



Youth at War

A Full English translation is available.

蕉兵戰時記

Author: ANIN **Illustrator:** ANIN **Publisher:** Gaea Books

Date: 03/2021

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172 pages | 14.8 x 21 cm **Volume:** 1

BFT 2.0 Translator: Michelle Kuo

In the 1940s, the roar of fighter planes overhead signals the onset of war. As merciless flames of battle descend, what will become of the bewildered youths at Taihoku High School? Their school is renowned for its spirit of intellectual freedom, and they arrive dreaming of a luminous future. Yet once war begins, that freedom is stripped away, and one by one, students are conscripted and sent to the battlefield.

Nekono, a student who loves literature, arrives at Taihoku High School expecting to find joy and growth. But this hope is swiftly shattered when war breaks out. His roommate and friend, Inuyama, is sent to the front lines in the Philippines, while his classmate Mikawa narrowly escapes death during an air raid. Gradually, Nekono comes to understand the true terror of war.



Author ANIN

A former animator, ANIN currently works as an art designer at a game company. ANIN has worked as a key animator on television anime series including *Fate/Stay Night: Heaven's Feel II*, *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba*, and *Attack on Titan*, and served as an animation supervisor for the Japanese anime series *RE-MAIN*. ANIN loves black tea.

Amid the Roar of Bombing, Youth Seek Meaning and Hope

by Chin-Tang Tsai

In ANIN's earlier manga, *Taihoku High School: A Manga Story* (2013), the final scene shows the school principal telling students heading to the Xindian River to be careful just as the rumble of fighter planes looms over the campus.

That haunting foreshadowing of a war-torn world unfolds in ANIN's subsequent manga, *Youth at War* (2021). This book delicately portrays the final two years in which the war reached its most intense phase. High school students, once expected by the Japanese government to become the future elite leaders of the nation, are conscripted to serve overseas or assigned as trainee soldiers. They are sent to dig trenches and construct defensive positions in places such as Qixing Mountain, Datun Mountain, and Zhuzihu in Taipei and prepare for the coming battles.

The first chapter introduces two main characters, who are roommates:

Nekono and Inuyama. Nekono, a Taiwanese student who has adopted a Japanese surname, has enrolled in the Humanities Division of the Advanced Department at Taihoku Commercial High School. Meanwhile, because Inuyama has repeated entrance examinations and failed multiple years, he's already reached the age of conscription. Dispatched to fight in the Philippines, he gives up on his crush on a female classmate, as well as his passion for literature and writing.

Youth at War depicts the military training that begins on the Taihoku High School campus, revealing the horrors of war, the ugliness of unofficial sanctions within the military, and the desperation brought about by hunger. The work also portrays historical events, including the October 23, 1944 incident in which a Japanese civilian aircraft accidentally crashed into the Taiwan Shrine as it

was being relocated, resulting in severe damage. Another episode reveals the little-known story of students from the Girls' Higher School who were ordered to retrieve diamonds from inside the aircraft. The manga also depicts the devastating Raid on Taipei on May 31, 1945. Together, these episodes reflect ANIN's meticulous examination of historical sources prior to drawing, demonstrating that her work is not mere fiction but is grounded in careful historical research and verification.

