Subaru POV

The new room was very dark. It was only bright enough for them to see the floor directly in front of their feet. The only light was from a dim bulb in the middle of the room. It glowed a soft white light. Under their feet was what felt like a hard floor. It was very smooth. A look down and it was what looked like hard concrete. The surface was a uniform dark gray. This was a heavy contrast to the pristine rooms they had been in before. The air here hung with a thin mist like the inside of a meat locker. Subaru shivered from the cold air around him. Each breath he took created a small cloud of precipitation.

The atmosphere hung over all the group like a thick fog. Subaru was blinded with trepidation. He could barely breathe. He felt as if there was something powerful here. An old powerful force that shook Subaru to his core.

“Hey, um, Subaru? Where exactly are we?” Emilia's voice rang out from beside Subaru causing him to regain his bearings.

“I am not sure.” Subaru stuck his hands out in front of him, “I am going to search around this place. Don't panic alright.”

“Okay Subaru, since you are searching we will stay put so we don’t bump into each other," Otto yelled out, voice shaking.

Subaru shuffled around slowly. His hands hit a cold surface. Subaru slowly dragged his hands across the wall feeling the little pockets. Subaru kept on searching until his hand touched something different. It was smoother than the concrete and also had no holes. Subaru tapped it. The thing sounded like thick glass.

Reaching the glass this feeling is amplified. It was as if he were walking towards the sun. There was a strong force radiating from behind the glass. There was immense pressure. It was oppressive but not malicious. There was no emotion behind it. It was simply a naturally powerful force like how the sun might burn everything indiscriminately. Subaru’s vocal chords turned to cement. His fingers turned to lead. His legs were turning to putty. He forced himself to fight against this pressure. He found his voice to speak.

“Hey guys I found something, come here,” Subaru rapped his knuckles against the glass slightly with the strength he had.

Subaru heard 7 footsteps approach him. They were all slow and steady. One by one all of them reached Subaru. As they grouped together Subaru knocked on the foggy glass.

“Guys take a look,” Subaru pointed into the glass. On the other side there was what looked like another room. Barely visible through the glass was what looked like a prison room. It

had chains on the sides of the walls. They were an orangey red from the rust built up on them. There was a thick yellow fog that hung in the air behind the glass.

“That looks like a prison room. This place is disgusting,” Felix turned a light shade green covering his mouth.

Emilia covered her mouth and gasped. Emilia knew better than to be loud in an unknown place. Even then she still hated the sight of the desolate unforgiving prison.

From behind the glass a figure slowly walked out from the shadows. Everyone took a small step back. Garfiel readied his fists clenching them and getting into a fighting stance. Julius gripped the hilt of his sword. As the figure came into view they relaxed a bit.

They didn't seem threatening in the slightest. The person on the other side looked up into the glass. They didn't seem like they had been starved. They just looked tired. When the person noticed team 10 at the glass door he sprinted towards the glass.

“This is madness, not only killing people but also holding them prisoner in such terrible conditions,” Crusch muttered in quiet shaken outrage.

They all jumped back a few steps. On closer look it was a man. He had tousled black hair. Atop his nest of messy hair rested what looked like a tarnished silver crown, a once regal, awe inspiring piece. On the front of his crown were 3 copper lines embossed into it. One of the Copper stripes was a sickly rustic green. In his hip hung a long gleaming sword. The hilt had been adorned with a blue shiny diamond. The sword's edge was dull and unthreatening. It has cracks running down the pathetic blade.

Copper on a crown? One of the pieces is oxidized too. Not my choice for a crown but who am I to judge, Anastasia pondered as she stared thoughtfully at the once luxurious crown.

It looked like he had just woken up from a nap. His unnaturally pale face was etched with exhaustion, his eyes widened at the sight of the new visitors. He had a chiton woven with silver threads. On his neck rested a glistening silver necklace. It was two rings that looked as if they had once been together.

