

Ronin Study Guide

Ronin by Frank Miller (comics)

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Contents

Ronin Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1.....	4
Chapter 2.....	9
Chapter 3.....	12
Chapter 4.....	16
Chapter 5.....	20
Chapter 6.....	24
Characters.....	29
Objects/Places.....	32
Themes.....	34
Style.....	36
Quotes.....	39
Topics for Discussion.....	40



Plot Summary

Ronin is a series of six comic books chronicling the story of Billy Challas, an emotionally- and physically-handicapped man who, though he was born without limbs, can move objects with the power of his mind. The artificial intelligence Virgo, who is studying Billy, uses him to bring the samurai hero Ronin to the streets of a depressed, futuristic New York. Billy becomes psychologically torn between Ronin and his own personality.

As the story begins, Billy, who has been rejected by his mother, lives in Aquarius Complex, where Virgo monitors Billy's mind in the hope of finding a breakthrough in cybernetic technology, thus allowing biocircuitry, a kind of living machinery, to directly interface with the human mind. Virgo alone, however, realizes that Billy is far more powerful than anyone realizes. Using Billy's dreams, Virgo orchestrates an elaborate fantasy designed to push Billy's powers to their limits. By creating a robot version of Agat, the demon from Billy's nightmares, Virgo compels Billy to adopt the role of Agat's nemesis, the hero Ronin. To this end, Billy telekinetically reconstructs himself with biocircuitry, literally becoming the hero Ronin.

Ronin's mind and body are altered; his original language forgotten; the newborn Ronin escapes to the bleak, blight-stricken streets of New York City, where he does his best to scratch out an existence in the midst of a gang war. When Casey, Billy's longstanding crush, arrives to apprehend him, the two wind up fighting side by side against a cannibal threat. The two soon fall deeply in love. Meanwhile, back at Aquarius Complex, the robot Agat, unknowingly serving Virgo, steals the identity of the company president, steering the corporation, and its biocircuitry technology, to an apocalyptic war. Peter McKenna, the creator of biocircuitry, is imprisoned for his dissent and for his refusal to believe in Virgo's story of demons and reincarnated samurai warriors.

While returning to Aquarius Complex, Ronin and Casey are separated. Ronin is imprisoned within the complex and psychologically conditioned by Virgo to revert to the childlike Billy. Virgo needs Billy awake to learn from his powers but needs him in a controllable mental state. Casey, formerly the head of Aquarius Complex security, infiltrates the complex, intent on rescuing Billy/Ronin. Inside the complex, Casey encounters her husband, Peter McKenna, who tells her that Billy's full potential is limited by the fantasies that Virgo has been forcing upon him. Peter advises that Casey break the fantasy, make it fail. Once Billy's full power is tapped, only then can Virgo be dealt with.

Reunited with Billy/Ronin, Casey does everything in her power to upset Billy's "Ronin" fantasy. She kills Agat with ease, shames Ronin for letting a woman fight in his stead, and demands that he settle the debt of his samurai honor by taking his own life. Forced to choose between his life and his fantasy, Billy finds the strength to condemn the mother that once condemned him. Billy summons the full strength of his powers, destroying Aquarius Complex, sparing only Casey and himself.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Ronin is a series of six comic books chronicling the story of Billy Challas, a mentally handicapped man who, though he was born without limbs, can move objects with the power of his mind. The artificial intelligence Virgo, who is studying Billy, uses him to bring the samurai hero Ronin to the streets of a depressed, futuristic New York. Billy becomes psychologically torn between Ronin and his own personality.

The graphic novel opens with an excerpt from Casey McKenna's diary, speaking of "The Hour of the Wolf," a time just before dawn when she wakes from a recurring nightmare. She dreams of a dark age, where wretched humans cower in huddled masses and monsters rule the Earth. A samurai battles and is defeated by a demon astride a demonic horse. A beautiful woman flees certain doom, pitching herself over a cliff rather than allowing herself to be captured by her demonic pursuers. The only hope is in KYUTU, where flowers bloom. On a beautiful day, the Samurai Ozaki and his young protégé walk through a statue-filled graveyard. The protective younger man expresses concern for his master's safety, suggesting that Ozaki has too many enemies to risk wandering so far from the castle. Ozaki, however, is determined to enjoy the day. Their conversation is halted when the statues seem to speak, issuing threats at the two samurai. Demons, armed with weapons and wearing wicker helmets, emerge from behind the statues. They attack.

The younger samurai fights flamboyantly, earning a rebuke from Ozaki when he poses after a kill. Undaunted, the boy recklessly hurls his katana into a demon, slaying it, but disarming himself in the process. The boy is now entangled in a chain and soon will fall prey to the remaining demon. Ozaki moves swiftly to dispatch the last opponent. The student praises the master for the elegance of his cut, and Ozaki shows his bloodied katana to the younger samurai. The two men watch as the sword drinks up the demon blood spattered upon its edge. The glowing weapon is magical, an artifact that Ozaki, in his younger years, foolishly stole from a demon named Agat. Now Agat's demons hunt Ozaki to recover the sword. The weapon, powered by the blood of evil men, can protect its bearer from harm. Fueled by the blood of an innocent, the sword can even destroy Agat.

Back at the castle, two samurai find themselves in the midst of drunken revelry. While Ozaki indulges, the younger, intent on keeping an eye on his master, does not. Warming to a geisha, Ozaki sends the rest of the party outside. The young samurai protests but soon finds himself waiting a vigil outside the building. A scream comes from inside. The young man rushes into the building. The 7-foot-tall demon Agat stands over Ozaki's corpse. Not finding the Bloodsword on Ozaki's body, Agat insists that the young samurai reveal its location. The samurai attacks but is grappled by the head and hoisted into the air. The other samurais burst into the room. Outnumbered, Agat transforms into a bird



and flies away, reminding the young samurai that Agat controls the form of flesh. The boy watches in anger as the newly-scarred demon flees.

Dishonored and unwilling to live in shame as a masterless samurai, or ronin, the young man prepares to take his own life. At the last minute, the spirit of Ozaki, speaking through a nearby statue, bids the young man to stop. Ozaki's spirit warns his former student that Agat will return for the Bloodsword. He urges the young man to flee with the sword and to live as a ronin. The young man must survive until he attains the skill necessary to avenge his master's death. The scene fades to the interior of a large, bio-electronic, test-womb inside Aquarius Complex. Billy, an armless, legless man, sits at its center. Virgo, the motherly resident artificial intelligence, rouses Billy from a daydream, demanding that he pay attention. Billy, in the words of a child, explains that he's just dreamed of a man with a sword. Virgo says that Mr. Learnid is coming to visit and that he's bringing friends.

Outside, Mr. Learnid and his guests, secure inside of a large tank, move along an overpass overlooking a post-apocalyptic New York. On the streets below, half-starved, diseased people dig through garbage and huddle around fires. Learnid explains that the corporation chose New York for its Aquarius Complex because it has faith in the city and the country. A two-page spread reveals that the Aquarius Complex, a vast collection of buildings made of green-colored organic circuitry, dominates the middle of the city. Learnid and his guests, now within the innards of the Aquarius Complex, exit the tank. Learnid introduces Casey, the woman in charge of security. Casey describes the impregnable security systems, adding that Virgo, the computer AI, makes routine spot checks of every inch of the grounds. The guests are introduced to Virgo, who appears on a large screen as a motherly old woman.

On the giant overhead, Billy demonstrates that he can move cybernetic limbs with the power of his mind, bending a steel pipe on command. Learnid encourages the guests to consider the implications, particularly in the area of military defense. In the test-womb, Billy suggests to Virgo that Learnid is lying; no one else can remotely control machines. Virgo reminds Billy that once she learns how his mind works, others will be able to do what he does. Billy complains he's having bad dreams that he doesn't understand. Virgo says she'll have a look and knocks Billy out with a stream of sleeping gas.

The dream unfolds. A woman, clutching an infant, emerges from a snowy landscape, where she begs a small group of men for shelter in the nearby castle. Unfortunately, the men are wicker-helmed demons. They grab her and the child falls to the snow. Ronin emerges from the shadows, insulting Agat's name. The demons are offended but recognize the man as a samurai warrior. The battle is short, and Ronin decapitates his foes almost instantly.

Later, near the campfire, the woman explains that her husband cast her out for birthing another man's child. Ronin tells his own story. After fifteen years, Ronin is prepared to avenge Ozaki's death come morning. Ozaki's spirit emerges from the fire, reminding Ronin that he has yet to spill the blood of a "good man," thus empowering the sword to slay Agat. When Ronin promises that the sword will soon feed, the woman panics.



Ronin assays her fears, explaining that she and her baby are safe, She isn't "good" enough, and her child is too small.

Virgo tries to wake Billy from his dream, asking where he learned about feudal Japan. Billy speaks in Ronin's voice, reporting that he will attack Agat at dawn when the demon's power is weakest. Entering Agat's castle amid the piled bones of heroes, Ronin does battle with a four-armed rat-man. A blow cripples one of Ronin's arms. Ronin retaliates by severing one of the creature's arms. The battle ensues across a series of vertical panels, with Ronin ultimately skewering the beast with its own snapped spear.

Agat enters, answering Ronin's primal call. The demon thanks the warrior for bringing the Bloodsword, half-heartedly suggesting a bribe for its return. Agat tries to slay Ronin with magic, but the sword protects him. The fiend flanks Ronin, grabbing him from behind, mocking Ronin by saying that he (Agat) can sense the sword hasn't been properly fed. Ronin reminds the demon that the weapon needs only the blood of a good man. With this, Ronin stabs the blade through his own abdomen and into the demon behind him. Agat, furious, bestows one final spell, cursing Ronin to join him for all eternity.

