me at all, huh?", Jin said so while making a bitter expression on his face. "..... Alright. Can you promise me that you won't tell anyone?"

It's a fake reason made up on the spur of the moment, but he can talk it over with Nina later.

"Nina and I were childhood friends. We were in the same class for six years in elementary school."

"Haa? That's new to me."

"Because I haven't told anyone about it. If this gets out, people will spread rumors that I was able to get into this school because of my connections, and that will be troublesome. That's why Nina doesn't tell anyone either."

"What, so that was what it was about....."

As if his previous hostility had been a lie, Casper laughed with cheerful smile.

"I see, I see. I'm so relieved. Well, it's obvious that there's no way I'm going to lose to you, but nevertheless, it's good to have fewer rivals ..... Then, from now on, please support my love journey, will you?"

"Alright, alright, I'll support you, I'll support you."

"Then, quick, tell me about Nina-chan's hobbies. I'd like to have an excuse to ask her out on a date."

Letting out a sigh, Jin formulated a calculation in his mind.

In reality, she would probably be in her room reading a book or going to the theater, but such a gentle hobby does not fit her character as the <Queen of Calamity>.

Besides, he had a plan for Casper that he had been thinking about for a while.

"..... I heard that she's into collecting knives these days."

"Oh, what an exciting hobby .....!"

"I heard that there is a store around here that specializes in knives with unique designs. If you ask her out, she'll probably take you up on it."

"I see. ..... Well, let me thank you in advance."

"No problem."

Jin perceived Casper’s emotions and knew that he wasn’t “smiling” in his eyes despite the friendly gesture. (Emotional Perception + Seeing Through People)

"Then, let's do our best."

Jin reluctantly squeezed back the right hand that was held out in front of him.

From the outside, this was a friendly gesture, but deep in Casper's eyes, he was not smiling at all.

This guy seems to have a lot of openings, but at the heart of the matter, he draws a line between himself and others. Perhaps this guy does not simply dislike men.

Perhaps this guy, in essence, does not trust anyone.

—*This kind of opponent is the most troublesome.*

Jin stared at the guy's figure as it moved away from him, bitterly cursing inwardly.

Jin can still perceive Nina’s nervousness, even after she stops acting as Kate, which implies that Jin can perceive Nina’s emotions while she’s acting. Nina’s emotional management is on a

platonically conceptual level due to her human nature not oozing out while acting, so this means that Jin has platonically conceptual emotional perception. This would also buff his psychological insight categories and his emotional understanding because he's perceiving the platonic concept of emotions. That's the highest level. (Emotional Perception + Emotional Understanding + Psychological Insight + Cold Reading + Profiling + Seeing Through People)

Walking side by side like this, He could see that Nina's steps had become much heavier.

Even after removing her red wig and colored contact lenses, her nervousness still seems to be present.

Nina blends herself into a role and creates a completely different persona with near self-brainwashing precision. (Emotional Engagement + Emotional Management + Acting Skills)

Method acting.

A high-level technique to blend oneself into a role and create a completely different persona. It is a technique commonly used in the theater world, but Nina can perform it with near self-brainwashing precision.

When she tricked Bennett before, Nina was merely adjusting her values and her mental behavior based on herself, but when she becomes a completely different person, it must be very draining.

Jin told Nina that Casper was going to ask her on a date. He gave Nina a piece of paper and told her to tell Casper that she wants to go to the place written on the piece of paper. The plan was to know Casper's psychic ability, since he refused to tell Nina. There is a small burglary gang based in the area of the place. Mr. Health is in touch with the leader of the gang so Jin asked him to pass on some information to the gang. The gang will attack the store and force Casper to use his abilities. The store is fake, as he had Gasta and his team to renovate an old abandoned store, and it is currently staffed by Gasta's employees. (Short-Term Planning + Planning Coverage + Planning Accuracy)

"Let me change the subject, Nina. Can I trust you with another important task tomorrow?"

"..... Don't tell me, is it Casper?"

Nina made a blatantly displeased face, but Jin continued regardless.

"Tomorrow morning, he's going to ask you out on a date."

"A-A date!?"

"I gave him information that you walk around the girls' dormitory on Sunday mornings, so I'm sure he'll try to make contact with you under the pretense of a coincidence. When he contacts you, tell him that you want to go to the restaurant on this piece of paper."

"..... Umm, are you up for it, Jin?"

"Well, this is a great opportunity after all."

"Yeah ..... figures."

The paper Jin handed her contained the address of a dangerous establishment such as a knife workshop.

After making sure Nina had skimmed through it, Jin told her of his plan.

"Remember the terms when Karen offered you an alliance? She demanded that you investigate Casper's psychic abilities. And besides, we, for our part, would at least like to know the abilities of the person we're going to deceive as well. ..... So I devised a plan to use on the day of the date."

"There your wicked face again....."

