SURPASSING THE LEADER

[UPDATES TO THE INTERPRETATION]: There is a possibility that ‘The Alien' as we know it might have been destroyed when Hal achieved perfection. In chapter 454, we see the Alien crumble after Hal resists his erasure; the Alien is composed of all of Leader's past iterations and their raw memories, so by giving them all back, ‘the Alien’ ceases to exist and the superorganism becomes the ‘Aliens’ (hence we are Aliens). The Alien symbolism and Souichi's perfectionist trauma still remain however; he cannot make any mistakes, otherwise that would be imperfect. Please consider both interpretations of Alien and non-Alien when reading this analysis.

As such, keep this in mind whenever I mention ‘the Alien’ being behind some of Leader's actions or choices. This recontextualises Hal's first Near Dream a bit, so I have fully updated that individual section of the analysis to reflect that. The essence of the Friendship Trap remains mostly the same, but with the additional context that instead of being erased by the Alien to avoid the trap, Hal is actually erased due to his mistake (‘you slipped up’), meaning Baku purposefully hinted at Leap Second to Hal to make him gamble by interacting with the Leap Second, which in turn would trigger his perfectionist instinct where Hal is directed towards his past with Baku, where he figured out his mistake and was erased.]

(The main analysis should be read alongside the main images section. The other sections contained in this analysis are simply for some extra details/explanation, and are taken from previous posts I've made, hence there is a significant amount of repetition and overlap).

Pre-STL/Context:

(The rules of the gamble can be seen in image 1, please read over them carefully). Standing outside the Obelisk, Baku begins his plan immediately by giving Leader a stopwatch. Leader starts the stopwatch, before noticing a nervousness emanating from Baku as the watch is about to switch between 59-0 (image 2). Leader then stops the watch at exactly 9 seconds (image 3), before Baku destroys the watch. Leader then reasons that Baku's nervousness must be related to a trick he has prepared, related to time, or could be a way of manipulating him using a 'wedge' (image 4).

Notice how Baku smiles in image 4 when it is suggested that time may be used as a trick or wedge. Believe it or not, Baku had actually left himself open to being read by asking Leader to start the stopwatch in front of him. Why? In order to make Leader suspect a trick on purpose. It is no coincidence that Leader picks up on the fact that Baku is nervous during the interval between 59-0, as well as at 9 seconds, hence why he stops the watch and gives it back to Baku at that exact time, trying to read his intentions by forcing him to confront something that Baku seemingly wants to avoid to preserve his deception.

The gap 59-0 refers to both nervousness around leap second since a minute involving a leap second would go 59-60 instead of 59-0 and Baku wanting to play as D at 8:59, as well as the 9 seconds referring to leap second occurring at 9:00 o'clock. Now why would Baku want Leader to uncover his trick? We've seen multiple times throughout the manga the lengths

Baku goes to in order to avoid being seen through, i.e not counting his beads during TOK just to avoid Suteguma reading him. Surely Baku could've used another way to confirm that Leader doesn't have a stopwatch on him? Well, Leader said it himself. Baku could be using time as a wedge. And indeed he is.

To understand this wedge, you have to understand the different components that make up Souichi's Perfection: Hachina, Hal, and over 100 different versions of Souichi that have been erased over the years by The Alien. This 'Alien' is the manifestation of his perfectionist desire, not necessarily acting as a separate personality, but more like an omnipresent overseer in the background of all of Leader's personalities, as seen in Air Poker (image 5). The Alien has access to all of Leader's memories (in terms of raw information; the significance of this will become apparent later), but not necessarily the perspectives of each personality.

All of these features are unified into one form, which I will refer to as Leader for the sake of simplicity, acting as a superorganism (image 6). However, like a fire ant (image 7), all of Leader's personalities have a great degree of individuality, and therefore anomalies can arise that do not suit the needs of the greater superorganism. This anomaly is Hal.

Named by Baku due to his nature of always being one step ahead, this entire personality is basically engineered by Baku from the days he and Souichi spent together in their adolescence. Hal has the greatest knowledge of Baku compared to all other personalities, shares the deepest bond, and views Baku as his rival, while other personalities seem to view Baku as a threat or an addicted gambler.

So when I say Baku wants Leader to uncover his time trick, I actually mean that Baku wants Hal specifically to realize this. Given his closeness to Baku and desire to beat him, Hal will be the first to discover this potential trick, and obsess over it to uncover Baku's intentions. This is precisely what Baku wants. I will explain why Baku wants Hal to realize leap second despite seemingly blatant contradictions to this idea when I cover Leader's near death dream during Round 2.

Once Yakou arrives and the three enter the Obelisk, they encounter Oofuna and Kaji (image 8). Baku had asked Kaji to go to the Obelisk in advance in order to raise Yakou's suspicions that he has tampered with something in advance to win the gamble.

This is important because when Yakou pulls out the clock from the drawer to use in the gamble, he recalls how Kaji and Oofuna had arrived separately, so may have prepared the clock in advance to make the match unfair. Baku already predicted this exact thought process in advance, encouraging Yakou to use the speaking clock connected by the phone line instead, which Baku had already checked in advance to ensure that Leap second would be displayed.

Something interesting I noticed is Yakou's references to 'luck' in regards to STL (image 9,10). Baku is seen to be an extremely lucky man by the end of the game, with everything falling into place perfectly. Yakou remarks how the game has an element of luck, and later how his luck was 'devilish' due to the date of the match aligning with Leader's monthly memory loss.

Of course, we see just one chapter onwards from this that Baku had actually been to the Arizuka Building way in advance and discovered Leader's memory loss and planned around this. Furthermore, isn't it interesting how such a lucky man would lose Janken when played with Leader? The motif of 'luck' is incredibly ironic: it contradicts itself, showing that all of these instances of 'luck' are all a result of Baku's planning, and by giving off an appearance of extreme fortune, he has deceived everyone perfectly.

Now let's focus on images 11-13: Leader recalling the idea of Magician's choice, asking the exact questions that Baku wants to know but avoids doing so himself to avoid suspicion, then Baku blatantly eating his Kariume in front of Leader after the latter acts suspicious of the clock, confirming that everything is going according to his predictions.

These all seem to be intentional, which Baku knows that Leader realizes. This is all to further plant the wedge of time into Leader. By keeping his actions and intentions readable, but still seemingly attempting to conceal them, Baku lures Hal inside Leader into trying to figure out his true intentions, and so is free to manipulate Leader in the process.

One final panel I would like to address before the actual rounds of STL start is image 14. Pay attention to the idea of 'The loser dying in a dream in which they believe they have won'. This is foreshadowing the true meaning behind the hallucination round, but we'll have to wait a while before we get there.

Round 1, Turn 1:

Baku: Accumulation 0M0S/Near-death 0M0S
Leader: Accumulation 0M0S/Near-death 0M0S

By looking at images 15-18, we can see both Leader and Baku attempting to read each other's minds, with Leader believing that Baku will turn his head about halfway through his turn. Baku sees through this and reads his mind perfectly, choosing to follow Leader's thought process to make him realise his thoughts are being seen through.

Baku wants to die to test out the intervals between rounds so that he can align himself with leap second. An instant check in the very first round would be too blatant and immediately raise Leader's suspicions, so Baku acts exactly how Leader expects him to in order to conceal his intentions. Image 19 establishes the idea of exaggerating an opponent in your mind in order to read them, which sets up a key context for image 20, where Leader stops exaggerating Baku in his mind, which will be elaborated later on.

Image 21 also establishes the idea using 'senses' as 'superpowers' during a mind game, foreshadowing Baku's aura of determination during round 3. Image 22 displays Leader slowly leaning down before dropping the handkerchief in order to try and trick Baku's 'god-like' senses, causing Baku to turn around just before Leader let go and fail his check.

Of course, Baku wasn't actually tricked by this; in fact this was precisely what he anticipated, and by turning around just before Leader was about to drop, he showcases his 'god-like' senses fully, indirectly manipulating Leader's future thought process. The reason why Baku

is able to read Leader so well here during the first two rounds, but falls for his bluffs and traps past round 2 is all related to Hal. Simply put, Hal is still present inside Leader for now, and thus for now, Baku is in control.

Leader then attempts to induce fear into Baku, entertaining the idea that he might have tampered with the near death drug in advance to guarantee his victory (image 23). The purpose of this is to worsen Baku's chances of revival by demoralising him, therefore worsening his physical condition at the same time.

During Baku's near death, Hal emerges from Leader and regards the idea that a minute can feel like different lengths depending on one's feelings, showing that he suspects Baku using an altered version of a minute as part of his time trick, with Yakou also starting to believe that Leader has many different personalities at once (image 24).

Hal then hallucinates the visage of a smiling Baku (image 25). This has a double meaning: not only does this serve as Hal subconsciously confirming his suspicions of Baku using an altered minute, but it also foreshadows the fact that this is actually part of Baku's plan, something The Alien inside Leader is starting to fear.

Round 1, Turn 2:

Baku: Accumulation 0M0S/Near-death 1M0S
Leader: Accumulation 0M0S/Near-death 0M0S

Starting from image 26, Leader is once again attempting to read Baku's mind by 'overlapping' his idea of Baku with the real one. Both Baku and Leader read each other perfectly: as soon as Baku drops the Handkerchief, Leader begins to turn his head, anticipating him targeting the accumulation of the drug.

However, in the exact same instance, Baku once again uses his 'god-like' senses and steps in front of Leader during his attempt to check, introducing new information for him to consider (image 27). Leader's read was correct: Baku had dropped the Handkerchief already. But by standing in front of Leader and pretending to hold the Handkerchief, before revealing it was just his necktie, Baku introduces more and more variables to Leader's reasoning, forcing him to dwell on the possibilities for longer so that Baku can accumulate his drug.

Image 28 shows Leader back at the Bookstore, representing the memories of Hal, showing Baku with a bloodied nose suggesting excitement, hence Hal confirms that this was according to Baku's plan and that the Handkerchief has already been dropped. Leader declares that he has seen through Baku and checks successfully.

Leader is now fully aware of Baku's extraordinary senses and ability to read people, so attempts to impede him by claiming that he in fact knows Baku better than the latter knows him, suggesting that Leader is aware that Hal is being seen through by Baku (image 29).

Round 2, Turn 2:

Baku: Accumulation 0M25S/Near-death 1M0S
Leader: Accumulation 0M24S/Near-death 0M0S

Baku remains seated even after his turn as 'C', testing whether he can delay the intervals between rounds to align with leap second (image 30). Images 31-32 show Baku regarding Leader's desire to win perfectly, claiming that he had mistakenly assumed that Leader was willing to die to win the gamble.

Throughout the match, Leader gradually makes this perfectionist mantra more and more believable, with more and more accurate checks to compliment it, eventually convincing the Referees that he has achieved a 'god-like' state. Image 33 shows Leader testing echolocation once again, still finding the speaking clock too loud. Image 34 states that both Baku and Leader have missed different things. I believe this refers to Baku not noticing Souichi trying to lower the speaking clock for echolocation (he ‘should have noticed’ because he's seen Eko's tapes), while Souichi missed the bloodstain in Baku's jacket all those years ago.

You might think the thing Leader missed must surely refer to failing to notice Baku trying to delay the round intervals, but this seems strange since he has noticed every other foreshadowing of Leap Second, and goes on to figure it out by round 2 anyways. I would like to point your attention towards the statement ‘however, some things can only be grasped by those who have been there'.

At first, I believed this to refer to echolocation, like how Souichi is making himself blind to grasp his surroundings more accurately using echolocation. However, the statement just before this is ‘there exist some miracles that are only in reach of those who have polished what limited senses they have to the utmost’. Doesn't this also fit echolocation? ‘Miracles’ i.e echolocation, ‘limited sense' i.e turning blind, ‘polished… to the utmost’ like how in the absence of sight, your hearing develops beyond the normal to help visualise your surroundings.

So here's how I see it. As discussed so far, Baku wants to play a mind game with Hal specifically. Only Hal has grasped Leap Second this early as per the friendship trap. To me, this all links back to how only Hal, who knows Baku best, and has ‘been there' i.e actually experienced life with Baku. And so what has Hal missed that he should have noticed? The bloodstain on Baku's jacket. I'll go into more detail on this when covering the significance of cognitive load in regards to Souichi's second near death dream, but essentially Hal ‘should’ have realised that Baku had been to the Arizuka Building, but due to cognitive closure/load, he came to the simplest conclusion and ignored this possibility.

I also find the quote "a predator will show its flaw when it goes to finish its prey" to be a nice bit of foreshadowing: once Leader begins to achieve his god-like state, how misjudges during round 8 and fails his check, showing how by assuming he had already won, Leader left himself exposed to be tricked by Baku. Conversely, the hallucination round after Baku believes he has won exposes Baku's absolute fear of Hal's revival, and how Baku still has the inherent fear that he won't be able to win forever.

In terms of chronology rather than narrative, the next event that occurs is Leader performing an early check at 5 seconds and failing, recieving 1M24S of Near-death time, during which the first dream occurs. The reason why Leader checked at 5 seconds was to die on purpose and open the leap second route to Baku; if he had checked instantly it would have been too suspicious.

As said before, Hal has realized leap second at this point, and The Alien believes that Hal is being manipulated by Baku, so there is an internal conflict within Leader. Hal wants to counter leap second, opening the route to Baku to make him predictable. On the contrary, The Alien wants to ignore leap second, not wanting to fall into a trap set by Baku. So when Hal fails his check and interacts with leap second, The Alien makes the decision (or perhaps more of a reflex, given that The Alien fundamentally is a trauma-based instinct) to remove Hal from Leader's consciousness. Note that the raw of information of his past with Baku (“traces of memories of the time we spent together”) still remains due to the Alien possessing all of Leader's memories, but Hal's perspective on those memories, and all the reasoning on Leap Second are gone.

Image 35 shows Hal's memory of attempting to replicate Baku's feat of jumping onto a moving truck, a gamble if you will. The panel briefly cuts away to a dark figure looking down, which is Yakou performing CPR on Leader (hence the ‘thmp’). The dream then cuts to young Hal and Baku discussing The Neck Man (image 36), a prisoner on death row who trained his neck every day in the hopes of surviving his hanging, and thus being granted a second chance at life (image 37).

As shown from image 38 however, all the training was for nothing after all. Hal himself claims to have expected this outcome, while Baku questions why he was so interested in the first place if that was true. In truth, The Neck Man represents the appeal of gambling, the slight notion that one could change an apparently certain destiny. Hal is unwittingly enamoured by this concept of gambling (image 39), which is encouraged further by his friendship with Baku. Also note the image of a clock pointing to 9:00 in image 36, which dream Hal wants to ignore (relating to how part of Hal wants to avoid Leap Second so as to not fall for the Friendship Trap), further suggesting that Hal has figured out leap second.

So who is Hal actually talking to in this dream? I believe that Baku actually represents the gambler side of Hal he wants to become like Baku, and dream Hal represents real Hal's caution and rationality. Incredibly convoluted yes, but somehow coherent once I've explained the details. As I have already said, the Alien wants to turn a blind eye to leap second to avoid being manipulated: like in Air Poker, Leader wants to erase this 'wedge' that Baku has planted inside him. However, this time, the wedge is Hal.

Notice how in image 36, when Baku remembers something important and looks up at the clock pointing to 9:00, Hal immediately claims that he is not interested, and doesn't even look up from the Prince Bee book, aligning with the ideas of the Alien. This is also directly related to why Hal checking the 'ground' after his failed check is so strange to Yakou: he is making a conscious effort to avoid seeing Baku's expression, which could manipulate him further. Hal taking the form of Baku in the dream also makes sense thematically, since Hal also wishes to adopt Baku's gambling philosophy and immerse himself in those ideas, hence why The Neck Man is also brought up.

Baku then mentions his match with Fukurou (image 39), inviting Hal to watch. Image 40 is extremely important to understand the overall analysis, with the result of The Prince Bee and Rival Bee's second clash seemingly being revealed: "The Rival Prince took advantage of their friendship to lay a trap".

To briefly cover the significance of the Prince Bee book, Baku represents the Rival Bee and Leader represents the Prince Bee. The story is basically a prophetic telling of Leader and Baku's story: the bees were good friends, until one day they had to duel each other, in which the Prince Bee won easily (representing the first STL). The rival bee then regained his strength and later came back to re-challenge the Prince Bee (Second STL).

The outcome of the second battle is intentionally left ambiguous to both Leader and the readers at this point. The true outcome of the second Battle is that the Rival Bee (Baku) wins; but The Alien, the one who designed this entire dream, purposefully obscures the true ending of the second battle from Leader, instead claiming that the Prince Bee (Leader) will win.

Now, let me explain the Friendship Trap set by Baku. We have already established the idea of Baku using the time wedge to manipulate Hal and by extension Leader. Skipping ahead to the end of the gamble, we are told that leap second wouldn't have succeeded if Leader didn't lose his memories, which is true. However, the true trap, while reliant on both Leader's monthly memory loss and the time wedge, is getting Leader to erase the wedge, Hal.

As seen from round 9, even though Hal has lost the memory of figuring out leap second during round 8, it still has a subconscious influence over his actions. However, there is no such subconscious influence after Leader's near death dream when Hal's memories are erased (I will explain why round 3 Turn 1 is not an example of subconscious influence when we get there). Why? Because Leader hasn't just erased Hal's memories of STL, he has removed him from his consciousness/superorganism altogether.

And who returns after Leader loses his memories during round 8? Hal. Hal is the leftover consciousness, the one that remains after all else is erased and Leader loses his perfection. During Round 7, once Hachina (he takes over Leader's primary consciousness after Hal is erased) has solved the mystery behind Baku's aura of determination, he begins to investigate the truth behind his missing memories about Round 2, suspecting that he might have missed something significant in his past that might explain it. As represented by the double Rubik's Cubes, Souichi would begin to search through his memories (including Hal's; note that these memories, while they do influence Souichi's behaviour, do not actually mean that Hal is re-emerging as part of the superorganism; the cubes act as a way for Leader to re-experience and manipulate his memories as seen from the tape of Eko’s death during round 4).

Anyways, back to the dream. Image 41 shows The Alien reminding Hal of when he 'slipped up', revealing his true identity to Baku and allowing him to find out about his memory loss. The Alien's message is clear: Hal cannot be trusted to lead him through STL, and so must be removed like any other wedge.

Image 42 shows up and finally we have an explanation for image 35, with the figure of the Alien appearing once again. By turning into Baku during the dream, Hal has completely turned into him in real life, obsessing over the gamble and investing in it emotionally. If Hal continues to gamble, just like at the train tracks, his risks his life.

Hal is an anomaly in Leader's superorganism, a personality that strays from Leader's path to perfection (image 43) and in doing so, invalidates the existence of The Alien. Finally, Leader encounters Tatsuki on the Sanzu River, a place where one must die to arrive at (image 44), which represents Leader's current near death in the immediate sense, while also paralleling the third king from the Prince Bee, foreshadowing Leader's true destiny: he will lose the gamble and his perfection.

Leader is revived (image 45) and notices the blood from Yakou's hands, representing Leader noticing Yakou's worsening physical condition, which he will use to his advantage in the fifth round. Since Hal is no longer a part of Leader, he does not recognize Baku when he awakes (image 46). Image 47 states that Leader has stopped exaggerating his fear of Baku, which makes sense if Hal is no longer a part of Leader's consciousness.

Naturally, Baku is worried that Leader has seen through leap second, and instead of erasing Hal, he is instead trying to counter it, opening the route to Baku to make him predictable instead, something Baku did not foresee.

Round 3, Turn 1:

Baku: Accumulation 0M25S/Near-death 1M0S
Leader: Accumulation 0M0S/Near-death 1M24S

Leader wants to drop the handkerchief early into his turn to accumulate Baku's drug, but cannot seem to be able to overcome Baku's aura of determination, fearing he will be seen through as soon as he drops (image 48). There are multiple reasons behind this: since Hal is no longer a part of Leader, he can no longer read Baku as well, especially since he just recovered from his Near-death.

Furthermore, since Leader erased his memories of the second round, he is trying to remember the reason for his failure at the same time as trying to read Baku, who overflows with a mad determination. All this comes together to leave Leader in a sort of mental block, unable to drop in time to make any significant accumulation.

The reason behind Baku's determination is because in order to maintain access to the leap second route, Baku cannot accumulate too much during rounds 3 and 4. By manipulating the mentally unsteady Leader in such a way, he is able to guarantee that he can still use the safe strategy without accumulating too much drug.

Image 49 shows Leader recovering his memories of round 2, only with Hal's perspective crucially omitted, so he is only left to conclude that he wanted to challenge Baku but lost.

Round 3, Turn 2:

Baku: Accumulation 0M29S/Near-death 1M0S
Leader: Accumulation 0M0S/Near-death 1M24S

From Baku's perspective, the best possible move would be for Leader to fail check and unknowingly allow Baku to enter the leap second route. As such, he baits Leader into failing his check for 24 seconds before dropping, accumulating a full 36 seconds on Leader, who took the safe strategy to avoid dying too close together and lowering his chances of revival (Image 50). Image 51 demonstrates Leader trying to see through Hal's perspective by looking through his memories in order to see through Usogui, but merely encounters some fleeting memories among the darkness, since Hal has been erased by The Alien (perhaps it would be more apt to say he has been 'cut off' from the rest of the superorganism).

Round 4, Turn 1:

Baku: Accumulation 0M29S/Near-death 1M0S
Leader: Accumulation 0M36S/Near-death 1M24S

Baku once again has to risk an early check to limit his accumulation and turns around at 10 seconds. Leader waits 7 seconds to bait Baku into self-destruction before dropping, allowing Baku to evade a failed check (image 52). However, despite only accumulating 3 seconds, this is actually all according to Leader's predictions.

Leader dropped early to confirm whether or not Baku has a trick up his sleeve. Remember, Hal is gone, and therefore cannot influence his reasoning anymore. Leader no longer has the ability to see through Leap Second (see Round 6, where Baku says “Kiruma Souichi, if one cannot read their opponent, they can never win”) which is where the idea of cognitive closure comes in. The manga itself only explicitly refers to cognitive load, but gives the definition of cognitive closure anyways (image 53).

Since trying to conclude leap second from limited premises and without Hal would be a burden on Leader's cognitive capacity, he naturally accepts the simplest answer in the form of the 3 Near Death strategy, wherein Baku can die thrice to maximise his total accumulation in his body + cylinder without going overboard. While Leader doesn't properly figure out 3ND until Round 5, by checking early during this turn, Leader is convinced that Baku is planning something.

Leader then whispers for everyone to be quiet once again (image 54,55), addressing the referees directly this time, while still managing to manipulate them without suspicion. Finally the volume of the speaking clock is low enough for Leader to use echolocation. Furthermore, Leader's perfect state allows him to detect the heartbeats of others around him, extending even to the referees in another room.

Using this ability, Leader is able to effectively read the minds of all the referees, as well as Oofuna, understanding their exact thoughts based purely on their heartbeats. From this point onwards until Round 8 Turn 2, Leader has basically planned everything in advance. Using a combination of echolocation, bluffing and his knowledge of 3ND to guide his decisions, Leader begins his Endurance Battle Strategy.

The purpose is fairly self-explanatory; if Leader can force Baku into an endurance battle of the cylinders, so long as Leader has enough of a gap, he is almost certain to win. Pretty basic in premise, but very complex and layered in execution.

Also, notice how Baku reacts with astonishment when Hachina mentions destiny; it is also at this point that Baku begins to suspect that Hal has already been erased and that he has to now focus on concealing Leap Second from Leader. Hal does not believe in destiny in the same way that the rest of Souichi does, he has deviated from this mindset, hence why Baku is surprised.

Round 4, Turn 2:

Baku: Accumulation 0M32S/Near-death 1M0S
Leader: Accumulation 0M36S/Near-death 1M24S

With his echolocation now available to use, Leader initiates his own time wedge. Leader will intentionally create a pattern of checking after making his clicking noise at intervals of either around 10 seconds or 30 seconds. This is a tactic that was orchestrated way in advance to make Baku believe that Leader will use echolocation as efficiently as possible: once at around 10 seconds, then around 30 seconds, then use the safe strategy (image 56). Imitating the mannerisms of Eko, Leader uses echolocation and checks successfully at 34 seconds (image 57).

Round 5, Turn 1:

Baku: Accumulation 0M32S/Near-death 1M0S
Leader: Accumulation 1M10S/Near-death 1M24S

In image 58, Baku is shown to be concerned about whether Leader has read his intentions or not, with the ellipsis showing his uncertainty. Baku is not sure whether Leader has figured out leap second or not, despite Hal being already gone.

Baku has also prepared Leader's monthly memory loss on the same date to ensure that after Leader erases Hal's memories, the rest of Leader's memories are lost as well, full on stopping any version of Leader from figuring out leap second in time for 9:00.

Baku makes an instant check (image 59), and is initially overwhelmed with joy to achieve a perfect check (image 60), but once he realises that Leader has seemingly figured out the intentions behind his instant check, he falls into silence. By dropping instantly, Leader prevents Baku from dying according to the 3ND strategy, confirming it from Leader's perspective.

Additionally, this adds a Logical basis for Leader's bluff during the next turn: that he will die first (image 61). Leader manipulates Baku perfectly, drawing attention to Yakou's deteriorating physical condition and claiming that he who dies sooner has the higher chance of revival. This also works as reverse psychology on Yakou, bolstering his strength for Leader's next revival, making his bluff almost impossible to see through from Baku's perspective.

Round 5, Turn 2:

Baku: Accumulation 0M33S/Near-death 1M24S
Leader: Accumulation 1M10S/Near-death 1M24S

Baku completely falls for Leader's bluff (image 62), dropping instantly to prevent Leader's death, only for Leader to avoid an instant check, instead waiting for a bit before using echolocation to check at 15 seconds. While it is true that Leader very likely could have achieved a perfect 1 second check, Leader's strategy is overall much more reliable if he maintains his Echolocation timing wedge to guarantee the success of his echolocation trap during round 7.

Furthermore, there is another intention behind Leader's recent pattern of checks: as the gamble progresses, Leader's checks are becoming more and more accurate each time. This is on purpose. Leader very well could have done an instant check during round 5, but in doing so, he will make Baku desperate quickly.

Leader wants Baku to believe that he still has a chance to accumulate his drug with early drops, allowing him to control Baku's actions and gradually give off the impression of becoming sharper and more accurate with his checks, reducing his accumulation until it is too late for Baku to overcome the difference in the cylinders.

Round 6, Turn 1:

Baku: Accumulation 0M33S/Near-death 1M0S
Leader: Accumulation 1M25S/Near-death 1M24S

Baku once again makes an instant check (image 63), expecting to receive a one second accumulation once more. However, Leader actually refrained from dropping this time, allowing Baku to die for the second time during the gamble. While this isn't necessarily a blunder for Baku, as he still gets to access the leap second route, the fact that Baku still expected to make a perfect check shows that Baku is still being deceived by Leader.

Both Baku and the referees feel that they are just 'dancing inside Leader's plan'. Just before Baku enters the near death, he senses the speaking clock getting lower and lower, which is foreshadowing behind Baku later noticing Leader's echolocation (image 64). Image 65 shows the beginning of Baku's near death dream, wherein he notices an altered version of the Prince Bee, detailing how Baku cannot let a shadowy figure 'find' him, or else he will die, foreshadowing the events of chapters 534-535 when teen Baku discovers the Arizuka Building.

An interesting detail referenced in both Baku and Leader's near death dreams is the Sanzu River, with Yakou claiming that only people who are mentally assured of themselves will not see the Sanzu River in death despite knowing about it (Image 66). Leader, the one who sees the Sanzu River, is actually still conflicted within himself; he isn't perfect after all, he still isn't able to reconcile his relationship with Baku and understand his overall goal, nor can he allow

all of his personalities to work in tandem without interference. Baku on the other hand, is certain of what he wants, now only seeks the means to carry out his objectives.

Baku's dream takes place in the abandoned building (image 67), with a shadowy figure chasing him throughout the building just like during the real gamble. However, this shadowy figure is none other than Eba. Repeating many of Eba's prior quotes from Baku encountered with him a decade prior (image 68,69), this monster pursues Baku down the hallways. In image 69, we can see a reference to Greenland Sharks, which are symbolic of Eko, hinting at the fact that Baku has watched Eko's tapes. Finally, in image 70 Baku encounters a split between 60 and 0, relating to leap second, and so Baku chooses the one 'correct' route in order to win the gamble: he must continue on leap second route to come out victorious. Baku revives just in time after Yakou punches him, breaking his ribs in the process.

Round 6, Turn 2:

Baku: Accumulation 0M0S/Near-death 2M33S
Leader: Accumulation 1M25S/Near-death 1M24S

Leader anticipates Baku expecting him to to take a breather from his recent risky checks (image 71), and checks early knowing that Baku is targeting his accumulation. The symbolism of the parasites in the eyes of the Greenland Shark (image 72) represent Leader intentionally limiting his visual senses, manipulating his body to make himself essentially blind in order to exaggerate his echolocation as much as possible to allow him to make a very precise successful check at 8 seconds of accumulation, with Baku dropping instantly.

The scene transitions to Eko, in which she explains the gamble she made with Tatsuki (image 73,74). Not wanting Tatsuki to die early as per her predictions, she wagered that if either both her and Souichi die or survive, then Souichi would be an ordinary child, and Tatsuki would die at his forseen date. If Eko died but Souichi survived, he would be an extraordinary child (“If you really are extraordinary, you won't die”), but eventually bring about Tatsuki's death, since Baku needs Yakou to kill Tatsuki in order to challenge Leader to STL. This will be important later on.

Round 7, Turn 1:

Baku: Accumulation 0M0S/Near-death 2M33S
Leader: Accumulation 1M33S/Near-death 1M24S

Baku's aura of determination re-appears (image 75), with this resurgence of outwards confidence brought on by his need to use the safe strategy. Since Baku just died, it would be extremely risky to die again so soon, so he is forced to use the safe strategy. If it is obvious to Leader that Baku won't take any risks, he will simply drop instantly and benefit from a full 60 seconds of accumulation.

Neither Baku nor Fukurou believe that Leader can overcome his own instincts (image 76) if Baku clings on to his determination and acts like he has a plan... but miraculously he does. Leader is free to accumulate the maximum amount in Baku's cylinder. Image 77 shows a solved Rubik's cube, symbolising how Leader has solved the puzzle behind Baku's aura of

determination, and overcome the wedge that Baku has placed inside him. During the empty time provided by using the safe strategy, Baku figured out Echolocation and begins to devise a plan to counter it.

However, at the same time, Souichi begins to search through his memories, trying to find the reason behind his missing memory of round 2.

Round 7, Turn 2:

Baku: Accumulation 1M0S/Near-death 2M33S
Leader: Accumulation 1M33S/Near-death 1M24S

Leader begins to solve two Rubik's cubes simultaneously. As seen from image 78, one cube relates to his search through his memories (left hand), while the other in his right hand represents him trying to solve the Leap Second puzzle.

Images 79 and 80 show Baku's reasoning regarding echolocation, identifying the time intervals that Leader intentionally manipulated Baku to realize. Baku initially wants to use his necktie to trick Leader into failing his check (image 81), but feels his newfound determination and concludes that he will be seen through. So instead Baku chooses to flatten the handkerchief completely to avoid detection via echolocation (image 82).

Since Baku expects Leader to take the safe strategy after he doesn't detect anything after 10 and 30 seconds respectively, Baku will be free to accumulate a full 60 seconds ideally. However, as soon as the clock sounds, Leader turns around instantly without echolocation (image 83), having already anticipated Baku flattening the handkerchief, accumulating only 1 second. Leader has achieved a 'god-like' state to everyone else, with more and more referees gradually believing that Leader is going to win.

Souichi is seen to be shaken by the immense pressure/stress of the instant check, but manages to keep his composure until no longer observed by Baku, with his trembling hands foreshadowing that Souichi is at his limits (as Eko goes on to explain during Leader's second dream) and will soon lose his memory due to cognitive overload (image 84).

The idea of gambling through a 'narrow thread' also compliments this idea, since if Leader has made even a slight error, his strategy may have fallen apart. As a result of being exposed to Hal's experiences, Souichi begins to be influenced, feeling as though he is 'changing' back into Hal (image 85) as he approaches the premises to conclude Leap Second.

Leader is poised to win the endurance battle, so even if Baku is manipulating Hal using a time trick, he should still win anyways given the rapidly increasing difference between the cylinders. And indeed, he would have been right if Round 8 had gone as predicted.

Round 8, Turn 1:

Baku: Accumulation 1M0S/Near-death 2M33S
Leader: Accumulation 1M34S/Near-death 1M24S

Leader is free to keep targeting Baku's accumulation, waiting for 5 seconds for Baku to self-destruct before dropping and accumulating 55 seconds (image 86). Declaring that Baku is already dead (image 87), Leader believes that his victory is imminent.

Round 8, Turn 2:

Baku: Accumulation 1M55S/Near-death 2M33S
Leader: Accumulation 1M34S/Near-death 1M24S

This is arguably the most important round of the gamble, even more important than leap second round. As confirmed from image 88, whether Leader's check is successful or not will determine the result of the gamble. Once again, Leader makes an instant check, and to his astonishment, Baku has refrained from dropping. Baku had noticed that Leader caught on to his pattern of instant drops, and finally realising that accumulating Leader's drug through early drops will not work, decides to work against the pattern and refrain from dropping, resulting in Leader failing his check in the process.

Image 89 states that 'a small shadow has been illuminated', with Kaji's tense expression suggesting that there is a darker undertone to Baku's apparent victory. Everyone begins to believe that Leader actually chose his own near death on purpose (image 90) in order to make his victory more definite, hence why Kaji notices a 'shadow' in Baku's move; he may have unknowingly doomed himself.

What I find interesting is Leader's insistence that this instant check was made 'after deliberation' (note that this is also the title of the chapter, so likely has some degree of significance). Leader, while from his expressions it seems clear that he wanted this check to succeed, seems to believe that his victory is guaranteed either way, whether his check succeeds or not.

The most likely explanation is that Leader is confident that he will revive after his near death, and so will still maintain his advantages by resetting his cylinder for the endurance battle. Ideally, Leader wanted to only accumulate 1 second, then accumulate another large amount of drug in Baku's cylinder next turn. As such, even if Leader did fall for some currently unknown time trick during later rounds, his accumulation would simply reset with a decent chance of revival, leaving Baku in a hopeless situation.

Just before Leader enters his second near death dream, the concept of cognitive load + closure is addressed once again (image 91), suggesting its significance in the following dream. Leader is engulfed by a bright light and appears in front of Eko and Tatsuki, who warn Leader of an oncoming crisis (image 92).

The language of 'awaiting ahead' used to describe this crisis suggests to me that this crisis already existed, and was merely waiting to be triggered. So what is this crisis? In image 93, Eko explains how due to her gamble of whether Souichi would be extraordinary or not, he attained great cognitive abilities, but at the same time, a great burden was carved into him: his memory loss.

'As all people approach a peak, their legs will tremble reflexively', meaning that while attempting to achieve great cognitive feats like Leader's perfection, one is also at their most vulnerable. To what exactly? This is where the idea of cognitive load is also significant. Being perfect and unifying all of his personalities at once places a massive strain on Leader's mind, and if he keeps going the way he is, trying to uncover the time trick while searching through his memories, he may just exceed his own cognitive capacity.

To be pedantic, the crisis is Leader losing his perfection specifically, not just his memories. We are shown later on that Leader already knew about his memory loss (image 94), so he would have no reason to be confused about what this 'crisis' is in the dream, unless he didn't expect to lose his perfection also. From this we can conclude that, based on the fact that prior to the near death Leader still didn't know the truth about Round 2, he likely still believes that memory loss is some sort of side effect of the ND drug; he lost his memory during his first near death but retained his perfection, so expects a similar scenario here (and even uses similar wording, asking Yakou to ‘clear up the muddiness of his conscience’).

The scene changes and shows Hal's 'small lie' (image 95) to Baku once again, claiming to be disinterested in Kakerou, while Baku has already been to the Arizuka Building and knows that Hal is the Leader of Kakerou. Believing that his small lie has gone unnoticed, Hal doesn't consider the fact the Baku knows about his relation to Kakerou. Image 96 shows Dream Leader arriving at Baku's apartment, questioning why he has been brought to here. The truth is, Hal had missed something on that fateful day.

Inside the apartment, Leader sees Baku staring at a screen showing a Greenland Shark (image 97), hinting to Leader that Baku has seen Eko's tapes. Hal's words from Round 2 are regarded again as the screen changes to Baku laughing, hinting at leap second. In image 98, Leader ignores Baku's phone on the table, the very same phone from which Fukurou called Baku to gamble, only to be answered by Hal.

Finally, Leader arrives at the answer in image 99; a crazed Baku calls Leader a liar, holding up his bloodied coat for Leader to see. Finally, Leader realises the truth. When Hal had received the Prince Bee book from Baku, he realized that he might have actually tracked down the Arizuka Building himself. This is the true and most important meaning of cognitive load in STL.

Hal went to Baku's apartment, only to find nothing except the phone and the bloodied coat, and so he reaches cognitive closure and concludes the simplest answer: Baku had not discovered the Arizuka Building after all.

But now confronted with the bloodied coat, as well as Baku exposing Hal's Kakerou lie, Leader realises that Baku has planned everything. Baku has watched Eko's tapes and knows about his memory loss. In this same instance, Leader finally figures out leap second: if Baku knew that Leader would lose his memories on as specific date, then Baku must have used the time card during Protoporos to ensure that STL occured on that exact date.

If Baku is sure that Leader will lose his memories, he is free to carry out whatever scheme he wants without Leader being able to counter it in time after he loses his memory. All the

clues now make sense, and converge to the answer of leap second, reached once again, only far too late this time.

Image 100 shows that Leader has been revived, with Eko's words about miracles lingering in the background. The 'miracle' that will allow Baku to win is Leader's memory loss, and this 'miracle' is in actuality not luck, but rather reasons upon reasons, all according to Baku's plans.

Finally, Leader reaches cognitive overload (image 101) triggering his monthly memory loss and causing him to lose his perfection (image 102,103), with the Rubik's cube representing his search through his memories shattering on the floor (image 104). Hal awakes and declares the endgame of the gamble to Baku (image 105).

Yakou, emboldened by this final declaration between two rivals, believes that he can 'see that place' (image 106). This looks very similar to the location of the first STL (image 107,108) only with the significant presence of a bright moon. The location is likely symbolic of the Yakou's anticipation for a new Leader just like on the day of the first STL when the seemingly unstoppable gambler went head to head with the current Leader. But I am not certain of this, so feel free to correct me.

The moon however, also appears regularly in Hal's thoughts during round 9, with the email regarding his memory loss (image 109) comparing it to the waxing and waning of the moon, this likely symbolising Hal's distorted memories at the moment, which Yakou could be aware of.

Round 9, Turn 1:

Baku: Accumulation 1M55S/Near-death 2M33S
Leader: Accumulation 0M0S/Near-death 3M58S

Hal is influenced by his subconscious to drop instantly (image 110); since Leader figured out leap second just as he lost his memory, his brain’s subconscious has still retained a portion of the influence (image 111). Hal claims that it is almost like 'he has known for a while' (image 112), in reference to his certainty behind why Baku will take the safe strategy, further suggesting that Hal used to know about leap second before The Alien erased his memories relating to Leap Second.