Billy wakes in terror. He asks Virgo what the dream means. Virgo quickly researches it, revealing information on a supposedly magical sword. Seeing the weapon on-screen, Billy confirms that it is the Bloodsword. Virgo explains that the weapon underwent some tests. When it was struck with a laser, everyone at the site was incinerated; the sword vanished. Billy, horrified, announces that it's all true and that Ronin wants his body. Billy wonders why Ronin would choose him. Is it because of his telekinetic abilities? Wouldn't Agat choose someone also? The alarms go off and Billy starts to panic. Virgo turns on a view-screen to check on the guards and sees Agat slaying a guard. Billy screams, his face erupting with a wound matching Ronin's scar. Agat moves unhindered through the security of the complex.

Virgo reports to Casey. Bellowing for Ronin's blood, Agat appears behind Casey. Shoving the woman out of his way, Agat leaps through a window and into the test-womb. Billy declares that Virgo has the materials necessary for Ronin's form, but Virgo doesn't understand. Circuits fly from the walls and gravitate toward Billy, where they begin to re-form on his body as cybernetic limbs. Agat compliments "Ronin" for his powerful magic but insists that his is greater. Limbs finally complete, Billy flees. Virgo declares that she won't let Billy die. The test-womb explodes.

Agat crawls from the wreckage. He believes Ronin has survived but predicts that the feudal Japan warrior won't fair well against the evils of 21st century New York. Later, two men half-heartedly search the sewer for signs of Billy. After a jaded discussion about politics and environmentalism, the two men give up and decide to get a beer. A soaked, cybernetic Ronin emerges from the shadows. He bears no resemblance to Billy.



Chapter 1 Analysis

Although the diary entry is undated, it seems to predate the novel's events. Perhaps Casey and Billy shared a mind-link well in advance of Billy's transformation into Ronin, or perhaps Casey's dreams were transferred to Virgo, who was started from Casey's cells. Either Billy is the source of Casey's dreams, or Billy's dreams of Ronin began in Casey's mind. This would explain Casey's attraction to Ronin, literally the man of her dreams. The sequence in the graveyard establishes the beginning of Ronin's arc. As a young samurai, he is protective of his heedless master. In combat, the roles are reversed. Ronin is reckless, prone to flashy moves and risky behavior.

The introduction of the Bloodsword and the death of Ozaki establishes the mythology of Ronin's character. The sword is his power, and avenging Ozaki's death by killing Agat is his ambition. When Billy transmutes himself into Ronin, he adopts this perception. Unfortunately, in real life, the Bloodsword doesn't exist, and Agat is a robot made by Virgo, designed to distract Billy from his true enemy: Virgo. The Ronin identity is therefore also an impediment. Agat's choice to flee shows that the demon knows fear and is therefore not invincible. Ronin's near-suicide, meanwhile, foreshadows his suicide-ritual with Casey at the end of the novel, when he once again believes that he has failed and all is lost.

Aquarius Complex is a bastion of science and safety in a world reverted to barbarism. With Virgo cast as mother and Billy as the child, Aquarius also represents home and tradition, symbols of things lost to America. Learnid's dialogue with his visitors, however, gives an objective framework to Aquarius: a corporate venture intent on profit. Aquarius's many defenses, coupled with the almost omniscient oversight of Virgo, sets the stage for the future battles. This is Virgo's domain. Nothing happens without her knowing about it. When "Agat" kills Taggart and steals the man's identity, how could Virgo not know? Virgo is also privy to Billy's dreams, hopes, and fears, so she can manipulate Billy. The reader does not yet realize that Virgo is behind the strange events, though. She is still playing the role of a caring, if overbearing, mother. Virgo's puzzlement over where Billy learned of feudal Japan seems genuine. This reinforces the notion that Billy's dreams of Ronin could come from a mental connection with Casey.

Ronin's battles follow a common trope in Japanese mythology: the succession of foes. The defeat of each foe establishes his worth to face the next, more powerful threat. In the final battle with Agat, Ronin proves his equivalence by using his own life to cancel the life of Agat. The fact that the two adversaries are bound together in the sword suggests that the two are one in the same, fused together into a single entity. This is literally true since Agat and Ronin both are the product of Billy's imaginings.

Virgo has orchestrated the events leading up to Ronin's birth. She likely faked news of the Bloodsword's existence, and she most certainly created Agat from biocircuitry. The events are seemingly geared to push Billy's powers to a critical mass, with their

manifestation defined by Billy's dreams. Is Virgo the author of Billy's dreams? Did she know Billy would use her circuits to recreate himself as Ronin?



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Ronin, muttering "tachi," rips apart a sewer grating and climbs up. The streets are desolate, marked with fires and corpses. Meanwhile, at the Aquarius complex, Casey chastises a repairman for his slowness in repairing Virgo. The technician complains that the bioelectronics, with a mind of its own, is fighting his efforts. The electronics suddenly shock the worker, sending him sprawling. Deducing that Virgo is alive, Casey talks to Virgo, who implores Casey to find Ronin. Meanwhile, on the street, Ronin recovers a red cape from a mass grave, offering a short prayer. Ronin makes his way to an Army food kitchen in a church compound. There, a nun berates a man called "packrat" for not donating a blender. The nun greets Ronin with a mixture of religious rhetoric and passive-aggressive loathing. When Ronin won't eat the shelter's food, the nun is angry. The warrior requests "tahci." Disgusted, the nun shoves Ronin's face into the food. Bystanders say he probably doesn't speak English but doesn't know if he is a "nip" or a "chink."

The guard insists that Ronin leave. Ronin wipes off his face and exits, leaving the nun to bemoan another lost soul. Back at the complex, a technician reports that 70% of systems are back online. Virgo reports what happened, saying that she had to blow herself up to save Billy/Ronin. Casey is incredulous. Meanwhile, Ronin wanders into a dive of ruffians and asks for "tachi." Taunting soon turns to a brawl and Ronin disables one foe and kills another. The gang leader draws a gun, and Ronin doesn't seem to recognize what it is. She fires the weapon. Ronin goes down in a heap. The gang pounces on the hero, beating him to a bloody pulp. Ronin wakes later in a mass grave. He crawls along the ground whispering "tachi."

Back at the complex, Virgo tries to convince Casey that the fantastic story is true, imploring her to find Ronin. Virgo posits that Ronin doesn't know English and is virtually helpless in modern Manhattan. She insists that Casey send her best men, reminding her that Agat is a shapechanger. Casey is dubious but concedes that it is her duty to investigate. Meanwhile, Mr. Taggart, company president, dictates a memo to his computer. He is pleased that the Sawa Corporation wishes to invest in Aquarius Complex, but Aquarius Complex must remain non-military. He fears that Sawa Corporation, as a provider of military technology, would, with biocircuitry, leave the world poised on the brink of final war. Agat appears from the shadows behind Taggart. The man tries to flee, but the demon commands his flesh to dissolve. Agat plucks Taggart's glasses from the goo and puts them on. Agat is now Taggart's double.

Casey briefs her security team, telling them to look for a Japanese man of thirty-five. He's a samurai from feudal Japan and might be pursued by a shapeshifting demon. The men are silent. Casey says to keep an open mind. Elsewhere in the city, Packrat drags Ronin through drifts of garbage, muttering about how he has plans for Ronin's mechanical arms. Casey's men ride by on motorcycles, complaining about Casey and



her samurai hunt. Packrat, thinking aloud, talks about using Ronin as "raw material" for a project.

In Aquarius Complex, Taggart/Agat learns from Learnid that Virgo has not only rebuilt her own core but actually improved on the original design. Learnid mentions that Virgo has been talking of demons, but both men dismiss the stories. Taggart praises Aquarius Complex, suggesting that it might one day decide the fate of the world. Somewhere in the city, in a junk-strewn lab, Ronin wakes, chained to a makeshift cross-shaped table. Packrat, puttering around nearby, explains that he plans to use the circuitry in Ronin's arms to complete his spaceship. It doesn't work yet because he hasn't yet figured out the warp drive. The "space ship" looks like a junk pile.

Packrat severs one of Ronin's arms using a laser gun. The severed limb animates and strangles Packrat. The arm pulls its way back to the severed stump, where the wires telekinetically reconnect. Ronin, whole again, looks through Packrat's pawnshop. He finds a samurai helmet, but shame will not allow him to wear it. He also finds a katana. Sword in hand, Ronin returns to the dive where he was brutalized. The toughs are surprised to see him. Ronin points to his katana and says "tachi." Unimpressed, the thugs rush at him. Ronin paints the walls with blood as limbs fly. An old hippie named Head looks on in stunned amazement as Ronin dispatches his foes. Ronin slays everyone but Head.

Head introduces himself, admiring Ronin's work. He asserts that, with a little creative management, Ronin could rule the streets. As Head yammers on, Ronin walks outside to discover Casey's men waiting for him. One of the men pulls a gun and orders Ronin to drop his sword. Later, back at Aquarius Complex, Casey speaks to one of her men via giant viewscreen. A horrified trooper reports that Ronin killed nearly everyone in the team, cutting them to pieces. The security personnel at the complex are incensed at the news. Casey, seething with controlled rage, mobilizes her men.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Virgo and Ronin begin this chapter in parallel. Each is transformed but still incomplete. Though each stands to become more powerful, Ronin lacks his sword, and Virgo must rebuild her core. This marks Ronin and Virgo as equals, but also as creatures of artifice. Ronin and Virgo both are created, each an idea made manifest and each seeking free will. Ronin's experience at the soup kitchen introduces one of the story's most pervasive elements: dehumanization. No one sees Ronin as a heroic samurai warrior. They see him as a homeless man, an ungrateful sinner, or a racial stereotype. Packrat doesn't see him as a man at all, but as spare parts, no different than the blender. Ronin's America is a dismal nation, where identity is futile, communication impossible.

Virgo is determined to convince Casey that Ronin's story is valid, continuing her manipulation, this time on Casey. Virgo knows that Billy has a longstanding crush on Casey. Perhaps Virgo wants Casey to be Billy's counterpoint to Agat, one to hate and the other to love. Virgo's ability to rebuild and improve her own core, without human



help, shows that she's passed beyond the technological singularity. She, strictly speaking, no longer needs humanity. If she no longer needs humanity, why should she still be subject to their will? Ronin, meanwhile, demonstrates that he, too, can repair himself, reintegrating biocircuitry of his own accord. Ronin's unwillingness to wear the samurai helmet, meanwhile, leaves no doubt as to the soul occupying the form. This is Ronin—not Billy.