Emilia's gaze drifted towards the crown and the necklace. Her breathing hitched. A slight shiver ran down Emilia's spine. It was as if she was remembering something although never actually seeing it before, at least she thought she hadn’t. Those symbols meant something, but the purpose of them slipped Emilia's mind.

“Help me out of here!” The man pointed towards a metal door on the right of the glass, “This place needs to be bleached! Even if I don't get out of this damned place I need it to be fixed! It can't fail so early. It has been only 3 generations for us!”

Looking at the door it was very thick. It was shut with metal bolts. The door was covered in an orange-brown rust. As Subaru lunged for the door to release the man. Subaru gripped one of the rusty bolts. The rough surface against his skin hurt but he continued on. There was a lot of resistance, Subaru needed to adjust his grip trying to loosen the bolt. The rust started flaking and falling off getting all over his hands.

As the bolt finally started to twist he felt a childish pang of excitement. Even if his hands were getting covered with grime rust and his own blood. He still held the excitement that a selfless fool would get while taking a bullet for a stranger.

He could get that man out and it could be of major help. It wasn't pragmaticism, it almost never was. Just a cover up for his inherent self detrimental behavior. The last screws were almost off, only one of them left.

"You'll be out in a second man," Subaru called out, only they had been teleported out.

"Thank you so much Satella and Flugel for saving me—," The prisoner's words of gratitude were never heard for the better or the worse.

"Whoa—?!" Garfiel yelps as he is launched forward.

There was a sudden lurch. Their surroundings had gone completely white for a split second. They were quickly teleported to a new room. The quick change in lighting had momentarily stunned them all. Garfiel stumbled to the side propping himself up against a wall. They slowly gained their grip on the situation taking their surroundings. The heavy mist was gone. The air was now back at a manageable temperature. The force he had felt from before had stopped. His soul felt like it had shed a few tons.

I should have worked faster! I could have gotten the man out. I should have been more diligent, Subaru mentally chided himself.

H-hey guys what is up. Sorry for teleporting you guys to the wrong room. It—happens sometimes.

The voice… he spoke very quickly. Why is that? Subaru had been snapped out of self loathing.

One more thing, the words of the old senile man. Take no note of them. When you age you tend to lose a bit of mental ability. Heh…heh…

The voice seemed awfully off balance. It spoke quickly but not without purpose.

Why speak so fast? Does he really fear the prisoner? This tower really is something else. All of this had confused the nasty eyed knight.

Subaru's hands were red and covered in rust from the effort. It still stung. He looked around the area taking in his surroundings. The floor below him was shiny, gray porcelain tiles. The walls were a darker, more solid, shade of gray. A dark oak door stood tall in the middle of the wall in front of him. Next to it was a small keypad the size of a phone. It has 9 numbers on it with a green and red button on either side. The tiny screen was above it which was a dark green.

On the opposite side of the room sat a desk. It was made of dark oak. It was polished and had a sheen to it. On the thick legs of the table sat two sets of 4 drawers. Under the desktop was another compartment.

Anastasia rubbed her hand across the shiny wood of the table. There was no sign of dust or any grime for that matter. *What needs to be bleached?* The merchant thought to herself. She had heard that term from Emilia a while ago. It was a Subaruism. It meant something along the lines of being deep cleaned. Anastasia looked around again. Nothing needed to be visibly cleaned. Everything in the room was completely sterile.

Alexander speaking, can I get everyone's attention please?

"Alexander, how ironic," Subaru snickered.

The voice above echoed loudly. Everyone stopped and looked up. There sat a speaker where the sound was coming from.

"That is the metia we used in the snakes and ladders game. It is very similar to the metia in Pristella, just way smaller. Perhaps they have a connection to the people who designed Pristella," Julius pointed to the ceiling.

So pretty simple stuff, you complete some riddles and escape the room for this level. You have an allotted amount of time. You have 15 minutes to complete it before a punishment is handed out. The faster you complete the puzzle the more points you get. Any questions?

"Tis guy in the metia is much more talkative now. Wassup with that?" Garfiel turned towards Subaru raising an eyebrow. Subaru just responded with a shrug.