Hal is fully immersed in his passion to win the gamble, the trait that Baku planted into him and had already used to his advantage. Congratulating Hal on his victory, Baku takes the handkerchief and the final round begins.

Round 9, Turn 2:

Baku: Accumulation 2M55S/Near-death 2M33S
Leader: Accumulation 0M0S/Near-death 3M58S

Image 113. Absolute cinema.

Hal falls for leap second, and as the drug is being injected, Hal recalls his perspectives from rounds 1 and 2 that were erased by The Alien (image 114). Image 115 from Yakou's perspective once again hints that Hal died during Round 2 on purpose to open the leap second route to Baku.

Hallucination Round:

Baku: Accumulation 2M55S/Near-death 2M33S
Leader: Accumulation 0M0S/Near-death 4M58S

Hal revives in time for the tenth round, 'miraculously' reviving with 2 seconds of deviation (image 116,117). A miracle doesn't exist: it has reasons upon reasons. So what is the reason behind these two seconds? In image 118, Hal singles out round 6 and round 7, claiming that if he hadn't limited his accumulation to 9 seconds during these rounds, those two seconds never would have existed. What caused this? It's destiny!

Ok so what does all of this mean? I do not believe that Leader created these two seconds, and like he said, simply 'seized' or took advantage of them. Let me go back to some comments I made during the Pre-STL section. "The loser will die in a dream believing that they win". And what is the hallucination round but a dream in which Hal, the loser, believes he has won?

The most likely explanation for these two seconds is just as Leader said: it's destiny. Hal, now clinging to the idea that the destiny of continuing to win without losing belong to him, believes that it was destiny that his accumulation was controlled in such a precise way during these two rounds, allowing him to seize those two seconds. This assurance of destiny also likely played a role in Leader's 'deliberation' during Round 8. Furthermore, from the perspective of Leader during Round 8, who hasn't figured out leap second for sure yet, nor believes that he will lose his perfection, he will simply reset his accumulation if he fails his check, so he can initiate an endurance battle afterwards, while still retaining his memory of the time trick/leap second.

But enough about Hal. After all, the hallucination round was 'a reality for the three of them' (image 119), right? As shown from image 120 and 121, Yakou and Baku also have their own reasons for seeing the hallucination round. For Yakou, this round is the fear that Yakou did not want to see: despite being expected to remain impartial, Yakou still hopes for Baku to win deep down, and is horrified by the thought of Baku's victory being torn away from him.

Perhaps this acceptance of his own impartially is a reason for why Yakou decided to stop being a referee after this STL. For Baku's the hallucination round also represents his fear of Hal's revival, but naturally with a much more personal touch. Baku fears that if he loses STL, all the seeds he has planted will turn into nothing: The L-File, the Karamete, the absorption of Ideal into Kakerou, all of his schemes only to Leader's benefit.

Deep down however, all three of them know that this isn't true. Finally accepting his defeat, Hal tells Baku to 'not look back' (image 122), to not regret his decisions, not to reminisce on the past as Leader did and let it weigh him down. Right at the end, the additional meaning of the 'New Life' from the Neck Man symbolism becomes clear: Hal, surviving the death match,

will begin anew by Baku's side, with a new idea of perfection to guide him. To improve, to adapt, to learn from his mistakes, but never, ever look back.

Want to read a moderately truncated STL with terrible formatting because I'm terrible with technology? Well lucky you! Here it is!

Image 1



Image 2


SPLIT/RESET
MODE
START/STOP
MIN.
SEC.
1/100S
YOU...
!
...
FOR SOME REASON, YOU...
...SEEM RATHER NERVOUS, ARE YOU?

Image 3


!
OH...?
KEEPING MY EYES OPEN AND LOOKING UP AT THE SKY ISN'T WORTH THE EFFORT... BECAUSE NOTHING WILL COME.
NO PLANES WILL COME.
IT'S FUTILE...
HUH?
I'M TAKING A NAP.
THERE'S NOTHING THERE. I DON'T EVEN HAVE TO LOOK.
YOU'RE LYING.
Could it be...?
AH! RIGHT THERE!
...
HAVE YOU GIVEN UP ALREADY?
YOU'RE THE ONE THAT ISN'T UP FOR IT.

Image 4


"TIME."
TIME IS RELATED TO THAT TRICK UP YOUR SLEEVE. THE ONE YOU DON'T WANT ME *UNCOVERING.*
OR...
...IT COULD HAVE NO MEANING AT ALL. IT COULD SIMPLY BE RELATED TO A "WEDGE" OF YOURS THAT YOU WANT PLACED IN ME.
SO...
...WHEN'S THAT REFEREE COMING?
HALF AN HOUR.
HUH?
THE REFEREE WILL ARRIVE IN HALF AN HOUR.

Image 5


DON'T WORRY...
LET'S FORGET... ONCE MORE...
I HAVE TO BE PERFECT.
...HAVE TO BE PER-FECT ...
INCLUDING THE SMALL ONES,
THIS WILL BE THE 138TH TIME...
BECAUSE WE'VE BEEN DOING THIS REGULARLY, AND WE'LL BE DOING IT FOREVER.
DOING THIS HAS ALWAYS BEEN A RELIEF FOR US SINCE A LONG TIME AGO... DON'T WORRY, IT'S FINE NOW,
NO.
THIS ISN'T PERFECT AT ALL!!
IF I FORGET IT, I'LL LOSE...

Image 6


DO YOU KNOW WHAT THIS IS CALLED?
A GROUP OF CREATURES, ACTING LIKE THEY ARE JUST ONE UNIQUE ENTITY, RALLIED UNDER ONE COMMON THOUGHT.
SUCH TALK WILL MAKE US STOP?
..... DO YOU THINK
WELL, INDEED, IT'S TOO SIMPLE...
I BELIEVE IT IS CALLED A "SUPER-ORGANISM".
YOU GUYS ARE LITERALLY THE CLOSEST EXISTENCE TO THIS SUPER-ORGANISM.
EVEN IF YOU HAVE YOUR PERSONALITY INDIVIDUALLY, YOU SHUT IT OFF FOR THE PURPOSE OF THE SYSTEM... SOMETIMES, DRAWING YOUR OWN BLOOD... SOMETIMES, DOING DIRTY THINGS."
JUST LIKE HOW HUMAN CELLS ARE DIFFERENT BASED ON WHICH ORGAN THEY BELONG TO, THERE IS NO CONCEPT OF "INDIVIDUALITY" FOR THOSE ENTITIES.
TURNING A GROUP INTO A SINGLE ENTITY THAT FOCUSES SOLELY ON ACCOMPLISHING THEIR OBJECTIVE, NOT CARING ABOUT TRANSMITTING THEIR INDIVIDUAL DNA.

Image 7


THIS KIND OF ANT IS A KIND OF SUPERORGANISM WITH A HUGE AMOUNT OF INDIVIDUALITY.
IT IS SAID THE REASON IS THAT THEY KEEP ABSORBING OTHER COLONIES.
THE FIRE ANT...
ORIGINALLY, THEY SHOULD BE CONSIDERING OTHER COLONIES AS ENEMIES, EVEN OF THOSE OF THE SAME SPECIES.
EVEN ANTS ARE ABLE TO BREAK OFF THE RULE,
AND MAKE THEIR SUPER-ORGANISM EVOLVE.
HOWEVER, WITH EVOLUTION COMES A STRAIN, THAT CAN NEVER BE REMOVED...
FOR THE FIRE ANTS, ALL THE DIFFERENT COLONIES' QUEENS ARE ALSO BEING ABSORBED.
MEANING THAT MULTIPLE QUEENS WILL BE LIVING IN THE SAME COLONY..... HOWEVER,
ONLY ONE CAN SURVIVE.

Image 8


I HOPE THAT MY CLEVER-CREEP, KAJI,
IN OTHER WORDS, SURPASSING THE LEADER WILL BE HELD THERE...
WILL BE BY MY SIDE LIKE ALWAYS...
...
KAJI, I'LL BE MEETING HIM AT THAT TOWER.
?!
THIS MATCH OF SUR-PASSING THE LEADER...
...ALLOWS ONLY THE REFEREE TO BEAR WITNESS.
NO...
HAVE YOU TWO BEEN TOGETHER ALL THE TIME YOU WERE IN HERE?
I ENTERED THE ROOM A MOMENT AFTER KAJI. WE CAME SEPARATELY.
AS HE SAYS,
WE DIDN'T STAY TOGETHER, NO.
AND AFTER THAT?

Image 9


EVERYONE IS AWARE THERE EXISTS NO GAME UNINFLUENCED BY LUCK.
...A MATTER OF LUCK; *TIME AND PLACE.* OR SO THEY SAY...
VICTORY OR DEFEAT IS SIMPLY...

Image 10


NO, IT'S BECAUSE NOT EVERYTHING'S WITHIN HIS PREDICTION.
CHARMED BY HIS STYLE OF GAMBLING, WHICH MAKES IT FEEL LIKE EVERYTHING'S JUST AS HE PLANNED...
THAT'S WHY WE REFEREES ENDED UP BEING CHARMED BY HIM...
THE "DATE" USOGUI SET FOR HIS "LEAP SECOND" PLAN
HAPPENED TO OVERLAP WITH LEADER'S "MEMORY LOSS" CYCLE,
WHICH USOGUI COULD NEVER LEARN.
"LEAP SECONDS" ONLY HAPPEN IRREGULARLY.
THEREFORE, AS A RESULT OF "LOSING HIS MEMORY",
THE LEAP SECOND DISAPPEARED FROM LEADER'S HEAD TOO.
THAT IS THE REASON HE BETS.
AS IF HIS MISSTEPS WERE BEING MADE ACROSS A TIGHTROPE, HE KEEPS EVERYONE WATCHING ON THE EDGE OF THEIR SEAT.
NO MATTER THE ERA,
PEOPLE MAY JUST WANT TO SEE SOME IMPRESSIVE COMEBACKS.
3205
DEVILISH ...WELL, I CAN'T DENY IT.
INDEED, WE COULD SAY THAT ABOUT HIS LUCK.
WELL, WHEN THE COMEBACK IS TOO EXTREME, PEOPLE MAY JUST THINK OF IT AS SOMETHING DEVILISH.
HA.

Image 11


...IT WILL ACCUMULATE FOR AT LEAST ONE SECOND.
EVEN IF A "PERFECT" CHECK *IS* ACHIEVED...
AFTER THE HANDKERCHIEF HAS LANDED...
...I WILL PRESS THE BUTTON CONNECTED TO THE CONTAINER AND BEGIN TO COUNT DOWN THE TIME SQUANDERED.
UNFORTUNATELY...
...ZERO SECONDS OF ACCUMULATION IS NOT POSSIBLE.
THIS MATCH CAN BE DETERMINED BY EVEN *A SINGLE SECOND.*
...
IT'S A GAME OF *PRECISION.*
...BUT, WHAT ABOUT *US?*
REFEREE YAKOU, *YOU* CAN FOLLOW TIME WITH YOUR WATCH...
YES...
"THE MAGICIAN'S CHOICE"...?
...THEY WILL HAVE THE *OTHER* PERSON SAY WHAT THEY WANT TO HEAR, AND *THEN* MOULD THE SITUATION INTO THE OUTCOME THEY DESIRE.
FOR EXAMPLE, IN ORDER TO NOT SEEM SUSPICIOUS...
IT'S A TECHNIQUE THAT CAN BE APPLIED TO MANY SITUATIONS.
WHEN A MAGICIAN GIVES THE AUDIENCE *THE ILLUSION OF CHOICE.*

Image 12


REST ASSURED, THIS CLOCK IS USUALLY STORED HERE.
I'LL PLACE IT IN FRONT OF THE TWO OF YOU.
...INDEED,
WE *WOULD* NEED SOMETHING TO KEEP AN EXACT TRACK OF TIME FOR THE GAME.
AFTER ALL, YAKOU WILL BE OCCUPIED WITH COUNTING THE TIME SQUANDERED AND BEARING WITNESS TO EVERYTHING WE DO.
183

Image 13


AS HE SAYS,
I ENTERED THE ROOM A MOMENT AFTER KAJI.
WE CAME SEPARATELY.
NO...
HAVE YOU TWO BEEN TOGETHER ALL THE TIME YOU WERE IN HERE?
3
THAT IS CORRECT...
WE NEED SOMETHING TO KEEP AN EXACT TRACK OF TIME...
WE...
...DIDN'T STAY TO-GETHER, NO.
AND AFTER THAT?

Image 14


...EVEN IF ONE IS TO LOSE...
...HE WILL, AT THE VERY LEAST, DIE DREAMING.
DREAM-ING A DREAM...
...IN WHICH HE BELIEVES HE HAS WON.
SURPAS-SING THE LEADER...
...WILL NOW BEGIN.
UP UNTIL THIS DAY, THEY HAVE BOTH TASTED...
...THE TERROR OF DEATH TIME AND TIME AGAIN.
THEY HAVE FOR-EVER...
...BEEN LONGING THIS BATTLE... FOR THESE TWO...
...IT IS AS IF IT WERE A WAKING DREAM...
SO...
Image 15

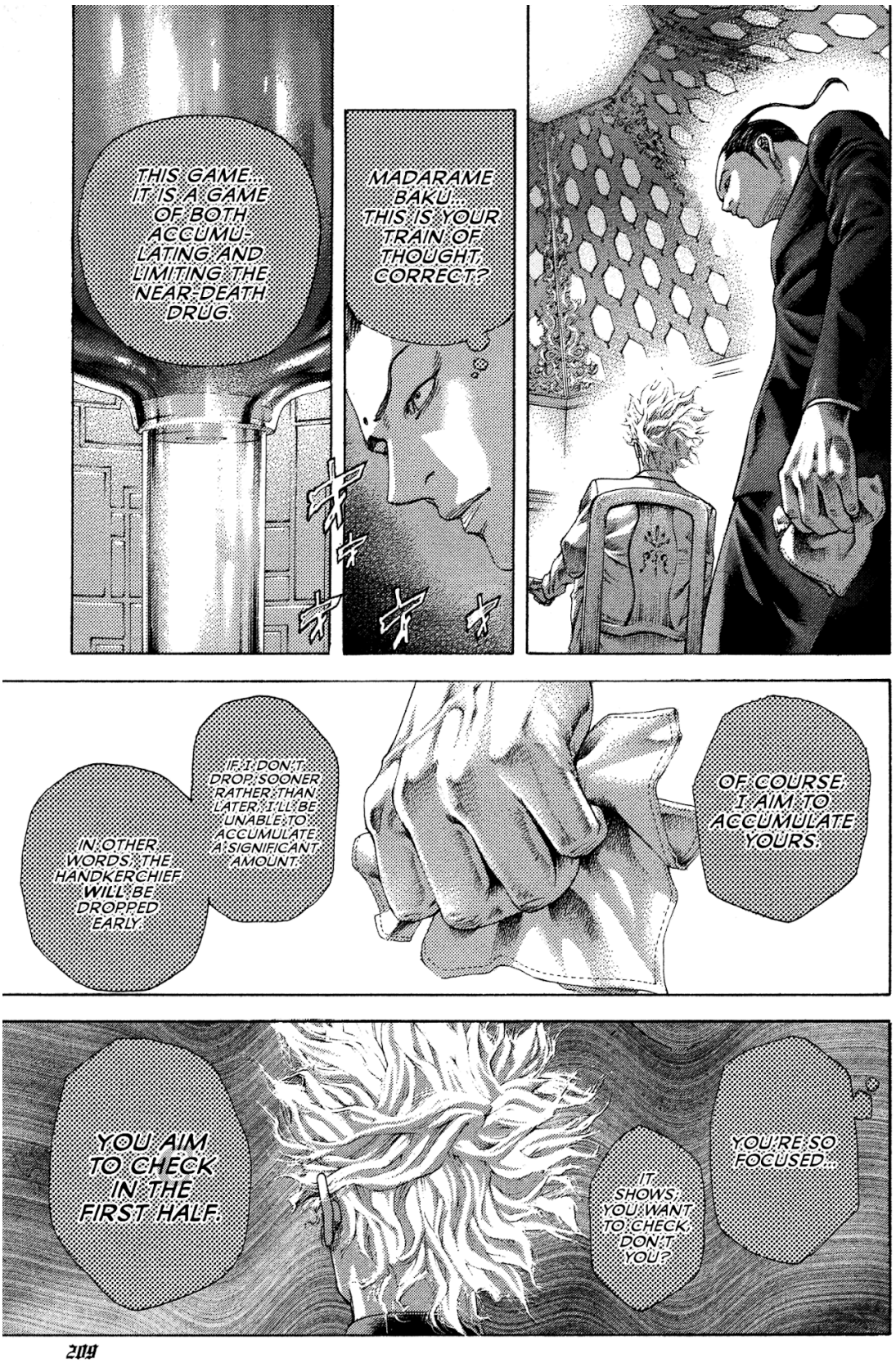

THIS GAME... IT IS A GAME OF BOTH ACCUMU-LATING AND LIMITING THE NEAR-DEATH DRUG.
MADARAME BAKU... THIS IS YOUR TRAIN OF THOUGHT, CORRECT?
IN OTHER WORDS, THE HANDKERCHIEF WILL BE DROPPED EARLY.
IF I DON'T DROP SOONER RATHER THAN LATER, I'LL BE UNABLE TO ACCUMULATE A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT.
OF COURSE I AIM TO ACCUMULATE YOURS.
YOU AIM TO CHECK IN THE FIRST HALF.
IT SHOWS YOU WANT TO CHECK, DON'T YOU?
YOU'RE SO FOCUSED...

Image 16


IF HE INTENDS FOR ME TO FAIL TO CHECK AND HAVE A MINUTE'S WORTH OF THE DRUG INJECTED INTO ME...
...THAT IS KIRUMA SOUICHI'S TRAIN OF THOUGHT...
...DROP THE HANDKER-CHIEF, YET.
...HE WILL NOT...
HE WON'T DROP UNTIL TIME'S UP.
WAITING OUT MY PATIENCE. FOR ME TO KILL MYSELF.
HE'S WAITING FOR ME TO CHECK.

Image 17


I MUST REMEMBER.
WHAT KIND OF MAN IS MADARAME BAKU...?
WILL HE TAKE THE SAFE STRATEGY RIGHT OFF THE BAT...?
NO... HE IS A GAMBLER.
He will turn his head immediately...
...towards my drop...
IT'S FINE... NOT NOW... HE HASN'T DROPPED YET.
"HE WON'T TAKE THE SAFE STRATEGY RIGHT OFF THE BAT."
"HE'LL TURN HIS HEAD IMMEDIATELY..."
That is what he's thinking...
He hasn't dropped it yet.
嘘喰い 45 完

Image 18



Image 19


...THERE IS ANOTHER OPPONENT IN YOUR MIND.
AS WELL AS THE REAL OPPONENT BEFORE YOU...
IN THAT MOMENT, THERE WILL BE ANOTHER OPPONENT YOU MUST FACE.
HAVING THE OPPO-NENT...
...that you have created your-self.
You must face the exag-gera-tion of your oppo-nent...
...EXAG-GERATE YOU IN HIS MIND...
IF YOU CANNOT ACHIEVE THIS, YOU WILL NEVER TRULY...
...STEAL THE INITIA-TIVE!

Image 20


HE HAD STOPPED.
...
DON'T TELL ME...
HE STOPPED THE EXAG-GERATION...
...HAS HE ALREADY...?
...OF HIS OWN FEAR OF THE ENEMY...
...AND THE DEAD-MAN BEGAN TO MAKE HIS MOVE;
GRADUALLY PIECING TOGETHER THE TRUTH...
...BEHIND HIS PREVIOUS FAILURE.

Image 21


...AND THE OUTSTANDING VETERAN GAMBLER, MADARAME BAKU...
THE ENIGMATIC KIRUMA SOUICHI, NESTING IN THAT PIVOTAL LINEAGE...
A TRULY REMARKABLE MIND GAME REQUIRES SOMETHING AKIN TO A SENSE.
THE CONCEPT OF A "MIND GAME" ISN'T IN THE DOMAIN OF KNOWLEDGE OR EXPERIENCE...
TO PUT IT SIMPLY, IT IS MUCH LIKE...
...THAT CAN'T BE EXPLAINED WITH SIMPLY SOUND JUDGEMENT ALONE.
AN EXTRAORDINARY PHENOMENON...
...A SUPER-POWER.
I... WON'T CHECK.
NOT YET...
THE DRUG ISN'T BEING ACCUMULATED. THE BUTTON HASN'T BEEN PRESSED...
...AND THE HANDKERCHIEF HASN'T BEEN DROPPED.

Image 22



Image 23

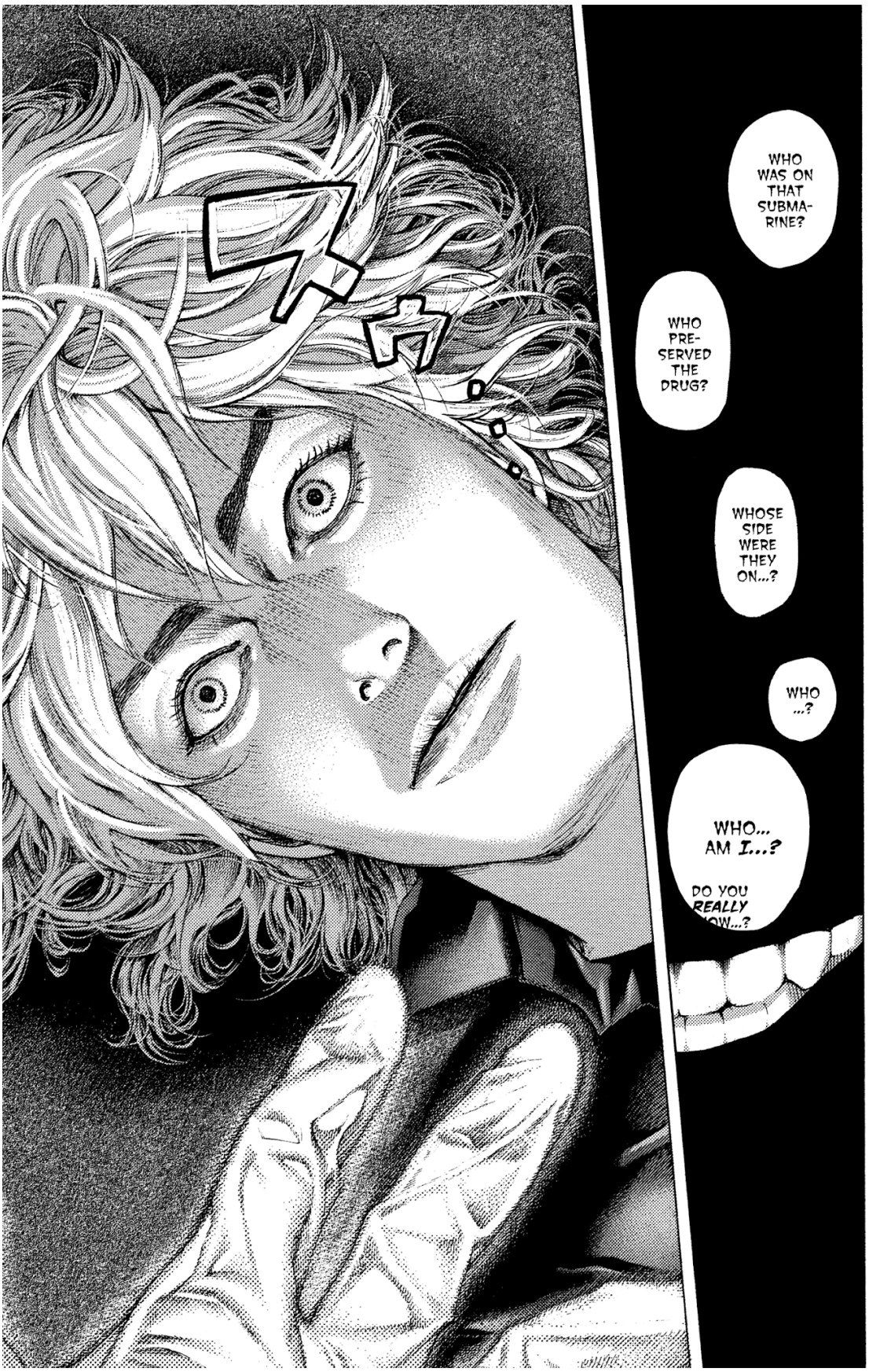

WHO WAS ON THAT SUBMA-RINE?
WHO PRE-SERVED THE DRUG?
WHOSE SIDE WERE THEY ON...?
WHO ...?
WHO... AM I...?
DO YOU REALLY

Image 24


45 SEC-ONDS ...!
!
IT FEELS LONG, DOESN'T IT?
IT'S AS IF...
...THERE EXIST SEVERAL DIFFERENT LEADERS...
SIR LEADER IS SHOWING MORE AND MORE SIDES TO HIMSELF TODAY...
...TIME LASTED SO LONG THAT I BEGAN TO THINK TO MYSELF: "IS THIS TRULY ONLY A MINUTE?"
JUST NOW, BEFORE USOGUI HAD TURNED HIS HEAD...
THE PASSAGE OF TIME CAN FEEL DIFFERENT FROM SITUATION TO SITUATION...
...FEELS SO SHORT TO ME.
COM-PARED TO THEN, THIS ONE MINUTE, RIGHT NOW...
IT'S VEXING...
IS THIS TRULY THAT SAME MINUTE?
IS THIS...
...THAT FAMILIAR 60 SEC-ONDS?

Image 25



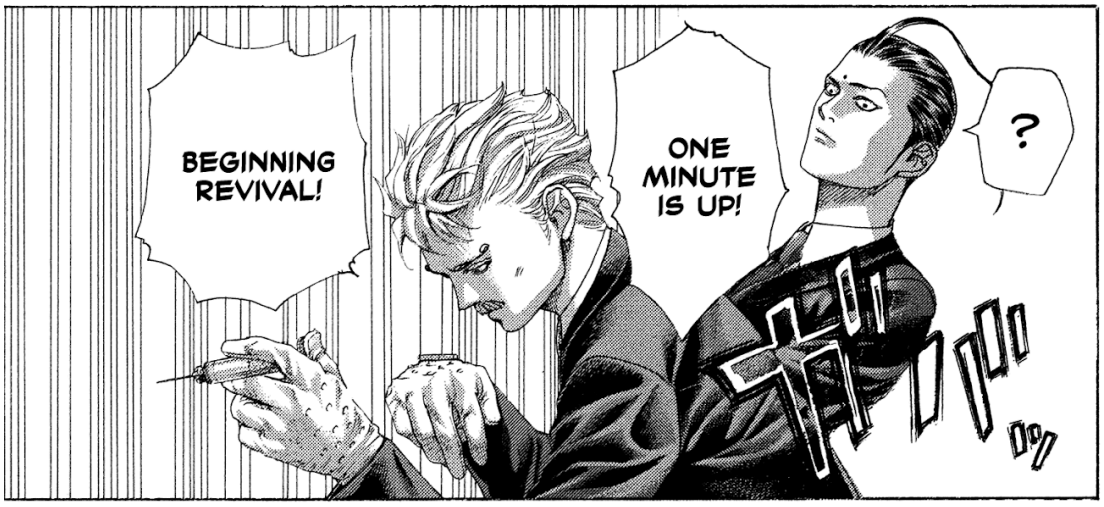


Image 26


THE INFORMATION C, BEING WATCHED OVER FROM BEHIND, CAN GARNER...
...IS LIMITED.
MAKE YOUR CHOICE NOW...
...AND SEE IT THROUGH TO THE END!
WILL HE...
...HOLD HIS ADVANTAGE? OR WILL HE TAKE A CHANCE...?
NO, THERE'S NO TIME TO HESITATE...
NO...
...ALL HE CAN DO IS TRY HIS BEST TO OVERLAP THE USOGUI IN HIS MIND WITH THE REAL USOGUI.
...RIGHT NOW...
DESPITE HIS ADVANCED PROCESSING POWER...
IT'S PRACTICALLY NOTHING.
...SUCCESSFULLY READ HIS OPPONENT.
...THEN HE WILL HAVE...
IF HE IS ABLE TO DO THIS...
フ…

Image 27



Image 28

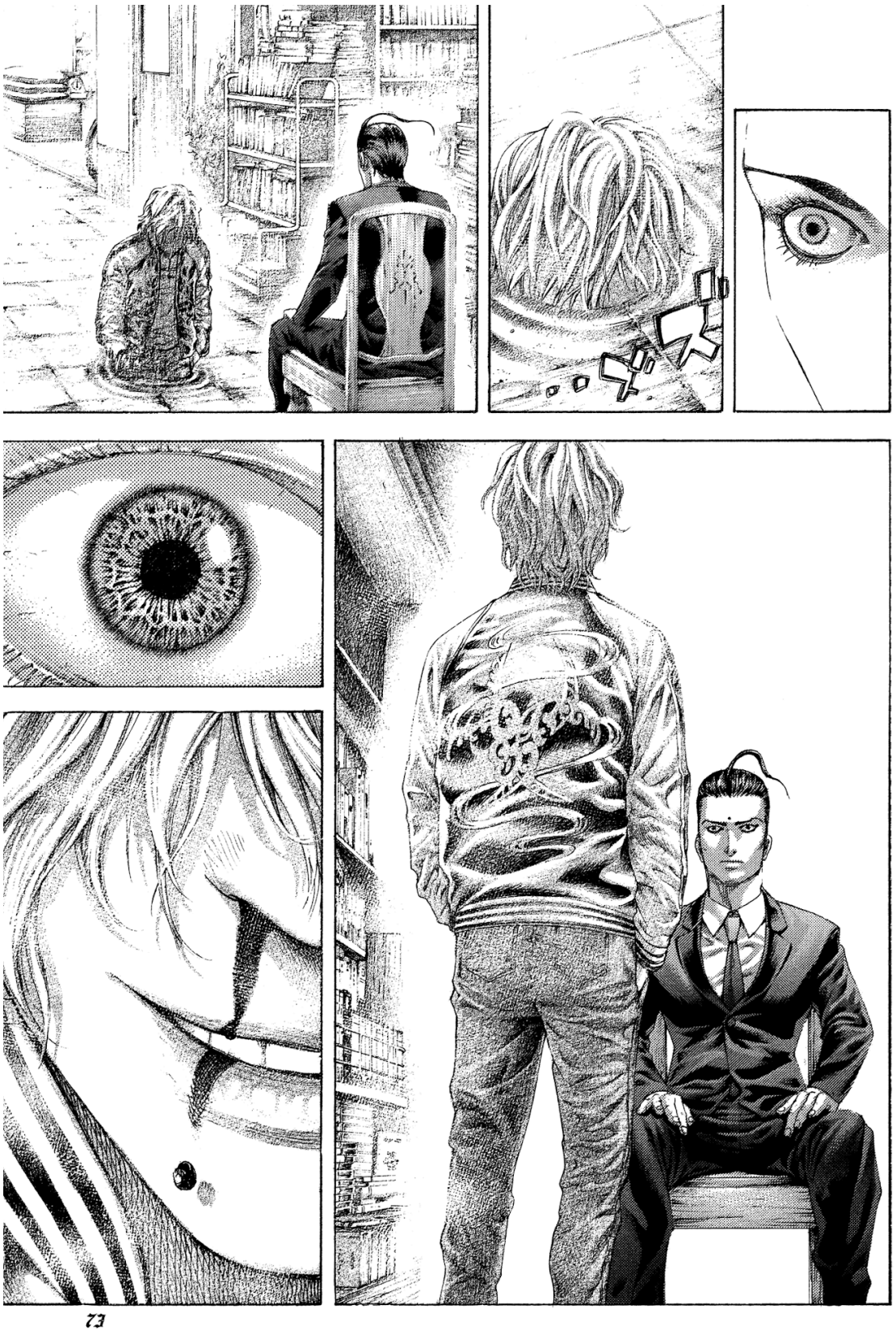


Image 29


...KIRUMA SOUICHI...
...YOU DO NOT KNOW...
...AS WELL AS I KNOW YOU, AM I CORRECT?

Image 30


...ACCUMULATE KIRUMA SOUICHI'S DRUG TO FIVE MINUTES' WORTH BEFORE HIS OWN...
IF HE CAN...
IT'LL BE ONE SHOT, ONE KILL FOR HIM.
AS LONG AS HE DOESN'T MAKE TOO MANY MISTAKES...
...THEN THE VOLUME OF DRUG ACCUMULATED FOR KIRUMA SOUICHI WILL CONTINUE TO INCREASE...
...AND THE GAME WILL BE OVER.
ONE SHOT...
At the fourth stroke, it will be 08:20:20 a.m.
Tick
Tick
WOULD YOU MOVE?
...
FOR HOW LONG DO YOU PLAN ON STAYING SEATED ...?

Image 31

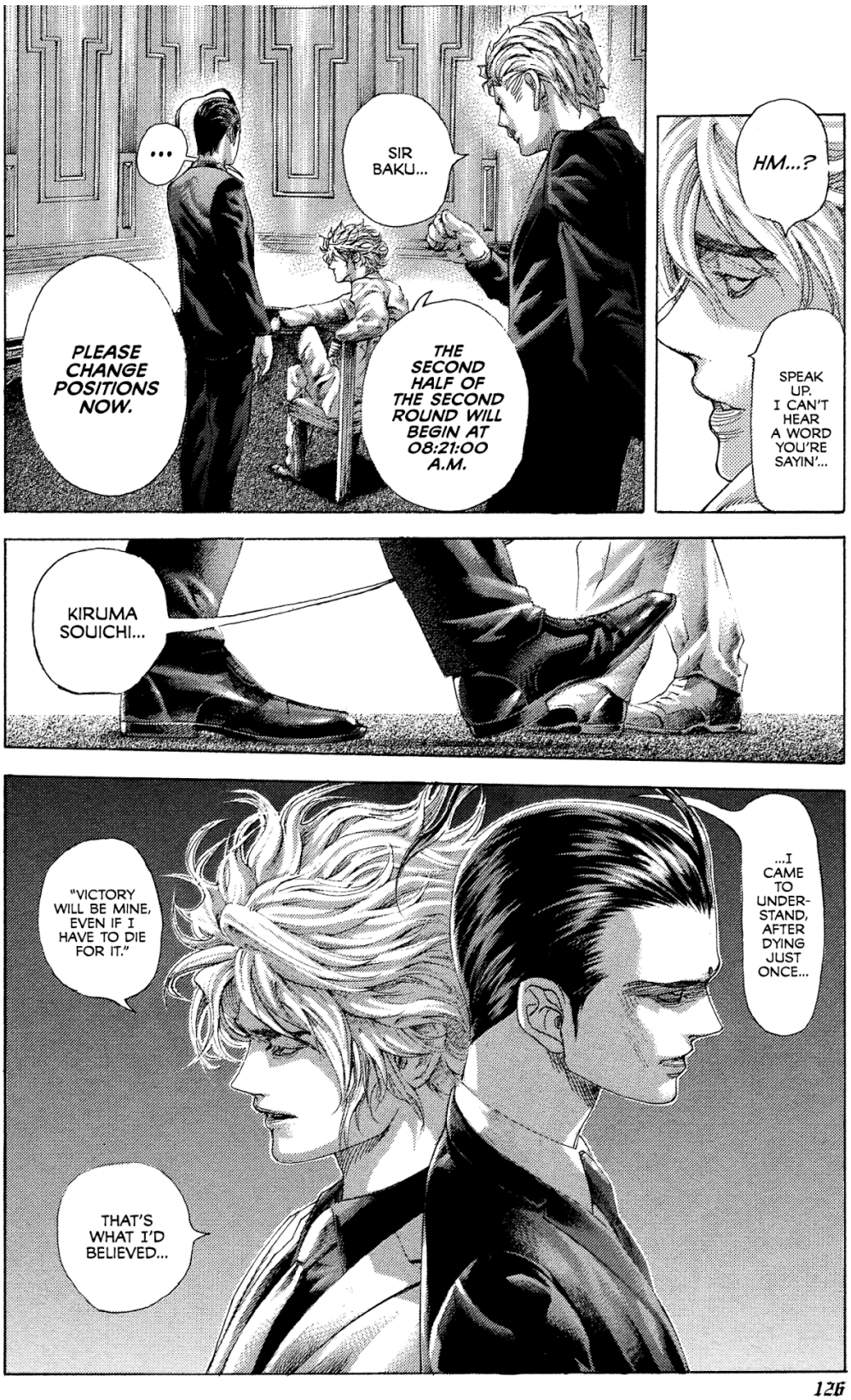

...
SIR BAKU...
PLEASE CHANGE POSITIONS NOW.
THE SECOND HALF OF THE SECOND ROUND WILL BEGIN AT 08:21:00 A.M.
HM...?
SPEAK UP. I CAN'T HEAR A WORD YOU'RE SAYIN'...
KIRUMA SOUICHI...
"VICTORY WILL BE MINE, EVEN IF I HAVE TO DIE FOR IT."
...I CAME TO UNDER-STAND, AFTER DYING JUST ONCE...
THAT'S WHAT I'D BELIEVED...

Image 32


BUT... I WAS MIS-TAK-EN...
THE NUMBER OF NEAR-DEATHS TAKEN...
THE DURATION OF ONE NEAR-DEATH...
THERE'S A LIMIT TO ALL OF THESE.
THE NEAR-DEATH DRUG'S ACCUMU-LATION IN THE TUBE...

Image 33


Tick
TU!
Tick

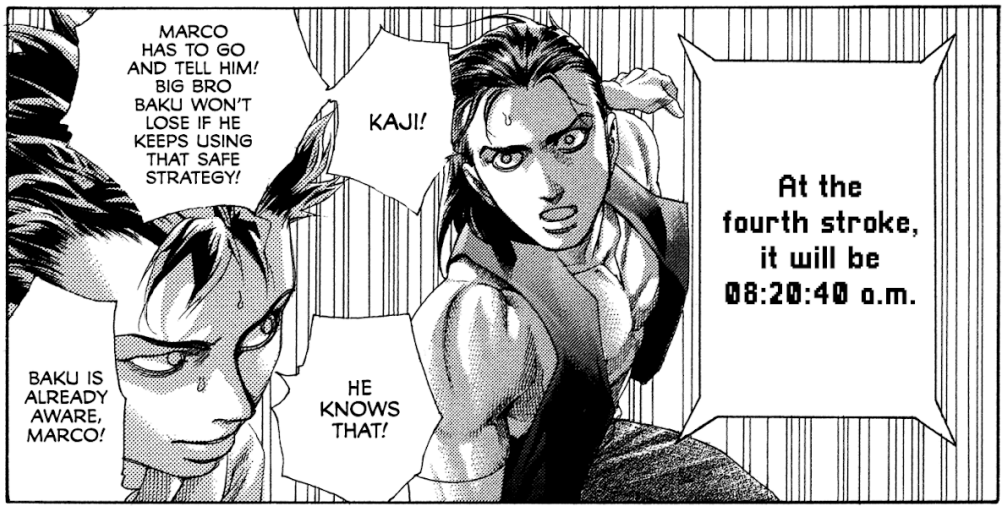

MARCO HAS TO GO AND TELL HIM! BIG BRO BAKU WON'T LOSE IF HE KEEPS USING THAT SAFE STRATEGY!
KAJI!
At the fourth stroke, it will be 08:20:40 a.m.
BAKU IS ALREADY AWARE, MARCO!
HE KNOWS THAT!