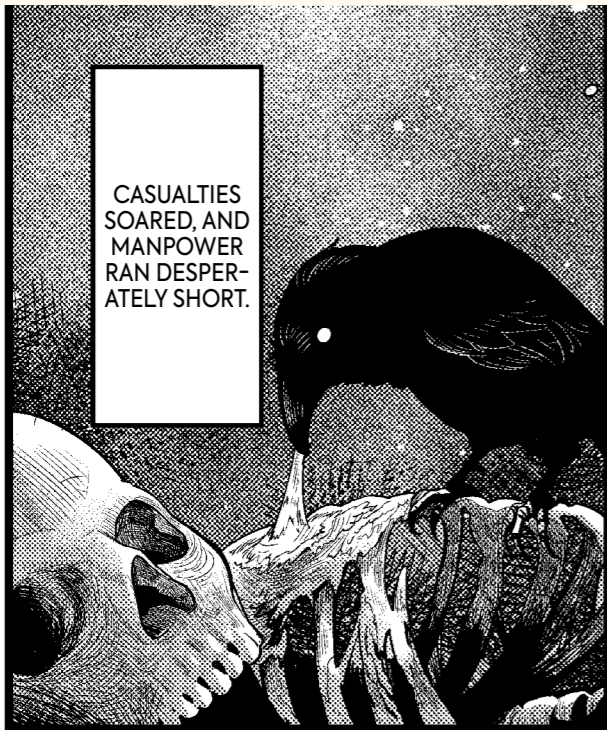
Naturally, the manga also includes moments of creative storytelling and entertainment. When the female protagonist, Lin Hsiu-Ying, passes Nekono during a military march and remarks, "There is a soldier whose face... I cannot stop thinking about," readers may initially assume she has recognized him. The following panel, however, reveals Nekono's face swollen from punishment, creating a subtle comedic twist. In another episode, Private Second Class Li Musheng asks Nekono to descend the mountain to buy a laxative strong enough for cattle, hoping to

use it as payback against an overbearing corporal. Set against the chaos and anxiety of wartime, these flashes of humor offer readers brief moments of relief.

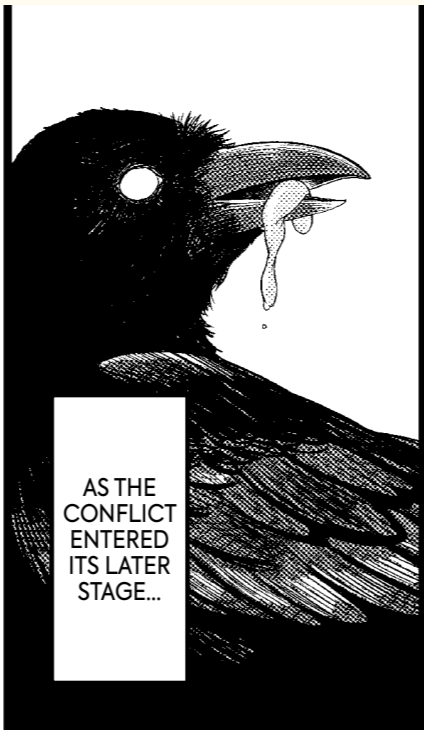
Beyond its historical significance and moments of humor, *Youth at War* also reveals the influence of ANIN's professional training at Japanese animation studios, particularly in its panel composition and visual storytelling. The eruption of the Raid on Taipei is depicted through a striking juxtaposition of terrifying explosions and scenes of ordinary daily life, creating a powerful and dramatic visual contrast.

This preface has been edited for the purposes of this booklet.