"Let's debate about the semantics of it later, y'all have any questions?" Anastasia surveyed their faces. They all shook their heads. The premise was very simple.

The information that Baku gave us was pretty useless. I had suspected that. It didn't really matter if it was information or points. It was rather the idea of it. He was willing to give up something to gain an alliance. That would suggest there is something we have he needs. Aside

from that it was a very useful insight. He… or at least other people can learn about the next games, Anastasia thinks to herself.

Alright then let's get this show on the road.

The voice used a Subaruism, so did the man in the prison. They must have some connection to where Subaru is from, Anastasia takes a mental note.

Emilia walked towards the desk. She tugged on the metal handle opening the drawer on the underside of the table. As she opened it something came into view. It was a leather book. It looked worn out. Emilia picked it up. Some of the leather was falling off revealing the hard cover underneath. Emilia lifted up the book.

"Hey guys look what I found," She smiled proudly at her new discovery.

"Emilia-tan is already working hard to solve the case," Subaru gave a wide grin to Emilia as he walked over. Emilia handed the book to Subaru. He opened the book and both of them leaned in taking a look inside.

"Stop being so hasty, slow down for a second," Otto walks up to the elf and her knight.

They all peered into the notebook. The pages curled at the corners. The paper itself was a neutral yellow. It looked like it had once been fresh but had aged over time. The paper had almost crumbled in Subaru's hand just from exerting too much force. Most of the pages were empty until they reached 10 pages in. There written in clean i-glyph was the name, Darius.

As they were starting to read the text, the book disappeared from Subaru's hands. Otto looked up towards the speaker in annoyance.

Stop snooping around. That isn't important, but just stop.

"We'll stop if you answer one question Alexander. Who is this Darius guy?"

Oh Darius, that bumbling idiot! He was just… an insignificant enemy of mine. A… a third-rate ruler, a fraudulent king, at that. D- don't worry about him. Anyways yall are taking up too much time. I- I need to talk to another group.

"He is lying, the wind reeks of deceit," Crusch sternly points out.

"We will have a discussion about this later, let's just focus on the issue at hand," Anastasia sighed in annoyance while pressing her forehead. All of this was giving her a migraine.

They started searching all the drawers. Inside of each of them were slips of paper. Each of the papers were in i-glyph so everyone could read them easily. They spread all of the papers out on the desk.

“Let's start with the paper that has ‘code’ written on it,” Otto points towards a smaller sheet of fresh, white, printer paper.

Julius, being the closest, picks it up and clears his throat, “murder —> weapon —> victim in that order.”

“We can only find out what it could mean from reading the other papers,” Otto looks down at the other papers.

They worked diligently matching up the papers that made sense. Once that was finished Subaru started to read it aloud.

“There was once a Copper Cheetah and Diamond Snake. The Copper Cheetah was a strong and loyal creature. He was powerful and nobody contested it. One day though the Diamond Snake breathed a poison into the Copper Cheetahs bedroom while he was asleep. This weakened the Copper Cheetah. This illness caused the Copper Cheetah to die. When he ended up dying the Diamond Snake told everyone that the Copper Cheetah entrusted him with the leadership. With that the Diamond Snake took the throne. When they had found his body they didn't even think it was the Copper Cheetah. The poison had turned his once regal, orange look into a dull sickly green with rust flaking all over the place.”

I seriously wished that he could die like in the story and wouldn't be needed to maintain power.

“What?” Anastasia asked.

It's nothing. Carry on.

“So what would the answer even need to be used for?” Garfiel asked expectantly.

“That pad thing back there.” Anastasia pointed towards the key pad, “Maybe we need to input a number into there, then the doors will open.”

“The puzzle is super long. There are also no numbers in the puzzle. How are we supposed to figure it out?” Otto narrows his eyes looking at the page intently.

Trust me buddy when I say this. I wanted to shorten this but I couldn't. This is seriously taking way longer than I expected, *sigh.*

He is getting bored… this really isn’t a great sign, Anastasia worries.

