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BATTLE ROYALE

BY

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TOKYOPOP

HAMBURG // LONDON // LOS ANGELES // TOKYO
BATTLE ROYALE

SHIRO IWA Junior High School - Grade 9/Class B - Student Roster

Boys: 21 - Girls: 21 - Total: 42

15: Noriko Nakagawa  8: Kayoko Kotohiki  1: Mizuho Inada  15: Shuuya Nanahara  8: Yoji Kuramoto  1: Yoshio Akamatsu
17: Satomi Noda  10: Mirei Shinzui  3: Megumi Eto  17: Mitsuru Numai  10: Ryuhii Sasagawa  3: Tatsumi Ooki
PROGRAM CONDITIONS:
All members of the class must kill each other until one survivor remains. • All students are supplied with a ration of food, a map of the island, and a weapon. • All students will wear an explosive bomb collar that also monitors life signs. • Students are free to move about the island but must stay out of designated danger zones that will frequently change locations. • If there is more than one survivor at the end of the game, the remaining bomb collars will be detonated.
In the near future, a random class of 9th graders has been kidnapped, marooned on an island, and forced to compete on The Program, a popular reality show that requires its contestants to battle to the death. Each contestant has been given food, water, and a random weapon (which could be anything from a machine gun to a frying pan.) After the students were told that escape is impossible and that they’d all be executed if more than one student survived, the carnage and casualties quickly escalated to record-breaking levels.

Though forty-two students started the game, only four remain. The three that aren’t willingly playing the game are Shuuya Nanahara, an optimistic, would-be rock star; Noriko Nakagawa, a girl who started the game with a gunshot wound to the leg;
and Shogo Kawada, a former winner of The Program who claims to have a secret way off of the island.

The only other student left alive is the one responsible for the most kills: Kazuo Kiriyama, a brain-damaged killing machine incapable of feeling human emotion. After a whiplash inducing car chase (and subsequent crash), it's a gunshot wound courtesy of Noriko that finally seems to have Kiriyama on the ropes. But this is one homicidal maniac that won't go down without a fight, and with Kawada sidelined with a bullet to the gut, it's up to Shuuya to put this rabid dog down once and for all...
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YOU GO THROUGH ME FIRST! YOU GO THROUGH ME!!

...WHEN IT COUNTS MOST.

DO RIGHT BY HER...
ESPECIALLY IF IT COMES DOWN TO A HARD CHOICE...

...DO RIGHT BY HER.

CHAPTER 112: Cause and Effect
DROP, YOU SON OF A BITCH!!
"It's not over."

When it counted most, you pulled through.

Took Noriko to pull it out of you... but you did it!

If it was that easy, there'd be no game!

You focus on her! Whatever it takes, you do right by Noriko! Whatever it takes!

You stick with it for her! He's not down yet!
DID IT... I DID IT...

IT... I HAD TO! I HAD TO!!

GOT YOU, KIRIYAMA! GOT YOU!

NOT NORIKO! NEVER NORIKO!

?!
He's going down!!

Clutch shot, Mimura...

Mine...

All yours, Shu...
CLUTCH SHOT, MIMURA!

IT'S ALL YOURS... DO NOT FUCK IT UP!
I had him dead bang. Busted me up something fierce... but I had him dead fucking bang!

But I missed when it counted...

I had him, Shu...
TAKE THE FUCKER DOWN FOR GOOD!

ONE SHOT, SHU-DON'T FUCK UP!!
I had him and I blew it...

He killed Yutaka...
HE KILLED SO MANY...

...I'M THINKING IT'S HIS TURN, SHU... DO IT!!
TAKING THE SHOT!!!
Boys: 21 - Girls: 21 - Total: 42
Brace yourself for the climactic conclusion to Battle Royale!

Mere days ago, 42 students were marooned on an island, given random weapons and ordered to kill or be killed. Now only four remain alive...but that's still three too many. As our heroes are confronted with a grisly end, one will be forced to betray the others in the ultimate sacrifice. Will anyone make it out of The Program alive?
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SOMEONE DRAWS DOWN ON HER—YOU DRAW DOWN ON THEM.

PROTECT NORIKO. PRIME DIRECTIVE, SHIYUKA. PROTECT HER NO MATTER WHAT.

WHOEVER IT IS...

YOU SHOOT—PERIOD.

SHOOT THE MOTHERFUCKER!! FINISH IT!!
YOU PROTECT NORIKO—PERIOD!!

YOU SHOOT... SHOOT TO KILL...
NO HESITATION...
NO MERCY...

...NO REGRET.
How many'd he kill, Shu? No hesitation... No mercy...
NO REGRET...

YOUR FRIENDS, SHU, MISURA, SUBIMURA...

...NO REGRET.
HE WOULDN'T ADD HER TO THE LIST...

TAKE THE SHOT.
Pappy Nevez

...IS WHAT I WANT IT BAD ENOUGH...

ALL YOU HAVE TO DO


HE DOESN'T ADD NORIKO TO THE LIST!!

DADDY NEVER LEFT!! DADDY NEVER LEFT MITSU!!! I CAN FEEL HIM!!
PUT HIM DOWN, SHU!!

GODDAMMIT, SHUWA! YOU'RE GONNA GET US KILLED!

SHIT!

HE WON'T-- CAN'T-- DO IT!
Take the fucking shot!!

Shoot him!! What the hell are you waiting for?!!

I know...

It's US or him! Cap the fucker!!
HE'S GOT TO FEEL IT!!

SHUHAR? YOU'VE GOT TO...
HE'S GOT TO KNOW... TO FEEL... ALL OF IT!!
IT'S NOT ENOUGH...

JUST KILLING HIM'S NOT ENOUGH...
CHAPTER 114: Determination
NO HESITATION...
NO MERCY...

NO REGRET...
HOW MANY FINGERS ARE ON THIS TRIGGER?

TOO MANY, KIRIYAMA.
Some of them did the right thing...

Too many...
...while others lost their way.

Then there were those who never wanted to be found.
SOME THOUGHT THEY HAD ALL THE ANSWERS...

...while others' beliefs let them down.

SOME GAVE IN TO THE FEAR...
OCEANS WANTED TO THE PAIN.

THERE WERE THOSE...

...AND TRUSTED TOO LITTLE.

...WHO CARED TOO MUCH...
...One found her faith. I don't even think she knew it had gone...

And one...

That one... she died happy.
Funny how it always hides in plain sight...

All you have to do is look...

She knew all along.

And some...some found their heart's desire.

Hadn't been for this, I might never have looked...
AT LEAST NOT THAT I EVER HEARD.

NO CRISIS OF CONSCIENCE—NOT NORIKO. THAT WAS RESERVED FOR YOURS TRULY.

ALL THE OTHER GIRLS NEVER HAD A BAD WORD...

AND THE GIRLS...

...TO SAY ABOUT HER.

THAT WAS WAY BEFORE I HAD FAITH IN MYSELF.

SHE SAID SHE HAD FAITH IN US... IN ME...

WHAT?

THAT'S JUST HER WAY. SHE'S ALWAYS THINKING THE BEST OF PEOPLE...

