



Long ago, still too recent to be considered a legend, but old enough to be recognized as a part of history.

The Hundred Lilies War, which consumed a long period of a hundred years between the Shepherd Kingdom and the Abyssina Empire progressed greatly due to the success of Shepherd's new weapon, the "Robo", which helped turn the tide in their favor, closing the curtain of the war with the Empire of Abyssina's destruction.

160 years had passed since then.

At that time, shock waves had quietly awakened the unprecedented incident which would endanger the lives of all those within what would come to be known as the Shepard Republic.

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In the northern airspace of the Shepherd Kingdom, a mysterious phenomenon had been witnessed.

"I suddenly saw an island in the middle of nowhere."

The airspace had long been infamous due to accidents caused by the effects of field disturbances that could cause malfunctions in equipment necessary for airship operations.

In addition to being such a difficult area to navigate, there was now this strange phenomenon.

There was discussion in the kingdom as to whether or not a survey team should be sent, but since most of the people were reluctant about it, no decision was ever made.

However, the situation wouldn't be that way for long.

The island finally made its appearance.

It was barely large enough for an entire village to exist on it. It held not a single trace of vegetation, and it looked more like a massive lump of rock rather than an island.

An investigation team was promptly organized to find out the identity of this mysterious island, however they could not find anything remarkable from its exterior so they decided to dig in and investigate what was inside it.

The excavation was carried out by miners from Shetland, a known mining town.

It was evening, after several weeks had passed without any mining progress.

Two sibling miners responsible for the cave's digging work were swinging their pickaxes all the while airing out their grievances.

"I'm just saying, how long are we going to be stuck down here with no clue of what we're gonna find?"

"Well, if we still can't find anything after everything we've dug up, we can probably call it quits... Hm?"

The older brother felt a strange sensation from the tip of the pickaxe he had just swung down. It couldn't have just been a rock; the sound echoing off of it was much more clear.

Unable to contain his growing anticipation, he hit the pickaxe to the covering of rock with even more force than before.

With a thud, the rock collapsed, revealing a metal wall beyond it. He wondered if its sudden appearance was simply his mind playing tricks on him.

"This is insane..."

The wall clearly had workmanship and refinement that was far beyond anything he knew how to create. The wall was so shiny that he couldn't imagine it having been buried under rocks until just now.

The two miners stood there dumbfounded, until the older one let out a hefty laugh and began muttering to his younger brother.

"We've run into something real hard here, huh."

"You said. Diggin' this out's gonna be a real pain."

The younger brother's face tightened into a similar smile as well.

The older brother sighed and unintentionally touched the wall. Suddenly a crack appeared in the wall, and with a whoosh, it widened and opened up like a door.

Their tails curled up tightly.

"This is gettin' scary!"

"Look... There's something in the back."

As the older brother expressed his fear, the younger one pointed to the back of the door.

"Should we take a look...?"

He gulped as his curiosity overcame his fear.

Upon entering through the door, the dim lights revealed a small room to them.

As they searched through the room, the younger raised his voice.

"...! ...Check this out!"

"What's up? You dig up a cute girl or something?"

The younger brother took a cautious step forward.

"See for yerself!"

The younger brother made a knocking sound that reverberated throughout the room.

The older one focused his eyes, and saw a large container-like object.

The shape of the object only brought one thing to his mind.

"Th- This ain't a coffin is it...?"

Upon examining the container, he noticed that it was humming and had visible mechanical parts attached to it.

"Some kinda machine..."

"Looks like there's somethin' inside..."

As the Caninu's interest in the machine grew, they found themselves wanting a closer look at what was inside.

"There a device that can open it?"

"Hmmm... Lemme see. Is this what yer talkin' 'bout?"

The older brother found something that looked like a button and pushed it without hesitation.

The container began vibrating as they heard the sound of air being circulated.

"Gooooood! Let's see now..."

The two took a step back from the container as they awaited what was inside with great anticipation.

Out of nowhere they heard an inorganic voice.

"Mainframe operation confirmed."

"System activation rate 80%"

"Checking order..."

