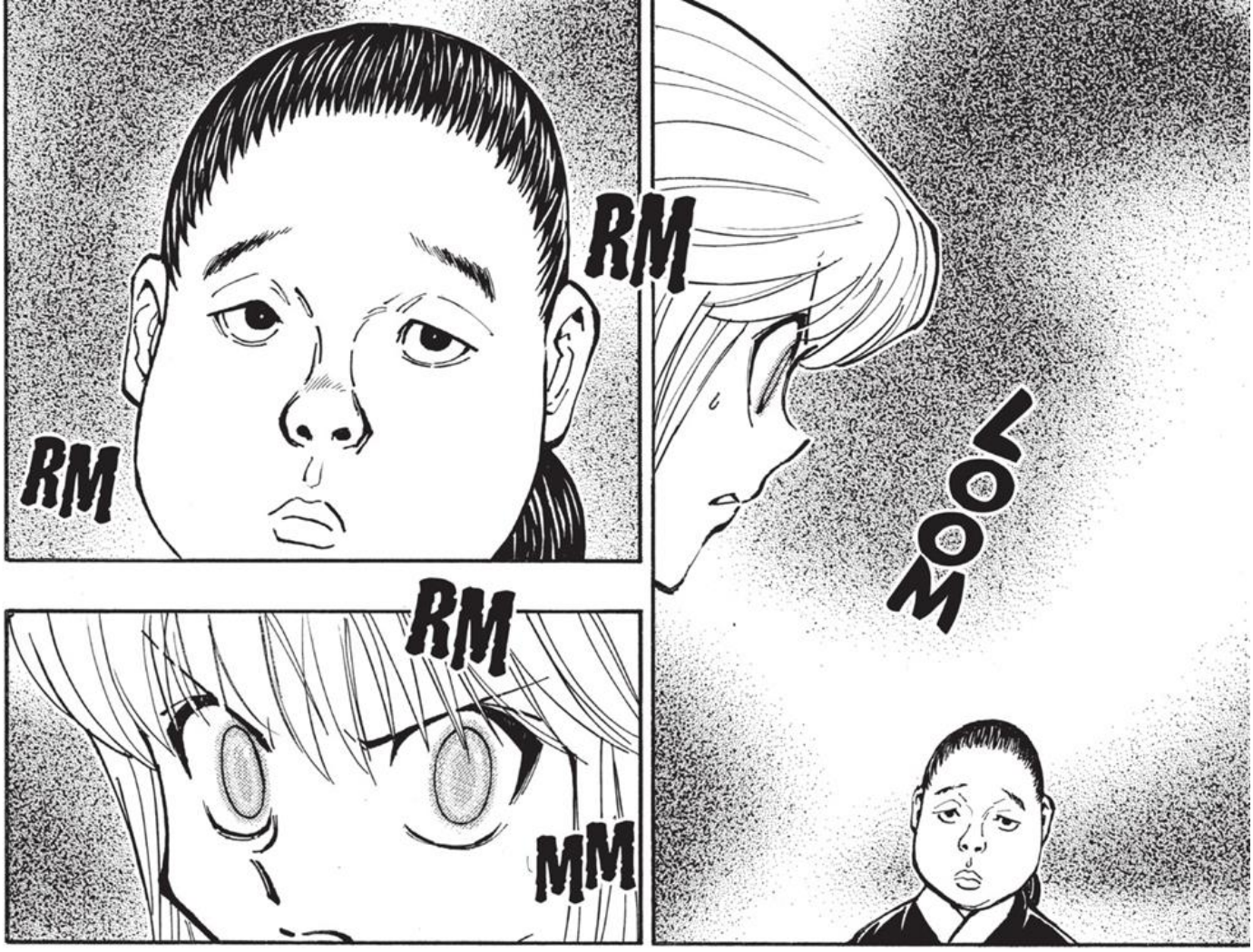
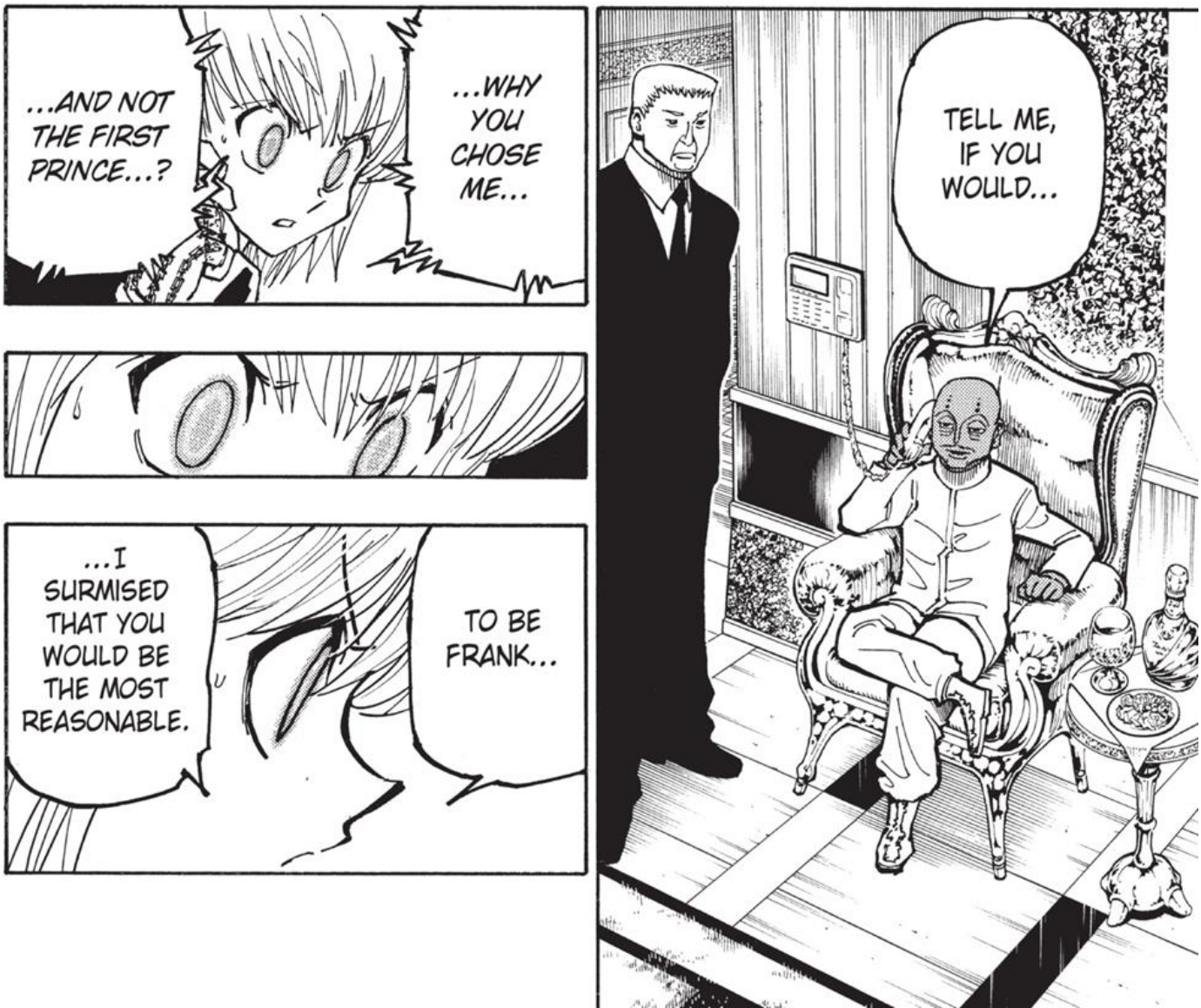
Chapter 365: Choice




