

THE BANANA SPROUT

芭蕉的芽

* 2023 Golden Comic Award

Two students at Taiwan's most prestigious prep school confront the uncertainty of youth head on when they decide to start their own campus literary journal. But will their passion be enough to make them see past their differences, and carry on through the difficulties that lay ahead?

It's 1930 and Yeh Hsing-chiao, a hard-working student with a gift for writing, has tested into Taihoku High School, a prestigious school which grants students an unmatched degree of autonomy. Upon moving into the dorms, Yeh discovers that his Japanese roommate, Nanjo Untaro, is a notorious campus eccentric who frequently cuts class. At first, the straight-laced Yeh is infuriated by his roommate's unorthodox behavior, but as they spend more time together, he discovers another side to Nanjo: he is a voracious reader who only skips class so he can pursue his passion for reading and self-study, even mastering German (Yeh's weakest subject) in the process.

One day while consulting with a teacher about his writing, Yeh learns that Nanjo's impulsive behavior is mostly a response to his uncertainty about the future. Upon reflection, Yeh realizes that he, too, often questions his direction in life. After a long discussion, the two roommates decide to undertake a plan that will help them find the answers they need: they will start their own campus literary journal.

But nothing about the endeavor is as easy as they imagined. In addition to the daunting tasks of magazine production and competition from the official journal of school, Yeh and Nanjo still don't know if they can find contributors and collaborators among their fellow students. Will the unlikely partners find enough like-minded classmates to make their journal a success? And what other



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difficulties will they face as they juggle work on the journal with the demanding coursework of Taiwan's most prestigious prep school?

Author/artist Zuo Hsuan conducted extensive research in order to accurately depict the campus, uniforms, and life circumstances of students at Taiwan's most prestigious high school under Japanese colonial rule. The delicate warmth of her linework animates this engaging tale of two young men with divergent personalities throwing caution to the wind to pursue their passions, and determine their own course in life.

Zuo Hsuan 左萱

Zuo Hsuan is a well-regarded comic book artist and book cover illustrator. Her first published work, *Rites of Returning*, won the Bronze Award at the 2015 International Manga Awards in Japan. The book went on to sell foreign language rights for Japanese, French, Vietnamese, and Italian, and a television adaptation was released in 2021. Zuo Hsuan has represented Taiwan at the Angoulême International Comics Festival, the Frankfurt Book Fair, the Lucca Comics & Games, and the BDFIL Comics Festival.



NO THAT'S ONISH!

HE'S ON THE FIELD HOCKEY TEAM, RIGHT?

YOU SAY HE'S A CLASSMATE OF OURS? ISN'T HE IN THE ENGLISH PROGRAM?

NANJO?



BIG BOSS? YOU MEAN TAI-CHI?

YOU MEAN THE GUY WHOSE GOLDFISH GOT EATEN BY THE CAT?

ISN'T THAT THE DORM ROOM THAT THE SENPAIS SAY TO STEER CLEAR FROM?

I'VE RUN INTO HIM BEFORE IN THE DORM. HE'S A BIT OF AN ODD-BALL!



HA HAHA... NANJO SAN IS A VERY SPECIAL BOY.

A DELINQUENT, EH? BETTER NOT TO GET MIXED UP WITH THOSE TYPES.

UNTARO? WASN'T HE SUSPENDED?

GO ASK SOMEONE ELSE.



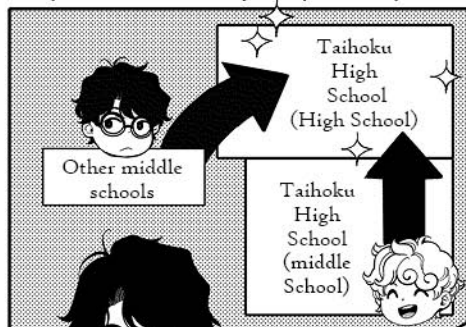
SO, I'D SAY I KNOW HIM PRETTY WELL.