ALWAYS BRINGING OUT THE BEST IN PEOPLE...
SO TELL ME, KIRIHAMA... HOW MANY FINGERS ARE ON THE TRIGGER?!

THAT WE'D LET YOU KILL HER....?
EVERY LAST ONE!!

All of them, Kiryuu...!!

You know it's coming...

Do you feel it now? Do you feel what they felt?
I just wanted you to know you're lost!!

Oh, God...

It ends here.
YOU DON'T GET SHUUYA...!!
H-HE... HE'S MINE!!
GROW A SET.
...AND YOU'RE LOOKING TO GET HER KILLED.

EITHER YOU SHOOT HIM...

I FIND A GIRL I LIKE...
SHE'S GIVEN YOU NO CHOICE, DO IT!

NO CHOICE, SHU...

...OR HE SHOOTS HER.

STOP LOOKING FOR REASONS NOT TO... FIDDLE'S SAKE...!! GROW A SET!!

NORIKO KNOWS...
ENDGAME, SHIIYA. TAKE THE SHOT!!

ONLY MY FINGER ON THE TRIGGER THIS TIME!!
ONLY MY FINGER, MOTHER F**KER!!
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CHAPTER 115: One's Last Moment
KIRYAMA! CAN YOU HEAR ME?!
KIRYAMA!!

HE'S STILL ALIVE!

TOOK THE SHOT! TOOK IT!!

I HAD TO...

KIRYAMA...?
HE'S STILL ALIVE! WHAT DO WE...?
HE'S STILL ALIVE!!

I-I HAD TO! I HAD TO!!
I didn't want to play! Why didn't you want to play? Why did you make me?! We can take you with us! We can get you help! Kiriyama? Kiriyama!!

I didn't want to win! There is no winner! How could you be so smart and not know that?!

I don't know what to do... I...

Why didn't you make me play?! This didn't have to happen! You didn't have to do this!

Why did you make me play?!
I didn't want to play!!
I can feel... again...
DON'T YOU FUCKING DARE!
I'M NOT THE WINNER!
YOU CAN'T MOTHERFUCKER!
YOU CAN'T DO THIS TO ME!!
CLEAN WOUND FIGURED AS MUCH THE WAY YOU WERE WAVING IT AROUND. GONNA HURT LIKE A BITCH

SHIYAA... IT'S OVER. NO ONE WINS... REMEMBER?

YOU DID GOOD. OH, AND I'M FINE, THANKS FOR ASKING.

FIRST KILL ALWAYS GOES DOWN HARDEST.

...I KILLED HIM.
JUST GOT ONE MORE THING NEEDS DOING AND WE ARE OUT OF HERE.

THAT LIGHT YOU SEE'S THE END OF THE TUNNEL. GET YOUR HEAD ON STRAIGHT.

TAKE A FEW.

GIVE THE BOSS A RUN FOR HIS MONEY... ROCK AND ROLL AND RAKE IT IN...

OFF TO AMERICA WITH NORIKO RIGHT?
I GUESS...

SURE...

KAMADA...

!!
C’MON. IT’S NOT MUCH FARTHER.

I KNOW WHAT HE MEANS.

IT’S NOT JUST US! THE SOLDIERS!

WHAT ELSE NEEDS DOING IF IT’S JUST THE THREE OF US? I MEAN...

IT’S JUST US... RIGHT? JUST THE THREE OF US?
GETTING GONE? NORIKO'S RIGHT...

SHOULDN'T WE BE, LIKE...

CLOSED IT'S ALL ABOUT CLOSURE...

DEEP CLEANSING BREATHS SHU CHECK IT OUT

LIKE I SAID, IT'S ALL ABOUT CLOSURE. ENGAME.

CHECK OUT THE VIEW... THAT'S YOUR PREFECTURE, ISN'T IT? HOME SWEET HOME?

THIS IS THE LAST TIME YOU'LL EVER SEE IT. THOUGHT YOU MIGHT LIKE TO SAY "GOODBYE."
NEXT...

EVERTHING I'M MISS ABOUT IT IS GONE. NOT YOU, NORIKO...

WE DIDN'T LET IT GO... IT LET US GO WHEN IT GAVE US OVER TO THE PROGRAM.

IT LOOKS SO PEACEFUL FROM HERE...

WITH PLEASURE!

WITH PLEASURE!

WE LEAVE HERE, WE LEAVE CLEAN. LET'S HAVE 'EM.

FORK OVER THE GUNS. FROM HERE ON, THEY'RE A LIABILITY.

REALLY HARD TO COME BY, TRUST.

WE'VE COME A LONG WAY...

TRUSTED ONE ANOTHER TO DO WHAT'S RIGHT...

WHAT'S ... OUR NEXT MOVE?
KAWADA? WHAT ARE YOU...?

DON'T GET ME WRONG—IT WAS FUN WHILE IT LASTED. BUT...

"OUTLINE YOUR USEFULNESS."

I... IT'S JUST THE THREE OF US LEFT.

I TRUSTED YOU GUYS NOT TO KILL ME IN MY SLEEP... AND YOU GUYS TRUSTED ME TO KEEP YOU SAFE UNTIL WE COULD GET OFF THE ISLAND. YEAH...

I DON'T PLAY PRONOUN GAMES. YOU TWO HAVE, I BELIEVE THE TERM IS...

THREE DON'T CUT IT.
I'm getting off this island the same way I got out of that fucking ship! They stuck us in last time, only one winner, kiddies. You know that going in.
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SHORT FORM KIDDIES... I WIN--YOU LOSE.

CHAPTER 116: Deception

NO...
CHAPTER 116: Deception

YOU... W-WE

H-HOW, KARDO...
Now you let us in on the joke... r-right?

No joke. There's only one way out of here... and I'm taking it.
You two are too trusting... too needy.

I killed the only person ever meant anything to me. Do the math!

I feed you half the story and you buy it as a whole? You two truly are perfect for one another.
I KNOW YOU, KAYADA! HOW MANY TIMES DID YOU SAVE OUR LIVES?!

WE BEAT THEM AT THEIR OWN GAME!

IT'S US. WE DID IT... TOGETHER...

TOGETHER...
YOU TWO WERE DEAD THE
MINUTE YOU DECIDED TO
TRUST ME ON THE SMART SCALE?

BUT I'M NOT TOTALLY HEARTLESS. I
BROUGHT YOU TWO UP HERE FOR
A LAST LOOK AT HOME.

ABOUT A NEGATIVE THREE.

BUT MAKE NO MISTAKE
ABOUT IT—IT IS VERY
MUCH A LAST LOOK.

AND MY OWN BY EXTENSION.
TWO IN A ROW... THAT'S GOT TO COUNT FOR SOMETHING, RIGHT? THIS TIME THEY WON'T BE ABLE TO SHUNT ME ASIDE. A STAR IS BORN, KIDDIES.

KIRIYAMA... HE...

YOU'RE NO BETTER THAN KIRIYAMA!! NO--YOU'RE WORSE!!

YOU CAN'T DO THIS! THIS ISN'T YOU!!

I HAD...

I HAD FAITH IN YOU....