BENJAMIN KNOWS ONE OF HIS SOLDIERS IS DEAD BECAUSE OF US!
WE COULD BE IN A STATE OF WAR ALREADY...!
SO WHY WOULD HE WANT TO TALK TO US AT THE SAME TIME HE SENT ANOTHER ASSASSIN...?!
THE OTHER TWO PROBABLY HAVE THE SAME REASON TO MAKE CONTACT WITH US.
TO GET INFORMATION ON THE NEN BEASTS !!
THEIR OWN SECURITY TEAMS LIKELY DIDN'T INCLUDE ANY NEN USERS.
THIS HYPOTHESIS IS SUPPORTED BY THE FACT THAT BOTH PRINCES INCREASED THEIR SECURITY STAFF WITHOUT HIRING HUNTERS!
I WOULD REALLY LIKE TO TALK... BUT WE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH INFORMATION ON THEM.
THEY WOULDN'T CONTACT US JUST TO DECLARE WAR.
IF WE CONTACT THE FIRST PRINCE, IT SHOULD PRESSURE THE OTHER PRINCES...!!
SHIMANO!
HAVE THE SOLDIER OUTSIDE WAIT AND TELL THE SWITCHBOARD TO TAKE THE CALL FROM THE FIRST PRINCE.
YES, SIR..
BILL!
KEEP AN EYE ON THE SOLDIER.
THERE'S A CHANCE HE COULD ATTACK.
USE GYO.
LEAVE IT TO ME.
I'LL HOLD HIM BACK.

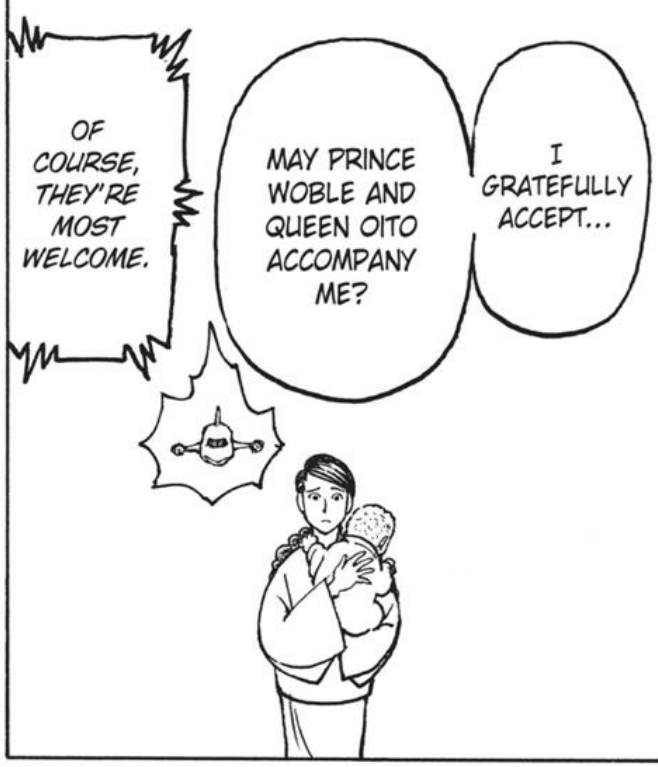

...THEY WILL MOVE WITH CAUTION...!
IF PRETENDING THAT WE HAVE A MANIPULATOR WORKED...
...THAT YOU TOOK MY CALL OVER FIRST PRINCE BENJAMIN'S.
I'M HONORED ...
...
HELLO ?
ZHANG LEI... THE THIRD PRINCE...?!

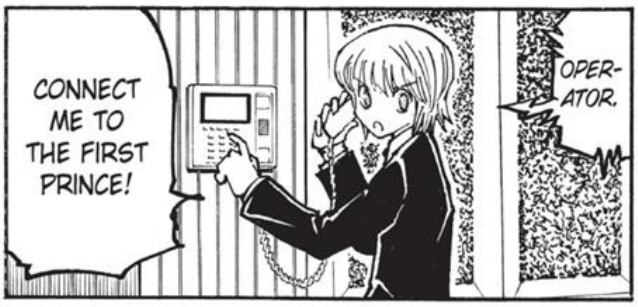

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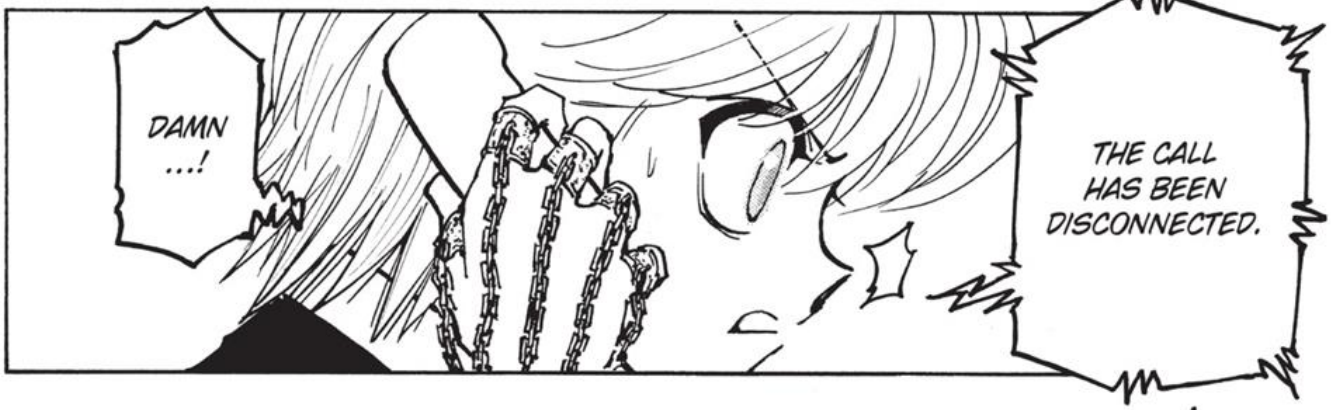

...AND NOT THE FIRST PRINCE...?
...WHY YOU CHOSE ME...
...I SURMISED THAT YOU WOULD BE THE MOST REASONABLE.
TO BE FRANK...
TELL ME, IF YOU WOULD...


...IT IS PROBABLY INFORMATION YOU WANT.
...AS...
I CANNOT REVEAL THAT...
ON WHAT BASIS...?
OH...?
...IT HAS TO DO WITH NEN.
YOU SEE...
SO...
BUT SECRECY CANNOT BE GUARANTEED OVER THE PHONE.
AS YOU GUESSED, I WANT AS MUCH INFORMATION ON NEN AS I CAN GET.
...
ALL RIGHT, I'LL CUT TO THE CHASE.
HE CAN'T STAND THAT SOMEONE ELSE IS IN A SUPERIOR POSITION.
IT SPEAKS TO HIS ROYAL BLOOD...
IT WILL BE AN EXCHANGE OF HONOR AND INFORMATION.
I PERMIT YOU TO ENTER MY QUARTERS.