I WAS HIS ADVISOR WHEN HE WAS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL, AND I HELPED HIM AND HIS CLASSMATES PUBLISH "BANYAN VERDURE".

HUH?

I DID GET THE SENSE THAT HE HAS A PRETTY GOOD COMMAND OF GERMAN...

*Banyan Verdure: The official journal published by Taihoku High School's middle school.



Other middle schools

Taihoku High School (High School)

Taihoku High School (middle School)



HE DOES HAVE QUITE A SUNDRY COLLECTION OF BOOKS...



NANJO SAN IS A QUICK-WITTED BOY AND HAS A PARTICULAR INTEREST IN BOOKS AND LITERATURE.

MANY OF THE BOOKS HE'S READ I'VE NEVER EVEN HEARD OF.



IT'S A BIT HARD TO SUM UP IN A FEW WORDS...



SO? HOW ARE YOU TWO GETTING ALONG?

Chapter 2

Strange
Bedfellows





CAN I
BORROW
YOUR
TOWEL?

NO

GET
YOUR OWN
TOWEL!



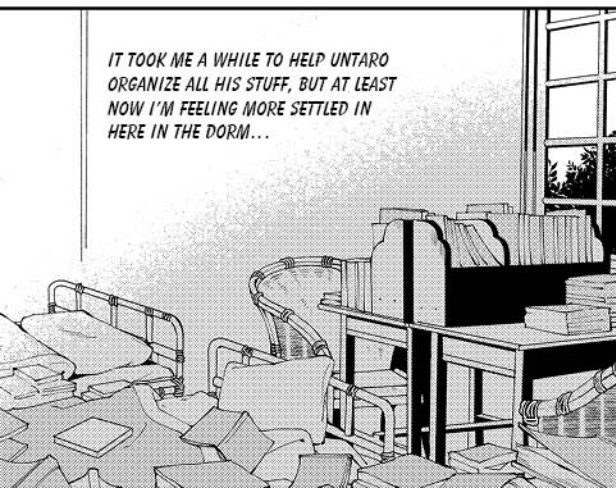
HSING!



IT'S A
NICKNAME,
OF COURSE.
CALLING YOU BY
YOUR LAST NAME
MAKES IT SEEM
LIKE WE'RE
STRANGERS.



UH... WHY
ARE YOU
CALLING ME
THAT?



IT TOOK ME A WHILE TO HELP UNTARO
ORGANIZE ALL HIS STUFF, BUT AT LEAST
NOW I'M FEELING MORE SETTLED IN
HERE IN THE DORM...



YOU
CAN CALL
ME UNTARO
TOO!

SO DOES THAT MEAN
WE'RE GETTING
ALONG
WELL?



DID YOU SEE THAT "SOARING WIND" IS CALLING FOR SUBMISSIONS NOW?



HEY!

I'M FINALLY GETTING USED TO THIS BED AND I DON'T SEEM TO BE ALLERGIC TO BIG BOSS ANYMORE.



YAMAJI SENSEI MENTIONED IT TO ME, BUT I HAVEN'T MADE UP MY MIND YET.



ARE YOU GOING TO SUBMIT SOMETHING?

THEIR NEXT ISSUE IS SUPPOSEDLY GOING TO BE A SPECIAL EDITION AND THEY'RE EVEN OFFERING CASH PAYOUTS FOR SUCCESSFUL SUBMISSIONS!

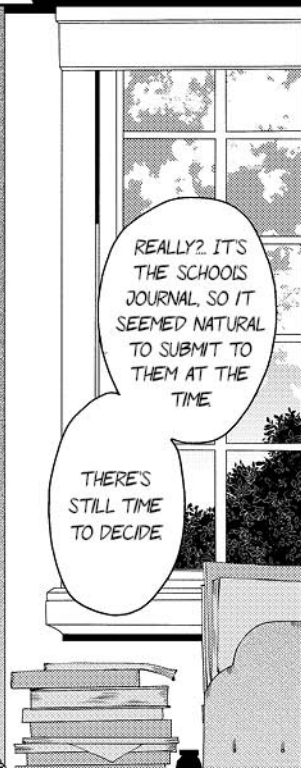


I WOULDN'T BOTHER.