I WOKE UP TO A MOUTH LIKE THAT.

BUT I'LL MAKE IT QUICK. I OWE YOU THAT MUCH.

BREAKING MY HEART HERE NO!

FUCKER!!
WHAT THE THREE OF US HAVE! HOW 'BOUT YOU DO THE MATH FOR ONCE, HUH?!

I MEAN HAVE!

YOU CAN'T FAKE IT, KANADA! YOU CAN'T FAKE WHAT THE THREE OF US HAD!

THEN IT'S THREE MINUS THREE EQUALS FUCK ALL THAT, KIDDIES. AIN'T GONNA HAPPEN.

...LESS I'M STUPID ENOUGH TO WAIT OUT THE COLLARS...

THREE MINUS TWO EQUALS ME. HOW'S THAT?

THE GAME...
IT TOOK KEIKO FROM YOU... AND NOW IT'S TAKING YOU FROM US!

AND KEIKO... I HEARD... SAW YOUR PAIN. MAYBE YOU CAN TALK YOURSELF INTO BELIEVING YOU DIDN'T CARE... NOT ME, KAWADA. NOT ME!

IT'S THE GAME, YOU SEE... I UNDERSTAND THAT NOW.

YOU CARED... KEIKO WAS... YEAH. SHE WAS SOMEONE I...

NICE TRY.
THE COLLARS, NORI! WHAT ABOUT THE COLLARS, P'CHRISSAKE! TWENTY-FOUR HOURS TICK BY WITH NO ONE DEAD AND BOOM! WHAT? I'M SUPPOSED TO DIE BECAUSE YOU HAD FAITH?!

NICE LEGS, SWEET RACK. SURE, HER FACE COULD HAVE USED A BIT OF WORK... BUT I'VE FUCKED UGLIER.

SHE'S THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY.

OH-- AND ALL OF YOUR FRIENDS ARE DEAD, YOU AND POLLYANNA IN PANTS HERE ARE ABOUT TO JOIN THEM, AND I COULD GIVE A FLYING PUCK, REALITY 101.

NEWS FLASH-- OZ IS A SLUM, THE WHITE KNIGHT'S A RETARD AND THE SEVEN DWARVES GANG RAPED PIXIES.
THE BIRD CALL... YOU KEPT IT BECAUSE OF HER... YOU KEPT IT BECAUSE YOU CARED! WHY WOULD YOU KEEP IT IF YOU REALLY DIDN'T CARE?!

THE LIE GOES DOWN SMOOTHER WHEN YOUR EYES AREN'T THE PRIMARY FOCUS.

LOOK OUT FOR NUMBER ONE.

PEOPLE ARE THERE TO BE USED. WHO WAS IT SAID, "THERE'S A SUCKER BORN EVERY MINUTE?"

I MEAN WHAT ARE THE ODDS? I'D BEEN CARRYING THAT STUPID BIROCALL AROUND ON MY KEY CHAIN... AS A REMINDER TO TRUST NO ONE.

COULDN'T FUCKING BELIEVE IT WHEN I GOT SCOOED UP AGAIN.
SON OF A BITCH! YOU...

![Panel with dialogue boxes](image)

NO!!

BIT LATE FOR THAT. YEAH...

WASN'T FOR ME, YOUR TICKET WOULD'VE BEEN SIGH... PUNCHED FIRST HOUR OUT.

YOU COULD RARELY BRING YOURSELF TO SHOOT KIRYAMA.

COME ON, SHH...

...BUT YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN. A PITY, THAT...

...I WASN'T LYING WHEN I SAID YOU TWO WERE MADE FOR EACH OTHER. WELL, MAYBE NOT IN THOSE EXACT WORDS...

IF IT MEANS ANYTHING...
MOST PEOPLE GO THEIR WHOLE LIVES AND NEVER FIND THE RIGHT PERSON. MOST PEOPLE SETTLE.

NO NEED FOR THIS TO GO DOWN MESSY. ATTA BOY...

DON'T, SHU. TIME FOR STUPID'S OVER.

BUT YOU TWO... YOU'RE VICTIMS OF BAD TIMING. I ALMOST FEEL FOR YOU... ALMOST, AT LEAST YOU TWO GOT A TASTE.
JUST LOOK AT THE TWO OF YOU...

YOU STILL DON'T QUITE BELIEVE...

YOU KNEW THE RULES OF THE GAME... BUT YOU'RE STILL SURPRISED WHEN IT COMES TO THIS. YOU BOTH HAVE A LOOK SIMILAR TO WHEN YOU FIND OUT A HOOKER'S PACKING TUBE STEAK.

SEE THOSE TWINKLING LIGHTS OUT THERE? HOW MANY DO YOU FIGURE ARE TUNED IN TO THE PROGRAM RIGHT NOW?

HOW MUCH MONEY'S CHANGED HANDS AS BETS PAY OFF? HOW MANY PEOPLE'LL BENEFIT WHEN I PULL THIS TRIGGER?

SHOULD'VE PLAYED SHU...

ODDS ON YOU WINNING WOULDN'T HAVE MADE PEOPLE RICH
SHE DESERVES THAT MUCH.

KISS HER, SHII...

NO? HAVE IT YOUR WAY, ENGAME SHII!

WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?!

DO IT, THEN!!
As last words go... not too shabby.
SIR...THE KILLS ARE CONFIRMED. NAMAHARA AND NAKASAWA.
AND SO IT ENDS. WELL PLAYED, KAWADA. BEAR WITH ME A MOMENT, WON'T YOU?

LET THIS SERVE AS OFFICIAL NOTIFICATION THAT SHIRO INA JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL, GRADE 9 / CLASS B HAVE SUCCESSFULLY CONCLUDED THIS YEAR'S PROGRAM. THAT'S A WRAP.

SORRY ABOUT THAT, BUT THERE ARE CERTAIN FORMALITIES THAT MUST BE SEEN TO... BUT THEN YOU ALREADY KNOW THAT, DON'T YOU?

BUT THEN YOU ALREADY KNOW THAT, DON'T YOU?

THE RESTRICTED AREAS HAVE BEEN NEUTRALIZED. YOU CAN FIND YOUR WAY HERE YES?

THAT'S A TWO PEACE FOR YOU, KAWADA. THE DVD COLLECTION WILL BE SELL THROUGH THE ROOF.
AND YOU A REPEAT CHAMPION病人病
NARROWLY SEEMS FAIR...

IF IT MAKES YOU FEEL ANY BETTER, WE'LL HAVE A WINNER'S WELCOME WAITING FOR YOU.

SPOOT-- BUT NO Heli-
COPTER PICK-UP THIS TIME.

SEEMS ITS SERVICES HAVE BEEN... OTHERWISE PRIORITIZED.

PROGRAM CONCLUSION CONFIRMED.

05/14/2637 "KAGAWA PREFECTURE SHIRO IWA JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL, GRADE 9/CLASS B."
TERMINATING
FEED...

SHOGO
KAWADA...!

TERMINATED.
Yeah, yeah. File it under "deja vu."

Um?

Well done... again!

Masterful. Truly masterful.

I laughed; I cried...

