KV Friend Writing Doc #1

(Semi-Comprehensive; Brief Overview)

Pls read the original source before reading (20th Century Boys and 21st Century Boys), final warning.


A GOD ...
HE BECAME ...



Katsumata Tadonobu
1960-2018
Faceless antichrist, The World's Christ, Faceless monster, The world's president, the devil who never existed, a 20th Century boy, The newest God, The Whispered Prophecy, The Imposter, Friend, Memory Manipulator, A Fate Worse Than Death, Johan slayer, Animanga slayer, Big Brother But Better, Billy Bat victim. (Def not stolen from Friend doc)

This analysis will be using Katsumata Version Friend. If you haven't read the "theory", here it is, please give it a read before viewing this analysis:
The Reddit Analysis

This is by no means a comprehensive doc; I will only cover the most important points and symbolisms. I doubt a truly comprehensive doc will be made any time soon though. Also please read the manga before reading this analysis.

I will list most of the symbolisms that Friend has. *However,* I only analyze symbolisms if they are good ones. A huge amount of people in the writing community seem to think that having references to biblical or classical figures somehow makes that character's complexity, depth, symbolism, or

writing better. IT DOES NOT. Only when the symbolism makes sense, fits in with evidence from the text, parallels the character well, and most of the time even adds something to the character (like a new pov) does it increase the rating of that character, otherwise it is just a surface level symbolism. I have seen plenty of characters (like Johan) be plastered with 50 different characters (which are all either religious figures or from classical texts) and have that be the foundation for their complexity or depth. I don't at all like it. This also goes for ideology and philosophy; just because a philosophy is sort of adjacent to the character doesn't mean that the character symbolizes it. In my opinion this is by far the most grueling aspect about writing comparisons, along with the "ah, so you think you can scale the character? Please list to me their 4 layers of depth, and if it doesn't perfectly align with my view then it's automatically wrong" (granted I've been guilty of doing similar things, partially the reason I'm making this analysis).

This doc won't be covering OG or PE friend, this analysis is ONLY on KV Friend. The other two deserve completely separate docs. In my opinion, KV is far superior to the two others.

This doc might also focus on Kenji and some other aspects of the story because they're either integral to Friend or I just wanted to include them to show how good 20th Century Boys is. (I'll try to not include too many of those types of segments).

I wish I could do a full manga analysis, however I don't have the time. This doc would be about ten times longer if I had to analyze everything relevant.

The start of this doc is a bit shaky since it has a *lot* of set up, so please bear through the beginning, I promise it gets better and more organized soon.

For reference:
Friend=antag, friend=regular definition (capitalization)
BNYE=Bloody New Years Eve

NBOP and BOP= [New] Book of Prophecy
Singer guy=Singer guy
Cartoonist guy=Cartoonist guy

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About the Inspiration

I didn't know where to put this section quite frankly so I put it at the very beginning. Yes, Friend and his cult are inspired by the Aum Shinrikyo cult. Much of the first part and even sections of the second

part relate heavily to the cult. Not much else to say other than the inspirations for the events in 20th Century Boys being very clear.

Movies

Won't be covering the movies. They're not canon. You should still watch them though.



The first introduction, funnily enough, does not include nor mention Friend. Yet, for the purposes of keeping this both concise yet thorough, I will be using all 4 intros that Friend has.

Intro 1, the end) We pan to a shot of some random school, 1973, Japan. The captions read "We thought something would happen. We thought something would happen...Something...Rock'N'Roll was played for the first time in public middle school #4, but...Not a damn thing happened", cut. Kenji has tied up a supposed hall monitor esk girl and has succeeded in playing 20th Century Boys on the school radio, but for now, the narrative seems to suggest that this crucial event for Kenji, did ***absolutely nothing.***

This is such a strong opening that it stayed in my head for the entirety of the manga, even though this scene itself is mentioned rarely, if ever. It is not important to us for now but we will come back to it much later. All we need to know for now, is that Kenji has just altered the course of humanity forever.
Intro 2, the symbol and the man) 1997, Kenji notices a symbol while carrying some bottles, he instantly remembers the symbol from his childhood. It was the symbol of "a true friend", created by the 4 main group members of the Kenji faction: Yoshitsune, Maruo, Otcho (the creator of the symbol), and Kenji. (This is my idea of the 4 main group members; you could argue that Maruo isn't as important as the others. Also Yukiji is excluded but whether she's even in the Kenji faction is debatable in itself) Pan to a cult, all people in it praising someone called "Friend". Some of the presumably less experienced cult members are pondering on what "teachings" Friend will teach today. Yet, that will not be happening on this particular day. One of the presumably more experienced cult members tells the others that today, Friend will float. Friend does float. And what do we see below Friend but the childhood symbol that Otcho once drew, 24 years ago. Instantly engages the reader through the mystery aspects of the plot twist.


"FRIEND" IS...
IT'S INCRE-DIBLE ...
"FRIEND" IS...
TH... UNBELIE-VABLE...
WOW !!
HUH ...?
33
FLOATING ...

Quick Section on the Friend symbol:



Here is the most likely familiar Friend symbol. It is shown all throughout the manga and especially so during the end of the world arc.
First thing we observe is that it's a mask. This can tell us about a hundred things about Friend, however we won't reach that part for a while yet. For now it's best described as a symbol, a symbol for something. Similar to how V from V for Vendetta wears a mask to be portrayed as a symbol, Friend does the same thing. He wants to be anonymous, he wants to establish a sense that everyone and anyone is Friend. It's similar to how Jesus is very

sparingly described in appearance in the Bible, or how Muhammad's face has to be covered in art as well. This is to make a connection between the person and the figure; to make it so anyone can relate to them.
As said earlier, this could also be a sign that Friend is afraid of showing his face.
The second observation we notice about it is the fact that it's black and white. Black is the colour used to draw the symbol and white fills the rest of the mask. The white is symbolism for heaven or virtue, the black is symbolic of evil. It is a metaphor for a false prophet/god. Satan in eden.
The outermost rim of the symbol is the print of an eye. This is supported by the pupil in the middle. The eye is full of eyelashes on all sides which look like thorns, possibly a nod to Katsumata's protective nature regarding his past. This is done so on both the eyes (exterior and interior), showing Katsumata's thoroughness which we'll see in the rest of the series going forward.
The eye is painted everywhere in the series, rarely will you go a chapter without seeing it at least a few times. It is meant to show that Friend is always watching, every event was done because he allowed it to happen. Friend sees everything and everyone.
The last part that we notice is the giant hand pointing up, encompassing the pupil of the eye. The hand is pointing to heaven or god, symbolizing and solidifying Friend as a god/prophet and his committee as divine.
Put this all together and you get a terrifying message: Friend is god, looking down at you, seeing every action you take no matter how you hide it, conform to the regime. On the other hand, it is a safety for those who are in the regime, Friend watches every action; he will reward the righteous and dismember the impure.
References:
God-obvious
Big Brother-it's a very clear reference to 1984's Big Brother by George Orwell, a book which also features a dictatorship run by a supervisor. "Big Brother is always watching", in 20th Century Boys there is no quote like that, however the symbol is more than enough since it's a direct reference to it. Friend===Big Brother

Chapter 2) We get informed that an engineer has died from a mysterious virus. The engineer had many mystical contraptions in his room. Friend has obviously done this, just like with the professor in chapter 1. All of this foreshadows what's to come in the future.

We see a flashback where Kenji and some others (like Keroyon) are playing some sort of war game. Kenji gets shot at (by a toy gun) and now has to say "I am dead" ten times. He does so, then says "I am alive again".
Friend does the exact same thing with one of his disciples/cult members. He tells them to repeat "I am dead" ten times then tell him what they see. This is a sort of baptism that Friend does to his followers. The idea of rebirth is used in many religions, often to signify a new start. In this case Friend uses it to gain control over his subjects by wiping their mind clean. This could also be interpreted as Friend trying to figure out the meaning behind the phrase that Kenji used back then, so he tests it out on more people, yet it seems to be unsuccessful as the person who he does this to says "I see light!" while crying (could be an allusion to "let there be light", the start of the new universe for him), yet this is not what Kenji said.

That part is symbolism once again for 1984, mainly the action of taking away the man's sight and hearing. "The Party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential command."

Kenji continues to rant about how his life is "just fine" even though he's obviously discontent with it. I won't be referencing Kenji too much, however he is important to Friend as well so some parts will need to be mentioned.

Chapter 3)

Starts with even more foreshadowing for things to come. A magazine/movie cover shows the end of the world, featuring some UFO's.

While Kenji is sulking about his lost years and his depression, Friend is making a big announcement. "I have a very terrible announcement to make to all of you today/ The world is coming to an end very, very soon/ But everyone here with me/ Will be saved!!!", Friend draws in his viewers even close by saying "but everyone here *with me*", yet again establishing a saviour/prophet bond.

Chapter 4-10)
Donkey dies

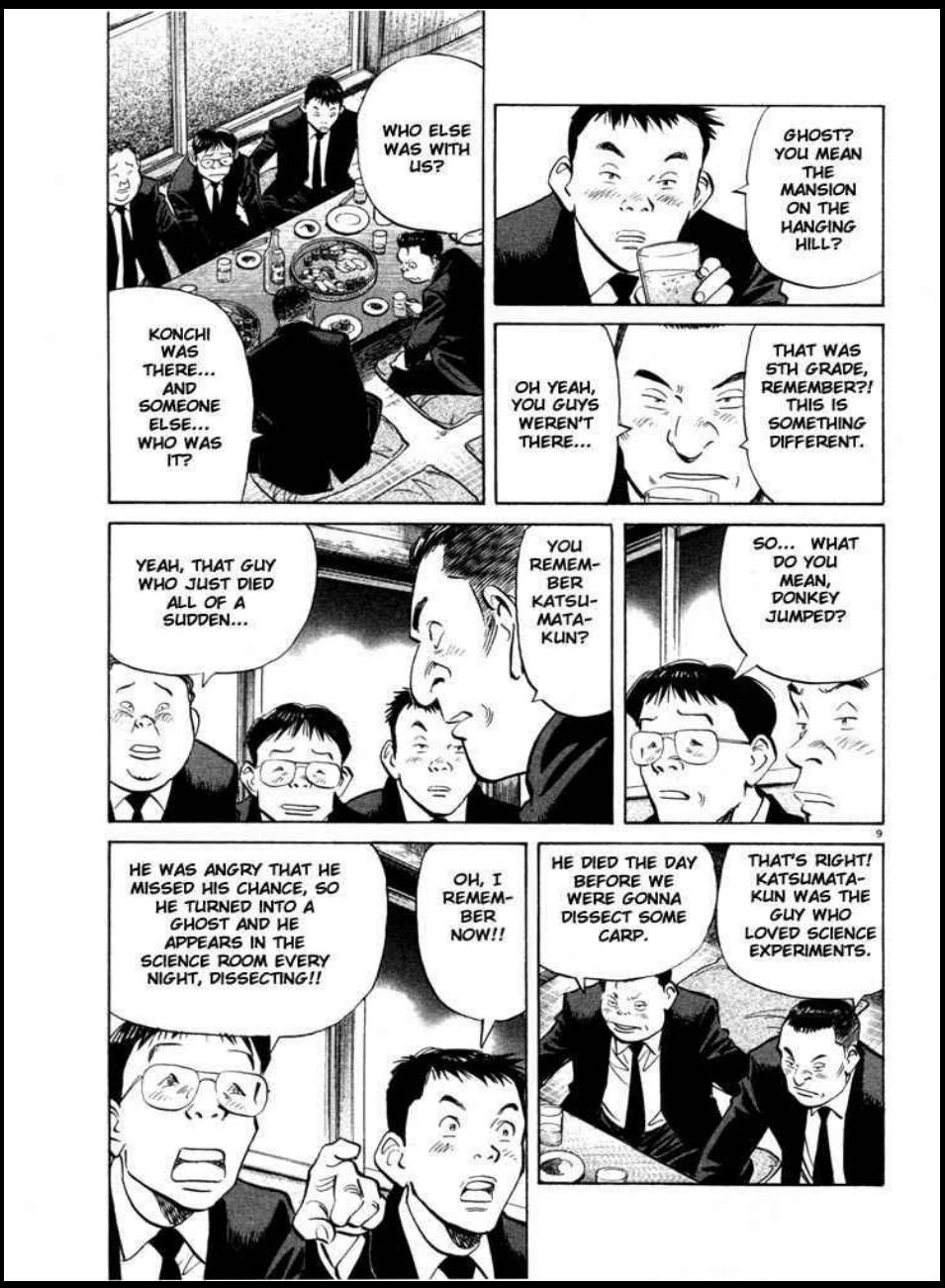
However, he leaves a message to Kenji right before he dies:



(The relevancy is self-explanatory)

Keroyon and Mon criticize the lack of care the student's of Donkey show towards his death. The holy person (I'm not an expert on Japanese culture) isn't paying attention to Donkey's funeral either, trying to stuff his face with as much food as he possibly can. Overall, this world is already very corrupt.

Mon then proceeds to drop the first mention of Katsumata.



We see that Katsumata is faintly remembered among the main cast.
We get some hints that Katsumata might be alive/Friend early on as well.
If Katsumata really died he would most likely have a funeral and the school wouldn't treat it lightly either, however there is no mention of that in the entire chapter. Yet, Katsumata's name is also never mentioned after this, so there's a chance he went dark after he supposedly died, which could imply a deceptive nature. (Insane foreshadowing by the way)

Cut to a man dancing hysterically. This is of course a member of the Friend Regime. His mother (presumably) calls him; he lashes out at her when she does so, saying that she's ruining his healing dance and that she just can't understand (incredibly common cult techniques; basically rituals and seclusion strategies). He starts listening to a "healing CD", then we see his room….



Another reminder to the reader: Friend is watching.
Preying on the weak minded.
The question remains however on why he's doing this. Does he truly want to purify and protect these people? Is he being sadistic in some sense? Or is it done out of pure narcissism?
For now we can't tell, even a person who's read the PE interpretation of 20th Century Boys would probably struggle to give you a concrete reason.

We pan to Friend answering a question from one of his followers: What is the true meaning of healing? Friend says "it is to be with me/ That is what it means to be healed". Friend is once again referencing religion (most of the time it's Christianity). Here are some texts from the Quran and Bible which Urasawa might have been referencing:

Surah Ash-Shu'ara 26:80

> *"And when I am ill, it is He who heals me."*
> This is a statement from the Prophet Abraham, acknowledging that Allah alone has the power to heal him, both physically and spiritually. (Obvious parallel)

Isaiah 41:10

> *"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."*
>
> There's plenty of quotes which are related to this concept.

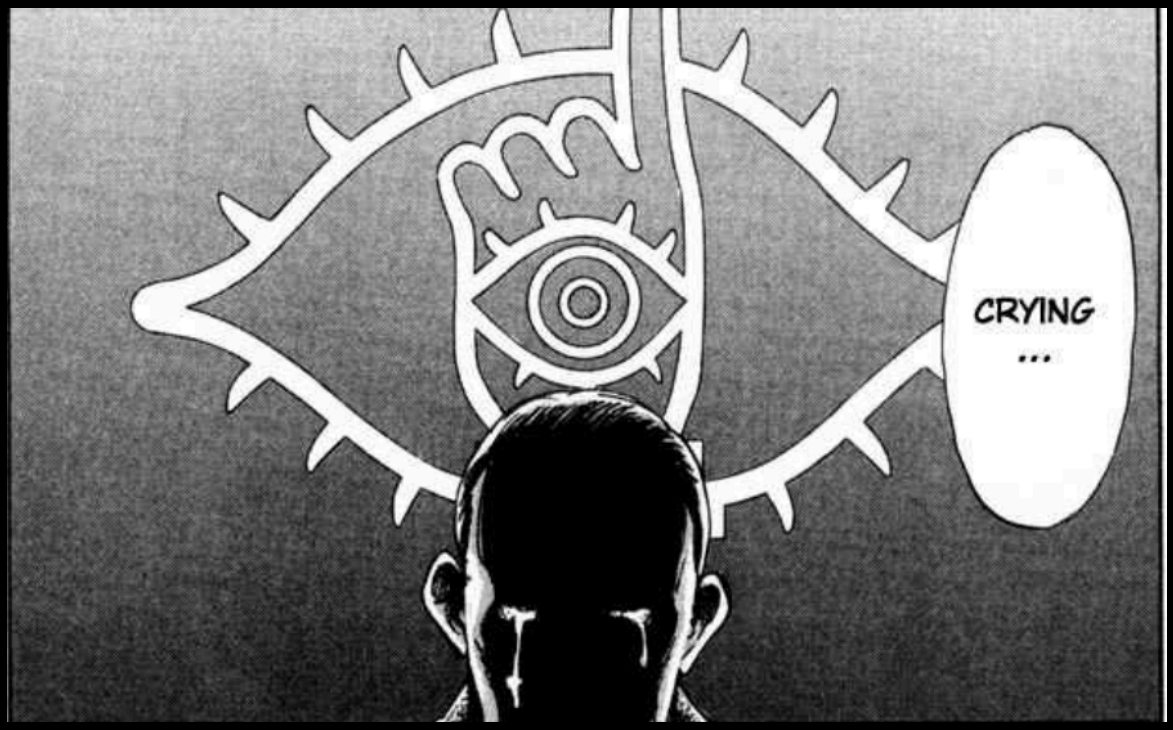
The next question that Friend's followers ask is "Friend, where did we come from"

Friend declares that that is quite an interesting question.

Friend goes on to describe the secret base. Using the word “us” and “our” when referencing the ownership of the secret base.

This is quite a strange statement for Friend to make. Friend didn’t build the base, nor did he help with it, nor did he even go inside it when the others were inside it. Friend’s first traits are showing, mainly his entitlement. Nonetheless, Friend thinks himself as one of the good guys “vowing to destroy evil and bring justice”. He is stuck in the past, a past which he wasn’t even part of. Then this proceeds it:





Why does Friend relate to Collins?

Because he thinks he was neglected. He went to the hanging hill with the Kenji faction, he most likely did a ton of other side quests with them as well. However, they never asked for his name, they never remembered him, they never thought of him as part of their group. Friend feels like Collin, so close to reaching the moon and becoming one of the first few people to walk on the moon, to be in an exclusive rank of people, yet he could not.

Is this true?

Maybe. Friend is incredible when it comes to social awareness, EU, etc etc yet the one thing he can't seem to understand is a kid's mentality. He can't, or maybe it's better to say he doesn't want to understand it. He is deeply traumatized by his childhood not because he was tormented a lot, but because he's prideful and insecure. He is embarrassed that he could never join that faction, he hates it, and he wants to let others know about it too. To understand his point of view. But why does Friend care about joining Kenji so much?

The answer to this question is much more complicated. We will need to reach the end of the manga to answer it.

Intro 3, the child) Katsumata appears for the first time in person. However, this is child Katsumata. Donkey is telling Kenji about how awesome the moon landing was when Katsumata shows up (Donkey ran off by that time) and reinstates his sadness for Collins. We see that even Katsumata (Katsumata most likely isn't dead yet) is jealous of Kenji and sad about his exclusion.

Kenji explores more into the cult, he even sees Friend merchandising.

While Kenji does that, Friend chooses the people he wants to "purify". Friend again feels as if he's curing these people rather than killing them. Or it's possible that he doesn't feel that way at all and simply wants to convince other members of that.

Our dancing companion once again reappears (Kenji tracked him down). When Kenji asks him a question, he screams and recites almost nonsensical commands. This shows just how far Friend has brainwashed these people, they do things instinctually now, even this student who was intelligent enough to go to top universities was brainwashed to the extreme. No one is safe.

The Kenji faction discovers their time box with some artifacts. In it are the drawing of a robot and laser gun, foreshadowing for later parts of the story.

Friend spouts some drivel about how he killed a vanguard of heresy (the religious figure that the student, who Kenji followed, stabbed). He uses the word "purified" when referencing his plans of destroying false doctrines (obvious connections). Friend then proceeds to say

something very strange. “This is not the end but the beginning/ The cosmos have begun to choose their true ‘Friends’”

Surface level analysis will tell you that this is just Friend furthering his plan on indoctrinating the cult members by spitting more drivel about some higher state electing new friends. However, the interesting part about this, and even possibly about the Friend cult altogether is whether Friend actually believes in this. It’s a question which I've always posed when researching about cults: does the leader actually believe in whatever they’re preaching or is it just an elaborate hoax to get more members?

In the case of Friend this question is incredibly incredibly complex. It’s also not a question that we can answer right now, so we will come back to it a bit later, but do keep it in the back of your head when you read this as it will be important later.

Back to the main topic. Friend references “the cosmos” as the entity which chooses friends and presumably saves them, giving them some kind of salvation. What is the cosmos? It’s most likely not Friend himself, or at least not directly so. Yet, it does seem strange that it references the word “friends”. Obviously Friend could just be saying that word to further increase that name’s theme (which I have discussed briefly but I promise that there will be a more in depth analysis on that as well). However, I do not think that the friend theme is the only thing the line is referencing. Cosmos can be interpreted as “god”; this cosmos elects “friends”; Friend is a prophet/god, similar in status to Jesus; this gives us a sort of dichotomy, whether Friend sees himself as a prophet or a god but evidence seems to suggest that he sees himself as more a prophet which is just related to god through that. From this we can deduce that Friend sees himself as an almost reincarnation of a greater being. Yet, he hopes to pass on this power as the line clearly states that there will be multiple friends. If you still don’t understand what I'm referencing then just take a look at rebirth plan or the Friend Era. Yes, I believe that this line is directly

referencing the Friend Era (yes, we're skipping around in continuity a bit). During the Friend Era there were multiple Friends who ruled different parts of the world, I believe that a few of those Friends are likely from the very cult circle that you just saw. First of all, this is insane levels of foreshadowing; Usogui and One Piece type foreshadowing. Second of all, we get a new look into Friend's psyche, and this is where his characterization reaches new heights. For first readers this would actually come out sort of selfless in a way. I mean……Friend is just allowing people to take on a position similar to his with no restraints or curfews. Isn't it actually pretty noble in a sense? In like a deranged psycho killer type of way?

Well…no, quite the opposite in all likeliness. We know that Friend is selfish, extremely so. He seeks constant praise and attention from all, he is the embodiment of self-centredness (partially the reason he started the cult in the first place). He certainly wouldn't allow anyone to be equal to him. Two conclusions can be made from this fact. A) He will ascend the title of Friend in some way. B) He doesn't consider multiple Friends to be that at all; all Friend's are extensions of himself, if a stunt double does something then that basically means he did it, that is how delusional he has become. For option A, we also have to consider a VERY crucial fact. Friend is currently Fukubei, not Katsumata. Katsumata doesn't care about Fukubei, actually he hates him quite a bit [for reasons that will be discussed later]. If Fukubei was seen as just another Friend among the crowd, Katsumata would be completely okay with that, in fact he'd like that very much. Katsumata does want attention but from his actions we can tell that he'd be perfectly content with just being labeled "Friend", he doesn't need a name, at least not yet.

This sentence also provides us with some insight on Friend's ideology. Friend is a strong believer of fatalism, at least as far as the cult is concerned. He references the cosmos, which is most likely a reference to god, sure, but it also could be that Friend thinks of the cosmos as something which has already determined the events of the universe. This is where we get our first signs of Friend subscribing to compatibilism. Compatibilism is the belief that humans have free will, but reality is already determined. We don't see the latter part be relevant or brought up until much much later, however we do see the notion of predetermined reality pretty early on: "the world will end soon", "there will be no survivors", etc etc. This will be further expanded on when we discuss the book of prophecy, both old and new. For now, let's move on.

Friend then says that "the time for rebirth and destruction has come", most likely in reference to the rapture and other events of such a kind. You could make the argument that this relates to the duality of the figure that Friend poses as well, similar to Shiva who is both the god of rebirth and destruction (important for later); this is further referenced in other parts of the story such as "there is no good or evil in my universe".

Kenji and the rest discover a Friend flag that Donkey made. In their childhood they said that they would unite under this flag once more when the world was in dire danger (I wonder what Urasawa was hinting at there). Then appears one of the main themes of 20th Century Boys: "I wonder if we're the adults now that we dreamed of being back then/ or if our childhood selves would laugh at us if they saw us now". This is an integral theme in 20th Century Boys, while its main focus is usually on Kenji, it's

very impactful on Friend as well. This message could never reach Friend because he never grew up, he remained a child till the very end. This is emphasized later in the story, at this point we wouldn't really get that message.

We learn that Friend is indoctrinating young people as well from Yukiji's friend. Nothing new. Friend's followers could also allegedly fill up the entire Budokan; so, for context, Friend's cult at this point is 15,000+ people in strength.

More context is added: Friend is building a robot (Manjoume first appearance), Kenji still adamant about the Friend symbol



(Quick tidbit. Keroyon, why are you so mean ☠️. I can understand being upset at Donkey killing himself but why call Yukiji an ugly horse, she saved you multiple times 😭. Yoshitsune once again showing why he's the goat)

Volume 2)



Manjoume talks with Yukiji's lawyer friend (same friend as before; she also mentioned that she has to investigate into the Friend party since her clients children went missing). The lawyer starts talking to Manjoume[oume]. She asks what name this cult goes by, however Manjoume replies "why do we need a name?" (then later points to the symbol when giving the cult a "name"), undoubtedly this was said out of Friend's mouth at one point. This further confirms Friend's mentality of Friend being a symbol rather than a person. Friend isn't afraid of there being multiple Friends because all Friend's come from him/he is all the Friends. This could also be Friend saying that his cult doesn't need words, only a symbol. In all fairness this makes a lot of sense; a lot of cults use this method too. Why ally yourselves under words which constantly change when you can instead ally yourself under a universal symbol. Friend has no need for words; words change,

they are not constants; a symbol never changes, it is a constant, just like Friend, Friend will eternally be your friend.

When asked “What is Friend’s name?” Manjoume responds with “‘Friend’/ is ‘Friend’”. No need for further explanation.

Manjoume proceeds to explain what the Friend cult is all about:



The first line is pretty simple. Manjoume is simply saying that Friend isn't starting a cult, nor is he confining the people there. People are coming to Friend because they seek a friend.

The second line however adds a bit more spice to the equation. What does Manjoume mean when he says "friendship" and that Friend is the first to have thought and allowed to use it? Well, the most likely explanation is that Friend is a pure altruist (in a sense). Friend holds great friendship because he is a Friend to everyone and anyone, he does not exclude anyone and loves everyone equally. He is the first person to do this; the first person to be a friend to everyone, [something which he himself needed so much]. Why does he offer this? An incredibly complex question, just like every question I'll pose in this analysis. My current hypothesis is that Friend wants to create a "true friend" bond with people. He will take on the hardships of being a Friend to everyone, he will act as the martyr so everyone else will know what it's like to have a Friend. This is where it gets more complicated since the ending of the manga has a conclusion which puts our hypothesis into question, but we will get to that later as well. For now let's just assume that Friend does truly want to be a friend to everyone, to have an unshakeable bond where everyone can rely on him (hinting at his manipulative tendencies).

Manjoume proceeds to leave just as all the spoons bend thus performing magic. In reality, Manjoume most likely set those spoons up beforehand. Some of the analysis I've seen on YT seem to suggest that Manjoume couldn't have done this……which….why not exactly? By the narrative it's not even implied that he came in second as well (I think) so there's a good chance he set those up. Even if he did come in second, there's still

a good chance he could have set those up (this is important I promise).

In chapter 12, we're shown Otcho. He's the one who drew the Friend symbol. Now Kenji will suspect Otcho for some time to come.

Otcho's dialogue when showing the Friend symbol is "Anyone who knows this symbol is a true Friend", used many times in the manga.

Kenji is shown defending Yukiji from the bully brothers Yanbo and Mabo. Gets thrashed; scene is meant to emphasize his sense of kind heartedness. Adult Kenji seems to think that he's not the same person anymore.

Detective Chou proceeds to solve nearly the entire case (sadly KV Katsumata's deception is too good) before getting killed. However we do learn quite a few things. The religious figure who Friend assassinated was actually his classmate in a religious group. We also learn that Katsumata had "low motives and a weak spirit" which is strange, right? Wasn't Friend pretty adamant about his plan? Yes, he was. Most likely this is either him being even more deceptive or it's Friend being so impatient that he feels down for not being able to put his plans into effect even sooner (highly doubt it, as seen later). Maybe it's just hearsay from the other guy since he also called Katsumata an "incurable fool" (that one actually sounds quite accurate). You could argue that this is the true first sign of Katsumata's suicidal tendencies but I'm not 100% convinced. Katsumata does give this classmate his name (Fukubei's name) allegedly. However, the more coherent timeline (and correct me if this is a stretch) is that the person who gives Chou Friend's real name is just another puppet set up by

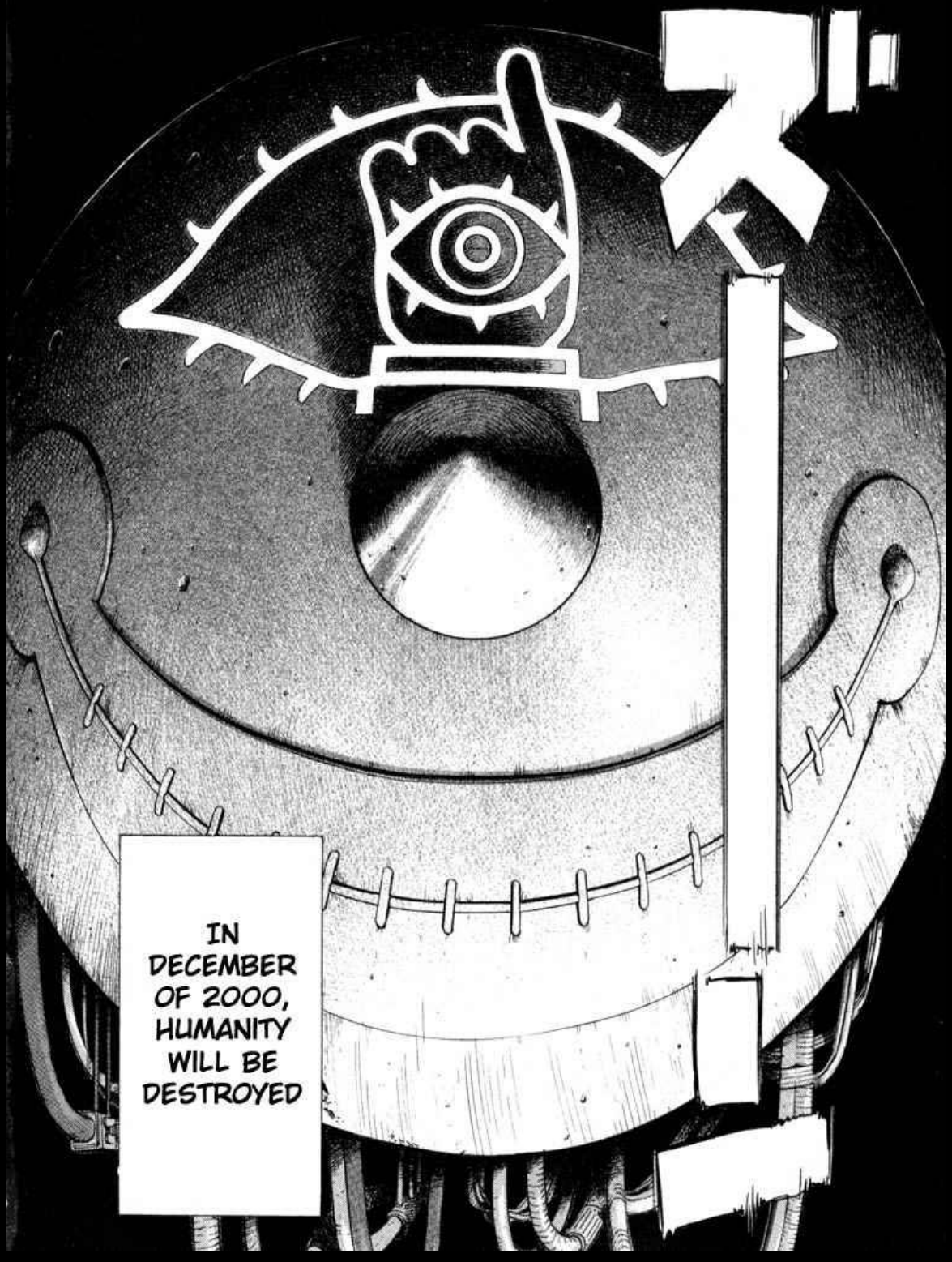
Friend. I know this narrative sounds like it could be dismantled with Occam's razor but I really do implore you to think about it. If this is not the case then the narrative would be that Friend just let the leader have the name of a person who's very related to Katsumata (read the KV proof doc if you haven't), which is completely inconsistent with Friend's incredibly careful behaviour. Going by the OG narrative this would mean that Friend just let someone have his real name, complete nonsense. Chou goes to the religious group that Friend used to be in and finds "Friend" (again, most likely more manip from Friend. Also this might be proof that Friend actually wanted to expedite events even more since this would lead Kenji to discover Fukubei even earlier. His original plan wouldn't have changed though, he still planned everything perfectly. Or it's possible that Katsumata thought that if Chou did try to convince Kenji of Fukubei' guilt that Katsumata could just lie his way through it. If you're wondering why Friend would let Chou investigate that far in the first place, it's most likely because either A) he wanted to expedite things. B) he wanted to see how well his identity was hidden, so he picked the world's greatest detective to try and catch him, and once all the info he could gather was relayed, Friend had no more use for him and so he killed him. I'll discuss the purpose in another analysis). Katsumata's professor tells Chou about how Fukubei bent spoons; nothing of significance is added. Chou dies, we will talk about his finding a bit later since Chou's investigation puts some strain on the version.

Pan to Friend's followers asking about what the cosmos wishes. And, in a pretty hilarious way, Friend responds by saying "the cosmos tells me to make my dream a reality" 🤣. Epitome of self centeredness, imagine believing that the cosmos wants you to make your dream a reality. On a serious note however, this

wouldn't be selfish if only Friend had made an extra clause which said that the cosmos wants different people to do different things, but he didn't.

Friend then says that "Dreams can only be made into reality by those who continuously act on their first impulses", this has multiple meanings. On one hand, you could interpret this as an antithesis to what Kenji will go through. To act on first impulses is what Kenji has been doing for a while now, always taking the easy route out. It's only when he learns responsibility and that he has to overcome those instinctual urges does Kenji finally grow. But then again, this could be taken in a more positive way; if Friend didn't feel that he wanted this out of instinct then all of this has been a lie. We have yet to see how much conviction Friend has and whether he is truly acting on his impulses or not. This line also again references the idea of free will.

Friend then says that his dream is world conquest while adoring a gaping smile, however I don't buy it entirely. He says that this is his goal, yet I think that this is only the beginning, this is what's pre determined, everything that happens after Friend achieves it will no longer be predicted by the cosmos, it will become free will (don't worry about this part but do reference it at the end).


IN DECEMBER OF 2000, HUMANITY WILL BE DESTROYED

Absolutely bone chilling.

Context: we get introduced to God, he can see the future, sometimes, also probably the second funniest character in 20th Century Boys. Predicts some bad stuff will happen soon.

More context: Kiriko is an actual saint, saved Kenji multiple times. She missed the entrance exams to the college she wanted to get into for years just to take Kenji to the hospital because his mom and dad didn't want to do it, literal angel 😭. Kiriko leaving Kanna to Kenji is once again reinstated, but this time it makes less sense to us on why she would do that. Kenji discovers the letter Friend sent to Kiriko. Kiriko is shown once again to be angelic, it's amazing how quickly Urasawa can make you like a character so much. She adopted stray cats and dogs when on a tight budget bruh 😭. And then she got him the guitar he always wanted 😭😭😭.

Kenji has the famous "There, machine gun in hand/ stood an invincible man" scene (he equipped his new guitar for the first time). Then Kenji promptly proceeds to tell his manager off and not give away Kanna.

More More context: Kiriko's bf got killed by Friend's assassin.

Assassin guy and Manjoume glaze Friend

Manjoume says "have you become able to feel as one with the cosmos yet?". Friend is probably just doing some easy propaganda, but it is also just gauging how much Friend is in control of these people.

Assassin emo guy talks about how cool villains are, and acknowledges that he is one. Manjoume says that the villains often lose in drama shows, assassin guy says “this isn't a drama/ This is real life”. Did Friend implant that idea into him? Probably not. However it does add some complexity to Kenji’s theme and how he defeats assassin guy.

Assassin guy seduces the professor's daughter. They talk about robot construction.

Robot and Bloody New Years Eve foreshadowing ensues.

Kenji expresses his surprise about Godzilla being a girl to Kiriko. Just realized that this is foreshadowing for Kiriko being Godzilla, how does Urasawa manage to do it? This makes me infinitely sadder for what's going to come. (Then Kiriki says “it’s weird that she didn’t have a mate”, ahhhhhhh, Friend leaving Kiriko foreshadowinggggg. Also pregnancy foreshadowing ensues)

Friend indirectly manips one of his followers to leave and seek Kenji, which he eventually does, relaying that the events that Friend is accomplishing are actually based on the book of prophecy.

Cut to Kenji, Yoshitsune, Maruo, and Otcho discussing world conquest as kids. Otcho suggests conquering the world instead. Maruo and Yoshitsune daydream about reading all the manga they want and eating anything they want after doing so. Kenji is the only one to object to conquering the world, saying he wants to save it instead (not in such formal language obv).


WITH OUT HOME-WORK
EVERYDAY WOULD BE SUMMER VACATION.
ALL THE FOOD I CAN EAT!!
ALL THE MANGA I CAN READ!!
YOU WOULDN'T HAVE TO DO ANYTHING BOTHER-SOME...
YEAAAAAAHHHH.
DOESN'T WORLD CONQUEST SOUND NICE?
2
I'M TRYING TO THINK OF HOW WE'RE GOING TO SAVE THE WORLD FROM THE BAD GUYS!!
THAT'S NOT WHAT I'M TRYING TO COME UP WITH RIGHT NOW!!
...WAIT, WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?


IF THE BAD GUYS DROPPED A BIG HYDROGEN BOMB, THE GOOD GUYS WOULD ALL DIE AT THE SAME TIME.
REALLY ?
ALL I CAN EAT.
YEAH, BUT SUDDENLY THE BAD GUYS SIDE LOOKS BETTER.
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?! EVIL'S GONNA DESTROY THE WORLD!!
THEN HOW WILL THEY ATTACK, OTCHO?
IF YOU DROPPED A HYDROGEN BOMB, IT'D RUIN THE CITY, RIGHT?
THEY WOULDN'T USE A HYDROGEN BOMB.
3
THERE'S ALL THESE NASTY GERMS EVERY-WHERE,
YEAH, MY SISTER WAS TELLIN' ME,
JERM WARFAIR?
GERM WARFARE.

Establishes Kenji's motive to save the world, which he forgets later in life. It obviously contrasts Friend's goal, which is, as confirmed by M Y and O, to be the easier route. Anybody can conquer the world, but it is much harder to save it; partially because you have to dig deep into yourself to figure out what you truly want.

Foreshadowing for both germ warfare and the bomb.

Kenji will eventually attempt his dream of saving the world once again. I'll try to not talk about Kenji too much since not all of his themes are related to Friend (in fact most of them aren't).

London is next to germ bomb after San Francisco

We discover that Friend has also made the laser gun from Kenji's drawings. As we later learn, it's quite faulty, not a fully functioning one. Again referencing that Friend is a giant fraud, living in a make-believe world. (or not?)

We get further confirmation from the follower who ran away that Donkey never could believe in Friend's lies. Donkey was always logical and empirical; you could say Friend and Donkey are polar opposites, unlike Kenji and Friend. I'll probably reference this later when discussing Kenji and Friend.

Speaking of Kenji, he gets riled up hearing that the follower killed Donkey, so he tries punching him while tears stream from his eyes. Once again showing Kenji's naive yet kind soul. He is not at all jaded yet.

The follower hands Kenji a letter from Donkey and says that he is the only one who can save the world.

End of vol 2.

Volume 3)



I have no clue what the robot is referencing. I'll try to be comprehensive but as you'll notice, I am not an old Japanese pop culture expert, there will definitely be symbolism in some of these references which I just won't be able to see, however I do know of a few thanks to YT comments.

Getting back to the plot, I did forget to mention in vol 2 analysis that the follower was sent by Friend for a reason (by the way, it's not confirmed that Friend sent the follower, however it would make no sense if he didn't, at least indirectly so). The reason being that Friend desperately wanted to reach Kenji, so we know that Friend is guiding Kenji along [and he will proceed to do so for basically the entire series].

Kenji feels all emotions at the current moment, all at once. He is overwhelmed with the duty of caring for Kanna and saving the world.

No amount of analysis from me could capture this moment. I'll let you read it for yourself.


WHAT THE HELL AM I SUPPOSED TO DO?!
CHAPTER 22
HERO WITH A GUITAR


LAZZER GAN
レザーガン
A LASER GUN...
RUST LE
THIS WAS ALSO YOUR IDEA, WASN'T IT?
HAHH
HAHH


KENJI
ケンヂ
LAZZER BEAM
しゃーっビーム
WEIGHT 1 MILLION TONS
HEIGHT 50 METERS
GIANT ROBOT
きょだいロボット
たかさ50メートル
おもさ100まんトン
ケンヂ
KENJI
I...
I...
I...

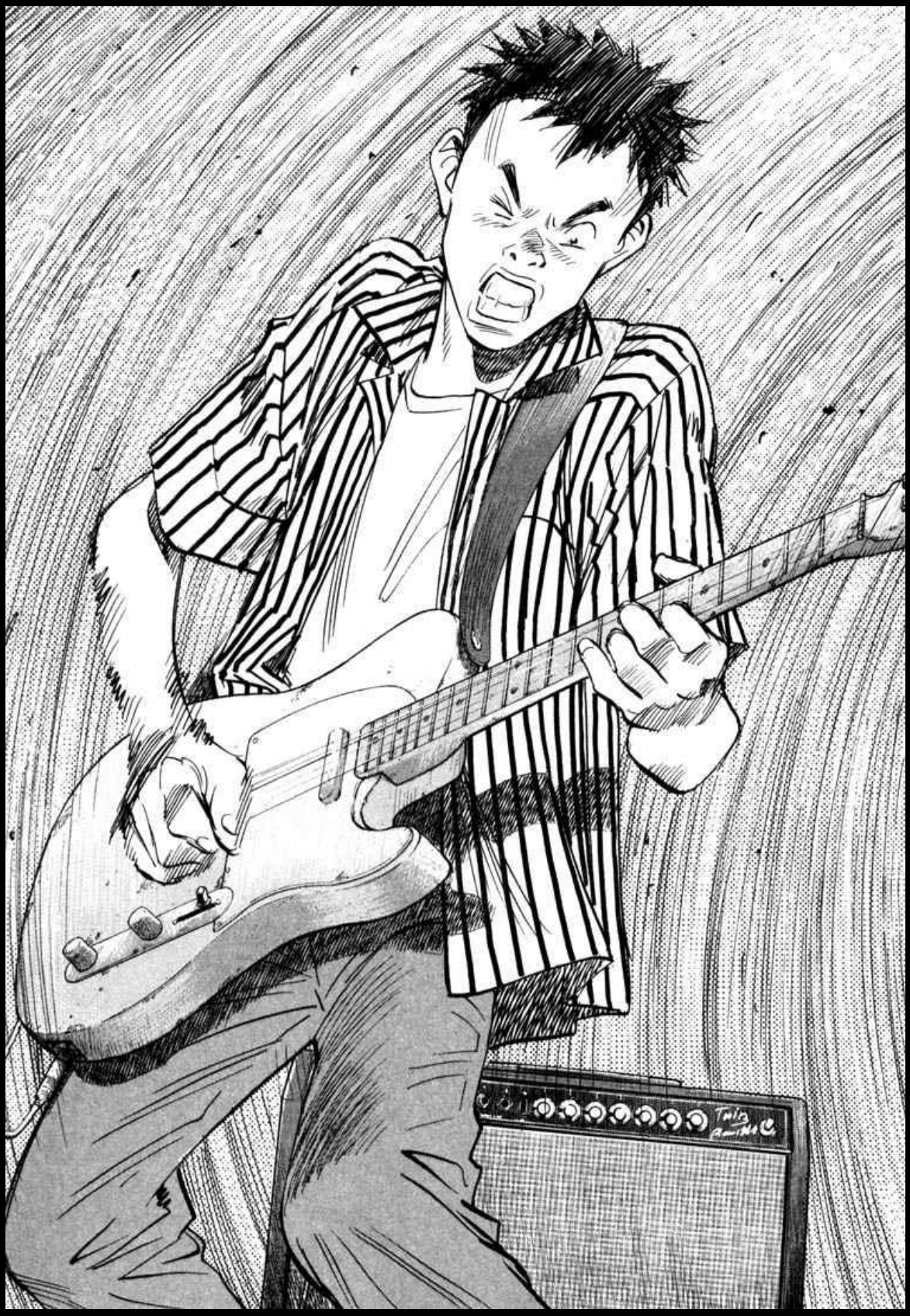

DONKEY...
TO KENJI...
I PRAY THIS LETTER REACHES YOUR HANDS SAFELY.
AT FIRST, I THOUGHT "FRIEND" WAS YOU.
SO THERE WERE A FEW TIMES I CHECKED UP ON YOU.
I'M IN SERIOUS DANGER RIGHT NOW. PLEASE FORGIVE THE MESSY WRITING.


YOU'RE NOT "FRIEND".
BUT YOU WERE WORKING HARD IN YOUR STORE EVERYDAY, WITH THAT CHILD ON YOUR BACK.
IT'S CLEAR THAT HE MUST BE ONE OF OUR OLD CIRCLE.
WHO IS "FRIEND"?
YOU'RE MY OLD FRIEND.
"FRIEND" IS REALLY TRYING TO DESTROY THE WORLD.
THE SITUATION IS MORE DIRE THAN I THOUGHT.
ONE OF US WHO KNEW ALL THE THINGS YOU MADE UP.


THAT WE WOULD SAVE THE WORLD...
WE MADE AN OATH... UNDER THAT FLAG...
14
THE WORLD.
SO YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE..
WHO CAN SAVE...
20


DONKEY
...
ガラ
ドサッ
ドサッ
カッ
15


!!
YAAAWN.
WHAT IS THAT STUPID BOY...
W... WHAT'S HE DOING?! IT'S THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT!!
W... WHAT THE?!



Simply brilliant.

The first couple pages following that chapter are equally brilliant.

Now I want to make a Kenji writing doc.

We learn that Friend is holding a concert (now his cult has 50k members)

It's also the 169th concert. The number 169 symbolizes "making room in your soul for new experiences", not sure if Urasawa intended that or not but it definitely sounds like something Friend would mean.

Kenji confronts it.

In the concert hall all the Friend members are watching all sorts of performances ranging from stand up comedy to songs, all of which make the audience laugh hysterically. Kenji seems to be the only one who's not amused by this.

I couldn't get a hold of anything which these performances resemble (Kenji doesn't recognize them either which also adds onto my conclusion). Conclusion is that they're most likely gibberish. The members aren't laughing at the jokes as much as they're laughing at the idea of a joke itself if that makes sense. They are incredibly lost, yet this isn't uncommon in the real world either. Many people laugh at things which they don't find funny, but are supposed to find funny, something resembling instinct forms in themselves, forcing them to laugh. These people are taking the easy route. They're not finding their true selves, what

they're doing is clinging onto others and trying to form a bond made out of straw. The bond is weak, it has no real nuance or depth, it's just a facade to avoid loneliness and the real world (guess who that's similar to).

Next comes the rock portion.

A band gets up onto the stage and starts performing "rock". They start saying their slogan[?] which is just English for "I rock you", nothing of substance. Kenji immediately picks up on this and much more. His face shrivels up with disgust. He says that while there's no definition to rock, this definitely isn't it, he can't call this rock.

Why does Kenji say this?

Because Friend's cult and Friend himself could never figure it out; they don't know what rock is. They sing it soullessly, with no emotion, with no passion, with no ambition in their hearts, and with no love in their souls. It's a really interesting scene in my opinion because Kenji can't figure out what's wrong with the rock they're playing. Consciously he can't reason through it; however, his subconscious does see through it. He can sense that the passion isn't there, that the motto is folly, that the people cheering aren't really cheering.

Kenji could tolerate all the other portions of the concert but not this one. Rock is special to Kenji, it makes him who he is. This is a disgrace to the art of rock. Friend doesn't understand the passion behind it, he doesn't understand the loss of trying to achieve it, he only believes rock to be the thing that it is on its surface. He tries replicating it as if almost to say "look, I can do it too. So why isn't my rock the same as yours? Why is your rock so invincible and mine so superficial and flaky?"

This part is very important when interpreting the ending, this above all else you should keep tucked somewhere in the back of your head.

Kenji is now fully locked in.

Members try taking him up onto the stage but he shoves them aside and does it himself. Kenji grabs the mike forcefully and shouts that Friend is a murderer. He says that he knows the location of the next virus outbreak, when suddenly, right behind him, Friend floats down and asks Kenji "What's the next place?/ Kenji-kun".

The crowd, which has been dead pan since Kenji started speaking, suddenly erupts into applause as Friend makes way onto the stage.

Chapter ends by the way

Kanna shenanigans happen

Cut back to Friend approaching Kenji out of the shadows, and what do we see but the Hattori ninja mask.

