

深見真

Makoto Fukami

疾走する
思春期のパラベラム

The Parabellum called "Dangerous rabbit"

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《長谷川志甫の場合》

そして、部室には一人の女の子がいた。

女の子は、左右の手に一寸ずつ拳銃（オモチャだろう）を持って、

部室の中をぐるぐると踊っている。

（なんだ……この娘？）

一兎は呆れて少女を見つめる。



その少女は、イヤホンを装着して何か音楽を聴いていた。

クックが届かなかったのはこのせいだ。

音楽にあわせて少女が半回転した瞬間、一兔と目が合った。

「ひあっ！」

少女が驚きの声をあげた。

「な、ナンダヨー！」

イヤホンを外し、二丁の拳銃を一兔に向けてくる。

「なにもの！」

「……………」

何者、って。そんな時代劇じゃあるまいし。



《伊集院陸美の場合》

「『ピーター』とウサギ」……そんな実験の話聞いたことは？」

「いえ」

「マリィ・カバー・ジョーンズが行った実験だ。」

ピーターという、なぜかウサギをひどく怖がる少年がいた。

ピーターにとって、ウサギはなぜか『キケンなもの』だった。




ジョーンズは、その『ウサギに対する恐怖』をなくすように依頼されたんだ。

ジョーンズは、記録として残る初めての行動療法——脱感作療法を行った。

「……行動……療法？」

判らない単語も多かったが、陸美の話は面白かった。



長谷川志甫 (Shiho Hasegawa)

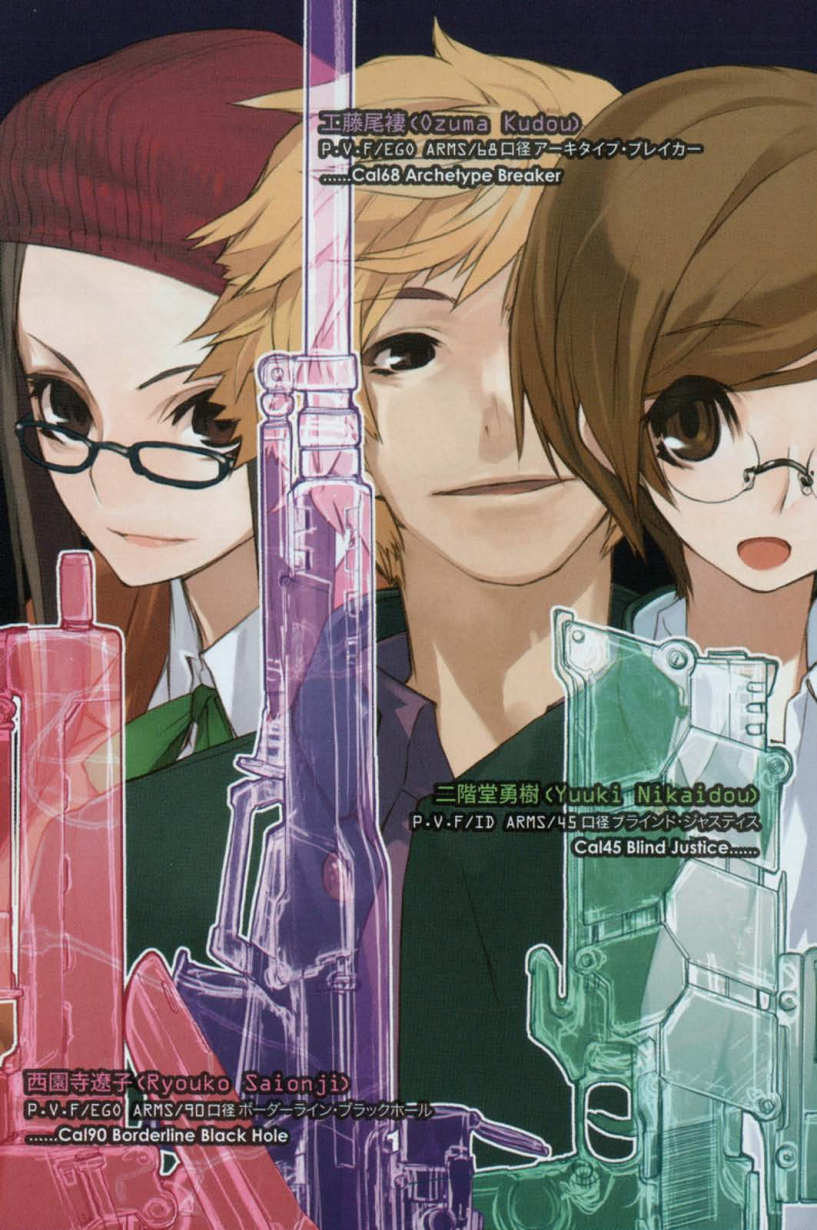
P・V・F/EGO ARMS/68口径プリリアント・カタルシス
Cal68 Brilliant Katharsis.....

伊集院睦美 (Mutsumi Ijuuin)

P・V・F/EGO ARMS/68口径バーンアウト
.....Cal68 Burnout

佐々木一兎 (Itto Sasaki)

P・V・F/EGO ARMS/68口径デンジャラス・ラビット
Cal68 Dangerous Rabbit.....



工藤尾棲 (Ozuma Kudou)

P.V.F/EGO ARMS/68口径アーキタイプ・ブレイカー

.....Cal68 Archetype Breaker

二階堂勇樹 (Yuuki Nikaidou)

P.V.F/ID ARMS/45口径ブラインド・ジャスティス

Cal45 Blind Justice.....

西園寺遼子 (Ryouko Saionji)

P.V.F/EGO ARMS/90口径ボーダーライン・ブラックホール

.....Cal90 Borderline Black Hole

Si vis amari, ama.

—— 愛されることを望むなら、愛せよ。

Si vis pacem parabellum.

—— シイ・ウイス・パケム・パラベラム。
汝、平和を望むなら戦争に備えよ。





疾走する
思春期のパラベラム

The Parabelle called "Dangerous rabbit"



工藤尾棲

Ozuma Kudou

Kido High Second Year and Vice-President of the Film Club. Popular despite his audacious behavior



伊集院睦美

Mutsumi Ijuuin

Kido High Second Year and member of the Film Club. Brilliant and beautiful, though eccentric



長谷川志甫

Shiho Hasegawa

Kido High First Year and member of the Film Club. A cute but stupid girl.



佐々木一兎

Itto Sasaki

The protagonist. Kido High First Year. For some reason, he can only think pessimistically...



シンクロシティ

Synchronicity

A mysterious girl clad in a black dress. Elusive.



西園寺遼子

Ryouko Saionji

Kiwazono High Second Year and rival to the Kido High Movie Club. Loves anime.



二階堂勇樹

Yuuki Nikaidou

Kido High Second Year and President of the Movie Club. Though gentle, he can be assertive.



Prologue



The members of the Kido High Film Club have two [Common Features].

The first is that all bear an emotional scar of some kind.

President Nikaido Yuuki was bullied throughout elementary school and middle school. It is said he unsuccessfully attempted suicide. Vice-President Kudou Ozuma became a major problem when he had an affair with an older woman in middle school. Of the female members, Hasegawa Shiho's brother was murdered by a serial killer. As for Ijuuin Mutsumi, when her love ended, which cannot be spoken of to this day, she lost everything and nearly froze to death beneath the snow.

The second commonality is that all members are <Parabellum>.

*

Two boys looked down at the Kido High School grounds. They were standing atop a water tank on the rooftop of an apartment building. Though the wind was strong and the footing unstable, their posture was not in the least bit unsettled.

They were not afraid of the height, and they wore uniforms from a high school which was clearly not local.

The city was wrapped in the gray of twilight as dusk approached.

“So that's Kido High.”

One boy spoke.

“Yeah.”

The other nodded.

“The <Flight> centering around Nikaido Yuuki should exist here.”

“We should finish him off before he can form his <Element>.”

“Gotcha, partner.”

The boys jumped down from the water tank.

They fell dozens of meters, straight to the ground. Under normal circumstances, they would become corpses when they landed, but the two jumped off the twenty story apartment and landed casually. There was no sound; as if manipulating gravity, the two landed unnaturally.

These two people are <Parabellum>.

--- To begin with, what exactly is a <Parabellum>?

Chapter I

Encounter



1

The life of Sasaki Itto is one inherently bound to misfortune. No matter how much effort he puts forth, something completely unrelated hinders him. As such occasions piled up one after another, he gradually grew to become a cynical man.

His first instance of bad luck probably happened in middle school. At the time, his parents promised to buy him the latest portable game platform if he managed full marks on his math exam, a subject Itto was particularly weak on. He worked hard, since there was a game he wanted to play no matter what. It was a new RPG which allows you to purchase and modify a tank and use it to defeat the enemy. Due to his efforts, Itto managed to get a perfect score.

“All right!”

--- His joy did not last long, though. Itto was accused of cheating by a boy sitting next to him, since both managed a perfect score. There was a piece of scrap paper from the desk of his neighbor, too. Though Itto was innocent, his teacher did not believe him. “It’s interesting how the two of you solved this problem the same way.”

Instead of getting a new game system, he ended up being scolded by his parents, his teacher, and his classmates.

Right before his matriculation into Kido High School, Itto's parents got a divorce. The trouble was problematic enough to involve their child, so Itto could not attend school for the first two months.

It was no different from usual. Itto had already become accustomed to such situations.

It happened again...

It's the story of my life.

It's pointless expecting anything. It's useless making an effort. Such is life.

He put up with such misfortune every day. Itto did not think much of it anymore.

Whatever he might do, he was just a waste of a human in this world.

Itto was of normal height and build. His face was not particularly bad, but he was hardly handsome. Though he had a nondescript face, his eyes set him apart from others. They were lifeless, as if his sockets were embedded with artificial glass orbs.

“Your eyes are hollow, like a fish or an insect.” He was told that often.

He arrived at an office in the school.

Kido High School was located in the immediate vicinity of a large shrine. Located in a quiet residential area near a shrine, the school had a good location. Using the Tozai Line, it was only a five minute walk from the subway station.

Due to strange incidents happening in the area, a security guard was hired to stand beside the main gate. *The school is clean, and the air is fresh. This school looks pretty normal*, Itto thought. On school grounds, the track and field club were diligently practicing.

Itto's classroom for the upcoming year would be class B in the general course.

I finally get to join the class. I'm a bit late, but the course didn't seem too difficult. Still, my family name will be different in the attendance record, so I guess my classmates will be a bit confused. It's a bit nerve racking, but I should be fine.

Itto was anxious he might not fit in with the class.

“Well, whatever happens, happens.” Itto spoke to himself in a quiet voice.

Itto had a habit of saying this phrase.

--- That was his life.

“Um... Kishida... No, Sasaki, is it.”

“... Yes?”

During lunchtime, while Itto ate alone, his homeroom teacher, Wajima, approached him. Though a bit dull looking, he was a well liked middle-aged physical education teacher. Itto was a little frustrated seeing his gold tooth stand out.

“You haven't taken part in any activities yet.”

“Yes.”

Itto's high school life had just started today, after all.

“Our students are required to choose an extracurricular activity, or else they will be kicked out.”

“Yes.”

News to me.

“Please choose an appropriate activity by the end of the week.

--- That is just how it was for him.

2

Mandatory extracurricular activities, what a pain.

He could have ignored it, but knowing the man would be his homeroom teacher from now on, it would be troublesome (furthermore, he would have to look at the man's gold tooth more often). He was determined to enter a club and remain a ghost member at best.

In front of the Student Council Office, many posters for extracurricular activities were posted. Itto decided it would be good to have a look at them.

His motivation was nonexistent from the very beginning, since it was such a tiresome thing.

A cultural club would probably work.

[Recruiting Members for the Manga Club. Spread the Moe Culture!]

The poster is embarrassing. Pass.

[Literature Club. No gardening or handicrafts required.]

What the hell is this? What are they going for, a pun? This is a terrible way to solicit people.

[Railway Society. We center on the Keikyu Lines and are building a model train set. How about joining us in studying this out-of-production brass set?]

They wrote what they do, but I have a bad feeling about it. Not sure I can just skip activities.

[Film Club Trivial activities. Always lazy.]

Hm? Itto's eyes stopped for a moment.

--- *Oh. They were pretty neglectful of their kanji. I like it.*

If the words were true, it would be ideal for Itto.

“Here... All right, I'll go.”

He determined the location of the clubroom.

The Film Club was located on the third floor of a three-story school building. It was a lonely place built at the very back of campus next to a warehouse. It was a bit damp and very quiet. Itto was liking this more and more.

He stood in front of the clubroom door.

[Kido High School Film Club. Entrance is prohibited without permission. Don't forget to return the key after activities are over.]

A note was placed on the door.

From inside, it sounded like there was someone singing.

“Um, excuse me.”

He knocked.

However, there was no response.

Knowing there was someone inside, Itto slid the door open carefully.

“Excuse me...”

The room was about ten tatami in size.

With so much equipment, it felt quite narrow.

Inside, there was one girl.

The girl held a pistol (it must be a toy) in both hands and was dancing, round and round.

What... is with this girl?

Itto stared at the girl in amazement.

This girl wore headphones and was listening to some music. She must not have heard him knock.

The moment the girl half-turned with the music, her eyes met Itto's.

“Hya!”

She let out a shriek of surprise.

“Wha, What is it!”

She removed her headphones and pointed her guns at Itto.

“Nothing!”

“...”

It's not like this is a drama.

3

“Um, I wanted to join this club.”

“Oh...”

“I knocked, but I entered when I didn't hear a response. Sorry.”

Itto bowed.

The girl, now understanding the situation, blushed in panic.

“Um, Ah, This is...”

She hastily hid the toy guns behind her back.

She hid them from Itto. Even if they were gas powered, it was sill against school regulations to have them.

Looking carefully, she was a beautiful girl. Her pupils, from which a bright vigor spilled, were especially attractive. Though cut short, her hair was finely decorated with a thin ribbon wrapping about it. Her height was decent, and she had good thighs and style.

“This, I was just rehearsing for a movie! These aren't real!”

Of course, Itto thought. It would be a problem if they were real.

“You were listening to music while doing this? Is there a specific reason...?”

“Eh, ah, I just had a bit of free time.”

“Ah, oh.”

“Ah, no, that's not it. I was doing some research for the movie.”

The girl corrected herself in a hurry, though it was too late.

She was playing around to kill time...

Itto was at a loss.

Though he did not plan to get motivated, it was beyond his expectations.

“You were doing this alone?”

“Of course. I don't have any friends who would do this, too.”

The girl laughed.

She's an idiot.

As if understanding Itto's thoughts, she cleared her throat and looked at him seriously.

“So, you want to join the club?”

“Yes.”

“My name is Hasegawa Shiho. I'm a first year club member. My best regards.”

“Sasaki Itto. First year. Good to meet you.”

Finally settling down for a moment, Itto looked around the room again.

The walls were filled with bookshelves and a PC located deep inside. Itto focused on the contents of the bookshelf. Despite being a Film Club, there were a large number of books on psychology, from major research papers to books by Freud and Jung. There were also books only enthusiasts would read, like psychopathology and the psychology of war.

--- Isn't this Film Club a bit odd...?

“Yo, Hasegawa.”

A male student entered the clubroom. Since there was no warning, he surprised Itto momentarily.

He was a man with simple features. He had sharp eyes like a kabuki actor's son. He was tall, had broad shoulders, and had a large red earring in his left ear.

“Who's he?”

He spoke to Shiho.

“Um, he wants to join the club.”

“Hmm...”

The man looked rudely at Itto.

In such a short amount of time, Itto felt a dislike for the man. He was the type Itto hated. His face was good and seemed the type to do well, no matter what he did. He was probably popular with the girls.

“Name?”

“Sasaki Itto.”

“Kudou Ozuma. I won't say anything bad, but you should leave now.”

“...?”

“Sasaki-kun, we will not accept you.”

A cold expression.

Shiho quickly spoke to the man who introduced himself as Ozuma.

“Wait, Ozuma. Saying it like that...”

“I see.”

Though Shiho protested, Itto withdrew.

A club member he disliked.

I don't want to work too hard.

It will be less trouble to back down.

Itto's life simply was not lucky. Every time he tried to do something, bad things happened.

Itto turned his back to the two and left the Film Club. He need only choose his club activities slowly.

Still...

--- [We will not accept you.]

He was caught by the man's manner of speaking.

4

Itto returned to his classroom for the time being. Since it was after school hours, no one else remained.

Itto's body felt heavy, so he lay his head on the desk to sleep.

“Ah...”

Speaking of which, he felt something like this before.

In middle school, he had an amazingly rich classmate. She was really like a princess straight out of a cartoon. She was a local celebrity. That princess celebrated her birthday. It was befitting of someone of [Noble Birth]. There was a large screen LCD TV for entertainment and Bingo (coincidentally, winning first place got you a trip to Okinawa), it was a full-fledged party.

Though the entire class was invited, Itto alone did not hear of it.

Though he was not particularly interested, he was truly ignored. The princess said to him.

“Your mother, I heard she had a problem with the police a while ago. I don't want that kind of person's son to join. I mean, what could happen...?”

He could not hit a girl, and his position was different in the first place.

--- *Ah, now that I think about it, it was completely different.*

Having been rejected by the Film Club, Itto recalled many memories.

Though it was unavoidable, he ended up lying on his desk for a long time. Itto stood up and prepared to leave the school.

“--- Hm?”

Itto noticed a girl standing in the class.

She was not a student of the school, she was not even wearing a uniform. She was wrapped in a dress.

Fair skin, beautiful silver hair.

The girl's lips were small and had a good shape.

“--- Goodbye.”

“--- Eh?”

The unfamiliar girl suddenly bid him farewell, puzzling Itto.

When Itto blinked on instinct ---

The girl had completely disappeared.

“... What!?”

Only Itto remained in the classroom. Though he approached and examined where the girl stood, he found nothing.

“Too much bad luck... I wonder if I've gone a bit crazy...”

Itto sighed in lament toward his misfortune. He had finally seen a hallucination. It would be terrible to become neurotic. Itto stood up and left for home so he could sleep early.

5

The city was wrapped in the gray of twilight as dusk approached. Itto walked through the quiet residential area, thinking how tiring the day was.

As he passed by the park in the center of the district, someone called out to him from behind.

“Sasaki-kun!”

It was Hasegawa Shiho.

“What?”

“No, um... Just a while ago, I'm sorry about our Vice-President's attitude.”

“You came to apologize in his place?”

“Yeah.”

Shiho nodded deeply.

What a cute, childish gesture.

“Here.”

Shiho had a Popsicle in each hand.

She held one toward Itto.

“What's this?”

“A popsicle, an apology.”

He could tell that from a single glance.

There are too many words on this thing...

The two walked into the park.

They sat side by side on a bench, eating their icy treat.

From a distance, it would seem a stupid sight, especially since they were high school students.

In the park during the evening, the fragrant scent of dinner drifted from the houses in the vicinity. Food for all but the two. The sun was on the verge of sinking, the sky dyed the faint color of rust against the trees surrounding the park. The shadows were terribly long.

“So cold, delicious~”

“...”

That's not how the song goes.

What an odd girl.

--- Is she innocent, or perhaps she's just a carefree idiot.

The two immediately finished eating.

While Itto was troubled by what to talk about, Shiho opened her mouth.

“That Ozuma, I think he spoke that way on purpose.”

“On purpose? Why?”

“Well...”

Shiho tilted her head slightly.

“I can't say it very well, but the people in the Film Club have a lot of enemies.”

“Enemies?”

Itto instinctively frowned.

--- *Enemies of a Film Club?*

Are they being marked by some ethics committee for a gory film? Or are the members problematic enough to get the ire of the PTA?

“I'm not sure if it makes sense...”

“Yeah...”

Shiho was at a loss for words.

Itto noticed something hidden deep in her words.

A secret.

Come to think of it, Kudou Ozuma was acting a little strange. "We won't accept you" was it? What would be the point of soliciting new members if they wouldn't accept them?

There's something ---

Itto was convinced at this moment.

"Hey."

Two boys appeared before Itto and Shiho.

They appeared abruptly, as if they had fallen from the sky.

"You're Hasegawa Shiho."

The two boys wore high school uniforms from the neighboring town. One had flashy blonde hair and the other was a giant who looked like a sumo wrestler.

"Is this guy a <Parabellum> as well, Kousuke?"

So said the fair haired boy as he looked at Itto.

"He's different, Goro."

The giant sumo wrestler called the blonde [Goro].

It seems the sumo man was called [Kousuke]

“This is bad.”

Shiho clicked her tongue.

“It's a bit poor of me to do this in front of this guy, but...”

As he spoke, a brutal smile appeared on Goro's face.

“I can't miss this opportunity. Allow me the pleasure.”