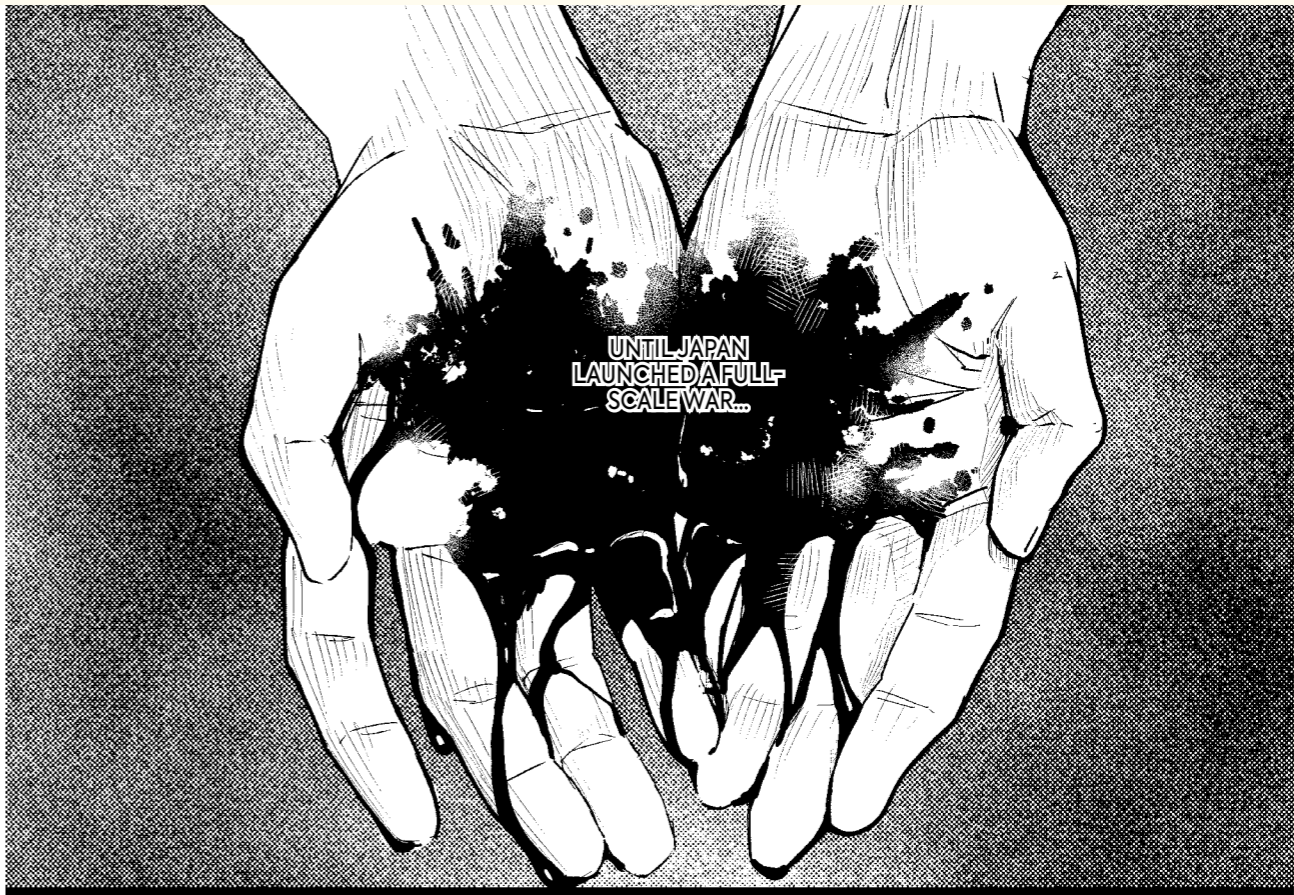
Chin-Tang Tsai is an adjunct professor at the Graduate Institute of Taiwan History, National Taiwan Normal University. His research focuses on Taiwan under Japanese rule, modern Japanese history, and Japan-Taiwan relations, with particular interest in religion, education, and culture.



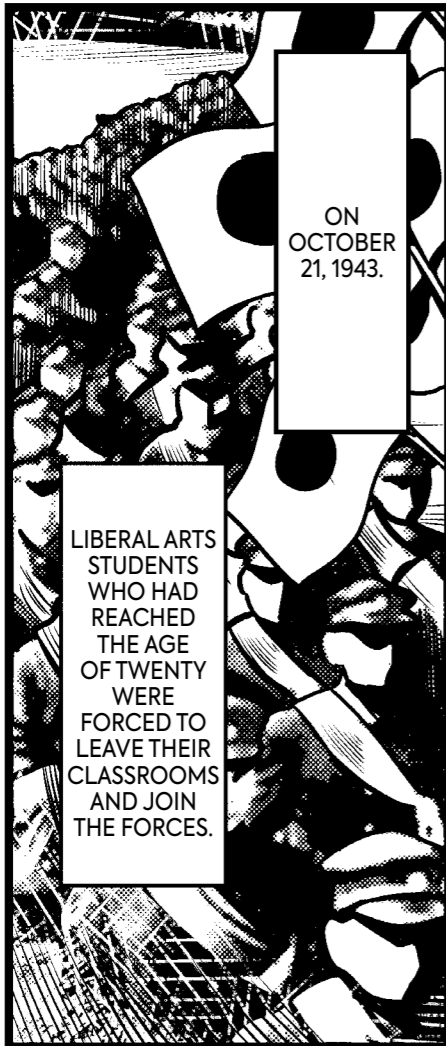
CASUALTIES SOARED, AND MANPOWER RAN DESPERATELY SHORT.