And none of that government-issued nicotine-free crap.

A two-time champ should at least be worth a name brand.

GOT A SMOKE? I RAN OUT AFTER OFFING THE FINAL TWO.

NINTH GRADE / CLASS B: BOY #5

SHOGO KAWADA
CHAPTER 117: Inference

AT EASE, SOLDIER BOY. JUST A SOCIAL.
CHAPTER 117: Inference

I trust your needs are being seen to? You only have to ask, you know.

Winner and still champion...

Goa... Muy ma-cho!

And save the praise, chief. Coming from you, it feels like being given a hand job...

...with a chain mail glove.

I "need" you to piss off.
I hate loose ends. Don't you hate loose ends? I most certainly do. Which brings us to...

And here I am turning a blind eye to underage smoking. I'd tell you they'll stunt your growth, but...

Satellite imaging, a new innovation. It came in especially handy when the schoolgirl was putting on her tawdry little feet...now.

There a point to this?

What can I tell you? They told me lightning never strikes twice—and I believed them!

That's a pretty steep bet for a guy in my wage bracket.

You know, I had 20,000 on Kiriyama to win. No offense... but you cost me dearly.
Nasty things. More collars.

You wouldn't believe the difficulties we had diagnosing the footage before we figured out how to mis the collars.

...impending death and all that yes... definitely nasty. But useful. You have no idea.

But a necessary evil... tells us where you are. Who you're with... moves the show along briskly...

The things we hear...

Miniaturization science marches on, eh?

...right about here.
AND STILL MISTAKES WERE MADE.

...SHOCK ME? SURPRISE ME? THE PROGRAM'S BROADCAST! HOW FUCKING STUPID DO YOU THINK WE ARE?!

SO THE COLLARS WERE WIRED FOR SOUND, AND THIS IS SUPPOSED TO... WHAT?

YOU ARE THE COLD-BLOODED ONE...

YOU YOUNG PEOPLE, SO QUICK TO TAKE OFFENSE.

NO, NO, STUPID?

SO PASSIONATE!
WHAT OF IT?

ABOUT YOUR PERFORMANCE WITH NAMAHARA AND THE GUARD.

MORE AN AWKWARD COMPLIMENT

STRETCHED IT OUT A BIT TOO LONG...

A BIT MUCH, NO?

ALL THAT MELODRAMA... MOST UNLIKE YOU. I'D HAVE THOUGHT YOU'D POP THE TWO OF THEM AFTER THEY TOOK DOWN KIRIYAMA FOR YOU.

WHATEVER POSSESSED YOU TO PLAY IT OUT LIKE THAT, HMM...?

PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE AND ALL...
YOU HEARD EVERY FUCKING WORD. MINIATURIZATION, REMEMBER?

NOW TELL ME IT WON'T MAKE THE HIGHLIGHT REEL...

I DID WHAT I DID BECAUSE I DAMN WELL WANTED TO! I GAVE YOU YOUR FUCKING MONEY SHOT!

AH! AS IF OH CUE.

?! 

YES...

THAT WOULD BE THE HELICOPTER
Loose ends and all that... You understand.

Can't be too careful. No...

Poker face still intact. I see.

Very good.
Almost managed to sneak one in under the radar. Built a bomb, of all things. A bomb!

Hmm... Speaking of performances... Goodness gracious, the Mima Kura boy!

Quite the show-stopper, that one.

The collars! Right. And your, oh so, melodramatic performance.

Now what would a middle school student know of bombs...?

His uncle was a "tolerant" president. Did you know that?

Kept the wrong company, what I'm thinking.

Don't know, don't care.

I'm sorry... Blood will tell.
In short---we caught his worm and purged it. As for his bomb, Kiriyama saw to that. Took us by surprise, the bomb...

My guess is he was looking to disarm the collars. It wasn't the first system breach... Won't be the last bear with me... This Mimira, he managed to scrounge up a laptop---quite enterprising. Hacked into the program's system...

I actually got so angry that I put out a warrant on a man we'd already... rendered threat neutral.

I see? Surprises.

So much attention focused on Mimura's worm...

Like I said... Mistakes were made.

I'm of course referring to the uncle. You have no idea my embarrassment over that one.
A LUCINDA AND PROUD. NOW DELIGHTFULLY BOHEMIAN. YES INDEED.

KEEPING OF IT REAL. COURSE.

I WOULDN'T KNOW A WORM FROM A MOLE'S ASSHOLE.

YOU GOT MY FILE. SO YOU KNOW.

INTERNET DIDN'T QUITE REACH THE SHITHOLE I GREW UP IN. "WWW.ARMPITOFTHEFUCKINGWORLD.COM."

SECURITY CODES, CLASSIFIED FILES, POLICE, MILITARY... ALL STANDARD DISSIDENT M.O.

THE HACKER TARGETED THE USUAL...

OO CLUMSY. IN FACT...

BEFORE MIMURA, THERE WAS A SYSTEM BREACH ABOUT SIX MONTHS BACK. VERY CLUMSY.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT I FOUND?

HAD YOU LOT BEEN MORE AGGRESSIVE, I MIGHT NEVER HAVE FOUND THE TIME.

I TOOK IT UPON MYSELF TO INVESTIGATE DURING ONE OF THE LAG TIMES.

REVEALED A HIDDEN TRAPDOOR. VERY CLEVER...

IRONICALLY, IT WAS MIMURA'S WORM THAT POINTED THE WAY.
... Why wouldn't they say it still, once found?

As near as I could tell, nothing dissident had been altered. Even stranger than that...

Inoculate someone had been peeking at the collar specs. Gata Canal #22 Electronic Restraint Collar.

Nothing had been downloaded from the site.

Motive, motive. Motive... who could possibly care about the design of the program collars?

Memorizing. Perhaps? Now why would a dissident do that... or even care, for that matter? I think we can remove "dissident" from the equation, huh?

Just visiting, perhaps? Nah...?
THAT NARROWS DOWN THE LIST OF SUSPECTS DRAMATICALLY.

SOMEONE OBSESSED HAS TO BE! AND WHO MORE OBSESSED...

...THAN ONE WHO HAS WORN THE COLLARS? EH? EH? AM I GOOD, OR AM I GOOD? HA!

ONLY YOU AREN'T A BASKET CASE.

PROCESS OF ELIMINATION, DEAR BOY, TAG... YOU'RE IT.

METHINKS THE "LUDITE" COULD PROTEST TOO MUCH. THE COLLARS... AND I'M SURE YOU ALREADY KNOW THIS...
Perhaps a disoriented individual who'd memorized the specs over an extended period of time, eh?

...react to removal the same as to death. Cessation of discernible life signs. Or would, if one knew how to remove the collar without triggering it.

What? You think I hacked the collar specs—then deliberately got myself sent here just to prove a point?!

There's no way I could have known which class was next! Reality check, old man.

Fine, I'll play along. Why would I bother—unless I knew I'd be back?

Subtleties...
I'm sure you'd have continued digging into the program's workings... such a sight... you see?

You were fishing...

You believe the program wronged you. You are nothing if not vindictive.