RING THE DOOR IN 15 MINUTES.
WE'RE SIBLINGS. WE'RE NOT IN CONFLICT OF OUR OWN DESIRE.


I GRATEFULLY ACCEPT...
MAY PRINCE WOBLE AND QUEEN OITO ACCOMPANY ME?
OF COURSE, THEY'RE MOST WELCOME.


CONNECT ME TO THE FIRST PRINCE!
OPER-ATOR.


DAMN ...!
THE CALL HAS BEEN DISCONNECTED.

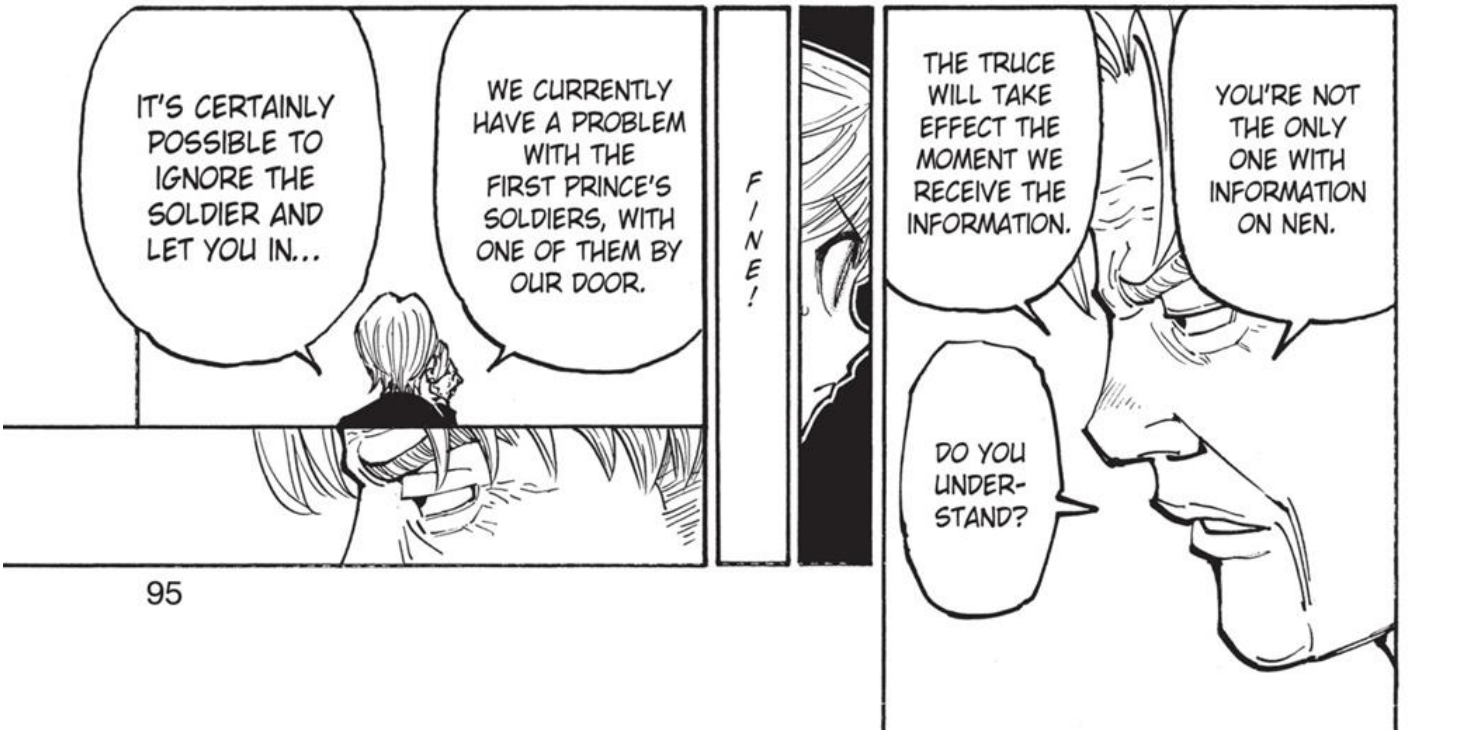

THIS IS SECOND LIEUTENANT MAOR ON THE LINE FOR PRINCE TUBEPPA.
HELLO, THIS IS KURAPIKA.

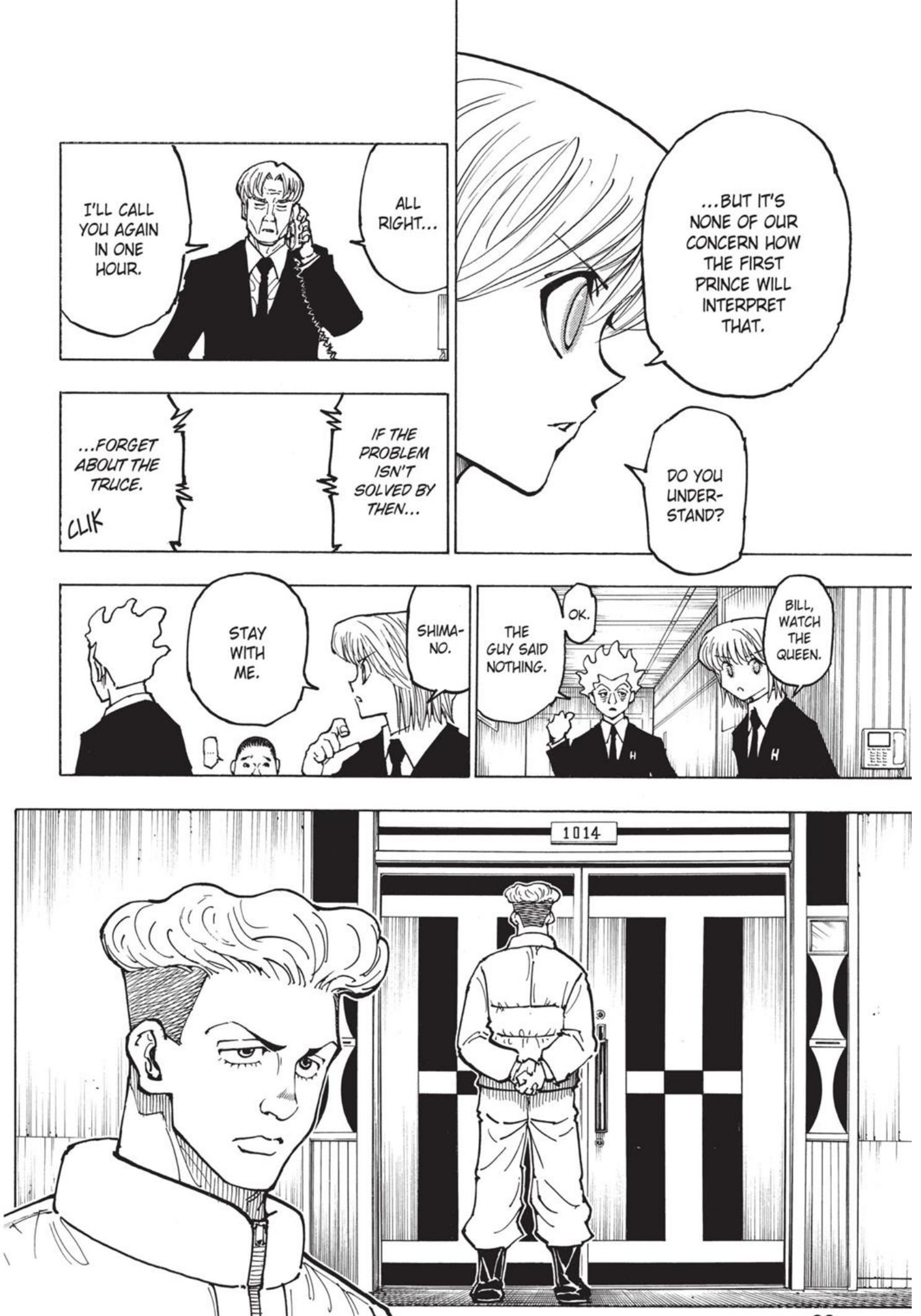

SHALL I CONNECT YOU TO FIFTH PRINCE TUBEPPA?
!
YES, AT ONCE.