"Confirm operation 'CODA' execution condition."

"Confirming execution."

"Main memory damaged. Execute data recovery... error."

"Limited mainframe activated."

Parts of the metal container moved one after the other as if opening a latch, and the lid-like top began to quietly open.

The brothers shuddered in fear, unsure of what to do in the face of the incomprehensible voice and machine movements.

(Could this be a weapon, or even a bomb—)

The brothers glanced at each other before rushing away from the scene.

As soon as the lid of the container was fully opened, something, or rather, someone in the shape of a "human" rose up from inside the container and quickly stepped out of it.

The person was tall, and his silhouette indicated that he was of a large, well-proportioned build. He dizzily looked around him.

"So... this is *paradise*."

There was a hint of disappointment in the man's deep voice.

When the man left the cave, a team investigating the account of the brothers who had run away earlier had gathered and were heading towards it.

They were surprised to see the tall, imposing man.

The man was of a species they had never seen before, with little of the trademark Caninu or Felineko fur on his body.

His face was flat, with a mouth that almost didn't protrude at all and small ears on the left and right sides of his head.

To those in this world, that was all they could compare him to.

He was truly "human".

However, there was nothing in Shepherd that could ever be called a "human".

"What are these creatures...?"

To their surprise, the man said the exact same words that they were thinking. This "human" man could speak the same language as they did.

"C-Capture it!"

The one in charge of the survey team shouted the command in a trembling voice, and several soldiers approached the mysterious man with spears at the ready.

"What are you people... Is this not paradise?"

Unafraid of the spears, the man calmly approached them.

"What are you! This guy is a... m-monster..."

The soldier responded in a muffled voice. The man's brow wrinkled in response to those words.

"What... What am I? I do not know."

The moment he said that, the man disappeared from the soldier's sight.

"However—"

The voice came from right behind the soldier. The man was standing behind the soldier before he knew it.

"I don't appreciate being referred to as a monster."

He put his hand on the soldier's shoulder.

It all happened in an instant.

Crackling black fire engulfed the soldier. Before he even had the time to scream, the soldier was no more.

A sudden silence fell.

The man turned to the survey team.

"Ah— ***UWAAAAAAAAAH—***"

The silence was broken by a scream wrung out by someone from the survey team.

"Magic? Are you a remnant of Abyssina!?"

One of the soldiers slowly approached him, brandishing their spear.

"I do not know what that is. —However, I don't care to have such a lowly weapon pointed at me."

The man casually pointed his finger at the soldier.

At that moment, black flames once again enveloped the soldier's body in an instant, obliterating them without a trace.

It was at this point that the survey team finally understood the dangers they were in.

The sudden change of the situation sent the entire team into a state of panic.

They all screamed as they scattered to escape to their airships.

The man watched the scene without expression.

The man began muttering to himself on the deserted island.

"I have something that must be done..."

The man grasped his face with his right hand, and strained his voice.

"The order given to me!"

By the time the Shepherd army, now well-armed, returned to the airspace, the island had vanished.

Eventually, information about the island and the mysterious man was buried before finally disappearing from the public's consciousness...

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Fifty years have passed since then, and the once mighty empire of Abyssinia is no more than a small tribe scattered across the land as a province of the Shepherd Kingdom. However, hostility still injured between the two sides, and the oppression and suppression imposed on Abyssinia by the Shepherd Kingdom, the current victor, had become a daily occurrence.

There was a hidden village that continued to exist without any connection to domestic issues, quietly hiding from history.

It was called Ragdoll.

It was a small village where only Felineko lived, and its name was not engraved on any map.

The people who lived there made “contracts” with the legendary Wolf Tribe, and called themselves the “Contractor’s Clan,” who dedicated themselves to watching over the outside world, all while isolating themselves from it.

The phrase "watching over the outside world" was not a metaphor; it was quite literal. This claim was represented through a “ritual” that they continuously protected with their life and pride.

The "Rite of Forfeit".

Although it was the middle of night, a young man was running at full speed in the forest that served as the barrier to Ragdoll.