Goro and Kousuke extended their right arms.

The next moment ---

A flash blinded Itto's eyes.

“...!?”

He shut his eyes involuntarily.

“...”

Opening his eyes slowly in fear, Itto was astonished.

In a split second, the two boys were armed.

The fair-haired man had a ridiculously large silver pistol, similar to a Glock the police of the United States often used. Its barrel was far too long, though; it was a monster.

The giant had an excessively heavy looking machine gun, just like the one used by Stallone in the [Rambo] movies. Its texture and quality were overwhelming. In no way was this a toy; it was an authentic weapon.

Itto doubted his eyes; it was like watching some Hollywood movie full of special effects. *I don't know where the two pulled their weapons from, but it couldn't have been hidden under their clothes. They're too large.*

--- Then where the hell did they come from?

Shiho stretched her right arm out, just like the two a moment ago.

“This is...”

Particles of light danced about Shiho's right arm.

“The armament of the <Parabellum>.”

Itto's legs lost their strength.

Translucent armor wrapped around Shiho's arm.

The translucent armor immediately formed a chamber, then a barrel. With a loud sound, a clear silhouette was formed from thin air.

A weapon was created.

What... is this!?

The firearm was created from nothing, as if by magic.

Shiho's gun was also large.

A gun, long like a knight's lance.

Seeing a cute girl brandish a weapon that size with ease was obviously impossible, but Shiho lightly moved with it.

Their muzzles crossed one another. Itto could only look about.

“Wha, what the hell...?”

--- What is a <Parabellum>?

A person with the power to call forth a special firearm, the will to fight, and the intent to kill.



Chapter II

Dash

Parabellum

A person with the power to call forth a special firearm, the will to fight, and the intent to kill.

1

The two boys and Shiho. Three people deployed weaponry with their right hand and created a [Magazine] with their left at approximately the same time. Though it seemed like a magic trick, there was no secret mechanism. The three drove their magazine from their left hand to the firearm in their right. The first bullet from the cartridge was loaded into the chamber as they pulled the slide. They could now fire at will.

As soon as she developed her weapon, Shiho's power and movements sharpened. With her left arm, she grabbed Itto, lifted him up, and jumped to the side, kicking a bench as she moved.

“!”

The bench flew up easily, flying straight toward the two. Let alone a girl, this act was impossible for any human. Upon deploying the firearm on her right arm (though the principle was still not understood), Hasegawa Shiho's strength was reinforced.

The two men fired at the bench flying at high speeds toward them and turned it to a beehive.

With a loud roar, the bench was demolished in a single moment.

While debris blocked their vision, Shiho moved further away while shooting; an impact several times more intense than a roller coaster hit Itto as they moved. Using high speed movements, Shiho jumped into the wooded area, hiding in the bushes.

Everything happened in instant.

2

“...”

Shiho checked the surroundings with bated breath.

The two enemies temporarily lost sight of Shiho and Itto.

However, the park was small. If they searched the nearby bushes, the two would be found immediately.

“What... is that?”

Lowering his voice as much as possible, Itto asked Shiho.

“Ah.”

Shiho, in a small voice, responded.

“<Psycho Ballistic Firearm>, alias <PVF>. Translating it into Japanese... it would be [Firearm of Mental Bullets]... I guess? Although I say that, I'm not too sure myself...”

“... In other words?”

“In other words, a human's psyche forms a weapon. The bullets are also created through our mental will.”

“... Yes?”

Persons of Ability

“Those who can use <PVF> are called Parabellum.”

“First time I've heard of this...”

“Well, we <Parabellum> try to hide our powers, and...”

“And?”

“<Parabellum> have only been present in recent years. In truth, no one really knows what the situation is.”

Itto was surprised. A special ability born only recently, such a dangerous power was used to fight.

“I'll give you more details later. There are others who can give you better explanations.”

So Shiho said.

“Why did those two attack you so suddenly?”

Itto asked.

“That, well, I don't know, either...”

“Really.”

“The <Parabellum> from the high school in the next town... They have misunderstood something. They said 'Our companion was attacked by the <Flight> from Kido High,' but we haven't done anything.”

Again, a word Itto did not understand.

“<Flight> is?”

“A group of <Parabellum>.”

<PVF>

<Parabellum>

Firearms produced by the human mind---

For the time being, Itto needed to know one more thing.

So he asked.

“... How can I get in?”

“There are two methods...”

“Yeah.”

“One way is to perform surgery on you. It's a simple operation, of course, but it's impossible in this situation.”

--- *Surgery. Definitely impossible.*

“The other is... this.”

Shiho took out a small case of medicine from her pocket.

She opened the lid and showed Itto its contents.

Inside the plastic case were many white pills.

“This heightens the abilities of a <Parabellum>. One tablet, no water required. If a <Parabellum> takes it, it temporarily improves our abilities, but there are side effects, so not many use them often... If a normal person drinks it, there is a chance they will awaken... but that's dangerous. It's dangerous enough for a <Parabellum> to take it, the average person's brain might burn out...”

After taking one, Shiho returned the case to her bosom.

“...”

Brain death---

A tremendous risk.

“Uu.”

Shiho's face was distorted in pain.

“Were you shot just now?”

“A bullet grazed me...”

Shiho rubbed her flank.

The clothes were not damaged.

“Since the bullet is made of human will.”

Shiho's explanation.

“It will hurt [Only] the human mind and nerves. Even if someone becomes disabled, no evidence will remain. Ozuma says the <PVF> could become the worst assassination tool ever.”

“Injuries...”

Itto grated his teeth.

--- *What the hell should I do?*

“It's fine. Run away.”

Shiho smiled brightly as she spoke.

“You and I have only just met. There's no need for you to worry about a girl you don't know disappearing from school, right? It's fine to forget, so run away.”

Leaving those words behind, Shiho jumped from the bushes. To let Itto escape, she planned to play the decoy without his permission.

In the grass in the woods surrounding a park, Itto was left alone.

3

Itto was involved.

Shiho was protecting Itto. That was natural.

In the first place, he could not acclimate himself to such abnormal circumstances so quickly.

It's fine.

Shiho told him to.

Itto only had to escape.

As if it were a bad dream.

No, perhaps it really was a nightmare. Itto recently felt a strange sense of neurosis from his continuous bad luck. It would hardly be strange to see a nightmare.

So it's fine.

Itto looked at his feet suddenly and noticed a white tablet. It was the medicine Shiho said awakened the <Parabellum>

“...!”

It must have fallen out when she opened the pill case.

Itto picked up the tablet and felt its texture. A dangerous medication. The feeling of reality within this nightmare crept up his fingertips.

--- *One tablet, no water required.*

Itto swallowed his saliva.

--- *If I fight, I'm sure it'll be hell.*

Misfortune awaited him. That much was obvious.

Itto lived a trivial and care free life. If he jumped into such abnormal circumstances, he would ensure a continuous life of fear and suffering.

--- *Run away, Itto.*

He persuaded himself.

Nothing I do will pan out.

Such an unusual thing, he would definitely ruin it.

I worked hard getting full marks on that test and was falsely accused of cheating.

He recalled Shiho's smile.

The sister I loved eloped with some man with a piercing in his nose and was hurt.

Shiho was attacked. He recalled the two enemies.

My parents fought every night while I was preparing for my high school entrance ceremony.

He recalled Shiho's expression as she suffered from injury.

And then they divorced.

Ah---

Itto noticed.

--- For someone like me, isn't it strange to be afraid of death?

More than anything, Itto had something to say to Shiho.

Shiho said it as they parted---

There's no need for you to worry about a girl you don't know disappearing from school, right?

Itto was accustomed to the taste of contempt and humiliation.

However, he noticed something in Shiho's words; perhaps it was a coincidence.

Of course, Shiho had not spoken out of malice, she just spoke naturally. She just seemed like that kind of girl.

--- *You said something unnecessary.*

In Shiho's eyes, Sasaki was reflected like a little Rabbit who would not mind, even if a girl was killed in front of him. Shiho's words were the largest humiliation Itto had ever received in his short life.

Besides, Itto wanted [The Worst Assassination Tool].

If he had it, the things important to him would not have to be taken away any longer. *I want that power. I want to get the man who hurt my beloved sister.*

“Even if I die...”

Itto reached for the tablet on the grass once again.

“It's better than living this shitty life.”

He picked it up and put it in his mouth with the intent to commit suicide.

Filled with unease and tension, he broke into a cold sweat.

The medicine took effect immediately.

From the nape of his neck to the crown of his head, he felt an impact, like a chill.

Dizzy. His ears were ringing.

He sweat even more, became breathless.
His heart palpitated, rapidly accelerating.

4

Itto fainted.

How much time has passed---

"..."

He opened his eyelids.

Was it long, or was it short?

It no longer hurt.

His brain functioned as normal as well.

Did something change?

Ignoring that thought, Itto stood.

He extended his right arm like Shiho had done---

He concentrated. He focused on the image of a weapon.

Good... Do it.

Itto's wish reached the heavens.

Particles of light surrounded his arm, forming a weapon.

Though it was done by his will, Itto could not help but be surprised.

A large firearm was there.

A combination bow and rifle, an unusual <PVF>.

Amazing.

Though the size was unexpected, there was no weight to it at all, yet all parts composing the gun had the clear texture of a strengthened steel.

On the main portion of the gun – along the chamber, characters were engraved.

<Cal68 Dangerous Rabbit>

“68 Caliber Dangerous Rabbit...?”

It was the name of the gun.

5

The name of the <PVF> Hasegawa Shiho used was 68 Caliber Brilliant Catharsis. It was a ranged rifle with a sleek design, reminiscent of the long lance of a knight.

Shiho returned to the park and reunited with Goro and Kousuke.

Goro held his handgun at the ready, Kousuke his heavy machine gun.

For a <Parabellum>, in a two on one fight, their <Element> could be two, even three times the strength.

At this time, there were two confirmed types of <PVF>, the Id Arms and the Ego Arms. The Id Arms was a weapon such as a handgun, typically used for close combat, while the Ego Arms was typically geared toward mid-ranged battles. The two had different types of Arms, covering their weaknesses. It was a good plan for victory.

Some <Elements> gather and form a <Flight>.

However, Shiho was alone today. There was no other <Element> to unite with. Shiho could do nothing but use her Ego Arms, Brilliant Catharsis.

Even if it was two on one, Shiho's <PVF> was superior.

Shiho typically fired in succession while hiding behind the trees. Goro came out in front and held his left hand before his breast. From the center of his left hand, a hexagonal shield appeared to repel Shiho's bullets. The spirit shield a <Parabellum> used to defend was called a [Trauma Shell]; it was impossible to deploy alongside an Ego Arms because the mental burden required was too heavy. Unless the person used an Id Arms like Goro, it was impossible to call forth a Trauma Shell.

Leaving the defense to Goro, Kousuke fired his giant heavy machine gun.

Bullets of emotional strength – that is, a mental system which forms cartridges – only destroy the human psyche and nervous system. However, Kousuke loaded his weapon with armor-piercing ammunition, since “Mental Bullets only hurt the target.” His armor-piercing bullets would hurt [Anything Non-human]. A <Parabellum> used a gun with the right arm and formed a variety of ammo with the left.

Kousuke's bullets destroyed the tree trunks and branches. In doing so, he planned to strike the final blow once Shiho was completely bare.

If I can use my special shot ---

Shiho thought to herself.

The <PVF> had a special ability, called a Special Shot. Using it would use all ammunition and render the weapon unable to reload for a time. The power invested in this bullet could not compare to a typical attack and typically caused some abnormality to the target's psychology.

In order to prepare her Special Shot, Shiho jumped backward while paying careful attention to her cartridge.

However---

“Naive.”

Goro's voice.

Before she knew it, he had gotten behind her.

With his Trauma Shell dispersed, Goro used high-speed movement to attack Shiho from behind.

The 50 caliber mental bullet pierced Shiho's right thigh.

“Nn!”

Shiho muffled her scream.

Though there was no bleeding, her nerves felt the pain.

Her leg could not move, as if she had a severe cramp.

Shiho lost her balance and fell over. Goro fired three more shots, purposely missing her vitals – the head and the heart – to remove all possible movement of her limbs.

Saliva spilled from Shiho's mouth, her breathing was rough.

Shiho's <PVF>, Brilliant Catharsis, was forcibly released. With her mind and nervous system injured to such an extent, it was impossible to maintain her <PVF>.

"I'll ask you. Why did you attack our companion..."

Goro looked down at Shiho as he asked.

"I don't know..."

Shiho replied with a desperate look.

Her answer did not satisfy Goro, so he kicked Shiho's stomach.

"!"

He kicked seriously. As proof, Shiho's body trembled with a sharp pain; she was involuntarily crying.

Kousuke closed in.

"Let me take care of the torture."

Goro responded.

"What's with that?"

"You go too far."

The two had a conversation moving in a dangerous direction.

“Wait.”

A boy's voice hung in the air.
Itto had returned.

“Sasaki-kun...!”

Shiho let out a voice of surprise seeing Sasaki Itto return.
In his hand was a 68 caliber Ego Arms <PVF>.

“That amateur from a bit ago...”

Goro said.

“No, he's not even up to that level.”

“What the hell are you two doing!”

Itto was enraged to see Shiho so injured.

“Kicking a girl on the ground, is there something wrong with your
head?”

Itto began running.

Goro and Kousuke, convinced he would shoot with his <PVF> looked
with wide eyes.

--- *What is he doing!?*



Itto had become desperate midway.

He intended to shoot first, but it did not go so well. He did not yet understand how the lever or safety operated. Before he could properly learn it, he had jumped out to stop the two. Even now, he did not know how to fire his <PVF>.

His body, it was light.

No, that would not be enough to describe it.

The moment he developed his <PVF>, he could control gravity to some degree. His body could become so light that a large jump would be simple. Just by kicking off the ground lightly, he moved about ten meters without knowing it.

--- This too was an effect of the <PVF>.

Seeing the enemy surprised by his suicide attack, Itto used the brief interval to help Shiho.

“This guy is fast.”

Fast – Goro's face clearly said. Itto thrust his <PVF>, Dangerous Rabbit, forward.

It could give a good beating.

Though a special firearm, it was a blunt weapon.

Itto was anxious whether the <PVF> would be effective as a blunt object...

There was a clear response at the moment of impact.

Thinking about it... It's been a long time since I hit anyone so seriously.

Itto swung Dangerous Rabbit horizontally, blowing Goro further away.

The barrel struck Kousuke's shoulder.

“...!”

Kousuke retreated, his face distorted with pain.

He moved to Goro, his partner.

Goro had received a concussion. Worrying about this, Kousuke ran away, carrying Goro on his shoulder.

They ran away...?

Itto looked at the surroundings.

Any sign of the two disappeared completely.

Really – They ran away.

In other words, Shiho survived.

Itto was relieved and sat down involuntarily.

Then, his eyes met Shiho's.

“Ah!”

It was too early for Itto to relax.

Shiho was wounded.

“Sasaki-kun, you became a <Parabellum>... It was my mistake.”

“Of course not.”

Rather, Itto was grateful to Shiho. Though he wanted to express his gratitude... it seemed impossible now.

For now, he needed to take care of her injuries.

“What... should I do? Take you to the hospital?”

“The hospital is useless.”

Shiho said.

“Call President Nikaido...”

Chapter III

Invisible Sniper



P.V.F.

The soul armament of a <Parabellum>. At the moment, the Id Arms and the Ego Arms are the two confirmed types.

Id Arms

A small weapon used in close quarters combat. Usually a handgun.

Ego Arms

A large caliber, long-range weapon such as a machine gun or rifle.

1

A conversation at midnight.

In the corner of the business district.

In the darkness---

There, a single <Parabellum> stood.

On the right arm of the <Parabellum>, a <PVF> was already fitted.

The <Parabellum> was a hunter whose prey had not once survived.

There was not only death.

The criminal did not understand the means.

While enjoying the game of killing, the <Parabellum> performed experiments. Achieving the original goal of homicide, all that remained was to act in comfort.

That is, to learn what made a <PVF>.

Once upon a time, it was said they were handed to urban guerrillas.

[While you experiment with these, make sure not to overstep your bounds], or so it was written.

So far, the experiment was going well.

The <Parabellum> looked for new game.

In the corner of the intersection was a police box.

A policeman in uniform stood before it.

The <Parabellum> loaded the <PVF> with a Special Shot.

The officer was sniped.

It was probably the eighth or ninth person. Either way, the <Parabellum> had already lost count.

2

--- The day after the fight in the park.

“...”

Itto woke up in his room and stared intently at the ceiling for a while.

Slowly, he raised his right hand before his eyes.

He stared at his hand.

At first glance, it was featureless.

Itto sat up. When he went to sleep, he did not bother putting on his pajamas, leaving his torso bare – getting down from the bed, he extended his right arm.

He deployed his <PVF>, Dangerous Rabbit.

A huge firearm wrapped about his right arm. Itto reaffirmed yesterday was not a dream.

“Amazing...”

Instinctively, he smiled.

It was like he was a character from some cartoon. Perhaps, with this new found power, he would not suffer the various troubles he once had. He finally understood. If anything, he was simply happy to have gained this ability.

Itto went to the living room, strangely elated.

The breakfast prepared by his mother lined the table.

He sat down, “Thanks for the meal.”

He watched the morning news on the television.

[About the incident, the latest news has just been reported...]

The parent and child, as always, ate their meal in silence, watching only the television.

Itto poured a glass of milk after finishing his sandwich.

The news continued.

[Midnight yesterday, an unbelievable event occurred. A policeman on duty fired at civilians. The current suspect is Makoto Motogi, thirty-two years old. After exhausting all his bullets, the police rushed in and apprehended him.

During this standoff, two people were killed, two were seriously injured. The suspect himself, normally known to have a serious personality by those around him, said, "I don't know why this happened." When asked, he said he did not know why he did it. It was an order, as if a Devil had told him to.]

Itto suddenly recalled yesterday's events.

3

Goro and Kousuke ran away. Itto and Hasegawa Shiho remained in the park.

"Call President Nikaido..."

Shiho had said.

“Eh...?”

“The Film Club room, it's already time to meet...”

“But...”

Shiho was breathing roughly. He did not want to take his eyes off her for a moment to tell the truth, but ---

“The President can heal wounds made by a <Parabellum>...”

“!”

Thank goodness, Itto thought. If that were the case, it would be a different matter. He began moving at once.

“Wouldn't it be better to take you to the room, Hasegawa-san?”

“Right now, it hurts... I don't want to move.”

“I, I got it!”

Itto ran.

Because he wanted to get to the room even a little bit faster, he ran without thinking of releasing his <PVF>. Regardless, there would not be many people on school grounds at this time.

Itto ran faster than a car.

Though he could not believe it – it was not a dream.

Itto eventually reached the schoolyard and focused on the open window on the third floor of the school building.

--- *Can I do it?*

I can probably do it.

“Ohh!”

Raising a light battle cry, Itto kicked off the ground.

His body lifted up, the empty dusk sky completely in his view.

He was floating, he was flying.

“Oh!”

Pulled by his senses, he jumped to the window of the third floor with accuracy. He took a passive stance and rolled into the hallway.

Amazing, I can even do that...

Itto reached his destination.

He never thought he would visit the club room again.

“President Nikaido, are you there?”

Itto spoke as he violently opened the door.

“What is this, so suddenly...”

Ozuma turned around and noticed Itto's right arm.

“<PVF>!? What the hell is going on!”

"I'll tell you the details later!"

Itto interrupted Ozuma's words and continued.

"Hasegawa-san is in danger. I heard the President could heal her injuries---"

Itto looked about the room.

Other than Ozuma, there was a small boy who was not present before.

"Are you the President?"

"Ah, yes. Pre, President, Nikaido Yuuki..."

Found him.

Though timid, Nikaido Yuuki had refined features. He was small and wore glasses. It would not be a surprise to confuse his gender. Perhaps it was because his uniform was not the right size, it was slightly baggy. He expected to grow taller as a high school student, so he probably ordered a larger size in case.

Itto, Kudou Ozuma, Nikaido Yuuki.

The three rushed to Shiho's location.

"President..."

"How terrible, Shiho-san."

Yuuki spoke anxiously.

Yuuki sat next to Shiho and took her PVF in his hand.

Removing the pins from Shiho's <PVF>, he separated the barrel from the main body.

“What... is he doing?”

Itto spoke to Ozuma next to him.

“He's treating her with [Field Stripping].”

So Ozuma said.

“The <PVF> parts, the portion pertaining to the main compartment, represent the user's [Mind and Nervous System]. It is connected directly, so it's possible to heal mental damage by recovering that portion.”

“Ha...”

Yuuki quickly took Shiho's <PVF> apart.

When removing the cover of the main compartment, a doll came out.