Friend says 'long time no see Kenji-kun' which could be both him referring to himself (obv) not seeing Kenji since childhood *and* he could also mean the ninja mask, a comic/anime that Kenji probably hasn't seen in decades (he forgot his child side). We'll be discussing the masks separately and also much much later.

Friend keeps goading Kenji about the location of the next outbreak until Kenji remembers it. Osaka is next.

Friend mocks Kenji by saying "ah, that's right/ Osaka! Of course" as if he hasn't already made all the necessary preparations for it.

After Kneji replies with a “huh?” Friend just stares into his soul. It’s a really easy-to-miss panel, this is the first time I really thought about it, however it’s quite amusing.



You can feel anger and fury fuming out of that mask. I would really love to know what Friend is thinking at this moment, however we don’t get that closure.

Friend then proceeds to introduce the audience to Kenji, saying that Kenji is “the great prophet”. Does Katsumata imagine Kenji to be Christ? No. Isaiah? Probably not. He’s just referring to Kenji making the original book of prophecy. He’s also once again emotionally torturing Kenji, which will set him up for the later chapters.

Kenji then calls Friend a murder and points the laser gun at him, threatening to shoot for the sake of his next victims [and to avenge Donkey/the people of SF and London. Take note of the way Kenji deals with Friend here.

Friend actually acknowledges this out-of-character behaviour from Kenji: “That’s unlike you, to point a gun./You’re not the type of person who does that.”. It catches Kenji off guard and us the readers as well.

Friend continues by saying that Kenji can’t shoot him, for one very important reason. “You can’t shoot…/Kanna’s father, can you?”, then “You are my little brother”.

Urasawa hits us in the gut once again. We can now piece together that Friend manipulated Kiriko and got her pregnant, then left her. This is especially gut wrenching as we’ve just seen Kiriko save Kenji three separate times, then gifted him the one thing he wanted (a guitar), the same guitar that he just used to announce that he would save the world. Friend is an absolute villain. Impregnating and abandoning a person’s sister then leaving the baby to them so he can then manipulate that baby into doing obscene things as well just to get revenge on the person is…Satan levels of evil. He also says “you are my little brother”, I think that’s referring to Friend being Kenji’s brother-in-law (I wish the translators noted that). Friend is now Kenji’s family, technically. It’s interesting that that is the dialogue that Friend chose instead of “I am Kiriko’s husband”, it just further exemplifies his obsession with Kenji.

Sadly, the Friend cult members aren’t too happy with Kenji pointing a gun at their leader, so while most of the members turn happy after Friend relays the new family connection, Friend’s bodyguards are still quite upset, thus they throw him out (he gets carried through the crowd). Outside, Kenji remembers Katsumata with the Hattori mask on (it’s not Sadakiyo) chanting “let’s play Kenji-kun”.

Yukiji reminds Kenji of the class gathering that's about to happen, Kenji goes. Kenji recognizes a lot of faces, all of which turned out just like they had hoped, hardly changing (unlike him). While others he doesn't recognize at all, I'd say 50/50 ratio.

Kenji remarks that memory is such a fickle thing (I wonder what that's referencing), when a mysterious figure taps him on the shoulder.

Intro 4, the human) It's Hattori. Kenji can't remember his name but comes up with Fukubei; whether it's his real name is uncertain (real name as in the name that Katsumata came up with). Hattori remarks that he's too old to be called Fukubei (irony). Hattori, for the first time, doesn't lie by saying that his wife was caught up in a creepy cult (his cult, wife is Kiriko), which immediately grabs Kenji's attention. Throughout his dialogue with Kenji, Hattori doesn't share too much disdain for the cult, whether this is intentional or not is up to you.

Hattori lists the members one by one. Hattori, Kenji, Yoshitsune, Maruo, Frog, Mon, and then "there's one more". Hattori's choice to include himself when listing the group members is an obvious appeal to his narcissistic and almost vulnerable personality. Hattori wasn't part of the main group, not even close, but he's probably very giddy being able to say that he was.

Is Friend expressing himself when he poses as Fukubei? Yes. The full extent of it isn't revealed yet but I do believe on some level this is cathartic for Fukubei, especially the later portions. It's as if Fukubei is back with the Kenji faction, making bitter-sweet memories. This shows one of his complexity/depth layers. His desire to both destroy Kenji and play with him. He wants both, and so he tries to accomplish both. He is in a state of

undecidedness. He tries hard to do both, yet he can stick with neither. Which one will he choose? Does he even want to choose one?

Fukubei then mentions how he went to the secret base since he always thought that Kenji and the others seemed so relaxed there. This kind of contradicts him being part of the main group, so he basically plainly states that he wasn't really part of it.

He tries to frame Sadakiyo as being Friend. However the professor interrupts Kenji. In that process the spoon bending controversy is mentioned (Friend planned for this as well). Kenji's classmates sort of loosely remember it. Basically, one day in the cafeteria someone (Katsumata) bent all the spoons, the professor did a "everyone close your eyes and whoever did it raise your hand" thing. He figured out who it was from that but has forgotten it since then (memory motif again, actually it comes up a lot but I won't always be mentioning it).

[back to 1997] One of the students suggests they do the test again to see who did it. Fukubei and Kenji make a mutual expression of acknowledging the silliness of the situation (idk what else to call it) and so the test starts again.



(Seriously what would you call this)

Katsumata supposedly raises his hand. The professor asks why and how he did it. No response.

I wonder if Katsumata really did raise his hand that day. It's intentionally unclear (for now). Did he let his narcissism win or was he deceptive as always and let someone else raise their hand, who knows. I believe in the former [I've definitely never read this before], however I don't think it was out of pride or narcissism. I think due to Friend's indirect manipulation on Chou we can assume that Friend did this intentionally and then raised his hand accordingly, once again showing a sort of pride, though I don't think it's the traditional type of pride.

Some time passes and everyone gets drunk (some more than others). Fukubei pretends to be drunk, a babysitter calls him, Fukubei hands the phone to Kenji. Kenji is very disoriented at this point, I think anyone would be. Fukubei could be trying to gather sympathy from Kenji here, both for tactical reasons and selfish reasons.

They reach "Fukubei's apartment". The apartment number is 606. What does 606 represent? The number itself represents love and growth. Though, 606 is very close to 666, only one line stroke away in fact. My interpretation is that this is a reference to Katsumata being Lucifer/Satan, however if you think this is a stretch then let it be so.

Katsumata relays Sadakiyo's name to Kenji, now all suspicions are on him.

Again, Katsumata really is the devil. His actions are reprehensible. He abuses and points the blame on one of his only friends

(something which he's supposed to care a lot about, yet he doesn't truly understand what a friend is so he obviously doesn't).

Kenji and drunk Fukubei exchange some unimportant dialogue before Fukubei goes to sleep. Just before Kenji leaves, he notices a copy of 20th Century Boys on the desk next to a speaker.

Still stuck in the past. We'll get to know later how he even found out about 20th Century Boys but for now we'll just conclude with this. Katsumata still remembers that one fateful day very clearly, and while playing the song he most definitely remembers Kenji. But why does 20th Century Boys give Kenji an invincible feeling? Friend can't understand.

Kenj visits Maruo to get the yearbook photos. He discusses Sadakiyo briefly. The important part that he mentions is "Sadakiyo, always communicating with aliens on the rooftop", we'll come back to this later.

Airport double bombing happens.

Manjoume reminds Kenji that Kanna might be in danger alone (as a threat obviously)



Again, this shows Friend's struggle to understand his feelings towards Kenji. He goes from a great prophet to a demon in the span of chapters.

Kanna's importance in the series is very complicated. We won't discuss her right now, for now she's just a tool to get Kenji to go up against the world.

The followers fail the mission. Before it started the leader's assistant reassured the leader in his leadership. They agreed that

their friendship was strong, that they were friends. Yet…

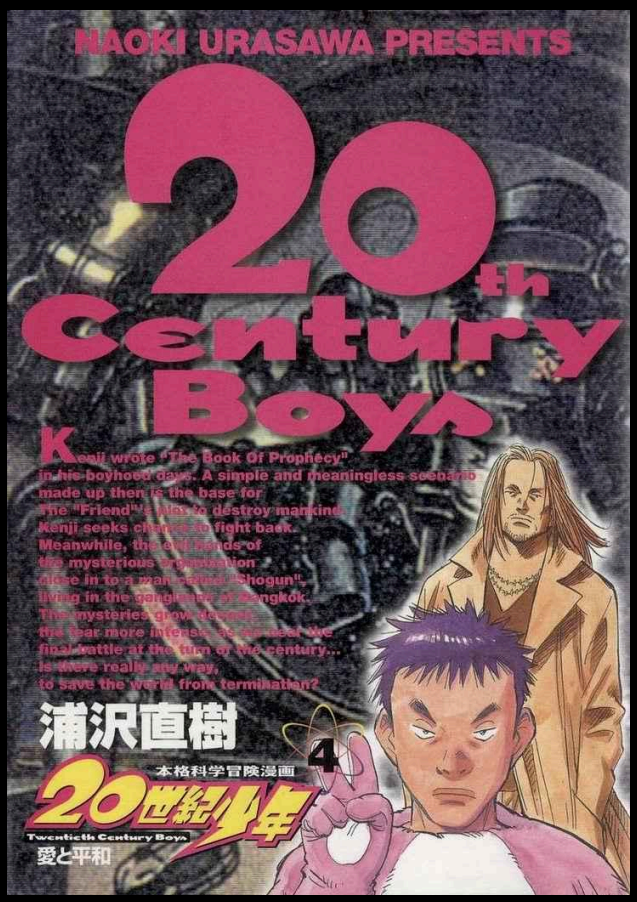


Parallels how Fukubei treated Sadakiyo. 20th Century Boys is abundant in parallels, symbolism, etc, I'll try to cover the important ones only.

Store is burned down. Kenji digs up the book of prophecy.

Otcho/Shogun appears, the story will focus on him for a bit.

Volume 4)



Friend's Otcho guiding strat happens.

Also one of Friend's victims mentioned a "stolen badge" when talking about Friend. I don't think he's mentioning Katsumata's badge but I do indeed think this was foreshadowing from Urasawa. Actually, considering that Friend told that guy about Book of Prophecy, it's possible he told the victim about the badge as well, possibly another clue for Otcho and Kenji. (240 chapter foreshadowing ☠️).

Flashback) Yoshitsune and Maruo are distraught over their base getting demolished by Yanbo and Mabo. Kenji on the other hand

says that homework is much more important than their summer base, since they don't even use it anymore, however his face seems to show an opposite reaction. Even homework cannot conquer Kenji's soul, so he goes and confronts the bullies. Otcho, who seemed to be insistent on his "love and peace ideology" (he got it from a hippy) comes and helps Kenji, saying that "love and peace/ are on hold.".

Otcho destroys Friend's drug factory. The drug they produced could make people go to the past, it was called "Rainbow Kid". Perhaps Friend thought this was the best and worst kind of drug.

As Otcho makes it back to Japan, we see a member of the Friendship party help a grandma cross the street. He says he did it because he's a member of the friendship party. Friend once again shows that the teachings he gives to his members are faulty and superficial.

Kenji meets up with Otcho and informs him of the robot. We learn that professor Shikishima completed the robot because the Friendship party kidnapped his sister.

Cut to the Friendship party discussing the details of the robot. Take note that these people are at the absolute top of the Friendship party, right below Manjoume.

One insists to the professor that the robot has to be 50 meters tall even when the professor tells him that it's impossible. Two of the members suggest that the robot should be able to fly. One of them thinks that shape is most important. An industrial designer

and a system engineer present their model of the robot. It's a toy gundam. They show the robot shooting off one of its arms. The two of them then have an argument over whether the robot should have a cockpit or be remote controlled. The professor isn't amused to say the least.

Manjoume then goes to Friend to consult him on what his opinion is. Friend says that the robot should be both remote controlled and have a cockpit, and that it should be powered by atomic energy. The professor is about to leave the meeting when Manjoume threatens him once again. Manjoume says that they must create the god of destruction at all costs.

Besides the possible Shiva reference, we learn a lot about the Friend party. They're children. They're stuck in the past somewhat as shown by the gundam robot. And all but one of them is incredibly incompetent (Manjoume is solo carrying). When reading this I found Manjoume's behaviour quite strange. I didn't mind when he smiled at the brainwashed subjects, however I was a bit perplexed that he didn't care that even the highest ranking subjects were incompetent. I then remembered how good Friend's charisma is. At this point Manjoume himself is fairly desensitized as well. The reason I'm talking about the Friend cult isn't only to show how Friend teaches his members, but also because the cult is a reflection of Friend. It's as Sherlock Holmes said 'a dog reflects its owners. A violent dog will usually have violent owners. A timid dog will have timid owners.', these people are a reflection of Friend's own mind.

Kenji tracks down the professor's daughter, who tells him this:



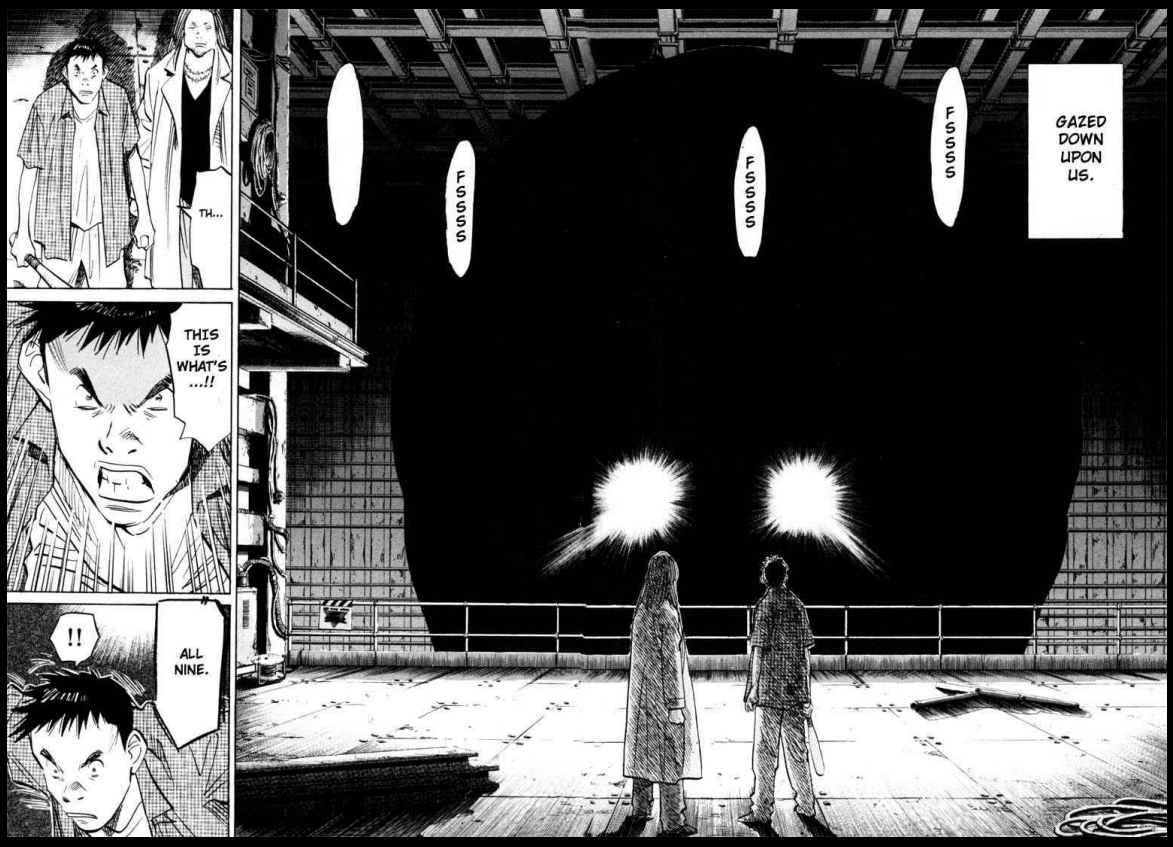
Friend sees Kenji and his faction as “demons”. With Kenji being the leader of it, we can assume Kenji to be Satan (Otcho would probably be Beelzebub, etc etc). It goes nicely with Friend being Jesus. Just as Paradise Lost goes, the two sides will have an epic battle, where Friend will win. Kenji is currently in the underworld [hell] but will rise once more to defeat the kingdom of heaven. If we want to go further with the symbolism we could: Kanna would be death (Divine Comedy and Paradise Lost reference), Yama and

Sadakiyo would be Adam and Eve (Paradise Lost) who both eventually betray god (Katsumata, not Fukubei)(this would make both of them Judas in their own way. However, Yamane is the only one who is referred to as Judas directly.), Kiriko would be the Virgin Mary.

Flashback) Kenji and Otcho try retrieving a lost ball from a dark cave. Kenji is courageous at first but soon says "F…Forget about it, let's go back…//It's okay!! I don't want to be a hero after all!"

Eventually the two run away after their lost ball bounces back. Still, this is important characterization for Kenji. I will try to bring up most instances of this.

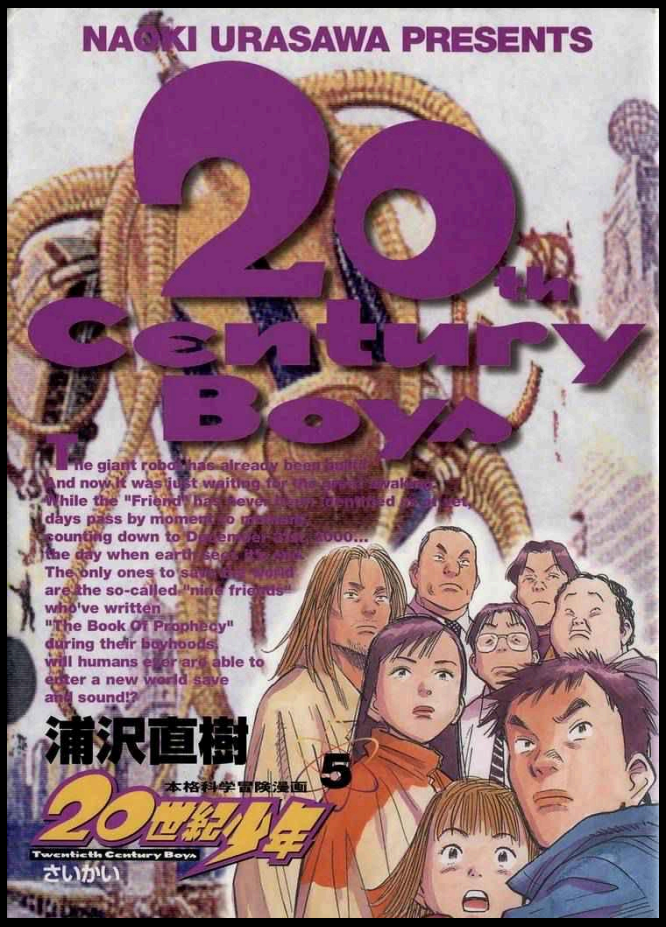
Kenji and Otcho try to find the place where Otcho saw the robot. They manage to do so. There Kenji sees a VCR and plays it. Friend then appears on the screen and tells Kenji to get ready and to gather everyone. The ball that they lost back then, once again, bounces back out of the darkness. (We can speculate that the person in the cave was most likely Yamane, possibly with Fukubei since the rumor went that the person in the cave was a mushroom grower.){Correction: it's extremely likely that Fukubei was there with Yamane. It's possible that he was even there alone.}


TH...
THIS IS WHAT'S ...!!
!!
ALL NINE.
FSSSS
FSSSS
FSSSS
GAZED DOWN UPON US.



Pretty clear what Friend wants.

Volume 5)



Kenji sends invites to everyone who “saw the book of prophecy” to try to get at least 9 members. Only 7 show up, that being Kenji, Yukiji, Yoshitsune, Maruo, Mon, Fukubei, and Otcho. Keryon doesn’t show up. Konchi also doesn’t show up as we’ll see later. Yanbo and Mabo also don’t show up since they’re part of the Friendship party (also I don’t know why Kenji invited them? Maybe as back ups? He says that he invited people who have seen the BoP yet Yanbo and Mabo haven’t…)

Kenji leaves Kanna to his mother. He tells them that they have to leave Tokyo. It is an absolutely heartbreaking moment, and one which Kanna will remember for the rest of her childhood and teen years.

The faction gets prepared by getting guns and dynamite. Fukubei makes funny faces which further enhances my theory that he's secretly enjoying himself immensely during this sequence.



(I will be showing all goofy Fukubei faces. Keeps me sane)

Their base gets busted thanks to Yanbo and Mabo, they now live in the sewers. All are trying their hardest to catch Friend (find out what he's doing).

Fukubei also says that they set up a bug in Manjoume's office, which I have to question for a second. How? I assume Fukubei just used his influence but how did Kenji think that plan would work??

Fukubei also questions whether Friend is even real, however Friend's existence is confirmed by Kenji and Otcho.

Just as Kenji is about to give up, the diet building explodes and the next prophecy is fulfilled. Could this be Fukubei trying to gauge how loyal Kenji is to the cause and his heroism over his and his friend's own sake [and the chance that any of this is even

real]? Maybe. Fukubei certainly could have been curious, and likely was. 

Kenji plays his song the last time before Bloody New Years Eve happens. Two guys tell him that his songs are strange but actually pretty good. A couple of lines ensue and then Kenji says this: “When the time comes, there’ll be something you have to do, no matter how much you hate it./That’s when you have to be serious…”

It’s a very wise insight. However, it is not yet genuine.

Friend starts BNYE. Terrorism reigns over all countries.

Right before they go to fight the robot, Yoshitsune asks Otcho how he created the symbol.


SHONEN SUNDAY ...?
WHAT DOES THAT MANGA MAGA-ZINE HAVE TO DO WITH IT?
FLIP FLIP
I'D ALWAYS KIND OF WONDERED ABOUT IT.
THIS LITTLE HAND THING...



I like to imagine that that was Fukubei's actual reaction to seeing how nonsensical the method to creating the symbol was.



Andddddd…Timeskip.

We've reached the end of 20th Century Boys's first part. Pat yourself on the back, that was a wild ride, you made it.

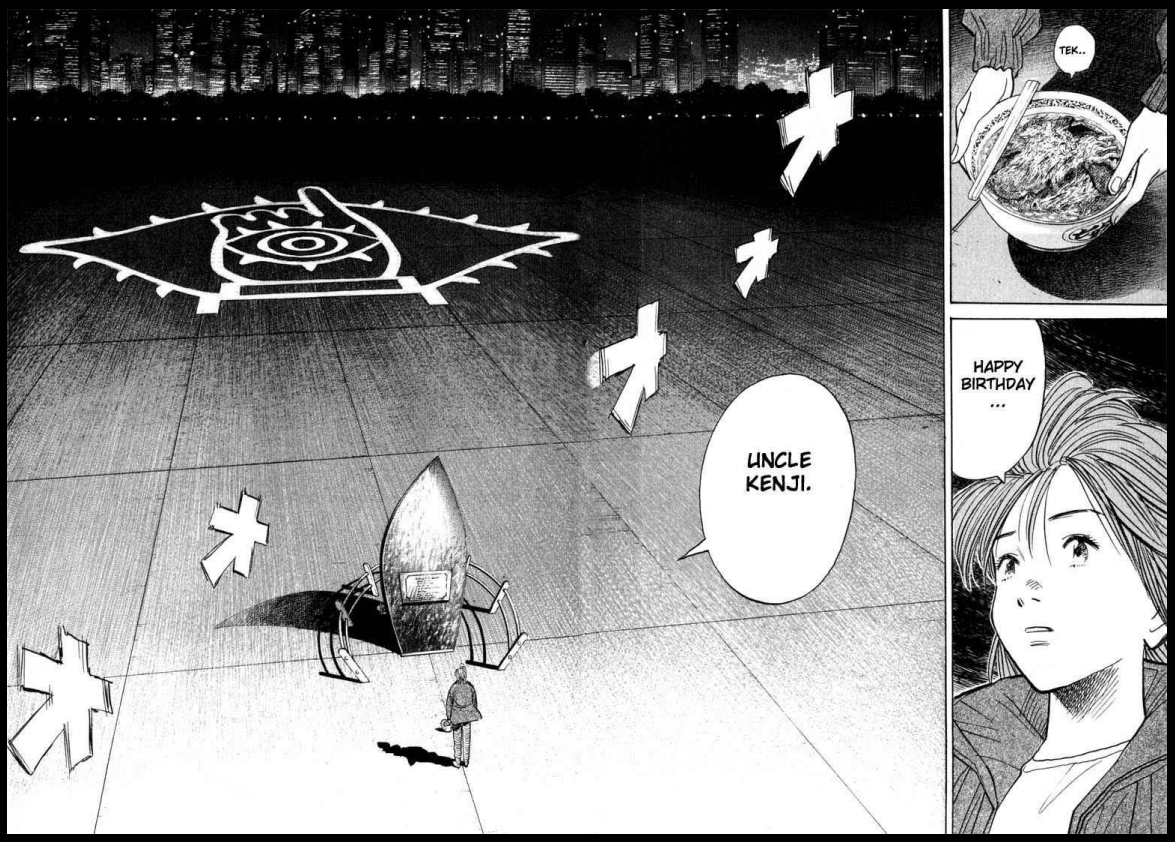
Ignoring Friend, this was an absolutely beautiful segment on its own. Probably my second favourite part of the entire series, maybe third.

Great mystery aspect to Friend in the first 50 chapters, even better catharsis when revisiting them.

2014) We now follow the perspective of Kanna, and thus Friend is shown quite a bit less.

I will thus be skipping a good portion of chapters as they don't have much Friend content.

If you want to remember what happened then read it, starting at chapter 50. I will only be providing a brief summary.



(Friend can’t even let Kenji rest in the afterlife 😭. Blud wants to be Judge Holden so badly.)



(Friend hubris is so big he had to remind the world of his kill count, even Chou 😭)

The first new aspect of the Friend society that we notice is censorship. No one can write about heroes saving the world, people rebelling, or anything of the sort. It's just *1984* mixed in with *It's Hard to be a God.* (Might reference the latter a bit later, already mentioned the former)



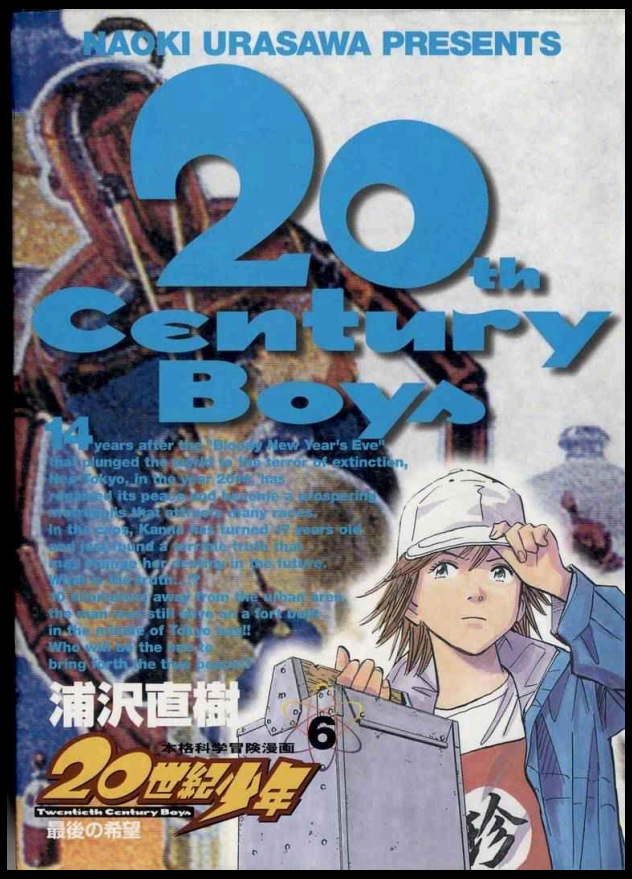
●「週刊ビッグコミック スピリッツ」2000年第48号～第50号、2001年第1号～第10号掲載作品

BROUGHT TO YOU BY BAND OF THE HAWK AND MANGA SCREENER

Totally not a Big Brother reference in the slightest.

It horrifies me every time, both Friend and Big Brother.

Volume 6)



Drawing further parallels from dictators, Friend's methodology is very precise.

He first indoctrinates desperate citizens, who, on the surface, look like they're being rescued.

Then he indoctrinates the police. (Authority figures)

Then he pushes his members into government office.

He kills opposition. Both in the government and simply other religious leaders.

Then their group saves the world.

Even more censorship. (This is very important since without it, CA looks a bit more vulnerable)

Symbol is put up even more.

Influencing the school curriculum into putting out propaganda for the students which we'll see later.

People who make art which violates the expectations, they get sent to prison.

Etc etc.

Extremely bone-shaking stuff.





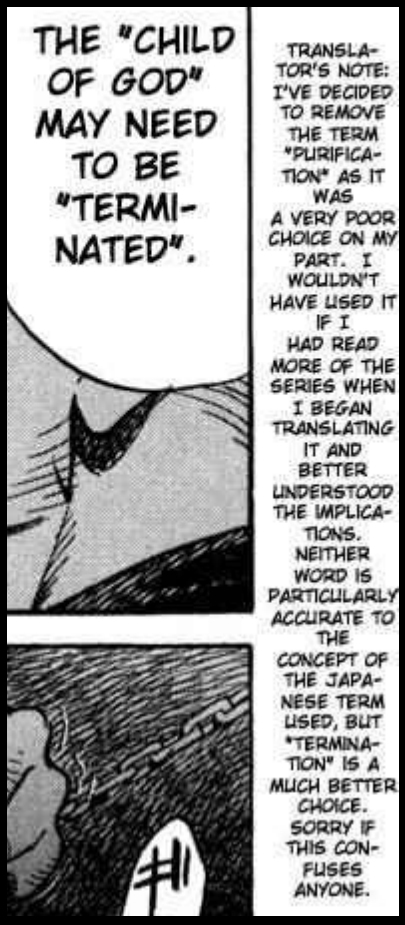
(Brutal)

Flashback) Kenji and the others discuss “The Great Escape”. Kenji expresses his desire to “save the world” once again, even if he can’t at all imagine how he would actually do it. I personally love these flashbacks, even if they don’t add the most profound messages sometimes, they sure are enjoyable.



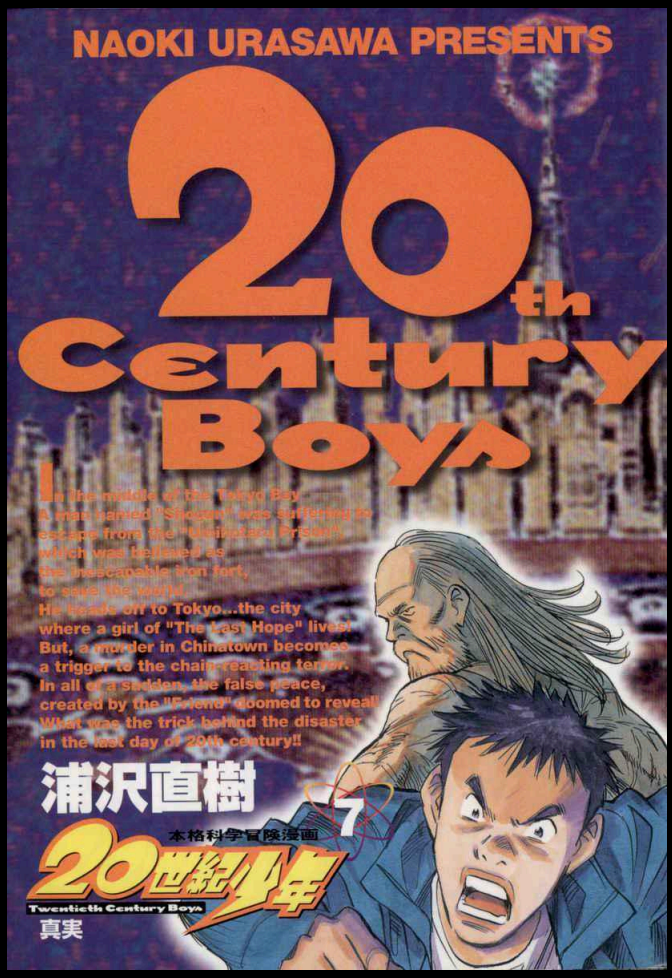
"Only the guys who believe they'll live will survive/ Those two guys have power in their eyes"

Otcho taking that message to heart is incredibly wholesome.



I'm still going to use the term "purification", at least for the previous scenes as it ties into the religious themes.

Volume 7)



Otcho escaped prison

God “went to space”


WHAT A STUPID THING TO COMPETE OVER!!
IT'S BEEN 2 MINUTES ALREADY...
THEY'RE TRYING TO SEE WHO CAN HOLD HIS BREATH UNDERWATER THE LONGEST...
WHA...
HUH? I THOUGHT THEY WERE ARGUING OVER WHO FOUND THE CRAWDAD POND FIRST.
HUH ?
IT'S OVER THE BEETLE TREE.
THEY BOTH FOUND THE SAME TREE, SO THEY WERE ARGUING OVER WHO FOUND IT FIRST...
3
I'M GOING TO GET THEM RIGHT N...
WELL, I'M NOT GOING TO GET IN TROUBLE FOR ANY ACCIDENTS CAUSED BY SUCH A RIDICULOUS THING!!
BOYS ARE SO STUPID.
NO... THEY WERE ARGUING OVER WHO WON THE IMPOSSIBLE-TO-WIN NUMBER PRIZE AT THE JIJIBABA STORE FIRST.


SOME-ONE'S UP...
!!
BUHAAAAAAH!!
WHICH ONE?!
OTCHO !!
ZEH AAA AH..
ZEH AAA AH ...
IT'S...
WHICH MEANS THAT... !!
ZEH AAA AH ...
ZEH AAA AH ...
OTCHO LOST!!


KENJI WON!!
GAHAAAAAAAH!!
THE RIGHTS TO THAT SUMMER'S BEETLES AND CRAWDADS WENT TO KENJI...
ZEH AAA AH ...
HEY !!
BU HA AA AA H...
ZEH AAA AH ...
AND IT BECAME KENJI WHO WON THE NUMBER PRIZE AT JIJIBABA.
BUH AAA AAH ...
BUT WHAT STUNG MOST OF ALL...
BUH AAA AAH ...
WAS THAT KENJI...
BUH AAA AAH ...



Amazing scene.

Also Keryon foreshadowing the badge is crazy.



The expo is introduced for the first time.

We get retold that Kenji desperately wanted to go to it (Otcho, Yoshitsune, and Donkey as well). Kenji, with great grief, learned that his dad booked a trip to a beach that day, so he could not attend. Donkey couldn't either since he was poor, and sadly his bike idea did not go through. Yoshitsune made it to the expo but fainted due to a sun stroke. Otcho seemed to enjoy it, Maruo too.

Friend is obviously behind the expo. We'll learn later as to why.

Skip to Koizumi, AKA my second favourite character. She's a junior in highschool and has just randomly picked to do a free report on Kenji Endou, the terrorist.

Her teacher reminisces about BNYE. 'If Friend wasn't there, the world would have come to an end' etc etc. Friend has basically turned himself into a world saviour by using propaganda. He obviously made Kenji the devil.

Koizumi is suspicious of the photo [of the gang in front of the robot] since she thinks that Kenji wouldn't endanger himself like that. The teacher replies that they had a remote, however Koizumi says that it doesn't appear as if they do in the photo. To me it looks like they could, so I think Koizumi was just trying to make a quick rebuttal. It's up to you though.

Koizumi goes to the "'Friend' Peace Memorial" and meets God (Also, the Friend Peace Memorial is incredibly devastating and funny. Reminds me of "The Ministry of Love").

God and Otcho proceed to retell BNYE.



Kenji goes to stop the person with the remote control (the person who controls the robot) when he sees Fukubei pointing a gun at Friend.

I believe that Friend (Fukubei) is portraying the first signs of his very ontological nature.

Fukubei then gives a monologue to who he calls “Sadakiyo”.

In my opinion this is one of the greatest monologues in manga. It is one of the highlights of 20th Century Boys, especially to those rereading it.

Paraphrased: “My wife was dragged…no…abducted into your cult! Every night my kids cry for their mom. It was partially my fault isn’t it, I had other women as well at the time. You’re Sadakiyo…aren’t you? [Kenji questions Fukubei by saying that he thought Sadakiyo died back in middle school] Who told you that Kenji? [Maruo, he heard a rumor] I heard it from a friend of a friend. There’s nothing as suspicious as a rumor from a friend of a friend. It’s my fault isn’t it. You’re getting back at me, aren’t you? Because of what happened back then, right? I was your only friend Sadakiyo. And when your bullying got worse you said to ‘keep being my friend’, but I was afraid that I would be bullied too so I told you ‘shut up, you’re not my friend’. What do I have to do? Do I have to die to satisfy you? Will you stop these atrocities if I do? You stole my wife out of hatred, seduced Kenji’s sister, killed Donkey, and even created the robot! [Fukubei crying] Just stop it! That’s enough! [Fukubei starts climbing the fence to get to Friend/Sadakiyo] I’m sorry for all the trouble; Sadakiyo and I weren’t even original members. But when I watched you I couldn’t help but want to join in. I brought Sadakiyo to the fort, he’s my responsibility. I wasn’t one of the original members but I did see

the end of the secret base (ceremony). I remember your last words clearly 'The next time we dig this up…/ Is when The Earth is in grave danger!!/ And then we'll save the planet from the enemy'. [To Sadakiyo] Now give me the controller. Let's bring this to an end. Give it to me! How long are you going to keep wearing that stupid mask! [Falls] It's not Sadakiyo."

Phew. Fukubei really conjured up his inner Hamlet for this one.

Let us immediately take note that the person who's saying all of this is Fukubei, it's not Katsumata (Katsumata's intention that is, might not be true on a more grand scale).

This section is extremely complicated to digest.

Fukubei is an ego of Katsumata. The interesting part is where you take this scene based on that fact. I believe that Fukubei here is talking to both Sadakiyo and Katsumata at the same time.

Also, it is very important that Friend (supposedly Sadakiyo) is wearing a Hattori mask, not the Sadakiyo mask. This gives further credence to this Friend being Katsumata and not Sadakiyo.

The first important line is "You're Sadakiyo, aren't you?", he says it twice. If we assume that this is Fukubei talking to Katsumata then this is actually quite a good parallel with a scene which happens much later in the manga, specifically the one where Katsumata questions who he is. One of the lines which Katsumata says is "Are you Sadakiyo?". We then see a bit of Katsumata starting to leak from Fukubei, or maybe it's Fukubei talking. When Kenji question Sadakiyo's current mortality status, Fukubei answers that you can't believe something that a friend heard from a friend. This can be traced to a lot of things. Firstly, it is a reference to the "copy of a copy" theme in 21st Century Boys, secondly it

references how Katsumata's death was just a rumor. Katsumata let a bit of himself slip there, mainly out of anger. Not that it affects the situation in any way, but it is noteworthy. Katsumata is still mad about being forgotten. The next lines may seem like it's Fukubei simply making up stuff about Sadakiyo, however I think these lines are from Fukubei to Katsumata. Fukubei knows that Katsumata is trying to kill him off because he hates him, it shows a keen level of self awareness which makes Katsumata's character all the more complex. The next lines however are to Sadakiyo, they are surface level but they do show, again, a level of self awareness. Fukubei knew he was abusing Sadakiyo. The next lines are where it gets even more interesting. "Do I have to die to satisfy you", Fukubei again recognizes that Katsumata wants to kill him, Katsumata knows that he can't stand Fukubei anymore, yet he also knows that killing Fukubei won't stop his plan, it will not satisfy him. He then recognizes that he wasn't one of the original members. He wanted to join so badly yet he never could. The line Fukubei remembers is important, though he probably thinks of Kenji as the enemy. The second to last line also has a similar effect. Fukubei says to Katsumata to take off the stupid mask. He recognizes his own childishness, he recognizes his cruelty, he recognizes his shallowness, yet he can't stop it, this is his inner turmoil.

(I love this scene so much. You could interpret it in fifty different ways and all of them would be entertaining. Is Fukubei telling this to Katsumata? Is Katsumata telling this to Fukubei? Is Fukubei/Katsumata telling this to Sadakiyo? Extremely entertaining for me. The best part is that in all versions this is a sort of vent for Fukubei. Fukubei relies on ontology a lot in his monologues. He sees himself from the sidelines, not as himself, double so for Fukubei but this also applies to Katsumata. He

knows that he is childish, he knows that he is a liar, but he tries to convince himself he's not, and it seems to be working to some effect for now (we will see later whether this is true or not).

Flashback to early 2000) Fukubei is telling Kenji that he wants to make Ken-Chan rice (Kenji's rice) for his kids on Christmas (today). He asks Kenji how he makes it. Kenji gives what seems like a normal recipe for fried rice, Fukubei points that out. Kenji says that there's one secret ingredient, Fukubei asks him what it is. "You gotta scream, 'Be yummy!!' While you cook it."

Fukubei says that only Kenji would do something that stupid and that it was a mistake asking him, with a smile on his face of course.

Fukubei reaffirms Kenji's character in his mind.

As he's walking away he says this to Kenji: "Hey Kenji…/ Thanks a lot for letting me into…/ Your group of friends.", then the flashback gets distorted, almost VR style.

I believe that Katsumata does truly think that Fukubei is now in the Kenji faction, at least to some extent. This line will get blurry during 2015 but we'll get there when we get there.

It could also be Katsumata thanking Kenji for allowing him to see, once again, what he can't understand. Their friendship. He almost can't stand it, and that's why he is so fascinated with it. He hates Kenji the most by far, we will see the definitive answer much later, however we already have plenty of hints as to why.

Back to BNYE, Otcho is telling the operators to stop the robot, however they can't stop laughing. When Otcho forcefully

questions them on why the robot hasn't stopped (since Friend was supposedly killed by Fukubei), the operator says that 'though the remote control fell, don't forget that Friend can float', foreshadowing the fact that Fukubei didn't die, and that that definitely wasn't the real Friend. The operator then tells Otcho that the robot has a cockpit as well, as planned by Friend.

Kenji plans on driving the truck full of dynamite to presumably do a suicide mission, or at the very least a mission that heavily risks his life. Maruo also gets in the truck.

Maruo finds Fukubei's cassette tape in the truck. They play it as they head towards the robot. 20th Century Boy.

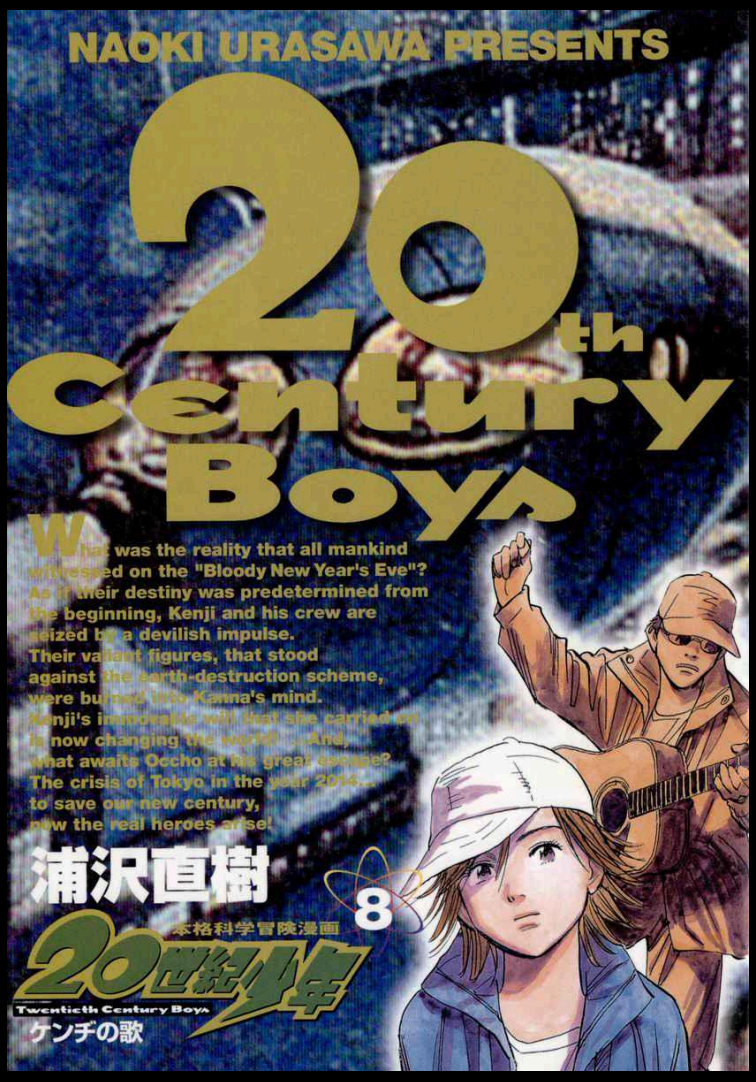
[God retelling it] From the radio could be heard only one thing. Twentieth Century Boy. The song of invincibility that Fukubei left to Kenji.



Kenji, Otcho, and Maruo put on gas suits and drive in between the robot's legs.

The BNYE climax is fast approaching

Volume 8)



We learn that the robot, behind all the fragrances, was very faulty, a fake [just like someone else we know].

Kenji mutters "This wasn't…/This wasn't the future we dreamed of/" in reference to the robot.

As Kenji makes his way up to the cockpit, we get news that the Manjoume and the Friendship party has finished working on the vaccine for the virus thanks to Yamane [and Kiriko]. Friendship party has now "saved the world". Kenji goes to the cockpit with dynamite in hand [alone].

Kenji makes it to the cockpit but discovers that the pilot is just a mannequin.

A monitor atop the desk then displays Friend.

'Kenji Kun let's playyyyyy. Let's play some more. This is fun, let's play some more…[Kenji says "quit all the sneaking around!! Come on out and show yourself!!"] I am. I'm right in front of you. Right here. I'm right here."



The ultimate showdown. On one side is Kenji and the childhood robot he designed (made to not resemble it at all) and on the

other side is the Summer Expo with Friend mounting it. Two sides, two people, with the two things they hate the most (Kenji because he feels guilt for indirectly creating the robot. Friend because of the lie.)

Friend and Kenji bicker for a bit. Kenji says that Friend is a coward and that he can only commit such atrocities because he's wearing a mask that keeps him from seeing the reality around him. Quite true to some extent.

Kenji proceeds to say that he has no right using the expo or that mask since it's their childhood, not his. Friend says "You say the funniest things, Kenji-Kun.", as he takes off his mask, revealing that he is Fukubei [Katsumata] to Kenji. Just as the two face off, the clock strikes midnight, it is now the 21st Century.

All previous events are now left behind, in the 20th Century. A century that Katsumata will never leave.

As this is happening Kenji (in a flashback scene, 2000) sings Bob Lennon.

Here are the lyrics, feel free to interpret them however you like:

The sun goes down, and somewhere

I can smell curry cookin'

How long will we have to walk before we get home?

Will the croquettes from my favourite shop

Still taste the same? And waiting for me?

Night comes down upon the earth

And now, I'm hurryin' home

They say the ogres will be laughing next year

And I say, let 'em laugh all they like

I'll keep talkin' about 5 or 10 years in the future

And 50 years later, if I'm still with you

Night comes down upon the earth

And now, I'm hurryin' home

Rain may fall, and storms may come

Spears may fall, so let's all go home

They can't stop us, nobody has the right to stop us

Night comes down upon the earth

And now, I'm hurryin' home

Night comes down upon the entire world

And the entire world is hurryin' home

And I pray that these days will

Continue forever and ever…

Gutalala sudalala

This song is more relevant to Kenji than to Katsumata in my opinion. However the "And I pray that these days will/ Continue forever and ever…" is definitely an idea subconsciously rooted in Katsumata's mind.

Flashforward once again to 2014. Though, we have to make a pitstop to 2001 for a second.

The Friendship party is greeted as heroes by the UN. Manjoume proceeds to say that there's no need for the applause since everyone in their position would do the same thing they did, as fellow humans, as fellow friends.

Manjoume says that he had trouble deciding whether he should play a video that Friend had recorded for them since Friend's condition is so poor. He then plays the video recording of Friend anyways.



It's a short video, however it does show us how far Friend's influence has reached. Even the UN members now clap as if they're a part of the Friend cult. Friend's dialogue isn't too important, not to say it's not good, it's just that he repeats these types of phrases quite a bit. I've already analyzed what he means by it so I won't be repeating it every time.



Aside from this scene being humorous, it also informs us that Friend's censorship campaign hasn't fully taken over yet. Or maybe Friend just deems it as unimportant since no one can connect the dots; even if they did, Friend would just execute them, like he did with Chou (though that's a completely different thing).

Koizumi is invited to Tomodachi Land, or…forced, I guess. I agree with the translator that Tomodachi Land sounds better than Friend land, and that Friend sounds better than Tomodachi, but

do keep in mind that the two are the same thing, not important in the slightest though.

(Tomodachi Land arc is starting 😴, this along with PV will truly be my doomsday. The VR section in general is a nightmare to try to analyze and explain. My fingers and brain are about to hate me.)

Koizumi enters the Friend bus. They all get spoons which magically bend, obviously mimicking Katsumata's fake spoon bending.

Cut to Koizumi getting destroyed by VR Kenji in the tunnels.

The first few levels of the VR all involve shooting down different members of the Kenji faction, emphasizing both Friend's propaganda usage and his unfiltered hate.

They give a slideshow presentation about how much of a terrorist Kenji and his faction were. It's scary how accurately it resembles our real world.