As he passed through the forest and reached a hill overlooking the village, he glared at it angrily. The night sky enveloped the young man’s body and soul in its darkness.

His clenched fists tightened more and more, and he finally shouted with anger that could no longer be contained.

"DAMN IT!"

The cry went unnoticed by the night sky, as the young man felt even more uncertainty.

"Why... Why does the Rite of Forfeit have to be my sister..."

The young man was so dizzy that he fell to his knees. He sat there for a while before noticing something in the forest.

"Elh?"

Upon being seen by the young man, a girl called Elh stepped out from the forest.

"Yes... I knew you must've gone here, Beluga."

"Just leave me alone."

In a clear sign of rejection, the young man, Beluga, looked away from Elh and stared down at the village once again.

There was silence for a while, before Elh tried to say something.

"Listen... about Lady Terina—"

"Don't you dare speak her name!"

Beluga shouted at her for bringing up the topic he least wanted to touch. Elh trembled as she apologized, almost to the point of tears.

"I'm sorry, but... your sister wanted to talk to you. That's all. See you."

Fighting back her tears, that was all Elh could say before leaving. Though Beluga felt the urge to apologize to her, he lacked the strength to do so at the moment.

Those who were chosen to be sacrificed had to give their lives in the Rite of Forfeit. The next sacrifice chosen by the Medallion for the ritual was Terina, the only living relative of Beluga, whose parents had already passed away.

The sacrifice was to be chosen by the Medallion.
Its decision was absolute.

That was the painful truth of the village, passed down from generation to generation in order to protect the world.

Beluga cursed the fate that had befallen his sister, and now just wanted to be alone under the night sky.

At the same time, in the forest surrounding Ragdoll, where no outside was supposed to have been, there was a lone man who walked toward the village.

His body was tall and well-built, though his head was covered in a robe that made it difficult to distinguish him from the outside.

At the same time, there was a man who stepped towards the forest surrounding Ragdoll, which should have been closed off. He wore a robe that completely covered

his head. His identity could not be distinguished just from his appearance, but he seemed to be tall and heavy.

He moved in a dazed manner and raised his head.

"My order... It's calling for me."

Ragdoll was not yet within his line of sight.

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As the sky began to brighten, Beluga had returned to his house, but found himself hesitating to open it. Standing there would accomplish nothing, and so he timidly opened the door and was faced with Terina sitting down right in front of him.

She smiled at Beluga.

"Welcome home, Beluga. Did you talk to Elh?"

"Terina... Why did you get up?"

Feeling uncomfortable, Beluga averted his gaze from his sister.

"I was worried about you, of course. How couldn't I be?"

"You don't have to worry about me... Terina—"

Beluga interrupted himself, not wanting to admit that she had been chosen for sacrifice. However, Terina just kept on smiling and continued without any hesitation.

"Just because I was chosen to be sacrificed doesn't mean you need to be worried or angry."

"How can you accept it so easily!"

He hadn't been wanting to show his anger.

However, seeing his sister so easily accept her fate, Beluga's mind was quickly occupied by something other than sadness.

"Because that is the mission that we, 'a clan of contractors', have been tasked with."

Terina remained smiling. She took out the medallion from her chest and clasped it carefully.

"So until the next Rite of Forfeit begins one year from now... Let's live our remaining days together without any regrets, Beluga."

Beluga had seen many people give up their lives as sacrifices. He knew that their deaths was something they had all accepted, just like his sister. That was simply a fact of life for those in the village.

Beluga had always wondered if he was crazy for not being able to accept that, but when it came time for his sister to be chosen for sacrifice, he was convinced that he was right all along.

"Accepting a fate like that isn't automatically going to stop you from feeling any regrets."

Beluga straight into Terina's eyes. He was saddened to see her respond with a silent expression of anguish.

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The robed man was in front of a cave on the outside of Ragdoll. It was a place where even the villagers never stepped foot. One of their reasons for this was due to a legend that claimed the back of the cave contained a malicious presence that had been sealed away by the village.

"It's calling me... from within."