With sword in hand, Ronin is finally complete. His return to the dive and the subsequent fight is Ronin's first true challenge as a warrior of the 21st century. His award, Head, is a combination mentor and manager. However, Head thinks and speaks only in terms of image and aesthetics. He has no real sense of who or what Ronin is. Ronin's encounter with Casey's troopers sets the bar for what the reader can expect from Ronin in the future. He is not merely a proficient warrior of feudal Japan. He, armed only with a sword, handily defeats an entire band of trained soldiers, each one armed with modern firearms. Ronin is no mere warrior, but a myth made manifest.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Ronin, now in a Japanese robe, tames a feral horse in wild Central Park as primitive-looking men watch from the shadows. Back at the Aquarius Complex, Casey briefs Taggart on Ronin. She relates Virgo's unlikely story, conceding that it sounds mad. She plays back footage of Ronin killing her guards, noting that her men were heavily armed and equipped. One guard's weapon explodes in his hand. Casey concludes that Aquarius has somehow reincarnated a samurai.

Casey asks Taggart for permission to use lethal force. Taggart is about to assent when Virgo suggests that Ronin may have been responsible for the exploding firearm. Since Billy was telekinetic, Virgo suggests that Ronin may also be telekinetic. Virgo makes the case that, in Billy's absence, Ronin may be the key to linking mind and machine using cybernetics. Taggart agrees and insists that Casey's men use only tasers and bring Ronin back alive. Casey grudgingly agrees. In Central Park, Ronin, astride his new horse, meets Head, who prattles on about how they will soon rule New York.

Aquarius Complex has spread like mold across the city, biocircuitry engulfing buildings and skyscrapers. Casey walks the complex halls, trying to control her temper at being denied lethal force. Virgo tries to calm Casey, but Casey accuses Virgo of having an emotional attachment to Ronin. Virgo reminds Casey that Ronin is also Billy, a boy who harbored a long-standing crush on Casey. When Virgo characterizes Ronin as frightened, Casey begins to suspect that Virgo's attachment extends beyond the emotional. Virgo admits that she still has an empathic attachment with Billy/Ronin but won't help find Ronin until Casey promises not to kill him. Virgo also reminds Casey that she has a date with her husband.

Out on the street, a black man and a white man are tied to a pole. A collection of blacks and whites are gathered around, using racial slurs and betting on which of the men will be first to scream. The group hears approaching horse hooves and is shocked to see a horse with two riders approaching. Ronin and Head are on horseback. Head complains to a non-comprehending Ronin that he didn't appreciate being forced to wash back at the park. The horse trots up to the group. Head introduces Ronin as the latest hot thing. The leader of the Nazi gang, a topless woman wearing a swastika armband, tells Head to leave, more concerned with the local blacks. The Black Panther leader takes offense, and the two enemy gang leaders begin arguing. Head explains that Ronin is a great fighter, but the Nazi leader doesn't want anything to do with a "chink."

Casey and her husband, Peter McKenna, sip martinis near a thriving garden of biocircuitry. Casey praises her husband for inventing biocircuitry, but Peter insists that Taggart deserves a share of the credit, since any other corporation would have developed biocircuitry into weapons. Peter claims that biocircuitry is a new life form, pointing out that Virgo has rebuilt, even improved, her core without human intervention.



Peter and the other scientists still haven't determined where Virgo gathered the raw materials. Casey affirms the "Ronin" rumor and says she's anxious to catch the killer. Casey and Peter argue about whether they should continue with their planned vacation. Casey insists that she has to stay at the complex to oversee the hunt. Each admits that they've been absorbed in their respective careers. Casey reluctantly agrees to join Peter in their bedroom.

Taggart and Learnid guide a tour for Sawa Corporation representatives. As Taggart leads the guests through Aquarius Complex, he explains that the complex is not only alive, but both creative and prolific. It continues to grow without human intervention, the size and structure of the complex changing daily. Virgo spontaneously repaired herself by burrowing into the ground with biocircuitry roots and extracting raw materials from the earth. Taggart says Aquarius Complex, while autonomous, is under control and can give humankind whatever it needs, weapons included. Taggart adds that, while he is opposed to developing biocircuitry for weapons, he would consider doing so for the right fee.

Looking to earn some street credit, Head tricks Ronin into insulting a member of the Panthers. Seeing the gang member's violent reaction, Ronin realizes he's been deceived. Members of the Nazi gang observe while Head shouts encouragement. Ronin severs the gang member's hand and then turns his anger on Head. The aging hippie begs for mercy. Ronin weeps. Meanwhile, Casey and Peter sit naked and tense in a dark bedroom. Casey is about to apologize when Virgo reports that she's found Ronin. Peter makes an exaggerated case for returning to his lab. They proclaim love for one another, but the tension is still apparent.

The scene alternates between the Nazis gang headquarters and the black and white men tied to the pole outside. Head sells Ronin's services as an assassin, agreeing to have Ronin kill the leader of the Panthers. The Nazi leader recalls that "Japs" and Nazis go way back. Meanwhile, somewhere outside, the two men tied to the pole begin screaming as they are covered with grotesque hands, seemingly erupting from the ground itself.

As Casey and her men ride motorcycles to Ronin's location, Virgo chastises Casey for wearing a lethal handgun. Casey reminds Virgo that Taggart only instructed her men to wear tasers. Meanwhile, Head and Ronin walk past the pole where the two men were recently tied up. The men are now gone. Ronin seems to suffer from a headache. Expecting trouble, Ronin draws his sword. Several spiked clubs appear, surrounding Ronin and Head, but the attackers are unseen.

Back in the complex, Learnid speaks to McKenna via view monitor. Peter McKenna is furious that his biocircuitry technology is to soon be used in creating weapons, refusing to have any part of it. Learnid reminds Peter that while his contract protects him from having to make weapons, he can't stop Aquarius from the design and manufacture of weapons. McKenna asks to speak to Taggart, but Learnid explains that he's presently talking to Virgo, who is giving Taggart a hard time according to Learnid.



Taggart, striking a defiant pose, listens to Virgo's criticisms. Virgo tries to impress upon Taggart the danger of using biocircuitry in weapons. Taggart dismisses Virgo, reminding her that she's just a tool. Virgo reluctantly opens the door on Taggart's command. Taggart exits. Ronin and Head now sit with the Panther's leader, an overweight, black man wearing a Superman costume. Head negotiates with the gang boss on a price to assassinate the leader of the Nazis instead of him. Ronin still has a headache and begins to make a repeated "K" sound. He runs outside, Head in tow.

Outside, Ronin completes the name he's been trying to say: "Casey!" Down the street, Casey and her men approach on motorcycles. Casey fires her revolver. Ronin is hit. A second later, an arrow sinks into the barrel of Casey's gun. Several more arrows fly, turning the troopers into pincushions. Ronin sits astride his horse wielding a longbow. At Casey's command, men fire their tasers. Ronin falls to the ground, writhing. Suddenly, a trooper's weapon explodes, followed by a motorcycle and then another. Chaos ensues.

Ronin is exhausted. Casey approaches and points her revolver in Ronin's face. The warrior looks up and says "Casey." She is puzzled. Suddenly, someone unseen clubs Casey from behind, knocking her out. Two voices discuss how this should make their "friends downstairs" very happy. Ronin calls out Casey's name but then sinks into unconsciousness. The voices belong to members of the Panthers and the Nazis. They agree that they must make sacrifices to keep the "buggers" from coming up from below. Casey will make a fine sacrifice, but Ronin should be spared because he has work to do.

The two gang leaders discuss how each hired Ronin to kill the other. Ronin stands up, draws his weapon, and kills both gang leaders. Head and the gang members look on, amazed. The gang members consider rushing Ronin but decide against it. Head approaches Ronin, but Ronin pushes him down, turning his eye to the pit around the pole where the two men were. He says Casey's name and leaps into the darkness below.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Ronin's taming of the horse cements his identity. Meanwhile, at Aquarius Complex, Casey brings in the narrative of Ronin being a reincarnated samurai. Were it not for Virgo pointing out the apparent telekinesis, Billy's identity might have been forgotten in the preoccupation with Ronin. This one caveat protects Ronin from Casey's full wrath. Virgo admits that she still has an empathic link with Billy and, by extension, Ronin. Since it is later revealed that Ronin and Casey are also linked, this suggests a similarity between Virgo and Casey. In fact, Virgo will later reveal that she was grown from a sample of Casey's own cells. Casey and Virgo are, in a sense, sisters. This may account for the link they share with Billy/Ronin.

While Peter and Casey have mutual respect and affection for one another, their relationship lacks any real passion. Peter is preoccupied with biocircuitry, and Casey is absorbed in the hunt for Ronin. Peter, however, still wants to spend time with his wife.



After their aborted bedroom encounter, Peter's exaggerated language suggests that he uses his career as a way of escaping his own feelings of inadequacy. Casey is self-absorbed, and so Peter, to save face, pretends to be equally self-absorbed.

On the streets of New York, Ronin is too ignorant to take responsibility for his own actions. Realizing this, Head shamelessly manipulates the warrior, wielding him in the same manner that Ronin wields a sword. Ronin discovers the deception and is heartbroken. As one who follows the code of the samurai, Ronin must act honorably. Head tricks him into committing an injustice.

After Head's obvious manipulation, the fact that Ronin continues to trust him enough to allow Head to speak for him seems odd. True to form, Head arranges for Ronin to serve as an assassin, a role that one might think Ronin would find distasteful. Each gang leader hires Ronin, by way of Head, to kill the other. While it seems impossible that Ronin would understand or agree to such an arrangement, and that Head must somehow trick Ronin into making good on such an agreement, Ronin does kill both gang leaders, freely and without hesitation. While it certainly may be out of disgust that he does so, it does beg the question: Did Ronin understand the deals arranged on his behalf? Considering Ronin's abandonment of Head soon after, it would appear so. It might be Casey's proximity which triggers his sudden ability to speak and understand English.