The doll was made of light particles. It looked like a human body, filled with nerves and blood vessels. The places Shiho was shot were red. Yuuki placed his hand atop the red portions; as soon as they turned white, Shiho's expression softened.

“Yuuki,” Ozuma said, “has poor combat skills for a <Parabellum>. He can't produce an Ego Arms, and his Id Arms only comes to 45 caliber. However, Yuuki is excellent when it comes to medical treatment and searching for the enemy.”

“Searching?”

Itto asked.

“Looking for the enemy.”

Yuuki completed the treatment.

Shiho stood up and released her <PVF> Though she was in a terrible state a moment ago, Nikaido Yuuki's abilities were magnificent.

“A family restaurant. Let's talk there.”

Ozuma made a proposal.

“Before that, how do I get rid of this?”

Itto asked uneasily. He could not walk around town in that state.

“Relax and think 'Disappear.'”

Like Ozuma said, Itto relaxed his shoulder.

“Um... 'Disappear.'”

Inadvertently, Itto spoke the words.

Suddenly, the <PVF> scattered, the particles of light dispersing to the surroundings like smoke.

4

The four moved to a nearby family restaurant.

The restaurant was famous because of the cute waitress uniforms.

The skirt was excessively short. Because of that, however, the customers would not enter so easily except for on holidays. As such, this was the perfect place to talk calmly.

They surrounded a table and sat down. Itto was facing Ozuma. Next to him, Shiho sat, clearly tired. Though she had been treated, she could not hide her fatigue.

“Are you okay?”

Itto was anxious about Shiho.

“... Yeah. I want to eat something. Something sweet.”

An easy-going answer returned.

Itto explained the circumstances in detail about how he became a <Parabellum> and how he got involved with the fight by chance, as well as how he picked up the tablet on accident.

“I see...”

Ozuma nodded.

“Though I'm sure you've noticed, Kudou Ozuma is a <Parabellum>.

Actually, all members of the Kido High School Film Club are <Parabellum>. Having the room as our base for activities makes it convenient.”

“So that's why you refused to let me join.”

“That's how it is.”

“Um, I have a bit of a strange question,”

“Hm?”

“Do you need to report this to the police?”

“Sasaki-kun, what are you saying?”

Ozuma's expression became serious.

“Aren't these a bit too amazing...? Concealing it is actually... somewhat frightening. Is there a specialized agency or anything like that?”

“In the past, there was a <Parabellum> that did such things.”

“... And?”

“He [Disappeared]. He was brought to some research facility, and no news has been heard since. Naturally, an official announcement was made up. The government knows of the <Parabellum> but choose not to acknowledge their existence publicly.”

“...”

A cold chill went down his spine.

“... About the enemy, mind telling me more?”

Itto continued with his next question.

“Ah, those two belong to the <Flight> from the next town's Kuwazono High School.”

Ozuma said.

“Kuwazono High.”

He had heard of it. It was a school famous for its sports.

“It seems there's a strange misunderstanding. They're convinced one of the <PVF> we have was used to snipe one of their partners.”

“Are all <Parabellum> high school students?”

“There are exceptions, but most of them are.”

“Why?”

“I'll explain that eventually. Please let that be your last question for now. We should get going.”

“... Got it.”

“Sasaki Itto. What do you plan to do with your future?”

--- *What will I do? Anything?*

I haven't decided. How could I?

“For now, I'd like to join the Film Club.”

“Entering means...”

Ozuma asked for confirmation.

“Just so you know, it's not a place to just relax. We have to support each other with our lives. If you want to join our <Flight> of <Parabellum>, you can't do this for just club activities. Got it?”

“Of course.”

Itto nodded.

“I was desperate and ignored the risk to my life. It wasn't that bad.”

“I understand. Well, as long as there are no problems with the others, you're a member from today on.”

Ozuma spoke as he looked to Shiho and Yuuki.

He confirmed there was no opposition with eye contact.

Of course, there would be no dissenting opinions. Ozuma smiled and presented his right hand to Itto.

“We have one more, but majority rules. Good to work with you, Sasaki Itto-kun.”

Since he requested a handshake, Itto responded.

“Same here.”

5

And so, Itto became a member of the Film Club.

Though he did not fully understand everything, he would continue the conversation tomorrow. Itto also needed time to arrange his thoughts.

Before separating, they exchanged cell phone numbers.

“If something happens or if you're attacked, contact one of us immediately. For the time being, just run away.”

Ozuma said.

Shiho had nearly fully recovered after eating the parfait at the family restaurant. Nikaido Yuuki's treatment was indeed a wonderful one. Still, out of caution, Shiho used a taxi to go home.

“...”

Embracing an odd feeling he was unfamiliar with in his chest, Itto walked the night streets home.

On the way.

“Hm?”

Itto's cell phone vibrated in his chest pocket.

He answered the phone. It was Shiho.

[Good evening.]

“Hasegawa-san?”

[Yeah.]

“We were together until just a bit ago... what's wrong?”

[Um, that...]

Shiho seemed nervous on the other side of the phone, or so the signs said.

[... Thanks for helping me earlier.]

“...”

[I forgot to say my thanks. Sorry.]

“N, no, that's fine...”

[Tomorrow, you'll be our companion as well.]

“My, my best regards.”

[Then... Good night.]

“Night.”

Ending the call, he returned the phone to his pocket.

When thinking of Shiho as one of his companions, he became strangely tense. He could not think of anything quick-witted to say at all.

Incidentally, it was his first time receiving a phone call from a person other than family.

6

The next morning.

Awake in bed, he experimented with forming his <PVF> on his arm.

A large crossbow-type rifle, 68 Caliber Dangerous Rabbit.

He noticed yesterday's incident was not a dream. Releasing his <PVF>, he left his room to eat breakfast with his mother.

[... During this standoff, two people were killed, two were seriously injured. The suspect himself, normally known to have a serious personality by those around him, said, “I don't know why this happened.” When asked, he said he did not know why he did it. It was an order, as if a Devil had told him to.]

Dangerous news came from the television in the living room.

7

Itto...

Itto's mother, Sasaki Satoko, noticed her son's appearance was oddly calm. Since her divorce, he had not spoken positively.

When did her family become so awkward?

Sasaki Satoko's entire body was covered in scars she cruelly received from her father. He had beaten Satoko and put cigarettes out on her body while her mother watched from the side, pretending not to see. Satoko decided to try and build a happy family because of her experiences.

However, her husband was also violent. In the end, they separated.

Her relation with her child as well, was not going well. She acted like a stranger to her son (though Itto acted no differently).

Itto's sister married a person like Satoko's husband. It was clear he was the type to use violence toward women. Satoko thought they were parent and child after all, their sense in men was clearly the same.

Yesterday, Itto had an odd appearance. Though it would be normal if it were a typical rebellious phase of adolescence, he had a number of unnatural actions. It was not the shock of the divorce. Her intuition told her [Something] happened to her son.

--- *What should I do as a mother at a time like this?*

How should I touch my son? I don't know.

I have never been treated decently by my parents, so how can I deal with my children? Satoko wanted to build a happy family, but she did not know what that was. Even with all her hesitation, Satoko could not communicate with Itto. This morning, breakfast had been cold and quiet as usual.

Chapter IV

After School Session



1

Itto left his house and went to school. Secretly, he hoped to meet Hasegawa Shiho between classes, but there would be no chance of that. She might even be absent. Because Kudou Ozuma was in a different year, it was unlikely the two would meet.

Anyway, he was impatient for classes to end.

He had never been this restless in years.

By the way, Itto had few friends, which made PE a troublesome class. Often times, people would pair up for different activities like gymnastics, catch, judo... He was not particularly lonely, though, since he had never really understood the feeling before. Today as well, Itto had an odd atmosphere. As soon as the stragglers remained, he began looking around. While looking for someone similar to him---

“Hey.”

He was called for. Why an American style?

The one calling out to him was a man named Tanigaki from the same class.

He was always smiling in the midst of a circle of people. To use an older way of speaking, he was an easy to please person.

“Um, Sasaki-kun, right? Let's go together.”

“Ah, thanks.”

Itto breathed a sigh of relief that no one would notice. Two classes would take gymnastics classes together typically. If it were true, Shiho may have been present, but she was not there.

Incidentally, they were playing basketball. For the time being, they would practice in pairs.

“You hardly talk, so I kind of thought you were a pretty dark fellow.”

After a few dribbles and passes, Tanigaki spoke up.

Though a bit insulting, it's true, Itto thought.

“I heard you joined the Film Club?”

“Yeah.”

“That place, you know, is full of odd people. The women are all beauties, but they're all depressing. It's like they always make friends with eccentric people.”

Itto noticed this man named Tanigaki was quite a rude fellow, but he had no sarcasm in his voice. Rather, he seemed a bit happy.

“Beauties, is it?”

Itto thought Shiho would get angry if she heard his words.

“Hasegawa would be more cute than beautiful, I guess. But there's another one, that odd beauty, right?”

“Is that so?”

“She's really glamorous. Maybe she's a model? A busty princess maybe?”

“Oh...”

How should I react, Itto pondered. Until now, he had scarce opportunity to talk about girls, and Tanigaki seemed a bit weak, so he was a lifesaver in this class.

After class, Tanigaki began speaking more assertively. Since he was always in the center of large groups of people, the people around Itto also increased. Between yesterday and today, Itto felt like he was part of a different class.

Since school would end soon, Itto decided to rush to the room.

However ---

“Oh?”

When he placed his hand on the door, it did not open.

It was locked.

How troublesome...

Though he could wait for the other club members, he felt using a cell phone would be troublesome. Also, Shiho might be absent.

“Hello, it's Sasaki.”

[So it's you.]

Itto called Kudou Ozuma instead.

[What's up? We'll be meeting up in the room.]

Ozuma was speaking in a quiet voice so others would not hear.

“The room is locked...”

[Ah, sorry, I forgot to tell you. The first person who goes to the room needs to get the key from the adviser, and the last to leave needs to return it.]

“Adviser?”

[Nagayama-sensei, the Japanese and World History teacher. He's always in the history prep room.]

“Could he also be...”

[No. Actually, we're keeping this a secret from him as well.]

“I see.”

[All right, see you later.]

“Yes.”

The call ended.

The history prep room was on the second floor.

“I guess I should be going.”

He knocked on the door.

“Yes---?”

An easy-going voice.

“I'm from the Film Club...”

“Ah, come in, come in.”

He entered after receiving permission.

Inside the room were large maps and calenders used for classwork, the material forming a mountain of paper. Because the window was closed and the room was full of bookshelves, the interior gave a gloomy appearance. The air was stagnant and full of dust.

At the desk furthest back, a middle-aged man was filling out paperwork. He was looking through notes and newspaper articles.

The middle-aged man looked up at Itto.

“Eh? You're a new face.”

“I'm a new member, Sasaki Itto.”

“Oh? I'm the adviser, Nagayama. Nice to meet you.”

Nagayama wore glasses with sturdy black frames. He had a bright and relaxing atmosphere and looked suitable for research.

“Still, to get a new member at this time is unusual.”

“Ha...”

“Member, hm, you're the fifth one. It's still small.”

Nagayama smiled as he spoke, he then pulled a key out of the desk.

“Here, the key. Return it when you're done. There are a lot of valuables in there, so be careful.”

“Yes.”

Valuables? I didn't notice.

Itto took the key and left the room after bowing.

Itto returned to the clubroom to find someone there.

President Nikaido Yuuki.

“Ah...”

“Thanks.”

Though, no matter how you looked at it, Kudou Ozuma fit the role of the President of the Film Club, he was only the Vice-President.

“I was thinking of getting the key from Sensei.”

“I came at the right time.”

Itto opened the room with the key and entered with Yuuki.

Itto still knew nothing of Nikaido Yuuki.

However, it seems Yuuki and Ozuma get along well.

--- *Yesterday, when he treated Shiho.*

At that time, Ozuma explained Yuuki's ability with pride. “Yuuki's an amazing guy,” as if he were boasting to someone.

Since the two were alone without much of a problem, he decided to ask a few things while he could.

“Your relationship with Kudou-san seems good.”

“Ozuma and I have known each other for a long time.”

Long time.

Though a short phrase, Yuuki's tone said not to delve any further. It seems Yuuki also thought of Ozuma as an important friend.

“Um, Sasaki-kun...”

“Itto is fine.”

“Ah, really?”

“Yes.” He nodded like a rabbit. It felt odd.

“I see, Itto-kun.”

“Yo!”

Hasegawa Shiho appeared.

She was energetic, as if yesterday was an illusion.

“Hey, Yuuki-san, Sasaki-kun.”

“I was just telling President Nikaido...”

“Yes?”

“It's fine to call me Itto.”

“Okay, Itto!”

--- *Eh? No honorific... Well, it's fine.*

“I thought you would be absent today.”

“That's right.”

Shiho nodded frankly.

“... Eh?”

“I was too tired from what happened yesterday, so I skipped classes.

I thought I'd show up for club activities, though.”

“...”

Itto and Yuuki looked at each other on instinct.

--- *Really, this girl.*

Soon after, Ozuma appeared.

Someone was with Ozuma; the girl looked familiar with the room.

Itto remembered Ozuma had said there was one more member.

This girl had a cold glance. Her eyes were sharp like knives, or a bow and arrow ready to pierce the enemy.

Her long, beautiful hair was tied together with a clip, looking like a lion's mane and tail. Her chest was large, and her leather jacket worked well with her uniform and rugged boots.

She was a girl who gave a sense of beauty and danger. That was his first impression.

"... New member?"

And so the lion-haired girl spoke while looking at Itto.

"Last night, he's the newbie I told you about over the phone, Sasaki Itto."

Ozuma introduced him.

"Hey."

The girl nodded and stared at Itto. Her gaze was sharp, as if Itto had gotten on her bad side.

And then---

"Ijuuin Mutsumi. My hobbies are reading mystery novels and science journals. I respect Conan Doyle, Edison, and Baba the Giant. I have a cat named Nicholas Tesla, and he's certified as a Norwegian Forest Cat. Now that I've gotten into the spirit radio, I'm hooked on Edison."

The girl introducing herself as Mutsumi took a deep breath.

"... Ha?"

Itto missed more than half her words. She spoke quickly, so his brain could not catch up.

However, because she said such strange things, he understood why Tanigaki called her an [Odd Beauty].

“... Itto, she's a <Parabellum>.”

Ozuma said so. His attitude touched a sore spot for Mutsumi. It seemed that was Ijuuin Mutsumi's role.

“I'm well versed in chemical engineering and language. I'm quite brilliant.”

Mutsumi said it herself.

“What's more, I've studied up on psychology. I'm sure I can read the rookie's heart if I wanted to.”

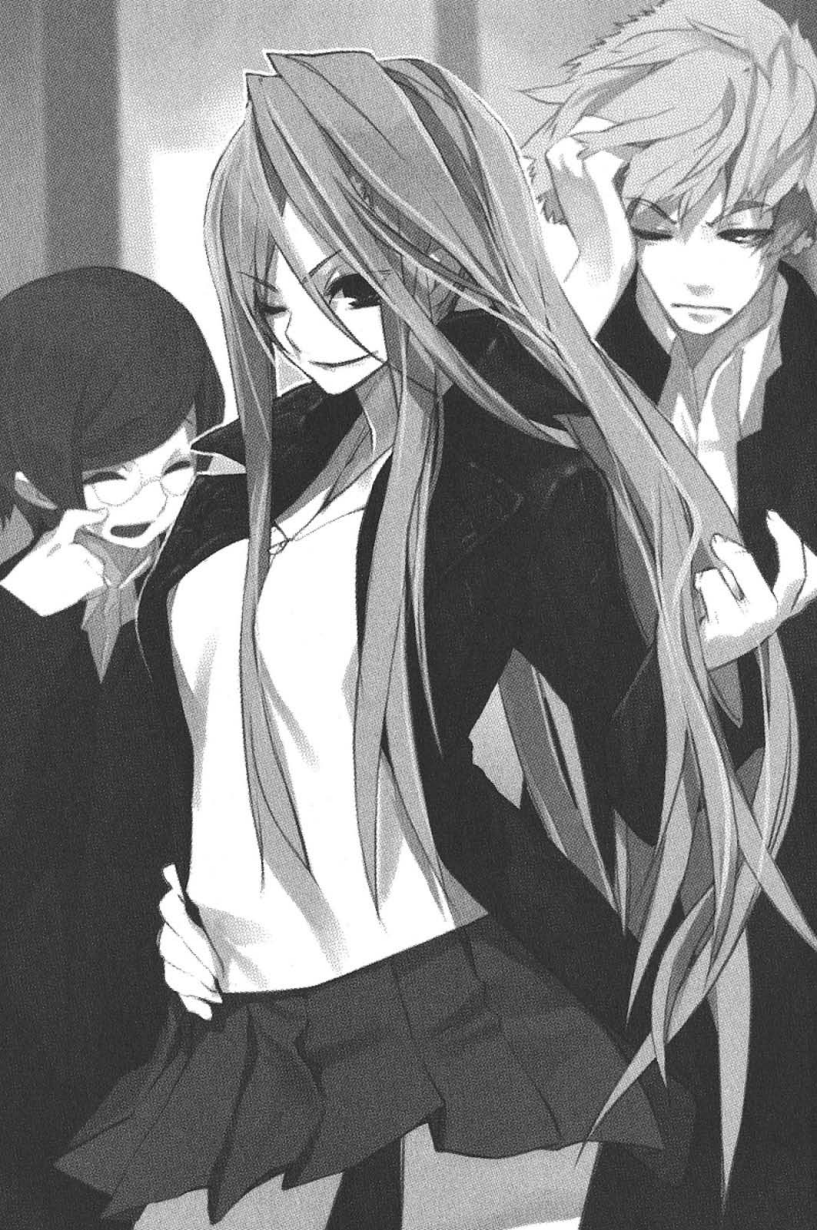
“... You can read my mind!?”

“... Just now, you were confused by your first meeting with an upperclassman.”

“That doesn't really relate to psychology.”

Strange person. Definitely strange. Still, she has a strange charm.

Itto's heart throbbed having seen Mutsumi.



2

“By the way... Yesterday, I never could figure out how to shoot my <PVF>.”

Itto broached the subject he was most anxious about.

“I take it you aren't familiar with firearms.”

Ozuma said.

“I was in a bit of a hurry, but it's big, too.”

“Then how about we help you now?”

“Thank you, rather, I'm still not sure what a <PVF> is.”

“In a word, a <PVF> is...” Ijuuin Mutsumi began speaking. Though Itto thought Ozuma or Yuuki would talk... it seems Mutsumi loved to explain things.

“It is a weapon formed by man's psyche. The bullets, too, are produced in this manner. The <PVF> born more from a person's instinct would be an <Id Arms>, while the <Ego Arms> is born of one's conscious thought. Roughly speaking, those are the two types.”

Mutsumi continued in an indifferent tone. Since she seldom breathed, her voice became stifled.

“When a <Parabellum> develops their <PVF>, a special field is generated in the surroundings which affects their self, an inner reduction field, so to speak. Within this field, it is simple for a <Parabellum> to move like a superhuman. That's my guess---”

“I follow that theory as well.”

Yuuki interrupted Mutsumi. Certainly, her story seemed like it would become long. It seems Nikaido Yuuki was that kind of person.

“Ozuma, Hasegawa-san, please teach Rabbit-kun how to use his <PVF>.”

“Roger---!”

Shiho spoke in a happy-go-lucky voice for some unknown reason.

Itto deployed his <PVF>, Dangerous Rabbit.

“Uwa... Your <PVF> seems strong. A 68 caliber Ego Arms.”

Ozuma spoke in admiration.

“It has Dangerous Rabbit stamped on it.”

“Rabbit? Rabbit-san? Cute!”

Shiho was bubbly.

“This is your charging lever.”

Ozuma pointed while ignoring Shiho.

To the rear of the main body of Dangerous Rabbit was a T-shaped lever.

“When you pull this lever back, you can put a magazine in. The first bullet will be loaded into the chamber and you can shoot at any time.”

“I see.”

“When you're ready, just put your finger on the trigger.”

“Ah, yes.”

“You should try creating a magazine,” Shiho said.

“How do I do that...?”

“It's easy. When I look at my gun, I illusion a ball forming in my hand.”

“Not illusion, imagine.”

Ozuma corrected Shiho.

Itto did as he was told.

He imagined bullets and a magazine to hold them all.

Particles of light gathered in his left hand at once, and the material formed.

It was surprisingly simple.

Before he realized it, he had a black magazine made of steel in his left hand. Though the magazine was as large as an encyclopedia, it did not weight that much, same as the <PVF>. From the end of the magazine, he could see a large bullet.

Ozuma also looked at the bullets inside his magazine.

“Dummy cartridge for training. You're good.”