The man did not seem to be aware of this legend as he walked deeper into the cave.

As he went deeper into the cave, he came upon a large, rocky wall. It was covered with geometric patterns. They seemed to resemble patterns from the Oshilasama faith, a religion practiced exclusively by Felineko.

"It's here."

The man looked up at the rock with an expectant voice.

"Now then, show me the way."

When placed his hand on the rock, a streak of black flame ran down from where his hand was, creating a crack through it. The rock shattered into pieces along the crack, and a smooth metal wall appeared on the other side of it. The metal wall closely resembled the wall found in the cave on the island that had long since disappeared as if it were phantom.

The robed man removed the hood over his head to reveal his face. He looked identical to the "human" man who had woken up on that island.

But hadn't fifty years passed since he was awakened?

The man's face had not changed at all since then; not a single trace of aging.

"It appears I was right."

The man put his hand on the wall and, with a woosh, the door opened, just like the wall back then did. On the other side of the door was a passage that extended slightly downward. Without hesitation, the man walked to the end of it.

"I feel it... The presence of my other half."

The man arrived at a rather large space. He paused and looked at the back of the hall.

"You were calling for me, weren't you?"

A gigantic figure stood there. The man approached it.

It was the figure of a Robo.



In this era, Robos existed as an important weapon to the Shepherd army, but the Robo in this cave had a somewhat biomechanical silhouette, different from any other Robo in Shepherd. It was too dark to see the details, but the technology used had an aura of sophistication that was beyond comparison.

"Now, tell me. Who am I!?"

The man touched the Robo.

A clear ringing echoed from the Robo.

The man's head jerked, and he collapsed onto his back. Lying on his back, the man stared at the ceiling with unfocused eyes for a while.

"Heh... HAHAHA!"

The man suddenly burst into laughter.

"This isn't where my order is— However, the way to it is here."

He stood up slowly and touched the Robo once again.

"I remember now. 'Berius'."

The man called out the Robo's name clearly. The will in his eyes was clearer than ever before. His will was madness itself.

"My name is Baion... And I have awakened at this time to progress Project CODA to its next stage."

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Three days had passed since Terina had been chosen to be sacrificed.

Those who were chosen as a sacrifice were to always wear the medallion somewhere on their body. It was said that this was so that the Nono that resided in the medallion could prepare them for the ritual.

Ever since she had been chosen, Terina, too, wore the medallion around her neck like a pendant. Beluga saw the dull, dark gleam in the center of the medallion as a source of evil that was transforming his sister into something else entirely.

Unable to stand the thought of that, Beluga unconsciously turned away from his sister.

At breakfast, Terina was sitting across from Beluga, and spoke to her brother in a stern yet gentle voice.

"You're the next person to inherit the medallion, and carry out the ritual, aren't you?"

Beluga silently ignored her.

The Rite of Forfeit was to be performed by a group of inheritors of the medallion and sacrifices.

Sacrifices, who gave their lives, and inheritors of the medallion, who perform the ritual.

It was a very simple combination.

Normally, every time a Rite was held, the medallion was entrusted to the next inheritor chosen from candidates highly talented with magic. It was a custom that had been carried out in the village for ages.

Medallion inheritors were never chosen to be sacrificed. It seemed to have been an ancient safety measure put in place to prevent the inheritors of the "Lares" and "Lemures" medallions from choosing each other to be sacrifices. Beluga had already been chosen to inherit a medallion.

In a cruel twist of fate, he was to inherit the "Medallion of Lares" and take the life of his sister.

"Listen, you have to watch over the sacrifice's life through to the very end... That's—"

"My duty as a Medallion inheritor?"

He interrupted his sister in a sarcastic tone of voice.

"...Yes. We can't let Lares and Lemures return to this world. Our duty is just something we have to accept for the sake of that."

Terina stared firmly at her brother. Beluga, unable to avoid her gaze, threw his head down as he spoke.

"If this world can't be protected without continuing this absurd ceremony, I'd rather let it get destr—"

"Please, don't say anything else."