Image 34


THE GOAL... IS TO MAKE KIRUMA ACCUMULATE FOUR MINUTES' WORTH.
THAT IS BAKU'S OBJECTIVE FROM NOW!
Tick
Tick
THOSE WHO STRAIN THEIR EARS, IN ORDER TO BETTER HEAR...
...ARE TRYING TO VISUALISE THE SITUATION USING THE INFORMATION OF SOUND...
THERE EXIST SOME MIRACLES THAT ARE ONLY IN REACH OF THOSE WHO HAVE POLISHED WHAT LIMITED SENSES THEY HAVE...
...TO THE UTMOST.
HOWEVER...
...SOME THINGS CAN ONLY BE GRASPED BY THOSE WHO...
...HAVE BEEN THERE...
...AS WELL AS DIFFERENT THINGS...
THERE ARE DIFFERENT THINGS BEING SEEN...
...THAT BOTH OF THEM ARE MISSING.
A PREDATOR IS AT ITS WEAKEST WHEN IT GOES TO FINISH ITS PREY.
BOTH OF THEM HAVE BECOME SO IMMERSED IN THEIR STRATEGIES...
...AND MISSED THINGS THEY SHOULD HAVE NOTICED.
BUT, STRANGELY, THEIR THOUGHTS ARE THE VERY SAME IN THIS MOMENT...
THEY'RE SEEING ENTIRELY DIFFERENT THINGS IN THIS MOMENT.

Image 35

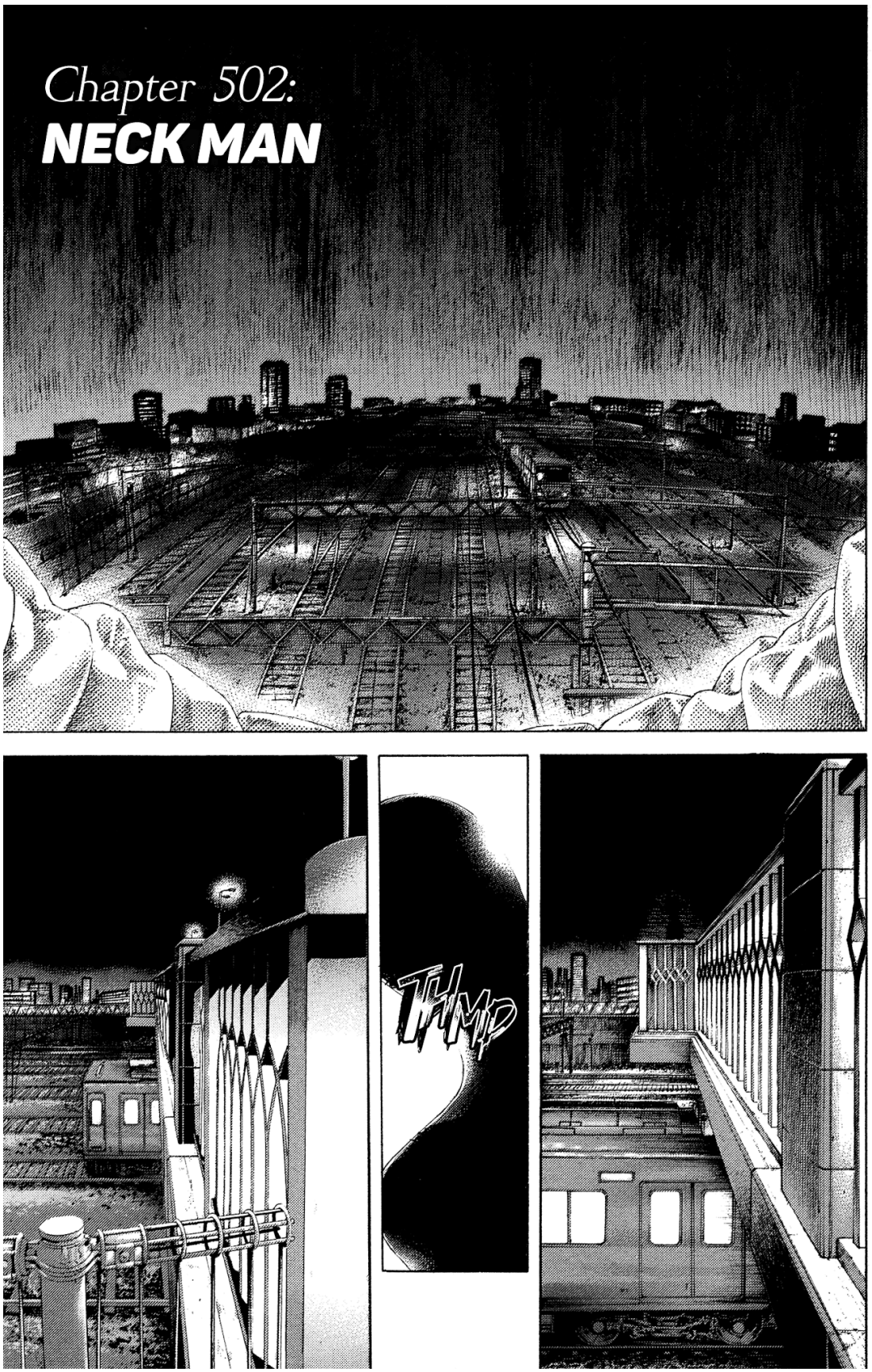
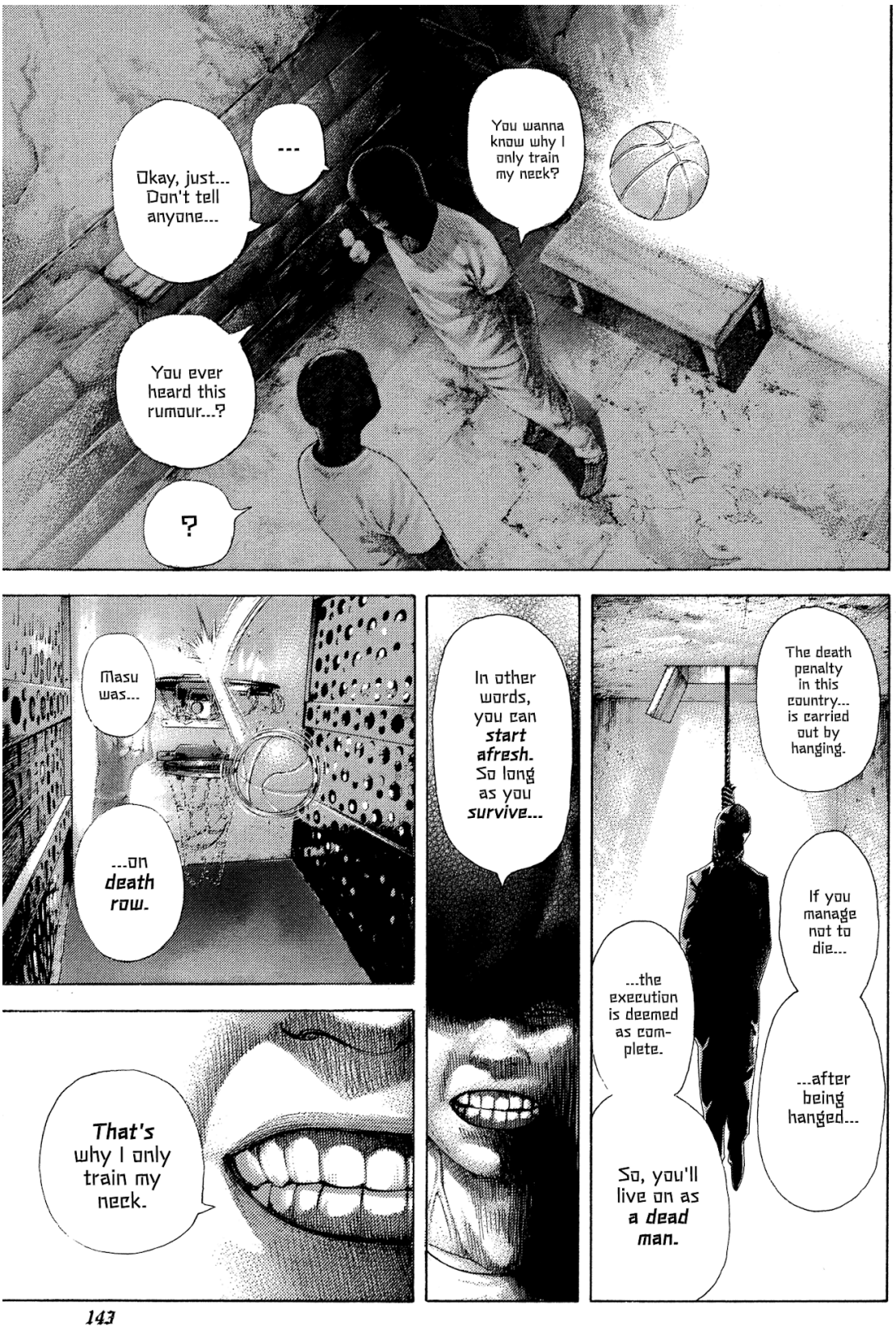


Image 36


Huh?
Don't hassle me, just leave me out of it...
Hal... You're a guest in my home, you know ...?
I just remembered, I've got something to do...
Hal...
10 円
Masu Kijuuin?
Right...
I think that was his name, at least.
Is that even a real name?
Doesn't matter...
So, Masu answered the question...

Image 37


You wanna know why I only train my neck?

Okay, just... Don't tell anyone...
You ever heard this rumour...?
?
Masu was...
...on death row.
In other words, you can start afresh. So long as you survive...
The death penalty in this country... is carried out by hanging.
If you manage not to die...
...the execution is deemed as complete.
...after being hanged...
So, you'll live on as a dead man.
That's why I only train my neck.

Image 38


People began to think...
"...maybe he..."
"...really can do it..."
But Masu's neck...
...grew to be as thick as a log through his day-to-day training.
No one bought into it.
They all just thought...
...you'd die if you were hanged.
That tale is just a rumour. Masu will die...
No, not at all.
Then... why the intrigue about how he ended up?
Not at all?
What happened to Masu?
What do you think? Think he stood a chance?
And then?
Crap...

Image 39


...Fukurou has accepted the match...
Usogui...
Just a little hope can raise people's expectations... They're gambling before they know it.
Are... Are you going to have a match with Fukurou ...?
Hal...
!
If you agree, you may decide the time and place.
...on the condition you play poker.
It may not be as intriguing as Masu's hanging...
...but my odds are way more likely.
Y'wanna see it?
Me against Fukurou.

Image 40



You're being too cocky.
Can you *really* say they're more likely...?
If you're intent on fighting *him*...
I feel as if Fukurou has a ***fondness*** for you... being that you're both gamblers.
I think you can...
...take advantage of that fondness.
Are you...
...referencing the fight in the second chapter of "The Bee Prince"?
Yes.
In order to beat the bee prince, the rival prince took advantage of their camaraderie to lay a trap.
But... Wait...
Even though the rival prince tried to trick the bee prince...
...didn't he still lose anyway? He couldn't return to the third king...
You misunderstood.

Image 41


...and then you slipped up.
answer me as if you knew Fukurou...
And then the third king said...
trying to hide your identity,
Nor would you,
I'd never ask about Fukurou...
Back then, I had no idea who you really were.
"So, you're the one that made it here..."

Image 42

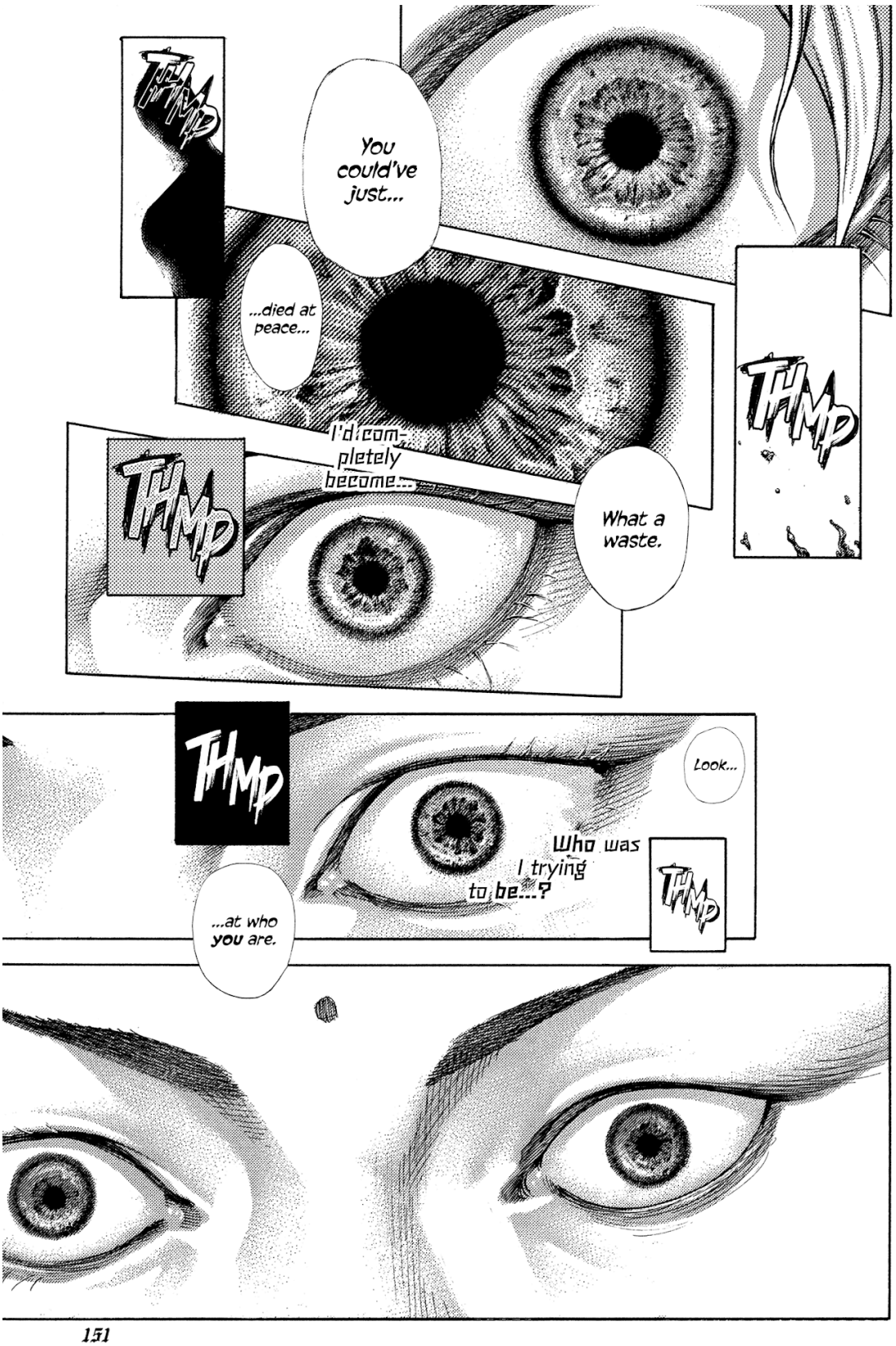

THMP
You could've just...
...died at peace...
I'd completely become...
THMP
What a waste.
THMP
THMP
Look...
Who was I trying to be...?
THMP
...at who you are.

Image 43


IT'S LIKE I'VE BEEN STRAYING OUTSIDE OF MY ORIGINAL ROUTE.
IT FEELS LIKE...
I'VE BEEN DIS-CONNECTED FROM EVERY-THING.
THAT PICTURE BOOK, THE PRINCE BEE... YOU CAN HAVE IT IF YOU WANT?
HAL?
I HAVE ALREADY FINISHED IT, SO...
I WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO BECOME... MYSELF AGAIN...
I FEEL LIKE
EBA...

Image 44



Image 45

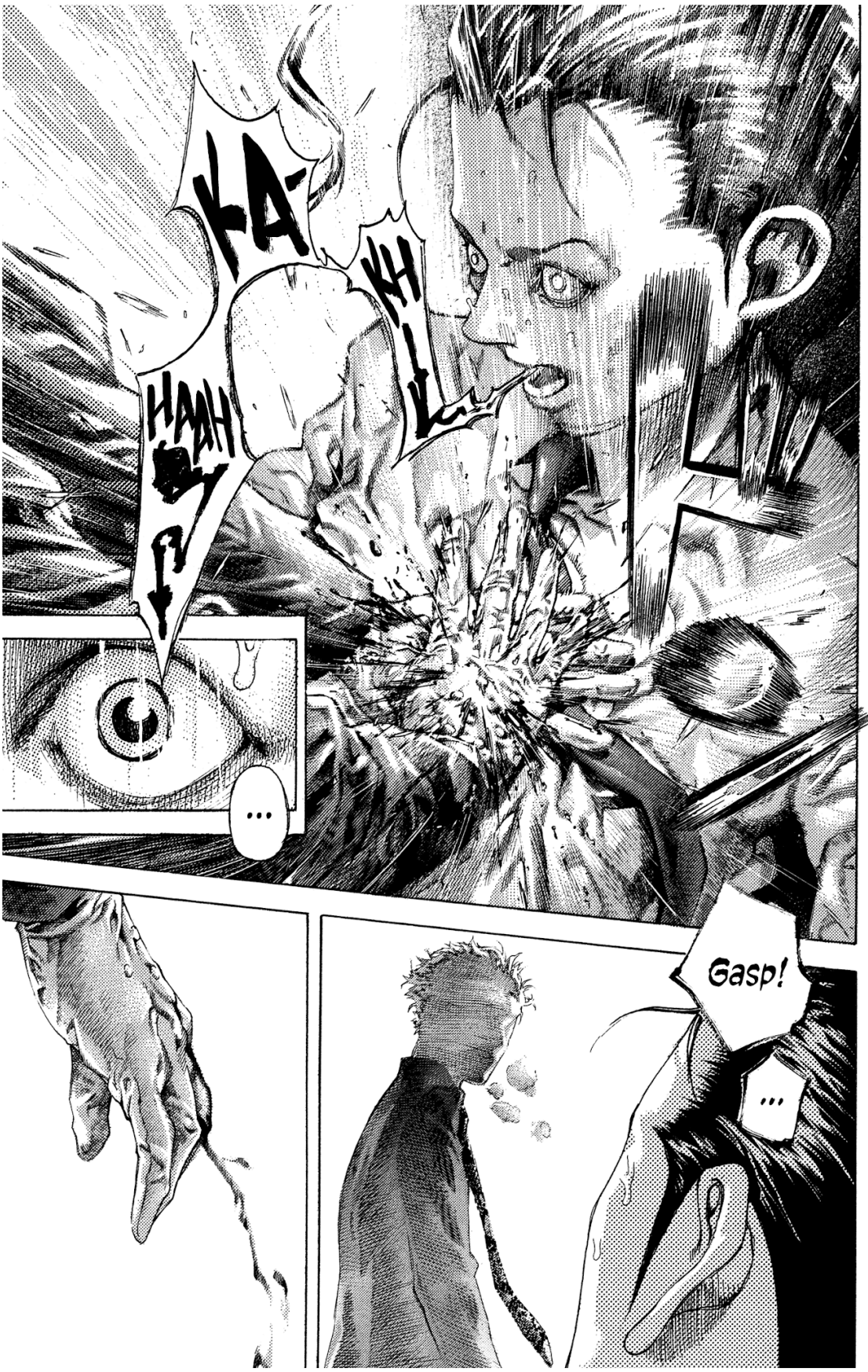


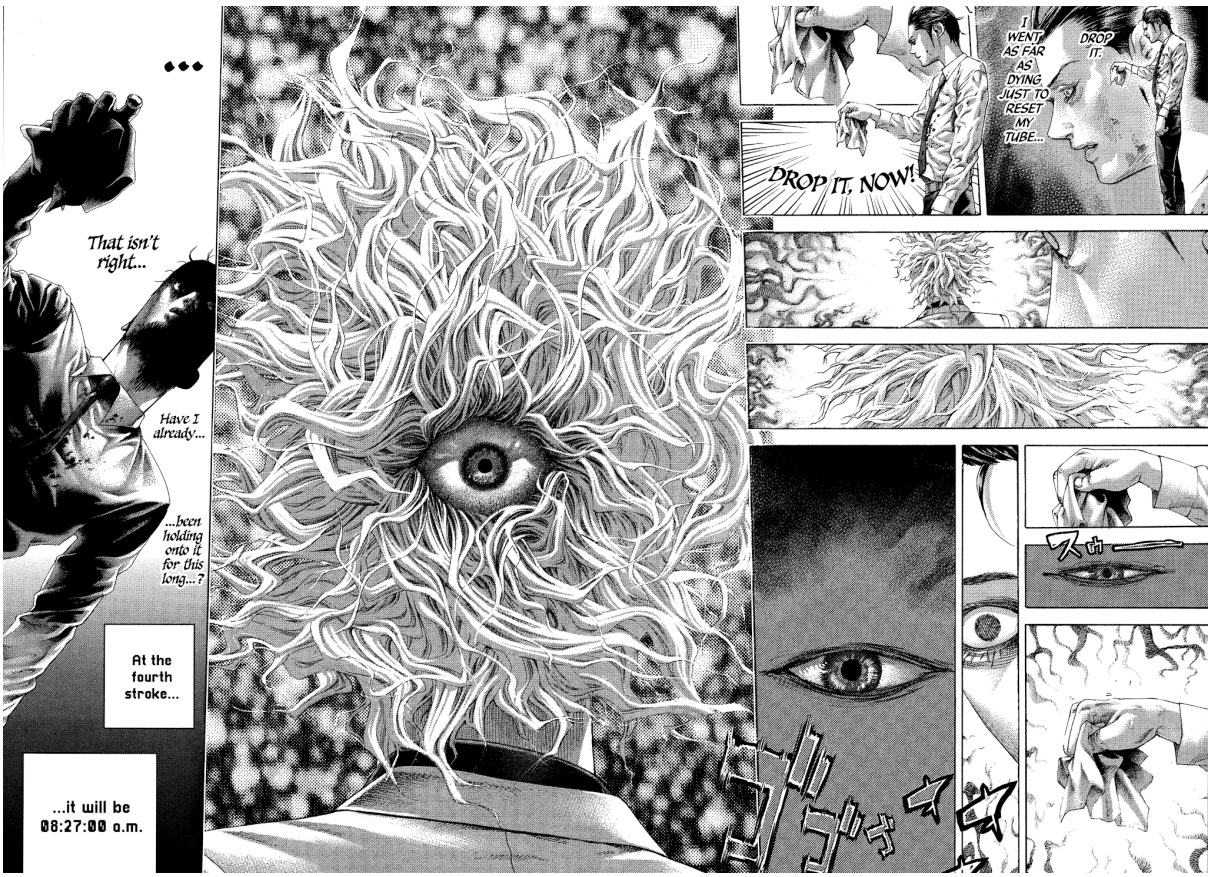
Image 46



Image 47


HE HAD STOPPED.
...
DON'T TELL ME...
HE STOPPED THE EXAG-GERATION...
...HAS HE ALREADY...?
...OF HIS OWN FEAR OF THE ENEMY...
...AND THE DEAD-MAN BEGAN TO MAKE HIS MOVE;
GRADUALLY PIECING TOGETHER THE TRUTH...
...BEHIND HIS PREVIOUS FAILURE.

Image 48


...
That isn't right...
Have I already...
...been holding onto it for this long...?
At the fourth stroke...
...it will be 08:27:00 a.m.
DROP IT, NOW!
I WENT AS FAR AS DYING JUST TO RESET MY TUBE...
DROP IT.
ゴゴゴ
スッ
Image 49

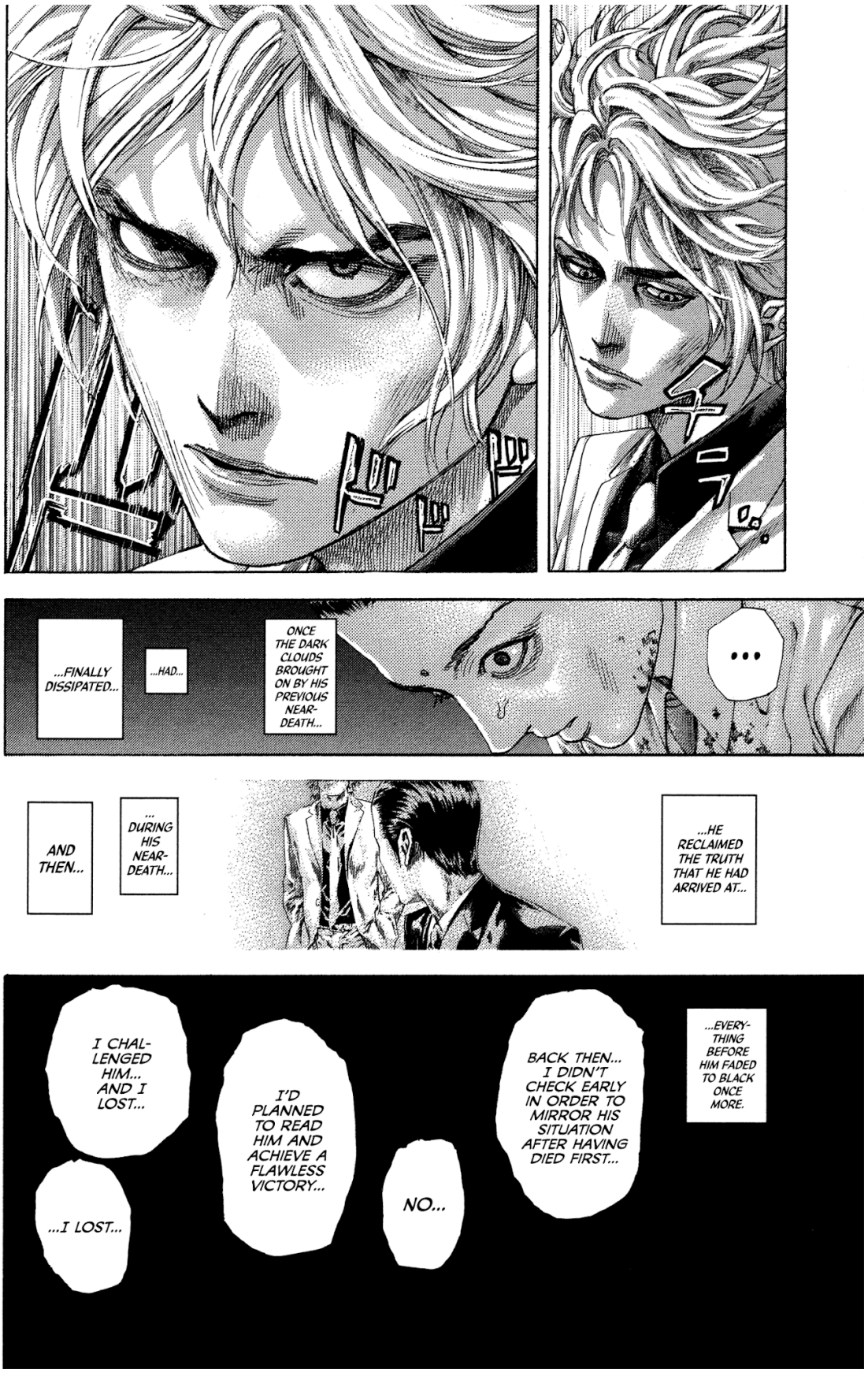

...FINALLY DISSIPATED...
...HAD...
ONCE THE DARK CLOUDS BROUGHT ON BY HIS PREVIOUS NEAR-DEATH...
...
AND THEN...
... DURING HIS NEAR-DEATH...
...HE RECLAIMED THE TRUTH THAT HE HAD ARRIVED AT...
I CHAL-LENGED HIM... AND I LOST...
...I LOST...
I'D PLANNED TO READ HIM AND ACHIEVE A FLAWLESS VICTORY...
NO...
BACK THEN... I DIDN'T CHECK EARLY IN ORDER TO MIRROR HIS SITUATION AFTER HAVING DIED FIRST...
...EVERY-THING BEFORE HIM FADED TO BLACK ONCE MORE.

Image 50

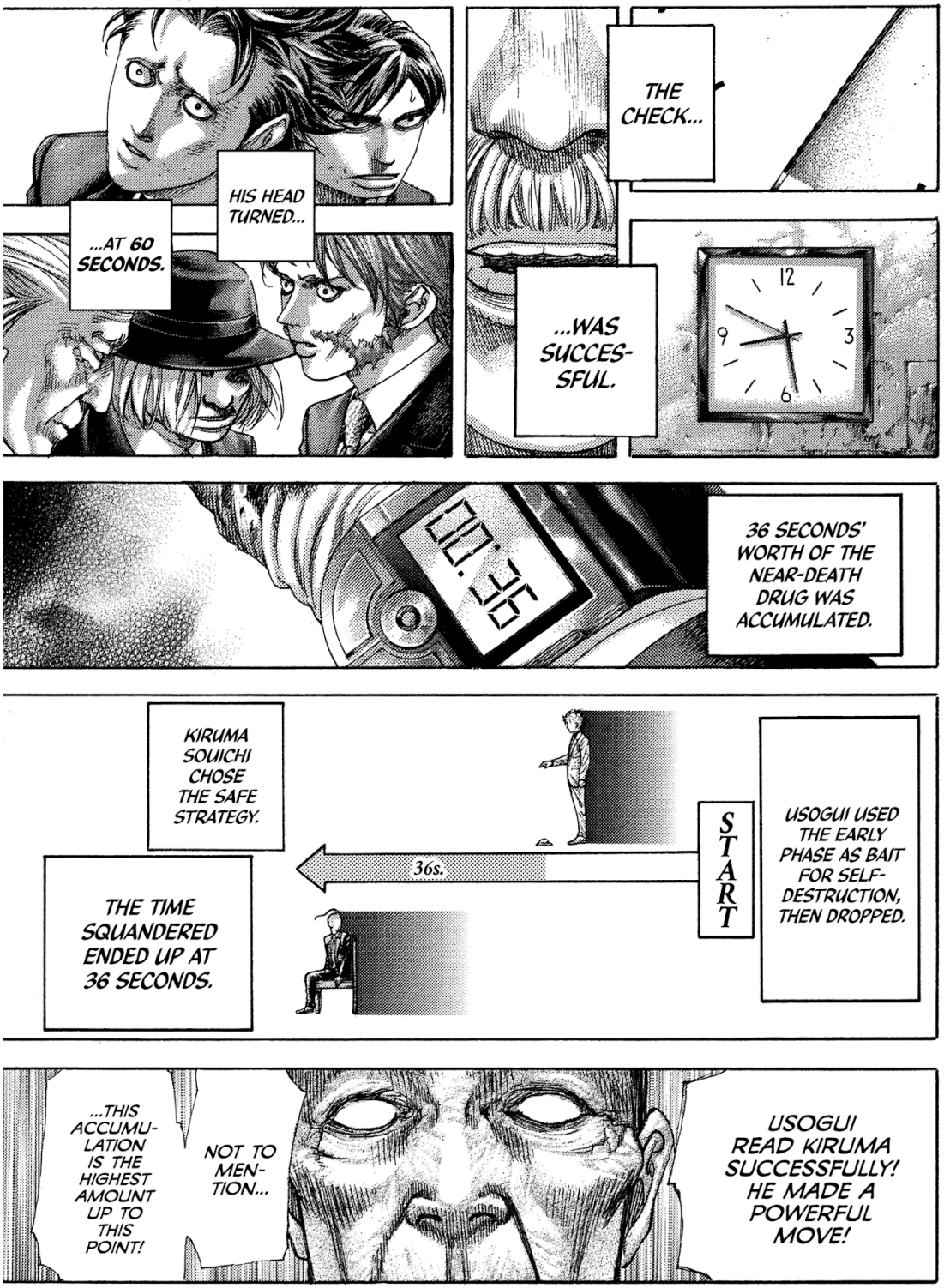

...AT 60 SECONDS.
HIS HEAD TURNED...
THE CHECK...
...WAS SUCCES-SFUL.
00:36
36 SECONDS' WORTH OF THE NEAR-DEATH DRUG WAS ACCUMULATED.
KIRUMA SOUICHI CHOSE THE SAFE STRATEGY.
THE TIME SQUANDERED ENDED UP AT 36 SECONDS.
36s.
START
USOGUI USED THE EARLY PHASE AS BAIT FOR SELF-DESTRUCTION, THEN DROPPED.
...THIS ACCUMU-LATION IS THE HIGHEST AMOUNT UP TO THIS POINT!
NOT TO MEN-TION...
USOGUI READ KIRUMA SUCCESSFULLY! HE MADE A POWERFUL MOVE!

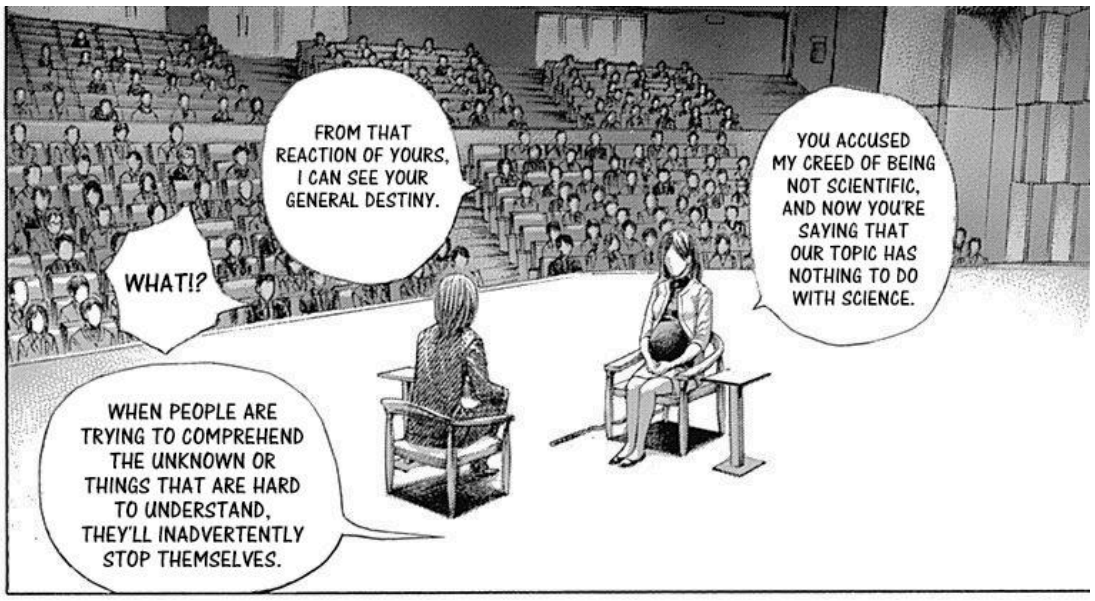
Image 51

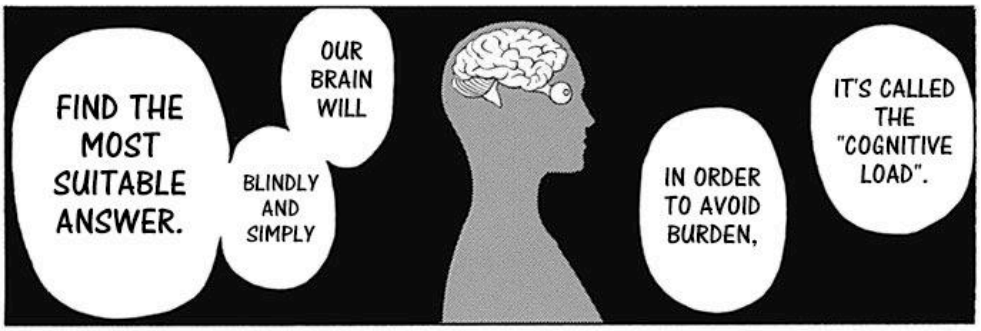

...IS NO LONGER WITH US...
BUT THE PERSON FROM BACK THEN...
THE PERSON THAT I AM TODAY IS NOT THE SAME AS THEN.
INDEED, THERE ARE TRACES OF MEMORIES...
THOSE BYGONE DAYS...
...OF THE TIME WE SPENT TOGETHER...
IT WILL SOON BE 08:30:00 A.M.
WE'LL BEGIN THE FIRST HALF OF THE FOURTH ROUND AT THAT TIME.
...WERE TO SEE THIS DUEL?
...THINK, IF HE...
...THAT I WAS BACK THEN...
WHAT WOULD THE MAN...
...

Image 52


CHECK...
...SUC-CESSFUL!
!
...CLAIM-ING THEY CAN-NOT TURN...
...YET TURNING AROUND!
HE...
HE'S FAR TOO STRONG!
嘘喰い 46之元

Image 53


FROM THAT REACTION OF YOURS, I CAN SEE YOUR GENERAL DESTINY.
WHAT!?
YOU ACCUSED MY CREED OF BEING NOT SCIENTIFIC, AND NOW YOU'RE SAYING THAT OUR TOPIC HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH SCIENCE.
WHEN PEOPLE ARE TRYING TO COMPREHEND THE UNKNOWN OR THINGS THAT ARE HARD TO UNDERSTAND, THEY'LL INADVERTENTLY STOP THEMSELVES.


FIND THE MOST SUITABLE ANSWER.
OUR BRAIN WILL
BLINDLY AND SIMPLY
IN ORDER TO AVOID BURDEN,
IT'S CALLED THE "COGNITIVE LOAD".

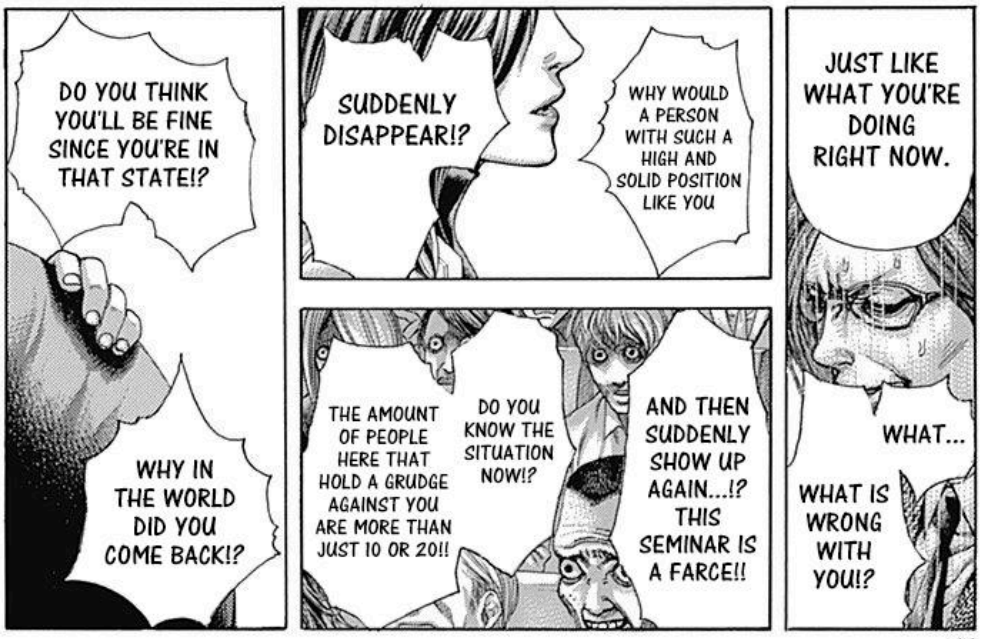

DO YOU THINK YOU'LL BE FINE SINCE YOU'RE IN THAT STATE!?
WHY IN THE WORLD DID YOU COME BACK!?
SUDDENLY DISAPPEAR!?
WHY WOULD A PERSON WITH SUCH A HIGH AND SOLID POSITION LIKE YOU
THE AMOUNT OF PEOPLE HERE THAT HOLD A GRUDGE AGAINST YOU ARE MORE THAN JUST 10 OR 20!!
DO YOU KNOW THE SITUATION NOW!?
AND THEN SUDDENLY SHOW UP AGAIN...!? THIS SEMINAR IS A FARCE!!
JUST LIKE WHAT YOU'RE DOING RIGHT NOW.
WHAT...
WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU!?

