Yuki Sorimachi

The Phantom



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was thinking with a policy of a KO victory by annihilating the phantom thieves rather than holding out until dawn.

Strapping holsters containing handguns to their waists and stuffing their clothes' pockets full of ammunition, Yuuki and the others went around the art museum once. It was a vast three-story building with many rooms. As a slightly unusual thing, there were no places that looked like entrances or exits—the entrance and windows were blocked,

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if the air and turning her face this way,

"I'm going ahead!" She said.

Immediately after, Busutake crashed onto the second-floor floor.

This atrium was nearly ten meters high. A distance that could take a life if done poorly, but she rolled on the floor and skillfully dissipated the impact. She wasn't dead, didn't look injured, and additionally, while waving her hand at Yuuki, ran toward the location of

There, a figure looking like a player was shown. Not dressed as a detective like Yuuki, nor as a detective or police officer, she was wrapped in a black bodysuit. Clearly, it was the attire of a human plotting "infiltration."

A phantom thief.

Since Yuuki had memorized the location of each surveillance camera, she knew the place immediately. Beside the stairs on the second floor—directly below this atrium corridor. In other words, it was a matter Yuuki

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"Phantom Thief" was over.

It ended at 10:00 PM—meaning it concluded before even half of the allotted time had passed. Because all players on the Phantom Thief side had either died or been eliminated, the game was brought to an early close.

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Yuuki didn't think Just my imagination. She had absolute confidence in her sensory abilities. She definitely must have been watched.

However, there was no time to bother with that now. Discovery reports of phantom thieves were coming into Yuuki's terminal one after another even at this moment, and she was running around inside the building to respond. She had already separated from Busutake. Considering safety, she wanted to act in a group of two or more, but there

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Giving death to the three with unrivaled accurate aim and restoring order, Yuuki left hurriedly.

Replenishing bullets, she headed to the next destination. This time a corner room on the third floor—finding two phantom thieves trying to enter the room, she quickly sent them to the other world. Next was in front of the stairs on the first floor. Seeing a phantom thief taking independent action in the corridor on the way, she finished her off while she was at it, and when she went to the scene, she discovered a trio just

full sight of herself being captured by the arena cameras and transmitted to the many viewing screens, but regardless of how uncool she looked, she was managing to put up the bare minimum of a fight, without getting stabbed or killed.

As Yuki continued her performance, the fire in her brain rapidly intensified due to a wave of many negative emotions, including anxiety, fear, confusion, and a sense of crisis. It was a sensation she had long forgotten despite living in the world of death games—the feeling of being on the brink of death. Things were bad. Dying was certainly possible. In an attempt to not be overwhelmed by those emotions, Yuki clicked her tongue increasingly faster and louder.

This won't work. Defending won't be enough. Team 10's record is seven wins and nine losses. There's little chance of my opponent surrendering. The only way forward is to stab my opponent to death. That's why this won't work. I have to go for it. I have to do ev-

Yuki left the arena while continuing to click her tongue. She walked down the hallway to the waiting room. Unlike after round nine, she didn't follow the wall with her hand this time. She had no need to do so.

Everything was *clear to her*. Yuki could see it all.

It was a strange feeling, similar to the sensation of trying to picture one's old elementary school, of blindly rummaging around one's bag, of reaching for a cola on the table while staring at the TV. That sort of "indirect vision" anyone could experience in day-to-day situations had expanded to encompass the entirety of Yuki's surroundings.

Although her newfound perception was not as accurate as directly seeing things, it beat fighting with half her vision and had allowed her to win the duel effortlessly. Her opponent must have dropped her guard after

Sure enough, Yuki found Mishiro hiding in a spot where rubble had been disturbed.

“Hey,” Yuki called out. “Seems like you’re okay.”

Mishiro was wearing a dumbfounded expression.

Despite the thick shadows of the room, the exhaustion on the girl’s face was obvious. And it was little wonder she was fatigued—she’d been curled up in such a cramped space for quite a while. Yuki thought about giving her a wake-up slap, but before she could lift her hand—

“How?” Mishiro asked. “How did you know I was here?”