She interrupted her younger brother's harsh words and, after a simple gesture of protection and blessing, touched Beluga's cheek.

"To be honest, I'm truly glad you're the one to inherit the Medallion, and not the sacrifice... I want you to live a long life for my sake."

Though she put on a brave smile, Terina's eyes were slightly teary and shimmering with an uneasy light.

Beluga was frustrated at his own helplessness.

"Beluga, I was chosen as a candidate to inherit the 'Medallion of Lemures.'"

As Beluga was once again alone in thought on a hill overlooking the village, Elh came to report to him.

Candidates were chosen from those who were skilled in magic and had a wealth of knowledge about it, and with Elh by far the youngest of them all at only 14 years old, one could even say that she was still a child. Even Beluga and his 18 years of age was a topic of conversation within the village.

"Do you think that what we're doing is a good thing?"

Beluga said that bluntly. He was always somewhat cold, but Elh felt that his words had more ice in them than usual today.

"I don't think it's bad, but... do you think it is, Beluga?"

"Is it wrong to protect the world?"

"No..."

"Well, then I guess that is good."

"You're saying that like you don't really mean it."

It was somewhat annoying for Elh to have to think about all the needless disingenuity whenever she spoke with Beluga.

"My sister has a full year to live... I can take that as a good thing."

Although he was not fully convinced, Beluga decided to think about how his sister felt.

It was at that moment.

Beluga felt the world shift.

"What... is the wind stirring?"

"Beluga, what's happening?"

Beluga and Elh simultaneously looked at each other.

From each other's distressed looks, the two were convinced that their mutual feeling of discomfort was a sign of danger.

"We have to head back."

"Alright."

With those short words, they rushed down the hill in a hurry.

When the two returned to the village, a female mage who had gathered the other magic users of the village was calling Beluga from afar.

"Where were you! Your sister is in great trouble!"

A blood vessel appeared on Beluga's head.

"What happened to my sister!?"

The mage replied,

"The Medallion suddenly activated, and your sister rapidly advanced into a state ready for sacrifice. She's barely conscious, but her body is unresponsive. She seems so faint that she can't even move. She is resting at my home right now."

He had never heard of the Medallion suddenly activating, before.

"Why did it activate!?"

The Paladin answered with a serious face.

"Perhaps, the seal of Lares was suddenly awakened, and to respond to it, the Medallion made preparations for the sacrifice in a hurry."

"I'm such a fool..."

Beluga stood still in place.

"The situation is content for the moment, Beluga. I know you feel bad for Terina, but you must perform the Rite of Forfeit soon. Otherwise, Lares will wake up."

Alongside the female Paladin, Beluga went to his sleeping sister's bedside. Terina slept with a face twisted in pain. It seemed that the Medallion being activated was accompanied by severe pain due to rapid change of body structure.

"...Belu...ga...Be...lu..."

Beluga nodded and held his sister's hand without thinking.

At the same time, the Medallion's radiance grew more violently, and its color began to change.

"This is... It can't be..."

Beluga knew the meaning of the Medallion's shine. The woman said something to support it.

"Yes... the Rite of Forfeit seems to be ready."

A pillar of light came down in Ragdoll, indicating the position of the "Sacred Realm" that carried out the Rite of Forfeit.

Due to Terina being weak, it was fortunate for them that they didn't have to travel. But for Beluga and his older sister, their farewell time had been shortened as well.

Beluga made his decision.

"I...will now inherit the Medallion of Lares."

With a solemn nod, the female mage watched Beluga.

"Do you understand what this means?"

Beluga nodded slowly, with a clear intention.

"I will perform the Rite of Forfeit."

Elh had been watching Beluga with shock.

"Beluga, that's—!"

"I will take my sister's life."

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The inheritance of the Medallion soon took place, with Beluga and Terina opening the dimensional doors to the Sacred Realm.

Elh and others tried to speak to Beluga, but he silently rejected them.

Terina never regained consciousness, however Beluga held her in his arms as they went through the door.

After a moment, the two reappeared from the Sacred Realm. Beluga was still holding Terina when he came through the door again.