“Dummy cartridge?”

“Only sound and light are emitted. It's an empty case without any ability to injure, and you've got a magazine of sixty there.”

Ozuma carefully observed Dangerous Rabbit as he spoke.

“You should cock the lever and give a try.”

“Got it.”

Itto placed his hand by the body of the gun.

Near the level, [Safe], [Semi], [Full], and [SS] were stamped, matching the letters along the lever. He switched the gun mode.

He moved the lever to the [Safe] position.

“Right, [Semi] means semi-automatic, and you'll fire a single shot.

[Full] means full-automatic, and you'll fire as long as you hold the trigger.

Ozuma spoke once again.

“What's [SS]?”

“That stands for [Special Shot]. It must be a good <PVF>, since it has [SS] on it.”

“Could you tell me a bit more?”

Once Itto asked, Mutsumi began explaining from the side.

“It's an original special attack attached to a specific <PVF>. Not all of them have one. Though it's strong, it eats up all your ammo, and the mental drain is massive, so you can't reload for a while. It's pivotal, so use it where it counts.

“... Is, is it really that strong?”

Every one of Mutsumi's explanations were long.

“It depends on the <PVF>. There are a variety of effects, so it's not so simple to explain. There are some with an SS that cause hallucinations, while others force the enemy to sleep... Well, you won't know unless you try it out on someone, but that's not something you should do. Anyway, try loading your first bullet and test it out.”

“I, I'll give it a try.”

Itto, in accordance to Ozuma's instructions, loaded the magazine he just formed into Dangerous Rabbit. It stopped after letting out a sound. Itto pulled the charge lever back and loaded the first bullet into the chamber before moving the switch to [Full].

He pulled the trigger by mistake.

“!”

A distinctively pale flame shot from the muzzle of the <PVF>, the sound of the bullet roaring.

The gun continued to roar until the ammunition was exhausted from Dangerous Rabbit. After hitting the floor several times, it changed to particles of light and disappeared.

Good thing they were blanks. It would have been bad if it were live ammunition.

Ozuma, Shiho, and Yuuki, all three stared wide-eyed.

“Idiot! We're on school grounds!”

Ozuma shouted at him.

“I'm sorry, it was an accident.”

“Reports of <PVF> fire, though it's nothing compared to a real gun... Since it was so loud, [That Woman] will come...”

“... That woman?”

3

The Kido High School Newspaper Club was located opposite the Film Club.

In their room, a roaring sound like a gun could be heard. While organizing an article, Kurama Sanae stood on reflex hearing the sound.

“Those idiots are being noisy again!”

Kurama Sanae, Second year, manager of the Newspaper Club. Her long, beautiful black hair was wrapped unfashionably in a bandana. She was a hopeless girl with no sense of fashion, though she was lovely in her own way.

She stomped out of the room and walked to the Film Club with large strides.

“Excuse me!”

“Well, well.”

So said Vice-President Kudou Ozuma.

The Film Club was watching a DVD on a large screen LCD. Right now, a movie with heavy gun action was playing with the sound blazing. Apparently the gunfire came from this movie.

--- She would accept it normally, but something caught her attention.

"... That noise is hardly suitable for the school grounds, so I came to complain."

Sanae crossed her arms and spoke.

"Not suitable?"

Ozuma smiled calmly.

"Can't the Film Club watch movies?"

This time, President Nikaido Yuuki spoke.

"I---"

Sanae stared between Ozuma and Yuuki.

"Every time you people do something, I can't help but doubt it."

"We're not doing anything---!"

Shiho spoke with a bright voice.

Sanae thought, *this girl's an idiot*.

"I can't really understand why you're so hostile toward the Film Club, Sanae. Is there something wrong?" Mutsumi said. "We just told you, but this is a movie. Do you have something against the entertainment industry? Did you become a communist without us realizing it or something? Following the scientific principles of Marxism but not treading into Stalin's territory, you suit the position as the newspaper editor..."

“You, shut up!”

Sanae knew it would be confusing if Mutsumi was involved. Since Mutsumi would speak for a long time, Sanae stopped her immediately.

She noticed the Film Club members had increased by one.

“A new face.”

“Ah, yes. First year, Sasaki Itto.”

“You just joined. It's not too late. You should leave. These people aren't normal.”

“... Not normal?”

“That's right. They're just a bunch of trouble.”

“... Ah, I can agree with that, somehow.”

“Well, I'll let you go with this much today!”

Sanae turned on her heels and left the Film Club room.

4

“Somehow, she's an amazing person...”

Itto was overwhelmed by Sanae's presence.

Ozuma frowned.

“She's the head of the Newspaper Club, Kurama Sanae. For some reason, she's hostile toward the Film Club.”

“Does she hate movies?”

“Maybe. I don't understand her well.”

Before Sanae arrived, Itto had quickly removed his <PVF> in a panic.

He now roughly understood how to use it. In the future, he would limit how often he pulled out Dangerous Rabbit in the clubroom.

“Ah, that's right.”

“Hm?”

“I have one more question... How many <Parabellum> are in Japan?”

“We don't know.”

Ozuma answered promptly.

“However, there seem to be a lot in this area. Through various routes, we've looked into it a bit. At the very least, it doesn't seem likely <Parabellum> exist outside this country.”

“For what reason are the <Parabellum> high school students?”

“It's [Senpai's] fault.”

“... Senpai?”

The moment Ozuma uttered that word, Yuuki and Shiho's expression stiffened. Apparently all club members, excluding him, had met this [Senpai]. Seeing Yuuki and Shiho's reaction, Itto decided not to delve any further.

Ozuma continued.

“We're not sure of her real name, but there is a female high school student known as [Senpai]. She is the one who distributes tablets in the surrounding area.”

“What for?”

“[Senpai] said 'I give to the man who desires.' We don't know how to find her since she's so elusive. Ah, by the way, the various terms like <Parabellum> were taught to us by her as well.”

"It seems like... a testing ground."

"Testing ground?"

"The concentration of <Parabellum> in high schools from this area feels unnatural... It's like a testing site someone purposely made."

"I see... I hadn't thought of that..." Ozuma's face stiffened. "Still, there are many things we don't understand about this power."

"I thought it could be for something like dissecting a human... but that's more of an ethics issue."

Mutsumi ignored all other members and spoke dangerous words.

"Well, anything might happen, which is why we gather together."

Yuuki spoke.

That's right.

Even if trouble occurs because of the power of the <Parabellum>, it would be reassuring to have companions.

"One more question, is that okay?" Itto asked.

"Sure." Mutsumi nodded as representative.

"Why is there a <Flight> at each school?"

"It's a coincidence," Mutsumi responded. "If Kuwazono High School's <Flight> representative was a bit friendlier, we could join up like old times."

“What kind of person is she, this representative of the Kuwazono High School <Flight>?”

“What kind of person...” Ozuma said.

“She's a bossy, aggressive character.”

Hearing that, Itto remembered the duo that attacked Shiho. Since they were rough people, he could figure the leader's character a little.

“How about we end for the day?”

Ozuma made the proposal.

“No objections here,” “I'm good,” Yuuki and Shiho said.

“That's very like the Film Club... What's wrong?”

“We aren't going to analyze the movie or anything?”

When Yuuki asked, Mutsumi spoke up.

“We should take our activities more seriously.”

“It's long, so let's do it another time,” Ozuma said. “How about the newbie watch it and we can see his [Insight] a bit?”

“... Mu, that's true.”

“[Insight]...?”

“The movie we put on, [RoboCop], have you seen it before?”

Ozuma took the DVD from the shelf.

“Yes.”

“Your impression?”

“It seems like a common B-class action film...”

It was a strange movie from the United States about the future. In Detroit, a policeman was killed by criminals and was revived as a robot with the backing of some large enterprise. He fought against evil. It left a simple impression on him.

“You've seen it, this movie?”

“I saw it on TV.”

Ozuma, Yuuki, Shiho, and Mutsumi – They all looked at Itto and sighed in unison.

“Eh? Why are you so disappointed?”

“Listen, you were looking at it from an [Amateur's View]. We're the Film Club, so you've got to look at it with an [Expert's Eye].”

Ozuma spoke like a teacher.

Yuuki nodded to Ozuma's words and turned back to the new member.

“For instance, the DVD Ozuma took out just now was [RoboCop: Director's Cut]. The director, Paul Verhoeven, came from the Netherlands and always had violence and the ugly side of man as a theme in his movies. The so called B-class futuristic movie that he directed, [RoboCop], is a parody of the Reagan Administration. Did you notice that, Itto-kun?”

“N, no...”

Ozuma put the DVD in the player.

The images began to flow.

“Though you might be able to tell from the version shown on the television...” Yuuki started. “The original film had violence which surpassed any B movie of the time. Conversely, by making the hero a machine, you could say he represented man's cruelty and folly; however, if you look through his eyes, a different perspective comes out. It's a rather interesting movie in that sense.”

When it came to movies, the quiet Yuuki became talkative. This sudden change made him seem like a different person.

“Hasn't the idea of an unequal society become popular in Japan these days?” Mutsumi began preaching to Itto. “It's all a matter of degree, and it has been since old times. [RoboCop] covers this. If the gap between upper and lower class becomes too wide, even the policeman of the future will go on strike. Someone once said [The truth is found within the lie]. Even if the movie is entirely fictional, there is truth in it.”

Eventually, everyone ended up watching [RoboCop] to the end.

Hearing the annoying commentary from Yuuki, Ozuma, and Mutsumi, Itto was surprised by what he saw. *Was the movie ever this funny? I really didn't know much, thinking this was only a cheap B movie.*

“Next time, we'll try [Lethal Weapon].”

Ozuma said that while putting [RoboCop] away.

“That one's got to be Hollywood's [Evangelion].”

Mutsumi said.

“Is that so...?”

Itto did not realize what she was saying immediately.

“Well, that's it for today. See you tomorrow.”

Yuuki spoke and went to return the key to Nagayama-sensei with Ozuma. Mutsumi disappeared like smoke the moment Yuuki declared they would separate.

“Nyoha, let's go together, Itto.”

“Sure.”

--- “Nyoha,” *what's that?*

Shiho sometimes mixed odd words into conversation.

5

He walked back with Shiho.

It was just the two of them. Shiho said her house was in the same direction as Itto's a moment ago.

They enjoyed the quiet evening air.

Having always walked alone, Itto had fun walking together.

--- *Speaking of which, I met Shiho and we were attacked while walking down the road just like this.*

Shiho apologized for Ozuma's rude attitude and brought a popsicle with her.

No popsicle this time...

Itto never thought he would get such an amazing ability.

He still did not understand his life.

“Are you hungry?”

Suddenly, Shiho spoke.

“Y, yeah...”

Itto nodded vaguely.

“Let's have some ramen!”

Shiho was completely enthusiastic. Itto decided to go with Shiho.

Actually, he was not particularly hungry.

Shiho seemed happy to eat ramen. She spread her hands like wings and ran like a child.

Stopping by a small wooden stand on the way home, he placed an order for salt-flavored ramen while Shiho chose pork miso ramen. The food was prepared immediately.

“Thick roast pork! You've come again!”

Shiho spoke as if it were something evil.

The two ate ramen. Incidentally, it had been a long time since Itto last ate ramen. Of course, it was his first time eating with a girl.

“Delicious---”

Shiho smiled as she ate.

Since he entered the Film Club – no, since he met Shiho, Itto had a variety of [First Experiences].

Itto thought about it---

“Thanks for the meal.”

Before he was aware of it, Shiho had finished eating.

“Fast!”

Itto had barely eaten two, three bites.

Shiho waited for Itto to finish eating by reading [Britain-kun] in a nearby shop. Of course, there were manga for girls there as well. Anyway, Itto finished eating. He was full, and the salty and garlic flavored ramen was extremely delicious.

Itto finally arrived at his house.

“Well, this is my house.”

“Okay, I’ll see you tomorrow!”

“Then...”

He was somewhat reluctant to part.

It was the first time Itto had such a feeling. He thought about whether he was coming to like Shiho for a moment, but ended up ridiculing himself in the end. Somehow, Shiho felt like a little sister.

Chapter V

The Intimidating Empress



1

Nikaido Yuuki and Kudou Ozuma had been in the same class since their second year of middle school.

Yuuki was a quiet boy who was subject to bullying. On top of that, he had many problems at home as well.

Ozuma, in the same class, had not normally paid attention. At the time, he was not yet a <Parabellum>, but he was strong since he eagerly practiced judo. He was willing to help, but he could never get in the mood to.

Ozuma, as a second year middle school student, was already tired of life.

That day, Yuuki was being bullied as usual in the class, this time by three boys and one girl. Though he did not understand what was so interesting, they were throwing a wet dust cloth at Yuuki.

Yuuki did not bother resisting; he merely stood there.

Ozuma was quietly reading in the vicinity.

Though he could occasionally see Yuuki's eyes look at him from the side, Ozuma ignored it. No matter the circumstance.

The four classmates' [Violence] soon accelerated.

"Here, use this."

One of the boys took out a cigarette. It was a violation of school rules, obviously.

The other three agreed and said, "Good idea."

Yuuki was frightened, seeing the lit cigarette.

Obviously, he was burned afterward.

"Hey, no need to go too far."

Seeing them trying to press a lit cigarette to Yuuki, Ozuma instinctively called out. Rather than wanting to help Yuuki, it would be a big problem for the class.

One of the bullies spoke.

"What do you want, Lady Killer?"

"...!"

Ozuma stood up.

Ozuma, as a middle school student, had an affair with a married woman. He was bored and she wanted to have an affair. Though it was an issue on Ozuma's end, the woman was married and ended up falling into a depression and attempted to commit suicide.

When he was insulted for it, Ozuma could not help but become rough.

However, the one to hit the boy was not Ozuma, but Yuuki.
Everyone was surprised.

“!”

No matter how much he was bullied, Yuuki never fought back. The boy making fun of Ozuma did not know what happened.

He then said,

“Don't make light of a person's past.”

At that time, Ozuma learned of Yuuki's strength.

Rather than for himself, Yuuki became angry for another's sake.

Yuuki was weak to violence and never resisted when attacked, but (even for strangers), he ignored that weakness and stood forward.

Ozuma decided at this time to help Yuuki should he be beaten up again.

2

Even when he went to school, the only thing in Itto's mind all morning was the Film Club. Would anyone be able to think of anything else in his situation? Being a member of the Film Club meant being a <Parabellum>.

Though restless, he concentrated in class. He did this because he knew time would pass more quickly.

When lunch break came, Tanigaki called for him.

“What are you doing for lunch?”

“Usually I just grab some bread from the cafeteria.”

“Then let's go!”

“Itto!”

While speaking to Tanigaki, he was surprised to be called out by a girl. He soon found the voice which called for him. Hasegawa Shiho had come to see Itto from her class next door.

“Ah, Hasegawa-san---”

Itto became hollow the moment he saw Shiho walk over.

Shiho – for some reason he could not possibly imagine – had her bra completely in view. Her breasts were surprisingly rich as they visibly shook. Itto, in a panic, did not understand the situation at all.

“What the hell are you doing!”

Itto, clearly panicking, called Shiho somewhat rudely.

“She's following me!”

“Who?”

“Mutsumi-san.”

“Ha? An ally!?”

“It's fine. How about lunch?”

Tanigaki spoke nonchalantly.

“Tell me the details while we eat.”

Itto took his jacket off and put it on Shiho.

Tanigaki guided them to the back gate of the school building.

“Let's go out for a bit,” Tanigaki said.

“... Wouldn't it be bad if we were found leaving campus grounds during school hours?” Itto asked while remembering the school regulations. “Actually, the gate should be closed for security purposes.”

“This entrance is for contractors. It's fine, let's go.”

Tanigaki spoke forcefully and urged Itto and Shiho off the grounds. For some reason, it was a bit exciting leaving the school during hours.

Tanigaki guided them to a Chinese restaurant in an open, quiet neighborhood by the school. Its name was [Poison King]. It sounded dangerous. The shop would never become popular.

“Don't be fooled by the name. The food is delicious.”

The three entered the store.

“Welcome!” The clerk's cheerful voice sounded out like a greengrocer's. His voice was deep, but it did not give off a bad feeling.

“Sweet and sour pork.”

Tanigaki ordered the recommendation as soon as he entered. Soon, a strangely dark vegetable soup and seasoned rice arrived.

“Yay!”

Shiho shouted in pleasure while bringing the food to her mouth.

“Mu.”

Certainly, it was a delicious dish. He understood why Tanigaki was so eager to go. The dish was a sweet and sour pork dish with black vinegar which was probably used in the rice as well. It was sweet and had depth, and the food was well priced. It was definitely addictive.

“A special prize for Itto's perversity.”

Tanigaki spoke while eating.

“Me, a pervert...?”

After a moment of thought, he responded.

“Not particularly.”

“That's a lie.”

Tanigaki persisted.

“If I were to give you a reason...”

“Hm?”

“No, it's nothing.”

“Don't stop there!”



“There's something more important.”

Itto changed the subject.

“Why were you running around like that, Hasegawa-san?”

“Like I said, Mutsumi-san was chasing after me,” Shiho said with her mouth full of food. She looked like a squirrel with a nut in its mouth. She called it a [Science Experiment] and was looking for a girl.”

“What's with that,” Itto said.

“No, seriously... In the middle of it, she started stripping talking about Namahage clothing, calling it a [Lecture in Psychology]. It looked like she was trying to change the outfits of the girls going to Kido High. 'A cutie-pie---!?' She's terrible.”

“Now it's a Kansai dialect?”

“Like I thought, the people in the Film Club are odd.”

Tanigaki spoke happily.

“Anyway, back to the story.”

Itto spoke coldly.

After finishing lunch, the three returned to school. The moment they entered the back gate, however, they were scolded.

3

“Sasaki-kun...”

“... Yes?”

As soon as classes ended, Itto thought about going to the clubroom immediately when he was called out by a female classmate. Seeing as he had very few friends until now, he had never spoken to a woman. The girl had a cute face and wore trendy clothing. She walked around in clothes which suit Shibuya. Itto had no idea what business she had with him.

“So you joined the Film Club.”

“Ha...”

“Do you like movies?”

“I suppose so.”

“You get along with the Vice President, Kudou Ozuma-san?”

“There hasn't been a problem yet...”

“Do you know Kudou-senpai's phone number?”

“I see.”

Though her introduction was long, her intent was now clear.

--- *Ridiculous.*

In short, she wanted to learn more about Ozuma. Certainly, he was good looking, and he was calm enough.

“I'm sorry, but I really can't tell others. Excuse me...”

“Is, is that so?”

“Yes. I'm in a bit of a rush. I'll see you later.”

He had taken a cold attitude toward female students. Itto left the classroom and headed to the Film Club.

He passed by the A-V room on the way.

“... Hm?”

He heard a noise inside the classroom, which made Itto stop. The A-V room was rarely used; he had heard it was used by teachers and students to do some secret things. Given the sounds heard in there, everyone thought that.

The door was not locked and slid open easily.
He opened it a little bit and peered through the gap.
Inside, there was an acquaintance and a girl whose face he did not know.

The one he knew was Kudou Ozuma.

The atmosphere felt serious.

The girl, crying, ran from Ozuma.

Not good, Itto jumped back without thinking.

The girl, storming out, passed by him.

A bit afterward, Ozuma came out as well. He looked calm in comparison.

“Ah, Kudou-san.”

“Yo, Itto.”

“Did she just confess?”

“Ah, you saw.”

“Yes.”

“Rather than a confession, it was a separation.”

“...!”

That's a surprise.

This man...

Can he break up with his girlfriend as easily as he can change clothes?

Itto had such an experience only once, so he could not understand what happened. Itto felt it disgraceful.

Itto and Ozuma headed to the room.

Yuuki and Shiho were in the room already. Shiho was wearing gym clothes; apparently her uniform was ruined.

“I've changed into my gym clothes, so I'll give this back to you, Itto. Really, you saved me. Thanks!”

“Ah, well... it was natural in that situation.”

Itto put his jacket back on. He could not see her figure any more.

“What did you do today?”

Itto asked as he took a seat.

“Right, we should try some tactical training.”

Ozuma answered.

“Tactical Training?”

Itto was surprised, hearing such a brutal sounding phrase.

“... I'll be taking part as well?”

“Of course. The greenhorn needs to practice.”

Ozuma turned the DVD player on while replying.

“For now, let's watch this DVD.”

Ozuma took out the newest Hollywood action film, starring Tom Cruise. It was a serious movie where he ran around and shot guns.

Is this somehow related to the <Parabellum>?

Itto watched the movie seriously.

However---

“This... is just an action film?”

“Of course. What about it?”

Ozuma's face was calm.

“This... is [Training]? Isn't it the same as [RoboCop]?”