AS THE CONFLICT ENTERED ITS LATER STAGE...

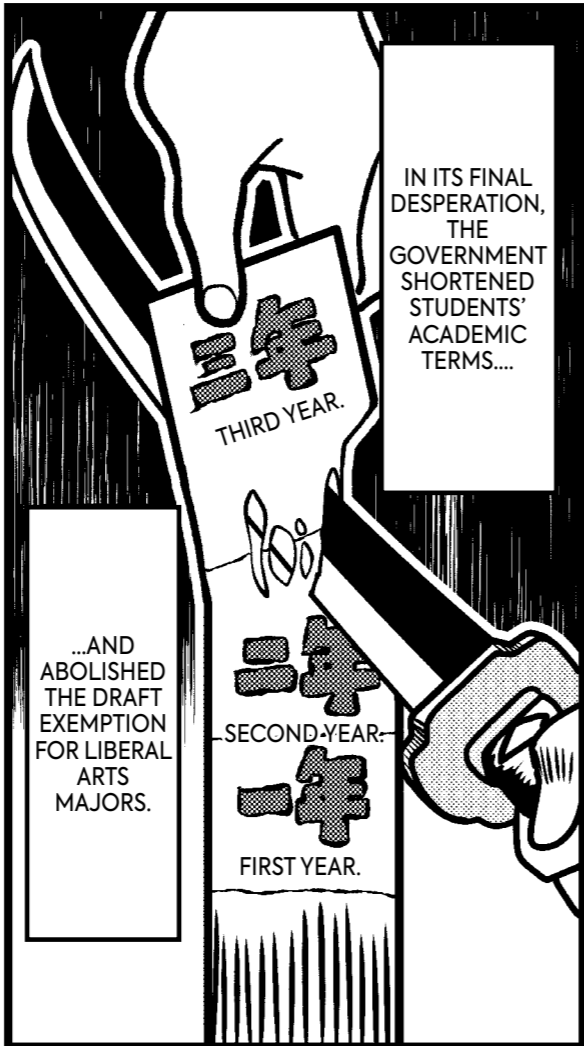


UNTIL JAPAN LAUNCHED A FULL-SCALE WAR...



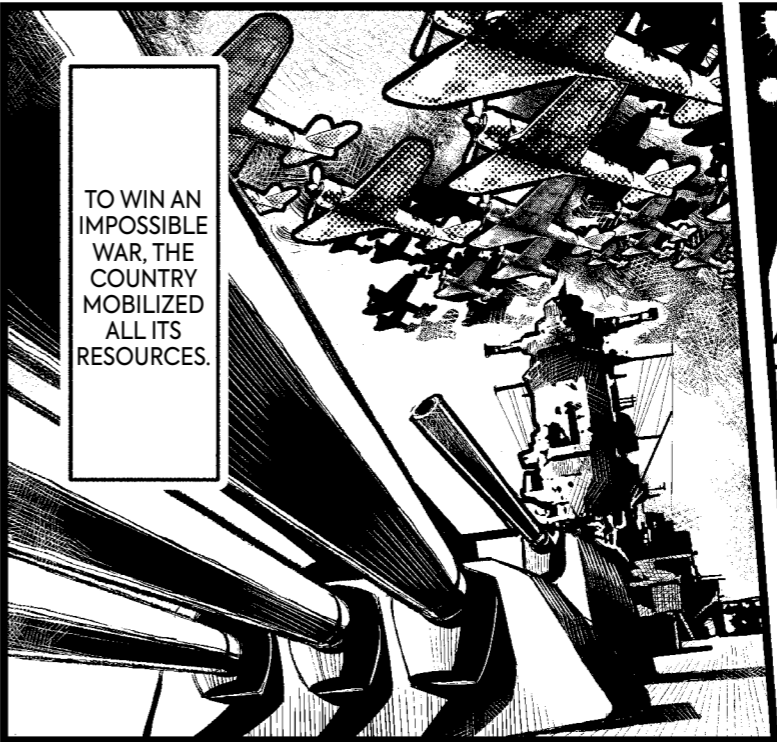
ON OCTOBER 21, 1943.