Koizumi however doesn't buy any of it. Mainly because God has already disproven most things, and that she's also quite a skeptic. The eye closing trick doesn't work on her either when imagining what Friend looks like.

Tomodachi Land uses all forms of emotions to brainwash its subject, from fear to love.

A section of it also features an amusement park with roller coaster rides. Quite childish.

They, of course, confiscate Koizumi's music (they see her listening to it with a secret camera, how comforting).

Koizumi and Yoshitsune meet. Yoshitsune plans to send Koizumi to the bonus stage of the VR to play with Friend since his previous student failed (he also left behind a teru teru bozu so that means he probably made it to Hanging Hill before something happened, or maybe he made it all the way to Science Room.)

So Koizumi tries her best to make it to top 3 in the trials. Her strategy, as acquired from Yoshitsune, is to "not think". She says everything the party wants her to say. Reminds me of a certain family member.

She managed to place 3rd.

And so, Koizumi enters the VR final stage.

Young Fukubei tells her to come play. The game is on.

The year is 1971. The attraction is for the most part accurate besides the existence of Fukubei and the date (1971 and 1970).

Kenji and the others are planning to attend the Hanging Hill at midnight to see a ghost (rumor).

Koizumi joins them.

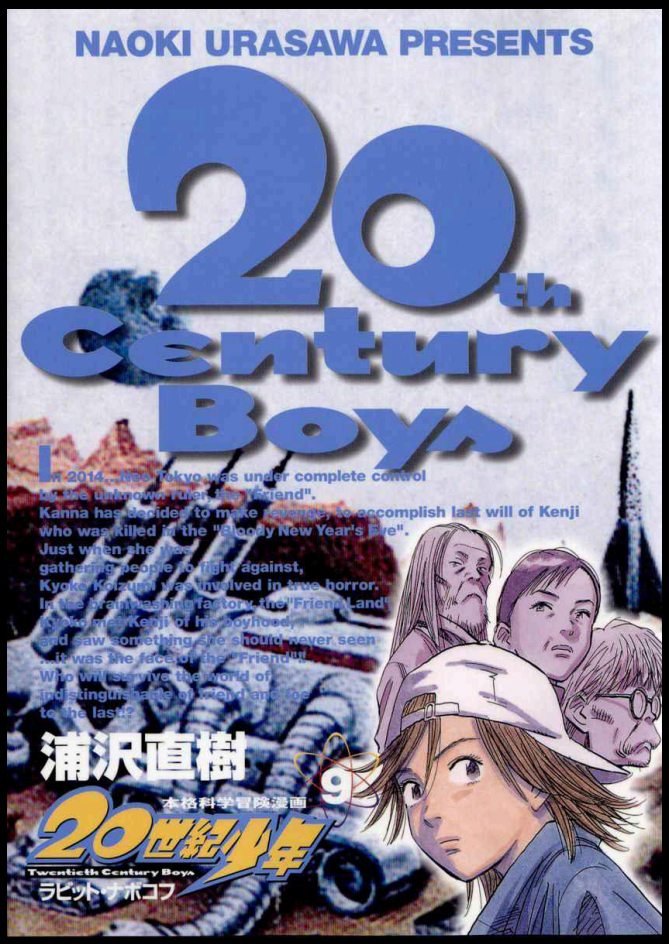
Everyone besides Maruo; you can even see Fukubei in the background of some shots which is hilarious.

Koizumi's goal is to uncover Friend's identity while in the VR, so she asks the group whether one of them is "Friend". "Aren't we

all friends?", love this response for many reasons. One because of its absurdity in context. Two because it's incredibly simple, yet it is one of the pivotal points of the series.

They see the TTB. However Koizumi stays behind a little longer and sees Fukubei talking to Sadakiyo. I won't be discussing the Hanging Hill now as Friend's pov in PV is much more interesting. Right now we're just getting a hint of what's to come.

Volume 9)



Koizumi wants to look at Fukubei, however Katsumata made the VR in such a way where if you try to look at Katsumata's face or

Sadakiyo's, you'll be prevented [in this case by Yoshitsune]. So Fukubei and Sadakiyo escape unseen.

Yoshitsune and Koizumi go to the school rooftop to pay a visit to Sadakiyo.

Koizumi already knows that Sadakiyo isn't Friend so she simply asks him who Friend is.

Sadakiyo tells her “Look, he’s right behind you”


ゴト…

Flawless execution



CHAPTER 89 :

NIGHTMARE

This arguably goes even harder. “Nightmare”.

Koizumi goes to take off his mask; Yoshitsune tries to stop her.

Fukubei asks her “If I take off my mask, will you be my Friend?/ If I show you my face…/ Will you be…/ My Friend?”

Translation: “If I behave like my true self, if I become my true self, will you be my friend? Will you still love me?”

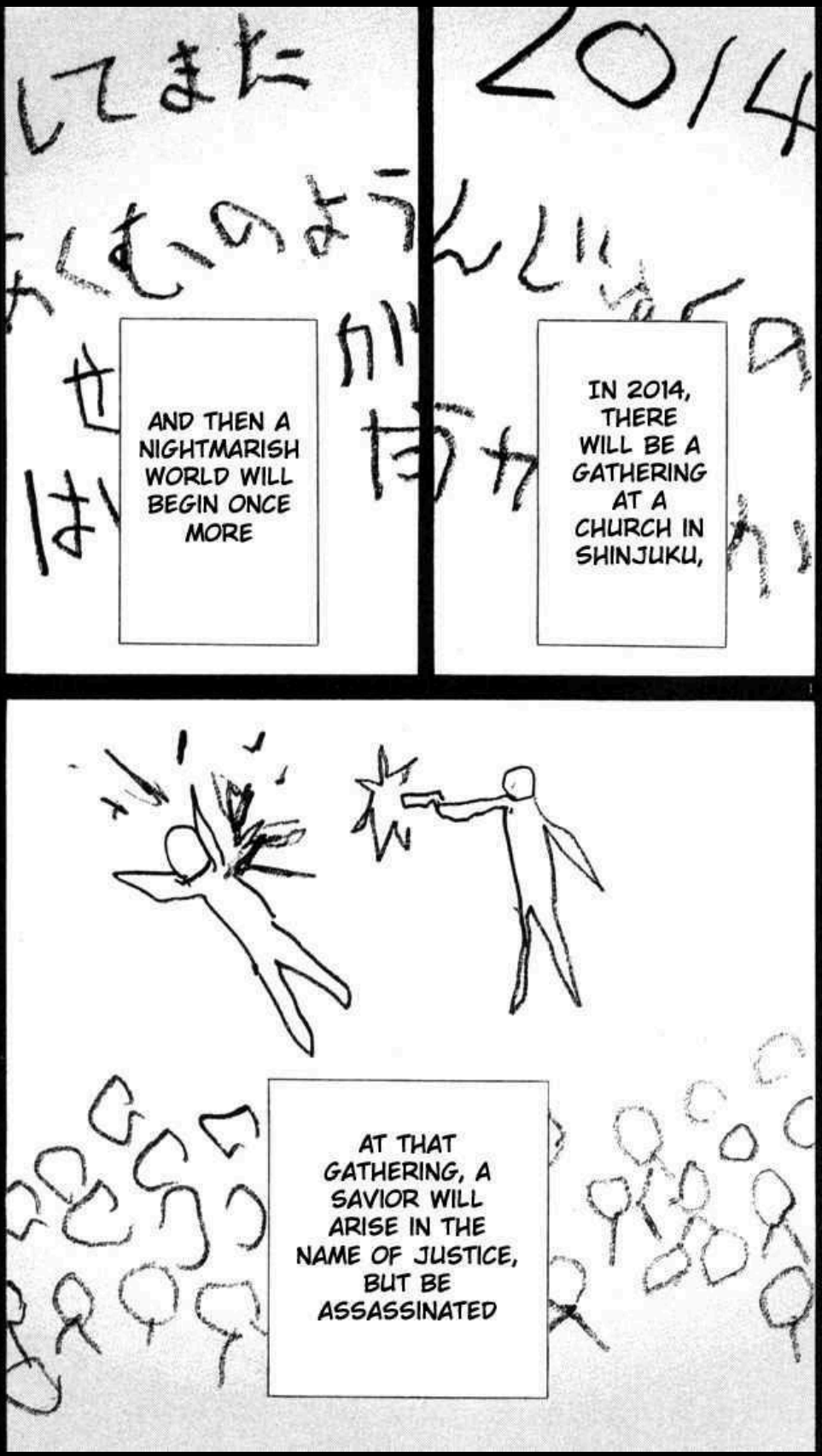
This relates to both Katsumata and Fukubei in their own separate ways. For Katsumata, it’s a reminder to stop using the guise of Fukubei. For Fukubei, it’s a reminder to stop lying so much and putting up a false persona.

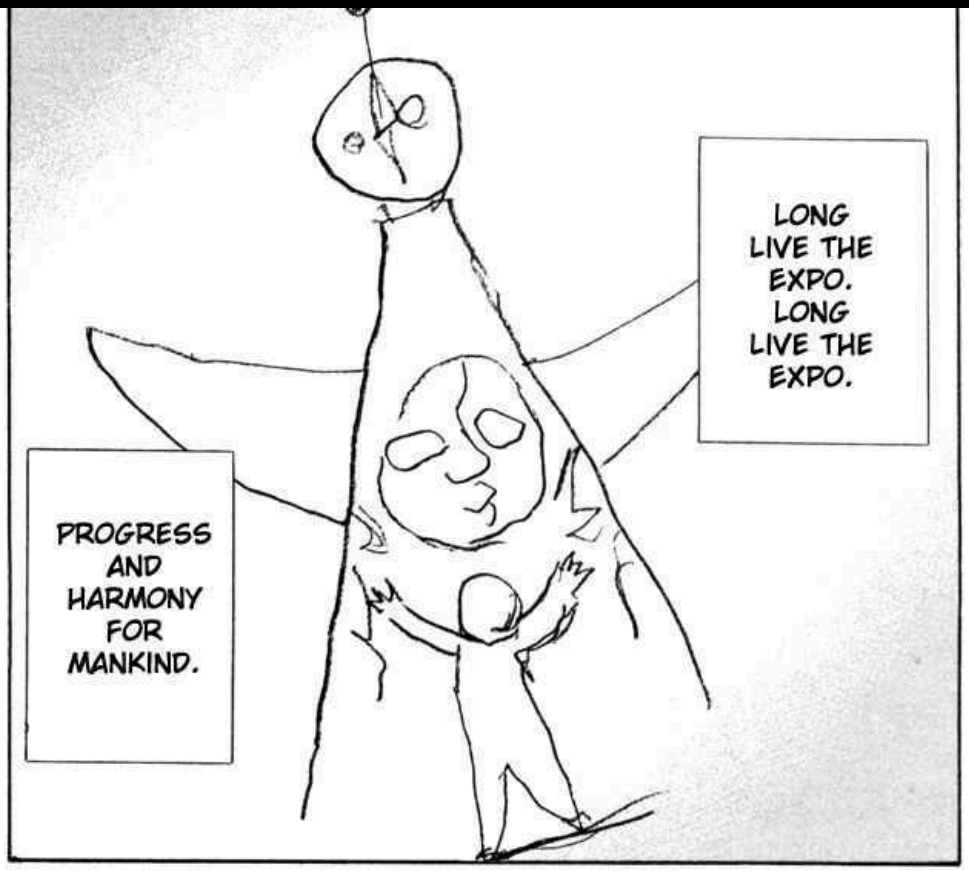
Koizumi is pulled out of VR, though she manages to see “Friend’s face”

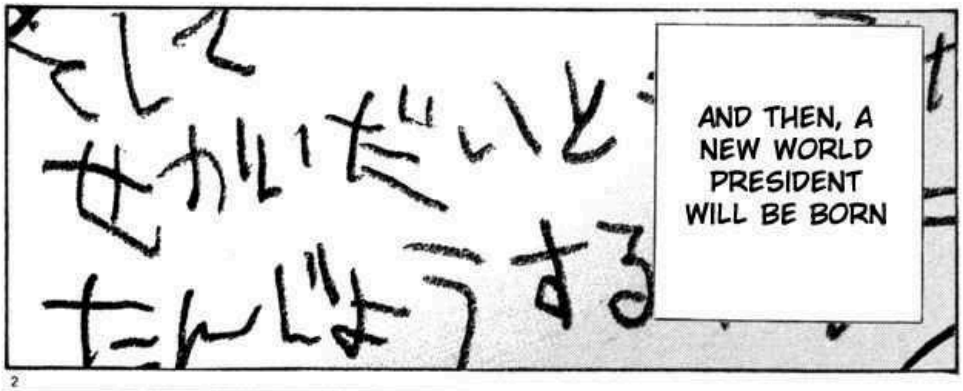
Kanna shenanigans happen

Mon hands Yukiji a copy of The New Book of Prophecy, she reads it. (This isn’t the entire thing)

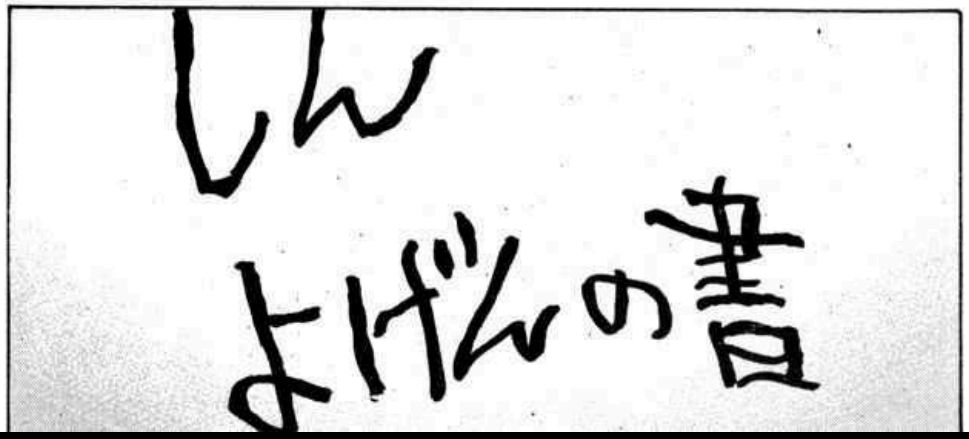
20th Century Boys v09
Rabbit Nabokov
c93
The New Book of Prophecy
translated by Stephen Paul,
Scanned and evdited by Gatsu.
BotH &MS




LONG LIVE THE EXPO. LONG LIVE THE EXPO.
PROGRESS AND HARMONY FOR MANKIND.


AND THEN, A NEW WORLD PRESIDENT WILL BE BORN

2



1st step: Church at Shinjuku) Some people seem to think that this step is the only one that doesn't quite fit into the narrative. I sort of agree, however I think it can be easily overlooked. We know that Katsumata had amazing foresight, so I think with the influence of some other factors it's pretty plausible he could suggest this location.

2nd step: Expo) Makes sense, he still holds that lie close to his heart. He takes great pride in a lie.

3rd step: President) Again, quite clear. Katsumata has always wanted power over others, he is very manipulative and power hungry. Everything outside his control he hates (Kenji and the others included).

Cut to post Church scene where the policeman gets assassinated by 13. Otcho catches up to 13, however he's already on his way out. Before he leaves however, he asks Otcho whether he knows what a certain line means from The New Book of Prophecy.

"When the holy mother descends…/ She will bring with her either heaven or hell"

13 draws a parallel between the Virgin Mary and Kiriko.

So that would make Katsumata, the father: god.

The heaven or hell part is referring to the cure for the virus.

The interesting part of this is the ambiguity of it. For the first time, Friend doesn't know something: will she find the cure, or will she not?

That means that Friend has prepared two contingencies based on what happens. By the end, we will know one of them, but I will discuss the other as well. This goes far beyond Kiriko and the cure (and even beyond Takasugi, we'll get to that later).

Volume 10)

NAOKI URASAWA PRESENTS

20th Century Boys

Please! Give me all your strength!
——Kanna's strong will goosed up the hearts of the raging people in Shinjuku.
She is about to change the history now, swears revenge for Kenji's sorrow and fights against the mysterious dominatoe, called the "Friend", who manipulates Japan behind the dark shadow.
But then, what's the purpose of the mystery man who appeared at the campus?
Crisis continues after crisis!!
And the twisted mystery now begins to untangle.....



浦沢直樹

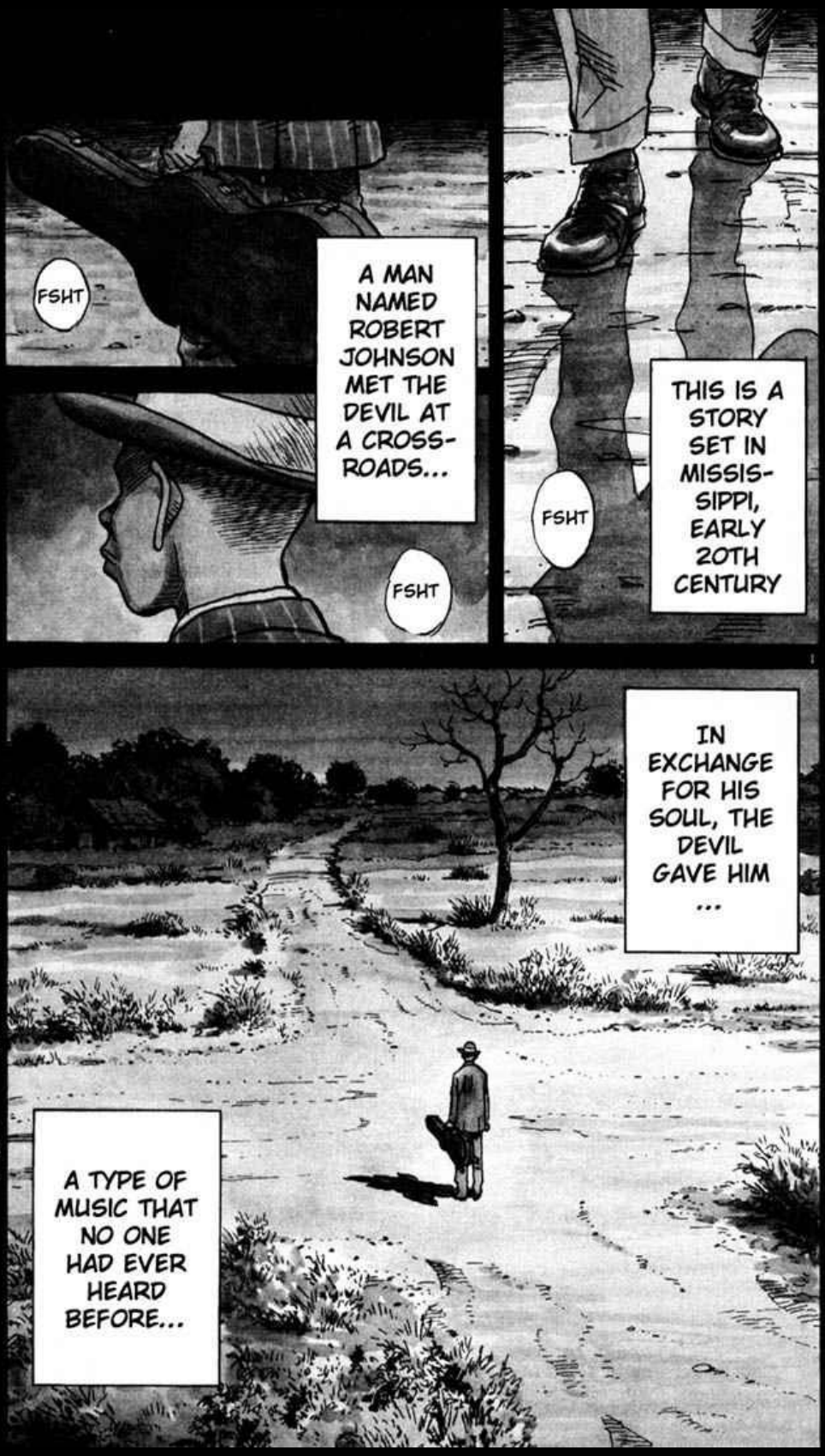
本格科学冒険漫画

20世紀少年

10

Twentieth Century Boys

顔のない少年



20th Century Boys v10 Boy Without a Face c99 Cross-roads translated by Stephen Paul, Scanned and edited by Gatsu. BotH &MS



Nice callback to “all musicians die at 27”

Also once again the devil is referenced in regards to Kenji.

Koizumi tries to find out more about Kanna, accidentally gets drafted into the Tomodachi World again, whoops.

Adult Sadakiyo gets introduced. I wish I could cover him more because he’s the third best character in the series, but sadly can’t. I’ll only be mentioning the parts which are important to the plot and to Fukubei.

Currently he's just seen a student get bullied and did nothing, then cried. ReFerEncE tO Fukubei nOt DoINg aNyTHinG to hELp Sadakiyo?!

Jokes aside, probably not the case, though it is true.

Koizumi and Sadakiyo take a car ride.

You can very distinctly see the effects of the drugs that Katsumata used on Sadakiyo, it's…sickening.



They also make an Ashita No Joe reference (Koizumi does) which is crazy foreshadowing (more so a reference to a future chapter).

They make it to Katsumata's house. Which is, unsurprisingly, full of manga and toys (I guess Katsumata was a trust-fund baby)

Sadakiyo explains why Katsumata wants to become world president: "The world president does anything he wants./ He makes the world as he sees fit./ He can 'end' everything in an instant, if he so wishes."

First signs thats Katsumata might be suicidal arise (first confirmed). Aside from that, it also gives us yet another example of how much Katsumata likes control. And not just to control, but to reshape in his image, to make everyone see his world. That is why he wants to be the world president.

He also asks Koizumi whether she is good or evil. Sadakiyo asks that question a lot to himself. He wants to be good, so he destroys the monitoring devices in Katsumata's house, and decides to help out Kanna.

We get a tour of Friend's house. Then we get a flashback of Sadakiyo, lonely, without any field trip photos. He thought that aliens would come down from outer space and be friends with him. He got bullied severely. The only person who cared for him was his teacher who would always arrive too late to stop the bullying. He wanted to join a group, especially the Kenji group. So, just like in the Fukubei narrative back in volume 3, Sadakiyo goes to the secret base. There he finds Fukubei. Astute readers might remember that Fukubei has already told us about this event, twice in fact, doesn't this spoil the identity of Friend? No, even if you did remember this scene it wouldn't let you figure anything out. Nothing here implicates Fukubei to be Friend, in fact

it even shields him since his narrative turns out to be true. Until a few pages that is…

This scene does give us the true dialogue between the two. Fukubei actually quite likes Kenji in this scene, or at least his ideas. He wants to see Kenji and his friends save the world. Again showing his hate love dynamic with Kenji.

We further learn that Fukubei abused Sadakiyo and treated him like a slave, though we haven't seen the full extent of it yet.

Based on this, we can now conclude Friend is Fukubei. The person who was abusing Sadakiyo had to be Friend. The person in the secret base at the time was Fukubei as confirmed by him, so Friend is Fukubei.

Sadakiyo poses an interesting question to Koizumi and to himself most of all. Is Friend good or evil?

Right now it seems as if he's evil, but maybe we're just not seeing enough of his backstory yet.

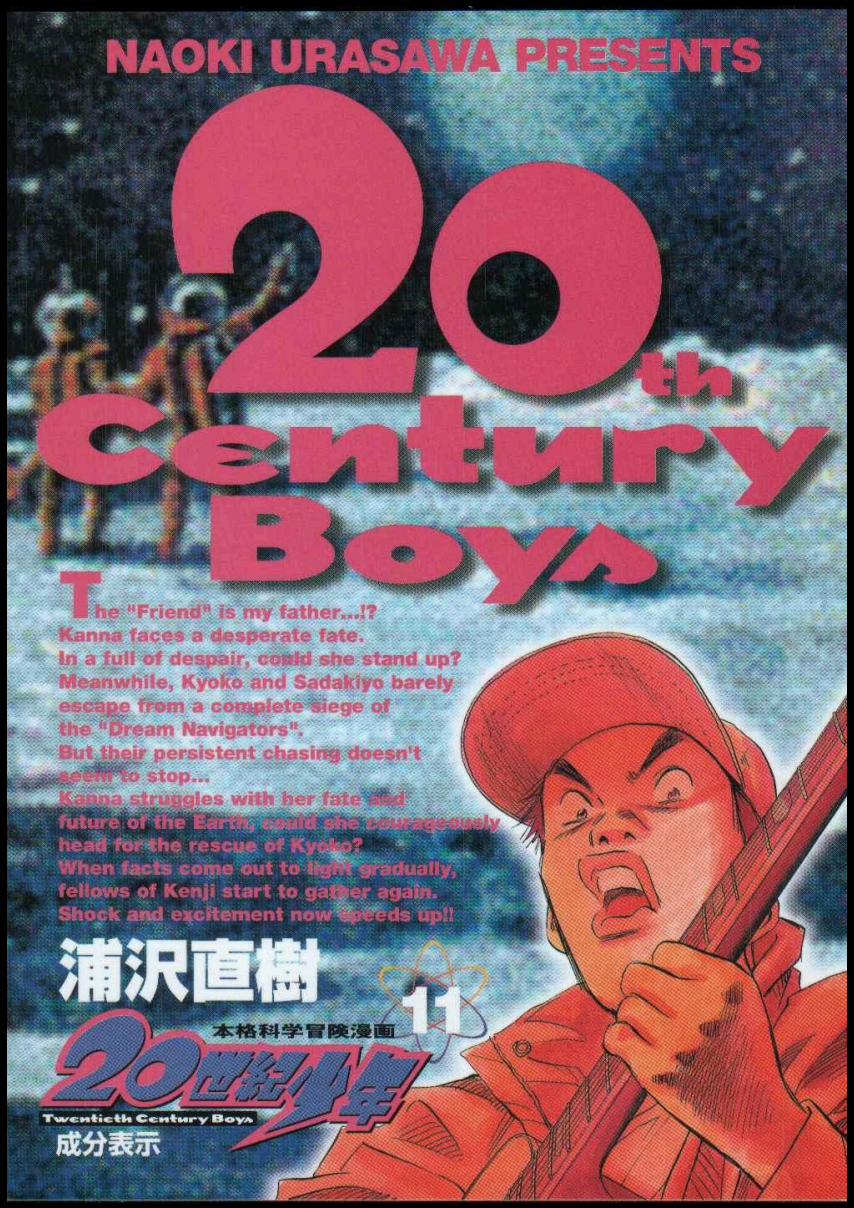
The reason Sadakiyo's head in the VR was his adult head is because Sadakiyo's face wasn't in any school pictures. While I do think that's true, I also believe that Friend wanted to rub more salt in Sadakiyo's wound by doing that (he can easily recreate Sadakiyo's face, just like he does in PV).

Fukubei also happens to be the person who started and spread the rumor about Sadakiyo's death. Possibly to make Sadakiyo know what Katsumata felt. Also it helps realize the Sadakiyo pawning plan/strategy.

Heart shattering scene of the teacher giving Sadakiyo his field trip photo ensues.

Flash to 2000) Kanna and Kenji are discussing spoon bending. Kenji remembers that Sadakiyo told him (when they were children) that you couldn't use tricks to bend a spoon. Kenji observes that all Friend does is use tricks, that's why he doesn't think that Sadakiyo is Friend. Immaculate intuition from Kenji, I wish he used it more.

Volume 11)



Kanna reaches a breaking point after finding out Friend is her father. She's fully depressed.

She remembers Kenji saying "I want to be strong//I'm not strong at all…/ I'm so, so cared…And I don't know what to do"

Only when playing rock n roll does Kenji feel invincible. Not with drugs, but with flash and blood he prevails, guitar in hand.

Cut to Manjoume and Takasugi (Dream navigator) talking about the now multiple rising forces. Takasugi worries, Manjoume doesn't. They're not as much concerned about Sadakiyo, Kanna, and the others as they are about Friend finding out that they know the lie of 1970. They also discuss Takasugi bearing Friend's child. That we will talk about a bit later since we don't have enough info on that yet. Do however note that Manjoume calls her the holy mother.

Flashback to 2002) Mon and Sadakiyo meet. That whole sequence happens. I had forgotten this scene entirely so it felt like I was reading it for the first time. I think it might be the saddest scene in 20th Century Boys. I am speechless. Sadakiyo gives the manuscript that he wrote to Koizumi. In the flashback he says "I am good" after killing Mon. In the present day he says the reverse. He no longer knows the answer.

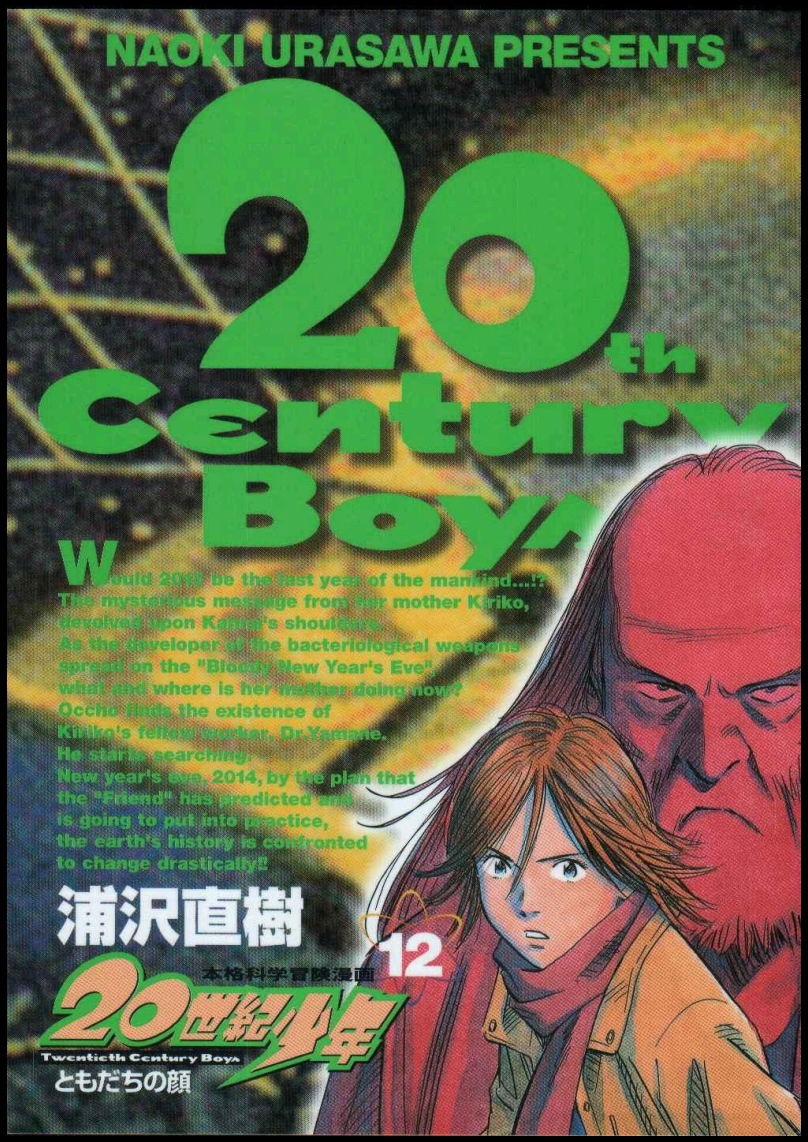
Koizumi, Kanna, and Yoshitsune reunite and leave on a copter. Sadakiyo escapes using Friend valuables, but supposedly dies in his car.

Kanna goes to investigate her mother, discovers that she made the virus (also cool Yamane foreshadowing). I am Godzilla scene happens, referencing volume 2's Kirko and Kenji scene. Fukubei is diabolical.

Yamane is introduced, completing the original Friend faction.

His child version is about as sadistic as Friend at times. He names a clownfish Kiriko 😭.

Volume 12)



We meet back up with Maruo who's now the agent of the famous singer guy.

He tries to suicide bomb and kill Friend but Friend makes sure that doesn't happen.

The part that really annoys Maruo is when Friend starts light-heartedly singing his soul away with the singer.

Yet, by setting up some convenient events, Friend is able to avoid danger once more.

Next comes the infamous Otcho amnesia scene.

Otcho remembers his conversation with Yamane after having years to remember it in prison.

Most people hate this scene, I don't, not exactly at least.

First of all, Otcho had other things to think about at the time. Second of all, he was fairly old by that point. Third of all, finicky memories is one of the themes of 20th Century Boys. Fourth of all, it was one conversation with a person that he never spoke to, and it was a fairly unpleasant one as well, of course his mind would forget an unpleasant memory. Fifth of all, Yoshitsune couldn't even remember Yamane's name until it was mentioned by someone else; he was fairly forgettable and most likely rarely interacted with Otcho.

Otcho and manga artist go to the school library. They find a note saying that the reunion will be in the science room, so they go there.

Yukiji, Yoshitsune, and Koizumi figure out that Friend was lying about 1971.

We get more exposition about 1971, now from Yamane. (he's in the science room) 'Donkey saw something he shouldn't have'. "'Friend' was born…/ In this science room./ No…/ Maybe I should say…/ He *died* here…"

Friend will appear here very soon, he says. Footsteps are heard down the hall.

Kanna fittingly remembers Friend holding her up as a baby. "Who are you…?"

We learn that Yamane tried to run away from Friend when Kirko came to him in 2003, however Friend easily tracked him down. He sent him a notice saying "Do you remember the Secret Society notice?". Friend has carefully planned this. This time he won't mess it up.

Friend enters the science room.

Maruo finds out that Fukubei is Friend through the singer guy drawing his face. He goes to Fukubei's home to make sure. After doing so [and giving them so incense] he intersects the school. There he sees Kanna.

A gunshot is heard in the school.

Yoshitsune and Yukiji also figure out it's Fukubei (or at least have high suspicions of it) through looking carefully at a photo that someone took of them on BNYE. We get a small flashback of Fukubei saying "I just wanted…/ To commemorate the event…". You can feel how giddy Fukubei is that his plan is finally proceeding as planned. It's a malicious joy. However, at the time

everyone thought he was just trying to cheer them up; Fukubei, on the contrary, was wishing they would suffer, the irony.

(No, the picture isn't a flaw in the story. The picture isn't really evidence per say. It's hinted that other photos have been edited and photoshopped to make Kenji look bad (and the others). Also even if they did remember that Fukubei took the shot, there's about a thousand excuses that could be made.

Yoshitsune calls the professor, asking who bent the spoons. The professor says he can't say, however when Yoshitsune spills a secret of his own, the professor folds and tells him. Yoshitsune's suspicions are confirmed. (Friend planned this as well, in fact he planned this for Yukiji, Yoshitsune, Kanna, Otcho, and Maruo. Though, Otcho and Kanna are a little more debatable. He didn't necessarily plan it for Otcho as much as he simply let it happen since Yamane most likely told him that Otcho now knows about the NBoP back in 1970. For Kanna, if you believe that Friend influences her psychic powers, then yes, he did plan it.)

Kanna remembers the face of her father.

Otcho asks who he is

Friend replies "Can't you tell?/ I remember it all so clearly…// Fascinating…/ So fascinating and yet…" {Friend describes him entering the secret base in an almost cartoonish way. The "fascinating" comment is referring to him reading the Book of Prophecy. The last comment, which he didn't get to finish, was most likely going to be about the New Book of Prophecy.}

Otcho asks once again who he is, this time in a much more aggressive style.

Friend says "I am Collins/ Apollo 11… While Armstrong and Aldrin walked on the moon,/ I sat, spinning around in its orbit, watching,/ poor little lieutenant Collins/ Nobody was watching me./ I bent all of those spoons…/ But the teacher made everyone close their eyes…/ And made the spoon-bender raise his hand…/ I had my hand raised like this…/ But they all had their eyes closed. They weren't looking at me…/ Look./ Someone look at me./ Someone, be shocked./ That terrible teru-teru bozu is hanging mid-air./ Someone, scream./ Run around in terror./ But no…/ That 'Book of Prophecy' isn't enough./ Right Yamane-Kun?"

Yamane is next to speak "And that's why you made the 'New Book of Prophecy'…/ Either the New Book of Prophecy…/ Or the true book of prophecy…".

Let's stop here for now.

Friend, for the second time now, recites his Collin parallel. We confirm our suspicions and our previous deductions about why he has said this, however this new dialogue does help. Armstrong and Aldrin are probably Kenji and Otcho. A couple details I forgot to mention/ are now added: Katsumata is floating in orbit, he is destabilized, he has no ground to stand on; "poor little LC", Katsumata has quite a self-depreciating look on himself even if he means to draw sympathy, kidding kidding, this is him having a self-depreciating look as Fukubei, not Katsumata, that's why he's wearing the Katsumata mask, he doesn't want sympathy here, it's an almost sarcastic comment; Collins never got as famous as the other two in life, Friend has a different agenda in mind; when saying "nobody was watching me.", Katsumata has his head

tilted, noticeable, we can see just how much this really ticks him off. We next get reaffirmed that the spoon bending raising hand act was planned intentionally by Katsumata. “Some look at me/ Someone, be shocked/ That terrible teru-teru bozu is hanging in mid-air”, once again, his desperately narcissistic personality shows itself; in the case of the TTB, all he wanted to know is that the prank influenced Kenji, we’ll get to it later. The ending lines are quite crucial as well. Katsumata might have wanted to destroy the world, just like in the original BoP, however he didn’t let the nihilistic tendencies win, this time (he can leave that part to Fukubei). Before completely destroying the world, he wanted to change it, so everyone could experience what he experienced, so he could kill everyone in the cruelest way possible, as if to say “you did this to yourself, it is your fault, how does betrayal from a Friend feel?”, but once again, we’ll get to this in the Friend era arc. Back to Yamane. Out of the two names, new and true, I prefer true. I think “true” reflects the intentions of Katsumata better, however the difference isn’t too large.

Yamane continues his monologue, saying that all the inside stories that they made up, all the inside language they used, through all of that, he never strained from his idea that Fukubei was a liar. “Have you lied so much that you can’t tell what is a lie and what isn’t, anymore?/ So many lies you want to hide.”. He then asks him whether he wants to hide the 71’ lie or the 70’ lie the most. He says Friend really wants to hide the 71’ lie, that’s why he banished Donkey, he asks Friend whether he will banish him next. Yamane says that Friend didn’t really die in this room, he just failed in his lie, that’s why he will kill Donkey, and that’s why he will kill him next.

Friend has not budged an inch or spoken a word until now. Suddenly, he says “no more talk”.

The most interesting part of Yamane’s dialogue is the line I quoted. It describes Friend’s character perfectly, even if Yamane doesn’t know it. Friend has created an entire personality to basically cosplay as; he grew so attached to it that he started to hate it as a result, and even wanted to kill it. Friend’s dialogue is full of lies, almost every line is a lie in some way or another. It is usually either a direct lie or a lie which he fools himself into believing (cosmos as an example). He has lied too much, about everything, so much so that even the reader doesn’t know what the truth is anymore (besides me obviously). He knows no other lifestyle, at this point it goes beyond temporary relief; it is a lifestyle.

How does Yamane know about the lie of 70’? Fukubei most likely talked to him during that time.

Friend’s ego is getting hurt quite a bit by Yamane, so he promptly puts an end to it by saying “no more talk”, it’s so menacing that even Otcho is surprised.

Friend says that none of them will leave this room and that the room is surrounded by men, Yamane says that both of those statements are lies (He’s almost correct, one of those isn’t true).

Yamane completely goes off the rails, screaming “These are lies…‼/ You’re nothing but lies, lies, lies, lies‼” before pulling out a gun and shooting Friend. Friend only manages to get in a *pathetic* “huh” before getting shot.

We get a flashback back to BNYE. Friend takes off his mask and reveals that he is Fukubei to Kenji. Kenji slowly unravels that

Friend's child and wife are fakes. Friend only used them so he could get close to kenji, what a monster. Kenji gets angrier and angrier as he remembers what Friend did: used children, impregnated & abandoned Kiriko, conceived Kanna & abandoned her (supposedly). Friend says nothing, most likely enjoying the moment immensely, seeing Kenji squirm in hatred.

(Bomb goes off, however it doesn't seem like it's directly hitting the robot that Kenji is on.)

(Symbolism: Nostradamus predicted that a great king of terror would descend from the sky to end the 20th century. Friend is once again symbolized as a devil. The sky part is referencing Friend's floating trick. Thank you Limitless.)

Back to 2015. We see Friend sprawled on some boxes. The shot went straight through his heart, foreshadowing Katsumata's lack of empathy due to being heartless.

(Extra tidbit: I have seldom mentioned the chapter names. That is my fault. I completely forgot about some of them. I will be analyzing some of the more important ones though. The name of this chapter is "The Face Of A Friend". Even the author is mocking Fukubei, as Fukubei was never really a Friend. Again, I love how Urasawa wrote "A" instead of just "The Face Of Friend", it's small things like these which makes a series great.

Friend, getting up: "Hey…/ Geez…/ You scared…/ Me…/ [Looks at his wound and the blood on his hand] Huh…/ What…?/ Huh…?/" Yamane says that this scene is a repeat of 1971, however this time Friend really will die, without any lies attached to it. Friend keeps saying huh [dispersed throughout Yamane's dialogue]. He then says "Am I dying…?/ No…/ That can't be…/ Call…An…/ Call an ambulance…/ This…/ This can't be happening…/ This wasn't in

the prophecy…/[Yamane says" That's right…It's all over now./ It's all over"] No…/ No…/ No…/ I was almost…‼". Friend, who has now raised himself up to lean on a table, falls over spectacularly, and dies.

This scene is quite incredible, especially in this version, almost as much as Fukubei's/Katsumata's monologue back in BNYE.

We know that this body double (spoilers), has been sent by Friend to take his place. What I'm interested in is what Friend said to this body double. This scene was obviously rehearsed many times. However there are two possibilities here.

A) Katsumata told the BD to method act exactly like this

B) Katsumata told the BD that he would live (Friend's brainwashing is good enough to convince the BD that he really is Fukubei)

Let's explore both options, I like both.

A version) The actor is supposed to be playing Fukubei's death, so he over exaggerates slightly. Katsumata told the BD to appear as stupid as possible, constantly repeating "huh", not believing that he's bleeding (or dying)/acting dumbfounded, telling his enemies to call an ambulance for him, and being perplexed at the prophecy going awry. Katsumata wanted Fukubei to look as pathetic as possible. 'Everyone started to care a little too much about him. Let me show you who the real Fukubei is. He's not a genius like me. He's a fraud. He doesn't have powers like me. He constantly lies. He's not as smart as me, just look at how ill-prepared he was to meet Otcho and Yamane. He is nothing. He uses underhanded tactics to get his way. I will now take over.", that's my interpretation of Katsumata's thoughts. Dying

mid-sentence and laying on the floor due to knocking over a table is also an added humiliation. Katsumata despised this man. Fukubei was fun for a while, but he started to steal his glamour, and Katsumata's ego could not take that.

B version) Similar to A. The difference lies in its maliciousness. Somehow this version makes Katsumata even more of a hater. In this version he would fake believing that the BD really is Fukubei, or something of that sort. He sent Fukubei to his death bed, knowing that he's too prideful. He probably told the DB that he would survive, since it's in the prophecy. He sent Fukubei with a fake bullet-proof vest, this is supported by Fukubei being confused by his blood when feeling his chest. He set him up for failure, a person which was very like Fukubei that he specifically trained for this purpose.

The ending line is quite ambiguous. We never get to know what Fukubei would have said. My guess is "I was almost world president" or "I was almost there". Something along the lines. Our strive for knowledge will never be quenched, sadly (Unless you're Urasawa I guess).

Fukubei is dead.

He won't appear in the manga anymore besides the PV and VR sections (and flashbacks!). Katsumata accomplished his 1st true act of revenge. Time for Kenji…

(Also, when talking about the Hattori mask, I forgot to mention that this is a double edged sword. Fukubei mocks Kenji by having the mask represent a very simple riddle, Katsumata mocks Fukubei for the exact same thing.)

Yamane gets shot after telling Otcho about how fearful he was of shooting Friend, how fitting.

Friend's men have made it to the second floor.

Maruo and Kanna have a little scene together.

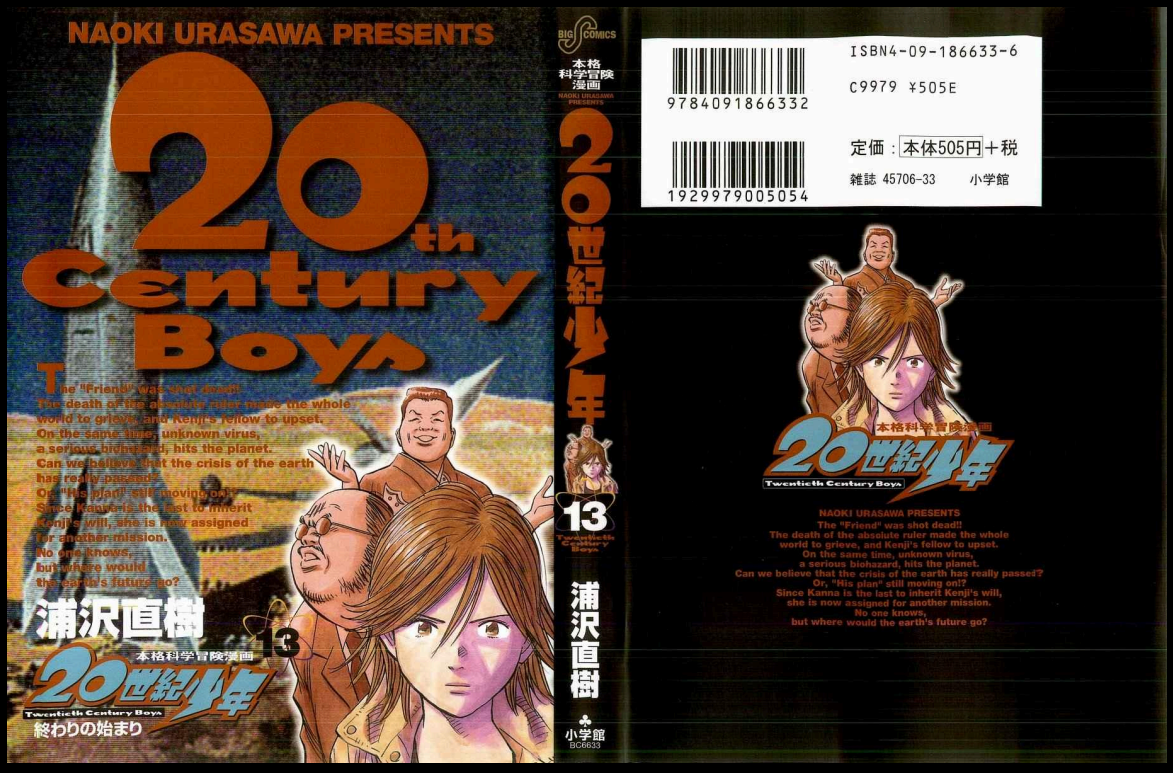
Otcho takes off the Hattori mask. Hattori is behind it (dumb joke ik ik).

Otcho is taken aback.



(No translation 😭)

Volume 13)


NAOKI URASAWA PRESENTS
20th Century Boys
The "Friend" was shot dead!!
The death of the absolute ruler made the whole world to grieve, and Kenji's fellow to upset.
On the same time, unknown virus,
a serious biohazard, hits the planet.
Can we believe that the crisis of the earth has really passed?
Or, "His plan" still moving on?
Since Kanna is the last to inherit Kenji's will, she is now assigned for another mission.
No one knows,
but where would the earth's future go?
浦沢直樹
本格科学冒険漫画
20世紀少年
Twentieth Century Boys
13
終わりの始まり
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but where would the earth's future go?

We get a cooler POV of Fukubei:





Katsumata remains expressionless, probably better to do so as well, imagine smiling at this moment.

The title is sick and true. Katsumata was forgotten; Fukubei was forgotten.

Yoshitsune tries remembering Fukubei from his childhood; he can't, Fukubei never existed (background character ah). The first memory is from the 1997 reunion.

"Why was a man we never remembered as a child…/ One of our members…?", it's because Katsumata is the best memory manipulator the world has ever seen.