Image 54


DON'T WORRY, GAKUTO... I'M STILL ME.
HUH?
REFEREE KADOKURA,
REFEREE NOWA,
REFEREE MAKAMI,
!!
IN THIS LIFE THREATENING FIGHT, YOU'RE STILL JUDGING THE SITUATION ONLY BY RISK? WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN SEEING IN USOGUI UNTIL NOW?
WAIT...
QUIET... LEADER IS SAYING SOMETHING!

Image 55


REFEREE DOUJI,
FOR ME,
REFEREE DOUJI,
!!
YOUR THOUGHTS AND WHAT YOU'RE DOING RIGHT NOW ARE SO EASY TO READ.
...
WHAT ...?
REFEREE MIDARA,
THEORETICALLY SPEAKING, MY "DROPPING" WAS INDEED A MISTAKE... "THEORETICALLY".
NO WAY... HE CAN READ OUR MINDS...?
BEING CHARMED BY GAMBLING, CAN YOU CALL YOURSELF A WINNER, FUKUROU?
!!
IF YOU WERE ABLE TO TURN BACK TIME, WOULD YOU WANT TO GO BACK TO THE FIRST TIME YOU LOST?
THAT'S WHY I SAID "QUIET"...
I'M SURE
YOU WOULD FLUSTER LIKE THAT...
IF YOU'RE ALL THERE,
QUIET.
YES...

Image 56

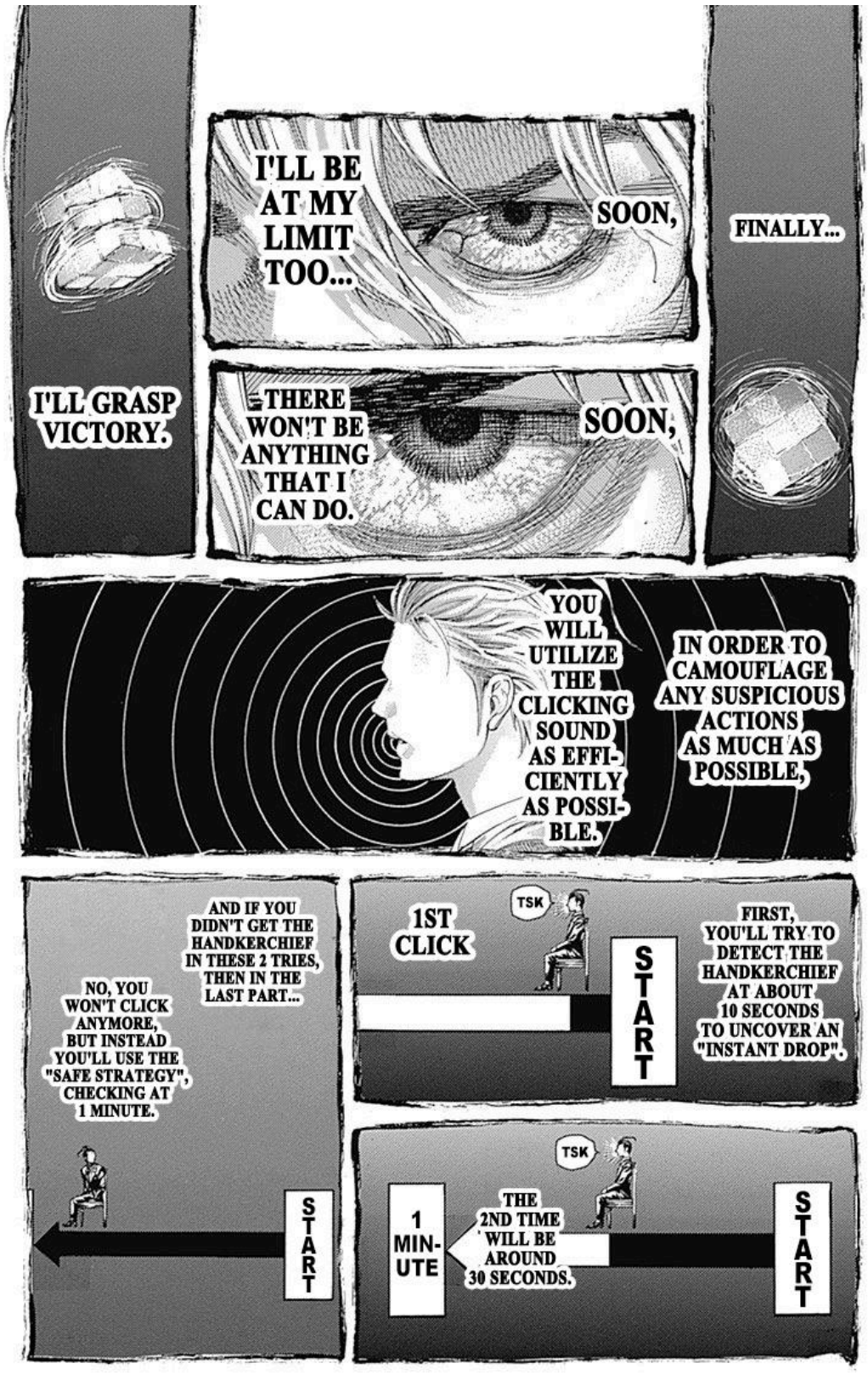

I'LL GRASP VICTORY.
I'LL BE AT MY LIMIT TOO...
SOON,
THERE WON'T BE ANYTHING THAT I CAN DO.
SOON,
FINALLY...
YOU WILL UTILIZE THE CLICKING SOUND AS EFFI-CIENTLY AS POSSI-BLE.
IN ORDER TO CAMOUFLAGE ANY SUSPICIOUS ACTIONS AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE,
NO, YOU WON'T CLICK ANYMORE, BUT INSTEAD YOU'LL USE THE "SAFE STRATEGY", CHECKING AT 1 MINUTE.
AND IF YOU DIDN'T GET THE HANDKERCHIEF IN THESE 2 TRIES, THEN IN THE LAST PART...
START
1ST CLICK
TSK
START
FIRST, YOU'LL TRY TO DETECT THE HANDKERCHIEF AT ABOUT 10 SECONDS TO UNCOVER AN "INSTANT DROP".
TSK
1 MIN-UTE
THE 2ND TIME WILL BE AROUND 30 SECONDS.
START

Image 57



Image 58


NOW, THE 5TH ROUND, 1ST HALF,
WILL
START AT 8:34:00 AM.
IT'S ALRIGHT...
IT'S GOING TO BE 8:34:00 AM.
BEEP
BEEP
BEEP
MY INTENTIONS YET.
HE HASN'T READ...

Image 59



Image 60


EVEN THOUGH THEY SAW NOTHING,
THEY CAN TELL
THROUGH HIS VOICE.
HIS SHEER HAPPINESS
HAS TOLD THEM EVERYTHING...
FUFU
FU...
IT HAS GIVEN THEM THE PICTURE...
KU HA HA HA HA
HAAAA HAHA...
EVERY-ONE
IN THE ROOM
LOST THEIR VOICE...

Image 61


I'LL BE THE ONE TO DIE FIRST.
IF YOU CAN'T DIE BEFORE YAKOU DEPLETES ALL HIS ENERGY,
YOU CAN'T EXPECT TO BE REVIVED ANYMORE.

Image 62


IN THAT CASE, I HAVE TO AT LEAST
ACCUMU-LATE HIS NEAR-DEATH DRUG...
I'VE BEEN HAD...
FROM THE START, THIS GUY NEVER PLANNED TO DIE...
THEN...
LEADER
DIDN'T DO A "INSTANT CHECK"!!
TSK
!
TSK

Image 63


FAILED.
"CHECK"
.....
ANOTHER...
REVER-
SAL...
IT'S NOT NECESSARY FOR ME ANYMORE...
YOU CAN DIE TWO OR THREE TIMES AS YOU WISH.
NOR RESETTING THE CYLINDER.
NEITHER DYING

Image 64

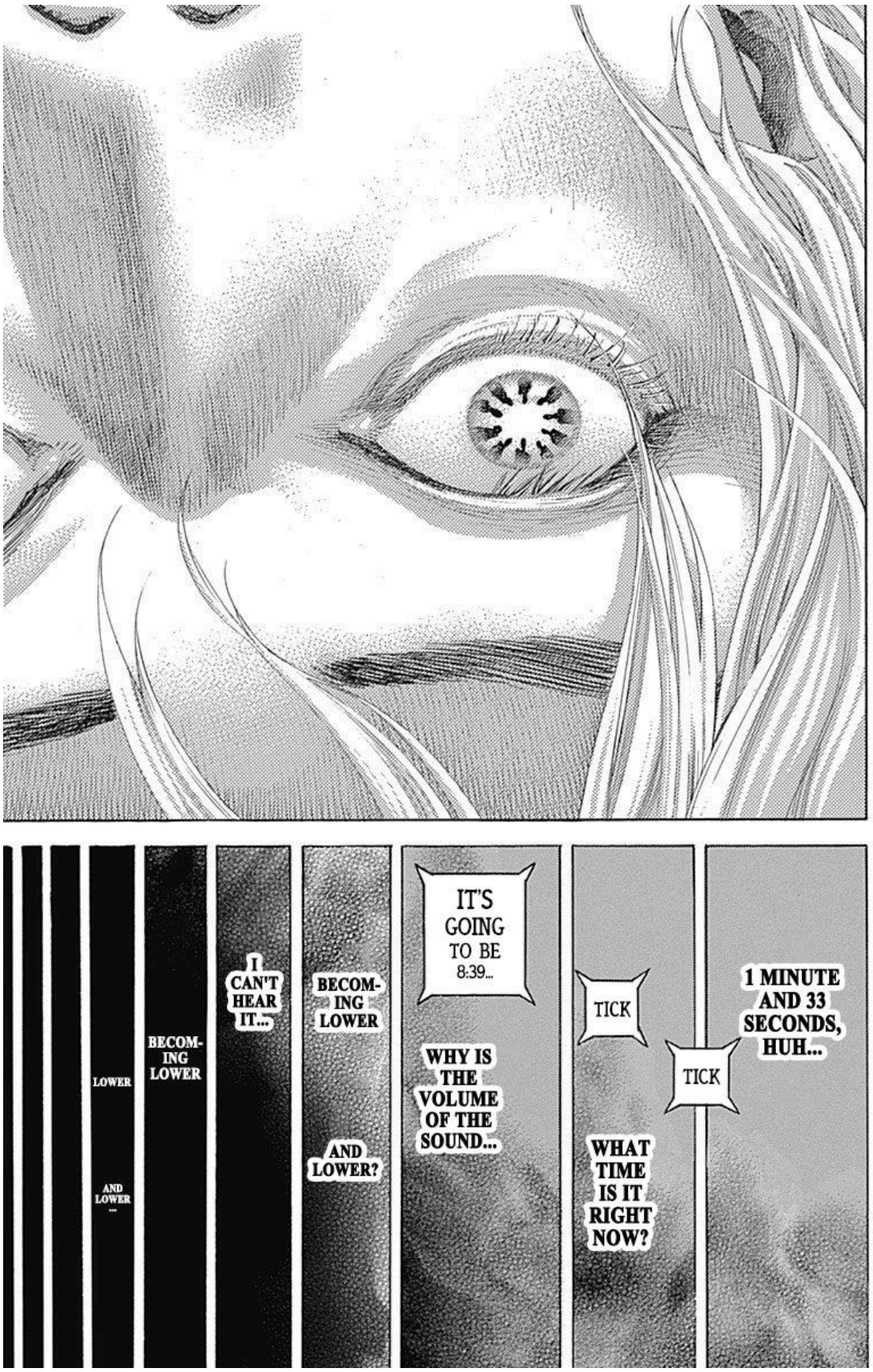

LOWER
AND LOWER...
BECOM-ING LOWER
I CAN'T HEAR IT...
BECOM-ING LOWER
AND LOWER?
IT'S GOING TO BE 8:39...
WHY IS THE VOLUME OF THE SOUND...
TICK
TICK
WHAT TIME IS IT RIGHT NOW?
1 MINUTE AND 33 SECONDS, HUH...

Image 65


YOU DIED.
THE DEATH WILL LAST FOR 1 MINUTE AND 33 SECONDS.
IF YOU CAN'T REACH THE CORRECT ROUTE BEFORE THE TIME RUNS OUT,
はちの土
?
WERE THE CONTENTS OF THIS BOOK LIKE THIS BEFORE?
YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO REVIVE.
YOU WILL THEN DIE FOR REAL.
BECAUSE YOUR BODY IS WEAK.
I WAS HOPING TO SEE THE SANZU RIVER BEFORE...
WELL,

Image 66



Image 67

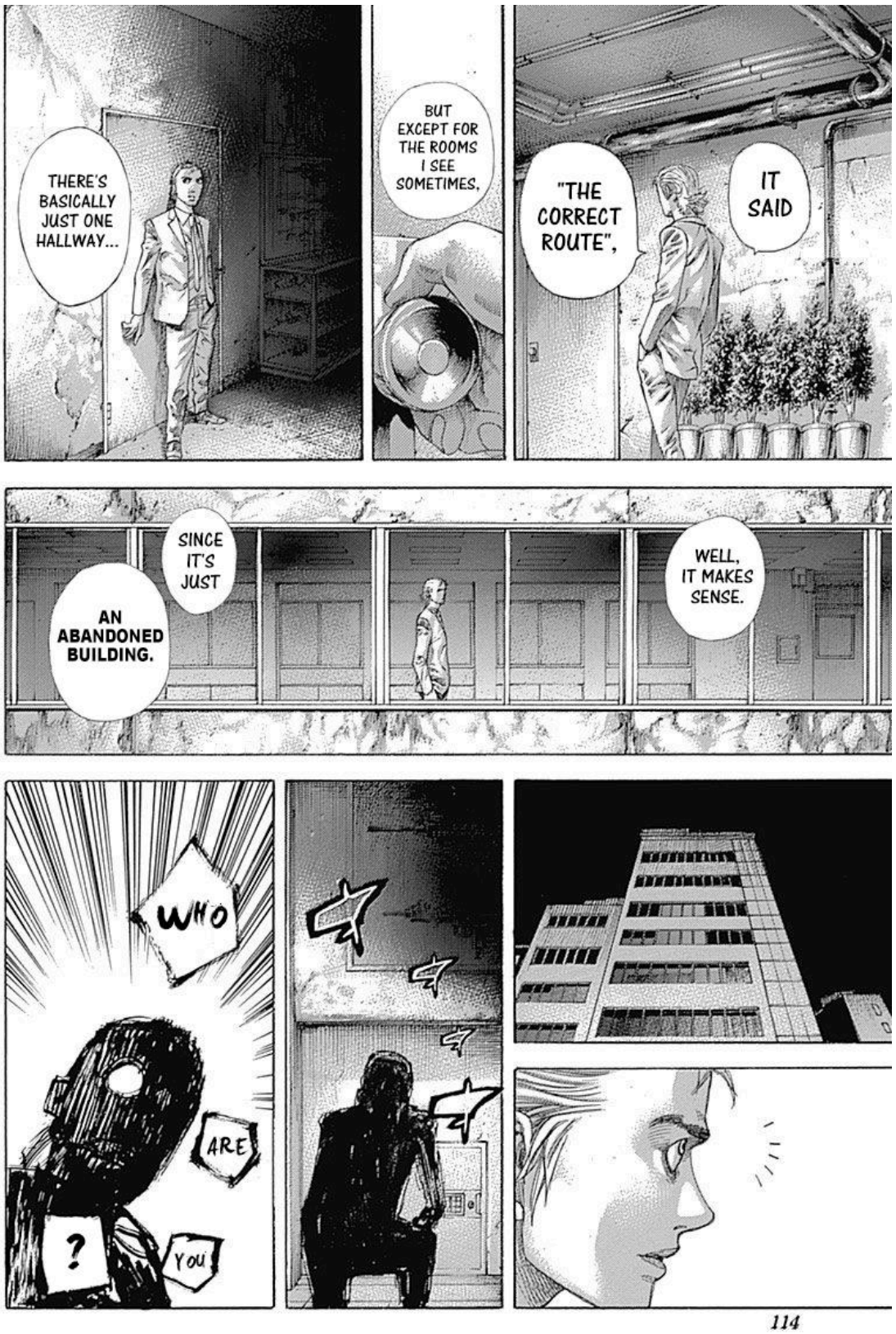

THERE'S BASICALLY JUST ONE HALLWAY...
BUT EXCEPT FOR THE ROOMS I SEE SOMETIMES,
"THE CORRECT ROUTE",
IT SAID
SINCE IT'S JUST
AN ABANDONED BUILDING.
WELL, IT MAKES SENSE.
WHO
ARE
?
YOU

Image 68


WAS IT JUST ME?
NO
.....
ONE...
THIS... THIS BOOK!
!!
DID I GO BACK TO WHERE I WAS BEFORE?
HUH? WHY IS THE BOOK HERE?
!
YOU MUSTN'T BE FOUND BY THIS GUY.
IT'S DIFFERENT !!
THE CONTENTS OF THIS BOOK ARE DIFFERENT FROM THE PREVIOUS ONE!!
IT'S ANOTHER BOOK!
IF HE FINDS YOU, YOU'LL DIE.
IT'S YOUR DESTINY.

Image 69

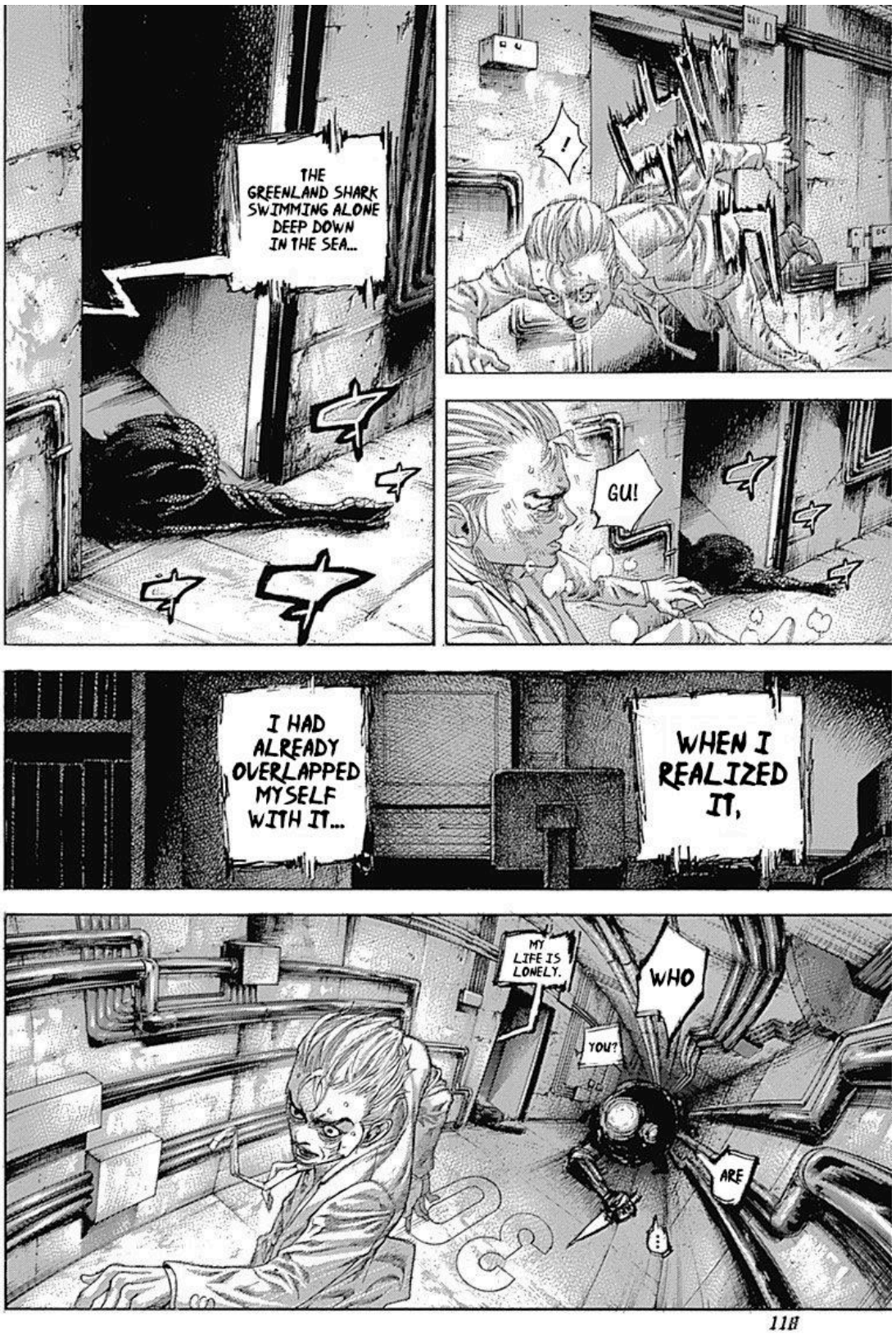

THE GREENLAND SHARK SWIMMING ALONE DEEP DOWN IN THE SEA...
!
GU!
I HAD ALREADY OVERLAPPED MYSELF WITH IT...
WHEN I REALIZED IT,
MY LIFE IS LONELY.
WHO
YOU?
ARE

Image 70



Image 71


WHAT SHOULD I BE THINKING NOW?
WOULD USOGUI BE THINKING THAT I...
SHOULD SOON NEED TO TAKE A BREATHER?
IN THAT CASE, HE WILL TARGET AN ACCUMU-LATION,
AND DROP THE HANDKER-CHIEF IN A QUICK MANNER.
BUT, IF HE THINKS I'LL USE ANOTHER DANGEROUS CHECK,
HE WILL NOT DROP THE HANDKERCHIEF.
HE WILL
BAIT ME INTO
SELF DESTRUC-TING.

Image 72



Image 73


I DON'T WANT YOU TO DIE...
BECAUSE I LOVE YOU...
TSK
TSK
WHETHER HE IS EXTRAORDINARY OR NOT.
SO, JUST LIKE YOUR KARMA, I WILL
BET MY EVERYTHING.
THE REASON, WHICH WILL BE BROUGHT TO THIS WORLD BY THIS CHILD, WILL KILL YOU IN THE FUTURE.
YOU WILL DIE EARLIER THAN THE AGE WHICH I FORESAW.
YOU'LL DIE, BECAUSE OF THIS CHILD...

Image 74



Image 75


THE AURA OF HIS DETERMI-NATION DOES NOT DIMINISH ONE BIT.....
I CAN'T LET GO OF IT.
THE HANDKER-CHIEF WILL BE FOUND FOR SURE.
ONCE I DROP THE HANDKER-CHIEF,
HE WILL TURN HIS HEAD.
AN OVER-WHELMING PRESSURE.
IT'S THE SAME AS THE 3RD ROUND, 1ST HALF.

Image 76


TICK
TICK
IT'S GOING TO BE 8:45:20 AM.
HE INTUITIVELY THINKS IT'S AN APPLE.
FOR INSTANCE, IF A PERSON SEES SOMETHING ROUND AND RED,
YOUR BRAIN WILL COMPLETE THE IMAGE BY ITSELF, IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH YOUR WILL... IT'S A CURSE THAT CAN'T BE RESISTED.
PEOPLE THINK THEY CAN CONTROL THEIR BRAINS OR THEIR REFLEXES, BUT THEY ACTUALLY CAN'T.
TICK
TICK
IT'S GOING TO BE 8:45:10 AM.
IT'S GOING TO BE 8:45:30 AM.
TICK
TICK
IT'S GOING TO BE 8:45:40 AM.
HAS CURSED KIRUMA SOUICHI!!
USOGUI
HE'S STILL NOT MOVING ?
THE HANDKER-CHIEF...
WHAT WILL HAPPEN ...?
IF THIS GOES ON
ISN'T HE GOING TO MOVE?
CAN'T HE MOVE?
HE HASN'T MOVED YET.
NOT YET...

Image 77


THE UNNECESSARY THINGS...
I ERASED
HAS THE AWAKENED
HERETICAL BLOODLINE...
TO WEAVE IT TOGETHER,
OR THE OPPO-SITE...
...
IF THE "WEDGE" IS IN YOUR WAY,
JUST FORGET IT.
THE SQUANDERED TIME IS
60 SECONDS!!
ED TIME
THE CYLINDER THAT USOGUI JUST RESET
MADARAME BAKU
ED TIM
WAS FILLED WITH 60 SECONDS OF NEAR-DEATH DRUG IN ONE SHOT!!
KIRUMA SOUICHI
(+60) 1 MIN
HE...
HE DID IT! A FULL ACCUMU-LATION OF 60 SECONDS!!
WHA ....!?
WHA AAAT!?
AT SUCH A MOMENT, HE ACHIEVED A "MAXI-MUM ACCUMU-LATION" !?
60 SECONDS !?

Image 78

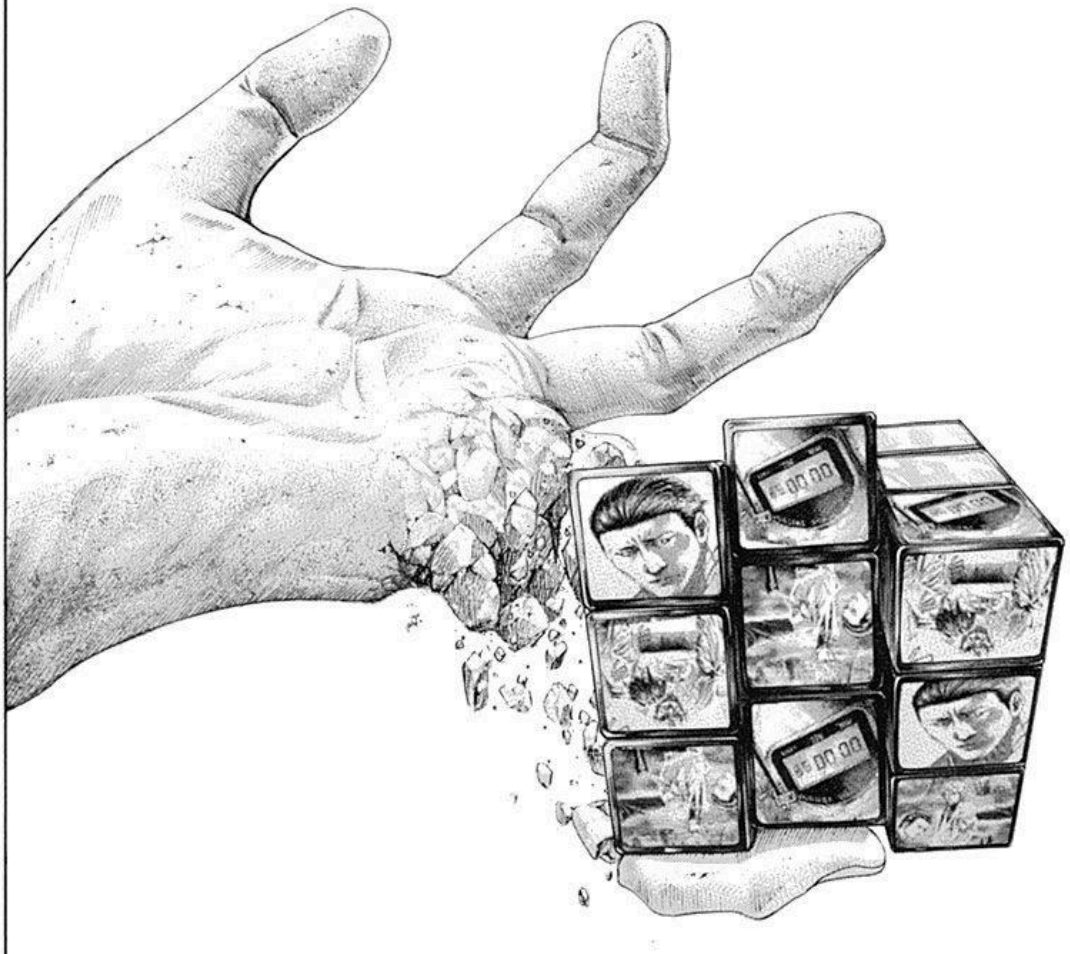


Image 79


I'M JUST SAYING.
BUT,
"WITH A QUIET VOICE".
I WILL WIN... PERFECTLY.
TSK
YOU SPOKE THOSE WORDS TO ME,
IN THE 1ST HALF OF THE 2ND ROUND,
*CH.500, P.11
YOU WANTED TO
DECREASE THE SPEAKING CLOCK'S VOLUME
BY DOING THAT...
BUT WHY?
THERE'S NO ADVANTAGE FOR ME IN DOING THAT?
BUT THERE IS, RIGHT?
!!
AND THEN,
ONE OF THEM ACTUALLY DECREASED THE SPEAKING CLOCK'S VOLUME.
CH.506, P.15
WAIT, STAY SILENT!! I THINK SOMEONE IS TALKING!!
TICK
SHIT, THE SPEAKING CLOCK IS SO LOUD, WE CAN'T HEAR ANY-THING!!
*CH.500, P.12
YOUR OBJECTIVE FROM THE BEGINNING.
THIS WAS

Image 80

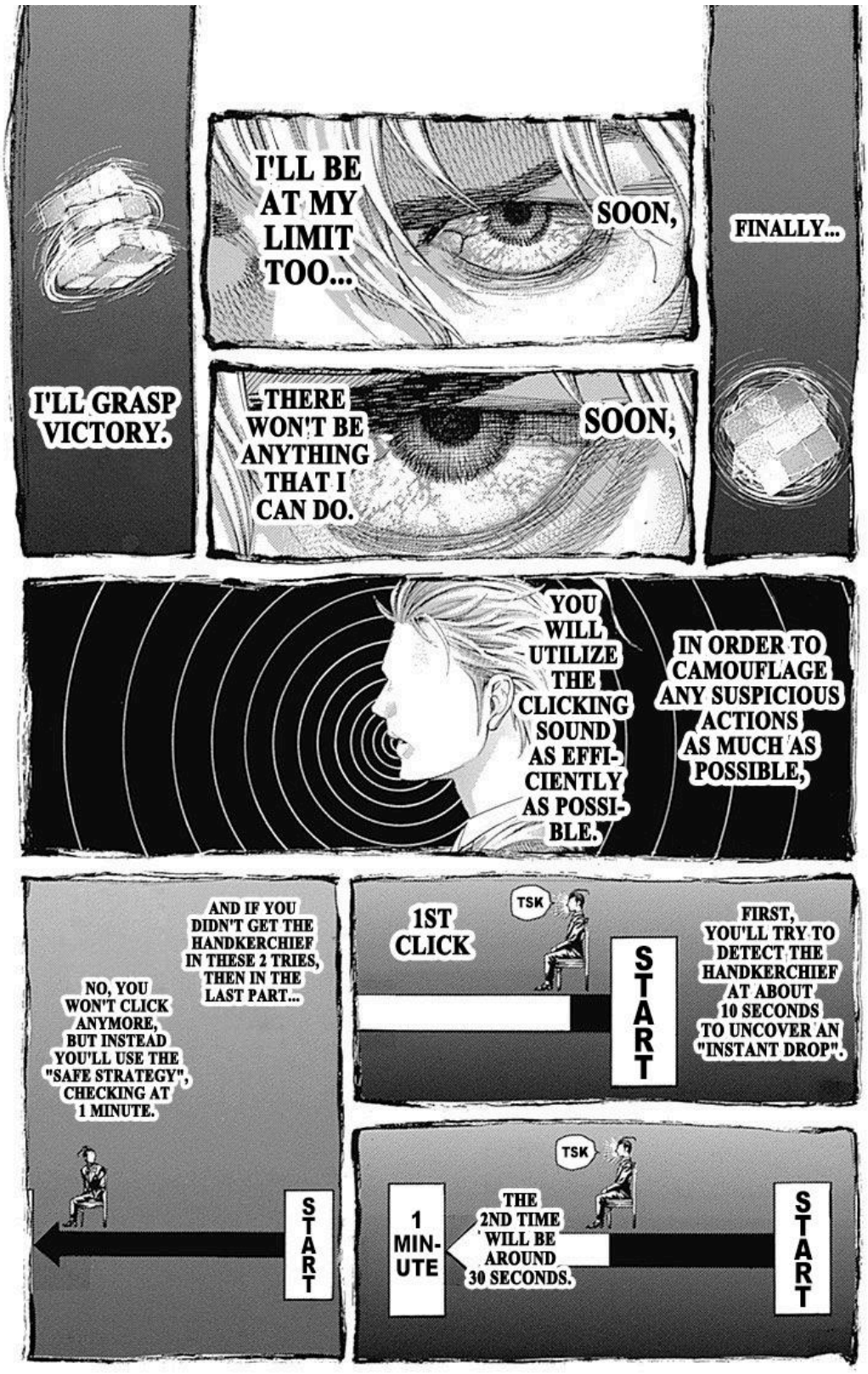

I'LL GRASP VICTORY.
I'LL BE AT MY LIMIT TOO...
SOON,
THERE WON'T BE ANYTHING THAT I CAN DO.
SOON,
FINALLY...
YOU WILL UTILIZE THE CLICKING SOUND AS EFFI-CIENTLY AS POSSI-BLE.
IN ORDER TO CAMOUFLAGE ANY SUSPICIOUS ACTIONS AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE,
AND IF YOU DIDN'T GET THE HANDKERCHIEF IN THESE 2 TRIES, THEN IN THE LAST PART...
NO, YOU WON'T CLICK ANYMORE, BUT INSTEAD YOU'LL USE THE "SAFE STRATEGY", CHECKING AT 1 MINUTE.
START
1ST CLICK
TSK
START
FIRST, YOU'LL TRY TO DETECT THE HANDKERCHIEF AT ABOUT 10 SECONDS TO UNCOVER AN "INSTANT DROP".
TSK
1 MIN-UTE
THE 2ND TIME WILL BE AROUND 30 SECONDS.
START

Image 81


SO YOU NOTICED
WHAT I HAVE BEEN DOING, MADARAME BAKU...
MAKING ME BELIEVE I HAVE FOUND THE HANDKERCHIEF,
MAKING ME FAIL MY "CHECK",
THROUGH ACTUALLY MAKING ME DISCOVER ANOTHER OBJECT.
...

Image 82


I WON'T LET YOU FIND ANYTHING.
THE OPPOSITE WAY.
YOU
CANNOT DETECT ANYTHING.
I WON'T LET YOU DETECT ANYTHING.
嘘喰い47完
212

Image 83



Image 84


SUCH AS HOW INSANELY DIFFICULT
THE PATH TO ARRIVE AT THE DECISION OF MAKING THAT "INSTANT CHECK" WAS.
THROUGH SUCH A
NARROW THREAD...
THE FACT THAT HE GAMBLED

Image 85


IF IT KEEPS GOING A LITTLE MORE,
I'LL BE ABLE TO SEE THAT...
I WILL BE ABLE
TO SEE IT.
THAT
SECRET.
THAT
...THAT
ANSWER.
AND
I AM CHANGING.
RIGHT NOW,
I AM TURNING INTO SOME-THING.

Image 86


55
SECONDS.
THE
SQUANDERED
TIME IS...
U...
KU...
COMP-
LETELY.
CHANGED
"THE TIME
UNTIL
NOW"
"THAT
MOMENT"
28

Image 87


YOU ARE ALREADY DEAD.
ゴゴゴゴ
BUT, THOSE AREN'T THE MOST IMPORTANT MOTIVATIONS.
A DESIRE FOR THRILLS, A HUNGER FOR VICTORY... ANYTHING OTHER THAN THOSE...
DO YOU REMEMBER THE WORDS YOU SPOKE AT THAT TIME?
SWINGING FROM JOY TO SORROW,
BETTING YOUR ENTIRE LIFE, WHICH PALES IN COMPARISON TO THE ECSTASY OF THAT ONE MOMENT,
DESTROYING YOURSELF,
THAT'S WHAT A GAMBLER IS.
EVEN HARDER TO SAVE.
YOU'RE DIFFERENT FROM THE MASSES.
SO, WHAT NOW?
IN THIS MOMENT RIGHT NOW,
DO YOU FEEL THRILLED?
IS NOT NECESSARY IN GAMBLING!

Image 88


"C"
KIRUMA
SOICHI
8TH
ROUND,
2ND
HALF
"D"
MADA-
RAME
BAKU
IT WILL
ALL BE
DECIDED
IN THIS
"MOMENT".
"CHECK"
.....

Image 89


NEAR-DEATH
1 2 3 4 5
KIRUMA SOUICHI
1 MIN (PENALTY)
1 MIN
34 SEC
THE 1 MINUTE PENALTY,
IT'S A TOTAL OF 2 MINUTES AND 34 SECONDS!!
I HAVE NO REGRETS.
THIS WAS A DECISION MADE AFTER DELIBERATION.
WHEN FACING "USOGUI", MADARAME BAKU,
A SMALL SHADOW WHICH WASN'T NOTICED BY ANYONE
...
HAS BEEN ILLUMINATED.
HE WENT TOO FAR!! HE MISJUDGED THE TIMING TO USE THE "SAFE STRATEGY"!!
A SELF DESTRUC-TION!!
A "FAILED CHECK"...
4Cm
4Cm
SHORT INTERVAL,
DURING THIS

Image 90


ANDERED TIME
ACCUMULATION
MADARAME BAKU
KIRUMA SOUICHI
AND RESET HIS CYLINDER AGAIN!!
AND MADE THE GAP BETWEEN USOGUI AND HIMSELF EVEN BIGGER!?
IN SUCH A SITUATION, HE STILL CHOSE TO BEAR THE MASSIVE RISK OF NEAR-DEATH,
THE MORE ADVANTAGEOUS THE SITUATION IS, THE MORE YOUR "INSTINCT" WANTS TO KEEP IT THAT WAY.
IF THIS RESET SUCCEEDS, IT WILL BE A NIGHTMARE FOR USOGUI!!
KIRUMA "BROKE" THAT INSTINCT!! HE DIDN'T MAKE A MISTAKE!!