Just look at that resolution! Mihara, Sato, and Izuma identifiable by sight. Yes...

Rado circumstance not landed you here. I'm sure you'd have continued indulging your obsession...

You do have program issues. Step one in a series?

Don't be ridiculous! I mean, what were the odds?

So...you're saying I stole these collar specs on the off-shot I wound up here again?

?!
RECOGNIZE THIS ONE?
IT'S WHERE YOU POPPED THE STAR-CROSSED LOVERS.

STEP ONE: ONE SECRETS AWAY?
STEP TWO: FIND SECRETS TO KEEP? IS THAT IT?
STEP THREE: HOW MANY SECRETS TO KEEP?

Meticulous as ever, Kanada, and you are nothing if not meticulous.

Hardly fair, is it?

Robbing so many of your history-making triumphant moments...

So many trees... so dark... hardly a fitting climax, eh?
...IN THE DARK.

WE HEARD IT ALL... YES WE DID. HEARD IT ALL LOUD AND CLEAR. CLEAR'S A BELL...

...WHY DID YOU CRAN IT OUT?

HERE...

THE SPONSORS ARE PITCHING FITS...
NOT DEAD, KAWADA. WELL, NOT YET. WELL STAGED, YES... BUT SADLY LACKING IN AUTHENTICITY. NOT AS METICULOUS AS YOU THOUGHT, ARE YOU?

THEY'RE STILL ON THE ISLAND HIDING.

HOW FAR DO YOU SUPPOSE THEY'LL GET CHOKING ON THEIR OWN VOMIT? AN UNFORTUNATE SIDE EFFECT OF THE TOWN BEING SPRAYED THE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF THE ISLAND AS WE SPEAK.

NOT ENOUGH TIME. NO SCREAMS OR TEARS THAT HE COULD MAKE OUT. NO PUN FOR SHUGO?

NINE BY TEN GLOSSIES OR THE FUCKING BODIES?

THE TRAGIC, STAR-CROSSED LOVERS...

THEY'RE DEAD. WHAT MORE DO YOU WANT?

WHAT SAY WE PUT OUR CARDS ON THE TABLE, EH?
In the past, some we thought dead... well, weren't.

It's a recent addition, you see...

Awkward, that.

This cuts down on any... moist surprises.
WHAT THE HELL DO I CARE...?

SNRK

WINNER AND STILL CHAMPION.

'56 ONLY MR. LEFT.

DEAD'S PROOF.

FUCK YOU...

PRICELESS! CAUGHT RED-HANDED AND STILL STICKS TO IT ALL LIKE GLUE! PRICELESS!

A PITY, REALLY, KAWADA...

I'M SURE.

HEE HEE HEE HEE!!
ON THE BRIGHT SIDE, YOU DID MANAGE TO STRIKE A BLOW AGAINST THE PROGRAM. THANKS TO THIS LITTLE DEBACLE, THIS YEAR’S PROGRAM’S BEEN RENDERED NULL AND VOID.

ALL OF THOSE LOVELY BOYS AND GIRLS DEAD AND FOR WHAT?

AFRO-FUCKING-LUTELY NOTHING. YEARS ON ONE’S HEART JUST THINKING ABOUT SUCH A TRAGIC WASTE OF YOUNG LIVES....

ON! ON! ON!!

YOU HAD SUCH PROMISE.
DO IT, MOTHERFUCKER! DO IT!!
CHAPTER 118: Counterattack

BUT I DIDN'T...

SHOT!
SIR! WE'RE UNDER ATTACK...
WE ARE EXPERIENCING TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES. PLEASE STAND BY...

ON SECOND THOUGHT... FUCK OFF, THE LOT OF YOU.

NG-GHIEEE!

NUH-UH... LATER FOR PAIN...
WE DID IT! WE--

KAWADA! ALL RIGHT!!

SO... HOW MANY YOU RACK UP TOPSIDE?
DIDN'T KILL THEM. WHY AM I NOT SURPRISED?

OLD HABITS DIE HARD?
YOUR BOSS FIGURED IT OUT. I DECLARED WAR ON THE PROGRAM.

YOU WERE THE WINNER!

GOT WHAT I WANTED RIGHT HERE.

ANYTHING YOU WANTED WAS YOURS FOR THE ASKING! SO WHY?!

HEH. NEVER CHANGE, SHU.

SO I LET YOU HEAR WHAT I WANTED YOU TO HEAR... AND SEE WHAT I WANTED YOU TO SEE.

NOT A SOUND!
THE CON WAS IN

NOT A SOUND!

BIGGEST CONCERN WAS KEEPING SHU HERE QUIET.

HAO ME A LITTLE MEMO READY THAT SPILLED OUT WHAT WE HAD TO DO NEXT. NO OPTIONS.
EASY ENOUGH TO TRANSFER IN AND ACT THE PART. FIGURE I HELL-- I ALMOST CONVINCED MYSELF. THE AMERICANS MIGHT SLIDE ME AN ENEMY FOR THE DRAMA CLUB. GO FIGURE.

OH... FYI... THE COLLAR SPEGS WEREN'T ALL I HACKED AND MEMORIZED. I MADE IT A POINT TO FIND OUT WHICH SCHOOL YOU PUCKERS HAD TARGETED NEXT.

HAD ME THE WILL, THE MEANS-- AND HOW THE ALLIES I NEEDED.

NEVER OCCURRED TO YOU THAT ANYONE'D BRING IT BACK TO YOU. DID IT?

YOU BOYS PLAYED A PRETTY CRUCIAL ROLE IN ALL THIS...
WHY CLIMB WHEN YOU CAN RIDE? THIS IS WHERE YOU GUYS COME IN...

...LEFT YOU RAISED A GOOD BIT MORE THAN THE ANCHOR THIS TIME...
ALL THINGS CONSIDERED, IT SHOULDN'T HAVE WORKED...

FROM THEN ON IT WAS LAY LOW AND WAIT FOR THE RIGHT MOMENT.

I MEAN I WAS PLANNING TO GO IN A SOLO ACT BUT WOUND UP PART OF A BAND WE WERE FLYING BY THE SEAT OF OUR PANTS.

I MEAN... WE DID IT WITHOUT KILLING THEM. THAT'S GOT TO COUNT FOR SOMETHING.

THEY... AH...

I'D HAVE SHOT TO KILL...

JUST BE GLAD IT WAS SHIT.

COMPLICATES THINGS SHU DEAD MEN TELL NO TALES. IT'S... SIGH...

WHY DO I BOTHER?
STILL GOT TO MAKE THE MAINLAND AND FIGURE A WAY OUT OF THE COUNTRY. YOU GUYS STILL SET ON THE U.S.?

WE BEAT THEM AT THEIR OWN GAME! WE BEAT THE PROGRAM!

WE DID IT! I CAN'T BELIEVE WE DID IT!

BUT IT'S NOT OVER YET.

SURE DID.

JUST WAIT 'TIL THE NIGHTMARES KICK IN.

YEAH.

YEAH... THE U.S.... IT'S...

...IT'S JUST HARD TO BELIEVE IT'S REALLY OVER, Y'KNOW?
SEE IF I LET YOU LIVE!!