HUH? WHY?

BECAUSE.





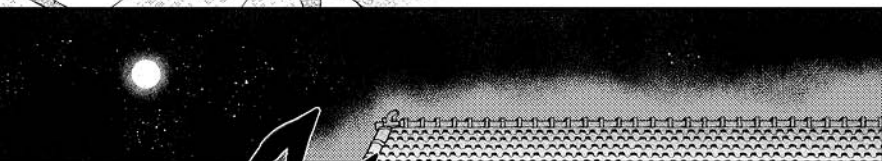
WOULD ANYONE
REALLY WANT
TO PUBLISH
THAT KIND OF
CONTENT...?

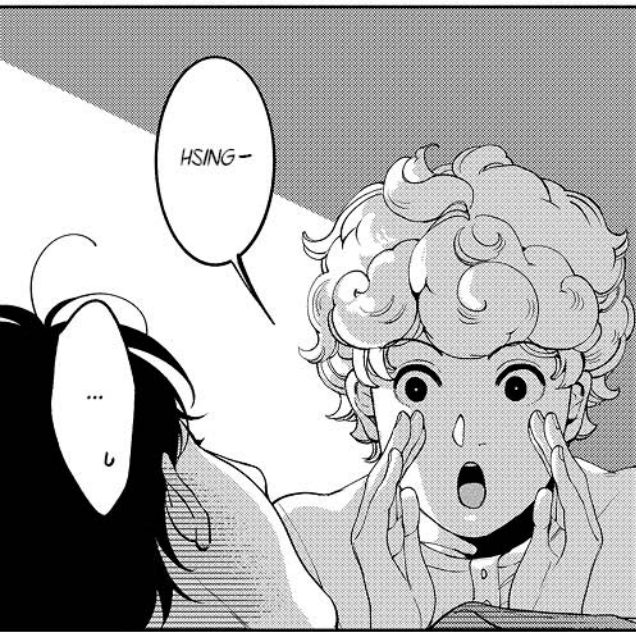
I HAVE BEEN
TOYING WITH
SOME IDEAS
RECENTLY.

BUT IT'S MOSTLY
SELF-INDULGENT
STUFF.

I ONLY
SAID
"THERE'S
STILL
TIME TO
DECIDE"...

AHAI
SO YOU'RE
GOING
TO WRITE
SOMETHING
NEW?







SO I BEGAN THINKING

WAIT A SECOND! WHAT ARE YOU GOING THROUGH MY PERSONAL DIARY!



I ALREADY TOLD YOU, I'M NOT GOING TO SUBMIT TO "SOARING WIND".

YOUR WRITING BELONGS IN A JOURNAL WITH SOME VERVE AND SPICE

BUT, JUST AS I SAID BEFORE, THE WRITING IN "SOARING WIND" IS JUST TOO RIGID AND FORMAL.



SINCE NONE OF THE CURRENT JOURNALS FIT OUR NEEDS, WE MIGHT AS WELL...