Beluga's expression was stiffer than it had ever been, and his emotions could not be read.

He hugged his sister and muttered towards the Medallion on his sister's chest,

"With the Medallion,"

"With this sacrifices' life,"

"Lares will—"

Terina, who did not wake up, seemed to be smiling at Beluga.

"Slumber."

The Medallion's radiance shined brightly. No one could keep their eyes on the glare of the wondrous flash.

No one, except for Beluga.

Terina, still in Beluga's arms, began turning into light particles, until the last bit of light disappeared, and there was nothing left.

With the body that was supporting it having disappeared, the Medallion fell to the ground with a ringing sound.

At the same time, invisible waves centering around the medallion rapidly spread all over the world. As the waves flew away, everything regained silence.

When Elh opened her eyes, she saw Beluga quietly picking up the medallion.

Nobody spoke to Beluga that evening.

At the same time, in the back of the cave on Ragdoll's outskirts, Baion was in front of his Robo, Berius.

"The awakening of Lares has ceased...?"

He slid into Berius' cockpit and began operating it. He felt around its neck, as if looking for something.

He opened his eyes and muttered,

"Near here— Ragdoll, did you say? There was a wave from there that disturbed the awakening? How unfortunate."

Berius' body began to heat up and vibrate.

"Lemures and Lares still need Nero and Blanck to regularly control it."

The entire cave vibrated, and a tapping noise was made as stones fell from above.

"In any case, there is no doubt that its existence interferes with my current mission here."

Berius gently floated whilst making low tone machine-like noises.

"I need to get rid of it."

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That night, when the people returned to their homes, they noticed that their breath had become white and cold.

They always felt like this after Rites.

Although it happened irregularly, since ancient times, the ceremony had been repeated many times in the village.

Everyone had hoped that time would heal the wounds of Beluga's heart as well.

When Elh returned to the Paladin training grounds, she stood in front of the Medallion of Lemures and thought about what she might be forced to do someday.

To protect the world, to inherit the Medallion.
To protect the world, to take the sacrifices' life.

Until now, she had never really thought about it, but Beluga and Terina gave her that opportunity.

Of course, she didn't have an answer yet.

"I don't know anything yet. I really am just a child."

She was curious about Beluga.

She expected that he probably went to that hill, but she didn't know how to approach him, or what kinds of words she should use.

"But, it's getting cold tonight..."

The night became cold in just a short instant. Elh was surely getting cold. Just when Elh was thinking about what she could wear, her magical sense felt disorder in the Nono.

"This is... Impossible... What happened to Ragdoll's barrier?"

Elh headed for the female mage in a hurry.

"Master, there's something strange!"

A woman's yawn rose from the bed as she turned her head to the left and right, rubbed her eyes, and looked far away.

"*Yawn*... I don't understand, I need to go see the situation. Let's go, Elh."

"Yes, Ma'am!"

The female Paladin looked at the shrine and thought to herself for a moment, before removing the Medallion of Lemures.

"Let's take this just in case, Elh."

"Y-Yes Ma'am."

She thought about various things from a while ago, like how the Medallion was strangely heavy.

When the two came out of the cabin in the training ground, two steep dazzling red curtains suddenly appeared, running through the dark and quiet village.

A few moments later, a streak of red light rushed through. It seemed as if everything on the ground, buildings, and even the air, exploded in a fiery blaze.

Hot air hit Elh and the mage like a shockwave.

"Ah!?"

The two were blown back into the cabin and hit a wall inside.

"Ah, Master... Are you okay!?"

As Elh regained consciousness, she looked for her master,

"Elh... Are, you safe...?"

"Huh... M-Master!"

The mage was struck against a wall by some shrapnel that pierced into her body. Blood was slowly oozing out of her.

"...The Medallion, do you... Have it?"

She asked Elh, in pain.

"Y-Yes, Master..."

"You...will have to keep the Medallion from now on..."

"Huh!? But..."

"There's no time... Right now, it would be impossible to find the others..."

When Elh looked outside the cabin, again a red fire streak ran over the village, the resulting pillars of flame and hot air creating a dance.