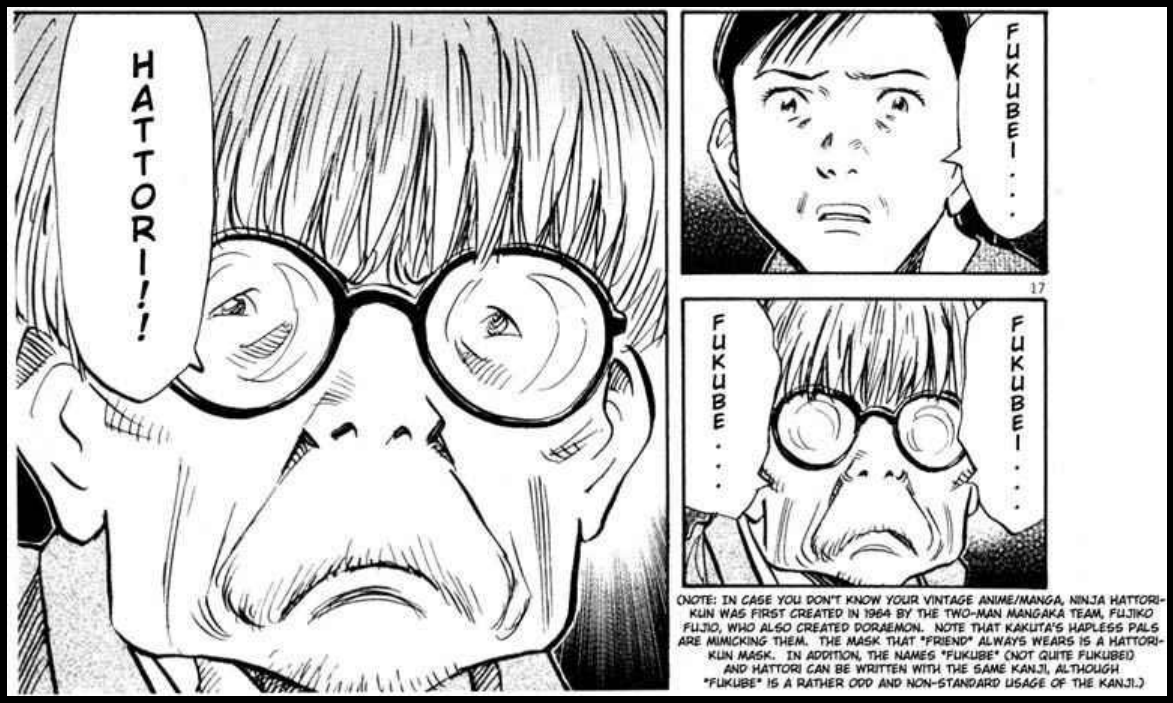
Maruo talks himself out of suspicion since he's the manager of the singer guy. The cop is an absolute fanboy, however when Maruo asks him what happened in the school, the cop instantly

turns aloof, almost as if a switch was flicked.



The reporters come soon after, asking if Friend was assassinated or not. Considering the reporter's speed, this was probably

planned by Friend.



Might have to fix my Fukubei and Hattori name analysis, with this it's even more likely that both names were made by Katsumata.

Manjoume reminisces about his past with Fukubei while on cocaine. We'll get to it later.

The media are quick to announce Friend's death.

What constantly baffles me is the reporters reaction, it is…undescribable



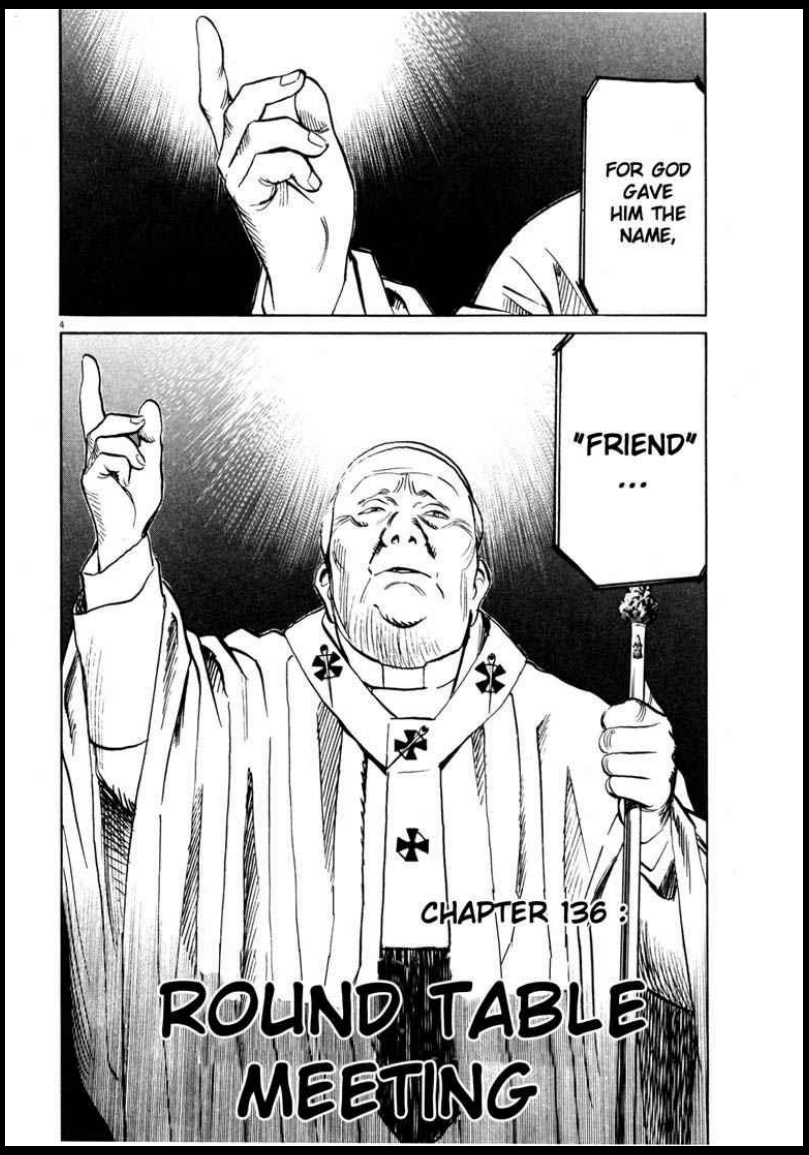
To these people, Friend was a true hero, even the toughest of reporters couldn't hold their tears. It makes the end arc of 20th Century Boys all the more disheartening.

Manjoume doesn't react well to the news.



You almost feel bad for him.

The world is grieving. People are out on the streets crying. Posters with “We still love Tomodachi” can be seen everywhere along with others of similar nature. Everyone is holding the Friend sign. Even the pope:



Diane level of mourning.

Manjoume and the 11 board members come together once again to decide what to do. Friend's instructions instruct them to not hold any fancy ceremonies; the funeral service should be held in secret with no use of national funds.

So Manjoume decides to do a national funeral service out of pure love and compassion. Friend simply does this to progress his plans.

Members of the board have different reactions: some are crying while others couldn't care less. One wants to end the board all together, saying that it's pointless. That same day he was killed, most likely instigated by 13 who had just entered the meeting.

Yukiji's past boss turns out to be part of the 12 board members, he's also the guy who died. At least this confirms our suspicions about the double bombing plan.

We get some insight on Kirko from Yamane (Otcho learned it through Yamane, now he's telling it to Kanna)

Very heartbreaking scene for Kirko and Yamane. We also learn that Friend wants to kill 5.94 billion people when releasing the virus…

Reminds me of AM, kill all humanity but leave 5 to torture.

Otcho leaves to stop the virus.

We learn that the singer guy was actually teen Kenji's drummer, I had completely forgotten this. Something interesting to note, the only people who believe that Friend is evil (from outside stories) are people who have had some kind of contact with Kenji. The

only people who don't follow this rule are Chou Jr and Koizumi. In a way both did have contact with Kenji.

New virus outbreak.

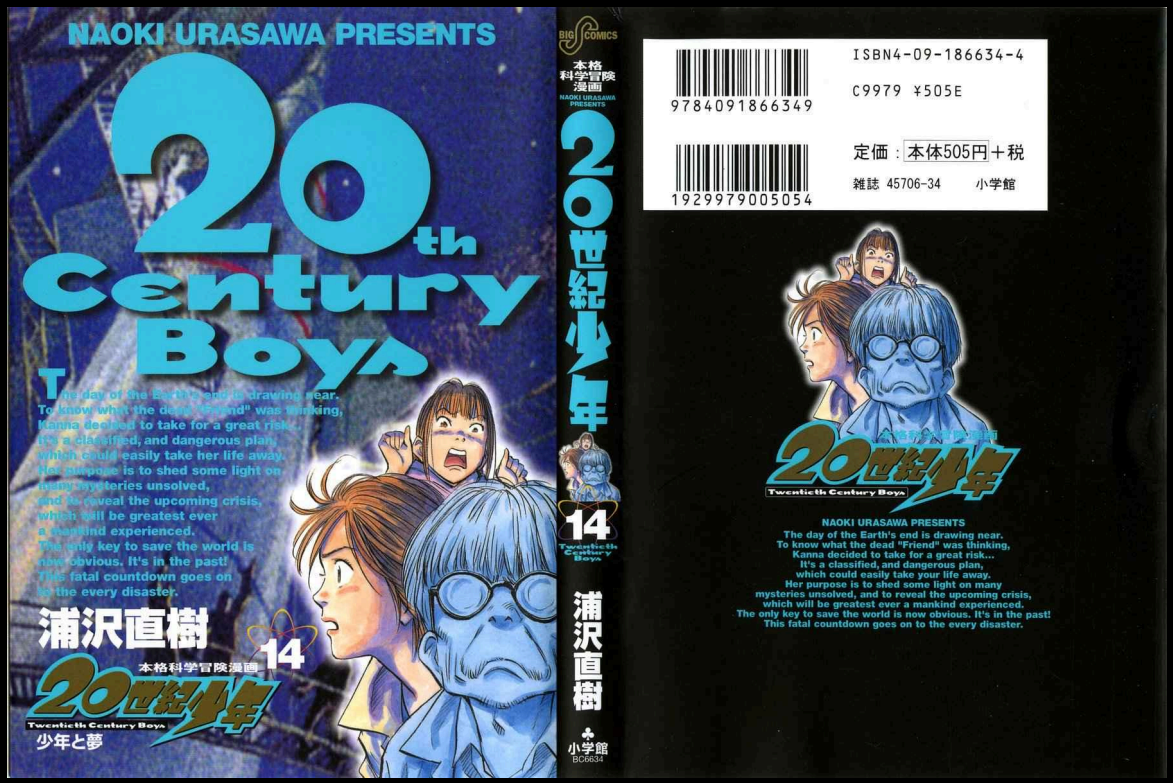
Frog Empire wants to save the world.

So many excellent scenes. If you haven't read the manga in a long time, I'd implore you to do so.

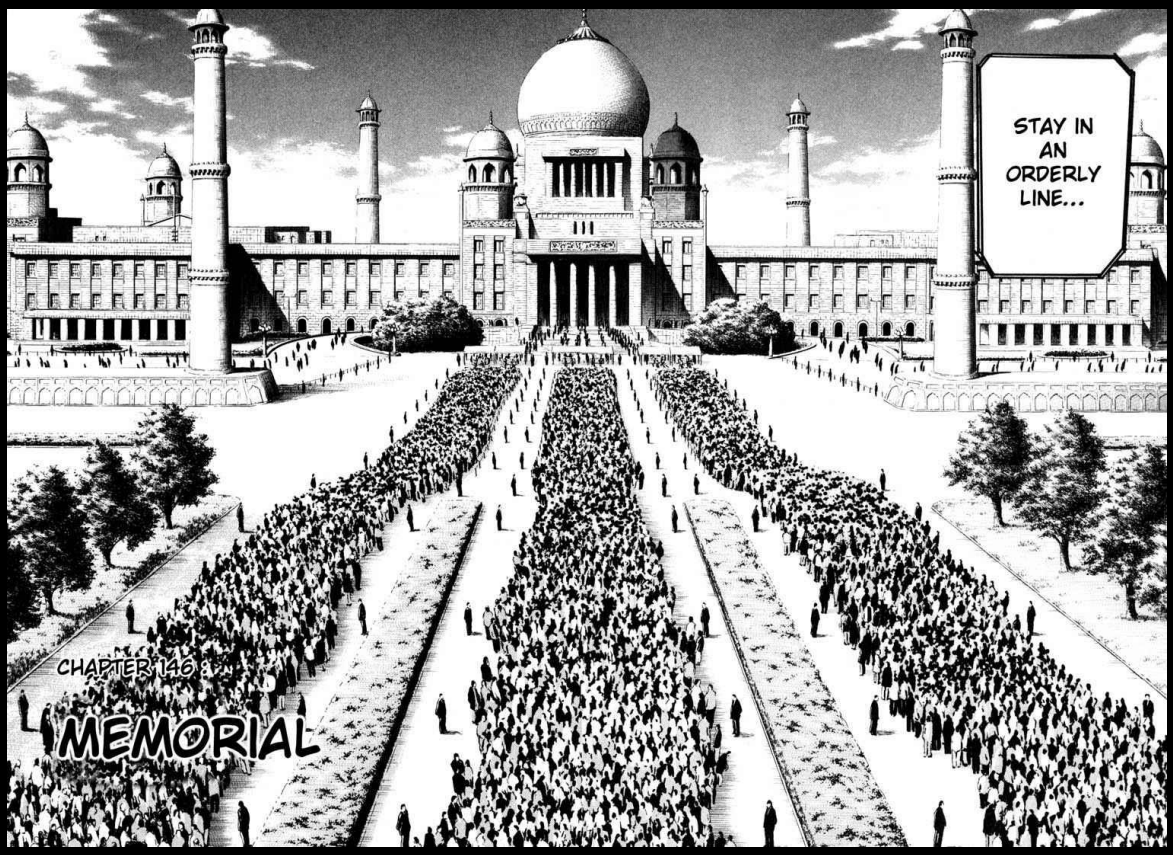
Virus spreads more.

Yoshitsune and Kanna go to VR to find out more about Friend's mind

Volume 14)



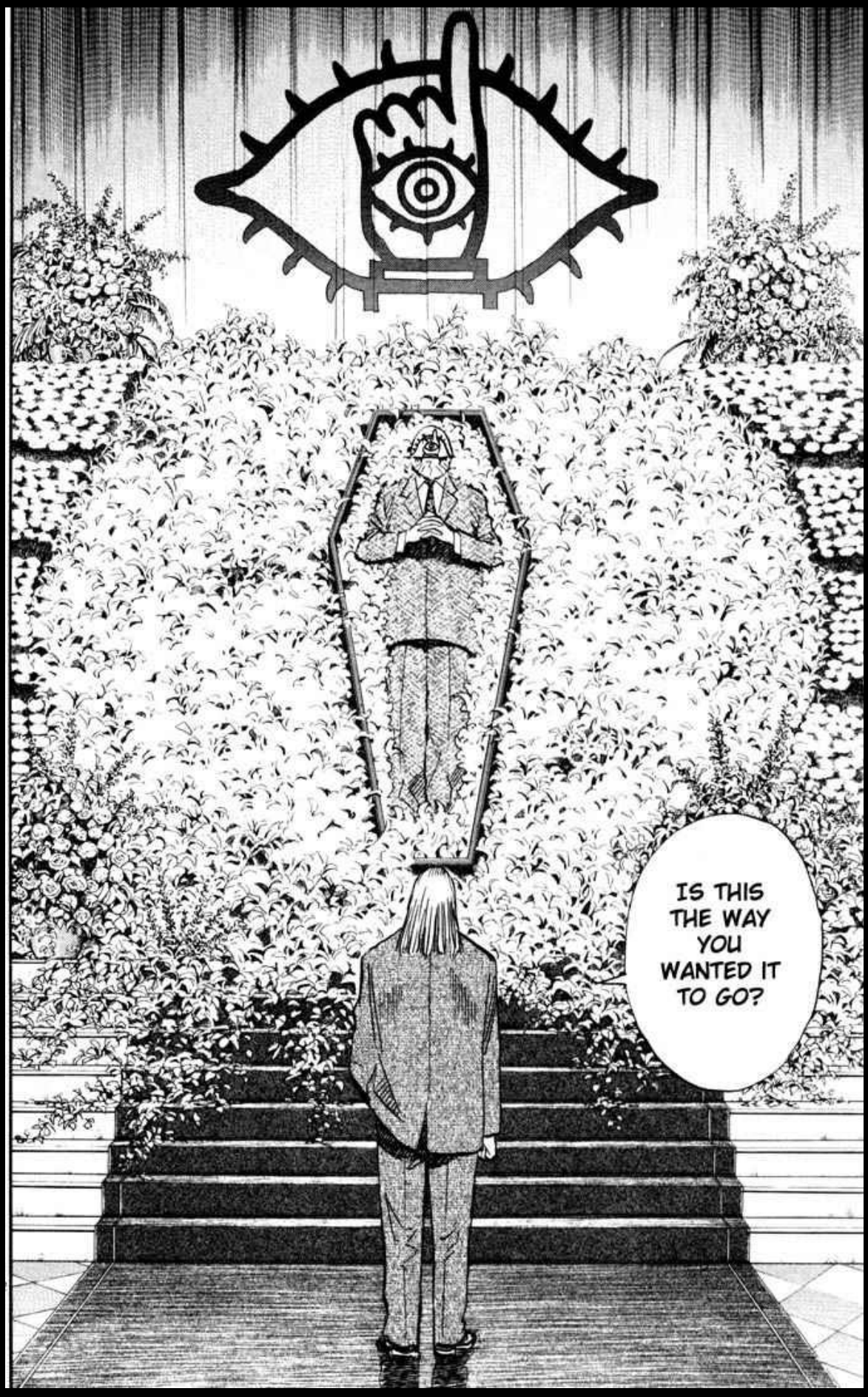
People mourn over the loss of Friend.



A terrifying image. Tens of thousands of people packed to pay homage to a murderer and torturer. This was a manual sign-up funeral as well, absolutely crazy, the amount of influence Friend had up to that point.

We learn from Manjoume that Friend wanted a big funeral after the mass amount of outcry and grieving. This certainly lines up with his characterization; the original funeral will now make a lot more sense. You can't take the narcissist out of Katsumata.

People are begging to see Friend and pray for him just a little while longer. Manjoume goes to the funeral and asks to be alone with Friend. Then we get a beautiful shot of Manjoume asking Friend if this is the way he wanted things to go.


IS THIS THE WAY YOU WANTED IT TO GO?

Bloody beautiful.

Manjoume asks Friend 'What now? How does this end? I remember when you were a boy…I gave you a spoon just like this. [He starts to cry] What should I do? I want to know what you're thinking

Friend's ability to grow in the most perverted and corrupt part of the human heart is unparalleled. He's able to give solace only through the worst part of the human, unlike Kenji who does it through compassion and acceptance, though, in a way both do it through some form of acceptance.

Manjoume has the same idea as Yoshitsune and Yukiji, thus he goes into the VR world.

Yoshitsune and Koizumi enter the VR, leaving Kanna behind as their life line in case anything goes awry. Yoshitsune confirms that the VR is a perfect replica of their hometown, down to the details. Friend once again is confirmed to be stuck in the past, although this time it is much more apparent. Yoshitsune is also very giddy about going back to 1971 which is very adorable (Just imagine your grandpa or grandma going back to their childhood, even your parents would work for this comparison. They would be ecstatic.).

We learn [from the VR] that in 1971, God had destroyed the secret base to make way for a bowling alley. Kenji, Maruo, Otcho, and Yoshitsune called God "The Evil Emperor"

Koizumi turns out to be a natural at bowling. God now wants her on his team.

Some absolutely heartbreaking stuff occurs with Yoshitsune. I wish I could go over it but I can't for the sake of time. Please reread it if you haven't, it's around chapter 148.

Manjoume enters the VR, he realizes that it's the real 1971; he's fairly terrified.

Takasugi, while doing her job, sees Friend out in the rain, walking adjacent to the cafe she's sitting in. Or at least what she believes to be Friend.

Manjoume sees his old self and reminisces about his life.

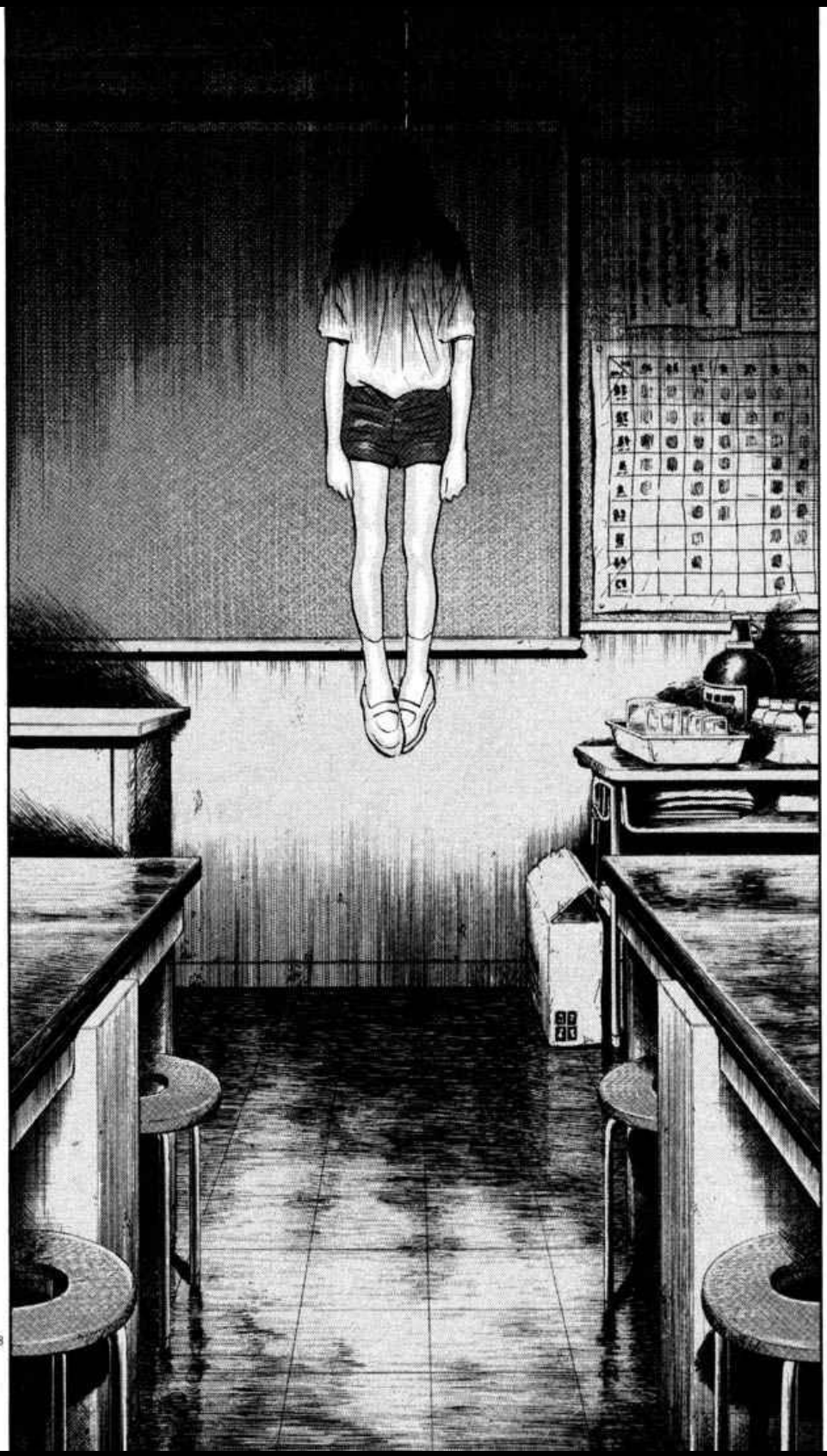
Konchi, Mon, and Keroyon discuss Katsumata while going to the science room. When Mon asks Konchi about what Katsumata's like, Konchi says that he doesn't know him. Keroyon asks if he's in class two, Mon says he thought Katsumata was in class five (both are incorrect, he's in class 5. Or maybe that's in 1970?). Keroyon asks how he died, Mon says he doesn't know. One of them asks if there was a funeral or not. The only thing that's known about Katsumata is that he died before dissecting the carp; this gives further credence to Katsumata being the one who spread the rumors (or Fukubei in this case). As we can see, Katsumata isn't known at all, not even by his classmates. It almost justifies some of Katsumata's actions. He didn't have his parents, friends, or even people to talk to. However, this doesn't excuse his actions; he is the reason for all of this. I wonder how Katsumata felt while making this scene in the VR.

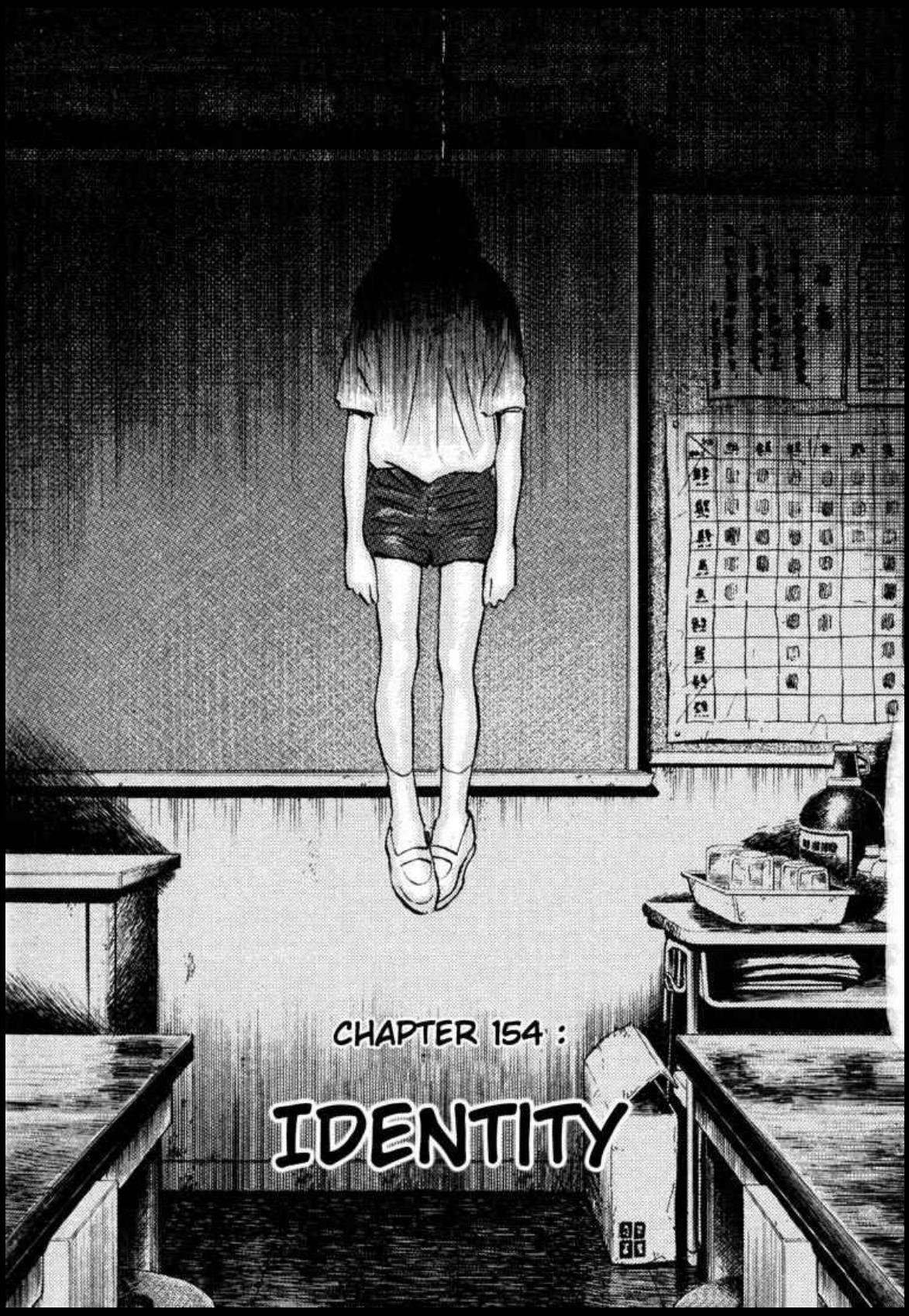
Yukiji and Otcho also see Friend. His plan is working.

Friend meanwhile just entered the attraction and started to clear all the stages in seconds.

Kanna goes into VR to figure out what's happening. Meets young Kenji and has a nice moment with him.

Donkey goes to investigate, we see Fukubei dangling for the third time now. However this time it looks really cool.




CHAPTER 154 :
IDENTITY

Donkey sees Donkey and Yamane staring menacingly at Fukubei.

He notices Fukubei and tells the other two to go save him (calling him Fukubei by the way).

Fukubei opens his eyes and tells Donkey to spread news of this miracle to everyone. Donkey doesn't buy it. First he says that this scene is a lie, Fukubei is still smiling; then he says that when people die they turn to nothing, Fukubei is still smiling; he then says that this is a trick, Fukubei's face turns sour. Fukubei is not a trickster. Fukubei tells Sadakiyo and Yamane to banish Donkey for speaking of such heresy.

Let's quickly talk about why Katsumata is doing this before we move on. Katsumata has just spread a rumor that he died, thus he is giving himself a fresh start as Fukubei. Like a phoenix rising out of its ashes, Fukubei will rise from Katsumata. He also simply wants to get Katsumata out of the way so he doesn't have to exert himself on more deception, plus it sets everything up for the half century long plan. He does it out of ego as well but I'm sure you could already tell.

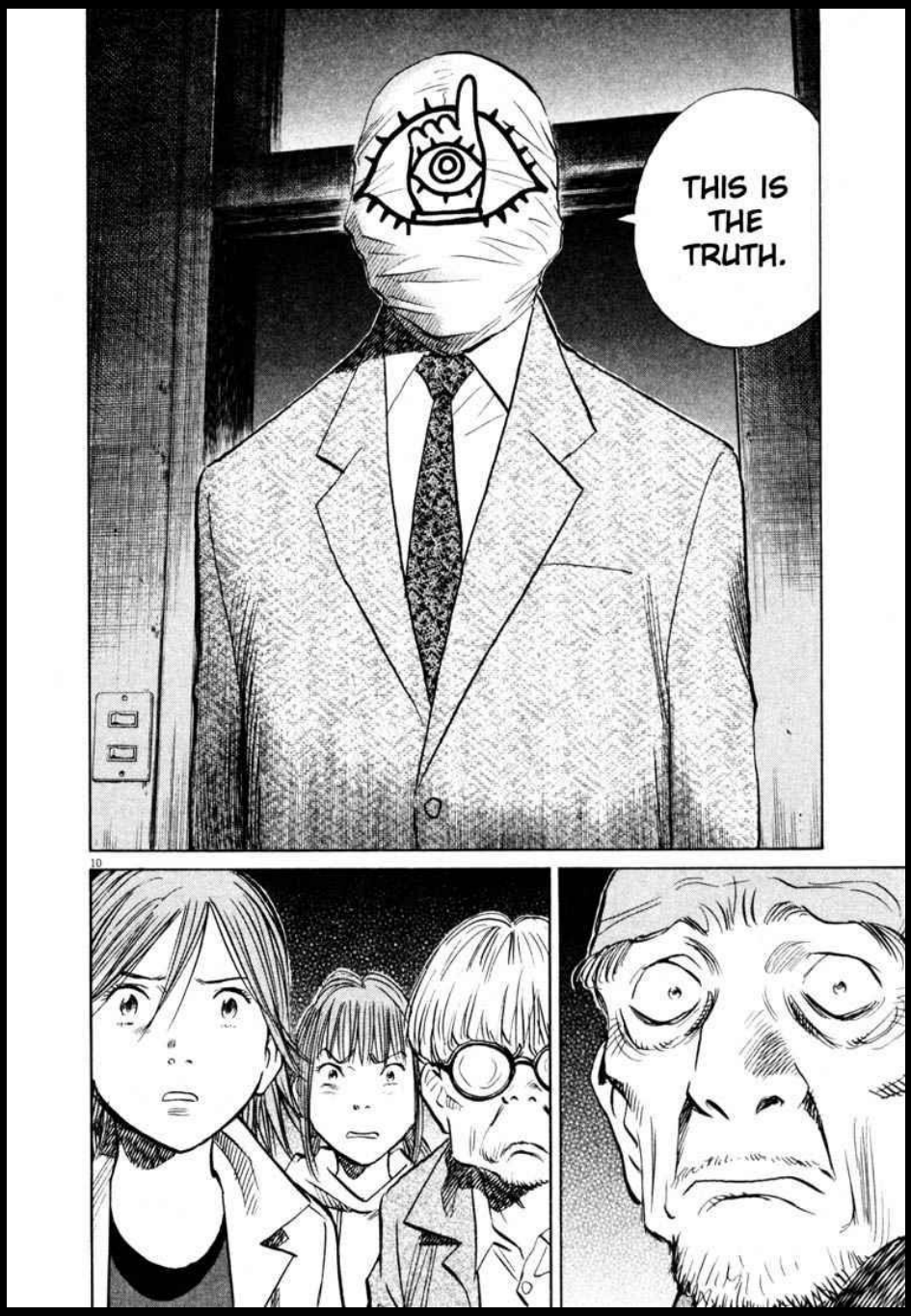
Yoshitsune says "So that's it…/ That's what it was…", Fukubei replies with a gaping smile: "Yes./ This is what it was". Firstly, it implies that this VR Fukubei most likely knows that this is the VR, he has some kind of omniscience in this verse, or it's possible that he knew this would happen (predicted it while making his 50 year plan which would be insane), either way works since the result hardly changes. Secondly it shows a really interesting perspective on Fukubei. It's such a cool line. Fukubei is proud of this, proud of being able to orchestrate such an event. He isn't even irritated by not banishing Donkey properly, he probably planned to do so. He has such a unique self awareness, it's almost hard to describe.

Manjoume arrives and asks him what's next. What will Fukubei show him, or maybe this is already a distorted truth. The chapter ends with a mysterious figure standing behind Manjoume.

As Manjoume stares at Fukubei, Fukubei doesn't seem impressed or interested in him. Manjoume demands (lightly) for Fukubei to stop lying and show what really happened. That's when Friend steps up from behind Manjoume and says "This is right". Manjoume is dumbfounded

Small break away, professor's daughter also sees Friend walking around.

Manjoume is terrified, child Fukubei seems to be doing alright. Friend continues, “This is right./ This is the truth.”



Child Fukubei speaks up too: “Yes…/This is right.” while giving a slight smile which slowly gives rise to a much bigger one.

Koizumi and Kanna have no clue who Fukubei is so they're dumbfounded, I found it pretty humorous.

Friend approaches child Fukubei. Fukubei is smiling. Then suddenly, Friend grabs Fukubei's feet, Fukubei is surprised, he did not anticipate this. Everyone is shocked as Friend starts pulling down on Fukubei. Fukubei starts choking as Friend says "You will die here.". Fukubei tries to say stop as his eyes bulge out of his sockets. Manjoume tries stopping Friend but he simply retorts with "This is.../ The truth".

Why did Katsumata pull down Fukubei? It's part of his deceit, but it's also a parting gift to Fukubei, to conceal his lie so it stays dormant for a while longer. It's interesting that Fukubei didn't know that Katsumata would pull him down. It shows that Katsumata didn't make Fukubei inherit his conscience when making the VR. This is very important for the end scene, and in general for Friend's conclusion.

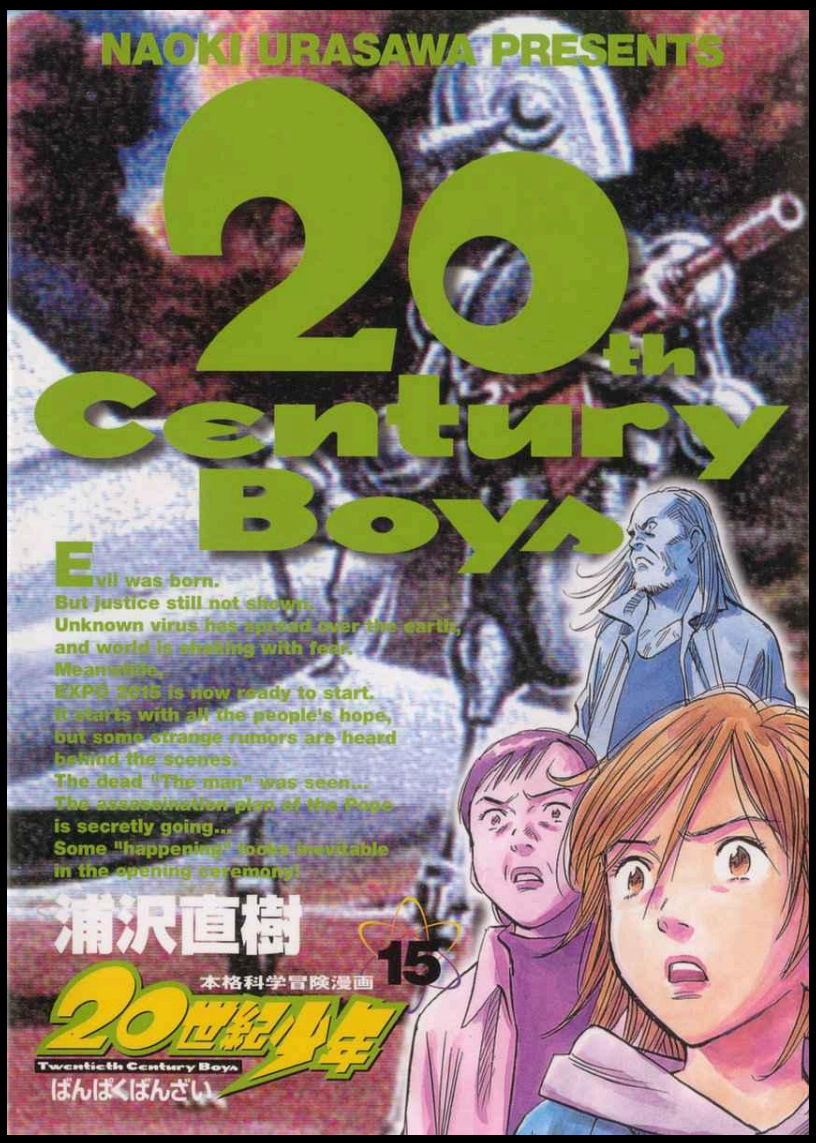
Manjoume is sent out of the VR, he wakes up and sees Friend staring down at him with the VR goggles in hand.

The VR starts to dematerialize. To get back Koizumi pulls off Sadakiyo's mask, she makes it back to the real world. Yoshitsune and Kanna don't, they still have their own journeys to make.

Yoshitsune's realization is the third most emotional scene in the entire manga. Heart tearing.

Donkey and Kanna have a scene together which is equally heart breaking. Donkey says that Fukubei will definitely be the bad guy. He wishes for Kanna to bed the good guy; Kanna says the same to Donkey. Other stuff too but it's off topic.

Volume 15)



The Pope arc is officially starting. We get a side story about a priest named Luciano; won't be covering it too much besides the parts relevant to Friend, much like I did during the Chou Jr and Kanna arc.

We get to see a very interesting perspective on Friend's death in the form of two Italian guys. The two aren't part of the Friend cult

or really supporters of him, however their dialogue is quite interesting.



We get key insight into how the public viewed Friend pre 2001. They thought he was a bit scummy, a little too mysterious, and probably a bit weird. It's an excellent example of the human psyche. Even your most primary intuition and instincts about someone can be overwritten by changing your perspective/ the way you view it. Friend knew this and utilized it to his advantage very well. It is quite shocking to me that Friend's cult was popular

enough to reach these two Italians before 2001. Anyways, Urasawa excellently portrays the public mentality.

The next scene is much the same. Luciano and the two toast to Friend.

Luciano discovers the New Book of Prophecy (novel version). Figures out that his teacher believed in this book; the world will end in 2015.

One of the Vatican puppets that Friend brainwashed says to Luciano "The era of Christ will not have ended by next year", I wonder if he thinks of Friend as Christ, or at least god. It seems like the case. Extra foreshadowing.

Flashback) We see Luciano's master tell him that book's of prophecy which resemble the Bible aren't holy, they are "The Devil's prophecies". Not sure how happy Friend would be about that.

Luciano safely makes it to the church in Shinjuku. Friend's plan seems to be proceeding even after his death.

Our main cast has a meeting, confirming once again that Friend is *definitely* alive. Friend looked back at them and gave them a slight smile (when they saw him while in Shinjuku. It looks really cool).



They discuss what their course of actions should be, New Book of Prophecy in hand.

We see more and more people praying in front of Friend, asking him to protect them from the virus. It's incredibly depressing.

A small kid, being a kid, climbs up the flowers and right into the Friend coffin. Authorities obviously go and get him down, however before they do so the kid reaches to touch Friend:



Friend is now confirmed to be in the coffin, awaiting the pope.

How did Friend block that kid without anyone seeing him? Either his aura or reaction speed (and hand speed). Don't think about it too much, it's mainly to show that Friend is indeed alive.

Mini story about the pope and the priest (the Japanese one) ensues, pretty heartwarming.

Kanna says that she wants to save the pope, not because he is the closest person to god, but because she just wants to protect him. We'll see how much this attitude changes.

Yoshitsune, Otcho, and Yukiji start a search group for 13.

Meanwhile 13 is just sitting on a bench eating a rice ball while listening to a Friend album. "What a beautiful world…♫/ What a beautiful new world…♫", already preparing for the Friend era arc I see. He looks weirdly happy while singing it, it's rare that we see any of the Friend party members happy.

Kanna and the others chase down one of Friend's hitmen. Turns out to be the same hitman who helped a grandma cross the street back in volume 4. I guess the Friend party isn't so friendly after all. Still feel bad for the grandma though. Luckily 13 is there to help her out. He guides her along the crosswalk, even though the light is showing red. The grandma is worried, however 13 says "Don't worry/ People should walk the way they want to…/ Wouldn't that be the right kind of world for everyone?". Now we see how Friend brainwashed 13, and probably some of the other high-ups as well. They use a utilitarian ideology to justify themselves; for them it is a battle to decide who the strongest is; Friend seems to have the most favourable ideology for the end goal, the most altruistic and gracious one where everyone is a [F]friend. 13 believes that he is purified from an imperfect world; he will be free once Friend becomes the world president. 13

continues by saying that everything will be okay once the new world begins, that she won't have to suffer anymore. This reaffirms that 13 believes Friend to be an altruist, which Friend (Fukubei) up to this point has shown very well, in his own cultish twisted way.

Back to the pope. He leaves Shinjuku, thus the prophecy isn't fulfilled, or at least that's what the mafia thinks (and Kanna). Otcho doesn't appear to be satisfied in the slightest.

Takasugi and Manjoume seem to disregard their sightings (Why? I guess you could justify it for Takasugi…but Manjoume…Friend literally stood in front of you…I guess Manjoume's brain was too fried from the VR [even his eyes are full of blood when he exits, not to mention his nose]). Manjoume tells Takasugi to find 13 and stop him (he really depressed in that shot). Manjoume's manager comes up to him and tells him that the pope's schedule is almost finished, the last event is him visiting Friend's body during the expo……huh… Manjoume is thrown in for a loop. He asks who decided that, his manager tells him that he did. Manjoume says he never gave those orders, then the realization hits him.



Friend has shown plenty of shows, but this one will be one for the ages.

320,000+ people show up two days before it takes place (how did they allow this when there's a virus outbreak 😭, people will be people)

The news, who has been narrating this event up till now, tells its viewers “Now is the time for Friend’s dream to become reality!!”

Friend’s dream will come true; for everyone else it will be a nightmare.

The security is fairly weak in the expo, so Yoshitsune and Chou (along with Kanna and Otho) make it through unharmed. Weak security? I wonder why.

13 prepares to assassinate the pope.

Maruo encourages a doctor to keep working on the virus by telling his Kenji’s story. Even though Kenji’s band broke up, the one who poured so much time in, he sang his songs, this time on the sidewalk. Kenji did give up on his dream.

Maruo learns about the gas-mask wearing salesmen. A terrifying image appears. One which we will discuss later.



Meanwhile, 13 and Otcho are playing mind games with each other to see from where the pope would be assassinated.

Keroyon goes to Kiriko.

Takasugi encourages Manjoume by saying that he will now stand at the peak of humanity during this festival. Manjoume refutes the point, saying that the peak that her and him will experience is nothing more than the bottom of the foot-hill. “He [referring to Friend] is about to stand in a place I could never dream of reaching”.

Takasugi questions him on what will happen. “The show is about to begin./ And in front of every man, woman and child on the planet…/ The imposter…/ Is going to become genuine.”. What

does Manjoume mean by this? He's clearly not referring to Katsumata, that wouldn't make sense either since Fukubei is the imposter, but you could make the argument that Katsumata was never ordained as Friend. What Manjoume actually means is that the prophet and Christ-like figure of Friend will finally breach the title of imposter and become a genuine saint.

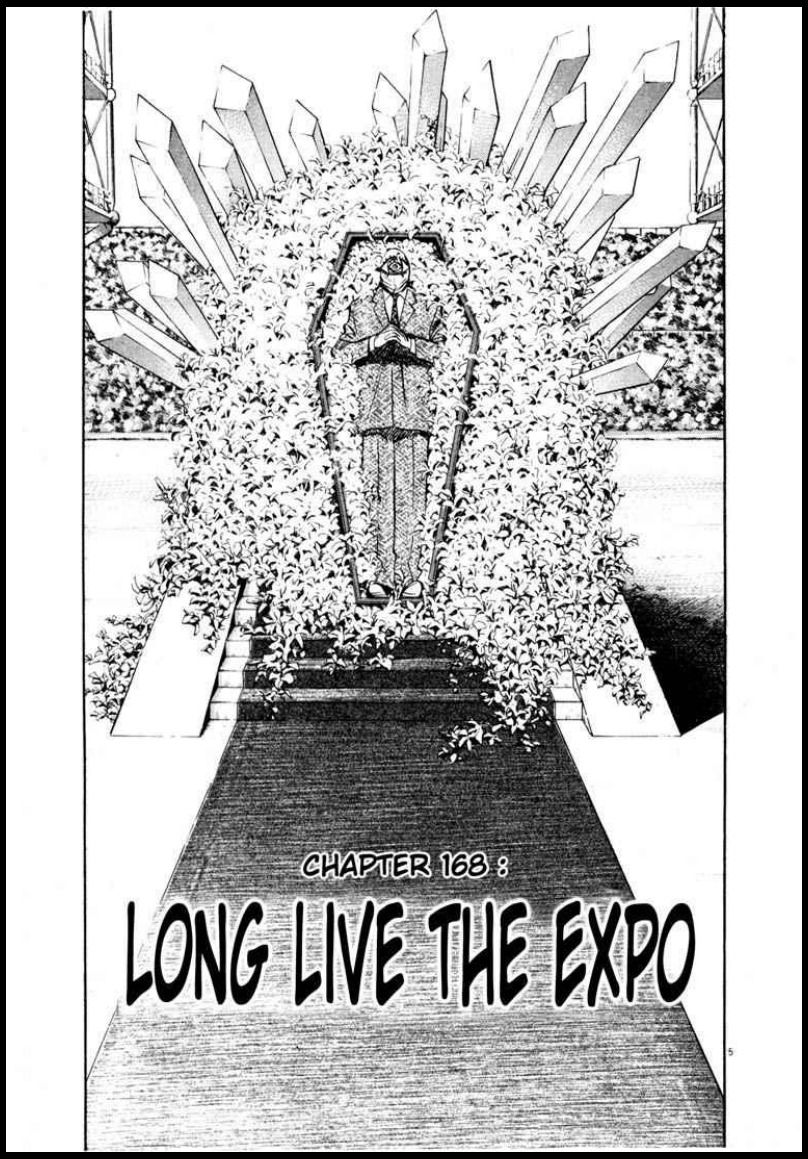
The Pope Assassination Climax.

"The heart-stopping event that characterized that day forever took only seconds…/But at the time, it played out as if in slow motion"

I, with my poor writing, will never be able to capture the atmosphere of this chapter. If you have forgotten it I would suggest rereading it.

Otcho is frantically securing the area. Yukiji is shaking. A huge roar of applause is heard as the pope walks to the "podium".

The dome that guards Friend is silently pulled up, revealing the coffin.



Luciano and Chou figure out that 13 will be in the expo (Otcho listens attentively) while the pope is making his speech. The pope's speech is excellent.

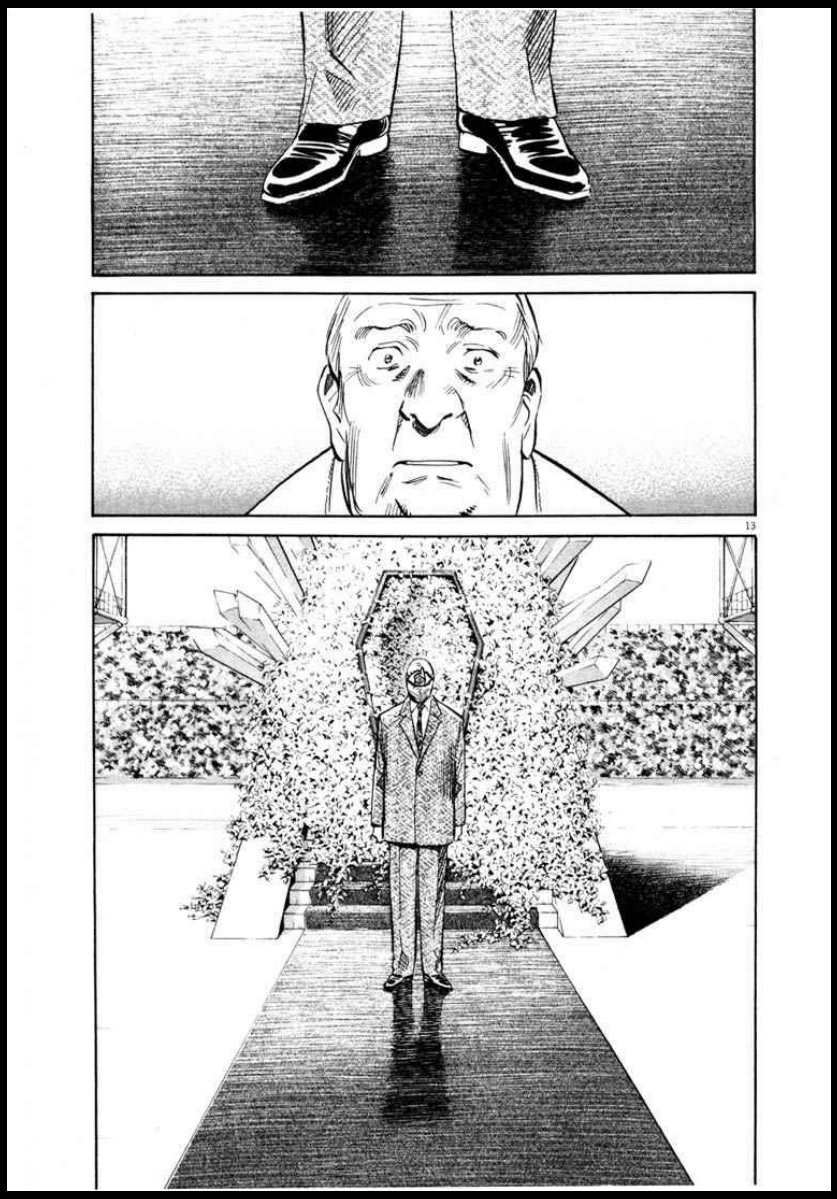
"Our lord Jesus Christ,/ Bearing the sins of mankind with the cross on his back,. Was given eternal life once more by the father in heaven./ Our 'Friend'.../ May you, too.../ Our 'Friend'.../ You saved us in the Bloody New Year's Eve of 2000, at the risk of your own life./ God will grant you eternal life with him...". The pope, though not Nostradamus, was fairly accurate with his wishes.