LIBERAL ARTS STUDENTS WHO HAD REACHED THE AGE OF TWENTY WERE FORCED TO LEAVE THEIR CLASSROOMS AND JOIN THE FORCES.



IN ITS FINAL DESPERATION, THE GOVERNMENT SHORTENED STUDENTS' ACADEMIC TERMS...

...AND ABOLISHED THE DRAFT EXEMPTION FOR LIBERAL ARTS MAJORS.



TO WIN AN IMPOSSIBLE WAR, THE COUNTRY MOBILIZED ALL ITS RESOURCES.



AND FREEDOM BECAME GRADUALLY RESTRICTED.



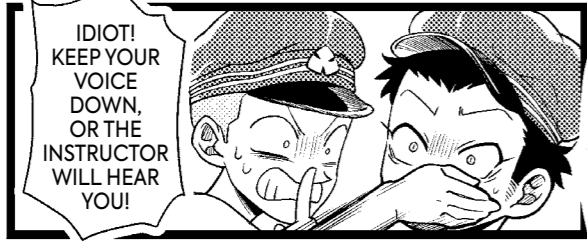
THE SEVEN-YEAR TAIHOKU HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM CONSISTED OF A FOUR-YEAR "ORDINARY DIVISION" AND A THREE-YEAR "HIGHER DIVISION." THE ORDINARY DIVISION WAS ROUGHLY EQUIVALENT TO SECONDARY SCHOOL.



!?

ALL THOSE NIGHTS BURNING THE MIDNIGHT OIL...

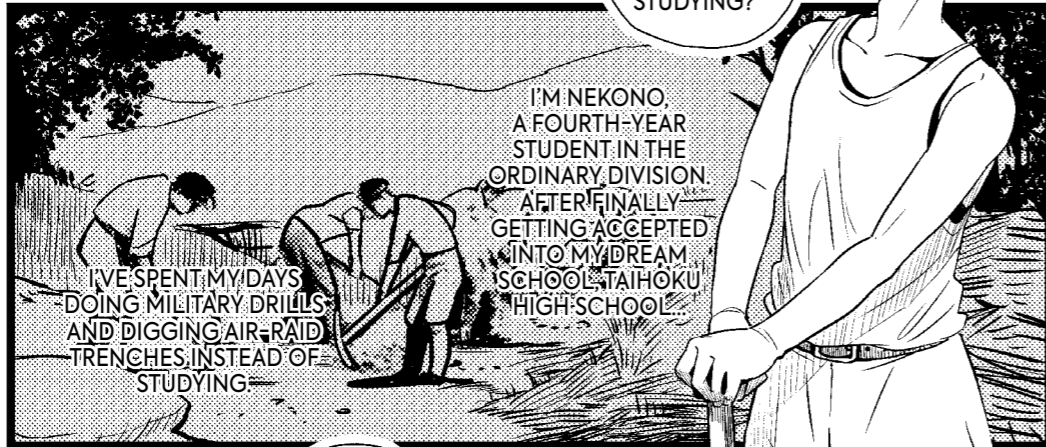
WAS IT JUST TO DIG OUR OWN GRAVES?