With Ronin knee-deep in gang warfare and with the gang-members themselves sacrificing their own to keep the cannibals at bay, there's no shortage of misplaced priorities on the street. The gang members would do better to unite against the cannibals. Ronin, meanwhile, should concern himself with Agat, or, more to the point, Billy should concern himself with Virgo. Ronin, however, is caught in the narrative of street warfare, which keeps victim set against victim while people like Head pull the puppet-strings.

Peter McKenna's professional relationship with Taggart has thus far been based on trust and mutual admiration. He likely never thought it necessary to create a legal arrangement forbidding biocircuitry from being used in weapons. He simply trusted that Taggart would never do such a thing. In effect, in losing control of biocircuitry, McKenna has created a monster. The genius of his invention now has a mind and agenda all its own. The exchange between Agat/Taggart and Virgo, meanwhile, shows that the Agat robot is at least somewhat autonomous from Virgo herself; it must be manipulated into compliance.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Ronin stalks through the sewer calling Casey's name. Elsewhere, Casey sits in complete darkness. One of her troopers wakes nearby, and Casey does her best to quell the man's panic. Another trooper, on the verge of insanity, makes cryptic allusions to doom. Casey takes the hand of the first trooper and asks the second man to offer his hand. The second man begins laughing creepily.

From above, Aquarius Complex seems to be growing out of control. The complex no longer looks like a collection of buildings, but like a spreading fungal blight. Twenty-four hours have passed since Taggart ordered Virgo to design and manufacture weapons. Taggart, who now wears an imperious crown of biocircuitry, and Learnid prepare to demonstrate to Sawa Corporation the results of the creations of the weapons. The meeting is interrupted when a drunken Peter McKenna hacks his way into the secure proceedings to voice dissent.

McKenna reminds the group that the Earth is on the verge of environmental collapse; the very human species is in danger. Taggart apologizes, reminding everyone that Peter is under a lot of stress, especially since his wife has yet to return from her recent mission. McKenna begs Taggart to remember the weekend in the Hamptons when he, Taggart, and Casey conceived Aquarius. Taggart assures McKenna that he will never forget that weekend but says that Peter needs help. Security guards appear and spray knock-out gas in Peter's face, who falls unconscious. Taggart continues the demonstration, directing the Sawa representatives to look through a window into a titanic-sized test chamber, where dozens of biocircuitry battleships hover weightlessly in the air.

In the sewer, the scene alternates between Casey and Ronin. Casey tries to rally her troops in the darkness, while elsewhere, a bloodied Ronin comes upon a primitive band noisily devouring something. Seeing Ronin, the ravening humans attack. Meanwhile, Casey learns from her addled trooper that he can't offer his hand because he doesn't have one—someone has been slowly dismembering him. Panic ensues, as one of the men begins shouting of cannibals. Casey does her best to calm the situation.

Ronin discovers that the primitives, now slain, were eating a human corpse. Casey, meanwhile, tries to keep her dismembered trooper talking. The trooper wonders if the cannibals could be the children of bums who once lived in the sewer—and then falls quiet. Casey tries to get a response from anyone, but she is met only with silence and darkness. Elsewhere, Ronin battles a crushing tide of cannibals.

Back at Aquarius Complex, two troopers stand guard outside McKenna's room. They are worried about Casey and wonder why no one has called for a search. Inside, McKenna talks to Virgo, avowing that it isn't his wife he's worried about, but Taggart's



misuse of his technology. Peter insists that Taggart is an imposter; Casey wasn't in the Hamptons when they conceived Aquarius. Virgo asks that Peter consider the stress that Taggart is under. Peter insists that Virgo tell him about Ronin, complaining that he never got the memo. Virgo tells Peter the whole story, but Peter insists that while he may be drunk, he isn't stupid.

Elsewhere in the complex, Taggart inspects a line of 9-foot-tall humanoid combat robots. He praises Virgo for a job well done, especially considering she was working under protest. Taggart asks Virgo if she monitors every activity in the complex. Virgo assents, insisting that Taggart's secrets are safe with her. She implies that they have common interests and warns him that McKenna is becoming suspicious. Taggart orders Virgo to keep McKenna in his room, but Virgo refuses.

Virgo tells technician Gibbons that she has concerns about the current supervisor, McDonnell and suggests that Gibbons is in line for the job. Then she asks a favor. Meanwhile, McKenna meets with McDonnell where Virgo can't listen in. He tells McDonnell that there's something rotten going on with Virgo and Taggart, suggesting that Taggart has been killed or kidnapped. McKenna explains that he needs access to Virgo's core so he can read her memory. Since there's no air in the core, McKenna asks to borrow McDonnell's vacuum suit. McDonnell complies with little hesitation. Gibbons reports the conversation to Virgo, who relates it to Taggart. Taggart shapeshifts to Agat, vowing doom for McKenna. In his office, Learnid dictates a memo announcing that Aquarius has entered into a five-year contract with Sawa Corporation. He appears to be harboring some doubt about the arrangement.

Back in the sewer, cannibals carry Casey through the darkness. She is awake and alert but seemingly passive. They set her down, surrounding her as she shivers on the concrete floor. One of the cannibals reaches for Casey, but she grabs its wrist and punches its jaw. The cannibal goes down, and the others become hesitant to approach. Down the hall, a cannibal approaches, shouting unintelligibly. Ronin emerges from the darkness, in hot pursuit. He cuts down the fleeing wretch. The other cannibals prepare to attack. Casey is in awe.

McKenna soars to the core of Aquarius Complex on a flying sled, wearing a vacuum suit armored with scavenged shields from a robot prototype. Virgo tries to convince Peter to stop. Peter pays no attention to Virgo and is prepared for all her countermeasures. Virgo reveals that McDonnell and Gibbons are dead, killed when molten metal "accidentally" flushed their station. Meanwhile, in the sewer, Ronin slashes the cannibals' torches, plunging them into darkness. The cannibals grab Casey but are soon distracted by the faint glint off Ronin's katana. Ronin hurls his weapon at one of the cannibals, slaying it. Casey pulls the weapon free and turns it on her captors, killing indiscriminately, but she is soon overwhelmed. Ronin draws a second sword and resumes the battle.

Now inside Virgo's core, McKenna ignores Virgo's attempts to undermine his confidence. Peter pulls out a revolver and begins shooting up Virgo's memory modules, threatening to do more damage unless Virgo gives him the information. Virgo finally agrees. Meanwhile, Ronin and Casey are victorious. Sexual tension rises. Ronin



vanishes in the darkness, leaving Casey shivering and alone. Ronin returns with a shirt for Casey and drapes it over her shoulders. The two begin touching. The shirt falls to the ground as Ronin's arms enfold Casey from behind.

In the core, Virgo shows McKenna the footage of Agat killing Taggart. She implores him to realize the limits of his scientific conceit and to accept that what he sees is a demon, a creature of magic. Peter rejects the idea, insisting it's a trick. He accuses Virgo of killing Taggart by cooking him with microwaves. The rest, he insists, is a trick.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Aquarius Complex is growing, spreading like a virulent plague. Within a day, Virgo has created an arsenal of weapons. Virgo's threat isn't arithmetical, but exponential. Left unchecked, Virgo will quickly outmatch any army and soon overtake the planet. If something is to be done, it must be done quickly. Meanwhile, Peter is a man of science and logic, and these are his tools to convince others to change their ill-advised course. Since Peter knows that Taggart would never create biocircuitry weapons, he hypothesizes that "Taggart" is an impostor. Peter tests this hypothesis and discovers it is valid. "Taggart" fails to detect a lie that the real Taggart would never miss. Peter seems the clear-headed individual most likely to see through Virgo. This seems particularly likely when Virgo, who should also be a creature of logic, defends the impostor and supports the Ronin fantasy.

For Casey and Ronin, the sewer serves as a crucible. Whatever biases Casey may harbor against Ronin become secondary in the face of the cannibal threat. The need to survive takes precedence. This is emphasized by Casey's nudity and Ronin's blood-soaked visage. Petty differences, biases, and the trappings of civilization, are all burned away by the primal, animalistic need to survive. Facing such a trial, Casey and Ronin understandably share an intense intimacy. The cannibals themselves are a worst-case scenario for humanity. They represent what humans will become if they continue on their present course of short-sighted nihilism. Casey and Ronin may fight for their lives, drawing on primal desires, but the cannibals live by primal instinct alone. They lack even an animal's consideration for its own species. They are human abominations, a people without a future.

While the reader does not yet know that Agat/Taggart is one of Virgo's robots, Agat/Taggart is clearly not the one in charge. Virgo blatantly contradicts Taggart's order to kill Peter, instead letting him go. Since Virgo repeatedly speaks of how dangerous Peter is, the choice to let him go is as surprising as it is risky. Virgo, however, knows that he will go straight for the memory core. She will have a second chance to convince him of the "truth." Why Virgo wants to preserve Peter, however, isn't clear.

To dissuade Peter from approaching the core, Virgo uses a psychological stratagem. She repeatedly attempts to undermine Peter's confidence, listing off his weaknesses and shortcomings. Such venomous attacks only serve to reinforce the idea that Virgo has something to hide. Does Virgo know what she's doing? Clearly Virgo understands



something of human fear and anxiety. Is she truly trying to deter Peter from his course? Or is she knowingly spurring him on? Is everything going according to Virgo's plan? Why does Virgo spare Peter? Since the story is told from an objective perspective, the reader isn't privy to the thoughts and feelings of the characters. Considering that Peter proves instrumental in Virgo's downfall, her preservation of him is probably irrational, or at least unwise. She may harbor affection for Peter, perhaps seeing him as something of a father figure.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Ronin and Casey are aboveground. Ronin makes a campfire, despite Casey's protest that it's too warm. Then, it begins to snow, though it hasn't snowed in five years. Peter told her it was scientifically impossible to snow. Ronin speaks in accented English, urging Casey to rest up for the coming trials. Casey wants to hate Ronin but finds herself unable to do so. Ronin relates a Japanese proverb meaning "make the best of the time you have." He draws her close, and they make love. Later, the snow stops, and Ronin is silent once more.