Subaru takes a look at the paper carefully, “He said he tried his best to shorten it but he couldn't do it anymore. That would imply that Copper Cheetah and Diamond Snake are completely necessary to have and he couldn't have shortened the names. There was only one Cheetah and one Snake so why would he keep the words before their names.”

“Maybe let's take a look around the room to see for any other clues,” Emilia suggests.

They started searching the room looking for any clues. Otto walked up to the keypad. He looked into the green screen. He put his finger against a random number. He pressed the key multiple times. One number three, two number three, three number three. Each number had a gap in between them. Then the other two number threes were next to each other. No other numbers would appear.

“Hey guys take a look at this,” Otto calls out.

“Take a look at this. There are 4 numbers and 2 separations. Maybe each of the words represents a separation,” Otto theorized.

“That is plausible. It still wouldn’t explain how we get numbers out of those words,” Crusch calls out while rereading the text.

What do we currently know right now? The murderer is Diamond Snake and the victim is Copper Cheetah. What is similar between them? How can we get a number from that?

Time is ticking, you have 5 minutes left.

They all started looking around more quickly. They hadn’t started going frantic yet but there was still some panic building up in the air.

Felix put his hands on his hips, “Nyew know, killing someone with poison is really dirty. What kind of poison turns someone green and causes them to rust?”

Turns green and makes them rust… the Copper Cheetah died from turning green and rusting. The poison did that to him so it would make it the weapon. Oxygen would be the weapon. What is in common? Both Oxygen and Copper are elements but Diamonds aren’t… Subaru suddenly sprinted towards the keypad.

Two minutes left.

“I think I got the code!” Subaru started punching in numbers into the keypad.

“Don't be hasty, we don’t know what the consequences are if we get it wrong!” Otto yells from behind the desk.

They all turned their heads towards the keypad where Subaru stood unmoving.

This could be the wrong code… what if we get this wrong. What if I am wrong, Subaru's mind rushes.

Subaru's hand hovered inches away from the keypad. Cold sweat rolled down his temples dripping onto the floor. Subaru feels a gentle tap against his shoulder, it was Anastasia.

"I think I found the code," she revealed.

Anastasia quickly gave Subaru what she found. The code she figured out was the exact same as his.

If Subaru got this too then this must be the right answer, Anastasia thinks to herself confidently.

If Anastasia got this right it must be the correct answer, Subaru looks towards the keypad.

"You got the code by figuring out that the murder was Diamond Snake, the weapon was oxygen and the victim was Copper Cheetah?" Subaru asks for confirmation.

"Yup, then found the atomic number for all of them. Diamonds are made up of carbon, carbon is 6. Oxygen is 8, and Copper is 29."

1 minute left. Tick tock time is running out.

Crap! Subaru quickly jabbed the numbers 6, 8, and 29. Just as he was going to press the green button Anastasia stopped him.

"Yes, I know the faster we finish this the more points we get, but this time it isn't a good idea. Just trust me on this," Anastasia looks towards Subaru.

30 seconds left.

"Just wait a bit longer," Anastasia put her hand on Subaru's shoulder. His hand was anxiously hovering over the keypad.

15 seconds left.

"Just a bit longer. Also remember, the fattest animal is always the ones who are shot down first," Subaru's hands were practically vibrating at this point. He had realized why Anastasia wanted to stall for time.

5 seconds left.

“NOW!” Anastasia shouted.

Subaru’s hands dashed to press the button. The numbers on the keypad lit up and a little jingle played. Subaru's heart rate slowed down. He took a big breath in letting the pressure from his joints release. Anastasia wiped the sweat off her brow.

Creeeak. There was a sound to the right. The wooden door had opened revealing a bright light that led to the next room.

Completed in 14 minutes 59 seconds you get a measly 50 points. But hey, congratulations, you will not die. You shall be moving on to the next room.

Only 50 points? Perfect, Anastasia smirked.

Baku POV

Baku and his team watched as their surroundings peeled away around them for a transient amount of time. During that time Baku could make out an empty void below him devoid of any activity. No stars, no galaxies, no planets, just an empty lifeless void.