However, he got one part wrong, you can't be with god if you already are him.

13 mounts the expo and takes out his rifle.

Kanna, distracted by 13, wonders why everyone is suddenly looking down in amazement. "So that's what…" Yukiji says in shock and horror. Kanna looks down to see the pope in shock.

Friend has resurrected from his cross {coffin}.



The pope's eyes widen as Yukiji rushes in to save the pope.

13 lines up to take the shot, Otcho commands Chou to shoot him.

The pope says "It's…/ A miracle", solidifying Friend's legacy.

Friend and the pope are mere centimeters away from each other, face to face.

Everyone is celebrating Friend's revival, Otcho is telling Chou to shoot 13, Yukiji is trying to make it through the crowd with kanna behind her.

13 fires as the expo Friend symbol watches down on all of them (it's also in the form of a sun which is just more symbolism for god).

"Was it three gunshots…? Or four…? It's hard to remember.". This might be an allusion to the assassination of John F Kennedy. Not only is the "three or four" gunshots a similar phrase to the one most onlookers of the assassination used, the assassination is also shown in Urasawa's other famous manga called Billy Bat (It's even a major arc in that story).

"The entire stadium fell silent/ The man who saved the pope lay dying on the ground" Irony

"And then, Otcho muttered…/ Just when he had been given eternal life…/ He turned into a god…"

There are 3 distinct meanings to this. Otcho knew about 2 of them, we know about the other. The first interpretation is that Otcho is saying that Friend revived and almost like Christ he approached the pope and saved his life; pretty simple. The second interpretation is that he's saying this in a larger picture sort of

way; ‘just when Friend was immortalized by his funeral with the pope, Friend suddenly saved him and will most likely soon become a god for most people’. The third meaning is much more lucrative. We already discussed in detail why Friend wants to be god. So far Friend has created a well constructed narrative:

Fukubei is a false prophet who tries his best to appear like a real one

->

Fukubei=Christ and/or a great prophet

->

Fukubei gets killed, and along with many other factors, is proven to be a false prophet.

->

Katsumata is not like Fukubei (we’ll see this later). Fukubei is a mere prophet, and a false one at that, he tried too hard to be something more than he is. Fukubei is merely one in a long line of Friends (Reference). Katsumata will rise above that

->

Friend is revived, but not Fukubei. Katsumata has arisen, he will make sure to tell Manjoume and everyone else as well in due time.

->

Katsumata wants to rise above a mere prophet, to surpass Kenji (Reference) and Fukubei. To make the world anew So what’s the next logical step from a Christ-like prophet?

->

To become a God.

(Who would solidify such a title? The pope)

Manjoume: “I was supposed to have written the scenario./ But starting then…/ No, long before then, I had been pushed into a side role…/ At this point in time, the main character was clear./ ‘Friend’ was grievously injured…/ He came back to life and gave his body to protect the pope…”. I think he’s becoming a bit too meta aware.

Resume) The pope’s guards rush to protect him. The pope says that he’s fine, they should be hurrying to help Friend instead. They move the pope to a secure location before the Japanese priest can inform him of Friend’s tricks:



Friend's ability to deceive others is top notch.

The pope's guards try to help Friend by carrying him off to the medics, however Friend retaliates by telling them to put him down. He starts walking down the expo grounds as the crowd murmurs in horrific excitement. Takasugi asks Manjoume if it was his plan, the response is clear.


LET ME ...
DOWN ...
WE NEED SOME MEDICS !!
AMBULANCE!!
I'M ...
FINE ...
HUH...
WOBBLE
AH ...
WHERE ARE THE PARA-MED-ICS?!
B... BUT ...
MURMUR
OOOH ...



Friend drops down to his knees

And holds up his bloody hand

Forming the Friend symbol


A GOD ...
HE BECAME ...

Katsumata has long surpassed Fukubei and Kenji. He is god.

(The perfect edition apparently has this as "He did it…/ He had achieved divinity", I think the original version is better, either way they say that Friend has achieved godhood. I will be going by the original manga with the perfect edition ending [and original], nothing else.)

The crowd is the most terrifying of all. They all hold the Friend symbol in unison. Their faces are blurred to create an even more surreal effect. Reminds me a lot of Dante's paradiso (*The Divine Comedy*). Specifically the scene where Dante and Beatrice meet god. It truly reflects just how terrifying Friend's plan was.(In this case it would be Yukiji and Kanna, or maybe Otcho and Yukiji. Sadly this parallel would make more sense if it was Dante and Virgil instead of Beatrice. Unfortunately though, Virgil is still serving his infinite time in limbo.)



We are now fast approaching the Friend era. Friend accomplished his goal of becoming a god, he has little to achieve left in the grand sense so he's going to speed up the process.

Cut to a week later. Crowds line up before the building where Friend's funeral was once held to see Friend [this time he isn't dead]. Friend is rolled out on a wheelchair with one of his arms bandaged. As the crowd cheers, Friend waves back with Manjoume by his side. He silently, but just loud enough so Manjoume can hear it, says "Buh-bye now./ Later./ Wonder how many of you I'll see again.", foreshadowing the events that will occur in the rapidly approaching Friend era while also still confirming his compatabilism ideology. Manjoume is perturbed significantly (not really, still creeped out though).

A meeting is held in the diet building. Friend says that plenty of members have changed, that they were banished, fear inducing the members even more to keep cooperating with his plan.

The professor's daughter asks Friend who he is. Friend says that she saw him at the intersection in Nishiazabu. I doubt that what she was really asking, but the only follow up is her looking at assassin guy.

Friend then transitions to talking about the book of prophecy. "Now…/ How far have we gotten through the 'New Book of Prophecy'?/ The 'sales-men' have appeared…/ Has the 'Holy Mother' 'descended'? [One of the members says that the factory Kiriko was burned down]/ So our net for her has been cut./ It's only a matter of time. Before she will 'descend'…"

The salesmen part is self-evident. The holy mother part is referring to whether Kiriko has failed or succeeded in making the cure for the virus and spreading it, currently the situation is unknown due to the factory burning down and her location being disputed. Friend says not to worry since whether she makes the cure will be known very soon.

“Which means we come, finally [more signs of Friend’s impatience], to this page./ ‘Ring ring, goes the phone…’/ ‘And all the preparations are complete.”

Friend stares at the phone, menacingly, while everyone else does the same, but more so worriedly.



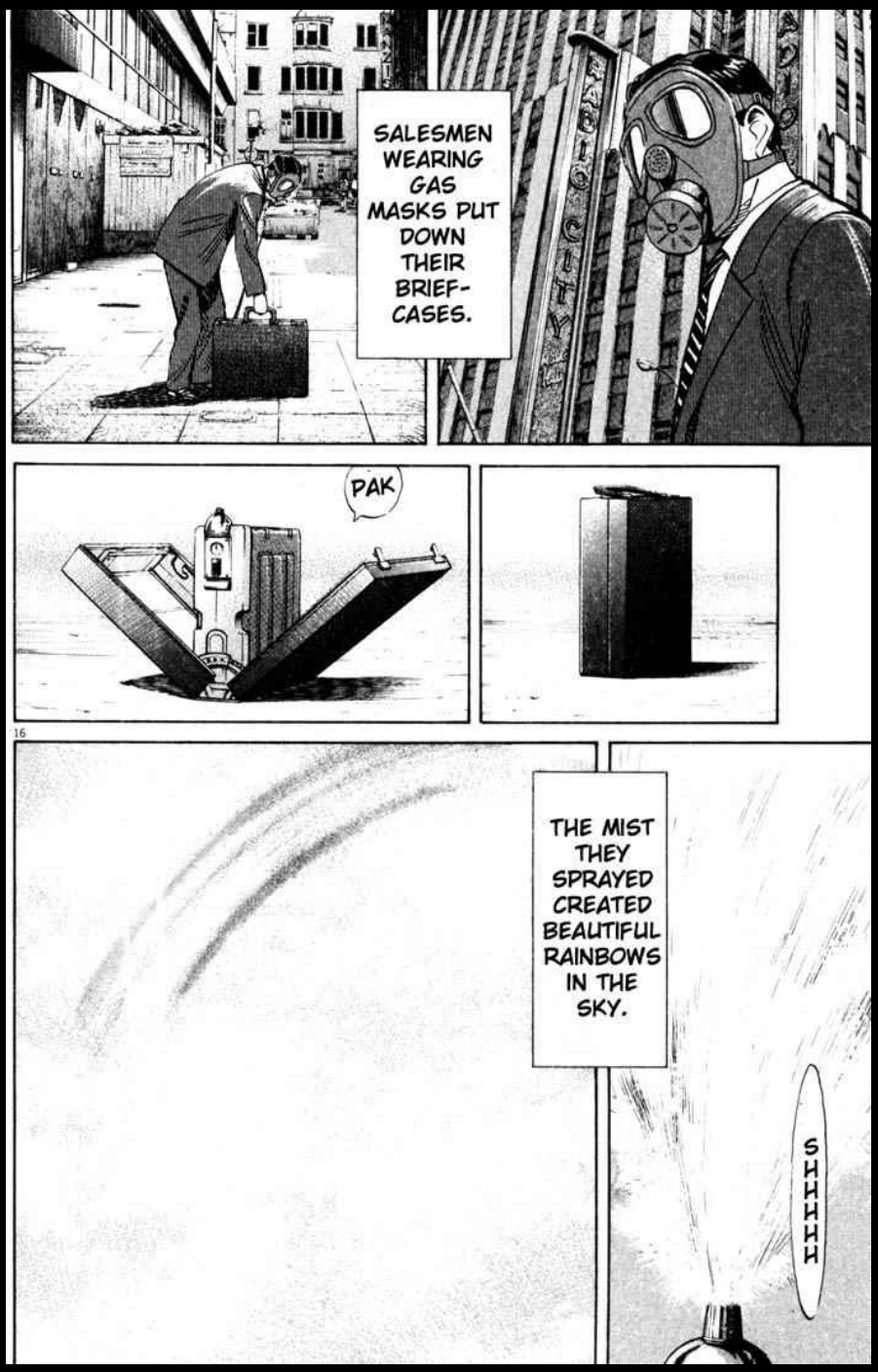
“It rang.” peak dialogue. In all seriousness, it’s very like him to say such a line; that’s how I would imagine a child reacting to it (notice how it’s an old landline phone as well).

Friend picks up the phone. “Hello?/ Yes./ Good./We will meet again, if the fates allow. [puts the phone down]”

We get another hint that Friend believes in predetermined outcomes, even though he also believes in free will.

His mask also has a weird zig-zag pattern on it in these shots, almost as if a sort of metamorphosis is happening.

Narrator: “Just then, all around the world…/ Salesmen wearing gas masks put down their brief-cases./ The mist they sprayed created beautiful rainbows in the sky./ And the world fell into ruin.”


SALESMEN WEARING GAS MASKS PUT DOWN THEIR BRIEF-CASES.
PAK
16
THE MIST THEY SPRAYED CREATED BEAUTIFUL RAINBOWS IN THE SKY.
SHHHH



I've been racking my brain for a while trying to remember what the salesmen remind me of, I haven't come up with a conclusion, if you can relate them to something then please tell me.

I do know that they most likely reference the nuclear disaster cartoons during the Cold War, where family and often businessmen were drawn wearing nuclear gas masks, which would make sense for the comparison.

The rainbows are irony for the doomsday that is about to happen. Rainbows are associated with harmony, peace, and happiness; exactly the opposite of what's to come.

The world is now in ruin.

Chapter 170) One of my personal favourite chapters. Time skips by 3 years. Here it is:

20th Century Boys v15 Long Live the Expo c170 Over the Rainbow Translated by Stephen Paul, Scanned and edited by Gatsu. BotH &MS




I WAS DEAAAAD ♫
I WAS DEAAAAD ♫
ドドドド
JASRAC 許0315249-301
IN HEAVEN ... ♫
BRRM
BRRR ...
CHAPTER 169 :
OVER THE RAINBOW



The zenith of manga.

Kenji sings a song that describes his life as of recently. He was dead and considered to be in heaven, but now is returning to finish where he left off.

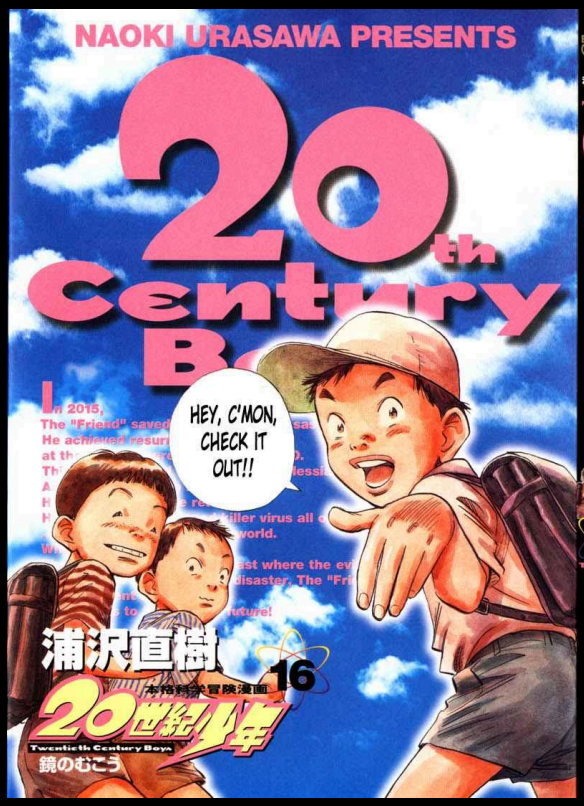
It's really cool to see Kenji returning after so many people have referenced him. Think of it from the perspective of Koizumi. She knows that Kenji exists and has been told a wide array of things about him. Tomodachi world has taught her to hate Kenji, Kanna

hasn't shut up about how much of a hero Kenji is, Yukiji constantly admires Kenji for his decisiveness, Otcho admires Kenji for never giving up, Yoshitsune admires him for being the leader. Yet Koizumi still hasn't met him; the only time she interacted with Kenji was a programmed child version of him in the VR world. It's good to have him back after a 120 chapter break. It's symbolic how Kenji is missing for 50% of the manga yet still has influence over the entirety of it. It shows how a hero gives power to others, though we'll learn later why Kenji probably would disagree with me about being a hero. The reason as to why is probably the most engaging part of the whole story for me because of its trickiness.

We see the date as "3rd Year of Friend". This is similar to countries like North Korea or Japan where their leader's life/reign is the date, or at least it is so partially (Japan uses the Gregorian calendar date too).

Volume 16)

PV Section

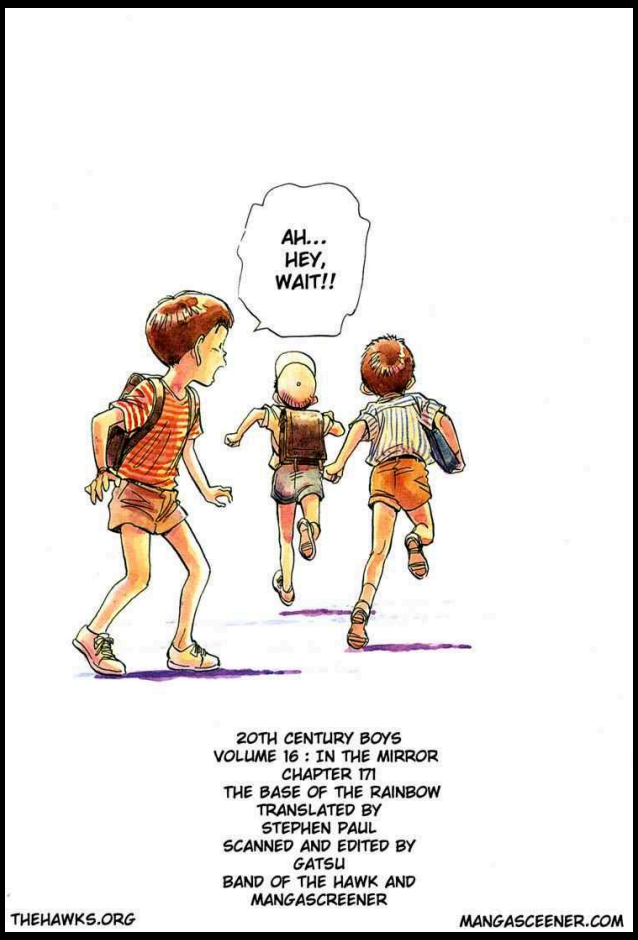




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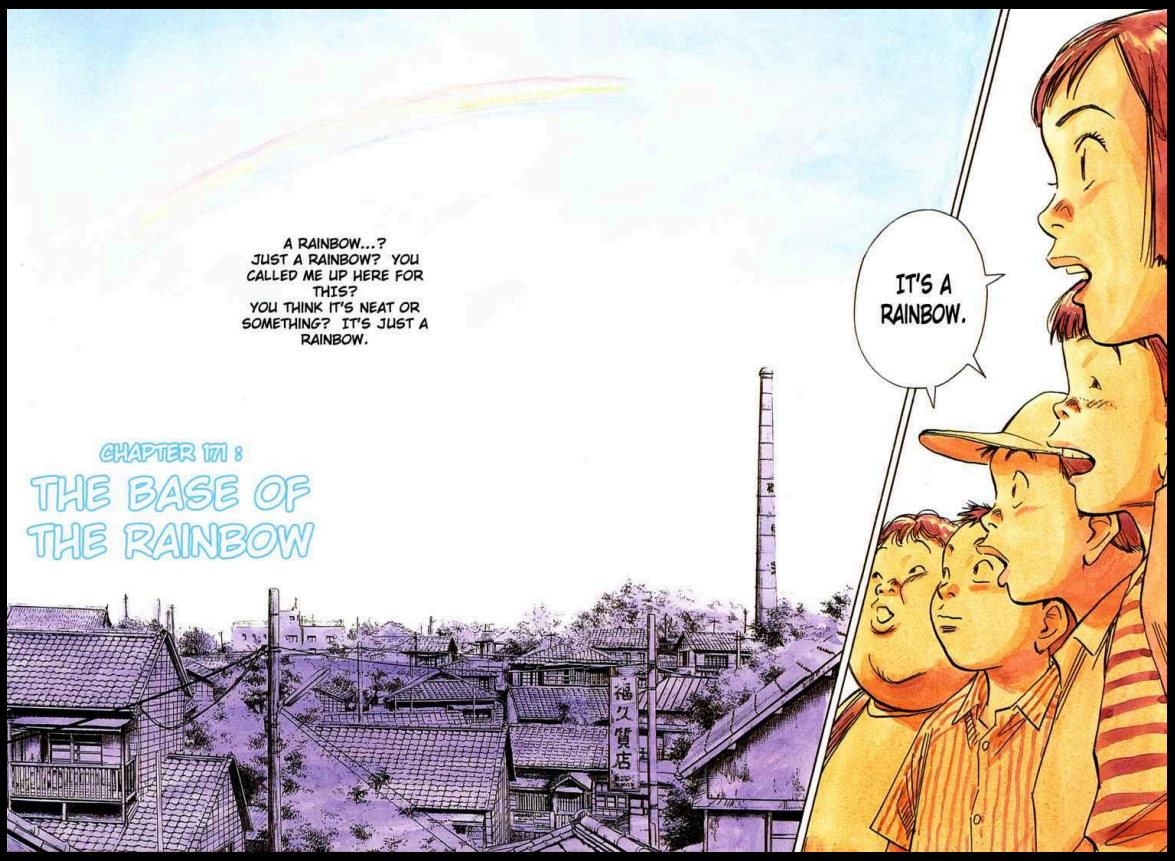
NAOKI URASAWA PRESENTS
In 2015, The "Friend" saved Pope from the assassination,
He achieved resurrection of miracle at the opening ceremony of the EXPO.
This made him God rather than the Messiah.
And no one can stop him. Horrible plan became real.
He commanded to spread killer virus all over the world.
.....That was the end of the world.
Why this tragedy happened?
The story goes back to the past where the evil was born.
On the other side, after the disaster, The "Friend" becomes
The president of the world.
We witness to the horrible future!

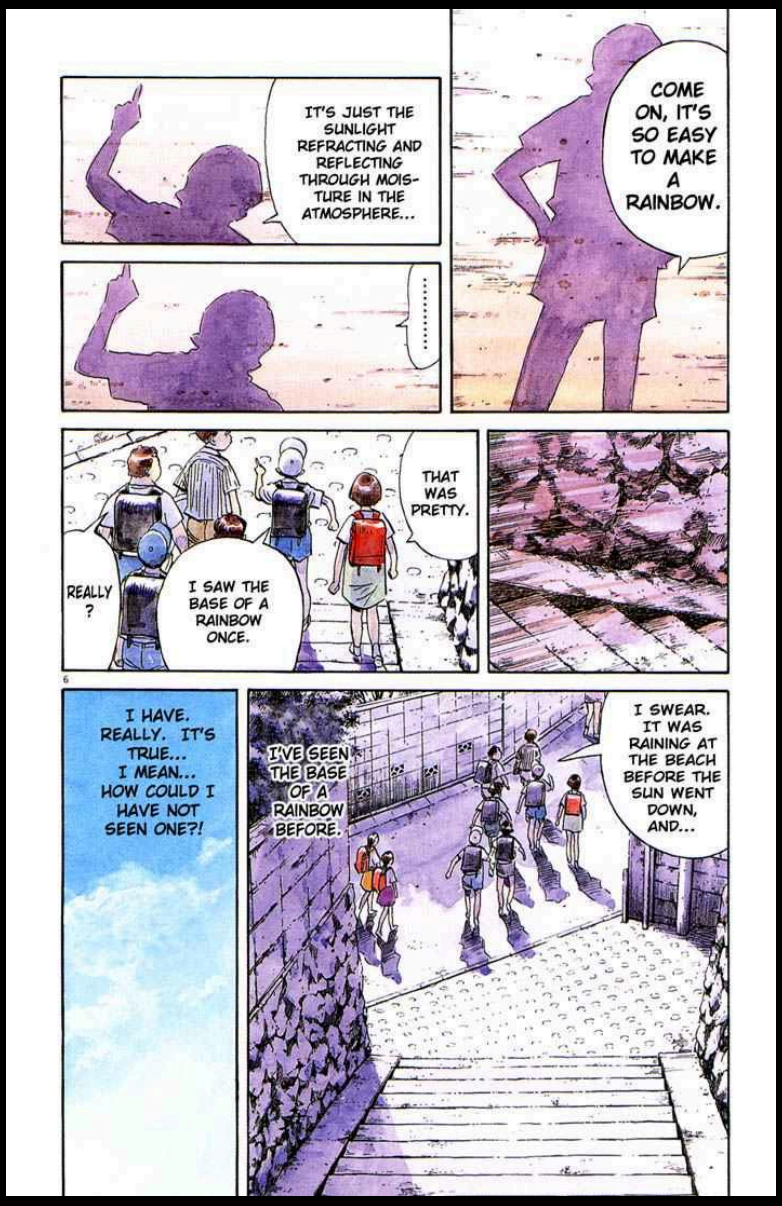


Colored!?

We now enter the PV section of 20th Century Boys. The purpose of this as we'll discover later is connected to the holy mother descending (I'll discuss this at the end). These are the unabridged memories of Friend, none of them are fake unlike VR. Originally I thought that some of them are different, however this got debunked (by myself). Without further ado, let's see what Friend is hiding.


WHAT, WHAT IS IT?!
WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL ANYWAYS... I'M TIRED.
GASP!! SLOW DOWN, GUYS!!
CHAPTER 17
THE BASE OF THE RAINBOW
AREN'T YOU GONNA SEE?
IT'S KENJI AND HIS FRIENDS AGAIN... JUST LIKE ALWAYS.
WHO AAA AA!!
I GUESS, BUT I DON'T REALLY CARE ABOUT IT ...


A RAINBOW...?
JUST A RAINBOW? YOU CALLED ME UP HERE FOR THIS?
YOU THINK IT'S NEAT OR SOMETHING? IT'S JUST A RAINBOW.
CHAPTER 171 :
THE BASE OF THE RAINBOW
IT'S A RAINBOW.
福久質店



Kenji and the others are running up to see nothing other than a rainbow. Katsumata [? Most likely it's Katsumata since this is before the summer of 1969 as seen by the foliage and the outfit that Kenji, Yoshitsune, and Maruo are wearing. Also shown by Donkey not being with them. They're going to school so it's either early fall or late spring, I'd say it's May of 1969. Maybe it's September since Kenji mentions he saw one at the beach earlier. Could also simply be October of 1968. Doesn't matter too much.] explains why a rainbow is actually nothing exciting. His self

awareness currently is at its largest valley. He can't understand why they would enjoy a rainbow, or maybe it's just that he doesn't want to since he thinks he's much too mature for stuff like that; he doesn't really understand what it means to be human. No one pays attention to his ranting. When Kenji mentions that he saw the base of a rainbow, Katsumata instantly proposes that he also saw a rainbow, even though he knows that it's completely absurd. Looks like science pales in comparison to Kenji's stories huh Katsumata.

The rainbow parallels the start of the Friend era as seen by the previous chapter.

Flashforward to 1969, probably) Fukubei is reading a manga, Kenji and Maruo take an interest in the manga and ask him if they can borrow it. Everyone crowds around it and tries to read it (it's the week's Sunday). Fukubei's inner-monologue says "don't crease it./ Kids always mess them up. Don't hold it like that. Don't crease the binding./ Don't crease it./ Don't you dare get it dirty", very protective, yet he allows them to borrow the manga.

He later asks them where it is. Kenji and Maruo say that they put it on the window-sill, then they notice that it's gone. "It's gone./ What did you do with it?/ Where is my Sunday now?". Fukubei is impulsive, yet he hides it very well; a psychopathic trait. He looks down the window only to see it in the mud. "Oh…/ There it is, in the mud…" he says to himself. Maruo and Kenji apologize but it's not enough, he wants his money back (I'll note when he's talking to himself and when he's talking to Kenji/ the others.). Maruo and Kenji say that they promise to pay him back. Fukubei says to himself "Of course you will. You're not getting off with just an

apology.", he has little empathy in his heart, however this is a fairly justified reaction right now, manga is pretty rare after all. He says to Kenji "It's okay.", completely contradicting his words. He then says to himself "Do you really think it's okay?", he could be saying this to Kenji or he could be saying it to himself for letting them off so easily. Kenji then says thanks to him and once again apologizes. "So you're not going to pay me back anymore?", pretty humorous, but also quite insightful; even though Fukubei lets them off, he expected them to pay anyways, he's very manipulative and controlative, but for now it's not the main issue, the main issue are his constant contradictions. Fukubei says that he has plenty of manga at home, Kenji and Maruo are surprised. Fukubei goads them on by saying he has Magazine King, Bokura, and even Bouken-Ou (Note: The reviewer is not very knowledgeable on 60s-70s manga). Maruo and Kenji are super excited so they ask Fukubei if they can go to his house, Fukubei says "If you want.", even though they just ruined his manga, he allows them to come to his house and read more. "You can come over. You can look at my manga./ I have plenty of books your parents won't but for you./ And I have all the volumes of 'Cyborg 009' and 'Kyojin No Hoshi' of course", classic narcissist Fukubei, wanting attention at the cost of what he values most. "I bet you've never really read 'Emu Emu Santa' or 'Submarine 707.' I might even show you 'Majin Garon.'", he's already cherishing this opportunity and acting as if he's a king. "But in return…", he says, clearly wanting something from them back. Fukubei brings them some Calpis, they barely pay attention to him. "Be gentle with them. [referring to Maruo showing Yoshitsune a funny panel]/ Looks like they haven't touched my Tankobons./ That's right, they'd better not. They've all got covers on them. They shouldn't be touching them.", still overprotective, yet I think there's a side of Fukubei which wanted them to touch the Tankobons, just so he could scold them. Fukubei says aloud "I

guess I'll read the newest volume of 'Yuu-Yake Banchou'", trying once again to impress them, and also once again failing miserably. Otcho and Kenji whisper about adding a robot to the Book of Prophecy; Fukubei is interested and asks what they're talking about, they instantly go back to reading (as school children wanting to keep a secret do). Fukubei is now angry and really wants to know what the Book of Prophecy is. 'I'm letting you read my manga, tell me what it is. I said you could read as much as you want so in return let me join you. You said it yourself…yes, you did, you promised, you promised, you promised.", Fukubei says, his hands shaking. Are his hands shaking out of a sort of jealousy or rage? Probably. It could also be a sort of fear, a fear of doing all of this yet it still didn't work. I think both interpretations work as both fit his characters in different facets. Fukubei tries desperately to get their attention once more by offering Calpis to them, but they soon leave to go to the secret base. They briefly thank him for the manga. "You're leaving? You're not even going to say goodbye?/ Secret base…/ Secret base…", so he goes to the secret base out of desperation and fury. "This place…? [he says as he walks up to the secret base]/ Whoa…‼[Probably referring to a bug he saw]/ These weeds are gross…/ They stick to your shoes and legs…/ I'm itchy…Too many bugs./ I hate this place…/ They're tied together. Are they supposed to be traps?/ That's so dumb. Do they think that will stop anybody?/ They're so stupid", a natural born pessimist, can't enjoy anything. He can't understand why they made the traps because he doesn't have their imagination. For Kenji and the others this place is magical; Fukubei can't imagine it so because he has no imagination, he doesn't have the essence of a child even if he's childish (I guess he really inherited the wrong part of that exchange).

“How can they call this dumb thing a secret base…?/ I could make a better one./ I could make a better one./ [As he looks around the base] This place is so stupid./ This is just the kind of thing that kids do. Talk about lame…”, talk about hypocritical Fukubei, you were just begging them to take you to this base.

He notices the Book of Prophecy and starts reading. He sees the new drawn on robot. But before he can complete his read, he hears a figure in the background.”Who’s there…?!/ Oh, it’s him…”, It's Sadakiyo. “Why don’t you come in? I’m not a part of their group…” Fukubei says to Sadakiyo. “Let’s see, what was his name…? Umm… Oh, Sadakiyo.”, Fukubei is luring in Sadakiyo like a fisherman casting his bait. “There’s some Shonen magazine and Shonen Sunday over there” Fukubei says while thinking “Why’s he just standing there? What a creep, with that dumb mask on all the time”, he’s such a devilish little child. Fukubei laughs about the Book of Prophecy, obviously trying to get Sadakiyo to be interested as well, which he is. Yet when he comes closer Fukubei thinks to himself “Don’t come over here. You’re gross…Geez.”, what a jerk, but yea, he thinks of everyone as inferior to him (even himself ☠). Fukubei lets Sadakiyo see the Book of Prophecy after some more pleading. “Normally, I wouldn’t be showing it to a stupid creep like you.”, you don’t even own the book Fukubei, you’re reading stolen property, how petty can you get. Sadakiyo asks Fukubei about the Book of Prophecy, Fukubei explains to him that Kenji imagines evil bad guys destroying the world at the end of the year 2000, and that Kenji and his friends will destroy those bad guys. He says that it would be pretty funny if the future really was like that, which is probably Fukubei’s first plans starting to form (he can think extremely quickly, especially as an adult but almost equally so as a child so he’s probably already formed some of the logistics). Fukubei then tells Sadakiyo to take off his

mask, he does so with some hesitation, prompting Fukubei to say [to himself] “quit hesitating, just do it already./ Hurry up, hurry!!/ Arrgh, this is so annoying.”, this is in total contrast to how he actually talks to Sadakiyo [he’s quite nice when you look solely at his dialogue to other characters, typical nice guy act]. Sadakiyo reveals his face. Fukubei…isn’t so enthusiastic. “Pssh, what a boring, normal face.” he thinks while saying “Ohh, so that’s what you look like”. We can once again confirm that he’s quite impatient, and rude.

Sadakiyo asks Fukubei “Will you be my Friend?” in a shaky voice. Fukubei is caught by surprise, “what” he mutters. “What is he talking about? What an idiot. I’m not gonna be your Friend. What a total dummy.”. The idea of Friend is probably starting to form in his mind, but it won’t be fully realized until later. This scene is especially sad because you can see just how nervous Sadakiyo is while attempting to make his first Friend:



Sadakiyo asks him if he can call Fukubei Fukubei or Hattori, Friend coldly rejects the idea and ignores it. We'll see later as to why his response is so cold. Fukubei says he wants to create a Book of Prophecy that's much better than the current one. Sadakiyo tries to support him. Fukubei then says "And it will really happen. All of my predictions will come true.", almost as if he's a prophet.

“The world will be just the way I say it is…”, again referencing his perfect world. It’s interesting how even at this early age, Katsumata is perfectly harmonized with Fukubei and has made a completely different personality for him.

Fukubeibey says to Sadakiyo: “I’ll be your Friend./ But don’t ever say my name again./ I’m not Fukubei, and I’m not Hattori./ I’m just a ‘Friend.’”. The early prototype of Friend is born. Fukubei is shown to really dislike his name, there are actually two reasons for it, however this is simply the lead up.

“My dream is not a dream. It is not a dream, because it really will happen./ Next year, I will be going to the expo during the entire summer vacation./ I have relatives in Osaka so I’ll be able to go every single day/ I think I will take some of my friends along./ I know a lot about the xpo, so I will be the guide for everyone else./ They’ll all be amazed, we’ll see the real future there.”, this is from Fukubei’s essay titled “Dreams”.

Kenji reads the essay and asks Fukubei what the expo is, Fukubei smirks and laughs at him for not knowing but later explains what it’s about. As Kenji hears his explanation his eyes light up. Kenji asks more and more about the expo. “What a surprise./ Kenji was fascinated with my story…/ Kenji of all people…”, Fukubei’s obsession with Kenji is evident. The lead up to the lie has started.

Soon Kenji spreads the details of the expo to everyone. Fukubei notices it and is happy since the story everyone is discussing is his.



This is where the “Long live the expo” line came from. Also this is one of the few times Fukubei smiles, of course it’s done out of greed. Which, now that I think about it, Fukubei is well versed in just about every sin besides gluttony.

1970 rolls around. Sadakiyo is extremely excited for the expo that’s about to start since Fukubei is taking him. He looks happy for the first time. He asks when they’re going, Fukubei responds that they’re not. Sadakiyo pleads why, but Fukubei simply tells him to be quiet: “Be quiet. We’re not going, and that’s that.”. Sadakiyo gets more and more desperate, saying that Fukubei promised to take him. Fukubei tells him “since when were you

allowed to speak to me that way, Sadakiyo?", showing how quickly Fukubei has turned Sadakiyo into his puppet. This scene parallels the scene before this, where Fukubei also said that Kenji promised him something, yet Fukubei does not see this hypocrisy.

"If I'm taking *you*, you don't have the right to complain./ I'm not the same as you."

Fukubei's superiority complex is shining through his exterior. He doesn't see Sadakiyo as human, he would exchange him for one conversation with Kenji if he could.

"Give me your mask" [Huh…? Says Sadakiyo] "I said, give me your mask." Fukubei yells at him. [W…Why…? Sadakiyo says timidly and fearfully] "I'm supposed to be with relatives in Osaka for the entire vacation, going to the expo./ I'm not supposed to be in Tokyo this summer.", Fukubei says while Sadakiyo grows more and more disheartened. The lie starts.

"Don't look at me that way./ You got bullied at your old school, then transferred here this semester,/ And you're *still* being bullied! What a creep./ But here I am, spending time with you./ Me.", what a manipulative self-loving narcissistic bastard. Saying all of this to a Sadakiyo who, probably for the first time in his life, has felt happiness is another level of cruelty. All this to make up for his own timidity. He's using Fukubei as an outlet for his own insecurities, that's why he's bullying the weak, a person just like him. To be honest this can almost be classified as self-loathing.

"You can call me 'Friend' but that doesn't mean we're friends./ If you help hide the fact that I'm in Tokyo all vacation long,/ I'll really be your Friend", Sadakiyo folds and gives Fukubei his mask.

[Fukubei] walks in the scorching rays of the sun while wearing the Sadakiyo mask. A couple of bullies approach him and demand some money (they think it's Sadakiyo). Fukubei says nothing (he can't since that would give away that he's Fukubei). The bullies beat him up and take most of his money.

He gets up, injuredly. Walks over to a window door. He's dying of heat at this point. He tears off his mask. "I'm not supposed to be in Tokyo this summer./ I'm going to the expo everyday./ Long live the expo, long live the expo./ Long live the expo, long live the expo.", he is desperately clinging onto his lie. As he looks at the glass door, he sees himself, faceless.


AAAAAAAAAAA

Katsumata is faceless. He has no personality, all he does is steal others. He stole Fukubei, he stole Sadakiyo, he stole god, he stole Jesus, and he tried to steal Kenji. He is a faceless person, features as smooth as a cueball. Not only is he indistinguishable and forgettable, he also can't for the life of him be content with anything.

In his summer journal he writes about all the exhibits he visited during the summer, lying in every word he writes.

Then comes *the* scene.

Fukubei takes off his Sadakiyo mask. "I do…/ Have a face…/ Who…/ Are you?/ Sadakiyo…?/ Haha…/ No, hahaha…/ Are you…Katsumata-Kun?/ Hahaha, nope./ Then, who are you?/ Who are you?"



This is one of my personal favourite scenes.

Fukubei first asks himself if he's Sadakiyo. He laughs saying of course not. Did he confuse himself with Sadakiyo? Partially.

Sadakiyo and Katsumata are quite alike in nature after all. But there's more to it. The important part isn't Sadakiyo but the essence of the question. Are you A? No, of course not. You can't be A because you're nothing like A, so you know you're not him, right? Well, you're supposed to be C, yet right now you're nothing like him, you're B. Who are you then? If you're just as far from C to B than A to B, then are you really C? No, of course you're not. Are you really B? No, that's completely out of the question, why would you try to be something that you already are? That's why the next line he says is 'Are you Katsumata' and subsequently answers 'no'. My answer may seem contrived but it's not. It's integral to the theme and the ending. A mirror is supposed to reflect you, yet for Katsumata there is nothing to reflect. And so he is terrified, terrified at what the future has for him, for a man without a face. Jealousy and fear alone can't make up a person.

Sadakiyo calls out for him. Fukubei thinks it's Kenji calling him, so he rushes to see if it's him. It's interesting that Fukubei thinks it's Kenji. After deep thoughts get distracted I guess your thoughts go to the easiest and most instinctual solution, that being Kenji, not the most logical solution however, just the one he wanted to see the most.

Fukubei gets mad that Sadakiyo called him Fukubei, or called him at all so he scolds the soul out of him. He says that he's neither Hattori nor Fukubei, he's just Friend. We get yet another reason as to why he wants to be called Friend. It is to hide himself. Early on I mentioned that both the mask and name were symbols, and while yes those symbols are extremely important to starting a cult, the actual reason as to why the name was made is because of this. With a name like Friend, Katsumata doesn't have to be someone, he can hide behind a symbol all he likes. He has no

distinguishing characteristics which aren't simply his traits and tendencies (and he doesn't even have that when he becomes Friend full-time), so he wants to be called Friend. The word "friend" establishes a baseless connection, something that Katsumata has no idea on how to acquire yet wants dearly. That's why he's so envious of Kenji, how is he able to build these bridges on invisible trust? Friend is never able to achieve that. He makes bridges based on religion, based on ideology, based on mutual goals, based on the occult/the occulted, but never on friendship.

Fukubei as mentioned goes completely ballistic on Sadakiyo:


AND FIRST OF ALL, WHY ARE YOU YELLING FOR ME IN FRONT OF MY HOUSE?!
I'M NOT HATTORI OR FUKUBEI.
I'M JUST "FRIEND"!! HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO TELL YOU?!
I'M SORRY ...
I'M SORRY ...
I'M NOT SUPPOSED TO BE IN TOKYO!!
I'M SUPPOSED TO BE GOING TO THE EXPO IN OSAKA!!
I'M IN MY HOUSE, DOING NOTHING!! WHY WOULD YOU RUIN THAT?!
I'VE BEEN IN MY HOUSE THIS WHOLE VACA-TION!!
WHAT HAPPENS IF PEOPLE FIND OUT?!



You can see the perplexed face of Sadakiyo on the second page, probably thinking about why Fukubei is the way he is.

Fukubei pressures Sadakiyo further by asking him to think up something fun to do. He continues to be relentlessly mean to him. But Sadakiyo finally thinks of going to the haunted mansion, since no one will be there to see them play (Fukubei requested so). Sadakiyo tells Fukubei the story about the mansion and how the daughter of the doctor died there so now she appears as a ghost…yada yada yada.

They go to the hanging hills. Sada is scared of the ghost, however Fukubei tells him that he's dumb…and that ghosts don't exist.

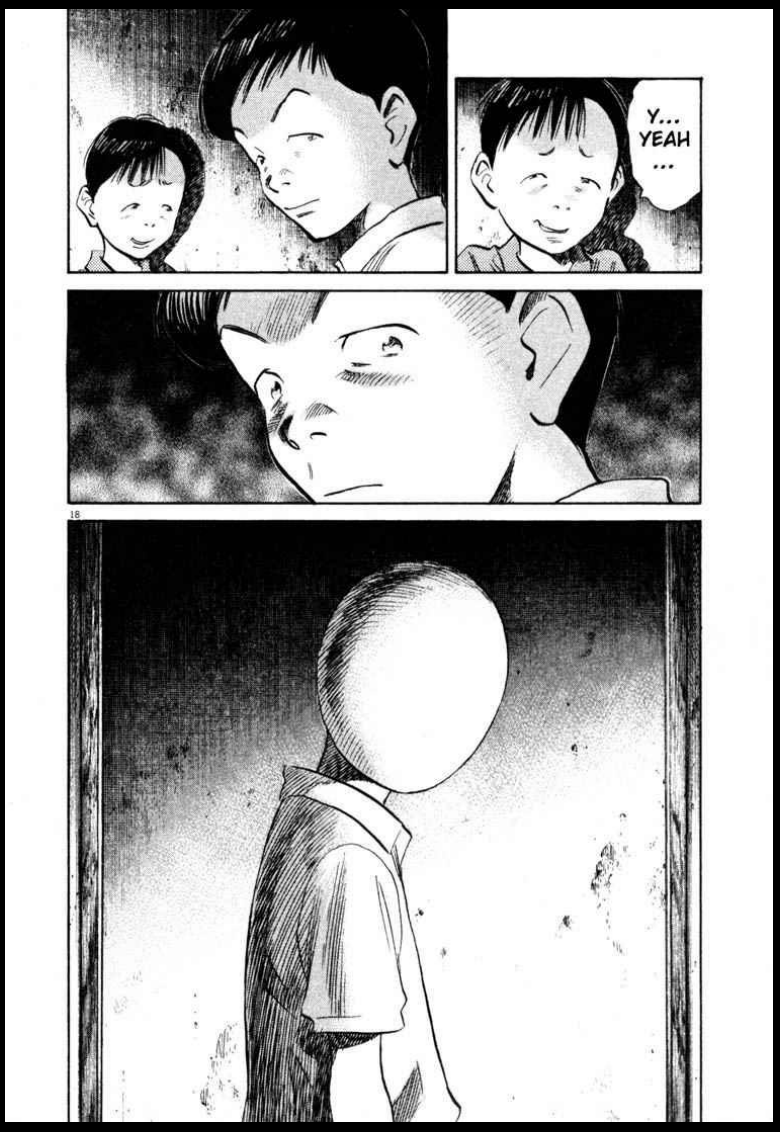


It's interesting that Fukubei uses the exact same line Donkey uses. I don't think that's supposed to mean anything, though I do think it's intentional; both are science nerds but Donkey is the polar opposite of Fukubei (and Katsumata) in every regard. This moment is also really interesting because Fukubei is smiling. It's strange, especially since in the scene before Fukubei was nearly beating up Sadakiyo. My instinct was to simply say that Fukubei is a psychopath, he is often irrational and impulsive, and while I do

think that part of that is true, I don't think that's all. Fukubei genuinely likes science, it's shown multiple times. Some examples include the rainbow scene which we just saw, the mushroom scene (Ex), and the carp dissection which he got really mad over. I think that Urasawa is trying to show us that Fukubei isn't hopeless, he never was unlike what he believes. Donkey loved science just as much as Fukubei (Katsumata) and he turned into a teacher; Fukubei never could, the first reason is because he was stuck in the past, trying to decipher a question long lost, the second reason is because he thought that he was a man with no qualities, and so, just like he often does, he tricked himself into truly believing so. Remember, this is how Fukubei and Katsumata sees himself, even if it's true to some extent, it doesn't change the fact that Katsumata did have a way out. Donkey and Fukubei is a massively underrated dynamic in the story, I think that it's arguably in the top 8 Friend dynamics.

Friend comes up with the Treru-Teru Bozu idea, so he tells Sadakiyo to bring him a bed-sheet. 'I can finally take back my vacation'. So he makes Sadakiyo make the Teru-Teru Bozu, of course. Sadakiyo tells Fukubei that maybe they should add a face to it, but Fukubei smiles and then says no, it's scarier without a face. As he keeps looking at it, his smile slowly disappears. Why is it scarier without a face? Or why does FUkubei think so? Does he find himself scary? Yes, he does. A man with no traits and values is the scariest man of all. A man who is lost in himself is even scarier. Fukubei sees himself in that Teru-Teru Bozu, that's why he stops smiling: he realizes that not having a face might not be such a good thing, it's purposeless, just like a faceless Teru-Teru Bozu, it's just a blanket on a rope.

Some teenagers or young adults arrive at the haunted house and get scared off. Fukubei thinks that they got scared by the Teru-Teru Bozu, Sadakiyo points out that they didn't make it to the stairs, Fukubei quickly retorts and points out that Sadakiyo is a dummy (foreshadowing for the next chapter). While doing so he looks at himself in the mirror, he's seemingly normal. He lectures Sadakiyo about how the entire town will be in an uproar. He looks back one more time and sees himself faceless once again.



Perhaps this symbolizes that whenever Fukubei wants attention, he reverts back to his blank self, it's a reminder from god that his greed and pride are making him faceless.

Next day comes. Word has spread around town, even Kenji has heard it. Sadakiyo relays the info and leaves. Fukubei is slightly amused when Sadakiyo mentions the people of the town, but when Sadakiyo mentions Kenji his ears perk up. At first it's almost cute, and then it's not…


GO SEARCH SOME MORE.
O-OKAY, I WILL!!
IT'S GREAT, THEY'RE ALL TALKING ABOUT THE TERU-TERU BOZU WE MADE!!
THE OWNER OF THE CAFE, WITH SOME CUS-TOMERS!!
OTCHO AND KENJI WERE TALKING ABOUT IT...
KENJI ...
AND ...
OH ...
SLAM
I'LL GO FIND OUT SOME MORE!!



Get this demon away from me.

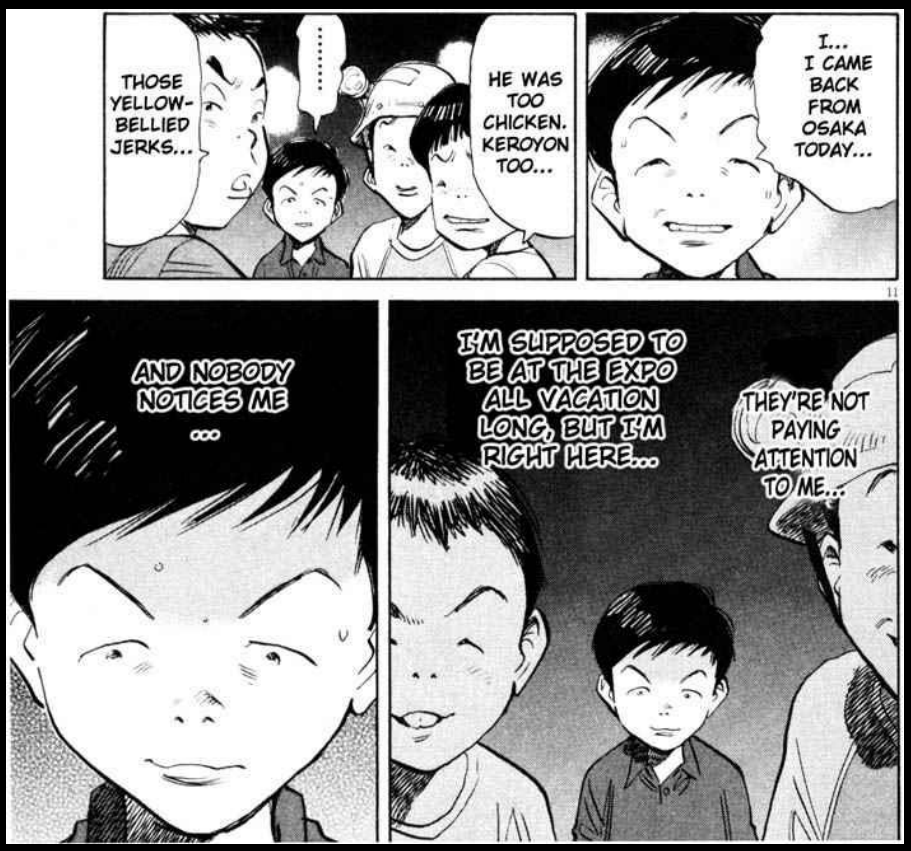
Fukubei writes some more lies in his notebook (up to the 31st of August). Then Fukubei hears Kenji call his name. He runs up the window and stresses over Kenji seeing him (it's only the 28th). He decides to call out to Kenji, showing that he values him even

more than his (Kenji's) opinion of him, but this is to no avail as Kenji doesn't hear him.