IDIOT! KEEP YOUR VOICE DOWN, OR THE INSTRUCTOR WILL HEAR YOU!

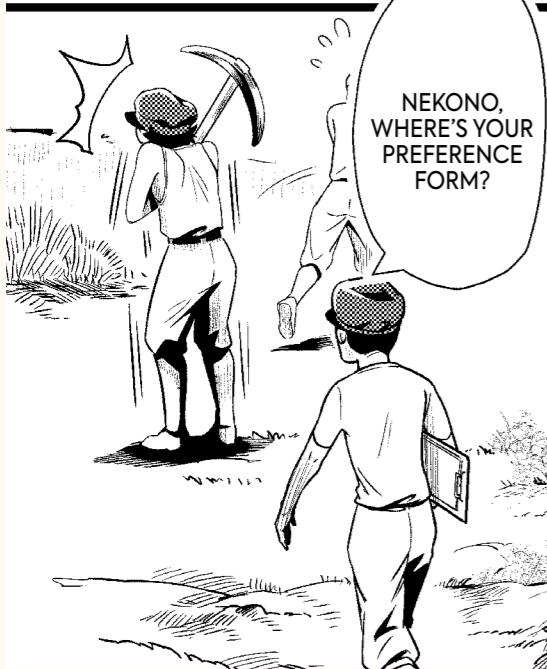
HAH... WEREN'T WE SUPPOSED TO BE THE CHOSEN ELITE? THEN WHAT ARE WE DOING, DIGGING HOLES INSTEAD OF STUDYING?

HEY! STOP SLACKING OFF! THE INSTRUCTOR MIGHT CATCH YOU!



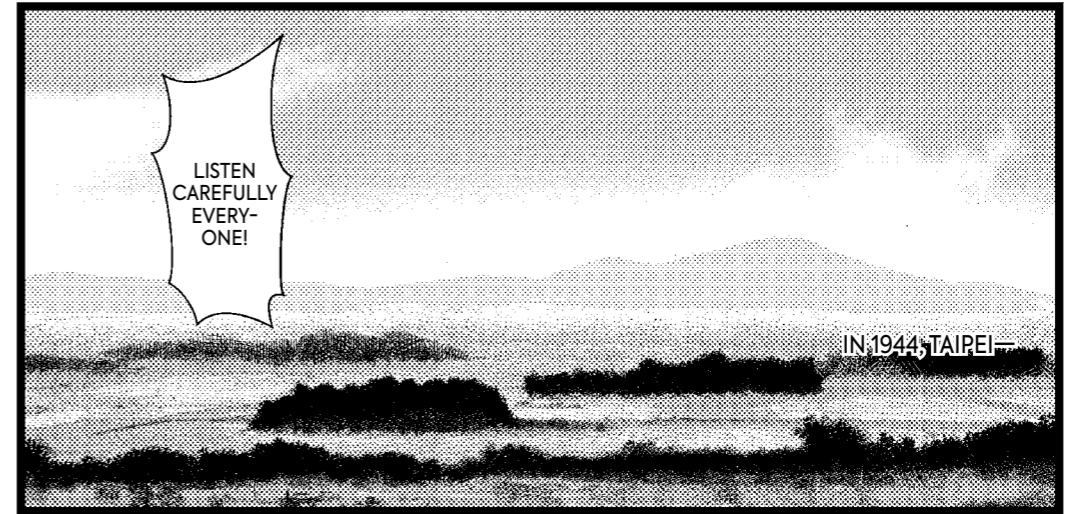
I'VE SPENT MY DAYS DOING MILITARY DRILLS AND DIGGING AIR-RAID TRENCHES INSTEAD OF STUDYING.

I'M NEKONO, A FOURTH-YEAR STUDENT IN THE ORDINARY DIVISION. AFTER FINALLY GETTING ACCEPTED INTO MY DREAM SCHOOL, TAIHOKU HIGH SCHOOL...