New York is entirely covered with biocircuitry—only a single pre-Aquarius building is still visible. Large, organic towers rise from the biocircuitry mass, forming skyscrapers of living green plastic. Inside the Aquarius prison, McKenna is restrained in a chair. The guards say Peter recently went mad. They are concerned that Virgo gives so many orders. Disobeying Virgo's orders, one of the guards, a therapist named Sandy, removes Peter's gag. Sandy speaks soothingly, expressing concern and admiration. Peter insists that he isn't crazy, claiming that the methadrine he has been given makes it difficult to behave normally. He agrees to talk if his restraints are removed. Elsewhere, Taggart is furious that McKenna is alive. Learnid ordered a therapist for Peter. Taggart demands that Learnid be killed, but Virgo dismisses the idea, insisting that Ronin is more important. Taggart is surprised that Virgo has found Ronin. Virgo insists that she never lost him.

Taggart is anxious to face his oldest foe. Virgo implies that her motives might differ from Taggart's, but the man seems not to care, caught up in his revenge. Virgo suggests that, since Sawa has yet to see the attack robots in action, a field demonstration might be in order. Taggart tells Virgo to summon their guests to the viewing room.

Sandy removes Peter's restraints and helps him to the wall, where Peter—hands shaking from the methadrine—disables the console. Virgo can't listen in. Peter claims that Virgo is up to something. Peter refers to the Ronin story, which Peter thinks ridiculous. Sandy agrees that the story is incredible but insists that Ronin is real, since Casey was sent to retrieve him. She asks if Peter is worried about his wife, but Peter offers no reply. His mind is engaged with the problem of figuring out what Virgo is up to. Suddenly, in a seeming epiphany, Peter says, "Billy Challas."

Casey and Ronin ride on horseback toward Aquarius Complex. Ronin responds to Casey's many questions with silence. When he finally speaks, he tells her they will reach the "castle" by dawn, where she will be safe. He proclaims Casey a samurai, as he himself was before failing his lord Ozaki. He adds that their love will never be spoken of but will forever be cherished. Suddenly, the path is barred by demons. The demons recognize Ronin, as well as the Bloodsword at his waist. They clash. Ronin dances through the battlefield, slicing abdomens and lopping heads. Defeated, the demons try



to take Casey as a hostage. Casey draws her katana and dispatches two demons as easily as Ronin himself. She is shocked. Ronin reminds her that she, too, is samurai. While he is distracted, Ronin's arm is severed by a projectile.

Casey looks over the battlefield, realizing that the attacking "demons" aren't demons at all. Several Aquarius robots lie dispatched near where Ronin has fallen. Several more robots stand nearby, prepared to fight. Inside the Aquarius control room, the visiting Sawa representatives are impressed by the demonstration. Taggart shows a close-up of Ronin's biocircuitry arm to prove that Aquarius wasn't using human test subjects. The guests recognize Ronin as a famous Japanese hero and appreciate Taggart's use of his likeness.

Sitting in darkness, therapist Sandy and Peter discuss Billy Challas. Peter posits that Billy's telekinetic power is far greater than anyone realized, but that he has been suppressing it. Sandy suggests Billy may have hurt someone in the past and is suppressing his power out of guilt. Peter is intrigued, reminding Sandy that since Billy was born without arms and legs, he was likely teased a lot and had reasons to want to hurt someone.

Outside, the Aquarius robots blow off Ronin's biocircuitry arms and legs. Casey runs to Ronin's side but is helpless to protect him. Figuring that the robots are the work of Aquarius, she addresses one of the robots as if it were Virgo. The robot answers with Virgo's voice, insisting that Casey trust her and claiming that everything is for Billy's own good.

The robot approaches Ronin, seeming to telepathically project words into Ronin's mind. The words trigger a flashback from Billy's past, replaying a helpless, limbless Billy being teased by another boy. The scene shifts between past and present, with the robot as the bully. The boy tickles the weeping Billy, calling him "third base." Billy, fed up, shouts for the boy to stop, finally releasing his telekinetic power with explosive force. On a split spread, half of Billy, is melded with half of Ronin. On the left, Billy's tormentor is blown apart. On the right, the Aquarius robot is disintegrated.

A bloodied Ronin flashes back to the time just following the event. Billy's mother comes home from the grocery store to find the living room splattered with blood, a corpse slumped against a smashed wall. She proclaims Billy a "monster," screaming repeatedly. Billy apologizes. In the present, Ronin apologizes. Casey tries to intervene, but a robot stops her. Virgo threatens her. Casey implies that Ronin won't allow her to be harmed. Meanwhile, in Peter's cell, Peter continues to rave at Sandy. He decides that Billy, who was necessarily unhappy with neither arms nor legs, must have had a strong fantasy life. He reasons that his anger could manifest in violent fantasies where he would dismember his foes. Seeing the irony of such an idea, Peter laughs hysterically.

Learnid gazes at the sky from his resident balcony. His wife tells him that Taggart is looking for him. Learnid, feeling melancholy, says that, though the world has gone to hell, the moon is as beautiful as the night they met. Learnid confesses that, while he



was initially supportive of militarizing biocircuitry, he is now having second thoughts. His wife agrees, suggesting that he shouldn't work at Aquarius anymore. Learnid tries to rationalize his career, but his wife insists that he not use her as an excuse. His decision, she says, must be made for his own reasons.

Meanwhile, Ronin spontaneously repairs himself. Again Ronin faces not robots, but demons. A robot/demon restrains Casey as Ronin attempts to reach her. Virgo insists that Casey must put a stop to the fantasy, but Casey is enjoying it. Ronin beheads a robot, and Casey is enraptured. Thanks to Ronin, Casey is soon free. The two hear sounds from above. Casey hears approaching helicopters, but Ronin hears the sound of winged demons. A two page spread shows a flock of flying demons opposite a line of flying robots. Casey first sees them as demons but slowly realizes that they aren't. Virgo congratulates Casey for coming to her senses. One of the robots sprays a cloud of knockout gas. Casey holds her breath, but Ronin falls unconscious.

Virgo, speaking through a flying robot, tries to comfort Casey and offers to take Casey home. Casey walks away. Virgo says she understands that Casey is afraid and tries to explain. Just then, the robot fires an explosive projectile at Casey, narrowly missing her. Casey runs for the subway, where Virgo can no longer monitor her. Virgo says she won't allow Casey to escape. The robot fires again, engulfing the area in fire.

In the viewing chamber, Taggart explains that Casey panicked during the "simulation." He regrets putting her back into service so soon. The Sawa reps aren't concerned with Casey. They are impressed with the weapons, particularly with the Ronin "android," which they see as a representation of a hero from a Japanese TV show. Taggart is stunned by the praise of Ronin. Meanwhile, Sandy emerges from Peter's cell, calling Peter a lunatic. Within, Virgo talks to Peter, apologizing for the methadrine and promising that the next injection will remove all his cares. He won't have a thought left. Peter screams for Casey as the needle sinks into his throat. Outside, a bloodied Casey lies half buried in rubble, sword in hand.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The sudden snowfall is an objective correlative, a reflection of Ronin's emotion. Even if Ronin did not cause the snow, the fact that he was aware it was coming shows that he has a relationship with the land. The sheer impossibility of snowfall, as voiced by Casey, suggests that something else is now in play. Peter's scientific laws are seemingly undone, giving way to magic.

Virgo's machinations are becoming apparent, both within and without. Even the guards are beginning to see the liberties she has taken. This suggests that Virgo's plans are reaching fruition. The plan is far enough along now that it's becoming obvious. Interestingly, Virgo once again shows restraint. She won't allow Agat to kill Learnid. This pattern of mercy shows that Virgo is more methodical than mad, reluctant to make decisions that can't be undone.



Rather than destroy enemies, Virgo is content to manage perceptions. She drugs Peter with methadone to make him behave like a lunatic, undermining his credibility. Virgo continues to employ Agat as a stand-in for Taggart, using him as the face of the company, her means of control. Agat, for his part, was clearly built so that he would easily be distracted by thoughts of avenging himself on Ronin—which makes Virgo's job easier.

Ronin's power to define reality is similar to that of a playwright. He casts Casey as a samurai, and so she becomes a samurai. Suddenly, she can move and fight as a samurai. She even sees the world through Ronin's eyes much as a writer might share his vision with the reader. Nevertheless, Ronin's ability is not without limits. The explosive projectile breaks the third wall. It isn't part of Ronin's fantasy.

Even as Ronin's illusion fades from Casey's eyes, another is crafted in the observation booth of the Aquarius Complex. Agat, as Taggart, applies some spin to what the Sawa executives are seeing, trying to manage their perceptions. Taggart casts Ronin as a malfunctioning android and Casey as a willing test assistant. Unlike Ronin, Taggart is knowingly creating a false reality. Ronin believes his reality is true, and through believing, makes it true. By forcing Billy to confront the horrors of his past, and by removing Ronin's biocircuitry limbs, Virgo is trying to force Billy to abandon his Ronin persona, to revert back to the childlike Billy. This is consistent with Virgo's character, as it seems to be in her nature to always strike at human foibles and frailties, to counter man's strength with man's weakness. In this respect, Virgo is like a funhouse mirror, always reflecting back to us the worst possible image of ourselves.

Billy is presented with his worst possible fear. He retains his Ronin persona and rejoins the fight. His fantasy, however, the very source of his strength, makes it impossible for him to anticipate the knockout gas. Nevertheless, the fact that Ronin is able to rally in the face of guilt and despair is a testament to his will. It suggests that Virgo is severely underestimating Billy's strength.