In that micro instant Kaji saw a clear baby blue sky. Devoid of any substance. No clouds, no planes, no birds, just an empty open sky that went on for an infinity.

After that very brief moment they had landed in their new room. It had taken Baku a moment to realize what the place was. He had seen this place a while back, maybe once while watching TV when he was very young.

Although never attending an actual high school he remembered sitting in his living room when he was around 4 years old watching a show where they were in a high school setting. He remembered every moment and detail of that episode. It was one of those shows he really enjoyed.

The room had tiled floors. All around them were rows of desks. 30 of them to be exact. Each one of them were the exact same. A wooden desk with metal legs. Each of them was polished down. There was a door on the side of the room with a keypad next to it.

We have to insert the code into a keypad. Pretty standard stuff, Baku yawns.

In front of them sat a white board. There was a word problem written as follows. The angle of a straight line divided by two minus A, B, and C will give you the angle of incline. An ice

brick goes down an ice ramp as fast as possible on this incline. How fast does it speed up on earth? Below the question was written out in chalk, _.__

“There is more on the tables,” Marco picked up a paper that was lying on one of the desks.

“Can you read it aloud for us,” Kaji requested while making his way through the room.

“Lemme see here, ‘all of these Latin or Greek based words with the amount of letters most in common will be used. They are all cognates of English words,” Marco reads aloud.

“Hmm~mm, cognates of English words. Sounds good, what else is there?” Baku rests his head on his shoulder.

“There are some questions here, questions A, B, and C. It must be the ones mentioned on the board.” Kaji reads out his sheet of paper, “ Question A : what is food eaten by 75% of the population? Hint: they are at the taxonomy level kingdom. Question B: what is a place people are taken to when injured. And finally Question C: A type of government where people vote, it was the result of many revolutions. ”

They are using academic knowledge for these puzzles. I wonder what are the limitations to what can be here, Baku ponders. He knew that there were people from other worlds here, at least he thought they were from a different world with different rules.

“If I remember correctly 75% of the population eats meat. But it says they are at the taxonomy level kingdom so it must be the word animal. That would also make it 6,” Kaji points out, snapping Baku out of his train of thought.

You guys have already figured out what to do. Thank god, I was dealing with another group. They were a pain. Like seriously, asking way too many personal questions. They found a journal and just started reading it, like come on. Watching them struggle ain’t any fun either. It is *so* boring.

“People like that are qui~ite obnoxious,” Baku chuckles at the complaints. The mention of the journal had intrigued Baku. He was slightly disappointed at the idea of it being confiscated.

Let’s see here. Where people go when injured, a hospital, easy. Maybe in other languages the word count might change. Even with latin or greek root cognates it still would be the number 8. The simplicity of the puzzle confused Kaji. He thought it would be harder.

“Hey Baku, just to confirm, you got 6 for A and 8 for B?” Kaji looks towards Baku for confirmation.

“I also got that, good stuff Kaji,” Baku gave Kaji a pat on the back.

Y’all need anything, ima be gone for like a minute?

“Nah, I think we should be fine,” Kaji looks around at his group. Marco gives Kaji a little thumbs up and Baku shakes his head.

A moment later Baku yells, “Hey dude I have a question.”

No response— perfect, Baku lightly taps Kaji on the shoulder and whispers into his ear.

“He is planning on doing a death game sometime soon. Let's get as low points as possible alright, throw em off a lil.”

I am expecting at least one of the teams to pull this off. Trench coat guy and Team 10 are a no go for attacking right now. It would be an exceptional waste of an opportunity when they can be taken out later, Baku predicts.

“You are pretty bad at math,” Kaji winks at Baku. Baku gave a slight chuckle in response.

Anyways I am back, you get anywhere?

“Yeah we are doing fine,” Kaji says as he writes down the answers for questions A and B.

“For question C I think it is 10. Although the word is democracy the cognates have 10 letters. Democracia, Démocratie, Democrazia, just to name a few,” Kaji lists off from memory.