WE ARE PREPARED TO ENTER A TRUCE IN EXCHANGE FOR INFORMATION ON THE NEN BEASTS.
WILL YOU ACCEPT?

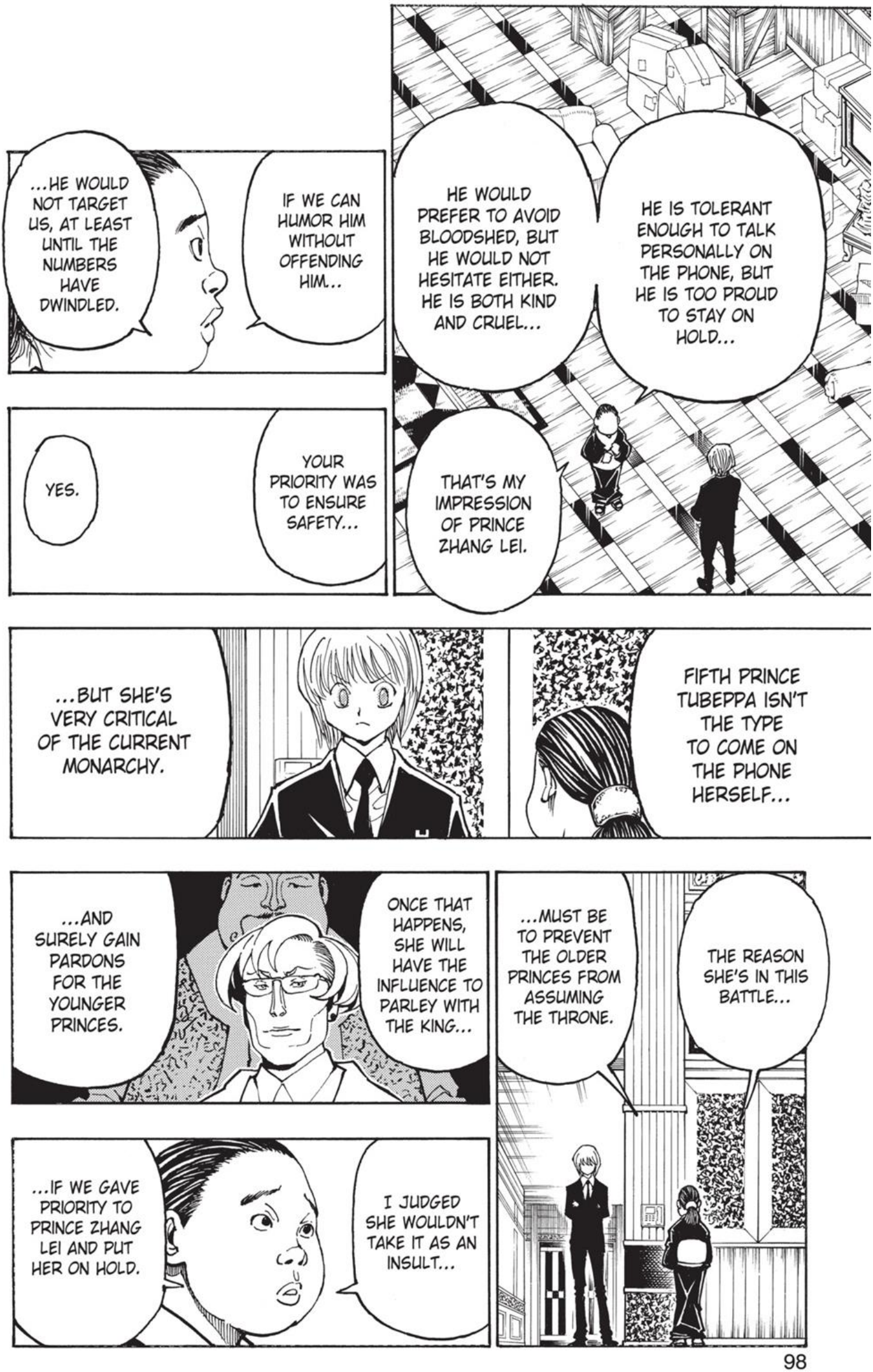

ALL RIGHT, I'LL HEAD RIGHT OVER.
DON'T WORRY, WE DON'T DESIRE CONFLICT EITHER.
CAN YOU WAIT A WHILE...?
ALL RIGHT, WE ACCEPT.
WE'RE NOT CONCERNED.
YOU AREN'T CONCERNED ABOUT OUR AFFAIRS WITH THE OTHER PRINCES?
WE WILL NOT BREACH THE TRUCE OURSELVES, BUT WE MAY REVOKE IT DEPENDING ON YOU.
THE PRINCE HAS LEFT ME IN CHARGE OF THIS MATTER.


...YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES ARE NONE OF OUR CONCERN.
AS I SAID...
...