"Father... Mother!"

The screams scattered in an instant, leaving only the sound of a burning village.

Elh hesitated to regain her strength. She did not notice that tears were flowing out of her eyes like a waterfall.

"Fortunately you have the ability to be the next successor... Come on, over here..."

She said, as Elh held the Medallion in her trembling hands, and went closer to her master who was losing consciousness.

Her master put Elh's hand on the Medallion and drew a magic spell on her hand and forehead. The Medallion shone for only a moment, and a pattern appeared on Elh's forehead.

"...With this, you are now the successor to this Medallion... *cough**cough**"

Elh's master wondered if she was faintly smiling, before she coughed up blood.

"There... there were so many more things that I wanted to teach you... I apologize..."

"It is such that... I have one more job to do... I have to hide you in a safe place. I will see you afterwards."

Elh understood the meaning of her master's words, but did not have time to think.

As Elh's consciousness was cast away by her master's magic, she cast a spell to forcibly open the door to the Sacred Realm.

A small dimensional rift opened up, showing the shadow of the Sacred Realm idle. The mage carried Elh to the dimensional rift, and Elh was sucked behind it.

When she confirmed her plan was a success, she closed the door to the Sacred Realm with the last of her strength.

"I'm so sorry Elh... Now, you must endure more hardships than ever before..."

A belt of flame extended towards the cabin.

"Forgive me... Elh"

A streak of fire rushed through the cabin, causing it to burst.

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Beluga was crouched on top the the hill, clenching the Medallion.

"This emptiness... What is it?"

He lost his dear sister.

The sense of accomplishment of having protected the world had not helped him, however.

Was it the same for the others who performed the Rite of Forfeit?

While thinking on it, Beluga fell asleep before he even realized it.

Sounds of impact from the village woke Beluga up.

When he looked up at the village while raising his body, it was already covered in flame, shining red despite it being the middle of night.

He felt faint heat.

"What... What's going on!?"

As he focused his eyes, he saw what looked like a black Robo with a bio-organical appearance slowly move through the village, emitting a flame.

"Who in the world..."

Holding the Medallion to his chest, Beluga came running towards the village.

Upon arriving at the village, it was already a scorched land. The only movements were from flames and black smoke.

He felt the same despair as those who were no longer alive.

Beluga laughed dryly.

"Hahaha... Isn't this supposed to be a clan of contractors who protect the world?"

Beluga was convinced.

"The world can't be protected by the Rite of Forfeit."

His emotion changed from one of mockery, to one that came from the back of his heart.

"...I'll never forgive you!"

Beluga went to the Elder's house, whist overwhelmed with hot air. He was aiming for the "guardian" of the village who was supposed to be there.

When he got there, the Elder's house was burnt to the ground with no trace of it having ever existed.

No one could have been alive.

Beluga did not bat an eye at the Elder's house, and went into the cave behind it.

"Were you safe, Salamander..."

In the back of the cave, a black Robo equipped with cannon guns on both arms, the "Salamander", was stored.

There was no evidence of anyone trying to leave, and the raid looked like it burned down all of the village in an instant.

While sliding into the cockpit, Beluga emerged a bitter smile.

"Until a few minutes ago, I thought I didn't care about the village or the world anymore."

Upon entering the Salamander's activation key, the steel began to heat at once.

"Has my anger lessened?"

He depressed the accelerator panel and idly rotated the roller equipped on the feet of the Salamander.

Unleashed, the Salamander jumped out of the cave like a storm.

Having destroyed the village, Baion, along with the Berius, aimed for the harbor beyond the mountain to leave the island of Ragdoll.

Baion had arrived at the port that came across the island.

Before dawn, when the Berius was trying to cross the mountains, its radar reacted to something.

"What is the machine responding to?"

A gauge indicated its presence to Baion.

When he looked at the direction showing the reaction, he saw a cloud of dust rising up, and a Robo violently approaching.



"Three seconds..."

He dashed in and kept the revolver cannons of both arms straight.

"Pray to the wind...!"