“A woman’s intuition,” Yuki answered, repeating the same phrase she had used some time ago. “Doesn’t matter how long I’ve been away from these games—I’m not going to lose

This cryptographic tool was also something that had become known among players recently. Like that walking art, it seemed to have been developed by a certain group. A communication method that does not use words—this time stones were used, but the tools are not limited to that; tree branches, leaves, water droplets, etc., can be used. In fact, tools aren't even necessary; information can be sent via every conceivable method, down to extremely minute gestures like hand signals, the sound of coughing or sniffing, or the movement of one's gaze.

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besides, this girl's range was greater than that one. If targeted from afar, it would be a considerable threat.

Regarding this fact—she would have to firmly convey it to everyone else.

Yuuki took out several small stones from her pouch. She looked around the area and placed them at the base of a giant tree that seemed to be the largest in her field of vision. She arranged them in a layout decided upon beforehand—so that the information she wanted to convey would be

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Beside the root of a certain tree, a dozen or so small stones were placed. Observing closely, one could tell that they were not "fallen" there, but "placed" there.

This was exactly what Keito had been looking for. These small stones, likely placed by an Elf who went on reconnaissance, were a cryptographic tool similar to, for example, a ninja's Goshiki-mai (five-colored rice) or Ketsujo (knotted ropes), capable of conveying a certain amount of information through their arrangement and number. Keito stared at the small

Looking, her Phantom self was right next to her. She had already entered an attack posture, rotating her body in mid-air.

In the instant before having a roundhouse kick landed on her, Yuki saw. There are stairs behind the Phantom. The neighborhood map and the path she ran came to mind. Taking those stairs would be a shortcut. She could come to this point with less distance and catch up to me—just as the logic was

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She was beaten again. But, there was a harvest too. Although she was indeed caught up to, it wasn't done by unreasonable mysterious power. Yuki was able to confirm the logic that she took a shortcut through the stairs.

Yes—logic. That is the keyword. That Phantom is an existence created by my head. Modeled after the invincible me that once was. It is nothing more than that. Just as she aptly said herself, she is by no means a mysterious monster.

Inside Yuki, a strategy is assembled.

Anyway, what is needed first is time. She must stall the Phantom. As far as Yuki can think of, there is only one method for that. That is the first stage of the strategy.

And the second stage is—if she had to say, it would rely on someone else. But surely, she should manage something. Because she has actually done so in the past. Assuming she

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Calm down.

The Phantom sneers at such Yuki.

"Don't brace yourself. The things you're worried about won't happen."

The Phantom says. Her outfit was just a shirt, same as Yuki.

Triggered by her appearance, Yuki remembers.

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set on a remote island.

"Oh my, Agent-san. What's the matter?"

Despite the late-night call, Rinrin says without seeming offended.

The Agent told the circumstances. When she finished listening to everything, "I see," Rinrin answered simply.

"Is that kind of thing common? When one acquires echolocation, do invisible

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"But, it's a story often heard in the player world," Rinrin says. "The humans one killed blaming them in dreams, or being trapped in delusions that traps are set on the roadside and becoming unable to go out... There are many girls who become depressed for such reasons and become unable to continue as players. You can consider it an advanced version of that. Seems various things happened, and hand in hand

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ask Rinrin was already decided, but she dared to ask. If it's her, she should guess the intention without explanation—because Yuki had said so.

"Let's see..." Rinrin thought for a moment, then,

"That Phantom moves according to logic in her unconscious, right?"

"It seems so."

"If so, she should think a <Rule> to bind the Phantom is necessary... A rule to escape the current situation of being beaten one-sidedly and drag it into the same ring... Speaking of the most powerful rule for a player, only one comes to mind. A game where life is at stake."

Rinrin deepens her thoughts while voicing them.

"Then... is she seeking the holding of a simulated game from me? Conducting a game with her Phantom self and

"...Correct answer."

The Agent said.

That was—exactly the same as what Yuki conveyed to the Agent. Not only the content of the request, but the flow of logic was also perfectly the same. Impressive, the Agent thinks. Surely, there is something that only humans who have continued as players for a long time understand. The Agent harbors awe for both Yuki, who immediately set up a solution