He learns that Kenji is going to the hanging hills at midnight. "Kenji and his friends…/ They're going to see it…/ Kenji's going to see the thing I made and be scared…/ Kenji, scared…/ I want to see that./ I want to see that./ I want to see that./ I want to see that./ I want to see that./ I want to see that./ I want to see that.". Buddy is obsessed with Kenji, full on obsessed. Why does he want to see Kenji scared? Does he hate him? Well, he does hate him, but that's not exactly the reason he wants to see him scared. When you're obsessed with someone in such a psychotic way you want to see all of them. You want to see them happy (if caused by you), you want to see them interested (if caused by you), you want to see them cry (if caused by you), you even want to seem then scared (if caused by you). Katsumata's psychological portal is incredible. Katsumata has Borderline Personality Disorder tendencies (he's the whole package to be honest), is depressed, obsessive, incredibly narcissistic, really neglected, and sociopathic. Fukubei also has BPD, is also narcissistic, obsessive, has a superiority and an inferiority complex (Same for Katsumata), but he's also both abusive and psychopathic. It's amazing how Urasawa manages to characterize this character well while also making it believable. Both Katsumata and Fukubei are believable, even when fused together into an amalgamation of a character; it actually makes much more sense that way. Why is Katsumata a sociopath [and not a psychopath]? It's a tough question. You can maybe even make a case for both of them being psychopaths. My perspective is that Katsumata is usually quite emotionless, unlike Fukubei. He doesn't act out of emotion but out of logic. He's cold and calculative. There is one scene

where Katsumata lashes out as we'll see later, but it can be overlooked.

Back the plot. Fukubei goes to the hanging hills in the Sadakiyo mask, hoping to sneak in to where Sadakiyo is staying. Things don't go as planned; Kenji calls him over, believing he's Sadakiyo, and makes him take off his mask. Fukubei takes it off and tries to lie his way out of it, but soon notices that Kenji doesn't care and didn't even notice him 😂. Fukubei meets the rest of the group, and again, tries lying his way out. Once again, no one cares about him, they unintentionally completely ignore him. Katsumata is the invisible man, even while he's in Fukubei's flesh. He's almost excited about it, but then he gets a bit uneasy knowing that no one cares about him. It's quick but actually quite effective on reread.



Please stop making faces Fukubei…

Kenji and the others get scared by a medical model of a man (probably what the couple got scared by as well, even though it's a bit questionable based on the dialogue.). "Do it right, Sadakiyo./ Just like I told you, over the phone./ Be shocked,/ Scream./ Run around, Kenji…", this again reaffirms our diagnosis that Fukubei wants Kenji to be affected by him, good or bad. This part I would say is a bit more so on the malicious side than the previous one.

Fukubei gets even more excited as they approach: "Do it, Sadakiyo‼ Move the Teru-Teru Bozy around…‼".

They see it, the faceless Teru-Teru Bozu…

And laugh, hysterically

Fukubei says his famous line: "Huh…?" (Parallel with Fukubei's death⁉)

Fukubei is thrown for a loop, saying "I failed." over and over again.

This scene is earth shattering for young Fukubei. He set this ghost up because he thought it's scary. A faceless man is the scariest thing of all, it was him. And here are the people that he admires most trampling over him, laughing in his face. They don't do it out of malice or to make fun of him, they just don't consider it scary. They don't try to ignore Fukubei, he's just forgettable in the eyes of a kid. They're kids, of course they won't be so self conscious. Fukubei just had most of his ideology trampled by a bunch of

kids. His superiority complex shattered for the last time. He gets a grim reminder that he's not special, at least in the eyes of these kids, they don't see eye to eye with him.

Kenji and Otcho go to investigate upstairs because they saw something moving (Sadakiyo). Fukubei realizes they're going to find Sadakiyo [and that he will tell them everything] so he rushes up to *rescue* him.

He finds Sadakiyo and drags him out with a mean mug on his face. He tells Sadakiyo that it's all his fault. He tells Sadakiyo to take the blame for him since he's still supposed to be in Osaka. 'If someone questions you, just say "shut up" and that you did it because you wanted to'. "Do exactly as I say Sadakiyo‼/ Don't say anything else‼/ If you tell, I won't be your friend anymore./ If you

tell…



You can see the fear in his eyes. A sacred little devil. I could probably write an entire document on all the parallels between Paradise Lost's Satan and Fukubei.

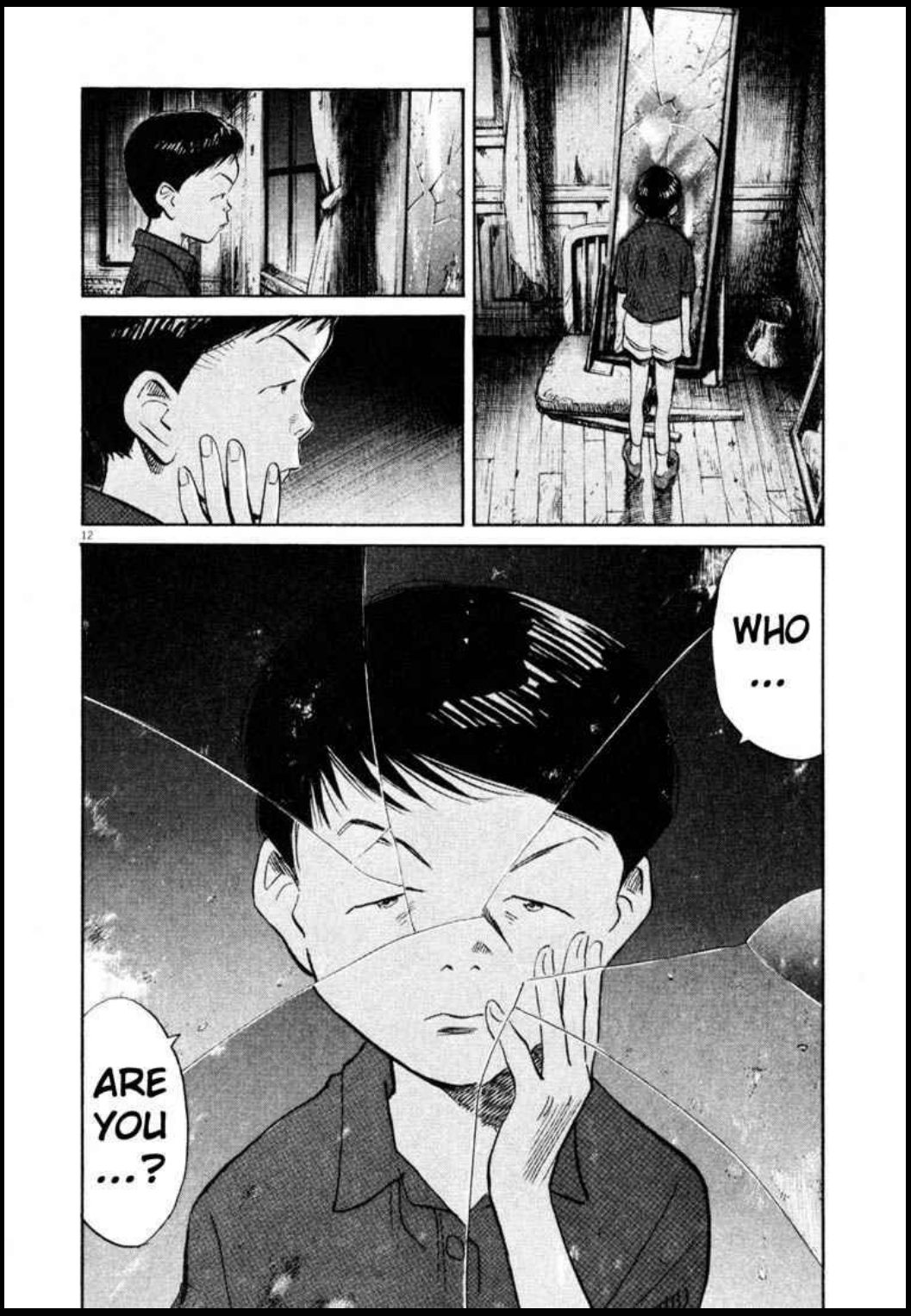
Kenji and Otcho run away because they supposedly see a ghost, Fukubei and Sadakiyo use the opportunity to escape as well, Yoshitsune follows. The two escape successfully, however Fukubei isn't content yet. He wants to know what they saw up there. "I want to see it, too./ There's no reason why I couldn't.",

Fukubei tries to hide his inferiority complex but he can't. He knows ghosts aren't real, Sadakiyo even points it out to him, but Fukubei doesn't listen, his head is already in the clouds. They go upstairs. "There's no reason why I can't see it./ There's no reason they could see it, and I couldn't…", Fukubei continues his inferiority monologue, but before he can finish it Sadakiyo screams in terror. "What is it, Sadakiyo?!", Fukubei asks, scared. Sadakiyo jumps up from the floor and runs away, screaming "A Nopperabo!!" (Same thing that the couple saw)



(Here's what they look like for reference. I doubt there's a male equivalent, thus the name, but then again I'm not an expert.)

Fukubei stands alone infront of a cracked and broken mirror. He comes up to it and touches his face, a defensive tactic.



He has lost all perception of who he is. Split into many parts but loyal to none. He exhibits plenty of traits but none of them are genuine, at least not in the way that Kenji expresses them. Kenji

does it flawlessly. But they are alike I assure you, that's why Fukubei obsesses over him so much. The reason is that Kenji is just as much of a coward as Fukubei.

Cut to the 31st. Fukubei's room is covered in papers that all say "The expo was really fun". A lie that he is now devoted to for the sake of his pride and ego.

Now in school, Fukubei wants the professor to read his expo journal, but before that happens the professor announces that Sadakiyo transferred to another school. Fukubei is distraught since Sadakiyo didn't inform him. It was most likely out of kindness. Fukubei doesn't appreciate it, saying on repeat that he's a jerk, even thinking about banishing him. Whatever doubts there were about Fukubei's ruthlessness for Sadakiyo are now gone.

He clings onto the hope that someone will ask him about the expo, almost pleading for it. However, his classmates are too preoccupied asking Kenji about the ghost. Fukubei is furious.

Later that day Fukubei sees Manjoume and Yamane talking about NASA. Yamane claims that it was a hoax, which almost delights Fukubei, though not super visible on his face. Maybe Aldrin and Neil didn't really go to the moon after all, maybe they were just as miserable as Collins and just pretended to go to the Moon.

Fukubei also apparently banished Yamane, most likely for telling Otcho about NBOP as seen in the page after.

Fukubei explains some of the NBOP plan to Yamane, they have a good laugh about it. Manjoume on the other hand is having an aneurysm trying to understand them.

Yamane says that “It’s the most fun talking with you./ All the other kids are so childish. They’re no fun at all.”, irony.

Fukubei says he talks too much, for example telling Otcho about his secrets (Probably had to change his entire plan because of that).

Yamane says that he won’t do it anymore. Fukubei then says that Yamane doesn’t believe in what he does, calling them “tricks”. Yamane adamantly denies that; we learn in 2015 that that is indeed the case.

Fukubei then tells him that if he says anything like that again, Fukubei will really banish him. Yamane swears he won’t.

Fukubei asks Manjoume for a spoon. Manjoume hands it to him saying that even an elephant couldn’t bend it if it tried (a fabrication). Fukubei bends it, using his “powers”. A con man getting tricked by a con man. Yamane says “it’s not a trick.” as both Fukubei and him leave Manjoume in the dust.

Later that day (possibly the next day) Yamane and Fukubei discuss making the virus and vaccine together. He tells Yamane to do a good job or the world will really go extinct. Yamane says “This is great. We’re really going to save the human race./ Because of us, people won’t die out.”, typical attention seeker, especially so since you’re making the virus in the first place. The interesting part is whether Fukubei’s original plan included the holy mother descending or not. I think it most likely did, thus Fukubei doesn’t say anything in response. Fukubei talks about how he’s superhuman and how he can do much greater things, most likely talking about the rebirth plan, but it could also include world domination in general (I don’t think that the hanging trick was all that was on his mind even though that’s

what the story seems to imply.). Before he can fully finish his thoughts though, Sadakiyo walks in. Fukubei mocks him for being bullied in school. He asks if Sadakiyo wants to join him since he's the only friend he has. Sadakiyo silently approaches him.

Yamane triest to caution Fukubei out of proceeding with this plan, but Fukubei persists ('You don't believe in me Yamane?'). Fukubei assures them that a miracle will happen.

They meet Manjoume for a second time. He gives Fukubei his card. Fukubei is cautious and walks off without saying anything.

1971 Science Room happens as usual. Yamane pretends to believe that Fukubei came back to life. Everything else happens as expected. Then we get the hidden half of 71'. Yamane comments on how Donkey was an idiot for not believing in the miracle, Fukubei affirms his belief. He then asks Yamane to let him down, however he slips on the noose contraption that he made. "Oh no…It slipped…I'm Dying…".



We finally understand the events that happened in the VR world. Friend entered it to make it seem as if he didn't lie at all, further deceiving everyone since this Friend shouldn't be worried about saving Fukubei since he hates him and wanted him to be seen as a fraud, or maybe he just felt embarrassed about it. The resurrection was supposed to symbolize Katsumata's death and Fukubei's birth, so maybe Friend considered the Katsumata half as vital. EIther way, Katsumata couldn't come back from it's ashes like a phoenix

Friend visualizes the rest of his life and some other events as well in a very nice spread.

20th Century Boys Volume 16 : In the Mirror Chapter 177: Friend Era translated by Stephen Paul scanned and edited by Gatsu





Until his intuition foretells him something unexpected.



Friend is released from the PV machine due to an error (either too much info or his intuition being too abstract for the machine to handle).

The scientist calls Friend "Mr. President", confirming that he has become the world president.

Friend walks up to the rooftop. "They're supposed to be memories of the past…[that he's visualizing]/ In that case…What is that?/ That last image I saw…/ What is it…?". Whether Friend knows what it is or not is up to you. I personally believe so, though I do think Friend was surprised by the wording used by Kenji. Friend stands at the top of the world, equal to none. The Friend symbol in the background, watching everyone.



Friend Era

We get introduced to Katsuo and Sanae. They're siblings. They're supposed to parallel Kenji and Kiriko, which they do fairly well (though the two are obviously not carbon copies of them, especially Sanae/Kirko, but Kenji/Katsuo aren't too alike either). They meet Otcho and go on a crazy adventure to find Kanna, I won't be covering it too much. What I will be covering in these chapters is the brainwashing; it's quite interesting the decisions Friend makes. I'll try comparing them to other similar stories like *1984*.

The most appalling aspect visually is the Friend tower. It seems to be the only building with modern architecture. Note the Friend symbol, surveying the entire city, reminding the rebels and citizens that god is always watching, carefully reviewing their every action. Friend symbols are generally everywhere.



All the housing is fairly poor. Not shabby, but certainly not like it once was. All of them are one to two story rural houses, maybe Katsumata liked it better that way. Maybe it will bring back some memories.

We observe that most people don't have money to buy a TV, they even criticize those who can/did. They rather prefer watching public TV. (Phones are also public; the Friend regime doesn't want anyone making private phones calls now do they)

Katsuo's father comes home completely drunk, as usual. I highly suspect that this is the case for most of the proletariat, however this isn't confirmed.

Old people are barely listened to, most of their words are taken as gibberish.

Steak and meat in general isn't allowed. The justification is that the cows might be infected; this is obviously not the case. Friend just wants to make them more and more miserable, so they can experience his pain, or maybe his vengeance.

Friend still allows the citizens to protest, you have to make it seem as if change is possible after all. Some other parties are allowed to protest as well, but that simply causes more planned infighting between the protesting factions. It is chaos, nothing organized about it.

The wall that guards the city (forgot to mention that, it guards them for the supposed virus) serves as a wonderful focus point. The protestors hate the wall, some hate it because they think they can save the people outside, some think that the virus has long ended and the government isn't letting them take the riches of the outside. Friend, throughout all of this, isn't blamed at all, in

fact he's praised by both parties for protecting them from the virus. Everything is going just as Friend planned. His ego stays large, the people stay confused and disoriented. Mind you this all happened in just 3 years (if time is correct), imagine what Friend would accomplish if he had more time. Friend's reputation isn't completely flawless, but it doesn't matter much, he's not in direct fire. Cultivating extremists is incredibly smart, it can be seen in many places. Cultivate extremists so the proletariat are too busy keeping them in check instead of solving the issue at hand.

The younger people, even the young adults, have no sense of culture anymore. Only old remnants of a long gone past remain in their hearts. Younger folk are off even worse.

The outside of the wall, as mentioned earlier, is mysterious. No one knows what's on the outside. So much propaganda has been made that almost any interpretation exists.

Otcho explains what's actually outside the wall. More Friends with their own mini cities encircled in a blockade. What righteous Friend would have it any other way.

Sanae mentions that her Friend always said that Friend is fishy, then his whole family moved to Osaka and there hasn't been word of them since. We can now add execution and prison to the list. If I had to choose I would probably say that the family got executed; Sanae's friend might have gotten spared and sent to a brainwashing facility (Friend doesn't kill kids, an interesting detail that I have yet to mention.).

Sanae asks Otcho whether Friend is a bad guy or a good guy. Otcho gives her a stern look and says "You have to make the conclusion yourself./ What is good, and what is evil…/ All I can tell you for sure…/ Is that the root of everything lies in

us…/…That's all.". Top 3 Otcho lines for sure. I love this response. Going beyond Katsuo and Sanae, Urasawa is asking us, the readers, this question. Decide for yourself if Friend is evil or not. If you empathize with Friend then don't let my writing impede on your opinion, this is all for you to decide. It goes much deeper than that but we'll probably discuss this at the end (21st Century Boys).

Otcho also mentions that he might be the last surviving member of those who created Friend. Does he think he's at fault? Maybe, it's not clear. I think it's unlikely. It is interesting to think whether they did create Friend or not, the classical nature vs. nurture, I think it's nature in this case.

Friend's revival isn't mentioned in the textbooks, just in case anyone questions that. He used the pope and discarded him just as easily. A means to an end. The textbooks only have two pages on events ranging from 2000-2018, even worse than before (Koizumi's textbook).

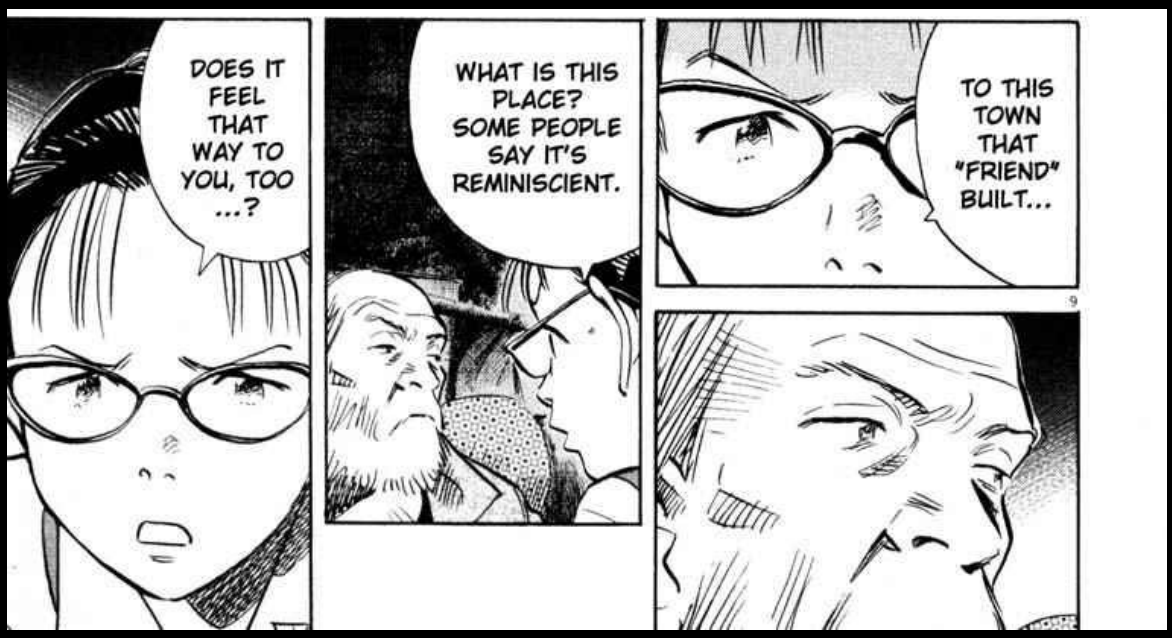
Books are checked thoroughly and can only be published after censor inspections. Books and ideas are what causes true revolts, as long as you can control the stream of knowledge, you can also control the revolutions.

Suspicious people get pushed outside the wall, or at least that's what Otcho seems to think. I would argue most of them just get executed, but both can work.

If you break a law, it can be considered as direct betrayal of Friend.

Sanae heard rumors that this town was supposed to be reminiscent of something, she asks Otcho if he feels that way

about a town very similar to the one in his childhood (if not perfectly done).





The sadness in his eyes as he says “no”...

This town isn’t the one he once used to know, not at all. It doesn’t have its soul.

Warning sirens are everywhere. Makes citizens nervous just by the sound alone.

TVs have to be turned off after a certain point. This is probably because Kanna broadcasts some signals of rebellion through them. However they're not effective as TVs break after just one broadcast of it. Friend makes sure they're possible though, just to reunite Kanna and the others.

Currency is made in honor of Friend, roughly translating to "The path of Friendship", hilarious.

Friend's police are everywhere, suspicious of everything and everyone.

The ministry of defense is also quite an iconic building.

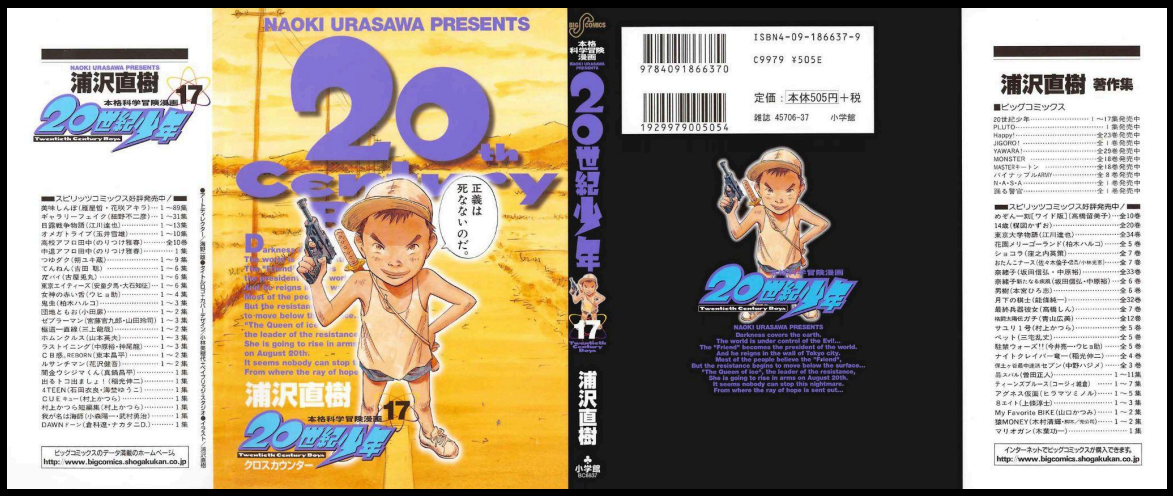


It's supposed to kill aliens. Aliens which spread the virus, like Kenji. Why is Kenji an alien? Friend views him as such, plus

alienating your opponent, literally, is quite effective. Though it is very childish, as usual. It also pays homage to Sadakiyo. Sadakiyo wanted aliens to come down from the skies and be his friends. Katsumata spits in Sadakiyo's face by making a giant building to shoot down and kill the virus spreading aliens. We will discuss this more a bit later.

Otcho meets god, which Friend ironically threw away. God then says this to Otcho: "Say Otcho./ I wouldn't be able to tell, since it never happened to me, but…/ When a kid gets all the toys he wants without difficulty, Until finally there's nothing left for him to want…/ What does he do next?/ 'Friend' is about to close his toybox.". Otcho continues: "Time for him to 'clean up'?/ The entire planet…". They're both correct, kind of. There's some truth to it of course, Friend is probably bored right about now, waiting for the conclusion. The thing they get wrong is that they think he's "cleaning up", no, I think God is more correct on this one. Friend is closing his toybox, the play is coming to an end, and Friend wants the final act to be a Shakespearean tragedy.

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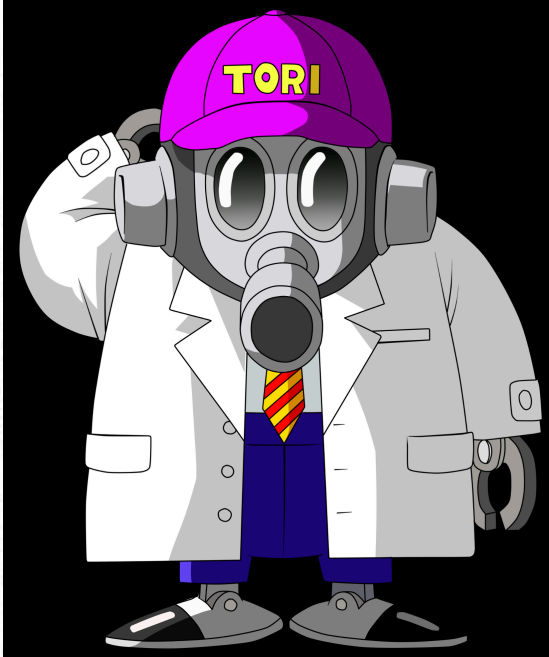


(Sanae and Katsuo go seek out the Ice Queen. They see a couple news headlines while on an abandoned train underground. Half the population is gone. The Pope did announce that Friend reviving from the dead was a miracle. The most interesting one is a news headline that says “Holy Mother Descends”. Last time I mentioned that the Holy Mother descending was supposed to be Kiriko either failing or succeeding at making a cure to the virus, not this. I think Friend just announced this to say that the holy mother plan is going strong, I don’t think that Friend truly announced this seriously, maybe to ease the minds of the board. This is the only part which I think can be excluded, Urasawa was just trying to get a reaction out of us, it doesn’t really make sense with the rest of the plot. Unless this is foreshadowing for Kiriko making progress on the virus cure, in that case this headline works.){After rereading some more. I think this title is still a fake, all it’s saying is that Kiriko has made a cure for the first virus, which you could interpret as the Holy Mother event but I wouldn’t be so sure. The more definitive Holy Mother descending scene will come at the end, it makes much more sense that way. This is simply a precursor.}

Friend’s laser guns don’t work, of course. They’re tricks.

Otcho and God continue their conversation. God: “I said that I crushed that field before your game could finish…/ But kids’ games never finish./ Becoming an adult means forgetting and moving on to the next thing./ Yet here I am,/ Still waiting for my bowling boom…”. We’ll save this for the end as well.





Otcho sad scene occurs. Kanna meeting Sanae and that whole segment is heart breaking. Katsuo goes and gets the Japanese priest, somehow.



😭

Friend gives vaccines to those who attended the expo. Symbolically it is aligned with the prophecies and Fukubei with the whole “Long live the expo” thing. Story wise, it forces masses of people to kill each other over them. Even the expo being a saviour is a fib, though, Katsumata doesn’t have the same values as Fukubei.

Cool panel scene:



Chou is working for the alien killing force. They usually just kill regular people all day. Continuation on Sadakiyo. Friend knows that Sadakiyo is alive, this might be how he's drawing him out, out of anger. The fact that no aliens ever come is Friend telling Sadakiyo that no one will ever come for him, thus he made Kenji an alien. It's interesting that Friend considers Kenji and the others to be Sadakiyo's friends though. This, along with hundreds of other things, reassures us of Friend's high social awareness and cognition. He knows that if Sadakiyo was allotted the

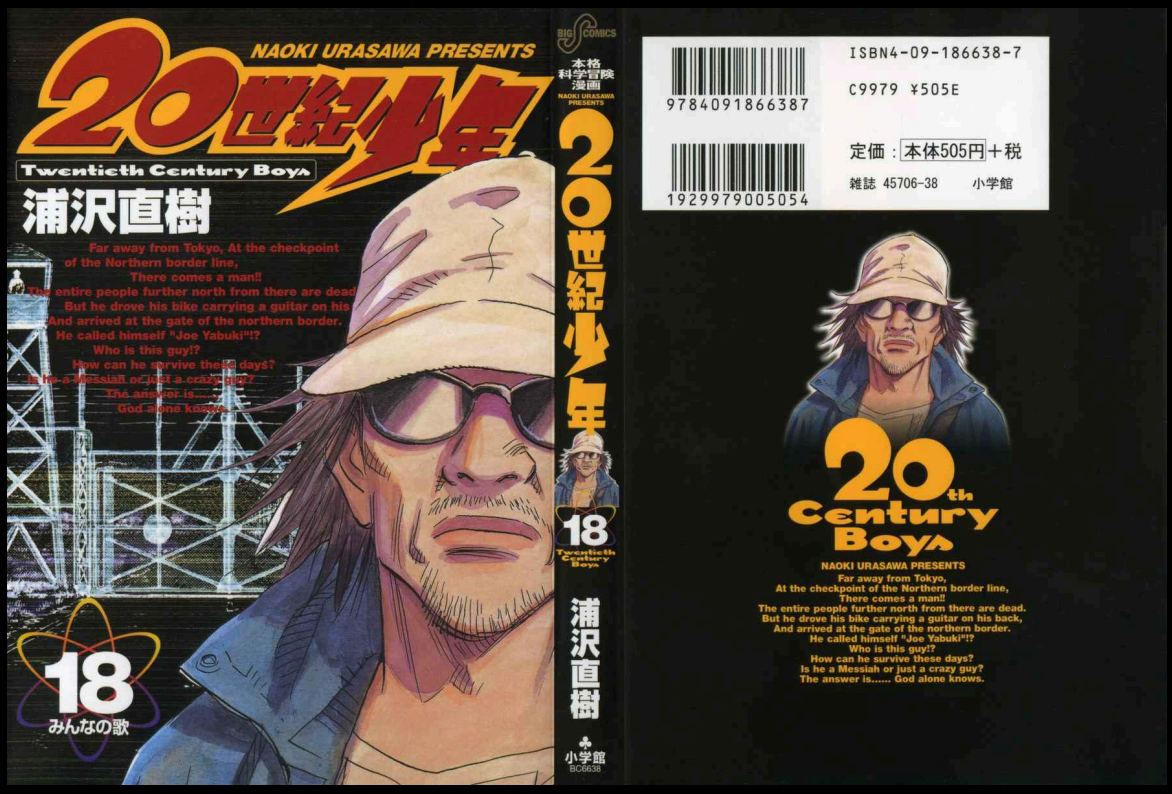
opportunity, he would have become a member of the Kenji faction, however this didn't happen due to Fukubei pawning him. Katsumata hates that idea, that even Sadakiyo can become friends with Kenji before Katsumata himself. Why do you think he asks Kenji if he wants to play? It's a coping mechanism, along with other meanings.



Immaculate side theme for Kenji.

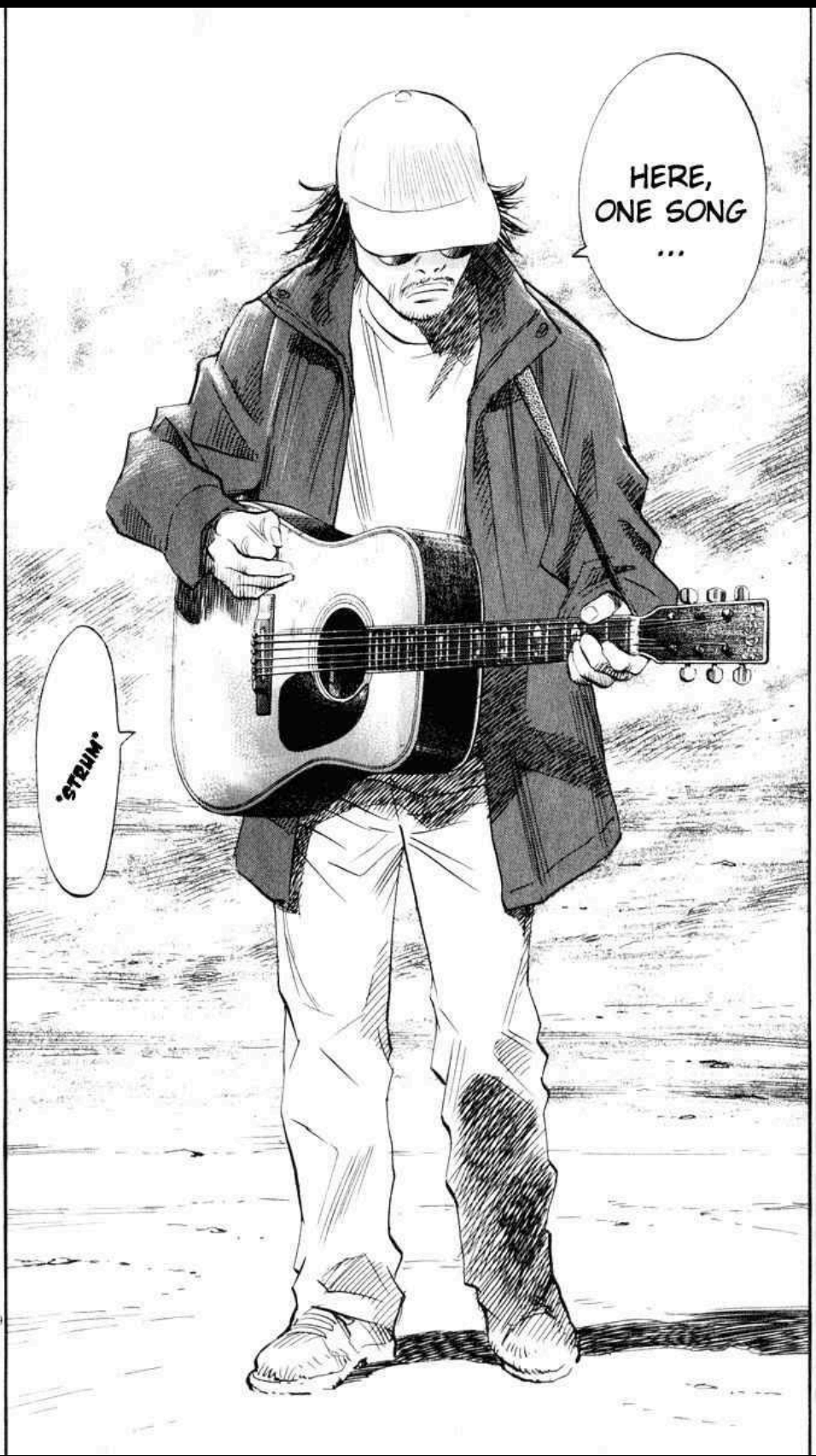
Kenji arrives. We see him saying two times “I guess that makes me…”. The first time he says “Devil”, the second time he says “Yabuki Joe”. As someone who's recently read Ashita no Joe, it’s quite amazing to see Kenji reference it. The reason as to why Kenji references it is because Joe, just like Kenji, was running away from his trauma after a very dire event transpired (won’t be spoiling Ashita no Joe, however if you’ve read it you know what I’m referencing). Joe after this event came back to the fighting ring. The most interesting part of this is that Joe didn’t immediately adjust to the ring, he still had lots of trauma thus he vomited a lot in the ring. This is all to say that Kenji, just like Joe, isn’t supposed to be viewed as an infallible hero during the 3rd part of 20th Century Boys. Kenji is still learning how to be responsible for his transgressions in his past, so he’s in no way supposed to be viewed as a Buddha-like figure (I’ve seen many people in the past comment on Kenji’s flawed characterization when he comes back; the problem is that those people don’t understand why Kenji says and does the thing he does. Kenji during this arc is still flawed, as are all people. The devil part is probably yet another reference to classical Christianity/Paradise Lost. (The first one happened in 2015, the second one is in current time).

Volume 18)



Kanna and Otcho meet up and learn about Kenji's survival. Kenji hides out in a village that Chou is about to infiltrate.

The anti-alien force, armed to the brim, point their guns at the alien as he walks forward, holding the most dangerous weapon known to man.



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Kenji sings the song of invincibility, Gutalala Sudalala, or perhaps it's the song of hope.

He gets shot.

But he gets back up and walks up to the one that shot him

"I'm singing a song./ I said, I'm singing a song./ And when someone is singing a song…/ Don't shoot them."

The officer falls to the ground.

Kenji isn't delusional, he realizes that singing a song doesn't make him invincible, but he has gained something from his 20 year absence. Maturity.

Chou calls Kenji the messiah, I think Kenji would disagree with that title but it does go along with the religious themes.

Through Kenji's song, the villagers form a gathering. Not to revolt, but to enjoy the music.

Chou misinterprets Kenji's line to be "You can't shoot someone who's singing a song", Kenji corrects him.



Recapping the Kanna and Otcho story: Kanna's entire battalion gets captured by Friend while Otcho and Kanna are away. The only way for Friend to release them is for Kanna to give herself up. Friend wants to see Kanna. Before the decision could be made, Manjoume kidnaps Kanna using his influence.

Manjoume wants to kill Friend.

Manjoume explains that this isn't a joke or ploy. He then reveals his early days with Friend. Meanwhile a friend of Maruo and singer guy discovers Friend's backstory on a VHS tape, so they get to see Friend's younger days as well. I doubt Friend planned for Maruo to find it; it's much more likely that Friend wanted Kenji and others to find the tape by searching through Manjoume's history, then connecting the dots. Friend's biggest flaw in his plans is overestimating people.

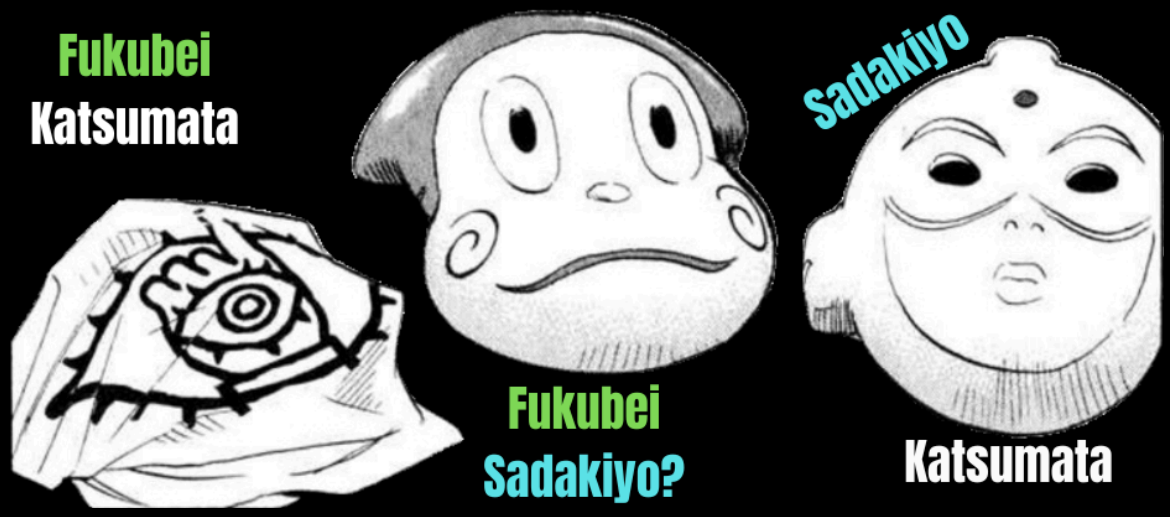
Cut to 1980. Fukubei knocks on Manjoume's door and announces "It's been a while./ I'm Hattori", confirming that he made the Hattori name. Unless you for some reason think that he also brainwashed Chuck [Manjoume] with Rainbow Kid, he is a drug addict after all. I doubt that's the case though.



Fukubei is 20 at this point. He discusses his activities with Pierre (the leader of the cult school Fukubei went to school with, Here). As suspected, Fukubei isn't depressed, confirming previous suspicions. Fukubei criticizes his teacher's methods, claiming that he could only rouse one hundred people, not ten thousand (a number which Fukubei manages to surpass in 17 years). He then

says “The miracle is making more entertainment.”. The first reason he says this is to further manipulate Manjoume, but it does have some truth to it; Fukubei wants to make entertainment for the people, so he could eventually take it all away in a singular rug-pull. Manjoume stays indifferent and aloof, ignoring Fukubei entirely. Fukubei then lays out 3 masks and asks which one Manjoume likes. Manjoume doesn’t understand, so Fukubei goes first and picks the Hattori mask, saying “I like this one.” and holding it up to his face. “What do you think?” he says. Manjoume doesn’t reciprocate nicely. Fukubei then starts talking about Manjoume’s downcast future, specifically about how Manjoume is in the slums, barely scraping enough to break-even. He then manipulates him further by reminding him of the example project (BOP and NBOP). What’s interesting about this scene is Fukubei’s masks, which now is the perfect time to talk about them.

Friend’s masks:



Finally at the point where I can talk about them more freely. If you remember I did a little segment on the Friend mask at the beginning of this analysis (Friend Symbol), but that was more-so

suited for the Friend “symbol”, I focused much less on the mask aspect of it.

Here’s the mask analysis:

First mask: The first mask is the typical Friend mask. I have already gone over its symbolic potency so I’ll instead focus on the one who wears it. The mask is worn by Katsumata and Fukubei. Both wear it as a protection method, literally hiding their eyes from the real world, thus the reason why only the two of them wear it. They believe in the religion they are fostering (at least Fukubei does), and both made “Friend” possible. They only start wearing the mask in their adult years; it’s meant to symbolize the start of the dreaded question they pose to Kenji.

Second mask: The second mask is the Hattori mask. Sadakiyo[?] and Fukubei wear it. Some very credible sources list Sadakiyo as a wearer of the mask, I am more skeptical. The foundation of this idea comes from Kenji’s memory. Back in the first volume when Kenji remembers Sadakiyo, he pictures him with a Hattori mask on, running alongside him (adjacent to him is more accurate). I don’t think this is Sadakiyo. Sadakiyo has never been seen with this mask. In fact, when Fukubei and Sadakiyo went to the hanging hills, Fukubei didn’t give Sadakiyo the Hattori mask. I think it’s more likely that the person Kenji remembered was Fukubei. The Hattori mask is from the hit anime series “Ninja Hattori-Kun”. I have never watched it, so I’m basing some of this based on the synopsis of it. Ninja Hattori lives in a society of non-Ninjas, it often causes wacky mishaps to happen because he can’t understand the social norms. This is very similar to Fukubei, I’m sure I don’t need to explain why, just go to the PV section and see for yourself; he is a messed up person, not understanding limits and social dynamics. This is where the parallels stop and

the satire begins. Hattori the ninja is an incredibly kind and caring person, Fukubei is the opposite of that. There's not a single scene where Fukubei is nice to anyone, he hates everyone [even himself!]. The mask represents Fukubei's close ties to childhood (and Katsumata by extension). Why does Fukubei call it his favourite mask? A) Hattori is speaking, of course the Hattori mask, the one which captures his essence, would be his favourite. B) It's the mask which most resembles his childhood. C) The mask has the least negative experiences associated with it [Eg. Friend mask was created by Kenji (that's what Fukubei thinks at least). Sadakiyo's mask reminds Katsumata of the time he got beat up and of the Hanging Hill incident]. Take note of the fact that every time Fukubei shows up around Kenji, he is wearing the Hattori mask, not the Friend mask. It is to both mock him with the fact that he is Hattori and to remind Kenji of his childhood anime. He spreads the Friend symbol for similar reasons. It also apparently relates to a Japanese samurai who was the greatest at everything, relating to Fukubei's desire to do the same thing.

Third mask: The third mask is the Sadakiyo mask. Its notable wearers include Sadakiyo and Katsumata. It's supposed to be a mask of Ultraman (I think); that's why the cover art is so symbolic for Sadakiyo. The Kenji faction does the Ultraman pose in the cover art for 20th Century Boys, so Sadakiyo wears an Ultraman mask to try and make friends with them. It is also the only mask of the three to have its eyes free (holes in the eye sockets of the mask), symbolizing how Sadakiyo is able to see the real world unlike Fukubei (yes, Fukubei did wear it but no notable moments occurred with it. In fact, when he did wear it, it was ironically taken off by Kenji.). So why do I think Katsumata wears it, isn't Fukubei the one who wears it? No, I don't think so. (Here), this is the scene where "Fukubei" borrows it from Sadakiyo. Fukubei's

character wouldn't take off his mask, he never does unless forced to by Kenji. This has to be Katsumata. Katsumata takes off his mask because "it's too hot"; his brain is too hot, it is overheating with information and questions. He sees himself in the mirror, he notices something strange, that he can see the real world, in an act of desperation and self gratification, he takes off the mask completely, exposing himself to the real world. But that doesn't go to plan; once he takes it off he is again reminded that he isn't ready for the real world, he is nobody. So what does he do? He goes back into Fukubei and remains dormant until a while longer, until the very end in fact: 1973.

This mask is the only one which is never used by Friend, outside of his earlier years. Mainly because Friend can't see the real world again, his urges might act up again. It's rare that Katsumata wears it, but when he does it's always for an important occasion. It also connects to Sadakiyo but we'll discuss that later.

There are in total 3 masks. Katsumata by extent wears all of them. There are about a thousand different things you could use that for.

Back to Friend's childhood. Manjoume goes on a show for talented kids (the last kid counted to 100 digits of pi. They certainly capture the feel of the 70's quite well.). Manjoume announces that the kid he will bring forth can bend spoons using his will power. The VHS tape cuts out, static. Maruo's friend shows him a newspaper which mentions Fukubei's failed spoon bending trick, but it doesn't include Fukubei's name, they just call him "Child A".

Cut to 1972. Fukubei called Manjoume after the show failed. He wants to talk about the example project again, but Manjoume spits to the side and says he doesn't want to see his face ever again. He says that Fukubei should be grateful that he covered Fukubei's name with "Child A". Manjoume says Fukubei screwed up. Fukubei replies that he didn't screw up. Manjoume calls Fukubei's stunt a fraud. Fukubei says it isn't fraud. He then says that he really can bend spoons, he just lacks the self-control. Fukubei says to Manjoume that he told everyone he'd be on TV, how all he'd be known as is a liar, everyone would point at Child A and laugh. Manjoume says that it's the truth, nothing he can do about it. Fukubei retorts "I am not Child A". "So I'll execute the example project./[Manjoume: "So what is it you want?"] Revenge./ On the people who called me a liar./ On the people who called me a fraud./ On the people who teased me./[Manjoume leaves, saying "Have it your way."] I'll contact you when I execute it,/ The example project‼/ I'm not lying‼/ I will definitely go through with the example project‼[Manjoume left] I will definitely go through with it./ My project to…/ *Take over the world and kill the people*."

Amazing scene, I don't think I have the ability to analyze it to its full extent and potential, but I will try.

Fukubei hates being called "Child A" because it puts a number on him. It contains him and it normalizes him, he is just another child. The worst case scenario for a narcissist. If people will give his situation attention then at least let the people know it's him. As Fukubei, Katsumata feels superhuman, he really can bend spoons. But people call him a fraudster and liar, Fukubei can't handle that. Everyone lies as well, everyone is also a fraudster, yet he's the only one who ever gets punished and tormented for

it. ‘Why’ he asks himself; there’s no answer. Fukubei will destroy the entire world, he will take down everyone who called him a liar, they deserve it since they’re hypocrites. They so desperately wanted to take him down, so why not do the same to them? ‘Fukubei isn’t a fraud, but even if he was, doesn’t that make everyone else a fraud too?’, Katsumata thinks. ‘This isn’t just an attack on Fukubei, it’s an attack on me as well’. This isn’t just. ‘I will kill everyone and rule the world, making sure to make everyone as miserable as possible before killing them’. ‘Then, then the only person left will be me…’. ‘The only thing worse than lying to others is lying to myself’, ‘I’ll kill Fukubei then, to relieve him of his pain, and to reinstate me as the true Friend’. ‘After that…after the world and Fukubei are dead…there’s only one thing left to do.’. This is the first scenario, if the Holy Mother descent is not smooth, this will be the end. The first ending will be a doomsday.