A whirlpool swirl pattern appeared on Beluga's forehead and revolver cannons.

Two bullets filled with the power of magic were released with a roar, as an attack on the Berius.

However, Berius slid laterally at speeds impossible to ordinary Robos and dodged the bullets.

"Tch!"

The Salamander and the bio-organic Robo passed by each other with their speeds.

"Now!"

It anchored one foot to induce a lateral spin, and set a long barrel behind its chest using its centrifugal force. The Salamander's Crystal Drive began charging the chest quickly in order to use its Buster Cannon.

Beluga confirmed that the Buster Cannon's charge was full, and directed the Salamander, which was spinning horizontally, towards the Berius, quickly closing the distance with a roller dash.

"This is it!"

At point blank range, the Buster Cannon was raised and bullets of light were released.

"Oh...?"

In Berius' cockpit, Baion marveled at the Robo's movements and battle power that suddenly appeared.

"This is the first time that I've seen someone go so far—"

He smiled faintly.

"In this era."

Just before the light bullets hit, the Berius sliced them just by swinging the flame whip on its arm.

More bullets of light followed, however only the shock waves wrapped around the Berius.

"What!?"

The Berius and Salamander missed each other once more due to the Salamander reversing.

Beluga looked back, and saw two whips of red flame.

"!"

The flame whips crossed, and caught Beluga's face.

The Salamander and the surrounding boulders were blown away, as if they were flipped by the whips. As it was, the Salamander tumbled down a cliff with the boulders. As a boulder crushed the Salamander, it was covered up.

When the Berius' sensor reported that the life signs had disappeared from where the Salamander had fallen, Baion began to lose interest in the Salamander and its pilot, aiming to head to the port again.

"Nero and Blanck have not yet been awakened."

He already had a conscious mission in his mind.

"Then, I shall prepare for it."

Baion's eyes sharply narrowed.

In the cockpit of the Salamander covered by the boulder, Beluga was bleeding heavily from the scar on his face and the wounds on his body sustained during the fall.

There were no signs of movement seen or sensed by Beluga's ears. It was only a matter of time until death came for him.

But, at that time, no one knew that the Medallion, which was placed in Beluga's chest, continued to emit a warm light that enveloped him.

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She wondered how long she had been unconscious for.

When Elh woke up, she was in a wasteland, which was covered in black charcoal, and could not believe that people had lived there before.

The cabin where she had last been, was now nothing more than black debris that surrounded her. There weren't even traces of her master's corpse.

There was no smoldering smoke.

Nothing moved and she could not hear anything.

There was just a quiet world.

"This is what has protected the world, the village of the clan of contractors... Ragdoll?"

Standing up unsteadily, Elh walked over to the place once called a village, that now held no power.

"With our tongue, we continued to give up the sacrifice's life, but now, the village protecting us..."

The last vision of Beluga and Terina came to mind.

"Did everything disappear... in just one night?"

Elh searched around the area.

"Anyone! Is anyone there!?"

She shouted out.

However, only Elh's own echoing voice returned to her.

"U...UWAAAAAH—"

She could not endure it and began running away as she cried.

"Someone please answer! Please!"

She continued running without waiting for a reply, before noticing Beluga on top of the hill he frequented.

"That's Beluga!? That's really him—!"

However, there was no reply.

"What should I do? Everyone..."

When looking at the village that had become a black, burned land, Elh shivered.

Beluga's cynical voice drifted in her mind.

"Is it wrong to protect the world?"

"No..."

She responded to the floating voice,

"Well, I guess that's good."

"That's right..."

"I will perform the Rite of Forfeit."

"I will take my sister's life."

"Stay strong, Beluga"

With tears flowing, she smiled with laughter.

"I wonder if I can do it... I couldn't even see everyone's lives off properly."

As a memento of the only thing that remained of the village on her chest, she held the Medallion.

"I will protect the world with the Rite of Forfeit"

Her tears were now dry.

"I have no choice."

Elh would soon notice the phenomenon of "eternal youth" in her body, and then, would spend a very long time getting accustomed to it.