"There's a small burglary gang that's based in this area. The informant who is in touch with the leader of the gang happens to be an acquaintance of mine - more specifically, Mr. Heath. I asked him to pass on some information to the gang."

"Don't tell me you're planning to have those people attack the store? To force Casper to use his abilities?"

"Of course, the store itself is also fake. I had Gasta-san and his team renovate an old abandoned store that had long been vacant, in hopes that someday I could use it for something. Now they are putting knives on the shelves at a rapid pace. The store is also currently staffed by Gasta-san's employees, so safety measures are perfectly in place."

Jin is aware that he’s insane. (Self-Awareness + Emotional Realization)

Jin, who would even use criminals as pawns for his goals, is clearly insane.

Jin is aware of that much, but it is time for Nina to get used to it.

Jin was able to see through Nina’s calm expression. (Seeing Through People)

"If you make him fall in love with you, he might tell you some important information someday ..... huh, you seem to be a little bitter, after all."

"I'm not bitter at all."

A perfect, impeccable smile.

Even with that calm expression on her face, Jin could see that Nina was hiding something.

Nina and Casper went to the store. Jin gave Nina a transceiver so they could communicate. Five minutes after she entered, three men will enter the store just in time for the counter clerk to be shifted. One of them has a gun but Mr. Heath, who sold them the gun, has made it so that the bullets won't come out. Two of them will intimidate the waiter and the customers, and the

remaining one is planning to find the finest quality goods in the wooden crate. Nina has to incite Casper to attack the criminals and reveal his psychic abilities.

After getting off the bus, they walked for a while through the downtown area, which was lined with street stores. Following the directions she had memorized last night, Nina saw the store she was looking for in a deserted alleyway.

The stylishly written sign reading <Wates & Pete's Cutlery> was of such high quality that it was hard to believe that it had been completed in one night. Gasta, the landscaper whom she had met several times, had a rough appearance, but his workmanship was surprisingly delicate. The unmotivated-looking clerk - a face she had seen when she had built the pit at the school before - was one of Gasta's most trusted subordinates, and it seemed he knew about Nina and Jin's circumstances.

Anyway, the small transceiver signal could reach her now.

Nina focused her attention on the noisy instructions she could hear in her ear.

[Nina, if you can hear my voice, tilt your head to the left. ..... Okay. Let's reconfirm the arrangements.]

Entering the surprisingly spacious store, she listened while acting as if she was gazing intently at the knives.

[Five minutes from now. The three men will enter the store just in time for the counter clerk to be shifted. One of them has a gun, but don't worry.

Mr. Heath, who sold them the gun, has made it so that the bullets won't come out. Their gang is so small that they can't even afford to consume bullets for test firing, so they don't know about it at all.]

Jin must be watching them from behind the hidden door behind the counter.

As for Nina, she has no choice but to trust the information given to her by her accomplice.

[While the two of them intimidate the waiter and the customers, the remaining one is planning to find the finest quality goods in the wooden crate. The rest is up to you, Nina, to successfully incite Casper to do his bidding. As long as we find out his psychic abilities' true nature, today's objective will be accomplished.]

Nina tapped lightly on her ear to convey her understanding.

The robbers appeared. One of them came up to Nina and Casper. Nina told Casper that she’s a pascift and doesn't slaughter humans unnecessarily. Casper slowly lifted his right hand and thrusted his palm in front of the robber's face. His hand slowly closed as if to crush it. Then the robber suddenly began to scream in agony and ran out with the other robbers. Nina had no clue what his psychic ability was since all he did was put his hand in front of the robber and close it.

"Everybody raise your hands!"

The robbers, who had appeared two minutes earlier than scheduled, raised their voices.

The three men were wearing black balaclavas to hide their faces, and the tallest man was clutching a pistol.

As per the script she had thought up beforehand, Nina whimpered.

"..... Casper-san. Looks like we've been caught up in an unfortunate event."

"Looks like it, Nina-chan. What shall we do?"

Contrary to the clerk who surrendered easily, the two of them kept a relaxed expression on their faces.

The leader of the group, who had sensed their unusual reaction, came up to them and said,

"What are you guys whispering about!?"

"You see, it's because we're on a date."

"Can't you see your situation!? We have guns!"

Although she knew there was no danger, this situation still made her tremble with fear. Nina smiled, trying her best to suppress the urge to run away.

"Ahaha, do you think you can handle us with just that thing?"

Laughing in annoyance, Casper lightly tapped the robber on the shoulder.

"Nina-chan, looks like they really mean it."

"D-Don't tell me you guys are heretics-....."

Casper must not know that the pistol has been tampered with. And yet it was clearly outrageous that he could behave in this manner.

[All right, Nina, go incite Casper.]

"..... What's the matter? If your hand shakes so much, you wouldn't be able to aim properly."

After clearing her throat, Nina turned to Casper.

"By the way, Casper-san. I may look like this, but I'm a pacifist, and I don't want to slaughter humans unnecessarily, no matter how many robbers there are."

"I see, you're very kind, Nina-chan....."