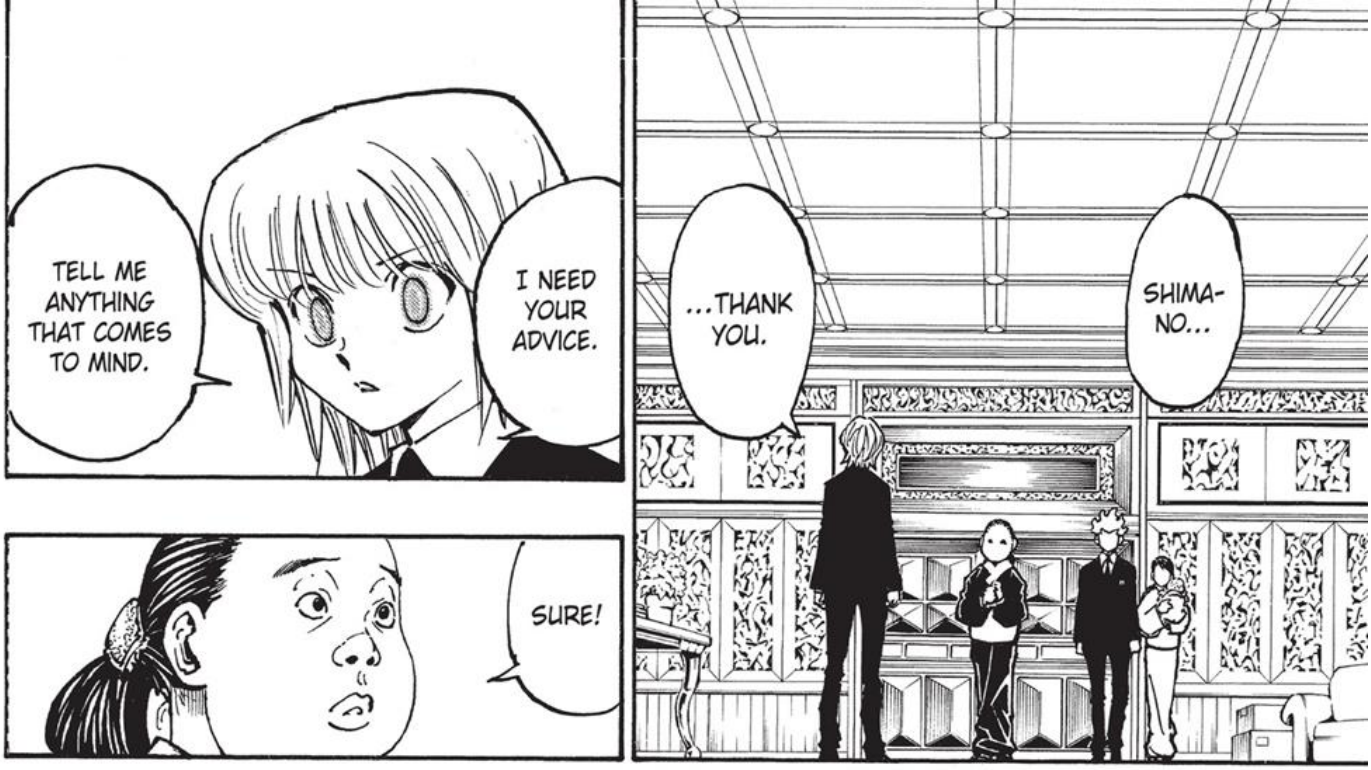

IT'S CERTAINLY POSSIBLE TO IGNORE THE SOLDIER AND LET YOU IN...
WE CURRENTLY HAVE A PROBLEM WITH THE FIRST PRINCE'S SOLDIERS, WITH ONE OF THEM BY OUR DOOR.
FINE!
THE TRUCE WILL TAKE EFFECT THE MOMENT WE RECEIVE THE INFORMATION.
YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE WITH INFORMATION ON NEN.
DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

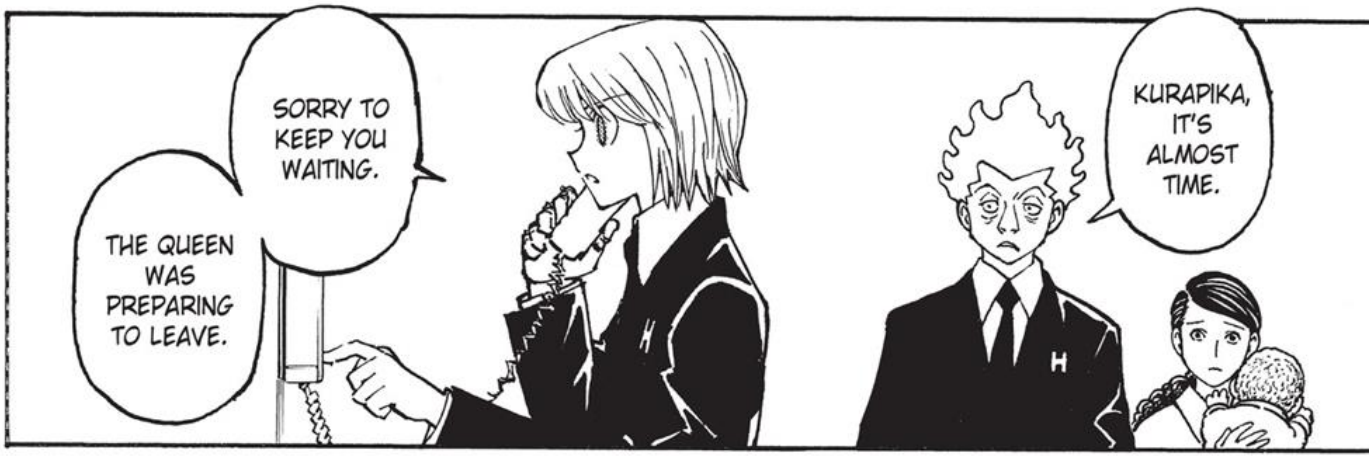

ALL RIGHT...
I'LL CALL YOU AGAIN IN ONE HOUR.
...BUT IT'S NONE OF OUR CONCERN HOW THE FIRST PRINCE WILL INTERPRET THAT.
IF THE PROBLEM ISN'T SOLVED BY THEN...
...FORGET ABOUT THE TRUCE.
CLIK
DO YOU UNDER-STAND?
SHIMA-NO.
STAY WITH ME.
OK.
THE GUY SAID NOTHING.
BILL, WATCH THE QUEEN.
1014


I WANT...
...TO DO MY BEST TO SURVIVE.
WHY...
...DID YOU TAKE THE CALL FROM THIRD PRINCE ZHANG LEI AND NOT BENJAMIN?
PRINCE BENJAMIN IS VERY COLD-BLOODED.
HE WILL NEVER CHANGE HIS MIND THROUGH NEGOTIATION, EVEN IF WE PLEAD FOR OUR LIVES.
NEGOTIATIONS HAVE BROKEN DOWN OVER THE DEATH OF HIS SUBORDINATE.
THEY HAVE ONLY ONE MATTER OF CONCERN.
HE WOULD ALSO NEVER SPEAK TO COMMONERS.
IT WAS PROBABLY MASTER SERGEANT MIGHT, CAPTAIN OF THE GUARDS, ON THE PHONE.
IN ORDER TO SHOW RESPECT FOR ENEMIES WHO REMAIN LOYAL TO THEIR CLIENT...
...THEY WILL LET THEM CHOOSE HOW TO DIE.
I'M NOT INTERESTED... I WANT TO *LIVE*.
THAT'S WHY I CONNECTED YOU TO PRINCE ZHANG LEI.
...


...HE WOULD NOT TARGET US, AT LEAST UNTIL THE NUMBERS HAVE DWINDLED.
IF WE CAN HUMOR HIM WITHOUT OFFENDING HIM...
HE WOULD PREFER TO AVOID BLOODSHED, BUT HE WOULD NOT HESITATE EITHER. HE IS BOTH KIND AND CRUEL...
HE IS TOLERANT ENOUGH TO TALK PERSONALLY ON THE PHONE, BUT HE IS TOO PROUD TO STAY ON HOLD...
YES.
YOUR PRIORITY WAS TO ENSURE SAFETY...
THAT'S MY IMPRESSION OF PRINCE ZHANG LEI.
...BUT SHE'S VERY CRITICAL OF THE CURRENT MONARCHY.
FIFTH PRINCE TUBEPPA ISN'T THE TYPE TO COME ON THE PHONE HERSELF...
...AND SURELY GAIN PARDONS FOR THE YOUNGER PRINCES.
ONCE THAT HAPPENS, SHE WILL HAVE THE INFLUENCE TO PARLEY WITH THE KING...
...MUST BE TO PREVENT THE OLDER PRINCES FROM ASSUMING THE THRONE.
THE REASON SHE'S IN THIS BATTLE...
...IF WE GAVE PRIORITY TO PRINCE ZHANG LEI AND PUT HER ON HOLD.
I JUDGED SHE WOULDN'T TAKE IT AS AN INSULT...