FUCK ASS FUCKERS!!
Not smart, soldier boy. You just bought yourself a one-way ticket to whatever hell will have you.

My hand! My fucking hand! Shit! F**k!!

Don't shoot! Kahaha!

Took a... souvenir...

S'way...
A PARTING GIFT FROM KIRIYAMA. INSURANCE. GUESS IT PAID THE RIGHT DIVIDEND, EH?

KEVLAR VEST, BOYS AND GIRLS. NEVER STORM A MILITARY COMPOUND WITHOUT IT.

AND SPEAKING OF FORCING PEOPLE INTO THINGS... WRESTLE HER TO THE GROUND AND FORCE HER INTO IT? GET OVER YOURSELF, SHOGO. SHE FLAT OUT REFUSED. WHAT WAS I SUPPOSED TO DO?

NICE MOVE. NICE MOVE, SHU. I'D HAVE MADE NORIKO WEAR IT, BUT...
YOU WANT FIRST Dibs, NOPE.
GOOD IDEA. YEAH... RIGHT.

Pff

OH, SURE...

SWAP

THERE'RE DRY UNIFORMS BELOW,
YOU MIGHT CONSIDER CATCHING SHOWER.
WHILE YOU'RE AT IT.

GETTING CHILLY. LAST THING I NEED'S YOU THO.
CATCHING Colds.
PILOT'S A LOT EASIER THAN TRYING TO PROGRAM AUTO.

MANUAL PILOT'S A LOT EASIER THAN TRYING TO PROGRAM AUTO.

KEEP IT LINED UP AND STEADY. YOU TAKE YOUR DIRECTION READS OFF OF THIS.

GYRO COMPASS AS... KAY.

OVER HERE...

... GOT TO THINK ABOUT THING AROUND YOU.

... ZERO HOT DOGING, KAY?

KEEP IN MIND THERE'S NO STOPPING ON A RR HERE.

THIS AIN'T NO CAR--SO NOT EASY.

GOT YOUR ACCELERATION HERE. SO EASY.

THESE THINGS PICK UP SPEED EASY.

PUSH FOR POWER BRAKE'S HERE.

HATE TO BREAK THIS TO YOU, BUT I GET LOST IN THE BATHTUB.

YOU'RE REALLY GOING TO TRUST ME TO DRIVE THIS THING?

YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT?

WHEN YOU REACH THE MAINLAND, THEY'LL KNOW WHAT TO DO. LEAD WITH MY NAME.

THE ADDRESS AT THE BOTTOM... 6-00 THERE.

YOU STILL GOT MY LITTLE "MEMO"...? TAKE GOOD CARE OF IT.

Nuh....
AND me... Huh... Yeah... One way or another, we're going to work this out... Man... You really had this worked out. Hey... You okay...?

I knew what needed doing... H-had the means and the will... But then you two show up...

I was revising on the fly, working you two into my vendetta, trying to keep you alive...

We beat them, shh... Noi... I got that part right. Just never considered I might not be around to savour the victory...
I C-CAN'T EVEN TELL YOU WHEN IT HAPPENED...

H-HOW'S EAT FOR P-PAYING ATTENTION?
DON' KN-KNOW WHEN... BUT IT'S L-LONG... OVER... DUE...
NO WAY! NO FUCKING WAY! YOU HANG ON!! YOU STAY WITH US, GODDAMMIT!!

SHU...
T-IRED, SHU...

YOU'RE THE DOCTOR'S KID! TELL ME WHAT TO DO! TELL ME!!

TELL ME WHAT TO DO!! SHOGO!!
TELL ME!

S-SAME'S... IT'S EVER BEEN.
SHU... PROTECT NORI...
ALWAYS PROTECT...
N... NORI...

HKK...

DOCTOR'S KID KNOWS WHEN IT'S A LOST CAUSE...

T-TOO LATE, SHU... T-FORN UP INSIDE...

PLEASE...

SHOGO...
FIGURE YOU COULD... S-SHARE ME UP A SMOKE?
NO!

YOU... WE... YOU CAN'T! YOU JUST... CAN'T!
NO!!

WE BEAT THEM!!

DON'T GO GETTING THE FILTER ALL R-N-H, YET... ATTA G-GIRL.
HI HI HI

ATTAGIRL... D-DON'T.

TOO S-STUPID TO COME RIGHT OUT AND S-SAY IT... BUT HE DOES. THERE. SOMEONE HAD TO SAY IT...

LOVES YOU, NOR... 6-SHOULD QUIT...

GONNA BE THE D-DEATH OF ME... HEN...
ONE GOOD THING CAME OUT OF THE F*CKING GAME... IN SPITE OF IT...

FLIES IN THE F-FACE OF EVERYTHING THE GAME'S ABOUT...

F-FUCKERS CULLEDN'T DO A THING ABOUT IT...

LOVE'S GOT NO PLACE IN IT... GUESS YOU TWO NEVER GOT THE MEMO... YOU TWO TOOK A PIECE... MADE THAT PIECE A ABOUT LOVE... GO F-FIGURE...

REMEMBER...

EASY ON THE SPEED...
I'M... I'M GLAD I WAS HERE TO SEE IT... I'M GLAD I COULD PLAY MY PART... STOP IT FROM REACHING KILL... OR BE KILLED...

HUN... YOU TWO PROBABLY HAVE WAIVED OUT THE COLLARS.

THEY DON'T KNOW YET, SHA...

SHAME ON YOU... BAD FOR RATINGS...

I HEAR IT-THA

DUMB ASS BIRD... CALL... HEAR IT? I GOTTA GOTA GO TO HER... GOTA TELL HER...

I... I GOTTA DO NOW...

STAY SMART...

JUST FOLLOW... GOD DAMN BIRD... CALL...
YOU DO RIGHT... BOTH OF YOU...

COMING...

THERE... SEE? SHE'S SMILING...
There you go. Have a nice day.

Come again.

I'm on it.

Mind the counter. I'm catching a break. You know the drill.
MARTIAL LAW remains in effect for the Kagawa Prefecture. The compromised program's sponsor requests that all citizens bearing the surname "Kagawa" report to their nearest interrogation center. "A citizen does as a citizen must."

The program remains on indefinite hiatus, with no word from the authorities as to when JCTV's highest rated show will return to the air. The identity of the contestant found dead along with show runner Yonezu...

The primary suspects, Shuuya Nanahara and Noriko Nakagawa, remain at large. Know them on sight.

Noriko Nakagawa Shuuya
THE AUTHORITIES ONCE AGAIN URGE THE PERPETRATORS TO TURN THEMSELVES IN BEFORE A LETHAL FORCE PROTOCOL IS PUT INTO PLACE. THE STATE IS NOT WITHOUT MERCY.

SHOGO KAWADA

YOU DON'T HAVE TO...! YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE...

OH...

I PACKED ONE FOR YOUR MAN, AS WELL.

SKIN AND BONES, EAT!

HE CAN EAT IT ON THE BOAT, NOT...

NON-SENSE! LOOK AT YOU!

I LOVE HEARING GIFTS!