"And I have my doubts about your ability. No matter how meager the alliance may be, if your psychic abilities are nowhere near as good as Karen-san's, then there's no merit for me."

"..... Huh, wait a minute? Nina-chan, is there some kind of halo shining above you?"

"Umm, are you listening?"

"Haha, I know," Casper laughed lightly, "Shall I crush these annoying people a little bit then?"

Flames of murderous intent lit up the eyes that peeked through the red hair's gaps.

Casper slowly lifted his right hand and thrust his outstretched palm in front of the robber's face.

Five fingers slowly closed as if to crush it. Then the robber suddenly began to scream in agony. The hunched-over man retreated pitifully, his eyes fixed on Casper as if he were looking at something terrifying.

"Y-You, that was....."

"Don't look away, look carefully. And remember how lucky you are to know the cause of your death."

"Hiiih~, you monster.....!"

It was not clear if it was a matter of angle or whatever was going on. Perhaps because it was only a moment, the two remaining robbers who rushed to the scene didn't seem to understand either.

—*But there is no doubt that there is something with his right hand*.

"This is the last warning I'm going to give you now."

Casper stated coldly as he slowly approached the frightened robbers.

"If you don't want to get yourself killed, you've got ten seconds to get the hell out of here. Ten, nine, eight ..... Oh shit, I'm getting tired of counting. Alright, let's change it to three seconds. Three, two....."

The frightened man shouted at his companions, who still didn't seem to realize the gravity of the situation.

"L-Let's get out of here, guys! This guy's nuts.....!"

"Come on, hurry up. Don't ever interrupt my date again!"

The robbers ran away as fast as they could, dragging their friends, who were too stunned to stand up, along with them.

—*Only a really strong person can repel an opponent with threats alone.*

And it is not just a bluff, like Nina's, that is a combination of bad reputation and acting. The robbers clearly were terrified by what they witnessed.

Something so vicious that the robbers were so frightened and yet could instantly understand the danger - what exactly did Casper generate with his psychic ability?

Nina had no clue, even though she had him use his psychic ability right in front of her. All the time and money spent on this farce was wasted.

Casper was able to sense Jin’s presence behind the hidden door in the store, but Jin had prepared an escape route in case it was needed. (Perception)

"I've been feeling a presence since a while ago."

Casper, not heeding the clerk who was trying to stop him, reached out his hand to the wall behind the counter.

"Hey, clerk. This is definitely a hidden door, right?"

Casper pushed on the brick wall and a rectangular outline appeared on the wall. A metal shaft was threaded through the shorter side of the rectangle, and the hidden door rotated around it.

Casper smiled like an explorer who had discovered a hidden treasure and entered the darkened office in the back.

What excuse would they use to get out of this predicament?

—Pretend that Jin is hired as a part-timer?

No, that would be too unnatural, especially given that students at the Heiberg Academy receive monthly subsidies.

—Shall I assert that I didn't know anything about it?

No, Casper, who already doubts the relationship between them, will not be deceived.

Nina felt a sense of foreboding as she realized that hell awaited her at the end of every option.

This would be the end of their fraud.

If Casper were the <shepherd's dog>, the two fraudsters would be chased out of the school and left to rot in the dark.

"..... Huh?"

Nina's bad imagination, however, was quickly negated.

Behind the hidden door - the room where Jin was supposed to be hiding - was completely empty. There were only two very simple office desks lined up side by side, and no sign of life.

"That's strange, I definitely felt a presence here."

Jin had no idea how Casper had noticed the hidden door, but he had prepared an escape route in case it was needed, so it was no problem. He had Gasta create a mechanism whereby the floor under the office desk could be removed to expose a hole just large enough for a grown man to just barely fit through.

Emma was able to sense the presence of Jin and Nina. (Perception)

Sensing the presence of someone in the distance, she ducks into a nearby bush.

Looking closely, she sees that two of the suspects happen to be walking together. They appeared to be returning to the school after finishing some errands right now.

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Ranking of Jin's Categories Ranked

1. Emotional Intelligence
2. Insight
3. Full Scale IQ
4. Planning
5. Strategy
6. Tactics
7. Field Skills
8. Deception
9. Adversity Capacity
10. Thinking/Reasoning
11. Foresight
12. Countering
13. Manipulation
14. Social Intelligence

Ranking of Nina's Categories Ranked

1. Emotional Intelligence
2. Deception
3. Full Scale IQ
4. Manipulation
5. Social Intelligence
6. Tactics
7. Strategy
8. Field Skills
9. Adversity Capacity
10. Planning
11. Thinking/Reasoning

Ranking of Bennett's Categories Ranked

1. Deception
2. Planning/Strategy
3. Manipulation
4. Social Intelligence
5. Emotional Intelligence
6. Insight

Ranking of Emma's Categories Ranked

1. Emotional Intelligence
2. Deception
3. Social Intelligence
4. Thinking/Reasoning
5. Insight