THEN I ASK...
SHE'S RIGHT... HER JUDGMENT HAS BEEN ACCURATE.
BARRING HIM FROM ENTERING IS NOT AN OPTION.
...
...ABOUT THE FIRST PRINCE'S SOLDIER WAITING OUTSIDE?
WHAT DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD DO...
REFUSE HIM, AND WE WILL BE ARRESTED ALONG WITH THE QUEEN AND THE PRINCE.
HE'S A HIGH-RANKING SOLDIER IN THE ROYAL ARMY, HERE FOR LEGAL BODYGUARD AND SURVEILLANCE DUTIES.
THE LONGER THIS ABNORMAL SITUATION CONTINUES, THE MORE COMPELLING THEIR STORY BECOMES, AND THE MORE CONVENIENT FOR THEIR GAMBIT.
HE'S BEING MADE TO WAIT, YET HE DOES NOTHING... BECAUSE HE KNOWS WHAT TO DO.
AT FIRST CHANCE, I CAN EASILY IMAGINE THEM ENFORCING THEIR STORYLINE OF THE FRAZZLED QUEEN, IN HER DURESS, COMMITTING MURDER-SUICIDE.
THE FIRST PRINCE'S SOLDIERS WILL ACCOMPANY US...

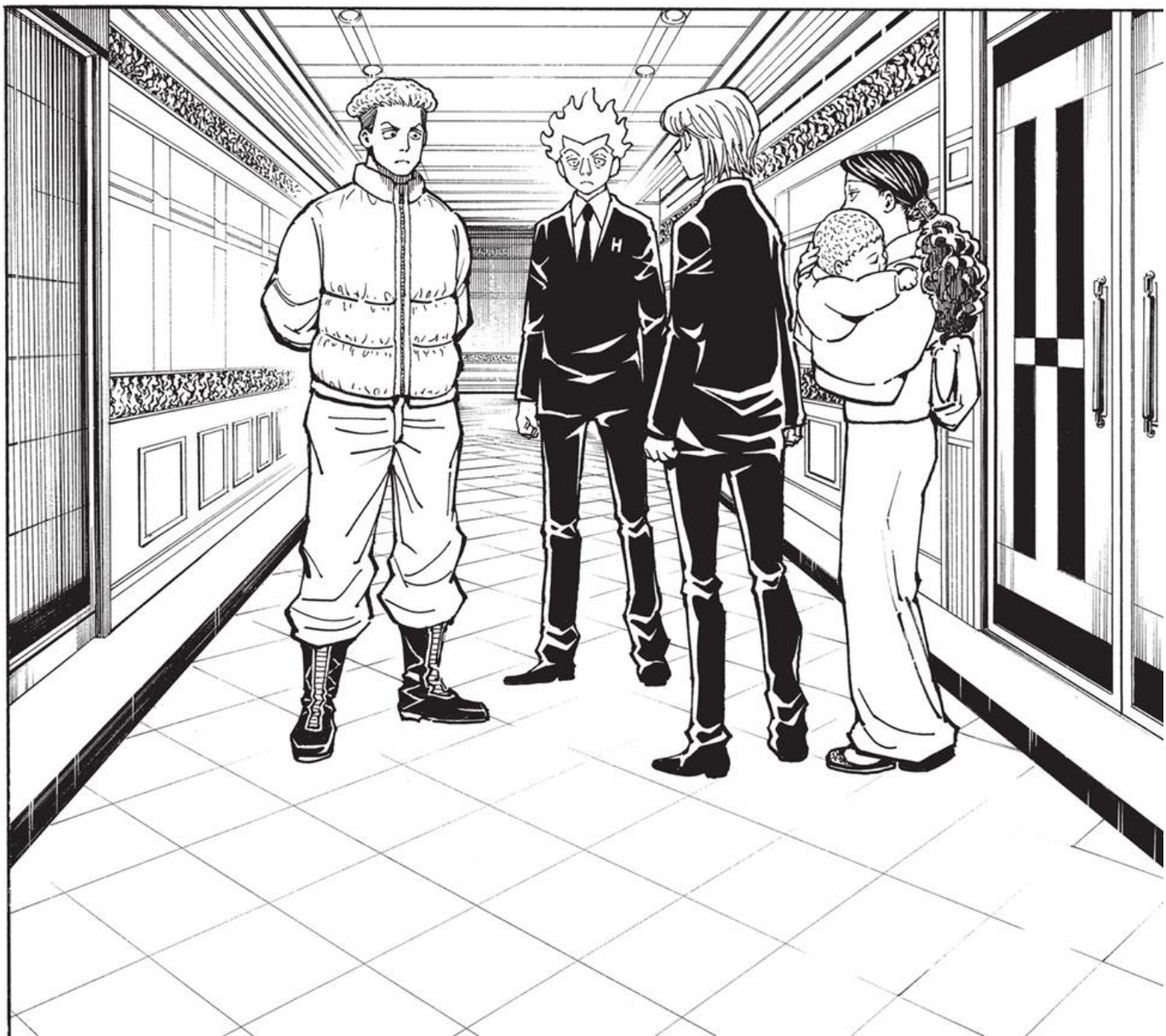

TELL ME ANYTHING THAT COMES TO MIND.
I NEED YOUR ADVICE.
SURE!
...THANK YOU.
SHIMA-NO...


SORRY TO KEEP YOU WAITING.
THE QUEEN WAS PREPARING TO LEAVE.
KURAPIKA, IT'S ALMOST TIME.


WE'RE GOING TO PRINCE ZHANG LEI'S QUARTERS.
WE WERE PERSONALLY INVITED, OF COURSE.
...
LEAVE?