Quick bit on the “superhuman” part: it’s actually a closely related concept to Nietszche’s Ubermensch/Superman. Friend’s whole persona tries to be an Ubermensch. He goes by his own morals as demonstrated by his “There is no evil or good/ In my universe.” quote. He tries to make a distinction between Friend and regular humans, pointing out that only someone who can become Friend will truly be perfect. Additionally, only a child can become an Ubermensch, which Friend 100% is, the only problem is that Nietszche didn’t mean that type of child. Friend followed the Ubermensch goals by literally defining/making an era. And at the end, he got to be the last man standing. (Credits go to .tanabe for most of what I said here, besides the multiple Friends part)

“Things that must not be heard” is the title of the chapter. It is a paraphrase from Exodus 23:13. It roughly means “no one shall

invoke the name of other gods". It once again symbolizes Katsumata's selfish and self-centered nature [and god complex].

Cut to Friend indoctrinating people with Manjoume. "We can become superhuman./ But we mustn't be in a hurry to attain perfection./ The reason is,/ To become perfect,/ You must become the universe.", if we relate this back to the cosmos monologue that Friend had back in volume 1 we can translate this quite easily (something that Manjoume isn't able to do). Friend is roughly saying 'We can become special and unique, but we can't hurry, to become perfect you have to become Friend', early builds up to Friend Era basically. Friend makes sure to build his report with perfect marks too, just so other Friend have an easier time establishing their ethical dominance over others. He saved the pope, revived himself after roughly 3 weeks, stopped the spread of the virus (curing people's sins). No one is interested.

Then Manjoume pulls on the rope hoisted to Friend. Friend floats, like Jesus floating on water. Jesus walked on water to establish that he is god and to show his compassion (in the Bible); Friend (Fukubei) is doing the exact same thing.

Manjoume can't understand why everyone is so charmed by him, even the person pulling the rope attached to Friend is amazed.

As Manjoume expresses his disbelief at everyone believing in Friend's trickery, Friend's inner monologue comes through: "Nothing at all/ There's nothing wrong with them/ They are just believing in something they want to.". Symbolism for…basically all religions. The people want to believe in Friend and his purpose, thus they believe it, that's just how humans are. Katsumata is much the same. He's not Fukubei, but if he believes he is, he can *almost* convince himself.

Otcho questions how they can even kill Friend since he saw Hattori's body in 2015, won't Friend fake die again and again. Manjoume confirms that that was Fukubei. He then recalls a meeting that Friend held a bit ago.

The board is discussing their success in stopping the virus. Friend tells them that they can leave for today. The board members yell "For the world leader, hooray!", before exiting.

"Is that so……/ That many are still alive……/ Once more…/ I've got to do something….."

Friend starts to mumble to himself, Manjoume listens in. In a very soft voice, Friend says: "If I were Fukubei, what would I do……?"

This leads Manjoume to suspect another Friend is present, all part of Friend's overarching plan. Analyzing the line, Katsumata wants to know what a more ruthless and bold person like Fukubei would do. As much as Katsumata hates it, Fukubei was always the more "brave" one. This line is mainly aimed to manipulate Manjoume though.

The chapter title is "Things that should not be known", referencing Luke 8:17. "For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open.". Foreshadowing that Friend's secrets will be revealed one-by-one.

Volume 19)



Friend asks a now terrified Manjoume “Whatever came of that Mars immigration project?”. “Ah…well,/ There was talk of that way, way back…”, Manjoume says. “Is that so…?/ I guess there’s no hurry./[“What do you intend to do?”, Manjoume asks] It’s just…/ If I were Fukubei, I would have probably already gone through with it./ The Human Elimination Project./ This is the last trophy…I think./ With this…/ It’s complete.”

Nothing much of note there, besides Friend manipulating Manjoume even further by now directly claiming that he is not Fukubei. Strangely, now that Fukubei is dead, Katsumata doesn’t seem to hate him as much. I guess Fukubei was a lie that Katsumata was able to leave behind, maybe for the first time in his life. His hesitance in confirming that “this is the last trophy” is questionable, but not much comes of it, unless you think the robot is the last trophy or something.

Kenji and Chou start talking while fishing. Kenji mentions how he's been running ever since Bloody New Years Eve. He tried coming back but couldn't, every time he did he would be reminded of Friend. Eventually he went to the Hokkaido mountains. He spent three days and three nights there, until he reached enlightenment. This is clear symbolism for Jesus, but could also relate to the Buddha since his enlightenment is much more akin to the Buddha than Christ in my opinion. The three days part is purely symbolic, it was most likely much longer. He says he killed bears and split rocks in the mountains, again, more symbolism for god.

God reaches his "He became a god" moment when he sees Koizumi bowl just like Uchiyama Ritsuko.

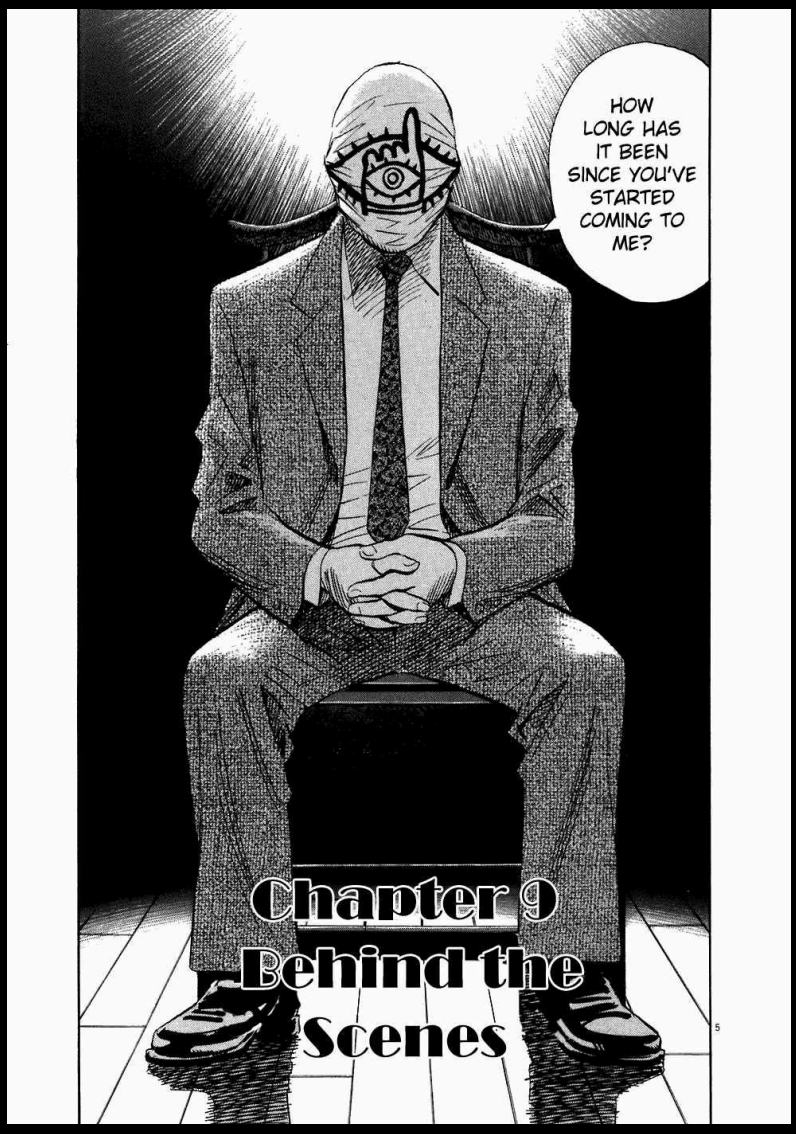


(Literally the same background ☠)

Kenji tries passing through the border. We see more development from him. Some lines might seem like they're a character regression but…they're not. Eg. "I go where I want, how I want. I don't take orders from anybody.", the line by itself could seem a little naive but in context it's fine, considering Kenji's ideology, especially so. Lines like "Stupid!! You can't give the same performance twice!! It's a new song every time!!" are awesome.

Kenji confronts the assassin guy. In one of the flashbacks there's a nice parallel between 13 and Kenji, both hold traffic for an old lady, and both don't see it as a good deed, just something they want to do. It's quite nice, but not too important.

We see how Friend seduced Kiriko, cool stuff [basically recorded how Kiriko's boyfriend acted, then acted as him perfectly, since he has a ton of experience in the field]. Also a cool panel.



Katsumata Lecter ah

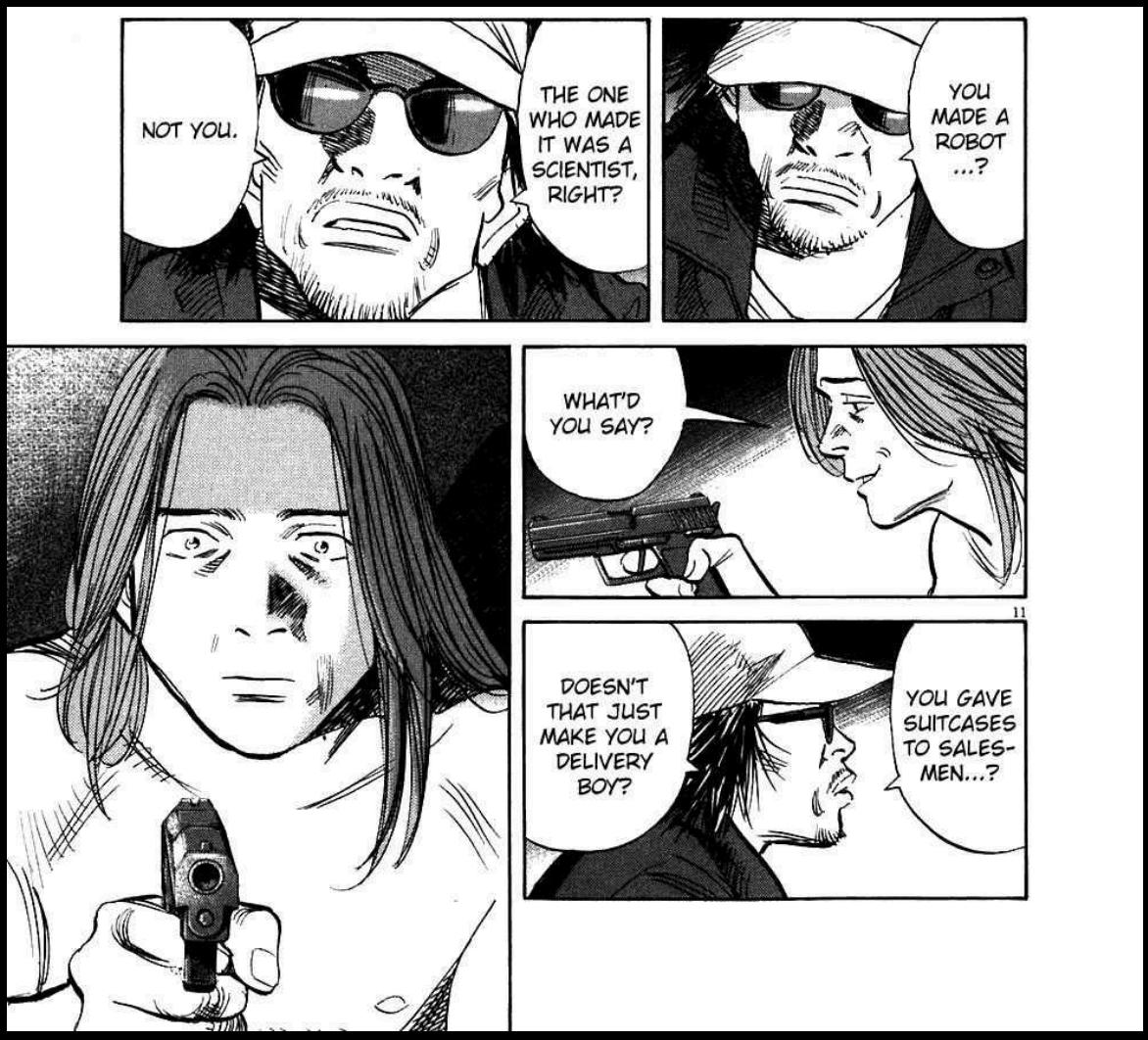
Assassin guy says 2 years. Friend comments that he thought it was longer because his "soul is evolving" (Idk what he's talking about). Friend tells assassin guy to banish Kiriko's boyfriend since he's an "obstacle"; doesn't have the decency to refer to him as a human.

Assassin guy asks "This is…'Evil' isn't it?". Friend replies "There is no evil or good/ In my universe". Cold line. Already discussed what this means in all my sections related to cosmos. Friend

simply doesn't see the moral values in things, only his own values. Those values are not per say good or bad, that's far too unspecific.

Cut to Friend emotionally manipulating Kiriko. "Have you thought about…Our talk the other day?/ If all you do is mourn, you can't move forward./ People can become what they want to become./ It's not too late even now./ You have to keep your motivation going.", maybe you should take your own advice Katsumata.

"I will do anything in my power for you as a 'Friend.'". What a horrible person.



Kenji proceeds to obliterate assassin guy with the power of roasting.

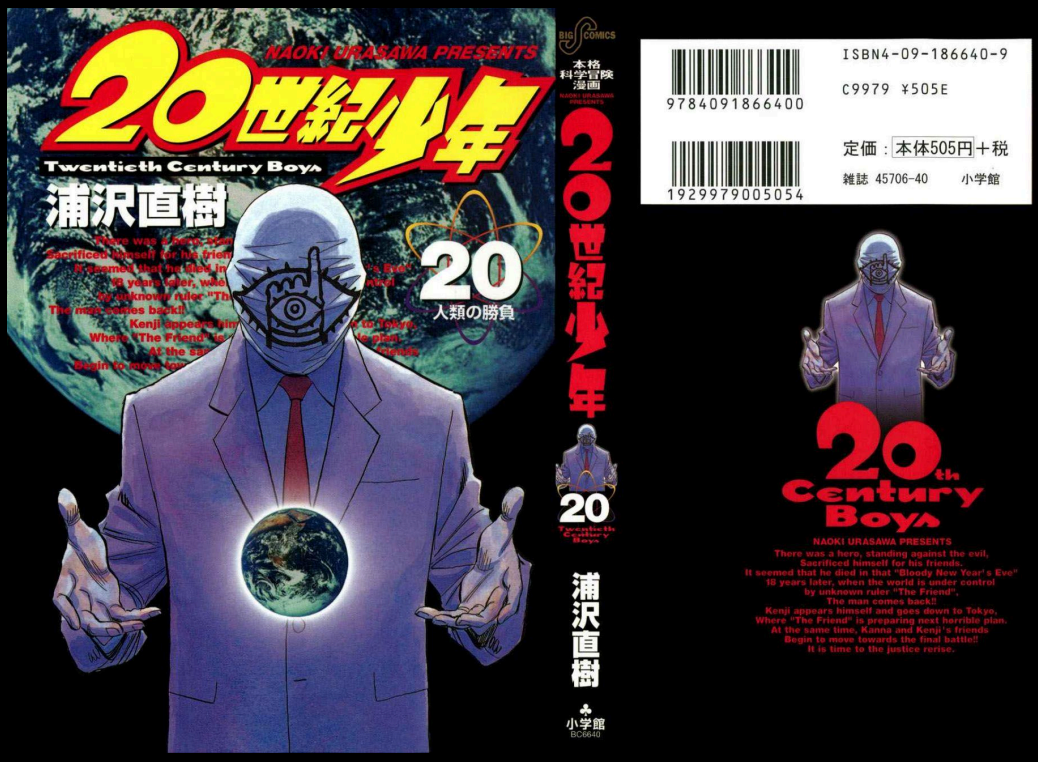
Kenji says “Mr. Fuhrer./ What’s your name?/ Me...?/ I’m Kenji”



Unlike Katsumata, Kenji has come to terms with who he is. Katsumata tries to hide his name from everyone, even making up fake ones in contrast to Kenji. Also the reason I've been calling assassin guy "assassin guy" is because I legitimately can't remember his name, plus it adds on to the theme. (After checking, he indeed does not get named, most likely intentionally)

Kenji has a really good monologue in chapter 214, would suggest checking it out.

Volume 20)



We learn that Friend did indeed burn the factory Kiriko was making the virus at. Whether this means that Friend wanted to kill Kiriko and expedite the process as mentioned multiple times or not is up to debate. I have no opinions, both could work. Perhaps Katsumata hoped that the Holy Mother wouldn't descend smoothly, thus he pulled some strings to favour that scenario.

We see more Kiriko flashbacks. [Fukubei talking about Kanna] “I will protect this child./ Even if mankind becomes extinct, this child…”. Friend manipulates Kiriko into finding out about the cult and promptly leaving, leaving Kanna to Kenji. She tries to give information about Friend to the police, but Friend has that covered, he sends detective Chou’s Friend to pick it up and promptly dispose of it. The men in business suits ask Kiriko for the vaccine: “Allow the ‘Holy Mother’ to ‘descend’, please.”. Maybe Friend meant for this vaccine and virus to be the final ones, or

perhaps not. Maybe that's why the anti-proton bomb was built, or maybe not. It's all up to you. Both arguments can be supported by numerous pieces of evidence. Though the more "tangible" evidence supports the 2015 virus as being the final one.

Kiriko tests out her new vaccine to combat the ultimate virus that Friend will unleash.

Kiriko says yes to 'Is Friend Fukubei?' and 'Is Friend Kanna's father?'. We have to again remember that Kiriko is heavily drugged by Rainbow Kid.

She also saw him once in 2015. "Oh, how nice of you to come back./ I've missed you./ Kiriko-San…", Friend being a jerk once again.

Kanna goes on a suicide mission to kill Friend. Kiriko is convinced that Friend won't lay a hand on Kanna.

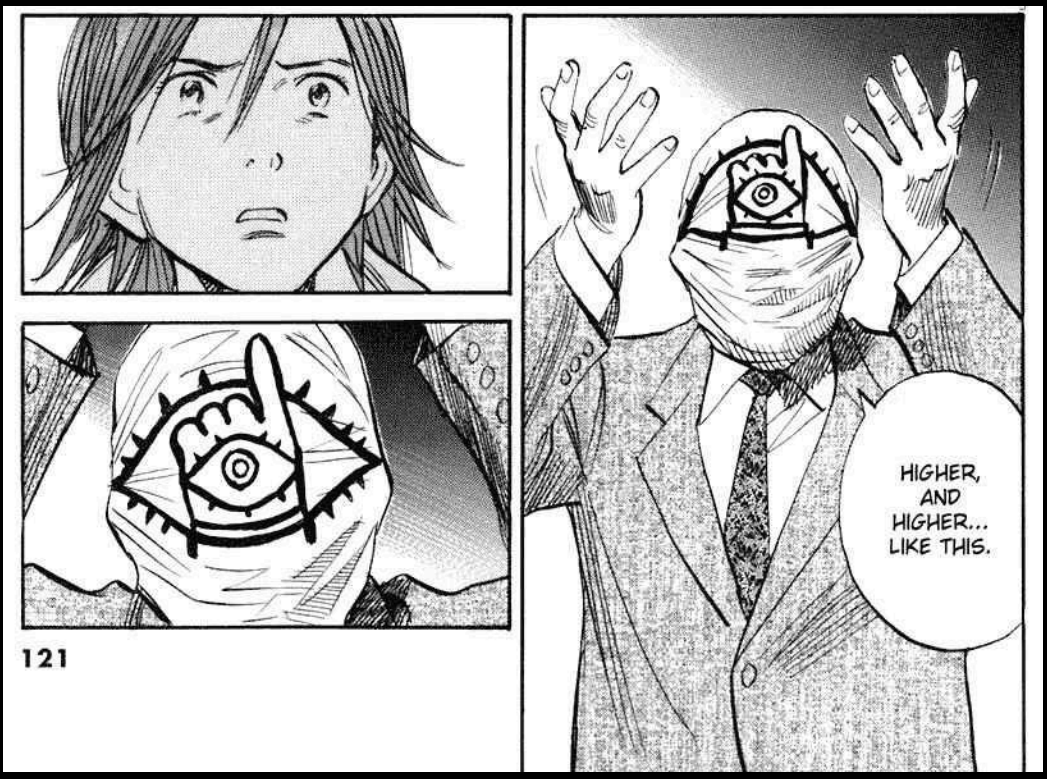
Friend approaches Kanna in the waiting room and greets her. He says he missed her and gives her a hug, nearly the same thing he said to Kiriko too. Kanna asks who he is while pushing him away.

Kiriko says that everything about Katsumata (doesn't actually know his name) was just like Fukubei, but it wasn't Fukubei. Of course, it makes sense, Katsumata isn't Fukubei, even if he lives in the same flesh and blood.

Kanna asks who he is. Friend responds "I'm the real him./ I'm your father.". Is he pretending to be Fukubei here? No, at this point, I'm not so sure. We see that during the assassin guy backstory, Friend isn't Fukubei, since assassin guy questions whether he is the same person that he saw yesterday (referring to Fukubei). Katsumata

wants people to know that he conceived of Kanna. Since Kanna has ESP and Kiriko doesn't, that means that Katsumata had to have powers, otherwise how could Kanna get hers. The most confusing part is Katsumata's intentions with Fukubei. We know he killed him in 2015, but we don't know if that was a symbolic death and a death which was meant to torment the Kenji faction. Could it be that we simply follow the PE version where Fukubei died as a child to gauge Katsumata's narrative? No, highly unlikely. The best narrative I can construct of Katsumata is that Fukubei failed in his trickery in 1971; Katsumata rescues Fukubei in the VR, probably the only form of kindness he gives anyone, though it also further his deception so that could be it as well. Fukubei and Katsumata work alongside each other up until 2015; Katsumata is the one to impregnate Kiriko; Fukubei lies about impregnating Kirko as it's in his nature to lie and further ruin Kenji. Fukubei dies in 2015 due to his incompetence and ego. Katsumata revives Friend and turns him into a god. Katsumata starts the reign of Friend while trying to guide Kenji.

Friend method acts holding Kanna up as a baby. "I wonder if you remember./ I went on walks with you in a baby carriage./ Back then, I held you like this…/ Higher, and higher…like this."



Friend then stares at her, as if to see her reaction. I do believe that Friend shares some kind of affection towards Kanna, yet that doesn't mean he can't torture her mind (it builds character).

Kanna continues to claim that Katsumata isn't her father. Katsumata walks into a dining room. "We are reunited at last./ Let's have a meal./ Okay, Kanna?". Friend asks what Kanna wants, she isn't as cooperative, questioning how many people like Friend exist. Friend is unresponsive, continuing to act flabbergasted at their meeting. Friend goes to remove the mask to eat, but Kanna stops him since she thinks Katsumata got plastic surgery. She says that the real Friend also put on a show, just like Katsumata is doing. Katsumata confirms this, saying that Kanna is a very smart child. "I tested a lot of things on your mother while she was pregnant, so you could turn out that way./['What did you do to her?' Kanna asks, with a half angry half frightened look on her face] Just gave her a little secret medicine.", we don't know the

medicine that Friend is referencing. Though one of them was most likely Rainbow Kid.

Kanna picks up a spoon and bends it in front of Friend's face. "So that means…/ Because of that, this power…", Kanna says. "Wonderful", says Friend. "You inherited my power./ My great power…". We confirm our suspicions. Friend made Kanna to represent his power. Though, there are probably other symbolisms in there as well. Besides demonstrating his power and manipulating Kenji through her, we don't have much reason to suspect Kanna as having a larger part in the story for now.

Kanna calls Friend's and her own powers fraudulent. She says that writing songs and singing from the bottom of the heart can bring real tears into people's eyes, those powers are of much greater importance.

This is probably one of the most misinterpreted parts of 20th Century Boys. Kanna's entire character is misinterpreted to be honest, but she's also the hardest to understand [partially because her writing has some drawbacks]. In this scene Kanna isn't talking about her actual powers, or at least she does so in a more metaphorical sense. Powers are equivalent to lies. Both Katsumata and Kanna use their powers to mask their sense of helplessness and to make a bravado. Kanna isn't saying that her powers are literally ineffective, just that in the grand scheme of things it shows how weak she is. Kenji, a normal person wielding a guitar, was able to get much closer to saving the world than Kanna ever could with her powers. In the case of Friend, his powers are simply lies, much for the same reason. He can't accept being normal, so he lies and becomes a false superman.

We learn that the news about Manjoume wanting to kill Friend leaked to Takasugi and Friend. Otcho and Yukiji subsequently find the dead body of Manjoume, sitting in his chair with his VR glasses.

Friend rings in his henchmen. He tells them to banish Kanna. She hit too close to home, she punctured an important organ of Friend's. Friend didn't try to tell his henchmen to banish her because she spoke blasphemy necessarily, but because if she went on for any longer it might have affected Friend. I don't think Kanna is nearly enough to influence Friend, but it would certainly push him in that direction. He's too close to his goals, he can't give up now.

Takasugi tells Otcho and Yukiji that they were the ones who killed Otcho. It's a nice little line which slips by you all too quickly. Takasugi is saying that hope is what killed Manjoume, hope that he found in the two of them, and probably Kanna as well.

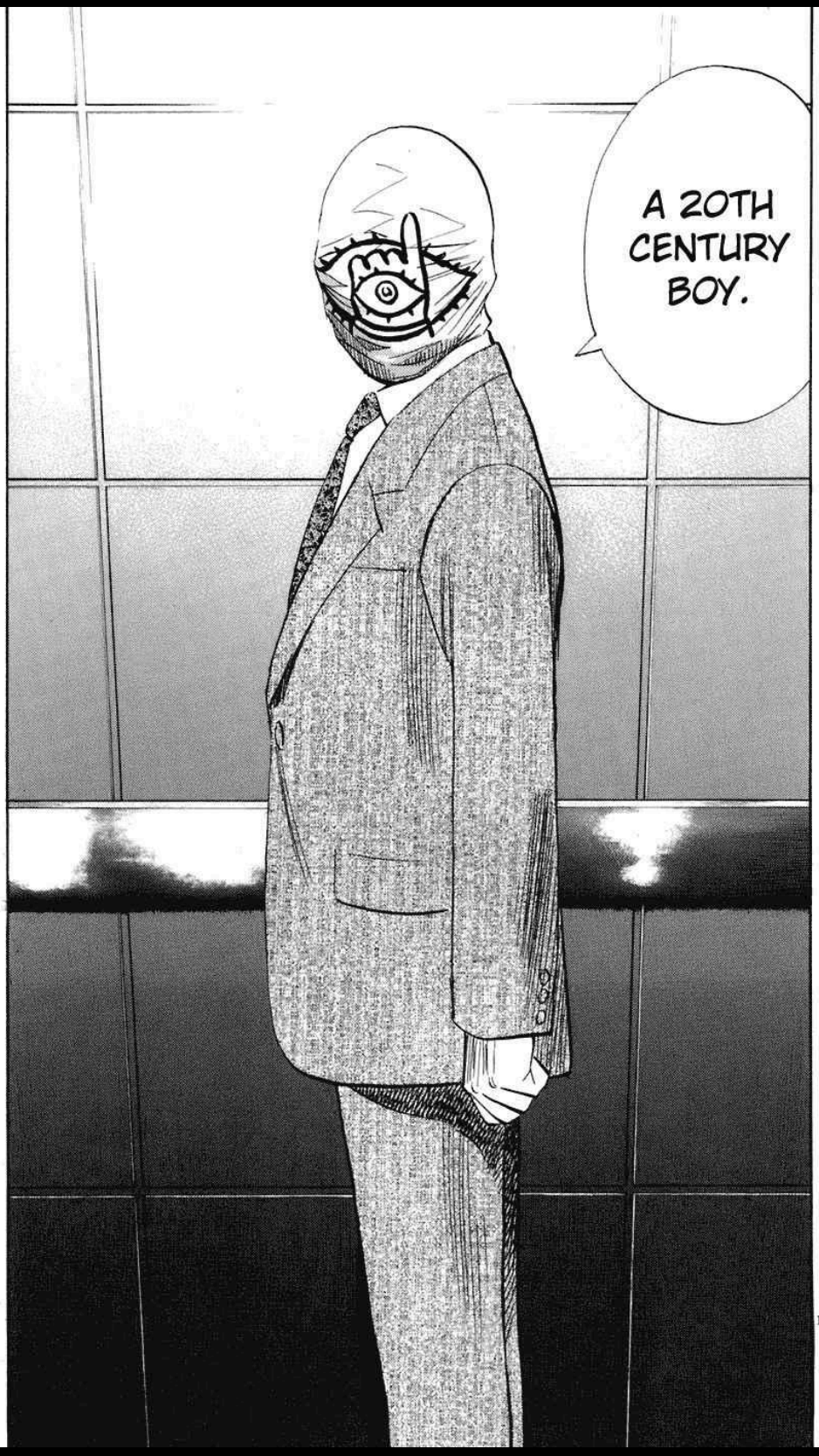
Kanna rushes up to Friend with the bomb in hand and threatens to kill Friend via suicide bombing. Kanna tells the guards to back off. Friend says "Do as she says./ I can't have you all mixed up in this.", if we didn't know about Friend's true intentions, this scene would almost make me doubt whether Friend is unsympathetic to humanity or not. But alas, this is more malicious deceit, Kanna even comments on it.

Takasugi once again mentions that she will be the Holy Mother. Back in volume 11 Manjoume also calls her the exact same thing.

Kanna and Friend have a discussion in an elevator, Friend obviously being held at bomb point. "Did you go to the world expo? Three years after the opening…The largest crowds would

come./ That world expo will open perpetually./ I've already been hundreds of times./ The 1970 world expo…When I was a child…/ I wanted to go, wanted to, wanted to…/ Let's go together next time./ It would be great if I could go with you./ 'Mankind's progress and harmony'.../ It really is just like that./ That's the perfect form of human civilization./ Only that place will remain…/ Once all civilizations fall, only that will remain./ Isn't it wonderful?". Friend seems to enjoy the expo a lot right. It is wonderful in a way; Fukubei's only happiness came from it after all. But Katsumata is not Fukubei.

Kanna gets off the elevator. "I won't kill you", she says. "Why?", Friend asks. "You're not the real 'Friend'." replies Kanna. "What is real?[Kanna asks who he is] Kenji knows who I am./[Kanna:"Uncle Kenji...Knows…?"] Yes…/ I am…/ Especially me…/ A 20th Century Boy."


A 20TH CENTURY BOY.

Title drop. Elevator closes.

It's quite clear Katsumata saw this coming (Kanna releasing him). His responses are insightful. When Kanna says that he's not the real Friend, he asks what is real. This relates to two things. First is his perception of himself, the fact that he is constantly stuck in between 3 people, where he has to be all three of them at once. Is he not Fukubei because Fukubei isn't real? He's not like Katsumata at all though, right now he's more like Friend. He switches perspectives so often that a personality being "real"to him is simply absurd. The second point of this is fairly related to the first. Our perception is what decides what's real and what's not, but what makes our perception real? Nothing, we trust it out of desperation and instinct. If we make our own perception then why not change that perception to be the most favourable one, right? And that's exactly what Friend does. Especially him, he is a 20th Century Boy. Because that time of all is the best and worst. He makes his perception, the cosmos is his, so he will get the answers that he needs from the one person who he desires most or take down everything trying.

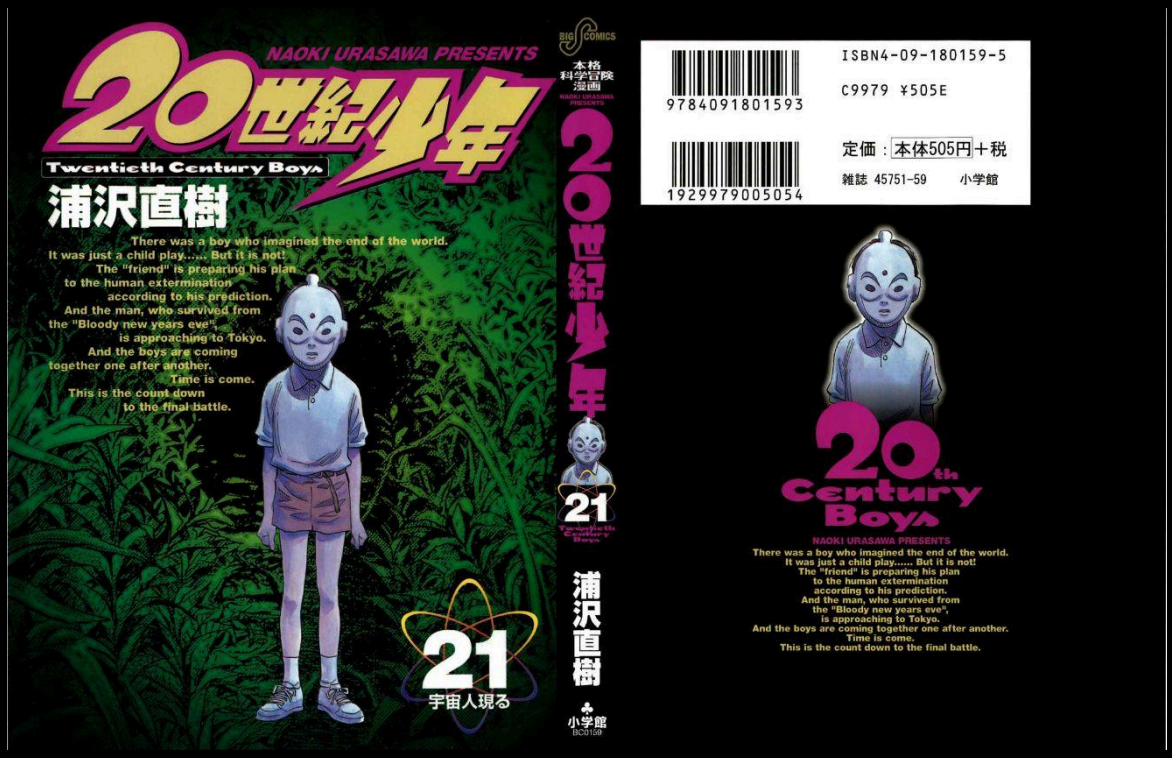
Otcho and Yukiji discover saucers in Friend's basement.

Maruo and Keroyon watch as Kiriko tries to cure the virus that she infected herself with using her new vaccine. If the 24 hours are up then humanity wins.

Kiriko remembers some childhood memories, particularly one where Fukubei, Katsumata, and Yamane walk past her, giggling as they do. This is most likely a fake memory, or a very altered one (Katsumata for sure can't be in the scene for obvious reasons). Fukubei and Yamane are most likely giggling about the Kiriko seduction plan. Kiriko confirms once again that she doesn't know who the second Friend is. We learn that Fukubei talked to someone on the phone when the club was still small. This is implied to be Katsumata…? Kiriko kind of confirms that Fukubei is Kanna's father? In Friend's eyes Katsumata was the one to impregnate Kiriko. In Kiriko's eyes it was Fukubei. It's a bit confusing. Kanna and especially Kiriko are the hardest to analyze and understand among the 20th Century Boys cast in relation to Friend.

Kiriko survives, the Holy Mother has nearly descended now.

Volume 21)



13 and Konchi meet up.



Translation mistake, should be 2015. Doesn't affect the 1972 flashback since that happened twice, plus it was in the voice of

the narrator, not a person speaking. Maybe 13 got some other kind of info, or he's just being forgetful. This happens a few times. I doubt that it's the memory motif either. Chou says 2014 when referencing Friend saving the pope in chapter 229 even though it was the summer of 2015. I thought that maybe Urasawa messed up Science Room 2015, maybe that was supposed to take place on January 1st of 2014, not 15, but that doesn't make sense since the second part starts out saying that the year is 2014. Most likely Urasawa just got confused since the New Year in 20th Century Boys is mentioned once and never really touched upon, so Urasawa just assumed the story stayed in 2014. At least they got the expo date right.

We also learn 13's real name which is pretty cool (Tamura Masao. Kafka on the Shore reference fr). Konchi and 13 fly away from the Friend police on a helicopter. 13 says that they will pay a visit to Friend.

Chou relates to Kenji the insides of the expo. Saying that he saw a child laughing, playing hide-and-seek, and saying 'Let's play Kenji-Kun'. Kenji decides to go to the expo.

Saucers spray paint over cities. For now it's paint, but next time it will be the virus.

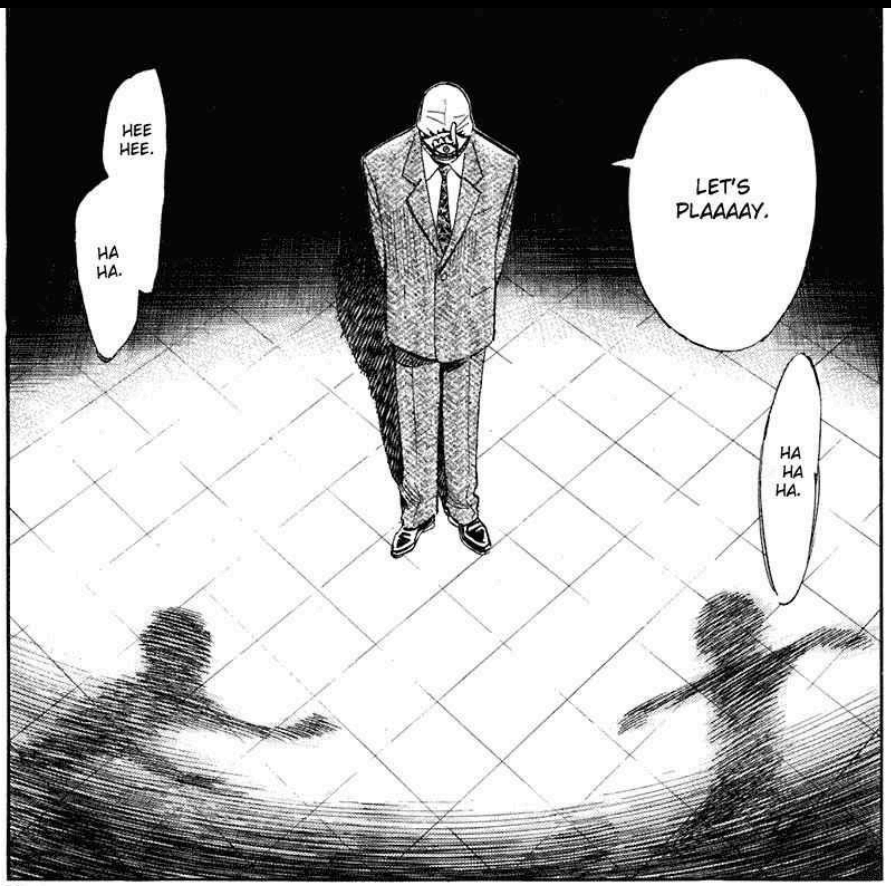
We learn that Takasugi has some kind of relation to Mars (her doctor asks her);what she wants to do there is unknown.

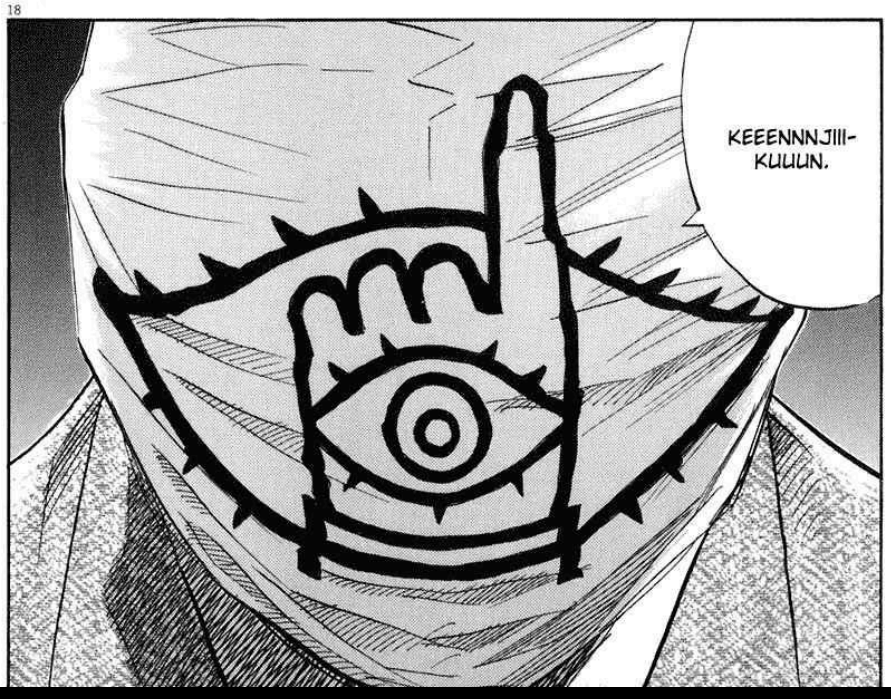
We also learn about some of the projects that Friend has been working on such as: Vaccine research, Genetic research, Clone research, and Brain transplantation. The vaccine one succeeded, the clone research might have succeeded (it depends on whether you think the multiple Friends and the body double sent to 2015 Science Room were clones or not), genetic research has most

likely failed, and the brain transplantation has also failed. From this we can infer that Friend is trying to live a little longer than his body allows him to, or perhaps he wants to make something which mimics him.

Takasugi says that Friend has found a way to live forever. Now we have solved the whole mystery. Friend tried to clone himself in case the Holy Mother's descent wasn't smooth, which is what he intended in the first place. He would impregnate Takasugi, then he would implant the child with all his memories using the PV data. At that point the earth would be destroyed and Friend's child (basically him), would go to Mars and make a perfect civilization there. Or it could also simply be a precaution, just in case humanity isn't destroyed. If it isn't then Friend's child will make sure it is, and then he himself can decide what to do from there, though I think we understand the implications at this point. The latter half is my interpretation; I think it makes a bit more sense than the first half.

Meanwhile Friend is waiting for Kenji inside the expo. Saying "Let's plaaaay./ Keeennnjiii-Kuuun.". While clay children play at his sides.


HEE HEE.
HA HA.
LET'S PLAAAAY.
HA HA HA.


KEEENNNJIII-KUUUN.

Cut the UN getting a surprise call from Friend

Friend starts his speech. “Hello, everybody./ Leaders of the world, I must give another prediction now./ Danger is once again trying to visit the Earth./ This time, it will not be a terrorist attack./ It will be an alien invasion./ Aliens probably released the historical ultimate virus all over Earth./ There is only one away for us humans to survive./Emigration to Mars.”.

We cut to Sadakiyo presenting his plans to Fukubei and Yamane. “The world president announced the plan to emigrate to Mars”. It makes quite a lot of sense for Sadakiyo to write it seeing as he’s an astrology guy. Fukubei says he doesn’t like it and tosses it away. Katsumata took an interest in it. But he put his own twist on it. Sadakiyo obviously wouldn’t write that aliens were the reason the world president emigrated to Mars, but Katsumata would. Katsumata blamed the aliens to further spite Sadakiyo just like he has always done.

The Mars project doesn’t go well. The astronauts they sent there died. When a reporter tried to write a report on it, he was sentenced to rehabilitation. He said that everything Friend said was a lie, the people there told him “Lies…/ Are not lies.”. Pretty cool *1984* reference.

Sadakiyo writes yet another ending. This one is about the anti-proton bomb, but we don’t see that for now. Whether Sadakiyo actually wrote it or not is unknown, there’s a good chance it was Katsumata who wrote it. If it was, that would make a lot of sense. Fukubei is a performer, he likes to make shows, he also wants everyone to suffer as much as possible. Katsumata isn’t the same. Katsumata follows NBOP as a nice gesture to Fukubei. Doesn’t Katsumata hate Fukubei, why would he do that?

We have to look at this question with the lens of Katsumata. Katsumata isn't a well adjusted person, neither is Fukubei. Most of their dynamics are multi-faceted and contradictory. Take Kenji for example. Katsumata dn Fukubei both hate and love Kenji. They call him a prophet yet they also call him the devil. Katsumata hates Fukubei because he got too much attention, was remembered unlike Katsumata, got bullied by him, and controlled him for far too long. Yet Katsumata also loves Fukubei; Fukubei created the NBOP, he followed through with a majority of the plan, he has the same goal as Katsumata, he was also shunned, and they share the same body. Katsumata both loves and hates him, that's why it was likely hard for Katsumata to kill Fukubei (probably, it's a fairly complex question. If we go by the narrative that Fukubei sent a method actor who followed a script, then I would say Katsumata did it out of hate since he made a mockery of Fukubei. If he sent a person who was supposed to act like Fukubei then the question gets even more complicated. Was Katsumata hiding the fact that Fukubei would get murdered in that room a gesture of benevolence or cruelty? It's up to you to decide. I think all interpretations fit his character well.). Back to topic. Katsumata follows the NBOP out of courtesy, to honor Fukubei. But his end goal doesn't require a show or torture. He is perfectly content with ending everything in one fell swoop. Katsumata has always been the more nihilistic and philosophical one out of the two (just think about the fact that he made the whole Pope Assassination sequence). He's more pragmatic, he's not like Fukubei. An anti-proton bomb will do just fine.

Kanna thinks that the expo grounds will be a safe haven from the virus due to Friend's speech from when they were in the elevator. She says to bring everyone there.

There’s a nice moment shared between Kiriko, Maruo, and Keroyon back at the From Empire. I think I completely omitted mention of it up until now.



Meanwhile we also get the complete story of what happened during the Yanbo and Mabo conflict. Specifically the one where they were destroying the secret base. Everyone got together to defend it, and eventually they were able to hold up a ratty old flag of the Friend symbol. Would suggest reading it, my explanation doesn’t do it justice (chapter 235).

We see Friend's childhood one more time. Now in the perspective of Katsumata. "Again…/ The same every day…/[Kenji goes to play 20th Century Boys, just like in the beginning of the series] This world…/ Necessary…/ Am I necessary…?/ Or unnecessary…?/ This world…/ Is it necessary…?/ Or unnecessary…?/[Steps out onto the school rooftop] This world…". Friend goes full "To be or not to be" on us. For now this is just foreshadowing for what's to come in a more immediate sense, we'll explore it later.

Friend wakes up, checks the next step of the NBOP. It's the last page, today is the day.

Friend goes to the broadcasting room and requests them to play 20th Century Boys. "Hey, everyone./ Good day, people of the world./ Do you all remember…/ The 'Bloody New Year's Eve' of 2000…/ And 2015, the last year of AD…/ A lot of people died from the virus./ It all went according to my 'prophecies'./ And now, aliens are invading with flying saucers./ You must be frightened. You must want to flee to Mars./ All exactly as my 'prophecies' said./ The world…/ The world never recognized my genius./ I am necessary./ But this world is not./ The 'prophecies' are all lies./ I did them all./ God made this world in one week./ So I will end this world in one week./ Farewell, everyone./ Keeenji-Kuuun…/ Let's plaaaay."

Friend makes his final move. He, for now, seems to have decided that the Holy Mother didn't descend smoothly (Kiriko didn't make

the virus, or at least he thinks she hasn't delivered it fast enough). So he decides to kill all humans. The jig is up. He will now cause the most suffering. Friend has effectively made himself into a Christ-like figure, then revealed to everyone that he is actually the devil in disguise. He made the virus and he killed all of those people. This along with everything that has happened so far is made specifically to cause maximum pain to everyone. He didn't care about anyone, not the people, not the multiple Friends everywhere, everything was fake. Everything he ever preached is a lie (that's what he wants to believe). The genius part is Katsumata's ego speaking through. He doesn't say this because he prides himself on his intelligence, he does this because he believes his philosophy is above all others. 'This world of liars and frauds doesn't belong' he thinks. Someone has to do something about it; I, the person who knows he tricks people, should do the task. God created the world in one week, so I will destroy it in one week. I will clean everything up, this toy box is dirty. The world is not necessary, it is full of liars. I am necessary, I can see through those lies. I will change, the world will not, they will always lie, and then go a step further by convincing themselves that they didn't. Is Katsumata being a hypocrite? Of course. In a sense all of it is, but that doesn't matter to him. He has gone too far to turn back. He has deceived everyone to get here, he became a god to get here. There's only one thing stopping him. It's Kenji. He still wants to understand him, his methods. He doesn't understand them yet. He must find out what makes Kenji, Kenji.
'Kenjiiiiii-Kuuuun. Let's plaaaaaay'.

[As in, 'Kenji, let's go back to 73' one more time']

Volume 22)



Kanna uses Kenji's song to try to gather everyone at the expo. She says that they will hold a music festival there.

Keroyon, Maruo, and Keoryon's kid go to Tokyo. On the way there they get shot at and run off to the sewers. There they meet the Sadakiyo child army and Sadakiyo himself. Sadakiyo has been adopting kids who lost their parents to the virus. Maruo, after some talk, finally recognizes Sadakiyo. Sadakiyo finally joins the Kenji group. They get over the wall safe and sound.

Kenji's old music group bands together once again.

Yukiji and Yoshitsune rally an army to fight off Friend.

We get confirmation that Katsumata has taken the controls for the giant robot from Bloody New Year's Eve. (Also some more evidence to support the KV narrative.)

The robot starts moving.



Keroyon, Maruo, and Sadakiyo take the vaccines to the expo grounds.

We get some small foreshadowing of Katsumata taking the badge of justice and Kenji stealing it.

Yukiji and Yoshitsune dismantle the Friend diet building. Everyone there starts crying. Friend had put a heavy toll on their mental psyche.

The saucers take off.

Kenji faces the robot from Bloody New Year's Eve at the Friend Peace Memorial. Quite ironic, Friend's robot coming to the grave of the ones it killed.

More and more space badge foreshadowing piles up.