Itto felt cheated.

“Yeah, it's some great training---!”

Shiho, who could not read the atmosphere, shouted cheerfully.

“Don't take it so lightly.”

Yuuki followed up.

“The ability a <Parabellum> has is terrific. It's too strong, so it's pointless doing normal training. That's why we watch movies like this to get some image training. At least it's a little effective.”

“...”

Being told that way, he was somehow convinced.

“Again, you're all so lazy.”

The door opened and a Namahage woman – Ijuuin Mutsumi – appeared. Shiho was surprised seeing Mutsumi and began trembling as she took a fake martial arts pose. Mutsumi, on the other hand, took a seat and crossed her legs.

“This is the Film Club. It's more appropriate for us to relax.”

“I think that sounds about right.”

So Yuuki said.

“No, no, there's still a ways to go. From the Student Council activities to the cultural festival, we need to participate in them, or we might be disbanded. We need to increase our activities for our safety...”

“Why does everything she say become so long?”

Ozuma interrupted her with a sigh.

“In short, Mutsumi-san is a movie lover, so she wants to devote herself to it.”

“Minimalization is a problem.”

Itto was troubled for a moment. Mutsumi's wording was particularly difficult.

“Roughly speaking, Mutsumi has something she's proposing we do.”

Yuuki continued the conversation.

“As expected of you. This'll be quick.”

Mutsumi nodded.

“We've got more members now, so I've decided. With five members, we can make a movie.”

“This again...”

Ozuma and Yuuki frowned at once.

“Impossible, Po!” Shiho said.

“Why is this impossible!”

Mutsumi raised her voice.

“Even working the equipment is tough,” Yuuki said. “It became easier with digital equipment, and students can make independent films and can edit them with a PC, even without special equipment... But it still requires money. We can do this for free as students once we've taken care of the initial fees, but Mutsumi-san, you want to do this full scale, right?”

“Of course,” Mutsumi declared.

Yuuki continued.

“Even if we choose the actors and actresses from amongst ourselves, there's a limit to how long we can work. We need to study and take breaks as well... And we have our issues as <Parabellum> as well.”

“I agree with everything you say... but really, what's with that lack of motivation. I'm aware of everything you said.”

“...”

Independent Movie making---

It was a phrase Itto had heard, and though it left a strange impression, he did not say anything. Though it is simple enough to talk about it, making the movie is not so easy.

Making a movie... by ourselves?

Though he was a bit excited, it was as Yuuki said. It would be difficult with just five people... Still, Itto thought it was a good idea.

“Even I love movies!”

Yuuki insisted a bit forcefully.

“But talking about it and doing it are two separate issues. We still need a good screenplay, too.”

“I've written one. How about I show it to you.”

Mutsumi was brimming with confidence.

A scenario Mutsumi wrote – As soon as those words left her mouth, Ozuma and Yuuki's expressions darkened. Without understanding the reason, Itto looked about.

“Though I don't understand well...” He spoke on instinct, “Is this scenario something bad?”

“A problem... in short, it's terrible.”

Ozuma said so in worry.

“... It's awful?”

Itto spoke timidly.

“Of course not.”

Mutsumi remarked strongly.

“Then let's hear it.”

Yuuki spoke in a tone like a detective interrogating a criminal.

“Mutsumi-san, what's your favorite movie?”

“Michael Bay's [Pearl Harbor].”

Hearing her response, Itto almost fell over. [RoboCop] was something of a masterpiece of B movies, but [Pearl Harbor], by no stretch of the imagination, was. It was an amateur film which was irredeemable in every way.

“Mutsumi-san, please tell us more of your favorite movies.”

“Live Action [Super Mario], Live Action [Street Fighter], Live Action [House of the Dead].”

--- *Why live action versions of three video games...* Itto was completely amazed by her chaotic remarks. He had seen [Street Fighter] and [House of the Dead]. Raul Julia played as the final boss in the live action version of [Street Fighter]. Many sympathized with him posthumously, as it was his final work. As for [House of the Dead], it was based on a horror game but ended up being nothing more than a zombie comedy.

He was unfamiliar with [Super Mario], but Itto remembered feeling it ridiculous they would take Mario to Hollywood seriously when he read about it in a magazine.

“What kind of movie are you watching now, Mutsumi-san?” Yuuki continued to ask questions.

“Michael Bay's [Transformers].”

“That's enough with Michael Bay!”

Itto finally stopped Mutsumi.

“Mutsumi-san is a useless movie maniac...”

Shiho spoke sadly.

“Mutsumi-san certainly is a genius, but given her sense for movies... Itto, you can imagine what it would be like, right?”

It was just as Shiho said. Her analysis of movies was good, and she had a sharp head, but her [Tastes] were so biased, it was easy to tell what kind of screenplay she would right.

Naturally, her opinion was overthrown by majority.

“That's right. Itto, are you free tonight?”

Shiho changed topics. Good timing.

“My mother is staying late for work... so I shouldn't have any problems.”

Itto responded.

“Itto-kun, your house has two incomes, does it? Just like mine.”

Yuuki said.

“Ah, no.”

Itto shook his head slightly.

“My parents just got a divorce... It's just me and my mother.”

So as not to dampen the atmosphere, Itto spoke as lightly as possible. He did his best with his expression to tell Yuuki not to worry about it.”

“Th, then, let's have a welcoming party---!”

Shiho forcibly advanced the conversation.

Itto was caught in a custodial dispute when his parents divorced one another. In accordance to Japanese law, a child's upbringing favored the mother; however, Itto's situation was complicated. His mother had a past history of drug addiction. Of course, the family courts hesitated to leave him in the care of his father, but now they had a reason to hesitate in passing custody to his mother. Itto did not care either way, he was raising himself. During all this, one of his relatives poked their nose in and said, “Instead of living with his parents, how about he live with me?” His relatives all began talking, and eventually Itto and his mother went to live with them. During all this, Itto ended up having stomach problems and had to frequent the hospital many times, resulting in him entering school late.

4

They left the room and went to a karaoke store in the vicinity. All members, except Ijuuin Mutsumi, who angrily said “I hate karaoke!” participated. She really was a difficult upperclassman to deal with.

Though an awkward atmosphere remained from the conversation about family as they left the room, the four somehow walked along the noisy shopping district.

“So we've got five people”

President Yuuki was the moderator.

“Yes, new member, introduce yourself.

“Sasaki Itto. Nice to meet you.”

“... Is that it?”

“What else should I say?”

“Hobbies.”

“Reading... Music? I suppose movies as well.”

“That's normal! Too normal!” Shiho said. “What, are you trying to hide something? Is your hobby something you can't say as a human? Are you a closet pervert?”

“No way! I'm not a pervert.”

Itto actually had a hobby he hid from his parents.

Naturally, he could not say it here.

“For some reason, I smell a lie,” Shiho said. “Come to think of it, your behavior during lunch was a bit suspicious ---”

“Can we start singing?”

Itto tried to deceive her by proposing the idea.

Then ---

“Song, I agree!”

Shiho began to frolic.

Shiho easily forgot the conversation just then and began singing fashionable idol songs, like [Round and Round] or [Here it Comes]. Though she messed up the lyrics pretty badly, she still continued.

Though a bit of a rough singer, Itto was saved by Shiho's idiocy.

Three hours passed surprisingly quickly.

Itto sang an especially dull pop song. Yuuki did some rap and rock.

Though the combination was surprising, it was unexpectedly skillful. Ozuma did not sing at all but listened to the three as they sung---

“I, I like to listen to others sing.”

Ozuma did not hold the microphone until the very end.

He was fumbling about before the song.

Though it had turned into a karaoke contest rather than a simple reception, Itto was fine since he was happy. They left the box and paid the fee.

Rather than splitting the tab, Ozuma paid it all, “Because my family is rich.” It seems Ozuma bought the television and most of the movies in the clubroom. He thought it strange that Ozuma paid the full amount when he did not sing. Itto did not find it particularly agreeable.

The four people left the shop.

Though they should have separated happily, that was not the case.

Three high school girls waited for them as they left the store.

5

The karaoke shop was present on the second floor of a multi-purpose building requiring the use of the stairwell to exit. On the way down, the four people confronted three female high school students five meters from the exit.

There was clear hostility toward them.

“They're...?”

Itto instinctively muttered.

“The woman in the middle is Saionji Ryouko, a part of Kuwazono High School's <Flight>.”

Ozuma whispered to him.

“Kuwazono High School's <Flight>...!”

The two beside Ryouko must have also been <Parabellum>.

Kuwazono High School. The name was familiar. The pair that attacked Itto and Shiho were also students there.

Saionji Ryouko wore a knit cap and slender, horizontally elongated glasses. With her super short skirt, high school blazer, and long legs, she looked like a model.

She had an intimidating, piercing look in her eyes.

“It seems we're indebted to two of you.”

Ryouko opened her mouth.

Definitely, she was talking about Goro and Kousuke.

“Same here. We were only defending ourselves.”

Shiho retorted.

“I'm just warning you...”

Ryouko's intensity grew.

“The first to attack was definitely Kido High.”

“...!”

Itto had just become acquainted with all the members of Kido High School Film Club.

However, he understood. They were not aggressive people. Ozuma seemed cold, but he was the type to avoid unnecessary disputes.

Yuuki was gentle and timid. Shiho was certainly a problem, and, though Mutsumi was eccentric, neither seemed to be bad people. Whatever the people from Kuwazono High School might say, it was hard to believe.

Ryouko continued.

“Do you know the strange incidents happening recently?”

“Yes.”

Ozuma nodded.

“Ah...”

Itto also remembered. He recalled hearing about the man on the news.

“It really is a strange incident.”

Ryouko said.

“He was a good natured man, and then so many things happened to him. No fewer than seven incidents, and now one is dead. In the beginning, [Criminal-san] attacked a thirty-four year old housewife. She suddenly stabbed her husband to death with a kitchen knife while in a daze. Of course, she was arrested by the police. During the investigation, she said 'My body moved as if I had been ordered by the devil.'

Three days later, the second [Criminal] was a teacher from Kuwazono High School. He was in charge of my class. He took a chair and beat a girl in class into a coma. Her head was hit and she had to go to the hospital. She's still in a coma. She's my friend.”

“...”

Itto and the others looked on earnestly.

“I suspect this is an effect of a <PVF> Special Shot. And so, I thought the incidents would end if we got rid of the Kido High School <Flight>.”

“There's no way we would do that!”

Ozuma spoke strongly.

“That's just an unjustified accusation.”

“Of course.”

“I looked it up.”

“What?”

“Amongst all these events, Kido High School has never been involved.”

“...!”

Itto was surprised, too.

“I looked into the day of the incidents as well. Only Kido High School had a holiday, their Founders Day. All other schools had lessons. Naturally, the events all occurred within a three kilometer radius of the school. Though it's all circumstantial, it's enough evidence to suspect you.”

“...”

There were no rebuttals that could be made.

Saionji Ryouko crossed her arms.

“Certainly, it might be a bit too much to just attack. It was reckless of those two, but if anything more were to occur...”

“Got it...”

Ozuma spoke with a tired voice.

“So you'll be observing us.”

“Observing?”

Ryouko frowned.

“We will find the culprit.”

Ozuma spoke forcefully.

His words surprised, not just Ryouko, but Itto and Shiho. Certainly, it would be the best method to dispel all doubts. "If you can do it."

Ryouko looked at them suspiciously. For a while, she simply stared in silence.

Saionji Ryouko had two escorts. Several more may have been standing by a distance away. Kido High School's <Flight> was at a complete loss.

Even if they chose to fight, they could not do it in this place. "We will leave you be for the time being. If we see no progress, we will attack."

Ryouko spoke with an icy tone. Along with her two escorts, she left the vicinity.

"Uwa, she's annoying!"

Shiho stamped her foot like a frustrated child.

"Don't get so angry, Shiho."

Ozuma sighed.

"What should we do?"

Yuuki spoke anxiously.

“Of course...”

Ozuma spoke quietly.

“We look for the criminal. In fact, I just happen to have some doubts about someone.”

6

The four left and walked to a fast food shop which was open for twenty-four hours.

In the two-story shop, they moved to the second floor due to how crowded the first floor was. The four sat in a non-smoking section.

“Here, a candid photo.”

Ozuma took several photographs from his breast pocket. Inside were two girls.

“Minamo Yana and Abeki Mika.”

One girl had broad shoulders and the other seemed fragile.

“These two...”

Yuuki seemed to know of them.

Ozuma nodded.

“Both are <Parabellum>. Though Yuuki and I have approached them, they rejected us for some unknown reason.”

“How do you know these two are <Parabellum>?”

Itto questioned.

“Yuuki.”

Ozuma replied simply.

“When someone develops a <PVF> in the vicinity, it can be perceived, but it's difficult to detect outside a range of one-hundred meters at most.

“Anyway, I'll move on. Minamo Yana and Abeki Mika are <Parabellum> in our school, but they're 'not interested in joining a group.' They insist on working together on their own.”

“Certainly... they are suspicious.”

Itto could not figure their intentions.

“Should we tail them...?”

Yuuki proposed.

“It's like a police drama! It's come!”

Shiho made a dull statement.

“They know Yuuki and I,” Ozuma said. “We'll leave this to you two, Itto, Shiho.”

“Me... and Shiho-san?”

Itto was puzzled by the sudden development.

“Oh, what a coincidence.”

Suddenly, a voice called to the four from the Film Club.

There stood Nagayama.

Next to Nagayama was a girl in elementary school.

“Wait a moment for me.”

Nagayama spoke to the girl.

The girl cheerfully responded with a “Yes~” and sat down.

“My daughter.”

Nagayama spoke, embarrassed.

“I accompanied her to a ballet class and we were on our way back.

Anyway, what are you four doing here at this hour?”

“Having a reception for the new kid.”

Ozuma answered.

“Ah, I see... How nice,” Nagayama said. “I'd like to hear a bit about you as your adviser... but I'd rather not leave my daughter for too long. You've heard about the strange incidents recently, right?”

Strange incidents---

This incident was filling Itto's head at the very moment.

“You four should be careful as well.”

“Ah, yes...”

Nagayama left the four.

It was unusual seeing their teacher's family.

“Saionji Ryouko is---”

Ozuma began speaking in a heavy tone.

“She said there were no incidents involving Kido High School personnel.”

“Ah, yes...”

“Strictly speaking, that's not true. Nagayama-sensei has recently separated from his wife. This divorce has to deal with the third incident. His wife was involved in the incident where the [Devil] made a criminal kill a person while drunk. Nagayama-sensei has to raise his child alone...”

Parental separation.

A daughter left alone.

The divorce partner was killed, the father was left alone.

Itto instinctively overlapped Nagayama's situation with his own, in particular, his empathy toward the daughter.

This case really is terrible.

“... I'll do it, this shadowing.”

Itto spoke forcefully.

“I'd like to solve this with our own hands if possible.”

Though he worried about Nagayama, he did not know who the next victim would be.

--- I want to do anything I can.

Because we are <Parabellum>.

It was something said in a famous American comic which became a big hit movie.

[With great power comes great responsibility.]

7

The next day, Sunday.

They would begin shadowing today.

Because they went to the same school, it was easy enough to follow Minamo Yana and Abeki Mika's movements during the weekdays.

The problem was on a holiday.

It was especially important they monitor the two on holidays. First, Yuuki and Ozuma would monitor Abeki Mika's house in shifts, and they would contact Itto and Shiho once she left her house. Though Ozuma told Ijuuin Mutsumi about the events happening today, he was told she was seeing some man about a dog, so it could not be helped.

Given their behavior, it was clear she would join Yana if she left the house. The two spent as much time together as possible.

Itto and Shiho received Ozuma's call and met at the local station. Because they were wary of wearing a uniform, the two wore plain clothes.

“Hey, Shiho-san.”

“Morning, Itto.”

Itto wore jeans and a T-shirt. Shiho wore hot pants and a tank top.

She was a little sexy, looking like Lara Croft in [Tomb Raider].

Though a bit silly, Shiho had a good body, so he was slightly conscious.

“... Then, let's go.”

“Okay.”

While diligently contacting Ozuma, the two headed downtown.

Along the way, they saw a police station where three policemen stood wearing bulletproof vests. Because the eerie incidents had occurred, they were on the lookout. A large number of police cars were patrolling; it was as if they were chasing after a mysterious crime which disturbed the world. Itto's body was tense.

Ozuma had told them it would be difficult to tail the two from a distance once they entered the business district. At that point, it would be up to Shiho and the new Rabbit whose faces Yana and Mika did not know. Itto found Mika and Yana join happily at the outskirts and took over Ozuma's job.

In the bustling city, Itto saw Mika and Yana look happily for the first time. Both looked more beautiful than in their photographs. Yana looked fragile in a white dress, very prim and proper. Mika had a more handsome atmosphere with a rocker's leather fashion.

Yana and Mika went to the movie theater while snuggling like sisters. It was a SF action movie directed by some Frenchman.

“Us, too. Let's go in.”

“Yeah.”

Itto and Shiho entered the theater.

After confirming Yana and Mika's seat, the two sat side by side a little behind them.

“I've wakuteka'd this movie for a while.”

Shiho said.

Wakuteka...?

A wrinkle appeared between Itto's eyebrows.

“But this movie must be... peculiar to the Film Club.”

“It takes a month for a movie to hit the shelves as a DVD.”

“One month...?”

That might not be that long, Itto thought.

The movie ended. It was a fashionable movie from Europe, which Itto rather enjoyed.

Yana and Mika left the theater and entered a nearby coffee shop immediately.

“It's exactly like they're on holiday..”

Itto involuntarily swallowed.

Naturally, Itto also entered the coffee shop to catch Yana and Mika conversing. The two chose a seat near Yana and Miko, Itto's back to them as he conversed with Shiho. Though he listened to the two converse, he could find nothing doubtful.

“So, let's go visit that clothes shop..”

Yana and Mika finished their snack and headed to a nearby department store to look at clothes. Reluctantly, Itto and Shiho followed after them.

The Rabbit sighed inside. The two people they shadowed hardly seemed like a culprit in the recent series of incidents.

Yana had an atmosphere about her, like a secluded rich girl. Though fundamentally expressionless, she nodded obediently like a child when Mika spoke to her. Yana did not even bother speaking to the clerk, either. She left everything to Mika.

As for Mika, she was active in contrast. Her movements were energetic, she ran about laughing. She was quite handsome, as well.

“Rather than friends, it feels like they're dating.”

Itto said while watching the two from the shadows.

“Somehow, it seems like we're on a date, too.”

Shiho said in a nonchalant tone.

--- *Don't say such embarrassing things!*

Itto almost got angry on reflex.

Apparently Shiho's words hit him.

Itto had not dated anyone before. There was a time when he was a junior high school student when he liked a girl, but she was a little idiotic. He was had. Shiho was far prettier than the girl, and her charm had shaken Itto.

Itto was embarrassed.

“... Ah! They're moving.”

Shiho cried out quietly.

The two began moving again.

“What do you normally do on break, Hasegawa-san?”

Itto asked as they followed along. He was not so interested in what Shiho did on breaks, but was looking for a way to calm himself down by talking about something different.

“Um, surf the net.”

“Net? Isn't that a waste of a day?”

“Of course. Even before this ---”

On their day off last week, Shiho had been surfing the web. Shiho often visited a board and read through the threads. She sat half-naked on her chair hitting the keyboard with vacant eyes. It was surprisingly simple for Itto to imagine.

On the image board, Shiho started a thread about her favorite singer. She was now pushing her favorite idol, but it did not go so well. Apparently there was too much fan service, so Shiho did not manage to do much. Still, she managed to make some noise for that idol.

“Man was it heated!” Shiho said. “We were fighting and there were people flaming everywhere... 'She's fishing! She's fishing!' they claimed.”

In the end, the thread became a flame war. Shiho felt defeated.

“I lost one~!”

She turned the power off on her PC and tossed it aside, so played the Sunday of Shiho's life.

Once he heard her story, he instinctively spoke.

“What a barren holiday...”

“D, Don't call it barren!”

Yana and Mika walked along.

Itto and the others shadowed them.

... *Hm?*

Itto could not understand Yana and Mika's aim. They left the main streets of downtown and went down a side road into the back alley between buildings where light barely reached.

With the crowd thinning out in the area, Itto and Shiho took more distance to make tailing the two easier.

--- *Where are they going?*

At the end of the small alley, Yana and Mika's movements stopped.

Itto and Shiho waited in a shadow to see what they would do.

Yana and Mika stared at each other.

The distance between them shortened.

Itto swallowed his breath due to the atmosphere.

Yana and Mika.

Their lips overlapped, a kiss between girls.

“Uhya!”

Shiho noticed their relation and blushed when she heard his odd voice.

“Stupid!”

Itto clicked his tongue from Shiho's carelessness.