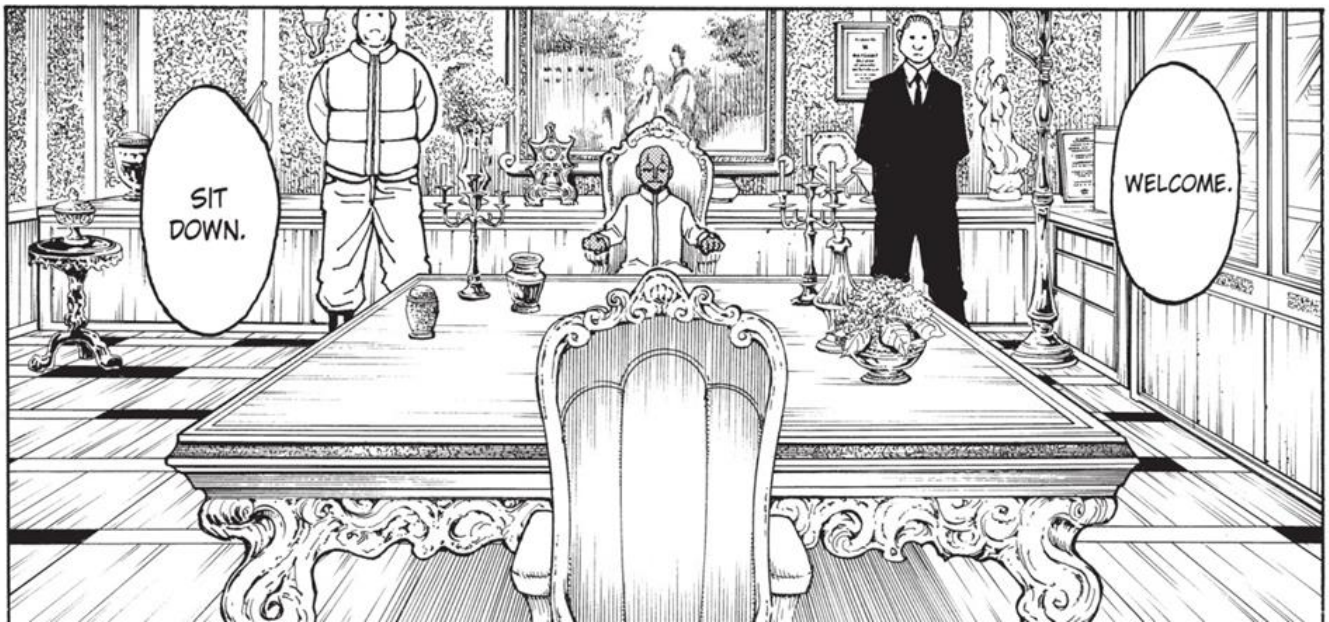

NO...
IN PRINCE ZHANG LEI'S DOMAIN, I'LL DEFER TO HIM.
I WILL STAND BY INSIDE.
WILL YOU COME WITH US?
H
H
I'LL PUT CONTACTS IN.
KURAPIKA... WHAT ABOUT YOUR EYES?
I'LL BE FINE.
THEY CAN'T GET ME *THAT* EASILY.
IF I'M BACK BY THEN, I'LL TAKE THE CALL.
IF YOU GET A CALL FROM PRINCE TUBEPPA, TELL THEM THE PROBLEM HAS BEEN SOLVED.


CHK

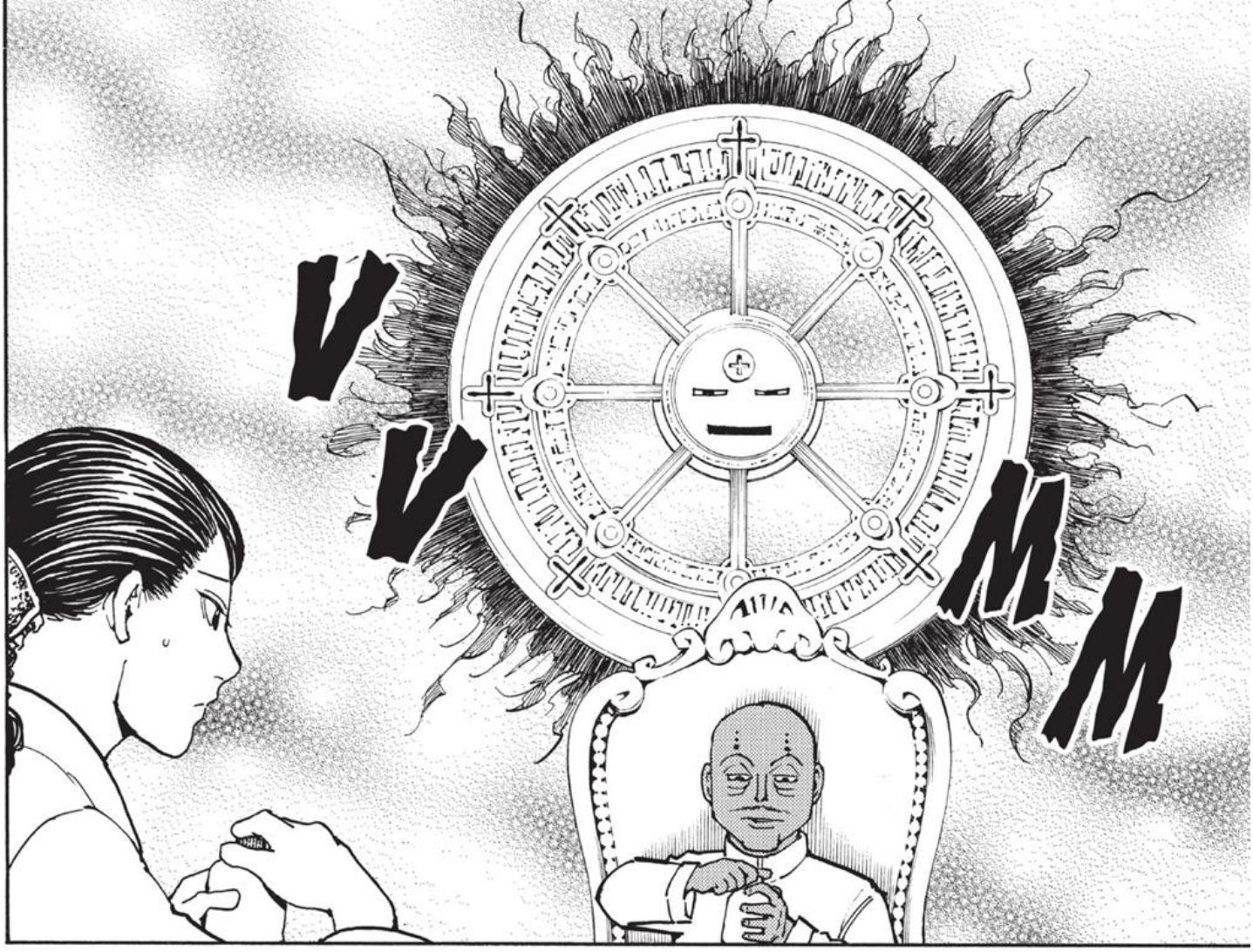



YOU ENTER FIRST.
BE SAFE...
1008

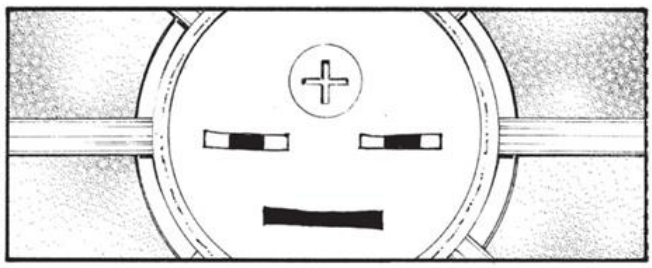

THAT'S FOURTH PRINCE TSERRIEDNICH'S QUARTERS...
THE THREE OF THEM ARE HERE.


SIT DOWN.
WELCOME.


TAKE ONE IF YOU LIKE.
PLEASE EXCUSE THE BASIC HOSPITALITY.
BUT YOU WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT PROTOCOL.
SO.
LET'S NOT WASTE ANY TIME.
TRMBL
TRMBL
THANK YOU FOR BEING THOUGHTFUL.
NEN IS A PSYCHIC ABILITY, A SUPERNATURAL POWER OF THE WILL.
WITH THIS ABILITY, YOU CAN SEE WHAT'S NORMALLY UNSEEN AND EXHIBIT MYSTERIOUS POWERS.
SO THAT I DON'T PANIC IN THIS SITUATION...
...IS SPEAKING TO ME.
KURA-PIKA...
...WHO CAN USE THIS POWER.
THERE ARE FEW...