Image 91


AND THAT WAY OF THINKING MATCHES PERFECTLY WITH LOTS OF FACTS...
WHERE DOES CONSCIOUSNESS COME FROM AND WHERE DOES IT GO?
EVEN CON-SCIOUS-NESSES WILL GO SOMEWHERE AFTER THEY DIE, INSTEAD OF DISAPPEARING...
EVERYTHING TRANSFORMS AND WANDERS IN THIS WORLD WITH THE SAME MASS.
INSTEAD OF DISAPPEARING,
JUST LIKE HOW WATER BECOMES WATER VAPOR
FU FU FU
HOW STUPID.
IT'S NOTHING BUT A DEVIL'S PROOF.
I CAN SAY "INSISTING THAT SOMETHING DOES NOT EXIST" IS UNSCIENTIFIC AND ILLOGICAL.
OUR BRAIN WILL BLINDLY AND SIMPLY FIND THE MOST SUITABLE ANSWER.
IN ORDER TO AVOID BURDEN,
WHEN PEOPLE ARE TRYING TO COMPREHEND THE UNKNOWN OR THINGS THAT ARE HARD TO UNDERSTAND, THEY'LL INADVERTENTLY STOP THEMSELVES.
THE "COGNITIVE LOAD".
IT'S CALLED

Image 92


NICE TO MEET YOU, SOUICHI.
WHAT A SHAME~
HAVE YOU NOTICED IT YET?
THE CRISIS
THAT IS AWAITING AHEAD.

Image 93

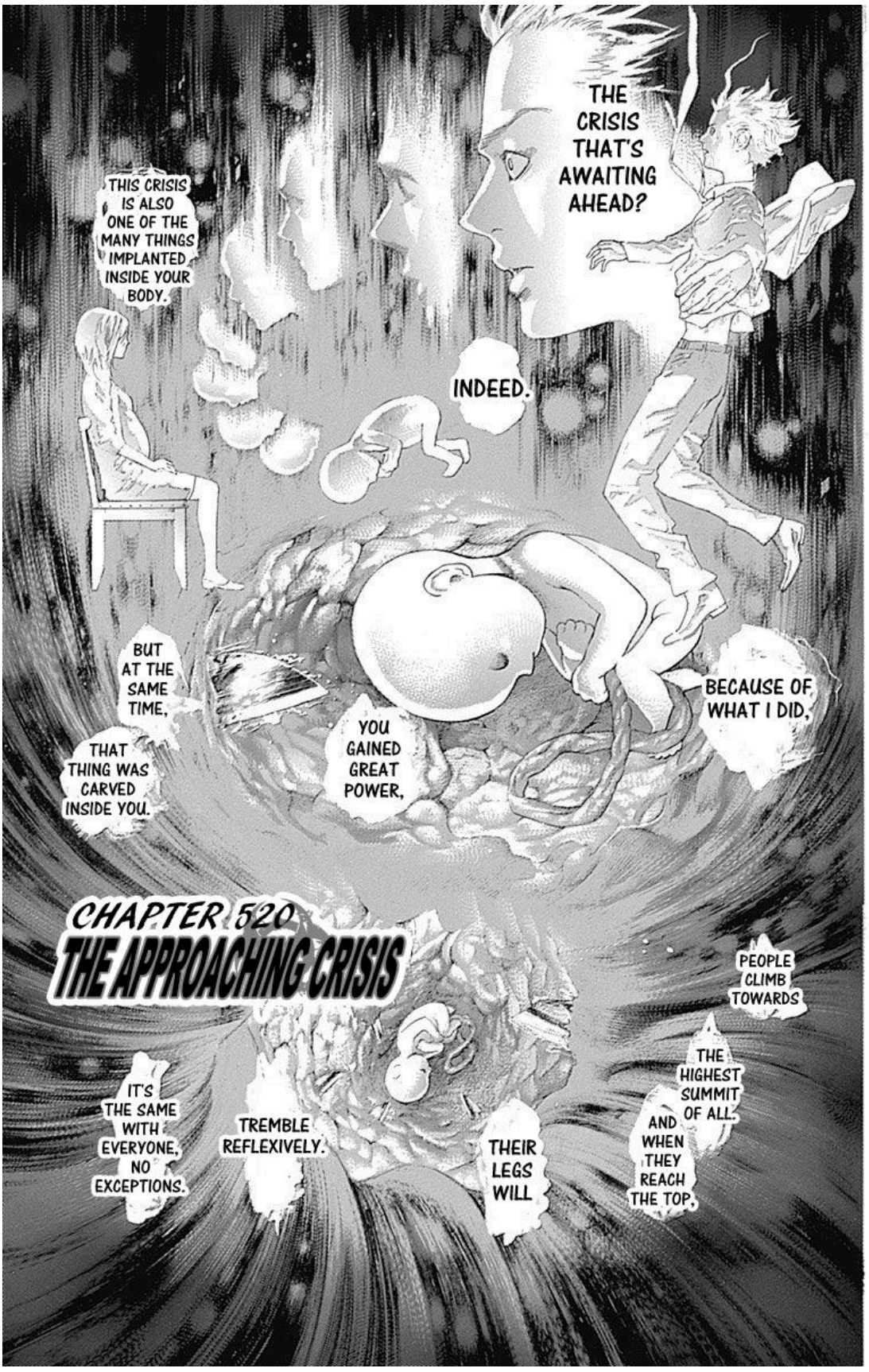

THE CRISIS THAT'S AWAITING AHEAD?
THIS CRISIS IS ALSO ONE OF THE MANY THINGS IMPLANTED INSIDE YOUR BODY.
INDEED.
BUT AT THE SAME TIME,
THAT THING WAS CARVED INSIDE YOU.
YOU GAINED GREAT POWER,
BECAUSE OF WHAT I DID,
CHAPTER 520
THE APPROACHING CRISIS
PEOPLE CLIMB TOWARDS
THE HIGHEST SUMMIT OF ALL.
AND WHEN THEY REACH THE TOP,
IT'S THE SAME WITH EVERYONE, NO EXCEPTIONS.
TREMBLE REFLEXIVELY.
THEIR LEGS WILL

Image 94


THIS PLACE IS...
HAL, AREN'T YOU CURIOUS ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ME
AND THAT GUY IN THE BLACK SUIT OR THOSE MEN?

Image 95


WITHOUT LETTING ANYONE NOTICE.
PLEASE COME TO MY PLACE
IF YOU FEEL THAT YOU'VE LOST YOUR MEMORY AGAIN SOME DAY, AND IF I'M NOT AROUND YOU AT THAT TIME,
AND THE LOCATION OF THE MEETING, INTO THE BOOK.
I'LL PUT THE MESSAGE, WHICH INCLUDES THE TIME
WHY WOULD I...
EBA...
OPEN
COME TO THIS PLACE AGAIN...?

Image 96


FEELS LONG, DOESN'T IT?
THE PASSING OF TIME FEELS DIFFERENT DEPENDING ON THE SITUATION.
JUST NOW, THE TIME BEFORE USOGUI TURNED HIS HEAD...

Image 97

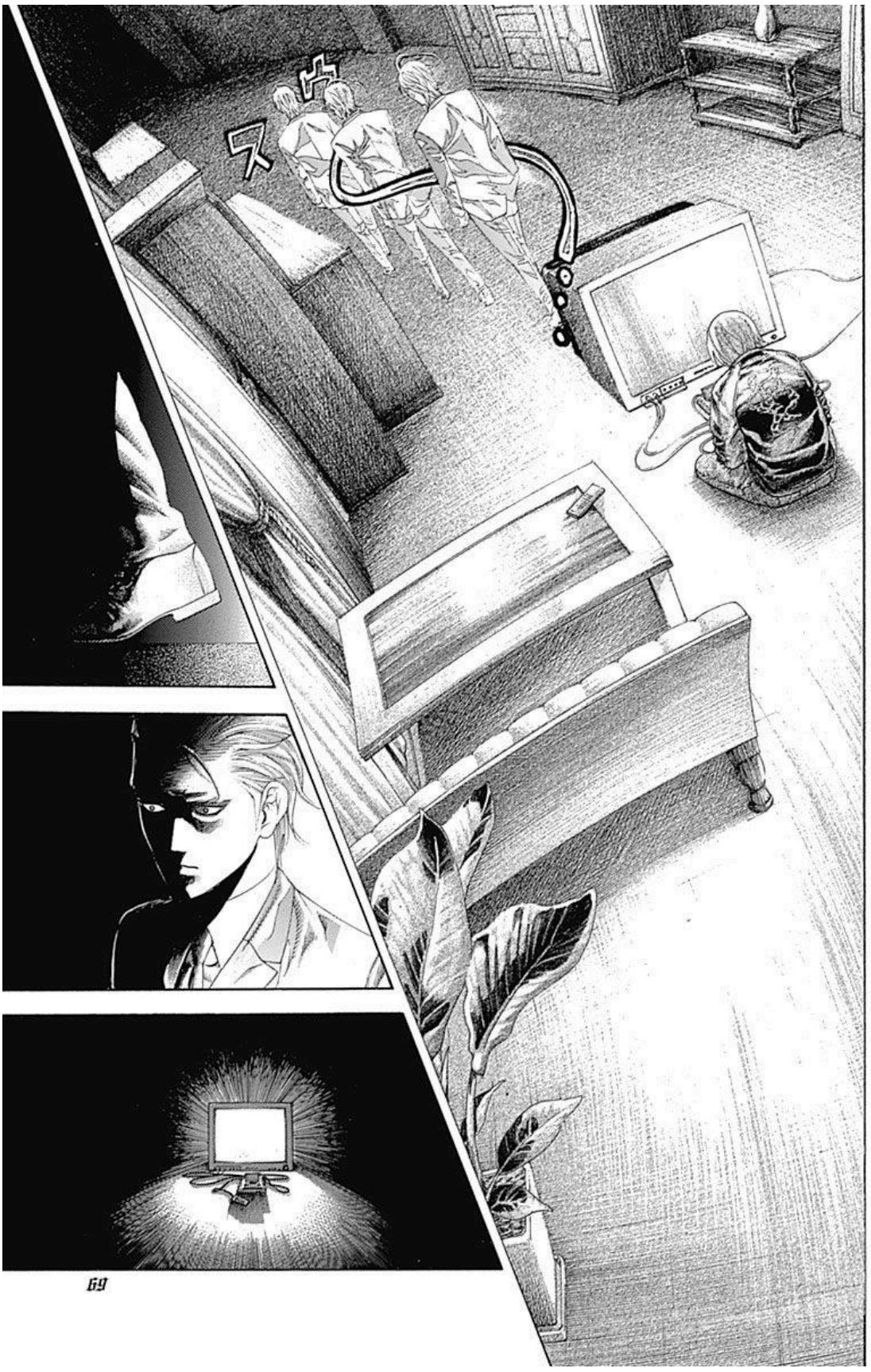


Image 98


YOU
LIAR.
YOU WERE PERFECT...
HOWEVER, PEOPLE CAN'T KEEP THEIR IDEAL FORMS FOREVER...

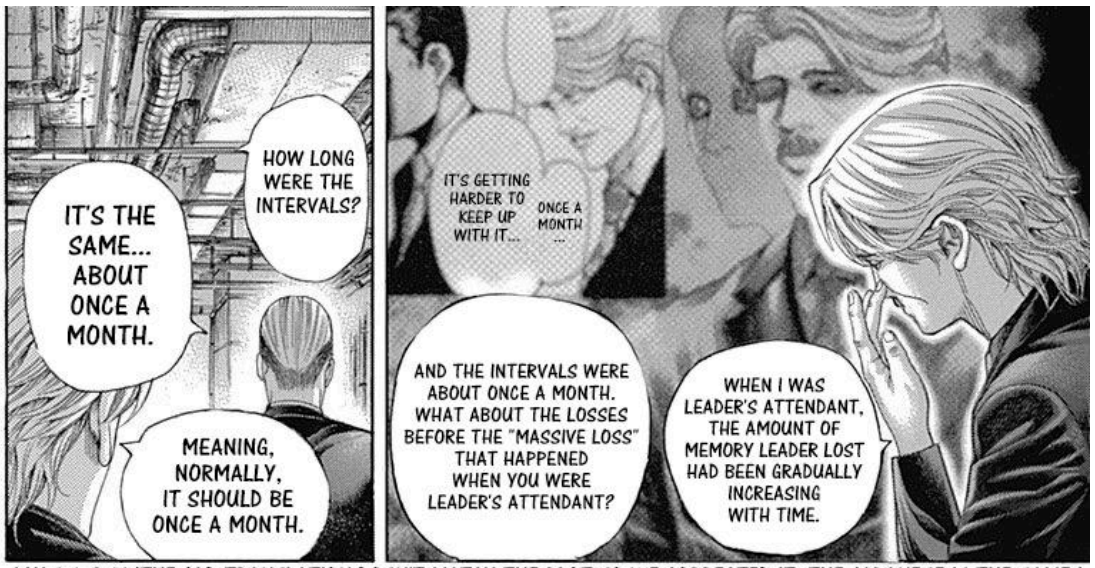
Image 99


NOW,
THE 9TH ROUND, 1ST HALF,
WILL START AT THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF 8:57:00 AM.
5 4 3 2 1
1 MIN 55 SEC
MADARAME BAKU
ACCUMULATION
5 4 3 2 1
KUREMA SOUICHI
WITH THIS, IN TERMS OF THE ACCUMULATION, IT'S 1 MINUTE AND 55 SECONDS VS 0 SECONDS.
IT'S OVER...
UNLESS THERE'S A MIRACLE.
YOU'VE REACHED THE ANSWER, BUT YOU'VE RUN OUT OF TIME.
THAT WAS CAUSED BY ANOTHER EFFECT, THAT WAS CAUSED BY ANOTHER.
IS CAUSED BY ANOTHER EFFECT,
EVERY EFFECT
MIRACLES DO NOT HAPPEN.

Image 100


AND THAT'S THE CRISIS AWAITING AHEAD OF YOU.
YOU ARE GOING TO LOSE IT.
ANNOUNCE-MENT?
9TH ROUND?
...
I WILL JUDGE THIS AS LEADER'S LOSS.
IF THE GAME CAN'T BE CARRIED ON,
...

Image 101



*CH.64, P.16(THE OLD TRANSLATION DOSN'T MATCH THE PLOT SO WE CORRECTED IT, THE JAPANESE IS THE SAME.)



*CH270, P.11



78

Image 102


PERFECT
PERFECT...
I CANNOT KEEP ON BEING...
...THE PERFECT ME I WISH TO BE...
I WAS...
I WAS SO CLOSE...
JUST...
A LITTLE MORE...
THE TIME
I CAN STAY PERFECT IS LIMITED .....
I'M RUN-NING OUT OF TIME ...
I'LL END UP LOSING IF THIS GOES ON...
CHAPTER 521
TO THAT PLACE

Image 103

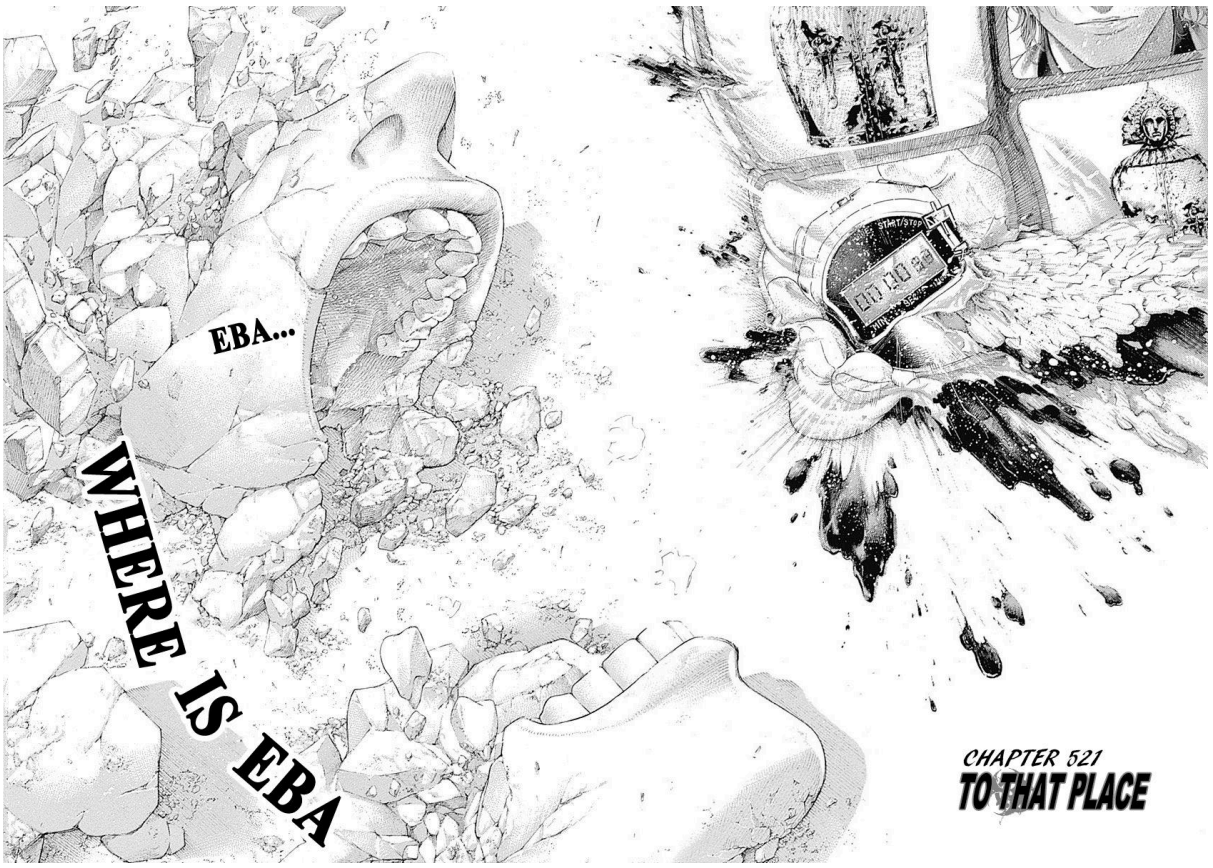


Image 104


THEN, I WILL INJECT THE NEAR-DEATH DRUG.
...YES?
THE DURATION IS 2 MINUTES AND 34 SECONDS.
REFEREE YAKOU...
I AM RELIEVED.
THAT WOULD NOT BE AN ISSUE AT ALL.
NO,
FROM A REFEREE'S POINT OF VIEW, WOULD THAT BE AN ACTION THAT WOULD INFLUENCE THE RESULT OF THIS MATCH?
AND REMIND ME OF EVERYTHING THAT HAS HAPPENED IN THIS GAME UNTIL NOW,
IF YOU EXPLAIN TO ME THE RULES OF THIS SURPASSING THE LEADER,

Image 105

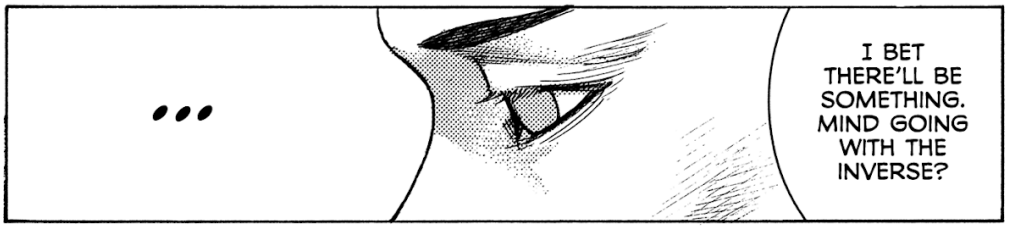


Image 106



Image 107


WHAT ABOUT BETTING ON IF THERE'LL BE ANY AIR TRAFFIC PASSING OVER THIS AREA? WILL ANYTHING SHOW UP IN THE NEXT HALF HOUR OR NOT?
HOW DOES THAT SOUND?


...
I BET THERE'LL BE SOMETHING. MIND GOING WITH THE INVERSE?

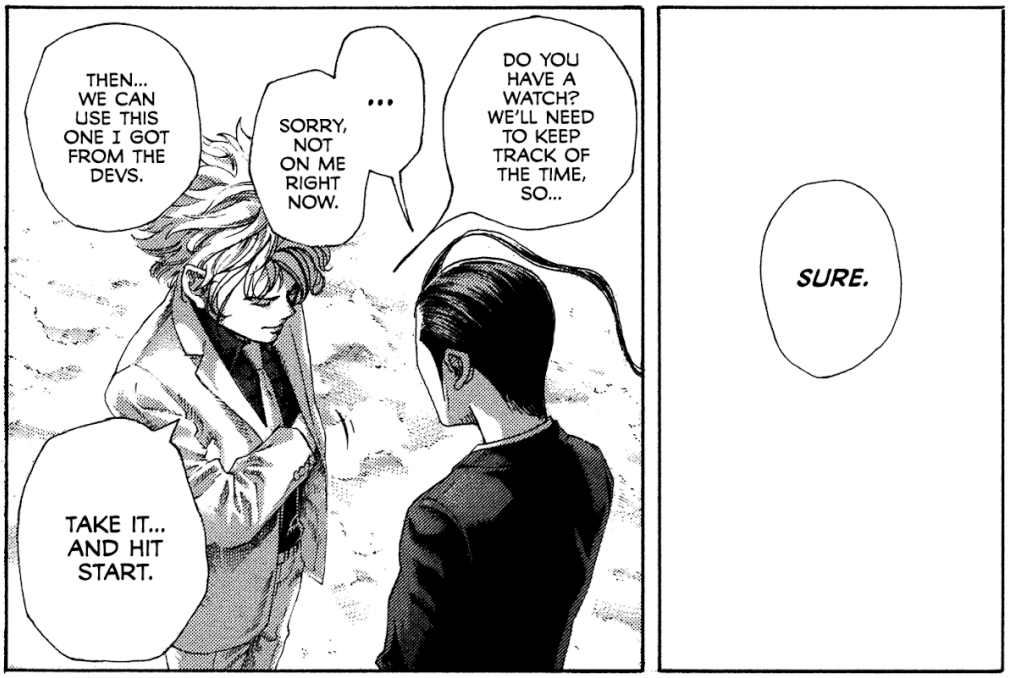

THEN... WE CAN USE THIS ONE I GOT FROM THE DEVS.
...
SORRY, NOT ON ME RIGHT NOW.
DO YOU HAVE A WATCH? WE'LL NEED TO KEEP TRACK OF THE TIME, SO...
TAKE IT... AND HIT START.
SURE.

Image 108


BET EVERYTHING YOU HAVE, RIGHT?
YOU SAID YOU'LL
BONDS AND CONNEC-TIONS?
YES.
THE FOURTH ONE IS "BONDS".
BONDS ARE NECESSARY TO OBTAIN "LUCK", "SKILL", AND "POWER".
THAT WOULD ALSO INCLUDE
BONDS AND CONNECTIONS.

Image 109

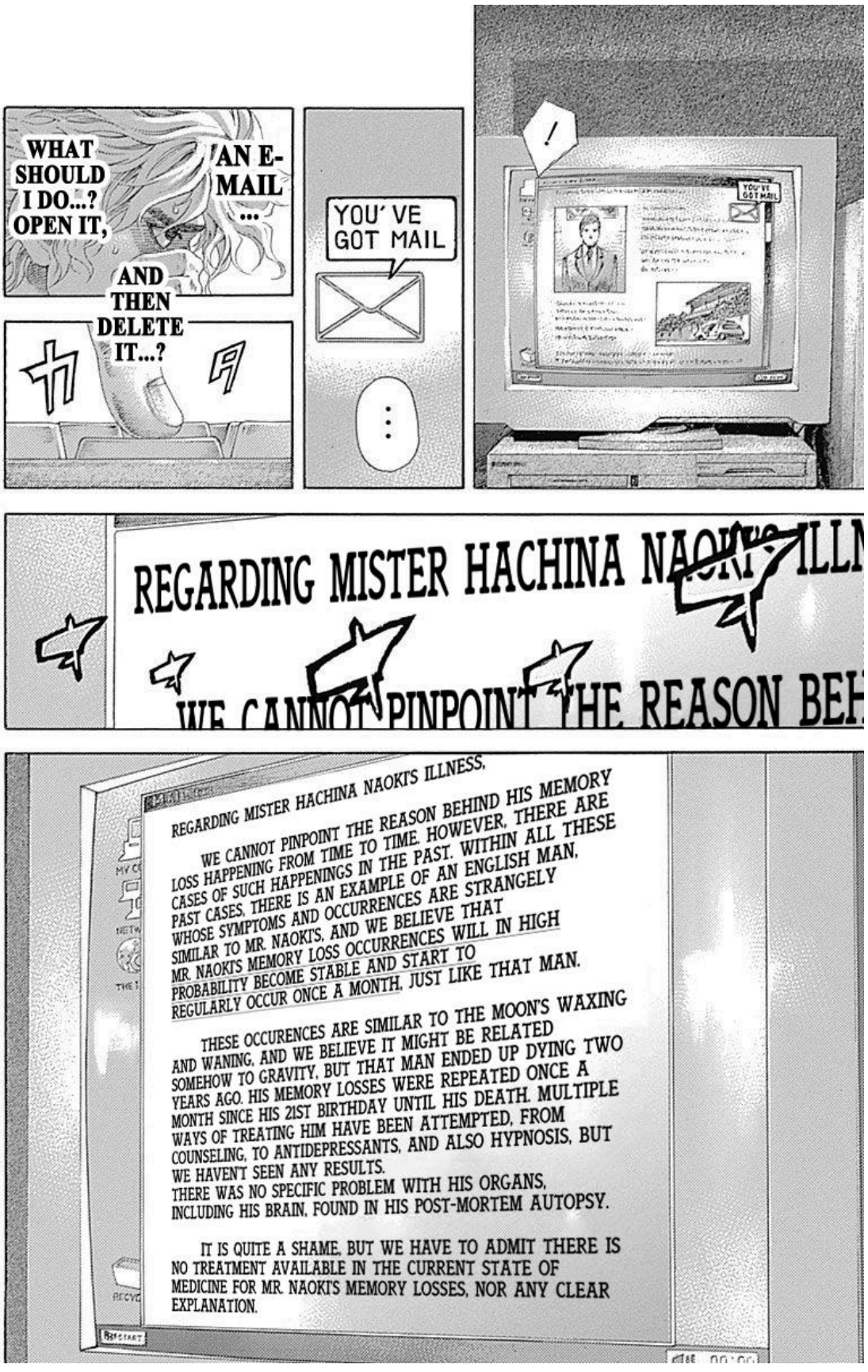

WHAT SHOULD I DO...? OPEN IT,
AN E-MAIL ...
AND THEN DELETE IT...?
YOU' VE GOT MAIL
!
YOU'VE GOT MAIL
REGARDING MISTER HACHINA NAOKI'S ILLN
WE CANNOT PINPOINT THE REASON BEH
REGARDING MISTER HACHINA NAOKI'S ILLNESS,
WE CANNOT PINPOINT THE REASON BEHIND HIS MEMORY LOSS HAPPENING FROM TIME TO TIME. HOWEVER, THERE ARE CASES OF SUCH HAPPENINGS IN THE PAST. WITHIN ALL THESE PAST CASES, THERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF AN ENGLISH MAN, WHOSE SYMPTOMS AND OCCURRENCES ARE STRANGELY SIMILAR TO MR. NAOKI'S, AND WE BELIEVE THAT MR. NAOKI'S MEMORY LOSS OCCURRENCES WILL IN HIGH PROBABILITY BECOME STABLE AND START TO REGULARLY OCCUR ONCE A MONTH, JUST LIKE THAT MAN.
THESE OCCURENCES ARE SIMILAR TO THE MOON'S WAXING AND WANING, AND WE BELIEVE IT MIGHT BE RELATED SOMEHOW TO GRAVITY. BUT THAT MAN ENDED UP DYING TWO YEARS AGO. HIS MEMORY LOSSES WERE REPEATED ONCE A MONTH SINCE HIS 21ST BIRTHDAY UNTIL HIS DEATH. MULTIPLE WAYS OF TREATING HIM HAVE BEEN ATTEMPTED, FROM COUNSELING, TO ANTIDEPRESSANTS, AND ALSO HYPNOSIS, BUT WE HAVENT SEEN ANY RESULTS.
THERE WAS NO SPECIFIC PROBLEM WITH HIS ORGANS, INCLUDING HIS BRAIN, FOUND IN HIS POST-MORTEM AUTOPSY.
IT IS QUITE A SHAME, BUT WE HAVE TO ADMIT THERE IS NO TREATMENT AVAILABLE IN THE CURRENT STATE OF MEDICINE FOR MR. NAOKI'S MEMORY LOSSES, NOR ANY CLEAR EXPLANATION.

Image 110


I DROPPED IT!!
INSTEAD OF WAITING FOR HIM TO SELF DESTRUCT...
WHY DID I DO THAT...?
I KNOW...
YES...
HE WON'T TURN AROUND UNTIL 1 MINUTE...
I...
I DROPPED IT!!

Image 111

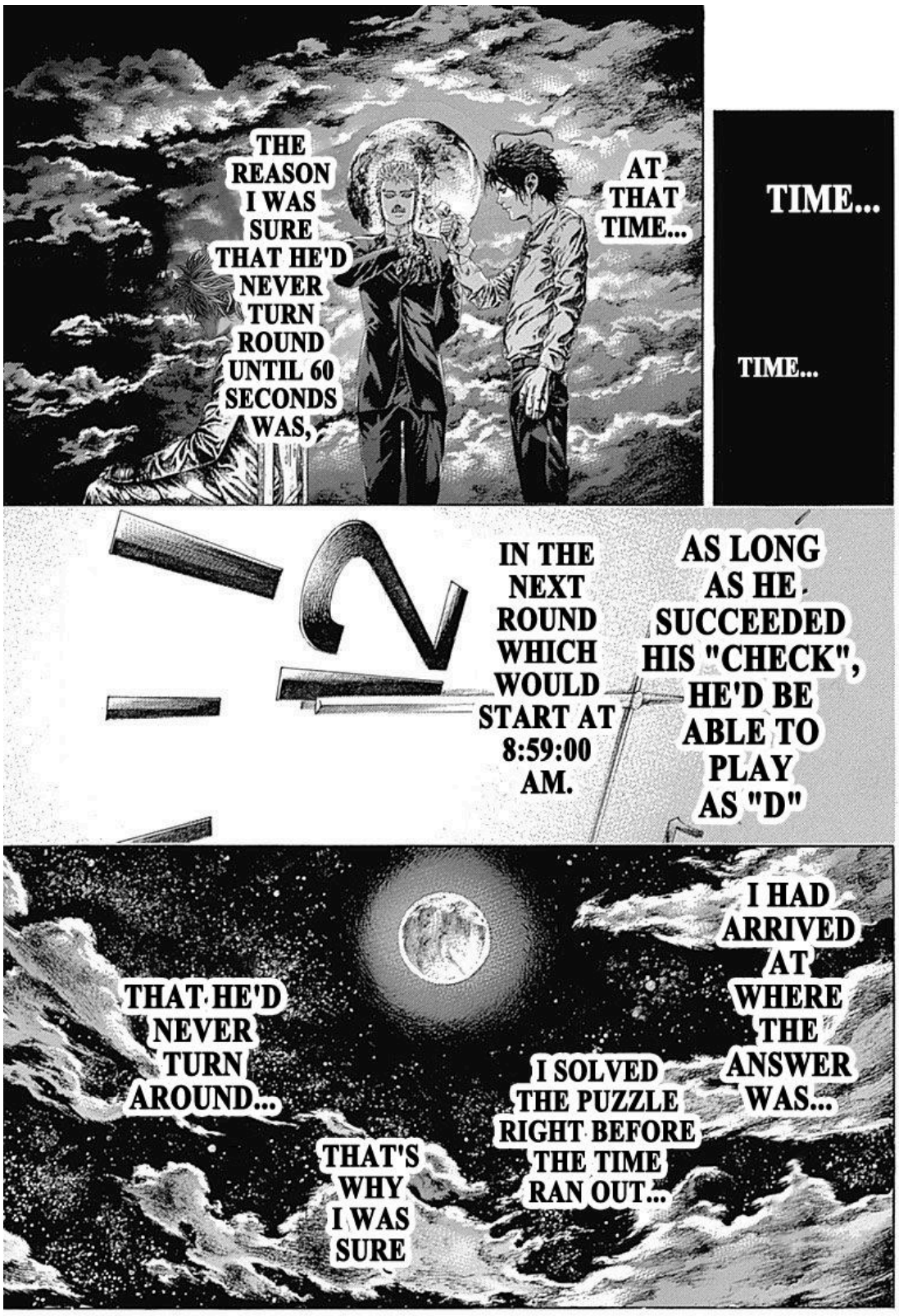

THE REASON I WAS SURE THAT HE'D NEVER TURN ROUND UNTIL 60 SECONDS WAS,
AT THAT TIME...
TIME...
TIME...
IN THE NEXT ROUND WHICH WOULD START AT 8:59:00 AM.
AS LONG AS HE SUCCEEDED HIS "CHECK", HE'D BE ABLE TO PLAY AS "D"
I HAD ARRIVED AT WHERE THE ANSWER WAS...
I SOLVED THE PUZZLE RIGHT BEFORE THE TIME RAN OUT...
THAT'S WHY I WAS SURE
THAT HE'D NEVER TURN AROUND...

Image 112


I'VE
KNOWN FOR A WHILE...
I KNEW IT.
SOME-HOW
IT'S ALMOST LIKE
IT COULD BE
THE SMOKE SIGNALS THAT HE HAD BEEN WAITING FOR TO START HIS COUNTER-ATTACK!!
IF USOGUI TURNS AROUND NOW, IT WILL BE AN "INSTANT CHECK"!!

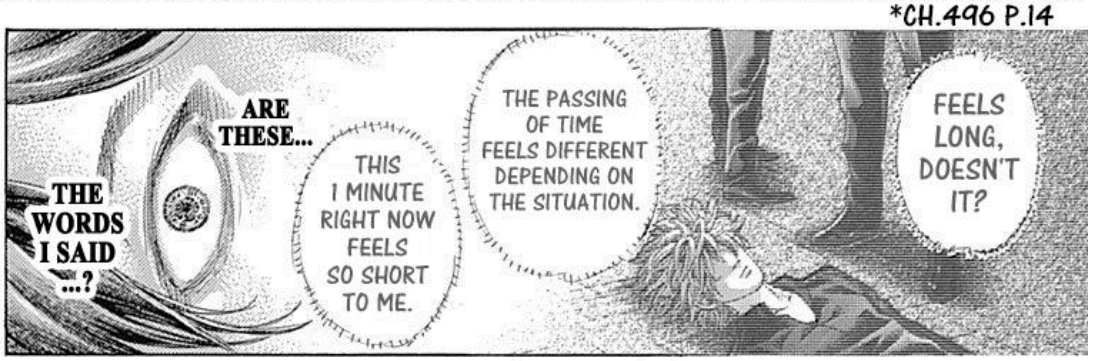
Image 113



Image 114



*CH.496 P.14



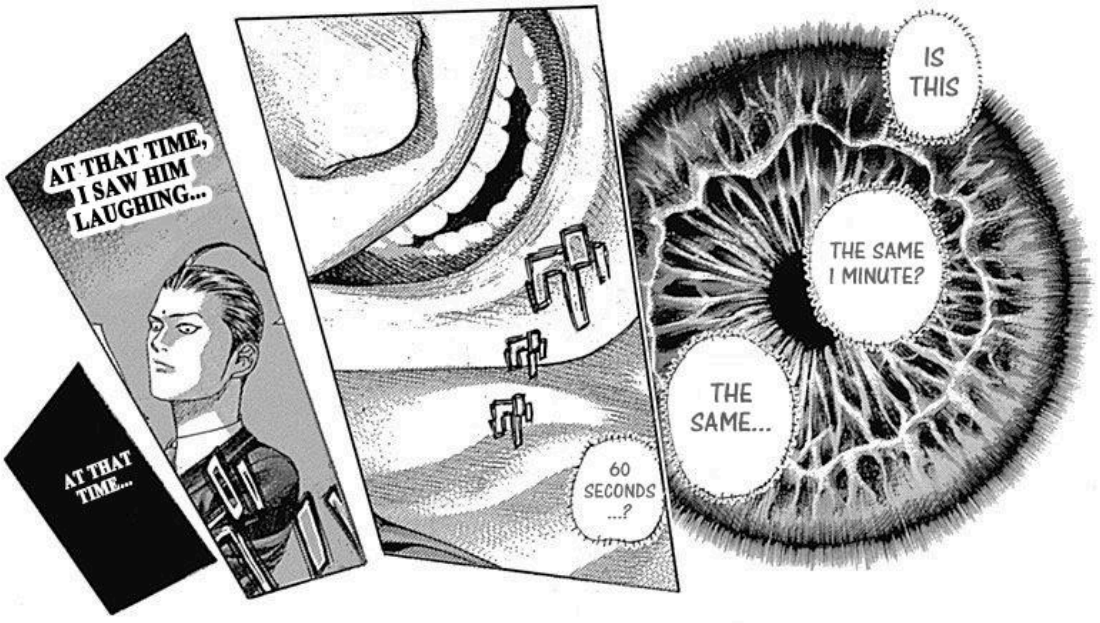


Image 115


FROM THEN ON, USOGUI ONLY NEEDED TO CONSUME ANOTHER "5 MINUTES" BY FAILING HIS "CHECK" AT SOME POINT.
HE WOULD EASILY ENTER...
BAKU, NEAR-DEATH
BAKU, NEAR-DEATH
SOUICHI, NEAR-DEATH
THE LEAP SECOND ROUTE!!
WHAT I SAW AT THAT TIME WAS THIS.
UNBELIEV-ABLE.
THE GATE OF THE LEAP SECOND ROUTE WAS OPENED IN FRONT OF HIS EYES.
IT WAS LIKE BEING GUIDED BY SOMEONE.
213

Image 116


HE MADE IT ON TIME.
THEREFORE, THE NEXT ROUND SHOULD BEGIN AT 9:04:00 AM.
TICK
TICK
IT'S GOING TO BE 9:03:10 AM.
IT'S 9:03.
BECAUSE THE NEAR-DEATH LASTED FOR 1 MINUTE, THIS ROUND WILL BE 5 MINUTES LONG.
HE HAS DIED FOR 5 MINUTES IN TOTAL, RIGHT...?
TO BE PRECISE, IT'S 4 MINUTES AND 58 SECONDS.
IT'S JUST 2 SECONDS! WE CAN IGNORE SUCH A SMALL DEVIATION!!
IT...
IT CAN ONLY BE CALLED A MIRACLE ...!!
IT DIDN'T REACH 5 MINUTES, BUT THE GAP IS MERELY
2 SECONDS.

Image 117


THIS IS WHAT YOU FEARED THE MOST.
YOU FAILED TO
FILL UP MY ACCUMU-LATION ENOUGH.
TSK
TSK
TWO SECONDS OF DEVIATION.
THERE WERE
BEHIND THESE TWO SECONDS ?
WHAT'S THE REASON
I SEIZED THOSE TWO SECONDS AND SURVIVED.
211

Image 118


AND THE 7TH ROUND,
IN THE 6TH ROUND,
THESE TWO SECONDS WOULD HAVE NEVER EXISTED IF I DIDN'T LIMIT THE ACCUMULATION TO 9 SECONDS.
...
HIDES INSIDE STRATEGIES, SCHEMES, AND PEOPLE'S OPENINGS,
GAMBLER WHO
LISTEN,
IT'S DESTINY !!
WHAT CAUSED THIS?
THE REAL BATTLE STARTS NOW.
AS YOU WISH.
YOU WANT TO HAVE A DEATH MATCH WHILE YOUR LIFE IS HANGING ON A THREAD, DON'T YOU?
NOW... BET YOUR LIFE TO TURN AROUND.