NEKONO, WHERE'S YOUR PREFERENCE FORM?

THIS YEAR, I'M ABOUT TO MOVE UP TO THE HIGHER DIVISION. BESIDES CHOOSING MY COURSES, I NOW FACE A FAR MORE SERIOUS DECISION... ONE THAT COULD MEAN LIFE OR DEATH.



LISTEN CAREFULLY EVERY-ONE!

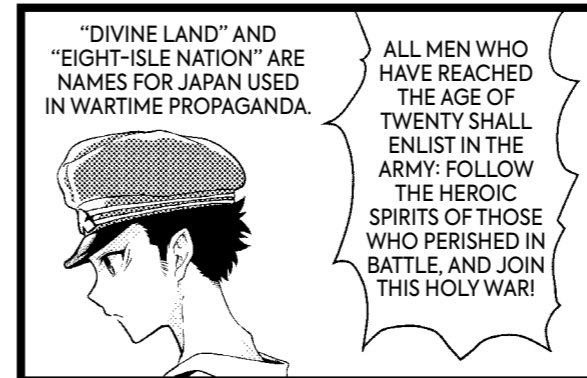
IN 1944, TAIPEI



AS CITIZENS OF THE DIVINE EIGHT-ISLE NATION, WE MUST NOT HESITATE TO DEDICATE OUR VERY LIVES IN SERVICE TO THE NATION!

THE BARBARIC AMERICANS AND BRITISH DEVILS HAVE ALREADY DRAWN NEAR TO OUR DIVINE LAND!

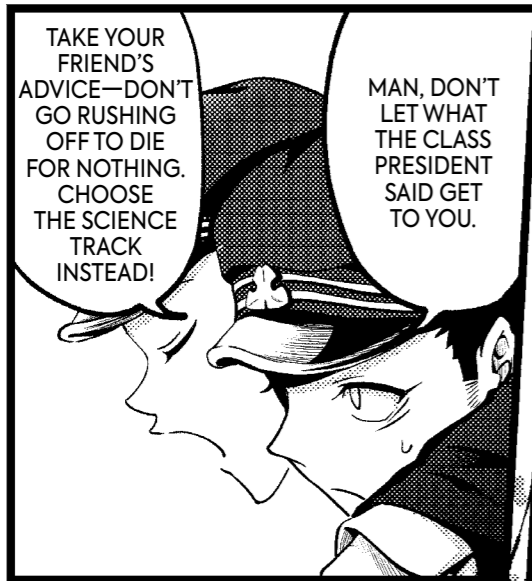
THESE THIEVES, HIDING BEHIND THE NAME OF CHRIST, SEEK TO ENSLAVE THE PEOPLES OF EAST ASIA!



"DIVINE LAND" AND "EIGHT-ISLE NATION" ARE NAMES FOR JAPAN USED IN WARTIME PROPAGANDA.

ALL MEN WHO HAVE REACHED THE AGE OF TWENTY SHALL ENLIST IN THE ARMY: FOLLOW THE HEROIC SPIRITS OF THOSE WHO PERISHED IN BATTLE, AND JOIN THIS HOLY WAR!





TAKE YOUR FRIEND'S ADVICE—DON'T GO RUSHING OFF TO DIE FOR NOTHING. CHOOSE THE SCIENCE TRACK INSTEAD!

MAN, DON'T LET WHAT THE CLASS PRESIDENT SAID GET TO YOU.



TORII WAS RIGHT. IF I CHOSE THE SCIENCE TRACK, I COULD POSTPONE GOING TO THE BATTLEFIELD...

BUT THAT KIND OF "UNPATRIOTIC" THINKING WASN'T TOLERATED IN TIMES LIKE THESE.

HONOR... OR LIFE?



WHY AM I HESITATING?



THE REVISION OF THE DRAFT SYSTEM IS EXACTLY WHAT WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR! WE SHOULD FOLLOW OUR FALLEN HEROES AND JOIN THIS HOLY WAR!