“You remember all of that?” Marco looks at Kaji in awe.

"Of course I do, otherwise I wouldn't have said it,” Kaji gives Marco a smirk.

“So our answers are now 6,8, and 10. We can now get started on our main problem,” Baku stretches his arms back behind his head.

Baku looks up at the board, so does Kaji.

10 minutes on the clock

Time to work this out, so a straight line is 180°. Half of that would be 90°. Add A, B, and C and minus 90° by that and it should give us 66°. Ice on ice as fast as possible implies that

there is friction. The fastest ice can go on ice would imply lowest friction possible so it would have a friction of 0.3, ice can also have a higher friction of 0.5 but I am positive it is 0.3. Now I just have to do the calculations for the acceleration, Kaji works out mentally.

"Hey, dude, how much time do we have left?" Kaji calls out.

It has only been a few seconds since I said 10 minutes left. Here have a clock

A digital clock appears on the wall. It reads 9:57.

Only a few seconds! We have to do filler activities to take up the time without being suspicious, Kaji was mildly annoyed at this.

Kaji signaled towards the time being projected on the board with a movement of his head. Baku took a look and gave Kaji a shrug. Looks like they would be taking the more irritating route.

*Time to get back to the problem. I've got all the parts I need to solve this. The acceleration is 9.8 m/s^2 due to it being on earth. The friction is 0.3 and the incline is 66°. Plug it into the formula a = g * (sin(θ) - μ * cos(θ)). Then we get a = 9.8 * (sin(66) - 0.3 cos(66)). So the answer here should be 7.76.*

"The answer is 6.76 is it not?" Baku cocks his head while looking at the board intently.

"Yeah I think it just might be. You got something we can write with?" Kaji picks up the chalk that was given to them. Baku and Kaji stand in front of the board working out the problem. In truth they had already known what the answer was.

"But wait, it couldn't be that, it doesn't take into account the friction," Kaji hesitates and corrects Baku wiping away some chalk from the board.

Playing the waiting game ain't fun but it is necessary. Making ourselves less of a target is the goal, Baku was starting to get bored.

Good grief, you guys are struggling too? I don't know which was more boring, this or chilling in the tower alone. Welp, I will be alone with the whole tower to myself after this entire game is over.

Alone with the whole tower to myself when the game is over? He said that someone would win this tower if they won the game. That would imply… The words of Alexander had cast Baku into deep thought.

Sorry for that, five minutes left though.

“Damn it, this math makes no sense!” Baku snaps the chalk sending little splinters flying all over the place.

Kaji writes down the equation on the board, a = 9.8 * (sin(66) - 0.5 cos(66)). He simplifies the equation to a = 9.8 * (0.9135 – 0.5 • 0.4067).

“Baku, I think we found the answer! It is 6.96! You were right!” Kaji jumps up and grabs Baku's shoulders violently, shaking them.

“YEAH! Stupid Game master thought he could trick us!” Baku's yelp cuts through the air.

They all cheered loudly until a voice cut through their voices.

Are you clinically braindead. That is definitely not the answer. You have 2 minutes left.

All of them turned towards the ceiling in unison giving a disappointed look.

“Back to the board it is,” Baku sighed.

One minute tick tock.

“Damn one minute,” Kaji hurriedly scribbles equations on the board. They were barely legible.

30 seconds.

“Kaji what do we do!” Baku walks as fast as he physically can to the keypad.

15 seconds.

“Just type something in!” Kaji shouts, voice wavering.

5 Seconds.

“Leap of faith, it is!” Baku's fingers dance across the keypad in a flurry typing in the numbers 7.76. Baku jabs the green button with full strength. The numbers lit up and a jingle started to play.

A gambler's intuition is no joke I guess, math must be a weakness. Team 10 also solved this at 14 minutes 59 seconds. As they say idiots think alike.

Ah team 10 sandbagged too. Quite intriguing, it seems things will be much more interesting, Baku thinks to himself as he steps through the open door into a bright light on the other side.