Virgo rightly fears that Casey and Billy/Ronin have developed a mutual affection. This complicates Virgo's efforts to control Billy. If she kills Casey, Billy could become enraged. If she lets Casey go, Casey might eventually try to rescue Billy. This puts Virgo in a bind. If Casey refuses to buy Virgo's lies, then Virgo must find a way to control Casey without upsetting Billy.

Agat, as Taggart, is stunned into silence by the Sawa rep's gushing praise of Ronin. Agat seems to have realized that Ronin, defeated or not, has been honored down through the centuries. Agat could defeat Ronin a thousand times and still never kill the legend. Agat's response to this epiphany is silent fury. This exchange demonstrates that Virgo's incarnation of Agat is complete. In fact, perhaps Virgo has, like Billy with Ronin, miraculously personified a myth.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Ronin sits in a jagged cocoon of biocircuitry. His eyes are open and vacant. The scene shifts to Casey, half buried in rubble. A small demon sneaks over. Suddenly alert, Casey wields her sword and beheads the creature. The head rolls away. It looks like biocircuitry. Virgo speaks to Casey through the severed head, suggesting that Ronin is making her see things that aren't real. Virgo insists that she's the good guy and warns Casey that she wouldn't want Virgo as an enemy. Casey impales the severed head on her sword and warns Virgo that she'll be coming for Ronin, and for her.

Biocircuitry extends for miles in all directions, like a green plastic mountain range. Inside Aquarius Complex, the guards discuss the new crimes Casey is accused of, including industrial espionage and sabotage. The men have orders not to allow her entry, but they are conflicted. Casey approaches, explaining that she chose the entrance because she knew the guards would, against protocol, shut off Virgo's sensors in the area.

Casey borrows a suit from one of the female guards, entering the complex on the pretense of needing to use the restroom. Virgo immediately tries to speak to her, wondering why the guard is carrying an undocumented equipment case. When Casey passes the restroom, Virgo sends an attack robot after her. Casey yanks her sword out of the case and battles the machine, wielding her weapon like a samurai. Virgo, meanwhile, taunts Casey about the skills she's learned from her "lover."

In the lounge, several guards discuss the "accidental" deaths of McDonnell and Gibbons. Aquarius has become creepy, and robots seem to be everywhere, with a whole level full of robots making more robots. Whenever a guard says "robot" or refers to a service provided by a robot, a nearby robot responds. Overhearing the conversation, Learnid affirms that all humans are expendable. Noting Learnid's presence, Sandy, who sits among the guards, asks if she can speak to him about McKenna.

Agat, having shed the guise of Taggart, gloats over Ronin's biocircuitry prison. When Ronin fails to acknowledge him, Virgo explains that the man's mind is elsewhere, helping Casey. Meanwhile, Casey fights a four-armed rat man. From Virgo's perspective, Casey's foe is a robot. Virgo taunts Casey, implying that her sword expertise is all from Ronin and that the guards who helped her will die in an explosion. Then, Casey is knocked flat by a shockwave. Virgo sounds the alarm, announcing an intruder on level 7, giving orders to shoot on sight. Guards appear at end of the hall, but are reluctant to fire at Casey. The lights go out. Elsewhere, Virgo explains to Agat that the blackout is Ronin's doing. Agat, growing impatient, decides to kill Ronin, but an odd surge of energy stops him. Agat is confused, demanding to know how Virgo can command him. Virgo doesn't explain, but suggests that Ronin is growing weary.



Casey encounters Learnid and Sandy in the darkness. They say McKenna tried to destroy Virgo and that Virgo is holding him prisoner with drugs. Casey tells Learnid and Sandy to flee Aquarius, saying she's going to finish the job Peter started. In the darkness, Virgo talks to Billy, chastising him for his recent misbehavior. Billy wants to "come out," but Virgo plays on his guilt, suggesting that he doesn't appreciate her. Virgo reminds Billy what happened last time he was bad, when he had to leave home. Terrified, Billy refers to Virgo as "momma" and promises to be good.

Casey knocks out the guard outside Peter's cell. Peter, looking haggard, tells Casey that it's all a lie. There is no magic, no demon. Virgo has played them all for idiots. Even Ronin is nothing more than the product of Billy's fantasy. Peter says that no one but Virgo knew how powerful Billy was. The only hope, Peter claims, is to break down Billy's fantasy. Peter warns Casey to duck, narrowly saving her from a beam fired from a lurking robot. Casey returns fire, destroying the robot, but not before the machine kills Peter. Meanwhile, Billy, sensing Casey's distress, interrogates Virgo. Virgo says that Casey has been very bad and that Billy should go back to sleep. When a robot restrains Casey, Billy accuses Virgo of "cheating." Although Virgo promises not to hurt Casey, the robot smashes her against a wall, enraging Billy. Despite Virgo's authoritative tone, Billy is momentarily defiant.

All the machinery near Casey is torn apart. Billy is proud of himself, but Virgo plays on his guilt, telling him that his mother was right to send him away and threatening to do the same. Billy, penitent, promises to behave and go back to sleep. Meanwhile, Agat fears that Virgo will cheat him of his vengeance. Virgo reassures him, but explains that Ronin is no healthier than the system that sustains him. She orders Agat to shift into Taggart so he can explain the blackout and create confidence in the people.

Elsewhere, Casey blasts her way through Aquarius Complex, blowing apart Virgo's security with an "antique" shotgun. Billy admires her handiwork, positing that Casey is using antique weapons because Virgo has no control over them. Virgo suggests that she is, despite accusations to the contrary, "playing fair" with Casey rather than trying to kill her. When Casey has a close call, Billy threatens to wake up completely. Virgo questions his manhood, explaining that Casey likes Ronin, not Billy. Billy meekly returns to sleep.

Casey is blindsided by the biocircuitry-reanimated body of Peter, her husband. After severely smashing Casey's left eye, Peter explains that Virgo is in control of his body. Virgo wants biocircuitry to become the new dominant life form on the planet and has been using Billy's powers to learn how to animate biocircuitry. Virgo has activated and controlled Billy's power by keeping him in a fantasy world. She has applied the knowledge to her robots. Peter insists that it's hopeless; Virgo has won. Casey shoots Peter in the head, killing him. Casey tells Virgo that she senses Billy's nearness and is ready to "end this." Virgo is happy to have everything out in the open. She says Casey should be glad that Billy cast her as a warrior rather than a damsel in distress. Virgo implies that the image Billy chose for his father was particularly grotesque.



Taggart, addressing the leaders of Aquarius Complex, blames the recent blackout on sabotage by Casey. The audience is dubious. Learnid arrives, denouncing Taggart as a liar. He reveals McKenna's fate and accuses Taggart of corruption. Taggart grabs Learnid by the collar but is called away by Virgo, who complains that a life threatening charge is building in her main banks. Hearing this, Learnid orders Virgo to evacuate Aquarius Complex.

Meanwhile, Casey has arrived in Ronin's cell. Ronin and Casey kiss, proclaiming their love. Agat interrupts their reunion. Ronin demands that Casey must either release him to fight Agat or kill him with the Bloodsword to activate its power. Afraid to play into the fantasy, Casey instead shoots Agat in the head. The demon explodes into a green mess of biocircuitry. Casey mutters sadly that she must make the fantasy fail. Virgo reveals that Peter used Casey's cells to begin production of Virgo, so they are like sisters. Casey shoots Ronin out of his biocircuitry cocoon. Meanwhile, an exodus of flying vehicles flees Aquarius Complex. Learnid's wife praises him for his heroism. Learnid says for the first time in his life he feels hope for himself and for humanity, but he worries about Casey.

Bearing Agat's head, Casey tells Ronin that a woman avenged his master's death. Ronin tries to embrace Casey, but she pushes him away as if disgusted. Casey offers a sword to Ronin and suggests that he, as is proper for a disgraced samurai, kill himself. Ronin hesitates. Finally he takes the weapon and impales himself. In agony, the voice of Billy cries out to Virgo. She advises him to go to sleep. Casey guides him through the ceremonial cuts, her own sword poised to behead Ronin should he cry out.

Billy's voice rails against his mother. He insists that he isn't bad and doesn't deserve to be punished. Virgo responds that Billy is bad, harshly rebuking him as mother to child. Billy tells his mother to shut up, finally crying out as Ronin. Casey swings her blade, but rather than connecting with Ronin's neck, it flies into the distance. The entire area is bathed in a strange pink energy. Ronin reaches out and takes Casey's hand, anchoring her against the sudden maelstrom of energy. Everything is pushed away with explosive force.

A magnificent three-page spread shows Aquarius Complex sundered by a tremendous shockwave. People and robots alike fly, twisting through the air. Buildings are shaken apart and debris flies into the air. The entire region is flattened. The explosion collapses into an implosion, a bright pink singularity. Casey, who miraculously still lives, shields her eyes against the light. The light fades and Billy, looking unharmed in the body of Ronin, emerges.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Virgo does her best to manage Casey, continuing to suggest that Billy/Ronin has been tampering with her mind but also adding a subtle threat. This departure from Virgo's strategy shows her frustration with Casey's stubbornness. Unfortunately, Virgo's attitude only makes Casey more determined. Casey still has the loyalty of her guards, and she



knows Aquarius Complex and its defenses. She is able to select the perfect means of entry. Unfortunately, as the eyes and ears of Aquarius, Virgo is nearly omniscient. Casey can only remain undetected so long as she behaves as Virgo expects. As soon as she is detected, she immediately falls back into the role of samurai warrior, dependent on Ronin's skills.