SUCH A COWARD. HOW COULD YOU FACE THE LOYAL SOULS WHO SACRIFICED THEMSELVES IN THE BATTLEFIELD?

Y-YES...

MAKE SURE TO HAND IN YOUR FORM BY THE END OF THE MONTH!



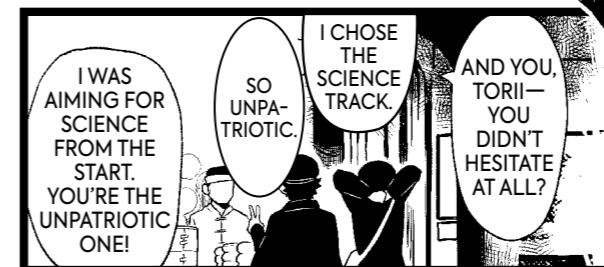
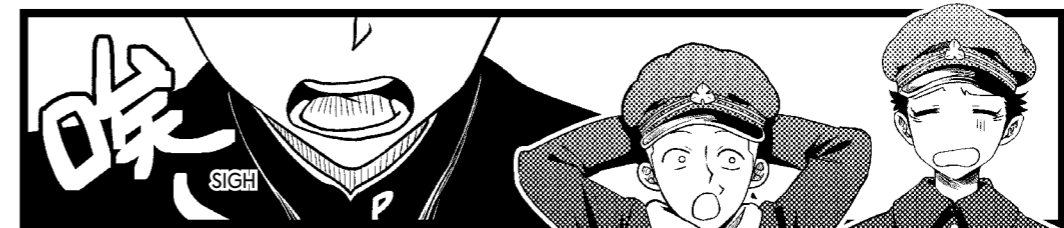
YOU WERE ORIGINALLY AIMING FOR THE LIBERAL ARTS, RIGHT?

C-CLASS PRESIDENT...? SORRY, JUST GIVE ME A LITTLE MORE TIME...



NEKO-NO...

DON'T TELL ME YOU'RE THINKING OF SWITCHING TO SCIENCE TO AVOID CONSCRIPTION?



I WAS AIMING FOR SCIENCE FROM THE START. YOU'RE THE UNPATRIOTIC ONE!

SO UNPATRIOTIC.

I CHOSE THE SCIENCE TRACK.

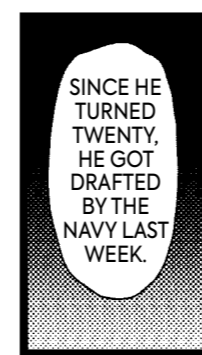
AND YOU, TORII— YOU DIDN'T HESITATE AT ALL?



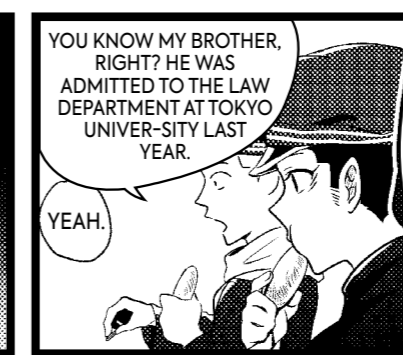
BUT WHAT ABOUT YOU? WHAT'S GOT YOU THINKING SO HARD ABOUT CHOOSING YOUR COURSE?

MIKAWA IS THE PRINCIPAL'S SON AND THE CLASS PRESIDENT. OF COURSE HE HAS A STRONG SENSE OF DUTY...

DUDE, THE CLASS PRESIDENT'S SO SCARY. I REALLY CAN'T STAND THOSE DIE-HARD PATRIOTS.



SINCE HE TURNED TWENTY, HE GOT DRAFTED BY THE NAVY LAST WEEK.



YOU KNOW MY BROTHER, RIGHT? HE WAS ADMITTED TO THE LAW DEPARTMENT AT TOKYO UNIVERSITY LAST YEAR.

YEAH.