Kenji and Maruo go through their childhood town until they stumble upon their school

Friend stands on the class podium, remote in hand.

"So…you've come./ Kenji-Kun./ The 'man who will save the world,' indeed./ There on that monitor…/ Is footage from the camera on the robot./ Your beautiful little girl is sleeping there,

now./ What do you think will happen…/ If I move this controller just a little bit?[“Stop it./ Just stop…”, Kenji says] Indeed./ The ‘man who upholds justice,’/ Remember./ YOU are the emperor of evil,/ Kenji-Kun.”

Friend is mocking Kenji’s ideals. In Friend’s mind Kenji is the emperor of evil, far from the man who will save the world. To Friend he is exactly the type of person who ruins the world. He hurts Kenji even more by threatening Kanna. Friend shows that he doesn’t care too much about what happens to Kanna, at the very least he cares much more about Kenji than he ever did Kanna.

The people make it to the expo.

13 proceeds to fly to Friend.

‘Kenji Kuuuuun. You don’t remember a thing!! You don’t remember…That YOU are the evil emperor!!! If you don’t remember what you did, Kanna will be crushed!’

Kanna wakes up and sees the robot approaching her house. She uses her powers to stop the robot (it should be noted that Friend controls her powers).

Kenji says he remembers it all. Friend’s remote starts to malfunction.

“L…look, you started acting weird…/ And now the remote’s acting up…!!”

Kenji at this point is on his knees on the ground. His approach to confronting Friend this time has changed drastically. He no

longer holds a gun up to Friend's head and threatens him. He comes to Friend to apologize and to empathize. (Reference)

The saucers float over the school.

"The robot has stopped, but you're too late./ Where do you think this flying saucer is going?/ I know Fukubei verrrry well./ I was always by his side. I knew him as well as I knew myself./ But Fukubei's concerns are not always my concerns./ Personally, I don't CARE what happens there…"

Katsumata doesn't say anything new. Katsumata knows Fukubei incredibly well because they share the same body, but the two don't necessarily have the exact same goals. Fukubei's concerns are not Katsumata's concerns and vice versa.

"I'm sorry…", Kenji says. "["I always regretted it…", continues Kenji] Stop…/["I never felt like it had been made right, deep down…"] Stop it./["I'm sorry…"] How can you remember that?! If you apologize, then it's all over!!", says Friend.

"It is over./ Our game is all over." concludes Keji.

Kenji remembers what he put Katsumata through. He apologizes. Friend is shocked that someone remembers him, after all, no one else had. Kenji isn't so much opposing Friend's belief here as he is attacking his psyche. Part of Friend's motivation is that Kenji never remembered him, and now that he has part of Friend is gone. But the game isn't over yet.

Kenji comforts Friend by saying that he will tell Friend everything, and that that will put a stop to his suffering (interpreting what he's saying, not the actual dialogue). I'll tell it infront of everyone at the Expo, he says.

Friend lashes out, saying that an evildoer like Kenji will never stop him. He holds out the remote control for the saucer and threatens to release the UFO's upon the Expo grounds, so that no one could hear Kenji apologizing. Katsumata will not let off Kenji that easily. Katsumata continues with his "Bad guys will never win" dialogue when suddenly Sadakiyo grabs Friend's hand. "I'm…/ A good guy." he says while holding a knife to Friend's throat. This is an amazing moment for Sadakiyo's development and journey. Sadakiyo finally accepts who he is.

Otcho shoots down one of the saucers.

"I am…/ Good…/ Let's die together.", says Sadakiyo. He wants to be a good guy by finally putting an end to Friend who has used him to commit horrendous atrocities.

Kenji tells both of them to stop. He asks Sadakiyo to give him the knife, to finally end everything.

13 flies his helicopter into the third UFO. "This is it!! This is what it means to be on with the cosmos…!!". To be one with the cosmos isn't to be Friend, but to kill him. To put an end to the false Ubermensch.

13 crashes the helicopter into the UFO. The UFO comes crumbling down right on top of Friend and Sadakiyo.



Cut to the concert. Kenji performs his songs with his old band to a crowd of thousands. He passes the torch to another band. He hasn't yet played Gutalala Sudalala. He then walks up to Kanna, places his hat on her head and hugs her. Telling Kanna not to cry.



Fin

“To take someone’s life is a terrible sin, but to take away one’s faith in the beauty of life is an even more terrible crime.”-Fyodor Dostoevsky

If you’ve made it this far, congratulations, you now know more about Friend than 99.99% of its reader base does. This isn’t the end though, we still have yet to analyze 21st Century Boys. So

please strap in for a little while longer as I tie up all the loose strings and explain the ingenious conclusion of this manga.

21st Century Boys



(I will be using both the original and perfect edition version of 21st Century Boys. Mostly the original though. Viz translations are weird.)

Before we get into the chapter contents of 21st Century Boys, we have to analyze the title and volume.

21st Century Boys is simple but effective foreshadowing and overview of the events that will happen in this manga. 20th Century Boys is all about being stuck in the 20th century. Fukubei and Katsumata are stuck there all their lives. Kenji was stuck in the 20th century for a long time as well (only relieving himself of it after his 3 days rejuvenation in the mountains). You can extend this phrase to most people in the manga, especially Kanna and those who were friends with Kenji. The move to the 21st century suggests development and acceptance. A conclusion has to happen if this is the title. Old perspectives will be shattered and new ones will be sown.

The 上 character is used for the volume number. I'm not an expert on Japanese. I know a tiny bit of Chinese, based off that knowledge this is either referring to heaven/god (such as in 天上 or 上帝). It could also be the word for "start". I think "god" is more symbolic but "start" is probably the author's intent, or maybe it's both.

Little warning before we start. 21st Century Boys utilizes Tomodachi Land's virtual reality a ton. Every flashback utilizes the VR, they are not actual flashbacks. This is never confirmed but the way the manga is laid out makes it fairly apparent. The VR world, while being perfect in terms of visuals, doesn't have to be perfect in terms of character moments. In the VR world, Katsumata and Fukubei are two separate people. The characters there, with some small exceptions, are programmed AI. However, even though they are AI, all of them were at one point made by Katsumata. Consider everyone as an extension of Katsumata and his wants/needs; the VR world is Katsumata.

Let's start.

Kenji leaves the performance, saying that he won't sing Sudalala Gutalala anymore. He most likely does this out of guilt. Sudalala Gutalala is the song of invincible justice; Kenji doesn't feel as if deserves to sing the song after what he did to Katsumata.

We cut back to the UFO crashing on top of Friend and Sadakiyo. Sadakiyo is knocked unconscious, but before that happens he asks Kenji if he can let him into his group (the Kenji group). Kenji says that he's been with them the whole time. Very heartwarming. It's true in the metaphoric sense at least, certainly not literally (they didn't even know who Sadakiyo was when they were children). In the perfect edition the conversation is a bit different. Sadakiyo asks if he can be a part of the group now, to which Kenji responds 'you already are'. I prefer the original translation.

They then find Friend's body. He's under multiple pieces of ruble, with a huge metal poll plunged into his lower abdomen.

He continues to say 'Let's play Kenji-Kun'. Kenji tries to take off his mask but Friend retaliates, saying "Don't…/ Everything will end…/ Don't…/ Our game will…". Kenji does take it off, the face of Fukubei appears in front of them. Maruo asks Katsumata who he is, Katsumata replies that Kenji knows.

Is Katsumata mocking Kenji the entire time? Kind of. I think it's just more manipulation to get Kenji to play in the VR world. Their game clearly wouldn't end since Kenji hasn't connected the dots yet, maybe Katsumata was just overestimating his deductive abilities once again.

Katsumata asks Kenji to play Bob Lennon one more time. Kenji complies. Friend raises his hand to make the Friend symbol one more time. When the song concludes, Friend's hand drops to the ground, and he dies (presumably*). Why did Katsumata ask Kenji to play Bob Lennon instead of 20th Century Boys? Well. he didn't. Katsumata simply told Kenji "That song..../ Can you sing it?". I think Katsumata wanted Kenji to play 20th Century Boys instead, reminding Katsumata that his purpose wasn't in vain, that all of this had a purpose (which 20th Century Boys also symbolizes).

Kenji says the line "I never thought you would die in this manner.", completing the prophecy and premonition that Friend had back in the PV section. Maybe Katsumata does regret some things after all.

Kenji asks Katsumata for forgiveness.

Maruo asks who that is. Kenji, most likely to the disappointment of Katsumata, says "I don't know.". In the PE version he says "I don't, but still, I...", suggesting that Kenji's memories are struggling to remember what happened on those days.

We get to see the lead up to the space badge confrontation. Baba (the old lady from the Jijibaba store) spots Katsumata (who's wearing the Sadakiyo mask) wearing the space bodge; it leads her to think that the person wearing the mask stole it.

We get to see Kiriko in VR as well. Her brainwashed memories mimic the VR world perfectly. She asks who the boy with the mask is (Sadakiyo is standing right next to her, mask off, though it's still with him). Whenever the camera shifts back to Kiriko, Sadakiyo is magically gone, suggesting some mischief with both her memories and the VR.

We get to hear what Yamane, Fukubei, and Katsumata are talking about. Fukubei says it's just not something he can tell people, even if he did they might not understand it (referring to Katsumata and Yamane). Fukubei continues to tempt Yamane until Katsumata intervenes. "I had a dream./ Both of you were in it./ Both of you were in our class room./ And…/ You../ Killed you." [pointing from Yamane to Fukubei]

Fukubei looks unamused, Yamane just stears wearily.

Yamane berates Katsumata, telling him to stop messing around, and reminding him that he can't talk to Fukubei and him like that. Katsumata has a self-deprecating mindset. He could have programmed Fukubei and Yamane to respect him, yet he did the exact opposite. He made himself realistic, being timid and frail.

About the dream Katsumata had…

Whether kid Katsumata actually had a dream about the future is unknown. In PV he has an intuition based premonition, but that doesn't confirm anything. It is highly likely that Katsumata really did program kid Katsumata to have such a dream. Or maybe he spoke to him directly, after all, Katsumata and Fukubei seem to know more about the VR than all others. Why did Katsumata reveal this to kid Katsumata? To provide solace for himself (and maybe to justify it).

Katsumata proceeds to recite Fukubei's entire plan. Almost as if he already knows it. He laughs about it. Then proceeds to finish the plan by adding on the anti-proton bomb conclusion. Adult Katsumata told him all of this. I don't think he told him about Fukubei's plan, but he certainly did tell him about the anti-proton

bomb. The most confusing part of this whole ordeal is where the flashback about Sadakiyo writing in the Mars emigration plan actually takes place, since it has to be around the same time that Katsumata wrote in the anti-proton bomb plan. I'm now starting to think that that section also could have been part of the VR, but I'm unsure, either way VR Katsumata and actual Katsumata aren't the exact same person. Why would Katsumata tell this to his child self? To justify it. Unlike the previous one, this one is definitely done for this purpose. Katsumata has a guilty conscience somewhat; that's why he helps Fukubei achieve his goals. Kanna, Kenji, Yamane, and Sadakiyo have all influenced Friend a lot through the story, to the point where Friend couldn't shun his thoughts anymore (he's always had these thoughts, just look at the Teru-Teru Bozu scene. He just tried to hide them, like he does when Kanna meets him for the "first" time). Who else to justify it to and explain it to but the kid version of yourself. Sadakiyo and Katsumata are very similar in that regard.

Kenji enters the VR world.

We get a cool scene between the original Kenji faction.



We get informed as to why Kenji goes into the VR world; the UN asked him to find out more about the anti-proton bomb's location. (They learned about it through the NBOP)

The Kenji faction has a celebration party. After a while, most members passed out drunk. Yoshitsune informs Yukiji that Kenji is going into the VR. Yukiji confronts Kenji about it outside. Kenji doesn't listen to her demands and instead says "Yukiji, is there anything you wish you had said when you were a child?/ Me…/ I've got a few.". This isn't character regression. Most people

associate maturity with lack of regrets but that's not what defines maturity. Maturity means not having those regrets eat away at you; Kenji is going to the VR to fix his past mistakes and make things right, even if they're in a different "reality".

Kenji enters the VR world, again. Gets suckerpunched by a shadowy figure (Manjoume).

Learns from young Kenji that the idea for an anti-proton bombs comes from a manga called 'Super Jetter'.

Sadakiyo, now bedridden, tries to tell Kanna the location of the anti-proton bomb, but can't seem to do it. (How does he know the location? Drugs).

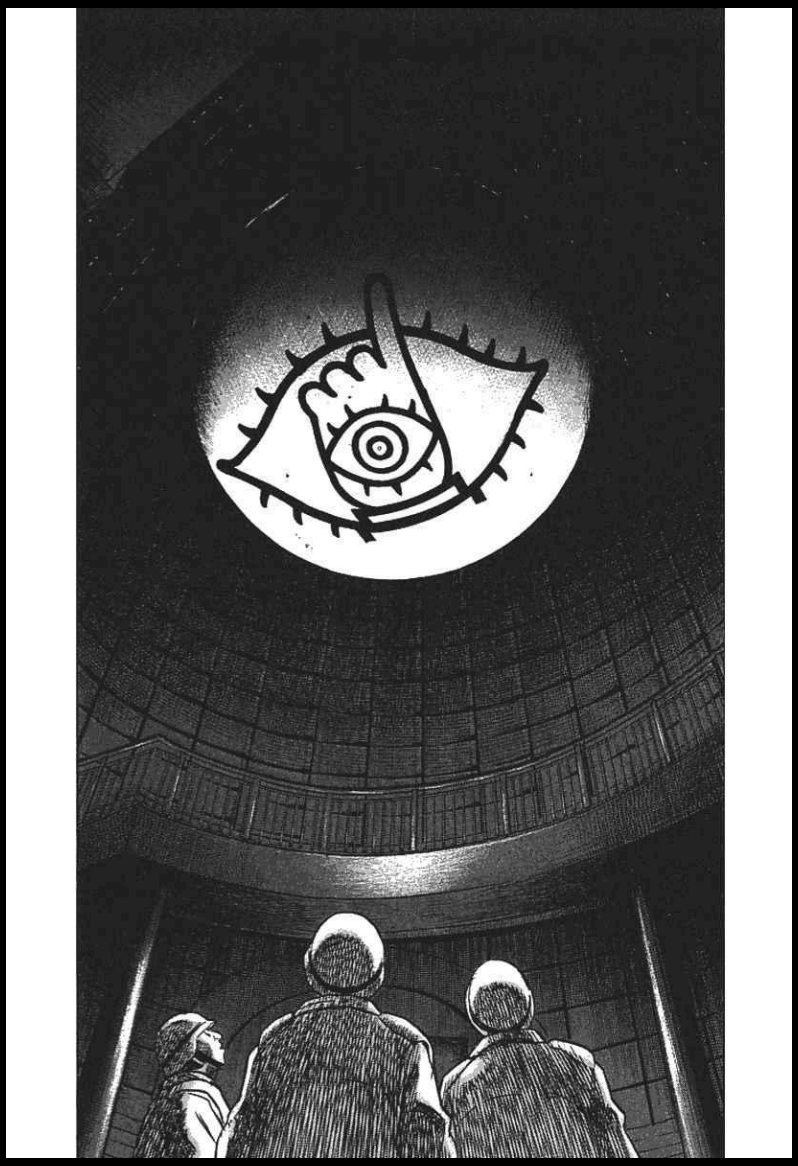
Kenji meets Manjoume. Manjoume vents about his regrets and how he wanted to be just a little famous in life. This is the type of person who is actually devoured by regrets.

We get a scene of Katsumata and Manjoume together (as remembered by Manjoume). Manjoume sells a product which is an imitation of an imitation. Katsumata really seems to enjoy that idea. He imagines himself as an imitation of an imitation. "Then it's an imitation of Fukubei imitating Kenji…". "Those guys were talking about germ warfare,/ But I'd do it differently./ If it were me,/ I'd set up an anti-proton bomb.// Hurray for the bomb. Hurray for the bomb.", Katsumata says, expressionless. This confirms our assumptions. Katsumata doesn't want to make people suffer; he just wants to end everything as soon as possible. The imitation of an imitation part is pointing to Katsumata's lack of character. Kenji is who Fukubei aspires to be (obviously a dumbed down version of their dynamic, but that is at its core). Katsumata made Fukubei so he could feel stronger, but Fukubei took over Katsumata since he was the more dominant

one. Now Katsumata is trying to imitate Fukubei, to feel powerful again. He hates his timidness. At one point he realizes that he doesn't feel the same way as Fukubei at all, he would much rather end everything than make people suffer. So in order to get rid of himself and his nihilistic thoughts, he kills himself (71' hanging). He allows Fukubei to take over and execute the plan, since he's much less of a nihilist and much more of a hedonist (to be honest, I wouldn't say Fukubei has a fixed ideology or philosophy. Even compatibilism applies more to Katsumata and the general idea of Friend than to Fukubei.).

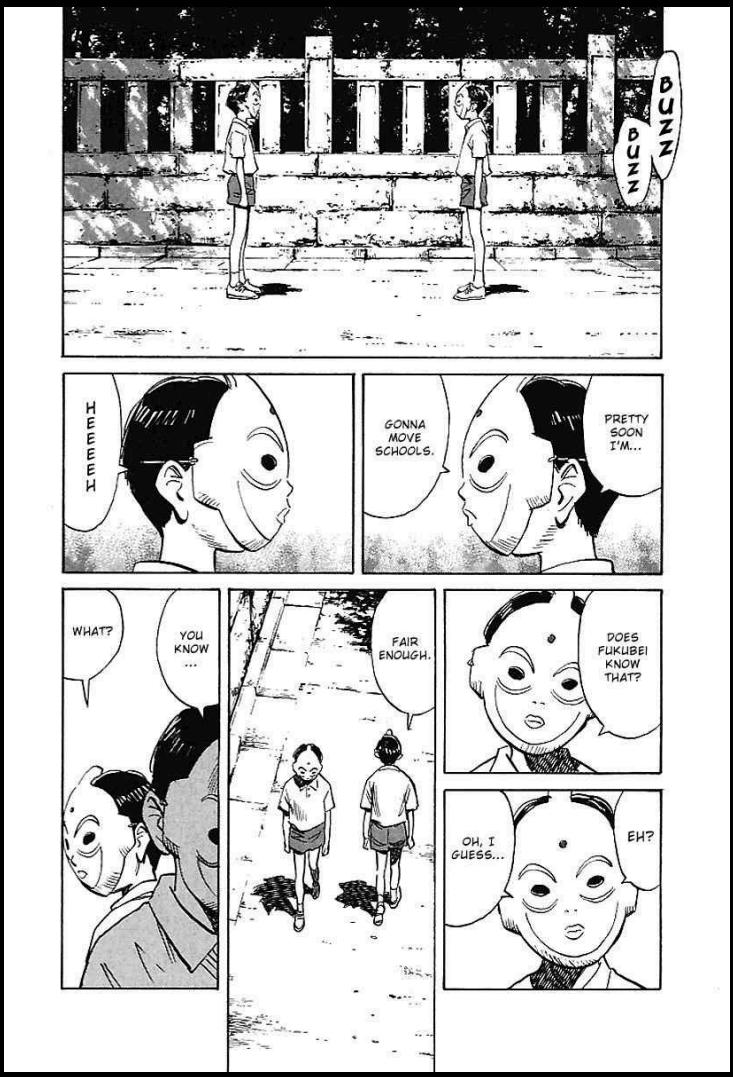
The UN's army go to the expo. Discover a child model who most people assume is Katsumata. It isn't. This is supported by the soldier saying "It's another model of a kid", instead of "the kid", implying there are multiple different models of different kids.

Then they discover the anti-proton bomb.



Next we get a scene with Katsumata and Sadakiyo, a rarity.

The two greet each other with the same response. They look eerily identical.



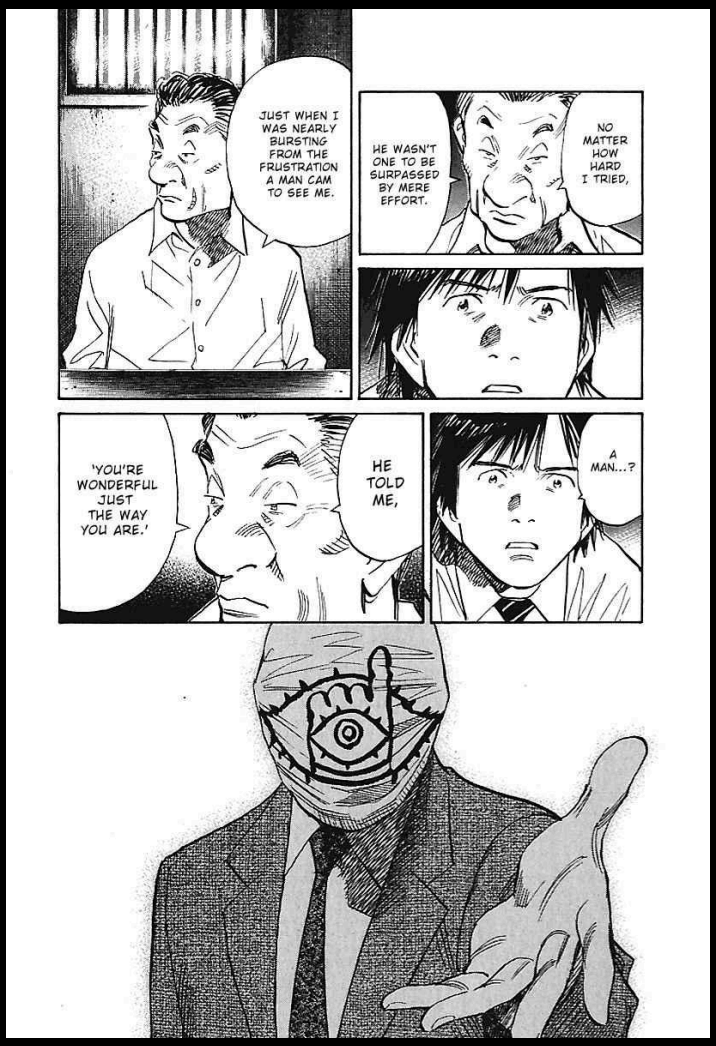
Sadakiyo's reply of "oh, I guess" is supposed to be a little ironic since he's literally talking to him.

The fact that both look the same is symbolic of their alikeness. Both are timid people with no friends who only seek to be accepted. Both also are open-eyed, able to see more than others (Fukubei).

One of my favourite realizations about this is why Fukubei treated Sadakiyo so harshly. While yes, Fukubei was genuinely a psychopath, he also did it because Sadakiyo reminded him of himself (Katsumata). The whole reason Katsumata became

Fukubei is to discard the weakness holding him back. Once he meets Sadakiyo he sees much the same thing as he did in himself, that's why he torments him more than anyone else. He hates himself most of all.

We get a cool story about how Friend manipulated Chou's sidekick.



The UN goes to the expo to investigate what the object is.

Katsumata gives Sadakiyo the notes to the location of the remote control to the bomb. Katsumata gives it to Sadakiyo because he likes him, in his own twisted way, as I mentioned above. (The

entire scene only happened in VR). Kanna later uses that to find the location of the anti-proton bomb remote control (the secret base). She used her abilities to either mind read Sadakiyo or to link to the VR, I'm not sure which. If you interpret it as her having read Sadakiyo's memories, then yes, Katsumata did have some empathy for Sadakiyo.

Then comes *the* scene.

Fukubei and Yamane walk side-by-side, discussing their next science project when they suddenly hear Baba yell "HEEY!!!".

Fukubei and Yamane turn around to find Katsumata getting handled by Baba. She's trying to take his space badge.

Maruo, Konchi, Yoshitsune, and others join in to see what's happening.

Katsumata says that he hasn't done anything. Baba points to the space badge, saying that he stole it. Katsumata denies it, saying that he won it fair and square, he put the winning ticket into the basket.

Baba doesn't believe him. She insults him and berates him in front of everyone, saying that she'll contact his teacher or his parents.

Everyone looks in disgust (not at Katsumata but at the situation), one boy even calls him a criminal.

Fukubei is the only one to have a neutral reaction. Maybe not neutral, it's almost reminiscent of disgust and disappointment (but unlike the others, these emotions *are* towards Katsumata).

Kenji notices all of this and takes note of the fact that everyone thinks Katsumata stole the badge. But before anything further can be done with this, Kenji runs away out of fright and guilt.

Baba tells Katsumata to get up and asks him what class he's in. Fukubei replies for him, joking with Yamane as he does so. "This kids in the 5th year, class 4, right?"

Katsumata yells out that he didn't do it, shaking as he does so.

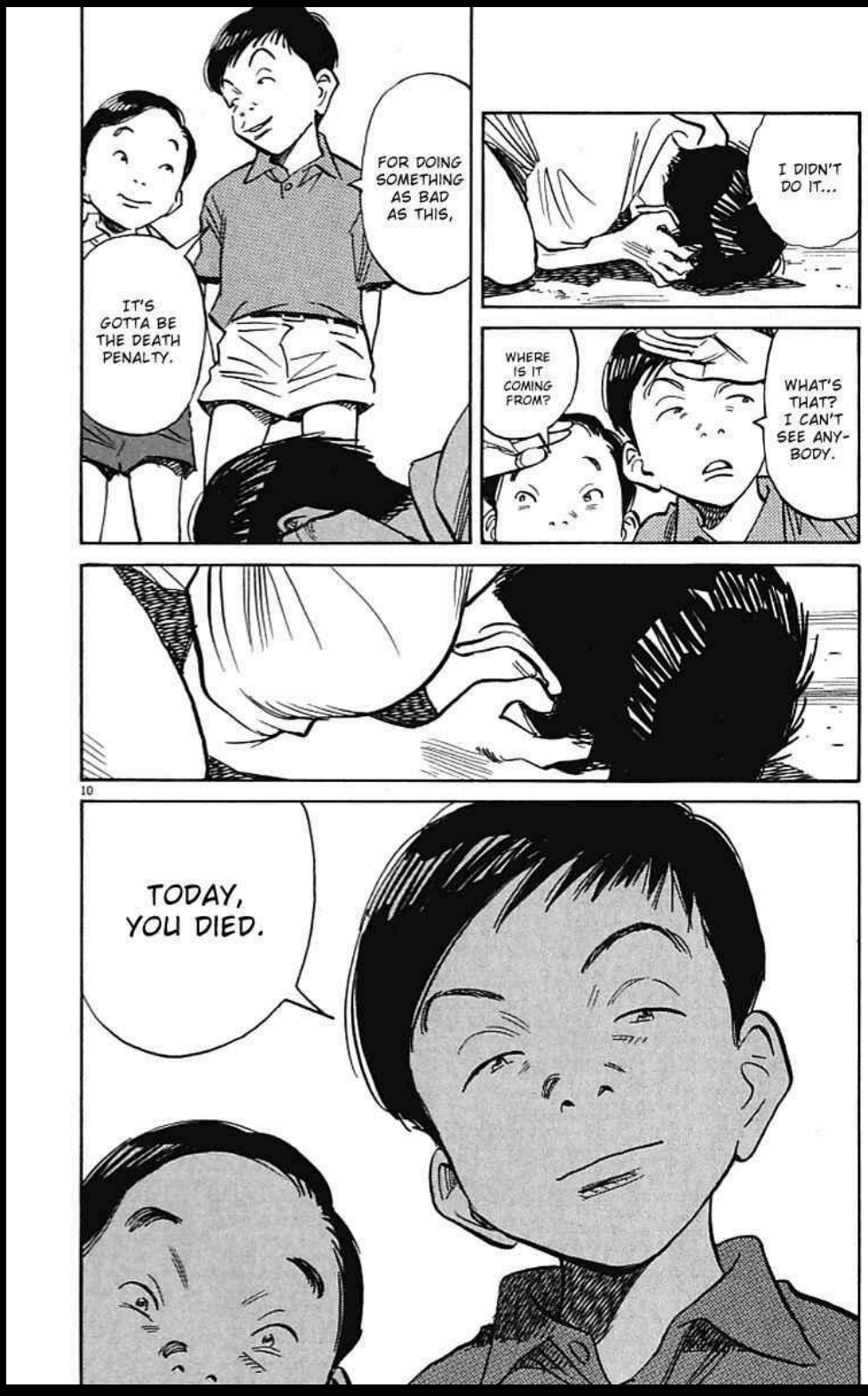
Fukubei says "I can hear a voice, but I can't see anyone…"

Katsumata continues to say he didn't do it. Fukubei continues to say he can't see anybody. "For doing something as bad as this,/ It's gotta be the death penalty./ Today you died."

Here's the sequence in the manga:


HEEEH.
SO THAT'S THE CRIMINAL ...
SO-, THIS IS WHERE IT ENDS-
OH DEAR LORD ...
WHAT'S GOING ON?
HEY, KENJI, LOOK AT THIS.
EH?
HE'S SAYING HE WON THE SPECIAL SPACE FORCE BADGE.


SOB
SOB
STOP YOUR CRYING AND GET UP BOY!!
WHAT'S YOUR NAME? WHAT CLASS ARE YOU IN??
THIS KIDS IN THE 5TH YEAR, CLASS 4, RIGHT?
HE'S IN CLASS 4.
I DIDN'T DO IT! I DIDN'T DO IT!!
HEEEH?
I CAN HEAR A VOICE, BUT I CAN'T SEE ANYONE...


FOR DOING SOMETHING AS BAD AS THIS,
IT'S GOTTA BE THE DEATH PENALTY.
I DIDN'T DO IT...
WHERE IS IT COMING FROM?
WHAT'S THAT? I CAN'T SEE ANY-BODY.
TODAY, YOU DIED.



Brutal

This is one of the best scenes in 21st Century Boys.

First things first. This is a scene in the VR world. This didn't happen in actuality. Everything that happened in this moment was chosen and designed by Katsumata himself.

Fukubei serves as a reflection for Katsumata's own thoughts in this scene. He looks disappointed in himself at first. Then Fukubei comments on Katsumata's emptiness when he says that he can't see anyone (or perhaps it's just more bullying, or both).

The "death penalty" part is again more mockery.

"Today, you died." might seem a bit confusing to you. Wasn't the whole point of the 71' hanging to kill Katsumata? Sure it was. This one is more so in the literal sense. Katsumata died, internally. Any hopes that he once might have had disappeared. Any love for this

world and its inhabitants died too [or at the very least he got much closer to it].

Katsumata's choice to make all of this is a quiet and meditative self reflection. How Fukubei took over his life. How he lost his sense of self. Etc etc.



{This section is still being analyzed; it's only my prototype for the "ending explained"}

The 〒 symbol probably represents "the end" or maybe "next". I'm not too well informed.

A bunch of school boys are kicking around Katsumata after learning that he stole the badge. Kenji flocks them away. Kenji then asks Katsumata whether he's Sadakiyo or Katsumata. No response. Kenji proceeds to ask how to stop the anti-proton bomb. Katsumata chuckles. Katsumata tells him that he doesn't get the rules of the game yet. Right now Kenji is just being manipulated by the UN. "Don't you have something else you need to be doing?/ Kenji.".

Kenji realizes this is not Sadakiyo. Katsumata then pulls off his mask, leaving Kenji shocked.



Back then Kenji didn't get scared by the Teru-Teru Bozu, now he is. As a child he never realized the grave danger a person with no face is in, but now he has started to realize the horrors. This also confirms the previous scene. Katsumata did die after the space badge event, internally. He shakes his Teru-Teru Bozu head, almost as if to show Kenji how much of a joke he's become.

Kanna tells adult Kenji about the location of the remote control through VR child Kenji (confirming that she has a link with the VR).

They go to the secret base. Kenji can't find it, then the narrative gets shifted by a year. Kenji is now in God's bowling alley.

Adult Kenji digs up the timebox they planted as kids. Finds the remote control, but……it's a toy, of course. The actual remote is in the real life location of the used-to-be bowling alley.

With the help of Manjoume, Kanna receives the message and goes there. Manjoume finally did something selfless. Manjoume holds out a spoon, admitting that fame [spoon bending] is a lie. There's nothing special about it. But then the spoon bends. Manjoume starts tearing up because he knows that it's the genuineness that counts. After telling so many lies [and bending so many fake spoons], he realized all he had to do was not tell them, to not seek fame, just embrace what was right in front of him. I wonder if this too was one of Katsumata's rare gifts to people. Manjoume disappears and dies contently.

Friend advances his plans. The secret base did have the remote control, but it's actually just a giant button. The robot will come and destroy the secret base, pushing the button, and only then will the bomb explode.

Kenji forcibly removes the VR goggles. Taking a lot of damage in the process. “Justice…/ Never dies…!”, he says.

Kenji confronts the robot. Saying “Whatever happens it mustn’t be crushed…/ Our secret base.”. Their childhood and roots will never disappear; that’s how I interpret it. Katsumata tried to crush them or put them to the test during Bloody New Year’s Eve, but Kenji was able to overcome even that with enough time.

Konchi plays Gutalala Sudalala as Kenji goes to save the world once more.

Kenji sweeps the robot’s legs and the day is saved once more. The world didn’t end.

But

Kenji says he still has a few things left to do.

He goes back into the VR world.

He tells young VR Kenji to go up to Sadakiyo and tell him goodbye. Kenji tells Sadakiyo to remove his mask, which he does, revealing himself to child Kenji.

The two become Friends. Sadakiyo promises to write Kenji letters. He yells “See ya!” to child Kenji with a smile on his face.

Bloody beautiful.

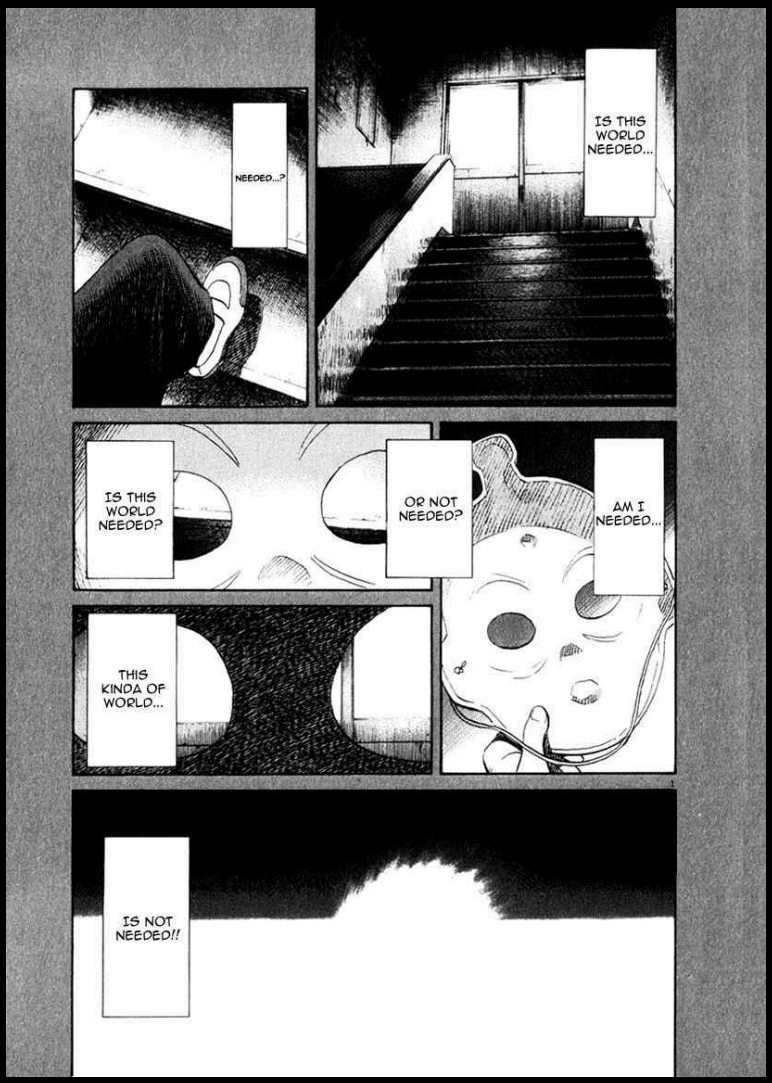
Kenji tells child Kenji to apologize to Baba, admitting he was the thief.

Then he tells child Kenji to apologize to Katsumata.

He does so, pouring real tears into it. Katsumata seems unphased. This isn't enough to Katsumata, his questions still haven't been answered.

The ending

We see a familiar scene play out.



In the PE version this dialogue is a bit different.

“What does the world…/…Need now?/ Does it need me?/ Or am I unnecessary?/ Is the world necessary?/ This stupid world…/…Is useless!!”

Both are good. I like the first one slightly more.

Katsumata has reached his tipping point.

The essential question holding together the series has gone unanswered.

What is a friend?

Yes, it sounds silly. But I do implore you to think about it for a moment.

To Kenji, everyone is a friend. Every human deserves his compassion. Even after fear inducing him so much that he had to Christ himself, he still came back and fought for his friends. But that isn’t what makes the question so complex, it’s who Kenji is which makes it so. Kenji is a liar, a fraud, a coward, and an attention-seeker. He is the exact same as Fukubei in theory. Kenji lied in order to not get beat up by Baba when he stole the badge. Kenji ran away when faced with danger. He constantly lies about literally everything (ghosts, badges, rainbows, and the list goes on). ‘What makes Kenji so virtuous that everyone talks to him and everyone wants to be his friend? Hell, even I want to be friends with him…Why? All his friendships are built on lies just like mine. All he does is try to hide his true face, just like me. So what does he have that I don’t?’. Friend wants to join Kenji so he can discover that secret factor. Sure, there are some obvious differences

between Fukubei [Katsumata] and Kenji, but those aren't important, their exo-skeletons are the same, two people cut from the same cloth.

'Why should I live in a world that's full of idolized liars? I tried to do that, but it never completed me, no, the hatred only grew larger. I'm a compulsive liar, but that doesn't mean I necessarily enjoy lying. Is it me that's wrong? Am I just not fit for a world like this? A world full of phonies, liars, cowards, and frauds. They seem content with what they do, even when the things that they want are completely nonsensical. This kind of world isn't necessary, it's true. But I can't change it, I can't reform it, even through my efforts to do so (literally became a god to accomplish it) {Friend Era/Friend's cult was indeed made to make people suffer, though I don't believe that everything Katsumata said/did was a complete lie}. Fukubei wants revenge by killing everyone, but I don't see the point. Even if I wipe out everyone on this Earth, I'll still remain a liar, the world will still be a liar. I tried emigrating to Mars, but it didn't matter. I tried to destroy the entire Earth with one massive bomb, but what good would that do, I would be just as miserable as the last on Earth as I am right now. I don't have any friends. There is only one choice left.', I think this most accurately describes Katsumata's mindset during his monologue up top.

Kenji enters the VR world and gets sent to the school roof.

There he sees Katsumata.

Climbing the school rooftop gate.

Ready to jump and take his own life.

Kenji yells at him to come down immediately.

Suddenly

20th Century Boys starts playing, shaking the entire school.

Katsumata sits on the gate

Listening

Listening

He jumps down

Onto the roof.

And stands there

Adult Kenji notices child Kenji trying to confess his feelings to Yukiji. She calls him stupid after blushing and walks away.

Kenji watches the disaster unfold. "Sigh… At least I confessed to her…".

Young Kenji sighs as well. "She wasn't even listening…/ To me anyway…/ Nothing changed…". He plops to the ground and starts listening to the radio. Something did change.

Katsumata comes up to him.

"Hey./ Did you just hear that song?!/[Kenji says that he's the one who put it on. Nonchalantly.] I…/ Don't have any plans after tomorrow…/ I've had nothing for a long long time…/ Hey./ Can you be 'friends' with me?", says Katsumata.

“I guess it’s okay…/ But y’know, you don’t become friends by asking…”, replies child Kenji.

Kenji suggests Katsumata listen to what’s on the radio but Katsumata has already walked away.

As Katsumata is about to walk out, Kenji asks him if he’s Katsumata. He mentions how cruel he and the others were for making a rumor out of Katsumata’s death (they didn’t). He says that they buried Katsumata alive even though he was with them the entire time. He apologizes for everything they did. Katsumata, through all of this, doesn’t say a word, similar to how Fukubei didn’t say anything in 2015 Science Room.

Katsumata leaves.

“All kinds of stuff up the road for you, kid…/ You take care of yourself./ Well, so long.”, adult Kenji says before leaving the VR world.

Kenji lays on the school rooftop. 20th Century Boys by his side, listening to the radio. The camera pans out.



The end of 21st Century Boys.

The first ending that is. It's fairly good on its own, but I think the Perfect Edition ending is even better.

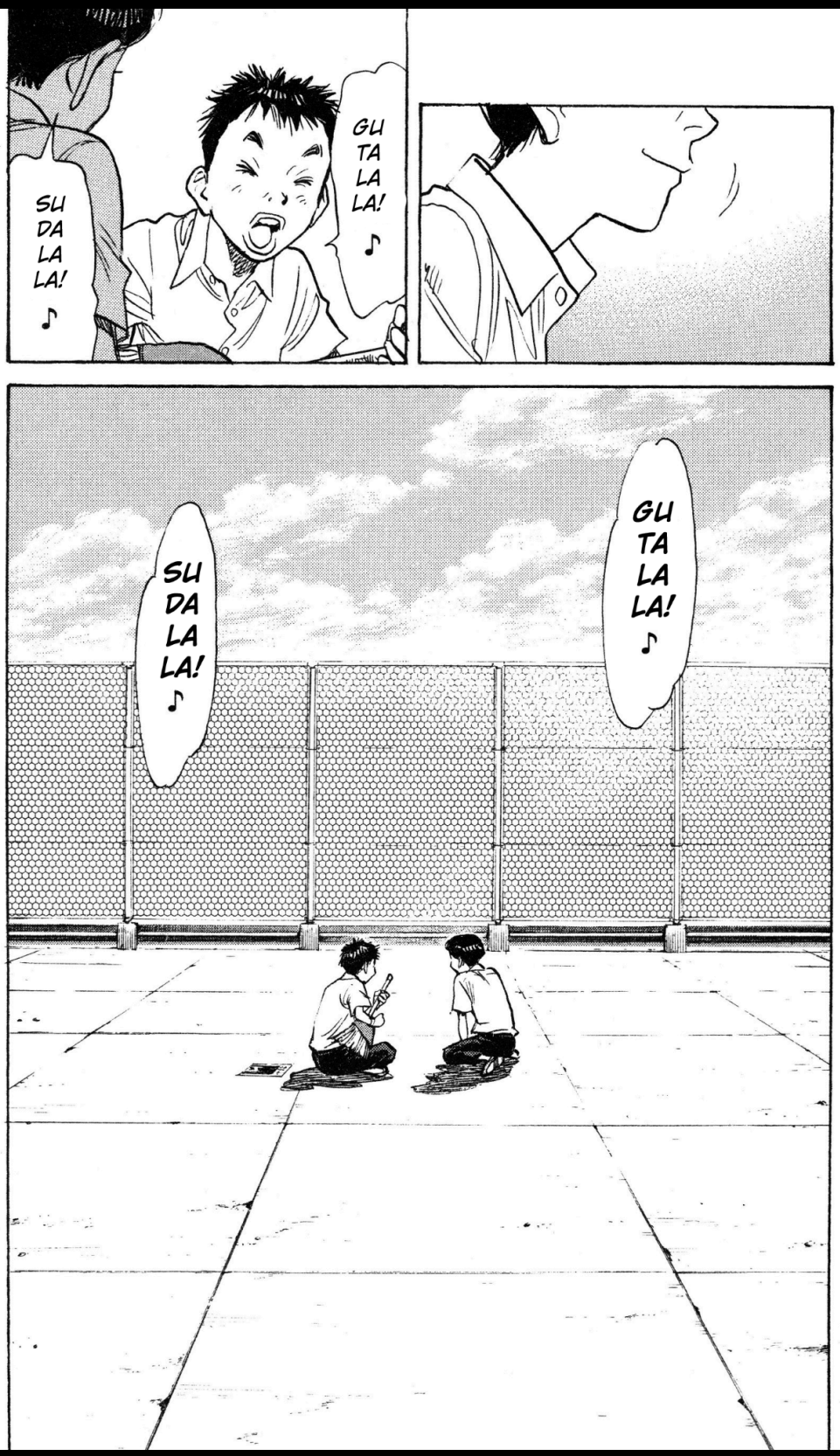
We pan in again. Kenji tries to make a rhythm on his broom guitar. He struggles to get the right lines though.

Katsumata approaches him, mask off. "Gutalala Sudalala", he hums. "How's that sound?", he asks.

Kenji tries it and thinks it sounds great. “You’re really talented!”, Kenji says. “You know, we should join forces!”, he continues. “Huh?” replies Katsumata. “We’ll create the song together! Like Lennon and McCartney!”, says Kenji with a cheery smile.

Katsumata smiles and nods.

They sing Sudalala Gutalala together on the rooftop.


SU DA LA LA! ♪
GU TA LA LA! ♪
GU TA LA LA! ♪
SU DA LA LA! ♪

The true end.

Amazing.

Now, for the meaning behind all of this.

I'vealready explained the reason for the suicide jump so we'll skip that part. Why does Katsumata change his mind about committing suicide when he listens to 20th Century Boys?

I don't know. We don't know. And I think that's part of the magic of what makes this scene so great. Perhaps we will never know why he jumped down.

I've mentioned that 20th Century Boys is the song of "Invincible justice", and while that is partially true, it doesn't tell the whole story.

20th Century Boys is the song of justice for Kenji. Kenji cares about justice, you could even say it's integral to who he is as a character. But Katsumata isn't the same. Not just Katsumata, no one is the same.

The song is played numerous times for the world to hear, such as the time the robot was heading to destroy the secret base or the time Kanna had to get everyone inspired to go to the expo.

It doesn't mean justice for everyone. It's more akin to hope, but even that isn't a complete thought.

Hope comes in many forms and shapes. 20th Century Boys is the catalyst for your own hope. For some people that hope might be that they'll be able to eat steak, for some it might be a

reassurance that justice is what they're fighting for, and for others it's a reminder that at the end of the tunnel, they will prevail.

Katsumata has his own purpose too, something worth fighting for. Katsumata has just buried that desire so deeply that now it's nearly impossible to excavate. The only thing able to rekindle his passion is 20th Century Boys. I'm sure even he doesn't know why it does. There's a good chance he has no idea why he didn't commit suicide then and there. It's a feeling that can't be manifested into words.

Katsumata, inspired by 20th Century Boys, gets enough courage to confront Kenji about it.

He says he doesn't have any plans for tomorrow, and that he hasn't had any for a while. It's very depressing listening to this. Katsumata's life has no meaning for him. He has nothing he wants to do. The hanging hill incident, the hanging of 71', the spoon bending incident, the rumor spreading, etc etc; it had no meaning for him in the grand scheme of things, they were all small distractions from a much larger existential crisis.

He asks if Kenji can be his friend.

Kenji says sure, but a friend isn't something that you make by asking. Once again relating to this theme of hope and the soul being more important than the brain (think about 20th Century Boys motif for example).

Katsumata walks away. I don't think he's necessarily upset or mad, just confused, perplexed.

Kenji stops him and explains his incorrect version of events. Katsumata probably isn't too happy about Kenji getting the

mystery wrong. This does put into question how conscious this Katsumata is. In my opinion Katsumata made his young version the most conscious out of all, so he could most resemble real life Katsumata. It's not unlikely that this is Katsumata himself in the VR.

Katsumata leaves to think about everythings that's happened once more.

At this point, he knows that the anti-proton bomb has failed, but that was never his true goal. One of his goals has already been completed; both adult and child Kenji admitted their mistakes and apologized to Katsumata [and Sadakiyo]. This relates back to compatibility. Katsumata knows that the outcomes of destiny are certain, but the actions one takes to reach there aren't. He tested Kenji through many trials; Kenji succeeded, even if he didn't get everything correct. It's not enough to completely change him, but it does help alleviate the pain. Kenji admitted he was the evil emperor. This along with the new hope that 20th Century Boys gives, leads perfectly into the next scene.

Katsumata comes up to Kenji and sings the lyrics that he knows all too well.

Kenji takes a liking to it and suggests the two become a duo.

Katsumata smiles.

They continue to sing Gutalala Sudalala together on the school rooftop.

Katsumata doesn't know why he's doing this. It just feels right, after all a friend isn't made from verbal vows but from the soul. I

don’t think katsumata has yet deciphered what a friend is and why people can make them so easily without remorse. But he doesn’t care. There’s a sense of hope that friendship gives Katsumata. It’s no longer the fake friendship that Katsumata has been building for the last 50 years, it’s real and genuine. Not spawning out of necessity or fear, but from an unknown yet genuine source [thus why I call it the soul]. It’s a truly beautiful ending. There’s no one conclusion or epiphany that Katsumata comes up with. He just goes with what he feels is right; what his soul tells him to do. And that’s the essence of what 20th Century Boys is about.

Your purpose and destiny is determined by you alone.

“A man who lies to himself, and believes his own lies becomes unable to recognize truth, either in himself or in anyone else, and he ends up losing respect for himself and for others. When he has no respect for anyone, he can no longer love, and, in order to divert himself, having no love in him, he yields to his impulses, indulges in the lowest forms of pleasure, and behaves in the end like an animal. And it all comes from lying - lying to others and to yourself.”-Fyodor Dostoevsky

(Dostoevsky’s quotes are killing it, two for two)

2024 December 27th - 2025 January 19th

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If there's anything you think I missed, please tell me so I can review it and add it into this document.

Thank you for reading. I hope this abridged overview helped you recognize the true potential of Friend's character.

(Word count:44655)