Image 119


REALITY,
IT WAS
FOR THE THREE OF THEM ONLY...
FOR THE TWO OF THEM...
NO.
BAKU-SAMA...
DON'T...
NO,
LEADER.
I KNOW.
HAL,
HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN
THE FINAL WORDS OF THE PREVIOUS LEADER?
KAKEROU MATCH
SURPASSING THE LEADER
"DROP THE HANDKERCHIEF"
REFEREE
KAKEROU REFEREE NO.0
YAKOU HIKOICHI
WINNER
"USO GUI"
MADARAME BAKU
GAIN
CLUB KAKEROU AND THE TITLE OF THE 22ND LEADER
"LEADER"
KIRUMA SOUICHI
LOSER
COULD NOT CONTINUE THE GAME DUE TO HIM DYING
Image 120


NO...
I SAW WHAT I WANTED TO SEE...
WHAT DID I JUST SEE? I REMEMBER I SAW LEADER...
WHAT...
WHAT WAS THAT ...?
WAS I SCARED ...?
WHAT I DIDN'T WANT TO HAPPEN...
IT'S THE FEAR THAT I DIDN'T WANT TO SEE.....

Image 121

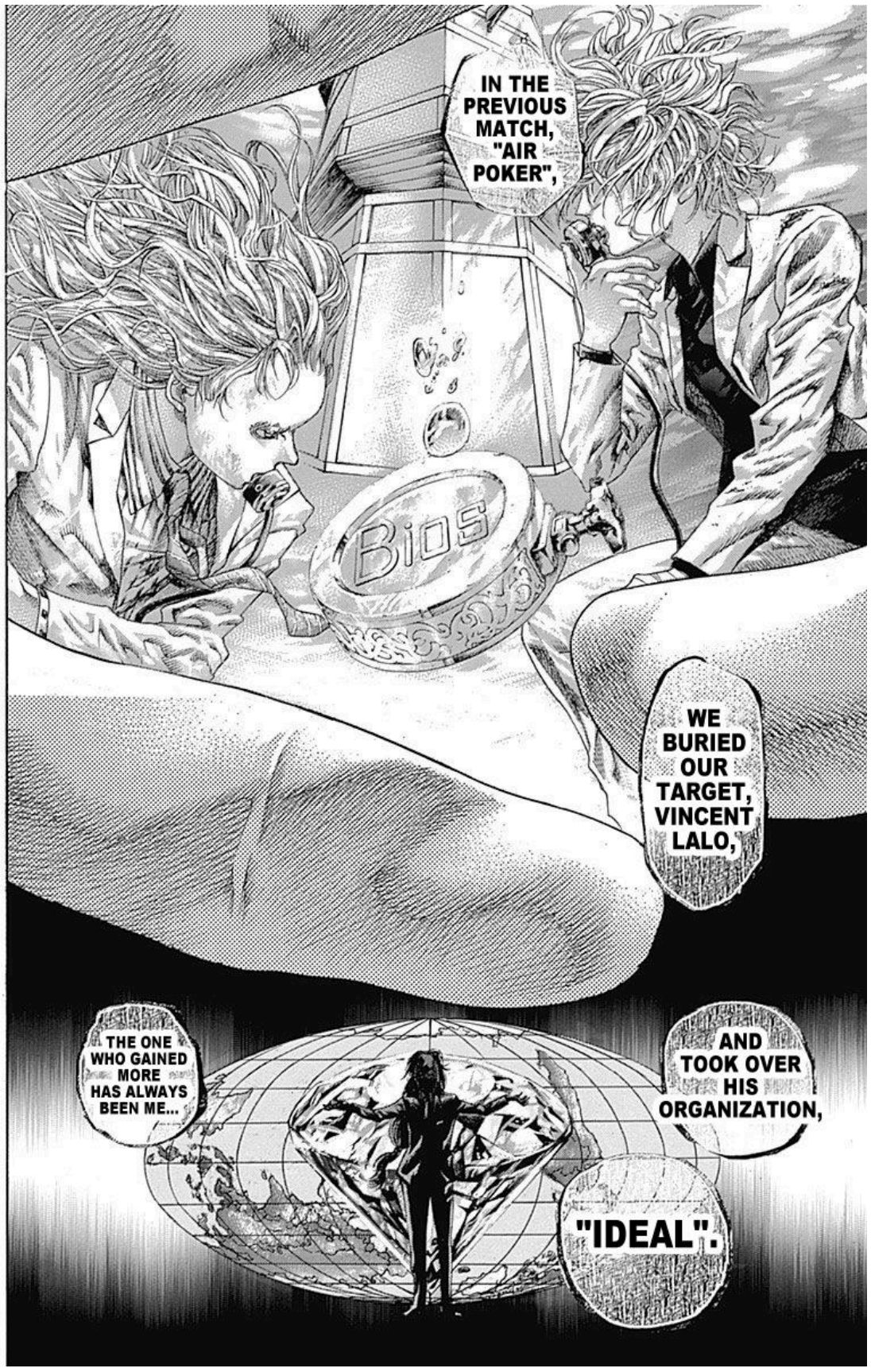
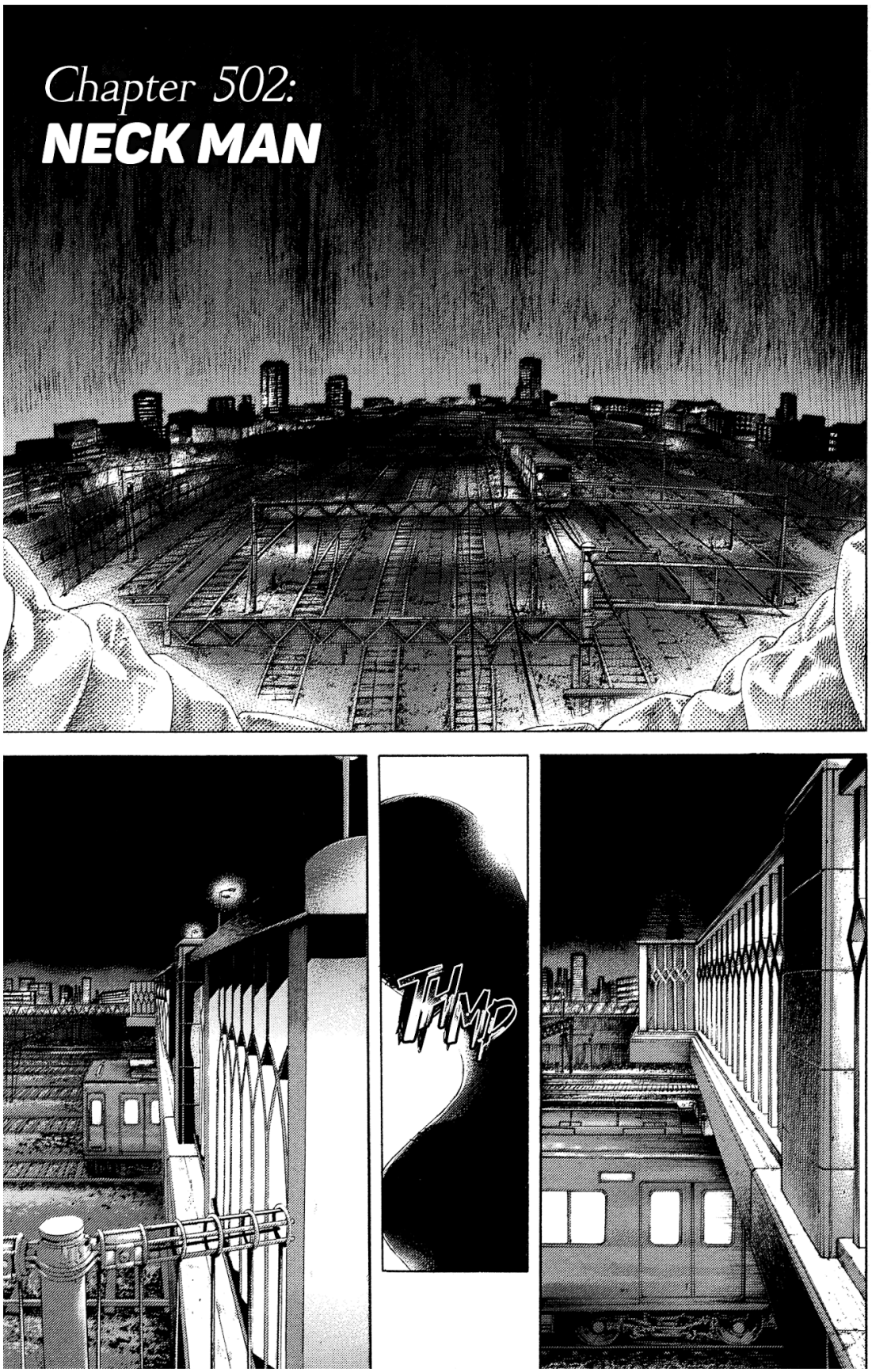

IN THE PREVIOUS MATCH, "AIR POKER",
Bios
WE BURIED OUR TARGET, VINCENT LALO,
AND TOOK OVER HIS ORGANIZATION,
THE ONE WHO GAINED MORE HAS ALWAYS BEEN ME...
"IDEAL".

Image 122


I'M GRATEFUL TO YOU.
SO,
DON'T LOOK BACK.
HE... HE'S TELLING HIM TO LOSE BY EXCEEDING THE TIME LIMIT...
TICK
TICK
ON THE GROUND.
THERE'S NOTHING.
DON'T LOOK BACK.

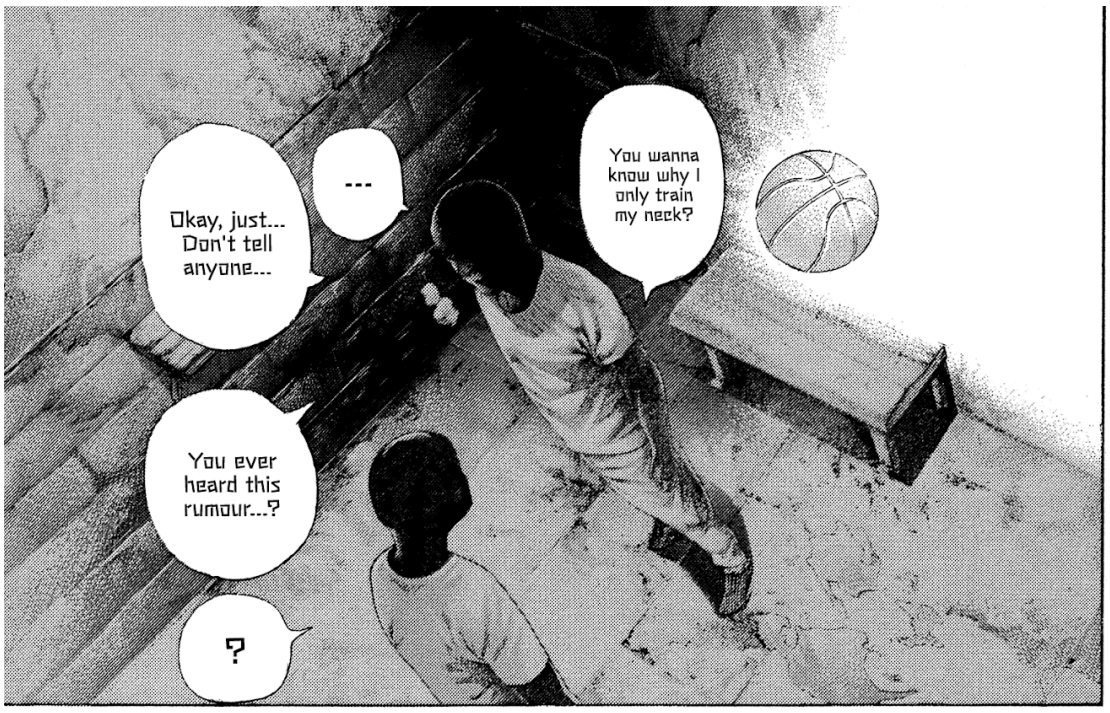
Explanation of Leader's First Near-Death Dream + Some Proof That Hal Figured Out Leap Second Early



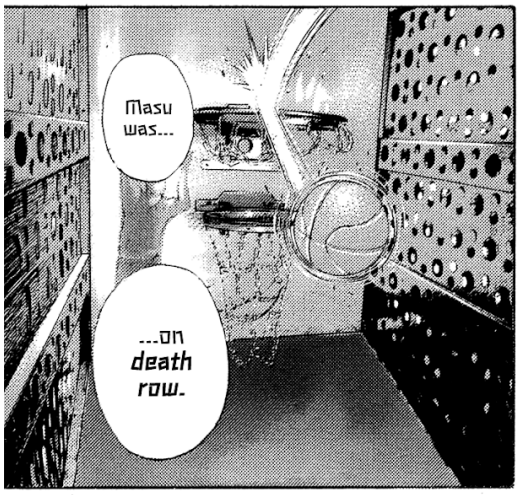
In the first image, we revisit Hal's perspective of when he first tried to imitate Baku's feat of jumping off the sidewalk and onto an incoming vehicle. This was one of Hal's first attempts to

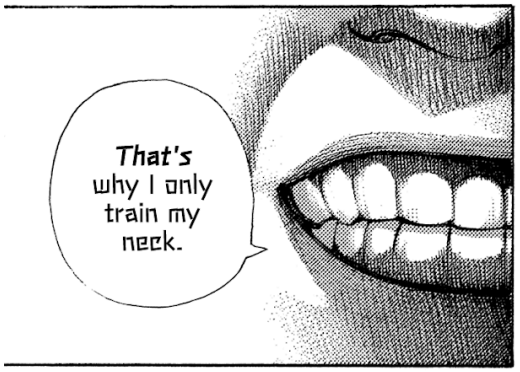
throw away his responsibilities and become a gambler like Baku, with the theme of Hal gambling being a core theme throughout this dream. The dark silhouette we see is Yakou performing CPR on Hal (as represented by the ‘thmp’), foreshadowing his failed check.


Huh?
Don't hassle me, just leave me out of it...
Hal... You're a guest in my home, you know ...?
I just remembered, I've got something to do...
Hal...
10月
I think that was his name, at least.
Right...
Masu Kijuuin?
Is that even a real name?
Doesn't matter...
So, Masu answered the question...


You wanna know why I only train my neck?

Okay, just... Don't tell anyone...
You ever heard this rumour...?
?


Masu was...
...on *death row.*


That's why I only train my neck.


In other words, you can ***start afresh.*** So long as you ***survive...***


The death penalty in this country... is carried out by hanging.
If you manage not to die...
...after being hanged...
...the execution is deemed as complete.
So, you'll live on as ***a dead man.***


People began to think...
But Masu's neck...
...grew to be as thick as a log through his day-to-day training.
No one bought into it.
They all just thought...
...you'd die if you were hanged.
"...maybe he..."
"...really can do it..."
That tale is just a rumour. Masu will die...
No, not at all.
Then... why the intrigue about how he ended up?
Not at all?
What happened to Masu?
And then?
Crap...
What do you think? Think he stood a chance?



In the next few images, Baku tells the story of the Neck Man to Hal. Note however, that this dream is a warped retelling of Hal's memories; dream Baku and dream Hal both represent different aspects of Hal himself. Dream Baku represents the side of Hal that wants to

become a gambler, who wants to ignore the friendship trap, while Dream Hal is Hal's rational side the leans away from gambling, choosing to try and avoid the friendship trap and warning Hal about it. The entire dream is essentially a reflection on how Hal tried to turn into Baku in the past, and how he is doing the same during STL by making his gamble of opening the Leap Second route to Baku.

The most important part of this story though, is Hal's curiosity over whether Masu survived the ‘execution' or not. As Baku says, why ask if he survived if you claim to already know the answer? This is because Hal is enamoured by the concept of gambling; just like how he was attracted to Baku's devilishness in reality. Note that this ‘execution' represents Hal's gamble with Fukurou; Hal wants to survive and live on as a ‘dead man’ with a fresh start as Hal.

The gamble was literally referred to as an ‘execution by shooting’ during Air Poker, and given the contents of the dream, this idea lines up nicely. But gradually, Hal begins to figure out the truth behind all of this.



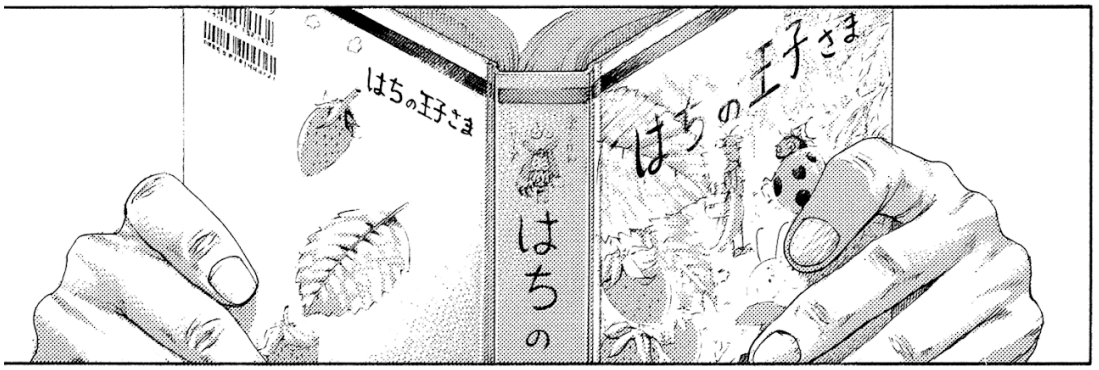
You're being too cocky.
Can you *really* say they're more likely...?


...take advantage of that fondness.
I think you can...
I feel as if Fukurou has a ***fondness*** for you... being that you're both gamblers.
If you're intent on fighting ***him***...


In order to beat the bee prince, the rival prince took advantage of their camaraderie to lay a trap.
Yes.
...referencing the fight in the second chapter of "The Bee Prince"?
Are you...

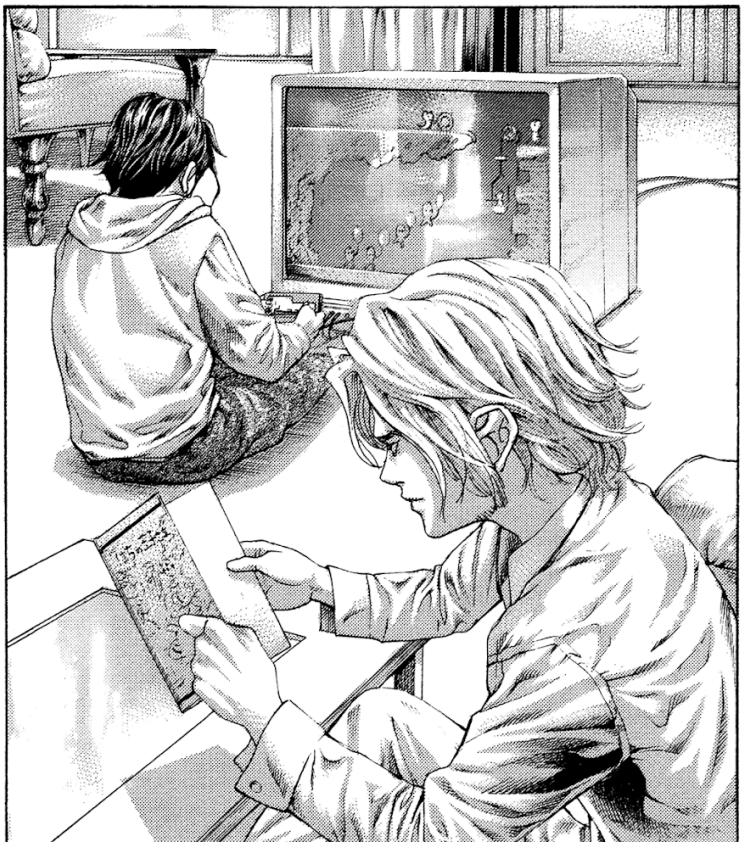

...didn't he still lose anyway? He couldn't return to the third king...
You misunderstood.
Even though the rival prince tried to trick the bee prince...
But... Wait...





Book: The Bee Prince





147

These images are about the Fukurou match, and the truth over whether the Prince Bee lost or won the second battle. We've already established a strong basis in gambling for this

dream, and now we're finally met with the beginnings of Hal's first life-or-death gamble. For Hal, this was his big opportunity to abandon his responsibilities and become the ‘real Hal', and so by dream Baku offering to let dream Hal watch his gamble with Fukurou, real Hal is basically expressing his fondness for gambling.

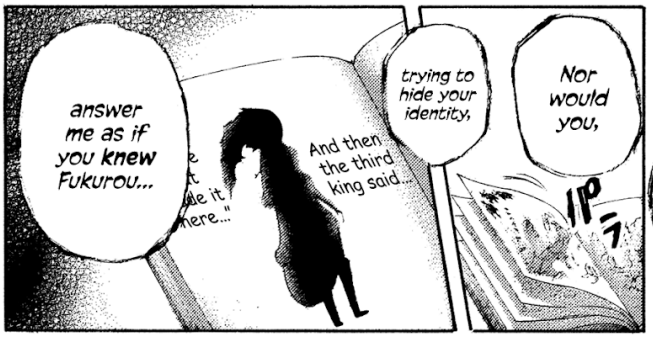
And in the very next panel, dream Hal brings up this ‘fondness’ between gamblers that Baku could take advantage of to win the match, which is a direct reference to the Friendship Trap in the Prince Bee Book Chapter 2. The reason why this is significant, is that it represents his subconscious warning Hal that by gambling, he could be playing into a trap during STL.

The Friendship Trap is Baku's plan to intentionally let Hal know about Leap Second; this would cause an internal conflict within Hal, who wants to both challenge Baku in the gamble, and also avoid manipulation and is aware that it might be a trap. In doing so, Baku actually forces the erasure of Hal and his perspective, portraying Hal as a ‘wedge’ that has to be erased for his mistake in the past, which he only now realises, allowing Baku to basically perfectly conceal Leap Second from Leader, who might have otherwise figured it out and countered it if Hal was still present.

Dream Baku wants to ignore this, saying that the Rival Bee (real Baku) lost the second battle anyways. However, Hal, who actually has memories of reading the Prince Bee book after Baku gave it to him and reading the true outcome of the second duel, corrects him, saying it was in fact the Prince Bee that lost. This basically translates to Hal on the surface being delusional and believing he'll win in his immersion of the gamble, while subconsciously he knows the real outcome due to Baku's action of returning the book to him previously.


Does this game even have a hundred stages...? Weird...
Hold on...
You're that good?!
Bip
Drip
Bip
Drip
You're both the one who asked and the one who answered...
...as well as all that talk about Fukurou... That was you, too.
And you were the one who told the story about the hanging...
It was you...
...who said that the bee prince lost.


...and then you slipped up.


answer me as if you knew Fukurou...
And then the third king said...
trying to hide your identity,
Nor would you,


I'd never ask about Fukurou...
Back then, I had no idea who you really were.


"So, you're the one that made it here..."


...
HE NOW LOOKED LIKE SOMETHING TOTALLY DIFFERENT...
SO?
WANNA KEEP GOING?





Ok, time to get complicated. For now just let me basically say who is being referred to in images 1 and 2, and then explain afterwards. “It was you (Hal) who said that the Prince Bee lost, and you (Hal) were the one who told the story about the hanging… as well as all that

talk about Fukurou, that was you (Hal) too. You're (guess who; it's Hal) both the one who asked and the one who answered… and then you (Past Hal) slipped up. Back then, I (Past Baku) had no idea who you really were, I'd (Past Baku) never ask about Fukurou…nor would you (Past Hal), trying to hide your (Past Hal) identity, answer me (Past Baku) as if you (Past Hal) knew Fukurou."

Once dream Hal finally transforms into Baku, Hal's delusion of being Baku is broken (as seen in the contrast between Baku's devilish appearance and Hal's widening eyes). Dream Hal (now transformed into Baku) points out how Hal (the one who created the entire dream) already knows the true outcome of the second duel (relating to when Baku gave him the Prince Bee book in purpose to make him seek out the Arizuka Building), was enamoured by the story of the hanging that Baku told in the past, and obsessed over the Fukurou match after he heard about it from Baku. Hal was both the one who asked and the one who answered, meaning both dream Hal and dream Baku both played a narrative orchestrated by Hal and his subconscious, which was trying to guide him towards the truth. And then he 'slipped up'.

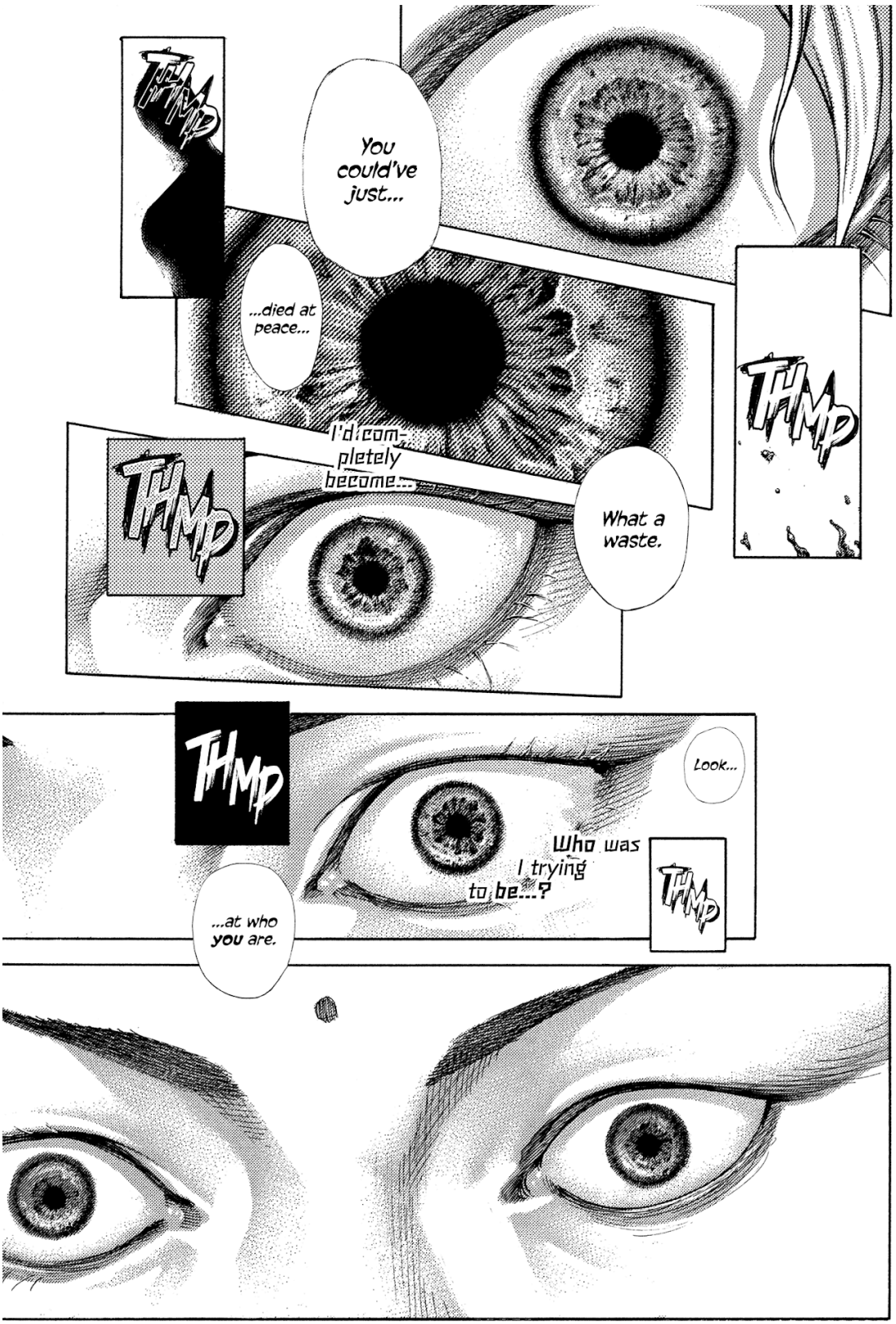
There are two things this could mean: either it references Hal's failure during the Fukurou match, or the fact that by becoming enamoured by Baku, Hal had accidentally led him towards discovering his memory loss after tracking down the Arizuka Building. I'll explain my decision shortly. 'Back then' Baku would never ask if Hal wanted to watch the Fukurou match: Hal instead impersonated Baku as the latter predicted to get into the gamble. Nor would Hal, trying to hide his identity as the future Leader of Kakerou, respond as if he knew Fukurou.

Hal's slip-up must have something to do with: gambling, the Fukurou match, Hal hiding his identity, Baku's suspicion of Hal, and the truth behind whether the Prince Bee would win or lose i.e Hal's conflict with destiny. Note that just before that panel about Hal's mistake, Baku's bloody jacket is shown, directly relating to the fact that Baku has been to the Arizuka Building and therefore knows about Hal's memory loss.

What relates all of this? Baku setting up Hal's gamble with Fukurou after figuring out about Hal's memory loss. This is the truth that Hal reached. This whole dream sequence is basically Hal's realisation that Baku tricked him all along, orchestrated the Fukurou gamble and discovered the Arizuka Building, and therefore Hal's memory loss. In light of his 'slip up', Hal is instinctively erased to prevent Hal being manipulated within Leader.

Note that the Leader (without Hal's perspective) doesn't actually have Hal's memories after he decided to throw away all other routes when accepting the Fukurou gamble since he wasn't under the control of the Alien, as seen from when he has to have Fukurou explain what happened in the gamble even after achieving perfection, and that he doesn't remember why Hal returned to Baku's apartment again after receiving the Prince Bee book from him.

Also notice that when Hal transforms into Baku, he looks very similar to when Hal was describing Baku's 'devilishness' (slicked back hair, flaming eyes; image 3). Furthermore, the part of the dream where Baku drops the Prince Bee book almost perfectly mirrors when Hal found Eba's body after the Fukurou gamble (compare the book falling in images 2 and 4).


THMP
You could've just...
...died at peace...
I'd completely become...
THMP
What a waste.
THMP
THMP
Look...
Who was I trying to be...?
...at who you are.


Didn't think it'd be *you* that was comin'...



Finally, in image 1 we get confirmation of Hal's desires: he is directly confronted with the fact that he was trying to turn into Baku, he was lured along by his devilishness, only to slip up and reveal his identity and the secret of his memory loss, hence he will lose the second STL,

as the Prince Bee book predicted. I believe it is this moment precisely when Hal was erased; he states ‘I’d completely become…: then the panel zooms out as Hal (Baku) turns back into Souichi, with Souichi then questioning ‘who was I trying to be?’.

Ok, now to explain the Third King. This is the part I myself understand the least, so take my suggestions here with a grain of salt. The Third King is potentially different for both Baku and Souichi (note that after the whole ‘look at who you are’ thing, Souichi takes over instead of Hal); for Souichi, it is Tatsuki (image 2), for Baku, it is Kyara (image 3). However, just as dream Hal said, the one who actually met with the Third King was the Rival Prince, Baku. In Leader's first Near death dream, Souichi didn't actually pass through the Sanzu River, hence why Tatsuki, his Third King, was surprised to see him. Baku on the other hand, actually ‘dies’ (fakes his death) and meets with his Third King, Kyara.

Perhaps the Third King instead links to the ‘dead man' symbolism, in that after Souichi survived the Fukurou gamble and lost his memories as Hal, Souichi lived on as a ‘dead man’, just as Hal is erased after Round 2 also. After his memory loss during round 8, Leader loses the Souichi and Hachina personas, leaving just Hal, so Souichi meeting the Third King at the Sanzu River might be foreshadowing of Souichi's ‘death’ (erasure due to cognitive overload during the loss of perfection). Fortunately, the significance of the Third King isn't that important for the rest of the actual gamble itself.

Summary of Leader's Strategy:



In short, Leader's strategy is trapping Baku into an unbeatable endurance/resilience battle of the cylinders between rounds 4-8 (I'm just calling it Endurance Battle strat for now). To do so, he basically needs to predict everything that will occur between these rounds. All of these predictions were made to ensure that Leader would win the endurance battle of cylinders once Leader confirmed his suspicions over 3ND, as well as Baku's hidden time trick. If Leader's instant check during round 8 was successful, the difference between the cylinders would have been so great that Leader wouldn't even have to worry about Baku's time trick, and would figure out leap second in time, and then win the gamble with a resounding victory.

Referee Douji mentions how Leader's accumulation is getting shorter and shorter each round; he is essentially dangling the idea that Baku can still win by accumulation until it is too late for Baku to make up the difference in cylinders. This is the overall aim of Leader's strategy, which is made possible by his insane foresight of the following rounds and layers behind his traps, and is why I believe Leader has stronger strategy and tactics than Baku (but obviously by a very small margin).

This is a brief summary of Leader's thoughts and moves from round 4 onwards that make the strategy possible: If Baku drops early, he is trying to die intentionally -> 3ND theory is confirmed -> Leader knows that Baku will try to die in the next round -> Leader can now use echolocation to begin establishing a time wedge to create a one second check during a later round -> Leader has already noticed Yakou's worsening condition and can use this as a bluff for round 5 to limit his accumulation -> He can let Baku die during round 6, forcing him to use the safe strategy during subsequent rounds as dying too close together could be fatal -> Leader is free to accumulate a full 60 seconds during round 7 -> Leader knows that Baku expects him to take a breather during round 6 Turn 2, prompting him to drop early, so Leader can limit his accumulation via echolocation -> Leader can do an instant check during round 7 using his echolocation trap -> Leader can accumulate another large amount during round 8 since he knows Baku will take the safe strategy (note that by around this point Souichi begins to access Hal's memories again, so he is close to figuring out LS, and so likely knows that Baku wants to play as D at 8:59) -> Leader can predict that Baku will do another instant drop during round 8 (obviously he makes a mistake here and fails) and therefore get another 1 second check -> Leader is basically guaranteed to win the endurance battle.

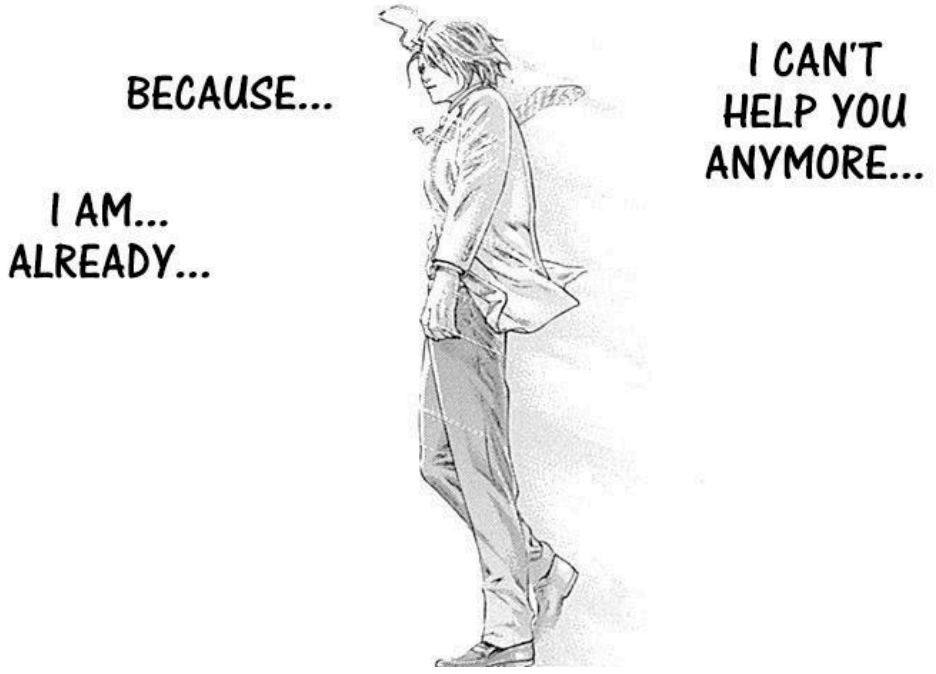
If he fails the instant check during round 8 though, Leader doesn't believe that he will lose his perfection yet, only some of his memories, so he will still be able to figure out Baku's 'time trick' during Round 9 and evade it. If it weren't for Leader not knowing about his regular memory loss being on the same day as the gamble, his strategy is perfect.

Compiled Evidence For The Friendship Trap Interpretation:




VERY...
VERY...
RIGHT NOW, TO ME, YOUR EXISTENCE IS...
.....
AND, THE MYSTERIOUS GUY WHO BOUGHT IT REQUESTED IT "TO CONTINUE BEING A BOOKSTORE WITHOUT CHANGING ANYTHING". IT'S LIKE A MYSTERIOUS STORY AROUND HERE.
BUT, HE DIDN'T OPERATE THE STORE WELL, AND AFTER HE GOT A LARGE DEBT, THIS STORE WAS BOUGHT OUT.
THE NEIGHBORS TOLD ME EVERYTHING AFTER I ASKED THEM. AFTER THE OWNER OF THIS BOOKSTORE DIED, HIS GRANDSON TOOK OVER IT.
!
HACHI-NA!!
WHAT'S WRONG? WHAT HAPPENED?


DON'T DROP YOUR GUARD... BAKU-SAN...
BAKU-SAN...
I WAS SORT OF ABLE TO FEEL HIS HEART WAVERING BEFORE,
BUT NOW, I CAN'T READ HIM ANYMORE AT ALL!!


BECAUSE...
I AM... ALREADY...
I CAN'T HELP YOU ANYMORE...


HA HA!
I TOLD YOU! I'M LUCKY!
.....
HA!
AH~
HA HA!
ONE HAS TO BE PRUDENT.
HOW-EVER,
BECOME A VIOLENT POISON THAT COULD
DESTROY ONESELF.
ONE DAY, THE SEED ONE HAS PLANTED MAY ALSO
IT'S NOT LIKE EVERY SEED PLANTED WILL GROW INTO A FRUIT.
ESPECIALLY IF ONE IS NOT AWARE OF HAVING PLANTED IT AT ALL.


JUST LIKE YOU TRYING TO HIDE FROM ME A PART OF MY PAST YOU SEEM TO KNOW, HUH...
TELLS ME THAT MY PAST IS NOT RELEVANT AT ALL RIGHT NOW.
IN THAT SENSE, MY INSTINCT RIGHT NOW
OF THE WAR.
2ND DAY
HOWEVER, THE PROBLEM IS THAT INSTINCT...
IS NOT ALWAYS RIGHT...



Images 1-6 are evidence of Leader's internal conflict with Hal. The Alien (the manifestation of Leader's perfectionist trauma, as seen in AP), or if you don't believe in the Alien for

whatever reason just think of it as Leader's subconscious self or instinct, reacts violently to when Baku attempts to recreate the Bookstore gamble, then entire incident that triggered the development of Hal, with the Alien imagery of full jet black eyes appearing frequently.

Image 3 quite literally shows the swirling of the Moon-like eyes (used to represent a familiarity, or in this case, Hal's influence) with the black eyes (The Alien), so there is clearly some internal conflict within Leader regarding Hal. Same for 4-6, Leader shows extreme reactions to the concept of gambling, showing resistance to Baku's influence even as Hal, and later trying to conceal his past with Baku during Protoporos.


...
HAL.
HEY...
HACHINA.
...
YOU ARE...
MADARAME
BAKU.