WELL, NO MAYBE, RIGHT?
Off to America, eh?
So... tonight...
You've been too kind... I'll wash it, um?
I'm sorry... This just smells so good...
Oh, y-yes...
So foul... Yet she beat the program...

So good...

Tears on their face, that's a good thing. Perhaps over time, they will scale less.

It's not going to go away overnight. You've been through...
No, no... I understand.
I... sometimes... I... I'm sorry.

Oh, right!
Perhaps distance will help soften the memories. Closure is never easy... and rarely pleasant...

Tonight you will be gone from here.
MISS RYOKO... SHE'S STILL...

AND GIVE PROPER PERSUASION... MORE THAN WILLING TO SHARE IT.

AND STILL, YOU STAY.

WHAT MEN DO...

THAT'S WHAT MEN DO...

YOSHIKO! AND I WILL PROTECT YOU!!

NO! MISS RYOKO!!
WELL, ALL RIGHT...

BE HAPPY, MISS RYOKO.
YOU KNOW I CAN'T DO THAT! PLEASE... MOM? I CAN'T!

BUT I...

I'M SORRY... I KNOW... I'M SORRY! MOM...?

I'M SORRY WE HAVE TO SAY GOODBYE LIKE THIS... NO, NO, MOM...

YOU BELIEVE WHAT YOU WANT. I KNOW WHAT I BELIEVE.

I'M... I'VE GOT TO GO. I...
YOU OKAY? YOU GET THROUGH THEM?

YOU’LL ALWAYS HAVE A DAUGHTER LIKE IT OR... MOM? MOM...

EVEN IF IT WAS BAD... SHE HAD TO.

BUT SHE HAD TO.

SHINJI USED TO TELL ME YOU WERE CLINICALLY INSANE. ANY TRUTH TO THAT?

THE INFAMOUS SHUJI, HERE IN THE FLESH. I’M IMPRESSED.
YOU'LL BE PASSED OFF TO A TRAILER WELL INTO INTERNATIONAL WATERS. THAT'S YOUR RIDE TO THE STATES.

HERE'S THE ITINERARY. THERE'S A FISHING VILLAGE ABOUT SIX K FROM HERE. THAT'S WHERE YOU PICK UP A FISHING BOAT. THAT'S JUST A SHUTTLE.

THAT MEANS YOU MAKE THIS WORK. FOR SHINJI AND EVERY KID THAT DIED ON THAT FUCKING ISLAND YOU MAKE THIS WORK!
 Quite a bounty on them two...

 They're those program kids, aren't they?

 We took on...

 Captain about those kids...

 You check out the girl's eyes when she thinks no one's looking? 's like looking into a black hole.

 Short jump from her to my daughter... too short...

 Enough to put a man on easy street for life...

 Good to hear—because no way do we turn them in.

 Sir? I wasn't trying to...
YOU HAVE TO ASK? ISN'T IT OBVIOUS?

SHOOSAI SAID YOU DO BUT...

...I'VE NEVER HEARD YOU SAY IT.

NEVER SAY.

I JUST REALIZED! WE'RE ON OUR WAY TO AMERICA...

OH, NOW...

SURE. IT'S... YEAH. OBVIOUS.

ONCE I'VE GOT WORKED OUT I'LL SHOW YOU 'KAY?

I'M STILL WORKING ON IT.

...I'M ALL ABOUT THE MUSIC, BUT...

I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU WANT TO DO ONCE WE GET THERE! I MEAN...

I JUST HAVE TO... YOU KNOW.

YEAH.

OKAY, SURE.

WHENEVER YOU'RE READY...
WE'RE GOING TO BE OKAY, NORI. YOU'LL SEE.

HELL... WE SURVIVED THE PROGRAM. HOW MUCH WORSE CAN THINGS GET?

I'M OKAY.

WE JUST... PREEMPTED IT WHILE THEY HUNT FOR US. WE DIDN'T STOP THE PROGRAM YET.

SHE WANTED ME TO TURN MYSELF IN So THEY'D GIVE MY BROTHER BACK.

HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE BEING PERSECUTED BECAUSE WE DID WHAT WE DID?

WE CAN NEVER GO HOME AGAIN. WE'RE FUGITIVES. MY MOM... MY MOM, SHE PRETTY MUCH DISOWNED ME.
NOT MUCH TO GO ON, HUH?

FOR US...

YEAH...

I CARRY IT AROUND 100... INSIDE...

EVERY MORNING I WAKE UP AFRAID...

EVERY MORNING I'VE GOT TO CONVINCE MYSELF I'M NOT STILL ON THAT F**KING ISLAND...

WE'VE BEEN THROUGH TOO MUCH.

WE'VE GOT TO MAKE THIS WORK!

BUT IT'S ALL WE'VE GOT.

WE'VE GOT TO FIND A WAY TO MAKE THIS WORK... FOR ALL OF THEM.
I'm glad for that...

...smaller somehow...

Then it's made...

What we went through... all those deaths must never lose significance.

Less significant...

We don't have much...

Like I said...
...BUT WHAT WE DO HAVE HAS TO WORK!
NEVER CHEAPEN THEIR DEATHS BY PUSHING THE MEMORY AWAY...

EVEN THE WORST OF THEM DESERVED BETTER.

NEVER FORGET...
Okay, I can believe, too. It's not like I've got a choice in the matter, is it?

Shuiya? You're crushing me. I can't breathe Shui?

That's better. I was...

You really believe, don't you? You really believe we'll make it.

Maybe you are clinically insane.
AND IF THAT'S TRUE...

...THEN I MUST BE INSANE, TOO.

BECAUSE I REALLY, TRULY BELIEVE IN YOU.

DO MY EARS REALLY STICK OUT LIKE THAT?

THIS IS ME, RIGHT?
I KNOW YOU LOVE ME...

AND THE NOSE... A BIT WIDE, DON'T YOU THINK? BUT ALL IN ALL, NOT TOO BAD...

SO IT'S OKAY. YOU DON'T HAVE TO SAY IT. I KNOW.
You watch. And as long as you watch, they move more. Just thought you

how many of your friends from the blood and yellow goons out there?/Kovajna’s followers...

Now, it’s simple. You’re going to have some kind of escape. Get out of the way, I’ll do it for you.

Same thing about you. Someone out there is going to find you. And when they do, they’ll tell you that you’re going to die. But don’t worry, I’ll make sure you’re not alone.

You watch. And as long as you watch, they move more. Just thought you

would maybe know.

Um writing this down on some stationery scavenged from the Carter and

Cathareie i* good. Or so I’ve heard.

You watch. And as long as you watch, they move more. Just thought you
I GUESS THIS IS WHERE YOU COME LOOKING FOR A HAPPY ENDING.

SORRY TO DISAPPOINT YOU.

OH, DON'T GET ME WRONG, WE MADE IT.
KAWADA'S THE ONE THAT STILL REALLY HURTS TO REMEMBER. I'LL WAKE UP CRYING AND KNOW I WAS DREAMING ABOUT HIM.

I NEVER SAID IT TO HER.