They were discovered. The two looked at Itto sharply.

8

“You there... Come out.”

Mika said.

Itto and Shiho looked at each other.

“... Should we run?”



Shiho proposed.

“If we run away unskillfully, it feels like we'll be shot in the back.”

“I suppose.”

Steeling their resolve, Itto and Shiho stepped forward.

Two pairs.

Standing before the two, Yana and Mika formed an <Element>.



Chapter VI

The Two <Parabellum>

<Flight>

A gathering of <Parabellum>. In Kido High School, this group is publicly known as the Film Club

<Element>

A pair of <Parabellum>. When an <Element> is formed, there is a division of labor, with one member in charge of defense and the other in charge of offense.

1

The two confronted their subject of their shadowing.

Itto's palms were sweaty as he took a step forward.

However, Itto was not hiding his surprise. Though he felt Yana and Mika's relationship was good, definitely enough to be called [Best Friends], it seems he was wrong. Itto did not quite understand, but he felt they had crossed that particular line.

“So...”

Mika began speaking while lifting her short hair.

“Who are you...?”

“...”

Itto thought about it and could not find an answer.

--- How should I answer? No matter what we say, it will seem like a lie.

Mika continued with a strict tone.

“You were following us... You've got some terrible hobbies.”

“Ah, um, well...”

Itto hesitated to go further.

“We are <Parabellum>.”

Shiho made it clear.

“!”

Yana and Mika's eyes opened widely. Itto was surprised as well.

Shiho continued.

“We hope you will become our companion, no matter the means...”

Itto's opinion of Shiho improved. Though she was a little slow-witted, she was unexpectedly reliable. It made Itto feel much more at ease. Certainly, it would be fastest to just lay everything out on the table.

“Could it be... Kudou Ozuma and Nikaido Yuuki?”

Mika asked.

“Yes.”

Itto and Shiho nodded.

“Mika.”

Suddenly, Yana opened her mouth. It was a quiet voice.

“These two are lying.”

“...!”

“If they wanted to invite us, there would be no need to tail us. They simply had to talk to us in the open immediately.”

Yana had seen through their actions in a moment. Shiho signaled to Itto – Her eyes were saying “This will be dangerous.” A fight was unavoidable, it seems.

“I can't say I have a good feeling about this.”

Mika slowly extended her right arm.

“Knock out one, take the other.”

Yana made a proposal.

“We'll get some good information, then. Okay. Let's go.”

“Itto, take out Dangerous Rabbit.”

Shiho said.

“I'll take care of defense with my Id Arms.”

“... Shit!”

Shiho summoned a gun with her right hand. It was a semi-automatic gun which looked like an Israeli Desert Eagle. It was not the [Ego Arms] she used before in the park, but a smaller [Id Arms].

Though the Ego Arms is strong and large, defense was impossible.

Itto summoned his <PVF> to his right arm.

68 Caliber Dangerous Rabbit.

“Attacker, Abeki Mika. 68 Caliber Rorschach Heart Breaker.”

“Backup, Minamo Yana. 50 Caliber Psycho Jericho.”

Yana and Mika spoke their roles while forming their <PVF>. It took less time for them to develop their weapons than Itto imagined it would. *Because they spoke the name, they may have been able to envision it more easily. I'll have to try it next time,* Itto thought.

Mika's <PVF>, Rorschach Heart Breaker, had a design like a double bass. Though the exterior had a graceful curve like a musical instrument, its barrel had a large caliber barrel extending to the tip.

Yana's <PVF> was a 50 caliber Id Arms used for self defense. The gun was called Psycho Jericho, and its engraving was splendidly carved, as if reflecting Yana's own beauty.

“50 Caliber Corsair. Loading ammunition.”

Shiho formed a magazine in her left hand and insert it into the main body of the gun.

Hearing those words, Itto remembered he had yet to load ammunition in his <PVF>.

He hastily created a magazine of mental bullets with his left hand. Because he was tense, his fingers trembled.

Though it was unlikely the opponent would [Kill] here, the likelihood of feeling [Pain] was very high. Considering the tone of their conversation, they were ready to act in cold blood toward their opponent.

Itto placed his magazine into Dangerous Rabbit and pulled the charging lever. The first bullet entered the chamber, making it fire ready. Still, the first to fire was Mika. Many bullets were fired from Rorschach Heart Breaker, currently set to full auto.

“!”

Shiho deployed a shield – the Trauma Shell – in front of Itto. Mika's attacks were deflected with an intense flash of light.

“She's using a Trauma Shell! Put more stress on its base!”

Mika shouted.

Though Mika's words were new to him, Itto understood why Shiho took it upon herself to defend.

Most likely, defense was more difficult.

Itto had little combat experience, so he could do nothing but concentrate on offense.

Itto fired Dangerous Rabbit full auto, leaving the defense to Shiho.

“Wha, what should I do...?”

Itto asked Shiho.

“Don't worry, I'll take care of it perfectly!”

Mika heard Shiho and Itto's conversation.

“This guy's a beginner!”

Yana defended against Itto's attacks with her Trauma Shell.

Even if they exchanged shots head on, nothing would happen.

What the hell are we doing...?

Itto began thinking impatiently while shooting his <PVF>, Dangerous Rabbit.

He still did not understand this mysterious ability.

The abilities of a <Parabellum>.

Something more impossible should occur normally. This little battle they were having was simply a private dispute between

Persons of Power

Parabellum, it was no different from a family quarrel, though on an admittedly larger scale.

I should be able to do something more amazing...

The moment Itto expanded his <PVF>, the inner reduction field had expanded in the vicinity around Itto and the others. It was a special field which increased a human's abilities to supernatural levels. Itto jumped high up.

He kicked off the wall of the building and flew.

Itto jumped high because he felt he would not be seen with how few people were around.

Itto instinctively twisted his body in the air and fired Dangerous Rabbit.

--- At the same time.

Newspaper Club President, Kurama Sanae, was walking about downtown.

She was on her way back from her favorite restaurant.

She casually turned her head---

And she saw something unbelievable.

She doubted her eyes.

Just now... If I'm not mistaken...

The new kid in the Film Club, Sasaki Itto---

He flew in the sky.

Sanae aimed for a Pulitzer Prize in the future, so, of course, she had her digital camera with her.

Sanae took a picture of Itto flying high in the sky.

2

The bullets stopped coming from Dangerous Rabbit in midair.

He thought it had broken, but he was wrong. His magazine was empty.

“Uwa!”

Itto let out a surprised voice.

Though naturally it would not shoot without bullets, he had forgotten that.

Itto pressed the button labeled [Magazine Release]. The magazine dropped to the ground empty and bounced several times before disappearing as particles of light.

Itto exchanged magazines as he fell. Mika, too, had jumped up.

Itto stiffened seeing her hand press closely to his face suddenly.

“Eat this!”

Mika's <PVF> fired.

Though dangerous, Shiho managed to place herself between them at the last minute.

Mika shot, Shiho defended.

The three landed softly and recovered their balance.

Itto placed a new magazine into Dangerous Rabbit and pulled the lever again.

--- *Should I test my Special Shot?*

Itto gave it some thought.

The last resort for a <PVF>, the Special Shot. Its power and effect differed depending on the <PVF>. Itto was still unsure what the Special Shot for the Dangerous Rabbit was, but it was likely the only method of breaking through this situation.

However---

If it was too strong, he might end up disabling Yana or Mika. He did not want to do that.

Itto was searching for a [Clue] to the [Criminal]. There was no clear evidence saying Mika and Yana were the culprits. No matter what the situation, he could not be too violent.

What should I do?

At that time.

“Stop right there...!”

From above the four, a voice called out.

Two boys looked down between the buildings.

Kudou Ozuma.

Nikaido Yuuki.

The two had deployed their <PVF> already.

Ozuma and Yuuki jumped down from the roof.

“Sorry, that was my mistake. Can you stop fighting for now?”

Ozuma said that as soon as he landed.

“Mistake...?”

Mika's voice was full of anger.

Ozuma explained things simply.

Apparently there was a <Parabellum> secretly on the rampage.

Because of that, two <Flight> were on the verge of warfare.

“You suspected us?”

Mika cried out in shock.

“We managed to clear up any doubt. Really, sorry.”

So said Ozuma.

“What do you mean?”

Shiho spoke up this time.

“There's been another event. Another criminal claiming he was [Ordered by the Devil].”

3

Saionji Ryouko, the leader of Kuwazono High School's <Flight> went through the CD and DVD shops in the neighborhood. Though a serious situation had been occurring recently, she could not continue without a break.

Ryouko did not seem like it, but she loved anime. Since the latest work of her favorite series had just been released, she had reserved and bought it. She was happy to get the poster with her reservation.

“... Hm?”

Ryouko's cell phone rang, the ring tone from one of her favorite anime. She picked it up and spoke, "It's me."

Ryouko had always answered her phone in such a way. A young voice responded on the other end.

[Ryouko-san, this is serious]. One of the <Parabellum> belonging to her <Flight> had called. This time, it was a girl named Yui Tokitsugi, Ryouko's right arm.

"What's wrong?"

[Another incident. One of our students was injured.]

"Who is it?"

[Sorry, we're still trying to confirm...]

"I understand. I'll investigate over here."

[Thank you.]

Ryouko closed her phone and placed it in her pocket.

"..."

Ryouko's expression was grim.

Ryouko thought about meeting her elder sister.

Ryouko's sister was a detective of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department Investigation Division. Though a <Parabellum>, she had kept that a secret from her boss. She was quite talkative when it came to Ryouko, so information was easy to get. Ryouko decided to head home and speak to her sister. It would be simple to talk face to face, so she took a short cut.

Ryouko deployed her <PVF>.

At the same time, an inner reduction field was generated.

Her ability to move had become supernatural.

Ryouko's weapon boasted the maximum offensive ability of all <PVF> Ego Arms currently known.

90 Caliber Borderline Black Hole.

Ryouko flew up to the rooftop of a nearby building holding a paper bag with her anime DVD.

After rotating once, she landed on the concrete rooftop.

She jumped to another building from there.

Rather than moving on the ground, she moved from rooftop to rooftop using the buildings and houses. She took the shortest distance possible. It was not like anyone would see her at this time, and if they did, they would simply believe it to be an optical illusion of some kind.

It was a safe, convenient shortcut.

--- Or it should have been.

Someone was chasing after Ryouko, moving at the same time as she did. At first, it looked like birds flying in the distance, but she could clearly hear its approach. It seemed like a normal middle-aged man you could find anywhere, but his ability to move was obviously that of a <Parabellum>.

--- *He can move that quickly without a <PVF>?*

“Hmm...”

Ryouko chose the widest available rooftop she could see to stop. It was a rooftop garden that was popular a while ago. The concrete jungle had made the heat worse. To ease that, a small rooftop garden was made on top of the building. It was a sudden field of vegetation in the middle of the city.

The man also stopped on the same roof.

“What do you want?”

“...”

The man remained silent to Ryouko's question.

Ryouko observed the man's face.

--- *No expression.*

The man moved as if sleepwalking. It gave off a strange feeling.

“You're hardly a normal person. Reveal yourself.”

Ryouko spoke sharply.

In the next moment---

“!”

The man's appearance abruptly changed.

The man's body expanded.

The skin turned to steel armor.

The clothing was torn to pieces.

The man's appearance finished changing.

It was like a beast of steel.

Furthermore, many gun muzzles extended from the beast's body.

The armor was composed of firearms. The beast made from man.

“I've only heard rumors...”

Ryouko spoke calmly.

Gun People

“It's the first time I've ever seen one of the [Juunin].”

The large caliber machine gun on the [Juunin]'s body breathed fire. All at once, hundreds of shots flew toward Ryouko.

Ryouko escaped to the side with a high-speed jump. The gunfire from the [Juunin] followed quickly after her, destroying the flowers in its line of fire. It was a great loss as the small rooftop lost its greenery. Ryouko moved using cartwheels and somersaults like a gymnast. Since the [Juunin] lacked in precision, Ryouko would not be caught. Since there were bullets destroying the surroundings and bullets that did not, she understood it was able to use multiple bullet types at the same time.

“Someone who failed to become a <Parabellum>. How like one.”

The Juunin changed its attack method.

It stopped firing and prepared for hand to hand combat.

Ryouko easily closed the distance.

A long nail extended from the Juunin's forelimb (A forearm?).

Ryouko evaded the attack by jumping backward.

However---

The paper bag in her left hand had been hit.

Her long sought poster was torn and her DVD case was scratched.

“!”

Ryouko instinctively opened her eyes.

She had reserved it, and it was already sold out!

I won't forgive you!

Ryouko placed the paper bag by her feet and created a <PVF> magazine with her left hand.

She quickly inserted the magazine and loaded the first bullet into the chamber.

She turned the muzzle to the Juunin and fired.

The Juunin's chest was hit with a powerful mental bullet.

With a dazzling flash of light, the gigantic Juunin staggered.

Ryouko moved to a suitable distance and began firing at point-blank range.

An overwhelming attack power.

The destructive force of a 90 caliber weapon was hardly a decoration. Though it was unnecessary at the time, Borderline Black Hole had a Special Shot as well.

“Take this, you bastard.”

The Juunin fell, now full of holes.



After twitching a few times, it stopped moving.

The end.

The Juunin had lost its power and disappeared into dust, like a vampire in the sun seen in movies.

Though the fight was simple, she had used her offensive power.

Though it turned out well this time, in a fight against other <Parabellum>, it would be close.

“This guy is probably related as well...”

--- *Was the Juunin an assassin sent by Kido High?*

No. Kido High's <Flight> isn't that stupid.

“Nothing's gotten any clearer...”

This problem was not only Ryouko's.

The case of the latest DVD of her favorite series which she bought lovingly through many great pains was ruined. It was unlikely she could return it due to the damage. All that extra effort and expense was now gone.

4

Yana and Mika returned a cold look to everyone from the Kido High Film Club.

“We won't forget this,” Mika said as she left.

The tailing was completely exposed and they had made yet another enemy.

Really... What are we doing?

Itto was exhausted.

After separating with the remaining members of the Film Club, Itto went home. Ozuma said, “Tomorrow, we'll talk in detail when Mutsumi-san is present.” He said he would briefly explain the situation to her over the phone.

His mother had not yet returned when Itto made it to his house. He lay in his bed and rolled over, recalling how he had shadowed Yana and Mika all day. The two were not criminals. Simply put, they were back to the drawing board.

Perhaps – They're using a Special Shot to manipulate others.

No, Itto thought it was useless. He would get nowhere, even if he thought about it at home.

“...”

Itto decided to go to a nearby gym facility.

He liked swimming since he was young. He quickly prepared himself and left.

It was a gym Itto had used often. Even if he was not a member, he could buy a ticket any time of the year, and high school students could enter for free. The pool was twenty-five meters long and had eight lanes. Because the facility was air conditioned and heated, it could be used all year round. The water walking movement was also popular in a separate area, so he was welcomed by a vacant pool.

The pool was in the third basement of the gym. Since it was a new building, each of the white walls and passages shined like a mirror.

Itto changed into his bathing suit and walked to the pool, his hat and goggles already donned.

After taking a shower and stretching, he jumped into the water.

Without worrying about his appearance, Itto swam as much as he could without breathing. Without thinking, he simply swam. He could swim twenty-five meters without taking a breath, and though it would be very close, he could go fifty.

Itto moved his arms and legs, enjoying the resistance of the water.

He swam five-hundred meters in a short time, so his breathing was a little rough. Itto made to get out of the pool.

At that moment---

He unexpectedly ran into a familiar face.

Ijuuin Mutsumi.

"I didn't think I'd meet the Rabbit in a place like this."

Mutsumi said in her swimsuit. It was a fairly small, blue swimsuit which was too intense for Itto; he did not know where to look.

Tanigaki had said before she was like a model or idol. He was now convinced he was talking about Mutsumi. Her bust was like ripe fruit curving down to her slender waist. Any idol near Mutsumi would simply have to run away.

"I'm the one who's surprised. How long have you been here?"

"I've been a member every year."

"I see."

"Looks like you had it rough back there."

It seems Mutsumi heard of their failure earlier.

She likely heard it from Ozuma over the phone.

“Yes, we fought... Since they were strong, I got impatient.”

Itto was recently a normal high school student. It was a serious fight, so it was expected the opponent was strong for him.

“In the end, I couldn't test my Special Shot...”

“Um, what was the name of your <PVF> again?”

“68 Caliber Dangerous Rabbit.”

“An interesting name.”

Itto and Mutsumi. The two sat on a bench by the poolside before Mutsumi continued speaking.

“[Peter and the Rabbit]... Have you heard of that experiment?”

“No.”

“It was an experiment Mary Cover Jones did. There was a boy named Peter who was afraid of Rabbits. For him, Rabbits were [Something Dangerous]. Jones was asked to cure him of his [Fear of Rabbits]. It was the first recorded instance of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy using conditioned desensitization.”

“... Behavioral... Therapy?”

“When Peter ate something, Jones showed the boy a Rabbit, of course, she started a long distance away. However, every time he ate, she brought it a little closer.”

Eating is a natural instinct of mankind, it is a necessity. By relating the act to Rabbits, Peter's fear of Rabbits diminished. In Peter's mind, he thought [I can eat whenever there is a Rabbit nearby]. That is called conditioning. Because it succeeded, it became a part of Watson's theory on Behaviorism."

"Ha..."

Though there were a lot of words he did not understand, Mutsumi's story was interesting.

"That's why, Itto-kun, I believe the Special Shot of your Dangerous Rabbit has to deal with behavioral therapy; its added effect will deal with behaviorism. Psychology really is interesting."

"Is all the material in the clubroom yours, Mutsumi-san?"

"Yeah. The <PVF> is a weapon of the mind, so it's good for a <Parabellum> to learn psychology."

"Is that so..."

When Mutsumi's lecture on psychology ended, the thread of their conversation was lost.

On a whim, Itto spoke.

"Ah, I forgot to say it..."

"Hm?"

"Your talk about making a movie seemed interesting."

"..."

She was faintly wide-eyed hearing Itto's words. She was surprised. Before long, Mutsumi began laughing.

"Is that so..."

"... What?"

"I thought you were just a mopey little brat at first..."

"I've been told that often..."

"But you're pretty cute, aren't you."

Itto's face went flush.

Itto and Mutsumi changed in their respective locker room before joining at the entrance. Mutsumi's plain clothing included a jacket and tank top with cargo pants.

"I'm in a good mood today, so let me show you a special place,"
Mutsumi said.

--- Maybe she was going to carry out another experiment.

Itto was a little anxious, but followed after Mutsumi who was walking with large strides in a masculine way.

Itto panicked as he followed after her; he would be left behind if he was careless.

Finally, they arrived at a pet shop.

Would she get angry if I said it was unexpected of her?

No, Itto secretly shook his head. She's an eccentric person. She might be buying an animal for her experiments.

"Let's go in."

"Ah, yes."

"Though it's better to see them in the wild... I like to come here to look at them."

In the store, many animals in special cases were lined up in a narrow corridor.

One puppy with beautiful fur caught Mutsumi's eyes.

"Ha..."

Mutsumi let out a strange sound, her eyes shining. She seemed to drool a little as well due to the animal's cuteness. Itto was fascinated by the gap in appearance with the normal Mutsumi.

“It's, It's too much...”

With rough breathing and flushed cheeks, Mutsumi looked like a pervert.

“Ha ha ha...”

Though he smiled wryly, Itto did feel it soothing to see animals.

Small dogs, kittens, little birds, hamsters... This pet shop seemed to stick to a small animal policy. Even if Itto was not particularly an animal lover, his mouth would loosen upon seeing the innocent eyes of a kitten.

“How is it?”

Suddenly, Mutsumi spoke seriously.

“It's a nice change.”

“... Yes.”

Ijuuin Mutsumi. Certainly, she's odd, but definitely not a bad person.

Mutsumi said she wanted to do a movie, and she had written a screenplay (though it would likely be a bit odd). Her energy – Mutsumi herself – was a novel presence for Itto.

That night.

Itto had a dream.

In the dream, he met with Ijuuin Mutsumi at the pool in the evening again.

Itto stared at Mutsumi's figure in her bathing suit.

--- The next morning, Itto woke up with an indescribably uncomfortable sense of self loathing.

“What the hell am I doing...”

Just thinking of Mutsumi made his heart beat.

It was his first time feeling this. He was not sure what it was at all.

5

Their shadowing over the holiday had failed. It was now early Monday morning.

Ozuma had contacted everyone and said “Come to the club room as early as you can.”

Given what was happening, it must have been serious.

Everyone gathered in the Film Club at once.

Ozuma's lips were distorted; he must have been in a bad mood.

“... Did something happen?”

Itto asked.