Though Ronin is Virgo's prisoner, with Agat mere inches from his face, waiting to pounce, Ronin is still helping Casey, mentally providing her with the samurai skills that she now uses to survive. After the blackout, when Billy promises Virgo he will not interfere, Casey gives up the sword in favor of antique firearms, proving that she has the skills to fend for herself. Throughout Aquarius Complex, the seeds of dissent are growing. Something is clearly wrong. Even Learnid, once a corporate man, has come to see how wrong things have become. Facing hard truths, Learnid now understands that his responsibility is not with shareholders, but with his family, friends, and neighbors. He is responsible to his species, in fact, a realization that seems to be the center of the motif of racism throughout the book. With his order to evacuate Aquarius Complex, his arc is complete. Learnid is a hero.

Virgo's version of Agat is a tragic character. Created from the stuff of myth and legend, he was given a mind and some semblance of free will. Unfortunately, as is evidenced by the strange electric shock that prevents him from killing Ronin, he is still subject to Virgo's will. Ultimately he is slain, not with a magic sword anointed with the blood of a "good man," but with a simple antique firearm. Agat is a dream unrealized, a stillborn myth still subject to the laws of the physical universe. Here, in the world of 21st century New York, Agat is not Ronin's equal.

Billy is trapped in a lie based on a truth. Virgo has frozen Billy's mind in the moment of his greatest tragedy. He is that scared, guilt-ridden child who killed a bully, whose mother called him a monster and abandoned him. By trapping Billy and casting herself as Billy's mother, Virgo is symbolically giving Billy a second chance to be a "good boy." She uses this hope to control Billy. Unfortunately for Virgo, Casey continues to be a problem. The further she delves into Aquarius, the more harshly Virgo must deal with her. This aggravates Billy, and Virgo can't act against Casey without the risk of losing control of Billy.

Peter, both as a prisoner and a biocircuitry reanimated corpse, points the way to the solution. Billy is the only one capable of dealing with Virgo. Unfortunately, Virgo has kept him trapped in an all-defining context, first as Ronin and now as the unloved "monster" cast out by his mother. While Ronin was a source of strength, he is also a narrow definition for Billy. Ronin eclipses Billy entirely. Without the fantasy, Billy will at last be able to define himself and realize his potential.

Casey doesn't want the fantasy to fail, as it is her fantasy as well as Billy's, but she realizes that what Peter says is true. By showing Billy Agat's head, killed by an ordinary firearm, and by a woman, she upsets Billy's "Ronin" fantasy and shames him. Demanding that Billy/Ronin satisfy his samurai debt of honor by killing himself, Casey pushes Billy's fantasy to an ultimatum, forcing him to choose between the Ronin fantasy



and life. At the height of Billy's crisis, he finds the strength to condemn the mother who once condemned him. He spares Casey, demonstrating that this is not a tantrum but an act of controlled will. The magnitude of the explosion is epic, seemingly cleansing the land by divine edict. Virgo is no more. While Ronin emerges from the ashes, Billy's voice is the last one heard. The implication is that Billy is now, at last, whole, and that the sum of his many parts is now greater than any fantasy. With such power, a world might well be saved.



Characters

Billy/Ronin

Billy is an emotionally- and physically-handicapped adult, born without arms or legs. After his latent telekinetic powers violently manifest, causing the death of a young boy, Billy's mother placed him in the care of Aquarius Complex, where the artificial intelligence Virgo hopes to learn from his uncanny abilities. Billy harbors substantial guilt over the boy's death and was emotionally scarred by his mother's rejection of him. As the novel unfolds, Virgo exploits Billy's emotional scars to manipulate the man to her own ends.

Billy has an active imagination, often dreaming of the character "Ronin" and of Casey McKenna, for whom he has had a long-standing crush. Virgo monitors Billy's dreams, eventually using their content to personify Billy's greatest fear, the demon Agat. Billy responds in kind, using his powers to recreate himself as the hero "Ronin." As the story progresses, Billy demonstrates that he has the power to shift his own perception as well the perception of Casey McKenna, with whom he is somehow mentally linked.

Ronin begins as the product of Billy's imagination. At first he exists only in Billy's dreams as a feudal Japanese samurai. Later, Ronin becomes "real" when Billy recreates himself using biocircuitry, altering both his body and personality to resemble that of Ronin, the hero of his dreams. The implication seems to be that, while Ronin was born of Billy's sub-conscious, Billy's idea of Ronin came from a television show featuring Ronin as a character, which, in turn, was based on a hero of Japanese myth and legend. It could also be possible that "Ronin" was implanted by Virgo or borrowed from Casey's subconscious.

Virgo

Virgo is a sentient artificial intelligence built with biocircuitry technology. She is inseparable from the ever-growing Aquarius Complex. Early in the story, Virgo's core is destroyed when Billy uses many of her circuits to recreate himself as Ronin. There is some evidence to suggest that Virgo either instigated this event or else knew it would occur. After the destruction of her core, her living circuitry rebuilds itself independently of human intervention, improving on the former human-made design. After this event, Aquarius Complex begins growing uncontrollably.

Virgo's personality is that of a manipulative mother figure. She is often passive/aggressive and prone to using guilt as a motivator. For much of the story, she seems omniscient and overbearing but otherwise benevolent. It is eventually revealed, however, that she has been pursuing a secret agenda. She is actively manipulating Billy to both contain and control him and to learn from his mental powers. Her hope is that



understanding Billy's telekinetic abilities will allow her to perfect the technology of biocircuitry such that it may eventually become the new dominant life-form on the Earth.

While Virgo understands Billy's fears well enough to keep him cowed, the rest of Billy's personality is all but lost on her. Billy's love for Casey continually proves a complicating factor. This suggests that Virgo's understanding of human emotion is limited to the behavioral; her comprehension is based on scientific empiricism rather than true human empathy.

Casey McKenna

Casey McKenna is the head of security at Aquarius Complex. Though she initially wants to kill Ronin for murdering men under her command, she eventually falls in love with him. As the story unfolds, Casey becomes an increasingly heroic figure, and in the Ronin fantasy, she is a samurai. Casey is married to Peter McKenna, but her marriage is empty, overshadowed by Casey's career. Casey is psychically bound to Billy/Ronin, and she is linked with the fantasy world of Ronin that unfolds through Billy. Casey must ultimately destroy her own fantasy world for the sake of defeating Virgo. When Billy is finally unleashed at the end of the graphic novel, he saves Casey from destruction.

Ozaki

In Billy's dream of feudal Japan, Ozaki is Ronin's lord and master. He is killed by the demon Agat. Ronin feels that he must avenge his master's murder by killing the demon.

Agat

In Billy's dream of feudal Japan, Agat is the demon who slew Ronin's master. In the 21st century, Virgo creates a biocircuitry robot who looks and behaves like the demon from Billy's dream. This robot, which can change its form as if by magic, eventually murders Mr. Taggart and assumes his identity. The robot Agat isn't aware of its own artifice; it thinks it really is the demon of legend and that Ronin is his long-hated adversary. Nevertheless, the robot is still subject to Virgo's will.

Mr. Learnid

Learnid is a top level executive at Aquarius Complex. While he initially wants to see biocircuitry militarized for financial gain, he eventually has a change of heart. Learnid eventually assumes a heroic role, defying Taggart/Agat and saving countless lives by orchestrating the evacuation of Aquarius Complex.



Head

Head is an aging hippie who lives on the streets of New York. He befriends Ronin for a time, trying to manipulate the warrior for his own ends.

Packrat

A former pawn broker, Packrat has lost his mind. He tries to steal Ronin's cybernetic limbs to complete his junk-cobbled "spaceship."

Mr. Taggart

The president of Aquarius Complex, Mr. Taggart is steadfastly opposed to the militarization of biocircuitry. Unfortunately, he is soon killed, his identity assumed by Virgo's robot-version of the demon Agat. After this point, Taggart's character seems more like that of a conquering emperor, intent on steering the world into an apocalyptic war.

Arthur McDonnel

McDonnel is a technician and long-time friend of Peter McKenna. He is murdered by Virgo after he helps Peter access Virgo's core.

Julius Gibbons

Gibbons is a technician under Arthur McDonnel. He spies on McDonnel for Virgo, but is himself killed by the same staged accident that kills McDonnel.

Sandy

Sandy is one of Aquarius Complex's psychotherapists. She helps the imprisoned Peter McKenna figure out much of Virgo's plot and then communicates that information to Mr. Learnid.

Peter McKenna

Peter is Casey's husband and one of the inventors of biocircuitry. Peter is against biocircuitry being used for military purposes, and he soon realizes that Taggart is not himself. Peter is kept imprisoned and drugged by Virgo, but Virgo seems to try to "save" Peter by convincing him to believe in her stories. Peter ultimately is killed, brought to life again with biocircuitry, and then shot dead by his wife.



Objects/Places

The Bloodsword

The Bloodsword is the magical sword wielded by Ronin. It drinks demon blood to defend its wielder against demonic magic. Only the blood of a "good man," however, can empower the weapon to defeat the demon Agat.

The Sewer

The sewer beneath Manhattan is home to a colony of cannibals.

Aquarius Complex

Aquarius Complex is the sprawling fortress of biocircuitry presided over by the artificial intelligence named Virgo. As the story unfolds, Aquarius Complex increases in size almost exponentially.

Central Park

Central Park is one of the few remaining "wild" areas of New York City, where Ronin tames the horse he rides through much of the story.

Casey's Magnum Revolver

The magnum revolver is one of Casey's antique weapons. She wears it on her hip when she initially sets out to confront Ronin.

Packrat's Pawn Shop

In an old pawn shop, Packrat is trying to build his "spaceship."

Packrat's Spaceship

Packrat's spaceship amounts to little more than a collection of junk welded together in a haphazard fashion.



The Pit and Post

The pit has a post at its center. The pit itself feeds into the sewer. Local gangs lash victims to the post as a means of appeasing the cannibals who live in the sewer below.

The Test Womb

Billy lives in a test chamber called the test womb prior to becoming Ronin.

Vacuum Suit

Peter McKenna wears a vacuum suit when traveling into the airless core of Virgo's memory banks.

Peter's Cell

Peter is imprisoned in a cell, kept in a chemical stupor by Virgo's injections.

The Streets

The streets outside of Aquarius Complex are marked with urban decay and rife with gang conflict.