NOT EVEN WHEN THINGS WERE GOOD.
FUCKING GAME.
Battle Royale has just finished a successful five-year run. What are your feelings about its length?

Takami: Oh, it was long...I didn't think it would be that long! (laughs)
Taguchi: But, I felt like if you try to do it thoroughly, that's how long it will take. I'm very happy I could finish drawing the entire thing.

The manga ended somewhat differently than the original, Takami-san, what are your thoughts on its revised ending?

Takami: In my novel, Shuuya Nanahara kills the soldiers without any remorse on the escape boat. But Taguchi-san didn't have Shuuya do that. So, while the manga at first paralleled my original version, by the end it became completely Taguchi-san's original story. Not that that's bad—I think that his sensibility really brought this version of the story to life. It seems that out of the two of us, I've got the inferior personality! (laughs)
Taguchi: Honestly, in my mind it's not an issue of which of us is good or bad—but it just seemed to happen this way naturally. Since this was published in a serial format, I had to differentiate between the various characters even more clearly than in a novel or movie. So Shuuya gradually developed a personality, almost like the character of a shonen manga, where a strong sense of justice caused him to say things like, "We shouldn't kill each other!!" Because I was trying to play up this characteristic in him, I felt that the manga version of Shuuya shouldn't kill the soldiers on the boat. It's almost like this character pulled me along through the story. Takami: That sounds like we're getting into the technical aspect of how to write manga. But, beyond that, I think that's just Taguchi's style. For example, compared to director Fukasaku-san's movie version, Taguchi-san's stance is closer to my own. That said, Taguchi-san seems to have this all-encompassing love for people in general...whereas, I think that I am a little bit more mean. That's not to say I'm Kiriya or anything...but I do think that I have a part that of me that views humans in the way one would view machines. Anyway, the manga version gives me a sort of effusive feeling—or closer still, a general, nonjudgmental love for humans.

Had you been planning this ending for a while?

Taguchi: Well, to answer that, I first need to talk about something rather personal. When I started this project, I had just recently become a father, so my frame of mind at the beginning was less jaded...to the point where I was leaning on the side of love in general. For example, my feelings concerning crimes against children were more acute than ever...and not to mention dealing with 9/11. When those things happened, I started thinking—not about revenge, but of how to deal with that human violence and still continue to live life while I was drawing. Of course, this is not an easy question to answer, but young people right now deal with a lot of issues (including these), so it became a song of encouragement. I just wanted to tell young people that they should keep looking for the answer...and that by just doing that, they could become worthwhile people.
Takami-san, in retrospect, were there any scenes you liked in particular?

Tekami: Before the manga began running, I often wondered how the action scenes would play out...but as the story progressed, I really began to look forward to Taguchi-san's original parts. That's not to say the action scenes weren't great...because they were! Especially those involving the supporting characters, like when the couple, Yahagi and You-chan, have their discussion. I really liked that. In the novel, I wrapped up the backstory of how they got together in a few short sentences...but I felt it really began to stand strongly on its own when it was shown in manga format.

Taguchi: I like Yahagi, too...which isn't a surprise, since I modeled most of the characters after someone I know.

Tekami: Did you model her after a girl who was in your class a long time ago or something?

Taguchi: Oh, there wasn't any particular person I had in mind for her...I just listened to a lot of women talk to get a sense of the unique outlook on life that they possess. On the other hand, You-chan is that pure, virginal part of myself that you don't want people to see. That virginal aspect is something I think all men want to hide. (laughs) As far as original parts go, for the section where the couple, Ogawai and Yamamoto, commits suicide, I feel like I fully grasped the idea that this is how I should do it. Of course, I really liked Akamatsu, Kiriyama's group, and so on...but as time passed, I started to feel more strongly about the characters, and the story just got bigger.

Tekami: I was really impressed with the skillful way he distributed time among the characters. It's possible that in my novel, the main characters are actually kind of all alike. Of course their appearances and hobbies are different, but when it comes down to it, they're all the same. I guess you could say characters in a novel are what they are...while here in the manga format, they continue to change and grow. On the other hand, by adding in parts like how Sugimura is afraid to be violent and is troubled by this, or how Minura has a proud, cocky demeanor, the characters are in a process of growing and evolving from there, I think.

Taguchi: I think that there's a technical and emotional side, and that this process utilizes them both.

Tekami: By the way, in the character-ranking poll, Kawada was first, right? He came in at number one.

Taguchi: Yeah, but I think timing has a lot to do with that. That poll was taken while I was drawing Kawada's episode.

Tekami: I think that even if that weren't the case, Kawada would have been first. I think that Kawada is really a "Young Champion"-esque character, after all (Young Champion is the name of the magazine Battle Royale was serialized in. --Editor). Especially when paired with your art, Taguchi-san. Someone even said he looked like Bancho Kiyohara! (laughs) (Bancho Kiyohara is a professional baseball player for the Yomiuri Giants. --Editor) But, Taguchi-san's art really is directly descended from Osamu Tezuka (Artist of Astro Boy, etc., considered the father of modern manga. --Editor). It's really very "manga-eseque" art. But, I think because his art has very clean lines, it's easy to overlook this at times, too.

Taguchi: People tell me my art is reminiscent of "gekiga" (gekiga: historical /serious comics), or that it's realistic, but it's really easy to put my own emotions into the faces, so it sounds strange if I say they're symbolic faces...but they are manga faces. Like, when they're sad, they bring their eyebrows down as far as possible, and so on.
Takami: Also, I feel like as the series went on, characters’ expressions became more and more grown-up looking. But it wasn’t necessarily a conscious thing, right?
Taguchi: In the beginning I was very conscious that everyone had to look like middle school students, but by the end I had specific expressions for certain things they would say. That allowed me to draw them more naturally.
Takami: Even though each character has different reactions to different challenges, there are elements that are universal throughout. That’s why I think Taguchi-san’s art was just so appropriate for this story.
Taguchi: There were many things I realized as an illustrator because I had a chance to work on this book—whereas before, it was almost as if a fog were covering it.
Takami: How so?
Taguchi: For example, in the middle of people’s changing values and views, there is an occurring drama. I became able to perceive it in this sort of precise way within myself. I read what Takami-san had written, and in the various stages of taking that and turning it into a manga, it somehow became almost engrained within me. To compare it to singing, for example, it would be like creating your own distinct way of singing in these five years, one that isn’t karaoke. So I’m very grateful for this experience.
Takami: No, no, not at all! (laughs) I think this is something you were able to grasp on your own, Taguchi-san—not because my original story existed or anything like that.

Any final comments?

Taguchi: I will keep creating different works and honing my skills, and if Takami-san writes a new story and there is a chance, I would love the honor of being allowed to draw the manga version. But, rather than doing it right away, I think it’d be more interesting to give it some time, first.
Takami: Well, even if we leave time, it might still become my next project! (laughs) But, I’ll do my best. Also, I’d like to use this space to say thank you to all of our readers. Thank you so much for staying with us all these years!
Taguchi: Yes, thank you so much! I will work hard to make sure my next project is the best it can be!

Thank you both for your hard work. I am looking forward to your upcoming projects, whatever they may be.
And thank you everyone for reading!