V
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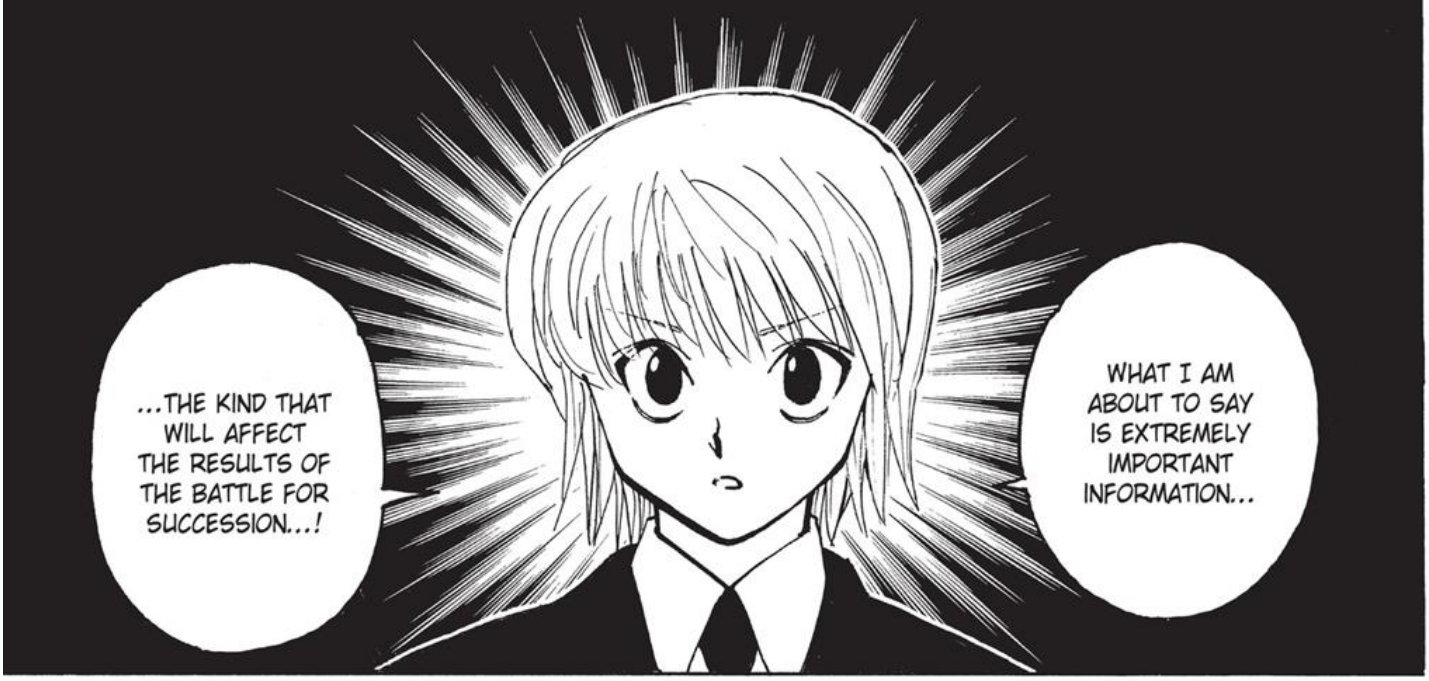


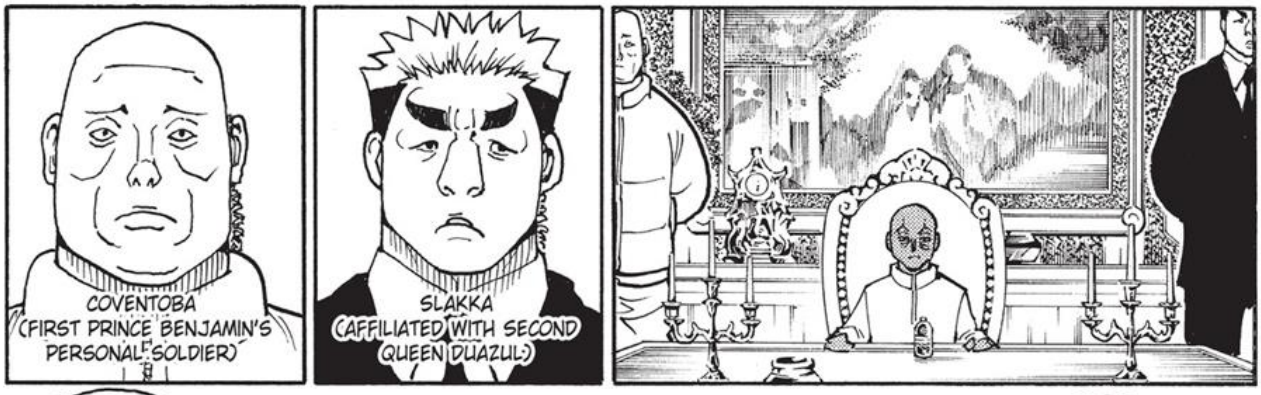


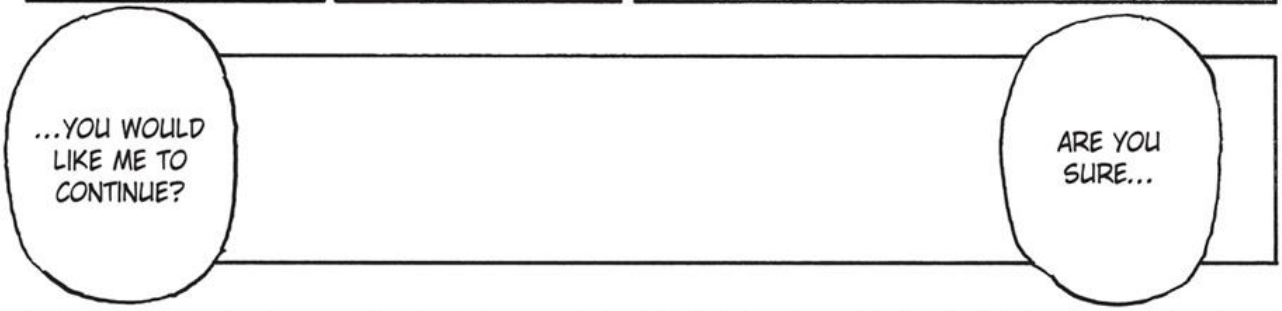

THOUGH YOU WERE UNAWARE, ALL PRINCES HAVE BEEN GRANTED THESE POWERS.
THIS BATTLE FOR SUCCESSION IS A RACE FOR SURVIVAL USING NEN POWERS.


THE SEED URN CEREMONY WAS THE LIKELY TRIGGER.
IN THE FORM OF NEN BEASTS, THE TERM USED IN THE EMERGENCY CALL.


!
OH ...?


...THE KIND THAT WILL AFFECT THE RESULTS OF THE BATTLE FOR SUCCESSION...!
WHAT I AM ABOUT TO SAY IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT INFORMATION...


COVENTOBA (FIRST PRINCE BENJAMIN'S PERSONAL SOLDIER)
SLAKKA (AFFILIATED WITH SECOND QUEEN DUAZUL)


...YOU WOULD LIKE ME TO CONTINUE?
ARE YOU SURE...





*A COMEDIAN WHO DOES INDEED RESEMBLE VINCENT.