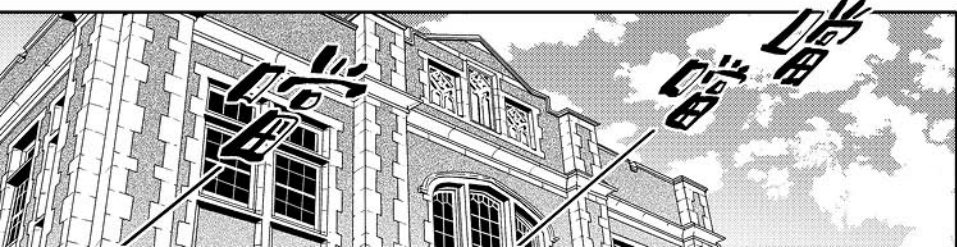


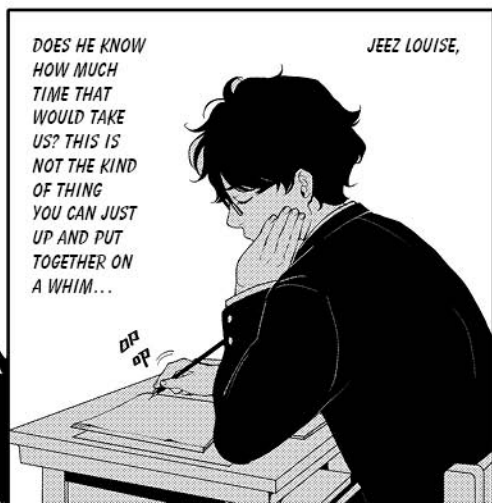
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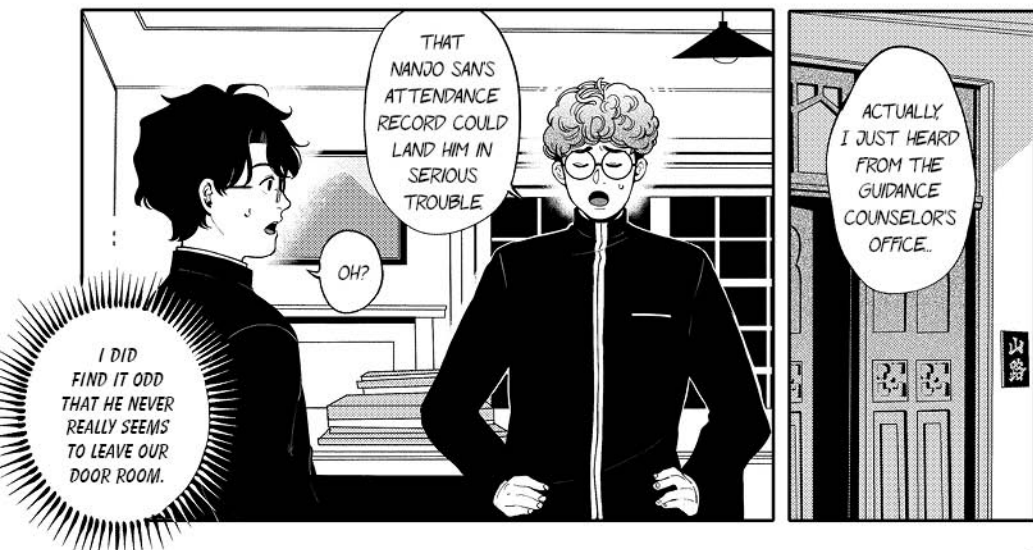
START OUR OWN!



WHAAAT?











UH, I'VE HAD MY FILL OF SIGHTSEEING ALREADY

NOW THAT YOU'RE DONE WITH YOUR TEST, WHY DON'T I TAKE YOU FOR A DAY ON THE TOWN IN TAIPEI!

AHI



THE LIFE OF A TAIHOKU HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT DOESN'T REALLY START UNTIL CLASS LETS OUT



NOT SIGHTSEEING I'M GOING TO TAKE YOU TO SOME OF MY FAVORITE SPOTS



YOU CAN JUST COPY SOMEONE ELSE'S TOMORROW!

BUT, I STILL HAVE HOMEWORK TO DO.

YAMAJI SENSEI IS GOING TO BE SO DISAPPOINTED IN ME...



HERE IT IS



NITAKADO GETS NEW RELEASES FASTER THAN ANY OTHER BOOKSHOP IN TAIPEI

AMAZING!

THEY GET ALL THE NEWS-PAPERS HOT OFF THE PRESSES AND YOU CAN BUY THE NEWEST BOOKS FROM TOKYO JUST DAYS AFTER THEY'RE PUBLISHED



THEY'VE GOT BOOKS THAT WERE MENTIONED IN CLASS AND MANY MORE THAT I'VE NEVER EVEN HEARD OF.



TOO BAD WE CAN'T BUY BANNED BOOKS HERE THOUGH.