Images 7 and 8 show the aftermath of AP after Leader achieved perfection. Despite being Hal just hours earlier, he shows clear signs of influence or control from the Alien, essentially

meaning Hal has almost been corrupted by the Alien, whom Hal sought to overcome the influence of.


SPLIT/RESET
MODE
START/STOP
MIN.
SEC.
1/100S
YOU...
!
...
FOR SOME REASON, YOU...
...SEEM RATHER NERVOUS, ARE YOU?


!
OH...?
KEEPING MY EYES OPEN AND LOOKING UP AT THE SKY ISN'T WORTH THE EFFORT... BECAUSE NOTHING WILL COME.
NO PLANES WILL COME.
IT'S FUTILE...
HUH?
I'M TAKING A NAP.
00 50 00
THERE'S NOTHING THERE. I DON'T EVEN HAVE TO LOOK.
YOU'RE LYING.
Could it be...?
AH! RIGHT THERE!
...
HAVE YOU GIVEN UP ALREADY?
YOU'RE THE ONE THAT ISN'T UP FOR IT.

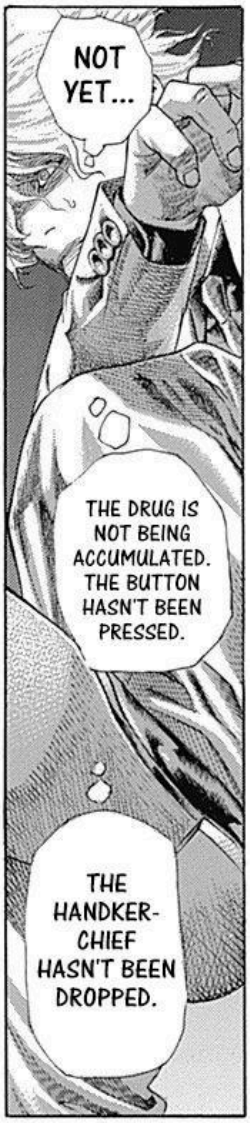

"TIME."
TIME IS RELATED TO THAT TRICK UP YOUR SLEEVE. THE ONE YOU DON'T WANT ME *UNCOVERING.*
OR...
...IT COULD HAVE NO MEANING AT ALL. IT COULD SIMPLY BE RELATED TO A "WEDGE" OF YOURS THAT YOU WANT PLACED IN ME.
SO...
...WHEN'S THAT REFEREE COMING?
HALF AN HOUR.
HUH?
THE REFEREE WILL ARRIVE IN HALF AN HOUR.

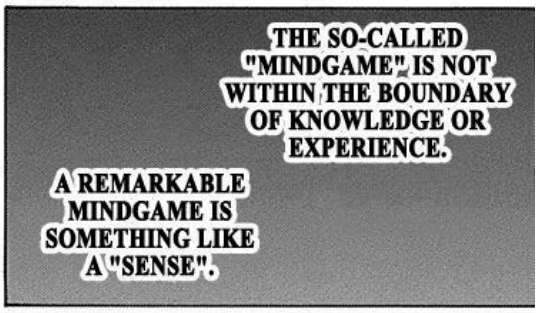
Images 9, 10 and 11 are obviously the classic evidence hinting that Leader started figuring out LS early; pay particular attention to panel 11, where Baku smiles after Leader brings up the possibility of him using the time trick as some sort of wedge.

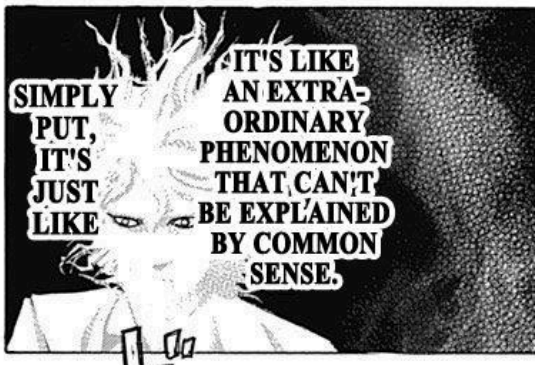

THE VETERAN GAMBLER WITH BRILLIANT TALENT, MADARAME BAKU.
THE ENIGMA THAT IS PIVOTAL TO THE HOUSEHOLD, KIRUMA SOUICHI.




オ
オ
オ


NOT YET...
THE DRUG IS NOT BEING ACCUMULATED. THE BUTTON HASN'T BEEN PRESSED.
THE HANDKER-CHIEF HASN'T BEEN DROPPED.


THE SO-CALLED "MINDGAME" IS NOT WITHIN THE BOUNDARY OF KNOWLEDGE OR EXPERIENCE.
A REMARKABLE MINDGAME IS SOMETHING LIKE A "SENSE".

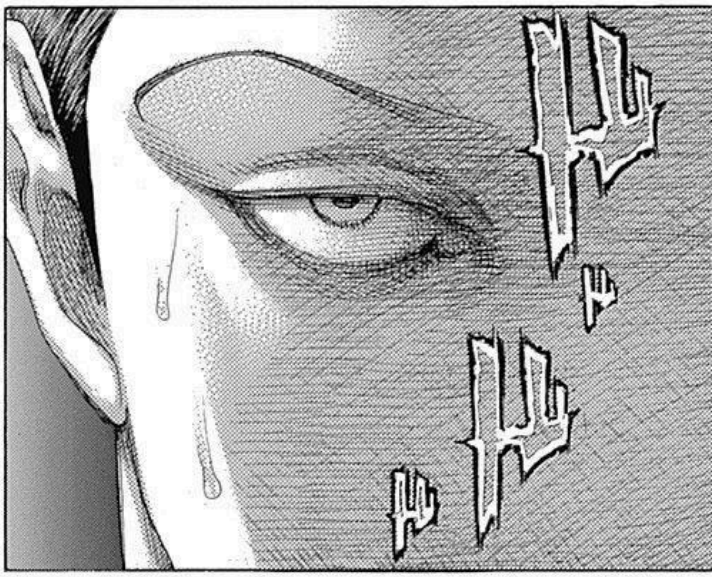

SIMPLY PUT, IT'S JUST LIKE
IT'S LIKE AN EXTRA-ORDINARY PHENOMENON THAT CAN'T BE EXPLAINED BY COMMON SENSE.

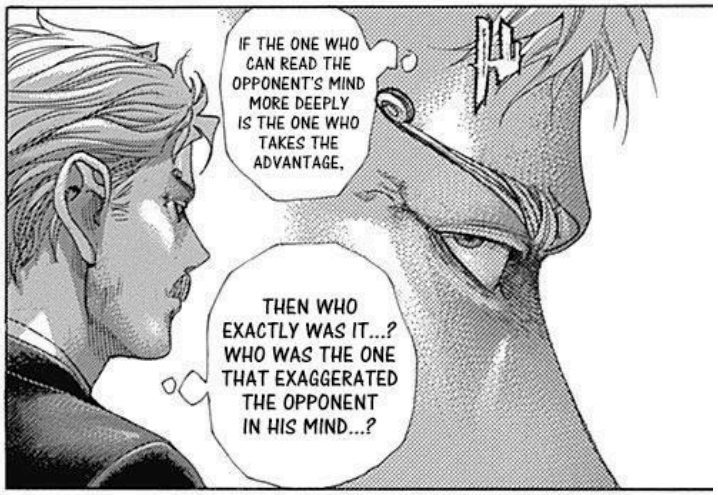

ドクン...
A SUPER-POWER.
I... WON'T "CHECK".


CHAPTER 495
STOLEN INITIATIVE
IT
HASN'T BEEN DROPPED, RIGHT?
...


"LEADER"
WAS ABOUT TO LET GO OF THE HANDKERCHIEF JUST NOW.

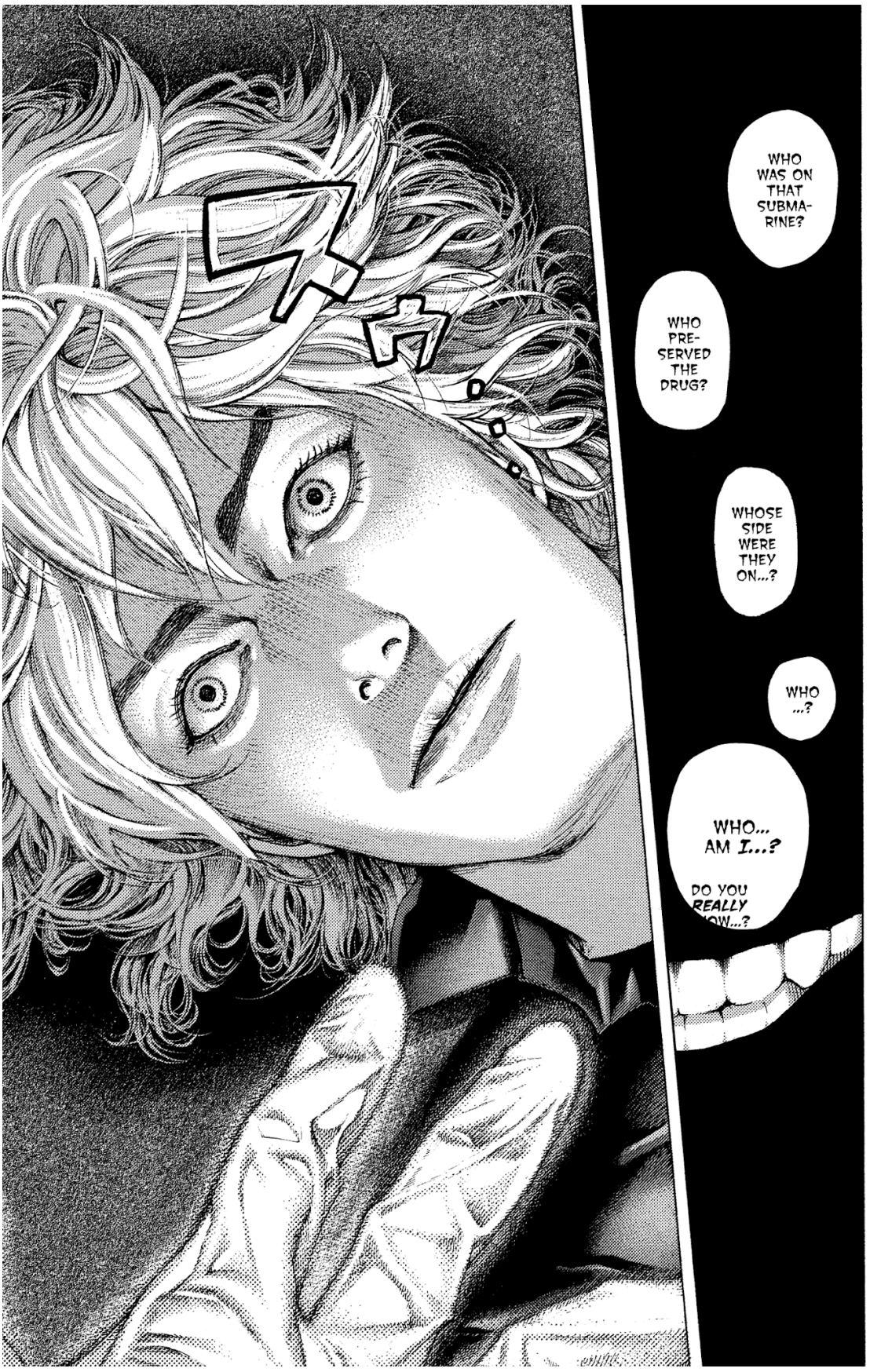

WHICH ONE WAS IT...?
NOW,
PLEASE DIE FOR 1 MINUTE.




IF THE ONE WHO CAN READ THE OPPONENT'S MIND MORE DEEPLY IS THE ONE WHO TAKES THE ADVANTAGE,
THEN WHO EXACTLY WAS IT...? WHO WAS THE ONE THAT EXAGGERATED THE OPPONENT IN HIS MIND...?


YOUR EXPRESSION... YOU WERE ABOUT TO DROP THE HANDKER-CHIEF, RIGHT?
WHEN I TURNED AROUND,
!


A DEAD PERSON
CANNOT BE REVIVED.
SUCH A SURE THING?
HAVEN'T YOU SUSPECTED
THIS IS A DEATH MATCH,
NO,
KIRUMA SOUICHI REALLY HAS NO MERCY...
MENTAL STATE HAS A DRASTIC EFFECT ON THE BODY.
PUSHING THE OPPONENT TO A DEEPER ABYSS TO SHAKE HIS MENTAL STATE IS A RIGHTEOUS ATTACK!!
THERE ARE CASES WHERE A SERIOUSLY ILL PATIENT, WHO IS RECOVERING STEADILY, DIES SUDDENLY WHEN HE IS TOLD HIS DISEASE...


WHO WAS ON THAT SUBMA-RINE?
WHO PRE-SERVED THE DRUG?
WHOSE SIDE WERE THEY ON...?
WHO ...?
WHO... AM I...?
DO YOU REALLY



12-18 present Baku's superhuman senses as some sort of mind game during Round 1, with image 13 being when Leader realises he's being seen through. After all, Baku knows he

wants to fail his first check, so why bother turning around so close to when Leader drops? It is to plant an image of himself in Leader's mind, as a person who can see through his every thought.

A further explanation would be that Leader sees Hal as weakness that allows him to be read by Baku, which contributes to Baku portraying Hal as a wedge. Leader knows that Hal is being exploited, so tries to counter Baku with remarks like in images 17 and 18, asking if Baku really knows who he is, and that Baku doesn't know Kiruma Souichi as well as he (likely meaning Hal) knows Baku, essentially trying to dissuade Baku's manipulations.

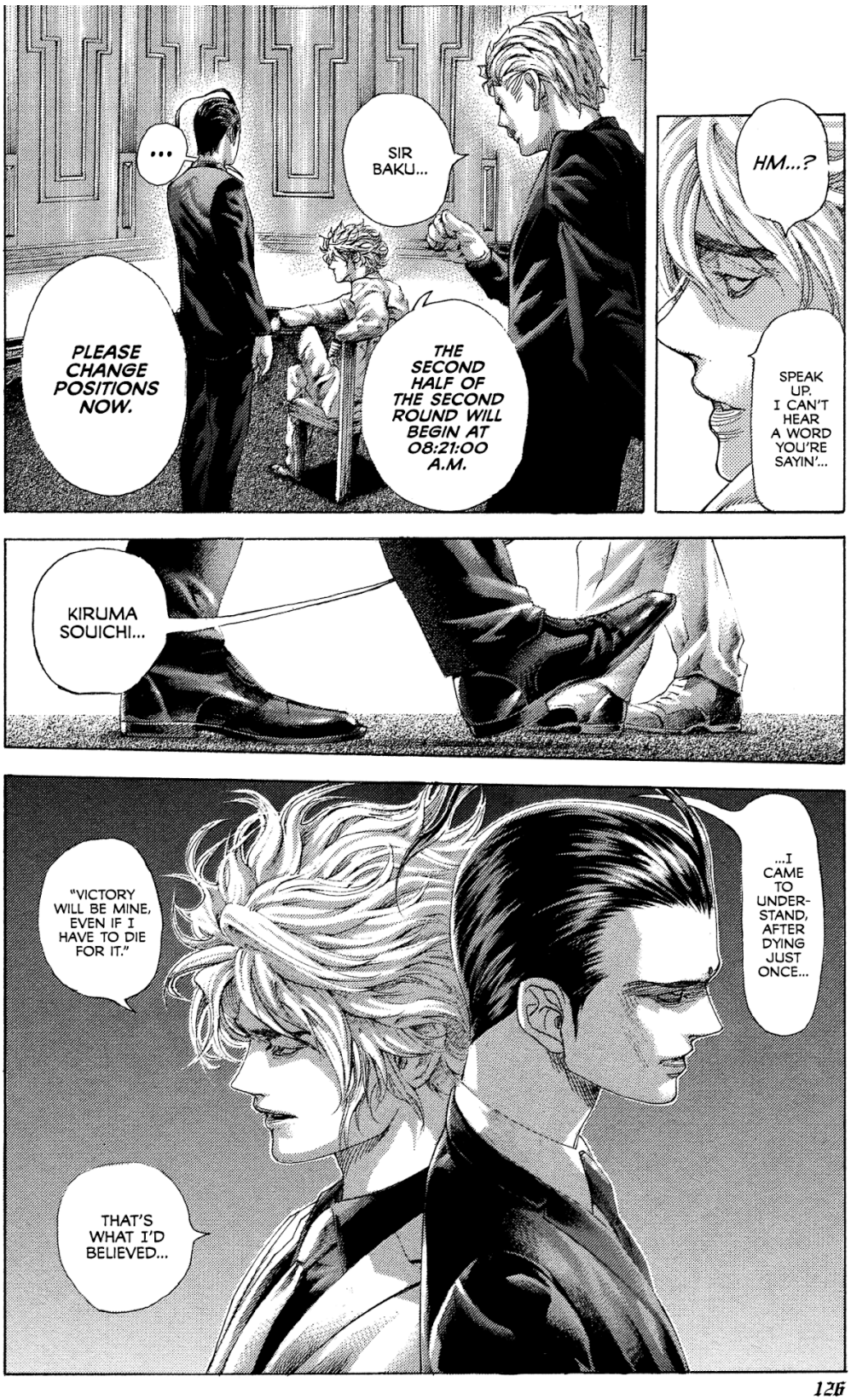

45 SEC-ONDS ...!
!
IT FEELS LONG, DOESN'T IT?
IT'S AS IF...
...THERE EXIST SEVERAL DIFFERENT LEADERS...
SIR LEADER IS SHOWING MORE AND MORE SIDES TO HIMSELF TODAY...
...TIME LASTED SO LONG THAT I BEGAN TO THINK TO MYSELF: "IS THIS TRULY ONLY A MINUTE?"
JUST NOW, BEFORE USOGUI HAD TURNED HIS HEAD...
THE PASSAGE OF TIME CAN FEEL DIFFERENT FROM SITUATION TO SITUATION...
...FEELS SO SHORT TO ME.
COM-PARED TO THEN, THIS ONE MINUTE, RIGHT NOW...
IT'S VEXING...
IS THIS TRULY THAT SAME MINUTE?
IS THIS...
...THAT FAMILIAR 60 SEC-ONDS?



Image 19 and 20 are obviously classics, representing Hal's subconscious self recognising the potential of Baku's time trick being some sort of altered minute, with him seeing Baku

laughing, suggesting that Baku wanted to figure it out (obviously you could just see it as Hal seeing through Baku's cunning nature, hence his laughter, but considering the overall direction of the evidence so far, it represents Baku intentionally making Hal figure it out fits nicely).


THE GAP BETWEEN THEM... IS ACTUALLY RATHER LARGE!
IF SIR LEADER CONTINUES TO PLAY DEFENSIVELY, IT COULD PROVE QUITE ADVANTAGEOUS... OR IS IT POSSIBLE... HE ALREADY HAS A HIGH CHANCE OF WINNING?!
SHF
PSTL
PSTL
RIP


...
SIR BAKU...
PLEASE CHANGE POSITIONS NOW.
THE SECOND HALF OF THE SECOND ROUND WILL BEGIN AT 08:21:00 A.M.
HM...?
SPEAK UP. I CAN'T HEAR A WORD YOU'RE SAYIN'...
KIRUMA SOUICHI...
"VICTORY WILL BE MINE, EVEN IF I HAVE TO DIE FOR IT."
...I CAME TO UNDER-STAND, AFTER DYING JUST ONCE...
THAT'S WHAT I'D BELIEVED...


BUT... I WAS MIS-TAK-EN...
THE NUMBER OF NEAR-DEATHS TAKEN...
THE DURATION OF ONE NEAR-DEATH...
THERE'S A LIMIT TO ALL OF THESE.
THE NEAR-DEATH DRUG'S ACCUMU-LATION IN THE TUBE...

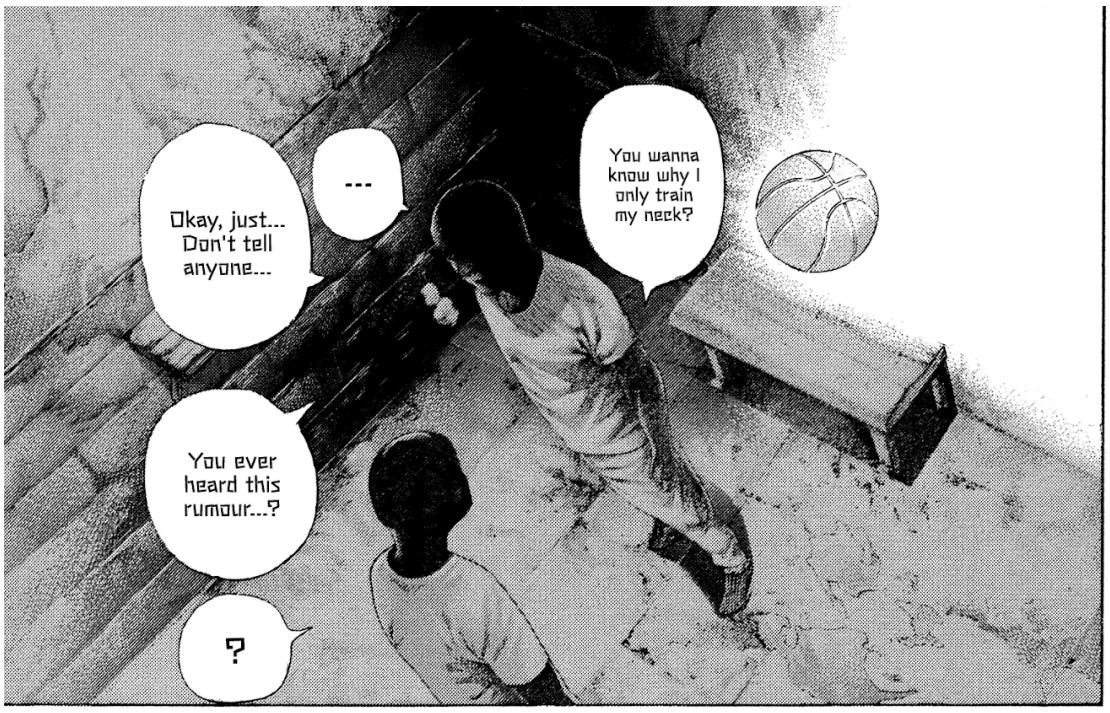


Image 21 shows Baku blatantly eating his Kariume in front of Leader once again, demonstrating clearly that everything is going according to his plan, making Hal obsess over

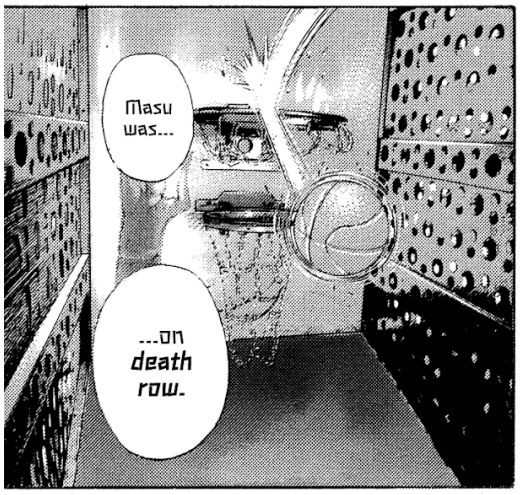
the time trick more and more. The final nail in the coffin is from images 22-24, where Baku straight up tells Leader that he thought he would be willing to die to win STL, essentially baiting Hal into eventually making a risky gamble when he realises his whole 'winning perfectly' will never work out, and that he has to try and counter LS once he figures it out, which will result in Hal being erased for trying to interact with the 'time trick', which the Alien fears is just a manipulation or misdirection.

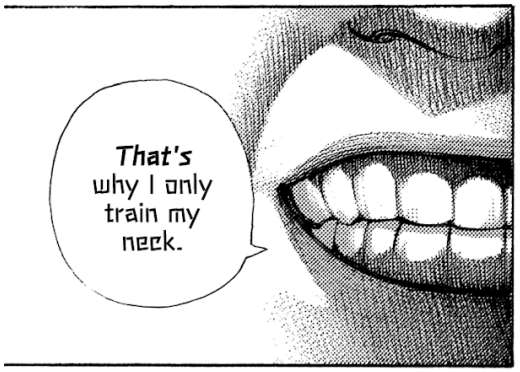
Then, to Baku's surprise, Hal had figured out LS as early as Round 2, and intentionally failed his check to open the Leap Second route to Baku in order to make him predictable. Obviously this doesn't work out, as Hal is erased as per Baku's plan, and Hal's Near Death dream begins, which contains some of the most important evidence pointing towards Hal erasure.


Huh?
Don't hassle me, just leave me out of it...
Hal... You're a guest in my home, you know ...?
I just remembered, I've got something to do...
Hal...
10月
I think that was his name, at least.
Right...
Masu Kijuuin?
Is that even a real name?
Doesn't matter...
So, Masu answered the question...


You wanna know why I only train my neck?

Okay, just... Don't tell anyone...
You ever heard this rumour...?
?


Masu was...
...on *death row.*

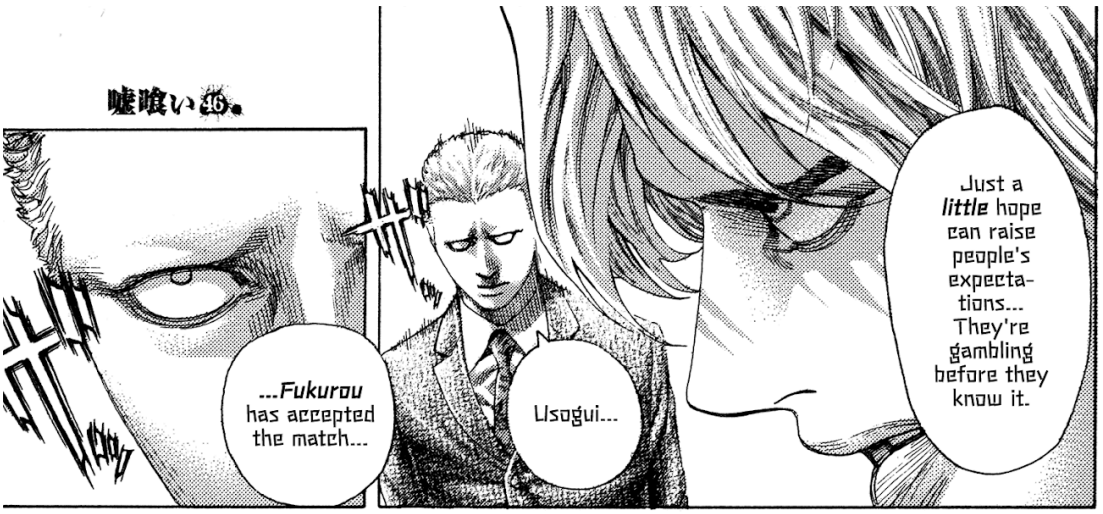

That's why I only train my neck.

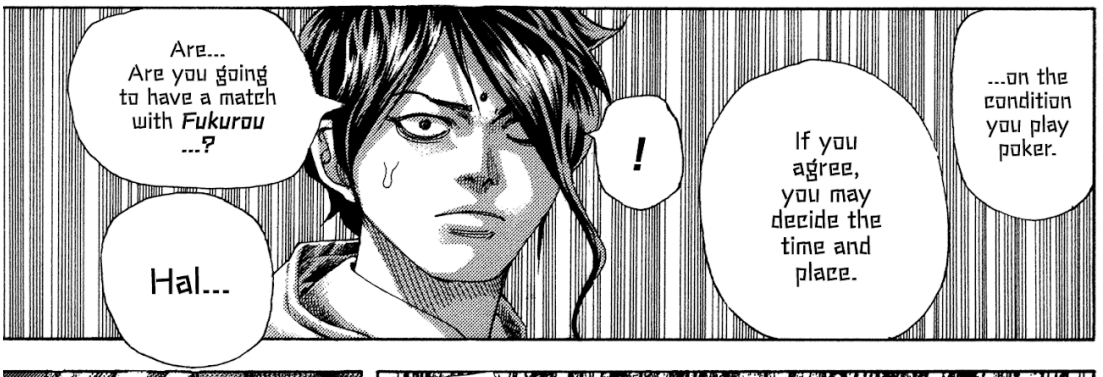

In other words, you can ***start afresh.*** So long as you ***survive...***


The death penalty in this country... is carried out by hanging.
If you manage not to die...
...after being hanged...
...the execution is deemed as complete.
So, you'll live on as ***a dead man.***


HE BET ON
THE MIRA-CLE...
HE BET ON HIS TRUE ALLY WHO WAS ERASED WITH THE "EXECUTION BY SHOOTING" FROM BEFORE...


People began to think...
But Masu's neck...
...grew to be as thick as a log through his day-to-day training.
No one bought into it.
They all just thought...
...you'd die if you were hanged.
"...maybe he..."
"...really can do it..."
That tale is just a rumour. Masu will die...
No, not at all.
Then... why the intrigue about how he ended up?
Not at all?
What happened to Masu?
And then?
Crap...
What do you think? Think he stood a chance?


...Fukurou has accepted the match...
Usogui...
Just a little hope can raise people's expectations... They're gambling before they know it.


Are... Are you going to have a match with Fukurou ...?
Hal...
!
If you agree, you may decide the time and place.
...on the condition you play poker.






It may not be as intriguing as Masu's hanging...
...but my odds are way more likely.
Y'wanna see it?
Me against Fukurou.



Images 25-30 show Baku telling Hal about the Neck Man story (also showing the 9:00 clock in the background as a further hint that Hal has figured out LS), where Baku baits him

towards gambling with Masu's execution, which relates to Hal's gamble with Fukurou (literally referred to as an 'execution by shooting'), where he attempted to 'survive' (win the gamble) and 'start a new life' (live by Baku's side as the 'Real Hal'), but in a cruel twist of fate he instead lost his memory after 'surviving' due to Eba's interference, meaning he 'started a new life' as Souichi, the Leader of Kakerou instead, living on from the gamble he should've died in as a 'dead man'.



You're being too cocky.
Can you *really* say they're more likely...?

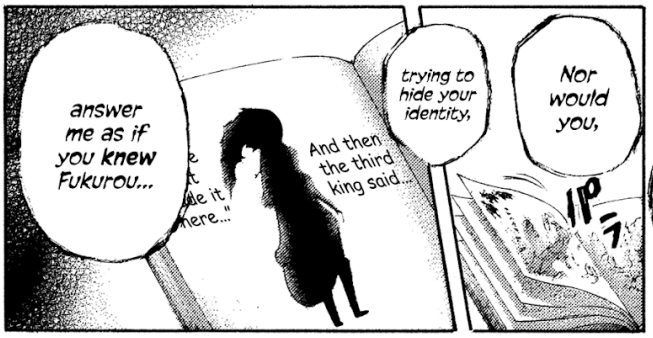

...take advantage of that fondness.
I think you can...
I feel as if Fukurou has a ***fondness*** for you... being that you're both gamblers.
If you're intent on fighting ***him***...


In order to beat the bee prince, the rival prince took advantage of their camaraderie to lay a trap.
Yes.
...referencing the fight in the second chapter of "The Bee Prince"?
Are you...


...didn't he still lose anyway? He couldn't return to the third king...
You misunderstood.
Even though the rival prince tried to trick the bee prince...
But... Wait...

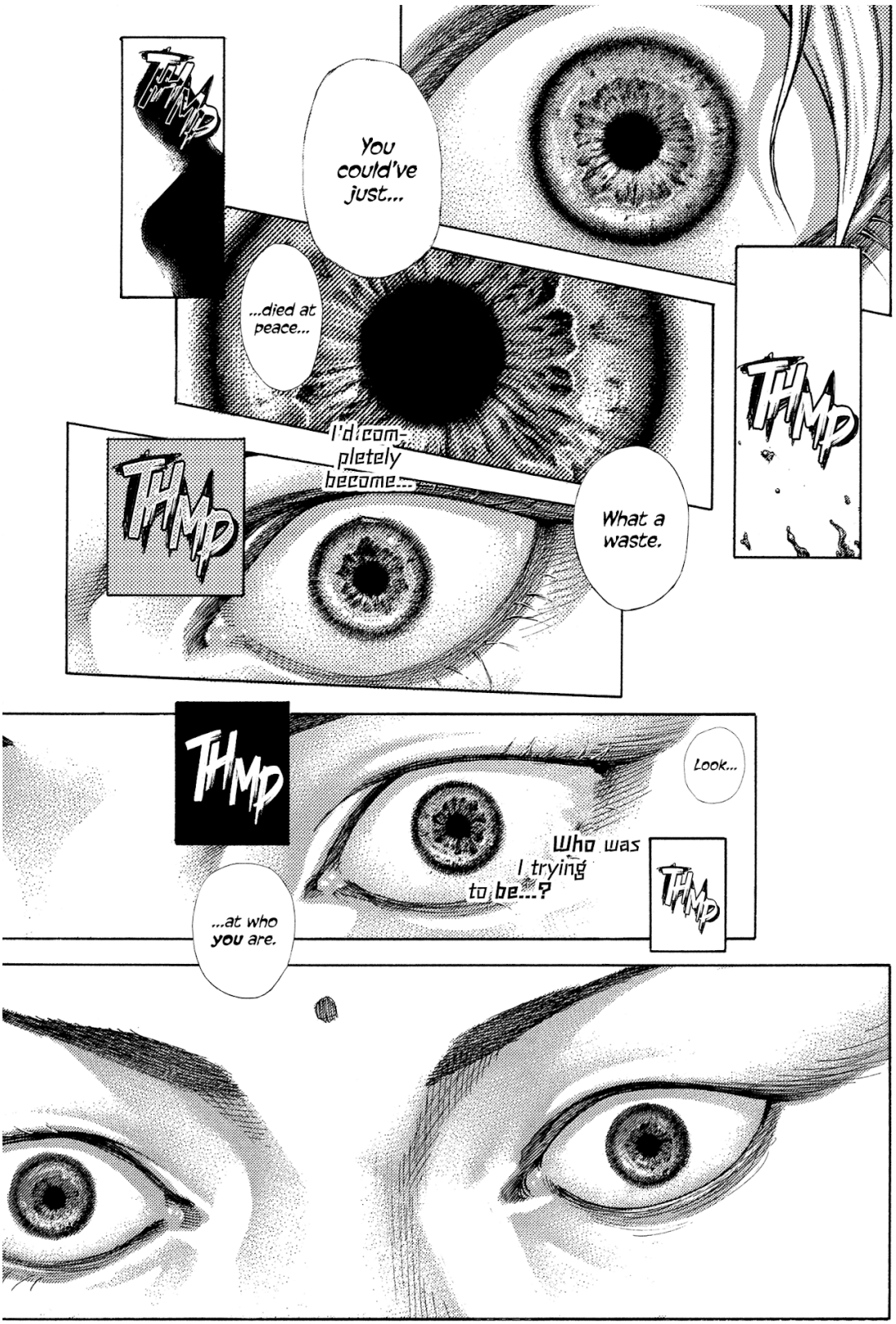

Does this game even have a hundred stages...? Weird...
Hold on...
You're that good?!
Bip
Drip
Bip
Drip
You're both the one who asked and the one who answered...
...as well as all that talk about Fukurou... That was you, too.
And you were the one who told the story about the hanging...
It was you...
...who said that the bee prince lost.


...and then you slipped up.


answer me as if you knew Fukurou...
And then the third king said...
trying to hide your identity,
Nor would you,


I'd never ask about Fukurou...
Back then, I had no idea who you really were.


"So, you're the one that made it here..."


THMP
You could've just...
...died at peace...
I'd completely become...
THMP
What a waste.
THMP
THMP
Look...
Who was I trying to be...?
...at who you are.





In the same way, in image 30, Leader 'survives the execution' (his near death), but Hal is erased (just as Hal's memories where lost after the Fukurou gamble), instead living on as a

'dead man' as said in image 12. Images 31-35 are a bit complicated, but the significant parts are: image 31, friendship trap mentioned for chapter 2 of the Prince Bee book (second STL), dream Hal (the Alien/Hal's subconscious self) mentioning everything Baku did to nudge Hal towards gambling and away from his obsessive mindset over perfectionism and destiny (Neck Man story, Fukurou gamble, the fact that the Prince Bee, Hal, would lose the second duel) in image 32, and finally showing Hal turning until a devilish Baku (Hal was attracted by Baku's devilishness) and mentioning his slip-up while spraying blood onto Baku's jacket (meaning he's been to the Arizuka Building) in image 33, etc yadda yadda.

TLDR, Hal realises Baku had been subtly manipulating him during his teen years, and his slip-up was allowing Baku to discover his real identity as the Leader of Kakerou + his memory loss, and that Baku set him up for the Fukurou gamble on purpose to lose his memories. The Alien is basically just showing Hal that he can't be trusted since Baku is likely manipulating him again (like in image 34, Hal is confronted with the idea that he's turning into Baku), so Hal, the wedge, unwillingly gets erased.

I personally wouldn't blame you for not considering this as evidence as Hal's ND dream is ridiculously complicated, but I do invite you to share a more fitting explanation that doesn't involve Hal erasure or knowledge of Leap Second. Also might be a coincidence, but image 35 with the book falling on the floor after Hal realises about the Arizuka Building is very similar to when he figures out that Baku had already been to the Arizuka Building in image 33, so just some food for thought.


I CAN SENSE 2 THINGS THAT ARE OFF.
SOME-THING THAT
ONLY I SAW.
LEADER, WHO TURNED HIS HEAD TO CHECK THE FLOOR.
AND USOGUI, WHO SAW THAT.
AT THAT TIME,
I WONDER IF IT'S BECAUSE THE ENEMY WASN'T LOOKING AT HIM...
HE...



Images 36 and 37 strongly suggest that Hal failed his check in Round 2 on purpose, with Yakou later stating that it was as though Baku was 'being guided by someone' when the LS

route opened. If you have any other suggestions as to what Yakou's strange feeling regarding Leader was at that moment, then be my guest.