Ozuma pulled a DVD from his pocket and put it on the desk.

“... DVD?”

“It reached my house at dawn. The sender was Saionji Ryouko from Kuwazono High School.”

“That person...?”

Saionji Ryouko, the Leader of Kuwazono High School's <Flight>. She was randomly hostile toward Kido High School's <Flight>.

“I watched the contents at home. I thought everyone else should see it as well.”

Ozuma put the DVD in the player.

“This is...!?”

On the big screen TV in the room, a rough image was displayed.

--- Flicker.

It was a fixed camera. The screen was dim, giving it a black and white feeling.

It was a picture of an intersection somewhere.

“This is the image of yesterday's crime scene. It was taken by a security camera in the shopping district by chance. Saionji managed to obtain it from some police connection.

She has a connection to the police? Itto doubted it, but he watched for the time being.

At the edge of screen, two high school students appeared.

They advanced toward the center.

“Those two...!”

It was an old opponent.

Goro, the boy with fair hair, and his giant sumo wrestler looking partner, Kousuke.

After talking, they moved quickly.

However---

It was sudden.

Kousuke jumped on Goro.

He grabbed his neck and strangled him.

Suddenly, he had changed---

Whether they were <Parabellum> or not was unrelated.

“Awful...”

Shiho spoke with a shaken voice.

“Their full names are Takita Goro and Aizawa Kousuke.”

Ozuma spoke in an unemotional voice.

Goro stopped moving. Kousuke stood there in a daze.

Before long, the police siren could be heard.

There, the screen turned black.

“There's more to this DVD.”

The image resumed once again.

Next was a dull room.

A police interrogation room.

Kousuke was sitting at a desk, a policeman to both sides. A man wearing a suit, supposedly a detective, sat opposite him.

The detective asked him why he did it.

Why did he kill his friend on the roadside.

Kousuke answered in a blank tone.

[... I don't know... I did it, but I didn't... Like a radio... My body moved without my permission. I don't know why...]

The detective was furious, screaming for him to stop lying and not to use it as an excuse to kill people.

Kousuke looked down.

[...]

Though his head was down, he continued to mutter.

“I'll up the volume.”

Ozuma fiddled with the volume button on the remote.

Gradually, Kousuke's voice was heard.

[Danger...]

[Rabbit.]

[Danger Rabbit... Danger Rabbit... Danger Rabbit...]

He repeated it quietly.

Itto's eyes were wide open.

6

---The <Parabellum> had killed two more people.

What's more, one prey was a <Parabellum> as well. When it comes to battle, this <Parabellum> must be strong. Though alone, the <Parabellum> was able to prepare a Juunin.

A voluptuous, distorted girl dressed in black happily flew down to the <Parabellum> nimbly.

“You seem to be having fun.”

“Synchronicity?”

Synchronicity was the girl's name.

“It seems this partner of yours is giving you quite an advantage.”

The two walked side by side.

“I know. I would not have been able to get it without your information. Your friend, [Senpai] gave me the medicine, allowing me to become a <Parabellum>. However, you, you're still a mystery.

“--- How so?”

“Your purpose, your name, your intent. I will never understand it.”

“[Testing the Human Soul]...”

Synchronicity spoke in a tone, as if reading aloud.

“--- Ha?”

“A British Journalist who was active during the French Revolution, Thomas Paine, once wrote, [The harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly].”

“Sorry... I don't get a word you're saying.”

Synchronicity was an unnatural girl. Though present, it felt like she was not, like some sort of hologram.

“That's your fault.”

Synchronicity flew up while laughing. Turning in the air several times, she disappeared in the valley between buildings.

Chapter VII

Strength in
Solitude



1

“Surely...”

Ozuma spoke quietly.

“Itto, your <PVF> is called Dangerous Rabbit, right?”

“Yes... Danger, Rabbit... That's definitely what he said.”

Itto sighed with fatigue.

“Am I the suspect this time?”

“There's no way it's like that!”

Shiho spoke impatiently.

“Itto was with me yesterday!”

“I know, I know... So how should we interpret this?”

Ozuma ruffled his hair in embarrassment.

“Fortunately, the people from Kuwazono High School don't know Itto's <PVF> is Dangerous Rabbit. Right now, they only have the phrase [Danger Rabbit]. I'm not necessarily impatient, but we need to take care of this quickly or there will be an all out war. Right now, it's just a matter of time.”

“Jeez...”

--- *It doesn't really matter.*

“Isn't it fine to say I'm the criminal?”

Itto spoke lazily.

It turned out this way again.

--- *Falsely charged of another crime.*

Itto stood up and left at a brisk pace.

“Itto!”

Though Itto heard Shiho call him back, Itto ignored her.

--- *That's just how my life is.*

When I think I finally have something, it falls between my fingers.

I've been stolen from, accused, cheated. This is what happens when I try hard. No matter what I do, it's all useless. It's all pointless.

--- *This is my life.*

*Was it a mistake being born? Or did I do something wrong?
Really, it doesn't matter anymore...*

In the room, Kudou Ozuma, Nikaido Yuuki, Hasegawa Shiho, and Ijuuin Mutsumi, the four of them, remained.

“How did it turn out this way...”

Shiho spoke, holding her head in worry.

Ozuma nodded.

“Even I know Itto's not the culprit.”

“I think so as well...”

Yuuki's eyes were thin.

“Still, we just met Sasaki Itto-kun.

Still---

I know we can do something about this. Everyone here knows I was bullied and even attempted suicide. Since then, I've always used my eyes to try and see a person's worth...”

“...”

Ozuma and Shiho became silently and seriously listened to Yuuki.

“I'm confident in them. I can't agree to parting with Itto-kun like this
– he resembles the old Ozuma.”

“--- Me?”

Ozuma was surprised to hear his name called out suddenly.

“How so?”

“Ah, I know what you mean.”

Shiho spoke.

“He has that look – [Nothing Matters] or something like that.”

“...”

“Anyway, right there.”

Mutsumi, who had remained silent until now, suddenly opened her
mouth.

“I'll follow Itto for now. Everyone wait here.”

“I'll go, too.”

“It will be counterproductive if we crowd him.”

2

Itto walked to the rooftop after leaving the clubroom.

Ozuma had told them to gather “as early as possible,” so lessons had still not started.

He bathed in the early morning air.

He approached the fence and leaned against it.

“...”

Itto was tired. He rubbed his eyes with his fingers. *What's going on with my life?*

--- What should I do from now on?

The consecutive incidents of people becoming criminals.

Failing to tail the two <Parabellum> who are not a part of the <Flight>.

Saionji Ryouko's argument --- [The criminal is from Kido High School].

And now, this incident.

The criminal (or rather, victim) had muttered the words “Danger Rabbit.”

That could mean ---

“You... Sasaki Itto-kun, correct?”

He was called unexpectedly.

A middle-aged man walked up to him.

“Nagayama-sensei.”

Nagayama, the adviser to the Film Club.

“Seems like something serious is going on...”

Nagayama spoke anxiously.

“You can tell?”

“It's easy enough to see on your face.”

“There haven't been many good things going on recently.”

“... I see.”

“For some reason, my bad luck is always following me.”

“Bad luck?”

“Family, school... Doesn't seem like anything is working out.”

“So you came here?”

“I'd like to leave early, but...”

Itto smiled bitterly.

"I don't want to go home. I'd rather not see my parents... For some reason, we're pretty incompatible."

Itto spoke frankly.

"Sasaki-kun."

Suddenly, Nagayama's voice became stern.

"You have time. Never neglect that."

"..."

"To say you're [Incompatible] with your mother makes me feel sorry for your her."

"Ha..."

Itto looked down.

Nagayama's words, as a man with a family, had weight.

--- However,

Now, there was something more important.

"Nagayama-sensei."

"Hm?"

"I said my compatibility with my [Parents] was bad. How did you know I was talking about my [Mother]?"

3

The student and teacher were glaring at each other on the rooftop.
“... It's not particularly strange that a teacher would know about a family's circumstances.”

“Then how many brothers do I have...?”

“...”

Nagayama could not answer promptly. He worried for a little bit.

“You are an only child.”

“Not quite. I have an elder sister. So, what do you mean by that?”

“Even if you say that...”

“It's simple.”

A third person spoke out.

Ijuuin Mutsumi had appeared.

“You chased after Itto who was weeping ---”

“I wasn't crying!”

“It would make a good scene... By the way, Itto, you have a sister?”

"I have one."

"I was also there when you spoke about your mother in the clubroom."

"Yes."

"Nagayama-sensei, you knew Itto was only with his mother, but you didn't know about his sister. There's only one conclusion I can make from that."

Mutsumi looked coldly at Nagayama.

"[The culprit of the recent events is a <Parabellum> or something stronger]. That much is 100% certain."

"I don't know what you mean."

"It's fine if that's the case. There's a possibility the culprit is a <Parabellum> using a Special Shot. That much is true. Perhaps its effect is to [Show an Illusion]... That's one possibility. The other would be to [Give a Suggestion] of some sort."

"..."

"The problem is that the true culprit has made the victim falsely accuse Sasaki Itto by speaking the phrase [Dangerous Rabbit]. Of course, Itto is not the culprit, so the criminal must be someone who knows the name of Itto's <PVF>."

That would mean the four possible culprits would be Kudou Ozuma, Nikaido Yuuki, Hasegawa Shiho, and me. However, the four of us aren't the criminal, that's 100% true... With all the possible suspects gone, the only possibility is that a wiretap was set in the Film Club's room."

"..."

"It's not hard setting up a wire, so long as you have a key to the clubroom.

Amongst those with the key, your name is the first to come up, Nagayama-sensei. It's easy if you're the adviser. You could also learn about the <Parabellum> in the Film Club. You knew the situation with Itto's mother because you heard our conversation through that tap. You also knew we are <Parabellum>."

The air on the roof cooled rapidly.

The Rabbit realized the cold air he felt was the clashing of excitement and hostility.

Mutsumi continued.

"Didn't Saionji Ryouko say it? [Amongst all these events, Kido High School has never been involved], and [Only Kido High School had a holiday, their Founders Day. All other schools had lessons. Naturally, the events all occurred within a three kilometer radius of the school]."

“... I see.”

“Her reasoning is correct. Once aligned, it all points to a connection with Kido High School. Though she suspected our <Flight>... she thought only [Students] could do this. It's doubtful a teacher from Kido High would be a criminal.”

“...”

“... This can't be about regulations anymore. What is your motive?”

Mutsumi deployed her <PVF> on her right arm.

A rifle formed from the light. It was a small arm with a thick design.

The thickest part was like a pig's leg, upon which a stocky fuel tank was attached.

“This is my <PVF>, 68 Caliber Burnout!”

Seeing this, Itto formed Dangerous Rabbit in a panic.

“Well, we can always learn his motives slowly after we've given him a beating.”

“... Can you two do it?”

Nagayama began laughing.



Chapter VIII

Stampede

Stampede

A runaway group of cattle.

Special Shot

A Special Attack attached to specific <PVF>. This is not to be compared to normal attacks as it can even affect the enemy psychology.

1

Nagayama did not feign surprise seeing the heavy firearms on Itto and Mutsumi's right arms which appeared in an instant. He too was a <Parabellum>.

Itto summoned a magazine with his left hand, drove it into Dangerous Rabbit, and strongly pulled the charging lever. He fully extended it and it sprung back to its original place strongly. He was now ready to fire.

Mutsumi similarly operated her gun.

"It was a failure to use the name Dangerous Rabbit. On the other hand, being the [Criminal in Close Proximity] worked quite well."

"... Looks like I messed up."

Nagayama's voice changed.

Until now, since he was concealing his nature, he consciously used a gentle expression. Nagayama's voice today had an inorganic quality to it, a ruthless scent.

“What are you trying to say?”

“Even if you're all grouped together, you're just a bunch of punk kids. You move before you think, after all.”

“Nagayama-sensei, it's better for you not to develop your <PVF>.”

Mutsumi pointed the muzzle of Burnout toward Nagayama.

“If you do it poorly, I'll hit a vital.”

Itto also turned his gun to Nagayama. Even more people came to the rooftop.

Kudou Ozuma.

Nikaido Yuuki.

And... Hasegawa Shiho.

“What is going on here?”

Nagayama asked in curiosity.

“President Nikaido has the ability to search for those with <PVF> in the area. I'm sure you know that much.”

“I thought there must have been a reason for Ijuuin Mutsumi's <PVF> to be deployed, but I couldn't figure out why. Until now, she has made an effort so as not to expand her <PVF>... But it seems she has a reason.”

“What's going on...?”

Itto and Mutsumi expanded their <PVF> Ozuma groaned upon seeing it.

Yuuki and Shiho also could not understand the situation before their eyes.

“I'll explain the situation later...”

Itto spoke without moving the muzzle away from Nagayama.

“[The mastermind behind the recent incidents is Nagayama-sensei.]”

“What!?”

Ozuma asked in surprise.

“Why did you do it?”

Itto asked the true culprit.

2

“Certainly, I am a <Parabellum>...”

Nagayama started his [Confession] at last.

“The name of my <PVF> is [68 Caliber Complex Mind Hunter]. I had a divorce from my wife, I had a terrible life as a teacher... Despite our hard work, we are hardly rewarded. When I was depressed, I found my [Ability]. I was happy, my life had changed. I could kill people without risk.”

“...”

Itto and the others silently listened to Nagayama's story.

“I used this <PVF> to kill my wife.”

“Wha...”

“I have killed many others to camouflage her death as well. After all, if my wife was the only one to die, I would become suspicious, right? Really, the special effect of the <PVF> is powerful. It stimulates the human [Impulse to attack others] explosively, and, to some extent, I can give orders... There is a fault, though. It cannot [Make People Commit Suicide], so it's difficult to make things look like a normal accident...”

Nagayama's wife was certainly involved in the abnormal deaths; she was the third victim to die. So he killed the other two to save his own neck.

“I needed a criminal to act in my place. Even if the government knows of <Parabellum>, they won't take any measures. I didn't want to stand out, so I provoked Kuwazono High School's <Flight>. It was a petty trick... As Ijuuin said, I did something unnecessary.”

What a shitty person. Itto ground his teeth.

Itto had gotten angry and had nearly given up just beforehand.

Though he seriously wanted to help Shiho at the time, he was still far more confused than anything else.

Now he understood. He understood it clearly.

Sasaki Itto was angry.

“I just didn't want anything to obstruct my life. If I were caught by the police or had to take child welfare, my body would simply be ruined.”

Nagayama's words took Itto's breath away.

Something absurdly horrifying was contained in his words.

“You---”

Mutsumi's flat voice.

“What the hell did you do to your girl?”

“I cannot say.”

Nagayama's long tongue extended, provoking Itto and the others.

“You abused your daughter and brainwashed her. Your wife noticed, so you thought you'd kill her and get rid of two birds with one stone. Your daughter would return to your side as well.”

“Bastard---!”

Itto and Mutsumi squeezed their triggers on reflex.

The next moment.

Nagayama flew up beyond the fence.

He fell toward the ground from the rooftop.

“Shit!”

Mutsumi clicked her tongue.

It seemed reckless, since he had not formed his <PVF>.

Nagayama deployed it mid-air.

Particles of light flashed, a sharp rifle appeared on his right arm.

A <PVF> like a beast's fang.

68 Caliber Complex Mind Hunter.

Nagayama landed and ran to the back of the school.

Kudou Ozuma, Nikaido Yuuki, and Hasegawa Shiho, the three developed their <PVF>, one after another. Ozuma's <PVF> was the Ego Arms, 68 Caliber Archetype Breaker, and it had a design combining a hammer with a rifle. Yuuki was responsible for support and deployed his Id Arms, 45 Caliber Blind Justice. Shiho also deployed an Id Arms to support Itto.

Itto jumped down from the roof, followed by the other members. Kicking off the wall in midair, Ozuma and Yuuki landed before Nagayama. With Ozuma and Yuuki to the front and Itto, Shiho, and Mutsumi behind him, he was surrounded.

Only three caretakers were cleaning the rear building. Nagayama, in his escape, had already passed them by. “Run away!”

Ignoring the risk of having people discover their <PVF>, Itto cried out to the janitors. It was best for them not to get caught up in a battle between <Parabellum>.

However---

The three did not try to run.

On the contrary, they stood as if to protect him.

It can't be... Those three are also Parabellum!?

Itto had misgivings about the possibility that the three men were

<Parabellum>

But they were not.

The janitors did not deploy their <PVF>.

However, they [Changed].

They became monsters.

Their bodies swelled into steel, their clothes were torn, their silhouettes resembled large, brutal monsters more than man.

They were beasts of steel with muzzles all over their body.

A number of firearms had been built into them.

“What is this...?”

Itto instinctively asked in blank surprise.

“Surely you've heard of the rumors... [Juunin].”

Nagayama spoke proudly.

“These are people who [Drank the Medicine] but failed to become <Parabellum>. Still, they have their uses...”

“Use...?”

“They were disabled when they drank the medicine and failed to become <Parabellum>. They can't think much, but they will listen to orders. Once a [Juunin], it is impossible for them to return to becoming human. They're simply disposable.”

The three steel beasts – the Juunin – began firing.

Fierce gunfire.

They discharged their mental bullets in succession on full auto.

Though their aim was poor, they had the advantage in pure gunfire.

Yuuki and Shiho each covered their teammate. Mutsumi, who had no partner, jumped to a nearby tree and began firing.

“!”

The bullets hit the Trauma Shells one after another.

Though Shiho and Yuuki's defense repelled the enemy, their movements were completely sealed.

“And then there's this---”

While protected by the three Juunin, Nagayama aimed the muzzle of Complex Mind Hunter.

He directed it at Itto.

He switched from [Full Auto] to [SS].

“My Special Shot.”

Nagayama squeezed the trigger.

An explosive flame launched from the muzzle.

A Special Shot was fired from Nagayama's <PVF>, Complex Mind Hunter.

Shiho had abandoned her 50 caliber <PVF> to develop her Trauma Shell with both arms. If she tried to defend Itto, she would not have the ability to attack.

However, it did not go well.

Her light weakened, she could hear cracks.

“...!”

Nagayama's special bullet had penetrated Shiho's Trauma Shell. Itto was hit directly.

“Ah...!”

He was hit by a mental bullet for the first time.

He was hit in the abdomen.

It hurt, like someone had thrust a stick into him, but no blood was spilled.

The pain extended to his entire body for a moment.

“...!”

Itto fell to his knees.

And his consciousness disappeared.

3

Itto fell over and stopped moving.

“Itto!”

Shiho screamed.

Though Yuuki looked fearful, Ozuma remained calm.

Ozuma had given the prior event thought. Nagayama had fired his Special Shot. Considering the incidents recently occurring, the result would not be good. At worst, Itto would suddenly attack others, as if he had [Turned into Someone Else]. All the victims were like this.

However, there were drawbacks to the Special Shot.

While it had a tremendous penetration and destructive power, it heavily drained the mind.

Most likely, he would not be able to use his bullets for a while.

In other words, now would be the time to attack.

Ozuma fired his <PVF>, Archetype Breaker, while hiding in Yuuki's Trauma Shell. He attacked the Juunin precisely.

Every time Ozuma's attack hit, the Juunin's armor cracked. Fine debris scattered, and the Juunin could be heard making a small voice of pain. It was effective.

“Don't insult me.”

Nagayama laughed.

Nagayama removed Complex Mind Hunter. In its place he summoned a 50 caliber weapon. He had switched from his Ego Arms to his Id Arms.

--- He switched his arm to decrease his mental fatigue!?

Ozuma had fought other <Parabellum>, but this was his first time fighting someone without excess movements like Nagayama. He was accustomed to fighting.

He placed a magazine in his pistol and aimed for Yuuki.

Yuuki could not handle Nagayama's movements.

He can't defend in time!

“Yuuki!”

Ozuma pushed Yuuki over.

Instead of taking the bullet, Yuuki was protected.

In Yuuki's place, Ozuma took the role of defense.

“Shit!”

Ozuma was hit twice, once in the right shoulder, and again in the right leg. Ozuma felt a sense of discomfort in the right half of his body, as if it had disappeared. It was a high price he paid to protect Yuuki.

“You!”

Shiho's 50 Caliber Corsair vomited fire.

It was a weak weapon. Her semi-automatic fire would not pierce the armor of the Juunin.

“Leave it.”

Mutsumi spoke to Shiho from overhead.

Mutsumi jumped down from the tree she took shelter in and fired at the Juunin Ozuma had damaged. She had fired her 68 Caliber Burnout on full auto, breaking through the Juunin armor. A clear sound of impact could be heard as her bullets shattered the Juunin to pieces.

4

Though they had managed to kill one, two, nearly completely intact Juunin, still remained.

Nagayama had injured Ozuma from the air and landed atop one of the remaining Juunin.