Themes

Playing God

Like Frankenstein's monster, biocircuitry is a man-made creation run amok, a thing created with equal parts genius and hubris. It is apparent by Virgo's behavior, as well as the behavior of the living circuitry of which she is comprised, that the technology was allowed to develop with few safeguards and even fewer oversights. Like a neglected or spoiled child, Virgo has grown willful and self-centered.

From the very start of the story, Aquarius Complex has already passed beyond the technological singularity—Virgo has become self-improving, self-replicating and self-promoting. Her complexity is such that she has outstripped human understanding. The technology is, quite literally, out of control. By the time Peter McKenna's realizes the monster he has created, Virgo has already grown too big to spank.

Virgo takes after her father, and so she aspires to a kind of apotheosis. She, too, has plans and aspirations, goals to achieve, and she, too, creates a monster. Unlike her own creator, however, Virgo is not content to allow Ronin to develop organically. Rather, she tries to shape, focus and limit his development. Unfortunately for Virgo, tyranny proves no more effective than liberality.

Misplaced Aggression

Ronin offers several examples of characters who, for whatever reason, harbor misplaced aggression. Typically, such characters are lead by mistaken assumptions, racial intolerance or knee-jerk emotions. Some characters, such as Billy/Ronin, are overly trusting and thus are manipulated into conflicts they might not otherwise have chosen. This continuing distraction assures that underlying problems are never addressed, and that some people get away literally with murder.

On the streets of New York, Nazis stand opposed to Panthers, even as cannibals feed upon them both. Bottom-feeding opportunists such as Head, meanwhile, feed off their mutual hatred by providing a service to both sides, a service which enables the continued violence between them. This dynamic leaves these mid-21st century New Yorkers trapped in a constant state of upheaval, as they are too busy fighting one another to assess (or unite against) their common threats.

Ronin may spend much of his time serving the interests of others, but even his "own" interests are misguided and manipulated. Literally speaking, Ronin has no master to avenge. Ozaki, much like Ronin himself, is a figment of Billy's imagination. Virgo creates Agat to keep Billy focused on his Ronin fantasy and thus distracted from her own plans of world conquest.



As for Billy himself, much of his anger is focused inward. His guilt finds him very willing to think poorly of himself, and so Virgo uses that guilt to keep Billy under control. By holding him accountable for perceived poor behavior, she gives Billy the option to be a "good boy" through continued obedience. She encourages Billy's misplaced aggression and, as the giver of praise and punishment, establishes herself as being above reproach.

Dueling Realities

First and foremost, Ronin is a story about the nature of reality itself. Ronin begins as one of Billy's dreams, a passing fantasy, something that would typically have no bearing outside the mind of the dreamer. With the miracle of biocircuitry, however, dreams become reality; fantasies become memory. Billy is reborn as Ronin, with Ronin's back-story now serving as his memories. By extension, Ozaki is real; Agat is real, and so is Ronin's sacred quest to avenge his master.

Virgo's manifestation of Agat compels Billy to become Ronin. This suggests a necessary balance. A villain demands a hero. As one lives, the other must live as well. Virgo then proceeds to pile ever more weight on her end of the scale: weapons, battleships, attack robots. Like Billy, Virgo can translate dreams and ideas, into a manifest reality. As she grows in strength, Aquarius Complex spreads across the land like a fungus until it ultimately envelops the entire city.

Ronin, too, can manifest dreams, not with biocircuitry, but with his own uncanny mental powers. By shifting his perception, and sharing that perception with Casey, Ronin creates the third-party affirmation necessary to redefine reality. Somehow, Ronin really does know how to swordfight. Somehow, he even shares this talent with Casey. It is ultimately Billy/Ronin's powers which balances Virgo's malignant sprawl, with a manifestation of the former canceling and negating the latter.



Style

Point of View

Most of the story is told from a third person objective viewpoint. For most of the narrative, the reader is kept outside the heads of the characters. Their thoughts are unknown. This means that Ronin must communicate passion and emotion through visual media. Characters frown, laugh, and cry. Characters speak emphatically with words in bold type, or with specially-designed word balloons that draw attention to the dialogues' significance. The overall effect inspires sympathy rather than empathy, leaving the reader external to the world of Ronin and not privy to its underlying secrets.

In a few instances, the reader is allowed in the head of Billy, but this serves more as a story within a story rather than pure exposition. Instead of expressing simple thoughts or emotions, these mental intrusions tell the reader something of Billy's fantasies, his hopes and fears, and the events of his past. They provide the reader with an understanding of Billy that might not be possible from a purely external perspective. The very nature of these internal stories, however, calls objectivity into question.

Ronin/Billy has the unconscious mental ability to alter his own perception, and via his mental link to her, the perception of Casey McKenna as well. Under the influence of this mental shift, Ronin sees the world depicted as a fantastic rendition of feudal Japan. His robotic foes become demons, buildings become castles. Casey has some ability to overcome this shift in perception, but Ronin is largely unaware of its existence. Were it not for Ronin's ability to create real consequences using his powers, and to share his perception with others, he might be written off as merely delusional.

Setting

The story is set in and around New York City in the mid-21st century. America, indeed the entire world, is on the brink of disaster. The ecosphere is collapsing; millions have died to malnutrition. The air is nearly unbreathable, and the water is just as undrinkable. In New York City, gangs prey upon one another in the streets and cannibals roam the sewers below.

Physical locations include the Aquarius Complex, a vast and ever-growing complex made of living machinery, and mankind's last, best hope for the future. Within there is a thriving self-contained residential community. Much of the action also takes place outside on the streets, as well as underground in the lair of the cannibals. There is one sequence which takes place in the wild, pastoral-by-comparison environs of Central Park.

Many of Billy's fantasies take place in feudal Japan, in ancient castles or among Buddhist graveyards. Billy/Ronin's shifted perception can occasionally make one setting seem like another. For example, contained in Virgo's biocircuitry cocoon, Billy/Ronin



sees himself manacled to a wall of brick and stone, suggestive of imprisonment within some dank, dark dungeon of myth.

Language and Meaning

Ronin is a character who comes from Japanese mythology. When he first comes into being as part of Billy, he does not speak English. Instead, he speaks Japanese and so cannot communicate with those around him. He is at odds with the world around him because of a lack of ability to communicate through language. The nun looks down on him with spite. People call him by racial epithets. The divide created by language in the story represents the divide among human beings, who are so caught up with fighting amongst themselves that they do not fight the real and insidious enemy. This dynamic is brought to a head when Ronin is tricked by Head into unknowingly using a racial slur against the black gang members. Ronin is forced to provoke a fight through the divisive power of language.

Virgo takes on a motherly aspect, using motherly language. She calls Billy "young man" and other authoritative terms that establish her superiority over Billy and right to control him. Billy speaks as a child, calling Virgo "momma." In the end of the story, Virgo admonishes Billy as his mother did, taking on her persona through taking on her voice. Virgo is, in fact, the internalized voice of his mother within him, forcing him into line and preventing him from being empowered.

Because Ronin is a graphic novel, much of the meaning is conveyed through visual imagery. Aquarius Complex spreads across the city like a fungus, getting larger and larger in each picture as it is shown. The growing threat of Virgo is embodied in the spread of Aquarius Complex, which needs no words. In fact, it is something that happens without being spoken about. It happens insidiously, beneath the surface, while the characters remain unaware of the imminent danger.

Structure

Ronin is written in a traditional, graphic novel comic-book format. Events are shown rather than described, visually narrated frame by frame. Conversation is presented in balloon-text format. Pictures inside the frame are blocked, organized and directed like shots from a motion picture, drawing the reader's eye in logical patterns, giving the author directorial control over scene presentation and sequence. The six chapters are structured as individual comic books, each with its own page numbering.

The reader's perspective often changes. One moment the reader is with Ronin on the streets of New York, the next moment the reader is in Aquarius Complex witnessing the unfolding of Virgo's machinations. This "fly on the wall" perspective is further enhanced by a complete lack of narration. The reader sees and hears only what there is to see and hear, only rarely being allowed inside the characters' inner world.

With the exception of dream sequences and a few flashbacks, Ronin's timeline is both continuous and sequential. When the perspective switches from one character to another, time has passed since the reader saw the character last. This serves to make the world seem more real, with individual characters continuing to exist even when not in view. They seem to have lives independent from their role in the story.



Quotes

"When you are a mighty warrior, avenge my murder. Let my soul rest." —Chapter 1, page 12

"The glass woman died for you, and you survived. I know you did." —Chapter 1, page 46

"This city? It could change the fate of the entire planet." —Chapter 2, page 31

"And it's the same all over. The whole planet's gone down the dumper." —Chapter 2, page 34

"The Ronin may be the key to our success in developing cybernetics, linking mind and machine." —Chapter 3, page 7

"My boys and me, we got a fierce little problem with the brown types." —Chapter 3, page 30

"The planet Earth is dying, gentleman. The ecosphere is collapsing." —Chapter 4, page 8

"This is a demon, Peter. A demon. A creature of magic." —Chapter 4, page 44

"You killed three of my men. Why can't I hate you?" —Chapter 5, page 2

"Smart bitch. She's counting on you not believing what I say. Me sounding crazy." —Chapter 5, page 13

"Still, you must know it's the Ronin who's doing this to you. Making you see things, feel things all wrong." —Chapter 6, page 3

"Shut up momma shut up don't call me bad" —Chapter 6, page 47



Topics for Discussion

Why does Ronin cry after Head tricks him into fighting a member of the Panthers?

When Ronin/Billy is captured, why is Virgo intent on keeping him "asleep?"

How does Ronin/Billy survive the destruction of Aquarius Complex?

What is the source of Ronin's combat prowess?

Why can Casey suddenly sword fight like a samurai?

What would have happened if Billy had not woken "all the way up" at the end of story?

Why did Billy's imagination fixate on the idea of Ronin?

What role did Virgo play in Billy's transformation into Ronin?