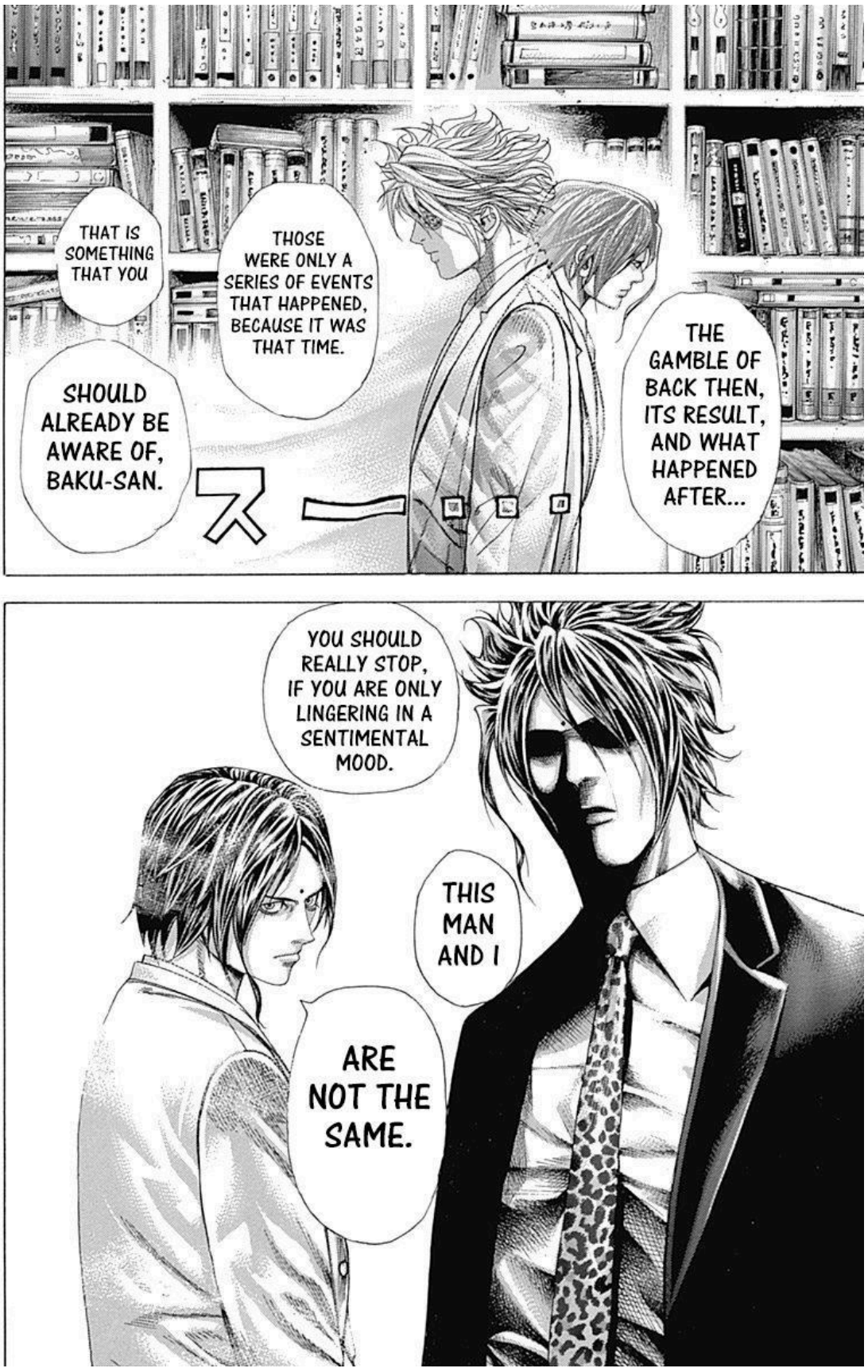


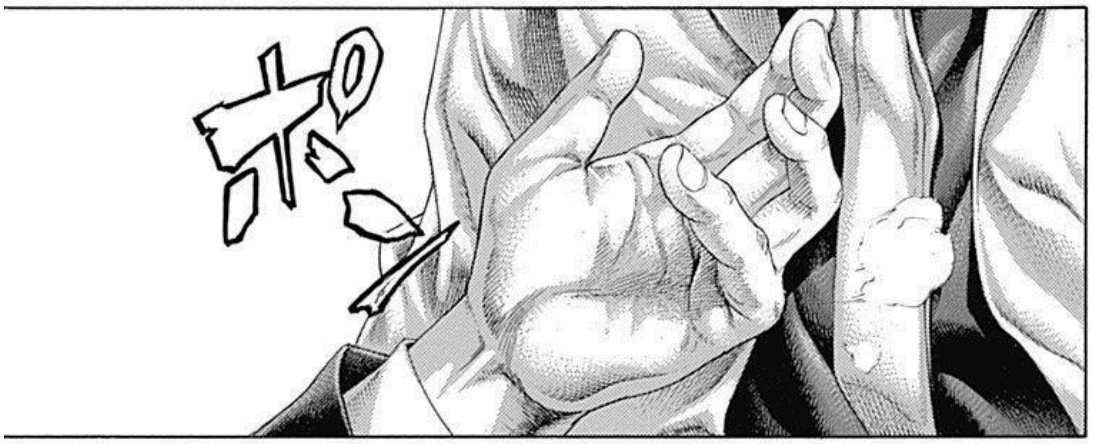
Image 38, Leader straight up says that the man from back then (Hal) is no longer with us (and even if you think that's just a figure of speech for how Leader has matured from his

ideas as Hal, doesn't he literally say "give all the 'me's (Boku; Japanese for I, in in reference to a young boy) back" when he achieved perfection?). When he tries to focus on what Hal might think about his duel with Baku by focusing on his past memories with Baku, he reaches a blank (as seen from the ellipsis) implying that he's been cut off from Hal's perspective. Also note that the words Leader uses here closely mirror the second bookstore encounter in image 39, where Hachina reacts strongly to Baku's appearance as he tries to recreate the incident that led to Hal.


YES.
...
YOUR DESTINY?


THERE ARE THINGS IN LIFE THEY HAVE TO DO AND BATTLES THEY HAVE TO FIGHT.
FOR PEOPLE,
IN ORDER TO SURPASS THE BOND BETWEEN US, I'VE DECIDED TO FIGHT YOU.
EVERYONE HAS HIS DESTINED BATTLE.
THIS BATTLE
IS MY DESTINY.


DESTINY, HUH.
THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH DESTINY.
CAN YOU WIN A GAMBLE WITH SUCH A THING?



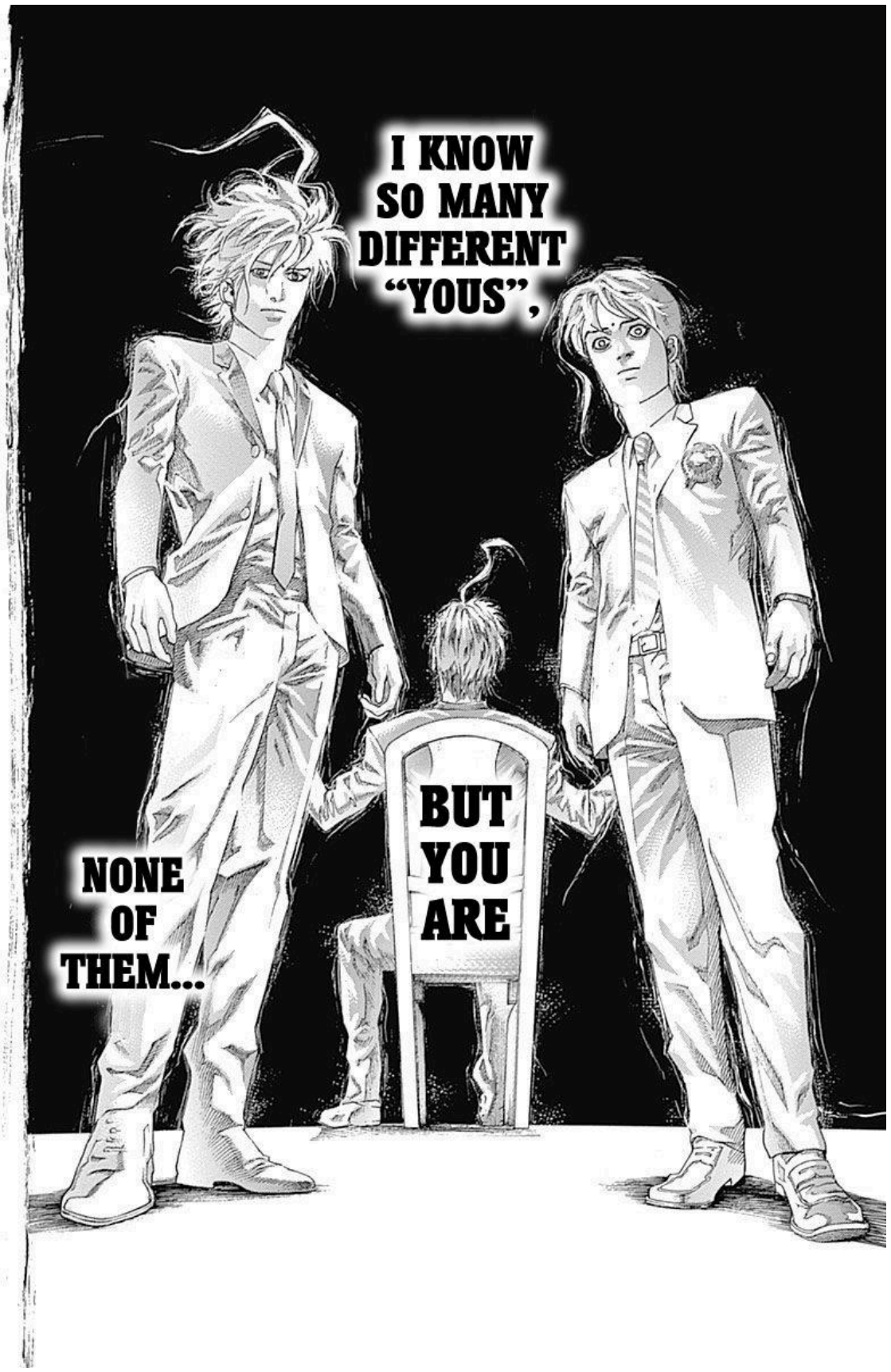
In both instances, Hal is not present, and the Alien tries to cut off Leader from Hal. Perhaps a coincidence that I'm over interpreting, or perhaps not. Before explaining images 40 and 41, I will offer an explanation as to how the appearance of Hal with Baku in image 40 doesn't contradict Hal erasure: The Alien (being essentially the hub of all of Leader's personalities) has access to all of his memories (like who if knows exactly how many times Souichi has been reset by his memory loss) in terms of raw information, but not necessarily the perspectives of each personalities (just like how memory re-implantation only returns the memory rather than the experience).

But anyways, images 40 and 41 show Baku has a strong reaction to Leader's mention of destiny, which Hal was adverse to, meaning Baku suspects Hal has been erased. Baku tries to test this by mentioning that the gamble has nothing to do with destiny, but is stopped by an unfazed Leader.



Continuing onwards, image 42 from round 6 strongly hints that Baku has realised Hal has been erased, addressing Leader as 'Kiruma Souichi' rather than Hal, and saying that he

cannot win if he can't read his opponent. This doesn't make sense if we assume Hal wasn't erased, since between rounds 4-6 Leader has been 'reading' Baku pretty much perfectly, therefore what Baku actually means is that he lacks the ability to see through him and Leap Second without Hal, hence why he also mentions reading Leader 'at the last moment'.


I KNOW SO MANY DIFFERENT "YOUS",
BUT YOU ARE
NONE OF THEM...


I DIDN'T HAVE THE STRENGTH TO CONVEY MY WORDS LOUDLY AND ENDED UP MUTTERING.
YAKOU-SAN...
THE NEXT... ROUND?
WHEN WILL BE...
WHEN I CAME BACK TO LIFE PREVIOUSLY, AND WAS STILL RECOVERING...
A FAINT VOICE CANNOT BE HEARD BY THE ONES WHO WANT TO HEAR IT.
"BECAUSE NO ONE CAN HEAR IT".
AND HOW DOES THAT RELATE TO THE SPEAKING CLOCK VOLUME BEING DECREASED?
ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE ACTUALLY DECREASED THE VOLUME OF THE SPEAKING CLOCK.
SO IN ORDER TO LISTEN TO OUR VOICES BETTER,
YOU MANIPU-LATED
PEOPLE WHO AREN'T EVEN HERE.
IT ALREADY HAPPENED BEFORE...
THAT WASN'T THE FIRST TIME.
TICK
TICK
THINKING ABOUT IT,
ARE A SCARY MAN.
YOU


I FEEL THAT TODAY IS
THE FIRST TIME
I MANAGED TO BE ONE STEP AHEAD OF YOU.



Images 43 and 44 are from Baku's echolocation explanation, wherein he talks to the various aspects of Leader, and sure enough, Hal fades into the distance after his whispering in

Baku's ear to lower the speaking clock volume from round 2 was explained, and Hachina is credited with the rest of it. After Leader pulls off his echolocation trap during Round 7, he has a strong emotional reaction to finally being 'one step ahead' of Baku (as seen in images 45 and 46), also remarking that he is 'changing' and is close to reaching the answer, Leap Second.

Where did all this come from? Leader using the double cubes in Round 6. If you pay attention in the echolocation explanation imagery, one cube represents Hal's memories and the other represents Hachina's memories. By re-experiencing Hal's memories he is able to finally get close to figuring out LS. Note that there is also no reference to a time trick between rounds 3 and 7, which is made especially clear since Leader immediately concludes 3ND (the 3 Near Death strategy) rather than relating Baku's moves back to the time trick, highly suggesting that Hal was the one behind most of the earlier conclusions on the time trick, and that his erasure removed those conclusions.



Image 47 is obviously just Hal returning; a surface level interpretation of STL provides basically no reasoning as to why Hal specifically returns and why he doesn't completely lose

his memories like Hachina and Souichi. The real reason Hal returns and doesn't completely lose his memories (we see some of his memories return after he falls for Leap Second, and the imagery of the dark clouds and moon match up with the idea that the same 'dark clouds' from round 3 are inhibiting his memory retrieval as a side effect of the ND drug) is because Hal is erased, so when all the other personas are lost when Leader loses his perfection, Hal is still left over, so he takes on that persona.



Image 48 is Baku welcoming Hal to the world of gamblers; Leader's gamble during round 7 was a much more intense and difficult gamble than seen in round 9, so why does Baku wait

until round 9 to welcome Hal to gambling? Because he knows Hal isn't really there during Round 7, only just his memories.



And last but not least, image 49, very simple, Hal states that it's almost like he's known the reason that Baku will take the safe strategy during Round 9 for a while. You could just interpret that as his memory loss threw off his sense of time, so he gauges him figuring out LS in round 8 as 'a while', but you probably know how I interpret it at this point.

Brief Evidence Of Baku Hinting At Leap Second:

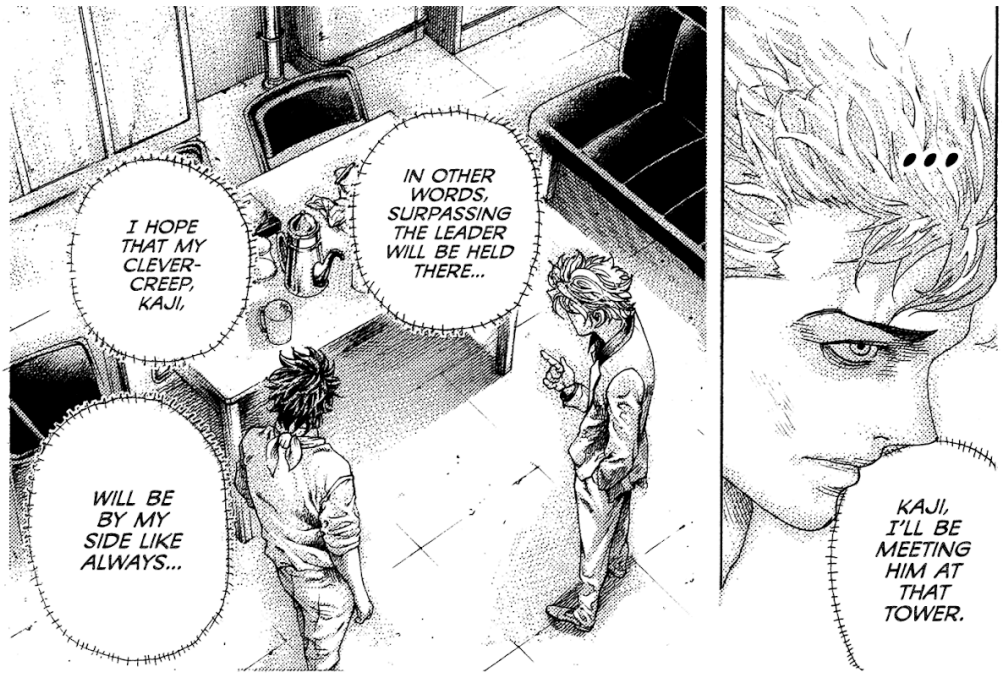
(Just copied this from my previous Reddit post so some images and points are probably going to be repeated)


SPLIT/RESET
MODE
START/STOP
MIN.
SEC.
1/100S
YOU...
!
...
FOR SOME REASON, YOU...
...SEEM RATHER NERVOUS, ARE YOU?

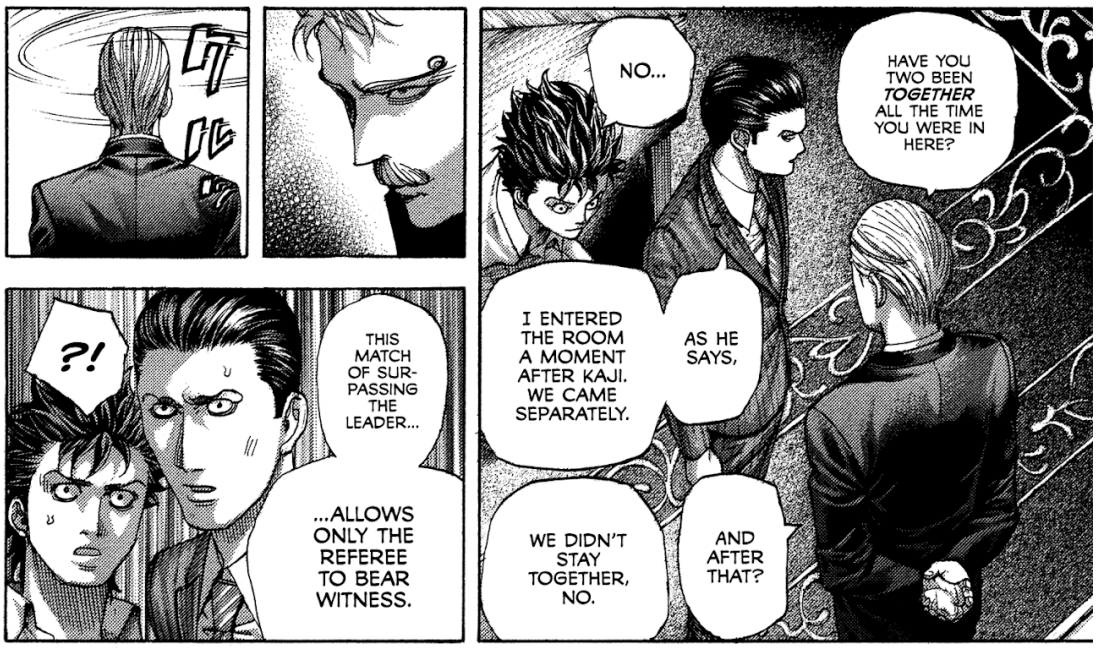

!
OH...?
KEEPING MY EYES OPEN AND LOOKING UP AT THE SKY ISN'T WORTH THE EFFORT... BECAUSE NOTHING WILL COME.
NO PLANES WILL COME.
IT'S FUTILE...
HUH?
I'M TAKING A NAP.
00 50 00
THERE'S NOTHING THERE. I DON'T EVEN HAVE TO LOOK.
YOU'RE LYING.
Could it be...?
AH! RIGHT THERE!
...
HAVE YOU GIVEN UP ALREADY?
YOU'RE THE ONE THAT ISN'T UP FOR IT.


"TIME."
TIME IS RELATED TO THAT TRICK UP YOUR SLEEVE. THE ONE YOU DON'T WANT ME *UNCOVERING.*
OR...
...IT COULD HAVE NO MEANING AT ALL. IT COULD SIMPLY BE RELATED TO A "WEDGE" OF YOURS THAT YOU WANT PLACED IN ME.
SO...
...WHEN'S THAT REFEREE COMING?
HALF AN HOUR.
HUH?
THE REFEREE WILL ARRIVE IN HALF AN HOUR.

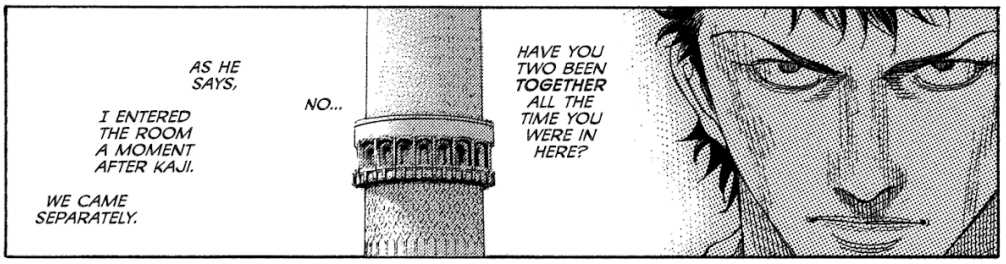
First off, the most well known one: the stopwatch (images 1-3). Of course, you could just explain it as Baku checking if Leader has one on him or not, but this is still an incredibly risky play that Leader seems to catch onto immediately, yet Baku seems completely unfazed despite apparently being unable to contain his 'nervousness' as Leader held the stopwatch. Baku shows a small smile after Leader suggests the idea of a 'time trick' or potential 'wedge'. By no means definitive proof, but still odd enough to arouse suspicion from both Leader and the reader.

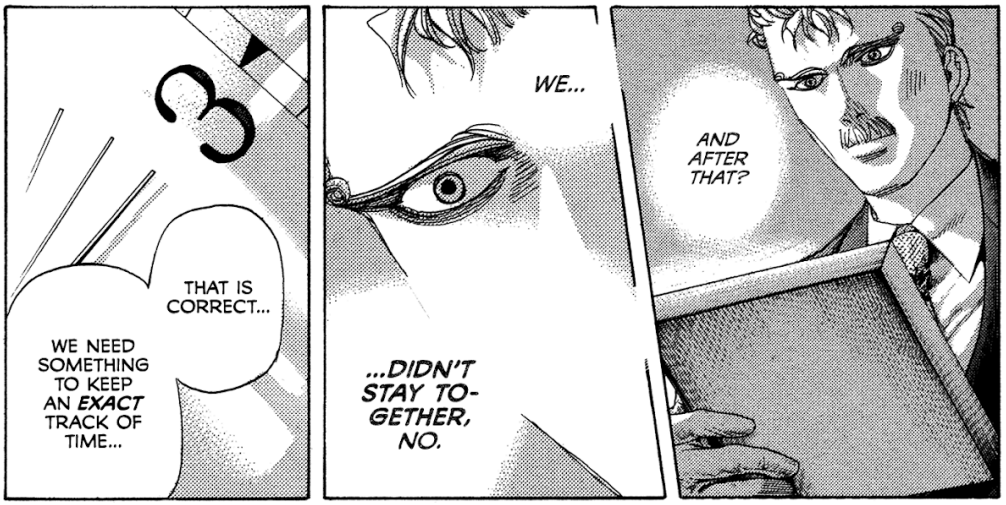

I HOPE THAT MY CLEVER-CREEP, KAJI,
IN OTHER WORDS, SURPASSING THE LEADER WILL BE HELD THERE...
WILL BE BY MY SIDE LIKE ALWAYS...
...
KAJI, I'LL BE MEETING HIM AT THAT TOWER.




?!
THIS MATCH OF SUR-PASSING THE LEADER...
...ALLOWS ONLY THE REFEREE TO BEAR WITNESS.
NO...
HAVE YOU TWO BEEN *TOGETHER* ALL THE TIME YOU WERE IN HERE?
I ENTERED THE ROOM A MOMENT AFTER KAJI. WE CAME SEPARATELY.
AS HE SAYS,
WE DIDN'T STAY TOGETHER, NO.
AND AFTER THAT?




AS HE SAYS,
I ENTERED THE ROOM A MOMENT AFTER KAJI.
WE CAME SEPARATELY.
NO...
HAVE YOU TWO BEEN TOGETHER ALL THE TIME YOU WERE IN HERE?

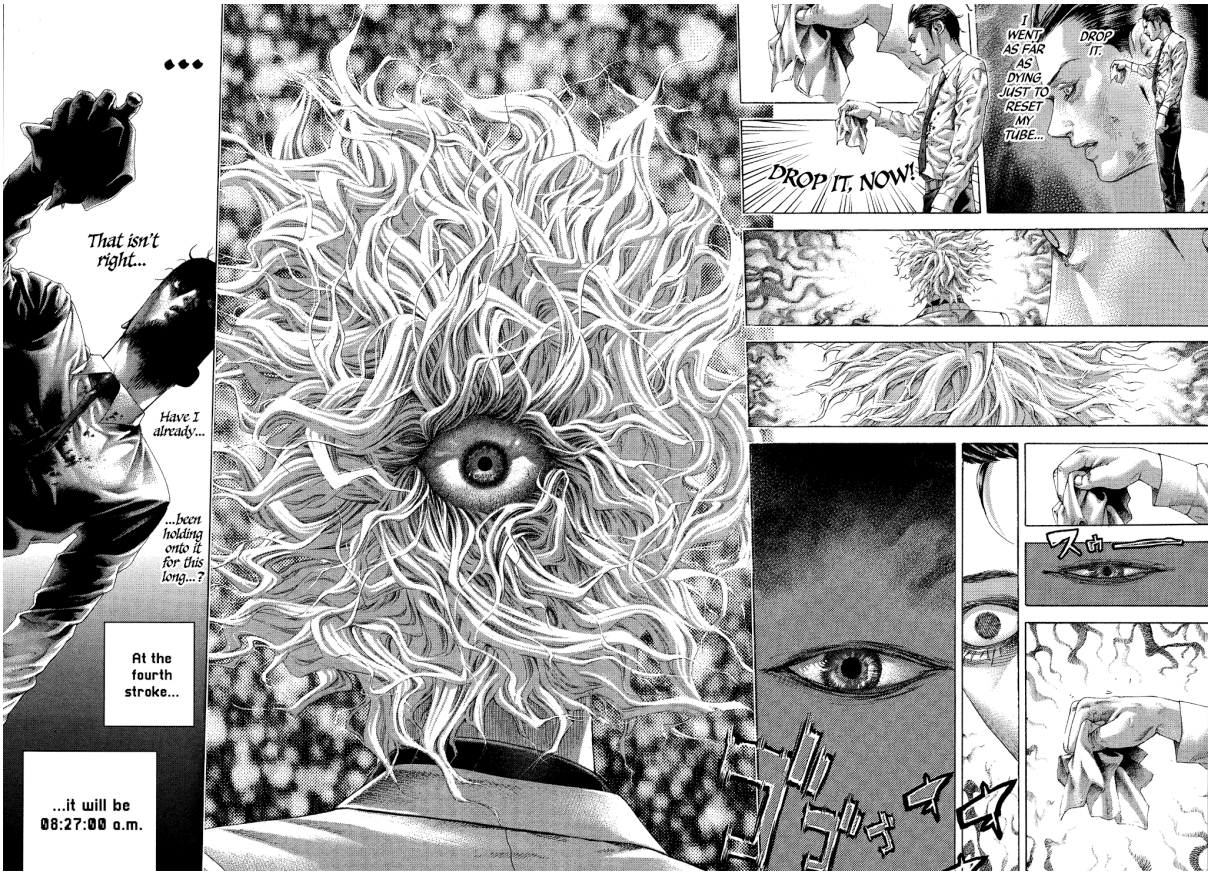

3
THAT IS CORRECT...
WE NEED SOMETHING TO KEEP AN EXACT TRACK OF TIME...
WE...
...DIDN'T STAY TO-GETHER, NO.
AND AFTER THAT?

Next, the meeting with Kaji (image 4, 5). Leader is present while Kaji explains that he wasn't always with Oofuna, and hence had ample time to prepare something in advance; if Yakou suspects Baku planned something, why wouldn't Leader?

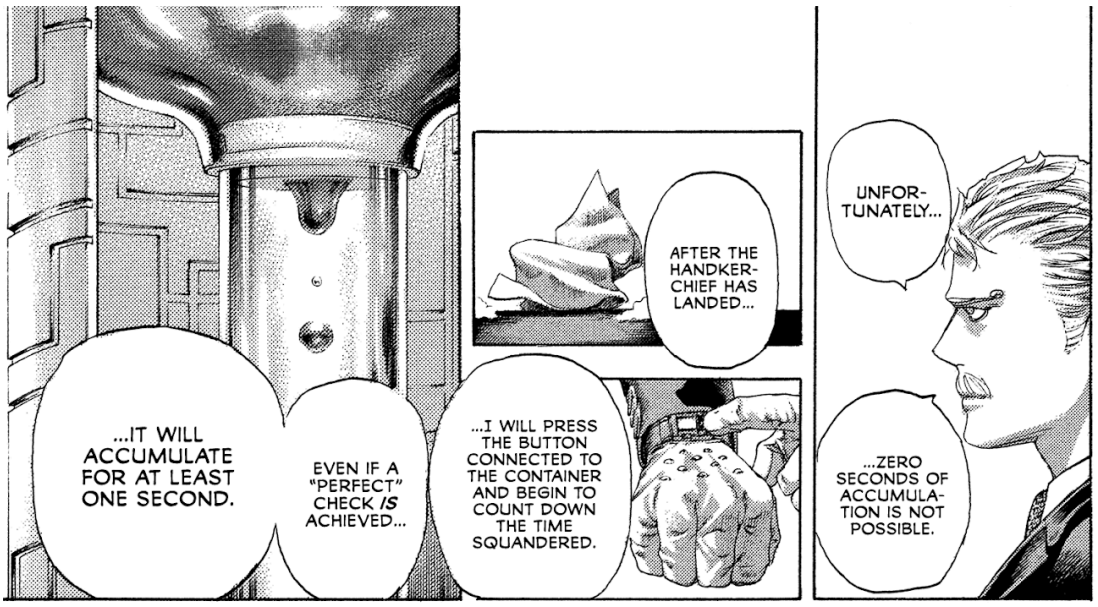


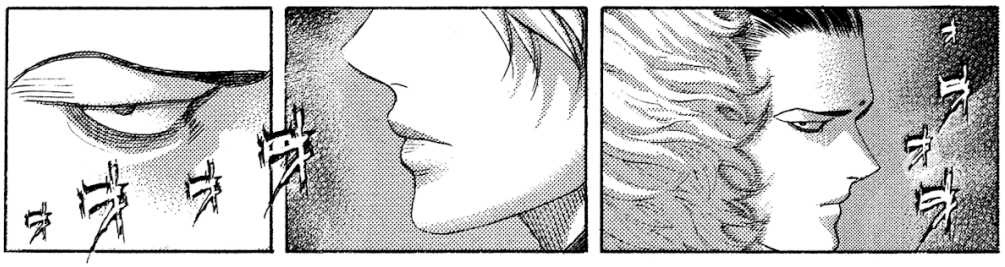
Then the ellipsis from Leader in image 6 as Baku reacts to the mention of a 'time limit' suggests that he finds Baku's reactions to be suspicious. What does a time limit have to do

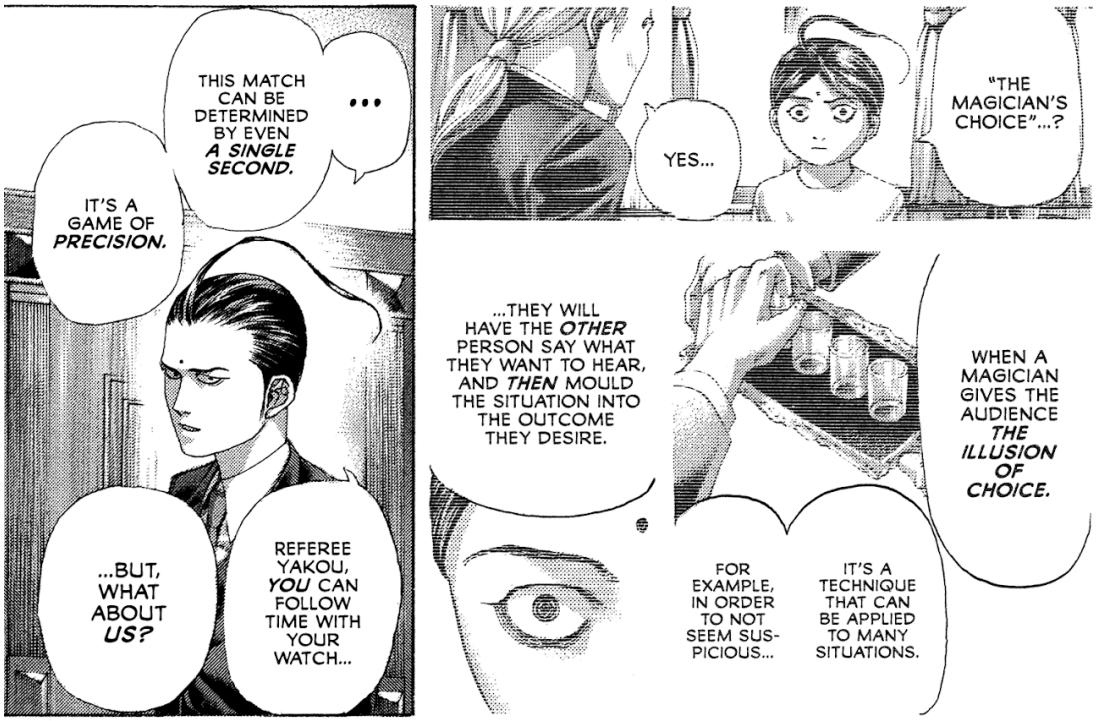
with Leap Second? Well, LS is Baku quite literally exploiting the idea of a 'safe check', one that goes up to the time limit, only to make Hal somehow fail his 'guaranteed check'. Leap Second only works BECAUSE there is a strict time limit. Baku is literally reacting at exactly the right times to make Leader suspect specific details.



I mean, just look at Baku, he's literally radiating a suspicious aura. If Baku desperately wants to conceal LS, and we're literally SHOWN that Baku can manipulate his aura during STL (i.e aura of determination, image 7), can't Baku just... not do that? Genuinely look me in the eyes and tell me Baku doesn't look like a man with a plan who is barely trying to conceal that fact.


...IT WILL ACCUMULATE FOR AT LEAST ONE SECOND.
EVEN IF A "PERFECT" CHECK *IS* ACHIEVED...
AFTER THE HANDKERCHIEF HAS LANDED...
...I WILL PRESS THE BUTTON CONNECTED TO THE CONTAINER AND BEGIN TO COUNT DOWN THE TIME SQUANDERED.
UNFORTUNATELY...
...ZERO SECONDS OF ACCUMULATION IS NOT POSSIBLE.




THIS MATCH CAN BE DETERMINED BY EVEN *A SINGLE SECOND.*
...
IT'S A GAME OF *PRECISION.*
...BUT, WHAT ABOUT *US?*
REFEREE YAKOU, *YOU* CAN FOLLOW TIME WITH YOUR WATCH...
YES...
"THE MAGICIAN'S CHOICE"...?
...THEY WILL HAVE THE *OTHER* PERSON SAY WHAT THEY WANT TO HEAR, AND *THEN* MOULD THE SITUATION INTO THE OUTCOME THEY DESIRE.
FOR EXAMPLE, IN ORDER TO NOT SEEM SUSPICIOUS...
IT'S A TECHNIQUE THAT CAN BE APPLIED TO MANY SITUATIONS.
WHEN A MAGICIAN GIVES THE AUDIENCE *THE ILLUSION OF CHOICE.*

Then, in image 8, the idea of magician's choice comes up, an already suspicious Leader begins to realise that Baku might be manipulating him to ask certain questions for him, implying their significance to him. Weaker evidence but there nonetheless.


REST ASSURED, THIS CLOCK IS USUALLY STORED HERE.
I'LL PLACE IT IN FRONT OF THE TWO OF YOU.
...INDEED,
WE *WOULD* NEED SOMETHING TO KEEP AN EXACT TRACK OF TIME FOR THE GAME.
AFTER ALL, YAKOU WILL BE OCCUPIED WITH COUNTING THE TIME SQUANDERED AND BEARING WITNESS TO EVERYTHING WE DO.

Image 9, once again Baku couldn't seem more carefree about revealing his intentions, and Leader couldn't be any more obvious about the fact that he finds Baku's actions suspicious.


WE ARE NOT...
...GOING TO USE THIS.
...
I APOLOGISE.
SUCH A SITUATION CANNOT HAPPEN. IT'S AN IMPERFECTION.
IF IT WERE TO RUN OUT OF BATTERY,
OR MALFUNCTION...
IS THERE EVEN...
IF WE DON'T USE IT, HOW WILL WE PLAY?
YOU BUY THAT?
"DISAPPOINTING"?
...ISN'T IT?
DISAPPOINTING...

And finally, image 10, Baku blatantly eats his Kariume in front of Leader, an obvious sign that things are going according to his predictions (it's extremely likely that Leader has seen Baku eat his Kariume in such a manner before, given that he now has all his memories back). "Disappointing? You buy that?" Here's Baku literally telling Leader that he shouldn't trust the idea that his plans have been overturned.


HE HAD STOPPED.
...
DON'T TELL ME...
HE STOPPED THE EXAG-GERATION...
...HAS HE ALREADY...?
...OF HIS OWN FEAR OF THE ENEMY...
...AND THE DEAD-MAN BEGAN TO MAKE HIS MOVE;
GRADUALLY PIECING TOGETHER THE TRUTH...
...BEHIND HIS PREVIOUS FAILURE.


NOW, THE 5TH ROUND, 1ST HALF,
WILL
START AT 8:34:00 AM.


IT'S ALRIGHT...
IT'S GOING TO BE 8:34:00 AM.


BEEP
BEEP
BEEP


MY INTENTIONS YET.
HE HASN'T READ...



Well, that's all jolly good, but oh wait... images 11-13 make all of that redundant, right? Not quite.

We've established what and how, so now we need to establish WHY.

To understand that, we need to understand the friendship trap. So here's my updated model of it:

The Friendship Trap (mentioned in Hal's first dream as being part of the second chapter of the Prince Bee), can only refer to something to do with the relationship between Baku and Hal, as Hal was the only personality of Souichi to truly form a close bond with Baku. This trap is exploiting that bond.

It is quite likely that Baku knows about the witch pain and Perfect Leader's ability to erase 'wedges' after Air Poker (I won't explain this now but feel free to ask more about it). Furthermore, Hal is an anomalous personality in Leader's superorganism, explicitly stated to be one that deviated from his path towards destiny. Hence it makes sense for Hal to act as a sort of 'wedge' inside Leader.

Hal has always wanted to be a gambler like Baku, and also knows him the best out of all his personalities, so if Baku were to hint at some kind of tactic, Hal would be the first to figure it out. I believe this is what happened during STL. By hinting at Leap Second, he entices Hal into obsessing over it, ultimately culminating into Hal figuring out Leap Second, then dying on purpose during Round 2 to open the Leap Second route to Baku.

However, Baku anticipates an internal conflict within Leader, as Hal has become too immersed in the gamble, and may have fallen for some sort of trap. Perhaps even a Friendship Trap. Baku's aim is to make Hal appear as a threat to Leader's perfection, leading to the 'wedge' Hal being erased, therefore removing Hal's perspective of Leap Second. This drastically decreases the likelihood of Leap Second being seen through and countered before Round 9.

Quite simply, if Hal figures out Leap Second but isn't erased, or even if Leader figures it out too early, Baku is done for, explaining his nervousness during the actual STL gamble.

Baku goes on to confirm that Hal has disappeared after Leader starts talking about destiny (something that completely contradicts Hal's beliefs) during Round 4, and so after Leader loses his memory due to the monthly cycle, Hal, the leftover consciousness that was erased from Leader's superorganism, will return. Baku will use leap second, win, Hal revives using the AED, Baku and Hal form the Prince Bee duo, beat Gonen yadda yadda and they all live happily ever after.