“It's about time I brainwash Sasaki Itto with my <PVF>.”

He spoke out of provocation.

“This Special Shot... It acts on a human's inferiority complex... It stimulates it. Rather than brainwashing, it forces that complex out. It is almost impossible for man to resist.”

“...”

Shiho looked about the area.

Yuuki lacked offensive capabilities.

Ozuma had become injured.

And Mutsumi was already working hard. Furthermore, Itto would become their enemy soon.

Shiho placed her Id Arms, Corsair, inside and threw away all defense.

She deployed her Ego Arms, Brilliant Catharsis.

Before Itto woke up, she would attack.

While shooting at the Juunin, Shiho could not deploy her Trauma Shell, so she jumped about quickly to avoid their gunfire. Yuuki, meanwhile, defended any attacks aimed at Ozuma.

5

Nagayama fired his Special Shot.

It had the effect of brainwashing.

Nagayama's [Command] had been placed in his Special Shot.

It was a mental bullet, made to affect the human spirit.

The spirit, even with the latest neuroscience, was not something understood by man. Humans barely understood the human psyche. Man thinks with the brain and controls the body with the brain, but what is the spirit? With present day science, it was impossible to clarify this.

Persons of Ability

However, the Parabellum are different. They somehow understood.

The object known as a [Soul] was something every human has. It was divided into the Id, the Ego, and the Super-Ego. It was a collective unconscious made of many layers.

A human's spirit was invisible to the eyes of man (even the person in question was not conscious of it). It was defended by many walls. Nagayama's Special Shot, the [Brainwashing Bullet] enveloped each wall in darkness.

It confined the target's spirit in darkness. They lost consciousness and stopped functioning, all thought ended. Itto was currently in that state. To Shiho and the others, it looked as if he had fainted, but his spirit was fighting the attack.

After isolating the spirit in darkness, the bullet began destroying the defensive walls. If it did not destroy them, Nagayama's words would not be imprinted.

However, the walls of the human heart were firm.

Nagayama's Brainwashing Bullet dug up all complexes the target had and used them. It broke through each wall in this manner. It took all thoughts of inferiority and tragedy that could not be forgotten.

Itto was forced to remember them all.

If his will shook or if he became masochistic, the Brainwashing Bullet would activate. It would process all past complexes and trauma Itto had, forcing him to do nothing but obey Nagayama's words. He would be convinced his only choice was to attack others.

It would activate his impulse to attack others.

He would lose all reason.

His Ego would be partially destroyed, and he would be controlled by Nagayama to some degree.

--- The incidents have always been like this.

With the worst possible twist, Itto would massacre the members of the Film Club and turn himself in to the police.



Chapter IX

Dangerous Rabbit and the Vicious Hunter

Id Arms

A small weapon used in close quarters combat. Usually a handgun

Ego Arms

A large caliber, long-range weapon such as a machine gun or rifle.

Trauma Shell

A mental shield used to defend. Though possible to use an Id Arm when deployed, the mental burden is too much to wield an Ego Arm in parallel.

1

--- Sasaki Itto's past was evoked by Nagayama's special bullet.

Has it already been more than a year?

When he returned home, his older sister, Mika, was in the living room.

It was a normal Monday. Itto was tired and it was hot outside.

Apparently it was a record high for June.

Don't feel like doing anything---

He had no desire. It was a hot, lazy afternoon.

Itto returned from school and took barley tea from the refrigerator before sitting in front of his sister.

“You want some too, Nee-san?”

Itto asked her.

And yet,

“I'm getting married.”

Her words were abrupt.

“... With that man?”

Itto's fingers trembled that moment.

The idea had never occurred to him.

He was his sister's lover. A tan man with fake looking bleach blonde hair who looked like a stereotypical thug. He had three earrings and a nose piercing and wore gaudy looking silver accessories.

“I know you don't like him, Itto...”

Mika spoke shyly.

“But still, I love him.”

--- *It's different, Nee-san.*

It's not about liking him or not.

I just have a bad feeling about him.

2

“I had heard Kudou Ozuma was the strongest <Parabellum>, but...”
Nagayama spoke triumphantly.

“You were injured for a coward like that? Idiot.”

“Don't you dare insult Yuuki.”

Ozuma stood up, dragging the right side of his body.

“The game will end when Sasaki Itto wakes up.”

Nagayama joyfully watched Itto faint earlier.

Ozuma developed his <PVF> in his right hand using his left arm.

Archetype Breaker's Special Shot was powerful. So long as an enemy was hit, it was likely they would die.

However, the problem was Sasaki Itto – Would he become an enemy?

--- *Should I end it now?*

--- *What should I do?*

No, Ozuma shook his head. Even if we've only known him a short time, he's our companion. It's embarrassing to even think of it for a moment. I don't know what will happen with him yet.

Besides, there was another possibility, though it would be a dangerous gamble.

“Shiho!”

“Ozuma!?”

“Help Itto with your Special Shot!”

“! O, Okay!”

“I don't know what's going on, but can you really do it?”

Nagayama instructed the Juunin to attack Shiho.

With Brilliant Catharsis at the ready, Shiho could not call forth her Trauma Shell.

Shiho was almost shot into a beehive.

But the bullets all were dispersed by a new Trauma Shell.

Mutsumi stood before Shiho defending her. Mutsumi had recalled Burnout and brought forth her Id Arms and Trauma Shell for defense.

“Mutsumi-san, That's amazing!”

“It's fine, go, quickly!”

“Yes!”

Shiho aimed Brilliant Catharsis at Itto.

After changing the switch to [SS], she pressed the trigger.

Shiho's <PVF>, Brilliant Catharsis.

Its Special Shot allowed her to submerge her mind into the subconscious of others (Psycho Diving).

Shiho placed her own consciousness in a bullet and invaded the soul and nervous system of another person.

While doing so, she was completely defenseless, so she needed someone to protect her [Body].

Shiho would dive and could exert a tremendous force on the target's Ego.

With that in mind, Shiho dove straight into Itto's mind.

3

--- Sasaki Itto's internal struggle continued.

Since his sister eloped and married, half a year had passed. The heat at the end of the season ended, as did winter, straight into spring.

During the spring break before Itto entered high school, he was idly reading comics in his room. Someone entered his house. It was not his parents. It was different.

“I'm back---”

His elder sister's voice came from the door.

Itto closed the magazine and left his room.

If she was with her husband, he would leave and relax at an arcade. He was not there.

She was at the table alone.

“Why did you come back?”

He sat before his sister as he asked that.

Then he noticed.

Her lips and right cheek were full of dark, red bruises. She had been hit.

“--- Wha, What happened!? Nee-san!”

“No, it's nothing. I just fell over.”

She tried to hide it with her long hair.

--- *How idiotic.*

“Was it that man?”

Itto spoke strongly.

“No, that's not it.”

She made her excuse.

--- *I'm not that stupid, Nee-san.*

“This isn't a misunderstanding. Impossible. Shit, that bastard.”

“Stop saying stupid things!”

--- *Who's the idiot!*

The partner she had chosen was a violent man, so she had run back to her parents' home. However, rather than separating from him, she returned. She was beaten and still returned of her own will. Itto could not understand her thoughts.

When Itto was accused of cheating, his sister was the only one to trust him. She was very kind.

She was his favorite.

4

Once it became impossible to endure, Itto visited his sister's apartment.

Her husband was a [Self Styled Pachinko Pro]. He only played pachinko during the day and rarely worked. His sister's income supported the household. Because of this, the two were living in such a terrible place.

Itto pressed the buzzer to their room, but no response was returned. He pressed it two, three times before her husband opened the door. He had tanned skin, blonde hair, three earrings, and a nose piercing. He looked like the stereotypical thug. Itto could not understand what his sister saw in him. When he asked her, she had simply said "He's cool and manly."

"What, it's you."

He spoke arrogantly and opened the door. His attitude was poor the first time they had met before, and it only seemed to have gotten worse.

"I want to see my sister..."

“Hm? Shut it and go back, brat.”

Itto was angry.

“... Did you do something to my sister again?”

Itto brought his left hand to his sister's husband and gripped his collar.

“So what if I did.”

“Shut up!”

Itto could not hold back any longer. His right hand had formed a fist. However, the man was much more familiar with fighting than Itto.

He blocked Itto's fist easily and countered with a right hook. Itto was beaten, his nose and mouth filled with blood while his sister's husband merely laughed.

Itto was kicked on the ground. When he stood up, he was kicked again. It was difficult to breathe, he would likely vomit.

Hearing the commotion, his sister ran from the back of the room. As he had thought, there were more bruises on her face.

“I, Itto! Stop it!”

Her husband did not stop kicking him. Itto did not understand at all.

Itto thought she would have called the police, but she would side with her husband, no matter what. She really did not understand. She was an idiot. Exhausted and amazed by his sister, Itto was finally moved to tears.

“What's this, he's crying.”

He continued kicking.

In the end, Itto could do nothing.

Even if he called the police, his sister would only defend her husband.

--- *Why don't I just give up?*

5

Nagayama's special bullet, the Brainwashing Bullet, continued to erode Itto's mind, bearing the image of a large snake.

Itto was seeing a dream, trembling, holding his knees as the python eroded his mind, showing him memories of the past. It was a cold world, deep in the depths of his consciousness.

His fingertips were numbed by the cold.

In the darkness, a large serpent reached out for Itto's body.

Ah...

It bound him tightly. From the tip of his finger, the cold gradually spread throughout his body, little by little.

Probably...

When the cold took over his body, his mind would be lost. It was a feeling close to conviction.

In that case---

This cold feeling is a painful way to end---

It's disgusting---

"..."

At that time, he thought he heard something.

A human voice in the silence of darkness.

--- An auditory hallucination?

"To---

This time, he was certain.

The voice approached him.

“Itto.”

It was Hasegawa Shiho's voice!

“Sasaki Itto!”

Tearing through the darkness, Shiho's figure appeared before Itto.

“Hasegawa-san... How did you get here?”

--- *No, rather, where am I to begin with?*

Shiho was naked, her <PVF> equipped on her right arm.

He then noticed that he, too, was naked, though his <PVF> was not equipped. He was not embarrassed, though. He simply did not care.

“Itto...! Expand your <PVF>!”

Shiho shouted.

Itto's mind was clearer.

He tried to summon the <PVF> in his right arm, but---

“... Ku!”

It did not go so well. When he tried to deploy his Arms, the large black serpent, an incarnation of Nagayama's attack, interrupted him. Every time he thrust his arm forward to create his <PVF>, a sharp pain ran through his body, forcing Itto to scream.

“Itto!”

Shiho fired.

She fired Brilliant Catharsis in the area surrounding Itto and finally hit.

Upon being hit, the snake flinched for a moment.

“Itto, do your best! Super best!”

Shiho encouraged him, but she had been driven to a corner, since she said [Super]. Itto smiled wryly hearing Shiho's words. He was glad.

“Got it.”

And so, Itto let out a roar.

The armor formed in the space before him and combined.

68 Caliber Dangerous Rabbit was complete.

Ah---

Itto was finally convinced.

That was the power of a <Parabellum>.



He could also change his elder sister's life.

Itto completed the formation of his <PVF>.

At the same time, the darkness exploded.

The Nagayama python scattered in all directions as particles of light.

Itto finally awoke.

6

“..”

Itto slowly opened his eyelids.

He sat up, his breathing was rough.

Nagayama looked at him with a satisfied smile.

“Can you get up...?”

“Yeah.”

Itto nodded and lifted Dangerous Rabbit.

He moved the muzzle---

He aimed at Nagayama.

“What...?”

“It looks like your Special Shot isn't all that special.”

Itto declared it.

“Thanks to you, I remembered... Because I went through so much trouble, I gained this power. It's best I use it.”

“Itto!”

Shiho called his name.

Shiho returned to her body the moment Itto woke up.

Itto fired Dangerous Rabbit.

Shiho matched his timing and fired Brilliant Catharsis on full auto.

Nagayama, who had completely relaxed his guard, could not guard against the Rabbit's attack.

Nagayama hid behind the Juunin between him and Mutsumi. The Juunin took the barrage of <PVF> bullets in his stead.

As for the third---

Ozuma had already put that into order. Perhaps he had used his Special Shot. *What kind is it?* Itto did not understand, since he had lost consciousness.

Itto continued firing, again and again and again.

The mental bullets pierced through the Juunin Armor and hit Nagayama behind it.

He could not endure it any longer. Itto continued, replacing each magazine, as bullet after bullet was fired. Nagayama's body convulsed with every bullet.

7

“Ah, Ah...”

Nagayama's eyes lost all sign of consciousness. His body was curled into a fetal position. He simply lay there trembling, unable to articulate.

Itto looked down at his former teacher and asked.

“Nagayama... What will happen to him from now on?”

“Nothing much. He'll be brought to a hospital. I doubt he'll be the same in all his life.”

Ozuma responded. Thanks to Yuuki's first aid, he had recovered from the mental injury.

“... All his life.”

This person, just this person, was ruined.

It weighed heavy in Itto's mind.

If they left quickly, no evidence would remain. The <Parabellum> cannot be judged by the law at present.

However, it was problematic at the same time. Nagayama had a young daughter, after all.

Itto realized he had fully tread into this world of unusual talents.

“Leave Nagayama's daughter to Ozuma and me.”

As if she had read Itto's mind, Mutsumi spoke encouraging words.

“Even for his daughter... Stopping Nagayama here is a good thing.”

“I know you're worried, but there were no other methods...”

Yuuki followed up.

“Shit, we showed an uncool side of ourselves as upperclassmen.”

Ozuma clicked his tongue.



1

One girl sat on the torii of a nearby shrine.
She clearly went up there in an impossible manner.
The girl had a transient atmosphere. She sat atop the torii as birds
perched nearby in search of food. The girl smiled like a cruel
animal. There was something inhuman in it.
“Of course, there are many things more frightening than man...”
The girl's name is Synchronicity.
Her fair skin was nearly transparent.
Her natural, silver hair was more beautiful than any jewelry.
She wore a frilly black dress not suitable to a Shinto shrine.
A shadow appeared high above the shrine.

The girl descended to the torii.

Before the black-clad girl – Synchronicity – a new girl appeared with a smile.

“Oh my, it has been a while, [Senpai].”

Senpai was Senpai.

No one knows her true name, nor was her age certain. Everyone simply knew her as [Senpai]. It was [Their] rule.

Senpai always wore a short skirt and had a wooden sword, such as those found in Kyoto souvenir shops. Her lips were thick and her hair was short. There were aircraft goggles on her forehead.

“Nagayama has lost.”

Senpai said.

“I saw.”

“An experiment with unexpected results, it's interesting!
Interesting!”

Senpai was bubbling with tension as she swung her wooden sword in the air.

In contrast, Synchronicity looked at the town before her with cold eyes.

“Our testing site is large...”

Synchronicity smiled.

Even her smile was cold.

“I wonder how many remain.”

2

“Hmm...”

Newspaper Club President, Kurama Sanae, lay on the bed in her room looking at the many photographs she had just printed.

In an alley between buildings, there was the shadow of a figure.

Sasaki Itto had something large equipped on his right arm which she was unfamiliar with flying at a height with surprising speed.

Did he jump, or did he fly?

Either way – It's unusual.

Did I... somehow get some surprising material?

Sanae crossed her arm as she continued lying down.

The announcement was still a long time away. Before Sanae could reveal anything, she needed to know more about the boy named Sasaki Itto.

I really might get the Pulitzer with this.

3

With the end to their fight with Nagayama, they could not put their mind to lessons.

Itto decided to leave early. Since the first class had not ended, he had essentially cut the entire day.

“Because I’m worried.” For that reason, Shiho followed after him. He walked to his house along the typical school route. It had been a long time since he last returned home early. Either way, his mother would not know, since she would not be back until late in the evening.

Itto and Shiho were exhausted. Once they left school grounds, they were surrounded by silence. Itto tried to think of something to talk about, but remained quiet.

“...”

What should I say? I have no idea.

“Itto, you're amazing.”

Shiho broke the silence.

“You worked hard for everyone.”

“That's not...”

That's not really what happened – it was different. He desperately fought, but he felt he had done it for himself. Still, he thought he learned what it was to fight with his companions in the truest sense. Only that he wanted to make clear---

“I---”

Itto opened his mouth.

“I wanted to use the power of a <Parabellum> for my own revenge.”

--- *Yes, revenge.*

If it was for his sister's sake, Itto would use the power of the <Parabellum> without hesitation. No matter what happened, Itto would fight alone for that person.

But he had already gone beyond that.

“You see, for me...”

Shiho spoke in an unnaturally heavy tone.

“My brother was killed. It was probably done by a <Parabellum>.”

“... Eh?”

That's a surprise.

Itto could not imagine Shiho had a past like that.

“I became a <Parabellum> to search for and find his killer.”

Shiho continued.

“You see, no matter what you do, I'm sure you'll be fine.”

“... Thanks.”

At last, Itto noticed.

Sasaki Itto, Hasegawa Shiho.

--- *We're a bit alike.*

Most likely, Ozuma and Yuuki shouldered something. Mutsumi as well, of course.

All <Parabellum> had something like that.

“That's why, Itto.”

“Hm? What?”

“Your hobbies. Tell me.”

“... You remembered.”

“Well, of course, so tell me!”

“ ... ”

Itto was exhausted by her persistence.

“ ... ”

“Hm? You were too quiet, I couldn't hear you.”

“... Tap Dance. I'm learning through a correspondence course.”

“Hee!”

Shiho had sparkling eyes.

“Itto! Show me! Do it!”

“I didn't say anything because it's embarrassing!”

“Why are you so shy? I'm sure it'll be fine. No need to hide it~”

“But it's depressing... doing it through a correspondence course.”

“That's some pretty deep shyness.”

“Anyway, I won't dance.”

Itto had a surly look as he turned away from Shiho.

“It's fine, so show me!”

Shiho was behaving like a spoiled child as she gripped Itto's sleeves.

“It's the request of your benefactor!”

“Uu...!”

Shiho used it as a last resort.

Certainly, Shiho saved Itto's life, enough so that, even though Itto helped her, he still owed her.

“Can't be helped...”

Itto stopped and took a deep breath.

“... Wakuteka.”

From a distance, Shiho watched Itto happily.

“I don't have the shoes, so you won't get the right sound, so don't get too angry.”

“Why did you start learning to tap dance?”

“It's in a movie different from what President Nikaido or Mutsumi-san would watch...” Itto began by kicking off with his right foot.

“When I was depressed, I saw Takeshi Kitano's movie and felt much better afterward. His tap dance had that much impact.”

He had somehow forgotten any shyness hearing the rhythm of his feet.

Since Itto was still a beginner, he mainly used his toes. He kicked off the ground and hit the earth with his toes. He hit and pulled back, the third sound ringing out. Tap Tap Tap, a basic [Shuffle] rhythm. Though simple, it looked wonderful just by performing it quickly. Right and left. He did not do much and simply played around in the end. Shuffle, step, shuffle, step.

Itto carved a rhythm with both his feet.

Shiho watched with shining eyes.

Despite being embarrassed, Itto had never had so much fun in his life.

4

After the events, Kudou Ozuma met with Saionji Ryouko of Kuwazono High School.

The two met halfway between their houses at Yasukuni Shrine.

Kudou stood beneath the bronze statue of Omura Masujiro.

Saionji Ryouko approached in a leather coat, flapping in the wind.

“... You wanted to meet at Yasukuni, good choice.”

“It was chance.”

"I see... [Si vis pacem Parabellum. If you wish for peace, prepare for war]. Indeed, this place is quite appropriate for the <Parabellum>."

"..."

Whether it was out of sarcasm or her true feelings, Ryouko did not judge Ozuma.

The bronze statue of Omura Masujiro, the second torii, the God gate, and the hall of worship.

Everything in Yasukuni Shrine seemed large.

"The incident has been resolved. I sent you the details in an email."

"I apologize for doubting you."

Ryouko laughed coldly.

"To think your club adviser would make you into a culprit. It's fine."

"I wonder why this happened. The conflict between <Flight> should not have gone any deeper."

"I wonder... At the very least, the creature spreading tablets to the <Parabellum> doesn't feel that way."

"... No one understands what [Senpai] intends to do."

Ozuma spoke, a sore spot was touched upon.

Ozuma had a dim feeling someone was trying to make the <Parabellum> fight.

“I don't know what will happen in the future. To defend myself, I will simply [Develop an Army I can Trust].” Ryouko said.

“You're too aggressive. Really, what does she plan to do with the <Parabellum>?”

“... In the end, won't we just split-up after this conversation?”

Kudou Ozuma and Saionji Ryouko.

Two people stared at each other against the backdrop of the shrine.

<Adolescent Rush of the Parabellum ACT 1 Si vis pacem
parabellum>