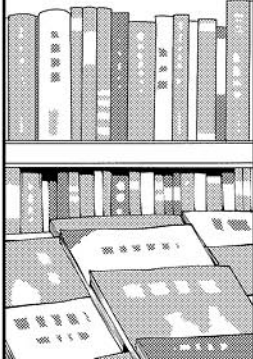


THEY'VE GOT A BIG SELECTION FROM THE IWANAMI LIBRARY SERIES AS WELL!



CAN I AFFORD THIS ONE?

HEY I ALMOST FORGOT!









IT'LL
JUST GET
EATEN IF WE
TAKE IT HOME-
LET'S GO SET
IT FREE
IN TAMSUI
RIVER..

THAT'LL
RUIN THE
ECO-
SYSTEM!



THE FOOD REALLY IS
PRETTY GOOD...



NOT
BAD,
EH?

I FOUND
THIS HIDDEN
GEM RECENTLY
AND IT'S ALREADY
MY ABSOLUTE
FAVORITE!



IS
THAT
SO?

SEE,
THIS IS THE
BEAUTY OF
SKIPPING
CLASS.



BUT
WON'T
YOU MISS OUT
ON A LOT OF
STUFF BY
NOT GOING
TO CLASS?

!



MAITRE D',
ANOTHER
BOWL OF
SPARE
RIB SOUP
PLEASE!



HEY, YOU'RE
THAT NICE
OLDER FELLOW
AREN'T YOU!!

SCRAM KID!



...





WERENT YOU ASKING ME ABOUT MY TIME AT TAIHOKU HIGH SCHOOL LAST TIME?



PLEASE HELP ME..

GET NANJO SAN TO START ATTENDING CLASSES AGAIN.



BUT I NEVER COULD HAVE GOTTEN THROUGH THAT EXPLORATORY PERIOD BY MYSELF

IT SEEMS EASY ENOUGH WHEN I TALK ABOUT IT NOW..



...



A LOT OF LIFE EXPERIENCES NEED TO BE SHARED WITH FRIENDS TO REALLY LEARN FROM THEM.



IF ONLY HE COULD RECOGNIZE THIS FOR HIMSELF



TAKE NANJO SAN -HE'S MAKING A GO OF IT ON HIS OWN, BUT THERE IS ONLY SO FAR HIS TALENT CAN TAKE HIM ALONE







THAT ALL BECOMES A LOT LESS SCARY WHEN YOU HAVE A PARTNER IN CRIME

SCARED THEY'LL BE REGRETFUL AND QUICKLY CHANGE THEIR MIND? UNABLE TO HOLD FIRM TO THEIR DECISIONS

DOESNT EVERYONE FEEL A LITTLE SCARED WHEN FACED WITH UNCERTAINTY?

IT'LL BE A JOURNAL THAT REPRESENTS "US"!



THAT WILL NEVER BE ANSWERED IF YOU DONT JUST FACE YOUR FEARS AND GO FOR IT




YOU MIGHT HAVE CERTAIN LINGERING QUESTIONS IN YOUR MIND.

RECENTLY I KEEP ASKING MYSELF...

WHY DID I ENROLL AT TAIHOKU HIGH SCHOOL?



WAIT...



SOMETIMES THE
PROCESS OF
LOOKING FOR
THE ANSWER
IS MORE
INTERESTING
THAN THE
ANSWER ITSELF.

WOULD
ANYONE
REALLY WANT
TO PUBLISH
THIS KIND OF
CONTENT?

CAN I
HONESTLY
SAV I LIKE
WHAT I'M
DOING
NOW?

...WHO AM I REALLY
SAYING ALL THIS FOR?





TO OUR
NEW
JOURNAL!



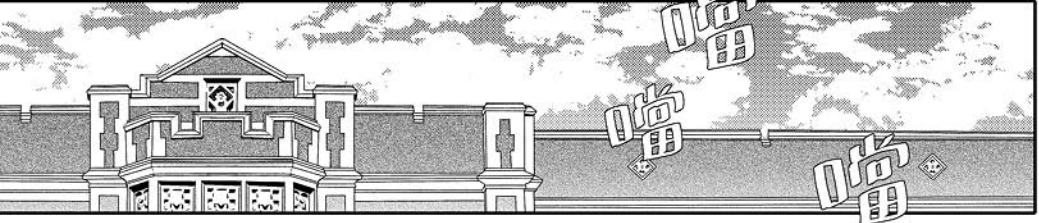
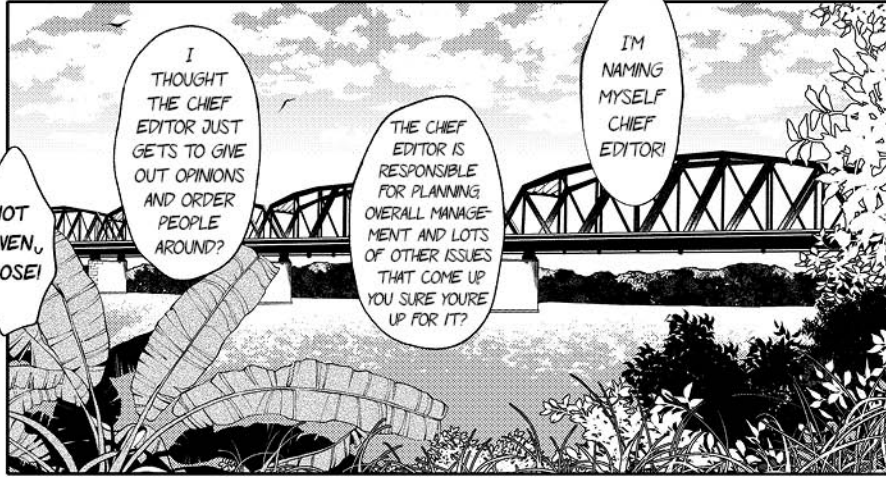
沙沙沙

NOT EVEN CLOSE!

I THOUGHT THE CHIEF EDITOR JUST GETS TO GIVE OUT OPINIONS AND ORDER PEOPLE AROUND?

THE CHIEF EDITOR IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PLANNING OVERALL MANAGEMENT AND LOTS OF OTHER ISSUES THAT COME UP YOU SURE YOU'RE UP FOR IT?

IM NAMING MYSELF CHIEF EDITOR!



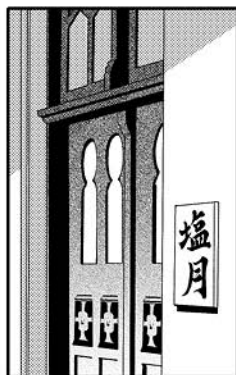
WHY ARE YOU ALWAYS SO TIRED THESE DAYS?

ZZZ...



THERE'S JUST ONE REASON AND HIS NAME STARTS WITH U.

HSING!





YES

LIKE
CONTRASTING
COLORS?

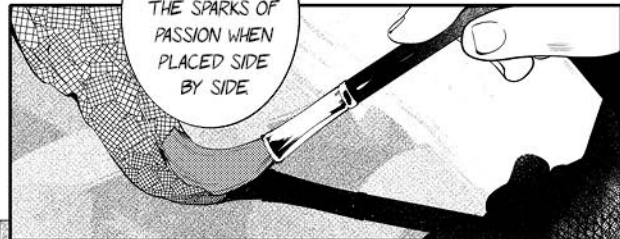


DOES IT
REALLY MAKE
SENSE FOR TWO
PEOPLE WITH
SUCH DIFFERENT
PERSONALITIES
TO BE WORKING
TOGETHER?



THE
GREATER THE
CONTRAST
BETWEEN TWO
COLORS...

THE MORE
THEY IGNITE
THE SPARKS OF
PASSION WHEN
PLACED SIDE
BY SIDE



YAMAJI



NO
PROBLEM!

SENSEI THANKS
FOR ALL YOUR HELP
AND WE'LL BE
LOOKING FORWARD
TO WORKING WITH
YOU ON "SOARING
WINDS" NEXT
EDITION

